

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

Programme Director: Vivian Hill



**“I deal with everything on my own”: Exploring
children and young people who are looked after’s
experiences of secondary school suspensions and
relationships with school staff**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent
Psychology**

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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Abstract

Children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA) are five times more likely to have a fixed-term exclusion than their non-LA peers (Department for Education [DfE], 2020a). At present, there is no consensus around individual or systemic factors which may lead to CYPLA's school suspensions and as such there is little sense of what interventions may serve to reduce them. Consequently, their suspension rates continue to rise year after year (DfE, 2020a).

Using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory, the research aimed to give much-needed agency to CYPLA and school staff which appears to be lacking in previous research. This research utilised individual semi-structured interviews and a personal construct psychology tool, to gain four adolescent CYPLA's (aged 11-15 years) and seven school staff's perspectives of CYPLA's secondary school suspensions in one local authority in England. The study also explored the factors which promote and hinder the development of staff-student relationships, which could serve to promote CYPLA's inclusion (Parker, Rose, & Gilbert, 2016). A pilot interview with two care leavers, enabled the young people to inform the nature of the individual interviews.

Thematic analysis was used to identify interview themes which further our understanding of adolescent CYPLA and school staff's experiences of suspensions and staff-student relationships.

Key themes included: Systems do not support CYPLA's cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs, foundations of positive school staff-student relationships and discrepancies between supportive school systems and staff intentions. There was a strong narrative around unsupportive school cultures and external services, which contributed to the participants' unmet needs and negatively impacted staff-student relationships.

This information will hopefully enhance our understanding of CYPLA's school and life experiences and inform interventions, practice and policy at the school level, in addition to local authority and national levels.

Impact statement

This research explored adolescent young people who are looked after's experiences of secondary school suspensions and the nature and quality of their relationships with school staff. It is one of few qualitative studies gaining insight into children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA) and school staff's views regarding CYPLA's suspension experiences; an important research area as CYPLA's suspensions continue to rise and they are five times more likely to be excluded/suspended than their non-LA peers (DfE, 2020a). CYPLA's relationships are a hopeful means of promoting their inclusion (Parker, Rose & Gilbert, 2016), however this research is the first to gain CYPLA and school staff's views to explore staff-student relationships; an important research area as relational difficulties are a risk factor for CYPLA's suspensions (Sarmezey, 2004).

This research found school cultures are at odds with the nurturing, compassionate environments required to promote CYPLA's inclusion and relationships with school staff (Kunter et al., 2013; Townsend, Berger, & Reupert, 2020). Despite school staff having positive intentions for their practice, systemic issues impact their relationships and support for CYPLA's needs. This population's staff-student relationships are mixed, however the participants shed light on the foundations for positive relationships which can inform practice and policy. Furthermore, suspensions do not appear to be serving as an effective "behaviour management tool" (DfE, 2022b), and the process appears rigid and unsupportive of CYPLA's needs.

This research has demonstrated the value of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model as a framework. It is the first study to have used it when exploring CYPLA-school staff relationships and one of few to have utilised it in relation to CYPLA's suspension experiences. The framework allowed reflection on the different layers within a young person's ecosystem and elicited key implications for schools, professionals, the virtual school, local authority, and government. The findings indicate these systems must adopt a collaborative approach to promote CYPLA's inclusion.

The research findings highlight the importance of the educational psychologist (EP) role in supporting CYPLA's inclusion as they are uniquely positioned both within schools and local authorities. Specific implications for EP professional practice include:

-Training- i) for school staff around supporting CYPLA through promoting compassionate/relational school cultures and supporting them emotionally and during the suspension process. ii) for carers/parents with a focus on supporting CYPLA's emotional and relational needs. iii) supporting virtual schools with designated teacher training.

-Consultation- i) with carers/parents and schools to generate shared understandings around CYPLA, focussing on staff-student relationships and suspension processes where applicable. ii) with schools to promote the use of preventative approaches to support CYPLA's needs.

-Assessment- i) with CYPLA to inform support provided by their surrounding systems. ii) with schools to reflect on their relational processes and support for staff well-being.

-Intervention- i) therapeutic work with CYPLA and parent/carers. ii) school staff supervision to promote reflective practice and their well-being. iii) organisational support in schools around behaviour policies and relational support for CYPLA.

-Research- i) suggestions for directions for future research. ii) action research to understand how the designated teacher role can best be supported.

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CYP	Children and young people
CYPLA	Children and young people who are looked after
DT	Designated teacher
EP/s	Educational psychologist/s
Non-LA	Non-looked after
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
PEP	Personal Educational Plan
VS	Virtual School
YPLA	Young people who are looked after

Chapter 1: Introduction

Children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA) are five times more likely to have a suspension than their non-LA peers (Department for Education [DfE], 2020a). Furthermore, they are currently situated behind their non-LA peers on a number of outcome measures (e.g. educational attainment, employment) which appears to negatively impact their mental and physical health, in addition to their well-being (O'Higgins et al., 2017). There are several factors across different levels of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory which have been identified as contributing to the suspensions of CYPLA, including their early life experiences, relationships with significant others, school cultures and lack of access to specialist services. However, few studies gain insight into the suspension experiences of CYPLA. The present research aims to do so by gaining adolescent young people and school staff's views to explore secondary school suspension processes, as well as risk and resilience factors impacting their suspensions. Such information is invaluable in informing advice and guidance around supporting the needs of CYPLA.

Furthermore, there is no consensus around how to reduce the suspensions of CYPLA and as such, their fixed-period exclusion/suspension rates continue to rise year after year (DfE, 2020a). The use of relational approaches within schools appears to be a hopeful means of supporting the needs of this population with research suggesting relationships are of particular importance to their well-being and inclusion (Dickson, Sutcliffe, & Gough, 2010). Despite this, research states CYPLA are more likely to report poorer relationships with significant others (e.g. teachers; Long et al., 2017). This is of particular concern as relational difficulties are reported to be significant factors influencing the suspensions of CYPLA (Long et al., 2017; Sarmezey, 2004). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest the relational difficulties of this population could be contributing to their high rates of suspensions in comparison to their peers.

Research proposes a number of factors impacting on the development of school staff-student relationships including those at individual (e.g. young person, school staff) and systems (e.g. school, home, local authority) levels. However, limited research has gained both CYPLA and school staff's views as

to the factors which promote, or provide barriers to, positive staff-student relationships. Thomson (2020) suggests this would be a valuable area of research by highlighting the need to gain an understanding of the relational processes in schools to help inform practice and promote CYPLA's inclusion. This information would inform preventative relational approaches in schools to promote the learning, well-being and overall inclusion of this vulnerable population. In turn this has led to the development of the current research.

1.1.Theoretical framework

Research suggests it is beneficial to make the theoretical framework of research explicit as theory allows researchers to compare findings and it provides common language (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). The present study has been underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory of human development which is a helpful conceptual framework for exploring the interacting systems surrounding CYP's development and educational experiences. In being explicit about the theoretical framework utilised, the researcher hoped to provide the research with both clarity and integrity, whilst supporting the development of systemic interventions to address the identified needs of the sample populations.

To allow greater understanding of the theory, it is useful to think of Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development as ever evolving until his death in 2005. He was a very self-reflective theorist and frequently reported amendments to his theory. His earlier theorising focussed on aspects of the context and he proposed development is situated within multiple levels of embedded systems, ranging from the proximal child environments known as microsystems (e.g. home, school) and the interconnections between them (the mesosystem), to more distal structures within the exo and macro systems (e.g. education and political systems).

Bronfenbrenner revised his theory stating that the earlier version lacked consideration for the role of the individual in their development due to its focus on the context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). His revised theory is often referred to as the bio-ecological theory or the 'Process-Person-Context-Time model' (see

Figure 1; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The most significant difference within this model is the idea of proximal processes as an essential aspect of human development. These are enduring forms of reciprocal interaction between an evolving individual and persons, objects and systems in its external environment. For these to be effective in promoting development, Bronfenbrenner stated the interaction must occur on a relatively regular basis over extended periods of time. The nature of the proximal processes is thought to vary as a function of the characteristics of the individual ('Person'), the immediate or remote environment of the interaction ('Context') and changes over time ('Time'; e.g. historical period, life course).

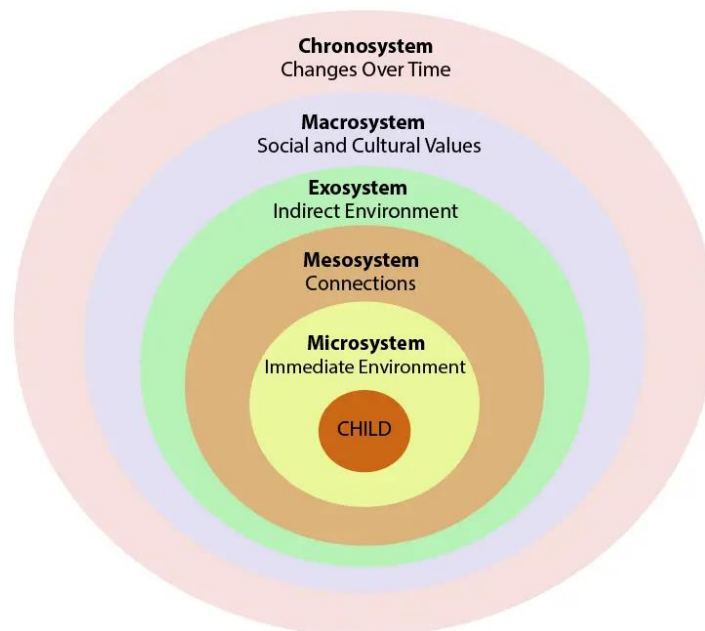


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory of human development.

The present research uses his most recent theory of human development (2005) which has been clearly outlined above to mitigate against any conceptual confusion which Tudge et al. (2009) states often arises from the use of Bronfenbrenner's theory within research. Bronfenbrenner did not provide any guidance around the application of the theory to research, thus researchers have suggested research does not have to use the entire theory and can draw on specific aspects of it (Tudge et al., 2009). In the interest of clarity, this research does not wish to specifically test the theory and the researcher acknowledges that due to the breadth and depth of the theory it is difficult to apply every aspect of it in great depth. Additionally, the research

methods employed mean that whilst the interviewer can have some influence over the topics discussed in the interview, these are largely influenced by the participants' lived experiences and willingness to communicate them.

In the present study, the bio-ecological theory provides a valuable theoretical framework for exploring the experiences of CYPLA's suspensions and relationships with school staff. In using the theory as a holistic frame of reference, it helps to identify factors at the individual and systems levels influencing CYPLA and school staff's experiences. In doing so this research hopes to inform practice, guidance and policy around supporting the needs of CYPLA, in addition to school staff. Eriksson et al. (2018) suggests research utilising Bronfenbrenner's most recent model has useful and powerful implications for mental health practice and policy, which is of particular relevance given the increased prevalence of mental health needs amongst CYPLA, in comparison to their non-LA peers (Meltzer, Gatward, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2003).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory was chosen as it aligns with the core values and beliefs of educational psychologists in terms of the factors important for development; there has been a shift over the years from within-child explanations of behaviour and development to a more holistic view which considers the child within their contexts (Pellegrini, 2009).

This research, with the assistance of the aforementioned theoretical framework, explored CYPLA and school staff's experiences of suspensions and staff-student relationships. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005) has helped to inform the research questions, methods, sample, findings and implications of the present study. The research questions acknowledge the importance of key adults in the young people's school microsystem by exploring staff-student relationships, in addition they are quite broad to allow factors to be identified at different levels of CYPLA's eco-system influencing staff and student suspension and relational experiences. In addition, semi-structured interview topics and the ideal school task (Moran, 2012) were utilised to help participants reflect on the eco-systemic layers when considering factors impacting CYPLA's secondary school experiences.

Furthermore, a multi-informant approach was adopted, where the sample consisted of school staff in varying roles and CYPLA. Interviews with school staff in CYPLA's microsystems allowed for a greater understanding of how young people's ecosystems can impact their suspensions and relationships with school staff. The findings and implications were influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory as each eco-systemic layer was considered when identifying themes and developing implications for policy and practice within many different systems (e.g. school, local authority, national) in which young people develop.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Chapter summary

The present chapter aims to discuss existing literature in relation to the present research area using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory to ensure a holistic approach is taken to reviewing the literature. Literature regarding CYPLA and their outcomes are discussed, in the context of their needs and life experiences. Subsequently, school suspensions are discussed in relation to risk and protective factors for this population, as well as possible support for CYPLA with a focus on relational approaches. Finally, the aims and rationale for the present study are outlined. Details for how the literature search was undertaken is provided in 'Appendix A'.

2.2. Children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA)

2.2.1. Definition

CYPLA are those who the state undertakes parental responsibility because the adults caring for them are, for one reason or another, no longer able to do so. The Children Act (1989) states CYP are legally defined as 'looked after' by the Local Authority if they receive accommodation from them for a period of more than 24 hours and is subject to a care of placement order.

2.2.2. Statistics

According to recent figures provided by the DfE (2022a), year upon year the number of CYPLA continue to rise in England. As of March 2022, there were 82,170 CYPLA by local authorities in England.

The needs of the population were statistically analysed. Although each child or young person will have had their own unique journey into care, the majority of the population had the primary need of 'abuse and neglect' (66%) and the next most common reasons were 'family dysfunction' (13%) and 'family in acute stress' (7%). Other needs included: 'absent parenting' (7%), 'child's disability' (3%), 'parental illness or disability' (5%) and 'socially unacceptable behaviour' or 'low income' (1%) (see 'Appendix P' for more contextual information).

The needs, characteristics and living situations of this population are important to consider in the current research to ensure a holistic approach is taken to understanding their educational and relational needs and experiences.

Particularly given that this research is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005) which is a theoretical framework providing reflections on the child's characteristics and the influence of, and interactions with, the systems around them.

2.2.3. Chronosystem: Historical national context

For decades there has been great concern over the life outcomes of CYPLA nationally, in comparison to their non-LA peers. In the United Kingdom, The Children Act (1989) is considered to be very influential in improving the educational and life outcomes of CYPLA as it sets out the duty of the local authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of this population. In more recent times, the government endeavoured in 2010 to 'close the achievement gap' for this population (Whitty & Anders, 2014). Since this time, there have been several initiatives aiming to promote their educational experiences and well-being. For instance, it is expected that every school must have a designated teacher for CYPLA who ensures the educational outcomes of currently or previously looked after young people and the population must have a 'care plan' containing a 'Personal Education Plan' which helps to support CYP to achieve the best possible outcomes (DfE, 2018a).

Most recently, the UK government provided funding known as the 'catch up premium' to schools specifically for vulnerable and disadvantaged CYP, which includes those who are LA. This is to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational progress of this population. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE; 2021) committee stated that the impact of the pandemic on CYPLA's educational progress, as well as their health and well-being, cannot be underestimated. In addition to lost learning and greater safeguarding risks for this vulnerable population, the pandemic has disrupted their relationships with their families, peers and school staff. Additionally, it is worth noting that the pandemic has had an impact on the number of CYP being referred to children's services due to domestic abuse and neglect and the financial impact on families.

2.2.4. Macrosystem: Cultural and societal perception

To illustrate the importance of, and provide context for, the present research, it is worth considering the reported narrative of CYPLA within society. Mannay et al.'s (2017) research findings focus on how educational policies and practices alienate this population from dominant discourses of educational achievement; they state that they are “permitted and even encouraged not to succeed academically due to their complex and disrupted home environments”. Despite this societal perception of CYPLA, findings suggest the CYP in Mannay et al.'s (2017) study rejected this view of themselves, implying there is a discrepancy between the perspectives of this population and key adults within their microsystem in terms of their aspirations and capabilities. Whilst this study was conducted in the context of the Welsh education system meaning the findings may not be extrapolated with confidence to CYPLA educated in the English system, there has been extensive documentation on this population encountering unsupportive professional and carer practices where their care status has been stigmatising and negatively impacted on adult's expectations of their academic achievement (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003; McLeod, 2010). This suggests there is a need to explore the educational experiences of CYPLA to gain more of an understanding of how their positive life trajectories can be promoted in educational settings.

2.3. Outcomes

2.3.1. Educational outcomes

CYPLA are five times more likely to have a fixed-term exclusion/suspension than their non-LA peers (DfE, 2020a). Despite the law clearly stating that ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rated schools should be prioritised for CYPLA, data suggests that they are less likely than their peers to attend these schools with 9% of those in residential care attending unregulated education (House of Commons Education Committee [HoCEC], 2022). Furthermore, they are currently situated behind their non-LA peers on a number of outcome measures, such as educational attainment, and this appears to negatively impact upon their mental and physical health and well-being (O’Higgins et al., 2017).

2.3.2. Life outcomes

For many CYPLA, their pre-care experiences continue to affect them for long periods of time after they become LA (Rahilly & Hendry, 2014). They are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment and have criminal justice system involvement (O'Higgins et al., 2017). In England in 2019/20, 35% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, training or employment (NEET), in contrast to 11% of 18 year olds and 13% of 19-24 year olds (DfE, 2019 & 2020b). These remain the most current statistics and the findings within Northern Ireland and Scotland for 2019 are similar to England's suggesting this is a consistent finding across the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020).

2.3.3. Special educational needs (SEN)

In 2019, it was reported that CYPLA were almost four times more likely to have SEN compared with all CYP and almost nine times more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP; DfE, 2020a). Within these EHCPs, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) was the most common area of need for this population.

2.3.4. Emotional and mental health needs

In 2001/2 the Office of National Statistics conducted a survey of the mental health of CYPLA aged 5-17 in Great Britain; at present it remains the most comprehensive data available on the mental health of children in care. This research found that in Great Britain, 45% of looked after children aged 5-17 had a mental health disorder, compared to 10% of the general population (Meltzer, Gatward, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2003). Given the most common reason for entering the care system is due to 'abuse and neglect', the emotional and mental health needs of some CYPLA are likely to have been compromised and resulted in the figures detailed above.

2.3.5. Factors contributing to poor outcomes

There are multiple factors across different levels of Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development (2005) which have been identified as contributing to the poor outcomes of CYPLA documented in the research literature.

2.3.5.1. Micro level

Positive interactions between a child and their immediate environment, such as their home and school environments, are more likely to promote positive development (e.g. Geddes, 2016). This suggests the chaotic and neglectful early life experiences experienced by the majority of CYPLA, could have adversely impacted on their life trajectories (DfE, 2022a; Happer, McCreddie & Aldgate, 2006). The adverse childhood experiences which are disproportionately experienced by CYPLA, research suggests can be harmful to their overall development, including the development of their self-regulation skills; ability to manage their behaviours, attention and emotions (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). Research has found that poor self-regulation is associated with lower social competence, unemployment, relational stress and academic performance (Graziano et al., 2002; Daly et al., 2016). Explanation for why CYPLA's development may be impacted in this way is provided by a number of different psychological phenomena, including trauma and attachment.

Bowlby's (1969) well-cited attachment theory states that an attachment is the strong, emotional bond which develops between an infant and their caregiver. When their physical and emotional needs are met, the infant is provided with a secure attachment and base in which they learn to regulate their own emotions and feel a sense of safety. However, when their needs are not met, they learn they cannot rely on adults which impacts upon their internal working model of relationships and their subsequent relationships. This suggests CYPLA's social and emotional development and ability to form relationships may be impacted by the lack of safety they have experienced in their relationships with their caregivers.

From a trauma perspective, chronic fear and hyper-arousal as a result of adverse life experiences can result in the prolonged, excessive release of cortisol, which has lasting effects on brain development (Glaser, 2000). It can result in diminished ability to regulate emotions which research suggests leads to poorer classroom performance, high emotional reactivity, poorer memory and retention (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). This implies the

negative life experiences encountered by CYPLA may impact on their development, learning and well-being.

Furthermore, Thomson et al. (2020) reported that some adolescent YPLA do not have a clear sense of their identity which may impact on their mental health and well-being (Waterman et al., 2013). The study suggested this may occur as a result of their relational trauma and adverse life experiences meaning it is difficult for them to form a positive identity. In addition, many of the young people stated that they had been labelled a 'naughty child' which may have resulted in these negative narratives being internalised (Apland et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need for their difficulties and life experiences to be considered and understood by key individuals in their lives so that their needs can be supported to ensure they do not pose as a barrier to their positive life trajectories.

2.3.5.2. Meso/exo/macro level

It is important to consider the impact of the UK education system and school cultures on the outcomes of CYPLA. Behaviour policies which are based upon a zero-tolerance approach have been thought to contribute to the rise in suspensions and be at odds with the establishment of positive, caring and trusting environments (House of Commons Education Committee [HoCEC], 2018). Thus, without the appropriate systems in place and understanding within educational settings to support the social and emotional needs of this population, the communication of their needs may be interpreted as undesirable behaviours (O'Donnell, Sandford & Parker, 2020). Ultimately suggesting if the appropriate support is not implemented and their behaviours remain misunderstood then this could contribute to their negative educational experiences and life outcomes.

It is also important to consider the impact of change and instability apparent in the lives of CYPLA on their life outcomes. Changes of both school and care placements have been found to negatively impact CYP's educational outcomes (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007). This is concerning as a significant proportion of CYPLA experience multiple care placements in a year and

because stability is considered to have a positive impact on the life outcomes of this population (Berridge, 2017; DfE, 2019).

2.4. Suspensions

2.4.1. Definitions

Suspension/fixed-term exclusion

The term “suspension” is described in legislation as an exclusion for one or more fixed periods, up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year (DfE, 2022b). The DfE changed this term from “fixed-term exclusion” applicable from September 2021. Whilst the term suspension will be primarily used in this research in line with the most recent terminology, where fixed-term exclusion is mentioned in relation to other research findings this should be regarded as synonymous to the term suspension.

Permanent exclusion

The term “permanent exclusion” is when a pupil is no longer allowed to attend school (unless the pupil is reinstated; DfE, 2022b). This decision should only be taken in response to serious or persistent breaches of the school behaviour policy and where allowing the pupil to remain at school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupils or staff in the school. Permanent exclusions are not the current focus of this research as the process takes a different format but for clarity the researcher felt it would be useful to define.

2.4.2. Purpose

The DfE (2022b) states that suspensions are “an essential behaviour management tool”. They support their use as a sanction when warranted as part of creating a calm, orderly, safe and supportive environment in which pupils can learn and thrive. They believe that to achieve such environments, suspensions and permanent exclusions are sometimes a necessary part of functioning systems, where it is accepted that not all pupil behaviour can be amended or remedied by pastoral processes.

The government states that suspensions provide a clear signal of what is unacceptable behaviour and indicate to the pupil their current behaviour is putting them at risk of permanent exclusion. During their suspension, a continuation of education is expected to occur and headteachers are

responsible for ensuring work is set and marked for pupils during the first five school days of a suspension. This is also expected in cases of permanent exclusion where the pupil will not be attending alternative provision.

Only the headteacher of a school can suspend or permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds. They are expected to use their own professional judgement based on individual circumstances when considering whether to exclude a pupil. The DfE (2022b) suggested a number of reasons for possible suspensions/exclusions including: physical assault, verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult or pupil. Headteachers are expected to have a clear process around suspensions including using a method of: reintegrating pupils and supporting their behaviour following their suspensions, in addition to informing parents, governing boards and in some cases, local authority and other professionals (e.g. social worker) of the suspension/exclusion with clear reasons stated for its use.

2.4.3. CYPLA and suspensions

Research indicates that for children with a social worker, being in the education system is an important protective factor due to the safeguarding risks often present in their lives (DfE, 2021a). Headteachers are subsequently encouraged to devise strategies which balances between the protection and opportunities that the school environment provides for these children and the need to ensure calm and safe environments for all pupils and staff (DfE, 2022b).

The DfE (2022b) states that where a pupil has a social worker, the headteacher is expected to inform the social worker, designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the parents/carers to involve them as early as possible in relevant conversations related to suspensions. In situations where they are likely to be subject to a suspension or permanent exclusion, the designated teacher should contact the local authority's virtual school head as soon as possible. The virtual school head is then expected to work with the designated teacher and other relevant individuals, to consider what additional assessment and support needs to be implemented to help the school address factors affecting the young person's behaviour and reduce the need for their

suspension or exclusion. Where relevant the school should also engage with the young person's social worker, foster carer(s)/parent(s) or children's home workers.

All CYPLA have a personal education plan (PEP) which should be reviewed every term and any concerns in relation to their behaviour should be recorded. The DfE states the creation of the plan and subsequent plan reviews aim to reduce the need for CYP's exclusions/suspensions in some cases by providing opportunities to discuss how the individuals are being supported to "improve their behaviour".

Despite the processes and guidance designed to prevent the need for the use of suspensions and exclusions in the context of CYPLA, research suggests they are five times more likely to have a fixed-term exclusion than their non-LA peers (DfE, 2020a). There are several risk factors which have been identified in the literature which contribute to the poor educational experiences of CYPLA (Mallon, 2005). Whilst these have been alluded to previously, the current section aims to explore risk and resilience factors related to the suspensions of CYPLA. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relevant literature was obtained, the researcher utilised Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005) as a framework; it acknowledges there are an array of factors which influence the development and outcomes of CYP at many eco-systemic layers.

2.4.3.1. Local authority context

In line with national statistics, the local authority within which the research was conducted reported that CYPLA are suspended more often than their non-LA peers and the trend among this population is one of increasing suspensions as of Autumn 2021. During the academic year 2020/21, four LA pupils (0.6% of CYPLA attending local authority schools) received permanent exclusions, which were later renegotiated as managed moves, and 52 received suspensions (8% of CYPLA attending local authority schools). 48% of the 52 pupils received two or more suspensions during the academic year.

