“We called it lockdown school”: a reflexive thematic analysis of the experiences of young people transitioning from primary to secondary school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Transition from primary to secondary school is generally experienced by young people as a significant event (Zeedyk et al., 2003), the success of which is associated with a range of long-term outcomes (e.g. West et al., 2010). Young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic have done so at a highly unusual time, which may have made transition more challenging (Bagnall et al., 2022). It is important to understand young people's perspectives of transition, both as they have the right to be heard and as their perceptions can influence the process and success of transition (Divya Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019). This study aimed to understand young people's experiences and perceptions of transition during the pandemic, as well as what they feel would help to support them in the future.

A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted on transcripts of seven semi-structured interviews conducted in July 2021 with young people who transitioned in September 2020. The eleven themes generated suggest that participants experienced a time of numerous and sometimes challenging changes, related to the social impacts of both transition and the pandemic. Despite these changes, participants generally described a positive sense of social belonging by the end of Year 7. However, they perceived more negative impacts on their learning and emotional wellbeing. Participants made sense of the pandemic as an abnormal and primarily negative time, describing online learning as particularly challenging. However, some simultaneously described this time as an opportunity for personal growth. Access to technology was perceived as an important influence on social and learning experiences. Educational success, positive relationships and developing existing interests was important to participants in the future, and they described consistent information as supportive. Limitations and implications for practice and research are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Primary to secondary school transition is a significant event for young people that can influence a range of longer-term outcomes. Young people who transitioned in September 2020 faced the additional challenge of doing so during a global pandemic. This chapter discusses literature regarding the process of transition prior to the pandemic, then explores the pandemic's impacts on young people. This chapter finishes by discussing the rationale for this research, which examines the experiences of young people transitioning to secondary school at this time.

1.2 Primary to secondary school transition

This section discusses the process of transition and what makes this successful, before considering young people's experiences of transition and how they can be supported to make a successful transition.

1.2.1 The transition process

This section considers the changes young people experience as they move from primary to secondary school.

Young people experience many systemic changes as they move through education, which can sometimes be challenging to navigate and can lead to longer-term declines in wellbeing and achievement (Anderson et al., 2000). These challenges are more likely when several changes occur simultaneously

(Evans et al., 2018; Waters et al., 2012), consistent with the focal model of adolescent development (Coleman, 2011), which suggests that adolescence is easier to navigate if young people are able to spread changes out over time.

One such systemic change is the move to secondary school. In most countries, this occurs at the age of approximately ten to twelve years (Evans et al., 2018), and involves a move to a larger school environment (Anderson et al., 2000; Rice et al., 2011), which and is generally experienced by young people as a significant event (Evans et al., 2018; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Social context also changes over transition. Secondary students tend to be drawn from a larger area, leading to a more heterogeneous social group (Anderson et al., 2000). Linked to this, friendship groups tend to change at this time (Gibbons and Telhaj, 2016). In some cases, this can offer an opportunity to develop more supportive peer relationships (Evans et al., 2018). However, these changes can also place greater demands on young people's social skills (Mahmud, 2021) and can lead to relational conflict or strain (Pellegrini and Long, 2002; Hung, 2014), with the move drawing particular attention to peer status (Coffey, 2013), and sometimes increasing incidents of racism and discrimination (Marraccini et al., 2022).

Academic expectations are also different in secondary school, with a greater emphasis on rules and academic attainment (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2018; Hung, 2014;). Young people move from having a single teacher to several teachers with different expectations (Anderson et al., 2000; Hung, 2014). This has been suggested to lead to declines in perceived teacher support (Bagnall et al., 2019), although this may reflect a more general pattern related to declines in perceived support over adolescence (Bru et al., 2010).

These changes in physical, social and academic environments can affect young people's emotions. Most young people experience some anxiety before transition, which usually reduces after starting secondary school (Rice et al., 2011; Zeedyk et al., 2003). However, this can sometimes lead to longer-term changes in emotional wellbeing (Evans et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2011). Self-esteem (Evans et al., 2018) and motivation (Anderson et al., 2000; Hung, 2014) and academic self-concept (Plante et al., 2022), can also decline at this time.

Young people's academic goals can also shift from mastery of material towards a greater focus on attainment (Hung, 2014).

Transition therefore leads to a range of changes for young people. The following section will consider the factors needed to navigate these changes successfully, and why successful transitions are important.

1.2.2 The importance of transition success

This section will consider how successful transition can be defined, and the longer-term effects of transition success.

Evans et al. (2018) highlight three important aspects of a successful transition, which will be used to consider the success of transition throughout this paper. These three dimensions are: integration into the social environment, including developing positive peer relationships; continuing to develop academic skills; and maintaining emotional wellbeing. The definition of emotional wellbeing requires some further consideration, as this concept has several definitions, that can be broadly split into hedonistic, defined by the amount of subjective happiness felt; and eudaimonic, defined by the person's ability to meet human needs such as living in line with their values (McMahan & Estes, 2011). Both these ways of defining wellbeing will be considered when discussing young people's emotional wellbeing over transition.

Understanding the components of a successful transition is important, as

a minority of young people experience less successful transition (Waters et al., 2012), which can impact on a range of later life outcomes. One area where difficulties may develop relates to academic progress. A dip in attainment and progress is often seen over transition (Evans et al., 2018; West et al., 2010) and attendance, motivation and engagement in learning may also be negatively affected (Rice et al., 2011). This decrease in attainment can have longer-term effects, being associated with lower engagement in future education, risky behaviours, and reduced educational and work achievement (Evans et al., 2018; Neugebauer and Schindler, 2012; West et al., 2010). These negative longer-term effects are more likely where declines in progress impact negatively on academic self-concept (Evans et al., 2018).

Young people can also experience social difficulties over transition, such as friendship difficulties or feelings of loneliness (Pratt & George, 2005) or bullying (Heinsch et al., 2020). The quality of teacher relationships is also often perceived to decline and young people may feel less respected (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013) cared for (Lithari and Rogers, 2017) or involved in decision-making (Deuchar, 2009) after transition.

Difficulties can also occur in relation to emotional wellbeing, with negative transition experiences leading to reduced enjoyment of school (Evans et al., 2018) and poorer longer-term psychological and emotional outcomes (Rice et al., 2011). Negative transition experiences can also have longer-term impacts on mental health (Waters et al., 2012; West et al., 2010).

Overall, therefore, successful transition includes positive social relationships, academic success and emotional wellbeing, while difficulties in any of these areas can have a range of negative impacts. Transition therefore appears a particularly critical time for young people's future development.

1.2.3 Factors influencing transition success

The above section defines successful transition and describes its importance. This section will consider individual, family, peer and school factors that influence transition success.

Individual

Individual-level factors can affect the success of transition. Pupils who are younger (Rice et al., 2011); have Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Rice et al., 2021); or come from lower-income (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; West et al., 2010); or minority ethnic (West et al., 2010) backgrounds are more at risk of poorer transition outcomes. The effect of gender is more mixed, with girls reporting more concerns pre-transition (Evans et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2021) but scoring more highly on several measures of success post-transition (Evans et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2021).

Children's academic abilities prior to transition can also affect their adjustment to secondary school, with pupils with lower prior achievement being more vulnerable to poorer academic outcomes (Evans et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2011), and higher levels of stress and anxiety (West et al., 2010). Social and emotional skills in primary school can also affect transition success (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021), as can levels of emotional wellbeing and mental health before transition (Nowland & Qualter, 2020; Rice et al., 2021).

Young people's perceptions and expectations can also affect transition. Young people's self-esteem, confidence, enjoyment and belonging (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020); academic self-concepts (Evans et al., 2018); self-efficacy in relation to emotional skills (Nowland & Qualter, 2020); expectations of secondary school before transition (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019); and how far these match their experiences following arrival in secondary (Kaur et al., 2022) have all been found to influence transition experiences and outcomes.

Overall, therefore, transition experiences can be influenced by a range of individual-level characteristics, including aspects of a child's identity such as gender, special educational needs and socioeconomic status, prior skills and abilities, and their perceptions and views.

Family

Family context can also affect transition success. Family factors influencing transition include the availability of resources (Evans et al., 2018); and the level of parental support and quality of home-school relationships (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Parenting style can also affect transition. Authoritative parenting styles (West et al., 2010) and those supporting the development of autonomy (Evans et al., 2018) can both increase the likelihood of more successful transition. In addition, parental views and expectations can influence young people's perceptions (Bagnall et al., 2019), and may therefore have an indirect influence on transition outcomes.

Siblings can also influence transition success. The effects of this appear somewhat mixed: having a sibling or cousin already at school reduced pre-

transition concerns in some research (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019) but increased them in others (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). This may relate to the nature of experiences shared by siblings and how they themselves found the transition.

Therefore, as well as individual factors, perceptions and experiences, factors at the family level also influence transition success, including factors relating to parents, siblings and the family system as a whole.

Peer relationships

Higher-quality peer relationships pre-transition have been associated with a range of positive transition outcomes, including academic outcomes, feelings of connection to school and emotional wellbeing (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2018; Heinsch et al., 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen, Vasalampi, Kiuru, et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2014; West et al., 2010). This may be because existing peer relationships act as an important support network during the move (Virtanen et al., 2019) and make it easier to develop new friendships in secondary school (Kiuru et al., 2020; Weller, 2007).

Following transition, support from peers becomes less important to outcomes (Waters et al., 2014), which may relate to the level of change in peer relationships at this time (Gibbons & Telhaj, 2016; Heinsch et al., 2020). However, while it is rare for children to maintain stable friendships over transition, doing so brings a range of benefits (Ng-Knight et al., 2019), and new friendships made can influence academic achievement (Gibbons & Telhaj, 2016). Therefore, while peer support is most influential in primary school, peer relationships in secondary continue to have an influence on transition success.

School

Whole-school factors in both primary and secondary also influence transition outcomes. These include primary school climate (Lester and Cross, 2015); socioeconomic status at school level (Moore et al., 2020); feelings of school belonging (Vaz et al., 2014; 2015) and engagement (Virtanen et al., 2019), as well as primary teacher expectations (Rice et al., 2021), and the level of

preparation offered (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Overall, therefore, a child's experience at primary school plays an important role in transition.

Secondary school factors also affect transition success. A greater focus on performance than learning goals in secondary school can have a negative impact on wellbeing and academic achievement (Evans et al., 2018), while supportive teacher relationships help to facilitate successful transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Whole-school factors such as the level of bullying (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020); socioeconomic status at school level (Moore, 2020) and practices such as ability setting (Boone & Demanet, 2020) also affect transition success.

Finally, the relationship between the two schools is also important. Moving to the same secondary school as some primary peers can enhance secondary peer relationships and academic achievement (Langenkamp, 2009). Changes in children's relative status over the move also has an impact: for example, children whose relative socioeconomic status in school decreases as they move to secondary are at more risk of poorer outcomes (Moore, 2020). The communication and continuity of curriculum between primary and secondary settings is also important to transition success (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020).

Therefore, both primary and secondary school environments individually and the relationship between them are all important influences on transition experiences and outcomes.

Summary

In summary, this section has suggested that factors at a range of levels within different systems influence the success of transition, including individual, peer, family, teacher and whole-school factors, consistent with an ecosystemic understanding of child development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1981). One important influence is young people's own perceptions and expectations, meaning that in order to understand transition processes and outcomes it is important to listen to young people's perspectives. Research in this area will be the focus of the next section.

1.2.4 Experiences of transition

The above section discussed the wide range of factors at individual, peer, family and school levels that can influence transition, which included young people's own views of transition. In understanding transition, it is therefore important to understand young people's perspectives, feelings and experiences. This section will explore existing research in this area.

In relation to feelings, most young people describe feelings of stress or anxiety before transition (Moore et al., 2021; Pratt and George, 2005) alongside more positive emotions such as excitement (Heinsch et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Sime et al., 2021). Following the move, anxiety generally declines (van Rens et al., 2019) following transition, and feelings of worry may give way to excitement (Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019). Young people's emotions over transition are therefore variable over the course of transition, involving a mix of positive and negative emotions that generally become more positive following the move to secondary school.

Young people's perceptions are also important to understand. By the end of primary school, children have developed views of school and transition, and often see the final year of primary school as a period of preparation for the change (Sime et al., 2021). Young people have also developed perceptions of secondary school at this stage. Some see secondary as a more challenging or risky environment (Sime et al., 2021), and express concerns about social relationships in particular (van Rens et al., 2019). However, many also have positive perceptions about the move (Mackenzie et al., 2012), including perceiving it as an opportunity for making new friendships, exploring new subjects and developing increased independence (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2020). Young people therefore have a range of perceptions about both primary and secondary school even prior to transition, which may influence what they expect from secondary school.

Research has also examined young people's views of what is important to them during this time. Throughout all stages of transition, relationships, especially those with peers, are a central area of importance and concern for young people (Heinsch et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Mumford and Birchwood,

2020; van Rens et al., 2019; Zeedyk et al., 2003), with concerns in these areas persisting for longer than other worries (Curson et al., 2019). Other common areas of concern include the physical environment and new routines (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2020; Mumford and Birchwood, 2020; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Academic concerns are less common (Moore, 2021), but are expressed by some young people (Zeedyk et al., 2003). Therefore, while young people view a range of aspects of transition as important, relationships and especially peer relationships appear to be the most important area to them at this time.

Young people also perceive some differences between their perspectives and those of others. For example, some young people feel that the significance of peer relationships is not always understood by parents or teachers (Bagnall et al., 2019). Young people also perceive others treating them as more independent following transition (Mumford & Birchwood, 2020). While they value this in some ways, they can continue to feel a need for nurture and reassurance that they do not always perceive is met (Mumford & Birchwood, 2020). Young people's views of transition may therefore differ to those of other stakeholders, making it important to understand young people's views specifically.

Young people's views of transition are not homogenous, and children's views may vary dependent on a range of factors. For example, boys and girls can perceive transition differently, with girls reporting more concerns about emotional development and boys focusing more on physical development (Pratt & George, 2005). Young people's family background may also influence their views, with young people from higher-income backgrounds more likely to report academic concerns (Moore et al., 2021) and children who are Looked After (LAC) reporting more concerns around relationships (Francis et al., 2021). The wider social environment can also affect experiences, as having siblings in secondary school can help young people feel less concerned about the move (Mackenzie et al., 2012). Young people with SEN can also have different perceptions, for example perceiving transition as more challenging than their peers (Fortuna, 2014; Makin et al., 2017), although the transition experiences of young people with SEN are very variable (Maras & Aveling, 2006).

Overall, most young people appear to experience transition as a significant event, associated with feelings of anxiety that usually quickly decline following the move. Young people have a range of understandings and expectations of secondary school prior to transition. They generally perceive relationships as particularly important to them over this time and feel that their views sometimes differ from those of parents and teachers. However, it is important to note that there is great variation in young people's individual perceptions, which may be affected by a range of individual and family factors.

So far, this review has considered the process and experiences of transition. The next section will discuss how others can effectively support transition for young people.

1.2.5 Supporting successful transition

The previous sections have explored the importance of successful transition and the potential for a range of factors to influence this. This suggests that through supporting transition effectively, adults can have a significant influence on future outcomes for young people. This section will explore how adults usually support transition for young people, and best practice in doing so.

The majority of young people receive some support from schools over transition (Evangelou et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2011). This often includes transition visits to the new school, preparation in primary school, and visits from secondary teachers (Evangelou et al., 2008). Other supports include joint social events, sharing information, booklets, and mentorship schemes (Evangelou et al., 2008). All these are good practice in supporting transition as they can help children feel prepared (Evangelou et al., 2008) and reduce anxiety (Neal et al., 2016). Children also benefit from support following the move, including support adapting to the new setting and relaxed rules in the first few weeks (Evangelou et al., 2008).

A range of literature has considered the most effective ways to support transition. To support emotional wellbeing, best practice includes presenting information positively to support positive expectations (Bagnall et al., 2019; Strand, 2020); providing a sense of safety (Mowat, 2019b; Strand, 2020), and

providing consistent information (Bagnall et al., 2019; Strand, 2020). Specific social or emotional interventions can also be helpful for some young people (Evans et al., 2018).

Linked to its centrality to pupil perspectives and its importance to successful transition, another key area to support is social belonging and peer relationships (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Mowat, 2019b; Strand, 2020). Interventions that can be helpful include creating smaller communities within the secondary environment (Anderson et al., 2000), monitoring and supporting friendships (Evans et al., 2018; Strand, 2020), offering extracurricular opportunities (Anderson et al., 2000), and interventions to reduce bullying (Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008).

Another important area to support is academic learning. Generally, support that makes academic changes more gradual over transition is helpful. This might include continuity between schools in curriculum (Evans et al., 2018; Hopwood et al., 2016; Mowat, 2019a; Rainer & Cropley, 2015; Strand, 2020) and classroom climate and expectations (Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008; Strand, 2020); support to develop required academic skills in primary school (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019); and initial lowering of expectations in secondary school to provide time to develop required skills (Strand, 2020).

To support this continuity, it is important that primary and secondary staff communicate effectively (Evangelou et al., 2008; Hopwood et al., 2016; Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008; Strand, 2020) and work jointly with other agencies (Anderson et al., 2000; Bagnall et al., 2019; Strand, 2020). Allowing sufficient time to support the transition is also important (Bagnall et al., 2019). Ideally, support should begin in late primary and continue over at least the first term of secondary school or longer (Anderson et al., 2000).

While these elements of effective transition support are helpful for all young people, some groups, such as children with SEN and LAC may require more tailored or individualized support (Brewin and Statham, 2011; Hoy et al., 2018; Richter et al., 2019). Considering and addressing individual student needs is therefore also an important feature of effective support.

In summary, effective support should help children to manage the emotional, social and academic tasks of transition by providing reassurance and emotional support; aiding the development of social relationships; providing curriculum continuity; and supporting the development of academic skills. Good communication between school settings, providing support over a sufficient time period, and tailoring this to individual needs are also important.

1.2.6 Summary of primary to secondary transition

Overall, secondary transition is experienced as an important milestone by young people, involving changes in physical, social and academic environments that have a range of impacts on young people's emotions, experiences and perceptions. To navigate transition successfully, young people need to manage all these changes to maintain positive emotional wellbeing, develop social relationships in the new environment, and develop the required academic skills to be a successful learner in secondary school.

While most young people make a successful transition, a minority have a more challenging experience. The success of transition can be influenced by a wide range of factors at individual, family, peer and school levels, and is associated with a range of longer-term academic, occupational and wellbeing outcomes. Supporting transition effectively is therefore crucial.

The cohort of children who made this transition in September 2020 not only experienced the changes usually associated with transition, but at the same time experienced the coronavirus pandemic, which itself was associated with a wide range of changes and impacts for young people. The next section will explore the pandemic's impact on young people.

1.3 The coronavirus pandemic

Children's development can be affected by a range of wider systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). The coronavirus pandemic impacted a range of these systems at different levels, leading to significant changes in young people's

lives. This section will consider the impact of the pandemic on children and the systems surrounding them.

In March 2020, the UK government imposed restrictions to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which included school closures. Most Year 6 children were allowed to return to school for a brief time in July 2020, but restrictions remained in place in the school environment, including social distancing and smaller class sizes. Further school closures followed in January 2021. Outside these school closure periods, various disease containment measures remained in place during most of the 2020-2021 academic year, including mask-wearing, regular testing and restricted movement in schools.

At home, children experienced three lockdowns in the spring of 2020, November 2020 and January-March 2021. During these periods, access to in-person social events and community resources were significantly restricted, and most adults either worked from home or had their work suspended. Outside lockdown periods, there were varying levels of restrictions in place at different points in time from Spring 2020 until after the time this research was conducted in July 2021. These included limitations on the numbers of people who could meet, social distancing, mask-wearing, and restrictions on travel.

As a result, children experienced substantial changes to their school, home and community microsystems over the course of the pandemic, lasting across two academic years. Emerging research suggests that these changes may have had a range of impacts on young people's emotional, social and academic development, as well as affecting wider systems that are known to influence children's development.

1.3.1 Impact on young people

This section will explore the emerging evidence of the impact of the pandemic on young people's emotional, social and academic development.

Emotional wellbeing

Several authors have suggested that the pandemic has negatively affected young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Research suggests lower levels of life satisfaction (Department for Education, 2020); increased feelings of anxiety (Andrés et al., 2022; Department of Education, 2020; Englander, 2021; Lane et al., 2021); increased frequency of mental health difficulties (Davies et al., 2020; Du et al., 2021; Englander, 2021; Özlü-Erkilic et al., 2021); and increased parental reports of emotional and behavioural difficulties for their children (Andrés et al., 2022; Ashbury et al., 2020; Laufer & Bitton, 2021) during the pandemic. These impacts may have varied over time, with some young people reporting the period after returning to school as being more negative for their mental health than the lockdowns themselves (McCluskey et al., 2021).

Several factors may have influenced these changes. Firstly, the pandemic itself may have given rise to a range of emotions, with young people variously reporting feelings of worry (Caldwell et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2021); sadness (Caldwell et al., 2021; Thompson et al. 2021); boredom (Caldwell et al., 2021); uncertainty (McCluskey et al., 2021); and shock or confusion (Strömmer et al., 2022). The pandemic may also have led to particular areas of worry for young people: for example, fears about themselves or family members becoming ill (Thompson et al., 2021) or concerns about the impact of school closures on their learning (McCluskey et al., 2021). Additionally, the pandemic may have negatively affected access to mental health services (McMellon & MacLachlan, 2021), potentially making it more difficult for young people to access support to manage these emotional impacts.

While there is emerging evidence that the pandemic impacted negatively on the emotional wellbeing of many young people, this was not universally the case. Young people also reported positive emotions associated with the pandemic, such as feeling safe, relaxed or happy during lockdowns (Caldwell et al., 2021). Early surveys by the Department of Education (2020) also suggested that wellbeing remained relatively positive for most young people in the early stages of the pandemic.

The impacts of the pandemic on emotional wellbeing therefore appear variable. While many young people were able to maintain positive wellbeing, the emerging evidence suggests that there was an overall worsening of mental health for young people during this time.

Social development

Young people's social interactions also changed. Keeping in touch with friends was important to young people but was challenging for several reasons, including difficulties with technology and having less to talk about (Davies et al., 2020). As a result, many children, especially those in primary school, experienced little or no contact with friends (Department for Education, 2020). Where children did maintain contact with peers, this was usually through technology, rather than in-person interactions (Bengtsson et al., 2021; Panarese & Azzarita, 2021).

In terms of family relationships, relationships with parents generally remained stable or improved (Davies et al., 2020; Department for Education, 2020), with some parents having more quality time with their children (Laufer et al., 2021). However, levels of family conflict (Davies et al., 2020) and even domestic violence (Drotning et al., 2022) also increased in some families.

Overall, therefore, the pandemic appears to have had several impacts on young people's social interactions, primarily reducing contact with peers and increasing contact with family relationships, with both positive and negative effects.

Learning and academic development

The pandemic also affected young people's schooling. Most were out of school for seven to fourteen weeks in the first school closures and nine in the second, and many had additional absences due to self-isolation (Sibieta and Cottell, 2020). The amount of time spent out of school was affected by age, region, and level of disadvantage (Sibieta and Cottell, 2020).

During this period, children learned at home, but generally spent less time on learning than they would in school (Andrew et al., 2020b). It is thought that

home learning may therefore have reduced academic progress (Cattan et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2020a; Sibieta and Cottell, 2021) and widened existing attainment gaps (Sharp et al., 2020a). Teachers felt they had covered less of the curriculum than usual and felt pupils were less engaged with learning (Lucas et al., 2020; Sharp et al., 2020a; Senft et al., 2022), and many young people and parents reported finding home learning difficult (Davies et al., 2020; Department for Education, 2020; Burns et al., 2022). However, reports from parents and teachers suggest that a small minority of young people may have found remote learning easier, perhaps linked to increased flexibility in how they learned (Burns et al., 2022; Lien et al., 2022). Therefore, while emerging evidence suggests that the overall impact of school closures on learning was mainly negative, there may have been a small minority of young people who experienced a positive impact.

From June 2020, some year groups, including Year 6, were invited to return to school (Sibieta & Cottell, 2021). However, only around half did so (Sharp et al., 2020a) and even fewer attended full-time (Sibieta & Cottell, 2021). Teachers also reported negative impacts of continued social distancing requirements on the standard of teaching (Sharp et al., 2020a). Negative impacts of the pandemic on learning may therefore have continued even after Year 6 children's return to school.

Schools reopened to all pupils in September 2020. Young people described their main needs during this return as feeling physically and emotionally safe; having clear information; and having opportunities to rebuild relationships (Sivers et al., 2020). School leaders also prioritised social and emotional support for the first few weeks (Sharp et al., 2020a), suggesting there may have been less of a focus on learning than usual during this time due to the need to manage the pandemic's socioemotional impacts.

Many secondary schools also organised their school day differently at this time, with teachers moving between classrooms rather than pupils (Sharp et al., 2020a), and social distancing may have continued to affect teaching. Attendance rates were lower than usual (Sibieta and Cottell, 2021), particularly in secondary schools, lower-income areas, schools with lower prior attainment,

and regions that had more coronavirus cases. Therefore, the school environment continued to be affected by the pandemic even after the return to school, which may have affected learning.

Overall, therefore, the pandemic and associated school closures had a range of impacts on young people's schooling and therefore their academic learning. Most young people are likely to have lost some learning time during school closures, with the potential to affect their progress, confidence or engagement. They are also likely to have experienced differences in teaching and school organisation on return to school.

1.3.2 Impact on systems around young people

The pandemic also affected wider systems known to be important to young people's development, such as family and school microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Incomes reduced for many families (Ashbury et al., 2020; Department for Education, 2020), and these financial pressures could indirectly affect young people's wellbeing (Low & Mounts, 2022). The pandemic also led to other changes to parents' lives, with many changing jobs and having less leisure time (Andrew et al., 2020a). Home schooling may have been an added pressure for some parents and parents may also have experienced shifts in their roles in the extended family (Hernandez & Colaner, 2022) or changes to the boundaries between home and work life (Kanewischer et al., 2021).

Emerging evidence suggests that these changes could affect parent wellbeing, with some parents describing feelings of fear and uncertainty (Kanewischer et al., 2021); higher stress levels (Idsoe et al., 2021); and negative impacts on mental health (Ashbury et al., 2020). However, despite these stresses, parents were able to retain high levels of motivation to support their children's learning (Nyanamba et al., 2021). Help from the wider community may have been particularly important in supporting this resilience (Kanewischer et al., 2021), and impacts at the family level may therefore have been affected by wider community systems. These wider community resources themselves were affected by the pandemic (Day et al., 2020), with availability of community services often reducing (Brewer & Patrick, 2021; Davies et al., 2020).

School systems were also affected by the pandemic. In Senft et al. (2022)'s Austrian study, teachers felt their workload became heavier and more demanding. In Norway, school leaders described a similar sense of increased demand, feeling a high sense of uncertainty in navigating their school's response to the constantly changing pandemic situation (Lien et al., 2022). School leaders also felt that staff wellbeing had been affected, and described it was more difficult to stay in touch with and support staff, which may have meant that support mechanisms reduced during a time when teachers were experiencing increased stress (Lien et al., 2022). While these studies were conducted outside the UK, teachers in the UK also experienced a significant change to their usual way of working, and it seems likely this would also have led to increased demands and workload. This may have had a negative effect on teacher wellbeing, and by extension their capacity to support children.

The pandemic therefore resulted in changes to the wider systems around children, which have the potential to influence their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). In combination with the direct impacts on young people outlined in the previous section, the emerging evidence suggests that the pandemic had wide-ranging impacts across a variety of areas of young people's development and wider lives.

1.3.3 Vulnerable groups

These impacts may have been especially significant for particular groups of children. Several studies have suggested that children with SEN may have found the pandemic especially difficult to navigate (e.g. Jacques et al., 2021; Jumareng et al., 2022; Mietola and Ahonen, 2021). LAC or children known to social services also experienced additional challenges (Roberts et al., 2021; Toros, 2021).

In addition, impacts of the pandemic varied with socioeconomic status and family structure. For example, children from lower-income backgrounds spent less time on home learning (Andrew et al., 2020c) and may have experienced more pressures on family finances as a result of the pandemic (Brewer and Patrick, 2021). Young people who had a parent living in a separate household

may have had limited contact with this parent (Davies et al., 2020) and those with a parent in prison were unable to visit them during lockdowns (Davies et al., 2020).

Services for young people in some of these vulnerable groups were also impacted. This included changes to mental health services and changes to support provided to young carers or those from lower-income backgrounds (Davies et al., 2020), which may have made these supports more challenging to access.

Therefore, the impact of the pandemic was unlikely to have been even for all young people, and particular groups were likely to experience more negative impacts. These included young people with SEN, LAC, those who were young carers or had mental health needs, and those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

1.3.4 Summary of the pandemic and its impact

Overall, the emerging evidence suggests that the pandemic led to substantial changes for many young people, impacting directly on their development and also affecting the systems around them. While some of these changes were positive, emerging evidence suggests an overall negative impact on several areas, particularly mental health and academic learning. These impacts may have been particularly acute for young people in vulnerable groups.

However, much of the research described above focuses on quantitative measures of impact or the views of adults. It is also important to understand young people's views of the pandemic and its impact, both as young people have the right to be heard (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, Article 12), and as their direct experiences make their perspectives a particularly valuable source of insight and understanding in this area. Some research has highlighted that young people feel they received limited information about the pandemic and were not involved or heard as much as they wanted to be (Davies et al., 2020; Day et al., 2020; Strömmer et al., 2022), making it even more important that young people's views are listened to as we consider ways to move forward.

The next section focuses on a systematic literature review conducted in June 2021 to explore young people's views and experiences of the pandemic and its impacts at that time.

1.4 A systematic literature review of young people's experiences of the pandemic

1.4.1 Introduction and objectives of review

The above section suggests that the coronavirus pandemic has affected a range of areas in young people's learning and wider lives, including several that are important to successful transition, such as academic progress; wellbeing and mental health; and social relationships.

However, the transition research also suggests that young people's own perspectives also influence both transition experiences and success. In understanding the potential impact of the pandemic on transition, it is therefore important to understand how children and young people have experienced the pandemic and the changes it has made to their lives.

A systematic literature review was therefore conducted with the aim of exploring young people's experiences of the pandemic. This aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What have been young people's experiences of the coronavirus pandemic?
- How do they perceive the pandemic has affected them?

1.4.2 Methods

Eligibility criteria

Table 1.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
Written in English	Written in another language
Presented primary data in a peer-reviewed research journal	Presented secondary data, such as reviews, or included non-peer-reviewed research such as government papers
Included young people's voices directly as at least part of the dataset	Examined young people's views only through the report of another person, such as parents or teachers
Included at least one participant between 10-12 years	Included only participants in other age ranges, or age range of participants could not be verified
At least one research question or aim focused on general experiences of the pandemic or its impact on education	Focused exclusively on impacts of the pandemic in non-educational aspects of children's lives, such as health services
Published in 2020-2021, with data collected in March 2020 or later	Data collected earlier than March 2020
Included at least one opportunity for an open-ended form of response (e.g. semi-structured or unstructured interview, open-ended survey question, art-based activities).	Included only closed questions (e.g. closed survey questions), where young people were only able to choose from pre-determined options.

Table 1.1 lists the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The first criterion was selected to ensure the author could read included studies. The second criterion was selected to ensure the review focused as directly as possible on young people's experiences, and the third aimed to support the quality of the research included. The fourth criterion was selected to ensure studies included young people in the relevant age range for this research. The fifth and sixth criteria

were included to ensure research considered experiences of the pandemic relevant to general life or education. The final criterion was included to ensure that research presented an opportunity for young people to freely share their experiences.

Study selection

Study titles and abstracts were screened using the inclusion criteria. Studies that did not meet criteria were rejected. Full texts of studies were then screened briefly using the inclusion criteria. Where studies met inclusion criteria at this stage, they were included in the review.

Information sources and search strategy

Two databases were searched between the 9th and 25th June 2021: Web of Science and PsychInfo. The date range was restricted to papers published from 2020 onwards. The search terms used were: "(child*** OR young people**) AND (experience* OR perception* OR perspective*) AND (pandemic OR COVID*** OR coronavirus)". Searches were conducted for the topic field of the database as this returned the widest range of papers.

Search terms were developed through considering the three key aspects papers needed to include to be relevant to the research question: that is, that they were focused on young people, included their experiences or perspectives, and were focused specifically on the pandemic. Possible synonyms for each of these areas were considered to develop the final search terms: for example, different ways of referring to the pandemic.

Data Collection Process

Included papers were read in detail and key information recorded using a data collection form designed by the author (Appendix 1). This was based on the form developed by the Cochrane Collaboration (2014) but adapted to capture information relevant to a qualitative study.

Data were sought on each study's epistemological viewpoint and background; study aims and research questions; number and characteristics of participants; context of recruitment and data collection; methodology and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness.

Weight of evidence

This was assessed using Gough (2007)'s weight of evidence model. This incorporates three areas to consider when assessing how much weight to give the evidence of a particular study within systematic reviews. The first area, Weight of Evidence A, involves assessing the coherence and trustworthiness of the study on its own terms, in relation to quality criteria for that type of research. For this review, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (2018) was used to review each study to inform the judgement for Weight of Evidence A, as this checklist includes quality criteria for the conduct and reporting of qualitative research.

The second area, Weight of Evidence B, considers the relevance of the type of evidence to the research question(s) of the review (Gough, 2007). The research questions of this review focused on perspectives and experiences. For these questions, data collection methods that included a higher proportion of open-ended questions or methods were given a higher weight of evidence, as such methods were felt to allow more opportunity for participants to express their own views and ideas. Methods that involved more direct methods for gaining young people's views (for example interviews conducted by the researcher directly with young people, rather than parent reports of young people's views) were also given a higher rating, as were analysis methods that were more inductive, as inductive methods focus primarily on participant experiences and perspectives to inform the development of results, rather than on existing theory.

The third area, Weight of Evidence C, considers the relevance of the focus of the study to the review's research questions. This review focused on young people's experiences to inform research in a UK context focusing specifically on transition to secondary school of 10-12 year old children. Studies that focused

primarily or solely on young people's views were therefore given a higher weight of evidence than studies that had a small section on young people's views alongside parent or teacher views. Studies with a higher proportion of participants in the 10-12 year age range were also given a higher Weight of Evidence C rating. Finally, studies conducted in a UK or European context were given a higher rating, as these studies are likely to have been conducted in a more similar cultural context to that of the study this review aimed to inform.

The criteria used to consider Weight of Evidence are summarised in table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Criteria for weight of evidence assessment.

Criteria for Weight of Evidence A	**Criteria for Weight of Evidence B**	**Criteria for Weight of Evidence C**
CASP checklist (CASP, 2018)	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Proportion of study focused on young people's views Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European context

Method of Analysis

The data set for analysis was the section of each paper labelled 'results' or 'findings', including the main text and any tables. This was entered into the NVivo software programme, used to support coding and analysis.

Results were analysed using thematic synthesis as described in Thomas and Harden (2008). Analysis began with repeated readings of the text. Following

three readings, the author generated some initial codes, then used line-by-line coding across the data set.

Following coding, the author reviewed the codes to develop initial descriptive themes. The author then re-read the text again to consider whether these themes adequately captured the data set. At this stage, Thomas and Harden (2008) suggest that themes are reviewed in light of the initial research question to generate analytic themes that generate additional concepts in light of theoretical frameworks. As this review focused on research that is in an initial exploratory stage, and as the research question focused on describing experiences, the author felt it appropriate for themes to remain at a relatively descriptive level. Nevertheless, at this stage themes were further refined and regrouped to generate a smaller number of themes to capture key areas of children's experiences (see Appendix 2 for a final list of codes and themes).

1.4.3 Results

Study selection

Figure 1.1

Flowchart summarizing study selection.

