

***Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child  
and Adolescent Psychology***



***Programme Director: Vivian Hill***

**“It feels like you’re just plastering over a crack”**

**The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools**

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### **Student declaration**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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### **List of abbreviations**

AEETS = Access to education, employment and training service

AP = Alternative provision

CAMHS = Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service

DfE = Department for education

EP = Educational psychologist

LA = Local authority

RTT = Reduced timetable

SDT = Self-determination theory

TEP = Trainee educational psychologist

VST = Virtual school team (for looked after children)

YOT = Youth offending team

YP = Young people

## **Abstract**

There is a plethora of research around school exclusions within the literature, given the stark consequences and frequency of the practice. Schools use a variety of methods to support young people at risk of exclusion. One method of managing behaviour that is starting to gain mention within the literature is reduced timetables. Research exploring reduced timetables is sparse and little is known about how reduced timetables operate. There is also very little research that seeks the views of young people regarding their experiences of reduced timetables. There has been no attempt to collect in-depth qualitative data on the operationalisation of reduced timetables, nor the experiences of young people placed on reduced timetables in England.

This thesis used an ecological lens to explore how and why reduced timetables are being operationalised in schools, and what the experiences are of the young people that are involved in them. Thus, the research presents a two-phase structure. In the first phase, eight professionals from schools and wider local authority teams that have a role in supporting young people on reduced timetables were interviewed. In the second phase, young people who have been placed on reduced timetables were interviewed. A reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, providing contextual information regarding reduced timetables and the lived experiences of those involved with them.

Findings from professionals highlighted three key themes: the varied process of reduced timetables, reasons for reduced timetables, and challenges and tensions within the reduced timetables process. Findings from young people highlighted three key themes: experiences of school, relationships with teachers, and experiences of reduced timetables. Discussions and conclusions focus on the importance of reduced timetables being part of a well-planned, wider support plan that aims to address the underlying needs of young people. The findings hold significant recommendations for educational psychologists, schools, local authorities, and policy makers.

## **Impact Statement**

This thesis explored the operationalisation of reduced timetables and the experiences of the young people placed on them through a socio-ecological design. There is little attention given to reduced timetables within the literature, and no research within England has attempted to collect in-depth qualitative data about the use of them, nor young people's experiences of them. This study aimed to address this gap through capturing the context of reduced timetables in one local authority, before exploring the experience of the young people at the centre of the process. Findings highlight the critical importance of reduced timetables to be part of a well-planned, wider support plan involving views from a multi-agency group, aiming to meet the underlying needs of YP to achieve reintegration back into fulltime schooling.

The findings provide contributions to the academic and professional practice. Recommendations for educational psychologists have been considered across system levels, highlighting roles in providing support within the reduced timetable process. Recommendations for schools, local authorities and policy makers are also outlined. The recommendations are widespread and include the following:

- Educational psychologists are well placed to elicit young people's hopes and views which can support schools' understanding of young people, whilst ensuring their voice is heard throughout the reduced timetable process.
- Educational psychologists can support schools in utilising person-centred approaches to gather young people's views could encourage and draw attention to the importance of including and listening to young people in situations that impact them.
- Educational psychologists are well placed to advocate for and empower parents and their involvement in the process which may address power imbalances between parents and schools and encourage parental involvement.
- Undertaking creative assessments to identify the needs of young people can support schools to consider the underlying needs that may be warranting a reduced timetable.

- Providing support for school staff around the relational needs of young people and utilising approaches such as Video Interactive Guidance and Video Enhanced Reflective Practice.
- Providing space, time, and containment through consultation and supervision for schools could allow schools to consider the difficulties that young people are facing and the support that could benefit them.
- Educational psychologists could encourage and support embedded proactive whole school approaches at systemic levels across schools to protect young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Educational psychologists are well placed to offer unique perspectives on multi-agency panels and meetings around reduced timetables to facilitate a solution-focused and problem-solving approach to setting up a wider support plan for young people on reduced timetables.
- Schools could consider the importance of relation, competence and autonomy for young people and foster policies and environments that allow these psychological needs to be met.
- Schools and local authorities could work closely together, to create a multi-agency approach towards reduced timetables.
- Policy makers could consider creating much clearer guidance around how and why reduced timetables should be used by schools, including examples of best practice.
- Policy makers could consider whether schools should be formally required to record and report on their use of reduced timetables, to increase accountability and monitoring.
- Policy makers might consider the pressure that current policies and guidance put on schools, such as behaviour policies that are exclusionary in nature.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

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The continued high rates of exclusions and suspensions in secondary schools in England and the acknowledged long-term consequences for young people (YP) means that much attention is given to processes and systems that support YP at risk of exclusion or disengagement. Approaches have included managed moves, home education, pupil referral units and learning support units. A more recent phenomenon that appears to be gaining traction is the use of reduced timetables (RTTs), with RTTs appearing for the first time in a government policy document about school attendance in 2022 (Department for Education [DfE], 2022c).

Whilst there is an understanding in the United Kingdom (UK) that every child has a right to full time education, as stated in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), The Education Act (1996) allows a local authority (LA) to provide an education that is not full time if it is in the best interest of the YP. RTTs, also referred to as part-time timetables, are bespoke timetables which offer YP decreased expected hours of attendance. Distinctive to RTTs is the focus on keeping YP in their mainstream school, albeit part time. Answering the question “Can a school place a pupil on a part-time timetable?”, the DfE state:

“As a rule, no. All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet a pupil’s individual needs. For example, where a medical condition prevents a pupil from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package. A part-time timetable must not be treated as a long-term solution... must record it as authorised absence” (DfE, 2022c)

RTTs are also mentioned in 2023 guidance about behaviour and exclusion. It is noteworthy here that RTTs are described as targeting YP with physical or mental health needs but should not be used to manage YP’s behaviour (DfE, 2023).

Research looking into RTTs is sparse and there is no research in England that is dedicated to exploring RTTs. It is possible that RTTs could be seen as a positive tailored intervention for YP which has advantages of maintaining contact with friends, schools being able to safeguard YP as they are still attending school, and not excluding YP. Thus, RTTs could be viewed as an inclusive approach to education for vulnerable YP at risk of disengagement. On the other hand, guidance on RTTs is vague and schools are not required to report data on RTTs to the government, meaning there is little understanding of what happens within the practice. Indeed, Timpson (2019) in his review of school exclusions commented “there are schools inappropriately routinely using part-time timetables... in an attempt to legitimise an informal exclusion” (p. 100). For instance, being long-term in nature and lacking parental consent. There are also suggestions that RTTs are being used for behavioural reasons (Parsons, 2018), as well as being overused for other vulnerable YP such as those with special educational needs (SEND) (Contact a Family, 2013; Brennan and Browne, 2019).

### **1.1 Motivations for the research**

I have a long-standing interest in supporting vulnerable YP. Whilst training to become an educational psychologist (EP), I came across several YP who were on RTTs for a variety of reasons. After talking to several EPs, it was clear that they had little understanding of RTTs, how they are operationalised and the prevalence of them. I discovered that the LA that I was working in on placement as a trainee EP (TEP) was collecting data on the use of RTTs across the area. They had written guidance for schools on the use of RTTs and were holding internal meetings to monitor the operation of them. The LA was interested in exploring how RTTs were being used and keen to develop their practice. This gave me an opportunity to conduct an in-depth study, looking into the operationalisation of one LA’s use of RTTs, which had not been done before in England. The operationalisation of RTTs and the experiences of those involved in them remains largely unknown despite evidence pointing to them being used with vulnerable YP and potentially in ways condemned in the guidance. Therefore, with this opportunity, it seemed a worthy topic for the thesis.

### **1.2 Definition of inclusive education**

Inclusive education is a national agenda and has been defined in its simplest form as “the central message is simple: every learner matters and matters equally” (UNESCO, 2017, p.12).

Principles of inclusive education are an integral part of legislation and policy within the UK. The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) states that inclusion in education involves meeting the needs of all learners, including those with SEND, within mainstream education settings whenever possible. The emphasis is on removing barriers to learning and providing reasonable adjustments to promote equal opportunities for all, as outlined in the Equality Act (2010).

### **1.3 Definition of exclusion in education**

The Education Act (1986) introduced school exclusions, breaking them down into “fixed-term” and “permanent” exclusions, now known as “suspensions” and “exclusions” (DfE, 2022a). Students that are suspended are removed from school from anywhere between a day to a few weeks, before returning to school. YP should not be suspended for more than 45 days in total across the school year. Students that are excluded are removed from the school register permanently and therefore do not return. The DfE (2023) outline circumstances in which exclusion may be considered, including breaches of a school’s behaviour policies, physical violence or aggression, persistent disruptive behaviour or possession of drugs, alcohol or weapons. The current most common reason for both suspensions and exclusions in England is ‘persistent disruptive behaviour’, accounting for 42% of suspensions and 39% of permanent exclusions in 2020/21 (DfE, 2022b).

### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter two presents a review of the literature, firstly exploring the wider context of the exclusion agenda, and then considering what we can learn from the available literature that explores RTTs. Chapter three will outline a description of the methodology used to explore the research questions of this study. The findings of this project will then be presented in chapters four and five. Finally, chapter six will pose a discussion of the findings, including thoughts on suggestions for educational psychologists, schools, LAs and policy makers, as well as future research possibilities.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

A literature review was conducted following a search on research into RTTs, using Google Scholar, British Education Index, Educational Resources Information Centre, PsychINFO, Web of Science, and Scopus. These databases were selected for their relevance to education, psychology, and social sciences. Search terms such as 'reduced timetables OR part-time timetables' AND 'schools' were used. Following this initial search, additional inquiry took place by perusing the reference lists of relevant articles. From this search, 3 research papers focusing on RTTs were found, as detailed below in table one. The large majority of the research found in this search focused on the use of 'unofficial' methods of exclusion, mentioning the use of RTTs. Hence, the literature led me to review the use of exclusions, both official and unofficial, whilst reviewing what we can learn about RTTs from the current available literature.

| Reference                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Country | Research focus                                                  | Summary of approach                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Weaver, C. (2023). <i>"This is your last chance to prove to us you can be here, we've tried everything to help you"-Exploring the use of reduced timetables as exclusionary practice for young people in Wales</i> (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).                     | Wales   | RTTs and the link to exclusion                                  | Online survey and semi-structured interviews with professionals supporting YP on RTTs (including teachers, teaching assistance, psychologists and YOT officers) |
| Brennan, D., & Browne, H. (2019). Education, behaviour and exclusion: the experience and impact of short school days on children with disabilities and their families in the Republic of Ireland.                                                                                   | Ireland | The use of RTTs for children with SEND                          | Online survey and interviews with 12 parents who's children were on RTTs                                                                                        |
| Mahon, M. (2022). <i>'Out of class?' An investigation into the practice and impact of reduced timetables in inner-city post-primary schools on young people's life course and educational trajectories</i> (Doctoral dissertation, University College Dublin. School of Education). | Ireland | The use of RTTs in post-primary education and the link to class | Semi structured interviews with 11 YP, 10 parents and 11 school staff across 5 education settings.                                                              |

Table 1. Details of research papers found focusing on RTTs

This chapter aims to provide an overview on the current context of the exclusion agenda in England. Researchers such as Power & Taylor (2020) argue that official data on exclusions does not provide a complete picture due to other forms of exclusion, which have been defined as ‘unofficial’, ‘illegal’, or ‘informal’ methods of exclusion. These are methods used to remove YP from the school environment and/or school register without officially excluding them, meaning that these YP slip under the radar and are not captured in official data collected on exclusion. RTTs have been labelled as an unofficial method of exclusion (Parsons, 2018) and therefore, this chapter will start by providing the context of exclusions, both official and unofficial, in schools. The chapter will then review the available literature on RTTs before discussing the relevance for EP practice and the rationale and research questions for the current study.

## **2.1 The context of school exclusions in England**

Exclusion has been a topic of debate in England over decades. After interviewing 46 headteachers, Martin-Denham (2021) reported that 50% of them perceive benefits of exclusions including keeping staff and other YP safe, providing time for the YP and their parents to reflect on their behaviour, and providing time for headteachers to seek external exclusions such as organise support from outside agencies. However, the other 50% of the headteachers interviewed did not perceive exclusions to be effective as often it is a desirable outcome for the YP who would rather go home than stay at school. These headteachers also shared concerns that exclusion is not effective in changing behaviour, and in some cases can cause the behaviour to deteriorate. This is a notion that has been widely supported in the research, with some researchers assigning reason to the reluctance of schools to consider what is underlying the behaviour. McCluskey has conducted several studies in this area. After examining literature, they conclude that exclusion does not seek to understand or address the underlying need of behaviour and therefore it is a behaviour management or punishment method which is not an effective way of changing behaviour (McCluskey, 2014; McCluskey et al, 2016).

Although the first official figures on permanent exclusions were formally collected in a routine way in 1994-95, it has been estimated that figures rose from 2,910 in 1990-91 to 11,181 in 1993-94 (Parsons, 1996). Data collected by the DfE hereafter show a further

increase to 12,668 in 1996-97. Some researchers have questioned the official data from this time such as Brodie (1995) who highlighted a survey carried out by The Independent Newspaper which estimated that 11,000 students had been excluded from just 36 Local Authorities (LAs) in 1993-94, suggesting an under-counting at national level (Gordon, 2001). In response to the increase of school exclusions throughout the 90s, the Government set up the School Exclusion Unit (1998) who were given a target to decrease exclusion figures (Gordon, 2001). At face value it would appear that they were successful, with permanent exclusions dropping to 4,630 in 2012/13. However, suspension figures appear to tell a different story. It has been speculated that in the 90s, for every 1 permanent exclusion, there were 11 suspensions (Smith, 1998). In 1997/98 there were 12,298 permanent exclusions which would lead to an estimate of 135,000 suspensions (Gordon, 2001). If this speculation rings true, suspensions had been vastly increasing, landing at the lowest figure in 2012/13 at 267,520. However, it is not clear where this speculation is rooted and how accurate it truly is.

Looking at more recent figures available from the DfE, trends show a decrease in both permanent exclusions and suspensions from 2008/09 to 2012/13, dropping from 6,550 to 4,630 and 363,280 to 267,520, respectively. From 2012/13, the figures begin to rise again. By 2018/19, suspension rates were up to 438,265 and permanent exclusions were up to 7,894. Figures appear to fall again in the two years after this, however the DfE state that caution should be taken when comparing across years for 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to pandemic restrictions seeing school closures due to the Covid-19 outbreak (DfE, 2022b). It is not possible to assume equivalence in the figures across years when most YP were not in school.

The substantial amount of YP being officially excluded in England is not reflected elsewhere in the UK. Whilst England has the largest school population and it may not be useful to focus on comparing the raw data, it is notable that in 2015/16 while many thousands of YP were excluded from schools in England, just 5 were excluded from schools in Scotland, 19 in Northern Ireland and 109 in Wales (Power & Taylor, 2020). Not only are rates of exclusion higher in England, but while rates appear to be increasing, they are decreasing across the rest of the UK (Power & Taylor, 2020).

## **2.2 Other methods of exclusions**

There are other methods used by schools to manage behaviour. Some of these methods include off-rolling, managed moves, home education, pupil referral units and learning support units (Parsons, 2018; Timpson, 2019). Researchers such as Power & Taylor (2020) have argued that these methods, whilst not defined as exclusion, operate on exclusionary practice. The true extent of unofficial exclusions is currently unknown, but evidence around the use of them is growing in the literature. These methods of exclusion have been mentioned in the literature over three decades. Stirling (1992) describes unofficial exclusions as methods that allow schools to continue receiving funding for a YP and record their absence as authorised without reporting it as an exclusion, whilst encouraging YP not to come to school. She gave examples of disguising exclusion as medical problems and persuading parents to keep their YP at home whilst more suitable placements are found for them. Stirling (1992) concluded that the exclusion data being collected was therefore just “the tip of the iceberg” (p. 1) and whilst she attempted to collect data on unofficial exclusions, she suggests that these numbers could only be guessed.

More recent work on other methods of exclusions can be seen in The Timpson Review of School Exclusion (Timpson, 2019). Edward Timpson was commissioned to review school exclusion by the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP, following an announcement from Theresa May, prime minister at the time, that she would challenge society to explain and resolve the disparities in how people from different backgrounds are treated, including disparities in education attainment data. The review used a plethora of evidence including examination of data, fieldwork, roundtable discussions with practitioners and discussions parents and YP. One of the review’s findings focused on the use of unofficial exclusions and off-rolling. Timpson defined unofficial exclusion as YP being “sent home from school for a period of time with no exclusions being recorded” (Timpson, 2019, p. 10). Off-rolling was defined in the report as YP who are removed from the school register without officially reporting the exclusion “or by the school encouraging the parents to remove their child from the school, which is done in the school’s interest, and at the school’s request” (Timpson, 2019, p. 10).

Timpson (2019) described both unofficial exclusions and off-rolling as “quite simply wrong” and “unacceptable” but argued that these practices are “rare” (p. 11). Some have been critical of this claim, suggesting that research shows off-rolling to be “anything but rare” (Whitehouse, 2023, p. 3). In a report looking into unofficial exclusions, The Children’s Commissioner Office ([CCO], 2013) asked teachers and school leaders about their experience of schools acting unlawfully around exclusions, they received responses from 1000 teachers, including over 200 school leaders. They recognised that respondents were unlikely to admit to illegal activity and it is therefore impossible to know how accurate the data was but claimed that “even at the most conservative estimates supported by the available data, an unacceptably large proportion of schools are acting illegally” (CCO, 2013, p. 25). A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research looking into unofficial exclusions reviewed eight datasets including census data and Office for Standards and Education’s (Ofsted) data and found evidence that in 2017 cohorts, 8.1% had experienced at least one unexplained exit from a secondary school (Gill, Quilter-Pinner & Swift, 2017).

Timpson (2019) suggests in his report that these practices were often done with good intentions, such as allowing YP to calm down or avoid exclusion labels. However, the report found evidence that unofficial exclusions can have negative impacts on YP and in some cases “leave them without education at all” (p. 99). Timpson found that these methods of exclusion can also pose safeguarding risks as YP not engaging in school could have a higher likelihood of becoming involved in gangs and criminal activity. Unofficial exclusions not only impact YP, but their parents to. Evidence collected suggested that parents are under pressure to move their child to another school to avoid exclusion, or to home educate. Some parents were seen to consent to providing education at home even when this was not something that they were able to provide, due to pressures from school (Timpson, 2019).

Whilst some of these methods of behaviour management are seemingly based on removing YP from the school register, like off-rolling, other approaches appear more similar to RTTs as they allow YP to remain in the mainstream school environment. The nearest may be seen as in-school support units, mentioned in Timpson’s (2019) report. In-school units have been found to offer a halfway point between excluding a YP and keeping them in the mainstream school (DfE, 2018). Lusted (2022) explored the use of in-school units by interviewing a small

sample of eight YP in secondary schools and seven school and LA staff. They found that the YP interviewed had negative experiences of being in an in-school support unit, including a sense of isolation and impact on sense of belonging by ostracising them from their peers, as well as experiences of injustice and frustration. Some of the YP's identity was also impacted as they labelled themselves as 'naughty' or 'bad'. With the similarities between the two approaches, these findings highlight the importance of understanding YP's experiences of RTTs and how they are being used.

### **2.3 Reduced Timetables**

Schools are able to place YP on RTTs under government guidance which states that this practice should be a short-term solution, consented to by parents, considered as a re-integration package and used only in "very exceptional circumstances" (DfE, 2022c). The lack of guidance around "exceptional circumstances" leaves schools open to interpretation. Some LAs add their own interpretation of exceptional circumstances in their guidance, themes include medical needs, re-integration after suspensions, transition for children accessing school for the first time, and attendance difficulties. Whilst the DfE (2023) state that RTTs should not be used to manage YP's behaviour, research is beginning to suggest that schools are using RTTs for YP with behaviour difficulties or at risk of exclusion. A small-scale research project comprised of interviews with eight SENCOs and survey responses from 31 school staff members found that schools were using RTTs as a method to avoid immediate exclusion, with one school stating that some students on RTTs may be off-rolled eventually (Done & Knowler, 2021). This finding raises the question of whether RTTs are a successful method of support to manage behaviour if the result can lead to off-rolling.

Brennan and Browne (2019) conducted a research project in Ireland, using a mixed methods approach by interviewing 12 parents whose children had experienced RTTs and three relevant professionals, as well as analysing data from 393 responses to a survey. They found that out of 75 respondents, 45 said that their YP had been placed on RTTs due to behaviour concerns. Where behaviour was the reason given for the RTT, the majority of cases did not have a wider support plan put in place and in the majority of cases support from an EP was not sought. This is a finding that has been echoed in other research (Weaver, 2023; Harris et al, 2006). Brennan and Browne (2019) concluded from their research that putting a YP on a RTT for behaviour is

“both unjust and logically flawed” (p. 25), and that “adopting a short school day as a behaviour-management strategy is generally ineffective, at best, and can exacerbate challenging behaviour issues, at worst” (p. 26). They recognise that it can be challenging for schools when YP are presenting with challenging behaviour but highlight that schools often rely on within-child factors to explain that behaviour, meaning they blame inherent character attributes. They call attention to the need for schools to view behaviour as an unmet need, a form of communication and a symptom of an underlying cause such as dysregulation, not having a means of communication, negative relationships with school staff and anxiety. They add that schools should have staff members trained to undertake a functional behaviour analysis, a process of understanding the cause and function of the behaviour to consider why the YP is behaving in the way that they are.

As well as YP at risk of exclusion, RTTs have been linked to other vulnerable groups including YP who are looked after; YP involved with the Youth Justice System; YP with Autism; and YP with significant mental health needs (Birchley & Stewart, 2009; Hayes & Simpson, 2021; Brennan & Browne, 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021). Again, research in this area is sparse and mentions RTTs without exploring the use of them fully. Besides unofficial exclusions, managing SEND needs seems to be the second most common area in the research where RTTs are mentioned. Contact a Family (2013), a national charity which supports the families of disabled YP, conducted a survey focusing on unofficial exclusions and received over 400 responses. Their findings highlight that 60% of the caregivers reported that their child with SEND were placed on a reduced timetable. Caregivers also reported schools saying they didn’t have the resources to cope with the needs of their YP. Martin-Denham (2021) supports both of these findings, the interviews they conducted suggests that RTTs are being used for YP with SEND needs and those who are waiting for an EHCP assessment. One headteacher said that they base some YP’s timetables on the times where they are able to have a staff member to support that child, suggesting that resources are stretched, and they are unable to offer appropriate resources for a full day. Adam Harris, chief executive of the autism support group AsIAM suggested that schools are using RTTs as staff members lacked the expertise to support children with SEND, although schools that the Irish Times spoke to suggested that a combination of staff shortages and lack of funding means they are sometimes left with “little choice” (O’Brien, 2019).

As well as potential misuse of circumstances, research suggests other areas where schools are not following government guidance around RTTs including RTTs being long-term in nature. Martin-Denham (2021) concluded after speaking with 46 headteachers that “of the schools who have reduced school day for children, it did not come across as a temporary solution as made explicit in the (DfE 2020) attendance guidance” (p. 389). There are also concerns shared in the research around YP being educated for very limited hours whilst on a RTT. Brennan and Browne (2019) found that out of 75 cases, 47 YP were attending for less than 3 hours a day. Harris, Vincent, Thomson and Toalster (2006) found that 2 YP were being educated for just one day a week.

Of the research looking into RTTs, the consent of parents and YP is also an issue, despite parent consent being a feature of RTTs stated by DfE (2022c). Mahon (2022) interviewed 11 YP and 10 parents and found that decisions around RTTs are made by schools without any discussion with the YP or their families. When analysing the context of the children involved in their research, Brennan and Browne (2019) also found that many parents reported they did not consent to their child being put on a reduced timetable, or that they felt pressure to agree with the RTT.

There is little research into the impact that RTTs are having on YP in England, however there has been some research from other areas of the UK. The research project by Brennan and Browne (2019) was conducted in Ireland and reports stark findings around RTTs. They found that RTTs increase the likelihood of YP feeling left out; not having a sense of belonging; being treated as different; missing learning (and therefore being denied their legal right to education); experiencing anxiety; not joining peers in after-school activities or school trips; feelings of disappointment and demoralisation; and leads to them wanting to avoid school all together. Research has also highlighted the impact that RTTs are having on parents. Mental and physical health problems including loss of sleep, significant stress, difficulties at work and financial impacts have been noted as impacts that RTTs can have on parents (Brennan & Brown, 2019; Weaver, 2023; Mahon, 2022).

On the other hand, RTTs have been found in other research to be a supportive intervention. Sproston, Sedgewick and Crane (2017) interviewed young girls with Autism and found that

reduced timetables reduced the demands on the social aspects of school, making it easier for them to cope. Although it is worth noting that other young girls being interviewed as part of this research found that it was unhelpful and did not work for them. Finning et al (2018) held a focus group with 16 educational professionals across three secondary schools in England in their research into YP with attendance difficulties. They found that RTTs were suggested by participants as a helpful strategy of support for YP who find it difficult to attend school. However, there was no attempt to collect the voice of the YP in this study to ask them whether they found it helpful or not. Chian (2022) did manage to collect some level of pupil voice in their research looking into Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA [a term referring to difficulties attending school due to emotional challenges such as anxiety]). They interviewed seven YP who were secondary school aged. Two of these YP expressed that a RTT, referred to by them as a 'flexible timetable', was helpful as it allowed them to leave school when they were anxious. It was unclear whether the 'flexible timetable' they referred to was set up like a RTT as it appeared their timetable was less structured than a RTT, but had similar principles, nonetheless. Weaver (2023) found that in a survey completed by 13 LAs in Wales, 'EBSA' was selected by participants as a reason for placing a YP on a RTT as many times as 'at risk of exclusion', however there is no other research exploring the link between RTTs and EBSA.

### **2.3.1 Reintegration in education**

Understanding the research around reintegration is important when thinking about RTTs, as one of their main features is that they are short-term, meaning the YP must be reintegrated back to fulltime education as a point of priority once on the RTT. RTTs could also be a supportive part of a reintegration package for YP who are out of school (DfE, 2022c). Some LAs mention the use of RTTs as a helpful strategy when supporting reintegration back to fulltime education for YP who are finding it difficult to attend school due to anxiety (for example, Buckinghamshire Council, 2024), which is particularly heightened after the COVID-19 pandemic.

YP can be out of education for long periods of time for many reasons, including health issues, poor attendance, being at risk of disengagement, or due to exclusion (Rogers, 2016). In recent years, the number of YP out of school has risen following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to school closures, which have had long-lasting impacts on YP's learning and

wellbeing (Blanden et al, 2021). Whilst some COVID-19 related illnesses would have played a part in absences, psychological and contextual factors have also been found to influence the number of YP absent from school following the pandemic (Children's Commissioner, 2022). Disregarding absences due to COVID-19 illness, 12% of YP were persistently absent from school during the 2021/2022 academic year, compared to pre-pandemic persistent absence rate of 10.8% (DfE, 2022d).

Data indicates that the mental health of YP and parents deteriorated during the pandemic (Ashikkali, Carroll & Johnson 2020; Creswell et al, 2021; Panda et al, 2021). Reduced opportunities to socially interact with peers during school closures is one reason given by YP for increased feelings of sadness and loneliness during lockdown; these YP were pleased to return to school and well-being generally increased after their return (Manyukhina, 2021). However, some YP were calmer and happier out of school and their anxiety and stress levels increased upon returning to school (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021). Previous school challenges being exacerbated, COVID-specific anxiety, difficulties adapting to new rules and routines, and concerns about missed learning and catch-up, have been identified as risk factors of non-attendance following the pandemic (McDonald, Lester, & Michelson, 2023).