The local authority's virtual school suggests that the impact of COVID-19 has been greatest on the most vulnerable. The three-year suspension trend from

2018 to 2021 saw a drop in suspensions for all pupils in 2019/20, followed by a significant increase in 2020/21. Whilst the increase for all pupils was 15%, for those looked-after it was 59%. CYPLA identified as more vulnerable to suspensions were those who were of secondary age, new to care and/or the educational setting, have additional needs and have had recent changes in residential placements. Whilst settings do not consistently record their reasons for suspensions of CYPLA, the reasons amongst those who have recorded them include: persistent disruptive behaviour (most common reason), physical assault, illegal substances, damage and verbal abuse/threatening behaviour.

The virtual school recognises that the high rates of suspensions amongst CYPLA are of concern as well as the reasons for these. Thus, they aim to support settings to promote this population's inclusion and in light of this they have developed a new suspensions/exclusions policy outlining the responsibilities of various teams and professionals in relation to reducing suspensions/exclusions. In addition, they have been very supportive throughout the recruitment process and development of the current research. They hope to use the research findings of the current study to inform their support for CYPLA, schools etc.

The local authority's educational psychology service supports the virtual school as an educational psychologist forms part of the virtual school team. They offer their psychological contribution to support the virtual school in catering for CYPLA's needs by attending meetings and helping to develop guidance etc. In turn, this helps to prevent the suspensions and exclusions of this population.

2.4.3.2. Risk factors- micro/meso level

Relationships appear to be a crucial factor contributing to school suspensions for this population; poor relationships between CYPLA and their peers and teachers are reportedly associated with school exclusion (Sarmezey, 2004). Research suggests school staff expertise and perceptions of CYPLA could be instrumental in their suspensions. Moyer and Goldberg (2019) stated that foster carers believe some teachers misinterpret CYPLA's behaviours and do not have the necessary expertise to manage them. It is therefore reasonable

to suggest the lack of understanding around the CYP's needs and behaviours could be resulting in their behavioural intentions being misunderstood and them becoming suspended from school. Despite these findings being based on the views of foster carers who may have somewhat limited insight into school life, consistent conclusions were drawn from research with a range of sample populations. For instance, Thomson (2020) reported following interviews with CYPLA, carers and a range of professionals that the school exclusions of this population were associated with a lack of advocacy and psychological containment, in addition to a mismatch between young people and adult aspirations. Furthermore, studies report poor attitudes and low expectations of key adults in the lives of CYPLA are influential in the decisions made to exclude them from school (Turner, 2003).

The mental health of CYP is also thought to have a bi-directional association with exclusions (Ford et al., 2018). The poor mental health outcomes for CYPLA consistently highlighted in research (Keyes et al., 2012), suggest their mental health could in some way be contributing to them becoming suspended and excluded. The concept of 'locus of control' (Rotter, 1954; 1966) could provide some explanation for the increased prevalence of mental health needs amongst this population. It suggests that individuals hold differing control orientations which impact their health and well-being (Gale, Batty & Deary, 2008; Jackson & Martin, 1998). Those with an internal locus of control, believe that life events and outcomes are a product of their own actions and behaviours, have enhanced ability to cope in stressful situations (Wallace et al., 2012). However, CYPLA are thought to have a bias towards an external locus of control, believe that outcomes are due to external forces (e.g. fate, chance, luck), due to the instability and lack of control they have experienced in their lives (Sun, 2003; Wijedasa, 2017). In turn, their negative life experiences are likely to pose a risk factor to them becoming suspended due to their impact on the young people's locus of control and mental health.

Furthermore, learning disabilities are thought to be associated with suspensions and exclusions (DfE, 2021a), which suggests higher levels of SEN reported in CYPLA could provide some insight into the disproportionately

high suspension rates amongst this population in comparison to their non-LA peers.

2.4.3.3. Risk factors- exo/macro level

The consistency of the school environment and how CYPLA connect to it appears to play an influential role in their educational experiences and the likelihood of them becoming suspended. Research suggests there is a relationship between the number of school moves and the suspensions of this population (Weinberg, Oshiro & Shea, 2014). Another possible risk factor for CYPLA's suspensions is a lack a sense of school belonging (e.g. feeling valued, included; Thomson, 2020), which could be impacted upon by instability in their school placements. Research also suggests the reactive approaches adopted by schools and their lack of opportunities to build resilience contribute to the CYP's suspensions (Sarmezey, 2004).

The HoCEC (2018) suggested schools often exclude at their own discretion and use inconsistent approaches to exclude pupils. This lack of consistency amongst schools suggests there is potentially a lack of clarity for them around suspensions. This paired with research which reported that school staff do not feel they have the expertise to cope with exclusions and subsequently requested more support in this area (Osler et al., 2001), suggests a lack of school understanding around suspensions could lead to them being inappropriately used for this population.

Another factor to consider is the apparent lack of access to specialist services, such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to support both CYPLA and school staff. This is thought to have arisen due to government austerity measures (Paget et al., 2018). Resultantly, schools may use inappropriate and reactive disciplinary action rather than evidence-based early intervention strategies (HoCEC, 2010).

It is also important to consider being in the care system as a potential risk factor for CYPLA's suspensions. Research suggests the stress associated with being in the care system impacts on the learning of CYPLA, resulting in them having difficulties with focussing their attention (Day et al., 2012). In turn

this is likely to negatively impact upon their school experiences and may be a contributing factor in their school suspensions.

At a local authority level there appears to be a lack of proactive steps taken to re-engage CYPLA with education when they have been out of it for a period of time (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001). Whilst this research was conducted several years ago, research suggests it is still important to consider the support provided by local authorities and the influence that can have on the suspension rates of CYP. More recently, Clemens et al. (2017) found former and current CYPLA believe there is a lack of collaboration between education and foster care systems, which could subsequently pose as a possible risk factor for this population's suspensions.

Whilst the risk factors highlight possible resilience factors which could positively impact the educational experiences and suspension rates of CYPLA, the research literature provides further information around what promotes the school inclusion of this population.

2.4.3.4. Protective factors- micro/meso level

The quality of relationships with significant others, such as teachers and peers, on CYP's health and well-being has long been recognised (Long et al., 2017; Osterman, 2000). Munn and Lloyd (2005) found that young people emphasised the significance of positive relationships in reducing exclusions. Furthermore, Wood and Selwyn (2017) acknowledge the importance of relationships for CYPLA in promoting their well-being. Given the aforementioned association between suspension and mental health, this research suggests relationships could play an important role in CYP avoiding suspensions. Such research is commended for its elicitation of the voices of a relatively large sample size of CYPLA, a notoriously difficult population to recruit.

The importance of relationships for CYPLA is further illustrated in a review commissioned by the NICE and the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) of 50 studies capturing the views and experiences of CYP in care (Dickson, Sutcliffe, & Gough, 2009). The outcomes identified as important to this population were mostly associated with them having positive, secure

relationships with others: love, a sense of belonging, being supported (both emotionally and educationally) and having someone to talk to. The unmet needs for love and affection were perceived by some CYP to have a significant and lasting impact on their life trajectory. Whilst some may consider this review to be outdated, the updated NICE guidance (2021a) also stresses the importance of relationships for this population suggesting there is consistency in the findings across time.

Research suggests the school environment can act as a protective factor for CYPLA's suspensions. Townsend, Berger and Reupert's (2020) systematic review of the educational experiences of this population stated that an important theme identified for promoting their learning was the school environment as a 'safe haven'. Rutman and Hubberstey (2018) suggests stability in the school environment can offer an alternative to their sometimes chaotic and unpredictable lives. They also reported this population experience a need for a sense of control over their education which can subsequently foster their sense of self-efficacy and empowerment. Furthermore, Harker et al. (2003) found CYPLA wished to have their opinions acknowledged by professionals and be involved in decision-making processes. The research implies if professionals work *with* this population and provide them with a sense of control this could serve to promote their school inclusion.

Due to the need for stability in the lives of CYPLA, research suggests it is important to have carefully planned transitions between settings for these individuals which provides both the young people and the settings with the opportunities to prepare (Clemens et al., 2017). This implies carefully planned transitions could pose as a protective factor against school suspensions.

2.4.3.5. Protective factors-exo/ macro level

Factors at the macro level which are likely to have a positive impact on the rates of suspension for CYPLA includes support for this population from local authorities. Educational psychology services help to promote the inclusion of CYPLA and this population make up a significant proportion of educational psychologists' (EPs') workloads (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). EPs are valuable in supporting CYPLA as they are able to adopt a meta-perspective of the wider

systems around CYPLA (Coman & Devaney, 2011). There are a number of ways in which EPs state that they support CYPLA including: training, multi-agency working, consultation, working with key adults, intervention, research and accessing the voice of the child/young person (Francis, 2020). Concern for the welfare of CYPLA in the profession is evident through the development of working groups/parties and specialist roles created which are designed to support the needs of this vulnerable population (Norwich et al., 2010).

A virtual school (VS) has been introduced in each local authority which is designed to ensure close monitoring and intervention for CYPLA (DfE, 2018a). The aim of the VS is to act in the best interest of the CYP and promote their health and well-being. They do so by encouraging them to express their views, ensuring they have access to local authority and community services, promoting high aspirations for them, ensuring they are safe and have stability in their lives and preparing them for adulthood.

The designated teacher role could also act as a protective factor for CYPLA (DfE, 2018b). These are appropriately qualified and experienced members of staff within educational settings who have responsibility within the school to promote the educational achievement of CYP on the school's roll who are currently and previously LA. They are the central point of contact within the school for the young people and help to ensure the school is effective in supporting their needs. The role involves working with the VS to promote the population's education and taking lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand the factors impacting their learning and well-being. They also have the potential to be very influential in promoting their inclusion by working with the VS when CYPLA are at risk of suspension.

Social care teams may also pose as a protective factor for CYPLA by ensuring CYPLA are assessed where appropriate and their needs are met across education, health and social care professionals (DfE, 2014). Additionally, social workers have a role in co-ordinating plans with other professionals if CYP have a social care plan.

In recent years more emphasis has been placed on supporting schools to become 'attachment aware' which educational psychology services have

helped to facilitate. The project focuses on relational-based strategies and aims to highlight the importance of attachment in relation to CYP's behaviour and learning. Additionally, emotion coaching has also been gaining popularity and is promoted as a universal, relational-based practice approach for schools (Rose et al., 2015). Research suggests these projects are positively impacting on pupils' academic achievement and decreasing the rates of school suspensions (Parker, Rose & Gilbert, 2016; Rose, McGuire-Snieckus & Gilberta, 2019).

2.5. Support for CYPLA

At present there is no consensus regarding how to reduce the suspensions of CYPLA and as such, their suspension rates continue to rise year after year (DfE, 2020a). Evans, Brown, Rees and Smith (2016) highlighted this in their systematic literature review. They suggested there is a lack of understanding around the effectiveness of educational interventions for supporting CYPLA's needs. Whilst they openly acknowledge the limitations of their review methodology in that it may have not detected some educational interventions, this research suggests there is a need to provide some clarity in understanding what serves as effective approaches to reduce CYPLA's suspension rates; Particularly as research states greater educational success is linked to better long-term outcomes (Forsman, Brännström, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2016). Furthermore, the NICE (2021a) guidance suggested a possible area for future research is therapeutic interventions for promoting this population's school stability and learning, suggesting the need to identify support strategies to promote their school inclusion.

2.5.1. Relational approaches

Research suggests relational approaches utilised within educational settings which have increased in popularity in recent years can serve as a promising means of reducing CYP's suspension rates (Parker, Rose & Gilbert, 2016). The approaches aim to promote a positive whole school ethos and policy that encourages positive behaviour and relationship development. Bomber (2011) suggests a relational approach to supporting the needs of CYPLA may be effective as teachers can act as a surrogate secure base for them. In turn this

can aid their emotional and social development. Furthermore, Geddes (2006) emphasises the importance of teacher-student relationships to enhance CYP's learning experiences and help them to overcome difficulties they encounter.

Research highlights the potential positive impact of school staff-student relationships on CYPLA's learning and well-being. Studies reported that CYPLA feel school staff support them to develop their self-regulation skills, career plans and overcome educational challenges (Day et al., 2012; Zeller & Kongeter, 2012; Schroeter et al., 2015). Furthermore, these relationships have been considered instrumental in creating turning points in CYP's academic development and have provided them with the opportunity for a second chance to accomplish education (Hass, Allen & Amoah, 2014).

Additionally, research emphasises the importance of relationships with staff for young people's sense of school belonging; students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others and feeling a sense of being an important aspect of school life (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Such sense of belonging is reported to encourage young people to positively engage with school and reduce their suspensions (Partridge et al., 2020).

Considering the importance of relationships for CYPLA detailed in the literature for their educational experiences and overall well-being, it is reasonable to suggest they have the potential to serve as a promising means of intervention for this population. Despite the hopefulness of relational approaches in supporting the needs of CYP, research suggests those individuals who are LA are more likely to report poorer relationships with significant others, such as teachers (Long et al., 2017). Whilst this study was conducted in Wales which means it may be difficult to generalise the findings to the English educational context, they are also consistent with international literature which reports attachment difficulties amongst the population (Kay & Green, 2013; Millward, Kennedy, Towlsend & Minnis, 2006).

Furthermore, the NICE (2021a) guidance suggests whilst supporting the development of relationships with CYPLA is often commented on, it has for a long period of time been poorly defined in practice. They stated that the population do not wish for specific relational programmes but rather they want

genuine caring relationships. To explore the barriers and facilitators to positive relationships among CYPLA, the NICE committee (2021b) conducted a meta-analysis of 66 UK studies and concluded that positive relationships are characterised by: care, trust, involvement in joint activities, non-judgemental listening, sharing, confiding, availability, reliability and continuity. Whilst this meta-analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of what CYPLA require to form positive relationships with key adults, none of the studies explicitly focus on CYP's relationships with school staff and how these are influenced by the systems surrounding them. Thus, research in this area is important to gain insight into the needs of CYPLA and school staff to determine how these relationships can be fostered as a hopeful means of promoting the education and well-being of both students and staff. Furthermore, Townsend, Berger and Reupert (2020) highlighted that investigating the perceptions of school staff supporting CYPLA and comparing those to the views of the CYP is an important research area.

2.5.1.1. Risk factors: CYPLA

In the literature there are several proposed possible barriers to the effective use of relational approaches with CYPLA. For example, the unsupported social and emotional needs of the population could provide some explanation for their relational difficulties in educational settings. Bion's theory of containment (1962) suggests why their needs may impact their relationships. The theory stresses the importance of the role of the primary containing relationship for a young person with a parent or carer for their future relationships. This relationship is characterised by the adult responding sensitively to the infant's emotional communications. However, if we consider CYPLA are more likely to have experienced negative early life experiences, it is reasonable to suggest the parent may not have demonstrated the level of sensitivity required to help their child process emotional experiences. Bion states this can result in a 'minus K' environment where the young person adopts a state of mind where emotional contact and knowledge are not possible and cynicism and omniscience predominate. Such defences can prevent their learning and growth.

The CYPLA's internal working model of attachment could also be impacting their ability to form relationships with school staff (Bowlby, 1969). The unstable caregiver relationships and adversity that this population are likely to have experienced may have negatively influenced how they interact and build relationships with staff. Research suggests CYPLA are more likely to develop insecure attachments with their caregivers as they fail to meet their relational, social and emotional needs (Howe, 2005). They experience a lack of caregiver trust and security which impacts their emotions, thoughts, behaviours and future interactions with adults. In addition, behaviours which were adaptive in abusive environments may result in complications in the formation of relationships with staff (Waldinger et al., 2001).

Research states there may also be a lack of understanding amongst schools around the unique life experiences and challenges experienced by CYPLA which may impact staff-student relationships. Harker et al. (2003) reported some students were mistakenly assumed by school staff to be in care due to their 'delinquent behaviour' and the CYP expressed teachers needed more understanding around their challenges with capacity to learn. Whilst these findings could be considered outdated, they are consistent with Morton's (2015) which suggests CYPLA experience a lack of understanding from school staff in relation to their behaviours and needs.

Another possible barrier to the formation of positive relationships for this population may be their ability to communicate as speech and language difficulties are higher among individuals who have grown up in disadvantaged homes and experienced neglect, which includes many of those in the care system (NICE, 2021).

Research emphasises the importance of the home environment for CYPLA's relationships at school. Berridge (2017) reported negative events at home can impact secondary school aged pupils' behaviour at school leading to conflict in their relationships with school staff. This conclusion was drawn from seemingly credible research which used a multi-informant approach to access the voices of the young people, in addition to their teachers, carers and social workers.

There are a limited number of studies exploring the factors impacting on the development of CYPLA-school staff relationships. However, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005), the immediate environment and wider systems are likely to play an influential role in the development of these relationships.

2.5.1.2. Risk factors: School staff

Limited attention has been paid to the experiences of school staff working with CYPLA and what they require to build positive relationships with them (Edwards, 2016). Osakwe (2009) suggests that the attitude, knowledge base and communication abilities of staff are important for effective classroom interactions, which facilitate the development of staff-student relationships. Thus, suggesting that if school staff exhibit hostility and disdain during their communication with students, then CYPLA are likely to withdraw from interactions with school staff. Communication is an open system and Eisenberg (2010) suggests a number of different barriers to effective communication including psychosocial barriers. This suggests that the individual's backgrounds, perceptions, values, biases, needs and expectations can influence how they encode and receive messages. These barriers to effective communication may be impacting on staff-student relationships due to their well-being and perceptions of one another.

Research suggests school staff can experience 'compassion fatigue' when supporting CYP due to the demanding nature of their roles (Kalu, 2002). Bion's theory of containment (1962) proposes that staff are expected to "contain" pupils through their emotional availability which supports the CYP's self-regulation in the school environment. However, if they contain both their feelings and those of the students, they may experience emotional exhaustion which could impact their relationships (Showalter, 2010). Stamm (2010) suggests a high workload and/or unsupportive work environment can contribute to these feelings of exhaustion, suggesting the school environment could be very influential in determining staff's emotional availability to form relationships.

Split, Koomen and Thijs (2011) stated that teachers can vary in the extent to which they feel responsible for developing close relationships with students and in their understanding of the potential benefits of these relationships. This view appears to be particularly prevalent in secondary schools as secondary school teachers have been characterised by an increased professional and physical distance in their interactions with students and decreased attention to school life's emotional aspects (Hargreaves, 2000). Secondary school students also describe a lack of connectedness with their teachers and state that most of them are not interested in building relationships with students (García-Moya, Brooks & Moreno, 2019). Interestingly these findings align with the higher proportion of suspensions prevalent within secondary schools, suggesting relationships may play an important role in CYP's school experiences. Furthermore, this is particularly interesting given adolescence is thought to be a critical stage of social, emotional and cognitive development (Giedd et al., 1999).

The school ethos and policy could play an important role in the development of staff-student relationships. Research suggests emphasis on control to effectively manage classrooms can lead to the perception of relational approaches conflicting with classroom management goals, leading to one being chosen over another (Kunter et al., 2013; Weinstein, 1998). Thus, school behaviour policies and culture could result in a devaluing of relationships if importance is placed on punitive approaches. Furthermore, Ridley et al. (2016) reported dissatisfaction in the relationships of CYPLA with adults occurs when their interactions have solely negative content (e.g. problematic behaviour) and the interactions are too time limited. These issues could be linked to school culture and a lack of staff understanding around fostering positive relationships with CYPLA.

Research suggests school staff also feel systemic pressures, such as the focus on CYP's attainment which can jeopardise the nature of their relationships with students (Hutching, 2015). Noddings (2015) suggests the current UK education system which emphasises the importance of attainment, is incompatible with effective relational approaches. A lack of access to specialist services to upskill and support school staff in catering for CYP's

needs could also be impacting on the school culture and staff well-being (Paget et al., 2018). In turn, this could be impacting on school staff's ability to form relationships with students.

The research highlights the difficulties and complexities at play in the development of relationships of CYPLA with school staff, thus it is important to gain insight into what school staff and CYP need to build positive relationships with one another.

2.6. Need for the voice of CYP

There is a need to access the voice of CYPLA in order to gain insight into their feelings, thoughts and wishes around the suspension and relational processes in school. This is demonstrated by a report by the Children's Commissioner (2019) stating that there is more to be done to ensure children's rights are a reality for all children. Despite the introduction of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the UK parliament passing of the Children Act (1989), the report states there are some systemic issues, such as statutory requirements and limiting funding, which are prioritised over obtaining CYP's views. This can lead to CYP feeling helpless and unheard within systems and thus they require professional advocates who represent their views, wishes and needs. Additionally, the review states that only a small proportion of CYPLA gain access to advocacy despite it being their statutory right as stated in the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Heptinstall (2000) highlighted the practical difficulties in accessing CYPLA in research and gaining consent for their participation, which may explain why there is a lack of research accessing their voices.

Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy's (2013) systematic review of interventions designed to support CYPLA noted that whilst many studies have asked the CYP about their school experiences, there are none where their views influenced the development of policy and practice. It is important to elicit CYP's views as research found what significant adults believe they need, can be very different to what they actually want (Maybery, Ling, Szakacs & Reupert, 2005). Furthermore, in the context of CYPLA, Holland's (2009) review highlights the theme within the research to focus on the problems encountered by this

population as opposed to focussing on strengths and what is working well. Furthermore, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC; 2021), stated that to improve the emotional well-being of CYPLA, there is a need to provide them with “voice and influence”. The aforementioned guidance, research and policy has influenced the present research in that it intends to be strengths-based and elicit the voices of CYPLA in the hope of enabling them to feel heard by using their views to inform approaches which are utilised to support them in educational settings.

Few studies have gained the views of CYPLA in relation to their suspensions (McElduff, 2001; Thomson, 2020; Turner, 2003; Sarmezey, 2004). The majority of which included small sample sizes and could be considered outdated in the context of the current educational system. Thomson (2020) which is the most recent study, used interviews to gather the young people’s views around their experiences and suspension protective factors. However, the current research aimed to also elicit the voices of CYPLA in relation to suspension *risk* factors as another means of identifying areas where the young people can be better supported. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned studies have gained their views of suspensions with a focus on their experiences of staff-student relationships, which research suggests is an important area of study as it could serve as a protective factor for school suspensions (Parker, Rose & Gilbert, 2016).

2.7. Secondary school aged CYPLA

Secondary school aged CYPLA are of particular interest in the present study due to the fact that suspensions are more prevalent in secondary schools and the environments of such settings are thought to be at odds with nurturing and relational environments required to promote positive outcomes for this population (DfE, 2019; García-Moya, Brooks & Moreno, 2019; Hargreaves, 2000). Furthermore, developments over the past few decades in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, suggest that adolescence presents a period of opportunity for effective intervention as it is a time where rapid brain development and sensitivity occurs (Giedd et al., 1999).

Prior to puberty there is development of the grey matter and synaptic over-production, whilst in adolescence there is extensive synaptic pruning (Giedd et al., 1999; Spear, 2000). Additionally, development during this time is particularly marked in the pre-frontal cortex which is involved in many cognitive processes (e.g. reasoning, control of impulses and emotions) and there is raised activity in the ventral striatum, an area associated with reward and pleasure (The Royal Society, 2011). During adolescence, the brain is also sensitive to stress in the environment and thus chronic stress can result in corpus callosum changes and stress hormone (cortisol) secretion which negatively impacts well-being (Vaillancourt, 2008; Teicher et al., 2010). In addition, adolescence is a crucial time for many aspects of the developing self and identity, including goals, motivations and psychosocial well-being (Becht et al., 2016). Ultimately, the aforementioned research suggests that adolescence could provide a vital window of opportunity for the systems around CYPLA to negate some of the stressful life experiences they may encounter (e.g. abuse, neglect) and support their overall development, including their sense of identity, reasoning abilities and impulse control. In turn, this could serve to promote the young people's positive school and life trajectories by supporting their learning and well-being.

2.8. Conclusions

In reviewing the literature regarding CYPLA and their school experiences, it is apparent they are a population vulnerable to negative life outcomes. There is acknowledgement of the power of education and relationships in promoting their learning, well-being and life trajectories, in addition to the power of adolescence as a period of opportunity for effective intervention. However, there appears to be a lack of research and comprehensive understanding around how secondary school aged CYPLA's rates of suspensions can be reduced and relationships with school staff can be promoted. Whilst there has been a rise in the use of attachment and trauma-informed approaches utilised in schools with the hope of enhancing the educational experiences for CYP, there appears to be no research to the researcher's knowledge eliciting both the voices of CYPLA and school staff to gain an understanding of what they

require to form positive staff-student relationships and how these may reduce CYPLA's suspensions.

2.9. Aims and rationale of the research

The present research gained insight into adolescent CYPLA and school staff's perspectives with regards to the secondary school suspension and relational processes of CYPLA in one local authority in England. It gained their views in relation to the factors which promote and hinder the development of CYPLA's relationships with school staff. It did so by utilising Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory of human development (2005) to aid reflection of the individuals, in addition to their interactions with their school environments, and the influence of interacting systems around them. In doing so, the research aimed to give much-needed agency to CYPLA and school staff which appears to be lacking in previous research. Such information may prove to be invaluable in reducing the rates of suspensions for this vulnerable population by informing educational approaches/interventions at both the universal and targeted level.

The research questions are:

- How do school staff/CYPLA describe the suspension process of CYPLA and the protective/risk factors impacting on their suspensions?*
- How do CYPLA describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers, to the development of their relationships with school staff?*
- How do school staff describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers, to the development of their relationships with CYPLA?*

The above research questions are designed to gain insight into CYPLA and school staff's perspectives with regards to the proximal processes and contextual factors which may be impacting on the suspension experiences of CYPLA and the development of staff-student relationships.

2.10. Implications of the research

The thesis elicited key implications for schools, carers/parents, local authorities and the government as it appears that supporting the inclusion of CYPLA requires a collaborative approach between the various systems that CYPLA navigate, which extends beyond the school and home environments.