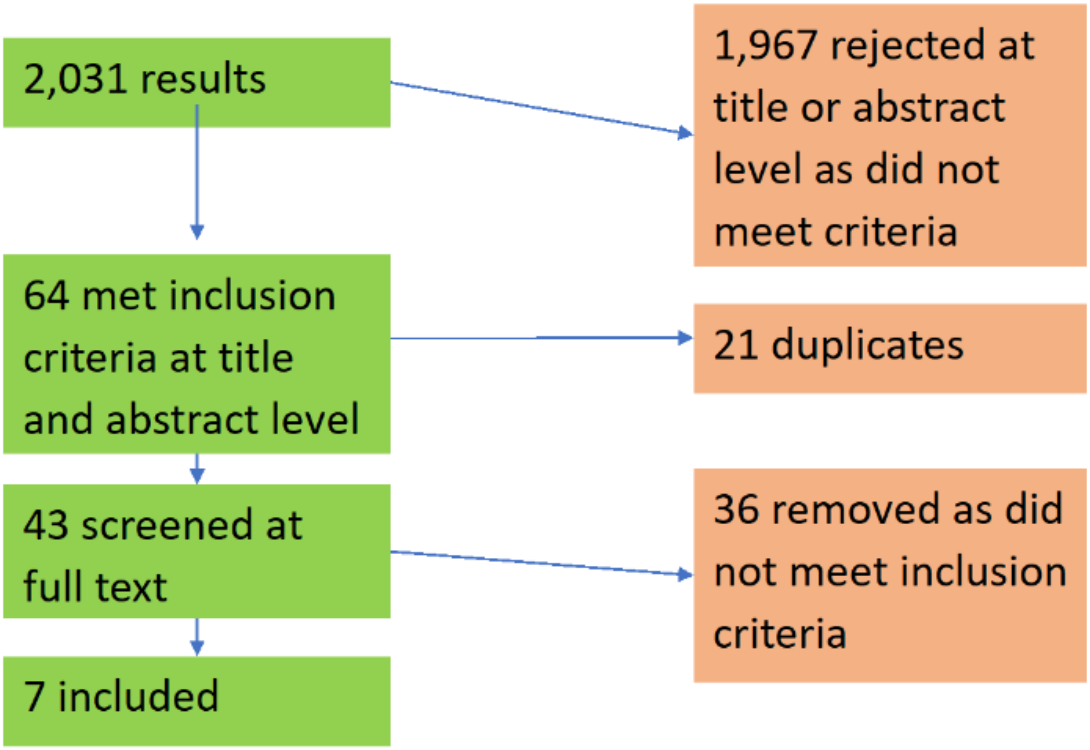


Figure 1.1 summarises the search and selection process. A total of seven papers are included.

Study characteristics

Table 1.3

Study characteristics.

Study reference	**Participants**	**Data collection method**	**Data analysis method**
Abdulah et al. (2020)	6-13 year-old children in Iraq	Children produced and discussed a painting about 'being at home during the pandemic' with the researcher	Content analysis

Amrutha et al. (2021)	43 9-11 year old children in India	Drawings and descriptive notes about the pandemic submitted to an online art exhibition	Not specified.
Flynn et al. (2021)	1189 primary and secondary school students in Ireland	Online survey including a mix of short and long-answer questions	Content analysis for short-answer questions; inductive analysis for long-answer questions.
Idoiaga et al. (2020)	250 3-12 year-old children in Spain	Parents interviewed their children using a framework provided by the researchers.	Statistical analysis to identify clusters of co-occurring phrases, which were then considered by an analyst to construct themes.
Larcher et al. (2020)	15 11-18 year-olds participating in a hospital youth forum in the UK	Focus group over video call	Inductive thematic analysis
O'Sullivan et al. (2021)	45 children in Ireland	Semi-structured online interviews alongside parents	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
Valadez et al. (2020)	649 children aged 5-15 years, mostly from Mexico	Survey including a mix of open and closed questions	Mixed-method. Qualitative data analysis began with statistical analysis to identify

			clusters of co-occurring phrases, which were then considered by an analyst to construct themes.

Table 1.3 describes the characteristics of each included study. Studies were conducted in a range of cultural contexts, of which only one was in the UK. Methods of data collection also varied, including creative methods, interviews and focus groups, and surveys. Studies included a range of qualitative analysis methods. Related to the range of analytic and data collection approaches, the sample size also varied substantially, from fifteen to over a thousand. The number of participants and the data analysis methods were, however, not always clearly specified.

Weight of evidence

Appendix 3 shows the weight of evidence assessments for each individual study. Overall, four studies were given a weight of evidence of medium to low and three medium to high (Table 1.4). Weight of Evidence A was strongest across studies, with two studies being given a 'High' rating for this category. Weight of Evidence C was weakest across studies, suggesting the focus of included studies was less relevant than ideal to the review questions. This was primarily linked to most studies being conducted outside a UK context.

Table 1.4

Weight of evidence for each study.

Study	**Weight of evidence A**	**Weight of evidence B**	**Weight of evidence C**	**Overall**
Abdulah et al. (2020)	Medium-low	Medium	Medium-low	Medium-low
Amrutha et al.	Low	Medium-low	Medium	Medium-low

(2021)				
Idoiaga et al. (2020)	High	Medium	Medium-high	Medium-high
Flynn et al. (2021)	Medium	Medium-low	Medium-low	Medium-low
Larcher et al. (2020)	Medium-low	Medium-high	Medium-high	Medium-high
O'Sullivan et al. (2021)	High	Medium-high	Low	Medium-high
Valadez et al. (2020)	Medium-high	Low	Medium-low	Medium-low

Thematic synthesis of results

Seven themes were identified, each including several sub-themes. Table 1.5 summarises the number of papers each theme was drawn from, as well as example quotations illustrating each theme. Each theme is divided into several sub-themes, which are described in more detail in Appendix 4.

Table 1.5

Summary of main themes.

Theme	**Number of papers**	**Example quotations**
Place in the community	6	"hope that together we shall win in this war against COVID-19 coronavirus" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "They're not listening to children, young people much at the moment" (Larcher et al., 2020)

Narrowed yet deeper connections	7	“I feel happy about spending more time with my family” (Valadez et al., 2020) “So, it might be very hard for some people because we can’t see our friends anymore…It’s not being able to have that human contact in person is really hard.” (Larcher et al., 2020) “They [young people] also identified being away from disruptive students or bullies (‘kids being mean to me’; ‘eejits in my class disrupting class’) as positive aspects” (Flynn et al., 2021)
Freedom	5	“I can take advantage and can do many things that I couldn’t do before due to lack of time” (Valadez et al., 2020) “‘COVID taught me the value of freedom of going outside which I took for granted’” (Amrutha et al., 2021) “sometimes I get angry because I want to go out and see my friends.” (Idoiaga et al., 2020)
Loss	7	“The children were also feeling depressed… because they could not do the normal activities that they had before the outbreak.” (Abdulah et al., 2020) “April 17th is my birthday, I will be 11 and I will have to be at home.” (Idoiaga et al., 2020) “I’m sad because my grandfather died” (Valadez

		et al., 2020) “Herself and her family’s hearts were broken during the coronavirus pandemic” (Abdulah et al., 2020)
Resilience	2	“It is normal to feel sad, worried and confused, but it is required to adapt to it” (Amrutha et al., 2021) “I hope that the pandemic ends soon, and everything goes back to normal” (Valadez et al., 2020) “Let us utilize this time to do something creative and beneficial” (Amrutha et al., 2021)
Safety	7	“If I go outside the home, I will be infected by the corona [virus]…. I will be admitted to the hospital.” (Abdulah et al., 2020) “The coronavirus… makes you feel a little afraid” (Idoiaga et al., 2020) “I could get coronavirus and I could die.” (Valadez et al., 2020) “He said that the coronavirus was strong and it would infect all his family members” (Abdulah et al., 2020) “Various anxieties were expressed about school reopening…that would lead to risks for staff and any students’ family members who might be at high risk of severe disease” (Larcher et al., 2020)

Challenges of home learning	6	“We have been almost overwhelmed. I know I have. With the amount of work that’s been set all at one time.” (Larcher et al., 2020) “Many students emphasised their lack of motivation towards schoolwork” (Flynn et al., 2021) “A lot of the teachers don’t respond when you ask them for assistance.” (Larcher et al., 2020) “Primary respondents particularly enjoyed project and practical work, technology-related activities, extracurricular activities” (Flynn et al., 2021)

Within the first theme, ‘place in the community’, many young people described the pandemic response with the imagery of battle or war, depicting the coronavirus on one ‘side’ and their community on the other. Many described needing to play their part in the response through following rules and precautions. They also expressed gratitude to others in the community involved in the response, such as doctors. Many young people also reflected on how the wider community viewed and interacted with them, with many expressing that information available to them was confusing and uncertain. Several young people also described a wish to be more listened to and involved in the response. In one of the seven papers, young people shared views that the pandemic had impacted unequally within the community, describing factors that made the pandemic more challenging, including special educational needs and technological and financial barriers.

The theme of ‘narrowed yet deeper connections’ focused on the impact of the pandemic on relationships. Young people described a sense of isolation from wider networks, especially peers. In contrast, most young people felt closer to

immediate family members during the pandemic and enjoyed the increased time spent with them, although this positive experience was not universal.

In the third theme, young people described a sense of increased freedom in relation to how to spend time, reduced freedom over space (for example being unable to go out), and a sense of anger or frustration around restrictions. In the fourth theme, young people described a sense of loss associated with the pandemic, which related to loss of day-to-day activities; special events such as birthdays or even exams, and experiences of bereavement. Young people across most studies also reported feelings of sadness in relation to the pandemic, which may have related to this sense of loss.

In the fifth theme, young people expressed ways they had maintained their resilience over the pandemic. Young people described coping skills such as adapting to the pandemic and maintaining wellbeing, as well as maintaining a sense of hope and optimism, with several drawing on religious faith to support this. Finally, several described opportunities presented by the pandemic such as time to learn a new skill.

Within the theme of 'safety' most young people reported feeling safe, comfortable, and happy at home but often felt unsafe outside it. However, home was not perceived as a safe space by all young people. Within this theme young people also expressed feelings of fear and concern in relation to the pandemic, including worries about friendships and learning and about their own and others' safety, particularly the safety of family members.

In the final theme, 'challenges of home learning', young people described the experience of home learning as characterised by increased workload and feeling overwhelmed and demotivated. Some also described conflicts with family related to home learning. However, some young people did have more positive experiences of home learning, especially in relation to practical or creative projects.

Weight of evidence across studies

All studies were given a medium-high or medium-low weight of evidence rating. There were therefore several limitations to weight of evidence across studies.

Most papers described little or no explicit procedures to support trustworthiness of the results. Sampling techniques may also have limited the range of views collected in some studies: for example, several collected responses via online means, so responses were only gained from children with the technology to access this. Data collection techniques in some studies may have influenced the views expressed by young people, for example where data were collected by parents, as part of a wider focus group, or following discussions of particular topics such as mental health with the researchers. Finally, only peer-reviewed, published papers were included, meaning that publication biases may also have influenced the results.

1.4.4 Discussion

Summary of evidence

Experiences of the pandemic

Young people's experiences of the pandemic were characterised by several themes. Young people described feelings of loss and sadness, relating not only to bereavements but also losses of day-to-day experiences and important events. This may be particularly relevant for young people at times of transition, as these periods are likely to include a greater number of such 'milestone' events. Young people also expressed fear and concern, especially around their own safety and that of others. Many young people viewed the home as safe and spaces outside the home, including school, as unsafe. This is important to note as a sense of safety within school is generally important to young people's engagement and learning (Milam et al., 2010).

Young people also viewed their experiences as part of those of a wider community. Many young people described the pandemic response as a battle between their community and the virus. However, some viewed the pandemic as impacting unequally on different groups within the community and increasing the visibility of differences between groups. Many also expressed that they did not feel heard or involved by others in the community. The pandemic may

therefore have impacted both positively and negatively on young people's sense of connection to the wider community. However, as all the included papers focused on experiences during the pandemic, it is difficult to know whether these views were changed by the pandemic or whether they reflect perceptions held for a longer period of time.

Finally, experiences of some young people in relation to the pandemic were more positive and characterised by optimism and a sense of resilience.

Perceptions of impact

Young people perceived a mixed impact of the pandemic on their freedom, perceiving more choice over how to spend time but less in relation to space. Similarly, young people perceived a mixed impact on their social connections. Overall, their range of social contacts was perceived to narrow during the pandemic, but relationships with those with whom they still had contact, mainly immediate family members, deepened. Impacts on social connections are particularly important to consider for transition, as relationships with others, especially peers, are of particular importance at this time (Heinsch et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Mumford & Birchwood, 2020; van Rens et al., 2019; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Views were less mixed about learning. Online learning was generally perceived as challenging. As a result, home learning experiences were often perceived as overwhelming and demotivating and could be a source of conflict with family. These themes are of particular concern in relation to transition, as young people's academic performance and engagement can reduce over transition (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2018; Hung, 2014; West et al., 2010), and academic skills are important to successful transition (Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Rice et al., 2011). The perception of home learning experiences as challenging and overwhelming also has the potential to impact on young people's academic self-concepts, which may also affect their transition experiences (Evans et al., 2018).

Limitations

This review had several limitations. Firstly, only a small number of studies were included, and only one was conducted in the United Kingdom. The studies themselves also had some limitations in methodology and reporting.

The author also conducted this thematic synthesis following reading of the literature and collection of some data for her own research. Themes identified may therefore have been influenced by these experiences and understandings. The author also conducted this thematic synthesis while continuing to experience restrictions and changes to her own working context and wider life associated with the pandemic. It is therefore possible that these experiences impacted on the way she understood children's views.

Finally, while the themes identified come from the views of young people across a range of countries and ages, and are collected in a range of ways, young people in different contexts or at different times may express different views or experiences. In particular, most data were collected early in the pandemic (during 2020) and young people's views of the pandemic and its impact may change over time (McCluskey et al., 2021). Readers should therefore carefully consider the applicability of this review to their own contexts, and especially to considering young people's experiences of later stages of the pandemic.

Implications for future research

This review suggests that young people experienced the pandemic as a significant event. Young people often felt that they were not listened to or involved in the response to the pandemic as much as they wished to be. Young people's own views and experiences of the pandemic are therefore an important area of research both to enable a full understanding of the pandemic and to support their right to be heard (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1990, Article 12).

Young people's views in this review were also variable, with many themes describing mixed responses. It is also notable that only one of the included studies was conducted in the UK. Some research in a UK context has been conducted in this area (e.g., Davies et al., 2020; Sivers et al., 2020), but this did not meet the inclusion criteria of being peer-reviewed, published research. As

the response to and impacts of the pandemic varied both at a country and regional level (Sharp et al., 2020b) there is therefore a need for more research exploring the views of young people within the UK, and it will be important to reflect a range of regions of the UK and groups of young people in this research in order to understand the full range of experiences and perceptions of the pandemic.

Conclusion

This review suggests that young people have experienced the pandemic as a significant event associated with a range of emotions and affecting many areas of their life. There is substantial variation in these experiences and perceived impacts, suggesting a need for further research to understand the full range of experiences. In particular, none of the included studies focused exclusively on the experiences of young people over transition. As transition is also experienced as a significant event that presents its own changes and challenges, considering the views of this group of young people is important.

1.5 Rationale and aims of current research

From the literature, it is evident that transition is a significant and challenging milestone in young people's lives (e.g., Moore et al., 2021; Pratt and George, 2005). Successful transition, defined in terms of social belonging, continued academic development and maintained emotional wellbeing (Evans et al., 2018) has a beneficial effect on a range of academic, occupational and wellbeing outcomes, continuing over many years (Waters et al., 2012; West et al., 2010).

The cohort of young people who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020 have done so at a very unusual time. The pandemic has led to a wide range of changes, and young people have experienced it as a significant event that has impacted many areas of their lives. Young people in this year group were therefore simultaneously experiencing two events that were likely to be significant and potentially challenging. Some theories of adolescent development suggest that experiencing multiple changes at the same time may

be more difficult to cope with (Coleman, 2011), suggesting that this could pose some risks for the development of these young people.

Emerging evidence also suggests that the pandemic may have impacted all three areas defined by Evans et al. (2018) as important to successful transition. In terms of social relationships, young people had reduced contact with friends (Davies et al., 2020), at a time in their lives when friendships are a particularly important source of support (Virtanen et al., 2019). In relation to academic skills, the pandemic has reduced learning time and may have had negative impacts on academic progress (e.g. Andrew et al., 2020b). Finally, in relation to emotional wellbeing, emerging evidence suggests the pandemic may have had a negative overall impact on young people's mental health (e.g., Department of Education, 2020; Englander, 2021).

This suggests that it is important to understand what the transition process has been like for young people in this unusual context. However, at the time of writing only one study had investigated the specific experiences of young people transitioning to secondary school during the pandemic. In a UK-wide survey of children transitioning to secondary school and their parents and teachers, Bagnall et al. (2022) found that most children, parents and teachers felt that transition would have been easier without the pandemic, suggesting that this group of young people may have faced additional difficulties during their transition. Children, parent and teacher responses suggested a range of potential areas of additional challenge, including poorer emotional wellbeing; missed opportunities and events; a changed school environment; and having fewer opportunities to prepare children for the transition. Parents and teachers felt that, likely as a result of these impacts, children in this year group were less ready for secondary school than in previous years.

Bagnall et al. (2022)'s study suggests that across the UK, children, parents and teachers perceived a range of impacts of the pandemic on transition and felt this had generally made transition more challenging. However, Bagnall et al. (2022)'s study was conducted with a large sample through survey methodology and also included parents and teachers, meaning there was limited opportunity for in-depth consideration of young people's specific experiences and

perspectives. In addition, surveys were conducted between September and November 2020, and therefore occurred just after children had moved to secondary school and before they experienced a second period of school closures in January 2021, meaning experiences and perspectives of this period could not be explored.

Therefore, while Bagnall et al. (2022)'s research adds substantially to our understanding of the process of transition during the pandemic, further research in this area is needed. The current study aims to contribute to this area by investigating in-depth experiences and perspectives of young people who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020 and by including their experiences across both Year 6 and Year 7. The study aims to consider three main questions:

1) What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?

2) How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?

3) How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter will detail the theoretical position and methodological approach of this research, then describe the research design. The chapter will end by describing the approaches taken to support the quality and trustworthiness of the research.

2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Stance

Ontology and epistemology are areas of philosophy important in informing research. This section will explore the main ontological and epistemological positions and outline the position taken for this research.

2.1.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality (Al-Ababneh, 2020). A realist ontology assumes the external world exists independently of our consciousness of it (Willig, 2008), while a relativist ontology does not assume this external reality exists, with reality existing only through human understandings and constructed through language (Willig, 2008).

Some authors adopt different ontologies for different aspects of the world. For example, Searle (1996) suggested a realist ontology for some aspects such as the natural world, and a relativist ontology for others, such as social norms.

2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to what and how we can know about reality (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Three main epistemological positions were considered to inform the positioning of this research.

The first position, objectivism, builds on a realist ontology and assumes we can know external reality objectively, independent of our own viewpoint (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge can therefore be certain, objective and true, directly reflecting reality. Objectivist research therefore attempts to remove subjective influences in the research process (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The second, constructionism, suggests the object being investigated and the viewpoint of the person investigating it interact to construct knowledge (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Crotty, 1998). Knowledge therefore cannot be fully separated from the viewpoint of the researcher(s) and is therefore subjective rather than objective. Interpretivism is similar but places more emphasis on individual viewpoints and social positionings (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

The third position is subjectivism. This also assumes reality cannot be known objectively, and that knowledge depends on the viewpoint of the researcher (Al-

Ababneh, 2020; Crotty, 1998). However, subjectivism assumes that the object being considered makes no contribution to the nature of the knowledge developed (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Crotty, 1998), so its meaning comes entirely from the researcher(s).

Research may therefore take a range of epistemological positions. Some of these, such as objectivism, involve a pre-specified ontological position, while others may be combined with either a realist or relativist ontology to form a particular theoretical position. The next section explores some of these theoretical positions.

2.1.3 Theoretical positions

Ontological and epistemological positions may be combined in several ways to produce different theoretical positions: that is, the understanding of the world informing the research methodology (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Positivism is one of these positions, underpinned by a realist ontology and objectivist epistemology. Positivism assumes that accurate and objective knowledge is possible (Al-Ababneh, 2020) and focuses on obtaining this through removing subjective influences in research (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Willig, 2008). Positivist approaches seek knowledge of causal explanations and laws that are universal and generalisable (Cohen et al., 2018). Positivism is closely tied to empiricism, which states that knowledge should be developed from observation (Willig, 2008), and therefore focuses research on what is observable.

Positivism as a theoretical position has received several critiques, including that it ignores aspects of reality such as individual and group ideas and experiences that are important in understanding psychological and social worlds (Pilgrim, 2019); and that the focus on universal laws ignores the multiple causes and probabilistic nature of real-life events (Pilgrim, 2019). Another criticism relates to its objectivist stance, arguing that it is impossible to remove subjectivity entirely from the process of knowledge generation (Pilgrim, 2019; Willig, 2008).

These criticisms have led most modern researchers using positivist methodologies to adopt a modified approach, often described as post-positivism (Crotty, 1998). Post-positivists acknowledge that fully objective knowledge is not possible, but still seek to reduce subjective influences as far as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2022), seeing objective knowledge as an ideal that can never quite be reached.

Another theoretical position that evolved from criticisms of positivism is post-modernism, which is informed by relativist ontology and constructionist, interpretivist or subjectivist epistemologies. Postmodernist philosophy sees reality as constructed by social and individual meaning-making rather than existing independently in the world, and knowledge as subjective rather than objective (Pilgrim, 2019).

A theoretical position closely related to post-modernism is social constructivism, which argues that reality is made up of ever-changing narratives or discourses that are socially constructed (Pilgrim, 2019). Research from this position tends to focus on these meaning-making processes, primarily how language is used to construct meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Pilgrim, 2019). In their strongest forms, postmodernist approaches argue there are no accurate claims to be made about reality, only different discourses that are equally valid (Pilgrim, 2019).

The postmodernist approach has also been criticised as missing important aspects of reality, such as the limitations posed on human experience by our existence as embodied beings in the natural world (Pilgrim, 2019). Pilgrim (2019) also notes that in a postmodern or constructivist paradigm, no form of knowledge or conception of reality can be seen as more accurate or valid than any other, which limits the possibilities for discussion and critique of research and the ability to make decisions based on it.

Another theoretical approach is critical realism, which is underpinned by a broadly realist ontology but a non-objectivist epistemology (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019). There are three core principles of critical realism (Pilgrim, 2019; Scott, 2014). The first, ontological realism, assumes that a large part of reality exists independently of our consciousness of it (Pilgrim, 2019). However, within

critical realism reality is seen as including different components, some of which exist independently of our minds and social discourses (intransitive aspects of reality) and some of which do not (transitive aspects of reality) (Pilgrim, 2019; Scott, 2014). Critical realism also divides the world into the 'actual', defined as what is happening in the world; the 'empirical', what we observe of the world; and the 'real', underlying causal mechanisms that affect what happens in the world (Pilgrim, 2019). In a critical realist ontology reality is therefore unfixed, with events emerging due to the influence of many different mechanisms that interact together in complex ways (Pilgrim 2019).

The second principle of critical realism is epistemological relativism, which holds that knowledge depends on individual perspectives and social and historical influences (Pilgrim, 2019). Knowledge cannot be fully separated from these (Braun & Clarke, 2022), meaning there are different possible knowledges about the same phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The third principle of critical realism is judgemental rationalism, which suggests that we can weigh up these different knowledges to make decisions about which to base our actions on (Pilgrim, 2019). This may be based on which knowledge of reality seems most likely given the range of evidence available, or which makes the most consistent predictions about the world (Pilgrim, 2019). As all knowledge is acknowledged as subjective and fallible, these judgements are made provisionally, but can still be made.

A final theoretical position is pragmatism. Unlike the other positions, pragmatism is less concerned with philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge, suggesting that methodologies should be considered based on their ability to answer the research questions proposed, rather than their underlying philosophies (Frost, 2011). Pragmatism is therefore primarily concerned with choosing an appropriate and helpful methodology to answer research questions, and research is evaluated in terms of its consequences, with usefulness considered more important than truthfulness (Cohen et al., 2011). What counts as useful knowledge or positive consequences is likely to be defined by the ethical value systems of the researcher and the wider community. Pragmatic research may therefore draw from a wide range of

methodologies underpinned by different epistemological positions, and often combines different approaches (Cohen et al., 2011).

2.1.4 Positioning this research

This research is informed by a critical realist theoretical perspective. This research therefore adopts an ontology that is primarily realist, but acknowledges that some aspects of reality, defined in the critical realist literature as transitive aspects of reality, exist only due to human meaning-making, viewing these aspects of reality in a more relativist way. The primary focus of this research project concerns young people's meanings and experiences, which are transitive aspects of reality. However, these experiences are positioned as being potentially influenced by a range of processes in physical and social realities that exist independently of the young person's meanings. Young people's experiences and meanings are also seen as potentially influencing external reality, for example through their responses to situations. Young people's experiences and perspectives are therefore seen as potentially important causal mechanisms that are important to consider in order to understand young people's responses to the wider world and how others might best support them.

In taking a critical realist perspective, this research also adopts a non-objectivist epistemology, recognising that knowledge is always mediated by historical and social context and the individual viewpoint, social positioning and history of the researcher. Specifically, an interpretivist epistemology is adopted within this research, as it is concerned with individual experiences which the researcher sees as shaped by both cultural and individual histories and positionings. The participant's positionings will influence the meanings they express, and the researcher's positionings will affect her interpretation of these meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The findings of this research are therefore considered one possible interpretation. Other interpretations are possible and valid. Rather than aiming to eliminate subjectivity from the research as would be intended in a positivist paradigm, the researcher aims to use reflexivity to consider her role

in the knowledge constructed within this research, to support the reader in making judgements about the usefulness of this knowledge to their own context.

As this research is conducted through interviews, data is expressed and mediated through language. Assumptions regarding the role and nature of language must therefore also be made explicit. Hall (1997) specifies three main theoretical positions in relation to language. A 'reflective' position assumes that language reflects what really happened, which ties closely with positivist and post-positivist positionings. An 'intentional' position suggests that language reflects the speaker's unique perspective and experiences, while a 'constructionist' position views language as the medium through which realities are created and constructed, and therefore as a process or discourse rather than a straightforward reflection of experience.

As this research focuses on understanding individual experiences, an intentional theory of language is adopted. Language in this research is not assumed to reflect an external reality but rather what the participant experienced as their reality, acknowledging that each participant will have a unique perspective. This research views language as a tool for expressing these realities, rather than the means by which they are constructed. This means that language is viewed in this research as a relatively straightforward reflection of participant experiences, although it is acknowledged that features of the researcher and situation may influence which experiences and perspectives participants choose to express and how this is interpreted by the researcher.

2.2 Methodological approach

Having defined the theoretical position of this research, the choice of methodology will now be discussed. Crotty (1998) defines methodology as the process behind choosing and using methods. This section will therefore describe the different methods considered and explain the final choice of approach.

2.2.1 Choice of methodological approach

Quantitative or qualitative?

The first decision was whether to use a broadly quantitative or qualitative approach. Quantitative research is most closely associated with post-positivist theoretical positions, involving a deductive approach and more objective stance, focusing on reliability and generalisation as important quality criteria (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

This approach was inappropriate for this research for several reasons. Firstly, this research focuses on the experiences of young people undergoing a novel event. The researcher therefore felt that an approach testing pre-existing theories may miss experiences that were different or new. Secondly, this research focused specifically on subjective experiences and meanings, which depend on individual viewpoints and are therefore not objective.

In contrast qualitative research focuses on collecting verbal or written information and tends to use a more inductive approach, collecting open-ended data and then analysing it to identify and construct meanings (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Qualitative research also acknowledges and values the subjectivity of both researchers and participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This aspect is especially helpful for this research, which focuses on subjective experiences. In addition, the more inductive approach to analysis supported the development of meanings not captured within pre-existing theoretical frameworks. For these reasons, a qualitative approach was chosen.

Choice of methodology

Within qualitative research, a wide range of methodologies are available. Four main approaches were considered for this research: narrative analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), grounded theory (GT) and

thematic analysis (TA). These will each be briefly described before explaining the final choice of TA.

Narrative analysis considers how people make meaning of their experiences by narrating them as stories (Silver, 2013). It analyses chronological factors such as story plots and non-chronological factors such as values and meanings (Jovlechovitch & Bauer, 2000). Advantages of narrative analysis for this research included its preservation of the chronological nature of events, given the nature of transition and the pandemic as processes over time (Silver, 2013). Narratives can also become particularly important to people at times of disruption or change (Silver, 2013), which both transition and the pandemic could be conceptualised as. Finally, the narrative interviewing process can be positive and supportive for participants (Silver, 2013). However, a disadvantage of narrative analysis for this research is that it primarily focuses analysis at an individual level (Lyons & Coyle, 2012). While experiences of the transition and the pandemic are likely to be variable between individuals, this research ultimately aimed to identify common patterns of meaning and experiences across young people transitioning at this time. Approaches that allowed a deeper consideration of shared patterns of meaning were therefore considered to be more appropriate.

Another approach considered was grounded theory (GT). GT focuses on developing theories inductively from rich open-ended data collection, aiming to develop an explanatory theory of how the phenomenon operates (Payne, 2011). GT studies are suggested to be most appropriate when the research questions focus on developing theories of social processes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). GT is also most appropriate when data collection and analysis can occur concurrently, and there is sufficient time to sample a large enough number of participants to reach saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2020), which may be difficult to predict in advance. In contrast, this study's research questions primarily focus on experiences and individual meanings, making GT less appropriate for this study. In addition, the time-limited nature of this project made it difficult to carry out data collection and analysis concurrently, and made very large samples, which may have been needed to reach saturation in a GT framework, impractical. For these reasons, a GT approach was not chosen.

IPA focuses on individual lived experiences and the meanings these have (Smith & Eatough, 2011). IPA considers subjective individual experiences, acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher in interpreting these (Smith & Eatough, 2011), and generally focuses on a small, homogenous sample (Braun & Clarke, 2020). IPA begins by analysing each individual case, then develops themes across cases (Smith & Eatough, 2011), meaning there is a dual focus on both individual experience and group experiences, although the individual focus generally takes primacy in the analysis and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Thematic Analysis (TA) aims to identify systematic patterns of meanings, or themes, across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA as a broad method is compatible with a wide range of theoretical positions and research questions (Guest et al., 2014; Willig, 2008). The theoretical assumptions and specific approaches used therefore need to be specified for each research project (Guest et al., 2014).

Both IPA and TA were considered suitable analysis methodologies for this research, as both enable a focus on individual perspectives and experience and allow themes to be developed across cases, both features that were important in answering the research questions. While either methodology could answer the research questions, the methodology chosen for data analysis in this study was TA, specifically reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). TA was chosen over IPA for three main reasons. Firstly, TA offers a relatively broad, flexible approach, which was felt appropriate to the exploratory nature of this study, as it enabled the data to be potentially approached in different ways as the analysis developed over time. Secondly, IPA requires a greater familiarity with and experience of qualitative research to conduct high-quality analysis, while TA is more accessible, meaning high-quality data analysis is achievable using this method even with limited experience of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As the researcher has limited experience of using qualitative methods, it was therefore felt that reflexive TA would be more appropriate. Thirdly, TA has a greater focus on identifying patterns of meaning across different individual accounts, which was helpful for this study's purposes of informing

understanding of the experiences of and future support for a cohort of young people.

For these reasons, TA was chosen as the overarching methodology. However, TA is a broad methodology and several decisions therefore needed to be made about the specific approach taken. The next section discusses these decisions.

2.2.2 Choice of reflexive TA

The first of these decisions was which form of TA to use. Braun and Clarke (2018) categorise TA into three broad approaches: coding reliability, codebook and reflexive TA.

Coding reliability is a more deductive approach to TA, beginning by developing themes and then coding data to identify which data belong with which theme (Terry et al., 2017). It tends to be linked to a positivist or post-positivist theoretical orientation, and accordingly aims to reduce the influence of researcher subjectivity (Terry et al., 2017). Coding reliability approaches were felt to be unsuitable for the current project for two main reasons. Firstly, the deductive approach to analysis did not fit with the exploratory approach taken within this research. Secondly, the attempted removal of researcher subjectivity did not fit well with a project aiming to interpret subjective individual meanings, or a critical realist theoretical position.

Codebook TA also develops themes early in the analysis and uses a structured approach to code data within them (Terry et al., 2017). However, it differs from coding reliability in that it is based within more qualitative philosophical paradigms and as such acknowledges the role of researcher subjectivity. As codebook TA takes a relatively deductive approach to analysis it was not felt appropriate for this research, which aimed to be inductive and exploratory.

Reflexive TA takes a more inductive approach to the data set, beginning with data familiarisation, then working to develop codes before developing themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; 2019; 2022). Reflexive TA acknowledges and values the role of researcher subjectivity in interpreting and analysing data and emphasises the importance of reflexivity: the researcher's reflection on their

perspectives and positionings and how these influence and are influenced by the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022). A reflexive TA approach was chosen for this research due to its inductive nature, allowing meanings other than those captured by current theories to be developed, and its consideration of researcher subjectivity, which was important in this research due to its focus on subjective experiences and its critical realist theoretical positioning.

Reflexive TA can be approached in a range of ways, and several decisions were therefore made about the approach taken for this project. These are outlined in the following section.

2.2.3 Choices within the reflexive TA framework

Having selected reflexive TA as the methodological framework for this study, several decisions remained regarding the approach to analysis.

Firstly, reflexive TA can take a relatively more inductive or deductive approach. The former involves generating themes primarily based on the data, while in the latter the data are coded through the lens of existing theoretical constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this analysis, a broadly inductive approach was taken, to support the possibility of developing novel themes that did not reflect existing theories. However, the researcher also felt that concepts from the literature around transition and the pandemic might be relevant to young people's experiences. Therefore, following an inductive approach to initial theme generation, concepts from the literature were also considered at the later stages of developing and reviewing themes.

A second choice to make is whether to focus analysis mainly on semantic (more surface or explicit) meanings, or latent (underlying or hidden) meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This decision is linked to the theory of language adopted. As this research assumes a broadly intentional approach to language, the semantic level of meaning was the main focus, although there were some aspects of the analysis that included more latent meanings.

A third choice is the approach to the data, which may be more experiential or critical (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Experiential approaches focus on the experiences of participants, approaching data in an empathetic way that aims to understand participants' views (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Critical approaches focus more on how participants use language to construct meanings, and take a more suspicious approach, questioning statements to understand their functions and underlying discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As this research aims primarily to understand participants' experiences and takes a broadly intentional view of language, an experiential approach was selected.

2.2.4 Summary

The methodological approach adopted within this research was therefore reflexive TA, informed by a critical realist theoretical framework. Within this, a broadly experiential approach was taken, with analysis focused mainly on semantic meaning. The analysis was primarily inductive, but wider concepts within the literature were used to inform later stages of the analysis, following the development of initial themes.

The next section describes the details of the research design, including details of data collection and how the reflexive TA was conducted.

2.3 Research Design

This research involved semi-structured interviews with seven young people who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. This section outlines the details of the research design employed.

2.3.1 Participants and recruitment

Sample size and sampling strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was initially considered, aiming to include participants from within several key groups, such as those receiving Pupil Premium funding, those identified with SEN, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, schools would need to share year group data with the researcher to select this sample. As this was sensitive data and parent consent was only obtained for the sample, this was not felt ethically appropriate. Instead, random sampling was used, as schools were able to do this without needing to share sensitive data.

Several approaches to determining sampling size have been proposed for research using TA. Guest et al. (2006) suggest that sampling should aim to achieve data saturation. However, Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that data saturation is a less useful concept for reflexive TA and suggest that sampling instead considers information power: the level of information likely to be held by each participant. This depends on the breadth and purpose of the research and the likely diversity of perspectives, as well as what is pragmatically possible.

The focus and purpose of this research was broad, considering participant experiences of a range of areas over a two-year timeframe. There has also been substantial variety in the impact of the pandemic, so varied perspectives were expected. A relatively large sample was therefore aimed for, but this was constrained by pragmatic limitations such as timeframe. The author looked at previous theses from individuals on the same course to gain a sense of the sample size that might be possible. Brown (2018) conducted twelve interviews using a similar analysis approach and within similar constraints. A sample of around twelve interviews was therefore aimed for, with a final sample of seven.

Participants

Participants were seven children, five girls and two boys, attending a mainstream secondary school. All children were from a White background, with six from a White British and one from a White Other background. Two participants received Pupil Premium funding and one was identified as having

SEN. None were Looked After. Four attended secondary school during at least part of the school closure period between January and March 2021. From participant self-report, none attended primary school during the school closures in 2020, although five returned to school for at least a few days in the summer term of Year 6. Participants had attended four different primary schools in the local area.

The participating secondary school is smaller than average and has a higher proportion of pupils receiving Pupil Premium funding and a lower proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds than average. The school's catchment area draws primarily from one of the more deprived areas in the town. The school is part of an academy chain. While details of socioeconomic status were not collected on an individual basis beyond receipt of Pupil Premium funding, the nature of the school demographics and surrounding area make it likely that participants primarily came from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

During the Spring 2021 lockdown, the participating school provided online learning using Google Classroom for most pupils, which included lessons across the full curriculum usually provided in school. Teachers were available during lessons, either via live Google Meets or using a chat function where students could type comments and questions while they were completing work. Online learning was expected to take up to four hours per day for students in Year 7. Students' attendance in online learning sessions was checked weekly, and teachers contacted those whose attendance had been poor, to ascertain the reasons for this and offer support. The school aimed to provide laptops for students who did not have one at home, although this was prioritised for Year 10 and 11 students first. Where students did not have a device to access online learning and the school was unable to provide one, printed learning materials were provided, to be submitted to teachers on the student's return to school.