The rise of non-attendance is becoming widely researched, often using the term Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), to describe difficulties attending school due to emotional challenges such as anxiety. Much of this research has focused on identification and intervention to promote and achieve a rapid return to school through reintegration to reduce the chance of negative development and outcomes (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). It has been argued that a quick rate of reintegration is in the best interest of YP (Arnold et al, 2009). However, achieving this can be difficult as rates of failure are high, leading to further disengagement (Parsons and Howlett, 2000). One area of focus within the research around reintegration is the use of person-centred approaches such as the PATH approach (Bristow, 2013), to address issues of power imbalance between YP and staff, in which YP and their parents can be involved in planning and decision making (Rogers, 2016). Corcoran, Bond and Knox (2022) used a case study design to explore supportive factors of reintegration for two YP who successfully reintegrated back to school after struggling with anxiety and school attendance post-pandemic. This research suggests that successful factors of reintegration

included support focusing on targeting underlying needs; effective communication between stakeholders; shared understanding of YP's needs facilitated by gathering pupil views and daily dialogue between home and school as part of planning and reviewing support.

## **2.4 Why are exclusions so prevalent in England?: Historical, political and systemic factors**

Whilst the reason for exclusions is likely to be a complex issue with several contributing factors, some research has attempted to link various historical, political and systemic factors to the explanation. Whilst there is not enough scope to cover all of these factors in this report, this part of the literature review will outline some of the factors mentioned within the literature.

### **2.4.1 Importance of student-teacher relationships**

Low-excluding Scotland have shifted their attitudes towards behaviour in recent years which has seen their approach move towards 'better relationships' (Scottish Government, 2017). Effective student-teacher relationships offer emotional support and help with learning for all YP but is particularly important for YP who are disengaging from learning (Rogers, 2016). Positive relationships which are built on YP feeling fairly treated and feeling safe, respected, and understood can contribute to positive engagement (Ross, 2009). Respect is a critical feature of student-teacher relationships, those who disengage from education often believe their teachers lack respect for them, look down on them or treat them like babies (Lloyd-Jones et al, 2010; Duffy & Elwood, 2013). There is much research in support of positive relationships as a factor for reducing exclusions. In a study across four secondary schools, Dean and Gibbs (2023) found that positive student-teacher relationships create an environment where teachers seek to understand why behaviour is occurring rather than immediately using punishment, behaviours are more respectful and in turn the need for disciplinary measures such as exclusion are reduced. However, to build student-teacher relationships, teachers feel that they need high levels of emotional investment, sometimes feeling they did not have the right skills, necessary emotional energy, or enough support to initiate and maintain these relationships (Fitzsimmons, Trigg, & Premkumar, 2021).

This relationship focused approach differs from England's approach which prioritises strict behaviour policies (DfE, 2012). Researchers have critiqued England's approach to dealing with

behaviour, claiming it focuses on “control” and “discipline” including “detention”, “punishment” and “reasonable force” and was “stripped bare” of reference to building relationships and the social and emotional aspects of learning (Garner, 2012 p. 333). This can be seen in the rise of ‘zero tolerance’ behaviour policies in England which involves strict consequences for behaviours regardless of severity, context or mitigating circumstances (Partridge, 2018). This is likely to impact YP’s innate need to experience a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which research has shown as an important factor within school settings (Bonnell et al, 2019; Korpershoek et al, 2020). Research on the more general benefits of positive student-teacher relationships span back decades. Erikson (1987) describes how students must feel safe and develop trusting relationships with others in order to be successful in school. Instead, by prioritising strict behaviour policies centred around punishment over relationships, YP are left feeling ostracised. Where being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions such as happiness and calmness, being rejected or feeling ignored leads to negative feelings such as anxiety and depression (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Professor Kipling D. Williams has shown that the pain felt through being socially ostracised has been shown to be deeper and last longer than that of a physical injury (Neubert, 2011; Williams & Nida, 2011). In turn, the manifestation of behaviour that roots itself in the consequences and emotional impacts of these behaviour policies leads to exclusion.

#### **2.4.2 Hierarchy and power imbalances**

Power and control are viewed as a “given” and “precursor of learning” in school institutes (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p. 147). Hierarchy has been seen as a framework that impacts the way in which YP interpret events and interactions within the schooling system. Pomeroy (1999) interviewed 33 Year 10 and 11 students over 19 schools, all YP in this research had been excluded from school. They found that these YP perceived themselves as being the lowest position in the hierarchy, while teachers were at the top, with ‘better behaved’ or ‘more able’ students occupying the middle position. This reflected a power imbalance, which held some significance for the YP. YP reported teacher behaviour that were “found to be antagonistic and humiliating included shouting, telling students to ‘shut up’, responding sarcastically, putting young people down and name-calling” (p. 469). These actions were often perceived to communicate a message to the students that they are not valued as students and, often, that they were not liked as individuals. The research adds that these YP viewed themselves

as being treated as children, with a lack of autonomy, responsibility, and respect. The researchers claim that “in such conditions, student’s capacity to practice mature, responsible, adult-like interaction is not explored” (p. 478). Ibrahim and Zaatari (2020) suggests that healthy relationships between teachers and students must include shared power, where YP can make their own decisions and have their voices heard. Despite this, they found that power can be misused by teachers who use punishment to control students.

### **2.4.3 Accountability and competition**

In England, ‘school league tables’ summarising average performances by pupils in secondary school have been published annually since 1992. Shortly after in 1993, the Education Act introduced marketisation into education, a system that promotes competition (Apple, 2004), and the league tables therefore fell into encouraging that competition (Bartlett & Burton (2012). These tables now show pupil’s General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results and serve as a school accountability strategy by the Government as well data informing the Ofsted inspections. The Government’s headline measure of school attainment is how many pupils are achieving five or more GCSEs at grade 9-5 (Lecki & Goldstein, 2017). Adnett and Davies (2003) argue that competition between schools can have some small positive effects on school performance in situations where competition is balanced with co-operation between schools. However, they go on to suggest that league tables and market-based reforms serve to increase competition and ignore the importance of co-operation between schools. Zancajo and Bonal (2022) support this, arguing that market-reforms foster school segregation.

Many researchers have placed blame on the culture of competition and accountability in schools for high levels of exclusion, both official and unofficial. In the CCO’s (2013) report, they mention evidence of YP being removed from school for the duration of Ofsted inspections and conclude that schools may be excluding pupils that are unlikely to contribute to the school’s results. In Stirling’s research (1992), headteachers stated that YP most likely to be excluded, either officially or unofficially, were YP presenting with challenging behaviour or YP who were not attending. This was a result of concerns for schools that these YP would interfere with the school’s examination results, leading to parents of high achievers being discouraged to apply for a place at their school. Bagley

(2022, p.131) states “in essence... the least ‘marketable’ children are pushed out and marginalised”. As well as the pressure to provide good GCSE grades, schools are under pressure to reduce their numbers of exclusions. Ofsted see levels of formal exclusions as a cause for concern (CCO, 2013). By setting targets around reducing exclusions, schools are encouraged to “mask various practices, make them less visible” (Power & Taylor, 2020, p. 14). Therefore, the pressure to provide results coupled with the pressure to reduce exclusion rates could be fuelling the use of unofficial exclusions. This idea was supported by Weaver (2023), who looked into the use of RTTs in Wales. Interviewing seven professionals involved in supporting YP on RTTs, including teachers and LA practitioners, they found that participants shared the view that schools may opt for a RTT to avoid having a high number of exclusions on their records.

Power and Taylor (2020) argue that whilst government policies are putting pressure on schools, they are not providing adequate resources to support them in meeting these pressures. They interviewed 12 secondary schools in Wales in an attempt to explore unofficial exclusions. All 12 of the secondary schools they spoke to said that resourcing was a current major issue for them. The CCO (2013) report supports this view, highlighting that budgets have been reduced leaving schools with less support from services such as EPs. They share the concern that schools may be more likely to exclude YP without this support.

## **2.5 Risk factors and consequences of exclusion**

YP who are excluded from school are amongst the most vulnerable YP in our society, both before and after they are excluded, with some factors being identified as both risk factors and consequences (Weale, 2017). Strand and Fletcher (2014) examined data from the National Pupil Database, a database that provides comprehensive data on all students in the education system, as well as census data to track the journeys of over 500,000 students in England from the beginning of secondary school to the end of their compulsory education (11 years old to 16 years old). They found that risk factors included low educational attainment, particularly in English; poor attendance at the beginning of Secondary School; LAC; YP identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; being of Black Caribbean and Mixed White & Black Caribbean ethnicity; being from a low socio-economic background, being male; and having SEND. Daniels et al., (2003) conducted a smaller study, tracking 193 excluded YP from

Year 9 to Year 11 (13 years old to 16 years old). Risk factors highlighted by them included involvement in offending and drug use.

Briggs (2010) suggests that these risk factors may not apply to some YP who experience unofficial exclusions. They conducted interviews with a small sample of 20 YP from inner-city urban schools who had been unofficially excluded from school and found that “many of these YP do not fit the profile of ‘excluded’ YP” (p. 13), with few having difficulties at home, nor being from disadvantaged families or areas, nor being criminally active. These findings would suggest that unofficial exclusions are impacting a wider range of YP who may not be known to other services such as YOTs, Educational Psychologists and Social Services, leaving these YP even more vulnerable and the understanding of unofficial exclusions even more crucial.

Findings from research into the consequences of school exclusions is severely problematic. Berridge et al., (2001) conducted a retrospective research project by examining data on 343 YP who had been excluded from school between 1988 and 1998 across six LAs, 72 of these YP had been unofficially excluded. They also conducted interviews with 28 of the YP from the data sample. They concluded that “permanent exclusion tended to trigger a complex chain of events which served to loosen the young person’s affiliation and commitment to a conventional way of life” (p. v); this was characterised by the loss of structure, change in identity; change in family relationships; decrease in contact with pro-social peers and adults; new associations with similar YP and an increased likelihood to police surveillance. They highlighted consequences for these YP including involvement in crime and lack of employment, and in cases where YP did secure jobs these tend to be short-term and poorly paid. Power and Taylor (2020) suggest that “it is possible to claim that the consequences of being officially excluded from school are so damaging that anything that a school can do to avoid this is worthwhile”. However, this research contests this by including YP who had been unofficially excluded in their sample.

## **2.6 Theoretical underpinnings**

The process of RTTs and the YP involved with them are situated in complex systems, which includes involvement from government, local authority, schools, teachers, families, peers and more. Therefore, this research utilises several psychological theories that recognise the

importance of interactions within systems, to understand the context and experiences of RTTs. This way of thinking is also in line with the social constructionist epistemological position of the research.

### **2.6.1 Ecological systems theory**

In its earliest form, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) proposed that an individual's development is a result of the influences of the environmental systems they are involved in. Bronfenbrenner names these systems 'microsystem', 'mesosystem', 'exosystem', and 'macrosystem':

The 'microsystem' wraps around the individual at the centre, who is surrounded and impacted by factors in their immediate setting, such as teachers in school.

The 'mesosystem' focuses on the connections between the factors within the microsystem. For example, interactions between teachers in school and parents.

The 'exosystem' highlights factors not actively involved with the individual but may indirectly affect them. For example, external professionals within the LA who are making decisions about the YP on various panels.

Finally, the outer layer is the 'macrosystem' which encompasses the wider cultural and political belief system, such as local and government policy and attitudes around behaviour or RTTs.

The model was then revised and adapted to emphasise proximal processes, named the 'Process-Person-Context-Time' model ([PPCT] Bronfenbrenner, 2005), outlined in figure two. This model has been found useful when exploring systems impacting on vulnerable YP (Burns, Warmbold-Brann & Zaslofsky, 2015). Weaver (2023) used the PPCT model as a lens in her research looking into RTTs in Wales. She found that the use of the model helped to explore the layers involved in the process and operationalisation of RTTs as well as areas of opportunity to consider for further development of the RTT process. Ecological systems theory is also in line with the social constructionism epistemological position which guided the research.

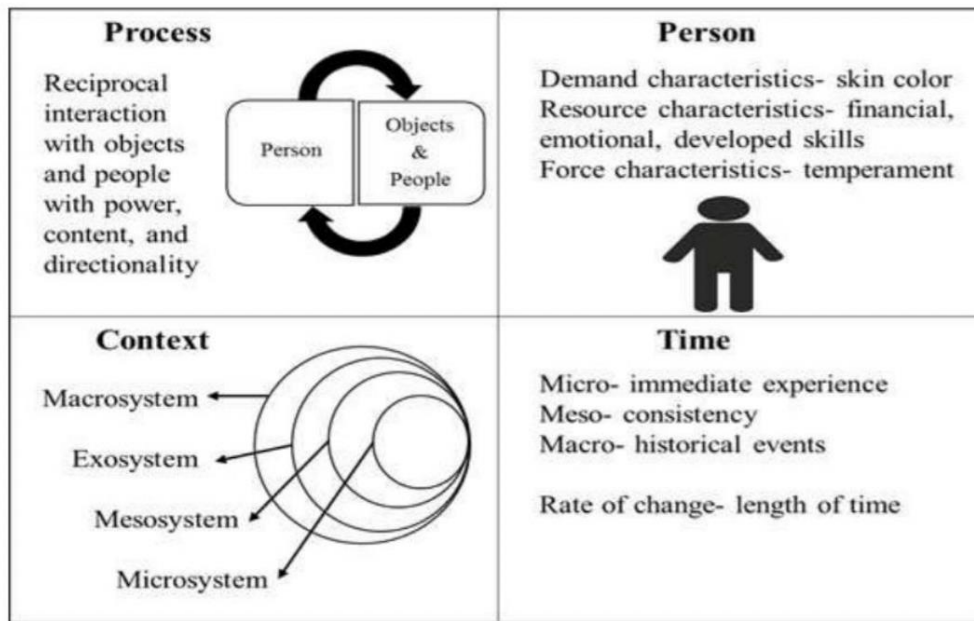


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Trummer, 2017)

### 2.6.2 Identity, self-concept and labelling

Tajfel and Turner (1979) first coined the term social identity theory by explaining that a person's sense of who they are, and a portion of their self-concept, is based on their group memberships. Individuals are likely to have positive feelings towards members in their group, with whom they identify with, and negative inclination to those that they do not identify with. They claimed that social groups give people a sense of belonging, purpose, self-worth and identity; social groups are an important source of pride and self-concept. Thus, self-concept is formed through experience with, and interpretations of, a person's environment (Shavelson and Bolus 1982). Burr (2015), adds to this conversation, claiming that discursive positions during social interactions play a key role in the creation of identities for ourselves and our circumstances. This suggests that our self-identity can change continually to reflect the conversations and interactions that we experience with others. Therefore, it is important to consider the language and labels used to and around YP throughout their school experiences.

Research has found that students applied labels used to describe them to their identity and use these labels to explain their differences from others (Caslin, 2019). This suggests that YP value the views that others have of them and can take on these labels, allowing the labels to impact their self-identity and self-concept. Whilst researchers claim that our self-identity is

changing continually alongside our interactions (Burr, 2015), labels that locate difficulties within the YP can create a feeling that their identity and the characteristic used to label them is unchangeable (O'Reilly, 2007). O'Reilly (2007) gives the example of labelling a child as 'naughty'. They highlight the importance of labelling the action rather than the YP, to separate the label from the individual and make change possible. It is important to note that labelling of YP by teachers does not always have to be explicit but lies on a continuum from informal forms of labelling and categorising, that are often implicit, and are used day-to-day within the classroom, to formal processes such as assessment (Riddick, 2012). Considering the ways that behaviour and wider need is conceptualised and the language used around this is therefore of great importance.

There have been concerns shared within the literature around the impacts that exclusionary measures in schools have on YP in terms of labels used. Norwich (2008) suggests that PRUs and alternative educational provisions isolate YP from their community and contribute to negative labelling assigned to the YP. Gilmore (2013) found that students in an in-school unit had taken on labels based on names that they were called by others. Their findings also highlighted that these YP were treated differently after being in the in-school unit and felt that staff were more likely to punish them when they returned to the classroom. One explanation for this may be that by labelling a YP, they take on the characteristic assigned to the label and the label becomes the pillar for shared understanding about the YP, with no explanation of the circumstances surrounding the child (Hjörne and Säljö 2012). This raises questions around the language used to describe reasons for YP being put on RTTs, when it is linked to behaviour.

### **2.6.3 Self-determination theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation, emotion and development which suggests that intrinsic motivation and overall wellness are fostered through competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A sense of competence evolves through positive feelings about an activity, i.e., YP feeling that they have mastered a new concept. A sense of autonomy stems from an individual feeling a sense of choice and opportunity for self-direction. Lastly, a sense of relatedness is fostered through a sense of secure relationships and attachments.

Research has suggested that students will be effectively engaged in their learning when they feel a sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness within their learning environment (Park et al, 2012). Ryan and Deci (2009) emphasise the crucial role that teachers play in fostering a classroom environment that supports these three psychological needs. Research has suggested that positive student-teacher relationships is key within this process (Pianta et al, 2012), and that this can be supportive for re-engaging students in their return to school (Nicholson & Putwain, 2016). Therefore, this theory was considered throughout the research as RTTs aim re-engage YP back to fulltime education.

## **2.7 Relevance for EP practice**

EPs have a significant role in helping schools to address behaviour and other systemic issues, using psychological paradigms and models to consult, advise, train and review behaviour policies across all systemic levels (Hart, 2010). Research has found that EPs have a significant role in the process of unofficial exclusions. Advice from Estyn (2018) outline examples of the practice of managed moves in Wales, they state that less effective practice involves the YP not being known to an EP. Bagley and Hallam (2017) interviewed a small sample of 16 school staff and LA staff to explore the role of EPs in facilitating managed moves. They discuss that EPs could have a role in ensuring the processes around unofficial exclusions are meeting the needs of YP, act in a preventative way to avoid unofficial exclusions being required, elicit YP's views, and challenge negative narratives around YP and systemic issues. EPs could also have a significant role in helping schools to uncover and understand underlying needs that may be tarnished as YP having 'behaviour difficulties', therefore working in a preventative way to avoid both official and unofficial exclusions.

Weaver's (2023) research into the use of RTTs in Wales outlines several areas of relevance for EPs in the RTT process. She found that EPs are often not involved in the process of a RTT, and where they are the situation feels beyond repair. Weaver goes on to suggest that EPs could offer unique insights and encourage curiosity at panels and multi-agency groups discussing and making decisions around RTTs, start conversations about and deliver training opportunities for school staff supporting YP, and act as a 'critical friend' to schools by eliciting positive change.

## **2.8 The current study: Rationale and research questions**

The prevalence of RTTs is increasing yet remain unmonitored, leaving schools unaccountable for their use. There is little guidance or available data around RTTs, and whilst they should be used for YP with medical and emotional needs, they appear to be in other ways such as an approach used for behaviour or methods to avoid exclusion (Timpson, 2019). Research done in Wales raises concerns, suggesting that placing a YP on a RTT can have damaging consequences including impacts on education and mental health (Brennan & Brown, 2019). RTTs have also been linked to other vulnerable groups of YP, including those with SEND, involved in Youth Justice Systems, and experiencing mental health needs and EBSA (Birchley & Stewart, 2009; Hayes & Simpson, 2021; Brennan & Browne, 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021; Contact a Family, 2013 ; Chian, 2022).

Despite these concerns, there has been very little research focusing on RTTs and no research conducted in England that offers insights into how RTTs are being operationalised and why schools are using them. Additionally, there is a lack of literature that prioritises the voices and views of the YP being placed on them. We must build a more robust evidence base on the use of RTTs, to learn about their impact. This research will take an exploratory approach into the use of RTTs from the perspective of YP and professionals involved in supporting them, aiming to answer the research questions below:

1. How and why are RTTs being operationalised in schools?
2. What are professionals' experiences of supporting YP on RTTs?
3. What are the experiences of YP who have been placed on RTTs?

## Chapter Three: Methodology

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### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and epistemological positioning of the research. It outlines the research design, procedure and data analysis, providing rational for the approaches selected. Ethical considerations pertinent to this research are also discussed.

The method aimed to answer three research questions:

1. How and why are RTTs being operationalised in schools?
2. What are professionals' experiences of supporting YP on RTTs?
3. What are the experiences of YP who have been placed on RTTs?

### 3.2 Ontological and epistemological position

Bold (2011) suggests a need for researchers to be transparent in stating their values and beliefs, as well as acknowledging the influence that this has on their research, including ontology (how we view reality) and epistemology (how we perceive knowledge to be created). Ontology can be seen on a scale between relativist (multiple truths created by people's differing perspectives based on their own experience and interpretations) and realist (essential truths known to the world) (Robson, 2002). I would place myself towards the relativist end of the scale, as I believe that the world is socially constructed and view individuals as existing in a multi-layered system, reflecting on the impact of interactions between individuals and contexts. This research explores multiple experiences of RTTs, in which different perceptions are at play. The research takes an exploratory stance, using interviews and activities which aimed to allow participants to share their views and experiences from their own perspective, fitting with a relativist ontology. It is important to acknowledge that 'reduced timetables' as a phenomenon are considered to exist, but that as a concept they will be experienced and interpreted in different ways by different people.

Mertens, (2010) suggests that researchers should identify the worldview that mostly aligns with their own to guide their thinking throughout the research. There are four major worldviews within research; postpositivism, constructivism, pragmatism and transformative.

This research was guided by a social constructionism epistemological position, fitting with a constructivism worldview, which understands that meaning is constructed through experiences and interactions (Burr, 2015), as the research explores YP's experience of being on a RTT, as well as how school staff and LA staff have experienced them being operationalised. A social constructionist approach allowed me to take an unassuming stance, embracing that each person's experience is unique and has different interpretations at play.

### 3.3 Research Context

The research took place in one LA in the South East of England. This LA have set up a fair access panel, as required by government guidance (DfE, 2021), in an attempt to reduce the number of YP being excluded, using an AP or managed move to avoid exclusion. The LA also collate data on RTTs to discuss at internal meetings. As part of my role as a TEP, I have been involved in these discussions and have access to the dataset. With permission from the LA staff member who oversees the data, in an attempt to provide context around RTTs within the LA I have collated some of the data to be presented as descriptive statistics, which can be seen in the tables below. As of May 2024, of around 3,500 secondary school students, 230 were on RTTs.

| School years | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | Total |
|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Number of YP | 24 | 30 | 59 | 57 | 60 | 230   |

*Table 2: The number of YP on RTTs in secondary schools*

| Length of RTT | Under 3 months | 3months-6months | 6months-1year | 1year-2years | Over 2 years |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Number of YP  | 30             | 90              | 87            | 19           | 4            |

*Table 3: Length of time that RTTs have been in place*

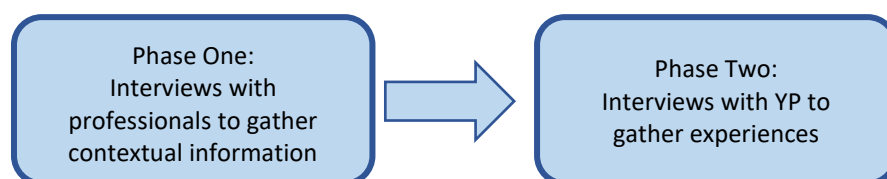
| Number of hours of education per week | 1-4.5 | 5-10.5 | 11-15.5 | 16-20.5 | 21-25.5 | 26-30.5 | 31+ |
|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| Number of YP                          | 5     | 67     | 34      | 91      | 27      | 3       | 3   |

*Table 4: Number of hours of education per week.*

### 3.4 Research Design

Qualitative research has the potential to provide complex, rich and detailed data (Willig, 2013). It produces opportunities for the researcher to share others' perceptions whilst exploring how people create meaning in their daily lives (Berg, 2001), in line with the constructionist worldview that is guiding this research. The purpose of this research was to explore YP's experiences of being on reduced timetables, as well as professional's experiences of operationalising them. Whilst quantitative data such as surveys could capture some of this information, it was felt that qualitative approaches would favour a more detailed exploration, allowing flexibility (Weller, 2012) and in turn promoting the voice of YP and professionals.

The research was conducted in one LA that I was on placement with as part of my EP training, as this LA were interested in the use of RTTs within their schools which gave me scope for the research. A two-phase qualitative design was utilised for the project, as demonstrated in figure two; the first phase collecting contextual information from professionals, and the second phase exploring the experiences of YP. This methodology was chosen as little is known about the use of RTTs, and therefore it was felt that understanding the context behind the operationalisation within the LA would be important to make sense of the experiences shared by YP before speaking with them in phase two. Sensitivity to context is suggested as a principle of good qualitative methodology (Yardley, 2000). Gathering contextual information first also helped in the designing of the interview schedule for phase two as it provided me with knowledge around the RTT process that I could use as prompt questions. Having said this, to ensure that interviews in phase one did not influence the data gathered during interviews with YP (e.g., professionals' opinions), I utilised my EP training to keep the interviews YP-led to ensure that the discussion came from the YP, rather than from the information that was given from the professionals. The two phases were also presented separately within the results chapter to ensure the voices of the YP were represented clearly and were not concealed by the views of professionals.



*Figure 2: Phases to research design*

Phase one included both LA staff and school staff as these professionals were all viewed as equal experts that had experience in supporting YP on RTTs. It was therefore felt that including both groups could provide contextual information about RTTs from different perspectives, widening the context lens. Grouping these two groups of professionals together into one phase also allowed me to explore and discuss any tensions across layers of the system during analysis.

### 3.4.1 Ecological systems approach

In line with Bronfenbrenner's work, it felt important to access insights from participants within various layers of the system. Interviewing YP would allow for an exploration into the experiences of the person in the centre of the RTT process. Interviewing teachers would allow an exploration of perspectives within the microsystem, and external professionals within the exosystem whilst gathering contextual information. Interviews with external professionals also gave insight into the process of writing local guidance around RTTs and wider attitudes towards behaviour and RTTs. The involvement of parents was a question included in the interviews with professionals, to give a sense of the interactions between schools and parents within the RTT process. The breadth of these perspective in turn explores the reciprocal interactions within the process, which is prioritised within the PPCT model (Trummer, 2017).

The PPCT model has received some criticism for causing "conceptual confusion and inadequate testing of the theory" (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 1). However, this research is not aiming to test a theory, but rather take an exploratory stance towards the research questions. To minimise conceptual confusion, I will link aspects of the method design to elements of the PPCT model to clearly show conceptualisation, shown below:

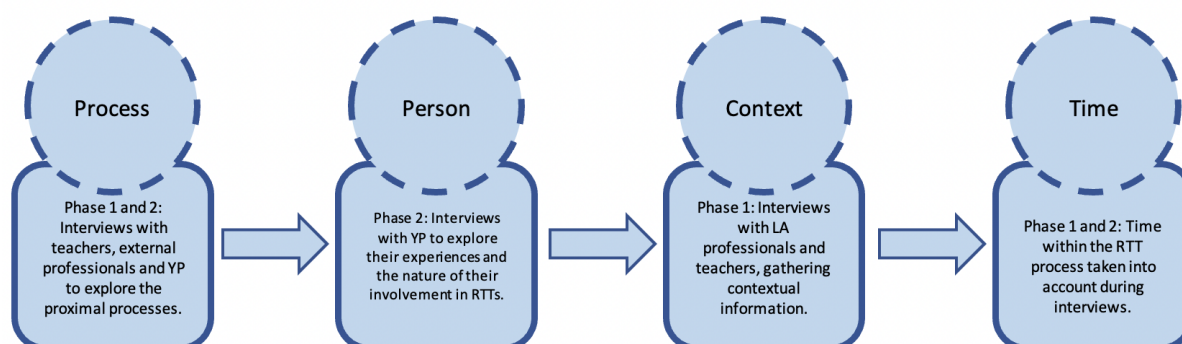


Figure 3: PPCT's application to the research design

### **3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Honouring the constructionist approach guiding this research, interviews needed to be flexible allowing adaptations to be made depending on how the professionals and YP were making sense of topics covered in the interviews, hence the decision to use semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have predetermined questions and allow for wording to be changed and explanations given, as well as the order modified based on what seems most appropriate for the participant (Robson, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews encourage flow within conversation and allow participants to voice what is important to them (McCluskey, Riddell & Weedon, 2015), whilst allowing for probing of areas of interest as interviews unfold, allowing discussions to be guided towards addressing the research questions (Robinson, 2014). This would allow me to honour the experiences and perceptions that both YP and professionals were sharing with me, whilst keeping the conversation focused on the aims of the research.