Educational psychologists (EPs) clearly have an important role in supporting the inclusion of CYPLA and reducing their suspension rates as they are uniquely positioned within schools and the local authority meaning they can facilitate a collaborative approach across the child's multiple ecosystemic layers. Thomson (2020) suggested they can do this across the 5 core components of EP practice: Training, Consultation, Assessment, Intervention and Research. This research has elicited key information which will hopefully inform EP and local authority practice by providing them with greater insight into school relational and suspension processes in relation to CYPLA. Please see 'Key implications for EPs' section for specific professional implications.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Chapter Summary

This chapter first outlines the theoretical, ontological and epistemological stance taken by the researcher and has been adopted to develop this present research. Subsequently the research design, participants and recruitment methods are stated, before data collection methods and analysis are discussed. Finally, reflections on the ethical issues which have arisen in this research are shared.

3.2. Positionality

The researcher wished to explore CYPLA's relational and suspension experiences due to her passion for promoting positive outcomes for this population. This passion stemmed from her personal experiences of living with foster children and caring for them as her parents were foster carers. The interest in this population's relationships and suspensions later grew whilst the researcher worked as a teaching assistant with CYPLA. In addition to wider implications, the researcher aims for the current research to have implications for her practice as an educational psychologist and that of other professionals.

The term 'CYPLA' is used consistently due to the researcher's wish to provide clarity around the population being referred to and in an effort not to reinforce

negative narratives around this population by using the acronym 'LAC' which may have connotations that they are somewhat 'lacking'.

3.3. Theoretical perspective

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005) is the theoretical framework which underpins the current research. Please see Chapter 1 for more in-depth rationale for the choice of this framework. The use of the aforementioned framework emanated through consideration of the research questions which are concerned with the exploration of CYPLA's suspension experiences and relationships with school staff from a multi-informant perspective. The present research is particularly interested in the interactions which CYP have with their environments (e.g. schools) and the multiple factors (person, context, time) which impact upon these. These were explored by gaining the perspectives of both school staff in varying roles (e.g. designated teacher, head of year) and secondary school aged CYPLA in relation to CYPLA's suspensions, in addition to the nature and quality of their relationships with school staff. In turn, this will hopefully inform policy and practice around supporting the needs of not only CYPLA but also schools and their staff.

3.4. Ontological and epistemological perspectives

The paradigmatic position taken in this research is critical realism which is ontologically realist (i.e. there is an assumption that there is an external reality independent of human minds) and epistemologically relativist (i.e. different methods produce different perspectives on reality) (Willig, 2012). The approach opposes forms of empiricism and positivism by viewing science as concerned with identifying causal mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1975). It believes unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events (e.g. suspensions and CYP's experiences of being suspended). This approach acknowledges the heterogeneity of experiences whereby each child or young person and school staff member has their own unique interpretations of the relational processes within school and the suspension experiences of CYPLA. This range of perspectives can help to build a shared and deeper understanding of the suspension experiences of CYPLA, in addition to the

factors influencing their suspension experiences and the development of their relationships with school staff.

3.5. Research design

The study design is qualitative inquiry using semi-structured interviews, a personal construct psychology tool ('Ideal school'; Moran, 2012) and thematic analysis. A pilot interview was also used to support the development of the interview schedule utilised in the young people individual interviews.

The qualitative approach and research methods were selected to allow exploration of the views and experiences of adolescent CYPLA and school staff with regards to secondary school suspension processes, as well as the factors which influence this population's suspensions and the development of staff-student relationships. The methods were chosen due to their ability to elicit subjective experiences and understandings. Multiple qualitative methods were used by the researcher as they acknowledged that CYPLA are a vulnerable population and they may experience difficulty expressing their views around the research topics (suspensions, relationships). Different methods were used in the hope of making them feel at ease and to ensure they were able to share their views via means accessible to them (e.g. visually in the 'Ideal school' task, verbally during the interview).

The researcher conducted a pilot interview to elicit young people's views with regards to the important areas of focus during the individual interviews, in relation to the research questions. Pilot interviews are not intended for data collection as such but can be used to identify the appropriateness of research designs, including interview questions (Kvale, 2007). This hoped to ensure the researcher developed a comprehensive understanding of CYPLA's school experiences through gaining the views of those in the pilot interview to ensure that the interview questions utilised in the individual interviews were fit for purpose. The pilot interview was not transcribed and was not included as data in the data analysis. It was used to involve the young people in the research process in an attempt to attend to power imbalances. Whilst the researcher endeavoured to utilise participatory research methods by involving the CYPLA further in the decision-making processes and sharing the power for the

decision-making, commonly reported challenges (e.g. time) to 'gold standard' participatory techniques impacted the researcher's ability to do so (Davis, 2009; Shier, 2001)

Semi-structured interviews were also used to allow the researcher to fully engage with the participants' experiences and thus gain comprehensive accounts of these (Drever, 1995). Additionally, thematic analysis (TA) allows us to capture, portray and explain the social worlds of people under study by staying close to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through its theoretical freedom, TA provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data. The "Drawing the ideal school" technique, adapted from an approach developed by Moran (2001), was used with the young people as it is a helpful means of allowing participants to share their experiences; it is very engaging due to its interactive nature and it aids reflection on the systemic factors impacting their school suspension and relational experiences. It enables young people to become actively involved in understanding themselves and expressing their views.

3.6. Sampling

Pilot interview

This research adopted a purposive sampling method to recruit participants for the pilot interview. The researcher endeavoured to access the voices of CYPLA who attended the care council and care leavers which the user voice and participation team in the local authority helped to facilitate. Whilst they were supportive of this, poor attendance to the meetings did not make it possible and instead two care-experienced apprentices (21-23 years old) who the researcher was liaising with in relation to attending the meetings kindly said they would do a pilot interview with them via Microsoft Teams (online). They had both attended schools and facilitated the care council and care leavers groups within the local authority where the researcher was on placement and so in the interest of ensuring that the young people were involved in the development of the CYPLA interview schedule the interview took place for one hour. The researcher asked for their thoughts on the interview questions both to share their experiences but also to reflect on the questions themselves (see 'Appendix B' for pilot interview schedule). Due to

their experience of being in care and willingness to share their school experiences, they were a very valuable part of the research process and they helped to ensure that the individual interviews conducted captured the richness of the young people's experiences. The care leavers shared that they felt the research questions and topics were appropriate and would be accessible to the participants. They felt that it was important to ask the young people for their views around factors impacting their suspensions and so the researcher thought further about how they could use the interview to ensure their views were expressed. This led them to prompt the young people to look at their 'ideal school' drawing in relation to any factors impacting their suspensions to aid them in sharing their experiences.

Interviews

This research adopted a purposive sampling method to recruit participants for the interviews. The selection criteria were secondary school aged CYPLA who have had one or more suspensions and secondary school staff members who have had at least one relationship with CYPLA and have been involved in at least one suspension process for CYPLA. In addition to be included in the research they had to attend, or work at, secondary schools in the local authority where the researcher was on placement to allow the findings to be of particular use and relevance to this context. The sample consisted of 11 participants, 4 male CYPLA and 7 school staff members meeting the criteria (information regarding the participants can be found in Tables 1 & 2, school names have been replaced with pseudonyms).

CYPLA	Age	School	Home
C	11	Birch (Mainstream)	Biological mum (still considered in care)
F	13	Fir (Mainstream)	Foster care
S	14	Apple (SEMH)	Care home
P	15	Blossom (Mainstream),	Foster care

		formerly Willow (Mainstream)	
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Table 1. Background of CYPLA participants.

School staff	School role/s	School
H3	SENCo/Designated teacher (DT)	Oak (SEMH)
C4	Form tutor/Teacher	Birch (Mainstream)
A6	Assistant head/DT	Cedar (Mainstream)
J2	Assistant principal/ DT	Maple (Mainstream)
L5	Assistant headteacher/DT	Birch (Mainstream)
S1	Teacher/DT	Chestnut (Mainstream)
J7	Assistant head/DT	Willow (Mainstream)

Table 2. Background of school staff participants.

Secondary school aged CYP were selected as the majority (80%) of suspensions are reported to happen in secondary schools (DfE, 2019) and research suggests secondary school environments in particular can negatively impact upon school staff-student relationship development. For instance, research suggests there is increased physical and professional distance between staff and pupils within these settings (García-Moya, Brooks & Moreno, 2019; Hargreaves, 2000). This research also investigates school factors which impact the suspension experiences of CYPLA and the development of their relationships with school staff to further understanding in these areas. Furthermore, this population was selected as developments in neuroscience and cognitive psychology over the past few decades suggest that adolescence is a vital window of opportunity for the systems around CYPLA to provide intervention and negate some of their stressful life experiences (Giedd et al., 1999). Thus, it is important to explore CYPLA's experiences during adolescence to elicit how their cognitive, social and emotional development can best be supported.

In order to gain a holistic understanding of CYPLA's suspension experiences and their relationships with school staff, the views of secondary school staff members in multiple roles were also gained. Ideally the school staff members

would have had a relationship with the CYPLA who are in the sample, but it was acknowledged it may be difficult to recruit staff members who have relationships with the CYP as this may be open to interpretation. A paired approach linking certain YP and school staff is not adopted in this research for the aforementioned reasons and in the interest of recruitment. The school staff participants consisted largely of designated teachers which may have been due to them being a main point of contact for the virtual school who supported with the research recruitment process or due to the nature of their role they may have been more interested in partaking in the study. A multi-informant approach was used in the research in order to gain the views of both adolescent CYPLA and secondary school staff members with varying roles. Authors have advocated for the use of multiple, as opposed to single, informant research methodologies due to their advantages which include their reduction of the impact of bias (Boyer & Verma, 2000). The use of both sample populations aimed to allow a holistic understanding of the contextual factors which impact on CYPLA's educational, suspension and relational experiences. Research suggests the viewpoints of school staff working in these environments may be particularly valuable to help promote understanding of the nature of the staff-student relationships from both perspectives (García-Moya, Brooks & Moreno, 2019).

In gaining both CYPLA and school staff's perspectives, the research aimed to achieve data triangulation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research area by having insight into the needs of both populations. Data triangulation involves data collection from different types of people to gain multiple perspectives which can lead to greater insight and help to reduce researcher bias when drawing conclusions (Carter et al., 2014). This information hopes to have implications for practice and policy around how best to support adolescent CYPLA and secondary school staff.

3.7. Recruitment

Pilot interview

The researcher contacted the virtual school with regards to meeting with a focus group. The virtual school then contacted the user voice and participation team within the local authority to enquire about the possibility of the researcher

attending a care council meeting in relation to the research. Following this, the researcher was contacted by a member of the team to gain more insight into the value of the research for the young people and to gain further details on the proposed structure of the meeting. At this point, a time and date were agreed for this meeting to take place, a video of the researcher explaining the research and introducing herself was shared, in addition to consent forms and information sheets. However, unfortunately the meeting was cancelled due to poor attendance and so in the interest of timing for the research, another opportunity was offered to the researcher which included meeting with the care-experienced apprentices who facilitate the care council and leavers group meetings to hear their views. Upon gaining consent, the researcher then met virtually with the apprentices and conducted a pilot interview.

Interviews

The researcher recruited the sample within the local authority where they were on placement as a trainee educational psychologist. The virtual school kindly agreed to assist with the recruitment of participants subsequent to them being approached by the researcher to ask for their support. They believed the research would help inform the development of their suspension/exclusion policy and guidance. The virtual school identified 15 CYPLA who had experience of being suspended for a fixed period who were living both in and out of county and have a broad range of needs (e.g. those with SEND and those without) and educational experiences (e.g. differing expertise of designated teachers). This aimed to ensure the sample captures the different subjective experiences of the CYP which aims to provide a rich and diverse understanding of the research area.

The recruitment process was as follows:

1. Virtual school (VS) to email the link person (e.g. SENCo, designated teacher) within the schools of pupils identified by the researcher as meeting the inclusion criteria for the sample. This stated the aims of the study and requested the school's support with the recruitment and consent process for the identified young person and a member of staff who met the inclusion criteria. An emphasis was placed on the benefits to the school assisting with the research in terms of them adding to the evidence base around school

support for CYPLA which will hopefully inform their practice.

2. Subsequent to schools expressing their willingness to assist with the research recruitment via email to the VS, the VS sent information sheets/videos to the schools for them to share with the young person, their parents/carers and members of staff interested in partaking in the research.
3. A member of school staff (e.g. head teacher, designated teacher, SENCo) spoke to the CYP, parents/carers and school staff member to ask them verbally whether they are happy to take part/have their CYP take part in the research.
4. Upon school gaining initial consent from the CYP, parents/carers and school staff member to partake in the research, the email addresses for the school staff and carer/parent of the CYP were then shared with the researcher (following their consent to do so), in addition to the researcher's professional contact details being shared with the school staff and parents/carers.
5. The researcher then emailed the parents/carers and school staff in order to provide further information with regards to the research process and answer any questions they may have. The CYP, parent/carers and school staff consent forms were then sent to the individuals.
6. Once the consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher via email, arrangements were made for the interview. For example, where and when the interview would take place, who would be present etc.
7. On the day of the interview, the participants were asked again for their consent to ensure they have had ample opportunities to ask questions regarding the research process and withdraw from the study.
8. Due to recruitment challenges, special education needs coordinators (SENCOs) of other schools within the local authority were also emailed with the aim of gaining more participants. Upon them identifying individuals meeting the selection criteria, the researcher sent information sheets and videos to the schools for them to share with the young person, their parents/carers and members of staff. Following this, steps 3 to 7 outlined above were carried out.

3.7.1. Recruitment challenges

Recruiting CYPLA meeting the aforementioned criteria (attending a local authority secondary school and experience of at least one school suspension)

was exceptionally difficult. The researcher was initially optimistic that with the support of the virtual school within their local authority where they undertook the role of trainee educational psychologist, the recruitment process would be relatively straightforward as there were pre-established relationships between the researcher and virtual school professionals, in addition to the relationships of these professionals with school staff.

The need to contact and thus utilise the relationships that the young people had already established with key adults in their school microsystem in the recruitment process was particularly important due to the attachments needs often associated with CYPLA. The interviews with school staff were very helpful for rapport building and most appeared willing to support me in recruiting these young people. However, despite numerous emails and phone calls to follow-up with gaining consent and arranging interviews for the young people, adults often reported that the young people could not participate in the research owing to a number of reasons: lack of willingness to meet with another professional, young people's mental health and educational needs, change in care status and school placement to out of county. Some of these reasons meant that some of the CYPLA no longer met the inclusion criteria for the research and they reflect the difficulties faced by some individuals in this population.

Additionally, another barrier to recruitment was that the school staff had very busy work schedules and their motivation to take part and/or help recruit participants was dependent on their interest in the research.

3.8. Procedure

Upon gaining ethical approval from the UCL Ethics Committee, the recruitment process outlined above was followed (see 'Appendix J'). The information sheets and consent forms sent to the individuals interested in partaking in the study detailed the general aims of the research and information with regards to the interview practicalities, including the participant's consent to record and right to withdraw from the interviews (please see Appendices F-I for examples).

3.8.1. Data collection

Upon consenting to participate in the research, a pilot interview, 'Ideal school' task and individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken by the researcher with the participants.

Ideal school task

At the beginning of the semi-structured interviews with the CYP, the 'Ideal school' task was used to complement the interviews. This is adapted from the 'Ideal self' drawing activity (Moran, 2012) as the researcher considered using personal construct psychology (PCP) techniques would be an effective way of eliciting views in relation to the educational experiences of CYP (Kelly, 1955). The approach seeks to explore young people's important core constructs about themselves and how they view the world by asking them to draw, and answer some questions regarding, both their ideal and non-ideal school (please see 'Appendix E' for more information). Furthermore, the task being completed at the beginning of the interviews served as a means of the researcher engaging and establishing rapport with the participants. Pupils were asked to draw the school they would *not* like to go to and then the school they would like to go, including the classroom, adults, peers and themselves (see Figure 3 for young people's ideal/non-ideal school examples). It appeared to be important to adapt the approach to the strengths and needs of the young person to maximise their engagement in the task and help to build rapport and elicit useful information. This included the researcher scribing some of the information and the young person being able to write instead of draw. Whilst the participants were given the option to meet online or in person, all of the young people met in person which meant that an online platform was not required to facilitate the drawings.



Figure 2. Examples of young people's ideal and non-ideal schools.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews then included some questions designed to elicit rich information with regards to the CYP's suspension and relational experiences, which were informed by the research questions, literature, and the pilot interview. Due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer used some follow-up questions and prompts to further engage with the participants' experiences and demonstrate sensitivity towards their accounts of their own experiences (Drever, 1995). In addition, the researcher asked the first school staff and young person participant to reflect on their interview experience and questions to help inform the researcher's approach for future participants. They communicated that the interviews were generally a positive experience for them.

It was communicated that the interviews and tasks could be undertaken in a location which was practically convenient and suited the needs of the CYP and school staff. All the interviews were conducted in person for the young people and for the school staff interviews, the majority were conducted online (6 of 7, via Microsoft Teams) with 1 undertaken in person. To ensure they felt comfortable, the young people were provided with the option of an individual joining them in the interview, however none of them opted for this. This would have come with limitations as the presence of another person could have impacted the extent to which the young people felt able to share their views. The themes of questions asked by the interviewer were developed in order to elicit responses from participants which would address the aforementioned research questions (please see Appendices C and D for more information). Subsequently these aimed to provide information regarding adolescent CYPLA and school staffs' views in relation to secondary school suspension processes and the development of staff-student relationships.

Qualitative approaches have been utilised in this research as they align with the theoretical position adopted which is critical realism which is ontologically realist (i.e. there is an assumption that there is an external reality independent of human minds) and epistemologically relativist (i.e. different methods produce different perspectives on reality) (Creswell, 2003; Willig, 2012). It believes unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events (e.g. suspensions and CYP's experiences of being suspended). Thus, by using qualitative approaches the researcher acknowledges the importance of the participants' unique experiences and interpretations and hoped to provide a rich account of these using their methodology. Whilst there are several strengths to the methodology, it is also worth considering some of the limitations of this research (please see discussion for further exploration of these).

Pilot interview

Pilot interviews are not intended for data collection as such but can be used to identify the appropriateness of research designs, including interview questions (Kvale, 2007). For this research, a pilot interview was utilised to aid the

development of the individual interview schedule utilised in the young people interviews (see Figure 2 for interview schedules development process). It involved the researcher interviewing two care-experienced young people at the same time so they could interact during the interview. The pilot interview was carried out virtually (Microsoft Teams) and lasted one hour. It covered the same topic areas as the semi-structured interviews which were developed deductively by the researcher utilising relevant literature and experience of working with staff/student populations (relationships with school staff, suspension experiences; see 'Appendix B'), in addition to providing individuals with the opportunity to reflect on the interview questions and offer suggestions for improvements if applicable. This information was then used to inform the interview questions which were subsequently used in the individual interviews. The care leavers shared that they felt the research questions and topics were appropriate and would be accessible to the participants. Additionally, they felt that it was important to ask the young people for their views around factors impacting their suspensions, leading to the researcher giving further consideration to how this information could be elicited during the interviews through the questions asked and use of the 'Ideal school' task. The pilot interview was not transcribed or used as data during the thematic analysis process in this research.

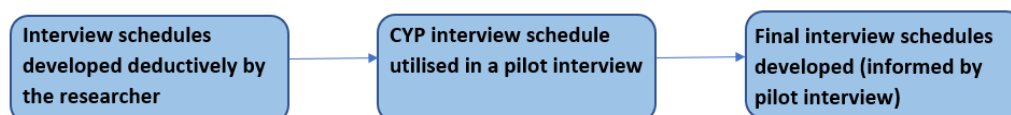


Figure 3. Development of interview schedules

3.8.2. Data analysis

For the semi-structured interviews, the participants' responses were then transcribed verbatim from digital recording, all personal identifiers were removed to preserve anonymity and they were then given a personal identifier number. A combination of deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) approaches to thematic analysis was utilised as a systematic method of identifying themes or patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; see 'Appendix K' for more information). Thematic analysis was chosen as the method of data analysis as it provides a flexible research tool capable of

providing a potentially rich account of data and it is consistent with the critical realism position which the research questions of the current study lend themselves to (Willig, 2012). The adoption of this position suggests the researcher acknowledges that the data is informative of reality but does not straightforwardly mirror it - rather it needs to be interpreted to provide access to the underlying structures of the data, hence the use of thematic analysis. The thematic analysis process began with the researcher's development of an initial coding framework which identifies words and phrases used to describe the experiences and views of the CYP and school staff with regards to the CYP's suspension process, as well as factors influencing secondary school suspensions and the development of school staff-student relationships. These pieces of text were condensed into codes and then subsequently grouped into themes (see Appendices N and O for examples of coding process and coding framework examples). The themes were then revised before a final list of themes and sub-themes were identified.

The CYPLA and school staff's interview data were analysed separately to ensure the voices of the young people were fully heard and to allow comparisons to be made between the themes identified in the two populations. It felt important particularly due to the lack of research eliciting CYPLA's views to privilege their experiences within the present study.

The 'Ideal school' task was used to facilitate conversations and reflections on the different systems within the individual's eco-system and as such the CYPLA's words during this task were transcribed but no further analysis of the drawings was undertaken.

Applying Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (2005) as a framework, each eco-systemic layer was considered when identifying themes and developing implications for policy and practice within many different systems (e.g. school, local authority, national) in which young people develop. The researcher reviewed each theme and subtheme and identified which layer of the eco-system it was relevant to. This allowed them to determine whether they had been holistic in their interpretation of the findings. They then used a table split

into the different layers to identify implications from the findings to ensure that the young person's eco-system was fully considered.

3.8.3. Inter-rater reliability

In line with Yardley's (2008) proposal that coding should be corroborated to ensure the codes and themes accurately represent the data set, the researcher carried out some double coding of transcripts with their supervisor and shared them with two fellow trainee educational psychologists to gain their reflections. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that this provides some credibility and robustness to the themes which are identified. Consideration was given to alternative themes and researcher bias to ensure that the themes were the most appropriate for the data set.

3.8.4. Reflexivity

The researcher was very aware throughout the research process that they have their own biases and previous experiences that could impact upon the process, particularly in the data collection and interpretation phases. The ways the researcher may have influenced the study were reflected on in a journal. This included consideration of beliefs about certain schools and pupils which were gained from past experience and from previous interviews. Other reflections were documented around the researcher's beliefs related to the negative narratives often surrounding CYPLA in schools and so the researcher was aware of how these may impact how they conduct the interviews and interpret the findings. Thus, they were conscious of eliciting positive school practice from the data collected, in addition to practice which had not been so supportive for the CYPLA. Furthermore, the researcher's experiences of working in a local authority educational psychology service had highlighted the lack of collaboration between external services and mental health support for young people which they reflected on in their journal. The researcher was therefore careful to ensure that their own views did not skew their identification of the themes by ensuring their codes and subsequent themes accurately reflected the data.

The need for reflection and the support of supervision following the interviews was identified by the researcher in order to support their own well-being as

some of the content of the interviews had an emotional impact on the researcher.

Consideration was given to the impact of the research highlighting to others the connection between CYPLA and school suspensions. The researcher did not wish to reinforce negative narratives around CYPLA, so they were mindful to utilise interview questions which were both solution-focused and encouraged reflection on systems around the young person to remove the within-child emphasis.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the UCL, IOE Research Ethics Committee in April 2022 (see 'Appendix J'). The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2021a) and Ethics and Conduct (2021b) guidelines were followed throughout the research planning. There were ethical implications for this research to be recognised and addressed by the researcher.

3.9.1. Informed consent

Informed consent was gained from all participants (school staff and CYP). The CYP were all under the age of 16 so consent was also gained from an individual with parental responsibility for them subsequent to them reading a research information sheet.

To help CYP exercise consent and have agency in relation their research involvement, consent was gained at multiple levels and timepoints. This was of particular importance as the researcher was aware the research's gatekeepers were adults and power dynamics may be at play. Initially consent for the research was gained at a local authority level (principal educational psychologist/virtual school), before school gained initial consent from CYP, their parent/carer and school staff member. Then once the participants were contacted by the researcher to provide more information about the research and their involvement, their formal written consent was gained. Verbal consent from the participants was also gained on the day of the interviews.

To ensure the consent is informed, accessible recruitment materials were used which helped the participants to understand the purpose of the research and what they were contributing to (e.g. videos). The ages, developmental stages and linguistic abilities of the participants were fully considered.

3.9.2. Sensitive topics

Due to the inclusion of CYPLA in the sample population and the open nature of the questions offering the opportunity to share personal experiences, it was possible that the participants may disclose some potentially distressing information. If this occurred, the young people were then emotionally supported by the researcher where possible and the researcher's professional contact details were shared. School staff, parents and carers were made aware by the researcher of individuals requiring emotional support where deemed appropriate.

If participants required any further support following the interviews, individuals who they felt comfortable speaking with in confidence were identified and the methods of contacting them established (e.g. school staff, parents, carers, organisations). Plans were also established/negotiated with the schools so CYP could contact this person following the interview for a 10 minute debrief if required.

Potential harm or distress caused by the questions asked or procedure followed were attempted to be mitigated by ensuring carers/parents were well informed about the nature of the research and topics so they were in a better position to support the CYP. Additionally, the topics and procedures were shared with the CYP before the interview to provide them with opportunities to ask questions to key adults in their lives and/or the researcher.

3.9.3. Confidentiality/safeguarding

The participants' information and data collected were/are kept confidential which was stated prior to the interview. All personal identifiers were removed from transcripts etc to preserve anonymity and the participants were given a personal identifier number. Pseudonyms are utilised in reporting which were

created by the CYP in the interview so they are able to identify themselves within the thesis. The data is saved on my UCL OneDrive account and will not be shared with others.

The interviewer also stated at the start of the interview to the participants that if they say anything concerning which suggests harm may come to themselves or others, the researcher would need to speak to others to ensure they are kept safe. To reassure participants, the researcher/interviewer stated that they have Disclosure and Barring Service clearance which means they are not considered to pose a risk to others.