The school is in a town with a population of around 100,000 people, existing within a large rural county in northern England. The town is in the most deprived area of the county and the average salary in the area is below that for both the county and wider UK. The population within the town includes more

older people and fewer people from minority ethnic groups than the national average.

Key background information about each participant was also collected. This information is presented in the data analysis section.

Recruitment strategy

School staff selected a random sample of young people from the year group who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020. The parents or carers of these young people were then approached for consent (Appendix 5). Following this, school staff approached the young people for whom parental consent had been obtained, sharing information about the project using the script in Appendix 5 and asking them if they wished to take part. Recruitment occurred in June and July 2021.

2.3.2 Data collection

Participants were interviewed individually within a quiet room in school. Interviews allow participants to share rich information about life experiences and were therefore felt an appropriate method for this research (Brinkmann, 2013; Willig, 2008). Interviews may be conducted individually, in pairs or groups (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Individual interviews were chosen due to the study's focus on individual experience, as it was felt that the group and power dynamics of focus groups might lead to some individual experiences not being expressed.

Interviews may be structured, unstructured or semi-structured (Edwards & Holland, 2013). As this research took an inductive approach, a structured interview was not felt appropriate as this would strictly define the topics covered in advance. Unstructured interviews were felt to be inappropriate for the age of participants in the study, as their ability to express themselves using language and structure their own account was likely to be less well-developed than that of an adult. Semi-structured interviews, which involve a series of questions and prompts that are applied flexibly to respond to the individual interviewee

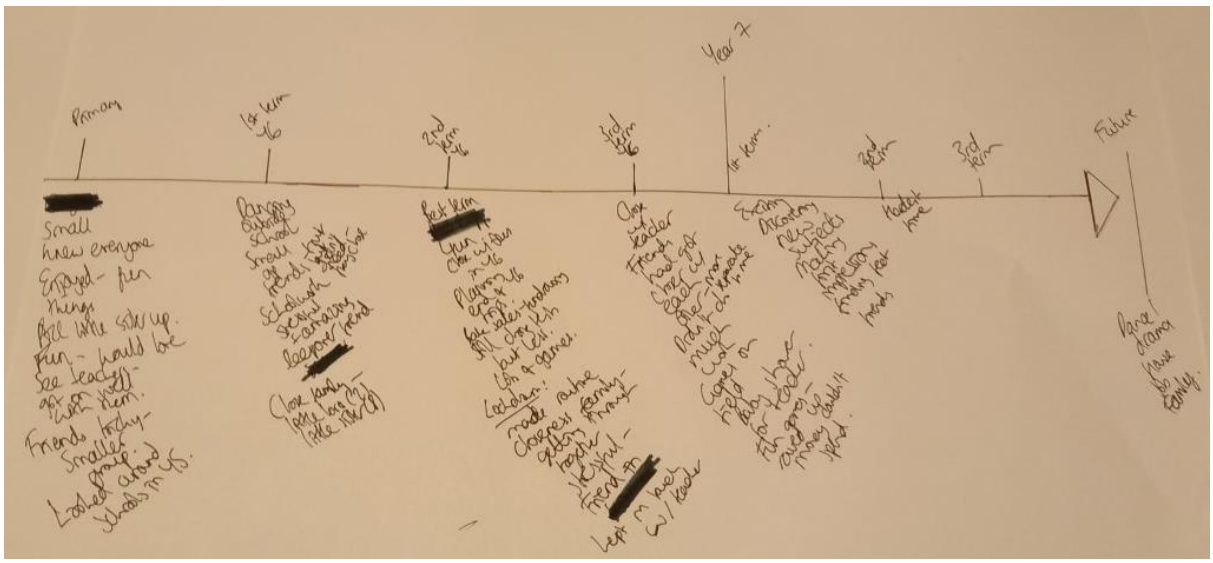
(Edwards & Holland, 2013), were therefore chosen as this provided a balance between allowing participants to express new ideas and meanings and providing some structure to support them.

The author therefore produced an interview schedule including a series of main questions and probes (Appendix 6). Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest two main ways for designing main questions, dependent on the level of information already available in the literature. Where enough is known for the researcher to be confident about the information needed to answer research questions, main questions should be designed to elicit this information. Where an area is newer or less known, Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest the researcher uses their knowledge of the context to produce questions around key areas and activities of the setting. As this research aimed to examine an unprecedented circumstance (the pandemic) alongside an event that is well-researched in usual circumstances (transition), a blended approach was taken. The author used her knowledge of the activities of school settings to identify questions about each of these areas but paid particularly close attention to areas identified in the literature as important to transition, such as relationships, emotions and learning.

The author then created a framework to order questions within the interview. Galletta (2013) suggests a structure for this, beginning with explaining the research and building rapport, followed by open-ended, then gradually more specific questions, with a concluding segment revisiting key ideas and offering opportunity for further exploration. This interview schedule made use of this broad structure. However, as the interviews considered experiences over time, several of these cycles were conducted, one focusing on each term of Years 6 and 7 (Appendix 6). Each segment ended with the author summarising what she had heard and noting these onto a life path tool adapted from Thacker (2017). The life path tool was an arrow onto which each term was marked and the key points discussed written underneath (see Figure 2.1 for an example). Young people were invited to write or draw onto this, but mostly preferred the researcher to do so. Two additional main questions were also asked around the impact of the pandemic and views of the future, to explore the second and third research questions.

Figure 2.1

Example life path tool (names of places have been anonymised).



A final decision was what interview approach to take. Brinkmann (2013) identifies two main interviewer styles: a 'receptive' style, involving an accepting, non-judgemental approach, which is helpful for research focusing on experience; and a more 'assertive' style where the interviewer provides more challenge, which is helpful for research focusing on how people construct meaning. As this research focused on experiences, a receptive style was chosen.

Interviews took place individually with young people in a quiet room in school. Interviews were scheduled to last for around an hour: the interviews ranged in length from forty-five minutes (the interview with the young person given the pseudonym ‘Joe’) to an hour and thirty-five minutes (the interview with the young person given the pseudonym ‘Thomas’), with most young people taking between an hour and an hour and fifteen minutes.

Two of the interviews (with the young people given the pseudonyms Helen and Joe) were conducted prior to the other interviews, with the purpose of piloting the interview schedule and process. Following this, the author reflected on the interviews and interview schedule. In this reflection, the author felt that the interview schedule had worked well and did not need to be amended, although there were some areas she reflected she could have spent more time exploring, linked to being less fluent in the process at this stage. As no changes were made to the interview schedule or process itself, these two pilot interviews were analysed with the other interviews and formed part of the final sample.

2.3.3 Data analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher (see Appendix 7 for an example transcript). A verbatim approach to transcription was chosen where all words, but not non-verbal responses, were transcribed, which is appropriate to this research’s focus on experiences rather than how language is used (Brinkmann, 2013). Interviewer utterances were also transcribed, to facilitate reflexivity and provide context for interviewee utterances during analysis.

Data were analysed using reflexive TA, following the approach first described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further developed and refined in their more recent work (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2022). The first stage of analysis, familiarisation, comprised transcription and three repeated readings of the entire data set. During this process, the author made notes of initial ideas for analysis (see Appendix 8 for an example of these initial notes). This first part of this stage (transcription) overlapped with further data collection.

Following the third repeated reading, the author made a note of her initial ideas for codes, then returned to the data set and coded this line by line, adding or amending codes as necessary (see Appendix 9 for example of coding). Interviewer utterances were not coded but were read alongside participant utterances during coding to facilitate understanding of context and reflexivity. The software programme NVivo was used to support coding.

The author then reviewed and revised the coding framework before repeating line-by-line coding, working through transcripts in the opposite direction, as Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that working in different orders can support new insights and interpretations. During this second coding process, the author considered whether each code adequately described the data assigned to it and further refined the coding framework.

The author then clustered related codes and considered patterns of shared meaning within them to begin to develop candidate themes (see Appendix 10 for an initial thematic map). The author then reviewed each candidate theme to consider whether it was meaningful in relation to the research questions, whether it had a central idea that linked codes together, and whether it had clear boundaries in relation to other candidate themes (Appendix 11).

The author then re-read the data coded under each theme, to consider whether there was enough data to evidence the theme; how well these data linked to the central concept; and whether it was clear what was included and excluded in each theme. Following this process, the themes were further revised (see Appendix 12 for a final thematic map).

The full data set was then reread, to reflect on whether the themes made sense in the context of the full data set, and the themes reviewed again. Following this, a name and brief definition of each theme was written (see Appendix 13 for a list of themes and constituent codes).

2.3.4 Ethical considerations

This research was informed by the University of Nottingham's ethical guidelines and professional practice guidelines for Trainee Educational Psychologists,

including the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and conduct (2018) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2016) guidance on conduct and ethics. The research received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham's Ethics Committee (see Appendix 14 for a copy of the approval letter).

Several areas of ethical practice required particularly careful consideration. Firstly, as the work was with children, confidentiality needed to be balanced with safeguarding responsibilities. These limits of confidentiality were explained to parents in consent forms (Appendix 5) and to young people both in the child information sheets given to young people prior to participating (Appendix 5), and again at the start of the interview. The author was aware of school safeguarding procedures and let an adult in school know if a young person shared something that she felt might mean they or another young person was unsafe. In one of the interviews, a young person discussed her experience of other young people sending unkind messages to her, which raised concerns for the author around cyberbullying. The author explained to the young person that she would need to share this part of the interview with staff in school to support them to ensure the young person was safe. The author spoke with the link staff member in school immediately following the interview to ensure they were aware of this, for which the young person chose to be present. No other young people raised topics during the interviews that the author felt to be a safeguarding concern.

Another consideration relating to confidentiality was that the size of the sample was relatively small, requiring particular care in reporting the analysis to ensure this did not allow individual identification.

Secondly, due to their age participants were not able to give formal consent for themselves, meaning that access to participants was through gatekeepers including school staff and parents (see Appendix 5 for recruitment and consent letters). Participants were recruited through and interviewed in school, which is a setting where young people are generally expected to comply with adult requests, leading to a risk that they may not realise they could choose whether to take part. This was addressed through asking school staff to speak with

young people about the research and ask for their assent to participate and repeating this process at the beginning of each interview, where participants' right to withdraw was also explained. At the end of the interview, the researcher explained what would happen next and the right to withdraw data, before checking again whether the participant still wished to take part.

The topics discussed also raised several areas that needed careful ethical consideration. Participants discussed their personal views and experiences, which always has the potential to raise sensitive or distressing topics. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic has been a time of difficulty for many, so discussion of it was potentially sensitive. To minimise this risk, the researcher asked schools to omit from the sample children who were known to have active ongoing mental health concerns or who had recently experienced a significant bereavement, defined as someone in the child's immediate family or someone who was of similar importance in the child's life (recognising that young people may have similarly close relationships with extended family in some cases). Parent consent forms (Appendix 5) also advised that young people falling into these groups should not participate. The researcher also monitored young people taking part in the interview for signs of distress, with the intention of terminating the interview if needed, although no such incidents occurred. The researcher also took a supportive interviewing approach that aimed to convey empathy for young people's feelings and experiences and invited young people to feedback at the end on how it had felt for them. Six participants reported that they had enjoyed the interview, with one saying it had been okay. At the end, young people and parents received a debriefing leaflet (Appendix 15) including information about support services.

2.3.5 Summary

This section has outlined the details of the research design, and considered the steps taken to address ethical considerations. It is also important to address considerations relating to the trustworthiness and quality of this research, and these are discussed in the following section.

2.4 Trustworthiness

In any research, it is important to ensure that the research process is as high-quality as possible. This section will consider how quality and trustworthiness within qualitative research can be supported, and describe the approaches used to support these within this research.

2.4.1 Assessing quality in research: reliability and validity

Within quantitative paradigms, validity, reliability and generalisability are central in assessing research quality (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Validity refers to the accuracy with which the research question is answered. Reliability links closely to validity, referring to how consistent results are when measured repeatedly, while generalisability refers to how far findings apply to other contexts (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Detailed reporting of methods is also important, to allow research credibility to be assessed (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

However, some of these concepts are less helpful for assessing the quality of qualitative research, which usually draws on different theoretical paradigms (Kirk & Miller, 2012; Williams & Morrow, 2009). The next section will consider the ways in which quality and trustworthiness can be evaluated within qualitative research.

2.4.2 Assessing quality in qualitative research

To recognise these differences, some authors have suggested alternative terms to discuss the trustworthiness of qualitative research (e.g., Cope, 2014; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Others maintain the use of validity and credibility (e.g., Guest et al., 2014) or even reliability (e.g., Seale, 2011) but define and evaluate these in slightly different ways.

Williams and Morrow (2009) present a framework for considering quality in qualitative research, focusing on three aspects. Firstly, integrity, which is defined as findings being based on adequate and dependable data. Integrity

can be enhanced by clearly specifying methods of data collection and analysis, collecting sufficiently rich data and representing a diversity of viewpoints. The second criterion is achieving a balance between the meanings expressed by participants and researcher interpretation. This balance is enhanced by reflexivity, which Braun and Clarke (2022) define as “thoughtful self-questioning” (p15), where the researcher considers their own role, viewpoint and social positioning and the potential influences of this on the research, both in terms of data collection and analysis.

The final criterion is clarity of communication and applicability of findings. This relates to how clearly the context of the research is described, which aids the reader in judging the transferability of findings to other contexts, as well as how well the research questions are addressed and how useful findings are to applied problems. The latter is sometimes known as social validity (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Williams and Morrow (2009) suggest that this third criterion can be enhanced through careful and rich description of the research context and researcher and participant backgrounds; and making links to existing theory and practical applications.

In addition, Braun and Clarke (2022) describe criteria to consider in supporting and evaluating the quality of reflexive TA specifically. High quality reflexive TA involves a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis; deep engagement with the data, informed by theory; a close fit between research questions, analysis and theoretical standpoint; themes representing rich, shared patterns of meaning; clear description of the social context of the research and the process of analysis; close links between the analysis and data; and reflexivity throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These criteria, along with the three areas described by William and Morrow (2009), were used throughout the research to plan approaches to support research quality. The following section describes these approaches.

2.4.3 Approaches to support quality

Supporting integrity

Several approaches were used to support integrity. At the interview stage, the author was aware of the power dynamics between herself and participants and took steps to reduce the strength of these, for example by introducing herself using her first name, emphasising that she was a researcher rather than a teacher, explaining confidentiality and its limits and taking a supportive, non-judgemental interview style. The interview schedule (Appendix 6) also built in several points where the author summarised her understanding of what the young person had said and offered an opportunity for the young person to add or change anything, to check that the initial meanings taken were felt by young people to accurately reflect their feelings and experiences.

Another way to support integrity would be to present key findings back to young people for member checks (Williams & Morrow, 2009). However, Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest this is only helpful where themes are likely to be recognisable to participants as an account of their own experience. As analysis aimed to synthesise themes across participants whose experiences may be quite varied, overall themes may not have been recognisable to individual participants, so member checks were not included.

During transcription, integrity was supported by clearly defining what would be transcribed in advance and checking each transcript for accuracy. At the analysis stage, a systematic approach was taken, described in detail in the research report. This included several initial readings of the data set, to support familiarisation and in-depth engagement. The author also revisited the dataset at several points to consider how well coding frameworks and themes fit the data and to repeatedly revise these frameworks. During this process, an audit trail was kept through a research diary, which documented initial ideas and the development of codes and themes. When writing up the analysis, themes were linked explicitly to the data using quotes, and the analysis process described in detail.

Supporting a balance between participant meanings and researcher interpretation

To support the second criterion, a reflexive journal was kept throughout the research, where the researcher considered her own positionings and their possible influences, as well as recording reasons for decisions made during the research process (see Appendix 16 for example entries).

At the transcription stage, both participant and researcher utterances were transcribed, and the researcher reflected on how her utterances may have shaped the participant's responses. The author used discussion with her supervisor and peers to reflect on the process of data collection and analysis and to gather alternative perspectives and meanings from others with different viewpoints.

Supporting communication and application of the findings

To support the third criterion, findings were related back to research questions, and links to existing theory and possible applications discussed. Key findings were also fed back to school staff and the author's placement educational psychology service, with the aim of supporting application. To support readers in evaluating transferability, the social and individual contexts of the participants and schools were described in as much detail as possible. In addition, the social positioning and viewpoint of the researcher was considered. This is the focus of the next section and is further considered within the discussion chapter.

2.4.4 Researcher positioning

The theoretical positioning of this research acknowledges knowledge as inherently subjective and influenced by the researcher's experiences and perspectives and by wider social contexts. As such, it is important to consider these positionings and their influence throughout the research process.

Researcher background

The researcher is a thirty-one-year-old white woman from a middle-class background who grew up in several parts of the UK and attended secondary school in the same county as participants. She has previously worked as a

secondary school teacher and this research was conducted as part of her training as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, within the local authority in which she is on placement.

In the researcher's professional role, she regularly speaks with young people about their views. This was helpful in informing approaches to support participants in expressing their views and meant the researcher felt confident in the interview context. However, in the researcher's professional role conversations usually aim to support change where children are experiencing difficulties in their school lives, while the research interviews had a different focus. When conducting the interviews, the researcher found it was tempting at times to stray into her more professional role, especially where participants discussed difficult experiences.

The researcher's own secondary transition took place at the same time as a move across the country, and the researcher experienced this as a challenging time. The researcher has also learned more about transition as part of her professional training and experiences. These personal and professional experiences have shaped her perception of transition to secondary school as an important time that can be a key turning point for young people in both positive and negative ways.

In common with most people in the UK, the researcher has also experienced several changes to her own circumstances because of the coronavirus pandemic. This included experiencing online learning herself in a university context and speaking with parents, teachers and young people about their experiences of online learning in her professional role.

Researcher relationship to participants

The researcher is in some ways an insider to the participant group, but in most ways an outsider. The researcher is an insider in that she also made a transition from primary to secondary school in the UK and attended secondary school in the same county. The researcher also shares a similar ethnic background to most participants.

The researcher is an outsider to participants in many ways. The most significant is age group, which has implications for the power dynamic between the participant and researcher during interviews, especially in a school context where young people are generally expected to follow adult expectations and where they may be particularly wary of sharing negative experiences of school with an adult. While the researcher took active steps to address this power dynamic, these factors remain likely to have affected young people's responses. The difference in age also means that the researcher experienced her own secondary transition at a time where society and educational systems were different. The researcher has also seen transition from a professional perspective through her work as a teacher. Both these factors may shape different perspectives of the transition process and pandemic to those held by participants. The researcher is also an outsider to several participants in terms of class background and to two in terms of gender.

The researcher was motivated to investigate this topic based on both her professional and personal experiences of secondary transition and the pandemic. The researcher is primarily an outsider to participants. In particular, the researcher's social positioning as an adult professional is likely to have a substantial effect on participants' reactions to her and the nature of the information they share.

The nature of the participant group

The participant group was small and drawn from a relatively homogenous background, comprising pupils of White ethnicity, primarily female, and primarily from a lower socioeconomic status background, attending one secondary school in Northern England. This presents some limitations to the findings (see Discussion section for further detail), and means these findings are of most relevance to participants from similar backgrounds. In addition, due to ethical considerations pupils who had experienced recent bereavements of immediate family members or those who had current mental health difficulties were omitted from the sample, meaning that this group of participants is likely to represent pupils who were less-acutely affected by the pandemic or transition. Caution

should therefore be taken in transferring these findings to groups of pupils who may have been more significantly affected.

2.4.5 Summary

This section has considered how quality can be evaluated within qualitative research, specifically critical realist reflexive TA, and outlined the approaches taken to support quality, including some of the reflexive considerations around the researcher's positionings, which will be further considered in the discussion chapter.

2.5 Overall summary

This chapter has positioned this research in relation to major epistemological and ontological paradigms and described the rationale for the methodology chosen. The methods of data collection and analysis have been described, and issues of trustworthiness and ethics considered. The following chapter presents the research findings.

Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter will detail the findings of this research. Firstly, this chapter will describe the context and situation of participants, before providing an overall summary of the themes developed. Each theme will then be considered in turn, linked to the research questions they inform. Following this, the researcher will reflexively consider her own role within the interview and analysis process. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

3.1 Situating the participants

Seven participants took part, all aged between eleven and twelve years and attending Year 7 in the same small mainstream secondary school. The demographic characteristics of the school and wider town and area are described in the 'Methodology' chapter. Six participants were from a White British background and one from an 'other White' background. Five were female and two were male. Two participants received Pupil Premium funding and one was identified as having SEN. None were Looked After. Four attended secondary school during at least part of the school closure period between January and March 2021. From participant self-report, none attended primary school during the school closures in 2020, although five returned to school for at least a few days in the summer term of Year 6. Participants had attended four different primary schools in the local area.

The experiences analysed here therefore come from an exclusively white, and primarily White British, perspective, and reflect the experiences of young people attending one school in Northern England. Participants were mostly female, and the analysis may therefore be particularly influenced by a female perspective. While it was not possible to obtain precise data on the class background of each participant, the general context makes it likely that most participants were likely to come from working class or lower-income backgrounds. The analysis presented is therefore likely to have most relevance to similar contexts.

Participant pseudonyms and gender are summarised in Table 3.1 below. Other demographic characteristics have been reported in general terms, rather than linked to specific participants, to support their anonymity in what was a small school and sample.

Table 3.1

Summary of participant pseudonyms and gender

Pseudonym	**Gender**
Helen	Female
Sara	Female
Mary	Female

Elsa	Female
Jenny	Female
Joe	Male
Thomas	Male

3.2 Introduction to themes

Eleven themes will be discussed, structured in relation to the research questions. When themes and dimensions within themes are discussed, some quantitative language will be used to give an indication of the approximate proportion of participants whose experiences were drawn on to develop that theme. This is not attempting to provide an exact quantification, as within reflexive thematic analysis a theme's relevance to the research question is not determined by its frequency in the dataset. Instead, this language aims to give the reader an indication of the strength or consistency of the theme across the dataset, to support the reader in interpreting where themes represented a more minority experience within the dataset. Where the terms 'some' or 'several' are used, this indicates a minority of participants contributed. 'Most' or 'many' indicate more than half the participants contributed, while 'almost all' or 'all' indicate that six or seven participants contributed, respectively.

The first research question was: 'What have been the experiences of young people transitioning to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic?' Table 3.2 summarises the two themes related to this question.

Table 3.2

Themes relating to the first research question.

Theme	**Subthemes**

Finding my place in a shifting social world	Transition changed social worlds Coronavirus changed social worlds Relational storms and stresses Building a new social group
A slowed expansion of our school world	*None*

The second research question was: ‘How have young people made sense of these experiences?’. Table 3.3 summarises the five themes related to this question.

Table 3.3

Themes relating to the second research question.

Theme
A time of personal growth
Coronavirus as a loss of normality
Less teacher support made remote learning harder
Learning gets more serious
Technology mediates experiences

The final research question was: ‘How do young people perceive the future and what would support them moving forward?’ Table 3.4 summarises the four themes related to this question.

Table 3.4

Themes relating to the third research question.

Theme

Will I succeed in the future?
Building on interests to find my future place
Good relationships are important to my future
Clear communication helps me move forward

Appendix 13 summarises the codes that were included within each theme.

3.3 Research question one: 'What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?'

3.3.1 Finding my place in a shifting social world

This theme encompasses four subthemes that together tell a story about participants' experiences of social relationships. Overall, this theme describes the experience of transition during the pandemic as a time of numerous social changes. Despite these changes sometimes leading to challenges and conflict, discussed in the subtheme 'relational storms and stresses', by the end of Year 7 all participants described a positive sense of social place in their new school, described in the subtheme 'building a new social group', suggesting participants were able to successfully navigate these changes.

Transition changed social worlds

This subtheme focused on changes in social networks and roles linked explicitly or implicitly to transition. Overall, this subtheme suggests that participants experienced a range of changes in different social relationships and in different aspects of these relationships linked to transition.

One area of change was in friendships, with participants describing both losing and gaining friendships. Several participants perceived that changes to the

school system and consequent effects on social groupings led to changes in their individual friendships:

"I was put in different tutors with them [previous friends] so like I was like friends with one of my other friends and like became closer with her" (Elsa)

"my friends from primary school who went off to [other secondary school] I still saw them when I played out which is nice but they weren't properly friends with me anymore" (Thomas)

Overall, therefore, participants appeared to describe transition as a time of change in friendship networks, linked to changes in wider school systems.

Other types of relationships also changed for participants over transition. Several participants described finding teacher relationships harder to navigate in secondary school:

"[primary school] had a lot of teachers that are easy to talk to, er, I just, um, find it difficult to talk to teachers in secondary school." (Mary)

"switching teachers and everything it was quite like harder" (Elsa)

Transition therefore appeared to lead to a reduced sense of closeness to teachers for some participants, for example Mary's extract highlights a sense of finding it more difficult to become close with teachers.

While the above extracts suggest independent changes in both teacher and peer relationships, some participants' descriptions of the role of teacher relationships in their school social world suggests these two aspects of change experienced over transition have the potential to interact with each other:

"my Year 6 teacher I was really close with and at breaktimes I'd just stand with her outside or like I'd go help her do like paperwork or move stuff around in the classroom so it [friendship difficulties] didn't really bother me that much" (Helen)

Here, Helen's relationship with her teacher appears to compensate for difficulties in peer relationships. As other participants described a reduced sense of connection with teachers following transition, it may have been harder for teachers to fulfil this compensatory role in secondary school, perhaps adding further challenge to navigating the changes in peer relationships experienced at this time.

Participants therefore experienced transition as leading to changes in several relationships within the school system. However, participants also described co-occurring social changes outside school, relating to perceived changes in the rules and expectations of parents and other adults:

"I just didn't spend time with my grandma because I was old enough to stay at home [alone] for that amount of time [after transition]" (Mary)

"now we've gone back [following transition] and there's so much pressure on me and [friend] we've moved up a category in Latin and ballroom so now suddenly the dance teacher expects us to learn all these crazy steps and these moves and we we learn how to dance with sixteen year olds" (Helen)

These extracts suggest an increase in expectations of participants in non-school systems following their transition. This change in expectations appears to relate to increased expectations of independence and skills, for example being able to spend more time alone or being expected to do more complex dances.

This subtheme considered social changes experienced by participants that

linked to transition. This subtheme suggests that transition was experienced as involving numerous social changes across a range of relationships and aspects of the social world, including losing and gaining relationships, perceiving relationships differently, and being perceived differently by others.

Coronavirus changed social worlds

This subtheme explored social changes experienced by participants that were linked explicitly or implicitly to the effects of the pandemic. To understand these changes, it is important to consider participants' social networks before the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, participants social networks extended outside their household in a range of ways, for example:

"yeah, I was like, erm, closer to my grandma than I was to my parents, so erm, I was always round at her house" (Mary)

"I just liked erm playing out with my friends a lot and just seeing my niece and nephew" (Sara)

The importance of wider relationships outside the household suggests that the restriction of social contact mainly to people within their household during lockdowns was likely to represent a significant change for young people. Related to this, many participants described a sense of contraction of their social networks during lockdowns, involving both reduced contact with wider social networks and, usually, increased closeness with those within their household, such as immediate family members.

In relation to reduced contact with wider social networks, many participants referred to having less contact with friends and extended family members, which was sometimes associated with feelings of sadness or loss:

“well I didn’t really talk to my friends because I had no way of communicating with them” (Joe)

“cause obviously I couldn’t see my friends I got a bit upset and it wasn’t easy” (Jenny)

“my sister got like a pillow with their [niece and nephew’s] faces, so I could just like hug the pillow when I miss them” (Sara)

Together, these extracts suggest that pandemic restrictions led to a narrowing of participants’ social networks during lockdowns, which was generally experienced negatively by participants. However, several participants also described a sense of increased closeness with those within their household:

“yeah we had a lot more family time and like we got to like bake stuff and that” (Elsa)

“it was well pretty good I saw her [mum] a lot more” (Thomas)

This suggests that, rather than leading to less overall social contact, the pandemic concentrated social interactions over a smaller number of relationships, leading to a closer and narrower social network. These closer relationships with family had both positive and negative impacts. Above, both participants describe positive emotions associated with spending more quality time with family, but other participants referred to this period as involving increased family conflict:

"well, my two brothers started arguing a lot more [in lockdown] and they'd argue all the time so it was a nightmare to sleep" (Joe)

Here, Joe suggests a negative aspect to this increased closeness as it increased conflict and led to a negative impact on his own wellbeing, related to sleep.

Overall, participant descriptions of their social world during lockdowns suggest these led to a smaller yet closer social network, associated with both positive and negative effects.

Following lockdowns, participants' views suggested that a re-expansion of social networks was experienced, but that this was sometimes limited by continued restrictions. Most participants described reunions with wider social relationships following lockdowns, generally perceived positively:

"erm well I got a lot happier because I could see my grandma again" (Thomas)

"I quite enjoyed like seeing my teacher again cause like it was hard in like lockdown and everything and like seeing my friends again" (Elsa)

However, these reunions were restricted in a range of ways by the continued impact of the pandemic, including both who participants could see and how they were able to interact with them. In particular, several participants noted that they did not have the opportunity to reunite with all the people who were important to them in primary school before transition:

"We called it lockdown school, I was just close to my teacher, I didn't really, not that I didn't really have any friends but there weren't really many people there, I think there was four, they split the class into two, there was four people in my class and three in the other class" (Helen)

“she [teaching assistant] was always there until like we went into lockdown, then she wasn’t allowed in the classroom.” (Sara)

Therefore, participants described experiencing repeated contractions and re-expansions of their social networks as lockdowns were put in place and eased. However, reunions following lockdowns often remained restricted or incomplete. For this year group, the timing of the pandemic particularly affected reunions with primary school social networks, and several participants did not have a chance to say goodbye to important people in primary school.

As well as changes in the size and closeness of social networks, many participants also described changes in social roles linked to the pandemic. These included changes in their own role in their family and friendships:

“she [mother] said like she’d really struggle [if she caught coronavirus] (…) so I’ve been really wary about that so I’ve tried to make up excuses trying to like tell my friends why I can’t play out like oh I’m busy today” (Mary)

“and she [mother] was struggling through it because she couldn’t go and see people (…) she’d get really upset so I’d comfort her and everything” (Jenny)

Participants also described changes in the roles others had:

“well my dad was a key worker (…) so he still had to work and my mum had to look after me most of the time and I was like yeah can I see my dad and she was like he’ll be home but he’ll be late so you’ll only be able to see him like tomorrow morning before he goes to work I was like yeah I know but I want him,

I want him to kiss me goodnight type of thing (…) he was a lot busier because of lockdown" (Thomas)

In all the above examples, participants make links between these changes in their and others' social roles and the financial, emotional or health implications of the pandemic. This suggests that as well as changing the width of social networks, the pandemic also led to participants experiencing changes in the social roles they and others had. In the above examples, these additional changes relate to specific vulnerabilities of family members: both Mary and Jenny's mothers were more vulnerable to coronavirus due to health conditions, and Thomas' father was a key worker who became busier during lockdown. This suggests that participant experiences of changing social roles might be affected by themselves or others experiencing greater vulnerability to the impacts of the pandemic, for example in relation to health or employment impacts.

Changes in social roles were also perceived at the level of whole systems. Several participants described the role of school as shifting during the pandemic from having a primary purpose of learning to one of socialising or having fun, especially during lockdowns or following the partial return to school in the summer term of Year 6:

"we had to like come back for three days [in summer term Year 6] to have like fun" (Sara)

"erm, so we was in the computers [during secondary school closures] and we had like erm, freedom really and I didn't, I didn't do any learning, I just talked to my friends (…) we only really went to talk if you know what I mean, I didn't really go for the learning" (Mary)

Both participants above suggest the role of school immediately following and during lockdowns as being primarily about social connection or enjoyment, rather than learning. During these periods, schools were also organised differently, and some participants described these changes affecting the social climate of their class:

"I think I was a bit more social in that time [summer term of year 6], because there wasn't a lot of people (…) there was only like fifteen, probably like ten people then in the classroom (…) so it wasn't like as hectic" (Mary)

Here, Mary describes a shift in the social climate of the classroom that also affected her own responses. Overall, the extracts above suggest some participants experienced the social climate and role of school quite differently during the pandemic than before it and may have experienced the role of school differently at different stages in the pandemic, for example in Mary's earlier example of the shift of the purpose of school towards a primarily social one during the school closures in 2021.

Overall, this subtheme suggests that that young people experienced the pandemic as a time of numerous changes in a range of social relationships, including contractions and re-expansions in social networks and shifts in their own and others' social roles, as well as in the role of whole systems such as schools. When combined with the subtheme 'transition changed social worlds', this suggests that participants had to navigate two simultaneous sets of social changes linked to transition and the pandemic, meaning that their transition may have been characterised by a particularly elevated level of social change.

Relational storms and stresses

This subtheme focuses on conflicts and other negative social experiences associated with the changes in social networks and roles that participants experienced. Experiences of friendship conflicts during or following transition were described by most participants:

"yeah and some of us split up now so I'm not friends with some of them because we've argued" (Jenny)

"we just like argue most of the time so we've just like stopped being friends" (Sara)

Here, both Jenny and Sara explicitly link peer conflicts to friendship changes, suggesting that social changes may have led to increased experiences of relational conflict. While Jenny and Sara refer to mutual arguments, some participants also described incidences of bullying associated with these conflicts:

"she'd sent me a she'd sent me a really mean message, it was like a TikTok video (…) she was like sending me voice recordings of her and her friend like, erm you think you're so funny, you think you're so cool, you're so ugly all this" (Helen)

Some participants also experienced being affected by conflicts they were not directly involved in, for example feeling affected by or drawn into conflicts between their friends and other peers:

"the first two weeks after the week holiday did put me in a dark place again and I felt, I just kept being, not necessarily told off but like brought into things that my friends had had arguments with old friends" (Helen)

This suggests that friendship conflicts may have sometimes had a wider ripple effect, impacting young people not directly involved, further suggesting this period as a time where relational conflicts and stresses were often experienced. Participants generally described experiences of conflict as negative and associated with emotions such as sadness, loss or confusion:

"just seeing her suddenly just go from being a really close friend in year 5 to then just being awful out of nowhere I was kind of just like what have I done to for you to be like this with me (…) it was just very confusing how close we used to be" (Helen)

Overall, this subtheme suggests that transition during the pandemic was experienced as a time of relational conflicts, stresses and difficult emotions for many participants, which may have been associated with the high level of change in social relationships and roles they experienced, described in the previous two subthemes. However, some participants referred to social changes without mentioning conflicts or negative interactions, suggesting that this theme of relational stresses may not have been a universal experience for participants.

Building a new social group

This subtheme focused on experiences of navigating the changes and stresses described in the previous subthemes to develop a new, positive social group following transition. Participants' views suggest that several saw developing a new social group as important to them, viewing this as an important task for the early part of secondary school:

"In the first term [of secondary school] (…) I was just kind of trying to figure out who my friends were and like find my real friends" (Helen)

"I used to get into a lot of trouble (…) I just did it because I didn't want to have like no friends like I did in primary school" (Mary)

Here, Helen explicitly describes finding a social group as a key task, while Mary describes engaging in behaviour she perceives as costly ('get into a lot of trouble') in order to develop friendships, implying the importance this social place has for her. Both these extracts suggest these participants viewed developing a friendship group in secondary school as important.

Other participants described the process of finding this friendship group following transition. Several participants referred to the importance of pre-existing relationships during this time, which sometimes acted as a starting point for building new relationships:

"we were staying in our old friend group, so there was four of us and obviously some two people from another school because we knew them and I she did my gymnastics so I knew her" (Jenny)

"erm it [friendship group] was still people from like [primary school] just like different people" (Elsa)

Both Elsa and Jenny describe their initial friendship groups as focusing on people with whom they had a pre-existing connection. This suggests that participants experienced pre-existing relationships as important in navigating these social changes. This experience is further suggested by participants who described pre-existing relationships as important influences on decisions about which secondary school to go to:

"it [other secondary school] was really nice but and then [friend from other primary school] was coming here and obviously I didn't really want to make a whole new group of friends" (Helen)

Here, Helen describes pre-existing friendships as key in informing her decision about which secondary school to attend, further suggesting the continued importance of these relationships over transition.

In whatever way these new friendships were formed, all participants described having at least some friends in secondary school by the end of Year 7, and most described these friends as an improvement on their social networks in primary school:

"they're like a lot more nicer in a way [than primary friends], they listen to me a little bit more" (Thomas)

"I've got more friends" (Jenny)

Despite the level of social change experienced by participants and the relational stresses this sometimes brought, all participants described ending the year with a positive sense of social place within secondary school, with many experiencing an improved quality of peer relationships when compared to primary school.