### **3.4.3 Phase One: Interviews with Professionals**

Kallio et al.'s (2016) suggest that when designing an interview schedule to explore an area that has "sparse or fragmented knowledge in the literature", such as RTTs, empirical knowledge could be used to "complement and deepen the theoretical background" (p. 11). Therefore, when designing the interview schedule I used knowledge gained from carrying out a literature review, alongside regular conversations with the LA officer who wrote guidance on reduced timetables and observations from discussions around reduced timetables at panel meetings as part of my role as a TEP on placement to draft questions. I mostly used questions that encouraged descriptive answers by starting questions with words such as what, who and how. I pre-designed follow-up questions to increase consistency across interviews but allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions based on the participant's answers. As the participant sample was limited, all participants were needed in the project to ensure a varied perspective and therefore a pilot study was not conducted. The interview schedule was instead discussed with the LA officer who wrote guidance on reduced timetables and adaptations were made following these discussions, such as adding questions around the review process.

The initial open-ended question: 'can you tell me about your role within the LA?' was a chance for participants to settle into the conversation, whilst giving me insight into the professionals who were sharing their experiences. The interview schedule (appendix A) started with themes around the wider context of behaviour and exclusions as this was thought to be important due to RTTs being placed within this context in the current literature. Themes then covered what a reduced timetable is; the process of placing a YP on a RTT, how that is reviewed, and who is involved; the types of YP on RTTs; professionals opinions of RTTs; and barriers and challenges around RTTs. At the end of the interview, professionals were given the opportunity to share anything important that they feel had been missed during the interview. The schedule was structured using 10 main questions, with prompts underneath. This encouraged the conversation to be led by professionals, whilst allowing me to steer the conversation to answer research questions where necessary.

#### **3.4.4 Phase Two: Interviews with YP**

Interviews with YP involved activities to compliment some topics to take the pressure off of a one-to-one conversation and the constraints of answering predetermined questions, instead encouraging YP to express their views in a way that gained rich data whilst building rapport (Conolly, 2008). This was deemed appropriate due to the possible vulnerability of students placed on RTTs. The Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) and the life grid approach were the selected activities for this study. is These activities were optional and YP could choose not to take part in them. For those who did not want to take part, some of the prompting questions were asked to elicit discussion.

##### **3.4.4.1 The life grid approach**

The life grid approach was used to sensitively explore key events in the YP's pasts to get an idea of the challenges and circumstances that had led up to their situations at the time of the interviews. The approach was chosen as it can create a relaxed atmosphere to support potentially vulnerable YP in this study to discuss sensitive issues and support YP to structure their thinking whilst telling their complex stories (Wilson et al, 2007; O'Riordan, 2011). Life grids can be complex, and so in this research the simplified approach taken by O'Riordan (2011) was used, reducing the number of rows to 'pre-school', 'primary school', 'secondary school' and 'the future', and the number of columns to 'home', 'school', 'other'. One

challenge in using life grids is that reflections can be limited (Bell, 2005). To mitigate the risk of producing linear conversations, open questions such as ‘what is a time that stands out to you?’ were used, rather than asking YP to start at the earliest life stage on the grid. A template of the life grid used in this study can be seen in appendix B, prompting questions can be seen within the topic guide.

#### **3.4.4.2 The Grid Elaboration Method (GEM)**

To compliment the interview, another visual approach was used to explore YP’s thoughts and feelings about RTTs. The GEM (Joffe & Elsey, 2014) approach was chosen because it is a simple visual tool which offers a structure to capturing experiences, focusing on the most important aspects of the YP’s thoughts and feelings. A blank grid made up of 4 boxes was presented to the YP. They were asked to provide 4 words or phrases that they associate with the question “what comes to mind when I say reduced timetables?”. Each answer was entered into a box, visually displaying their experience, as shown in appendix C. The YP were then asked to elaborate on each association that they had made, giving them the opportunity to build on their association and explore their experience deeper.

#### **3.4.4.3 Developing the Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule (appendix D) focused on 2 main topics: experiences of school journey and life events outside of school, and experiences of being on a RTT. These topics were chosen in line with the research questions and kept broad to allow YP to lead the conversation. The first topic explored was experiences of school journey and life events out of school. For this, the life grid activity was used, alongside prompting questions to encourage discussion. For the topic of experiences of being on a RTT, the question “I’d like to know how you are finding being on a reduced timetable. Can you tell me a bit about your experience so far?” was asked. I then followed the YP’s lead throughout the conversation, with possible questions and prompts used in case of situations where the conversation was not developing naturally. This was important as I was aware that some of the YP may be disengaged and have negative experiences of speaking with professionals. The interview then ended with the GEM activity which acted as a summary of the main factors within the YP’s experience of RTTs. This also brought the interview towards a safe, structured, and natural ending. Much like the interview schedule in phase one, possible questions were

chosen using knowledge gained from carrying out a literature review, and observations from discussions around reduced timetables at panel meetings as part of my role as a trainee EP on placement. A pilot of the topic guide was not carried out. Whilst this would have given the YP an opportunity to feedback on questions asked, the aim of the interviews with YP was to allow each conversation to develop naturally meaning each conversation and questions asked within was different.

The interview started with an open question, 'could you start by telling me a bit about yourself?'. This allowed the YP to answer in a way that they felt most comfortable, easing them into the discussion. The interviews were closed with one last open question, 'is there anything else that you would like to add to our discussion?'. This gave YP an opportunity to voice anything that was important to them, that they hadn't had the opportunity to voice during discussions.

### **3.5 Research procedure: Phase one**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit eight participants who work within schools and various teams within the Local Authority. All of these professionals had knowledge and experience of working with YP on RTTs and how these timetables are operationalised. The breadth of job roles allowed for a rich and holistic perspective to be collected. Details of participant are included in table five.

Professionals from the LA and secondary schools who are involved in a panel meeting in which data around reduced timetables is collected and reviewed were approached to take part in this study. Professionals identified were given an information sheet (see appendix E) which explained the project including the purpose of the research and what their role in the project would be. They then had the opportunity to opt-in to the study by emailing me. Professionals had an opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form (see appendix F) and setting up a date and time for the interview to take place.

| Name  | Job role/Team                                                |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chris | Access to Education, Employment and Training Service (AEETS) |
| Sue   | Youth Offending Team (YOT)                                   |
| Emma  | YOT                                                          |
| Amy   | Virtual School Team (VST)                                    |
| Nick  | Deputy Head Teacher                                          |
| Mike  | Director of Pastoral and Academic Standards                  |
| Leah  | Vice Principal                                               |
| Chloe | Principal of AP                                              |

*Table 5: Phase one participant details*

### **3.5.1 Interviews with professionals**

Professionals were given the choice to take part in their interview either face to face or online. Online interviews have been coined as being “more convenient for both parties” (Kazmer, Michelle & Xie, 2008, p. 265) and can therefore be appealing for professionals who are negotiating a busy schedule. Seven professionals involved in this research opted to have their interviews via MS Teams, with one opting for a face-to-face interview. During online interviews, the participants and I kept our cameras on to support non-verbal communication cues (Sullivan, 2012, p. 56). Interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. At the beginning of the interviews, I read through the most important information on the consent form. This included reminding participants of their right to withdraw, that the interviews would be recorded, and that identifying information would be removed. I asked participants to confirm once again whether they were happy to take part in the interview, before starting the recording and the interview. All interviews ended with a debriefing, reminding participants that they would be sent their transcript to read and have two weeks to request edits or request their interview be removed from the research. The debrief also gave participants to ask any questions or make any comments about the process. Two of the participants commented that they had enjoyed the interview.

### **3.6 Research procedure: Phase two**

Recruitment of YP was achieved through schools, where school staff acted as gatekeepers. This was seen as appropriate due to the possibility that these YP could be vulnerable. Secondary school age was chosen as data accessed through LA records showed that the majority of RTTs are being used in secondary schools. YP in years eight-ten were selected as it was not seen as appropriate to disturb YP in year 11 who would be going through exams, and YP in year seven would still be settling in and would not be able to provide a detailed experience of secondary school. All secondary schools within the LA were given an information sheet (see appendix G) which explained the project and what their role would be in recruiting YP. Schools were asked to opt-in by contacting me if they were happy for me to speak with YP in their school.

Four schools opted in to allow me to speak with their YP. Three of these schools were mainstream, and one was an AP. Once schools had opted in, I asked them to email appropriate parents with an information sheet (see appendix H). These were parents of YP who were currently on a RTT, or parents of those who had reintegrated back into fulltime education within the past three months. Parents were given the option to contact me with any questions before consenting. Once schools had consented, the gatekeeper within the school had a conversation with the YP, providing them with information about the project and asking if they were happy to meet with me. If the YP agreed, a meeting was set up for the interview and I gave them further information and asked for consent at the beginning of the meeting (further details around this are given in the next section). Seven YP in years eight-ten were recruited, five of these YP were currently on a RTT, and two of them had recently reintegrated back to fulltime education. Information about these participants can be seen in table six.

| Name    | School Year | Setting    | Reason for RTT                     |
|---------|-------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| Bonnie  | Year 9      | Mainstream | EBSA                               |
| Jack    | Year 9      | Mainstream | EBSA                               |
| Lilly   | Year 8      | Mainstream | EBSA and behaviour                 |
| Phoebe  | Year 10     | Mainstream | EBSA and behaviour                 |
| Susan   | Year 10     | Mainstream | EBSA                               |
| Amy     | Year 8      | AP         | Alternative Provision (AP) policy* |
| Frankie | Year 10     | AP         | AP policy*                         |

*Table 6: Phase two participant details*

\*The AP school included in this research had a policy in place in which all YP within the provision would be placed on RTTs.

### **3.6.1 Interviews with the young people**

Six of the interviews with YP took place within schools, and one interview took place at the YP's home, as they were not currently attending school. This interview was set up through direct contact with the parent. All interviews took place in a quiet room to minimise distraction, examples are meeting rooms or empty classrooms. Interviews lasted between 20-45 minutes.

At the beginning of the interviews, I introduced myself, my role as a TEP and why I was doing the research. I read through the information sheet (see appendix I) and consent form (see appendix J) with the YP, reminding them of their right to withdraw, that the interview would be recorded, and that identifying information would be removed. The YP were also reminded that they did not have to answer questions or take part in the activities, and that they could take a break or stop the interview completely by telling me verbally. Participants were given the option to agree a non-verbal cue for if they wanted to take a break. Three participants created their own cue which was to raise their hand or put their hand on the table. I asked the YP to repeat what they had taken away from what I had said to ensure they had understood. I then gave YP the opportunity to ask me any questions or share any

concerns that they had. None of the YP had anything to share at this point and all of them signed the consent form. I then asked whether the YP was happy for me to start recording. Taking time with this part of the process allowed me to build some rapport with the YP.

All YP were happy to take part in the activities. For the life grid, none of the YP chose to fill out the framework by writing. Two of the YP asked if I could fill it out as they spoke, and the others chose just to use the framework as a visual to support the discussion. All YP asked me to fill out the GEM whilst they told me their answer to the question. All interviews ended with a debriefing, reminding participants that if they wanted to remove their interview from the research they could do so by asking their parents or the school to contact me within two weeks. The debrief also gave participants to ask any questions or make any comments about the process. Four of the participants commented that it was good to have the opportunity to share their experiences.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were considered and implemented following ethical guidelines from the British Psychological Society (2014) and Health Care Professional Council (2015). Ethical approval was granted by the UCL, Institute of Education Ethics Board.

#### **3.7.1 Vulnerable participants**

Little is known about the cohort of pupils who are placed on reduced timetables, but literature review suggests that they could be vulnerable (Birchley & Stewart, 2009; Hayes & Simpson, 2021; Brennan & Browne, 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021). The YP were asked questions about their previous school experiences during the interview and life path activity, and about their experience of RTTs throughout the interview and GEM activity. It was important to acknowledge that if YP had negative experiences, this could be upsetting for them. Therefore, ethical considerations were implemented to be sensitive to this. During the interviews, activities such as the life path and GEM were used to in an attempt to reduce the demand and pressure on participants. The YP were also given the choice to not answer questions, not take part in the activities, to take a break, or stop the interview completely. I also sought to closely monitor the wellbeing of the YP throughout the interviews, offering to stop for a break

if I deem it necessary. YP were informed that if there was a safeguarding concern, the local safeguarding procedures would be followed.

### **3.7.2 Informed consent**

An information sheet was provided for all professionals interested in taking part in the study. They also had the opportunity to have an initial meeting with the researcher to ask any questions before agreeing to be a participant. All professionals were asked to sign an informed consent form which included bullet pointed information outlining exactly what they were agreeing to.

An information sheet was also provided to the YP that were identified as potential participants. When YP expressed interest in the study, their parents were given an information sheet and given the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions. Consent was gained from parents before the first meeting with their YP. Whilst it was important to get parental consent, it was crucial that YP had some agency in choosing whether to take part in the interview. YP were given the chance to ask any questions about the project before the interview began. I asked them to briefly summarise back to me what the research project is and what it would involve for them, so that I could make sure they had understood. The YP were then asked to sign a consent form, collecting informed and written consent.

### **3.7.3 Member checking**

Member checking was used in the research to reduce the chance that my own interpretations and preconceptions had an impact or misrepresented the voices of the participants (Weller, 2012). It also aimed to build rapport and trust between myself and the participants by allowing them to have some control over their own narratives. This approach has been noted to add credibility to qualitative research designs (Robson, 2002). To achieve this, I sent professionals their pseudonymised transcripts to them to give them an opportunity to ask me to edit or remove parts of their interview from the data, or withdraw their whole interview from the data, without explanation. All professionals agreed the transcripts were an accurate representation of the interview and no changes were made. Throughout interviews with YP I repeated back to the YP what I had taken from what they said, checking in that I had understood them correctly.

### **3.7.4 Pseudonymity in reporting**

All participants were given a pseudonym in the write up, with YP having the option to choose their own pseudonym. All other identifiable information such as place names and key parts of a YP's life story were modified or removed at the point of transcription. Participants were made aware of this in the information sheet as well as verbally at the beginning of interviews.

### **3.8 Data Analysis: Reflexive thematic analysis**

A reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse pupil and adult interviews. In general terms, thematic analysis is understood as a method that is exploratory in nature and aims to find patterns of shared meaning, which was the aim of this research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This differs from grounded theory which is aimed at generating a theory and thus is explanatory in nature (Birks & Mills, 2010). Thematic analysis also allows for heterogenous samples, which was important within this study which involved professionals from different job roles and experiences, and YP experiencing different educational contexts.

Broadly speaking, there are three types of thematic analysis: codebook, coding reliability and reflexive. Reflexive thematic analysis factors in the inclusion of the research's reflection and engagement, viewing research subjectivity as a resource rather than a threat to a descriptive thematic analysis (Braun et al, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2014). Within qualitative research, detachment and neutrality are impossible in relation to data collection, analysis and interpretation; reflexivity involves active recognition that the researcher's own decisions and actions impact the research (Horsburgh, 2003). Recognising this is in line with the social constructivism epistemological positioning of this study.

#### **3.8.1 Positionality and reflexivity**

Whilst acknowledging my active participation in the research through reflexive thematic analysis, I took steps to control for my interpretation impacting the data. Within the interviews, whilst I asked general questions to make sure the research questions were answered, I allowed participants to lead the interviews, following their line of discussion and asking follow-up questions based on what they were bringing to the conversation. Member

checking also allowed me to check back with participants that I had understood what they were saying correctly.

Within phase two, the GEM created a visual tool that represented factors of RTTs that were most important for the YP. Therefore, I referred to these throughout the analysis of data, such as when creating themes and choosing quotes, to make sure that I was representing what was most important to the YP. During the analysis, I used a structured approach to coding to reduce my interpretation. I started by coding small pieces of data, as this reduced the chance of me interpreting the data in a way that took away from the participant's views. Once I had done the initial coding, I then collapsed the codes to make the data more manageable.

### **3.8.2 The process of the reflexive thematic analysis**

The process of the analysis was guided by Braun et al's (2017) version of reflective thematic analysis. Other models were considered, such as Hesse-Biber and Leavy's (2006) three-step process. However, Braun et al's model was deemed most appropriate as it offers a more in-depth framework and honours flexibility, allowing for a thorough analysis. Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis has been successfully used in similar research which explores YP's perceptions of school processes (Jones, 2020; Weaver, 2023).

#### *Phase 1 and 2 – Familiarisation and coding*

Transcripts were read through several times, allowing me to actively immerse myself in the data. With the research questions in mind, initial observational notes were recorded on a separate document. These observations first related to a single interview and then across all transcripts gathered, recorded on a separate document. Examples of familiarisation notes can be seen in figure four.

**Examples of familiarisation notes from interview with Phoebe:**

- Sense of disconnect from teachers; feel like teachers are against her
- Struggle with mental health; regular panic attacks experiences in school
- Clear awareness of not wanting to return to RTT as underlying mental health needs have not been addressed

**Examples of familiarisation notes from phase two interviews:**

- Frequent references to struggles with mental health, both as a result of challenges at school but also adding to challenges at school
- Frequent references to strained relationships with teachers
- Worries across pupils around reintegrating back to fulltime education
- Sense that RTTs were favoured due to enabling YP to avoid the challenges in school that make things difficult for them

*Figure 4. Examples of familiarisation notes*

Once I had initial ideas in mind, I began to generate codes. Raw data was converted into basic segments of information to create codes that were meaningful to the research question. Codes were written up in the margin of a clean transcript, as this felt most comfortable to me. Table six shows an example of initial codes that were generated in Frankie's transcript. A full coded transcript can be seen in appendix K.

| Extract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Initial codes                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Frankie: I just got told, oh, this is your timetable from now on and they didn't really say to you 'is that gonna be all right? Would you prefer to be on the different hours?' So, but like I said, I didn't mind it at first. It was just after a while. | YP told they were going on RTT<br><br>Lack of choice<br><br>Opinion of RTT changed over time |
| Interviewer: How did that feel?                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                              |
| Frankie: I mean, no, it weren't good that I couldn't do it but at the same point, once it's already set in stone, there's no point in being                                                                                                                |                                                                                              |

|                                                            |                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| like, 'oh, I don't like that' because you can't change it. | No point giving opinion as no choice in the matter |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|

*Table 7. Extract of transcript with initial codes*

### *Phase 3 – Theme development*

During this phase, I searched for patterns across the codes by clustering codes together to begin to create possible themes. As suggested by Braun et al (2017), I kept the research questions in mind to ensure that the themes were telling a relevant story about the data. I made the data more manageable through further iterations of the codes. I collapsed initial codes that shared a similar underlying concept into one single code. An example of this can be seen in table seven. By clustering collapsed codes together, themes began to emerge. Similar themes were then collapsed together, to create themes and subthemes. An example of a theme can be seen in appendix L.

| Collapsed code                  | Examples of initial codes within                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lack of choice in RTT decisions | <p>All YP at AP are on RTT</p> <p>YP told they were going on RTT</p> <p>No point giving opinion as no choice in the matter</p> <p>YP told they was going on a RTT</p> <p>YP told that they would go on RTT</p> <p>Lack of choice</p>                                                                                                                  |
| Lack of flexibility on RTTs     | <p>Only able to do core subjects</p> <p>Chosen options taken away</p> <p>Missed out on 30 hours of options</p> <p>YP asked for RTT to be changed to less hours but school refused</p> <p>Had to do maths as it's a core subject</p> <p>In school for maths and English</p> <p>Miss preferred lessons but compromise to not come in for a full day</p> |

*Table 8. Example of collapsed codes*

#### *Phase 4 and 5 – Reviewing and defining themes*

With themes identified, I entered a reviewing stage in which I reviewed the themes alongside the data to ensure that they were meaningful, distinct and answered the research questions. Firstly, I looked through the codes in each theme to ensure that the theme captured the meaning coming from the codes. Then, I read through the transcripts again to consider whether the themes made sense across the dataset and to ensure that a convincing story of the data was being told. During this stage, some initial themes and subthemes were collapsed. For example, initial subthemes named 'SEND needs', 'EBSA needs', and 'medical needs' were collapsed into the subtheme named 'managing YP's needs'. Once I was satisfied, I defined and named my themes, producing definitions which summarised the themes as shown in figure five.

#### **The varied process of RTTs**

A central theme found in the data was how varied the process of RTTs are between schools. The process seems to follow a sequence of initial decision making, set up, reviewing and reintegration which all take different forms between schools. One thing that was agreed was that reintegration back to fulltime was a huge challenge for YP.

*Figure 5. Example of theme definition*

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodology used to conduct the research. Semi structured interviews with eight professionals were conducted in phase one in order to collect contextual information about RTTs, as well as the experiences of professionals. Semi-structured interviews with seven participants were then conducted in phase two, to capture the YP's experiences. The data was then analysed using reflective thematic analysis.

## Chapter Four: Phase One Findings

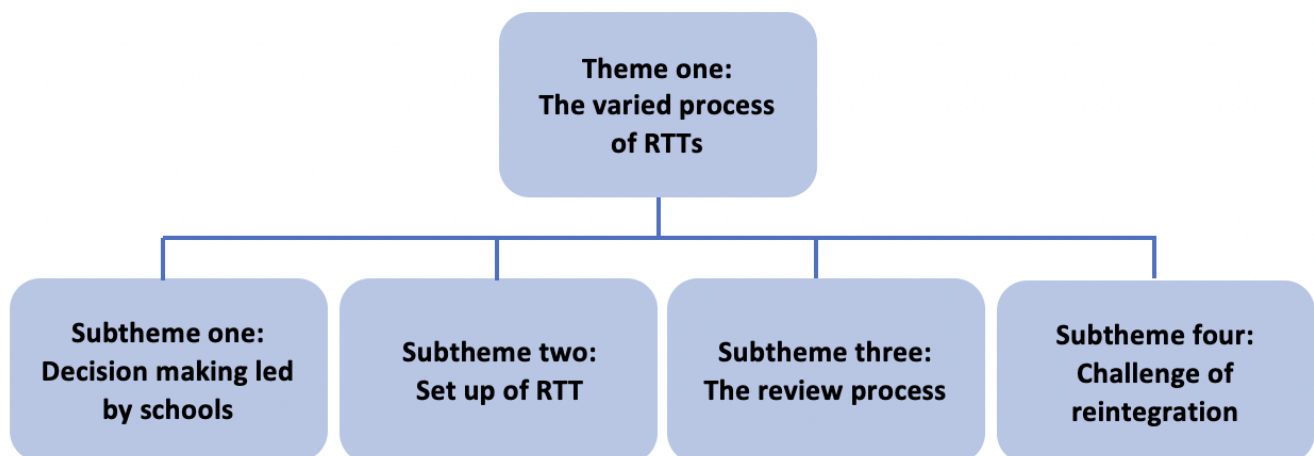
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### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the first and second research questions: ‘how and why are RTTs being operationalised in schools?’, and ‘what are professionals’ experiences of supporting YP on RTTs?’. Three main themes were identified: The varied process of RTTs, Reasons for RTTs, and Challenges and tensions within the RTT process. This chapter will present the main themes and their subthemes developed from the reflective thematic analysis.

### 4.2 Theme one: The varied process of RTTs

This theme highlights the varied operationalisation of RTTs between schools. It also outlines roles within the process of a RTT, with schools taking the lead throughout the process. All participants discussed challenges with the final stage of RTTs, reintegration back to fulltime.



*Figure 6. Phase one theme one and subthemes*

#### 4.2.1 Subtheme one: Decision making led by schools

All participants spoke of school staff’s role when deciding to put a YP on a RTT. Which school staff are making the decisions seemed to vary between schools. For example, for one school whilst a variety of staff can recommend a RTT, the headteacher makes the final decision. For another, decisions are made by the head of year and their assistant.

*“On the whole, pastoral staff, so for us that’s head of year and assistant head of year, the safeguarding team will sometimes be involved as well” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

*“It has to be the head teacher who signs off on it. The recommendation might come from the vice principal... or might come from an assistant principal, or it might come from the SENCO, or it might come from the family support worker” – Leah (vice principal)*

Participants discussed parents’ involvement in the decision-making process. Chris, having written the LA’s guidance around RTTs, said that schools should be involving parents when making a decision to put a RTT in place. However, information shared by participants suggests that parental involvement during the initial decision-making process seemed to lie along a continuum, from almost no involvement to a partnership approach. In one school, for example, the use of RTTs was written into the behaviour policy and therefore parental consent was viewed as not being needed. In another, while parents were informed, the decision was made by the school and in another, parents were involved throughout the decision making process in conjunction with the school.

*“A very conscious decision on the part of parents and the school” - Leah (vice principal)*

*“Parents are warned like before we would get to that stage... We don’t need parental permission to do this, it’s within our behaviour policy” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

The possible pressure on parents to agree with RTTs described by Mike, was also discussed by two team members within the LA. Concerns were raised about the possibility of parents feeling ‘worn down’ into agreeing that their YP should be put onto a RTT, or that parents may lack the understanding needed to make informed decisions around agreeing to their YP being put on a RTT.

*“I completely understand how a child... might have multiple suspensions, or their attendance is incredibly low because they’re anxious about going into school or have mental health needs, a parent might feel worn down into saying ‘yeah alright we’ll come in every day at 12 and I’ll pick them up at half one’” – Amy (VST)*

*“The parents have said yes, they agree, whereas then when you independently speak to parents, they say ‘I don’t know what I’m responsible for them for the three hours that they’re not in school... parents will say ‘I haven’t agreed to this, I don’t know what this means, what does this mean for me as a parent?’”- Emma (YOT)*

A lack of understanding of what exactly a RTT is appeared to be the case even when parents are driving the conversation about placing the YP on a RTT.

*“Where it’s being used because the parents demanded it or a parent has pushed for it because they...think it’s the holy grail in terms of solving their problem, it generally doesn’t work” – Leah (vice principal)*

The role of external professionals in the initial decision making was discussed from participants working within the LA. Much like parental involvement, Chris said that external professionals should be involved in the decision making. However, both professionals working in the YOT and VST reported their absence from the decision-making process. This feels like a gap in the process as professionals within the YOT discussed the potential benefits if they were to be involved in the conversation, such as advocating for the YP and adding their skills and expertise to the conversations.

*“For me, it feels that if you only are led from a school perspective, that then we might well be missing a trick with other agencies that are involved... there will be things that maybe social care and YOT for example can bring to the table that education may not have considered. Alternatively, there are also things that we might be able*

*to put in place to support the schools longer term plan. So, if we are not involved in that... that opportunity is missed then” – Emma (YOT)*

#### **4.2.2 Subtheme two: Set up of RTT**

Most of the LA staff interviewed recognised the variability in the operationalisation on RTTs which was evident in the discussion around how RTTs are set up across participants. There seemed to be three main functions named throughout the interviews; shortening the school day, removing YP from lessons they find difficult and basing RTTs on resource.