3.9.4. Methods

The methods used within the research poses adults as gatekeepers to the research and thus the researcher is aware that this, paired with the use of child participants, may mean there are a number of possible ethical issues which could arise; including the presence of power dynamics and the meaningfulness of the research to the participants. To mitigate against these, the research aimed to elicit meaningful contributions from CYP regarding their suspension experiences and relationships with school staff which can help to inform practice and policy around supporting the CYPLA's needs. The importance of their views were reiterated throughout the research. Furthermore, an inclusive approach to the research and the methods utilised was adopted which aimed to allow the participation of CYP of all abilities to gain a rich and diverse understanding of the research area. For example, a pilot interview with two care leavers was used to allow their views to shape subsequent individual semi-structured interviews with CYPLA and school staff.

The researcher is aware a potential source of distress for the participants may be the interview with an unfamiliar interviewer, particularly for these CYP who may experience, or have experienced, relational difficulties. To minimise their discomfort, the researcher used their skills and experience of working with vulnerable CYP throughout the interview process. They aimed to create a safe space by being

sensitive and compassionate towards the CYP and using their rapport skills. Additionally, participants were provided with information regarding expectations of them throughout their research involvement to enable them to feel prepared. Furthermore, following the first interview with each group of participants (CYPLA and school staff), the researcher asked the participants about the interview process/questions to reduce anxiety and confusion due to misunderstandings of questions and the interview process utilised. Additionally, the participants' right to withdraw was emphasised prior to and during the interview to reassure them their participation was voluntary.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of data gathered from CYPLA and school staff. It details CYPLA's suspension experiences and relationships with school staff. To ensure that full consideration was given to each set of participants' experiences, the CYPLA and school staff's views were analysed separately. Therefore in this section the young people's themes are presented before subsequently sharing the school staff themes.

4.1. Overview of CYPLA and school staff themes

For the CYPLA 3 overarching themes and 9 subthemes were identified (see Figure 4) and for the school staff 3 overarching and 9 subthemes were identified (see Figure 5). Although the themes are presented separately, it is important to acknowledge there is some overlap between themes and subthemes which will be discussed in the discussion section.

The multi-informant approach utilised in the research aimed to explore some of the interacting systems within a young person's ecosystem. Whilst the researcher intended to specify which eco-systemic layer each subtheme was relevant to, this was not possible as some of them were applicable to multiple systems. Instead, the researcher utilised the description of the themes and subthemes and the 'Discussion' section to further explore which layers they were relevant to.

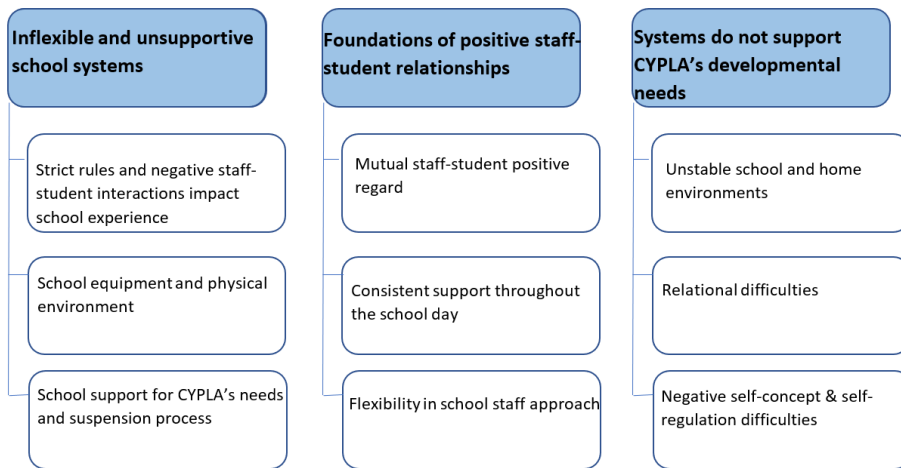


Figure 4. Thematic map of the themes and subthemes identified in the CYPLA's narratives.

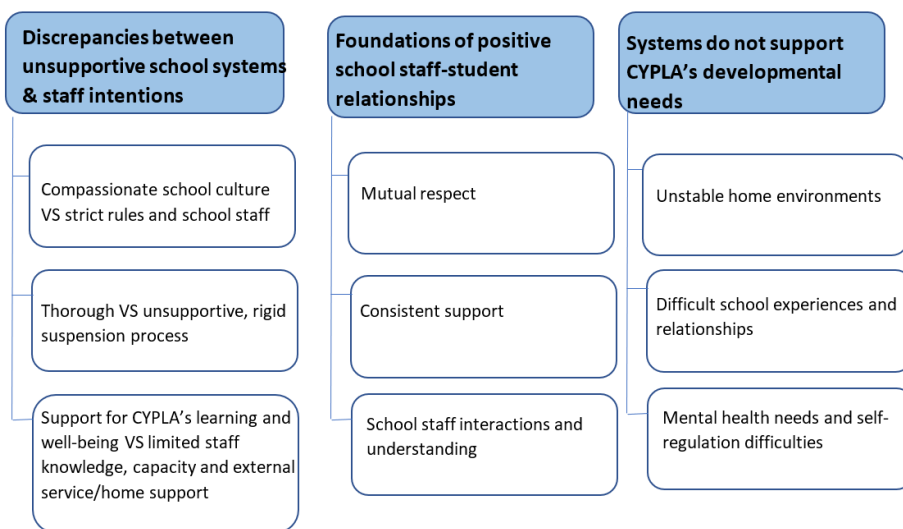


Figure 5. Thematic map of the themes and subthemes identified in the school staff's narratives.

4.2. CYPLA Theme 1: Inflexible and unsupportive school systems

This theme represents the CYPLA's views around inflexible and unsupportive school systems which includes the following subthemes: strict rules and negative staff-student interactions impact school experience; school equipment and physical environment; school support for CYPLA's needs and suspension process.

4.2.1. Strict rules and negative staff-student interactions impact school experience

The young people shared that strict rules and negative interactions with school staff often negatively impacted their school experience and view of the school and school staff. In some cases, this appeared to affect their engagement with school and the behaviours they displayed.

Most of the young people spoke about negative encounters with school staff being a feature of their school experience with C (aged 11) commenting, *"Some teachers are really strict."* It appears that when school staff implement rigid and punitive behaviour policies this impacts the CYPLA's view of them, which is likely to lead to negative staff-student interactions in the future.

P (aged 15) spoke of negative encounters with school staff in detail and it was a particularly common theme throughout his interview. These appeared to occur as a result of punitive school approaches and the teaching style of the school staff member impacting their engagement with learning and subsequent behaviour. These negative interactions had clearly impacted his school experience, in addition to his view of the school staff members and led to him experiencing a sense of injustice and becoming disengaged with his education. Furthermore, the exclusionary experiences (e.g. detentions) he encountered are likely to have further impacted on his school belongingness:

"Like if you are trying to get your point across, she (teacher) would just be like, "I don't want to hear it."" (P, aged 15)

"Sometimes the teacher would not have what we would be doing so we would just get sent out every lesson." (P, aged 15).

"If you answer a teacher back in any way then you get a detention... They give three hour detentions and that." (P, aged 15).

"I don't think it is fair how they (teachers) give punishments or detentions." (P, aged 15)

"They (teachers) don't really care about you. As long as you just sit there, be quiet, do your work, they don't really care. They do anything to make their job easier at the end of the day." (P, aged 15)

"I was getting in trouble every lesson. I was missing every lesson. At first I thought it was calm because I was out of English but then after a while it would just happen constantly and then I would think what is the point and then I would just give up." (P, aged 15).

P (aged 15) had a clear sense of what would improve his school experience when asked, which involved the school having increased flexibility in their use of disciplinary approaches and school staff having a good personal vs professional balance. This child-centred, flexible approach is likely to increase the frequency of positive staff-student interactions, which could positively impact their relationships and school experiences:

"...the school should treat everyone fairly." (P, aged 15).

"Being a bit more lenient with the rules, especially for people that struggle here." (P, aged 15)

"...he (favourite school staff member) can have a laugh but if we need to get stuff done, he makes sure that we got it done." (P, aged 15).

Similarly, C (aged 11) implied that inflexible teachers as a result of school rules impacted his ability to regulate his emotions and behaviour which resulted in him receiving a punishment for his behaviour, which is likely to have impacted his view of the school and staff member. He also expressed a need for his school to rethink behaviour rules and policies:

"I would not have got angry if she (teacher) just gave me another chance... she gave me a detention because I laughed and smiled." (C, aged 11)

"...no more detentions." (C, aged 11)

The strict rules and negative staff-student interactions resulted in the young people experiencing multiple exclusionary experiences which is likely to have had a very detrimental effect on their school engagement, sense of belonging and overall experience due to them experiencing this as a form of rejection:

"I have been in isolation before but I cannot remember what I did or why it was happening." (F, aged 14)

"I...got kicked out of ... one, two, three, four, five. Five schools." (S, aged 14)

When asked by the researcher to think about a time when they were suspended, one young person responded by saying, *"There's so many."* (P, aged 15) and C (aged 11) said in conversation with the researcher: "... every time I come back from inclusion and exclusion..." suggesting the frequency of these exclusionary experiences.

During the 'Ideal school' task, the young people shared that they wished for the rules of the school to be more flexible and fair and for lessons to be more engaging in their ideal schools. This is likely to positively impact the CYPLA's behaviours and result in more positive staff-student interactions which are needed for them to have more positive school relationships and experiences. For instance, F (aged 14) said during the task, that his ideal school would:

"Make lessons fun...Instead of just copying down stuff, putting in videos here and there and switching it up a bit." (F, aged 14)

4.2.2. School equipment and physical environment

Some of the young people shared the importance of the school environment for their educational experiences. The school cleanliness, physical environment, equipment and grounds appeared to inform how they felt about the school.

During the 'Ideal school' task, the young people shared features of their non-ideal school which included the physical environment, indicating that this was important to them. This is likely to impact how they view the school and feel attending it which may subsequently influence their behaviours, interactions with school staff and overall school experience. They stated that their non-ideal school would have:

"Lack of teaching equipment." (S, aged 14)

"Litter. Broken glass. No nice fancy touch screen TV thing." (C, aged 11)

"Everything's ruined and broken. It doesn't look presentable. Windows are smashed. Everyone is messing around, throwing paper aeroplanes and stuff."
(F, aged 14)

Whilst S (aged 14) shared that his current school physical environment was similar to that expressed by the young people in the non-ideal school task. This suggests that the physical environment may be impacting his overall view of the school and his experiences there:

"They (the classrooms) all stink. They all have something broken in it and not the right materials to be used." (S, aged 14).

During the 'Ideal school' task, the young people expressed a preference for a calm, well-equipped school environment which may provide a sense of safety for these young people, which may be much needed in the context of the difficult life experiences they are likely to have encountered. For example, in their ideal school they said they would like:

"Nice sports equipment and grounds... More than one person on a table so you have a partner." (C, aged 11)

"Everyone would be just getting on with it." (P, aged 15)

4.2.3. School support for CYPLA's needs and suspension process

The young people spoke about a lack of support for their social and/or emotional needs within their secondary school life and suspension experiences. They suggested areas for improvement and appeared to have a lack of understanding around the role of the designated teacher. Some of the young people suggested there was a need for improved support for CYPLA, particularly to support their emotional well-being and regulation, in addition to their suspension process. These CYPLA often have negative interactions with school staff meaning they may miss out on these opportunities for emotional support, which in turn impacts on their social and emotional needs being met.

A lack of support from school staff seemed to be a feature of the young people's school and suspension experiences which is likely to have impacted the extent to which their needs were met and they felt seen and heard within the school environment. F (aged 14) expressed that throughout his school

experiences he felt the needs of himself, and his peers, have not been well supported:

"They (school staff) don't support the kids. They just ignore them." (F, aged 14)

"The amount of times I have been bullied and no one has done anything." (F, aged 14)

F (aged 11) appeared to have not been spoken to about his suspension during the process and responded "no" when asked this question. This suggests school staff missed this opportunity to support his well-being and to reflect on the event that led to the suspension and utilise it to promote F's social and emotional development. Without such support and learning, CYPLA who are suspended are likely to find themselves having similar exclusionary experiences in the future which are likely to severely impact their life trajectories.

Similarly, C (aged 11) shared his suspension experience which suggested he received a lack of support from school staff and subsequently did not see the value in it. His views imply that increased support may have helped to potentially mitigate against him internalising these negative experiences and supported his mental health as he was left feeling disappointed following his suspension:

"After lunch they (teachers) said, "right, go home" and that was it." (C, aged 11)

"No, you don't really need to get supported, you just go home, stay home and then go back to school." (C, aged 11)

"I was disappointed, not good that I got excluded." (C, aged 11)

C (aged 11) also suggested, when asked, that school staff could support him better by providing him with, *"ELSA...Like a councillor or something"* as, *"It would be nice to talk to someone."* This suggests that these CYPLA could

benefit from greater support for their social and emotional needs and well-being.

P (aged 15) shared his similar school and suspension experiences. He appeared to feel misunderstood by school staff, which may have impacted upon his relationships with them and overall school engagement. He expressed that whilst he understood why school staff suspended him, there was a lack of support for his needs:

"They (school staff) sort of gave up on me really." (P, aged 15)

"When I was annoyed then the teachers would get annoyed at me as well which was not helping." (P, aged 15)

Whilst the designated teacher role is designed to be a source of support for the young people within schools, all of them replied "no" when asked if they knew who the designated teacher was for the school and when the role was explained further they were not sure who this person in school would be. This suggests the role of the designated teacher in supporting young people needs to be clarified to ensure that the young people are able to feel they are a source of support throughout their school and suspension experiences.

4.3. CYPLA: Theme 2: Foundations of positive school staff-student relationships

This theme conveys the young people's views around the foundations of positive school staff-student relationships which include: Mutual staff-student positive regard, consistent support for students and flexibility in school staff's approach.

4.3.1. Mutual staff-student positive regard

The young people expressed that school staff having a positive regard for them helped to facilitate positive staff-student interactions, due to the influence it had on their perception of school staff. This resulted in enhanced staff-student relationships which are likely to enhance their engagement with school and overall school experience.

For instance, C (aged 11) shared his experiences of teachers he had a positive relationship with where a positive perception of one another appeared

to have developed. The perception of his teachers appeared to be particularly important for C's development and maintenance of his relationships with them as he spoke frequently about his view of school staff:

"...she (teacher) is really nice. I am her favourite student." (C, aged 11)

"...she (teacher) is always really happy to see me. Like today I came back from exclusion and she was really happy to see me and said "C!" (C, aged 11)

"...she (teacher) always has my back..." (C, aged 11)

"I got to know her (school staff member) a bit and she is really nice and funny." (C, aged 11)

"So Miss X is really nice. Nice to stop and speak to her..." (C, aged 11)

Conversely, when C (aged 11) was sharing his views around a member of school staff he had a negative relationship with, he suggested that mutual respect had not developed and they had negative perceptions of one another. These are likely to have formed due to negative staff-student interactions occurring due to staff implementing strict rules and school cultures (theme 1):

"No one likes her (school staff member) anyway." (C, aged 11)

"You have to go into inclusion before get back into circulation and it is the last day so I can't get back into circulation which is her (school staff member) own fault so I hope she dies." (C, aged 11)

"She (school staff member) hates me." (C, aged 11)

S (aged 14) spoke similarly about school staff he had a positive relationship with, stating they had positive attributes and there appeared to be a mutual positive regard for one other. This seemed to impact his behaviour which is likely to enhance his interactions with school staff and facilitate in the building of his relationships with them:

"Loving and caring." (S, aged 14)

"One of my favourites would be B... he was my old maths teacher. I really liked them. Thought they were funny." (S, aged 14)

"It is just whoever I get along with really. It means I won't be rude to them." (S, aged 14)

Similarly, P (aged 15) shared his relational experiences with school staff he had positive relationships with and suggested that these relationships had great influence over his behaviours due to the respect that had built up between them:

"...if you like them (school staff), you like them and if you don't, you don't. You feel bad if you were rude to them, that is how I would look at it." (P, aged 15)

"When in the detentions, if I wanted to walk out then I would walk out but like if she (staff member) is in there, I do not walk out because of respect really." (P, aged 15)

4.3.2. Consistent support

The students appeared to value consistency in the support they received from school staff, which involved emotional support and check-ins outside of the classroom environment. This support seemed to positively impact on the young people's school engagement, in addition to their behaviours. In turn, this is likely to enhance their educational experiences as they feel a greater sense of belongingness and connectedness to the school and their staff.

The young people shared some of the reasons they had positive relationships with certain staff members, which included emotional support and frequent positive interactions. These reasons appear to be of importance for staff-student relationship building and are likely to provide the young people with some consistency in their lives and help them to feel valued :

"She (school staff member)... is nice to talk to. She listens to me. She gives me space to be listened to." (C, aged 11)

"Mrs X...is always talking to me outside of the lesson... She is always trying to help me." (C, aged 11)

“Even when I am not in lesson they (school staff member) still come and talk to me and say if you need this and that you can come and talk.” (P, aged 15)

“She (school staff member) was there when I was feeling down, she would listen to me and support me.” (S, aged 14)

“I go to them (school staff member) if I need to talk to them about anything...I don't do it a lot but I know I could go to them if I needed to.” (F, aged 11)

F (aged 11) expressed the importance of stability for building relationships with school staff. The young people are likely to need this consistency in their relationships to help them experience the level of safety needed to form positive relationships, particularly in the context of their adverse life experiences:

“We (favourite school staff member and F) have got to know each other over time.”

The young people suggested the value of positive school staff-student relationships for their engagement with learning, in addition to their emotional and behavioural regulation at school. This demonstrates the power of staff-student relationships for promoting adolescent CYPLA's inclusion and learning:

“The ones (teachers) that give me time... I am perfect in their lessons really.” (P, aged 15)

“...in my three hour detention... Half hour into it, I was throwing stuff and that and I was going to go and she (favourite school staff member) took me into her room and I was there the whole time. She gave me stuff to keep me occupied with. ” (P, aged 15)

“She (favourite school staff member) would just help when I was angry...She would ask me to speak to her and I would understand. I would just shout for a bit and then she would come up and give me a hug and then I would be like “fine, I will come and talk to you.”” (S, aged 14)

4.3.3. Flexibility in school staff approach

The students valued school staff members who were flexible in their approach and teaching style. They shared their experiences of school staff who they had a positive relationship with; these school staff members acted more compassionately towards them which is likely to have enhanced staff-student interactions and relationships.

When P (aged 15) was asked about the school staff that he had most positive relationships with, he suggested the importance of them being more flexible with their implementation of school rules and overall approach:

"The ones that...are a bit more lenient." (P, aged 15)

"They give me like a bit more chance." (P, aged 15)

"They don't just get rid of me like other teachers." (P, aged 15)

"Even when I am in the wrong, she (favourite school staff member) still tries to calm me down and get my point across and everything." (P, aged 15)

Similarly, C (aged 11) shared his views of school staff members he liked the most where he appears to value their flexibility:

"She (school staff member) always gives me other chances." (C, aged 11)

Additionally, when speaking about his suspension experiences and the support he received, he shared:

"She let me get the bus home when I was excluded." (C, aged 11)

"Miss P (head of year) supported me as she would always give me another chance." (C, aged 11)

The flexible approach adopted by school staff appears to have a positive impact on the mutual staff-student positive regard which appears to be influential in promoting staff-student relationships. In the context of punitive school cultures and strict rules present in schools (theme 1), school staff may

experience greater difficulty in interacting in a more flexible and compassionate way towards the young people. This highlights a need for schools to reflect on whether their policies and systems are fit for catering for the needs of CYPLA.

4.4. CYPLA: Theme 3: Systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs

This theme represents the views expressed by the young people around systems not supporting their cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs, which may be impacting their experiences of suspensions and relationships with school staff. The subthemes include: Unstable school and home environments, relational difficulties, negative self-concept and self-regulation difficulties.

4.4.1. Unstable school and home environments

The young people shared their school and home experiences which appeared to be characterised by instability. A number of them had experienced frequent changes in school and care placements.

For example, C (aged 11) shared his care experiences:

"I grew up with my dad before I went into foster care... I am not in foster care anymore, I have been back with mum for three years."

Similarly, S (aged 14) expressed that he had experienced multiple schools and care placements:

"I actually got kicked out of seven schools. Actually no, one, two, three, four, five. Five schools."

"So, at birth, my birth mum could not look after me so I went into foster care and then I went to a care home. Then I was bought up by who I call mum for 11 years of my life."

P (aged 15) also shared his school experiences which were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and included a change of school placement:

"...I missed two years at school anyway because of COVID and then they (school) sent me college. They then took me out of college and they sent me home before my GCSEs for like three months... First they took me out of college and put me in a classroom all day on my own..."

The instability in the CYPLA's school experiences, as a result of exclusionary experiences and socio-political factors, is likely to have impacted on their sense of school belongingness and relationships with school staff. This paired with the change in their care experiences is likely to detrimentally effect how they view the world, their sense of safety and their internal working model of relationships.

4.4.2. Relational difficulties

Difficult relational experiences were a feature of the young people's school and home environments, suggesting these environments may not be meeting their human need to belong. Some of the young people seem to experience trust difficulties resulting in a lack of willingness to gain support from others. These difficulties are likely to be impacted on by reported inconsistent staffing. In addition, the young people suggest that at times their behaviours may be communicating their unmet need to belong and need for peer acceptance. This may result in their behaviours being misunderstood by school contexts and them subsequently being suspended or having negative interactions with school staff, which can further impact their relationships.

The young people reported experiencing some difficulties with their peer relationships:

"There is bullying going on here (at school)." (C, aged 11)

"The other day someone dared me to pull the teacher's hijab off but I said "no"... and they all started to call me "gay"." (C, aged 11)

"I have been bullied half my life." (S, aged 14)

Despite these difficulties, the students expressed a real desire to be accepted by their peers and have positive relationships with them. In addition, they would like the physical school environment to facilitate such connections. During the 'Ideal school' task, they stated that in their ideal school they would

like:

"People you have your classes with to be nice and help you with your work."

(F, aged 14)

"Friends." (C, aged 11)

"The classrooms all look like this. More than one person on table so you have a partner." (C, aged 11)

"No bullying." (S, aged 14)

C (aged 11) also expressed a need for approval and attention from his peers during the 'Ideal school' task. When asked what he would be doing in his ideal school, C said, *"Making people laugh"* and *"Making noises"* and when asked what the reason for these behaviours might be, he said, *"I get dared to make noises and stuff..."*. This suggests that some of the behaviours displayed by young people which are deemed to be negative in schools may occur because CYPLA are seeking peer acceptance.

Other relational difficulties included their relationships with school staff, which are likely to negatively impact their school experience, given the impact of these relationships on young people's school engagement and behaviours (theme 2):

"Then you have Miss X, I hate her, she is an idiot." (C, aged 11)

These relational difficulties may also be contributed to by instability in school staffing. For example, F (aged 14) stated in the 'Ideal school' task, that his ideal school would have, *"Teachers that don't go home and not come back in the morning."* In addition, he said, *"Well who I would call my favourite is actually coming back after Easter, it was my old maths teacher."*

Some of the young people also had some negative relationships with their carers/parents, with some of them unfortunately experiencing neglect:

"Actually I will go into my home care... just by saying one word, neglect. I was neglected for 13 years and I am 14." (S, aged 14)

"...I ended up getting kicked out the house..." (S, aged 14)

"My mum has anger issues sometimes. She shouts mostly but does not hurt me." (C, aged 11)

S (aged 14) also alluded to how relationships with his biological family can be difficult despite no longer being in their care:

"When it is contact then all of them start crying saying they miss me around..."

Some of the young people appear to experience a lack of trust which may be impacting on their relationships. For instance, throughout the interview C (aged 11) asked the researcher:

"Are you part of social services?" (C, aged 11)

"Who sent you here? Are you a forensic? Are the police going to come in a minute?" (C, aged 11)

This lack of trust may impact the young people's willingness to share openly with others about how they are feeling with them reporting:

"I deal with everything on my own." (P, aged 15)

"I am not the kind of person to talk about it... I just don't really talk about it a lot." (F, aged 14)

Furthermore, perhaps their reluctance to seek support from others may be an adaptive response to the instability in their life experiences where they have learnt that the consistent person they can rely on is themselves.

4.4.3. Negative self-concept & self-regulation difficulties

Some of the young people appeared to have some unmet self-concept and self-regulation needs which have not been supported by the systems around them. Due to adolescence being identified as a particularly critical time for the social, emotional and cognitive development of young people, their unmet needs are of particular concern as this may have a lasting impact on their school and life trajectories.

Some of the young people have a negative view of themselves and their abilities, which may have been developed through the narratives around them and their negative school experiences (e.g. sanctions, suspensions, relational difficulties). These experiences may impact on their school engagement and how they interact with those around them. For instance, C (aged 11) appeared to have a negative view of himself and suggested that the exclusionary experiences he encountered may have contributed to him developing these perceptions:

"I am rubbish at drawing." (C, aged 11)

"I was disappointed, not good that I got excluded." (C, aged 11)

P (aged 15) also appeared to have similar views of himself which were saddening to hear:

"I was not the best of kids. I was quite bad." (P, aged 15)

"I am not the best in all of my lessons." (P, aged 15)

"I don't need to be so naughty." (P, aged 15)

The young people all appeared to have self-regulation difficulties evidenced by the behaviours they displayed at school and sometimes resulted in them receiving sanctions (e.g. suspensions) at school. CYPLA are a population who have particular difficulties in this area due to their adverse and unstable life experiences and without the appropriate support and understanding from educational settings, they will communicate their unmet needs in their behaviours. This in turn can adversely impact how they interact with the school environment and their subsequent experiences and interactions with others. The young people suggest their self-regulation difficulties may stem from a number of reasons including a lack of reasonable adjustments for their learning needs and limited emotional support:

"...sometimes I am angry...Anything can make me angry, nothing in particular." (F, aged 14)

"Sometimes I would be mucking about (at school)." (P, aged 15)

"Well like I cannot sit in a lesson for an hour really, not everyone can." (P, aged 15)

"Someone was annoying me so I closed their Chromebook." (C, aged 11)

"Making noises. Being late...that is what I do." (C, aged 11)

"So I kicked the bin...and it hit one of the teachers." (C, aged 11)

"Not going into lesson. Not doing work. This is how I have come to getting a lot of late lunches." (S, aged 14)

In addition, the young people shared the events resulting in their suspensions which suggest that they have self-regulation difficulties they have not received support for:

"I punched someone..." (C, aged 11)

"I called a teacher "gay"." (C, aged 11)

"I threw a ball into a detention room of 30 children." (C, aged 11)

"I lost my temper... I just flipped." (F, aged 14)

"When I get annoyed in the lessons, I am annoyed for a while so I may do things after that which lead to me getting a detention or exclusion." (P, aged 15).