Overall, this subtheme suggests that participants saw developing a friendship group in secondary school as an important transition task, one in which all participants appeared to be successful by the end of Year 7. This suggests that participants generally navigated the high level of social changes they

experienced in a way they perceived as successful, at least in relation to peer relationships. In this subtheme, participants also suggested that they may have experienced pre-existing relationships as supporting them in navigating these changes successfully.

Overall findings of this theme

The overall narrative of the theme 'finding my place in a shifting social world' suggests that participants experienced transition during the pandemic as involving a high level of social change. While this led to some relational challenges and stresses, participants were generally able to navigate these changes successfully to achieve a sense of social 'place' in secondary school that was experienced positively.

3.3.2 A slowed expansion of our school world

This theme focused on experiences of transition as involving an expansion in variety in a range of aspects of school, that was delayed or slowed by the impact of the pandemic. This theme had two related parts. In the first, participants described a sense of various aspects of their school experience expanding on transition: for example, encountering a bigger physical and social environment and variety of subjects. In the second, participants described aspects of this expansion being slowed or occurring at a different time linked to the pandemic, resulting in an experience of a more extended transition, or multiple smaller transitions.

Participants described a range of aspects of the school environment expanding following transition. This included describing secondary school as a larger physical environment, which was related to mixed emotions. Several participants described initially feeling worried about navigating this larger space, but some also described this larger space as preferable to the physical environment of primary school:

"it [primary school] was a lot more smaller, so I wasn't so like, wow all these buildings" (Mary)

"I remember it was just so scary just seeing how big it [secondary school] was" (Helen)

"I prefer, prefer the layout of this school because the corridors are a lot wider, you have a lot more room" (Joe)

An expansion in the physical environment of school was therefore experienced by most participants on transition, but views of this expansion differed. Participants also described secondary school as a bigger social environment, with many describing primary school as feeling closer-knit than secondary school:

"it [primary school] was really nice because like, you know how you only had one teacher and it was like, easy to get along with that one teacher unlike secondary school, like, lots of teachers" (Mary)

"Because there weren't many people at all [in primary school], and everyone already had cause obviously I was so close with my friend who then moved when she was gone I didn't really know what to do cause everyone was all in their own little group of three. And I, I didn't really know who to, who to go to anymore." (Helen)

In these extracts, participants again express a sense of secondary school as a larger environment than primary school, this time relating to the social

environment, suggesting both positive and negative aspects of this change, for example through referring to both positive and negative sides to the close-knit nature of primary school.

A final area in which participants described a sense of expansion on transition related to learning, describing studying more subjects and engaging in a greater range of learning activities. This expansion in learning variety was primarily viewed as positive, involving more interest and enjoyment:

"we didn't do like a range of different lessons [in primary school], we mostly did English Maths and Science" (Elsa)

"[secondary school was] nowhere near as boring cause it was different stuff." (Joe)

"it was just really fun to be able to learn loads of new subjects" (Helen)

However, as well as the positive feelings illustrated above, this expansion in learning variety was also experienced as challenging, especially initially:

"Geography and Science were a bit of bit hard cause I hadn't really done a lot of it so I didn't know what I was doing" (Thomas)

Overall, participants experienced transition as an expansion of their school world in several ways, including in physical, social and learning domains. This expansion was viewed by participants with mixed emotions, involving both excitement and interest alongside feelings of anxiety or challenge.

While an expansion in these aspects of school might be expected for cohorts of young people transitioning before the pandemic, the views of participants in this study suggest that this expansion was experienced differently, linked to the impact of pandemic restrictions. Primarily, participants experienced the pandemic as slowing or delaying this expansion, suggesting that transition at this time may have been more extended or involved multiple smaller transitions, leading to experiencing a more gradual expansion in each of the aspects of school outlined above.

In relation to expansion of the physical environment, participants described only accessing one block of the school initially, linked to pandemic restrictions, suggesting they experienced less of the size and variety of the secondary physical environment immediately after transition, only experiencing this fully in the summer term:

"we've only just [June 2021] started going into like food tech rooms and stuff we've been kind of in that block and in the same classroom so it's kind of been boring in a way so I kind of wish I could get lost now" (Helen)

"the start of this term [summer term] we started going into the proper rooms and doing proper lessons" (Joe)

Therefore, the experience of an expansion in the physical variety of the school environment appeared delayed for these participants, occurring fully only in the summer term. Helen and Joe's views suggest a negative perception of this delay, with Helen describing this as 'boring' and Joe implying a sense of incompleteness with his use of the term 'proper rooms'. Participants also experienced this delay to the expansion of the physical environment as slowing or delaying the expansion in social and learning environments:

"also we couldn't go in like, we could only go in lessons with our tutor, so it was just like annoying seeing the same faces like in classrooms, and my, most of my friends weren't in my tutor, so there wasn't anyone" (Sara)

"now we're in like the food tech and like design tech and like science rooms it's like better cause I actually get to like make stuff" (Elsa)

Here, Sara describes pandemic restrictions as also reducing the variety of her social experiences, impacting both on her ability to maintain pre-existing relationships with friends and implying this reduced the variety of people she met ('seeing the same faces'). Elsa explicitly links restrictions in the physical environment with impacts on the variety of learning activities, describing that when she was unable to access a variety of classrooms she experienced fewer practical learning opportunities in specific subjects. Other participants also experienced this delayed expansion of the physical environment as restricting the variety of learning activities, particularly leading to fewer practical activities and more writing:

"it was okay, erm, just did writing a lot. Erm and didn't do any practical work so it was just like annoying" (Sara)

"I'm really excited to get into all my classrooms I'm really like cause at the minute I can't really (…) in food tech we've just been doing like paperwork and like in design technology we've not really cut anything or not really done any stuff like that it's just all paperwork, science is the same we've not done any Science experiments if I was put in a Science lab now I'd have no idea what I'd do" (Helen)

These participants both imply this reduction in practical learning made lessons less enjoyable, which was also expressed by several other participants. Overall, the delayed or slowed expansion of the school world on transition brought about by the pandemic was primarily experienced negatively by participants, with the extracts above referring to emotions of boredom and annoyance, contrasted with excitement or enjoyment following access to the wider school in the summer term. This delayed expansion to the secondary school world therefore has the potential to have negatively affected participants' motivation or enjoyment of school, especially initially. However, the experience of increased enjoyment following the expansion to the wider school environment which was described by several participants suggests these effects may be temporary.

Overall, this theme suggests that participant experiences of transition during the pandemic were characterised by a slowed or delayed expansion in their school world following transition, with them initially experiencing a smaller physical, social and learning environment than they would have prior to the pandemic. This delay was generally viewed negatively by participants.

3.4 Research question two: 'How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?'

3.4.1 A time of personal growth

Participants perceived the pandemic in several ways. This theme focused on perceptions of the pandemic as an opportunity for positive personal growth or change. In this theme, participants described lockdown as offering increased time and freedom, presenting opportunities for reflection on what was important to them and sometimes leading to positive longer-term changes in their lives.

Participants in both this theme and the next ('coronavirus as a loss of normality') described lockdowns as a time of reduced activity. In this theme, participants

described this reduced activity as associated with positive emotions or as offering increased freedom:

"I used to be like really active (…) like having my own time I realised I was a lot more peaceful and stuff" (Mary)

"I could play on me stuff a lot more [during lockdown]" (Thomas)

Here, both Mary and Thomas describe the increased free time in lockdown positively, as offering more opportunities for relaxation and preferred activities. For other participants, this increase in free time provided an opportunity for reflection on their lives:

"I feel if like covid didn't happen I would feel like a big group of friends is something that you have to have in secondary school erm and I wouldn't be as close with any of them whereas now I've got a group of 3 friends but I'm so close with them" (Helen)

Here, Helen describes the pandemic changing her perceptions of what is important to her, leading to a positive change in her friendships. Therefore, as well as offering increased time and freedom, the pandemic may also have been perceived by some participants as offering an opportunity to reflect on the usual way of doing things and consider how well this worked for them.

As well as changing participant perceptions, for some participants the pandemic was a time where they made changes in their lives. Jenny described both developing her skills and confidence and making changes to her hobbies, linked to her experiences over lockdown:

"I got more confident and I used to be so scared of asking for help, I've no idea why. And now I've got back to school I ask them for help a lot and like I enjoy most of my lessons a lot more now" (Jenny)

"I quit [gymnastics] during lockdown because I got fed up of doing like zooms cause they try and get you to do things you can't do" (Jenny)

While in the extract above Jenny perceives her change in hobby as relating to her experience of doing online gymnastics, elsewhere in her interview Jenny reflected on elements of her gymnastics class she was already unhappy with before the pandemic:

"I'd damaged my Achille heels and I had a [gymnastics] competition like that weekend and they wouldn't let me like not do it and they were saying oh she was fine at training and I had to do the competition and it made them worse" (Jenny)

Taken together, these extracts from Jenny's interview imply that the experience of doing her hobby online over the pandemic drew further attention to elements of it she already felt dissatisfied with (namely the pressure to do things she felt unable to), leading her to make the decision to change. Similarly to Helen, therefore, the change to the 'normal' way of doing things over the pandemic may have provided an opportunity for reflection for Jenny, in this case leading to practical changes rather than changes in perception.

Overall, this theme included perceptions of the pandemic as a non-normal time that presented opportunities for positive experiences or personal growth. Specifically, the pandemic was perceived as involving increased free time, which provided opportunities to reflect for some participants, sometimes leading to them making changes in their lives or perceptions, or simply allowing more time to engage in interests and preferred activities. This theme therefore

presents both similarities and contrasts to the theme ‘coronavirus as a loss of normality’, discussed below. While both describe the pandemic period as different to normal, this theme highlights positive aspects of this change, specifically ways in which it was perceived to lead to growth or positive change, in contrast to the more negative perceptions described below.

3.4.2 Coronavirus as a loss of normality

This theme also focused on perceptions of the pandemic as an abnormal time, but in contrast to the above theme focused on negative perceptions of this change, involving feelings of loss or other negative emotions, perceptions of missing out, and a perception of the pandemic period as less desirable than ‘normal’.

One way in which participants perceived the pandemic as abnormal in a negative way was in feeling they had missed out on experiences that were important or enjoyable:

“I can’t do my SATs and that’s really going to have a massive impact on me” (Thomas)

“we were gonna go on like an activities week and go on Go Ape and everything but that got cancelled because of Covid which was sad” (Elsa)

“I was kind of annoyed because like I really wanted to do it [trip] and I already had like paid half of it” (Sara)

In all three extracts above, the participants position these missed experiences as negative, relating missing out to negative feelings or perceived negative impacts. As well as missing out on specific experiences such as exams and

special events, most participants also described a sense of having missed learning because of the pandemic:

"we've hardly had any like learning from year 6 and our first like proper year is year 5" (Sara)

"they couldn't teach us as much as they would have done so when we got to secondary and we hadn't learned certain things cause of lockdown they had to reteach us all of it" (Jenny)

Both Sara and Jenny's extracts here describe a perception of having learned less as a direct result of the pandemic, and Jenny perceives this as making secondary school more challenging for her, perceiving a need to catch up on what was missed.

All these narratives around missed opportunities position transition during the pandemic as lacking or incomplete compared to normal, with participants expressing a sense of having fewer experiences than they usually would have. One participant expressed this sense of the pandemic as incomplete more explicitly:

"I just want it [the pandemic] all to be over and we can get in like the full entire school and have the full experience" (Helen)

Here, Helen's use of the term 'full' in contrast to the pandemic period suggests she views the pandemic as a time that was incomplete, while expecting that after the pandemic her experience will be more complete. One way in which young people made sense of their experience of transition during the pandemic was therefore as a time that was incomplete compared to normal, perceiving

this incompleteness as negative and leading them to miss out on important or enjoyable experiences.

Another way in which participants perceived the pandemic as different to normal in a negative way was as a time of increased negative emotion:

"I feel different now like I'm sick of lockdown and all the horrible thoughts that it would happen again" (Thomas)

"it just during covid it like I got really stressed" (Jenny)

"coronavirus has like changed, like me, because I used to like going out but now I'm a bit more wary" (Mary)

"I was starting to get a bit more fed up [during the lockdown in the summer term of Year 6]" (Joe)

In these extracts, participants describe a range of negative emotions associated with the pandemic, such as stress, frustration and worry. Joe describes these emotions as increasing in intensity over time, perhaps implying a desire for restrictions to end that became stronger over time.

Therefore, another way in which participants made sense of the pandemic was as a time associated with negative emotions. Like the perception of having missed experiences, this also positions the pandemic as abnormal in a negative way.

A third way in which participants made sense of the pandemic as abnormal in a negative way was through describing a perceived hierarchy of experiences, where experiences closer to 'normal', pre-pandemic conditions were valued or enjoyed more. At one end of this continuum, many participants described in-

person contact with continued social distancing restrictions as less positive than without restrictions:

"we couldn't play tig or anything (…) couldn't hug them to say goodbye" (Sara)

"in most of the lessons we had to sit in register order for the seating plan so they knew who sat next to who in case of a covid outbreak so I didn't, we didn't get to choose who we sat next to" (Joe)

Here, Sara positions continued restrictions as preventing her engaging in physical contact that had emotional significance, while Joe described it as reducing his choice in social interactions, both implying that non-restricted, in-person social contact would have allowed more choice and freedom in how they interacted with peers, and therefore would have been more positive.

The second part of this hierarchy was indicated through participants expressing a perception of in-person activities as more positive than those conducted online:

"I'm enjoying a bit less the cheerleading because erm we're having to do it sometimes over video which is really difficult" (Mary)

"it would have been better like if she was like teaching the lesson [in person] obviously but like it wasn't too bad" (Elsa)

A third way in which this hierarchy was expressed was perceiving methods of remote learning involving face-to-face contact, such as video calls, more positively than other methods:

“it [year 7 lockdown] was like better cause (…) we started to do it on like Google meets and like there was also a teacher like helping which was also really good” (Elsa)

Taken together, these three aspects of this hierarchy suggest that participants perceived a continuum from unrestricted, in-person activities as the most positive to remote activities without video call contact as the most negative, with each step towards the more ‘normal’, unrestricted end of the continuum seen as increasingly positive.

Overall, this theme focused on perceptions of the pandemic as a negative deviation from normal. These perceptions were expressed in three main ways: perceptions of the pandemic as a time that was incomplete, where participants missed out on important or enjoyable activities; perceptions of the pandemic period as involving increased negative emotions; and a continuum from more to less ‘normal’ experiences, with experiences closer to pre-pandemic conditions more valued. All participants expressed one or more of these perceptions, including those who also referred to the pandemic more positively as a time of personal growth in parts of their interviews. Taken together, these two themes suggest that participants made sense of transition during the pandemic in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways, but that all participants perceived the pandemic as an abnormal time that was, in at least some ways, more negative than normal.

3.4.3 Less teacher support made remote learning harder

This theme focused on perceptions of online learning: specifically, that online learning was more challenging than in-person, and that these challenges related primarily to less teacher support being available.

Almost all participants described online learning as harder than in-person, although they varied in the level of difficulty perceived. Some participants described online learning as extremely challenging, while others perceived it as

more difficult but manageable:

"[online learning] was really difficult for me, really difficult" (Helen)

"online learning when the first part of lockdown ever happened I struggled massively with that" (Thomas)

"it [online learning] was stressful but we did, we did manage it." (Helen)

"it was harder to like do it than at school cause like there wasn't like teachers to help you or anything but it wasn't too hard" (Elsa)

Overall, while almost all participants described online learning as harder, the level of this difficulty varied, sometimes for the same participant at different times, as Helen's extracts above illustrate.

Participants generally attributed this increased difficulty to reduced availability of teacher support. Several expressed this idea explicitly, making links between the challenge of online learning, the limited teacher support available, and the increased need for independent working resulting from this:

"it was just harder because a teacher wasn't there, like we just had to do it like on our own" (Sara)

"because like online you can't really say oh I don't get it and they can't help you" (Jenny)

Other participants made more implicit references to limited teacher support as

contributing to this challenge. For example, some participants referred to strategies that might help compensate for limited teacher support:

"I did find a little bit hard with the online learning was that I didn't have maths anymore with my teacher (…) but my dad was obviously really good at Maths so he helped me a bit with it" (Thomas)

"me and my friends would call sometimes about work we found tricky and it was mostly Science because we don't, we don't find Science easy" (Jenny)

The above extracts suggest that participants may have made use of parental and peer relationships to compensate for the reduction in teacher support. This compensatory action further implies a sense of support being reduced over online learning, leading participants to seek support in other ways.

Some participants also perceived online learning as more challenging linked to the loss of routines and structures:

"[it was harder] cause we like didn't do it step by step like how we do it in the classroom, like, just they like set us work and said like do it by the end of the lesson or something like that, like they never really took us through it" (Jenny)

Here, Jenny perceives the usual role of the teacher as breaking the work down into more manageable steps and providing structure. This may suggest that as well as the impact of reductions in direct teacher support such as offering help, remote learning was also made more challenging by the lack of more indirect forms of teacher support.

Participants reported a range of impacts of the increased challenge they perceived during online learning. For some, they described a negative perceived impact on motivation:

"I kind of felt like I'm putting so much effort in my schoolwork for these six hours and then I'm I'm still getting told off and I'm still not doing anything and at one point I remember I just, I think there was one day where I just told myself I weren't doing it" (Helen)

Here, Helen describes a sense of her effort going unrecognised, perhaps implying another impact of reduced contact with teachers, as there may have been less feedback or recognition of effort. Helen's extract here describes a sense of this leading to a perception of her effort as wasted, suggesting a potential negative effect on her motivation. However, others described online learning as more motivating than learning in school:

"[referring to being back in school] I don't think I'm trying as hard as I was if you know what I mean, I can learn more in learning online, I was so used to it I was so quick at doing it" (Thomas)

Here, Thomas frames online learning as more motivating as he could work at a quicker pace, perhaps reflecting a positive side to the reduced structure during this time, which may have allowed more flexible working for some young people.

Overall, this theme suggests that participants generally perceived online learning as harder than learning in-person, linked to reduced teacher contact and therefore direct and indirect teacher support. In the next theme, participants also perceived learning becoming more serious and sometimes more challenging over transition, and the difficulty of remote learning described in this theme may have added to this challenge.

3.4.4 Learning gets more serious

This theme focused on perceptions of transition as involving an increase in the emphasis on academic learning. This was expressed in a range of ways, including perceiving secondary school as involving more learning, or perceiving learning as less 'fun' and more 'serious' in secondary school.

Some participants perceived that they learned more in secondary school:

"now I'm in secondary obviously I know a lot more than I did in primary cause they teach you a lot more" (Jenny)

Others referred to learning in primary school as easier or more fun than in secondary:

"it was a lot more like, um, easier to learn in primary school, because they did like a lot more like fun activities" (Mary)

These descriptions suggest that many participants perceived learning as becoming more serious and increasing in volume following transition. In some cases, such as Mary's, this change was seen negatively. Others, however, found primary learning too easy, suggesting they welcomed this change:

"it [learning in primary school] was just boring cause it was all stuff that we done before in the lessons" (Joe)

Therefore, while these participants had in common a perception of transition as increasing the amount and seriousness of learning, this was perceived in a range of ways. While the above extracts relate to a direct comparison of

primary and secondary school, many participants perceived this increased emphasis on learning as a more gradual process beginning earlier in Year 6, with Year 6 often described as different to the rest of primary school, associated with SATs preparation:

"that [first term of year 6] was stressful and amazing at the same time (…) our teacher was really head-on with like our SATs and stuff" (Helen)

"it [first term of year 6] was all like quick learning, and I prefer like quick learning" (Mary)

The perceived increase in the seriousness of learning over transition may therefore be best characterised as a gradual process, beginning towards the end of primary school and continuing over the move to secondary.

This narrative was also reflected in some experiences of remote learning:

"I remember being in primary school and doing during the lockdown and I'd just have a few hours of school whereas it [secondary remote learning] was like we were actually at school" (Helen)

Here, Helen implies that remote learning in secondary school was also busier or more pressured, suggesting that perceptions of transition increasing emphasis on academic learning were maintained even during the very different learning conditions of the pandemic.

The contrast in online learning between primary and secondary school was perceived in a range of ways:

"They [secondary teachers] would like ask like if I was okay with like the work and like all that (…) it made it kind of easier" (Sara)

"it [secondary online learning] was just so scary for me and I felt like I'd lost all the relationship with my family like I'd wake up at half seven and then it'd take me like half an hour to try and get on the zoom and I didn't have my breaktimes or lunchtimes cause I'd use my breaktimes to set up for my next lesson (…) and my mum would come and bring me up a sandwich or something I wouldn't even eat it, like I weren't really eating anything like I was losing weight like mental and it was just really stressful and not enjoyable at all" (Helen)

While both participants here describe spending more time on schoolwork during remote learning ins secondary school, they differ in how this affected them. For Sara, the increased contact time made online learning easier, linked to increased availability of teacher support. However, Helen describes this increased academic emphasis in secondary online learning as highly stressful, affecting her emotional wellbeing. Helen also described a sense of isolation in her experiences:

"I felt like I was the only one not being able to do this" (Helen)

The increased emphasis on academic learning in secondary school may therefore have interacted with the difficulties associated with remote learning described in the previous theme to create increased academic pressure. While some participants coped well with the increased emphasis on learning in secondary even during the challenging circumstances of online schooling, for at least one young person this led to increased feelings of stress and poorer emotional wellbeing during this time. This may have been added to by difficulties in communicating with wider social networks and therefore sharing experiences with peers (described in 'finding my place in a shifting social world'), as Helen describes feeling isolated in her experiences.

Overall, this theme describes a perception of transition as involving a gradual increase in the emphasis on and amount of learning. This increased emphasis on learning may be particularly challenging for this cohort of young people, as remote learning during the pandemic was perceived to bring additional challenges.

3.4.5 Technology mediates experiences

This theme focused on participant perceptions that access to technology had an important impact on their experiences of transition during the pandemic.

Participants described a range of factors influencing their technological access, including their own and others' skills in using technology and physical access to equipment:

"he [brother] wouldn't let me use his like laptop most of the time so, to do research on stuff" (Sara)

"I couldn't get on to, I didn't understand any of like, they were like go onto that document (…) I'm like not not a technical person whatsoever" (Helen)

"she [grandmother] didn't know how to do google meet or owt and neither did we at that point" (Thomas)

The above extracts illustrate that participants perceived a variety of potential barriers to accessing technology, suggesting that technological access may have varied for young people for a range of reasons. Such variation is important to consider, as participants also expressed a perception that the level of access to technology influenced their experiences over the pandemic, in relation to both learning and social interaction:

“my mum got me a computer and for me sister so we could start doing a little bit more learning” (Thomas)

“I just kind of felt like I’d like, I was doing all these things to get onto erm onto lessons
and then I’d still be getting told off and I just wanted to say to my teachers like not in a bad way, all my teachers are absolutely amazing but like, I’m trying so hard will you just give me a break” (Helen)

“I couldn’t really play with my friends cause I didn’t have a console then” (Joe)

“we were still mostly friends because we like we used to play like games online and everything together” (Elsa)

In the above extracts, participants linked access to technology to a range of important areas of their lives, including the amount of learning they were able to do, their relationships with their teachers, and the ability to interact with friends and maintain these relationships during lockdown. These perceptions of technology as supporting continued communication with wider social networks, in particular, suggest that technology might have ameliorated some of the effects of a contracting social network during lockdowns, described in the subtheme ‘coronavirus changed social worlds’.

Joe also perceived increased access to technology as reducing some of the negative aspects of closer relationships with a narrower network, this time relating to reducing family conflicts rather than maintaining wider relationships

outside the home:

"there was a lot less arguing [after getting a games console for Christmas] erm cause one of my brothers was like on the console a lot of the time so he didn't really pay attention to the other so there was a lot less like arguing" (Joe)

Participants therefore perceived technology as an important mediator of their experiences of transition during the pandemic, perceiving technology as supporting them to stay in touch with wider relationships and enabling more learning during school closures. These perceptions suggest a view of technology as reducing the impact of the pandemic described in other themes, for example reducing the contraction of social networks and the amount of missed learning. However, one participant described a more negative side of access to technology, suggesting this could reduce the positive effect of the pandemic providing more time and freedom:

"like they [friends] definitely had a lot more technology than our house did but I didn't really think much to it I was like yeah you managed to do more learning but I had more time to do what I wanted" (Thomas)

Here, Thomas repeats the idea that technology reduced the impact of the pandemic but relates this to reducing one of the positive impacts of the pandemic described in the theme 'a time of personal growth'. This further reinforces the idea that participants perceived technology as ameliorating some pandemic impacts, but highlights that this might sometimes be viewed as having negative as well as positive effects.

Overall, this theme suggests that the level of access to technology was perceived by participants to have an important influence on their experiences of transition during the pandemic. Participants perceived that where they had greater access to technological equipment and greater skills in using this, they

were able to learn more and better maintain wider social relationships, although for one participant this was viewed as coming at a cost of reduced freedom and time for preferred activities.

3.5 Research question three: 'How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?'

3.5.1 Will I succeed in the future?

This theme centred around participant perceptions of educational success as important in future, alongside a sense of doubt expressed by several participants about their ability to achieve this success. This part of this theme focused on the first part of this research question: what participants perceived as important in future. The second part of this theme considered what participants perceived as important in supporting their future educational success, linking to the second part of the research question.

Most participants described educational goals as part of their hoped-for future, suggesting that they perceived their future educational success as important. These hopes described educational success in a range of ways, including external recognition such as university access along with more internal perceptions and feelings, such as feeling more confident about their learning:

"I'd like to be in like quite high sets" (Elsa)

"I want to go to college and then university cause I want to be a History teacher" (Thomas)

"I hope I'm smarter in Year 11 and I hope I'm not worrying about GCSEs." (Mary)

These extracts illustrate that educational success both in terms of internal confidence and external achievements were perceived as important by most participants. However, several participants expressed a level of doubt alongside these hopes, indicating that they were unsure if they could achieve this success:

"I would say I want it [learning] to get easier but it can't really get any easier cause it'll just get harder" (Thomas)

"I really hope I do get into university but knowing me I'd probably stop at, stop at A level maybe" (Mary)

Here, Thomas and Mary both see themselves as unlikely to achieve their aspirations. Educational success was therefore perceived as important to their future by most participants, but participants differed regarding their confidence in their ability to achieve this.

The second part of this theme addressed the second part of the research question, namely what participants perceived as helpful in supporting them to move towards these educational goals. Some participants perceived peers' behaviour as an important influence on their ability to achieve educational success, describing that improved peer behaviour in lessons would help them to learn more:

"try to focus more cause some people are like really silly (…) if they're better we'll get a lot more done during lessons cause you can get a lot more done when you're all like concentrating and listening than if you're all just messing about" (Jenny)

Jenny presents peer behaviour in lessons here as a key factor affecting how much she would be able to learn in the future, suggesting that she perceives her peers as an important source of support for her in moving towards her educational goals. Sara also described peers as important, but also saw her own effort as important, suggesting that participants could also view themselves as important sources of future support:

"[when asked if there was anything she could do to support herself] keep your head down and like just keep trying to your best of your abilities" (Sara)

Overall, this theme suggests that most young people perceived educational success as important for their future, but also perceived this success as uncertain or doubtful. Those who described views about what could support them to move forward saw peers and themselves as important sources of support in this area.

3.5.2 Building on interests to find my future place

This theme focused primarily on the first part of this research question, how young people perceived the future, focusing on perceptions of developing existing interests as important to future hopes. This continued development of interests was linked particularly to future jobs or careers. Participants described a range of interests they hoped to develop in future, relating to hobbies, school subjects and aspects of social interactions they particularly enjoyed, such as spending time with younger children:

"I want to like look after kids I just I love little kids and things they're like so fun to play with (…) and like open a nursery or summat" (Jenny)

"I feel like for dancing, like I could do it and I could travel the world and dance on ferries and stuff" (Helen)

"I want to be a History teacher cause I like it" (Thomas)

A range of interests were therefore mentioned in relation to future hopes and were expressed at different distances over time. What the ideas within this theme had in common was a focus on building on existing interests to develop or find an identity, often in relation to work or career identify. This suggests a significant role of hobbies and interests for these participants in shaping their future aspirations.

3.5.3 Good relationships are important to my future

This theme focused on participant perceptions that positive relationships were important to their hoped-for future, and what they felt would support them to achieve these relational goals. All but one participant described good relationships as part of their hoped-for future. For some, this involved maintaining existing positive relationships, while others described a desire for increased quantity or quality of relationships:

"and still be friends with the friends I'm with now because we get on really well" (Elsa)

"having more like closer friendships" (Sara)

"I could start seeing my grandad a little bit more" (Thomas)

"like calm and not loads of arguments (…) not as many arguments as year 7" (Jenny)

The desire for positive relationships in the future therefore related to a range of types of relationship, including both peer and family relationships.

This theme also considered what participants perceived as important in supporting them to move towards this aspect of their hoped-for future. Some participants described the peer culture as an important influence on their future relationships, and suggested ways that their own or peers' behaviours could change to support more positive relationships:

"[when asked what would support her in the future] probably just like be nice to each other" (Sara)

"[when asked what would support her in the future] like ignore like people who don't like you" (Jenny)

Here, Sara and Jenny position peer and their own actions as important in supporting future positive relationships. However, Mary offered a slightly different view, suggesting that adults could help to support a positive peer culture through reducing bullying and conflict:

"well you know like people who come from like foreign or like different countries, it would be more easier if they did, I don't know like how to help but I felt really left out coming over to, over to England, more like an outcast(…) all these people like calling me like names and stuff, being picked on, so um maybe it'd be better if they could do something about that, if you get what I mean" (Mary)

While it is unclear here who Mary means by ‘they’, this suggests to the author that Mary views someone outside the peer group as needing to intervene, likely adults. While Jenny in her extract refers to mutual arguments, Mary’s extract appears to refer to experiences of being rejected or bullied, suggesting a more unequal balance of power. Mary also refers to wider social structures underpinning these peer interactions. Therefore, what participants viewed as important in supporting them to move towards relational goals in the future may depend somewhat on the types of relationships and relational difficulties experienced.

Overall, this theme suggests that positive relationships of various kinds were important to almost all participants in the future. Participants variously saw peers, adults, and their own actions as important in supporting them to move towards this aspiration. This theme links to the earlier theme ‘finding my place in a shifting social world’, which suggests participants have navigated and continue to navigate a range of changes in their social networks and roles over transition and the pandemic, which may influence their development towards this goal.

3.5.4 Clear communication helps me move forward

This theme focused on the second part of this research question, namely what young people felt would support them in moving forward. This theme centred around perceptions that clear and consistent information was important in supporting them to move towards their future goals. Different elements of communication were discussed. In some cases, participants perceived it would be helpful simply for adults to provide more information, to support them in making decisions that were important for their future, such as career choices:

“if right now I was in Year 11 and they said if there’s anything I can do to help you, I’d probably be like careers advising and more help like that (…)you’re either like going to start a job or you’re going to carry on your education, so erm a bit more about like, oh, so you have strengths in like these things so that would be a good job for you” (Mary)

While Mary's comment relates to simply having more information, other participants described the information currently available from adults as often varied or contradictory, and expressed a desire for this to be more consistent:

"what I think people could do is stop saying is it [the coronavirus vaccine] good is it bad like just give a solid answer so it's not like two opinions" (Thomas)

Thomas' extract above describes a desire for more consistency in explicit information provided by adults in relation to the coronavirus vaccine. In her extract below, Helen also describes that more consistent communication would be helpful, but here refers to consistency between what is explicitly communicated and what is implicitly communicated through adults' actions and responses:

"sometimes they say a lot of things in like tutor there's so many assemblies about like mental health and stuff. But like like little things like in lessons where you're upset or you just wanna go outside like some some people some of my friends have really bad mental health and they struggle with that. And they get really angry like they say how how thingy they are with it but then like some things like when a teacher asks them a question and they say like they're not sure and they get in trouble for it (…) like there are posters everywhere and in tutor they always say like we're always so high on mental health" (Helen)

Here, Helen describes a perceived inconsistency not between different explicit communications about mental health such as posters and assemblies, which she sees as relatively consistent, but between these explicit messages and the implicit messages given by the responses of teachers in day-to-day situations. Like Thomas and Mary, Helen expresses a desire for increased consistency of communication, but appears to refer to a broader definition of communication in

her description, incorporating more implicit ways of communicating ethos and values in school.

Overall, this theme includes participants' perceptions that information from adults around a range of topics can currently be insufficient or contradictory, and that more information and greater consistency would be supportive for them in the future.

3.6 Summary of findings

This analysis presented eleven themes relating to three research questions: 'what have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?'; 'how have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?' and 'how do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?'.

In relation to the first research question, participants experienced a period of substantial change in their social networks and roles, linked to both transition and the pandemic, requiring them to negotiate a new social group or place. Participants also experienced an expansion of variety in their school world on transition, but this process was slowed by the pandemic.

In relation to the second question, participants' sense-making of transition during the pandemic varied. Some perceived this time as a period of personal growth. On the other hand, the pandemic was described by almost all participants as a negative deviation from normal. Linked to this, participants perceived remote learning as more challenging, making sense of this as due to reduced teacher support. Participants also perceived access to technology as an important mediator of both their social and learning experiences during this time. Participants made sense of transition as involving an increase in the seriousness of learning, which may interact with their perceptions of online learning as difficult to present a particular challenge to their perceptions of learning over this time.

Participants perceived educational success, positive relationships and building

on existing interests as important in the future, although several participants expressed doubt about their ability to achieve their educational aspirations. Participants viewed their peers as important in influencing their progress towards this hoped-for future but also perceived adults as playing a key role, especially in providing clear and consistent information.

The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to wider literature and theory, and consider their implications for schools, educational psychologists and future research, as well as discussing the limitations of this research.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the experiences and perspectives of young people who transitioned to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic. These experiences are important to understand, as transition is an important milestone in young people's lives (Moore et al., 2021; Pratt and George, 2005), the success of which can impact on a range of later life outcomes (e.g. Waters et al., 2012; West et al., 2010). The pandemic has been an unusual time with the potential to change a range of elements of young people's experiences or perspectives of transition, and this study therefore focused on what young people's experiences and perspectives have been over this period.

This chapter aims to discuss the findings of this study in relation to the three main research questions, which were:

1) What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?

2) How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?

3) How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Each of these questions will be discussed in turn. Implications for practice and limitations of the research will also be considered. This chapter will finish with a summary of key conclusions.

4.1 What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?

Overall, experiences of transition during the pandemic were characterised by many transitions and changes. Two themes relate particularly closely to this question. The first, 'finding my place in a shifting social world', discusses the social changes and transitions experienced, while 'a slowed expansion of our school world' discusses a more gradual or extended transition in the school physical, social and learning context. These themes will be discussed in turn, before considering commonalities between these two themes and what, combined, they suggest about young people's experiences during this time.

4.1.1 Finding my place in a shifting social world

The theme 'finding my place in a shifting social world' highlighted the numerous social changes participants experienced. Many of these experiences were consistent with previous literature around transition, including changes in friendship networks, also described by Gibbons and Telhaj (2016); more difficulty in developing connections with teachers in secondary school, also found in previous research (Bagnall et al., 2019; Lithari & Rogers, 2017); and increased expectations for independence from adults outside school, also suggested by Mumford and Birchwood (2020). Overall, young people appear to have experienced many similar social changes over transition to those experienced before the pandemic.

However, participants experienced additional social changes linked to the pandemic. Participants described repeated contraction and re-expansion of their social networks over lockdowns, and changes to the school social context linked to restrictions. One way in which the pandemic may have affected young people's transition experiences may therefore be that it required them to navigate more numerous social changes, with changes linked to the pandemic adding to those associated with transition. Navigating social changes over transition can increase demands on young people's social skills and flexibility

(Mahmud, 2021), suggesting these additional social changes may have resulted in even more substantial demands on these skills.

As well as more numerous changes in social networks, participants also experienced changes in qualitative aspects of their social worlds. Most notably, on the move into lockdown participants experienced a substantial reduction in contact with friends and other social relationships outside the home, coupled with, usually, increased closeness in relationships with immediate family members. These changes were perceived both positively and negatively, with young people enjoying more family time but also experiencing feelings of sadness and loss related to wider relationships, and sometimes increased family conflict. Peer relationships are a particularly central concern for young people over transition (Heinsch et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Mumford & Birchwood, 2020; van Rens et al., 2019; Zeedyk et al., 2003) and provide an important support network during this time (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2018; Heinsch et al., 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2014; West et al., 2010). The pandemic may therefore have made transition experiences more challenging by reducing contact with an important source of social support, and may present one possible explanation for the finding of Bagnall et al. (2022) that parents, children and teachers all perceived transition as being more difficult at this time.