*“So, it could be as simple as, we could remove one hour at the end of every day” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

*“We have enrichment where we might take children off site and go bowling or do an enriching activity...some of our children can’t cope with that...so they may go on a part time timetable where they go home at lunchtime to help them manage their day” – Chloe (principal of AP)*

Whilst both LA staff and school staff reported shortening the day and removing YP from lessons as functions, basing RTTs on resource was only reported by LA staff.

*“We have the schools who are trying to manage their own resources...so it’s not based around the subject offer... it’s based around ‘this is where we can guarantee that we’ve got this person who can work with you” – Amy (VST)*

There was a feeling throughout interviews that the set-up of RTTs are impromptu, with no in-depth thinking behind the hours that the YP is given on their timetable. Professionals in the YOT shared the view that this can lead to YP being on extremely low hours of schooling whilst on a RTT.

*“Why are we saying that that child should come in for five hours a week, why are we saying that child should come in for 12 hours a week? So where is the thinking I suppose behind that, it’s not always made particularly clear, certainly to like youth justice, which is why we’ll often be going, what’s the plan?” – Emma (YOT)*

*“So you get some children that are getting an hour a day let’s say... I would say that lower hours feel like it’s more common than higher ours” – Emma (YOT)*

They added to this discourse that these hours can be reduced further if no progress is being made.

*“They’ll reduce it even further if the young person can’t manage it or the behaviour is still continuing” – Sue (YOT)*

Despite low hours, there was a feeling amongst two participants that for some YP, without a RTT they would not be coming into school at all and therefore *“some time is better than no time at all”* – Chris. As well as this, they suggested that although time in school is limited on a RTT, when YP are in school their experiences are more positive whereas if they were in fulltime, they would be less engaged.

*“When they do come in, their experience is positive and that’s managed and that hopefully you can then build up from having had some positive experiences for them where they haven’t essentially failed on the school site” – Chris (AEETS)*

#### **4.2.3 Subtheme three: The review process**

Chris explained the LA guidance is to review a RTT after six weeks and continue the RTT for another six weeks if needed. The practice of review processes varied between schools, but it seemed that all schools are holding reviews more frequently than the six weeks set out by the LA, with regular ongoing conversations about the YP outside of the formal review.

*“It’s reviewed every fortnight... the reviews need to happen, kind of all the time... as part of the RTT, you identify a named person, or a named group of individuals and they will meet regularly to talk about that child” – Leah (vice principal)*

*“It’s overseen by the assistant principal so he reports on that weekly, so we will have a check weekly of who’s on a part time timetable, can we increase them, is it working, do they need to decrease further” – Chloe (principal of AP)*

Similarly to the initial decision making, participants discussed that the review process is school led. However, two of the mainstream schools and the AP did speak of involving external professionals in the review process for some YP. Albeit this does not come without challenges, with time and accessibility being barriers for involvement.

*“If there is a medical professional involved sometimes it takes longer to review because you’ve gotta get their time involved” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

*“We are a specialist service so we can’t particularly call people in to support us... however, we have really good links. I have personally really good links with a number of people in the LA that I can call, they won’t come out and do some work, but they’ll talk to me” – Chloe (principal of AP)*

On the contrary, Nick’s experience is that external professionals aren’t involved to support the review process. When asked whether external professionals were involved in reviewing he said:

*“Not so much... I’m fortunate enough that a large chunk of my friends work in education... so we bounce ideas off each other” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

It seemed that LA professionals had to push to be involved in reviews of YP that they are involved with, but when they are involved they feel they can have a positive impact, by advocating for the YP and challenging schools where necessary.

*“I support injecting ourselves, so we make it our business to say what’s the plan and what are we doing? But I think, ordinarily it’s led by schools” – Emma (YOT)*

*“If we were aware there was a RTT, the question would then be right so when has that been agreed to, when are we meeting again, we’re gonna come to the next meeting... my team, the VST,. They know education and they are actually able to go in and say ‘I don’t agree with that’, and then step back without influencing that sort of working relationship that social worker has with the school or a carer has with the school, it’s nice to be able to go in and put in that impartial advice” – Amy (VST)*

To combat the gap in involvement during the review process, it appeared that LA teams were holding their own meetings to keep track of RTTs.

*“I review at the end of the month to see which children are on RTTs, and I review the numbers and then go back to the PEP officers to ask what’s going on with this child” – Amy (VST)*

#### 4.2.4 Subtheme four: Challenge of reintegration

Seven of the nine participants agreed that RTTs should be a short, time limited intervention. Two mainstream schools stated that this time limit should be no longer than 12 weeks, which is written into the LA guidance. However, these same seven participants explained that they can go on for much longer.

*“Usually given for no more than twelve weeks, that’s the guidance around it, but it doesn’t always equate to that” – Leah (vice principal)*

*“we’ve had some, if I’m really honest with you, that have run on for possibly 4-5 months or so... and they’re still running now” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

All participants from mainstream schools acknowledged the challenges when reintegrating YP from RTT back to full time timetables. Two participants described how reintegration can cause the YP to come in less or cause the situation to worsen. This was surprising considering RTTs are meant to be short-term before returning to school fulltime.

*“Only one in the seven that I’ve designed in the last two years has been successful at reengaging that child in coming to school. So, if it’s going to fail, it’s going to fail and it’s going to worsen, I would say” – Leah (vice principal)*

*“What we’re finding is that actually it’s hard to get some students off the reduced timetable once they’re on it because they almost are getting to a point where it’s at their comfort zone and if you try and increase it more then they reduce their attendance and so it’s like you’re going to a negative place” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

Some participants spoke of parental motivation to keep the RTT in place as a barrier to reintegration. In Nick’s experience, “Where the parent is happy for them just to continue to

sit on the same RTT, that's where it becomes problematic". The perceptions of interviewees about parental motivation seems to centre around RTTs being a relief for parents who's YP are finding school difficult by having a positive impact on wider family life.

*"So if a parent is getting phoned all through the day because their child's misbehaving or they're being suspended, in a parent's mind, and I can empathise with that, actually 'well if my child's then only in school for two hours a day, hopefully for those two hours a day they'll go in and that will be it'... parents may well be thinking, 'well actually it means I'm not getting called at work all of the time' and that's then disrupting the family" – Emma (YOT)*

YP can also be motivated to keep the RTT in place. The general sense here was that YP are happy to be on RTTs as it means they don't have to go to school as much, which is something they often find difficult.

*"Generally where RTTs are in place children are relatively content with them, there doesn't seem to be much pushback from the child themselves, but I think often that's because the reason they're on a RTT is because that school isn't the right place for them at that particular moment... so remove them from that, it is an acceptable outcome for them" – Amy (VST)*

*"I kind of wanna use the word enabled. I feel like sometimes RTTs enable children to opt out, when actually we should be teaching children resilience" – Leah (vice principal)*

Two participants were not part of this discourse for different reasons. For one mainstream school, the operationalisation of RTTs is done very differently. For most RTTs, Mike's school use structured RTT programmes and keep YP on the school premises during the hours that they are not following their timetable. Whilst he acknowledged that reintegration is still a challenge, the programmes ensure that RTTs do not go on for longer than planned.

*“It’s a six-week programme where the first two weeks are fixed... where students will work specifically in our Inclusive Learning Centre and they’ll have access to two members of staff that work there full time... they then start to re-enter core lessons in week three...they get student support, so they’ll work with the two members of staff in there, on whatever their individual needs are” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

Chloe explained that the AP do not set a time limit when putting a RTT in place, instead basing it on the child’s needs. When asked whether RTTs have a time limit, she said, *“No... it’s whatever the child needs when they need it”*.

#### **4.2.5 Summary of theme one**

Overall, the process of RTTs appear varied, across the initial decision making stage, the set up of the RTT and the review process. Schools fundamentally lead on the process in isolation, seemingly making ad-hoc decisions without the input from other professionals which could ultimately benefit the YP. The last stage of the process, reintegration back to fulltime, appeared to be a real challenge for schools particularly where the RTT was in place for SEND, EBSA or behavioural reasons. Participants discussed barriers to reintegration including the motivation of parents and YP to continue the RTT. Essentially the challenge of reintegration is leading to RTTs being in place long-term for many YP.

#### **4.3 Theme two: Reasons for RTTs**

Within this theme, participants discussed the use of RTTs to manage YP’s needs, including SEND, EBSA, and medical needs. Participants also discussed the use of RTTs to manage behaviour. RTTs were also being used for YP who are simply unable to engage in a mainstream school setting due to challenges with the curriculum and environment. Finally, schools appear to be using RTTs due to having a lack of resources to support YP full time.

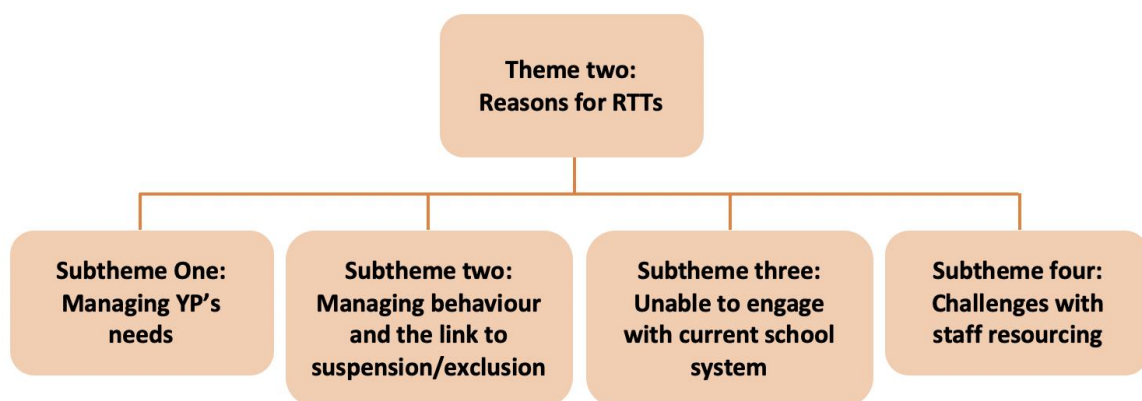


Figure 7. Phase one theme two and subthemes

#### 4.3.1 Subtheme one: Managing YP's needs

All schools spoke of the use of RTTs to manage YP's SEND needs, EBSA needs, and medical needs. School's perceived YP with SEND to be unable to cope with a school full day and therefore saw RTTs as a necessary management tool. Whilst this was seen as successful for managing need, it seemed to be a long-term intervention rather than the 12-weeks set out by the LA.

*"The SEND one has been in place for quite a period of time. It's successful in terms of it manages that student, that student wouldn't cope with a full day... they just physically wouldn't be able to do it, so consequently it's successful in that manner" - Nick (deputy head teacher)*

Schools reported a similar experience with YP experiencing EBSA, who also find it difficult to reintegrate back to fulltime.

*"It's the EBSA ones which are proving most problematic to not necessarily identify, but to close" – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

Although there did seem to be mixed experiences here, with one school reporting successful reintegration for a YP experiencing EBSA, who is now attending fulltime.

*“In a term we’ve had an incredible turnaround from a refuser to a child that’s attending every day” – Chloe (principal of AP)*

It seemed that RTTs are being relied upon for EBSA as it is a growing area of need that schools are finding difficult to understand and manage.

*“I envisage [the number of RTTs] being slightly more next year... because EBSA has become quite mainstream... it’s almost become self-driving, you give something a term and then it becomes something for people to say ‘my son or daughter is suffering with EBSA’... and that’s probably where we need some support and hence why I’m gonna do a bit of work on it.” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

RTTs are also being used as a tool for YP with SEND whilst waiting for a more appropriate school place for them. One participant suggested that a RTT was used to evidence the need for a special school place.

*“When we’ve offered a child with very profound SEN a RTT, it’s been done alongside a plan to find them AP which is more appropriate” – Leah (vice principal)*

*“I think the issue is if we had been increasing it, you might start to go ‘you might not be ready for special school or not appropriate for special school’ so, we’ve had to keep in” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

RTTs to manage medical needs appear to be more successful in terms of reintegration, as there is a clear plan and end point in place.

*“Highly, highly, highly successful because there’s an end point in sight... unless there’s a set-back in the medical recovery or whatever it might be, there is no reason really not to keep moving forwards so they’re normally highly successful. In fact, I can’t think of one that hasn’t been successful” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

*“A medical need, they break their leg, for example... that’s usually done much faster over maybe a period of a fortnight or a month” – Leah (vice principal)*

#### **4.3.2 Subtheme two: Managing behaviour and the link to suspension/exclusion**

Seven of the eight participants discussed the use of RTTs to manage behaviour. It appeared that RTTs were being relied upon by schools where staff found it difficult to manage a YP’s behaviour, which could be impacting on other YP.

*“We would have class teachers struggling to manage behaviour without that support [RTTs], we would almost undoubtedly have a higher suspension rate for persistent disruptive behaviour” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

RTTs were discussed as a pre-requisite to suspensions and exclusion as an attempt to demonstrate that schools have given time and support and perhaps defend their decision to suspend the YP or move them to a different school.

*“it’s sort of demonstrating I think to a child that the adults want to work with them in a situation and where it does mean that a child changes schools it wasn’t a knee jerk reaction” – Amy (VST)*

*“Before we get to that point of suspension, because we’re trying to demonstrate that we’ve given them the time to reflect and have that intensive work with specialised staff” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

As well as being a pre-requisite, RTTs seem to be used after a suspension or exclusion to reintegrate them back to school gradually.

*“After a suspension it might be that actually what we're going to try is building their time up gradually” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

Overall, it appeared that there was a blurred line between RTT and exclusions, with the only difference being that a RTT is agreed, as described by Chris:

*“If children are sent home early on a particular day, that's still an exclusion... what we're talking about with the RTT is that it's when a YP has an agreed period where they're not coming in to school for certain hours of the day. Anything beyond that is an exclusion” – Chris (AEETS)*

By contrast, Leah explained that her school do not use RTTs to manage behaviour as they view it as off rolling.

*“No, we try not to because that's off rolling, which is illegal. I wouldn't advocate the use of a RTT with a poorly behaved child. I think we've gotta use the other avenues that are open to us” – Leah (vice principal)*

Where challenging behaviour occurs which puts others at risk, RTTs are being relied upon to safeguard YP. This discussion including separating gang members who attend the same setting as discussed by professionals working within the YOT and the principal of the AP.

*“You've got YP that are on periphery of kind of gangs or they're gang affected, and they go to school with such and such, such and such is the victim, how do you then safeguard the victim and make sure that the YP also gets an education, and I think often it's about again, the go-to position, RTTs” – Emma (YOT)*

*“They’re [RRTs] necessary, especially for the cohort that I have, and that’s for all the reasons that I’ve already spoken to you about, primarily safeguarding and the risks and making sure the site is safe and all the other children here are safe” – Chloe (principal of AP)*

#### **4.3.3 Subtheme three: Unable to engage with current school system**

For some YP, the challenges of school appeared so great that they are simply unable to engage with schooling fulltime. Several participants spoke of some of the challenges faced by YP, such as the restricted curriculum and demanding environment.

*“They’ve got to deliver the core subjects and there’s very much a focus now nationally on the things like Maths, English, Sciences, that some YP really, really struggle with” – Chris (AEETS)*

*“It’s also in response to children not being able to engage in the environment because it, whatever they’re seeing, the behavioural presentation we’re seeing from children is causing them to get suspended or to put themselves in a position where they’re at risk of permanent exclusion” – Amy (VS)*

It appeared that some LA staff felt that things needed to be done differently, but that teachers sometimes turn to RTTs as their only option due to the challenges in the school system.

*“I do think some YP find the school environment really difficult to manage and challenging, but I think they should be finding an alternative site or somewhere where they’re still in a learning environment because I don’t think school works for everyone, but it seems to be ‘we’ll put you on a RTT’” – Sue (YOT)*

*“I think schools need to develop kind of more positive environments for children with additional needs for example... I think schools have*

*got the knowledge, but schools I think also maybe at times feel quite powerless because actually they're not just concerned with that one child they're concerned with 30 children in that class" – Emma (YOT)*

Another challenge that YP face is school transition. The difference between the set-up of primary and secondary schools, from a nurturing environment to a larger environment where staff have little time to get to know the YP, leaves YP vulnerable when joining secondary schools. For some YP, this is made more challenging due to information around YP's needs not being passed on over the transition,

*"When they then do that transition to secondary school, they can't cope, there's no coping mechanisms because the primary school's been so good at that nurture and development of wrapping that child up and making sure they're safe and secure and feel welcomed but secondary schools don't work like that. And then all of these needs come out of what appears like nowhere, but the primary school hasn't documented that... so the secondary school is then in this position where they have got a child that can't cope, can't manage their behaviours, can't manage their learning... so, you have these children that are just completely dropping out because ultimately their needs aren't met" – Chloe (principal of AP)*

#### **4.3.4 Subtheme four: Challenges with staff resourcing**

Several participants spoke of the challenge that schools are facing with resourcing. The limited staff resourcing leaves some YP without support. Due to not having enough resources, RTTs are being used to remove YP for part of the school day or week, reducing the amount of time that they are needing support and making it easier for schools to manage.

*"We're getting to the stage where some classes are increasing in size, so actually that teacher ratio time that some students are getting is in some cases shrinking" – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

*“It’s very difficult, I think, for school to manage that for six hours a day and therefore I think it’s a fair ask that they do it for two hours a day with that rapid increase... they’re often taking up a fair amount of resource for schools it make sure they’re safe and this is a short-term compromise” – Amy (VST)*

Two LA staff suggested that shrinking ratios and limited resourcing are reducing schools’ ability to use relational approaches with YP which in turn would support them to feel safe and listened to and cope better within school.

*“I feel like children need more and there’s less... Where schools work really well, it’s where they’ve got the capacity to put someone to that child to name them and to build a relationship... it’s a sort of team around that child where that child feels safe, they have someone to talk to or a group of people to talk to, there is somewhere they can go to” – Amy (VST)*

Being on a RTT appeared to open the door for YP to have access to pastoral support and build relationships with adults. Three participants spoke of RTTs being used to support relationships.

*“A child on a RTT is gonna spend time in a different part of the school, they’re gonna spend more time in the pastoral area, so they are going to develop positive relationships with adults who can help them and want to help them” – Leah (vice principal)*

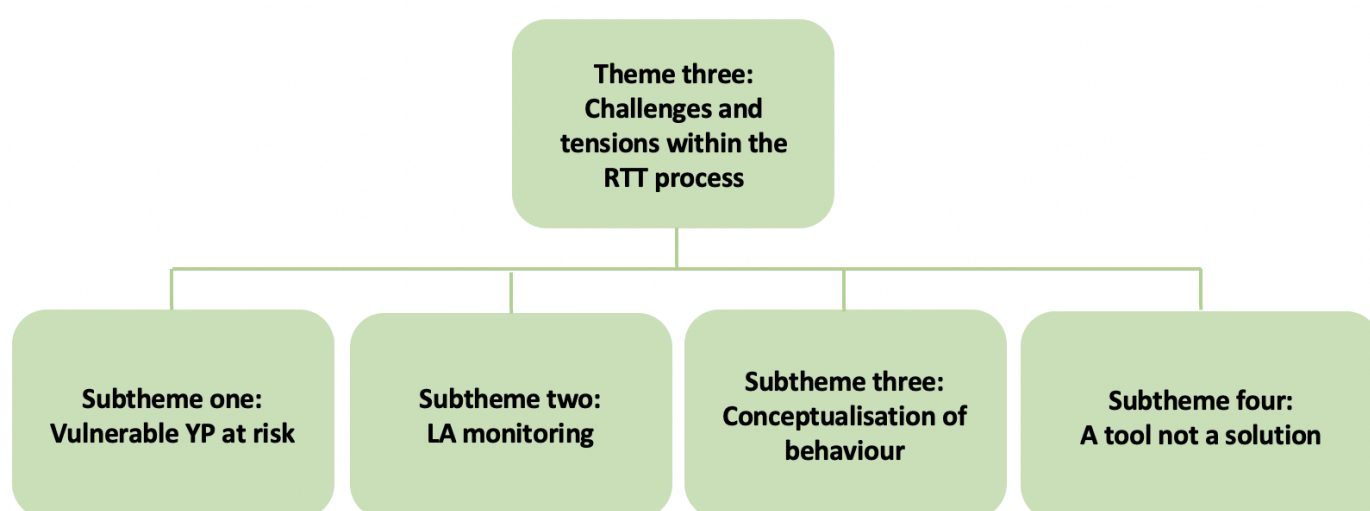
#### **4.3.5 Summary of theme two**

Participants discussed RTTs being used to manage YP in situations where they are unable to engage in school for several reasons, including SEND needs, medical needs, experiencing EBSA, or finding school challenging to cope with. Interviewees suggested that RTTs are also used to support teachers who are finding it difficult to manage behaviour in the classroom. It

did seem that RTTs are linked to exclusion and suspension, as they are used to defend the practice or reintegrate after it. There were mixed opinions about RTTs being used to manage behaviour. Some participants viewed it as demonstrating that a school want to work with the YP, where others viewed it as simply illegal. The view that RTTs demonstrate that schools want to work with YP is interesting, particularly because the very nature of RTTs means that schools work with them less, at a reduced rate. In fact, some participants actually highlighted this, suggesting that RTTs are used so that schools don't have to support YP as often due to reduced resourcing.

#### **4.4 Theme Three: Challenges and Tensions Within the RTT Process**

Participants discussed concerns around RTTs putting already vulnerable YP at risk and issues with the LA monitoring processes. It was also clear that there were contrasting perspectives and conceptualisations of behaviour between school staff and LA staff which caused some tension within the system. Lastly, participants shared their perspective that RTTs should not be considered as a solution, but that the use of them as part of a wider support package is crucial.



*Figure 8. Phase one theme three and subthemes*

##### **4.4.1 Subtheme one: Vulnerable YP at risk**

Several participants felt that RTTs are being overused for YP who are already vulnerable due to previous experiences including trauma, being in care, living in poverty, and being involved

with crime. It appeared that schools find it difficult to support these vulnerable YP and RTTs are therefore relied upon to manage their needs. This struggle appeared to continue throughout the RTT process as it was difficult to reintegrate these YP back to fulltime, risking “disadvantaging them again” – Amy.

*“They will have been ones who have struggled and essentially failed in our system up until that point...they’re the ones that perhaps won’t progress as quickly as what others might have done. Their journey, probably because it’s been reinforced through constant failure before, is gonna be a lot tougher and typically they would then spend longer on the reduced timetables” – Chris (AEETS)*

*“Would we find reduced timetables used, overused, for vulnerable children? And I would suggest we probably would... And I think for me it is useful, it has its place, however do we overuse it for vulnerable children and children with problematic behaviour? Yes” – Emma (YOT)*

There was concern amongst several participants that there are increased risks to YP who are not in school full time due to being on a RTT. Spending time outside of school can pose safety risks including exposure to crime and exploitation.

*“I think some of the impacts can be they’re out in the community a lot more, so they can be pulled into kind of offending, antisocial behaviour, they’re more easily targeted by people that might wanna exploit them, gangs, getting involved in situations that they may not have been involved in should they have been in school” – Emma (YOT)*

Missing out on education was discussed as a risk of being on RTTs, which seems to be having long impacts in terms on YP by making it difficult to gain the qualifications and skills necessary for employment.

*“A child who’s not coming to school full time will fall behind because they’re not in the classroom with a teacher” – Leah (vice principal)*

*“What that child’s gonna remember is, well ‘it was okay when I was 12 that you only wanted me in school for a couple of days and now you want me to get a job, or now you want me to go training’. Well, they’ve not built up the skillset to be able to do that because you’ve gotta set your alarm clock, you’ve gotta get up, you’ve got to understand the longer-term game...they don’t understand the longer-term game” – Emma (YOT)*

According to participants, RTTs can send the message to YP that they are unwanted and undervalued, causing long term impacts on their sense of self and self-worth.

*“I feel really strongly about is that if you’ve got a thirteen-year-old that’s being educated for an hour a day and that doesn’t increase and we’re talking over months and months and months, actually what does that say to the child about their value and their worth?” – Emma (YOT)*

#### **4.4.2 Subtheme two: LA monitoring**

The LA collect data on RTTs used in schools to monitor the use across the area, however this relies on schools submitting the data and it appeared that is not always happening, leaving the data inaccurate. One school gave an example of not informing the LA of a RTT used for a medical need as it would be short-term. This is puzzling as the example given would be an example of good practice as per the DfE guidance. It seems this school use different types of timetables that offer part-time education, only some falling under the label RTT.

*“We know that from our own [the VST] data ‘oh actually you’ve [the LA] got such and such recorded as having this amount of hours, well we can tell you we know that they’re on 10 hours... So, I don’t think it’s always known or it’s always entirely accurate” – Emma (YOT)*

*“There are formal reduced timetables called part time timetables, which are agreed with the LA... The other type of reduced timetable that we would run would be a bespoke one, where maybe a child’s got a medical need... that’s usually done much faster... where you might consider using a council approved part time timetable, you might start that way with a child who’s demonstrating EBSA” – Leah (vice principal)*

With this data, the LA holds a multidisciplinary meeting, which aims to ensure that YP on RTTs are making progress.

*“We’ve then got an internal review group within the local authority to gather that information as to why that’s still going on as a part-time school timetable, do we agree with the position, is actually the YP still making progress around that” – Chris (AEETS)*

However, concerns were shared by participants that this aim is not always met, with messages not getting through to schools who are not involved in the LA review process.

*“If I’m really honest, I don’t quite know what they do with the information when they get it because nobody’s ever come back to me and said that one’s been going on too long” – Nick (deputy head teacher)*

Some professionals recognised that the lack of multi-agency working may be a barrier in the process that could be improved upon as the schools are not present to be held to account for the YP.

*“We review those children and there is good representation, so it is from across the board. I suppose the concern for me in some respects is that schools don’t attend those meetings to actually be a part, this*

*is the LA holding all agencies to account for that child, so actually do we need schools present?” – Emma (YOT)*

#### **4.4.3 Subtheme three: Conceptualisations of behaviour**

There was a difference in the way that behaviour is perceived by staff within schools and staff within the LA throughout the interviews. LA staff tended to report that they are taking a holistic understanding of behaviour, focusing on exploring and understanding where behaviour is coming from. The evidence generated here suggests that this exploration does not seem to be happening in schools, where behaviour policies appear to be based upon punishment of behaviour rather than exploration, perhaps because “behaviour is not seen as the symptom, it’s seen as the cause” – Emma (YOT).

*“It shouldn’t be built on power imbalances, there needs to be expectations of what children, conform is the wrong word but I’m gonna use it anyway, but they conform to within schools, but where a child doesn’t do that, that there is an exploration of why they haven’t done that and that’s the first question as opposed to get your shoes on, get out of my room” – Amy (VST)*

*“We also have our emergency policy, so teachers can press a button for an instant removal...so that would be under extreme circumstance so for example, a student might swear at a member of staff that would be an instant removal” – Mike (director of pastoral and academic standards)*

School staff were described as lacking the time or space to explore behaviour due to competing factors in the school system such as funding, which can often be overlooked by external professionals. Overall, the differences in how behaviour is perceived and the disconnect in priorities appears to be causing tension within the system.

*“From the internal perspective... that’s probably more what the national perspective would be about saying children are entitled and*

*should be in school full time... it's as easy as that, isn't it?... Schools are paid and funded to be able to deal with that... saying actually behaviour is just a communication, isn't it... isn't it just as simple as identifying what that is, resolving it and having it so that that's fixed... So that's the challenge from internal colleagues... and the schools' perspective would be, you know what this is really hard, we aren't funded massively well... there's just not enough money to go around to give that level of personalised development and support in place. Obviously, class teachers have 30 children, if not more, per class... There's also the ability to spend time with each child... they're very very busy places" – Chris (AEETS)*

#### **4.4.4. Subtheme four: A tool not a solution**

The overarching perspective appeared to be that RTTs are not always addressing the problem underlying the need for a RTT and when this happens, the YP's situation does not change and therefore they are unable to return to fulltime education successfully.