These difficulties were apparent during the interview process as at times some of the students appeared to be disengaged and distracted by the environment. S (aged 14) and C (aged 11) looked outside of the windows and moved around the room at times during the interview and said:

"Hmm, there is someone out there... think it is M." (S, aged 14)

"Owh I have a splinter I need to go to the toilet. I have dropped a pin...Can I have a drink of water?" (C, aged 11)

There is an apparent need for schools to view behaviour as communication and to prioritise CYPLA's learning and well-being needs so they are able to have more positive school experiences and views of themselves.

4.5. School staff: Theme 1: Discrepancies between unsupportive school systems and staff intentions

This theme represents the views expressed by secondary school staff around positive practice and intentions for their practice which were often contradicted when they shared practice around suspensions and their experiences of working with CYPLA. The following discrepancies and subthemes were identified: Compassionate school culture vs strict rules and staff; thorough vs unsupportive, rigid suspension process; support for CYPLA's learning and well-being vs limited staff knowledge, capacity and external service/carer support.

4.5.1. Compassionate school culture vs strict rules and school staff

The school staff shared their experiences of a compassionate school culture established through their creation of a safe environment and having an understanding of the young people's circumstances. This school culture was later contradicted by all the school staff's experiences reported throughout their interviews.

The school staff expressed their views of their school cultures which included safe school atmospheres and a focus on restorative approaches to supporting students:

"They (CYPLA) feel that they're in a safe environment. So we've built that for them here. " (H3)

"I hardly hear raised voices in this school which unfortunately happens in lots of schools. It is much more community-focused and respect is both ways." (C4)

"They (school) have massively overhauled the behaviour policy so it is massively on restorative conversations and rewarding good behaviour and not just sanctioning bad behaviour" (C4)

"We're trying with the culture as a school to just be kind to each other... The way that you interact, the way that you speak, it always has to be polite, respectful." (J7)

Information sharing of the young people's circumstances also appeared to be an important part of school practice which reportedly allows school staff to be more compassionate towards them:

"... if a student is having a particularly difficult time, I will send an e-mail to the teachers of that student and say "please can you bear in mind X, Y & Z, you know, when you're doing things?" (S1)

"Not seeing this is a naughty child who's behaving in this way, seeing actually, this is a child who has, you know, really had a very difficult life." (A6)

The professional development of the staff also seemed to be valuable in creating a positive school ethos:

"We have regular CPD sessions each week... Where we have student focus each day, in each of those sessions, we focus on another student. So that enhances what our staff know and understand about those students. " (S3)

Despite the compassionate school cultures alluded to by the school staff, strict rules and negative staff-student interactions featured the school experiences they shared. For instance, some school staff had high expectations for the CYP's behaviour and they did not always take into consideration the young person's circumstances:

"... they'll (teachers) get cross because they (CYP) haven't done homework." (S1)

"I think sometimes in the heat of the moment, they (teachers) might even forget the circumstances in which the students might be living, and that is not because they don't want to do anything to support them, but they might just make a sweeping statement to the whole class. But that child might take that comment and think that's at me not at the whole class..." (S1)

"With some students, not all looked after children, there can be trust issues. Staff know and understand when explicitly told but they do not necessarily understand in the moment that actually they have had a lot of adults in their lives and lots of things taken out of their control." (C4)

Often these punitive school environments resulted in some CYPLA experiencing sanctions and exclusionary experiences:

"He was excluded for ten and a half days for his behaviour and damage." (S5)

"You know when they're (CYP) being naughty, missing lessons, swearing at teachers, fighting, you've got to have those sanctions and you've got to be telling someone off." (J2)

"...if they (CYP) are constantly truanting or constantly having a meltdown or swearing at staff, we have to follow sort of normal school procedures and have to say look, if you continue like this, this will be the consequence." (J2)

There appears to be a stark contrast between what school staff believe is the school context and the reality of school life. The school ethos, reported to be compassionate, appears to be quite punitive and unsupportive in meeting the needs of the CYPLA in most cases. This is in line with the experiences of the young people (theme 1) and suggests strict, rigid school environments are detrimentally impacting CYPLA's learning and well-being, in addition to school staff's ability to enact their positive intentions.

4.5.2. Thorough vs unsupportive, rigid suspension process

School staff reported that CYPLA's suspension processes were generally thorough and fair, this contrasted their later explanations of these suspensions within their schools.

School staff expressed that typically the decision to suspend is evidence-based, fair and includes multiple individuals (e.g. carers, designated teachers and external services):

"I think we're quite thorough and we do spend time to make it (the suspension process) quite fair and equal across the school..." (J2)

"So it's not a if you do this, you're automatically excluded." (S6)

"... we (school) would always triangulate on what a sanction would be... So

always at least three people involved, one of which would always have to be the head teacher and/or a vice principle." (J7)

"I invite virtual school and social worker every time (there is a suspension) as if we are saying that they (CYP) are not okay just to be a family then why are we not supporting them when it is breaking down." (C4)

"We (designated teachers)...would generally be involved (in the suspension process)." (J2)

"And so we have to call the carer..." (A6)

Most school staff spoke about reflecting on the young people's situation and needs when a suspension occurs. This often occurred during re-integration meetings. They also shared that the CYPLA were well supported and included throughout the suspension process:

"... We always have a reintegration meeting where we reflect. Why was it that we have taken that action and what sort of things could we do to stop it happening again?" (S1)

"We make sure they (CYPLA) have some work and then have a conversation with them about the incidents. We made sure that he was supported through that. We will also have conversations with him about why he is being excluded." (L5)

"They (CYPLA) are part of the process, they write down what they are feeling and then they are supposed to feel that is heard and acknowledged and they know the consequences." (C4)

Despite the thorough suspension process reported by staff, it appears through them sharing their experiences the process is somewhat rigid and unsupportive. The decision to suspend seemed to be quite clear-cut for some schools due to clear boundaries and expectations. Subsequently the circumstances of the CYPLA often seemed to become irrelevant:

"So for example, if a student defies like as happened recently, like eight or nine different staff including the head teacher and all the deputies, you've got

nowhere to go really, because basically what they're saying is I'm not going to follow any rule in this school and any authority in this school. And therefore there has to be a decision that a suspension has to come along." (S1)

"We try not to exclude looked after children if we can, but if they're, you know if they're fighting other children you've got no choice. " (J2)

"Sometimes I think that other professionals think you need to be more understanding but he needs to understand that is not acceptable behaviour, there has to be a sanction. We can put support in place but when we think about what are they doing... suddenly there is very little." (C4)

Also despite school staff believing the young people are well supported throughout the suspension process, there appeared to be a lack of explanation and overall support for them in the majority of cases (in line with the CYPLA views). For example, some school staff reported when asked if the school speak to the young people before they are suspended:

"So we wouldn't usually discuss with the young person what we would do is we would call their home or their foster carer and say this has happened and we will be calling you back or the head teacher would be calling you back with any further outcomes following investigation." (H3)

"It should have been that we got a student statement in the inclusion room before he left but that did not happen as he did not go to the inclusion." (C4)

The school staff expressed there was a lack of involvement from external services during the suspension processes. For instance, when asked if there were any external services involved in the process H3 reported, *"No, only the carer."*

Additionally, some school staff reported that an internal inclusion room was used for the young people either before they were sent home subsequent to being suspended or upon returning to school post suspension. However, the use of the inclusion room did not appear to be supportive in all situations. C4 reported, *"I am not convinced that inclusion room is doing exactly what we*

want it to. I think in theory it is great as a cooling off place but you saw the carnage that is happening down there. It is not at its best."

There appears to be a contrast between how the school staff perceive the suspension process, as supportive, thorough and fair, and the reality of the process where there is rigid decision-making, limited support and advocacy for the young person, and a lack of support from external services.

4.5.3. Support for CYPLA's learning and well-being vs limited staff knowledge, capacity and external services/home support

School staff shared that the young people are very well academically and emotionally supported in their schools. However, there appear to be barriers impacting on school staff's ability to support CYPLA such as limited knowledge, capacity and external services/home support in relation to the young person's learning and well-being. The relationships school have with key adults at home and external services seem influential in ensuring that school staff have the required knowledge and skills to support CYPLA's learning and well-being. The mixed experiences of schools working collaboratively with these individuals/services suggests at times there is limited support for school staff, and thus CYPLA. Such environments and relationships do not appear to be conducive of developing positive staff-student relationships and promoting positive outcomes for CYPLA.

For example, initially the school staff spoke about reasonable adjustments they implement to help CYPLA's learning and well-being, which suggests that they are well supported:

"We (school staff) will provide things so that they can access the curriculum and the school day." (J2)

"So we're constantly extending the comfort and the safety that they (CYPLA) feel, you know... to meet their needs in terms of their emotional needs, not just, you know, their EHCPs, but how they feel in our school." (H3)

"So you know those who might struggle with their communication and language skills there might be specific interventions that are put in place. For those children struggling with their mental health, we can use ELSA, we've got

a hub, we called it the hub here. It's like it's basically for those with SEMH difficulties.” (J7)

“She (CYPLA) has got a very good relationship with the home school link worker who will really look out for her...” (J2)

The designated teachers appear to support CYPLA in a number of different ways, including liaising with the local authority and key adults in their lives to ensure their needs are met:

“... my role is to sort of facilitate as well as to help, so that if, for example, a young person chooses... food technology as an option in key stage four then I would go and make sure that their ingredients are paid for... because sometimes it's overlooked accidentally that looked after children are eligible for pupil premium money.” (S1)

“Obviously with our looked after children, they are monitored more closely and we have three PEPs per year where we have smart targets that that we look into.” (H3)

Despite these positive intentions to support CYPLA, there are reported limits on school staff capacity, knowledge and resources which may be impacting the amount of support they are able to provide in reality. This suggests that like the young people, they too have unmet needs. School staff shared their experiences of multiple daily responsibilities and how this impacts their work life and relationships with CYPLA:

“We have to be here by a certain time. But then we go into meetings and we're going to tutor time, then we're going to lessons and there's a real cycle and it's a bit like a wheel and it's hard to get off that wheel.” (S1)

“... sometimes we're extremely busy and we want to build that trust (with CYPLA) but if we say you know something as small as you know, we'll get that for you at the end of the day and we've just got so busy that we haven't got that for the at the end of the day that is the next step down on the trust.” (H3)

Additionally, when asked barriers to forming positive relationships with CYPLA, C4 stated, *"...time but not necessarily with the students but if I don't sit in on their PEP then I might not know what is happening or then the DSL who sits in on it becomes the person that sat in on that and then it is like who is dealing with that and responsible. Here the deputy head oversees everything in the school and he doesn't want to burden us but then I feel out of the loop as I was not involved but then I have to organise things on the back of that."*

The ability for school staff to provide support for young people is also impacted by school staffing and knowledge of the CYPLA's needs and how to support them:

"We don't have the personnel to be able to do that preventative work." (S1)

"Not all the teachers will know the background, they'll know they are looked after but they won't know the background." (J2)

H3 also shared an experience of a young person in care who became dysregulated prior to his suspension and received minimal school support due to their limited knowledge: *"So staff members were too scared to intervene... this is where we need to strengthen our training with staff ."*

School staff's capacity, and knowledge required to support CYPLA, is likely to be impacted by their limited support from external services, parents and carers in relation to the young people's education and suspensions. They shared their feelings towards external services, including the educational psychology service, as a result of their lack of capacity and support. Such lack of support appears to be impacting upon school staff well-being and thus their ability to support CYPLA:

"I think the problem is at the moment all of these external services are just very stretched... And so frustrations develop because we don't know information that would be helpful to know. " (S1)

"With the virtual school, they ask if there is anything they can do but I have never spoken to anyone outside of the PEP meetings. Most recent exclusion, I

did not even get a response. Never been a conversation about the fact that the exclusions are racking up... Feels like me on my own." (C4)

"We are doing more in house here because of the poor local authority offer. That would be good. More support for looked after children. " (L5)

There appears to be room for improvement in collaborative working between the young person, key adults in their lives, and external services. It appears there is a lack of support generally for schools and CYPLA from external services, including the educational psychology service, during the young people's suspension and educational experiences. The relationships between schools and external services seem to be impacted by the perception that services do not adequately understand the school context which needs addressing to support these relationships:

"I start thinking where is everyone else (external services)? And if I am then he (CYPLA) must be thinking that as well. He knows there is all these people around but he is like where are they?" (C4).

"... we feel as a school we would like to be felt of as more as a team... sometimes we feel a little bit that rather than working as a team to support, they (external services) are there being "you shouldn't do that, you should do this" and actually that's where you can get bit of tension." (J2)

"They didn't really get involved with the exclusions, his social worker and the virtual school, they just needed more detail as to what happened." (H3)

"...outside agencies aren't always aware that you can't do something and say I can drop everything and deal with that..." (S1)

"The people that work for... (the) virtual school are not the happiest bunch of people and they're quite negative... on us as schools. " (H3)

School relationships with external services are likely to be further impacted by a reported lack of consistency and communication from social services:

"... the change over of social workers is horrendous" (L5)

“... we might hear late the day of a court date or we might hear that an arrangement has changed. We might hear that kind of in the middle of the day with no warning of it and it's unsettling for the child... it's really crippling as a designated teacher to not be informed as to what's going on... because you can't pre-empt the support the child is going to need. And when you put a child into an environment without the support, you're really asking for trouble.” (A6)

School staff alluded to the importance of the home-school relationship for CYPLA's overall school experiences, which is of concern as the support from parents/carers appears to be mixed for this population. When asked about barriers to school staff-student relationships, J7 shared his understanding of a young person who was suspended's situation, *“I would say the relationship between school and home wasn't great. So that's definitely a potential barrier.”*

In addition, H3 reported her experiences of working with the carers of CYPLA which featured carer anxiety related to the young person's support being projected onto school staff. This may detrimentally impact staff well-being and provide some explanation for why some home-school relationships are difficult: *“I mean the carers with him, they help, they're supportive but a lot gets thrown back on the school as we should know the answers and everything that's going wrong is happening at school, so what are you doing about it? ”*

In addition, one school staff participant suggested that the parent/carer's socio-economic status impacts their engagement with the CYPLA's education, *“Sometimes it is because of them having low socio-economic background... I think being back at home with mum there is probably not quite as much money as say a student in foster care. Perhaps they don't have as much money at home because there is not as much education so not as much importance is placed on school...”(C4).*

4.6. School staff: Theme 2: Foundations of positive school staff-student relationships

This theme encompasses school staff's views shared in relation to the foundations required for positive school staff-student relationships, including mutual respect, consistent support and school staff interactions and understanding.

4.6.1. Mutual respect

In line with the young people's views, school staff shared that CYPLA must perceive that staff have positive regard for them so a mutual respect and positive relationship can develop:

"You never know what you are going to get with teenagers but they know that we have their back." (C4)

"You are their safe either person or place in school." (A6)

"... the student will know that I am on their side." (C4)

Additionally, J7 shared that in positive relationships with CYPLA, *"... mutual respect is always there."*

School staff suggested that the young person's perception of how school staff view them can be adversely affected by their involvement in sanctions, which is likely to impact their relationship:

"It's very personal for them (CYPLA) to think that you're disappointed in them..." (A6)

"Sometimes he (CYPLA) does not want to speak to me (head of year) as last time I had to sanction him." (C4)

The above suggests that the more punitive school systems (evident in theme 1) have an adverse effect on school staff-student relationships as they promote negative staff-CYPLA interactions and alter YP's perceptions of school staff.

4.6.2. Consistent support

School staff shared that for positive staff-student relationships to form, CYPLA's support needs to be consistent (in line with the CYPLA's views). School staff being responsive, nurturing and consistent benefits their relationships with CYPLA which may be due to the development of trust and safety; this is likely to be important as it may contrast the young people's previous relationships. For example, when asked what helps facilitate positive relationships with CYPLA, school staff shared views around school staff being accessible and relationships being formed over time:

"So it is about not forcing myself on them but they (CYPLA) know that I am here. I always make sure I check in..." (C4)

"...it's about forming over a sustained period of time those relationships where they (CYPLA) feel as though we're invested in them and if they feel that we're invested in them, then... those positive relationships will be formed." (J7)

"I do think that in the relationship it is really important... to be accessible at all times. And they need to know where you are in the building." (A6)

"We (school staff) give them (CYPLA) places to go if they're not doing well." (J2)

Alternatively, S1 suggested how a lack of consistency in school staff support can negatively impact CYPLA's relationships, *"The turnover of staff is quite high... they (CYPLA) then become reluctant to put trust in somebody who's going to move on and move on and move on."* This suggests there needs to be some reflection on school working environments to promote staff consistency.

Extra-curricular activities are also thought to be helpful for building CYPLA's relationship with school staff: *"We have a residential organised for the year group next year and that bonds the year group and teachers with students."* (L5).

4.6.3. School staff interactions and understanding

School staff shared that for positive school staff-student relationships to form, positive staff-student interactions and understanding of CYPLA's contexts are required. Staff expressed certain styles of interacting with CYPLA which are important for relationship building, which are impacted by their personalities, flexibility in approach and understanding of the young person. It appears to be important for CYPLA that school staff are calm and provide them with some choice to create safety and a sense of agency in their relationship. This is of particular importance in the context of the unstable home and school environments they have encountered:

"I always want to smile, be welcoming, particularly if they're (CYPLA) having a difficult time." (S1)

"I have to be quite tactful as to how I might bump into them on purpose and say "I need to talk to you over the next two days. When's best?" You know, so I give them a little bit of ownership over when they want to do it." (S1)

"As a head of year, I am like just be compassionate and understanding and do it slightly different but teaching is so much about your personality as well." (C4)

"I think it's important to build a relationship on honesty that you're not hiding that you know exactly what's going on." (A6)

"I think it's being calm, not shouting because we know that they've (CYPLA) probably come from a background where they might have been shouted out and they haven't had that support..." (J2)

School staff also shared the importance of child-centred support and having an understanding of CYPLA's strengths and needs to promote their inclusion, C4 said, *"They (CYPLA) need... for support to be bespoke. Just because it worked for that child doesn't mean it will work for this one."* In addition, school staff shared their views around what may have prevented CYPLA from becoming suspended which highlights the importance of tailored support for young people and staff-student relationships. For example, H3 said, *"So he needs a staff member to say this is what you should be doing now and this is where you need to go with me."*

4.7. School staff: Theme 3: Systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs

This theme encompasses the views of school staff shared in relation to systems which do not support the cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs of adolescent CYPLA. This includes CYPLA's unstable home environments; difficult school experiences and relationships; mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties.

4.7.1. Unstable home environments

As expected, staff shared that often CYPLA had unstable home lives which somewhat impacts their school experiences and likelihood of becoming suspended. The consistency of their care placements, in addition to parent/carer engagement, are thought to be of importance. The lack of reported stability in the CYPLA's home lives is likely to have led to them forming a view of the world as an unpredictable, slightly unsafe place which could impact how they experience the school environment. This could be reflected in their behaviours at school and lead to them requiring more support:

"... if they're (CYPLA) changing placement or they don't know where they're going to, obviously it impacts on the school because sometimes they actually do not know from day-to-day where they would be sleeping." (S1)

"She's generally unsettled I think as she's been taken away from her home and would rather be at home, I think. " (S1)

"... it (the care placement) suddenly became not stable and it was really interesting seeing the change in her behaviour in lessons... She needed lots more time out of the class." (C4)

"...other's (CYPLA) parents engage but you can tell the young person isn't very engaged and they do not know why they are there and how long for and there is some uncertainty." (H3)

Reportedly there is a lack of parent/carer support and consistency for CYPLA in relation to their education. C4 reported that following a suspension for a young person, *"Sometimes mum comes, sometimes mum and new partner, sometimes mum doesn't come or the social worker comes."*

In addition, L5 emphasised the importance of the home environment when asked what may put CYPLA at risk of suspension; adverse experiences may impact their emotional needs which are communicated in their behaviours without appropriate support: *"Things that happen at home, moving house, parents splitting up, that kind of thing. Parent's mental health can impact their*

behaviour. We have seen all those things recently which can make them more persistently disruptive which leads to them becoming excluded."

4.7.2. Difficult school experiences and relationships

School staff expressed that the CYPLA who were suspended often had difficult school experiences and relationships. They experienced multiple exclusionary experiences, relational difficulties and a feeling of difference from their non-LA peers. For example, when school staff were asked what may have put CYPLA more at risk of becoming suspended, they stated the young people had a negative view of school and lacked engagement with education:

"Sense of injustice. Disaffected towards school." (J7)

"...one of them (CYPLA) does not like school and finds it difficult... She'll probably miss three lessons out of five." (J2)

"He is struggling with his engagement at the moment." (H3)

These young people who were suspended also experienced relational difficulties at school:

"He (CYPLA)...struggled to form positive relationships." (A6)

"Both of them (CYPLA) struggle with long term friendships... they've changed friendships quite a lot." (J2)

"He (CYPLA) hasn't got a particularly good relationship with the teacher in that classroom (where the suspension incident happened)." (C4)

School staff suggest that the negative staff-student relationships are likely to have a detrimental effect on the students' behaviours, illustrating the importance of these relationships. For example, C4 said, *"I have been teaching for so long now that I have learnt that if you do not have good relationships, then your behaviour management is shocking."*

School staff shared that the CYPLA had often experienced multiple exclusionary experiences (e.g. suspensions) which suggests that these sanctions are not having the desired impact to promote positive behaviours.

This may be because they are not addressing the unmet relational, social and emotional needs of the young people:

“She (CYPLA) came to us with... a huge amount of exclusions and suspensions.” (A6)

“He was excluded for ten and a half days for his behaviour and damage.” (L5)

School staff shared that the young people often felt different to their non-LA peers in their school environments, which may have formed due to school support differing for them at times. This is likely to impact how they view themselves and their sense of school belongingness, which could adversely affect their behaviours and relationships at school:

“... one of the things... post COVID, was to do catch up tuition and this one student said, “I just feel like I'm being beaten with a stick because I'm being made to do catch up and none of my friends are... But I have to because I'm looked after.”” (S1)

4.7.3. Mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties

School staff expressed that some CYPLA who were suspended had mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties for which the school, home and external services appear to be unsupportive of and/or unable to support. The CYPLA's mental health and self-regulation needs are likely to impact their relationships, self-esteem and overall school experience; they are likely to have communicated their unmet needs through their behaviours which may have resulted in negative interactions, exclusionary experiences and negative relationships with staff at school (reported in 'unstable home environments' and 'difficult school experiences and relationships' subthemes).

School staff shared their experiences of the mental health needs of CYPLA and their apparent lack of safety:

“2 of 3 looked after children we have here have mental health concerns.” (C4)

“With some students, not all looked after children, there can be trust issues.” (H3)

"They (CYPLA) feel like the teachers are just gonna walk out on them or leave. So that trust is a big thing for us." (S1)

Staff suggested that CYPLA often have a negative view of themselves which is impacted by their negative school experiences (in line with CYPLA's views). For instance, C4 stated how a young person felt following his suspension, *"He feels bad about himself."*

The socio-political context is also thought to have had an impact on the mental health needs of students, C4 shared, *"I think exclusions are rising after children are coming back from COVID and socialising again."*

In addition, A6 suggested that upcoming transitions may be impacting CYPLA's sense of safety and their mental health needs, which is demonstrated by their behaviours: *"I think it (the behaviours) was maybe just seeking some security and I think I have seen that more often with children moving into year 10 and 11 where... they start to really rock and think, "Oh my God, what am I going to do in the next steps?"*

The CYPLA's unmet mental health needs may be contributing to their apparent emotional and behavioural regulation difficulties. These unmet needs may be communicated in their behaviours and if misunderstood, could result in them becoming suspended. For instance, school staff reported:

"Often they (CYPLA) can be impulsive... and they just say, "Here's the situation. I'm gonna do it." (S1)

"One of them (CYPLA) would just see red and lose it... When she's calm, she's very calm and when she's not, she flips." (J2)

"...the looked after student took the metal leg... he ran down to... a year seven class taking place where the so-called bullying had happened and... was banging on the windows." (H3)

The young people appear to require additional support for their mental health needs, in addition to their emotional and behavioural regulation skill development. A current lack of school support for CYPLA in these areas is likely to be partially attributable to limited school staff capacity, knowledge and

skills (theme 1). In addition to, the limited support for schools and CYPLA received from external services who also have limited capacity (theme 1):

"More mental health support... would be really helpful." (A6)

"...he (CYPLA) cannot think about the steps that get him to that way out... "
(H3)

"... there have been times when I (teacher) have tried to de-escalate him and I can't." (C4)

"...we (school staff) can't calm her down." (J2)

Furthermore, H3 described the support provided for a dysregulated young person prior to their suspension which was not particularly effective suggesting there is a need for secondary schools to reflect on their current processes and support for CYPLA. : *"Then call out was done and then usually they go straight to the inclusion room...Then they are given time to calm down but when they were called he got angry and kicked a bin which hit a member of staff."*

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Chapter summary

This research utilised Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory to explore CYPLA's suspension experiences and relationships with school staff. It uncovered factors across the different systems within CYPLA's lives impacting upon their life and school experiences. Despite the fact this framework has positively impacted upon understanding around the multiple influences on young people, the inter-dependency of the different systems means that it is difficult to examine the findings relevant to each system separately. Therefore, the discussion section is more holistic in nature.