However, some participants' experiences present a contrast to this idea. Many participants described keeping in touch with peers in some way, usually via technology, consistent with other research suggesting a shift from a more physical to more digital social world during the pandemic (Panarese & Azzarita, 2021). The pandemic's impact on peer support may therefore have been complex, with physical separation not always translating to a lack of social support.

Family relationships are also important in supporting transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Participants generally experienced increased closeness with immediate family members during the pandemic, which may have presented an opportunity for family support to compensate for peer support. However, this experience was not universal. Jenny and Thomas both described having less

quality time with one parent, which they perceived as resulting from job demands and financial pressures. This suggests that where the pandemic placed additional pressures on families, children may have experienced reductions rather than increases in the closeness of family relationships, perhaps reducing an important source of social support over transition for these young people.

These social changes are consistent with previous research on the impact of coronavirus on young people more generally, described in the systematic literature review (Chapter 1). However, they may be particularly important to consider for children transitioning to secondary school. Social relationships are especially important in navigating transition, meaning that disruption to social support networks may be especially impactful at this time. The focal model of adolescent development (Coleman, 2011) suggests that the many changes involved in adolescence are more challenging to navigate where young people experience multiple changes simultaneously, suggesting that these experiences of numerous social changes in rapid succession may have made transition more challenging. Bagnall et al. (2022) suggest that the pandemic was perceived to make transition more challenging and noted negative impacts on young people's emotional wellbeing. These challenges may, in part, link to the increased number of social changes young people have had to navigate.

However, despite these challenges, all participants ultimately reported having a positive friendship group in school by the end of Year 7, suggesting they all experienced a successful transition in the dimension of integration into the social environment and developing positive peer relationships, as defined by Evans et al. (2018). Therefore, participant experiences suggest that participants were generally able to navigate these increased social challenges successfully.

Overall, this theme suggests that the experience of transition during the pandemic was characterised by multiple, frequent social changes. Social changes associated with transition still occurred, but additional changes were experienced linked to the pandemic, with the result that young people had more numerous changes to navigate, as well as some qualitatively different

experiences that may have affected the availability of social support. Both these factors have the potential to make transition more challenging and present risks to development: however, participants in this study generally achieved the positive peer relationships and sense of social place important in successful transition (Evans et al., 2018). The success of participants in navigating these challenges suggests a level of resilience for these young people and the systems around them.

4.1.2 A slowed expansion of our school world

The theme ‘a slowed expansion of our school world’ also suggested that participants experienced more numerous transitions as a result of the pandemic. Unlike the previous theme, however, this related specifically to the change in school physical, social and learning environments, rather than social relationships more generally.

Participants described secondary school as bigger than primary school in several ways, including in relation to the physical and social environment and the variety of learning activities. This relates to previous research around transition, which suggests young people experience an expanded physical and social environment in secondary school (Anderson et al., 2000; Rice et al., 2011). This experience of expansion in the school world therefore appears to have been maintained over the pandemic.

However, participants experienced this expansion as slowed by pandemic restrictions. They described that these restrictions included keeping them in the same year group to minimise social mixing and being restricted to the same block of the school and classroom. These restrictions were in place until late in the summer term, where pupils were then able to access the wider school setting and began to move between classrooms. Participants therefore experienced an additional transition towards the end of the summer term as they moved into the wider building, requiring them to navigate a larger space with which they were not yet familiar, and perhaps involving contact with a wider range of pupils as they mixed with other classes. Some participants described this bringing up similar feelings to their initial move to secondary school, such

as feeling overwhelmed. Like the previous theme, this again suggests an overall experience of more numerous, multiple transitions over the pandemic.

This additional transition could be expected to have a range of potential effects on young people's experiences. Previous literature suggests that young people experience mixed feelings about the expansion in their school environment, including worry (e.g. Pratt & George, 2005) and excitement (Heinsch et al., 2020). Generally, worries decline quickly (van Rens et al., 2019) and excitement increases (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019) following transition. Based on this, this delayed transition in the school environment could be expected to have a range of effects. One possible impact is that feelings of worry might be more prolonged, linked to the delay in fully experiencing the transition. Alternatively, the delayed expansion to the school environment might make the transition process more gradual, which may make it easier to manage (Coleman, 2011). A more gradual process might have had additional benefits for this cohort, as parents and teachers perceived them as less ready for secondary school than cohorts transitioning before the pandemic (Bagnall et al., 2022), suggesting that additional time to prepare might be valued. Alternatively, as previous literature suggests young people often experience feelings of excitement about this expansion (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019), slowing this process might be experienced as frustrating or demotivating.

Generally, participant experiences suggest the latter, with participants describing feelings of annoyance and frustration at the delay to accessing the wider school. These feelings often related to physical restrictions reducing the variety of learning experiences, specifically resulting in fewer practical learning activities, which made their initial secondary school experience less interesting. Young people's level of interest in their learning is important to consider as transition can negatively affect motivation (Anderson et al., 2000; Hung, 2014), which this reduced variety and interest may have added to. In addition, one element of successful transition is maintaining academic skills (Evans et al., 2018), and difficulties maintaining academic progress over transition have been associated with a range of negative longer-term outcomes (Neugebauer & Schindler, 2012; West et al., 2010). Reduced interest and motivation may make it harder for young people to maintain this progress. Young people's enjoyment

of their learning over transition is therefore important to consider for a range of reasons, and participants' experiences suggest this may have been negatively affected by the pandemic.

However, these negative effects appeared temporary for many participants, who reported renewed feelings of excitement following their access to the wider school. These experiences could be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, they may highlight the importance of the wider school environment to young people's enjoyment and motivation. Alternatively, the positive emotions experienced by young people at this time point may simply represent a delay to the changes in emotion usually experienced over transition, where feelings of anxiety tend to decline and excitement increase (e.g. Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019). In this interpretation, emotional experiences of transition may have been similar to those experienced prior to the pandemic, but some of these emotions were more prolonged or occurred later in the transition process, linked to the delay in the expansion of the school physical, learning and social environment.

In whichever way these findings are interpreted, they highlight several important aspects of young people's experiences. Firstly, young people experienced additional transitions in their school environment and a more gradual expansion of their school world. While this may have helped to spread out some of the changes associated with transition, this was primarily experienced by the young people in this study as frustrating and less enjoyable, meaning it may have impacted negatively on their motivation. Participants' experiences also highlight the importance of practical learning activities to their motivation and enjoyment.

4.1.3 Overall experiences of transition during the pandemic

In combination, these themes suggest that young people transitioning during the pandemic have experienced more numerous transitions and changes. Many of these changes were similar to those associated with transition prior to the pandemic. However, the pandemic led to more numerous transitions and changes, meaning participants experienced a high level of change in their social, physical and learning environments. Experiencing multiple changes at

once has the potential to make transition more challenging (Coleman, 2011), an idea that is supported by perceptions that transition was more difficult at this time (Bagnall et al., 2022). However, the experiences of participants in this study suggest that it was possible for them to navigate several of these challenges successfully. All young people in this study reported having positive friendships and a sense of social belonging by the end of Year 7 and many described a sense of renewed excitement and motivation about their learning following their access to the wider school. Overall, these experiences suggest that while transition has involved more numerous changes and therefore been more challenging during the pandemic, this did not prevent young people ending Year 7 with generally positive experiences of secondary school.

4.2 How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?

Five themes relate particularly closely to this question. For the purpose of the discussion, these themes have been organised into three sections, relating to how young people made sense of different aspects of their experiences. The first section discusses perceptions and sense-making around the pandemic itself, including the themes 'coronavirus as a loss of normality' and 'a time of personal growth'. The second section focuses on how participants perceived their learning during this time, including the themes 'learning gets more serious' and 'less teacher support made remote learning harder'. Finally, the third section focused on participants' perceptions of what influenced or changed their experiences, including the theme 'technology mediates experiences'.

4.2.1 How did young people make sense of the pandemic?

Young people's sense-making about the pandemic was primarily discussed within two main themes: 'coronavirus as a loss of normality' and 'a time of personal growth'. In both these themes, participants made sense of the pandemic as a time that was abnormal but differed in whether this change was perceived negatively or positively. Several participants expressed both these

narratives, suggesting young people made sense of the pandemic in multiple ways.

The theme ‘coronavirus as a loss of normality’ positioned the pandemic as a more negative time than normal. Within this theme, participants described a range of negative emotions, which links to wider research suggesting a generally negative impact of the pandemic on young people’s emotional wellbeing (e.g. Andrés et al., 2022; Englander, 2021; Department for Education, 2020) including for young people transitioning to secondary school (Bagnall et al., 2022). Impacts on emotional wellbeing may be especially important to consider over transition, as transition itself can impact negatively on wellbeing (e.g. Waters et al., 2012; West et al., 2010), suggesting the potential for transition and pandemic impacts on wellbeing to have an additive effect.

However, it is important to note that emotional wellbeing can be defined in different ways. The effects described above in terms of negative emotions relate most closely to a hedonic definition (McMahan & Estes, 2011), where wellbeing involves experiencing more happiness and positive emotions. However, emotional wellbeing can also be defined eudaimonically (McMahan & Estes, 2011), defining wellbeing as being able to meet human needs such as growing as a person and living in line with values. Many participants made sense of the pandemic as a period where they missed valued experiences they would otherwise have had, a perception that was shared by participants in Bagnall et al. (2022). Young people also made sense of the pandemic as a period of lost learning, which was an area valued by most participants in relation to their futures. One way in which young people made sense of the pandemic was therefore as a time where they missed valued experiences, suggesting some negative impacts of the pandemic on eudaimonic wellbeing. Part of the pandemic’s impact on emotional wellbeing may therefore also have been the result of young people perceiving the pandemic as making it more challenging for them to meet human needs such as engagement in valued activities.

However, several participants also expressed a more positive narrative about the pandemic described in the theme ‘a time of personal growth’. Here, participants viewed the interruption to normal routines as giving them more

freedom to engage in preferred activities and providing time to reflect and make positive changes in their lives. This theme therefore suggests that some participants also made sense of the pandemic as supporting positive personal growth, suggesting that the pandemic may also have had some positive effects on eudaimonic wellbeing.

Overall, participants made sense of the pandemic as a non-normal time. Mostly, this change was seen negatively, linking to research suggesting a generally negative impact of the pandemic on wellbeing. However, several young people simultaneously saw the pandemic as providing some opportunities for positive personal growth, suggesting there may also have been positive effects on wellbeing.

4.2.2 How did young people make sense of learning during this time?

Two main themes discussed how young people made sense of their learning during this time: ‘learning gets more serious’ and ‘less teacher support made remote learning harder’.

In the theme ‘learning gets more serious’, participants described transition as a process where academic learning became more serious and pressured. Previous literature also suggests that young people see secondary school as a more challenging environment (Sime et al., 2021) that places greater emphasis on academic attainment (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2018; Hung, 2014). The findings from this study suggest that this perceived change in emphasis continued despite the pandemic and was reflected in remote learning, with participants describing this as involving more learning and pressure in secondary school. For most participants, this change in remote learning was seen positively, linked to having more contact with teachers. However, one participant perceived this as incredibly challenging, affecting her emotional wellbeing. This suggests that the perception of increased emphasis on academic attainment over transition was preserved during the pandemic, but that the remote nature of learning experiences could sometimes affect how this was viewed.

Participants generally made sense of learning during the pandemic as more challenging. They described remote learning as more challenging than learning in person and felt less well supported during this time in the theme 'less teacher support made online learning harder'. Participants also perceived the pandemic as a time where they missed learning, discussed in the theme 'coronavirus as a loss of normality', resulting in an overall sense they had learned less. These perceptions are concerning, as in combination with 'learning gets more serious', they imply that participants perceived learning as becoming more difficult and perceived less support for their learning at the same time as perceiving more emphasis on their academic success, which may have placed a lot of pressure on their academic development. Transition itself has been associated with dips in academic achievement (West et al., 2010), motivation and engagement (Rice et al., 2011), as well as perceptions of reduced teacher support (Bagnall et al., 2019) suggesting that these perceived challenges affected participants at a time where there was already a level of risk to their academic progress and confidence. These combined challenges to their learning may have made it more difficult for young people to experience a successful transition as defined by Evans et al. (2018), as part of this definition involves continuing to develop academic skills, which participants felt was particularly challenging at this time.

These challenges also have the potential to impact young people's academic self-concept, which is particularly important to maintain over transition (Evans et al., 2018). However, young people's sense-making around why learning was more challenging primarily involved external attributions, such as pandemic disruptions and reduced teacher support. This may have reduced the likelihood of attributing these difficulties to their own skills as learners and therefore been protective for their academic self-concept.

Young people's perception that the challenge of online learning primarily related to a reduced level of teacher support also has other implications. Schools may have varied in the level of teacher support provided: for example, Andrew et al., (2020b) found that schools varied substantially in the amount of direct contact provided with teachers during remote learning. The capacity of parent, peer and other relationships to provide compensatory support may also have varied dependent on individual and family circumstances. As these relationships may

have compensated for the reduction in teacher support, anything that affected the capacity of these relationships to fulfil this role is likely to have made online learning more challenging, potentially leading to greater impacts on progress, engagement or self-concept.

Overall, therefore, young people made sense of the pandemic as a time where learning was more challenging and where they learned less. At the same time and in common with transition cohorts before them, participants made sense of transition as increasing the emphasis on and importance of academic achievement, which may have added pressure to an already difficult situation. Young people did, however, make sense of the causes of these difficulties as primarily external, which may have been protective for their academic self-concept.

4.2.3 What factors did young people perceive influenced their experiences?

Young people's sense-making also included factors they perceived as mediating these experiences, primarily described in the theme 'technology mediates experiences', where young people viewed access to technology as affecting both their social and learning experiences over the pandemic.

The importance of technology to young people's experiences has several implications. Previous research considering the impact of the pandemic suggests that not all young people had equal access to technology, affecting their learning (e.g. Andrew et al., 2020b). Participant perceptions in this study suggest that young people who had less access to technology may have been more affected not only in terms of their learning but also in terms of their social experiences and development.

Young people's perceptions of technology as important to social interaction as well as learning reinforces research suggesting an increased emphasis on digital interactions during the pandemic (Bengtsson et al., 2021; Panarese & Azzarita, 2021). This may be a particularly important area to consider for young people transitioning to secondary school, as relationships, and particularly peer

relationships, are of central importance to young people at this time (Heinsch et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021; Mumford & Birchwood, 2020; van Rens et al., 2019; Zeedyk et al., 2003) and important influences on transition success (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2018; Heinsch et al., 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2014; West et al., 2010). Participants' perceptions highlight that those with less access to technology may have benefitted less from this social support, which is likely to have made transition more challenging for them. The sense-making of young people in this study therefore suggests that technological access is an important factor to consider in making sense of how young people have navigated transition over this time and the impact the pandemic may have had on them, including on their social support and social development.

4.2.4 Overall perceptions of young people transitioning to secondary school during the pandemic

Overall, young people made sense of transition during the pandemic as a time that was abnormal or unusual. Mostly this change was seen as negative, associated with negative emotions, loss of valued experiences, and a perception that learning became more difficult during this time. Participants perceived access to technology as a key factor mediating their experiences, often by ameliorating some of these negative impacts.

However, some young people simultaneously described a more positive narrative, where the interruption to normal routines offered an opportunity to reflect, engage in preferred activities and make positive changes. There was therefore a less prevalent but more positive narrative of transition during the pandemic as an opportunity for personal growth. These two perspectives were sometimes expressed by the same participant at different points in their interviews, suggesting young people made sense of the experience of transition during the pandemic in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways.

4.3 How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Four themes related particularly closely to this research question. As this research question has two parts (firstly, how young people perceive the future and secondly, what support they perceive as helpful in moving towards these future goals), discussion of these themes has been organised under these two areas. The themes 'will I succeed in the future?', 'good relationships are important to my future' and 'building on interests to find my future place' are primarily discussed within the first section, as these themes relate primarily to what young people perceive as important to them in future, while the theme 'clear communication helps me move forward' is discussed within the second section as it relates most closely to the support young people felt was important in moving forward.

4.3.1 What do young people perceive as important to them in the future?

Three themes related to this question: 'will I succeed in the future?'; 'good relationships are important to my future' and 'building on interests to find my future place'. In the theme 'will I succeed in the future?' young people expressed that educational success was important to them, which links closely to Evans et al. (2018)'s emphasis on maintaining academic progress as part of a successful transition. However, several participants expressed a sense of doubt about their ability to achieve their academic goals. In the previous section, it was suggested that perceptions of learning being challenging and incomplete during the pandemic may have converged with a perceived increase in the importance of academic attainment over transition to mean that participants experienced a sense of increased challenge in relation to their learning during this time. This may have led them to feel less confident about themselves as learners and may link to this sense of uncertainty.

However, it is important to note that this sense of uncertainty represents a snapshot in time and was not explicitly linked by participants to the impact of the pandemic. Previous research suggests that it is common for young people to

experience temporary declines in their academic progress over transition (Evans et al., 2018; West et al., 2010), which might in itself lead to a sense of uncertainty about future academic success. Alternatively, it may be that this uncertainty is something these participants have always experienced and was not affected by the pandemic or transition. Whatever the explanation, this perception is important to consider, as lower academic self-concept over transition has been associated with more negative future outcomes (Evans et al., 2018).

Participants also described their hoped-for future as including positive relationships. This relates to Evans et al. (2018)'s definition of successful transition as involving the development of positive friendships and a sense of social belonging. While several participants expressed a sense of uncertainty about future academic success, this was not the case for relationships, perhaps suggesting that the participants in this study felt more confident in their ability to achieve this element of their hoped-for future. This may perhaps relate to all participants reporting experiences of a successful social transition as defined by Evans et al. (2018), for example having a positive friendship group in school.

While the above themes related closely to Evans et al. (2018)'s framework of successful transition, young people also described a third area that was important, discussed in the theme 'building on interests to find my future place'. Here, participants described developing existing interests as important in the future, usually to support career or future study choices. This suggests that it is also important to consider the impact of transition during the pandemic on young people's hobbies and interests.

Overall, young people described three main aspects of their hoped-for futures, including academic success, having positive relationships, and further developing their interests. Young people appeared more confident about their ability to succeed in ambitions relating to relationships than relating to academic success. The importance of existing interests to participants' hoped-for futures suggests the importance of understanding how transition during the pandemic may have affected this area of their lives.

4.3.2 What do young people perceive would support them to move forward?

This research question also considered the support young people perceived important in moving towards their hoped-for future. In the themes 'will I succeed in the future?' and 'good relationships are important to my future' some participants described peer behaviour as an important source of support for the future, while others described adults as important in supporting them to reach their goals.

In addition to these elements within other themes, one main theme was generated around the support participants perceived as important: 'clear communication helps me move forward'. In this theme, participants expressed a desire for clearer and more consistent communication from adults. This links closely to the views expressed by young people more generally in relation to the pandemic. In the thematic synthesis conducted as part of the literature review (see Chapter 1), one theme generated was 'place in the community', in which young people also expressed a desire for more and clearer information and a sense of feeling left out of decision-making and communication at this time. The experience of the pandemic may therefore have made the importance of clear and consistent information from adults more salient to young people. This theme also links to previous research on effective practice in supporting transition, where consistent information was found to be a helpful form of support even prior to the pandemic (Bagnall et al., 2019; Strand, 2020).

These findings underlie the importance of clear and consistent communication in supporting young people, perhaps especially during times of change. However, while participants in this study valued clear and consistent communication, they perceived that this was not always received. This suggests that an important way in which adults could support young people to navigate and overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic is to increase the availability of consistent information and communicate clearly with young people.

4.3.3 Overall perceptions of the future

In summary, young people described three main elements to their hoped-for future: academic success; positive relationships; and the opportunity to develop existing interests to support future educational and career choices. Young people expressed some uncertainty about their ability to achieve this hoped-for future, especially in relation to academic success. They perceived support from both adults and peers as important in moving towards this hoped-for future, with clear and consistent information from adults particularly valued.

4.4 Overall discussion of themes

Overall, participants' experiences and perceptions in this study characterised transition during the pandemic as an abnormal or unusual time, which required young people to navigate a greater number of transitions in the physical, social and learning environment, experiencing numerous and frequent changes linked to both transition and the pandemic across most of their Year 6 and 7, suggesting a prolonged period of disruption and change.

The focal model of adolescent development (Coleman, 2011) suggests that experiencing changes during adolescence simultaneously may be more challenging and may present more risks to young people's development. Related to this, the focal model suggests that young people benefit from being able to spread out these changes over time, allowing them to focus on each area of change sequentially before moving onto the next. Overall, young people's views in this analysis suggest that they experienced many similar changes to those reported in the transition literature prior to the pandemic. However, these young people simultaneously experienced and perceived additional changes related to the pandemic, such as multiple contractions and re-expansions of their social network as they moved into and out of lockdowns and perceiving a change in the nature and difficulty of learning during periods where they learned remotely.

This suggests that young people transitioning at this time may have experienced a higher level of change than those transitioning before the pandemic and had to navigate multiple changes simultaneously. Specifically, young people's experiences suggest they have navigated two sets of social changes simultaneously, relating to the changes in social networks associated with both transition and the pandemic and have also experienced simultaneous changes in their learning. Young people perceived learning as more challenging related to the pandemic, both during lockdowns and when and in school related to the impact of social distancing. At the same time, young people perceived changes in academic expectations associated with transition. Interpreted within this model, the simultaneous changes to learning and social aspects of young people's development may have made transition more challenging than in previous years and have the potential to pose risks to young people's development and the success of their transition process.

Young people's views within several themes support this idea, particularly the idea that their learning and academic development was more challenging over this time. The simultaneous changes young people have had to navigate in their learning environment may therefore have impacted negatively on their academic development, and it will be important to address these impacts to support young people as they move forward in their education. Young people also primarily perceived the pandemic as a more negative time and described a range of negative emotions linked to it. This suggests that the pandemic was experienced as a more challenging time by young people, which may relate to the need to navigate multiple, simultaneous changes across several aspects of their development. The focal model suggests that this may especially be the case for young people who experienced other changes or challenges at the same time as transition and the pandemic, for example changes in family structure or bereavements, as these young people are likely to have experienced even more numerous changes over this time.

However, while young people in this study also described experiencing simultaneous changes to their social networks and roles during this time, their views of social aspects of their development were more positive, with all young people perceiving their friendship networks positively by the end of Year 7, in

many cases perceiving these more positively than they did their primary friendship networks. Interpreted within the focal model, this suggests that young people had experiences that had the potential to pose risks to their social development or make this more challenging, but nevertheless perceived themselves as achieving a successful transition within the social dimension described by Evans et al. (2018). This may have partly linked to the nature of this sample, which focused primarily on young people who may have been less likely to have experienced other major changes or challenges during this time, for example avoiding recruiting young people who had recently experienced bereavement of immediate family members. However, this may also suggest a level of resilience demonstrated by young people and the systems around them in relation to their social development. Future research considering what helped young people to cope during this time and what supported their resilience would help to further understanding of this and may generate useful implications for supporting other young people who experience additional changes alongside transition in the future. It will also be important for future research to consider the academic, social and emotional development of this cohort over time, to consider any longer-term or delayed impacts of transition during the pandemic.

Finally, young people also discussed their perceptions of the future and what would help support them to move forward following this challenging time. Participants viewed an ideal future as including positive relationships, academic success, and developing their interests to support career aspirations. They viewed support from peers as well as adults as important in achieving these goals and felt that clear and consistent information was particularly important in supporting their future success.

4.5 Implications

This section will explore some of the implications of this study for the practice of schools and educational psychologists, and for future research.

4.5.1 Implications for schools

This study has several implications for schools, both in relation to young people transitioning during the pandemic and to transition more broadly. In relation to transition during the pandemic, participants views suggest that learning was more challenging at this time, a finding that links closely to findings of negative impacts on young people's learning linked to the pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020b; Cattan et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2020a; 2020b; Sibieta and Cottell, 2021). One implication for schools is therefore to take account of and address gaps in learning, especially for children who had less access to technology, as participants perceived this influenced access to learning opportunities. A second implication for schools is to help children make sense of the impact of the pandemic on their learning and support and build their confidence as learners.

This study also suggests that young people viewed the pandemic as a challenging time that gave rise to a range of negative emotions. Transition is already a time that can present risks to young people's emotional wellbeing (Waters et al., 2012; West et al., 2010), and the pandemic may have had an additional negative impact on young people's mental health (e.g. Andrés et al., 2022; Englander, 2021; Department for Education, 2020). Another implication for schools is therefore to take particular care to support children's emotional wellbeing. This might include strengthening systems for emotional support at a whole-school level, as well as providing early intervention to young people who are particularly affected.

Young people in this study reported experiencing numerous social changes, including reduced contact with peers. While participants in this study developed positive friendships despite these challenges, it is possible that this may have impacted on some children's social development, as social opportunities and social development can impact each other (Van Lier & Koot, 2010). Young people also described the importance of technology in accessing social opportunities, suggesting those with limited access to technology may have been particularly isolated. A further implication is therefore to carefully monitor

children's social development and social inclusion within secondary school and provide early intervention if necessary.

Despite these challenges, young people and the systems around them have shown a high level of resilience, with participants in this study generally reporting positive social and emotional experiences at the end of Year 7. Another implication is therefore to reflect on and learn from what worked well during this challenging time, to inform future support for transition.

As well as young people transitioning during the pandemic, this study also has several implications for schools in supporting transition more generally. Firstly, participants' views suggest they particularly valued practical learning activities and classrooms and resources that supported this, finding these opportunities particularly motivating. Schools may therefore wish to reflect on ways to provide more of these opportunities over transition generally, to support young people's motivation and enjoyment. Another area highlighted by participants' views was the importance of developing existing interests to their hoped-for future, suggesting that providing opportunities for young people to develop and explore curricular and extra-curricular interests early in secondary school are likely to be highly valued by young people and may help support them to develop career ideas, as well as supporting their enjoyment and personal growth.

Thirdly, participants saw secondary learning as more serious and pressured than in primary school, suggesting that this may be a particularly important time to support young people's confidence in their learning and academic progress, which previous research suggests can decline over transition (Evans et al., 2018; West et al., 2010). Finally, young people in this study perceived clear and consistent information from adults as important in supporting them, not only related to the pandemic but also in other areas of their lives. Schools may therefore wish to reflect on how they might provide a greater volume of more consistent information to young people, and how they might support young people's skills in navigating often contradictory information from external sources.

While it is hoped that there will not be another pandemic for some time, individual children may still have similar experiences to those transitioning during the pandemic for other reasons, for example experiencing long absences from school related to illness or experiencing simultaneous life or social changes occurring at the same time as transition, such as family breakups or bereavements. The experiences of young people in this study suggest a range of possible impacts of such disruptions on the transition process. Participants' experiences suggest that time out of school may produce feelings of losing out on milestone experiences and on learning, which may be associated with negative emotions or reduced confidence. This suggests that teachers may wish to pay particular attention to the learning progress, academic confidence and emotional wellbeing of children who have experienced disruptions to transition, so additional support can be provided at an early stage where needed.

However, participants' views suggest that these impacts can be reduced by using technology to support learning and social connection. In addition, experiences that were closer to normal routines were particularly valued during this time, as was the availability of clear information from adults. Schools may therefore wish to consider these factors when supporting children who experience disrupted transition for other reasons, for example using technological skills and systems developed during the pandemic to help children maintain their connection to school and peers; maintaining normal routines as far as possible; and communicating clearly and consistently with these young people.

This study also suggests that such disruptions to normal routines can also sometimes have positive implications for young people, for example supporting reflection and personal growth for young people, and the strengths, positive changes and resilience of young people experiencing disruptions to their transition should also be recognised and supported.

To support dissemination of the research findings and their implications to the participating school, the school was given the choice of the researcher presenting the findings in school or receiving a summary document of key

findings and implications. The school chose to receive a summary document, a copy of which is enclosed in Appendix 17.

4.5.2 Implications for educational psychology practice

This research also has several implications for the practice of educational psychologists (EPs) at a range of levels, from individual casework to systemic work and research.

In terms of individual casework, participants' views highlight a range of areas that may influence transition experiences and outcomes during the pandemic, as well as education more generally. These included the perceived impact the pandemic had on learning, and the role of technology and the type of learning experience provided by schools on young people's access to learning. EPs may therefore wish to consider learning gaps, the level of technological access during lockdown, and the nature of remote learning provided by school when developing hypotheses about a young person's situation. Additionally, EPs may wish to consider the pandemic's impacts on emotional factors important to learning such as engagement, motivation and self-confidence or self-efficacy. These areas might be addressed by asking young people and those around them about their experiences and perceptions of learning during the pandemic.

In addition, participants also described a high level of change in their social worlds during this time, and again an influence of technology access on their social opportunities. The pandemic's impact on the wider family may also have influenced the level of social support young people received. EPs may therefore wish to consider technological access and the availability of family and peer support during the pandemic when developing hypotheses about young people's social development.

Young people in this study also described numerous and sometimes contradictory impacts on their emotional wellbeing. These impacts of the pandemic may be important to consider for EPs when considering factors supporting resilience as well as barriers to emotional wellbeing, and again suggests that EPs may wish to explicitly address experiences of the pandemic in their work with young people and the adults around them.

As well as cohorts transitioning during the pandemic, EPs may wish to consider the areas described above in casework for young people who have experienced disrupted transitions for other reasons, such as illness or family changes. While experiences of these individuals are unlikely to be exactly the same as those transitioning during the pandemic, especially as they have experienced the disruption individually rather than as a whole group, the experience of young people transitioning during the pandemic might be drawn on in identifying areas for further investigation and developing hypotheses to inform support for these young people.

EPs can also play a role in supporting schools to address some of the implications of this research at a group and school level. They are well placed to support schools in working with young people to explore and address the impact of the pandemic on transition. This work might include supporting schools to implement evidence-informed interventions to strengthen children's confidence as learners; address learning gaps; support emotional wellbeing; and monitor and support positive social connections for young people. The impact of the pandemic on school staff and systems should also not be underestimated (Lien et al., 2022) and EPs may wish to use their systemic interventions and skills to support staff in considering the pandemic's impact on themselves and their school and making action plans to address these impacts.

To support dissemination of the research findings and these implications to educational psychologists, the author gave a presentation at her service's continued professional development day, summarising the literature review findings, method, research findings and implications and discussion. A copy of this presentation is included in Appendix 18.

4.5.3 Implications for future research

This study also has a range of implications for future research. Firstly, this study was one of only two conducted to the author's knowledge that focused specifically on transition during the pandemic. This study was conducted within a single secondary school and included participants from a White ethnic background in a particular region of the UK and both this study and Bagnall et

al. (2022) focused on young people who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020. However, experiences even within this relatively homogenous group varied substantially, and it seems likely that young people from different backgrounds may have different perspectives and experiences. Additionally, young people who moved to secondary in September 2021 also had their transition experience disrupted by the pandemic; and those who transitioned in September 2019 will have experienced disruption to their first year of secondary school. Therefore, further research including young people from more diverse backgrounds, areas of the country and year groups would add to our understanding of transition during this time.

This research also highlights that, while young people generally experienced the pandemic as a negative time and experienced a range of challenges linked to it, most felt happy in school by the end of Year 7 and had established a friendship group and sense of social belonging. This suggests a level of resilience in navigating these challenges. There may have been ways in which young people supported themselves, or ways in which they were supported by others or wider systems, that helped to achieve this. Some of the views of participants in this study inform ideas of potential mechanisms supporting this resilience. For example, many participants described making active use of technology to maintain contact with peers and facilitate peer support, which may have helped them to maintain social connections and manage challenges in their learning. Young people also perceived a shift in the purpose of their school environment away from learning towards a more social purpose, especially at the end of Year 6, which may have acted as a way in which school systems compensated for losses of peer connection and support over lockdowns. While these ideas present some potential mechanisms that may have supported young people's resilience, they were not able to be further explored within the constraints of this study. The mechanisms supporting resilience over the pandemic for this year group are therefore not yet well-understood, and future research exploring coping strategies and factors supporting this resilience would further develop understanding in this area. Identifying factors that supported resilience for young people during the pandemic may also help to inform future support for young people experiencing

disruption to their transition for other reasons, for example by identifying protective factors that can be developed or strengthened to support successful transition in these circumstances.

Young people in this study perceived the pandemic as negatively impacting their learning over transition. While research has considered the impact of the pandemic on learning (e.g. Andrew et al., 2020b; Cattan et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2020a; 2020b; Sibieta and Cottell, 2021), this did not consider transition specifically. As academic outcomes are an important element of successful transition (Evans et al., 2018), and as transition itself can be associated with negative impacts on academic engagement and progress for some young people (Evans et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2011; West et al., 2010), research considering the pandemic's impact on learning over transition specifically is important. In addition, less research has considered the emotional impact of these learning challenges, for example whether and how this has affected young people's motivation, engagement or academic self-concepts. Quantitative and qualitative research exploring the impact of the pandemic on these areas would therefore help to develop a fuller understanding of how the pandemic has impacted on young people's learning over transition.

Participants also perceived technology as having a significant role in mediating their experiences of the pandemic. Further research around the influence of technology on experiences and effects of the pandemic would therefore be helpful.

A final implication for future research links to the implications for practice outlined for schools and educational psychologists. In these sections, it was suggested that whole-school and more targeted group support to help address learning gaps; develop young people's confidence as learners; support their emotional wellbeing; and address any impacts on social relationships may all be helpful in supporting young people who transitioned to secondary school during the pandemic. Future research may therefore wish to evaluate the effectiveness of whole-school and targeted intervention programmes focused on these areas, which would help to support effective, evidence-based practice around young people who experience disruptions to their transition.

In summary, this study has several implications for school and educational psychology practice and generates a range of questions for future research. However, this study has several limitations, and readers should exercise caution when translating these implications to their own practice and research settings, especially where these settings are very different to the research context. The next section outlines some of the limitations of this research and reflects on the impact of context on data collection and analysis, to support readers in judging how far to apply these findings and implications to their own contexts.

4.6 Reflexive consideration of limitations

4.6.1 Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from a single secondary school in Northern England and were from an exclusively White and primarily White British background, along with being mostly female. Two young people in the sample received Pupil Premium funding, indicating that they were from a lower socioeconomic status background, and the school primarily serves an area that has a relatively higher level of deprivation than average for the town, which in turn has a higher level of deprivation than the UK average. Therefore, while data was not taken on individual participant socio-economic backgrounds, as this data was not held by school, the sample is likely to include participants primarily from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

These are important considerations for readers in evaluating the transferability of this research. Experiences and perceptions are likely to differ for young people attending different secondary schools and for those from different regional, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Readers should therefore exercise care in transferring the research findings to other contexts, especially where these contexts are different from the context of this study. Specifically, this study is likely to be most relevant for understanding the experiences of

White or White British, female students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, and is likely to be less relevant for understanding the experiences of young people from other backgrounds, most especially for young people from other ethnic backgrounds. Readers drawing implications of this study for work with young people in these contexts should consider carefully how far these themes apply to the young people they are working with, preferably by discussion or gathering young people's views, and be cautious in using the findings of this study to interpret young people's experiences in different contexts.

Additionally, due to ethical considerations the research did not include participants who had suffered recent bereavements of close family members or those experiencing significant mental health difficulties. Experiences of the pandemic are likely to differ for these groups, most likely in being more negative and potentially in having more impacts on emotional wellbeing, social and learning outcomes. This research should therefore be considered more reflective of the experiences of young people who were less acutely affected by the pandemic and may not capture the experiences and perceptions of those more severely affected.

4.6.2 Data collection

As described in the methodology (Chapter 2), the author was primarily an 'outsider' to participants and occupied several positions associated with more social power and privilege than those occupied by participants. Power dynamics were therefore relevant to interactions during data collection. This may have particularly made participants more hesitant to share negative views about adults, teachers or school, especially secondary school. Some participants showed hesitation before making these comments in the interview, further suggesting the existence of this dynamic. While the author attempted to address this power imbalance in a range of ways, this is likely to still have influenced what participants discussed.

The author's professional and personal background also influenced the interview schedule and her responses during the interview. The author's professional role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist involves working primarily with schools and families, and she was therefore more familiar with school and family systems, which led to more focus on these areas in the interview. This was justifiable in relation to the purpose of the research. However, findings should be taken as reflective primarily of participants' experiences in the school context and have most applicability in this context.

Another consideration in relation to data collection was its timing. Interviews were conducted towards the end of participants' Year 7 experience, and therefore involved participants looking back across the course of their transition experience and much of the course of the pandemic. Participants' perceptions and recollections of earlier periods were therefore likely to have been influenced by their later experiences, as well as by forgetting. These findings should therefore be considered a snapshot of participants' perceptions of transition at this period in time, which may have differed from earlier or later time points.