*"What I've noticed is that if you've got a child that's being suspended from school because there is problematic behaviour, then actually one of the kind of solutions to that can feel like a reduced timetable would be useful. So actually what we do is we try and reduce the amount of time that the child's in school for behaviour to get better. My experience is that the behaviour doesn't get better. So it's kind of like a sticking plaster, it feels like you're just plastering over a crack, but we are not actually looking at what's causing the crack" – Emma (YOT)*

Therefore, it seems that to be successful, RTTs need to be part of a wider support plan that involves other interventions aiming to address the underlying need. Only then, can RTTs be successful in being short term and ending with the YP back in fulltime education.

*"I think they're a useful tool, as long as they are well planned and they are used in collaboration with other interventions... they have to be*

*part of a really robust plan... because I think that they would have the potential to leave a child stagnating in a situation where actually they shouldn't be in that situation" - Amy (VST)*

#### **4.4.5 Summary of theme three**

Several challenges and tensions in the RTT process were shared by participants, including concerns around RTTs being overused for YP who are already vulnerable, whilst putting them at risk once more due to YP not being in school fulltime and therefore being exposed to crime, exploitation, missing out on education, and impacts on their self-worth. There appeared to be a disconnect between LA staff and school staff, both in terms of the process itself where separate meetings are held and communication between the LA and schools is limited, and in terms of conceptualisation where LA staff view behaviour as a communication and explore the underlying need of the YP but school staff don't have the space or time to do this. This leads to the overarching concern that RTTs are not always addressing the problem underlying the need for RTT. LA staff call for RTTs to be part of a wider support plan where underlying needs are supported.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Findings in phase one of this research provides an overview of phases involved in the RTT process and reasons that RTTs are being used, whilst capturing the challenges and tensions within the process. The findings have highlighted the varied process led by schools which often ends in challenges with reintegration, particularly for RTTs that are put in place for SEND needs or for YP experiencing EBSA. The narrative also presents the concern that due to limited space and time, schools do not explore the underlying needs of YP on RTTs, leaving these needs unmet and the situation to stagnate or worsen.

## Chapter Five: Phase Two Findings

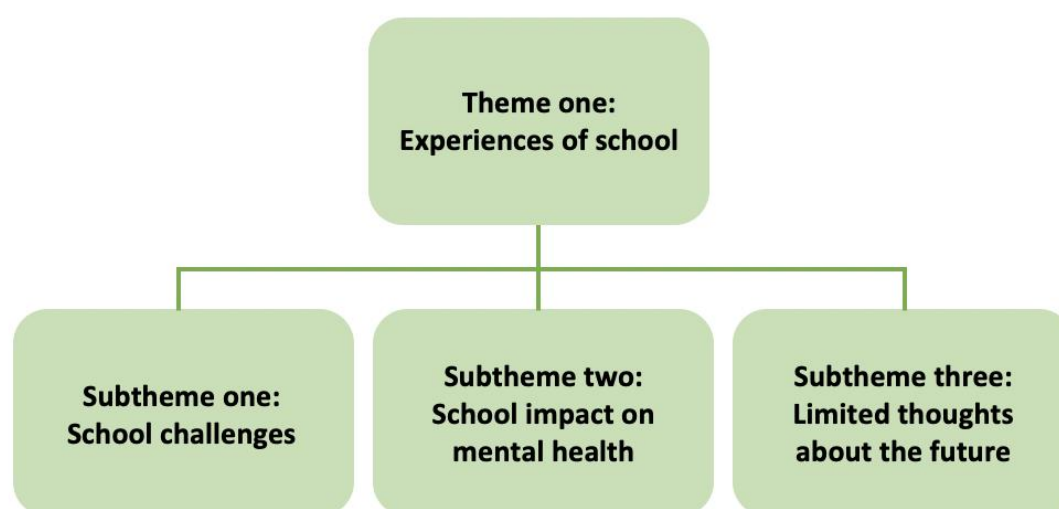
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### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the third research question: ‘what are the experiences of YP who have been placed on RTTs?’. Three main themes were identified, ‘Experiences of RTTs’, ‘Experiences of school’ and ‘Relationships with teachers’. This chapter will present the main themes and their subthemes developed from the reflective thematic analysis.

### 5.2 Theme one: Experiences of school

This theme reflects the challenges with the environment and work as well as pressure of exams were highlighted by YP as making school a difficult place to be, ultimately making the full school day too much for the YP to cope with and leading to difficult experiences of mental health. Participants suggested that school was so overwhelming for these YP they could only think about making it through school, limiting their ability to have positive thoughts and hopes about the future.



*Figure 9. Phase two theme one and subthemes*

#### 5.2.1 Subtheme one: School challenges

Six of the YP discussed the challenges that they have experienced with the school environment, both in the classroom context and the exam context. They asserted that the

large, crowded environment of secondary schools resulted in anxiety for YP, impacting lessons and often leading to them avoiding the classroom, or school as a whole.

*"I used to have panic attacks every day even when I was walking through the door because I didn't wanna be here" - Phoebe*

*"I always found it harder to go to lessons in secondary school because of how crowded the whole school was in general. So I just found myself like walking around and doing stuff you shouldn't be doing... If I couldn't focus in the lesson because something was happening in the back of the class or in the front that I wanted to focus on, I wasn't looking at my work, I couldn't care about my work" – Frankie*

Phoebe spoke more specifically about the exam environment causing her anxiety.

*"I want to get them [GCSEs] but I don't like going in the halls because we did last year and I couldn't do it, I couldn't go in there, it freaked me out... they put us in a big hall and stuff" – Phoebe*

All of the YP discussed finding lessons difficult or boring, which also led to YP avoiding doing the work or going to lessons. For some YP, the difficult work was so daunting that they stopped attending school.

*"The work was too hard so I didn't wanna [go to school]" – Jack*

*"I can't keep my focus for more than 30 minutes... it goes in one ear and out the other... I can't process it in my head, I physically cannot do it." - Lilly*

It appeared that the anxiety caused by these challenging school experiences makes a full school day feel too much to cope with. Five of the YP expressed that engaging in a full school day feels challenging and leaves them feeling exhausted. As Phoebe explained, this can leave

YP with no energy left to engage in hobbies outside of school, which makes school less desirable.

*"I don't really know how to explain it I just couldn't cope with being here it was just a bit too much... because once I'd be in school for six hours straight every day I couldn't get out of bed after that. I would go to school, go home, sleep and that's it... but then I'd have things to do, I have to go and look after my horse every day but I couldn't actually do that because I couldn't get out of bed." – Phoebe*

### **5.2.2 Subtheme two: School impact on mental health**

Four YP shared that they experience struggles with their mental health. These struggles were viewed by YP as both a result of and cause of challenges experiences in school. All four of the YP described feeling that their mental health had deteriorated because of their experience of secondary school.

*"To be honest I feel like it's [secondary school] kind of made me a completely different person. Since secondary school my mental health has gone like really bad. I've been in hospital, I've run away, I've been in hospital for days... I used to cut myself and I used to go to the hospital, my mum saw it and she took me to hospital and I had to get them cleaned... I've overdosed or attempted to overdose or try to kill myself a couple of times... It's [school] quite draining for me, especially the masking part of it because obviously I mask my autism" – Lilly.*

It is worth noting that like Lilly, three of the YP revealed that they were on the assessment pathway for Autism and ADHD. These SEND needs could play into the challenges that YP are facing with the school environment.

*Phoebe: "In year seven and eight, I used to have panic attacks every day even when I was walking through the door because I didn't wanna be here. I literally, my mum had to pull me out of bed every morning just to get me here"*

*Interviewer: "Why do you think that is?"*

*Phoebe: "The works harder definitely, and the teachers are always harder on us"*

For two of the YP, struggling with mental health also seemed to be a catalyst for acting out in school, or making it difficult for them to engage in school. Lilly gives an example of this, describing that she would get in trouble at school as a way of hiding her struggles.

*"I think it was just kind of because I wasn't okay, so it was kind of so people thought I was okay" - Lilly*

Unlike the others, Susan linked her struggles with mental health to traumatic events that she experienced during childhood. She felt that her struggles impacted her ability to engage in school, and that school only heightened her struggles.

*"In year eight I struggled so much with my mental health... everything was awful now that I look back on it... I was just completely unstable... I think that my main priorities were not school and when it came to me thinking about school, it just overwhelmed me even more" - Susan*

### **5.2.3 Subtheme three: Limited thoughts about the future**

When asked about their hopes and fears for the future, all of the YP had few thoughts about their future. School was described as being so overwhelming they could only think about making it through school, limiting their ability to think past school and into the future.

*"I don't really know about the future, I'll be honest. It's not something I think about. I just kind of focus on finishing here with GCSEs" - Frankie*

Those who could think about the future expressed fears about things going wrong for them.

*"I feel like I can see myself homeless and like not having anything to do with my parents like they'll abandon me because I'm like a*

*disappointment and stuff and I can see myself like. Not being able to do things like my autism and my ADHD stopping me from doing what I want to do” - Lilly*

One YP described experiences of limiting language being used by teachers which led to these fears.

*“They’re always like, I’ll do one little thing and they’ll all just bombard me with like ‘you are gonna fail your GCSEs, you’re not able to do this and do that” - Phoebe*

#### **5.2.4 Summary of theme one**

YP spoke about the challenges that they face in school, particularly linked to the school and exam environment and finding the work difficult or boring. These challenges appeared to be having an impact on the YP’s mental health, causing panic attacks and anxiety. The YP’s experiences had led to them lacking a sense of mastery and therefore having limited positive thoughts about the future, instead worrying that they wouldn’t achieve what they perceive is needed for them to be successful. For one YP, the narrative and labels given to them by a teacher, that they are going to fail, seemed to have had an impact on their sense of self-worth.

#### **5.3 Theme two: Relationships with teachers**

Within this theme, YP discussed the power imbalance that they experience, perceiving teachers to think they’re superior. YP also discussed feeling picked on and blamed for things that aren’t their fault. Feeling understood by teachers was important for the YP, but they described feeling that teachers don’t take the time to explore and understand them and their behaviours. There was also a sense of inconsistency, both with teachers and rules being enforced.

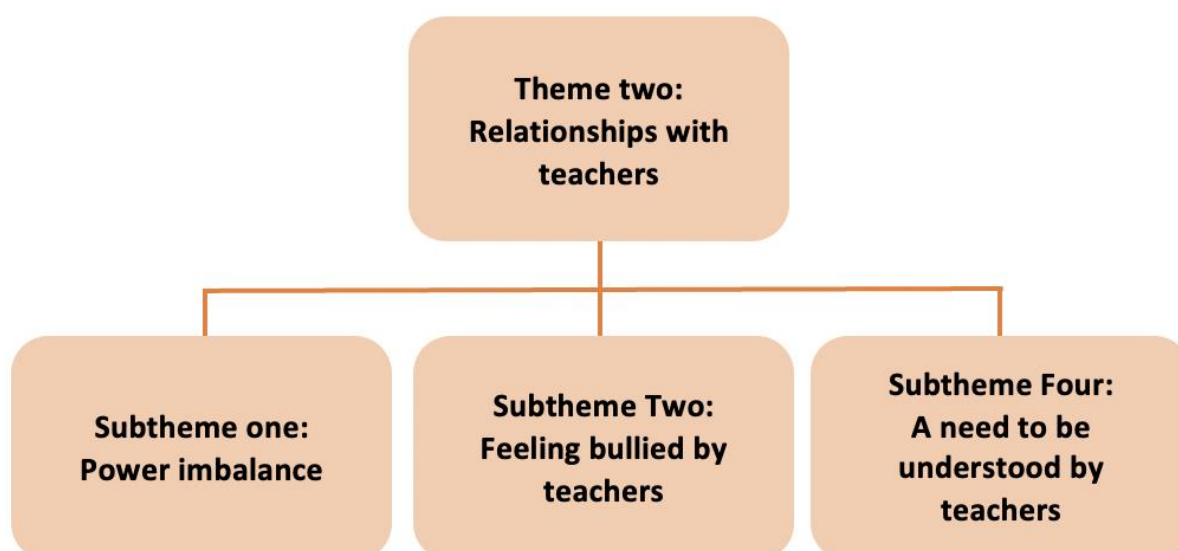


Figure 10. Phase two theme two

### 5.3.1 Subtheme one: Power imbalance

Some of the YP spoke about their relationships with teachers being ruled by hierarchy. YP discussed teachers immediately having more control and thinking that they are always right. This appeared to leave YP feeling inferior and patronised by teachers. All YP described being shouted or screamed at by teachers, and there was a sense of frustration and injustice from the YP that whilst teachers get away with shouting and screaming at students, if the YP shout back they get punished.

*“They [teachers] immediately think they’re higher up because they’re teachers, but they’re not, they’re the same level as everyone... I think when you’re a teacher you immediately have more control and some teachers, they use it when they want to just to be spiteful... they can get away with being horrible but if I was a little bit rude or horrible they wouldn’t like it... they’re always gonna be better, they’re always gonna be right. Can’t think of the word, but you feel like little and you can’t do anything about it” – Susan*

*“They always shout, but then I don’t help it because I shout back at them... and then if I shout at them they’ll go ‘oh I’m a human’, but so am I but they have the right to shout at me so why is that fair? They’ll be like ‘oh, I’m an adult I don’t care’... they think they’re all better than all the students because they’re ‘oh we’re the boss of you’ but they’re not” – Phoebe*

### **5.3.2 Subtheme two: Feeling bullied by teachers**

Three of the YP described a narrative around building a reputation which leads to teachers regularly punishing them, treating them differently from their peers, and blaming them for things they haven’t done. YP used phrases such as being ‘picked on’, which is a description of bullying.

*“Interviewer: What could make school better for you?*

*Jack: Maybe the teachers weren’t so hard on me.*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me what you mean by that?*

*Jack: Blame me for everything.*

*Interviewer: Can you give me an example of when that has happened?*

*Jack: Just when people will talk and then I’ll talk and then I’ll just get the blame for it all the time... they’re easier on everyone else, but harder on me”*

*“Mr. X goes, ‘oh are you talking about me?’ and I said, ‘no I’m not’ and he just suspended me for a week because he thought I was talking about him. I was like ‘I wasn’t talking about you’ but my mate can say whatever she wants to, and she won’t get in trouble” – Phoebe*

YP perceived that teachers were using severe punishments where it does not feel necessary, such as genuine mistakes by YP. These punishment methods are also impacting on other YP as whole classes are punished for one YP’s mistake.

*Bonnie: "He yelled at some guy called Chris the entire lesson because he didn't bring his homework in by accident so we weren't allowed to talk at all, we would have to put our hand up to ask to speak to the person next to us... and if you said something that wasn't about the work at all, you would get shouted at. Which was unnecessarily strict."*

*Interviewer: "How did that feel?"*

*Bonnie: "I dunno, I start to get like a lump in my throat"*

Whilst YP tended to speak about the strained relationships that they have with teachers, six YP did mention that some teachers were 'nice' or 'lovely'. It seemed that there was inconsistency in how teachers are interacting with YP, as well as inconsistency with teachers enforcing rules. Whilst some teachers strongly enforce rules, others are much more understanding and lenient with YP, which leaves YP confused.

*"In secondary school I think it's very mixed you either get a really nice teacher or a not so nice teacher" - Frankie*

*"I'll wear make-up to make myself feel better about myself, and some teachers just, most teachers don't care about it... some teachers just particularly my form teacher he comes to me every single morning and he stands at my desk and stares at me and he'll make me wipe it off even if I'm throwing a tantrum screaming at him saying I'm not doing it, he'll make me wipe it off and I can't go anywhere until I've done it"*

*– Lilly*

### **5.3.3 Subtheme three: A need to be understood by teachers**

Some of the YP expressed the importance of being understood by teachers. However, whilst YP desired to be understood by their teachers, all of them described feeling that teachers don't take the time to really understand them and where their behaviour might be coming from.

*"I think it would be nice to have a better relationship and they understood be a bit more and knew that I'm not wearing makeup or wearing jewellery to be difficult. I'm not doing stuff to be difficult I'm just trying to get myself to school and I get myself into school by wearing makeup" – Lilly*

*"If you didn't behave you'd get sent home or you'd get in trouble there was no second thoughts on 'oh, why is this happening?'" – Frankie*

*"Teachers don't usually think 'what could that kid be going through?'"  
- Susan*

For Jack, it seemed that his relationships with teachers had completely broken down and resulted in him having no desire to repair those relationships or return to school.

*Jack: "I don't really wanna talk to them because I don't know them"*

*Interviewer: "Do you think things would be easier for you in school if you knew them better?"*

*Jack: "No, I don't want to talk to the teachers no matter what. I don't like them" - Jack*

For two of the YP, whether a teacher was understanding or not seemed to be a deciding factor in their relationships with them and willingness to engage in lessons.

*"A teacher that was good would support you, she would understand why you didn't wanna do the work... whereas a bad teacher they'll try and try and get you to do it constantly without understanding, they're gonna be like 'okay, he's refusing to do the work, there's no reason for it.'" – Frankie*

*“Our English teacher is quite nice... she kind of gets it a bit more and when like we act up... she won’t get super antsy about it... she’s quite calm and like chill and she understands me” – Lilly*

#### **5.3.4 Summary of theme two:**

The core finding within this theme relates to the importance of student-teacher relationships. The leading narrative referred to relationships with teachers being ruled by power imbalance and feeling bullied by teachers. YP described instances of being picked on and shamed by teachers in front of their peers. This appeared to lead to feelings of ostracism, relationship breakdown and in one case led to the YP not wanting to attend school. Adding to this, YP felt that their teachers can do things that YP would get in trouble for, in turn causing a sense of injustice and frustration. Feeling understood by teachers appeared to be of crucial importance for YP. Where a YP believed that the teacher was making efforts to understand them and their needs, the relationship appeared to be much more positive.

#### **5.4 Theme three: Experiences of RTTs**

This theme covers what YP are spending their time on when not in school, as well as the impact that not being in school fulltime has on their friendships. The theme reflects the choice and flexibility that YP are given around the set-up of their RTTs, with some YP missing out on favoured lessons and struggling with the lack of varied experiences whilst on RTTs. Lastly the theme reflects YP’s worries that whilst RTTs helps them to avoid the things that make school difficult for them, with no extra support returning to a fulltime timetable will once again highlight their needs and leave them struggling.

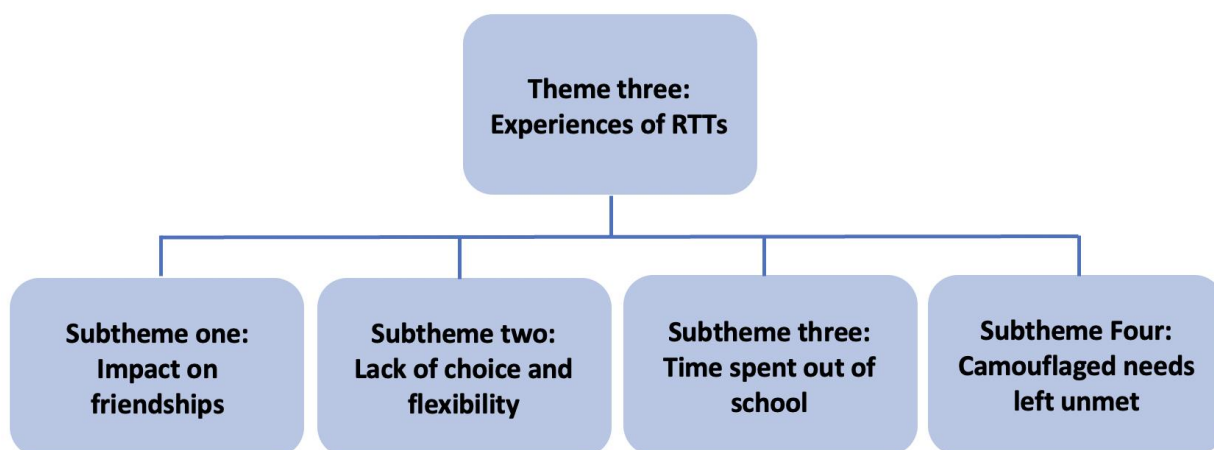


Figure 11. Phase two theme three

#### 5.4.1 Subtheme one: Impacts on friendships

Six of the YP spoke about friendships being a resilience factor at school, for some of them it was the only positive about engaging in school. Friendships appeared to have the power to influence YP's decisions at school, such as encouraging them to engage in lessons, to come into school when they are finding it difficult, or encourage them to reintegrate to fulltime.

*"Actually, that [being on a RTT] was irritating because I'd rather be in school with my mates and stuff chilling rather than being at home" – Frankie*

*"I mean, I know it's [reintegrating back to fulltime] going to be tricky but my head of year has asked me to sit next to my best friends so hopefully that'll get me through it if I'm next to her" – Lilly*

*"Bonnie: I find it easier to come in on the afternoons than the mornings and full days*

*Interviewer: What makes it easier to come in for the afternoons?*

*Bonnie: Well I get to see my friends and then afterwards I can go to lessons" – Bonnie*

Four of the YP discussed the negative impacts that RTTs can have on friendships. It seemed that being on a RTT reduces the YP's opportunities to socialise with their friends and can cause them to feel isolated from their friendship groups. RTTs also appeared to cause peers to gossip about the YP, which seemed to add to YP's anxiety.

*"It's [RTT] breaking friendships. It's hard to explain what I mean by that but because you're on a different timetable to your mates you don't see them as much and obviously you distance from them then"*  
– Frankie

*"People start to see that you're not in school and they'll start to go 'oh why are they not in school' and they'll ask questions and start talking about you behind your back"* – Lilly

By contrast, Amy felt like her friendships are better on a RTT. It seemed that YP who have friends that are also on a RTT allows them to engage in things that are more fun for them which can benefit their friendships.

*"Interviewer: Is having good friendships is something that is important to you?"*

*Amy: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: And how do you feel your friendships are impacted on a RTT?"*

*Amy: Better.*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me why?"*

*Amy: I don't know, it's just better because out of school I can see more people"*

#### **5.4.2 Subtheme two: Lack of choice and flexibility**

Some of the YP experienced a lack of choice and flexibility in the RTT process. Three of the YP explained being told they were going on a RTT, without being asked their thoughts on the

matter. Six of the YP discussed not having choice in the hours or subjects they come to school for, which meant missing out on their preferred lessons.

*“Frankie: I just got told, ‘oh, this is your reduced timetable from now on’ and they didn’t really say ‘is this gonna be alright? Would you prefer different hours?’*

*Interviewer: How did that feel?*

*Frankie: It weren’t good that I couldn’t do it but at the same point, once it’s already set in stone, there’s no point in being like ‘oh, I don’t like that’ because you can’t change it”*

Frankie describes not feeling able to advocate for himself because he has acknowledged and accepted that he isn’t given choice within these decisions. Six of the YP discussed also not having choice in the hours or subjects they come to school for, which meant missing out on their preferred lessons.

*“They’re lessons where you don’t really have to do much writing, so I’m kind of sad about that. I’d rather go to them but if I do those lessons, then that means I have to come in for a full day, which I don’t want to” - Bonnie*

When Jack asked school to review and change his timetable, he asserted that he was met with refusal. This lack of flexibility appeared to result in him becoming disconnected and disengaged with school.

*“Interviewer: Would you change your timetable in any way?*

*Jack: No because I tried getting it changed before and they didn’t do it.*

*Interviewer: What did you ask them to change it to?*

*Jack: I can’t remember. I wanted less hours.*

*Interviewer: How did that feel?*

*Jack: Just don’t care”*

It seemed this lack of choice and flexibility was felt more generally in the school context by Susan, who spoke at length about feeling controlled in life.

*“Susan: I feel very locked in and like you have to follow a system. It makes me feel a bit trapped because I feel like everybody is so limited, everybody gets put into these schools, and they’re so limited, they’re scared to ask things, I just hate it, I hate it because you’re just set to do one thing... every school makes you think in black and white and you can only be the same otherwise you’ve got a problem or you’re different...”*

*Interviewer: How does that feel?*

*Susan: Like you’re a zombie”*

Whilst Susan felt this inflexibility and lack of choice more generally, she was one of two of the YP who were able to choose the lessons that they went to when on a RTT.

*“Yeah I was just put on one [a RTT] and I got to pick what lessons I’d come in and he obviously looked at it and was like ‘okay, yeah, I think that’s good for you’” - Susan*

#### **5.4.3 Subtheme three: time spent out of school**

Most YP described spending time to take part in hobbies when they aren’t in school. Whilst five felt that this was a positive way to spend their time, two described spending time at home as boring.

*“That was probably the worst of it the fact that you’d go home and you’re like, ‘oh that’s great now what?’. I don’t really do much when I’m out of school I just kind of chill in my room, play PlayStation and normal stuff. I don’t really go out that much... I get up in the morning I just wanna do something. I’m not a lazy person. I always wanna be*

*doing something because I'll be like, that's three hours and I haven't done anything" - Frankie*

Unlike Frankie, two YP discussed going out with their friends during hours that they aren't in school. It seemed these YP were spending time with like-minded peers who were also finding school difficult and therefore not attending.

*"Phoebe: Horse riding, motocross, that's it really, go out with my mates.*

*Interviewer: Are your mates not in school in the afternoon?*

*Phoebe: Some of them are. I have one girl I know she doesn't really come into school. She wanted a reduced timetable but they wouldn't give her one so she gets herself suspended so she can go home because she can't stand being here.*

According to the YP, schoolwork either was not sent home for the YP to catch up on, and where it was it wasn't enforced and was perceived as an option. Where this was the case, all of the YP shared that they generally don't engage in it.

*"There was work where you could do it, but they weren't enforcing it at all, there were online classes but they would never enforce it, you'd never have to do it, so obviously if you're not gonna have to do it, then you're not going to"- Frankie*

For Jack, although he doesn't get any work sent home to catch up on, he would prefer to engage in work this way because he would feel more comfortable doing schoolwork at home.

*"Jack: They're supposed to send me work but they don't... I wanna stay at home and do the work rather than always going in... if I was struggling I could ask my parents to help... I don't like asking the teachers because it would feel like more easier because like I don't*

*know, it feels easier when you ask your parents instead of the teachers... because you don't really know them" - Jack*

YP appeared more likely to catch up on lessons that they were interested in and had a choice in how to engage with the subject.

*"The paperwork says I have to do work so, I'll just put a history documentary on and sit and watch that because that's the only lesson that I can fully get, but I only do history at home." - Lilly*

#### **5.4.4 Subtheme four: Camouflaged needs left unmet**

Being in school for reduced hours was viewed as helpful for many of the YP as it helped them to feel less anxious. For some YP, the RTT had enabled them to attend school more than they were before it was put in place.

*"It's really helpful because I don't really get stressed out as much anymore... because I'm not in school as much, I don't like burst as much as I used to" – Phoebe*

*"I think it [being on a RTT] was just easier for me to like not panic about things or overthink things... just be peaceful calm, do my work and then just leave. And I think that helped me so much" - Susan*

However, it appeared that being in school less simply hid the YP's needs. Whilst being in school less reduced the YP's anxiety, even the thought of returning to a fulltime timetable felt difficult for YP and increased their anxiety once again. The underlying need had remained unmet.

*"I mean it's been quite frustrating because teachers haven't been able to particularly solve it. I felt like when I was told I was going on a RTT I kind of thought 'okay, they understand me now, the system, it isn't broken', but it turns out the system is broken... I feel like the mental*

*health support in school and the safeguarding team, they just don't understand what's going on" - Lilly*

Being on a RTT hadn't supported Jack in attending more, and he is still not engaging in school.