The three research questions are discussed in the context of theory and research literature. The first research question aimed to explore CYPLA's secondary school suspension experiences. Whilst the second and third research questions are related to adolescent CYPLA and secondary school staff relationships. Key implications for EPs, strengths, limitations and ideas for further research are later outlined. The discussion then ends with some concluding comments.

5.2. Summary of main findings

CYPLA experience disproportionately high rates of school suspensions, however limited research exploring their suspension experiences means there is a lack of knowledge around what may serve to reduce them. Whilst relational approaches could promote CYPLA's learning, well-being and inclusion, their success may be impacted by relational difficulties frequently reported in this population. There is limited previous research exploring CYPLA's relationships with secondary school staff to establish what may be feeding into these difficulties and how they can be addressed. Adolescence presents a critical period for intervention and suspension rates are highest in secondary schools, hence the important focus on secondary schools and adolescent

CYPLA in this research. The young people's views fell under three broad themes: Inflexible and unsupportive school systems, foundations of positive staff-student relationships and systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs. Whilst the school staff themes included: Discrepancies between unsupportive school systems and staff intentions, foundations of positive school staff-student relationships and systems do not meet CYPLA's developmental needs. The young people's experiences were mostly quite negative; however, they shared some more positive educational experiences which can hopefully inform policy and practice.

5.3. Research Question 1: How do school staff/CYPLA describe the suspension process of CYPLA and the protective/risk factors impacting on their suspensions?

5.3.1. Inflexible and unsupportive school systems

CYPLA's school suspension experiences were characterised by a lack of pupil support and a sense of injustice. Some young people felt schools "gave up" on them and there was a lack of communication from school staff. This is in contrast to CYPLA's wishes to have their opinions acknowledged by professionals and to have a sense of control over their education (Harker et al. 2003; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Designated teachers were not consistently involved in the process, despite this being a role created to provide CYPLA with advocacy and support throughout their school life (DfE, 2018b). In turn this is likely to lead to the young person's needs not being adequately understood by the school and thus not being taken into consideration during the suspension process. Resultantly, there is a need to rethink how the designated teacher role is operationalised and how those in the role are supported to enable them to support CYPLA.

Consistent with research (HoCEC, 2018), schools suspended pupils at their own discretion and their suspension processes were inconsistent. School staff shared that suspension decision-making processes were fair and informed by

pupils' mitigating circumstances, however in practice they were rigid with pupil behaviour being taken at face-value. Low expectations of CYPLA by key adults in their microsystems may be impacting school decisions to suspend pupils (Turner, 2003), in addition to the well reported strict school rules and cultures.

School environments are not satisfying adolescent CYPLA's cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs. Consistently reported punitive school environments are at odds with nurturing, relational school environments which support CYP's social and emotional development (HoCEC, 2018). In general, there was a lack of school staff expertise and support with regards to supporting pupils' social and emotional needs, leading to them communicating their unmet needs in their behaviours which often resulted in their suspensions. Both school staff and young people expressed a desire for greater emotional support for CYPLA. This is of particular concern due to this population being in a critical period of development for their cognitive, social and emotional skills, in addition to them having high prevalence of mental health needs and emotional regulation difficulties (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023; Gieder et al., 1999; Meltzer et al., 2003). Thus schools require further upskilling in this area. The life experiences of these young people, often characterised by instability and adversity, may have been internalised by them and impacted on their learning and well-being. Trauma and attachment perspectives suggest that such experiences may have negatively impacted their view of the world and ability to form relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). The way in which the young people interact with their immediate environments is likely to be informed by their insecure internal working model of attachment and them experiencing a lack of safety in the world. Thus greater flexibility in school approaches is needed to account for the CYPLA's individual experiences and needs, as opposed to a one size fits all approach.

Limited school staff capacity, resources, and in some cases knowledge, may be impacting on the support CYPLA receive and result in the apparent discrepancies between school staff positive, supportive intentions and their

practice. Staff capacity and understanding appears to be leading to more reactive approaches being used in schools and a lack of opportunities for CYPLA to receive early intervention and build resilience (HoCEC, 2018), which research suggest contributes to CYP's suspensions (Sarmezey, 2004). Reported limited macro level support from external services (e.g. educational psychology services, social services, virtual schools), Paget et al., (2018) suggests is likely to be impacting on school staff knowledge around supporting CYPLA's learning and well-being. Despite virtual schools being implemented to closely monitor and support CYPLA (DfE, 2018a), schools had mixed experiences of working with them; there was a lack of communication outside of PEP meetings and limited understanding of the support they offer. Equally, experiences with social services were mixed with a lack of communication and high staff turnover impacting on their relationships and ability to support the young people. Evidently, there is a need for greater support for school staff from external services and school structures to enable them to support CYPLA.

School atmospheres and teaching styles influence CYPLA's engagement with, and perceptions of, their schools. There was a preference for the school to be calm and well-equipped, which research suggests would serve to satisfy their safety needs and lower the heightened stress hormone levels some young people may experience due to their adverse life experiences (Maslow, 1943; Knight, 2018). This environment in turn is likely to help them to feel more regulated and engaged with school life, serving to promote their inclusion. Furthermore, Frenzel et al. (2009) suggests teaching styles impact on the student's engagement with, and motivation for, learning. There appears to be a preference for more engaging lessons which are likely to impact positively on the student learning experience and behaviours.

5.3.2. Foundations of positive staff-student relationships

School staff-student relationships are important in satisfying the love and belongingness needs of young people and supporting their development (Bowlby, 1949; Maslow, 1943). CYPLA express a need for containment,

security and approval in their relationships with school staff. However, in line with research of secondary school students (Moya et al, 2019), their relational experiences with school staff were mixed. Some school staff lack flexibility and the CYPLA believe they have negative perceptions of them which impacts staff-student interactions and relationships. This is of particular concern as poor staff-student relationships are associated with suspensions and staff/student well-being (Long et al., 2017; Sarmezey, 2004; Split et al., 2011). Aforementioned rigid school rules, behaviour policies and other systemic factors are likely to feed into these negative relationships. These, in addition to the foundations required for positive school staff-student relationships, are discussed in greater depth whilst considering research questions 2 & 3.

It is well-documented in research that staff-student relationships positively impact young people's behaviours as they serve to enhance their learning experiences and overall engagement (Geddes, 2006; Bomber, 2011). These relationships are particularly valuable given the relational trauma which the CYPLA are likely to have experienced resulting in triggered stress response hormones and difficulties with self-regulation (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023; Glaser, 2000). Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and Bion's (1962) theory of containment suggests how staff-student relationships impact CYPLA's school inclusion and experiences. They imply that if school staff are not able to provide emotional availability, consistency, sensitivity and responsiveness which satisfies their attachment needs then CYPLA's self-regulation will not be supported. Consequently, their needs may be communicated in their behaviours which, if not adequately understood by key adults, may result in them becoming suspended.

5.3.3. Systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs

A lack of support for the adolescent CYPLA's cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs from their surrounding systems was a feature of all their experiences. In line with statistics and research (DfE, 2022a), there was instability in CYPLA's home and school lives/placements which is associated with suspensions (Weinberg, Oshiro & Shea, 2014). Their sense of school

belonging and engagement with learning is likely to have been impacted by their multiple exclusionary experiences (e.g. detentions, suspensions, isolation; Thomson, 2020). Aforementioned rigid behaviour policies may be giving rise to such sanctions which are subsequently negatively impacting student behaviours. The fact that suspensions are occurring multiple times in a young person's school experience suggests that they, in addition to re-integration meetings and inclusion rooms, are not having their desired impact and their function is not supportive to the young person's education and future. This calls for appropriate evidence-based support for CYPLA and adults within their microsystem to break this vicious cycle and promote the positive school experiences of this population, instead of schools using inappropriate and reactive disciplinary measures for young people (HoCEC, 2010); there is an evident mismatch between whole school discipline approaches and those needed for CYPLA, suggesting a need for a more flexible approach in schools for this population. A lack of macro level support from external services (e.g. educational psychology services) is likely to be impacting schools' ability to provide this support (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001). Thus there is a need for external services to further support schools to support students. Careful consideration needs to be given to providing support for CYPLA in a way which does not affirm feelings of difference and impact their sense of identity.

Negative home life experiences appear to be impacting on young people's view of the world and ability to engage with school life and learning. The disrupted and unstable relationships they have experienced with their caregivers are likely to have impacted on their social and emotional development, including their ability to form relationships (Bowlby, 1969). From a trauma perspective, those young people who experienced some neglect may experience the world as an unsafe place which may impact on their behaviours at school (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). Berridge (2017) suggested this may be the case as events in the home environment reportedly impact young people's behaviours at school. Subsequently, it is important that CYPLA's behaviours are viewed through a trauma-informed and attachment lens to ensure that negative narratives do not develop around them.

Reported relational difficulties with those in the school microsystem, appear to increase the likelihood of these young people being suspended. Research proposes this may occur due to a lack of engagement with learning and their needs not being met (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Sarmezey, 2004). Furthermore, these relationships are likely to contribute to their unmet belonging and self-esteem needs, and negatively impact their self-concept (Emon, 2014; Madigan et al., 2013; Maslow, 1943). In line with this, there was an apparent need for positive regard and validation from school staff and peers to satisfy their needs (Maslow's 1943). Elliot (1998) suggests that such acceptance is important for the young people's identity, including their self-esteem. This is particularly important for adolescent young people who are a critical period for their identity formation (Becht et al., 2017). Sense of identity is important for young people's motivation and engagement in the classroom, subsequently promoting their inclusion. Bandura (1997) suggests this may occur due to the young people's high self-efficacy; One's perception of their capabilities to perform tasks/actions at a certain level.

The CYPLA's mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties are not being adequately supported by those in the micro and macro systems around them, impacting on their school experiences and likelihood of becoming suspended (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023; Ford et al., 2018). Consistent with research, school staff reported that macro level factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may have negatively impacted on the young people's mental health and school experiences (Ford, John, & Gunnell, 2021). This is in line with the local authority suspension statistics reporting a large increase in suspensions for CYPLA post-pandemic. Staff reported that some young people have a negative view of themselves which a narrative perspective proposes may be a product of negative school and life events, in addition to negative narratives held about them by key adults (White & Epston, 1990). In line with previous research, CYPLA received a lack of support and in some cases a lack of understanding of their needs from school staff (Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). This may arise due to a lack of support from school systems (e.g. lack of: resources, external support, inclusive cultures) meaning some school staff are

not able to provide adequate support for CYPLA and do not have the adequate knowledge to cater for CYPLA's needs; consistent with previous research (Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). School staffs' ability to support young people may be impacted by their emotional availability as a product of their limited capacity and own well-being (Kalu, 2002). Bion's theory of containment (1962) proposes that staff are expected to "contain" pupils through their emotional availability which supports the CYP's self-regulation in the school environment. Thus schools need to be supported to promote staff well-being. Staff need to be upskilled and encouraged to reflect on their work environments so they are in a position to support CYPLA.

5.4. Research Question 2: How do CYPLA describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers to, the development of their relationships with school staff?

5.4.1. Inflexible and unsupportive school systems

A key narrative was that schools are generally punitive in nature. Such environments are likely to lead to more negative school staff-student interactions as staff implement inflexible, strict rules and policies. Research suggests these interactions negatively impact their relationships (Ridley et al., 2016). This is in line with literature stating zero-tolerance behaviour policies are at odds with the establishment of positive, caring and trusting environments required for positive relationships to form (HoCEC, 2018). There is a clear need for schools to reflect on their school cultures and behaviour policies to consider whether they are conducive to promoting positive relationships within schools. Furthermore, the young people's views express a need for more compassionate, relational-focused and supportive school environments which promote more positive staff-student interactions.

Generally, the adolescent CYPLA expressed a lack of support and advocacy in their school lives. They communicated feeling unheard and uncared for, which research suggests is likely to impact their staff- student relationships (NICE, 2021b). Thus there appears to be a need to upskill school staff to have

more understanding with regards to the needs of some CYPLA and how to support them, consistent with research findings (Morton, 2015).

The CYPLA also proposed that teaching styles are important for staff-student relationships with them preferring an engaging teaching approach. Consistent with this, studies suggest the importance of teaching behaviours on learners' intrinsic motivation, interest, active learning and participation (Frenzel et al., 2009; Keller et al., 2014). These positive student learning behaviours are likely to result in more positive staff-student interactions and relationships.

5.4.2. Foundations of positive staff-student relationships

One of the narratives within the findings was that CYPLA do have some positive relationships with school staff, which shed light on some of the foundations needed for these relationships from their perspective. The benefit to the CYPLA's learning and well-being of their positive relationships, suggests that school staff should take responsibility for developing relationships with this population and consider every interaction to be an opportunity.

Key to positive school staff-student relationships was staff having positive regard for CYPLA and providing them with consistent support throughout the school day. Positive interactions were important and were characterised by warmth, emotional support and care. Eisenberg (2010) suggests that this positive regard communicated by school staff is likely to help remove psychosocial barriers to communication as the young people believe staff will understand, and be interested in, what they are going to say. This is likely to promote positive staff-student interactions and relationships.

Availability of school staff was also valuable for forming and maintaining their relationships. The young people expressed comfort in knowing they could seek support from staff even if they did not utilise this support. These findings are consistent with NICE (2021b) findings that positive relationships are characterised by care, confiding, availability and continuity, suggesting these are important features of school staff-student relationships from CYPLA's

perspectives. Consistent care from key adults is likely to provide CYPLA with a sense of safety, which Maslow states in the Hierarchy of Needs (1943), is needed for them to have their belongingness needs met and form relationships. Additionally, Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) suggests that for young people to form attachments the adult needs to be consistent, responsive and nurturing in their interactions with them. Furthermore, such consistency and nurturing is likely to be much needed given the reported instability and negative experiences in their microsystem (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007).

CYPLA valued a flexible teaching style, where school staff gave them “more chance” and had a good personal vs professional balance. Such approach is likely to benefit staff-student interactions and relationships, in addition to young people's perceptions of school staff which is important for relationship building. Research (Roorda et al., 2011) supports this view and states that constructive teacher-student connection is typically described by compassion and low levels of relational dispute. School staff flexibility is inconsistent with zero-tolerance behaviour policies and suggests that some relational issues in school may be due to school systemic issues. Again this calls for greater development of compassionate school cultures and practice. Furthermore, the academic focus often apparent in secondary schools is likely to impact negatively on relationships due to a lack of prioritisation of relationships (Nodding, 2015). Perhaps this calls for an overhaul in school priorities, from results to relationships. For schools to be enabled scope to do this there needs to be change at a national level, including Ofsted (2022) inspection criteria where there is a current focus on academic success.

5.4.3. Systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs

A strong narrative was conveyed around the microsystem not meeting the adolescent CYPLA's cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs. This appears to have impacted negatively on school staff-student relationships, which are consistently reported in this population (Long et al., 2017). Traumatic adverse experiences may have led to the young people

experiencing a lack of safety in the world and them adopting a state of mind meaning emotional contact and knowledge are very difficult (Bion, 1962); subsequently impacting their ability to form relationships. Furthermore, relational trauma with key caregivers is likely to have impacted these relationships as Bowlby (1969) suggests these relational experiences shape our internal working model of attachment. Thus in the absence of the appropriate support, CYPLA may experience relational and educational difficulties.

Most of the young people were reluctant to seek support for their needs from key adults and preferred being self-sufficient in this regard. This suggests that they may have an internal locus of control, whereby they believe that outcomes occur as a result of their own actions (Rotter, 1954; 1966). This could be an adaptive response to the instability experienced in their lives and lack of appropriate support. In turn this could have resulted in them learning to rely on themselves meaning they are less likely to seek support from others. This suggests educational settings and external support services should consider how CYPLA can be encouraged to access support on offer to them, acknowledging that they may not access it voluntarily. In addition, it implies that young people should establish support networks and access appropriate support before adolescence so they can learn its benefits which will hopefully encourage them to utilise support at this developmental stage.

Some of the CYPLA appeared to have a negative self-concept and mental health difficulties which are likely to be impacting their relationships with school staff. Research suggests these difficulties may have arisen due to negative life experiences and narratives conveyed by key people in their microsystem being internalised by the young people (Ford et al, 2018; McLeod, 2010). When young people experience a lack of acceptance, competence and worth, it is thought to adversely affect their self-concepts (Burns, 1982). Subsequently, they are more likely to hold negative beliefs about their abilities to form positive relationships with others, which detrimentally impacts their relationships with staff.

It is reasonable to suggest that the CYPLA's unstable home and school lives, adverse childhood experiences and relational difficulties have bi-directionally impacted on their social and emotional development and mental health. The young people's needs in these areas do not appear to have been adequately supported leading to their unmet needs being expressed through their behaviours, which they often received sanctions (e.g. suspensions) for. Such negative interactions are likely to adversely affect staff-student relationships. This calls for greater understanding of the young people's unique experiences, needs and contexts within educational environments to enable staff to interact more compassionately. Schools need to reflect on their practice to ensure there is adequate support for CYPLA, with a focus on promoting their relationships. Key adults in the microsystem require further upskilling to enable them to support the developmental needs of CYPLA and to shift the narratives around these young people.

5.5. Research Question 3: How do school staff describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers to, the development of their relationships with CYPLA?

5.5.1. Discrepancies between unsupportive school systems and staff intentions

School staff consistently had positive intentions for their practice and that of the school to be compassionate and fair, in line with good practice around scaffolding positive staff-student relationships. However, rather than the educational experiences they shared being compassionate and fair, they implemented strict rules and sanctions and, in some cases, gave minimal consideration to the needs and circumstances of the young people. This is in line with the young people's accounts and research which suggests that school staff have a lack of understanding of CYPLA's behaviours and needs (Morton, 2015). Research suggests these punitive school cultures and negative interactions between staff and pupils negatively impact staff-student relationships (Kunter et al., 2013; Ridley et al., 2016). Eisenberg (2010) suggests this may provide psychosocial barriers to effective staff-student

communication as young people may begin to believe that staff do not understand, or have interest in, what they are going to say. Whilst there is a willingness for school staff to provide compassion for CYPLA, this appears to be negated by school cultures with a zero-tolerance approach to behaviours. In turn, this calls for schools to re-think their approach to supporting CYPLA so that there is more of a relational focus which promotes positive interactions.

Other school systemic factors are impacting staff-student relationships. Whilst school staff stated that CYPLA are emotionally and academically supported which would enable them to build relationships with staff, limited staff knowledge and capacity is impacting their ability to provide this support. Furthermore, there is a lack of relationship building and information sharing time, arising due to staff shortages, heavy workloads and school cultures. The young people suggested that staff not understanding their needs further impacts on the development of staff-student relationships. In line with previous research (Paget et al., 2018), school staff report limited access to external services which may negatively affect staff knowledge and well-being. Local authorities appear to be stretched nationally suggesting there is a need to consider at a strategic level how time can be devoted to working more collaboratively with schools to upskill them around supporting CYPLA and relationship building.

School staff's capacity to support CYPLA may also be reduced due to a lack of emotional availability for relationships and 'compassion fatigue' in their roles, particularly given the complexity of the young people's needs (Kalu, 2002; Stamm, 2010). Thus, the school system needs to prioritise staff well-being, in addition to information sharing of the young person's context and strategies for support, to equip school staff with the skills and abilities to enable them to form positive staff-student relationships. Eisenberg (2010) suggests this could serve to remove psychosocial barriers to staff-student communication as staff well-being would be supported and the young person would feel staff understand them.

5.5.2. Foundations of positive school staff-student relationships

School staff identified the foundations required for positive staff-student relationships. In line with the views of the young people, there was a strong narrative around there being mutual respect and consistent support for CYPLA in positive relationships. Mutual respect was established through staff demonstrating positive regard for young people and providing support throughout the school day. This is consistent with research and theory suggesting that for CYPLA to form secure attachments, it is important that adults are consistent and responsive in their interactions with them, which serves to satisfy their safety needs (Bowlby, 1969; Maslow, 1943). Bion's (1962) theory of containment also proposes that adults can act as a 'container' for the emotions of the young people, which helps them to regulate their emotions and behaviours, enabling them to be in a position to develop relationships. NICE (2021b) guidance also concurs with this narrative and states that CYPLA value consistency, care and being listened to in their relationships with key adults. This level of consistency and need for safety is likely to be particularly important for CYPLA due to the instability they have experienced in their microsystem over the years, with school and care placement changes and relational disruption.

Consistent with research, staff shared that extra-curricular activities are helpful for staff-student relationships as it provides time for relationship building, which appears to be frequently lacking in schools. Macfarlane (2004) suggests these activities provide a useful platform to establish meaningful relationships and leads to increased staff-student communication. Whilst these are helpful means of building relationships, research suggests staff may experience burnout if they engage in such activities due to their heavy workloads, which would negatively impact their relationships (Saiirari et al., 2011). Therefore, whilst schools should promote student and staff engagement in extra-curricular activities and provide such opportunities, staff-well-being needs to be considered in the context of these activities.

The school system appears to be posing barriers to relationships. Lack of consistent school staff due to high staff turnover in some schools seems to be adversely affecting CYPLA's relationships. This is of concern as there are

increasing teacher turnover rates reported in schools (Worth & De Lazzari, 2017). Zinsser et al. (2013) also suggests school environments diminish their nurturing capacity which impacts staff-student relationships. Thus, there needs to be consideration around school working conditions to consider how to promote school staff well-being and retention. This is important as there may be a lack of investment from young people in their relationships if the school microsystem echoes their previous unstable relational experiences, in addition staff may have reduced capacity to form relationships due to unsupportive working conditions (Stamm, 2010).

In line with research, how staff approached interactions with the CYPLA was key for relationship building (Ridley et al., 2016). School staff flexibility, providing choice and tailoring their interactions to consider the needs and context of the young people promoted positive interactions. Eisenberg (2010) suggests that this would serve to remove potential psychosocial barriers to effective staff-student relationships as students would feel that staff understand them. Staff flexibility is at odds with rigid behaviour policies and punitive school cultures suggesting these environments are not conducive to building positive relationships and need redressing. The findings suggest information sharing should be prioritised so that school staff develop an understanding of the CYPLA's circumstances to enable them to be child-centred in their interactions. Additionally, choice is likely to be important for the young people as it provides them with a sense of control and safety, which places them in a better position to be able to form relationships.

Certain school staff characteristics were valuable for promoting positive staff-student relationships, such as being calm and honest. Staff with these characteristics are likely to provide some predictability in CYPLA's lives and satisfy their safety and belongingness needs (Maslow, 1943; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). This containing school staff approach is likely to benefit the young people's emotional and behavioural regulation (Bion, 1962), and their engagement with learning, which would positively impact staff-student interactions and relationships. However, the school system appears to diminish school staff capabilities to remain calm due to their stressful working conditions, suggesting the need for systemic change.

5.5.3. Systems do not support CYPLA's developmental needs

School staff reported that CYPLA have experienced instability and adverse experiences in their lives which are likely to be impacting their ability to form relationships. In line with literature (DfE, 2022a), staff reported the young people had experienced multiple care and school placements, in addition to exclusionary school experiences (e.g. suspensions, isolation). This is likely to impact the degree to which the young people experience safety in their environments, needed for relationship building, due to a lack of consistency (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, staff suggested the adverse life experiences these young people have experienced can impact their behaviours at school and lead to relational conflict, consistent with research (Berridge, 2017). From a trauma perspective, these adverse experiences are likely to impact on CYPLA's view of the world as a safe place and subsequently result in them having greater difficulties regulating their emotions than their peers (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023; Glaser, 2000). Smith (2013) suggests such emotional factors may impact staff-student communication and result in negative staff-student interactions and relationships, without adequate understanding and support from staff.

Previous relational experiences are important for forming future relationships. Consistent with the CYPLA's themes and other research findings (Long et al., 2017), school staff reported the young people had relational difficulties both at school and home. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) proposes that their relationships may have been impacted by their negative, disrupted relationships with their primary caregivers, who may not have adequately met their needs. Their internal working model of attachment may have developed in line with their relationships with their caregivers and as such, they believe their future relationships will follow the same pattern. Ultimately this may impact their investment in their relationships with school staff and ability to build trust.

School staff reported that the CYPLA's mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties are impacting their capacity to form relationships with others, due to them not being adequately supported by the systems around them. Some of the young people hold a negative view of themselves which is

impacting their actions and relationships; a narrative perspective proposes this is likely to have been informed by their negative school and life experiences and the narratives of key adults in their microsystem (White & Epston, 1990). For example, Harter (2006) suggests that when teachers are rejecting, punitive, or neglectful, young people may be more likely to develop negative views of themselves as unlovable, incompetent and unworthy. Self-verification theory (Swann & Read, 1981) proposes that this view may pose as a barrier to staff-student relationships as we aim to affirm views we hold about ourselves, thus young people may withdraw from those who view them more positively than how they see themselves. Consequently there is a need for school cultures to promote positive narratives around CYPLA and support their mental health to enable them to feel more positively about themselves, which in turn is likely to benefit staff-student interactions and relationships.

The mesosystemic home-school relationship appears to be important for staff-student relationships. Consistent with research (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012) which suggests the importance of home-school communication, school staff suggest that it leads to them having a greater understanding of the young person's context which they can use to support them and have positive interactions with them. Therefore, schools need to extend their relational approaches to include home-school relationships, in addition to staff-student.