The interview schedule also gave more focus to the first two research questions, exploring experiences and perceptions during the pandemic in more detail than future aspirations and support, which was addressed more briefly at the end of the interview. An improvement to the methodology of this research would have been to give more equal focus to this question and especially what might support young people to move forward following the pandemic.

4.6.3 Data analysis

The author also brought her own professional and personal perspectives to the analysis. Her personal experience of transition was quite negative, and she found it hard to establish friendships in secondary school. This may have influenced the analysis, especially where participants discussed their social relationships. The author also comes from a professional background as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, in which she works with and around young

people in a school context, informed by a range of psychological theories and with a particular interest in emotional wellbeing, which influenced her interpretation and analysis of young people's views and experiences.

The author also experienced the pandemic and remote learning, although at a very different stage in her life. She experienced the pandemic in multiple ways, involving enjoyment and growth as well as challenge and negative emotions. Her own experience of remote learning was also mixed, enjoying more flexibility in her learning but finding reduced contact with peers challenging.

All the above experiences informed the author's analysis of the dataset. In addition, she engaged with literature prior to data collection and analysis. While the author tried to take an inductive approach, she was aware of noticing areas of commonality and difference with the literature, especially in relation to her earlier thematic synthesis of young people's views of the pandemic (Chapter 1). This may have led to meanings that were particularly similar or dissimilar to previous work receiving more attention in the analysis.

The data analysis was obviously also influenced by the analysis method itself: reflexive thematic analysis taking an experiential approach. While this was the most helpful methodology to investigate the study's research questions, it brought some limitations. Firstly, thematic analysis focuses primarily on shared patterns of meaning across the data set, meaning that patterns of meaning across individual participant stories were less of a focus. This reduced the amount of attention paid to the ways in which individual participants made sense of their experiences over time, and to experiences that were isolated to one participant but were significant to them.

Finally, the findings of this research relate only to young people's felt experiences and perspectives of the impact of the pandemic on them, and perspectives of others such as parents and teachers may be different. Such a difference in perspective was suggested in Bagnall et al. (2022)'s research, where parents and teachers but not young people viewed young people transitioning during the pandemic as less ready for secondary school. The

young people in this study have only experienced transition during the pandemic, and have less knowledge than others, especially teachers, of what the experience of transition is likely to have been like without the pandemic. Therefore, this study provides one set of perspectives and understandings of transition during the pandemic, and further qualitative and quantitative research drawing on a range of perspectives will be important in giving a richer and deeper knowledge of this phenomenon.

4.7 Conclusions

Young people transitioning to secondary school during the pandemic have experienced a high level of change and numerous additional transitions within both school and wider social environments, linked to the simultaneous impact of the pandemic and transition changes. The expansion in the school environment usually seen on transition was still experienced but was delayed. Participants generally perceived this delay as frustrating, linked to reduced variety in their learning, which may have affected their motivation or enjoyment. Participants also experienced numerous changes in social networks and roles during this time. Encouragingly, all young people described navigating these social changes successfully, developing friendships that were perceived as positive and perceiving a sense of social belonging and enjoyment in school.

Participants perceived the pandemic in two main ways, both of which positioned it as an abnormal time. While all participants expressed negative perceptions of this time, such as narratives of loss, experiences of negative emotions and views of the pandemic as incomplete, a smaller group simultaneously expressed a more positive narrative of this unusual time as providing a space for personal growth. Young people perceived technology as an important mediator of both their learning and social experiences during the pandemic.

A key perception echoed across several themes was that young people found learning more challenging during this time, which may have impacted on transition success in relation to academic outcomes and may have led to the

sense of uncertainty expressed by several participants in relation to their ability to achieve academic success in the future.

As well as academic success, participants perceived relationships and developing existing interests as important in future. Support from both peers and adults was perceived as significant in supporting them to reach these goals, and adults were perceived to particularly be able to help by providing more consistent information.

Overall, this study suggests that young people transitioning during the pandemic have had numerous changes and multiple transitions to navigate, linked to the simultaneous impacts of the pandemic and transition. Despite this, the participants in this study generally described feeling happy in school and having positive friendships, suggesting that they were able to show resilience, generally navigating transition successfully in relation to the social domain in particular (Evans et al., 2018). However, participants perceived a more negative impact of this period on their learning, and some described negative impacts on emotional wellbeing. It will be particularly important for adults around them to consider and address these perceived impacts to support a successful secondary education for these young people, especially in relation to their academic development and academic self-concepts. This study presents one group of perspectives and experiences, and further research, especially considering what supported resilience in coping with these changes, will be important in extending our knowledge of what it has been like to transition to secondary school during this unusual and challenging time.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: systematic literature review data collection form

Data Extraction Sheet

Basic study information

Reference	
Reviewer	
Date reviewed	

Study eligibility

Criteria	Yes	No
Includes at least one participant aged between 10-12 years?		
Includes children's views and experiences during the pandemic?		
Includes educational experiences as part of study questions/focus? Or general wellbeing		
Includes at least some open-ended survey questions or interviews?		
Include?		

Study background

Epistemological/ontological standpoint	
Researcher's background	
Aims	
Research questions	

Participants and context

Number of participants	
Characteristics of participants (age range, gender, ethnicity, setting, disabilities, other relevant information)	
Context participants were recruited in (e.g. school, community, type and size of school etc.)	
Method of recruiting participants	
Method of conducting research with participants (e.g. individual interviews, focus groups, parents present or not)	
Ethical approval needed/given?	
Length of participation (recruitment to final follow up)	

Methodology

Methodology of data collection (e.g. interviews, focus groups, survey, location of data collection)	
Questions or other data collection methods used e.g. interview or survey questions, main topics covered, structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews	
Methodology of data analysis (type of method used, stages followed)	
Trustworthiness e.g. checking processes, member checks, number of researchers involved in coding data, reflexivity etc.	

Results

Enter results/findings text into a separate word document or NVivo for coding and analysis.

Trustworthiness

- Complete a CASP checklist for the study
- Complete weight of evidence table

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	

Appendix 2: list of themes and codes generated in thematic synthesis

Theme	**Sub-theme**	**Included codes**
Place in the community	Us versus coronavirus	Community empathy

		Gratitude Helping/doing our part Sacrificing for others Rules and precautions
	The place of young people	Desire for information Information overload Uncertainty, lack of clarity, confusion Young people not listened to/valued
	Unequal impact	Technology access
Narrowed yet deeper connections	Deeper connections with family	Increased connection with family Family conflict
	Isolation from wider networks	Isolation from peers Positives of reduced peer contact Increased screen time Isolation generally e.g. from community Reduced perceived teacher care
Freedom	Increased freedom over time	Freedom – increase Routine- increased freedom Preferred activities
	Restricted freedom over space	Routine- freedom decrease
	Anger and frustration about restrictions	Emotion - anger
Loss	General loss and change	Loss- change
	Bereavement	Loss- bereavement
	Loss of day-to-day activities	Loss- day-to-day activities
	Loss of major events and transitions	Loss- rights of passage
	Feelings of sadness	Emotion- sad/low/depressed
Resilience	Coping	Resilience- coping strategies Keeping going
	Faith and hope	Resilience – hope and faith
	Pandemic as an opportunity for growth	Resilience – opportunity for growth Positive change
Challenges of home learning	Increased workload	Increased learning workload
	Feeling overwhelmed	Emotion – overwhelmed/stressed
	Lacking support	Learning – lack of teacher support Learning – reduced peer support
	Conflicts with family around	Learning – homeschooling

	learning	and challenges/conflict with family
	Demotivation	Learning – reduced motivation Emotion - boredom

Appendix 3: systematic literature review weight of evidence assessments

Abdulah et al., 2020

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	Medium-low. A good description of method but very little description of how data were analysed.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Medium – data collection was open-ended, supported young people to express their views through visual as well as verbal means, and data were collected directly by researchers. However, little detail of analysis was given so it is difficult to determine how inductive or deductive this was.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural	Medium-low: focused entirely on young people's views but included a wide age range and a non-UK or European context.

	context	
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-low

Amrutha et al., 2021

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	Low – limited detail given of how data were analysed, no description of researcher reflexivity.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Medium-low – entire design focused on open-ended expression. However, researcher did not directly interact with the young people, interpreting their drawings and written descriptions, giving less opportunity for young people to explain the meaning of their drawings. Little detail given of data analysis method, making it difficult to determine how inductive this was.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural	Medium- focused entirely on young people's views and was focused mainly on target age range, but a different country context.

	context	
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-low

Idoiaga et al., 2020

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	High – clear reporting of the data collection and analysis process and quotes used to show grounding of conclusions in the data.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Medium – design focused on open-ended data collection. However, data were collected by parents interviewing their children and feeding back the results, meaning results may have been influenced by parents' interpretations as well as the researcher's. The researchers did address this by providing specific guidance to parents on conducting the interviews and instructing them to record children's own words. Data analysis was inductive, but statistical analysis of co-occurring phrases was used to reduce the data set prior to thematic analysis, which may have led to some meanings

		being lost.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	Medium-high: Study focused entirely on young people's views and was in a European (Spanish) context. There was a wider age range than the target age range.
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-high

Flynn et al., 2021

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	Medium. Details were given about background of researchers and standpoint taken but there was little detail about how data analysis was carried out and few quotes provided for findings, making it hard to see how grounded these were in the data.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young	Medium-low – Analysis for long-answer questions (which were the ones relevant to this study) was specified as being inductive. However, not all the study focused on open-ended

	people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	questions or methods, also including closed questions. Data were collected through a survey so relied on young people's ability to express their ideas through writing.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	Medium-low. Was conducted in a European (Irish) context but a small proportion of the study was focused on young people's as opposed to teacher or parent views, and a wide variety of ages were included.
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-low.

Larcher et al., 2020

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	Medium-low. Some limitation in details of reporting, particularly around the background and perspectives of researchers and how these influenced the research, and the process of data analysis which was not clearly specified. Procedure of checking processes not clearly described – several

		authors were involved in coding but the process of this was not explained.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Medium-high – focused on open-ended views and detail of views and experiences given. An inductive analysis was used. However, the focus group method may have limited some young people in expressing their views freely e.g. if they wanted to agree with the group.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	Medium-high: the study focused entirely on young people's views in a UK context. However, only some participants were in the target age range and participants overall were a specific group (children cared for by hospital and part of youth voice group in this setting).
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-high

O'Sullivan et al., 2021

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	High – procedures were

		clearly described, processes to enhance quality such as cross-checking coding were used, interview schedule was clearly described.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Medium-high – focused on open ended questions but children were interviewed in the presence of parents which may have affected the views expressed. An inductive data analysis method was used.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	Low – the study was in a European (Irish) context but most of the paper focused on parent views, with relatively little included from young people and even less from the target age range.
D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-high

Valadez et al., 2020

Weight of evidence	Criteria	Result (low, medium, high)
A – trustworthiness	CASP checklist	Medium-high – how data

		gathered were clearly described but limited processes described to support trustworthiness.
B – relevance of study design to answer review question	Proportion of design focused on open-ended questions Data collection methods involving more direct collection of young people's views e.g. direct interviews Inductive data analysis	Low- only some of the paper focused on open-ended views and qualitative analysis. Data were collected through a survey, so were directly from young people but range of views may have been limited by young people's ability to express themselves through writing. Analysis was inductive but data were reduced using statistical analysis of co-occurring phrases prior to completing the thematic analysis, which may have led to some meanings being lost.
C – relevance of study focus to research question	Proportion of study focused on young people's views (as opposed to teacher or parent views) Proportion of participants in target age range (10-12 years) UK or European cultural context	Medium-low – was focused on young people's views but a wide age range was included and the study was outside a UK or European cultural context.

D - overall	Combination of ratings above	Medium-low

Appendix 4: detail of sub-themes for each theme in systematic literature review

Place in the community

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Us versus coronavirus	5	"it can be observed how children describe the COVID-19 with words such as bug, bad, or enemy but they also mention words such as doctors, win, brave, balcony, or clap" (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "A big salute to all corona warriors - police professionals, doctors, nurses, sanitary workers and first responders; real super heroes of the world" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "Still, we sacrifice all of this to keep ourselves and our dear and near and everyone safe" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "to beat it we have to help the doctors and stay home and that's it" (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "If we are sick use a mask and let our parents know in case we feel bad so they can take us to the doctor." (Valadez et al., 2020)
The place of young	4	"So, even if it's presented in a different way,

people		you're entitled to the same information in life as an adult should be." (Larcher et al., 2020) "A strong desire for more consistency and direction from the Department of Education, so as to ensure equitable access to the curriculum within and across schools, featured in many open-ended responses throughout the survey." (Flynn et al., 2021) "I have doubts because I don't know when this boring confinement is going to end." (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "Most participants agreed with the feeling of not having a voice during the pandemic or during the recovery process" (Larcher et al., 2020)
Unequal impact	1	"They kind of came out and asked who had the provision to actually access the Internet to do work. And I think for the people who didn't, they were given textbooks. And to me, that seems a little bit outdated and something that maybe isn't too useful because that's not a constant stream of information." (Larcher et al., 2020)

Narrowed yet deeper connections

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Deeper connections	6	"I am happy and calm because I like to be

with family		with my father and mother and we do many things that I like" (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "I feel happy about spending more time with my family" (Valadez et al., 2020) "spending quality time with family and grandparents" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "one teenager stated that "we stressed out so much because my parents are actually in the middle of a divorce, but they live in the same house. So that alone is stressful, then lockdown came, and my dad was always at home. Obviously, we couldn't go anywhere we can't get out of the house and it really added to the stress 'cause you can't walk into a room where my two parents are because you're like stepping on egg-shells. It's not really a relationship. I know for me it really effects like my mental health and everything. I hate being stuck inside. I don't mind being inside, but you know, I just wanted my one time where I was like. I really want to go out. I really wanna get outta here. I even missed getting the bus." (O'Sullivan et al., 2021).
Isolation from wider networks	7	"She played with her friends in the right side, while she was alone and watching TV in the left side. This picture shows two times of my life, before and after corona. I was playing game alone or with my friends outside the home before corona, but now I play video game after corona." (Abdulah et al., 2020) "Social interaction was a factor highlighted by the vast majority of both primary and second-

		level respondents as something they greatly missed, most notably with their friends" (Flynn et al., 2021) "being at home isolated me from my near and dear ones" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "They also identified being away from disruptive students or bullies ('kids being mean to me'; 'eejits in my class disrupting class') as positive aspects" (Flynn et al., 2021)

Freedom

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Increased freedom over time	4	"I don't wake up early to go to school and also watch TV" (Valadez et al., 2020) "Second-level students enjoyed getting up later, and following their own more flexible learning schedule." (Flynn et al., 2021) "I can take advantage and can do many things that I couldn't do before due to lack of time. I'm safe at home and it is not a big inconvenience, just washing the hands all the time. That I can do more things freely." (Valadez et al., 2020)
Restricted freedom over space	3	"COVID taught me the value of freedom of going outside which I took for granted" (Amrutha et al., 2021)

		““we stressed out so much because my parents are actually in the middle of a divorce, but they live in the same house… I hate being stuck inside. I don’t mind being inside, but you know, I just wanted my one time where I was like. I really want to go out. I really wanna get outta here. I even missed getting the bus.” (O’Sullivan et al., 2021)
Anger and frustration about restrictions	1	“sometimes I get angry because I want to go out and see my friends. It’s a virus that makes me feel angry because it’s a pain in the ass and I can’t decide about anything” (Idoiaga et al., 2020) “this lockdown situation also makes them feel angry” (Idoiaga et al., 2020)

Loss

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
General loss and change	1	“Life has drastically changed in the past two months with the outbreak” (Amrutha et al., 2021)
Bereavement	1	“I’m sad because my grandfather died” (Valadez et al., 2020)
Loss of day-to-day activities	6	“‘Missing school days, teachers, regular classes, fun with friends, recess” (Amrutha et al., 2021)

		“I feel sad and upset because I can’t do my daily things I’m sad because we’re not going on vacation” (Valadez et al., 2020) “Participants also expressed challenges produced by the interruption of their usual coping mechanisms, such as sport or music activities.” (Larcher et al., 2020)
Loss of major events and transitions	3	“worried about whether they will still be in confinement on significant dates, for example, on their birthdays” (Idoiaga et al., 2020) “For those preparing for A-levels, with the need to obtain specific grades to progress to university, cancellation produced feelings of disappointment, impotence and uncertainty about their future, for which they had been working hard and looking forward.” (Larcher et al., 2020)
Feelings of sadness	4	“The earth is crying because corona covered all the world” (Abdulah et al., 2020) “I feel sad because I can’t see my friends and cousins” (Valadez et al., 2020)

Resilience

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Coping	1	“the importance of staying physically and mentally healthy” (Amrutha et al., 2021)

Faith and hope	2	“Praying to the lord during lockdown; with folded hands, I pray to the almighty that he takes care of all the sufferings and the pains of all my brothers and sisters.” (Amrutha et al., 2021) “I hope that the pandemic ends soon and everything goes back to normal” (Valadez et al., 2020)
Pandemic as an opportunity for growth	2	“human beings shall emerge to be more compassionate towards each other” (Amrutha et al., 2021) “let us utilize this time to do something creative and beneficial” (Amrutha et al., 2021) “Able to do activities that enhance my abilities and skills.” (Valadez et al., 2020)

Safety

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Safe at home and unsafe outside	7	“They believed that if they went outside their home, they would be infected by coronavirus infection. R.S.M., a girl aged 13 years, believed that the coronavirus would be outside the house waiting for her. She

		painted her house with many coronaviruses outside." (Abdulah et al., 2020) "a microscopic devil waiting for all of us outside" (Amrutha et al., 2021) "With words such as safe, protected, calm, home, parents, or mother, children describe how they feel safe and protected at home" (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "I can be with my family and be safe" (Valadez et al., 2020) "There's obviously a lot of concerns about how the risk of infection will be strictly managed all day long because I know like at some schools there's key workers kids who all go in, and it's really good the social distancing. All-day long. But at the break and lunchtimes, there's no social distancing at all. So, all the kids go back together and then at pick up. All the parents are together as well." (Larcher et al., 2020) "A.S.R. a 13-year-old girl, also created a red line between school and herself. She could not go to the school because the school was unsafe zone and she would be infected by the coronavirus." (Abdulah et al., 2020)
Fear and concern	4	"it can be seen more clearly that the coronavirus evokes feelings of fright – and even terror and fear – in the children. This fear is mainly associated with the possibility of infecting their grandparents, along with

		feelings of guilt." (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "I was worried I wouldn't have friends when I got back to school" (Flynn et al., 2021) "I feel a little concerned because this Chinese pandemic is spreading too fast and I fear that the coronavirus will get to me." (Valadez et al., 2020)
Safety of others	5	"It doesn't hurt children but we can infect our grandparents and that scares me" (Idoiaga et al., 2020) "the possibility that it might infect others and the danger posed by the contagion" (Valadez et al., 2020)
Safety of self	2	"I could get sick with coronavirus" (Valadez et al., 2020) "We found that children had a high level of fear of infection during home confinement." (Abdulah et al., 2020)

Challenges of home learning

Sub-theme	**Number of papers including this theme**	**Example quotations**
Increased workload	5	"coping with a more intense workload" (Flynn et al., 2021) "We have been almost overwhelmed. I know I have. With the amount of work that's been set all at one time." (Larcher et al., 2020)

		“There were so many projects, nearly there was one project every week and then there was like every single subject on the thing and like she’s getting us to do like so much. And then I just got like really like it was too much for me. ‘Cause I’m used to like smaller work and she would give us more time to finish it.” (O’Sullivan et al., 2021)
Feeling overwhelmed	2	“home-schooling and online learning had been an overwhelming experience” (Larcher et al., 2020)
Lacking support	3	“‘I missed the way the teacher helped us with our work” (Flynn et al., 2021) “Participants expressed how support received was inadequate and slow regarding submission deadlines” (Larcher et al., 2020)
Conflicts with family around learning	1	“But obviously, our parents don’t know everything about things. So, then we try, and you google. But then when Google doesn’t give you the answer, then you rely on your parents. But your parents can’t really teach you anything. So, you kind of feel bad because you can’t do anything because you don’t understand it, but they don’t understand your work either” (Larcher et al., 2020)
Demotivation	4	“Bored because I have to do a lot of homework” (Idoiaga et al., 2020) “many students emphasised their lack of motivation towards schoolwork” (Flynn et al., 2021)

Appendix 5: recruitment and consent letters

Letter to headteacher for access:

Dear (headteacher's name),

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at X County Council. As part of my training programme, I am conducting a research project about the experiences of young people who moved to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic (in September 2020). My research aims to highlight young people's experiences during this time. I am writing to you to ask whether you would be interested in your school being involved in this project.

Following the project, I hope to share my findings with school staff. This will be in an anonymised form and no individual young people will be identifiable. I hope this may be helpful to staff's understanding of the experiences of this cohort of young people and may help to inform their approach to working with this year group.

Around ten Year 7 pupils would each be invited to take part in one interview lasting around an hour. I hope to conduct these interviews in the second half of the summer term (May-July 2021).

Interviews would either be conducted in school or over video call if this is necessary due to coronavirus restrictions. If it is necessary to use video call, an adult in school would need to be present to support this. If interviews are conducted in person, these will be fully risk assessed and all school visitor protocols around COVID-19 will be followed. I have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services disclosure to support my work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and I have had full safeguarding training from X County Council.

Support needed from school would include:

- Sending consent letters to parents of ten randomly selected Year 7 pupils
- Sharing information about the project with pupils whose parents consent for them to take part, and asking if they are interested in taking part
- Sharing key information already held by school about the pupils taking part, with parent consent
- Providing a space in school to conduct the interview (and a member of staff to support this if remote working is necessary)

All data will be kept securely and confidentially in line with data protection protocols at X County Council. Young people's data will not be individually identifiable in the final report and individually identifiable data will be destroyed when it is no longer needed. Young people will be free to withdraw from the project at any time if they no longer wish to participate.

I would very much appreciate it if you could contact me by email (Louise.Watson@Xcountycouncil.gov.uk) or telephone (XXXXXX) to let me know whether you would be interested in your school taking part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Watson

Parent recruitment letter

Dear parent/carer,

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at X County Council. As part of my training programme, I am conducting a research project about the experiences of young people who moved to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic (in September 2020). My research aims to explore young people's experiences, how they have made sense of these experiences and their views on any support they feel may

be helpful in the future. I am writing to you to share some information about this research project and ask if you consent for your son/daughter to take part.

Please read the attached information sheet about the project, and if you are happy for your son/daughter to take part, please fill in the attached consent form. If you have any questions about the project or would like any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me by email (XXXX) or telephone (XXXX).

Yours sincerely,

Louise Watson

Information sheet for form tutors introducing the project to young people:

Staff information sheet: transition during COVID-19 research project

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at X County Council. For my thesis research project I am interested in the experiences of young people who transitioned to secondary school during the COVID-19 pandemic (in September 2020). As part of this I am inviting a small number of Year 7 pupils to take part in an interview with me about their experiences. I am interested in speaking with the young person/people named below and I have received parental consent for them to take part in this project.

I would be very grateful if you could share the information sheet attached with the following young people and answer any questions they may have. **Please tell them that it is their choice whether to take part and they do not have to.** Please can you ask them to fill in the interest form to say if they are interested in taking part.

List of young people:

Please can you return the completed interest forms to _____ who will pass them on to me.

Many thanks for your support,

Louise Watson.

Parent information sheet

School of Psychology

Information Sheet

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project: Experiences of primary to secondary transition during the Covid-19 pandemic: a thematic analysis.

Insert Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number

Researchers: Louise Watson, University of Nottingham

Supervisors: Russell Hounslow, University of Nottingham

Contact Details

Louise- Louise.Watson@nottingham.ac.uk

Russell- Russell.Hounslow@nottingham.ac.uk

This is an invitation for your child to take part in a research study about their experiences of transition to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic.

Before you decide if you consent for your child 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 consent for your child to participate, they will be invited to take part in an interview about their experiences of transition to secondary school. This will take place individually in school, if restrictions related to COVID allow school visits. The interview will ask children about their experiences of moving to secondary school and their hopes for the future.

Before giving your consent for your child to take part, you should think about whether talking about starting secondary school and/or the future might be upsetting for your child. Children who are likely to become distressed by talking about these things should not take part; for example, because they have recently experienced a very stressful life event or they have significant mental health needs.

The interview will last around an hour and will be audio-recorded. Recordings will be stored securely in line with X County Council data security policies and will be deleted when they are no longer needed. Your child will also be asked if they are happy for the interview to be recorded before the recording is started.

If restrictions related to COVID do not allow school visits, the interview will take place over video call using Microsoft Teams. This will be either in school or at home and will be supported by a familiar adult at home or in school who will remain physically present with your child throughout the video call. The video call interview will be audio and video recorded. Again, recordings will be stored securely in line with X County Council data security policies and will be deleted when they are no longer needed. Your child will also be asked if they are happy for the interview to be recorded before the recording is started.

If you consent for your child to take part, some key information held by school about your child will be shared with the researcher, including their gender, ethnicity, whether they receive Pupil Premium funding or are Looked After by the local authority and

whether they are identified as having Special Educational Needs or as the child of a key worker. Your child's name will not be kept with these details and your child will not be individually identifiable when reporting the findings. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent for your child to take part. You are free to withdraw your child at any point before, during or after the interview, up until the point that data analysis commences, which will not be earlier than *(insert date)*. Your child can also choose to withdraw from the study at any time before this point. If your child would like to withdraw or you would like to withdraw your child, please contact the researcher using the details above.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask now. We can also be contacted after your child's 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

Child information sheet

Hello!

My name is Louise and I am doing some research to find out about what it is like to move to secondary school. I would like to find out what it has been like to move to secondary school this year by talking to some young people about what this has been like. I would like to know if you would like to take part and tell me about what this has been like for you.

This information sheet tells you about what would happen if you choose to take part. **You can choose if you want to take part and you do not have to take part if you do not want to.**

If you would like to take part, I will ask you to meet with me in school for around an hour. In this meeting I will ask you some questions about what it has been like moving to secondary school. I will also ask you about the future and what you would like to do.

You can choose what you would like to say and you do not have to say anything you don't feel comfortable talking about. I will take a recording of what we say in the interview so I can remember exactly what you have said. Only I will listen to this recording and it will be deleted once I have written down what has been said. Your name will not be kept with the information I have written down from the recording.

You can choose if you would like to take part. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you choose to take part, you can choose to stop at any time and you do not have to say why. You can also choose to stop taking part after you have done the interview, as long as you do this before I have started to write my report about what I have found out. If you do this I will delete any information you have given me.

After I have finished speaking to young people about moving to secondary school, I am going to write a report about what I found out. This is so that other people can understand what it has been like to move to secondary school this year. This report will not have anyone's name in it and anyone that reads it won't be able to tell who I spoke to.

The only time that I would need to tell anyone about what you say to me is if I think that you or someone else might not be safe. If I thought this, I would need to tell a teacher in school so they could help to keep you safe.

If you have any questions you can ask your teacher or an adult at home and they can pass your question on to me.

Please can you fill in the form below to tell me if you want to take part. Please give this to your teacher when you have finished.

Parent consent form

School of Psychology

Consent Form

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Title of Project**:** Experiences of primary to secondary transition during the Covid-19 pandemic: a thematic analysis.

Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number:

Researcher(s): Louise Watson – Email: Louise.Watson@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor(s): Russell Hounslow – Email: Russell.Hounslow@nottingham.ac.uk

- 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 your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason? YES/NO
- My child has no recent experiences or needs that mean they are likely to be distressed by taking part in this study. YES/NO
- I give permission for information held by school about my child, as described in the information sheet, to be shared with the

researcher for research purposes, and I understand that this data will be kept anonymously and securely. YES/NO

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

- Do you agree for your child to take part in the study? YES/NO

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

Signature: Date:

Name and relationship to child (in block capitals):

Child's name:

Child's form group:

Child interest form

Name: _____
Form group: ____

Please circle YES or NO to answer these questions:

Have you read the information sheet? YES NO

Did you understand the information sheet? YES NO

Would you like to take part? YES NO

Please give this form to your teacher.

Appendix 6: interview schedule

Introductory script:

Engage in some general small talk.

"Hello _____. Thank you for meeting me today. My name is Louise and I am interested in finding out what it has been like to move to secondary school this year. I'd like to talk to you about this today and ask some questions about what this has been like for you. I'd also like to ask you about what you'd like to happen in the future. I'd like to record us talking: this is so I don't forget what you have told me or what I've asked you. Is that okay?"

If yes:

"Thank you. If you change your mind you can ask to stop at any time and that's absolutely fine. You don't have to tell me why. You can also skip any questions you don't want to answer."

(Show child life path arrow). "I've brought this picture to help us think about your move to secondary school. It's a bit like a timeline – we can label different points in time on it, like when you were in Year 6 and when you moved to Year 7. We can write or draw on it to help us talk about the questions I'd like to ask you. You can write or draw on it or I can write or draw for you."

"Is it okay for me to start the recording now?"

If no:

"That's absolutely fine, thank you for meeting me." Invite child to return to class.

Interview structure:

'Warm-up' questions – easier, non-threatening questions to develop rapport.

1) Can you tell me which primary school(s) you went to?
2) What was it like at your primary school(s)? (Prompt for more information e.g. what were your teachers/friends/classroom/playground like? How many children were in your class?)
3) What did you enjoy about it? (Prompt as needed e.g. favourite subjects, teachers, trips etc.)
4) What did you not enjoy about it?
5) Did any other children from your primary school come to this school?
6) Who is at home? Do you have any brothers/sisters? (Prompt age, whether they go to this school).

Main body of interview

7) Direct child to life path arrow. "So you've told me a bit about primary school – is it okay if I put primary school at the start of the arrow?" Note down a few key points from the previous discussion on this part of the life path with the child.
8) Can you tell me about the start of Year 6 (before the Christmas holidays)? What was that like?
   Prompt as necessary to cover:
   - Learning and lessons
   - Teachers and relationship with teacher

- Friends and relationship with friends
- Leisure activities in school and at home e.g. playtime, clubs, activities etc.
- Things at home
- Favourite things/things they liked
- Least favourite things/things they disliked
- Feelings at this time – if you had to rate this time out of ten (0 being terrible, nothing good about it 10 being really brilliant, nothing bad) what would you say? Can you tell me about why you chose this number? (Record number on life path)

(Probe until topic exhausted, then advance to 9)

9) Can you tell me about the next term in Year 6 – between Christmas and Easter?
   Ask about:

   - What happened in this term?
   - Where were you learning?
   - Did anything change for you in this term? What was this?
   - Why do you think this happened?
   - How did you feel about this?
   - What was it like for you at this time?
   - Prompt with same prompts for question 8 above.

10) Repeat above questions (as question 9) for:
   - Summer term (Easter to Summer holidays of Year 6)
   - Autumn term of Year 7
   - Spring term of Year 7

11) Can you tell me about how things are now in school? Prompt in same way as question 8.

12) Do you feel that coronavirus has changed things for you or do you feel things are pretty much the same? If a change – how so? (If child shares negative impacts) – do you have any ideas about what others could do to help with this? Do you have any

ideas about what you could do? (If child shares positive impacts) – is there anything about this you would like to keep going in the future? How might you or others keep this going?

13) I'd now like to think a bit about what you'd like to do in the future. Can you think about when you are finishing this school in Year 11 when you are sixteen? Mark this on the end of the life path line. What would you want this to be like? What would you want to be happening at this time?
Prompt with:

- Learning, lessons, qualifications
- Leisure activities
- Relationships with teachers
- Relationships with peers
- Relationships with family
- How you would want to be feeling
- Other hopes or ambitions.

(If child finds it difficult to think this far ahead suggest a year on in the future e.g. end of Year 8).

14) Can you tell me a bit about how you will get there? Is there anything you might do that would help you? Is there anything others can do to support you?

15) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your move to secondary school? Or about anything else?

Closing questions:

16) Go back through the life path tool with the child and summarise what I have understood from what they told me at each time. Check for each section and overall 'have I understood what you have told me? Is there anything I have not got right? Is there anything you would like to add?'

17) How have you found the interview? What did you like about it? Are there any ways I could make it better?

Closing script:

"Thank you for taking part in the interview today. (Show debriefing sheet). This is some information for you to take away that tells you a bit about the research I am doing. It is the same as I said at the start – I am interested in finding out about what it has been like to move to secondary school this year. This sheet also gives you some information about who to talk to if you feel worried about anything we have talked about. Your form tutor is probably the best person to talk to first, but there are some other people you can talk to on there in case you would rather do this. I have also sent your parent(s)/carer(s) an information sheet in the post that tells them about the research and people they can contact, a bit like yours. It does not tell them anything about what you have said.

Even though we have now finished the interview, it is still okay if you would like to stop taking part in the study. You can let me know if you no longer wish to take part up until I start to write my report and I will take your information out of the report. Do you still want to take part at the moment?

Do you have any questions?"

Warm down stage:

Turn off recording.

General conversation e.g. What is their next lesson? What will they be doing? Plans for evening/weekend/lunchtime to warm down. Bring an activity e.g. a puzzle or game to use to help the child relax and regulate before going back to class if necessary.

Appendix 7: example of a section of interview transcript

The below transcript is taken from a section of Helen's interview, beginning to discuss her experiences of the first lockdown in March 2020, while in Year 6.

Louise: what about once, cause obviously in March then a lot of people were out of school, I don't know whether you were or not

Helen: yes I was

Louise: you were so what what was that like when you had lockdown and and went home

Helen: erm it was, it wasn't too bad erm I'm very I'm a very organised person like I've got my routine and I remember just the first day figuring out that I was going to make a a little routine so I could get all my schoolwork in and know how to manage it cause it was really hard for us in lockdown cause we had my sister who's in year, she was in year 3 at the time, and she's not been erm, not that she's not done as well but I was obviously very good with my schoolwork

Louise: mmm

Helen: and she struggles to concentrate and stuff so at school she's got like a little group like not special help, I feel bad saying that but she has like extra help with it all

Louise: mmm

Helen: so my mum would try and help her, and erm luckily for me I kind of get on with it, but it was hard with my little brother as well cause he was at the age where, you know, bad twos erm and he was running around and my mum couldn't take take her eye off him to help [little sister] and then it'd all be gone and I remember [little sister] went to my nanas for a few days so she could my nana could help her because it was too much for my mum she couldn't have [little brother] and [little sister] at the same time so for me I remember I had I think it was like nine till two of school work erm and we had like a class dojo where I'd I'd message my teacher and she'd tell me what to do she'd give us little tests, and we'd have like a booklet of loads of stuff to do and she'd like date it and make it all organised and she'd make sure we knew exactly what we were doing erm like and if I needed help sometimes I'd just ring my dad

Louise: mmm

Helen: erm he'd be at work but I I felt my mum struggling with [little brother] and [little sister] was already enough without me and I just wanted to be able to do it as much as I could

Louise: mmm

Helen: independently. And then I would go downstairs and sometimes I'd take my brother outside on the trampoline and my dad'd come back and me my dad and my brother could go on a walk and my sister would have three hours of schoolwork with my mum. Erm so it was stressful but we did, we did manage it, there was some days where I wouldn't get as much done as what I would like to erm but yeah we did we did manage it on a whole.

Louise: yeah, so it sounds like you, you kind of got that routine in place for yourself and you were kind of able to work quite independently for a lot of that schoolwork

Helen: yeah

Louise: which it was a few, a few of you to kind of juggle at home

Helen: yeah

Louise: so it was it was difficult in that sense so erm you kind of had to work a bit on your own but

Helen: yeah

Louise: you were able to do that and erm help helping out as well with, helping with your little brother and

Helen: yes

Louise: yeah and er getting that time kind of walking with with Dad as well

Helen: yeah

Louise: was that was that most days you kind of had that

Helen: yeah that was nice as well my dad cause he gets back from work at like six and then [little brother]'s in bed and then [little sister]'s doing her spellings and I'm upstairs just like chilling on my phone cause the rest of the day's always really busy. So erm the first few weeks we didn't do that and me and my dad just ended up saying we don't, we don't see each other any more like we can't remember the last time we like actually had a spoke together we like say hi and stuff and I'll be upstairs. So that was really nice to spend some time with him and as well like, erm like I said me and my family are really close, I think I didn't really realise how important that was in lockdown cause if we weren't I think it would've been so much of a struggle like we had to all work together and we had to like understand each other and it was hard not to get like not angry but how stressful it was some days we had to just be able to manage to work together and figure it out and accept the fact that some days I wouldn't be able to get everything done and because I was such a, everybody used to call me a nerd cause I found like schoolwork I liked to do someday the first few weeks I did I did find it a struggle when it was too much for my mum and I had to stop my school work, not do as much and, and help out my mum

Louise: mmm

Helen: but I did I did able to manage to think like we have to work together and I had to accept some days if I don't get as much done but then the days that I didn't my mum would allow me to have more time to catch up on it all so I'd always catch up on it but it was a bit of er, it was really crazy and very, I don't really know, confusing at the beginning but we managed, we did manage it.