*"It just feels the same there's no point at all... I just thought it would be better but it's just not" - Jack*

This links to a finding in phase one, which highlighted the need for RTTs to be part of a wider support plan, where YP have access to other support alongside the RTT, support which focuses on the need of the YP such as their anxiety in school. Some YP did describe receiving extra support, the two main methods of support seemed to be access to pastoral support and corridor or time out cards. However, there were questions about whether these methods of support were really supportive for the YP.

*"They gave me a timeout card but they've taken that away now because they said I used it too much, but what's the point of giving me it if I can't use it. So I've only got one for English now... I used to get sent out of English a lot so now I've just got that so I don't get sent out I can just leave instead" - Phoebe*

*Susan: "I could speak to Miss X... I feel like I wasn't on my own and I could easily just go and speak to someone if I had a problem I did speak to them a couple of times... I remember I struggled with disassociation a lot and I feel like some of the teachers don't know what to do when that happens, I've stopped talking to them about it because I feel bad for them because I don't think they know what to do"*

Like the others, Susan recognised that a RTT was helpful for reducing anxiety, but unlike the others she had managed to reintegrate back to fulltime. Susan had been receiving counselling sessions outside of school, through CAMHS which may have been a factor in her successful reintegration.

#### **5.4.5 Summary of theme three**

YP discussed challenging experiences of RTTs, particularly around friendships, lack of choice and missing out on education. The YP gave a narrative of RTTs being experienced through lack of choice and flexibility, where they felt little control or autonomy over what was happening to them. Seeing their friends less can lead them to feel isolated for their friendship groups. Whilst the majority of YP did not appear to complete catch up work on the lessons they were missing, it gave them an opportunity to engage in hobbies and things that are of importance to them. Overall, most of the YP appeared to find their RTT helpful as it reduced their anxiety. However, the thought of returning to school fulltime caused concern for YP, as the underlying need surrounding their anxiety had been unmet.

#### **5.5 Conclusion**

This phase highlights that YP being put on RTTs are often those who experience challenges at school, with the exam and wider school environment, finding the work difficult, and relationships with teachers, which can lead to struggles with mental health. RTTs appear to be a helpful way of supporting the YP's mental health as it allows them to avoid these challenges, however as the underlying need (mental health, which can be caused by school challenges) is not met, returning to school fulltime seemed to be an extremely challenging thought for some of the YP.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

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### 6.1 Introduction

There is a paucity of research exploring the use of RTTs, and experiences of the YP who are placed on them. In response, this exploratory research aimed to understand how and why RTTs are being used and explore the experiences of both professionals supporting and operationalising them, and YP placed on them. The research questions posed were:

1. How and why are RTTs being operationalised in schools?
2. What are professionals' experiences of supporting YP on RTTs?
3. What are the experiences of YP who have been placed on RTTs?

This chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions and relevant literature. The discussion is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979; 2005), in which factors across wider systems were considered. Following the discussion of research questions, attention will be turned to understanding how different levels of the system are impacting the RTT process and professionals' and YP's experiences of them. The strengths and limitations are then examined, future research directions proposed and recommendations for EPs, schools, LAs and policy makers presented.

### 6.2 How and why are RTTs being operationalised in schools?

Across the professionals' accounts, it was clear that RTTs are being used differently across schools. This includes different school staff making decisions, review meetings being held at different points and the set-up of the RTT being focused on different aspects such as resourcing, shortening the school day, and the removal from lessons. Participants from the LA shared concerns around the process of RTTs being varied and impromptu. The inconsistency in operationalisation of RTTs was also found in Weaver's (2023) research conducted in Wales. What was similar amongst schools is that the decision and discussions to put a RTT in place and decisions and discussions made throughout the review process was led

entirely by schools, with little input from external professionals, and no mention of EPs involvement in the process. The findings highlight a gap in multi-agency working that echoes Weaver's (2023) finding. The lack of multi-agency working across RTT process has resulted in the LA holding their own meetings. However, participants shared concerns around this as conversations discussed within these meetings are not always fed back to schools. There appeared to be a disconnect here, with schools and LAs having separate conversations about the same YP. Participants drew attention to the benefits that could be gained from external professionals being involved in these discussions. Professionals felt they would have a positive influence on these discussions and decisions, through advocating for the YP and adding their unique skills and expertise to conversations about the needs of YP and subsequent support for them. This is consistent with Harris et al's., (2006) who suggested that multi-agency teams could support YP who are engaging in part-time education.

The involvement and consent of parents in these discussions and decisions is an explicit part of government guidance around RTTs (DfE, 2022c). However, findings support the narrative that this is not always the case (Brennan & Browne, 2019). Participants spoke of parents being under pressure to agree to a RTT being put in place for their YP. This pressure is at times a consequence of an attempt to minimise the strain placed on the family during the YPs time at school, with regular meetings and phone calls about the YP's behaviour in school. This pressure is also a consequence of parents not fully understanding what a RTT means for them and their YP and therefore an inability to advocate for themselves and their YP. This raises issues around whether consent is truly informed. This was found to be an issue even when parents are the driving force behind the conversation around RTT. It could perhaps be out of desperation to support their YP, even though they don't truly understand the impacts of a RTT. This is in line with the literature around other methods of exclusion which suggests that parents can be under pressure to home educate even when this is not something they are able to provide (Timpson, 2019). The lack of opportunity for parents to be involved in discussions around RTTs suggested within this research is problematic, as effective communication between parents and schools has been highlighted as a factor of successful reintegration (Corcoran, Bond, & Knox, 2022), which was described to be a challenge by professionals.

The overarching aim of RTTs and last step in operationalisation is to reintegrate YP back into full time education. With this, RTTs should be short-term in nature, as stated by the DfE (2022c). The LA that this study was conducted in gives guidance that this should be no longer than 12 weeks. This seems to be longer than guidance given by many other LAs. As part of this research, I looked at guidance from 20 different LAs as this information is available on their Local Authority website. During my search, the most common guidance appeared to be that RTTs should last no longer than 6-8 weeks. However, findings exposed that RTTs can be in place for much longer than this, in support of wider research (Martin-Denham, 2021). Within this LA, the majority of RTTs had been in place for more than 12 weeks, from the data available. Schools seem to be coping better with medical needs, such as transitioning a YP back into school after a major operation, as there is a clear plan and a clear end point to these needs, being the end of the YP's recovery. It was the RTTs put in place due to challenges around behaviour or mental health that appeared to be the ones where reintegration was difficult. Whilst this finding suggests a conflict between government guidance and practice, there has been recent debate that RTTs should be longer-term in nature. In a recent blog post, a parent commented that the practice of RTTs puts timelines above YP's needs (Bladon, 2024). They suggest that putting deadlines on RTTs is unhelpful or counter-productive, recognising that recovering from mental health difficulties is not quick in nature. This parent suggests that with a different approach to the length of RTTs, they could be much more effective in supporting YP and their recovery. This is caveated within the blog post, as it is highlighted that the YP's underlying needs must be supported beyond the RTT. The parent shares his experience that wider professional support and joint-up working between school and family was crucial for success in his experience. Joint working between school and family, as well as focusing on targeting underlying needs, are both factors of successful reintegration found in wider literature (Corcoran, Bond, & Knox, 2022).

Whilst other research suggests that schools appear to lack the urgency to reintegrate YP back to a fulltime timetable (Weaver, 2023, p. 96), this research acknowledges that schools are aware of the urgency but are finding it difficult due to conflicting factors. Whilst research has stressed the negative impacts that RTTs can have on parents (Brennan & Brown, 2019), this research discusses that actually it can be desirable for parents. Participants allocated the challenges of reintegration to parental and YP motivation to keep the RTT in place. RTTs

appeared to be favourable by parents and YP as it had positive impacts on family life and allowed YP to avoid school which may be difficult for them. In turn, reintegrating them back to fulltime and increasing hours can be difficult for YP to engage in. This is also a finding by Martin-Denham (2021), where headteachers discussed exclusions being a desirable outcome as YP would rather be at home than in school.

Participants discussed RTTs being used to manage a YP's SEND needs. This supports findings in the literature, which evidence that significant amounts of YP with SEND are being placed on RTTs (Contact a Family, 2013). YP with SEND were often described by participants as not being able to cope with a full school day. This was also recognised where YP were waiting for a more appropriate placement, such as a special school. The narrative that YP can't cope and a RTT being the only answer may be due to schools having limited resources to cope with the needs of the YP that they support (Contact a Family, 2013; O'Brien, 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021). Participants spoke of the challenges that schools are facing with staff resourcing. This can lead to schools relying on RTTs to plug the gaps in staff resourcing by removing a YP for part of the school day at times where they do not have staff to support the YP. Limited staffing in schools also appears to be restricting schools' ability to form nurturing relationships with YP. The literature tells us that relationships between staff and students is crucial for a YP's success in school (Erikson, 1987), but school staff feel that there are high levels of emotional investment needed to build these relationships (Fitzsimmons, Trigg, & Premkumar, 2021). Limited staffing may decrease the time that teachers have to invest in these relationships, therefore impacting YP's ability to navigate the challenges that they face in school and ultimately leading to a RTT to manage this.

An unexpected finding from this study was the link between EBSA and RTTs. All participants in this study spoke about the use of RTTs for YP who are experiencing EBSA, and rates of this seem to be accelerating. The use of RTTs for YP experiencing EBSA has not been explored in the literature, however Chian's (2022) research does briefly mention that two YP that they interviewed said that part-time schooling was helpful as it allowed them to leave school when they were anxious.

The majority of literature on RTTs focuses on its link to behaviour and exclusion (Parsons, 2018; Timpson, 2019; Brennan & Browne, 2019; Weaver, 2023). This study supports the narrative in the literature, finding that RTTs are being used to manage behaviour in schools. Participants also alluded to blurred lines between RTTs and exclusions, with the only difference highlighted being that RTTs are agreed. It appeared that RTTs may be used before exclusions or suspensions, to demonstrate that the school have put support in place before making the decision and perhaps support or provide evidence for that decision. This is similar to Weaver's (2023) finding that RTTs are used as a final chance before the YP is excluded. RTTs were also discussed as being used after a suspension, to build the YP's time up gradually. One of the potential benefits of a RTT highlighted by participants in this study is that removing a YP for a part of the day can safeguard others where their behaviour puts others at risk. This benefit has been highlighted in previous literature around exclusion (Martin-Denham, 2021).

### **6.3 What are professionals' experiences of supporting YP on RTTs?**

Participants recognised that RTTs are being overused for vulnerable YP, such as those with previous trauma, being in care, living in poverty, and being involved with crime. This could link to research around identity and labelling, where YP pick up labels which make them more likely to be treated differently (Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Gilmore, 2013). Professionals were also concerned about the vulnerability of YP and what they spent their time doing out of school, and acknowledged the potential risks of exposure to crime and exploitation for YP who aren't engaging in education. This raises concerns that RTTs are putting already vulnerable YP, perhaps the YP who are most vulnerable in society, at further risk. As well as this, missing out on education was another consequence of RTTs identified by participants in this study. Participants discussed that missing out on education can have long-term impacts for these YP which makes employability difficult as they have lacked the structure, routine and life skills that can be gained from attending school fulltime. Whilst no research in England has discussed consequences of RTTs, the consequences highlighted in this study are the same as those found in literature around exclusionary practice, where lack of employment has been found to be a long-term consequence linked to exclusion in longitudinal research (Berridge et al, 2001).

With this in mind, findings highlight that these YP are likely to have experienced a sense of failure within the school system previously, and RTTs act to reinforce these feelings once more by communicating to YP that they are unwanted and undervalued. These implicit forms of labelling can cause long term impacts on their sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Riddick, 2012). This supports discussions by Weaver (2023) who's research suggests that RTTs could be worsening the YP's well-being, rather than encouraging reintegration and supporting behaviour.

Professionals in this study asserted a difference in conceptualisation of behaviour between school staff and LA staff. These different conceptualisations were experienced as a challenge by professionals working within the LA, causing tensions within the system. LA staff understand behaviour to be a symptom of underlying needs of YP. They highlight a need to spend time exploring what need the behaviour is communicating. However, evidence suggests that school staff fail to explore these underlying needs, instead skipping to punishment methods. Brennan and Browne (2019) discuss this issue and call on schools to train staff members to undertake functional behaviour analysis to explore the cause and function of YP's behaviour. Literature on exclusion also highlights the lack of understanding given to behaviour (McCluskey 2014; McCluskey et al 2016). Not only does this conceptualisation leave YP with needs unmet, but it can also impact their self-identity. Research has shown that using labels for YP such as 'naughty' can locate difficulties within the child and suggest that it is unchangeable (O'Reilly, 2007). YP take on this label as part of their identity and use it to explain their differences from others, in turn becoming self-fulfilling (Caslin, 2019). This is particularly important as professionals shared that RTTs give the YP messages that they are unwanted.

The overall experience of professionals supporting YP on RTTs is that RTTs can only be supportive when they are part of a wider support plan, with the underlying needs of the YP's challenges supported alongside the RTT. Where this doesn't happen, RTTs simply puts a "plaster over a crack", removing the YP from the aspects of school that they find challenging without truly supporting them with these aspects.

#### **6.4 What are the experiences of YP who have been placed on RTTs?**

Both YP and professionals identified that the current school system is not working for some YP who end up on RTTs. The busy environment, lessons perceived as boring and finding the work difficult were factors that are making school a challenging experience for YP. Five of the YP expressed that engaging in these challenges every day leaves them feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that some of the YP linked secondary school with deteriorating mental health and wellbeing. The mental health crisis amongst YP in England has been widely covered in the literature and the concern continues to grow (UNICEF, 2020). A recent survey in England completed between September 2022 and March 2023 found that 52% of 640 YP in school years 5 to 13 said school was having a negative impact on their mental health (Popoola, Sivers, Hooper & Ahad, 2024). The findings in this research supports this, suggesting that RTTs are being used to relieve the anxiety that YP are experiencing as a result of the challenges faced in school. In order to cope with being in school, YP are needing to attend only part-time.

The current research confers a finding that has not previously been discussed in the research on the aspirations of YP on RTTs. School may be so overwhelming for some YP that they are unable to see past the pressure placed on academic results. This may be a result of the wider system of accountability and competition discussed in the literature review. With government pressure on schools to measure school attainment (Lecki & Goldstein, 2017), these pressures are passed on to YP and often expressed as the most important factor for a successful future. The findings in this study support this, as YP shared that they have fears for the future as a result of predicting that they will fail their GCSEs which leads to thoughts about homelessness and abandonment. These fears could also be due to language used by teachers, as research suggests that the language used during our social interactions plays a key role in the creation of identities, which includes self-concept. One YP spoke about this directly, saying that their teacher had told them that they will fail their GCSEs. This finding could confirm concerns shared by professionals in phase one, who discussed that RTTs provide YP with messages that they are unwanted and undervalued, impacting their self-esteem.

By far the biggest challenge discussed by YP within this research was relationships with teachers, supporting other research looking into RTTs (Mahon, 2022). The literature review discussed that relationships between YP and teachers are ruled by hierarchy and power. This hierarchical structure in schools has led to YP experiencing antagonistic and humiliating treatment from teachers such as being told to “shut up” and being publicly shamed in school, ultimately leading to them feeling that they are not valued (Pomeroy, 1999). Whilst Pomeroy’s research is dated, findings in this research suggest that it is still relevant. YP described feeling inferior and patronised by teachers, being shouted at by teachers and feeling picked on by them. YP’s narratives also suggested that they had built a reputation with teachers which made it more likely that they would get into trouble, which could be a result of implicit labelling (Riddick, 2012; Hjärne and Säljö 2012). The difficulties with relationships could be explained by social identity theory, in which teachers and students have negative inclinations towards each other as they perceive each other to be in separate social groups and therefore do not identify with each other (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The research also supports the notion that teachers are misusing their power as YP perceived that teachers are using severe punishments where it may not be warranted (Ibrahim & Zaatari, 2020). This research highlights that YP feel a sense of injustice as they expressed that they get punished for behaviours that teachers subject them to, compounding the power imbalance. This is a finding highlighted in research looking into other methods of supporting behaviour (Lusted, 2022). Research suggests that the use of person-centred approaches can readdress power imbalances and help to gather pupil views which leads to successful reintegration (Rogers, 2016; Corcoran, Bond & Knox, 2022). It is important to note that there was some mention through the narrative that not all relationships with teachers are experienced this way. There seemed to be inconsistencies in how teachers interact with YP, the main factor in this appeared to be whether or not the teachers took the time to understand and explore the YP’s needs.

Much like the discourse of behaviour discussed by professionals, YP discussed directly that some teachers don’t take time to work out and appreciate why they are behaving the way they are. This caused frustration for the YP and in one case had led to a YP becoming completely disengaged with teachers and school. These strained relationships could be adding to the struggles with mental health being experiences by YP, as research shows that

being rejected or feeling ignored can lead to negative feelings such as anxiety and depression (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This echoes findings discussed in phase one, which highlighted that school staff don't have the space or time to explore what the underlying needs of YP. YP expressed a desire to be understood by teachers, and where they were, the relationship was more positive. Whilst phase one presented findings that YP has more access to pastoral support when on a RTT, these findings could suggest that these YP need a relational approach before it gets to a RTT being in place. If this was the case, the YP may feel more understood and therefore the protective factor of relationships with teachers would be in place, needs would be better understood and the YP may be better able to engage in school without the use of a RTT.

It is important to note that schools are incredibly busy, complex places, working within inflexible and stretched systems where anything can happen at any time of the day. Most teachers do not deliberately create strained relationships with YP but are highly stressed. It should not be about blaming teachers here but recognising the impacts of the underlying systems in play (Mahon, 2022). Government policies are putting pressure on schools by increasing levels of accountability around exam results (Lecki & Goldstein, 2017) and the need to reduce exclusions (CCO, 2013) without providing adequate resources to support them in meeting these pressures (Power & Taylor, 2020). The mental health of YP is deteriorating, with estimates in 2021 being that 5 YP in every classroom are suffering with mental health difficulties (NHS, 2021). With the coupling of increasing needs of YP and increasing pressure on schools without adequate resources, the only way that schools can support these YP is through approaches such as RTTs that remove them from the classroom. In essence, schools are incentivised to use approaches that are exclusionary in nature, rather than approaches that are built on relationships and nurture. An example of this can be clearly seen in the results of this research, where there is a paradox between professionals asserting that RTTs show that schools want to work with YP, yet the very nature of RTTs ultimately means working with YP less.

Findings also bring attention to the lack of time and space that school staff have to explore these behaviours. It is possible to think about this in relation to research around compassion fatigue which reduces school staffs' ability to feel compassion for YP as they are experiencing

difficulties in carrying out their job properly, due to lacking resources (Koenig, Rodger, & Specht, 2018). It could be beneficial for teachers to have access to better emotional support such as teacher supervision to provide them with the space and time to explore what may be going on for YP underneath their behaviour. EPs would be well placed to deliver this for teachers (Ferguson, 2022).

The YP in this research highlighted the negative impact that RTTs can have on YP's friendships. Spending less time in school removes the YP's opportunities to socialise with their friends, leading to feelings of isolation and distance from the friendships group for these YP. YP also mentioned that RTTs can cause peers to ask questions about the YP's situation, creating gossip between peers, which appeared to add to their anxiety. This negative impact wasn't felt in situations where YP had the opportunity to spend their time out of school with friends who are also on RTTs.

The YP also discussed the lack of choice and flexibility in the RTT process, supporting wider research (Weaver, 2023). Phase one of this research showed that decisions within process of RTTs are ultimately school led, with little involvement from parents or wider professionals. Phase two adds to this, suggesting that some YP also have little involvement with decisions. YP discussed being told they were going on the RTT, rather than being involved in the discussion of whether it would be helpful. There was a narrative that suggested that YP did not advocate for themselves or question these decisions as they had accepted that due to having a lack of autonomy, it wouldn't make a difference. This acceptance may be due to lack of choice and flexibility being felt in a wider school context, as discussed by one of the YP. One YP did discuss asking the school to change his timetable, but in this situation he was met with a lack of flexibility as the school refused to make the changes that he was asking for.

The findings around YP's experiences that have been discussed so far can be understood within the psychological theory of SDT. In essence, YP in this research described lacking all three of the psychological needs within the theory. They shared fears for the future which included failing GCSEs, suggesting a lack of feelings of competence. They also discussed not feeling listened to and accepting that they don't have a choice in the process of RTTs, nor decisions made about them. This removes their sense of autonomy. YP discussed at length

the issues that they experience in the relationships with their teachers, in which they often feel disrespected, picked on and misunderstood by teachers. Additionally,, YP mentioned the negative impacts that RTTs can have on their relationships with friends and peers, as RTTs remove opportunities to socialise and can cause peer gossip, thus, damaging their sense of relatedness.

In contrast to findings in phase one where professionals shared concerns around what YP are engaging in out of school, YP discussed using their time out of school for engaging in hobbies such as playing games and horse riding. Some YP did discuss spending time out of school with friends, but it was unclear what they would spend their time doing out of school. It is possible that this could lead to exploitation, as mentioned by YOT professionals in phase one. There were mixed experiences around whether schools would send work home for YP to catch up on lessons that they had missed whilst not in school. It was said that whilst some schools send work home for YP to engage in, it was not enforced and therefore YP chose not to complete the work. Where catch up work was done, the YP had choice in how to engage in the lesson, such as watching documentaries. Following on from the earlier discussion in this chapter around YP experiencing a lack of autonomy, this finding could support the notion that experiencing autonomy can lead to better engagement.

With similarities to phase one, YP acknowledged that whilst a RTT had helped to reduce their anxieties around school, it had not addressed their underlying needs. For the YP, this meant that anxieties were once again increased when the thought of returning to school fulltime was mentioned. In one case, where a successful reintegration had happened, the YP had received support for their mental health from outside organisation CAMHS. This suggests that the underlying causes of YP's anxieties around attending school, whether that may be general mental health needs, difficulties with the environment, or finding the work challenging, must be supported before or alongside the use of a RTT to make it truly successful. For example, school may want to consider whether the YP has a learning need and therefore needs more support in the classroom. The notion of this has been a crucial factor in other research looking in to RTTs (Mahon, 2022; Weaver, 2023), and wider research looking at successful factors for reintegration (Corcoran, Bond, & Knox, 2022), highlighting the importance.

## 6.5 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model Considerations

The ecological systems model recognises that there are many factors that could directly or indirectly influence the context of RTTs within a LA, why YP are placed on a RTT, as well as YP and professionals' experiences on them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Researchers have suggested that it is less helpful to share analyses of these complex issues in a way that presents the data in separate systems due to the interactional element between the systems (Thomson 2020). Therefore, some of the considerations for reduced timetables across Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005), outlined throughout the discussion, will be presented together in figure 12, below.

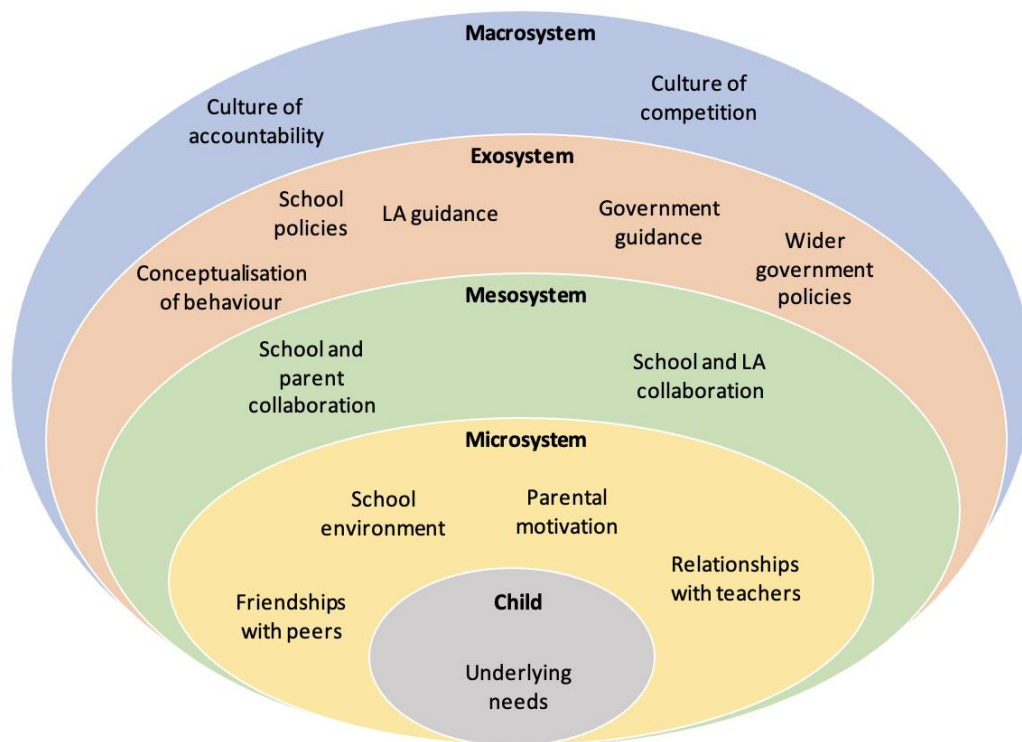


Figure 12. Considerations for RTTs across Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979; 2005)

## 6.6 Strengths and limitations of the current study and ideas for future research

The quality of this research will be judged using the set of principles outlined by Yardley (2000), which are said to be essential characteristics and qualities of qualitative research. Yardley (2000) states that her principles are not a set of rigid rules but are open to flexible interpretation, in keeping with the philosophy of qualitative research.

### **6.6.1 Sensitivity to context**

In this principle, Yardley (2000) highlights the need for the researcher to have knowledge on the context of the research. This contextual knowledge comes from both theoretical understanding (evidenced through the literature review and theoretical underpinnings in chapter two of this thesis), as well as an awareness of the socio-cultural setting of the research.

This research took an exploratory stance focusing on one LA to gain much unknown knowledge about the context of RTTs and make sense of the YP's experiences. Context was a central component of the research, utilised through the two-phase methodology, in which phase one focused on gaining knowledge about the context of RTTs. Future research could involve multiple LAs, exploring the operationalisation and experiences of RTTs in a wider sample to help build a picture in the literature of the use of RTTs across LAs. This would allow for comparison of operationalisation and sharing good practice and warning of widespread barriers.

The research offered a widespread perspective including school staff, LA professionals and YP, in keeping with the theoretical underpinning of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) social-ecological theory. This social-ecological theory not only underpinned the choice of participants, but was present throughout the whole thesis including considerations within the discussion and recommendations for EPs. Thus, the socio-cultural context was present throughout. Due to restrictions placed on the Thesis it was not possible to include parents in the sample. Future research could aim to capture the views of parents whose YP are on a RTT. Adding parents voice to the narrative would provide another unique perspective on the RTT process. Similarly, the school staff within this research were all part of the senior leadership team. It could be beneficial for future research to widen this perspective by collecting the views of staff who are based in the classroom, again offering another unique perspective to the conversation.

### **6.6.2 Commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence**

Yardley (2000), groups these principles as they all concern expectations for thoroughness across data collection, analysis and reporting. Transparency and coherence relate to a

construction of data which is meaningful to the reader and being explicit in its purpose. These principles will be evidenced in the recommendations chapter, showing that the research has meaning and purpose throughout multiple systems and levels; this also demonstrates the final principles in Yardley's (2000) qualities, impact and importance. Whilst this research will provide recommendations for EPs, future research could explore more directly the role that EPs could have within the RTT process. This research could involve gaining insight into the capacity and ability for EPs to be involved in the process. The research could also explore more widely what their role may look like.