Socio-political, chronosystemic, factors are also proposed as impacting staff-student relationships. Relational disruption and CYP's exacerbated mental health needs which occurred in some cases as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to have impacted staff-student relationships. Consistent with research (Ford, John, & Gunnell, 2021), staff suggested the pandemic impacted on CYP's mental health. They added that the pandemic isolation disrupted staff-student relationships as some young people were not attending school, which is likely to have had a negative impact on the young people's fundamental, biologically based drive to form emotional bonds and attachments with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Consequently, there is an even greater need for schools to provide mental health support for young people and re-build relationships.

5.6. Summary of implications

Whilst some implications for practice have been detailed throughout the discussion of the findings where appropriate, Figure 6 summarises and maps these implications across the different layers of the CYPLA's ecosystem. The implications are based on researcher reflections from data collected from the CYPLA and school staff around secondary school relational and suspension processes. The selection criteria for the participants means the implications will be of particular relevance to the local authority the research was conducted within, however the findings and implications are useful for informing practice and policy more generally.

		Implications
Microsystem	Schools/school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff prioritising relationships with CYPLA. Supporting them by providing consistent in/out of classroom support, having flexibility in their approach and conveying positive regard for students. - Activities to promote staff-student relationship building and time prioritised for involvement in these activities. - Support for peer relationships by using anti-bullying strategies, buddy systems, extra-curricular activities etc. - Greater involvement and support from designated teachers in CYPLA's school and suspension experiences. - Higher level of school and suspension support for CYPLA characterised by a greater sense of containment, advocacy and inclusion in decision-making processes. - Designated person (e.g. designated teacher) responsible for supporting CYPLA through the suspension process. - Strive to be adequately equipped, neat and calm school environments to support CYPLA's developmental needs. - Create opportunities for CYPLA to experience success and celebrate these.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide therapeutic support (e.g. CBT, emotional regulation strategies) and mindfulness strategies (e.g. whole class meditation) for CYPLA where possible. - Use of restorative justice approaches during re-integration meetings to break vicious suspension cycles.
	EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapeutic support to be provided where appropriate and possible to CYPLA. - Support staff well-being through the use of reflective spaces, training etc. - During assessments ensure that young people's views are captured and their relationships/suspensions are considered.
Mesosystem	Schools/school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance relational and educational processes, identify a staff member (e.g. designated teacher) to promote home-school communication. - Means of home-school communication to be identified and frequency of communications to be established. - Enhanced information sharing amongst staff around CYPLA's history, changing contexts and approaches for support following communications with parents/carers. - Increased sharing of CYPLA's strengths to encourage positive interactions at home and promote the young people's well-being and development.
	EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote home-school communication, shift negative narratives and promote shared understandings of CYPLA's strengths, needs and strategies for support through consultation etc.
Exo/macro/chron	Professionals/LA/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government funding for local authority services to enhance support for school staff and CYPLA's learning and well-being. - Ofsted school assessment criteria to be more relationship and mental health focused, as opposed to results driven.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide greater support for schools around suspensions of CYPLA to encourage consistency across schools and collaboration between professionals and discourage schools from using suspensions as a disciplinary measure. - CAMHS/therapeutic input for CYPLA to be increased where possible. - Prioritise consistency in home and school placements and professionals working with CYPLA. - Virtual school (VS) to provide more information to schools around how they can support them. - VS to provide more clarity and support around the operationalisation of designated teacher roles. - Review collaborative multi-agency working in the context of supporting CYPLA’s educational experiences and suspensions.
	Schools/school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider alternatives to using isolation rooms within school and/or review these to ensure they have a supportive function (e.g. restorative justice approach/ calming activities in the room). - Reflect on current practice/policies to ensure a relationship-focussed and compassionate school culture is fully embedded. - Reflect on barriers to effective staff-student communications and use these to inform practice.
	EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased therapeutic support to be offered for schools due to EPS’ prioritising preventative work and being commissioned to provide this support. - Advocate for CYPLA at a policy level and continue to communicate the need for increased funding for EP training.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage discussion around supporting CYPLA’s needs and consider how their needs are changing overtime at school planning meetings. - Encourage schools to adopt preventative, relational, compassionate approaches to supporting CYP’s needs. - Encourage discussions around how to promote positive outcomes for CYPLA and narratives around them during team meetings etc. Working groups designed to promote their inclusion and well-being are a good platform for this. - EPs should find out about, and link with, relevant interest groups for CYPLA so that they are working towards consolidating good practice in this area and working in collaboration with these efforts. Such groups should consider how to best meet the needs of CYPLA, giving special consideration to enhancing their suspension and relational experiences. <p><i>Above highlights some important EP implications, however please see the following section for a more holistic overview of these implications.</i></p>
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Figure 6. Summary of implications based on participant narratives.

5.7. Key implications for EPs

The views of the CYPLA and school staff highlighted some areas where EPs could be influential in promoting the educational experiences of CYPLA, by supporting both them and the systems around them. Figure 7 highlights the EP role implications by considering the role’s 5 core functions across different systems of the young people’s eco-systems: training, consultation, assessment, intervention and research (Scottish Executive, 2002). It highlights the scope of the role with regards to preventative work and in line with other research (Norwich et al.,2010), it suggests the usefulness of them working within the virtual school to promote the inclusion of CYPLA.

	CYP & Families	School	Local authority
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Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Therapeutic parenting courses. -Relational, trauma-informed parenting courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attachment, trauma-informed approaches. -Relational approaches/compassionate school. -Staff well-being support. -Best practice for supporting CYPLA's needs in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supporting virtual schools with their designated teacher training.
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shifting narratives around CYPLA's needs and behaviour. -Consultations to problem-solve concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shifting narratives around CYPLA's needs and behaviour and challenge the use of suspensions for this population. -Promote the use of preventative approaches to support CYPLA's needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Greater Team around the Child (TAC) and Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting involvement to promote advocacy for CYPLA and a shared understanding of their strengths, needs and preventative strategies for support. -Collaborative working with virtual schools.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Formulations post assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support schools to assess how CYPLA's needs change over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensure local authority monitoring of

	<p>to be shared and explained to young people and their families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Undertake case work highlighting the importance of relationships for CYPLA's inclusion and well-being. 	<p>time and how they can be supported during planning meetings etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourage schools to assess how they support staff well-being. -Encourage schools to reflect on their relational processes. 	<p>CYPLA suspension processes and the use of suspensions.</p>
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Signpost CYPLA and their families to mental health support/ family support services where appropriate. -Individual/ group therapeutic support where possible. -Set up parent support groups within schools -Promote home-school relationships with the use of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review and re-develop behaviour policies so they are more flexible and relational. -Signpost school staff to mental health support services where appropriate. -Reflective practice facilitated with school staff/designated teachers (e.g. supervision, Circle of Adults, Video Interactive Guidance). -Help schools embed staff well-being support structures into their day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EPS' prioritising EPs providing preventative work. -Working groups within local authorities around how best to support schools/designated teachers.

	interventions e.g. multi-family groups.	(e.g. solution circles, mindfulness activities). -Facilitate the use of activities which encourage connection e.g. friendship groups, social skills groups, buddy systems, extra-curricular activities.	
Research	-To be reviewed to consider how best to overcome recruitment issues in the context of CYPLA's needs.	-Action research with designated teachers to understand how they could be better supported to support CYPLA.	-Contribute to system level monitoring of suspensions. -Action research into how the education system could better support CYPLA's learning and well-being.

Figure 7. Summary of key implications for EPs and EPS' in supporting CYPLA based on participant narratives.

5.8. Strengths and limitations of the research

5.8.1. Strengths

The qualitative approach adopted in the research enabled a rigorous and in-depth exploration of the secondary school suspension and relational experiences of CYPLA. The findings offer insight into the lived experiences of this population of adolescent young people, whose voices are not frequently captured in research. Furthermore, the voices of school staff are heard within this research in relation to their views around staff-CYPLA relationships which do not appear to have been gathered in previous research in this area. In addition, few studies have conveyed the views of school staff regarding CYPLA's suspension experiences. Thus, the present research makes a

valuable contribution to the existing research and understanding in this area.

Due to the use of qualitative enquiry, the credibility of the findings is partially due to the trustworthiness of the researcher with Miles and Huberman (1994) posing the question “how valid and reliable is this person likely to be as an information gathering instrument?”. In order to increase the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher followed the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure the themes were identified from the interviews via a systematic process. Additionally, the researcher was also very reflexive and kept a journal to explore their thoughts and feelings in relation to the research to minimise bias during both the data collection and analysis stages. Furthermore, the researcher undertook the process of double coding transcripts with their supervisor to achieve inter-coder agreement and improve the dependability of the findings.

The multi-informant approach (CYPLA and school staff participants) adopted in this research means triangulation has been achieved and subsequently provides a rich understanding of the relational and suspension experiences of CYPLA and school staff. This approach aimed to aid credibility to the findings, through multivocality and crystallisation (Tracy, 2010). Throughout, the researcher endeavoured to discover new meanings derived from the participants’ experiences. During the analysis, the predominant use of an inductive coding approach enabled the identified themes to be rooted in the participants’ views; whilst the use of open interview questions allowed the participants to freely express their opinions and not be limited by the questions asked. The use of a personal construct psychology tool, the ‘Ideal school’ (Moran, 2012), for gathering views with the young people also allowed their views in this research area to be understood to a greater extent.

The research is likely to have benefitted from the researcher’s role in the local authority as a trainee educational psychologist. Firstly, it assisted with recruitment of the participants as the researcher was able to utilise their connections with the virtual school and subsequently their connections with schools to recruit the sample. Secondly, the skills and knowledge of the researcher is likely to have positively impacted upon the rapport built with the

participants and the ability of the researcher to navigate sensitive conversations. The level of insight the participants gave into their experiences is likely to be as a result of the safe space created by the researcher. Additionally, the participants hopefully felt emotionally well supported by the researcher due to the use of their therapeutic skills to contain their emotions. Furthermore, the researcher's thorough knowledge of educational systems and psychology has elicited practical implications for the findings within schools and wider systems.

The research was conducted within the schools of one local authority in England which gave a rich insight into the support received for young people and school staff within that local authority. This will hopefully help them to reflect on their systems and processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and cater for the needs of young people and schools to a greater extent. The research is timely as the local authority are currently reflecting on the support they provide schools around suspensions/exclusions and updating their policy in this area.

The research adopted the use of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory as a theoretical framework which allowed for a holistic understanding of the suspension and relational experiences of CYPLA by considering the ecosystems surrounding individuals. In turn this has led to a wide range of implications for schools, EPs, policy makers etc.

5.8.2. Limitations

One potential limitation of the research is due to the nature of the design, it may be difficult to determine whether the participants' responses during the task and interview accurately reflect their genuine views and experiences. This was of particular concern due to some of the young people expressing an apparent lack of trust in their school and interview experiences. In order to try and overcome this, the researcher used their rapport skills and provided the participants with as much information about the process and their role as possible to alleviate some of their anxieties. However, the participants may have been concerned the information they share may be communicated to others within the school context. Thus, it was important to clearly communicate

to the sample that all responses will be anonymised before being shared with others. Additionally, it may have been that the CYP had some difficulties understanding the interview questions and task, as well as articulating their views and experiences. To capture their views and ensure they were heard, the researcher used strategies to aid their understanding and scaffold their responses, such as paraphrasing questions and using a personal construct tool.

The recruitment process confirmed that CYPLA are a very difficult population to recruit, particularly those meeting the inclusion criteria (attending local authority secondary school, history of at least one suspension). Despite the persistence of the researcher and the multiple approaches taken to recruit participants, unfortunately the sample size is smaller than the researcher hoped. This is interesting as it reflects the difficulties and needs which are apparent in the population and surrounding systems, for example, the CYPLA's mental health needs and pressures within school systems.

Caution should be taken when extrapolating the present findings to the general population of CYPLA and school staff as these are reflective of the views of a small number of individuals with their own unique experiences and set of circumstances, in the context of one particular local authority. Additionally, the school staff participants consisted largely of designated teachers and so to some extent the findings are largely reflective of their views which may have occurred due to them being one of the main points of contact within schools for the virtual school who supported with the recruitment process. Therefore, the findings and implications from this research may have been different if school staff undertaking a wider range of roles had been interviewed. Furthermore, some of the interviewed designated teachers were not able to provide much information around their relationships with CYPLA as they did not have frequent interactions with them. However, the intention of this research was not to represent all secondary school staff and adolescent CYPLA who have had experience of suspensions. Instead, it aimed to improve the support provided for these individuals and school staff to enhance their school experiences which will hopefully enhance CYPLA's life trajectories.

5.9. Future research

In this research there were difficulties in recruiting CYPLA which calls for future research to consider barriers to recruitment to elicit strategies which enables this population's voices to be heard to a greater extent. Trust and the number of professionals that the young people engage with were identified as barriers in the present research so perhaps it is worth investigating more effective ways of gaining trust with the young people (e.g. rapport building exercises) and whether key adults in the lives of the young people could conduct interviews under close supervision from EPs.

Further research needs to be conducted around the role of the designated teacher (DT) as there appears to be inconsistencies around how the role is implemented, including their relationship with the young people, involvement in CYPLA's suspension processes and general daily tasks. The other role in the school which the DT undertakes appears to be impacting the effectiveness of their role and so it will be interesting to gather further information around how the role is operationalised to elicit best practice to ensure CYPLA are adequately supported. With this in mind, research needs to include gathering DTs' views around the training and support they received as those interviewed suggested there was room for improvement in this area which would help inform local authority practice and improve support for CYPLA.

There is also a need for greater understanding of the approaches used to support CYPLA when they are sanctioned or suspended to elicit best practice and to ultimately inform school practice. In the current research there appears to be a lack of support in this area for young people and in turn they are continuing to have negative experiences at school.

5.10. Concluding comments

The present research explored adolescent CYPLA's experiences of secondary school staff-student relationships and suspensions to enable CYPLA and school staff to tell their stories and to inform policy and practice. It is of interest because it is one of few studies to access the voices of CYPLA who have been suspended and school staff, in addition, it is the first to gain the views of both populations with regards to staff-student relationships.

Despite everyone's story being unique, several common narratives were identified. Consistently, the CYPLA all had multiple school and care placements, where they had experienced difficult relationships with school staff, peers and carers/parents. Additionally, some had experienced neglect in their home environments. Such experiences have had a detrimental impact on their social, emotional and mental health needs. This paired with the lack of support received from school, home and external services, has resulted in them experiencing mental health needs and self-regulation difficulties. These unmet needs are often then communicated by their behaviours which do not appear to be adequately understood by schools. In some cases, this has led to their suspensions which are characterised by a lack of support for CYPLA and rigid decision making. Ultimately, these negative life experiences appear to be feeding into how the young people view themselves, their sense of safety and belongingness needs in a negative way. Without adequate support this leads to vicious suspension cycles which are likely to impact negatively on the young people's life trajectories.

There were some discrepancies between school staff's positive intentions for practice and unsupportive school systems. Such discrepancies are likely to be the result of inflexible school rules/policies, rigid suspension processes, limited staff knowledge and capacity. This school practice and the CYPLA's unmet needs are likely to be partially attributable to an evident lack of support from external services, due to their limited capacity and inconsistent relationships.

There is a need for schools to buffer against CYPLA's adverse experiences by adopting compassionate school cultures which are embedded in school staff practice. The negative impact of suspensions far outweighs any positives, and as such should be avoided where possible. Staff-student relationships are powerful and could serve to promote CYPLA's inclusion and overall learning and well-being. To build these relationships, school staff should provide consistent support when interacting with CYPLA, understand the young person's needs and context, hold them in positive regard and have flexibility in their approach. Greater collaboration is required from the systems around CYPLA (e.g. school, home, external services) to support both school staff and CYPLA's learning and well-being so they are able to form positive

relationships with one another and to promote CYPLA's inclusion. EPs are vital in achieving these aims as they can influence change at individual, school, local authority and government levels. Greater funding is required to enable EPs to deliver this support which is essential for improving staff well-being and staff-student relationships, in addition to reducing the suspensions and enhancing the life outcomes of CYPLA.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature search

A comprehensive literature search was conducted by accessing the following databases (in alphabetical order):

- ERIC (EBSCO) and (ProQuest)
- Google Scholar
- UCL, Institute of Education Libraries Explore service
- JSTOR
- PsychINFO

The following search terms were used:

- Looked after child(ren), child(ren) in care, looked after young people, young people in care, care-experienced child(ren), care-experienced young people

AND

- School exclusion, school suspension, suspension, exclusion, fixed-period exclusion, permanent exclusion.

OR

- Intervention(s), educational intervention (s), educational support, school support, inclusive practice, support strategies.

OR

- School staff relationship(s), school staff attachment(s), teacher relationship (s), teacher attachment(s)

The research used the following inclusion criteria:

- Studies conducted in the UK, so they are relevant to the UK education system as referred to in this study.
- Studies including the perspectives of young people, as well as those in the systems around them, for example, carers, educational psychologists and other professionals due to theoretical framework adopted in this study which encourages reflection on the systems in which children and young people reside.
- Studies published since 2000 to increase the relevance of the landscape and educational experiences of pupils to the current socio-political context. Exceptions to this are key pieces of research or psychological theories which are used as they enrich our understanding of the research and are still widely used and considered applicable at the time of conducting the research.

Relevant government statistics and publications were accessed from the GOV.UK website. In addition to this search, snowballing strategies were used whereby the researcher accessed relevant sources from authors' reference lists.

Appendix B: Pilot interview script

Thank you for allowing me to join today. I am Lydia, a trainee educational psychologist studying at UCL Institute of Education and I also work for X EPS where I am on placement. Just to tell you a bit about why I am here today; I have decided to do my doctoral research on exploring what school life is like for care-experienced young people, like yourselves, in the hope that this will help make sure that care experienced young people feel really well supported and have really positive school experiences. So I would be really grateful if you would be happy to answer some questions around your relationships with school staff and also if any of you have had experiences of being excluded or suspended from school I would be really interested to hear your views around the exclusion process. Your thoughts are really valuable as I am going to use them to make sure that I ask the best questions possible when I do individual interviews with other care experienced children to make sure I really gain an understanding of care-experienced CYP's school experiences.

Does that sound okay? Has anyone got any questions?

I would also like to record our time together so I can make sure I capture all your important comments if that is okay with everyone?

So the ground rules for the group are confidentiality, respecting and listening to others, which I am sure you are all great at anyway.

The first set of questions are about your relationships with school staff, whilst they are written in the present tense, you may wish to reflect on your past experiences as obviously you are no longer attending school:

RQs	Topic	Questions
<i>How do CYP who are LA describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers to, the development of their relationships with school staff?</i>	General questions about relationships with school staff	<p>1. How would you describe your relationships with school staff you see the most?</p> <p><i>-What words would you say best describes these relationships?</i></p> <p><i>-What is positive about these relationships?</i></p> <p><i>-What are these school staff like?</i></p>
	Facilitators	<p>2. If you needed support from a member of school staff who would you go to?</p> <p><i>-Why would you choose that person?</i></p> <p><i>-How would you describe them?</i></p> <p>3. How would you describe your favourite member of school staff?</p> <p><i>-What words would you use to describe them?</i></p> <p><i>-What words do you think that they would use to describe you? Why?</i></p> <p><i>-Why are they your favourite?</i></p> <p><i>-Can you describe an example of where they have helped you recently or in the past? How did they help you?</i></p> <p><i>-How does this staff member impact your school experience?</i></p> <p><i>-What could they do to support you even better?</i></p> <p>4. What do you think helps you to have a positive relationship with this member of staff?</p> <p><i>-Was there anything you did or do to help?</i></p> <p><i>-Was there anything the member of staff did or does?</i></p> <p><i>-Was there anything school did or</i></p>

Thank you for your answers, they have been really helpful and given me a good sense of your relationships with school staff. That is the end of those set of questions, next I would really like to find out a bit more about your thoughts on exclusion and my proposed questions for the young people I will be interviewing who have been excluded. The first question is...

<p><i>How do school staff/CYP who are LA describe the suspension process of CYP who are LA and the protective/risk factors impacting on their suspensions?</i></p>	<p>Suspension process</p>	<p>9. Can you think of a time when you were excluded? <i>-How would you describe the exclusion process? What words would you use to describe it?</i> <i>-How did you feel during the exclusion process?</i> <i>-What were the different stages?</i> <i>-Who was involved?</i> <i>-In what ways were you supported? By who and how? How did this help? How did the support make you feel?</i> <i>-What do you think, if anything, would have made the exclusion process better? Are there any ways you feel you could have been better supported? At school/home?</i></p>
	<p>Suspension risk factors</p>	<p>10. What do you think were the reasons you became excluded? <i>- Was there anything that you/school/school staff/home did which you believe may have led to you being excluded?</i></p>
	<p>Suspension protective factors</p>	<p>11. What, if anything, do you think could have prevented you from being excluded? <i>- Was there anything you/carers/school/school staff could have done differently?</i></p>
	<p>Any other themes?</p>	<p>12. What do you think would be important for me to ask care-experienced CYP, like yourselves, about their experience of being excluded when I do interviews with them? <i>-Is there anything that has not come up during our time together that you think would be important for me to know or ask about when thinking</i></p>

		<i>about your experiences of being excluded?</i>
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That is the end of our time together. Thank you so much for all the information you gave, I am sure it will be really helpful in ensuring that other young people like you will be really well supported and can have positive school experiences. How did you find that? Would you like to speak further about what we spoke about today to me or anyone else? [support/signpost if appropriate]. Would you like to see my research when it is completed?

Appendix C: Interview questions- CYP

Introductory script at the start:-

Firstly thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today and take part in this study. I am looking forward to hearing more about your school experiences, which will hope to ensure that CYP, like yourself, are really well supported and have positive experiences at school.

So just to tell you a bit more about the our time together.. To start with I thought we could start off by doing a drawing activity which I hope you will find enjoyable about your ideal school. This will last about 20 minutes. Then I hope we can have an interview after that, which is more like a structured conversation, for about 30 minutes, obviously the length of the interview will depend on the length of your answers and our discussion. It will have 10 main questions and some follow-up questions.

And just to clarify, the information you give will be kept strictly confidential, your name or other identifying information will never be associated with any research reports or publications that use the data from your interviews. Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop and discontinue at any time and take with you any data that I have collected from you. Also I know I mentioned this in the consent form but is it still okay for me to record our time together so I can go back to our time together to make sure that I really capture your views?

Thank you- do you have any further questions or are you happy for me to begin the drawing task? (see ideal school script below)

Thank you for completing the drawing task, now we will move onto the interview part where I have 10 main questions with some follow-up questions about your relationships with school staff and your experience of being excluded. Are you okay to start?

The first set of questions is about your relationships with school staff....

RQs	Topic	Questions
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<p><i>How do CYP who are LA describe the factors that promote, or provide barriers to, the development of their relationships with school staff?</i></p>	<p>General questions about relationships with school staff</p>	<p>1. How would you describe your relationships with school staff you see the most? <i>What words would you say best describes these relationships?</i> <i>What is positive about these relationships?</i> <i>What are these school staff like?</i></p>
	<p>Facilitators</p>	<p>2. If you needed support from a member of school staff who would you go to? <i>-Why would you choose that person?</i> <i>-How would you describe them?</i></p> <p>3. How would you describe your favourite member of school staff? <i>-What words would you use to describe them?</i> <i>-What words do you think that they would use to describe you? Why?</i> <i>-Why are they your favourite?</i> <i>-Can you describe an example of where they have helped you recently or in the past? How did they help you?</i> <i>-How does this staff member impact your school experience?</i> <i>-What could they do to support you even better?</i></p> <p>4. What do you think helps you to have a positive relationship with this member of staff? <i>-Was there anything you did or do to help?</i> <i>-Was there anything the member of staff did or does?</i> <i>-Was there anything school did or does?</i> <i>-Was there anything your carers did or do?</i></p>
	<p>Barriers</p>	<p>5. Would you say there is anything negative about your</p>

	(Facilitators)	<p>relationships with school staff that you see the most? <i>-Could you tell me a bit more about that please?</i></p> <p>6. How would you describe your least favourite member of school staff? <i>-Why are they your least favourite?</i> <i>-What words would you use to describe them?</i> <i>-What words would they use to describe you? Why do you think they would use those words?</i> <i>-Can you describe an example of where they have not been very helpful or supportive recently or in the past?</i> <i>-How do they impact your school experience?</i> <i>-How could they support you better?</i></p>
	Facilitators	<p>7. What do you think would help your relationships with school staff you see the most to be better? <i>-Is there anything you/school/school staff/home could do to help improve these relationships?</i></p> <p><i>(when asking about school/staff, remind YP to look at the ideal school drawing as a prompt)</i></p>
<p>Thank you for your answers, they have been really helpful and given me a good sense of your relationships with school staff. That is the end of those set of questions, next I would really like to find out a bit more about your experiences of being excluded if that is okay? The first question is...</p>		
<p><i>How do school staff/CYP who are LA describe the suspension process of CYP who are LA and the protective/risk</i></p>	<p>Suspension process</p>	<p>8. Can you think of a time when you were excluded? <i>-How would you describe the exclusion process? What words would you use to describe it?</i> <i>-How did you feel during the exclusion process?</i></p>

<p><i>factors impacting on their suspensions?</i></p>		<p>-What were the different stages? -Who was involved? -In what ways were you supported? By who and how? How did this help? How did the support make you feel? -What do you think, if anything, would have made the exclusion process better? Are there any ways you feel you could have been better supported? At school/home?</p>
	<p>Suspension risk factors</p>	<p>9.What do you think were the reasons you became excluded? -Was there anything that you/school/school staff/home did which you believe may have led to you being excluded?</p> <p><i>(when asking about school/staff, remind YP to look at the ideal school drawing as a prompt)</i></p>
	<p>Suspension protective factors</p>	<p>10. What, if anything, do you think could have prevented you from being excluded? - Was there anything you/carers/school/school staff could have done differently?</p> <p><i>(when asking about school, remind YP to look at the ideal school drawing as a prompt)</i></p>

That is the end of the interview and our time together. Thank you so much for all the information you gave, I am sure it will be really helpful in ensuring that other young people like you will be really well supported and can have positive school experiences. How did you find that? Would you like to speak further about what we spoke about today to me or anyone else? [support/signpost if appropriate]. Would you like to see my research when it is completed?