Louise: yeah, yeah so it was, there were some bits that were stressful especially around kind of your school work cause that was something that was really important

Helen: yeah

Louise: or still is really important to you

Helen: uh-huh

Louise: but erm you kind of got to sort of oh, accept that I need to leave it a little bit and then I'll get it done later so kind of it sounds like you, changed a little bit

Helen: yeah

Louise: over the course of it and kind of how you were approaching that but

Helen: yeah

Louise: felt kind of that closeness with your family was really important

Helen: yeah it was

Louise: yeah and valued that time with your dad

Helen: mm-hmm

Louise: and kind of you all working together as a family to kind of go, get through it

Helen: yes

Appendix 8: example of notes of initial ideas

The below notes are the initial notes made from the first reading of the above extract of Helen's interview (Appendix 7), along with the notes of key concepts across her interview as a whole, made at the end of the first reading of her interview:

Initial notes relating to above transcript

Lockdown – viewed as not too bad. Routine as coping mechanism? Family demands – view needed to manage her own schoolwork – mum unable to help as struggling with siblings. Dad as compensatory help – phoning Dad?

Perceived need to be independent in work and not put more burden on Mum?

Idea lockdown stressful but manageable

Helping role within family – getting through pandemic together?

Increased closeness of family – spending more time with Dad – link to closer and narrower relationships in SLR?

Lockdown led to increased valuing of family time/family closeness?

Sense of working together – increased understanding of family – also linked to increased closeness?

Needing to take different attitude to work – acceptance of some days getting less done – conflict between family responsibilities and schoolwork in lockdown – not present before?

'Hard but manageable' idea – coming up repeatedly in transcript

Initial notes on key concepts across Helen's interview taken at the end of the first reading

Difference in school systems led to different felt experience in two lockdowns (primary and secondary)

Technology as (anti)social

Closer and narrower relationships – shifts in thinking, advantages and disadvantages

Online learning stressful

Impact of school mental health work

Extended or slowed transition?

Bigger 'jump' to secondary due to closer and narrower relationships in 3rd term of Year 6 – changed social structures?

Idea of finding place as a transition task – sets and friendships

'Storm and change' in social relationships/friendships

Covid perceived as enabling shifts in friendships and attitudes towards friendships – e.g. more choice, less reliance on who is in the same physical spaces

Teacher relationships continue to be important in secondary – being known and checked in on important

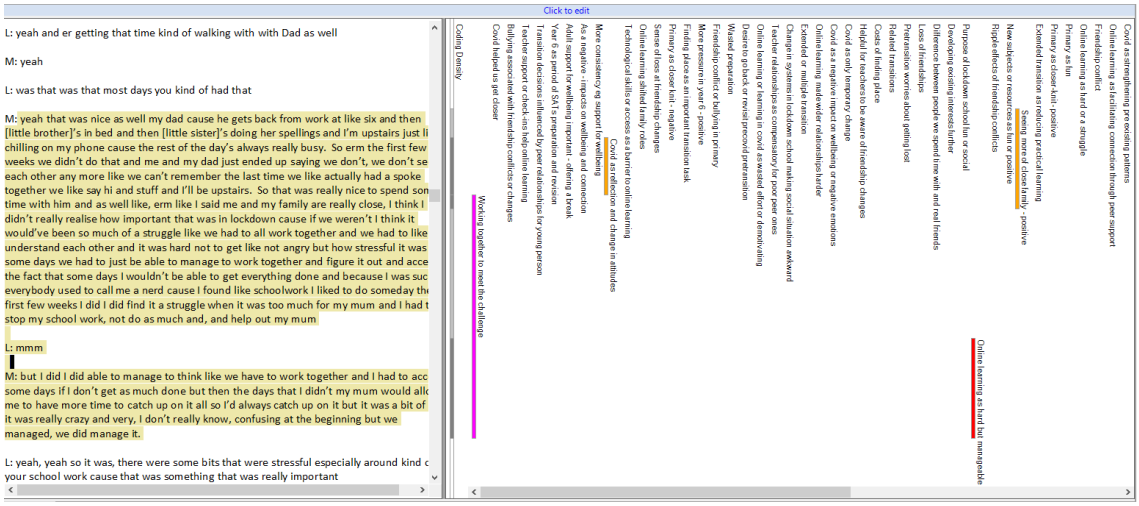
Lockdown as isolating- perceived need to put on a front, thought only one not coping

Importance of normalisation of lockdown as difficult time to wellbeing

Appendix 9: coding example

Coding was completed in NVivo: however, this does not easily show the codes given in a section of transcript. This appendix therefore includes both a screenshot of the relevant coding frame in NVivo but also a copy of the coding translated to word, where coded sections are highlighted and the codes given within each paragraph or line summarized in bold at the end of the paragraph or line.

Screenshot of coding frame in NVivo



Coding shown on transcript

Louise: what about once, cause obviously in March then a lot of people were out of school, I don't know whether you were or not

Helen: yes I was

Louise: you were so what what was that like when you had lockdown and and went home

Helen: erm it was, it wasn't too bad erm I'm very I'm a very organised person like I've got my routine and I remember just the first day figuring out that I was going to make a a little routine so I could get all my schoolwork in and know how to manage it cause it was really hard for us in lockdown cause we had my sister who's in year, she was in year 3 at the time, and she's not been erm, not that she's not done as well but I was obviously very good with my schoolwork ***(Codes: routine important to online learning; online learning shifted family roles; working together to meet the challenge)***

Louise: mmm

Helen: and she struggles to concentrate and stuff so at school she's got like a little group like not special help, I feel bad saying that but she has like extra help

with it all ***(Codes: online learning shifted family roles; working together to meet the challenge)***

Louise: mmm

Helen: so my mum would try and help her, and erm luckily for me I kind of get on with it, but it was hard with my little brother as well cause he was at the age where, you know, bad twos erm and he was running around and my mum couldn't take take her eye off him to help [little sister] and then it'd all be gone and I remember [little sister] went to my nanas for a few days so she could my nana could help her because it was too much for my mum she couldn't have [little brother] and [little sister] at the same time so for me I remember I had I think it was like nine till two of school work erm and we had like a class dojo where I'd I'd message my teacher and she'd tell me what to do she'd give us little tests, and we'd have like a booklet of loads of stuff to do and she'd like date it and make it all organised and she'd make sure we knew exactly what we were doing erm like and if I needed help sometimes I'd just ring my dad ***(Codes: online learning shifted family roles; working together to meet the challenge; covid as changing social roles; compensatory support)***

Louise: mmm

Helen: erm he'd be at work but I I felt my mum struggling with [little brother] and [little sister] was already enough without me and I just wanted to be able to do it as much as I could ***(Codes: online learning shifted family roles; working together to meet the challenge)***

Louise: mmm

Helen: independently. And then I would go downstairs and sometimes I'd take my brother outside on the trampoline and my dad'd come back and me my dad and my brother could go on a walk and my sister would have three hours of schoolwork with my mum. Erm so it was stressful but we did, we did manage it, there was some days where I wouldn't get as much done as what I would like to erm but yeah we did we did manage it on a whole. ***(Codes: online learning shifted family roles; working together to meet the challenge; covid as changing social roles; online learning as hard but manageable)***

Louise: yeah, so it sounds like you, you kind of got that routine in place for yourself and you were kind of able to work quite independently for a lot of that schoolwork

Helen: yeah

Louise: which it was a few, a few of you to kind of juggle at home

Helen: yeah

Louise: so it was it was difficult in that sense so erm you kind of had to work a bit on your own but

Helen: yeah

Louise: you were able to do that and erm help helping out as well with, helping with your little brother and

Helen: yes

Louise: yeah and er getting that time kind of walking with with Dad as well

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Louise: was that was that most days you kind of had that

Helen: yeah that was nice as well my dad cause he gets back from work at like six and then [little brother]'s in bed and then [little sister]'s doing her spellings and I'm upstairs just like chilling on my phone cause the rest of the day's always really busy. So erm the first few weeks we didn't do that and me and my dad just ended up saying we don't, we don't see each other any more like we can't remember the last time we like actually had a spoke together we like say hi and stuff and I'll be upstairs. So that was really nice to spend some time with him and as well like, erm like I said me and my family are really close, I think I didn't really realise how important that was in lockdown cause if we weren't I think it would've been so much of a struggle like we had to all work together and we had to like understand each other and it was hard not to get like not angry but how stressful it was some days we had to just be able to manage to work together and figure it out and accept the fact that some days I wouldn't be able to get everything done and because I was such a, everybody used to call me a nerd cause I found like schoolwork I liked to do someday the first few weeks I did I did find it a struggle when it was too much for my mum and I had to stop my school work, not do as much and, and help out my mum ***(Codes: seeing more of close family (positive); covid as reflection/changed attitudes; working together to meet the challenge)***

Louise: mmm

Helen: but I did I did able to manage to think like we have to work together and I had to accept some days if I don't get as much done but then the days that I didn't my mum would allow me to have more time to catch up on it all so I'd always catch up on it but it was a bit of er, it was really crazy and very, I don't really know, confusing at the beginning but we managed, we did manage it. ***(Codes: working together to meet the challenge; online learning as hard but manageable)***

Louise: yeah, yeah so it was, there were some bits that were stressful especially around kind of your school work cause that was something that was really important

Helen: yeah

Louise: or still is really important to you

Helen: uh-huh

Louise: but erm you kind of got to sort of oh, accept that I need to leave it a little bit and then I'll get it done later so kind of it sounds like you, changed a little bit

Helen: yeah

Louise: over the course of it and kind of how you were approaching that but

Helen: yeah

Louise: felt kind of that closeness with your family was really important

Helen: yeah it was

Louise: yeah and valued that time with your dad

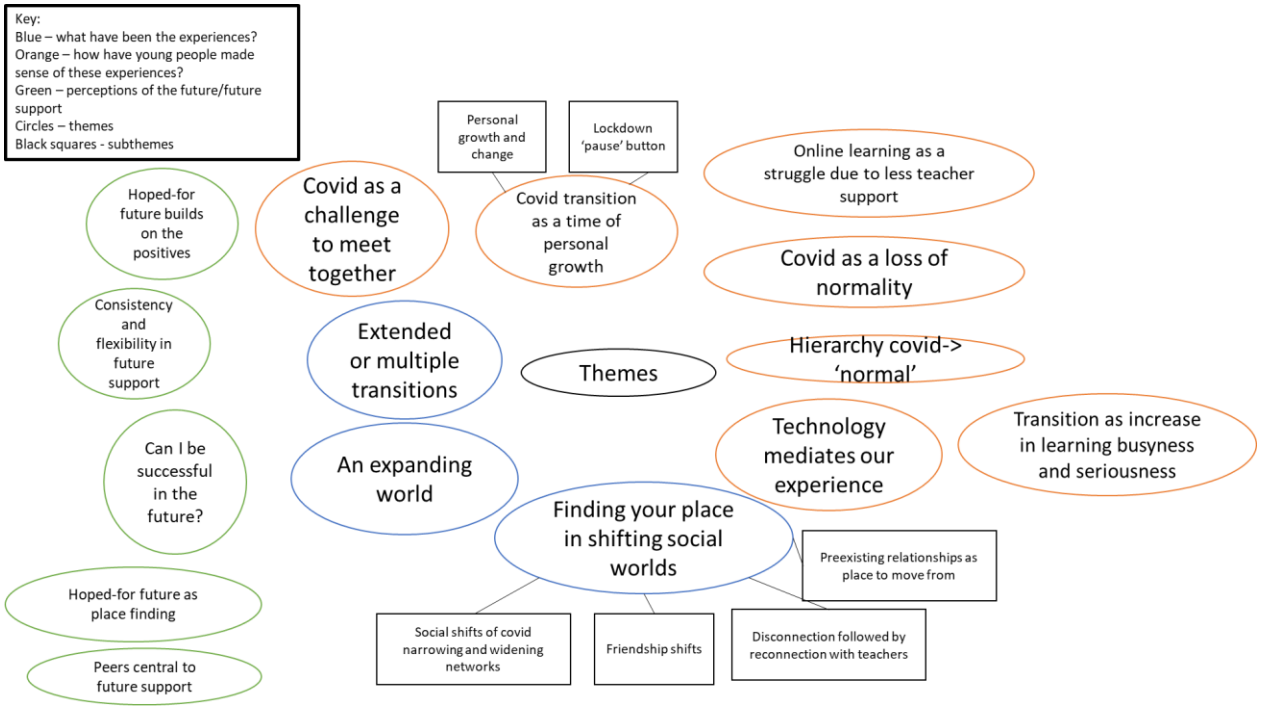
Helen: mm-hmm

Louise: and kind of you all working together as a family to kind of go, get through it

Helen: yes

Appendix 10: initial thematic map

Initial thematic map produced after generating initial candidate themes on 23rd February 2022. Please note the thematic map here and in Appendix 12 were generated as an aid to the author's own thinking and are provided here to support the reader in understanding the process of thinking and analysis: they were not produced with the intention of disseminating or explaining the findings, which is done through tables and narrative text in the findings section.



Appendix 11: table showing example of theme refinement and development

Theme	Is it a viable theme?	Can I identify boundaries?	Are there enough data to evidence it?	Are the data too diverse?	Does this theme convey something important?	Comments
Technological skills and access an important mediator	Yes	Boundaries may need to change – increased access to technology may not be one in itself- some could be regrouped under the other two codes and some lost	Yes – with a couple of meanings around learning and social connection	There are some differences in meaning (learning versus social) which are fine. The increased access one fits less well and may be too diverse.	Yes	Remove or regroup increased access
Can I be successful in the future?	Yes but may need to be	Need to decide if the boundaries are educational or are defined by	Yes- data from across	The example from M about	A little – it does feed into how they see	Remove dance example from

	narrowed	conflict more generally	the majority of participants that all frame idea of educational success as important, with most framing some doubt about achieving it	dancing is somewhat different – this may need to come out	the future research question but is less relevant to covid. May be more relevant when linked into missing out theme.	M's.
Peers central to future support	Yes	Yes – W's example doesn't fit within the boundaries of peers being important	It is a minority of the data set (3 participants) so a little thin, although 2 of the three repeat the idea.	The example from W about grandad needs to come out.	Yes	This theme feels a little thin in terms of examples – can it be reworked?
Finding my place/identity	There is a central concept but it doesn't quite fit the data! May need to be renamed to 'continuing growth'	The boundaries of this theme are not very clear – there are quite a few concepts within its 'umbrella'	Yes at present – vast majority (5 or 6 participants) for a couple of the codes within it and several codes	Yes – there are a diversity of concepts within it	If reworked it may do – it is important to have some themes to answer the future question! Or could remove this research question but seems wrong to	Consider reworking this theme – perhaps taking out some of it (maintaining relationships) and combining it with the

					do this due to the data being 'thin'.	theme above, maybe reworking this to 'relationships central to future support' – or is this too much of a topic summary? Think about how best to rework this theme.
Help support me to find my way through	There is a coherent organising concept but it may not match the data well.	There are really two different ideas within this theme – consistency and flexibility – however both are expressed close together within the narrative e.g. M's. I feel there is a consistent framework plus flexibility within it could meet these demands but I'm not sure if this is going too far beyond the data.	It is thin- only three participants and a couple of codes.	Possibly – there are two main concepts within it.	It would be useful for staff to know about these aspects of future support as they are things they can change so potentially.	This needs rethinking and reworking, alongside the other future themes
Online learning a struggle due to reduced teacher support	Yes	There are quite a few different concepts here and it is hard to draw boundaries clearly. I think the boundaries need to be a) indications of online learning as difficult and b) indications of the amount of	Yes – all but one participant refers to online learning as hard and over half (5)	Some parts of M's may fit more with technological access mediating experience e.g. struggling to get on than lack of teacher	Yes	Remove code 'teacher relationships make learning more fun' from this theme as it is a bit

		teacher support (including compensations for this) as important.	refer either directly or indirectly to teacher support as important	support. I have recoded these.		tangential and not focused on online learning
Expanding world on entry to secondary	Yes	There is a lack of clarity of the boundary between this and the disconnection/reconnection theme around teacher relationships. There is a connection between expanding world and shifting social world but I need to be clear about where the boundaries of the theme are.	Yes – lots of data.	There is a coherent concept so no, but there are some codes that don't fit well- particularly variation in teacher relationships in secondary. This needs to be reworked considering the boundary between this and the teacher subtheme under shifting social worlds.	Yes – especially in connection with other themes.	Review this alongside teacher theme and consider how to draw the boundary between these, regrouping codes as needed.
Teacher disconnection and reconnection	Yes- although there are also other patterns in the data	Confusion of boundaries between this theme and expanding world above – as review codes need to consider	A lot of the codes placed with this don't fit that well – those with lots of data. Those that do	Yes – some of the codes are negative cases, making up quite a lot of the data set, and some are not very explicit or close fitting (e.g.	Yes if it was a more consistent theme – as it is it may need to be split up	Possibly split this up into codes and regroup with other themes – e.g. navigating the variety of different

			fit well (teachers harder to navigate in secondary) or changing over time have between 2 and 4 respondents – as it is a pattern having only 2 for the 'start point' of the pattern may make it a bit thin, especially as there are other patterns.	negative teacher rships in sec, positive in primary etc) especially as these are mentioned with similar frequency		teachers with expanded worlds; developing teacher pupil relationships over time as finding place?
Slowing of expanding world through extended or multiple transitions	Yes	Some of the shifts in social world (e.g. lockdown school) as a multiple transition less clear if it fits here or with shifting social worlds of covid – feel it fits better there so have moved it for now.	Yes- 4 make reference to extended transition and 4 also note it as less enjoyable	Possibly the addition of secondary end of year tests as an additional transition is too diverse – maybe this would fit better with concerns about learning	Yes	Keep this theme but with some minor moving of some of the codes associated with it. Link extende

				performance??		d reduces practical learning and practical learning as fun together in the post it map
Transition as increase in busyness or seriousness of learning	Yes	Yes	Yes – a reasonable amount of data, quite a few different codes	Some of the codes are thinner than others. There are other patterns in the data from other codes within Year 6 particularly (e.g. year 6 as the same as primary before- but this is one case). So is some variation/negative cases that I need to be careful to represent these carefully. At first I thought the revision as boring code maybe didn't fit but then with Y6 increasing revision and	Yes	Keep this theme but be careful to represent negative cases carefully. Have shifted around some of the quotes and done some recoding, removing some of the data under this theme that didn't fit well with what they'd been coded under.

				becoming more serious it could fit with more serious.		
Covid as a frustrating deviation from normal	Think the suddenness fits when it is expressed as 'nothing like this would ever happen to me' – implies a non-normal, unexpected change. How well does the temporary element fit? Only one quote is within this? The ultimately staying the same could still fit in – as fits with sense of a frustrating blip	I'm a little unsure of the exact boundaries – where this merges into 'we have missed out' and whether elements such as temporary change or staying the same fit or not, whether the frustration or suddenness fits. This may need reviewing against the other two themes under its superordinate structure.	Relatively thin – just under half of respondents with a few quotes each across the theme	Yes possibly – see uncertainty of exact boundaries or central concept. This needs re-exploring alongside the other themes in its superordinate theme to see if boundaries need to be redrawn etc.	Yes – if can pin the theme down enough and construct the meaning here in the clearest way.	This theme needs reviewing alongside the other two in its superordinate theme – it may need to be merged into the others or reworked alongside the other themes to delineate clearer patterns.

	that can and will one day be over (or is over) or recovered					
We have lost out	Yes, although there are a lot of codes within this – they need to be carefully considered to check how well they fit	Again I'm a little unsure of the boundaries – do we frame -ve wellbeing as a loss or a temporary change, or as something else? For desire to revisit/bereavement – how much is this to do with covid and how much are losses more generally? Lockdown school as social purpose fits well with losing learning – but there are social gains instead and it is generally viewed as positive so partly sits here but not fully.	Yes – quite a lot of different codes, with many expressed by a majority of participants.	Yes possibly – there is a collection of codes that doesn't quite fit with this and need review. Lockdown school as social purpose or here is an ongoing question mark.	Yes but needs to be clearly delineated so it says something clear!	This needs to be reviewed alongside the other themes in its superordinate category and wider themes, especially focusing on the codes that don't quite fit, to ensure the boundaries are drawn clearly around the central organising concept.
The closer to normal the better	Yes	Fairly clear boundaries but possibly desire to get back to normal could be placed here too.	Yes – some areas of the theme are thinner than	There is a variety but they fit within a coherent framework. There are some	Yes- although seems a little obvious but important in the	This theme can be kept but it would be helpful to

			others but overall expressed by almost all participants	negative cases to take account of e.g. reunion not always valued	context of some children being closer to normal than others depending on the systems around them that this is how their value system runs!	consider it when reviewing the above two in its superordinate category.
Subtheme: lockdown as a pause button	Yes	Boundaries may not be clear – as it sits under personal growth, should this be only positive manifestations of the pause button, with negative manifestations regrouping, perhaps into the missing out theme?	Not a huge number of quotes or codes but included codes referenced by a number of participants – may make this one just a theme rather than having the divided subthemes.	Was too much variety with having negative pause button – this works better grouped with missing out.	Yes- within the wider theme	Keep this within the broader theme but may adapt it to just have it as a theme rather than a subtheme, dependent on the other subtheme
Subtheme: personal growth or change Overall theme	This may be more of a topic summary, especially as it include	Boundaries not very clear as includes some general change or negative changes as well as growth – may need to be tightened to look	Codes included (even excluding those that are more negativ	There is quite a lot of variety – some of the changes relate to transition, some to	Yes although it is unclear which research question it relates to (an experienc	Rework the main theme, looking at both subthemes to see if need

covid as personal growth or change needs reworking	s change (negative or neutral) as well as growth. May need to be reworked.	only at growth. Or may need to rename the overall theme to focus more on change.	e etc) from around half the participants so reasonable number – thinner than some themes.	covid, some to adolescence; some are negative and some positive. Could going back to changing identity as a broader theme work or is this too much of a topic summary?	e or an understanding?) and the meaning needs parsing out more clearly with more clearly delineated boundaries.	them as subthemes or if they need to change, and if the overall theme needs to change or some need to move to other areas.
Subtheme shifting roles to meet the challenge (together?)	Yes in itself, although the codes may not match the central concept captured here	Extended/multiple as affecting social fits better with delayed transition one than here. Online learning as a barrier to connection may fit better with the other subtheme here of closer and narrower, looking at the quotes. One also fits with ripple effects – could this code be broken up? Awareness of restrictions is a topic summary – may need to be split up under other codes	Yes – quite a few codes and majority of YP included	I think the variety has reduced now I have regrouped some of the codes. Ripple effects is still a little bit of a poor fit in the case of some quotes but not all.	Yes	Have redone some coding which has made this subtheme more boundaried. I need to further consider ripple effects and where these might best fit, or whether they might form a third subtheme (may not be rich enough).
Subthem	Yes	Online learning	Yes –	Quite	To an	Have

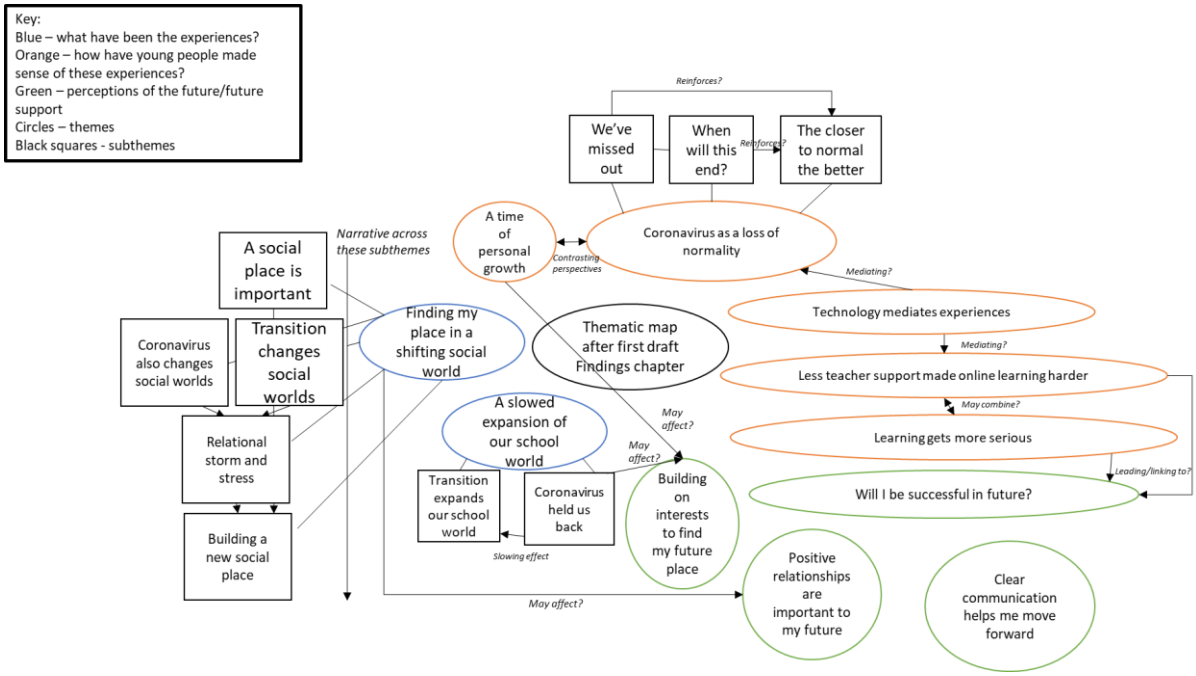
e: freeze thaw weathering	although it needs renaming – I know what I mean!	as a barrier to connection is hard to place – some may relate to conflicts of closer and narrower, but some may be due to the shifts in role required eg parent as teacher role. Maybe recode this into these two different codes?	almost all included, lots of codes – some of the shifts may be thinner than others but as an overall concept works	varied but fit into a consistent 'story' of narrowing and widening	extent – seems a little 'obvious' but important to reflect I feel	redone some coding around online learning to support this and the above theme. Otherwise am happy with this subtheme. The overall theme needs some reworking due to the need to rework the other subtheme above.
System shifts shift social world	Yes	Some of the quotes within the conflict with parents don't fit well in the boundaries – some relate more to covid – have regrouped to parent shock around change in identities to fit more with covid. System changes may be better as system changes lead to social changes rather than friendship changes.	Around half the data set but only a couple of codes	Fairly narrow as a theme – may be a little thin	Yes as part of the wider story	This may be better captured as a subtheme within one of the other themes in this section rather than a full theme – it is quite thin but a part of the story – perhaps to kick off 'storm

						and stress'?
Storm and stress	Yes	Some are just switching, some are more arguments/conflicts – do these need to be split or the theme renamed?	Yes – referred to by most participants	May be a little too broad with the shift included too – rework as part of reworking the themes under this overarching theme	Yes especially as part of the wider story under the overarching theme	Rearrange this to split it – storm and stress as a theme, shifting school relationships as another incorporating both teachers and friendships
Subtheme: preexisting relationships remain important	Yes	There are a range of preexisting relationships referred to, but they do share the core idea of remaining important over transition and guiding some of the development of new friendships. The hobbies as social theme only had one quote that actually was relevant about preexisting relationships so I moved this quote to preexisting relationships generally	Yes – referred to by most participants and includes several codes – not as big or rich as some themes though	No- see second column	As part of the story, especially related to the shifts in social role from covid, but a small part	Keep this subtheme with the minor adjustments already made
Subtheme: finding a social place as important	Yes	Some of the codes relate to a place being important in primary rather than secondary, but as part of the	No - referred to mainly by two and explicitl	As said some do relate to primary but still the idea of a social	Yes, this feels an important part of the wider narrative, although a	Rename the overall theme – and consider shifting it

		wider narrative of a shifting social landscape this still feels important.	y only by one, but it does seem significant as part of the narrative	place is important – maybe it should shift as a theme from finding a place as a transition task to having a social place is important? This ties closely to pre-existing relationships more generally rather than as a jumping off point.	small one. Perhaps the overall theme should become a subtheme, perhaps underneath system changes lead to social changes – finding a place in a shifting social system?	into a subtheme linked to system changes?

Appendix 12: final thematic map

Final thematic map produced after writing the first draft of the Findings chapter on 31st March 2022. Please note the thematic map here and in Appendix 10 were generated as an aid to the author's own thinking and are provided here to support the reader in understanding the process of thinking and analysis: they were not produced with the intention of disseminating or explaining the findings, which is done through tables and narrative text in the findings section.



Appendix 13: list of final themes and constituent codes

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Finding my place in a shifting social world	Transition changed social worlds	Teacher relationships as compensatory for poor peer ones Related transitions Friendship changes System change leads to social change Navigating teacher relationships harder in secondary Loss of friendship Feelings of loss around friendship

	Coronavirus changed social worlds	Closer with family increased conflict Loss of wider social relationships feelings Reversal – increased wider relationships Reversal- see less family Sense of isolation Closer with family as positive Important pre-lockdown relationships outside household Hobbies or time with friends outside house important pre lockdown Reduction in wider relationships in lockdown Peer support facilitates connection Online learning caused family conflict Online learning made wider relationships harder Online learning shifted family roles Lockdown school as social purpose Ripple effects of covid- shifting role Working together to meet the challenge Covid made us closer Job changes reducing family closeness Covid changing family roles

	Relational storms and stresses	Bullying associated with transition Ripple effects of friendship conflicts Friendship conflict on transition
	Building a new social group	Positive family relationships Home as relative stability Preexisting relationships continue to be important Transition decisions influenced by preexisting peer relationships Helpful for teachers to be aware of friendship changes Positive teacher relationships in secondary Finding social place as a transition task Expansion or increased friendship quality in secondary Teacher relationships develop over year 7

A slowed expansion of our school world	None	Pretransition worries getting lost Expansion of variety of people Primary as close knit – positive and negative Transition as change in physical environment Primary learning as boring Increased variety on transition Increased variety as more interesting Increased variety as challenging Variation in teacher relationships in secondary Extended transition reduces practical learning Extended transition Practical learning more fun Covid delaying new hobbies Extended affecting social Extended as less enjoyable
A time of personal growth	None	Transition as positive growth Covid strengthening preexisting patterns Change in hobbies

Coronavirus as a loss of normality	None	Desire to go back and revisit precovid or pretransition Restricted reunion Premature end to primary Missed family milestones Missed experiences – SATs Missed experiences – transition events Missed experiences – trips and special events Loss of activities or milestones Missing out on activity due to reduced activity Covid as missing learning Wasted preparation Covid negatively impacts wellbeing Covid as temporary change only Desire to get back to normal Covid as more frustrating over time Covid as frustrating Covid as a shock Covid incomplete or abnormal Covid as temporarily incomplete Happy at reunion Not hearing about covid anymore superior to hearing about it Unrestricted > restricted Awareness and views of restrictions In person > virtual Video calls> packs

Less teacher support made remote learning harder	None	Compensatory support from adults Online learning hard due to lack teacher support Online learning shifting motivation Routine important to online learning Online learning as a struggle Peer support as compensatory Teacher relationships make learning more fun
Learning gets more serious	None	Primary as fun Y6 different to rest primary Pretransition worries – learning Transition reducing motivation Extended projects enjoyed in primary Secondary increase in learning seriousness More pressure in year 6 Primary learning as easier Online learning in secondary as more pressured Y6 period of sats prep
Technology mediates experiences	None	Technological skills/access influence online learning Technology as social
Will I succeed in the future?	None	Conflict hoped for future and expectations Future as educational success Teachers already doing all they can Keep head down Secondary end of year tests Concerns around learning performance
Building on interests to find my future place	None	More flexibility as future support Future as developing existing interests Future as finding place – career etc
Good relationships are important to my future	None	Future support as be nice Future as maintaining or increasing close relationships Future as continued personal growth in confidence Finding place – home/family
Clear communication helps me move forward	None	More consistency future support Clearer information covid Info help and advice for careers

Appendix 14: copy of ethics approval letter

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Monday 4th May 2021

Dear Russell and Louise

Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research '*Experiences of primary to secondary transition during the Covid-19 pandemic: a thematic analysis*'

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

Appendix 15: debriefing sheets

Debrief sheet for parents:

Parent debrief sheet: Experiences of primary to secondary transition during the Covid-19 pandemic: a thematic analysis.

Thank you for allowing your child to take part in my research study exploring young people's experiences of moving to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic.

I hope your child has enjoyed the study and the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The interview procedure is designed to be supportive and many people find sharing their stories is a positive experience. However, I recognise that speaking about their experiences may have been distressing for some young people. If your child is worried or upset about anything they have spoken about or if you have any concerns about your child, the following contacts or services may be helpful:

- Your child's form tutor in school
- _____ (Pastoral Lead in school)
- If you have any concerns about your child's learning, contact their form tutor in the first instance or the school special educational needs co-ordinator _____
- If you have any concerns about your child's mental health or emotional wellbeing then the following services may be helpful:
    - Your child's GP
    - X service on X webpage, young people can also text the service on XXXX
    - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) -X webpage or telephone XXXX

What do I do if my child no longer wishes to take part or if I want to withdraw them from the study?

If your child wishes to withdraw from the study or if you wish to withdraw your child, this is possible until I begin to analyse the data, which will be no earlier

than _____. If you would like to withdraw your child from the study please contact me using the details below before this date.

If you have any further questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me using the following details:

Louise Watson Email: Louise.Watson@nottingham.ac.uk Phone: 07890 381 208

Debrief sheet for child:

Thank you for taking part in my study about experiences of moving to secondary school during the coronavirus pandemic.

What happens now?

I am interested in finding out about what it has been like to move to secondary school this year. Thank you very much for telling me about what this has been like for you.

I will now look carefully at what you and other young people have told me and think about what the main points might be.

I would also like to share what you and other young people have told me with other researchers and teachers. Remember, your name will not be shared and people will not know who has said what.

I've changed my mind and I wish I hadn't taken part.

That's okay. You can take your information out of the study as long as you let me know before I have started to write up the report.

Please tell your teacher or parent and ask them to contact me and tell me you no longer want to take part. **Please tell them as soon as possible,** and before *(insert date)*.

I will then take your information out of the study and delete the recording and all other information you have told me.

I feel sad or worried about something I have talked about. What can I do?

If you feel upset about something you have spoken about or anything else, please speak to an adult you trust. Here are some ideas of people you can talk to:

- Your parent or carer
- Your form tutor
- _____ (name of appropriate Pastoral staff member in school e.g. Head of Year 7 or Head of House, with agreement to be named)
- _____ (name of Designated Safeguarding Lead(s) in school, with agreement to be named)
- Childline: phone 0800 11 11 or visit their website https://www.childline.org.uk/
- If you are feeling very upset and are worried about how you are feeling, you can also contact X service by texting **XXXX** X are a service who can listen to young people aged 11-18 when they are feeling worried or upset.

Where can I get more information?

- If you have any more questions about the study, ask an adult at home or a teacher to get in touch with me and they can pass your question on to me.

Thank you again for taking part!

Louise.

Appendix 16: example of reflexive diary entries

Reflexive diary entry 9th February 2022 at the start of the familiarization stage of analysis

I am feeling anxious and a little excited as I start the analysis process. I am anxious that I may not 'find' anything in the data: already this phrasing suggests I need to be careful to be aware of 'positivism creep', especially as I am new to qualitative research. I find myself trying to impose some structure on the analysis to feel more secure in this new venture, for example mapping out timescales, and I need to be careful to balance this with allowing a sufficiently flexible and iterative approach to the analysis.

I am also excited to go back to the data after some time has passed and have the opportunity to really immerse myself in this and hopefully to learn something new. In orienting myself to the data, I am aware I experienced a challenging transition myself and already while I was transcribing the data noticed some creeping in of a desire to reassure or focus on the positives, for example in my reflections and summaries back to the young person, especially where experiences were difficult. I need to take especial care to be aware of this perspective during the analysis and ensure I am taking sufficient account of both positive and negative aspects of young people's experiences.

Reflexive diary entry 18th February 2022 at the end of the first round of coding

Over the last day and a half I have completed the first round of coding. I really enjoyed the structure of the coding process during the process as it felt clear and systematic. I feel I have generated a range of both semantic and more latent codes: often codes that are semantic in part of the dataset I have coded more latently elsewhere. I worry a little about how far some of this latent coding fits with my experiential orientation to the research and whether it goes too far beyond the data. I can also see some influence of the prior findings of my systematic literature review on the initial codes generated, despite trying to take an inductive approach I found myself noticing commonalities between what I had already found or reviewed in the literature and aspects of participants' accounts. I feel this helps to deepen the analysis in many respects but does make it more of a mix of inductive and more deductive approaches at times. It would be helpful to discuss this with others at the next peer thematic analysis meeting to consider how this has affected my analysis and what others' perspectives on these initial codes and when they are generated early themes are.