According to Yardley (2000), commitment refers to prolonged engagement with the research area and immersion in relevant data and rigour refers to the completeness of data collection and analysis (for example, adequateness of the sample, completeness of interpretation). Included in the widespread perspective gained through the different participants within the research, this research was one of the first to gather the voice of YP on their experiences of RTTs, and the first in England. Seven quality interviews were conducted in this study to produce rich data. This sample was hard to reach, and it took much commitment to include the YP within the sample. However due to the challenges involved in recruiting YP for phase two of the research, the sample was limited, and it was not possible to complete a follow up interview with the YP. Future research could focus on longitudinal research that follows the RTT process overtime to explore the operationalisation of RTTs in real-time, capturing the supportive factors in the experiences of those who manage to successfully reintegrate back to fulltime education whilst exploring the barriers to those who do not.

Member checking added rigour to the research by increasing the likelihood that the participant's views were being interpreted and represented correctly (Weller, 2012). In phase one, all professionals were sent their pseudonymised transcripts to give them an opportunity to edit or remove parts of their interview. In phase two, I used techniques such as summarising and repeating what I had taken from what they said, checking that I had understood them correctly. Member checking as an approach adds credibility to qualitative research designs (Robson, 2022).

The absence of a pilot study was another limitation of the research. Conducting a pilot study could have strengthened the interview schedules and in turn increased credibility of the results. However, in wanting to allow the YP the true ability to voice their experiences, the questions on the interview schedule were kept very broad and the interviews were largely led by the YP, meaning each interview was different.

This research outlined some groups of YP who are being placed on RTTs, including YP with SEND needs, those who are experiencing EBSA, youth offenders, LAC, and those who are presenting with challenging behaviours. Whilst the aim of this research was exploratory in nature across the RTT process in general, due to a lack of research, future research could aim to explore the use of RTTs for one of these groups of YP exclusively. This would provide a more in-depth insight that could provide distinct findings around challenges and gaps in support for these particular YP.

## **6.7 Recommendations for EP practice**

EPs work across multiple systems surrounding YP and therefore implications for EPs will be considered alongside Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (2005) within this chapter. Person and process will be considered together to honour the interactive factor between these components. The context that the YP is engaged in will be considered before acknowledging the time aspect of the RTT process.

### **6.7.1 Process and person**

YP experienced a lack of autonomy throughout the RTT process, with their views and decisions made about them often superseded by the views of school staff. EPs are well placed to play an integral role in ensuring YP's views are captured and listened to, in-line with government legislation (DfE & DoH, 2014). EPs could also support school staff to utilise person-centred approaches to gather the views of YP, whilst highlighting to schools the importance of this as part of the RTT process. Having obtained YP's views, EPs **could** work with schools in a multiagency capacity, including external professionals, to design a bespoke and well planned RTT and wider support plan taking into account the wishes of the YP.

Professionals shared concerns around parental involvement within the process, including the issue of parents not always having the knowledge to give informed consent around the process. Where a RTT is agreed, EPs are well placed to provide advice and support to schools in explaining the RTT process to parents, providing them with the knowledge that they need and deserve. EPs can also act as key professionals in supporting and empowering parents in their involvement in the process (Squires et al, 2007).

One of the main functions of the EP is to assess the needs of YP across several areas: cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social emotional and mental health, and physical and sensory. YP within this research mentioned struggles with their mental health, finding schoolwork difficult, and challenges with the environment which could link to the areas of assessment that EPs carry out. A major finding in this research is that schools are failing to explore and identify the underlying needs of YP, and leaving these hidden means that YP do not feel able to reintegrate back to fulltime once on a RTT. Therefore, EPs could have a crucial role in supporting schools to explore, understand and support difficulties that YP may be facing which could be leading to the perceived need of a RTT, using a range of creative assessment methods (Woods & Farrell, 2006).

### **6.7.2 Context**

A notable finding within this research reflects the difficult student-teacher relationships experienced by the YP. The research discussed that relational approaches would be beneficial for YP, although this would require high levels of emotional investment from teachers (Fitzsimmons, Trigg, & Premkumar, 2021). EPs are well placed to provide support to increase school staffs' knowledge of the relational needs of YP. Whilst this support may involve training, research has argued that training alone does not support effective implementation and does little to change practice or promote organisational change (Fixsen et al., 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Chidley & Stringer, 2020). Therefore, EPs may wish to refer to the Implementation Framework, a practical, planning tool to support planning work with schools (Chidley & Stringer, 2020), when planning how to support schools with their relational approaches. EPs could also utilise the use of Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) and Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP) within this plan, to support schools in building effective relationships with YP and create more reflective practice (Quin, 2017; Fukkink et al, 2011).

Support could also include improving knowledge of trauma-informed approaches, which has been called for by parents who have taken part in research looking into RTTs (Mahon, 2002).

EPs could also support in a supervisory capacity, to support the emotional investment from teachers in creating these relationships. Consultation can support staff in managing anxiety, have the space and time to explore challenges, and consider alternative ideas and ways of working (Solomon & Nashat, 2010). EPs are frequently offering supervision to professionals and have the skills to make this a successful session, however only 17.5% of supervision is being given to those outside of their teams (Dunsmuir, Lang & Leadbetter, 2015). This research supports the notion for EPs to increase this percentage and include school staff within their supervisory workload. This support could also take the form of consultation with school staff, perhaps in a drop in format or as a distinct offer, to enable school staff to seek support and experience containment (Dunsmuir, Lang & Leadbetter, 2015).

The research highlighted that YP are experiencing challenges with their mental health. EPs are well placed to support schools embed proactive whole school approaches at a systemic level to protect YP's mental health and wellbeing (Roffey, 2016). As the research presents that RTTs decrease YP's anxieties around school, improving the mental health ethos and offer in schools could prevent the need for a RTT, or support the reintegration back to fulltime.

### **6.7.3 Time**

Applying psychological theory, EPs could support schools to keep in mind the crucial aspect of the time element throughout the RTT process using a graduated approach. One way that EPs might achieve this is by offering a unique perspective on multi-agency panels and meetings that are making decisions around and monitoring RTTs. EPs are well placed to start conversations, sensitively challenge and facilitate a solution-focused problem-solving approach during these discussions. As this research shows, the way that schools are conceptualising behaviour is problematic for YP. Within these group settings, EPs could work to challenge the narratives that schools hold around YP and their behaviour at the earliest stage, increasing schools' awareness that behaviour is communicating an underlying need. This is critical within the time aspect to act as a preventative measure within the YP's stories.

## **6.8 Recommendations for schools and LAs**

Schools **could** consider the importance of relation, competence and autonomy for YP and foster school policies and environments that allow these psychological needs to be met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Schools could also reconsider behaviour policies that are focusing on punishment and instead promote the need to build positive teacher-student relationships as a preventative and reactive approach to supporting behaviour. Schools could encourage autonomy for YP by gathering their views and including them in plans that impact them, such as the process of RTTs. In order to foster competence, schools could consider the language that they use towards YP. For example, labelling YP's behaviour in ways that suggest they are innate and telling YP that they are going to 'fail' will only make YP take on these labels and attach them to their identity (O'Reilly, 2007; Caslin, 2019).

Results support other research which suggests that the process of a RTT would benefit from a multi-agency approach that gains from different professionals' skills and knowledge (Weaver, 2023). However, findings from this research suggest that there is currently a disconnect between the LA and schools in the RTT process. Schools could be encouraged to consider what external professionals have been involved with the YP, or should be involved with the YP, and involve them in discussions throughout the process. Schools could also be encouraged to consult with EPs around putting RTTs in place and reviewing progress throughout the process. Parents must also be involved in these discussions, and schools could consider how parents are made aware of what the RTT entails before asking parents to make decisions or provide consent. LAs could also consider how internal conversations around RTTs are passed on to schools, and whether schools being involved in the discussion would be more beneficial.

Schools could be encouraged to share best practice of RTT. These discussions would be beneficial for schools and support them in reintegrating YP when they are ready, back to a full-time timetable.

## **6.9 Recommendations for government and policy makers**

Findings suggest that schools are using RTTs in a variety of ways that can be detrimental to YP and are not always aligned with current government guidance. Policy makers could

consider creating clearer guidance around how and why RTTs should be used by schools. This might include the use of case studies to demonstrate examples where RTTs are working well and what best practice looks like.

Policy makers could consider whether schools should be formally required to record and report on their use of RTTs, to allow government and LAs to monitor their use. With the added responsibility to be explicit about their use of RTTs, schools could be held to account around their practice.

A review of how RTTs are being used within England might be beneficial as the findings suggest that they are currently being used in ways that do not align with current guidance. This could include a critical reflection on the time aspect as it has been debated that the notion of deadlines is a one size fits all structure that is not helpful. This could be considered alongside the context that RTTs must be part of a wider support plan that is led by multi-agency discussions.

Policy makers could consider the pressure that current policies and guidance put on schools with little funding or resource available. Evidence suggest that this pressure is incentivising schools to use approaches to behaviour that are exclusionary in nature, which can have serious consequences for YP. Reviewing policies and guidance around behaviour so that they favour a relational approach over a discipline approach could be beneficial for both schools and YP. This is particularly important in the current context of academies not being governed by LAs (Partridge, 2018)

## **6.10 Next steps**

This thesis will be presented to the EPs within the LA that the research was undertaken. Discussions around the findings will also be shared with people within the LA that are involved in the monitoring of RTTs. All participants and schools that took part in the research will be provided with a summary of the findings. The research will also be passed to the YP through a one-page summary document. Clear and accessible language will be used to disseminate the information to schools and YP. Finally, the research will be presented to TEPs across all years on my course as well as practicing EPs that tutor on the course. The longer-term aim

will be to publish a paper capturing the most pertinent parts of the research to reach a wider audience, including school staff. Consideration will also be given to other methods of dissemination to school staff, for example designing a workshop for school committees, including time for discussion and reflection on their RTT practices.

### **6.11 Conclusion**

All of the YP interviewed in this study are extremely vulnerable, with levels of anxiety amongst YP rising astronomically. School staff and LA professionals are trying to support these YP in challenging circumstances ruled by limited resourcing and inflexible systems. This at times is leading to the use of RTTs, which in current practice is experienced by YP as a lack of sense of agency, relation and competency.

This research interviewed school staff and LA professionals who are involved in supporting YP that are on RTTs, as well as YP who have been placed on one to capture their experiences. This allowed for a wide ecological perspective into the phenomena of RTTs to be gained, something that has not been achieved before within the literature. The research is the first piece of research to qualitatively capture YP's experiences and perspectives.

These findings highlight the varied approach to RTTs that schools are taking. The process is ultimately led by schools, without sufficient involvement from parents, external professionals and YP when making decisions throughout the process. RTTs are being used by schools to manage YP's needs, including SEND needs, medical needs, and YP experiencing EBSA. RTTs are also being used to support teachers where YP's behaviour is difficult to manage. Professionals shared that limited staff resourcing impacts schools' ability to provide support for these YP, which then leads to the need of a RTT so that support in school is needed less frequently.

Throughout the process, there are challenges and tensions that exist. Professionals shared concerns that RTTs are being overused for vulnerable YP, whilst putting them at further risk by removing them from the school setting. The process is currently happening without distinct and effective multi-agency discussions with external professionals that could have beneficial perspectives to add to the discussions. YP shared that they experience challenges in the

school system such as restricted curriculum and busy environments, which can have devastating impacts on their mental health. YP also experience impacts on their friendships through removed opportunities to socialise whilst on the RTT, leading to isolation. RTTs deliver messages to YP that they are unwanted, which can impact on their self-worth and lead to worries about the future with little aspirations.

Overall, there appeared to be somewhat of a disconnect between school staff and LA professionals in the way that they are conceptualising behaviour and support for YP, where the LA views behaviour as a communication but school staff lack the time and space to be able to explore these underlying needs. School staff also lack the time and space to foster a relational approach with YP where they feel understood and listened to. Fundamentally, this leads to YP experiencing unmet needs. When placed on RTTs, YP experience eased anxiety around school however the RTT itself does not meet the underlying need, and therefore reintegration back to fulltime is often not possible. Hence, RTTs must be part of a well-planned, wider support plan which involve multi-agency discussion and aims to support the underlying need of YP so that the RTT is no longer needed long-term.

It is critical that EPs, schools, and LAs work together to put systems and processes in place to give these YP agency, supportive relationships and a sense of competency. EPs must support the process of RTTs across varied systems. Through supervision, consultation, training and involvement in multi-agency discussions, EPs should help schools to understand the needs of YP and shift the underlying narrative around behaviour.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Phase one interview schedule

##### LA Staff Interview Schedule

##### *Contextual semi-structured interview questions for LA staff*

**Introduction:** Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project exploring the use of reduced timetables in secondary schools. This interview will allow me to understand more about the local authority context and how reduced timetables work in this LA.

Your responses will remain pseudonymised and will be used at the point of transcription and reporting and any other identifiable information will be modified or removed.

Please let me know if you would like to stop the interview at any point.

Do you have any questions?

Are you okay if I audio-record/video-record the interview today?

Key:

- Main question
- Follow up question/prompt if not covered

#### Questions/Prompts:

1. Can you tell me about your role within the LA?
2. I want to get a sense of the wider context before I move on to reduced timetables. Could you tell me about the Local Authority's position on behaviour in schools?
  - *What support does the LA give to schools in relation to behaviour?*
3. What is the current context of exclusions within the Local Authority?
  - *How many exclusions?*
  - *How has this area evolved? E.g., have the number of exclusions increased or decreased?*
4. What is a reduced timetable?
5. Could you tell me about the process of placing a young person on a reduced timetable?
  - *What/who informs the decision making?*
  - *How long does the provision last?*
  - *What are the sorts of reasons for young people being placed on reduced timetables?*
  - *How has the use of reduced timetables evolved? E.g., how long have reduced timetables been being used?*
  - *Is there any variability in the use between schools? Tell me about it.*
  - *How do you support young people who are on reduced timetables within your role?*
  - *What other support does the LA give to schools in relation to reduced timetables?*
6. How is the process reviewed?
  - *Who is involved in this process?*
  - *How does the process feel?*
7. What is the Local Authority's position on the use of reduced timetables?
  - *Is there any guidance or policies by the LA on reduced timetables? Tell me about it.*
  - *What do you think are school's perspectives on the use of reduced timetables?*
8. What is your opinion on reduced timetables?
  - *How effectively do you think reduced timetables operate in schools?*
9. What YP are being placed on RTTs?
  - *What do you think their views of reduced timetables are?*
  - *What are the impacts on YP?*

- *In your experience, have you noticed any similarities of YP who are put on reduced timetables? What are they?*

10. Are there any ways that the process of reduced timetables could be improved? What are they?

Would you like to add anything else?

## School Staff Interview Schedule

### *Contextual semi-structured interview questions for school staff*

**Introduction:** Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project exploring the use of reduced timetables in secondary schools. This interview will allow me to understand more about the local authority context and how reduced timetables work in this LA.

Your responses will remain confidential, pseudonyms will be used at the point of transcription and reporting and any other identifiable information will be modified or removed.

Please let me know if you would like to stop the interview at any point.

Do you have any questions?

Are you okay if I audio-record/video-record the interview today?

#### **Questions/Prompts:**

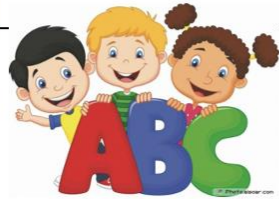
Key:

- Main question
- Follow up question/prompt if not covered

1. Tell me a bit about your role.
2. I want to get a sense of the wider context before I move on to reduced timetables. Can you tell me a little bit about your school's position on behaviour?
  - *What support does the school get by external services in relation to behaviour?*
3. What is the current context of exclusions within your school?
4. What is a reduced timetable?
5. Could you tell me about the process of placing a young person on a reduced timetable?
  - *What/who informs the decision making?*
  - *How is the process reviewed?*
  - *When on a reduced timetable, what happens next?*
  - *How long does the provision last?*
  - *What are the sorts of reasons for young people being placed on reduced timetables?*
  - *How has the use of reduced timetables evolved? E.g., how long have reduced timetables been being used?*
6. What agencies are you in consultation with during the process?
  - *How does the LA support schools in this area?*
  - *Is there any guidance or policies by the LA on reduced timetables? Tell me about it.*
7. What is your opinion on reduced timetables?
8. How do you think young people experience being on reduced timetables?
  - *What do you think their views of reduced timetables are?*
  - *What are the impacts for the YP?*
9. Are there any ways that the process of reduced timetables could be improved? What are they?
10. Would you like to add anything else?

**Appendix B**  
*Template of the Life Path approach*

|        | Pre-School | Primary School | Secondary School | The Future |
|--------|------------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| Home   |            |                |                  |            |
| School |            |                |                  |            |
| Other  |            |                |                  |            |



## Appendix C

*Example of YP's Grid Elaboration Method*

|        |               |
|--------|---------------|
| Calmer | less pressure |
| easier | helpful       |



## **Appendix D**

### *Phase two interview schedule*

#### **YP Interview Schedule**

##### **Overarching research questions**

What are the experiences of YP on reduced school timetables?

What circumstances and challenges have YP who are on reduced timetables experienced through their lives?

##### **Topics to be covered:**

Experiences of school journey

Key life events outside of school

Experience of being on a reduced timetables

##### **Introduction:**

*I want to find out some more about you today, including your experiences of school and maybe important things that have happened outside of school as well.*

##### **Opening question:**

Could you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

##### **Prompts:**

What do you like to do? What are you good at? What's an interesting fact about yourself?

How would someone who knows you well describe you?

##### **Topic: Experiences of school journey; key life events outside of school**

##### **Life journey activity:**

*Introduction: I want you to have a think about some of the key events that have happened throughout your life. You don't have to do things in order. Is there a time that stands out as being particularly bad? Or particularly good?*

Show the YP a template of the life journey activity. Offer them the chance to fill out a template or create their own.

**If the YP does not want to take part in the activity, move forward with just asking the questions.**

##### **Possible questions:**

- What was primary school like for you?
- What key events were happening out of school during the time you were at primary school?
- How did you feel when you moved to secondary school? What was different?
- What key events were happening out of school at the time of this transition?
- What has secondary school been like for you?
- What are the biggest challenges for you at school?
- What support do you have at school? How helpful is it?
- What could be better about school?
- What key events have happened since you have been at secondary school?
- What are your thoughts about the future? What are your hopes for the future? What are your fears for the future?

### **Topic: Reduced timetables**

*I'd like to know how you are finding being on a reduced timetable. Can you tell me a bit about your experience so far?*

#### Possible questions:

- How often do you come to school?
- When were you put on a reduced timetable?
- Why were you put on a reduced timetable?
- What discussions did you have about being on a reduced timetable? Who did you speak with?
- What do you think about being on a reduced timetable?
- What are the positives about being on a reduced timetable? What are the negatives?
- Would you like the reduced timetable to change? How?

#### Possible prompts:

- What was that like for you?
- How did that make you feel?
- Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- What does X mean?
- What do you mean by X?
- Are things better/worse since X?
- Have things changed since X?

#### The Grid Elaboration Method Activity:

Introduction: *I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to give me 4 words or short phrases to answer the question. This will create a visual of how you feel about reduced timetables.*

Show the YP a template of the GEM.

**If the YP does not want to take part in the activity, move forward with just asking the questions.**

*Ask: What comes to mind when I say reduced timetables?*

Possible questions:

- Tell me what this means.
- Why do you feel this way?
- Have you always felt this way since being on a reduced timetable?
- Are you surprised about the way you feel?

## Practitioner Information Sheet

**Research Project Title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools.

### What is this research and why is it important?

- The use of reduced timetables in schools is increasing but there is very little research that explores how they are operationalised, or how young people experience being on these timetables.
- Therefore, I would like to talk to practitioners working within schools and Local Authorities, as well as young people, to explore their experiences of reduced timetables.
- The findings from this study will be shared with Educational Psychologists and other professionals to consider how the use of reduced timetables in school can be supported.

### The researcher

I am Chelsea Markwell, a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at University College London, Institute of Education. I am passionate about supporting and promoting children and young people's wellbeing and ensuring children and young people have the best chance at education.

### What does the study include?

I will be doing individual interviews with practitioners (such as teachers, SENCOs, headteachers, and Local Authority workers), as well as young people.

### What will I be asked to do?

I will ask you to take part in an individual interview either in person, or via. Teams (your choice). Interviews will take approximately one hour. I will ask you about your experiences of putting reduced timetables in place and working with young people who are put on reduced timetables. This interview will be audio/video recorded and transcribed at the earliest opportunity.

### The process

1. If you are interested in being interviewed as part of my research but have further questions, we can arrange a Teams call so that I can give you more information and



answer your questions. Please email me at [chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk) to arrange this.

2. If you are happy to be interviewed at part of my research, please sign and return the enclosed consent form to me at [chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk).
3. I will contact you to arrange an interview with you, either in person or online via Zoom, whichever you prefer.
4. Once your interview has been transcribed and pseudonymised, I will send it to you. If you change your mind about part of your interview, you can ask me to remove or edit parts. If you change your mind about the whole interview being part of my research, you can withdraw your data up to 2 weeks after you receive your transcript. To do this, email me letting me know which parts you would like to remove/edit, or that you would like to withdraw your interview completely at [chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell21@ucl.ac.uk)
5. Once I have collected and analysed all data, I will send you a research briefing so that you can see a summary of the findings.

#### **What will happen to the information provided by myself?**

- All data will be pseudonymised (identifiable information such as your name, school, Local Authority etc. will be replaced by artificial identifiers, or pseudonyms). Every effort will be made to ensure you cannot be identified.
- Any other data that indicates any identifiable information will be removed or modified.
- The information gathered from interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be stored separately from any contact details and personal information provided on consent forms. These will be stored securely and only I as the research will have access to them.

#### **What should I do now?**

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone (07568553635) or email ([chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk)).

If you would like to take part, please sign and return the consent form to me via email.

Please note that you can withdraw from the research up to 2 weeks after you have received a copy of your transcript.

#### **Data protection notice**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data. This study will constitute part of my doctoral thesis and is intended for publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal and at national and international conferences. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any partners, either during, or after the completing of this study. Participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Data will not be presented at any point with real names.

If you are concerned about how your, or your child's, personal data is being processed, please contact UCL's Data Protection at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). If you remain unsatisfied, you can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office. Details can be found at <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr>.

**Practitioner Consent Form**

**Research project title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools.

**Name of researcher:** Chelsea Markwell

- I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of this research project
- I have had the opportunity to ask Chelsea any questions that I have about the project
- I understand that I am free to remove or edit sections of my interview, or withdraw my interview completely up to 2 weeks after my interview transcript has been sent to me without giving reason by contacting Chelsea.
- I understand that my name will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my identity by editing or removing identifiable information
- I understand that the information gathered in this project will be used to form the basis of a report, and that the findings may be used in future reports and presentations
- I understand that other genuine researchers may use my pseudonymised data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded (in a face-to-face interview) or video recorded (in an MS Teams interview)
- My decision to give consent to participant is entirely voluntary

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone (07568553635) or email ([chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk)).

## Appendix G

### Phase two school information sheet

Institute of Education



#### School Information Sheet

**Research Project Title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools.

#### What is this research and why is it important?

- The use of reduced timetables in schools is increasing but there is very little research that explores how they are operationalised, or how young people experience being on these timetables.
- Therefore, I would like to talk to practitioners working within schools and Local Authorities, as well as young people, to explore their experiences of reduced timetables.
- The findings from this study will be shared with Educational Psychologists and other professionals to consider how the use of reduced timetables in school can be supported.

#### The researcher

I am Chelsea Markwell, a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate course in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at University College London, Institute of Education. I am passionate about supporting and promoting children and young people's wellbeing and ensuring children and young people have the best chance at education.

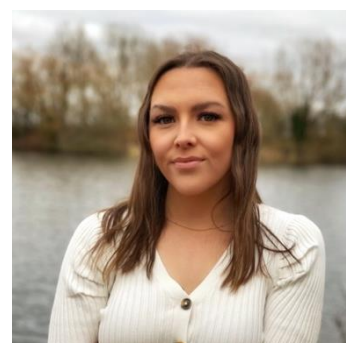
#### What does the study include?

I will be doing individual interviews with practitioners (such as teachers, SENCOs, headteachers, and Local Authority workers), as well as young people.

I am hoping to work with young people in Years 8-10 at your school who are currently on reduced timetables, to explore their experiences of being on a reduced timetable. This is an opportunity for your school to be involved in a project which allows young people to have a voice on school practice.

I will ask to meet with each young person for 45-60 minutes to discuss their experiences of being on a reduced timetable and their experiences throughout school.

This study has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee. I have an enhanced DBS.



#### What will happen to the information provided by the young people?

- The information gathered from interviews will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be stored separately from any contact details and personal information provided on consent forms. These will be stored securely and only I as the research will have access to them.
- At the point of transcription, all data will be pseudonymised (identifiable information such as their name, school, places etc. will be replaced by artificial identifiers, or pseudonyms). Every effort will be made to ensure the young person and the school cannot be identified.
- Any other data that indicates any identifiable information will be removed or modified.
- Young people will have up to 2 weeks after the final meeting to withdraw their information from the study,

### *The process*

6. If you are happy for me to speak with young people at your school, I will provide you with information sheets for parents/carers and young people.
7. I will ask you to pass these information sheets onto young people and their parents/carers that you think would be appropriate for the study.
8. Parents/carers will have an opportunity to meet with me via Teams or phone call to ask any questions they may have. I will then ask parents/carers to sign a consent form.
9. I will meet with the young person (this may be in school, at home or via MS Teams) to allow them an opportunity to ask any questions. I will then ask the young person to sign a consent form.
10. The interview meeting will then be arranged (this may be in school, at home or via MS Teams).

### **What should I do now?**

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone (07568553635) or email ([chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk) / [chelsea.markwell@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell@milton-keynes.gov.uk))

If you are happy for your school to be involved in this study, please contact me by telephone (07568553635) or email ([chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk) / [chelsea.markwell@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell@milton-keynes.gov.uk))

### **Data protection notice**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data. *This study will constitute part of my doctoral thesis and is intended for publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal and at national and international conferences. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any partners, either during, or after the completing of this study. Participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Data will not be presented at any point with real names.*

If you are concerned about how your, or your child's, personal data is being processed, please contact UCL's Data Protection at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). If you remain unsatisfied, you can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office. Details can be found at <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr>.

**Parent/Carer Information Sheet**

**Research Project Title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools.

**What is this research and why is it important?**

- The use of reduced timetables in schools is increasing but there is very little research that explores how they are operationalised, or how young people experience being on these timetables.
- Therefore, I would like to talk to practitioners working within schools and Local Authorities, as well as young people, to explore their experiences of reduced timetables.
- The findings from this study will be shared with Educational Psychologists and other professionals to consider how the use of reduced timetables in school can be supported.

**The researcher**

I am Chelsea Markwell, a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate course in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at University College London, Institute of Education. I am passionate about supporting and promoting children and young people's wellbeing and ensuring children and young people have the best chance at education.

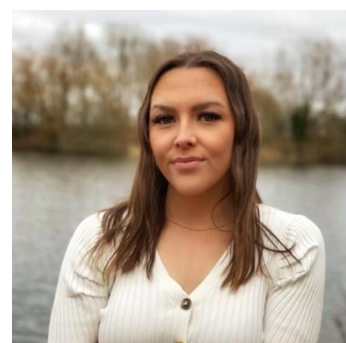
**What does the study include?**

I will be doing individual interviews with practitioners (such as teachers, SENCOs, headteachers, and Local Authority workers), as well as young people.

I am hoping to work with young people in years 8-10 who are currently on reduced timetables, to explore their experiences of being on a reduced timetable. This is an excellent opportunity for your child to be involved in a project which allows young people to have a voice on school practice.