My initial set of codes is also too long and fine-grained, with many coming from only one interview or being very specific. On the second round of coding I would like to try to reduce these down and group codes with similar meanings together to make the codes more manageable when generating initial themes. I am hoping that I will not need a third round of coding as I am beginning to feel a little worried about the time available for the analysis (as I have taken a period of time off placement to do the analysis and need to get this to a point where I can leave and return to it by the time I return). This feeling of time pressure is a contrast even to yesterday during coding where I felt this part of the process was going faster than expected. I need to be especially careful to check Braun and Clarke (2022) for what is needed during each stage of analysis and consider carefully whether I am ready to move on to the next stage, to avoid this time pressure affecting the depth and quality of the analysis. I also need to be ready to return to earlier stages of the analysis as needed.

Appendix 17: copy of summary document given to participating school

Research summary

"We called it lockdown school": a reflexive thematic analysis of the experiences of young people transitioning from primary to secondary school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you very much for supporting my research in your school, which aimed to investigate the experiences of young people who made the transition to secondary

school in September 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. This research aimed to answer three main questions:

- What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?
- How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?
- How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Why was this research topic chosen?

I chose this topic as research suggests that transition is experienced as a significant event in young people's lives, the success of which can influence a range of longer-term life outcomes. A successful transition can be defined as one where the young person builds social relationships in the new setting; continues to develop their academic skills; and maintains their emotional wellbeing.

However, the coronavirus pandemic had many effects on young people and the systems around them, which may have influenced young people's social support, academic development and emotional wellbeing, as well as changing the nature of their experiences over transition. For example, young people's social networks changed over lockdown, as they spent more time with close family members and less with friends. Early surveys also suggested many young people spent less time on school learning during lockdowns. Finally, the pandemic had a negative impact on emotional wellbeing for some young people.

All these factors had the potential to influence transition experiences for this cohort of young people. Survey data suggests that teachers, parents and young people across the UK felt that transition had been more difficult during the pandemic, and that the school environment and young people's preparedness for the transition were both different at this time.

Young people's own perceptions are an important influence on the success of transition, making it particularly important to understand their views. I therefore felt it was important to understand the views and experiences of young people who transitioned to secondary during the pandemic.

How was the research conducted?

I carried out interviews with seven Year 7 students in July 2021. The interviews lasted for around an hour for each pupil and involved the young person speaking about each term of their year 6 and 7 experience, then discussing how they felt the pandemic had (or had not) affected them and their hopes for the future.

I then transcribed each interview, using pseudonyms to support student anonymity. The same pseudonyms are used in this summary where quotes are provided. The transcripts were analysed using a qualitative research method called reflexive thematic analysis, which includes the following stages:

1) Familiarising myself with the data by repeated reading
2) Coding the data (attaching a short label to each relevant line or section of the interview)
3) Grouping the codes to create themes (patterns of shared meaning across the different interviews)
4) Reviewing the themes against the coded data and the set of transcripts as a whole and further developing these
5) Naming the themes and writing up the analysis

What were the findings?

Eleven themes were generated in the analysis.

Young people's experiences

Two themes related to the first research question, which focused on young people's experiences during the pandemic. The first theme, 'finding my place in a shifting social world', suggested that young people experienced more numerous changes in social networks and roles, with changes associated with the pandemic adding to those of transition. Despite this, young people generally felt a positive sense of belonging and had developed friendships in school by the end of Year 7. The second theme, 'a slowed expansion of our school world', suggested young people experienced a more extended transition related to social distancing measures. Young people generally perceived this delay to accessing the full school as frustrating, linked to having fewer opportunities to engage in practical learning.

Young people's perceptions of transition during the pandemic

Five themes related to the second question, how young people perceived and made sense of their experiences. These themes included: 'a time of personal growth'; 'coronavirus as a loss of normality', 'less teacher support made remote learning harder', 'learning gets more serious' and 'technology mediates experiences'. These themes suggested that young people made sense of the pandemic as an abnormal time. Generally, the pandemic was seen negatively, with young people describing feelings of loss linked to missed experiences and other negative emotions. However, a smaller group of young people also described the pandemic as presenting opportunities for personal growth.

Young people also perceived online learning during the pandemic as more challenging, which they felt linked to having less teacher contact and support, and simultaneously perceived learning becoming more 'serious' as they moved into secondary school.

Young people perceived technology access, in terms of physical equipment but also skills in using technology, as having a substantial mediating effect on both their learning and social experiences over the pandemic. Greater access to technology was perceived to reduce the pandemic's impact on a range of aspects of young people's lives.

Young people's views of the future

Four themes were identified in relation to the third research question, which focused on young people's perceptions of the future. These were: 'will I succeed in the future', 'building on interests to find my future place', 'good relationships are important to my future' and 'clear communication helps me move forward'. These themes suggested that young people feel positive relationships, academic success and building on existing strengths and interests are all important to their future, and that they see clear and consistent communication from adults as important in supporting them to move towards their future goals.

More detailed information and example quotes for each theme are provided in the appendix at the end of this document.

What might these findings mean?

- Young people have experienced more numerous and additional transitions and changes linked to the simultaneous impact of transition and the pandemic. This has the potential to be more challenging to navigate, and young people described some challenges and negative emotions associated with these changes.
- However, all young people felt successful in establishing positive social relationships by the end of Year 7, suggesting social elements of their transition were successful. They also described feeling more motivated and interested in learning at the end of Year 7 following access to the wider school and were generally happy in school. This suggests a level of resilience for young people and the systems around them.
- Young people generally perceived the pandemic as abnormal or unusual, usually in a negative way. All young people described feeling they had missed out on some experiences as a result of the pandemic and/or described negative emotions associated with it. A smaller group of young people simultaneously described the pandemic as also presenting positive opportunities for personal growth. This suggests that young people made sense of the pandemic in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways.
- Young people perceived that the amount and seriousness of learning increased over transition, in common with previous research around academic changes over transition. However, for young people transitioning during the pandemic this occurred alongside remote learning, which they perceived as more challenging, and alongside perceptions of having missed out on learning because of the pandemic. Young people may therefore have perceived their transition as less successful in relation to academic skills and their self-confidence as learners.
- Young people perceived that technology access reduced the impacts of the pandemic, in terms of social relationships and development as well as learning. Young people's access to technology is therefore important to consider in understanding their learning and social development during this time.
- Positive relationships, academic success and opportunities to build on strengths and interests were important to young people in the future. While academic success was also seen as important, some young people expressed a sense of uncertainty about their ability to achieve this. This may relate to the challenges experienced in relation to learning over this time.
- Young people felt that clear and consistent information was important in supporting them in the future. This may relate to young people's views of the pandemic generally, as research about young people's views of the pandemic suggests that young people often wished to have been given more information and to have been more involved in the pandemic response.

What might this mean for our school?

I feel this research generates several ideas and suggestions about areas that may be important for supporting this cohort, supporting other young people whose transition may be disrupted for other reasons (for example spending time out of school linked to

medical needs), and enhancing transition experiences generally. These ideas are outlined below.

Ideas for supporting this cohort of young people:

- Work with young people to address learning gaps linked to the pandemic and help to build their confidence as learners
- Continue to offer support for emotional wellbeing at a whole-school and targeted level, perhaps strengthening this support to address impacts of the pandemic on wellbeing
- Monitor the social inclusion of young people who transitioned during the pandemic, especially those who had limited access to technology or who may have had more limited social support or skills beforehand, and provide support to develop relationships if necessary
- Celebrate and learn from the strengths and resilience of both young people and the school system around them – despite the high level of changes and challenges this cohort have experienced, the young people interviewed were all happy in school, enjoying learning and happy with their friendships by the end of Year 7.

Ideas for supporting young people whose transition is disrupted for other reasons:

- Pay particular attention to the learning progress and emotional wellbeing of children whose transition is disrupted and intervene early to support this where needed.
- Consider lessons learned from the pandemic around the use of technology to support young people to maintain their connection to school learning and social opportunities when they are absent, as technology may reduce the impact of time out of school.
- Young people's views here suggest that during the unusual time period of the pandemic, every 'step' closer to normal routines was valued, so offering activities that are as close to 'normal' as possible may be supportive for other young people who spend time out of school or experience additional changes over transition.
- Plenty of clear and consistent information is likely to be particularly helpful for young people who spend time out of school or whose transition is disrupted.
- The views of some young people in this research suggest that the unusual experience of the pandemic also provided positive opportunities for reflection and growth, and this may be the case for other young people who experience changes or disruptions to their transition. It may be helpful to look for, celebrate and build on these strengths as well as addressing areas of difficulty.

Ideas for enhancing transition generally:

- Young people's views suggest that varied and practical learning opportunities are particularly valued and motivating over this time, so offering as many of these as possible during transition may be helpful in supporting motivation.

- Consider opportunities for young people to develop their interests and strengths in school, as young people indicated these were particularly important to their plans for the future.
- Support young people to navigate the change in academic expectations and the emphasis on academic learning they perceive as they move into secondary school and support their confidence as learners during this time.
- Offer clear and consistent information to young people, and support them to develop skills to navigate contradictory information they may gain from other sources

What are the limitations of this research?

- This research involved a small group of young people, who were likely to be those less acutely affected by the pandemic, as those who had had recent significant bereavements or mental health difficulties were not included. The group was also mostly female, and all children were of White ethnicity. The views of children of other backgrounds may be different.
- The research focused primarily on school experiences: other experiences such as home and community experiences may also have been important for young people.
- Young people were interviewed by an unfamiliar adult in school and may therefore have been reluctant to share some views, perhaps especially if these might have been seen as negative about school or other adults. While I addressed these dynamics as much as possible by being clear about my role as a researcher rather than a teacher and encouraging young people to be honest, these dynamics are still likely to have affected responses.
- As this was a qualitative research project, my own experiences and perspectives are likely to have influenced what was taken from the analysis, and others may have different interpretations. The findings are therefore best understood as my interpretation of the experiences and perspectives young people chose to share with me.
- Finally, this research involved young people looking back at their Year 6 and 7 experiences at the end of Year 7, and earlier recollections may therefore have been influenced by forgetting and later experiences. Findings should therefore be considered a 'snapshot' of young people's views at that point in time.

What happens now?

I have written this research up in full as a thesis for my course at the University of Nottingham: obviously the school's name has not been included and pseudonyms have been used for all young people, as they have in this document.

If you have any questions about the research or would like any further information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me using the details below. I would also be very interested to hear any comments you have about the research or findings.

Again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and very much for taking the time to support my research. I would particularly like to thank X staff member for going above and beyond to support the research to run smoothly, she worked incredibly hard to organise everything and as a result made my days interviewing in school very easy and pleasant!

I would also like to say a huge thank you to the pupils who participated in the research, who were polite, thoughtful, insightful and a pleasure to interact with. They were without exception a credit to their school.

Thank you very much again,

Louise Watson

Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Nottingham

Email: XXXXXX

Appendix: detail of individual themes

What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?

Theme	Subtheme (if applicable)	Description	Example quotes
Finding my place in a shifting social world	Transition changed social worlds	Transition led to changes in a range of social relationships for young people, including friendships, teacher relationships and relationships outside school.	*"I was put in different tutors with them [previous friends] so like I was like friends with one of my other friends and like became closer with her" (Elsa)* *"I just didn't spend time with my grandma because I was old enough to stay at home [alone] for that amount of time [after transition]" (Mary)*
	Coronavirus changed social	The pandemic also led to young people	*"my sister got like a pillow with their*

	worlds	experiencing a range of changes in social relationships, including closer and narrower social networks during lockdowns, and changes in the social roles of individuals and of school.	*[niece and nephew's] faces, so I could just like hug the pillow when I miss them" (Sara)* *"well my dad was a key worker (…) I was like yeah can I see my dad and she was like he'll be home but he'll be late so you'll only be able to see him like tomorrow morning before he goes to work I was like yeah I know but I want him, I want him to kiss me goodnight type of thing" (Thomas)* *"I didn't do any learning, I just talked to my friends (…) we only really went to [school during lockdown] talk if you know what I mean, I didn't really go for the learning" (Mary)*
	Relational storms	Over this time, most	*"yeah and some of*

	and stresses	young people experienced challenges in their relationships, especially friendships, such as arguments, loss of friendships or name-calling.	*us split up now so I'm not friends with some of them because we've argued" (Jenny)* *"I just kept being, not necessarily told off but like brought into things that my friends had had arguments with old friends" (Helen)*
	Building a new social group	Despite these changes and challenges, all young people reported having a positive friendship group in school by the end of the summer term. In many cases, young people viewed this more positively than they did their primary school friendships. Pre-existing relationships could sometimes help young people to develop this social group, and several young people saw	*"they're like a lot more nicer in a way [than primary friends], they listen to me a little bit more" (Thomas)* *"I've got more friends" (Jenny)* *"erm it [friendship group] was still people from like [primary school] just like different people" (Elsa)*

		finding a friendship group as an important task when starting secondary school.	
A slowed expansion of our school world	*N/A*	Young people described experiencing a greater size and variety of physical space, social interactions and learning activities following transition, but felt that some of this expansion was slowed by the impact of the pandemic, leading to a slower or additional transition when they were able to access the full school in the summer term, which could sometimes bring up similar emotions and responses to the initial transition. This slower transition was generally perceived as frustrating,	*"it [primary school] was a lot more smaller, so I wasn't so like, wow all these buildings" (Mary)* *"[secondary school was] nowhere near as boring cause it was different stuff." (Joe)* *"we've only just [June 2021] started going into like food tech rooms and stuff we've been kind of in that block and in the same classroom so it's kind of been boring in a way so I kind of wish I could get lost now" (Helen)* *"now we're in like the food tech and*

		especially in relation to learning activities, which young people perceived as being less practical and more writing linked to pandemic restrictions (for example fewer Science experiments as they were unable to access Science labs for the first part of the year).	*like design tech and like science rooms it's like better cause I actually get to like make stuff" (Elsa)*

How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?

Theme	**Description**	**Example quotes**
A time of personal growth	Some young people perceived the pandemic as presenting an opportunity for reflection, positive change and personal growth, linked to having more free time during lockdowns.	*"like having my own time I realised I was a lot more peaceful and stuff" (Mary)* *"I feel if like covid didn't happen I would feel like a big group of friends is something that you have to have in secondary school erm and I wouldn't be as close with any of them whereas now I've got a group of 3 friends but I'm so close with them" (Helen)*

Coronavirus as a loss of normality	All young people described the pandemic as an abnormal or unusual time in a negative way, referring to missing out on experiences and learning and describing negative emotions linked to the pandemic. Young people also described a hierarchy of activities where those closer to 'normal' were valued more, for example preferring in-person activities to virtual and video calls to other forms of remote learning.	*"I was kind of annoyed because like I really wanted to do it [trip] and I already had like paid half of it" (Sara)* *"they couldn't teach us as much as they would have done so when we got to secondary and we hadn't learned certain things cause of lockdown they had to reteach us all of it" (Jenny)* *"I feel different now like I'm sick of lockdown and all the horrible thoughts that it would happen again" (Thomas)* *"it just during covid it like I got really stressed" (Jenny)* *"it [year 7 lockdown] was like better cause (…) we started to do it on like Google meets and like there was also a teacher like helping which was also really good" (Elsa)*
Less teacher support made	Young people described remote learning as harder	*"it was harder to like do it than at school cause like*

remote learning harder	than being in school, ranging from perceiving this as harder but manageable to finding this very difficult. Young people perceived this as harder because of more limited availability of teacher help and support, and some used strategies to compensate for this, such as peer support networks online or seeking help from parents.	*there wasn't like teachers to help you or anything but it wasn't too hard" (Elsa)* *"online learning when the first part of lockdown ever happened I struggled massively with that" (Thomas)* *"my dad was obviously really good at Maths so he helped me a bit with it" (Thomas)*
Learning gets more serious	Young people perceived secondary school as involving 'more' or more 'serious' learning than primary school, and this perception continued for remote learning, where young people felt they did more in secondary online learning. For several young people this was a positive in terms of online learning, as it allowed them to have more teacher contact, but one young person found this very difficult to cope with. However, this young person described being greatly helped by a teacher	*"now I'm in secondary obviously I know a lot more than I did in primary cause they teach you a lot more" (Jenny)* *"They [secondary teachers] would like ask like if I was okay with like the work and like all that (…) it made it kind of easier" (Sara)* *"it [secondary online learning] was just so scary for me and I felt like I'd lost all the relationship with my family (…) it was just really stressful and not enjoyable*

	providing support around emotional wellbeing.	*at all" (Helen)* *"it was a mental health powerpoint and it was saying that like, just a bunch of nice things like how hard it was and then it left my teacher's email (…) I emailed her and I I said that erm I was really grateful for that lesson for number one for a break (…)* *and I just said like I'm really grateful for that cause it really, it really made me feel like I'm not the only, I felt like I was the only one not being able to do this erm and it felt nice that she, she'd noticed a bunch of people struggling" (Helen)*
Technology mediates experiences	Young people described access to technology as reducing the impacts of the pandemic, both in terms of learning and social opportunities. Young people described a number of potential barriers to accessing technology, including their and others' skill level as well as physical access to equipment.	*"she [grandmother] didn't know how to do google meet or owt and neither did we at that point" (Thomas)* *""my mum got me a computer and for me sister so we could start doing a little bit more learning" (Thomas)* *"I couldn't really play with my friends cause I didn't*

		have a console then [first lockdown]" (Joe)

How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Theme	**Description**	**Example quotes**
Will I succeed in the future?	Young people described academic success as important to their future, but sometimes expressed doubt about their ability to achieve this.	*"I'd like to be in like quite high sets" (Elsa)* *"I would say I want it [learning] to get easier but it can't really get any easier cause it'll just get harder" (Thomas)* *"I really hope I do get into university but knowing me I'd probably stop at, stop at A level maybe" (Mary)*
Building on interests to find my future place	Young people described developing their existing interests as important to their future aspirations, especially relating to careers.	*"I want to like look after kids I just I love little kids and things they're like so fun to play with (…) and like open a nursery or summat" (Jenny)* *"I feel like for dancing, like I could do it and I could travel the world and dance on ferries and stuff" (Helen)*
Good relationships are important to my future	Young people hoped for positive relationships in the future, and felt that peers, adults and themselves were all important in supporting this.	*"having more like closer friendships" (Sara)* *"I could start seeing my grandad a little bit more" (Thomas)*

		"[when asked what would support her in the future] probably just like be nice to each other" (Sara) *"[when asked what would support her in the future] like ignore like people who don't like you" (Jenny)*
Clear communication helps me move forward	Young people described that clear and consistent communication from adults was important to them in the future, both in relation to the pandemic and more generally. This related to explicit communication but also to implicit values shown by day-to-day actions.	*"if right now I was in Year 11 and they said if there's anything I can do to help you, I'd probably be like careers advising and more help like that" (Mary)* *"what I think people could do is stop saying is it [the coronavirus vaccine] good is it bad like just give a solid answer so it's not like two opinions" (Thomas)* *"sometimes they say a lot of things in like tutor there's so many assemblies about like mental health and stuff. But like like little things like in lessons where you're upset or you just wanna go outside like some some people some of my friends have really bad mental health and they struggle with that." (Helen)*

Appendix 18: copy of presentation given to support dissemination of findings to placement educational psychology service

Slide 1

"We called it lockdown school": a reflexive thematic analysis of the experiences of young people transitioning from primary to secondary school during the Covid-19 pandemic

Louise Watson – Trainee Educational Psychologist

Slide 2

Outline

- Transition literature
- Impact of the pandemic generally
- Young people's views of the pandemic generally
- Method
- Findings
- Discussion and implications

Slide 3

Transition to secondary

- Experienced as a significant event for young people (Zeedyk et al., 2003)
- Change to a larger physical and social environment (e.g. Anderson et al., 2000)
- Also a more varied academic environment and often more emphasis on academic success (Anderson et al., 2000; Hung, 2014).
- Associated with emotional changes, particularly anxiety before transition that usually declines and gives way to excitement (Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019; van Rens et al., 2019) after transition

Slide 4

Importance of transition success

- Successful transition involves (Evans et al., 2018):
  - Integration into social environment of new school
  - Continued development of academic skills
  - Maintaining emotional wellbeing
- Most young people experience successful transition but minority do not (Waters et al., 2012)
- Less successful transitions can negatively impact a range of outcomes, including much later in development (e.g. Neugebauer and Schindler, 2012; Rice et al., 2011; West et al., 2010).

Slide 5

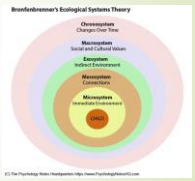
What influences transition success?

Individual child

- Individual identity – age, SEN, LAC, SES, ethnicity. Gender mixed effect.
- **Academic ability prior to transition**
- **Social and emotional skills prior to transition**
- **Child's perceptions and expectations** – of themselves and of the secondary environment – and how far these expectations are met

Family

- **Resource availability**
- **Parent support**
- **Parenting style**
- **Home-school relationship quality**
- Siblings already at secondary – mixed effect



Slide 6

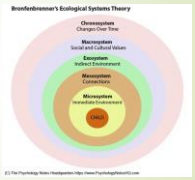
What influences transition success?

Peers

- **Pre-transition peer relationships** especially important and very central to young people's views as well
- Moving up with some peers they know is helpful
- Less important after transition – but where **stable friendships** are maintained can be supportive (Ng-Knight et al., 2019)

School

- **Primary and secondary school climate** – including mastery versus performance goals in secondary school
- School-level SES
- **Primary teacher expectations**
- **Preparation and support offered**
- **Primary and secondary teacher relationships**
- **Relationship an communication between the two schools**



Slide 7

Young people's perceptions

- Year 6 as period of preparation (Sime et al., 2021)
- Already have developed expectations of secondary school pre-transition (Sime et al., 2021)
- Relationships, **especially with peers**, are centrally important to young people (e.g. Mumford and Birchwood, 2020; Zeedyk et al., 2003)
- Physical environment and new routines also areas of concern (e.g. Mumford and Birchwood, 2020; Zeedyk et al., 2003)
- Academic concerns less common (Moore, 2021)
- Adult perceptions and young people's may be different e.g. significance of peer relationships may not always be understood (Bagnall et al., 2019)
- A shift in how they are treated post-transition, even outside the school environment (Mumford and Birchwood, 2020).
- Views not homogenous! e.g. LAC more concerned about relationships (Francis et al., 2021); young people with SEN may perceive transition as more challenging (but not always) (Fortuna, 2014; Maras and Aveling, 2006).

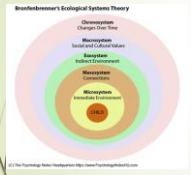
Slide 8

Supporting successful transition

- Typically receive some support (Evangelou et al., 2008) prior to transition
- Helpful support includes:
  - Emotional support
  - Social support, especially around friendships
  - Making academic changes more gradual and supporting curriculum continuity
  - Enough time – late primary to at least end autumn term Y7
  - Adapted to individual needs, especially for children with particular needs such as children with SEN, LAC.

Slide 9

The pandemic



- Impacts on young people:
  - Generally reduction in emotional wellbeing (but may not be true for all YP)
  - Reduced social contact with peers, and a shift from physical to online social world
  - Family relationships generally remained stable or improved, but increased conflict in some families
  - Reduced learning – but not even impact for all, often widening gaps. Some young people benefitted from flexibility of home learning
- Impacts on families and community:
  - Financial and other pressures could -> negative impacts on parent wellbeing
  - Impacts on wider community resources (Day et al., 2020)
- Impacts on schools:
  - Heavier teacher workload
  - Uncertainty for school leaders
  - Reduced support mechanisms for staff (Lien et al., 2022)

Slide 10

Young people's views of the pandemic

- Systematic Literature Review conducted July 2021 – thematic synthesis
- Qualitative (or partly qualitative) analyses of young people's views, including at least some in transition age range (10-12 years) – 7 papers
- Some limitations in quality of papers and all non-UK context – given limited availability of papers at this time
- Themes included:
  - Place in the community
  - Narrowed yet deeper connections
  - Freedom
  - Loss
  - Resilience
  - Safety
  - Challenges of home learning

Slide 11

Transition in the pandemic

- Bagnall et al., 2022:
  - UK-wide survey of parents, teachers and young people in autumn 2020, who transitioned in September 2020
  - Main findings:
    - Transition was perceived to be harder
    - The school environment was different (commented on by parents and teachers, not children)
    - Missed opportunities/things that did not happen e.g. transition events
    - Children were different – less ready for secondary school (parent and teacher perceptions only)
    - Emotional impact – feelings of sadness/loss, stress/anxiety, anger (teachers only- related to themselves and portrayal in media)
    - Strategies to meet children's needs pre-transition included relational support, sharing information, emotional support (by both parents and peers) and practical support (e.g. virtual tours)
    - Strategies post-transition included academic support, relational support, practical support, emotional support
    - Children and parents generally felt schools had tried their best in difficult circumstances and many suggested no improvements
    - Better information sharing (including around academic outcomes as no SATs) was discussed as an area for improvement. Importance of relational support from peers and parents was emphasised.

Slide 12

Thesis aims

- To investigate the experiences and perspectives of young people who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020
- Research questions:
  - What have been the experiences of young people transitioning during the coronavirus pandemic?
  - How have young people perceived and made sense of these experiences?
  - How do young people perceive the future and what do they feel would support them to move forward?

Slide 13

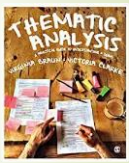
Method

- Semi-structured interviews in school in July 2021.
- 7 Year 7 children (5 girls 2 boys) attending one mainstream secondary school.
- Smaller than average secondary school with higher proportion of children receiving Pupil Premium funding.
- Interviews focused on a term at a time looking at experiences and perspectives, then questions about what they perceived the impact of the pandemic to be (if any), what their hopes were for the future and what would support them to get there.
- Summarised back at end of each term.
- Supported by visual life-path tool.
- Transcription – all words said by both interviewee and interviewer. Non-verbal communication e.g. pauses/intonation not transcribed.

Slide 14

Method

- Critical realist reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022)
  - Familiarisation – transcription and three repeated readings
  - Coding – initial list generated, NVivo – coding framework then revised and coding repeated, working in opposite direction
  - Generation of initial candidate themes through clustering codes
  - Reviewing candidate themes
  - Return to data coded under each theme, further review themes
  - Return to full data set
  - Refine, define and name themes
  - Writing up analysis
  - Reflexive journal



Slide 15

Finding my place in a shifting social world

Transition changed social worlds

- Many social changes occurred associated explicitly or implicitly with transition

  "I was put in different tutors with them [previous friends] so like I was like friends with one of my other friends and like became closer with her" (Elsa)

  "[primary school] had a lot of teachers that are easy to talk to, er, I just, um, find it difficult to talk to teachers in secondary school." (Mary)

  "I just didn't spend time with my grandma because I was old enough to stay at home [alone] for that amount of time [after transition]" (Mary)

Slide 16

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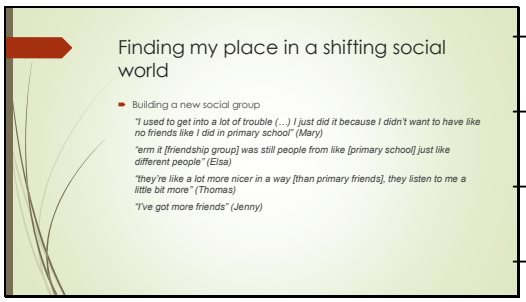
Slide 18



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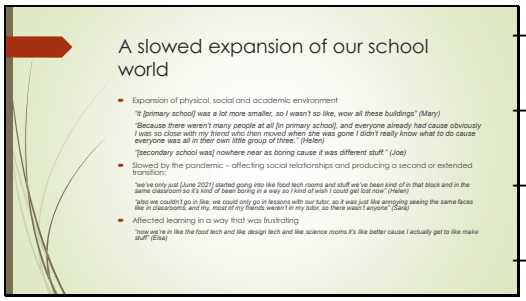

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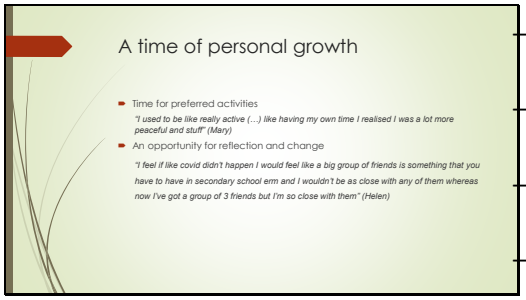

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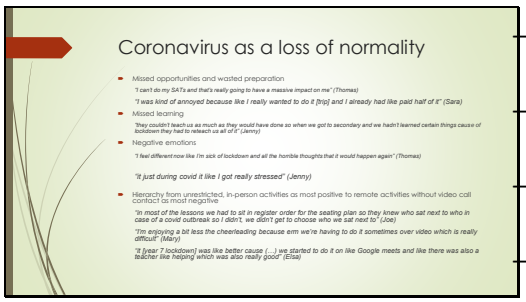

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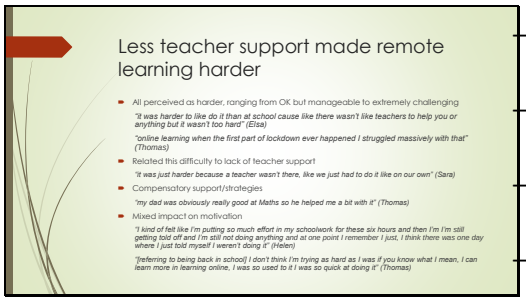

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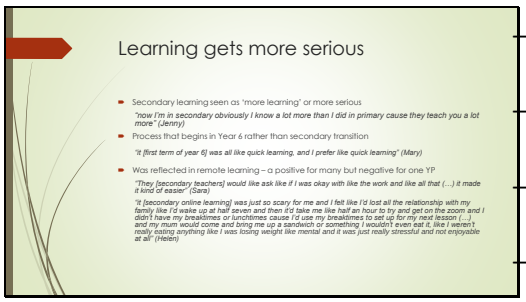

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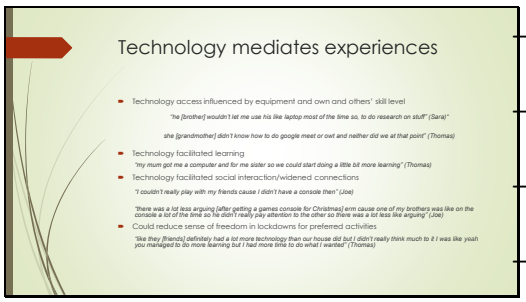

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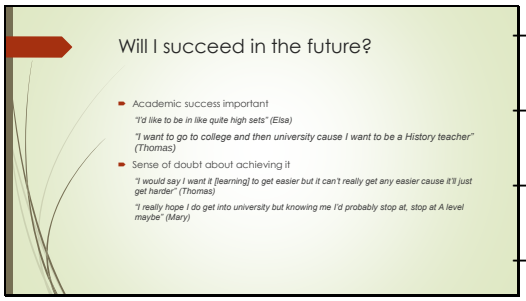

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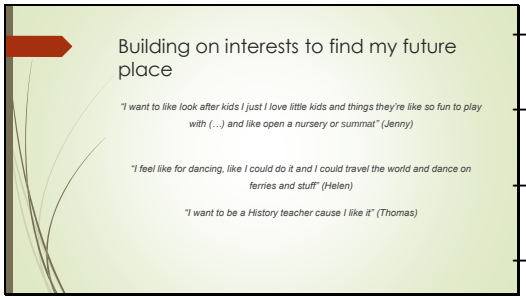

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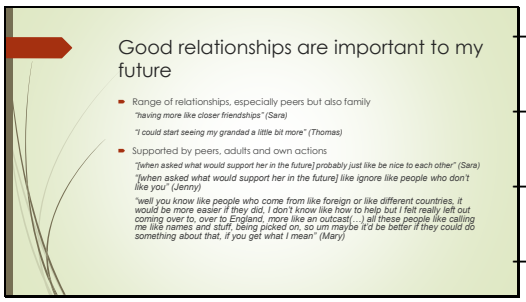

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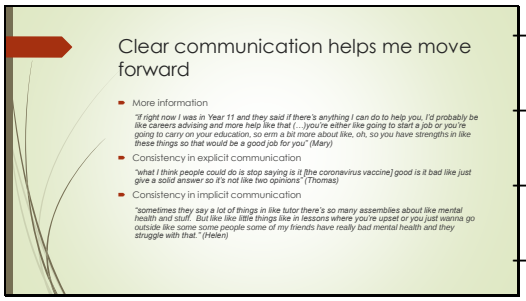

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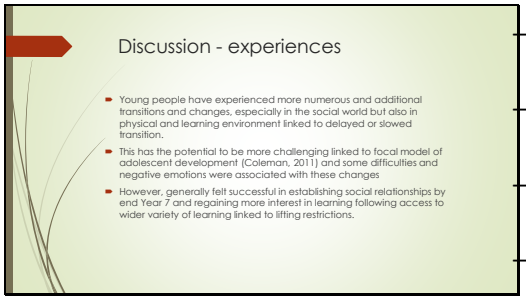

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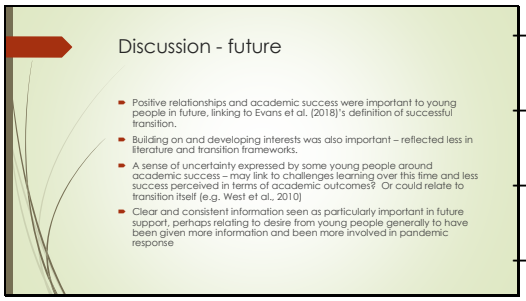

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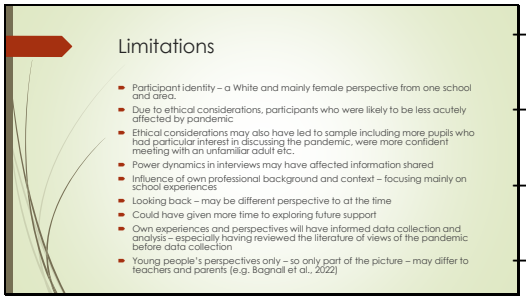

Slide 33

Slide 34

Implications for schools

For this cohort:

- Work with young people to support learning gaps and young people's academic self-concept
- Strengthening emotional wellbeing support at whole-school and targeted level
- Monitoring social inclusion and development and supporting where needed
- Learn from what worked well to support individual and systemic resilience

For transition generally:

- Providing more opportunities for varied learning experiences and practical learning in particular over transition, as valued and motivating
- Supporting and developing interests and strengths over transition
- Supporting young people to navigate changed emphasis on academic learning and supporting self-concept
- Providing clear and consistent information and helping young people develop skills to navigate contradictory information from other sources

For supporting young people whose transition is disrupted for other reasons:

- Paying particular attention to learning progress, academic confidence, and emotional wellbeing of these children
- Supporting learning and social connection through technology, using lessons learned in pandemic
- Maintaining routines that are closer to normal where possible
- Providing clear consistent information and supporting young people's understanding
- Providing opportunities to recognise and build on strengths, resilience and personal growth

Slide 35

Implications for EP practice

For casework involving time out of school (pandemic or otherwise disrupted learning/transition):

- Consider learning gaps, level of access to technology when out of school, changes in motivation and academic self-concept and nature of remote learning provided by school in hypotheses and questions to understand barriers to learning
- Consider technology access and family factors when considering social development and social support over absences
- Consider possible impacts of disruption on emotional wellbeing – both negative and positive (e.g. personal growth, coping strategies)

For systemic work:

- Supporting evidence-based practice in schools to build self-confidence as learners, address learning gaps, support emotional wellbeing and monitor and support social connections
- Systemic work considering impact of pandemic on staff and school system and making action plans to address these impacts or build on areas of strength and resilience

Slide 36

Conclusions

- Pandemic perceived as an abnormal time, associated with experiencing a lot of change
- Generally perceived negatively and learning a particular difficulty. Co-occurrence of increased academic emphasis in secondary school with challenges of online and missed learning – limited success in achieving academic outcomes of successful transition (Evans et al., 2018)
- Social more positive despite challenges, and pandemic provided opportunities for personal growth and positive emotions as well.
- Experiences around emotional wellbeing more mixed – both negative and positive emotions, but general sense of feeling happy in school by time of interview.

Slide 37

Questions/Reflections

- How far does this fit with your own experiences of supporting young people and schools over the pandemic, especially in relation to transition?
- How has this been helpful for your practice?
- Any questions (or feedback!) for me?