**What will my child be asked to do?**

I will ask to meet with your young person for 45-60 minutes to discuss their experiences of being on a reduced timetable and their experiences throughout school. These meetings can either be face to face (at school or at your home), or via Microsoft Teams, this decision will be up to the young person.



This study has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee. I have an enhanced DBS.

### **What will happen to the information provided by my child?**

- The information gathered from interviews will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be stored separately from any contact details and personal information provided on consent forms. These will be stored securely and only I as the research will have access to them.
- At the point of transcription, all data will be pseudonymised (identifiable information such as the young person's name, school, places etc. will be replaced by artificial identifiers, or pseudonyms). Every effort will be made to ensure the young person and the school cannot be identified.
- If your child provides me with information that suggests them or someone else is at risk of harm, I will have to share that piece of information.
- Any other data that indicates any identifiable information will be removed or modified.
- Young people will have up to 2 weeks after the final meeting to withdraw their information from the study.

### *The process*

11. If you and your child are interested in taking part in my study, please feel free to contact me on [chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk) or 07568553635, or let school know.
12. You will have an opportunity to meet with me via Teams or phone call to ask any questions that you may have. If you are happy for your young person to be involved, please sign the consent form and return it to school or to me on [chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk)
13. I will meet with your child to give them an opportunity to ask me any questions. If your child happy to be involved, I will ask them to sign a consent form.
14. The interview meeting will then be arranged.

### **What should I do now?**

If you and your young person are interested in being involved, please feel free to contact me ([chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk)).

#### **Data protection notice**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data. *This study will constitute part of my doctoral thesis and is intended for publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal and at national and international conferences. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any partners, either during, or after the completing of this study. Participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Data will not be presented at any point with real names.*

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## Young Person Information Sheet

**Research Project Title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools

### Who am I?

My name is Chelsea. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. Educational Psychologists work with children and young people to find out what helps them in school.

As part of my training, I have been asked to do a research project.

### What is this research project?

Reduced timetables are being used more and more in schools but we don't know much about how young people think and feel about them.

I would like to speak with you about how you find being on a reduced timetable and how school is for you.



### What will I be asked to do?

I would like to meet with you to talk to you about what it is like being on a reduced timetable, and your experiences of school. We might do some activities together, but these are optional.

Our meeting will last around 1 hour and can be either face to face (at school or at your home) or via Microsoft Teams (video call), it is your choice.

If you change your mind, you can stop our meeting at any time.

### What will happen to the information I tell you?

- I will record our meeting and type up what we have said.
- I will write a report about what I have found out during my research project, but I will not use your real name or your real school name. This means that no one will know that it is you that has told me the information. But if you tell me anything which makes me think you or anybody else is in danger, I will need to tell somebody. I will discuss this with you if it comes up.

### What do I do now?

- Your parent will let me know that you are interested in taking part in my project.

- If you would like, I will set up a meeting to speak with you so that you can meet me and ask any questions.
- After our first meeting, if you are happy to take part in my project, I will ask you to sign a consent form.
- I will then arrange with your school or your parent for me to come in and speak with you.

#### **Data protection notice**

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice: For participants in research studies, click [here](#). The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'public task'. Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). This study will constitute part of my doctoral thesis and is intended for publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal and at national and international conferences. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any partners, either during, or after the completing of this study. Participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Data will not be presented at any point with real names.



**Young Person Consent Form**

**Research project title:** The use of reduced timetables in secondary schools.

**Name of researcher:** Chelsea Markwell

- I understand what this project is about and what I will be doing with Chelsea.
- I have had the opportunity to ask Chelsea any questions that I have about the project
- I understand that I do not have to answer questions that I don't want to, or take part in the activities.
- I understand that I can stop the meeting at any time and can ask Chelsea to delete my information from the study up to 2 weeks after our final meeting.
- I understand that the information Chelsea will use will be written up in reports, but will not use my name or any information that can identify me.
- I understand that if I tell Chelsea anything that makes her think I or anybody else is in danger, she will have to tell somebody.
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded (in a face-to-face interview) or video recorded (in an MS Teams interview)
- I would like to take part in this research project 

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me: [chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chelsea.markwell.21@ucl.ac.uk).

**Appendix K**  
*Coded transcript*

- 1 Interviewer: Perfect. Okay. So you said sort of secondary school was a big impact? Tell me  
2 more about secondary school then. *hard to go to lessons due to crowded environ*
- 3 Frankie: Like, I always found it like harder to go to lessons in secondary school because of  
4 how crowded the whole school was in general. So I just found myself like walking around  
5 and doing stuff you shouldn't be doing. *wandering round as hard to go to lessons.*
- 6 Interviewer: Sure.
- 7 Frankie: Yeah. And then I came here and I feel like I settled in a bit faster here 'cause it's a  
8 very small, like the classrooms are a lot smaller and yeah, I think secondary school is quite a  
9 big one. *Settled in a smaller provision*
- 10 Interviewer: Okay. So it is sort of the environment that was quite challenging.
- 11 Frankie: Yeah one hundred percent.
- 12 Interviewer: What about the work in secondary school? Tell me about that.
- 13 Frankie: Yeah, the work, the work in like my mainstream secondary school was a lot harder  
14 than my work here. If I couldn't do the work, I wouldn't focus and then I'd leave and it  
15 would just kind of spiral from there. Whereas here, I feel like if I do the work, I know that I  
16 can go after but then I can come back and do more work like I don't feel like I have to sit in  
17 that room, do all the work at once. *choice around when to complete work CAP is helpful*
- 18 Interviewer: Okay. And so when did you move here? What year were you in?
- 19 Frankie: Year eight.
- 20 Interviewer: Tell me about that. How did that come about?

21 *excluded due to carrying knife as precaution*  
Frankie: What like how did I get kicked out? I had issues with multiple older kids in my  
22 mainstream school and then I was threatened of being stabbed, so I brought a knife in and  
23 then I got caught with that knife but yeah, so I got kicked out and then moved here.

*excluded/sent AP.*  
24 Interviewer: Okay. And tell me about sort of home, what was going on at home during that  
25 sort of time in secondary school?

26 Frankie: I mean, home was always alright for me obviously it'd be stressful when I do  
27 something wrong, that's understandable, but I think home for me has always been alright  
28 it's always been chill. *impact on home life*

29 Interviewer: That's good. So we've spoken about secondary school. Tell me about primary  
30 school.

31 Frankie: I think primary school for me was kind of, I mean, it wasn't hard, but it was difficult  
32 because I've had an ASD assessment but in primary school I didn't understand or I wasn't  
33 told anything about why I had certain thoughts and why I was acting in a certain way so  
34 obviously I'd feel out of place, but in primary school you don't really understand. So it  
35 wasn't, it wasn't a big thing for me until I moved up to secondary school and then you start  
36 understanding. *not helped to understand and AS assessment*

37 Interviewer: You said you didn't really understand what was maybe going on with you in  
38 primary. Tell me about the support that you got in primary and secondary school.

39 Frankie: With the primary that I went to, my parents would agree there wasn't much  
40 support, no, you just, if you didn't behave you'd get sent home or you'd get in trouble there  
41 was no like second thoughts on, 'oh, why is this happening?' But yeah, I don't think there  
42 was much in primary school that helped. *No exploration into behavior, immediate punishment*

43 Interviewer: And what about in secondary school at your mainstream?

44 Frankie: At secondary school they kind of clocked on quite early that there was something  
45 about me, but then I wasn't told until the start of year eight. But from then it was all right

*YP left out of discussions about their needs*

46 'cause as I was getting kicked out of my school, I was just finishing off my assessment so  
47 when I came here, I had everything I needed in place.

48 Interviewer: Okay. That's good. And what about the teachers in sort of primary and  
49 mainstream secondary school?

50 Frankie: Primary teachers, I think a lot of them are the same aren't they they spend a lot of  
51 their time around younger kids so they know how to talk to younger kids. Whereas in  
52 secondary school I think it's very mixed like you either get a really nice teacher or a not so  
53 nice teacher 'cause they spend their life around kids they get fed up. But yeah, I think  
54 teachers are always alright.

PS tes understand  
how to interact  
w ch.

inconsistency in  
teachers @ P1.

55 Interviewer: What do you mean by fed up?

56 Frankie: As in like if, if they're having the whole day around kids, you'd always find the last  
57 lesson that you would have with them, they would just seem so much more aggy and they  
58 wouldn't wanna be there just as much as you didn't wanna be there so obviously it would  
59 clash.

YP feels like teachers  
get fed up of them.

60 Interviewer: Sure. And what makes a difference between a teacher that was sort of like  
61 good and a teacher that was not so good?

62 Frankie: A teacher that was good would be like, she would support you she would  
63 understand why you didn't wanna do the work and then set up the work in a time when you  
64 did wanna do it. Because for me, if I'm saying that I'm not gonna do the work, then I'm not  
65 gonna do it. Whereas like bad teachers, they'll try and they'll try and get you to do it  
66 constantly without understanding they're just gonna be like, okay, he's refusing to do the  
67 work, there's no reason for it. Whereas I think nice teachers, they understand the reason for  
68 it.

good teacher is  
understanding  
& gives  
choice

he sees avoidance as refusal  
w/o considering reason

69 Interviewer: And what do you think was the reason for you?

70 Frankie: If I couldn't focus in the lesson 'cause something was happening in the back of the  
71 class or in the front that I wanted to focus on, I wasn't looking at my work, I couldn't care  
72 about my work. I was just like, oh, lemme get involved in what's happening over there.  
73 Whereas I feel like here if I'm, I don't really, there's loads of distractions here, but after like a  
74 couple months you get used to it and then you just focus.

75 Interviewer: So tell me about your time here.

76 Frankie: My time here's been all right to be fair, obviously it's still a PRU, it's not PRU but  
77 basically the same so yeah. So there's always gonna be issues with kids and teachers just like  
78 any school but I think here the teachers are very understanding, like very supportive and the  
79 kids here, as long as you find your group and you find who you're alright with, I think you're  
80 all right here. I think everyone's quite supportive here. *he's understand & supportive e AP*

81 Interviewer: So friendships are important, tell me more about that.

82 Frankie: Well 'cause a friendship group will encourage you to do better. Like in my *Friendship group encouragement/ influence*  
83 mainstream, I didn't have the right friends so when I was like, I'm not doing the work, they'd *important*  
84 get involved and be like, oh we are not doing the work either and then that comes back on  
85 me. Whereas here, if I'm saying I'm not doing the work, that don't mean my friends aren't  
86 doing the work, they'll still be like, okay, yeah, you don't have to, but I'm getting on with it.  
87 So I feel like it's the balance ennit.

88 Interviewer: Okay. Interesting. And tell me about the future.

89 Frankie: I don't really know about the future, I'll be honest. It's not something that I think *Limited thoughts abt future; can only think abt school*  
90 about. I just kind of focus on finishing here with GCSEs. And then from there we'll see  
91 college and stuff like that.

92 Interviewer: So you're hoping to go to college?

93 Frankie: Yeah. Well I don't really wanna go sixth form and that's my only other option. Even *College or sixth form as only option*  
94 if I have to go to college just to redo maths in English, if that's the worst thing. But I think,  
*Predicting failing math's*

- 95    yeah, it would always be college for me. I don't think university's just not the one and sixth  
96    forms, I can't really get into many six forms other than the AP sixth form which is just like  
97    this school over again.
- 98    Interviewer: Yeah. Sure. So you wanna sort of get out of that system?
- 99    Frankie: Yeah, one hundred percent.
- 100   Interviewer: Okay. Cool. Anything else that you want to tell me about your sort of school  
101   experience?
- 102   Frankie: No, I think, like I said, it's just you get good teachers, you get bad teachers, but you  
103   get that everywhere and it's just about you find which ones understand you.  
*being understood is important.*
- 104   Interviewer: And it sounds like being understood was quite important to you.
- 105   Frankie: Yeah, one hundred percent.
- 106   Interviewer: Why is that?
- 107   Frankie: Because like if you had a teacher that didn't understand you, then you're just gonna  
108   clash and you're just gonna have arguments with them and that only comes back on you  
109   'cause they come into work the next day but you are suspended. Like, whereas if you find a  
110   teacher that you can happily clash with, like you have that banter, you have the jokes with  
111   them, then they understand it it's not you being rude it's just how you're feeling in that  
112   moment.  
*inconsistency w  
rules/consequences.*
- 113   Interviewer: Yeah. Sure. Okay. Great. So let's move on. I'm sort of wanting to ask some  
114   questions around your time on a reduced timetable. So you said you were on it four months  
115   ago?
- 116   Frankie: Yeah, around four months ago. It was before Christmas.
- 117   Interviewer: For six weeks?

118 Frankie: Six weeks or just over.

119 Interviewer: So tell me how that came about.

120 Frankie: I was originally moved into the hub for an incident here with smoking on site,  
121 smoking weed on site. So I was moved over into the hub section and the hub section is on a  
122 reduced timetable set like that, their reduced timetables it their full timetable if you know  
123 what I mean. And then as I came out of the hub, everyone had been put on a separate  
124 timetable. So you had year sevens, eights, and nines on Tuesdays and Thursdays were on  
125 early, so that was quarter to nine till half 11 or half 12. And then the older kids would come  
126 in after the youngers had left and yeah 'cause obviously I was in year 10 I had more hours in  
127 school because 'cause I was on the Monday, Wednesday and Friday for the mornings and  
128 then Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

129 Interviewer: So how did you feel when you found out you were gonna go on a reduced  
130 timetable?

131 Frankie: At the time, I wasn't too bothered 'cause obviously I'd spent enough time in hub on  
132 a reduced timetable. I knew that I'm only gonna be in school for a couple hours and then  
133 you're going home. So actually that was irritating 'cause I'd rather be in school with mates  
134 and stuff chilling rather than being at home just doing your thing. But yeah, I wasn't too  
135 bothered about it at first, but after a while it got so boring like you would come in for three  
136 hours by the time you'd settled into school, which takes me like an hour to settle in so by  
137 the time I'd settled in I'd only have two lessons which were core lessons, then you'd go  
138 home.

139 Interviewer: So how did that feel?

140 Frankie: That was irritating a lot of the time because it's always, for me, it's my first hour  
141 inside school that I need to settle and I don't get on well with science at all so if I had maths  
142 first period, I take that whole hour just to settle in and then find out I have science next,  
143 obviously that'd be irritating. So to have three lessons a day was quite irritating.

Smoking  
weed on  
site

mass RTT  
@ AP

Rather be  
@ school  
w mates

RTT  
boring

Takes time to settle into  
school in the morning

No space/time to  
learn when in  
for 3 lessons

- 144 Interviewer: And did you find that that impacted how you engaged in those?
- 145 Frankie: Yeah, one hundred percent 'cause I didn't wanna be there at that point. It was  
146 three hours a day I was thinking I might as well just stayed at home. There's no point in  
147 coming in. *No point coming in for 3hrs.*
- 148 Interviewer: Okay. And tell me what you would spend your time doing when you weren't in  
149 school?
- 150 Frankie: I don't really do much when I'm outta school I just kind of chill in my room, like play  
151 PlayStation and normal stuff. I don't really go out that much.  
*Play PS @ home*
- 152 Interviewer: And did you have any schoolwork that you had to do at home?
- 153 Frankie: No. I think at one point there was, there was work where you could do, but they  
154 weren't enforcing it at all like there were like online classes, but they would never enforce it,  
155 you'd never have to do it, so obviously if you're not gonna have to do it, then you're not  
156 going to. *catch up work not enforced so didn't do it*
- 157 Interviewer: Sure. Okay. And what sort of discussions did you have with them about going  
158 on a reduced timetable.
- 159 Frankie: I just kind of got told, oh, this is your timetable from now on and they didn't really  
160 say to you 'is that gonna be all right? Would you prefer to be on the different hours?' So,  
161 but like I said, I didn't mind it at first. It was just after a while. *Lack of choice*  
*Opinion on RTT changed over time*
- 162 Interviewer: But how did it feel, not sort of getting to put your thoughts in?
- 163 Frankie: I mean, no, it weren't good that I couldn't do it but at the same point, once it's  
164 already set in stone, there's no point in being like, 'oh, I don't like that' because you can't  
165 change it. *No point giving opinion as no choice/say in the matter.*

166 Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So tell me more about what it was like being on a reduced  
167 timetable.

168 Frankie: I feel like there'd be a lot more staff than students obviously in the school day is  
169 kind of how it is especially in PRUs, but the fact that you would come in, there'd be about 30  
170 of you at maximum for three hours a day and then all the staff. So you feel like all the staff  
171 are constantly on you. Obviously like I said, if I leave a lesson, my staff know that I'm gonna  
172 come back in five minutes, whereas they wouldn't, they would just follow you around 'cause  
173 they have so much staff that aren't doing much.

*staff constantly  
on you when in sch  
on red hrs.*

174 Interviewer: Okay. And is it that you sort of didn't feel like they really knew you, the staff  
175 that were working with you?

176 Frankie: Yeah. There's a couple of staff like miss next door, she knows that if I'm going out  
177 I'm gonna come back in five minutes I'm not going out and not coming back I will come  
178 back. Whereas I feel like a lot of other staff, I'll go and then they'll follow you. That's not  
179 gonna help is it? Because at that point I might as well just stayed in the lesson and got  
180 irritated with you in the lesson.

*Difficult working w staff who  
don't know/understand me.*

181 Interviewer: Yeah. So you didn't get to settle in very well and that was irritating. The staff  
182 were sort of on your back a little bit. Anything else about your experience on a reduced  
183 timetable?

*Only did core subjects.*

184 Frankie: No. I feel like other than the fact that I only done core lessons, that was it three  
185 hours a day and it was math, English, science, every day you wouldn't do anything different.  
186 So you didn't, and especially I'm in year 10, so I'm doing options and so I didn't have my  
187 options. But when I was put on the timetable, I was told that it, it wasn't gonna be  
188 permanent and then I got told that they were gonna take it off in January.

*Chosen options taken away.*

189 Interviewer: Okay. So the lessons, so you were only doing math, science, and English. So  
190 what options do you take?

191 Frankie: I do construction and motor vehicles.

- 192 Interviewer: Okay. How do you find that?
- 193 Frankie: They're all right to be fair. I do a lot better with my hands and if I chose to do  
*do better w practical lessons.*
- 194 double science or double maths, that was gonna get me nowhere and I can't focus unless
- 195 I'm doing something, if you know what I mean. Like in motor vehicles, I whack on my music  
*listening to music*
- 196 and then I just chill, I'll do my work, I'll do what I'm meant to do and in construction it's the  
*helpful in lessons.*
- 197 same, I'm always doing something. But yeah, I feel like the fact that I didn't have my
- 198 options, that was irritating because I had been on them options, but I was just kind of like,
- 199 oh, this isn't gonna last forever but at the same point, I did lose out on, you think I do
- 200 options five hours a week and I was on that timetable for six weeks, that's 30 hours of my
- 201 options that I lost. But yeah, I mean other than that I got, I got back into the options after
- 202 but it was still 30 hours. *Lost out on 30hrs of options.*
- 203 Interviewer: Yeah. And was it easy to get back into or did you feel like you had missed out?
- 204 Frankie: They just kind of like just resumed from where we left off.
- 205 Interviewer: Right okay. So how did it feel just doing maths, English and science?
- 206 Frankie: That was rubbish. That was dread.
- 207 Interviewer: Tell me why.
- 208 Frankie: Because most days I'll have two core lessons I'll either have like maths or English or
- 209 English and science and then I'll go into other lessons like my options or PSHE or something
- 210 like that whereas when I'm just doing the same lessons everyday it just gets so repetitive.
- 211 There's only so much maths that I can handle in a week. *Time in sch felt repetitive on RIT*
- 212 Interviewer: And so is it easier to sort of handle and engage with math, science, and English
- 213 when you know that the same day you're gonna have an option that you prefer?  
*Having chosen subjects makes core subjects easier to engage with*
- 214 Frankie: Yeah. 'cause I'll be like, oh, I don't wanna go maths, but I do have catering soon. So I
- 215 might as well just go maths.

216 Interviewer: Good. Yeah. Great. Okay. So were there any positives for you being on a  
217 reduced timetable?

218 Frankie: Yeah, it wasn't as stressful. I mean this school, obviously you see it, the kids here  
219 they're always up so high it's like pure ADHD here and I mean three hours a day you'd be  
220 like, oh my God, that was a long three hours but you can kind of chill now. Whereas like with  
221 a full school day like five or six hours a day it just gets worse throughout the day and by the  
222 end of it you wanna be at home. But I mean once they took off the reduced timetable you  
223 didn't want to go home because you had been going home for so long. But yeah other than  
224 the fact that it was a lot calmer. *Less stressful being in school less*

225 Interviewer: So you preferred being in full time?

226 Frankie: One hundred percent prefer a full timetable.

227 Interviewer: Tell me why.

228 Frankie: Because I can focus more on full time table 'cause I know that like the last lesson,  
229 I'll never focus on that, that's not gonna happen 'cause I know that I'm going home soon.  
230 Whereas I'd get into school and then it would basically feel like my last lesson because I was  
231 going home soon the second I got into school. So yeah, I feel like when it went back on  
232 fulltime table, I was a lot more relaxed. It was more like 'you know what you're doing now',  
*Can focus more in lessons being FT.*

233 Interviewer: And you said when you were sort of not in school for the hours of the day, that  
234 you were just sort of chilling, playing on your PlayStation.  
*First lesson felt like last lesson on RTT so didn't focus*

235 Frankie: Yeah there was nothing much to do.

236 Interviewer: How did that feel?

237 Frankie: That was really annoying. That was probably the worst of it the fact that you'd go  
238 home and you're like, 'oh that's great now what?' You don't really do much at home. Kids  
*Boring being @ home*

239 say they hate school, but it's like 90% of their socialising is in school. Whereas when you  
 240 don't have that, it does get a bit irritating. *RTT takes opportunity to socialising away.*

241 Interviewer: And how did that feel knowing that your sort of friends were at school and you  
 242 weren't?

243 Frankie: Sometimes I'd feel like I was missing out, but then they're home in three hours  
 244 anyways so.

245 Interviewer: Okay. Great. Okay. So I am gonna ask you a question, and I've got this here. So  
 246 this is like obviously a grid of four. And I'm gonna ask you a question and your answers are  
 247 gonna represent like your thoughts on a reduced timetable. So if I was to say to you what  
 248 comes to mind, words or short phrases, when I say reduce timetable?

249 Frankie: Losing out on learning.

250 Interviewer: Yeah. Something else.

251 Frankie: Shorter days.

252 Interviewer: Yeah. Shorter days. Is that good or bad?

253 Frankie: That's definitely bad.

254 Interviewer: Yeah.

255 Frankie: I get up in the morning I just wanna do something. I'm not like a lazy person. I  
 256 always wanna be doing something. Because I'll be like, that's three hours and I haven't done  
 257 anything but I could have done something. *Being @ home felt like wasted time.*

258 Interviewer: Okay. Anything else?

259 Frankie: Like it's kinda like breaking friendships. It's hard to explain what I mean by that but  
 260 like, because you're on a different timetable to your mates you don't see them as much and  
*RTT break friendships.*

- RTT cause distance between friends*
- 261 obviously you distance from them then. When you come back it's like nothing ever changed  
262 but while you were on the reduced timetable it was annoying.
- 263 Interviewer: Annoying. And how did that sort of feel?
- 264 Frankie: I mean it's almost upsetting like because you know that you are mates with them  
265 and you can't even see them apart from outside the school and that's not the same.
- 266 Interviewer: Did you see them outside of school?
- 267 Frankie: Not as much, no. Nowhere near as much. No 'cause like I said, I don't really leave  
268 my house that much. I'm kind of chill.
- 269 Interviewer: Okay, one more.
- 270 Frankie: Calmer, to be fair. I mean calmer as much as there is all the bad, it is a lot calmer on  
271 a reduced timetable 'cause you're spending less time in school.
- 272 Interviewer: Great. Okay. So is there anything else you want to tell me about your  
273 experience being on a reduced timetable?
- 274 Frankie: No, I think we've covered a lot of it.
- 275 Interviewer: Perfect thank you.

## Appendix L

### *Example of theme development*

| Theme               | Subtheme                 | Examples of collapsed codes   | Examples of initial codes within                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experiences of RTTs | Time spent out of school | Engage in hobbies at home     | Do hobbies when not at school<br>Ride horse when out of school<br>Play PlayStation at home<br>Play games when at home<br>Watch TV at home<br>Go out with friends when at home<br>Go out with friends when not at school |
|                     |                          | Boredom                       | Being at home felt like a waste of time<br>Boring being at home RTT boring<br>Boring being on RTT                                                                                                                       |
|                     |                          | Don't engage in catch up work | Catch up work not enforced so didn't do it<br>Catch up work isn't checked so don't do it<br>Not doing catch up work                                                                                                     |
|                     |                          | Don't get catch up work to do | School are meant to send work to catch up but they don't<br>Don't get work at home to catch up                                                                                                                          |
|                     |                          | Single codes                  | Would rather do school work at home Easier to ask parents for help than teachers Only caught up on work if tests were coming up                                                                                         |

|  |                                |                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                |                                          | <p>Watch documentaries to catch up</p> <p>Sit on phone at home Time out of school is downtime</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|  | Impact on friendships          | Friends as a resilience factor in school | <p>Rather be at school with mates</p> <p>Friendship group can encourage you to do better</p> <p>Want to go in day before half term to see friends</p> <p>Good friendships are important to feel supported</p> <p>Friends are a positive factor at secondary school</p> <p>Friends as only positive in school</p> |
|  |                                | RTT can negatively impact friendships    | <p>RTT takes opportunity for socialising away</p> <p>RTT breaks friendships as don't see friends as much</p> <p>Not seeing friends causes friendship to drift</p> <p>Friendships are better on RTT as can see people more</p> <p>Miss out on what's happening with my friends</p>                                |
|  |                                | RTTs cause peer gossip                   | <p>RTT can cause peers to gossip</p> <p>RTT can cause peers to ask questions</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|  | Lack of choice and flexibility | Lack of choice in the RTT decisions      | <p>All YP at AP are on RTT</p> <p>YP told they were going on RTT</p> <p>No point giving opinion as no choice in the matter</p>                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|  |                   |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                   |                                       | YP told they was going on a RTT<br>YP told that they would go on RTT<br>Lack of choice                                                                                                                                                            |
|  |                   | Lack of flexibility on RTTs           | Only able to do core subjects<br>Chosen options taken away<br>Missed out on 30 hours of options<br>YP asked for RTT to be changed to less hours but school refused<br>Had to do maths as it's a core subject<br>In school for maths and English   |
|  |                   | Lack of choice and flexibly generally | YP have to be the same or are perceived as a problem<br>Feel locked in and trapped by the system<br>Doing same lessons every day is repetitive<br>Feels like a simulation when everything is the same<br>Feels like a zombie doing the same thing |
|  | Camouflaged needs | Less anxiety being in school less     | Felt peaceful and calm being in school less<br>Easier not to panic on RTT<br>Less pressure on RTT<br>Don't get stressed as much on a RTT<br>Not so angry on RTT, less time in school to blow up                                                   |

|  |  |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--|--|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  | Situation remained the same on RTT      | <p>Still not attending on RTT</p> <p>Avoid going to maths even on RTT</p> <p>RTT doesn't feel much different than FTT</p> <p>Feels the same, no point at all</p> <p>RTT still feels too long</p>                                                                              |
|  |  | Going back to fulltime won't be helpful | <p>Don't want to go back to fulltime</p> <p>Stressful to think about going back to FT</p> <p>Only downside to RTT is that I will have to go back to FT</p> <p>Worry that mental health will decline again when back to FT</p> <p>Anxiety thinking about going back to FTT</p> |