Appendix D: Interview questions- School staff
Introductory script at the start:-

Firstly thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today and take part in this study. I am looking forward to hearing more about your relationships with young people who are LA and your thoughts on the process for their suspensions. The research hopes to ensure that CYP who are LA are well supported throughout their education, as well as school staff, like yourself in your roles.

So just to tell you a bit more about the our time together.. The interview will last about 30-40 minutes, obviously the length of the interview will depend on the length of your answers and our discussion. It will have 8 main questions and some follow-up questions.

And just to clarify, the information you give will be kept strictly confidential, your name or other identifying information will never be associated with any research reports or publications that use the data from your interviews. Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop and discontinue at any time and take with you any data that I have collected from you. Also I know I mentioned this in the consent form but is it still okay for me to record our time together so I can go back to our time together to make sure that I really capture your views?

Thank you- do you have any further questions or are you happy to start?

Brilliant. The first set of questions is about your relationships with CYP who are LA..

RQs	Topic	Questions
<i>How do school staff/CYP who are LA describe the exclusion process of CYP who are LA and the protective/risk factors impacting on their suspensions?</i>	General question about relationships	1. How would you describe your relationships with CYP who are LA? -What words would you use to describe these relationships? -What, if anything, is positive about these relationships?
	Facilitators	2. What do you think facilitates school staff, like yourself, in forming positive relationships with CYP who are LA? -Is there anything you or school staff do to facilitate the development of these relationships? Is there anything school does? Is there anything the YP's carers do? Is there anything wider systems do (e.g. local

		<p><i>authority or specialist services)?</i></p> <p>3. What, if anything, do you think would improve your relationships with CYP who are LA? <i>-Is there anything you/the YP/school/carers/external services could do to improve these relationships?</i></p>
	Barriers	<p>4. What do you think are the barriers to school staff, like yourself, forming positive relationships with CYP who are LA? <i>-Is there anything school staff do to create barriers to the development of these relationships? Is there anything school does? Is there anything the YP's carers do? Is there anything external services do (e.g. local authority or specialist services)?</i></p>
<p>Thank you for your answers, they have been really helpful and given me a good sense of your relationships with CYP who are LA in your school. That is the end of those set of questions, next I would really like to find out a bit more about your experiences of being involved in the exclusion process of CYP who are LA if that is okay? The first question is...</p>		
<p><i>How do school staff/CYP who are LA describe the suspension process of CYP who are LA and the protective/risk factors impacting on their suspensions?</i></p>	Suspension process.	<p>5. Can you think of a time where you were involved in the exclusion process of a YP who was LA at the time of exclusion? <i>-How would you describe the exclusion process? What words would you use to describe it?</i> <i>-What were the different stages?</i> <i>-Who was involved?</i> <i>-How were you involved?</i> <i>-[if not the designated teacher] How was the designated teacher involved?</i></p>

		<p><i>-How do you think the YP would have felt about the exclusion process?</i></p> <p><i>-In what ways was the YP supported? By who and how? How did this support help them?</i></p> <p><i>- In what ways do you feel they could have been better supported?</i></p> <p><i>-What do you think, if anything, would have made the exclusion process better?</i></p>
	<p>Suspension- risk factors</p>	<p>6. What do you think were the reasons the YP became excluded?</p> <p><i>-Do you think there was anything that the YP/school/school staff/carers/external services did which may have put them at risk of being excluded?</i></p>
	<p>Suspension- protective factors</p>	<p>7. What do you think, if anything, could have prevented the YP from being excluded?</p> <p><i>- Was there anything the YP/carers/school/school staff/external services could have done differently?</i></p> <p>8. How could CYP who are LA be better supported in your school?</p>

That is the end of the interview and our time together. Thank you so much for all the information you gave, I am sure it will be really helpful in ensuring that both school staff and young people feel well supported and have positive experiences at school. Would you like to see my research when it is completed?

Appendix E: Guidelines for the Drawing the Ideal School technique (CYP only)

Introduction: The Drawing the Ideal School technique has been adapted from an approach developed by Moran (2001). Heather Moran has been a teacher and educational psychologist and now works as a clinical psychologist. The technique enables children to become actively involved in understanding themselves and expressing their views. It is based on ideas from Personal Construct Psychology, which was introduced by Kelly in 1955. This approach seeks to explore children's important or core constructs about themselves and how they view the world. Children (and adults) behave in a way that makes sense to them according to their own view of the world. We are likely to understand children (and the sort of provision that is most likely to help them) more fully if they are able to express these core constructs to us. In summary this type of work attempts to: "understand the child's unique perspective on life through the careful use of questions and extremely sensitive note of the child's answers." (Moran, 2001) The technique itself is simple to use once the child understands what is expected. This sheet gives guidelines for the adult completing the technique to follow and the next two pages list how to complete the technique.

Guidelines for use:

1. Equipment needed: a black pen and two sheets of plain A4 sized paper.
2. Allow about an hour to complete the activity, perhaps with a short break if necessary. *-due to further exploration of the task during the interview process approximately 20-30 minutes will be given for this task during the interview process.*
3. Explain to the pupil that you are going to be doing the writing today, acting as scribe. This is to take the pressure off the pupil and keep the process moving.
4. The pupil is asked to make quick drawings or sketches (rather than detailed drawings). Reassure the pupil that it doesn't matter if an error is made.
5. It is important to record exactly what the pupil says using their own words
6. If the pupil is overly anxious about drawing, either model stick people drawings first or just record the pupil's verbal responses.
7. Allow time for the pupil to process the requests – repeat/reword/simplify the questions if not understood.
8. Provide reassurance that there are no right or wrong answers or responses.
9. Provide encouragement and praise for the pupil's involvement with the activity.
10. Be sensitive about sharing the drawings with others, ask the child's permission and ensure that other adults understand that the child has trusted you in revealing such views, which must be respected
11. Talk to other colleagues about planning any follow- up work that might be indicated.

Part 1: Drawing the kind of school you would not like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper. Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

-What are the rules in this school? What are the worst things about this school?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school. Draw some of the things in this classroom.

The children

Think about some of the children at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

Part 2: Drawing the kind of school you would like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper. Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

-What are the rules in this school? What are the best things about this school?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school. Draw some of the things in this classroom.

The children

Think about some of the children at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me 3 things you might be feeling at this school

Part 3: Scaling

Use scaling to consider how the young person's current school compares to their non-ideal and ideal schools, and what could be done to make their current school more like their ideal school. Place their worst school picture/model on the left and their best/dream/ideal school on the right (with a space in the middle). Ask the young person the following questions:

- On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is your non-ideal school and 10 is your ideal school, where is your current school?
- What would help to move your current school up the scale by one point towards the best/dream/ideal school? What could the adults do, what could the young person do, what could their peers do, what could their family do?

The following questions can also be used:

- You've given the current school a rating of....what made you give it that rating and not one point less?
- Where on the scale would your current school have to be to be 'good enough'?
- Where is your current school on a good/bad day?
- Are there times when your current school feels/has felt better and is/has been further up the scale? What is/was different about these times?

Appendix F: Information sheet and consent form for CYP Care experienced children and young people's suspension experiences and relationships with school staff.

Information sheet for young people

Who am I?

My name is Lydia Nicklin and I would really like you to take part in my research project which hopes to learn about the school experiences of young people who are in care and have been excluded/suspended, focussing on their experiences of being excluded and their relationships with adults in school.

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. Educational Psychologists work with children and young people, as well as their families, schools and communities to support their learning and well-being.

What is the research about?

I am hoping to find out more about what school life is like for you and other young people who have experience of being in care and who have been

excluded/suspended. I would like to learn about what it was like for you to be excluded and about adults that you work with at school. Learning about your experiences and hearing your views around school and being excluded can help to ensure that children and young people who have been in care and excluded from school have the best support in place for them to have positive school experiences.

I really would love it if you would take part in my research as I feel it is very important for your views to be heard. By speaking out and having a voice, you will be part of a wider group of young people who are also sharing their views on their school experiences. Hopefully together you can help to make positive changes to the lives of many other children and young people. I hope this information sheet answers questions you may have about the research but please also contact me if you have any other questions about the research.

If you are under the age of 16, please discuss whether you would like to take part with your carer/parent. Your carer will also receive a similar consent form.

Who is carrying out the research and who will I meet with?

Me (Lydia Nicklin) will be carrying out the research and I will meet with you for an interview following you agreeing to take part in the research.

What will I have to do?

If you would like to take part, there will be one interview (for about 45- 60 mins) with myself to hear your views about what it was like for you to be excluded and about the adults that you work with at school. There will be a set of questions and an activity where you can draw your ideal school. You do not have to answer questions or draw if you do not wish to. The interview will take place either at school or at home or at another confidential place/online (via Zoom/Microsoft Teams) if that is preferred. This will be at a convenient time for you. You have the option to have someone present with you if you would prefer.

Will anyone know I have been involved or hear my views?

No, your views and personal information will be kept separate from one another and your name will not appear in the research report. Small quotes that you have said may be used in the research document/report but they will not have your name with them. Your information will be kept safe at all times.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point and you will be reminded of this throughout the research.

If you say something where I, the researcher, feels you are at risk, information will be passed on to the relevant person within school (safeguarding officer) and in some situations, information will be passed onto a senior manager within another local authority so that they can give advice to make sure that you and others around you are safe.

The interviews will be recorded to make sure that I do not miss important information you have said. These will not be shared with others and they will be destroyed at the end of the research process.

What happens if I do not want to answer or need a break?

I hope that you will feel as comfortable as possible throughout the interview

but if you need a break or would prefer not to answer a question then feel free to say so at any time.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will produce a word document about the what the research has found at the end of the research which will be finished in July 2023. I plan to share the results of the research with other professionals working at X County Council, such as Educational Psychologists, my research supervisors and it may be published so more people can see the outcome of the research at a later date. The document will not include your name and no one will be able to see that you have taken part. You will be able to have a copy of the report when it is completed, should you wish to.

Do I have to take part?

Whilst I would really love to hear your views, there is absolutely no pressure to take part. Please speak with your parent/carer or other adults you trust about taking part in this study and if you have any questions please contact me.

Contact for further information

Please email me if you have any further questions or if you wish to take part in the study please complete the following consent form and return it to me at: Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet- I hope to meet with you soon!

Best wishes,

Lydia Nicklin
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Data Protection Privacy 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. This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in the 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies on the UCL website (please see link: [ucl general research participant privacy notice v1.pdf](#)). 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 any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data. We will be collecting personal data such as: your name, school, email address. 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 dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk

Care experienced children and young people’s suspension experiences and relationships with school staff.

Young person consent form

If you are happy to participate in this study please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to Lydia Nicklin at the contact details below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the interview at any point.

4. I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

5. I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports(these will be anonymised)

6. I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what you have told us.

Name:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

Name of researcher:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

If you agree to take part in the research, please sign and return to : Lydia Nicklin, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk

**Appendix G: Information sheet and consent form for parents/carers
Care experienced children and young people’s suspension experiences
and relationships with school staff.**

Information sheet for parent/carer

My name is Lydia Nicklin and I would really appreciate your child/young person’s participation in my research, “**Exploring children and young people (CYP) who are looked after (LA)’s suspension experiences and relationships with school staff**”. Essentially, the research project hopes to learn about the school experiences of young people who are in care and have been excluded/suspended, focussing on their experiences of being excluded and their relationships with adults in school.

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. Educational Psychologists work with children and young people, as well as their families, schools and communities to support their learning and well-being. I work within X local authority and aim to use psychology to enhance children and young people’s educational experiences.

I really hope that your child/young person would like to take part in the study and you both consent to their participation in the study. I hope this information answers any questions you may have about the research but please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you wish to know. I encourage you to speak, if possible, to your child/young person to discuss the research and whether or not they wish to take part. All children and young people will receive a similar information sheet and consent form to complete and I will speak to them before their participation to provide them with the option to withdraw from the research.

What is the research about?

I am hoping to find out more about what school life is like for your young person and that of other young people who have experience of being in care and who have been excluded. I would like to learn about what it was like for your young person to be excluded and about the adults that they work with at school. Learning about their experiences and hearing their views around being excluded can help to ensure that children and young people who have

experience of being in care and excluded from school have the appropriate support in place for them to have positive school experiences.

I really would love it if your young person would take part in my research as I feel it is very important for their voices to be heard. By speaking out and having a voice, they will be part of a wider group of young people who are also sharing their views on their school experiences. Hopefully together they can help to make positive changes to the lives of many other children and young people. I hope this information sheet answers questions you may have about the research but please also contact me if you have any other questions about the research.

Who is carrying out the research and who will my child/young person meet with?

Me (Lydia Nicklin) will be carrying out the research and I will meet with your young person should you both consent to them taking part.

What will my child/young person have to do?

If your young person would like to take part, there will be one interview (for about 45- 60 mins) with myself to hear their views about what it was like for them to be excluded/suspended and about the adults that they work with at school. There will be a set of questions and an activity where they can draw their ideal school. They do not have to answer questions or draw if they do not wish to. The interview will take place either at school or at home or at another confidential place/online (via Zoom/Microsoft Teams) if that is preferred. This will be at a convenient time for them and they will have the option of having someone present with them if they would prefer.

Will anyone know that my child/young person has been involved?

No, their views and personal information will be kept separate from one another and their names or any other identifying information will not appear in the research report. Your child/young person's views and personal information will be kept securely at all times. Small quotes that your young person has said may be used in the research report but their names or identifying information will not be associated with them.

They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point and they will be reminded of this throughout the research process.

If they say something where I, the researcher, feels they are at risk, information will be passed on to the relevant person within school (safeguarding officer) and in some situations, information will be passed onto a senior manager within another local authority so that they can give advice to make sure that your young person and others around them are safe.

The interviews will be recorded to make sure that I do not miss important information that your young person has said. These will not be shared with others and they will be destroyed at the end of the research process.

What happens if they do not want to answer or need a break?

I hope that your young person will feel as comfortable as possible throughout the interview but if they need a break or wish not to answer a question then they can say so at any time.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will produce a report at the end of the research which will be finished in July 2023. I plan to share the results of the research with other professionals working at X County Council, such as Educational Psychologists, my research supervisors and it may be published so more people can see the outcome of the research at a later date. In the document, your young person's name will not appear within it and no one will be able to see that they have taken part. You will be able to have a copy of the report when it is completed should you wish to.

Does my child/young person have to take part?

Whilst I would really love to hear your child/young person's views, there is absolutely no pressure to take part. Please speak to them about taking part and contact me if either of you have any questions.

Contact for further information

Please email me if you have any further questions or if your child/young person wishes to take part in the study and you consent to them doing so then please complete the following consent form and return it to me at:

Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet- I hope to meet your young person soon!

Best wishes,

Lydia Nicklin

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Data Protection Privacy 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. This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in the 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies on the UCL website (please see link: [ucl_general_research_participant_privacy_notice_v1.pdf](#)). 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 any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data. We will be collecting personal data such as: your name, job title, workplace, email address. 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 dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk

Care experienced children and young people’s suspension experiences and relationships with school staff.

Parent/carer consent form

If you are happy for your child/young person to participate in this study please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to Lydia Nicklin at the contact details below:

2. I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

3. I understand that my child/young person’s participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

4. I know that my child/young person can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that they can withdraw from the interview at any point.

5. I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

6. I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports(these will be anonymised)

7. I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what your child/young person has told us.

Name:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

Name of researcher:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

If you agree to take part in the research, please sign and return to : Lydia Nicklin, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk

**Appendix H: Information sheet and consent form for school staff
Care experienced children and young people’s suspension experiences
and relationships with school staff.**

Information sheet for school staff

Who am I?

My name is Lydia Nicklin and I would really like you to take part in my research project, **“Exploring children and young people who are looked after’s suspension experiences and relationships with school staff”**.

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. Educational Psychologists work with children and young people, as well as their families, schools and communities to support their learning and well-being.

What is the research about?

I am hoping to find out more about the educational experiences of children and young people who have experience of being in care. I would like to gain understanding of your experience (s) of this population being excluded from school and your relationships with them. I believe that it is really important to hear your views to gain insight into: the needs of staff within the school context and the educational/exclusion experiences of children and young people who are looked after. In turn, this research will hopefully inform advice provided to schools.

I really would love it if you would take part in my project. I hope this information sheet answers questions you may have about the research but please also contact me if you have any other questions about the research.

Who is carrying out the research and who will I meet with?

Me (Lydia Nicklin) will be carrying out the research.

What will it involve?

Should you wish to take part, there will be one interview (for approximately 30-45 mins) with myself to hear your views with regards to the school exclusion process for children and young people who are looked after. In addition it aims to gain your views on the factors impacting their suspensions and your relationships with this population. You do not have to answer questions if you do not wish to. The interview will take place either on school premises or at

another confidential place/online if that is preferred. This will be at a convenient time for you.

Will anyone know I have been involved or hear my views?

No, your views and personal information will be kept securely and your name will not appear in the research report. Your information will be kept securely at all times.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point and you will be reminded of this throughout the research process.

If you say something where I, the researcher, feels that you or others are at risk, information will be passed on to the relevant person within school (safeguarding officer).

What happens if I do not want to answer or need a break?

I hope that you will feel as comfortable as possible throughout the interview but if you need a break or wish not to answer a question then you can do so at any point.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will produce a report at the end of the research which will be finished in July 2023. I plan to share the anonymised results of the research with other professionals at X County Council, my research supervisors and it may be published so more people can see the outcome of the research at a later date. You will be able to have a copy of the report when it is completed, should you wish to.

Do I have to take part?

Whilst I would really love to hear your views, there is absolutely no pressure to take part.

Contact for further information

Please email me if you have any further questions or if you wish to take part in the study please complete the following consent form and return it to me at: Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet- I hope to meet with you soon!

Best wishes,

Lydia Nicklin
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Data Protection Privacy 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. This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that

applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in the 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies on the UCL website (please see link: [ucl_general_research_participant_privacy_notice_v1.pdf](#)). 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 any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data. We will be collecting personal data such as: your name, job title, workplace, email address. 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 dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk

Care experienced children and young people's suspension experiences and relationships with school staff.

School staff consent form

If you are happy to participate in this study please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to Lydia Nicklin at the contact details below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the interview at any point.
4. I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
5. I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports(these will be anonymised)

6. I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what you have told us.

Name:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

Name of
researcher:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....

If you agree to take part in the research, please sign and return to : Lydia Nicklin, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix I: Information sheet and consent form for pilot interview

Care experienced children and young people's exclusion/suspension experiences and relationships with school staff.

Information sheet for young people

Who am I?

My name is Lydia Nicklin and I would really like you to take part in my research project which hopes to learn about the school experiences of young people who are in care, focussing on their relationships with school staff and their experiences of being suspended/excluded (if they have had these experiences).

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. Educational Psychologists work with children and young people, as well as their families, schools and communities to support their learning and well-being.

What is the research about?

I am hoping to find out more about what school life was like for you and other young people who have experience of being in care. Learning about your experiences and hearing your views around school can help to ensure that children and young people who have care experience have the best support in place for them to have positive school experiences.

I really would love it if you would take part in my research as I feel it is very important for your views to be heard. By speaking out and having a voice, you will be part of a wider group of young people who are also sharing their views on their school experiences. Hopefully together you can help to make positive changes to the lives of many other children and young people. I hope this information sheet answers questions you may have about the research but please also contact me if you have any other questions about the research.

Who is carrying out the research and who will I meet with?

Me (Lydia Nicklin) will be carrying out the research and I will meet with you for a pilot interview following you agreeing to take part in the research.

What will I have to do?

If you would like to take part, there will be one pilot interview for about 1 hour with myself to hear your views about school life, the adults that you worked with at school and if you have had experience of being suspended or excluded I would be interested to hear about these too. There will be a set of questions which I will ask you, I would like to hear your views on these and also I would like to ask you whether there is anything particularly you think that I should ask future young people about their relationships with school staff and their experiences of being excluded. You do not have to answer questions if you do not wish to.

Will anyone know I have been involved or hear my views?

No, your views and personal information will be kept separate from one another and your name will not appear in the research report. Small quotes that you have said may be used in the research document/report but they will not have your name with them. Your information will be kept safe at all times.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point and you will be reminded of this throughout the research.

If you say something where I, the researcher, feels you are at risk, information will be passed on to the relevant person within school (safeguarding officer) and in some situations, information will be passed onto a senior manager within another local authority so that they can give advice to make sure that you and others around you are safe.

The focus group will be recorded to make sure that I do not miss important information you have said. This will not be shared with others and they will be destroyed at the end of the research process.

What happens if I do not want to answer or need a break?

I hope that you will feel as comfortable as possible throughout the focus group but if you need a break or would prefer not to answer a question then feel free to say so at any time.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will produce a word document about what the research has found at the end of the research which will be finished in July 2023. I plan to share the results of the research with other professionals working at X County Council, such as Educational Psychologists, my research supervisors and it may be published so more people can see the outcome of the research at a later date. The document will not include your name and no one will be able to see that you have taken part. You will be able to have a copy of the report when it is completed, should you wish to.

Do I have to take part?

Whilst I would really love to hear your views, there is absolutely no pressure to take part. Please speak with your parent/carer or other adults you trust about taking part in this study and if you have any questions please contact me.

Contact for further information

Please email me if you have any further questions or if you wish to take part in the study please complete the following consent form and return it to me at: Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet- I hope to meet with you soon!

Best wishes,

Lydia Nicklin
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Data Protection Privacy 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. This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in the 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies on the UCL website (please see link: [ucl general research participant privacy notice v1.pdf](#)). 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 any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data. We will be collecting personal data such as: your name, school, email address. 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 dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk

Care experienced children and young people’s exclusion experiences and relationships with school staff.

Young person consent form

If you are happy to participate in this study please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to Lydia Nicklin at the contact details below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the focus group at any point.

4. I agree for the focus group to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

5. I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports(these will be anonymised)

6. I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what you have told us.

Name:.....
.....

Signature: Date:
.....


Name of researcher:.....

Signature: Date:

If you agree to take part in the research, please sign and return to : Lydia Nicklin, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Lydia.nicklin.20@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix J: Ethical approval

Year 2 Ethics approval granted for 20196861 / Lydia Nicklin

 McSweeney, Catherine on behalf of IOE, Doctorate In Educational Psychology
 Thu 4/7/2022 12:30 PM
 To: Nicklin, Lydia
 Cc: Hauari, Hanan; Hill, Vivian; Mollet, Nicola; Upton, Helen

Dear Lydia,

I am pleased to inform you that your research project '**Exploring children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA)'s exclusion experiences and relationships with school staff**' for the year 2 research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been given ethical approval. If you have any further queries in this regard, please contact your supervisor.

Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Your ethical approval form has been logged and will be uploaded to the UCL IOE database.

Good luck with your data collection!

Many thanks,

Cathy McSweeney
 Programme Services Co-ordinator
 Academic Programmes Office

[DEdPsy Programme Webpage](#)

Appendix K: Thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Stage of analysis	Actions	Purpose
1. Familiarisation with data	-Transcriptions of audio recordings created by the researcher. -Reading transcriptions several times, listening to audio recordings, making observational notes.	-Familiarisation with data and understanding the meanings within it. -Thinking reflexively about research bias or assumptions made.
2. Generating initial codes	-An inductive and deductive process of identifying and labelling relevant codes for each group of participants	-Identifying what is of interest. -Creating codes which are rooted in the narratives of the

	<p>(CYPLA and school staff).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Highlighting key aspects in text which are considered important and may be used as quotes. -Codes reviewed by researcher and discussed with research supervisors and fellow trainee EPs. -Refining of codes and deleting codes where appropriate. 	<p>participations as opposed to the researcher's interpretations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensuring the creation of clear, relevant and concise codes. -Identifying subthemes and themes on a semantic level.
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Codes clustered together informed by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (individual, home, school, wider systems) to create a mapping of patterns in the data for each group of participants. -Any difference and overlap of themes between groups of participants were identified. -Groups of codes of significance formed initial themes and subthemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using theory to support grouping of codes. -Comparison of participant data sets to provide a holistic overview of the data. -Finding meaning relevant to the research questions.
4. Reviewing and revising themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Checking whether the themes align with the coded data set and they are distinct from one another. -Reviewing data extracts related to themes -Re-reading the entirety of the data highlighting data relevant to each theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensuring there is data to support each theme and subtheme. -Exploring how each theme/subtheme can be used to create a holistic picture. -Ensuring the themes are appropriate given the context of the entire dataset and that they are reflective of the narratives of the participant populations.

<p>5. Defining and reviewing themes</p>	<p>-Developing theme definitions and selecting a theme name which has conceptual clarity. -Reviewing and revising names in collaboration with fellow trainee EPs and research supervisors.</p>	<p>-To illustrate the meaning of the themes with clarity. -Ensuring the theme names capture the central concept and represent realised themes as opposed to descriptive summaries.</p>
<p>6. Producing the report</p>	<p>-Analytic narrative is embedded within compelling data extracts. Themes provide the organising framework for the analysis. -Illustrative examples of data within findings (e.g. quotes)</p>	<p>-Demonstrate the breadth within each theme and ensuring the voices of the participants are heard. -Ensuring the overall narrative can be clearly understood.</p>

Appendix L: Extract from CYPLA interview transcription

INT: Yeah so now it is over to the questions a bit more. So now this the questions are about your relationships at school.. How would you generally describe those relationships with school staff that you see the most?

P: My English teacher I didn't like her until I got moved up to top set. She was alright

INT: Oh okay, is she your favourite?

P: Nah, my favourite is my maths teacher.

INT: Oh okay, but generally what are your relationships like at school with the school staff?

P: Probably negative as not all the teachers like me. I am not the best in all of my lessons but the ones that give me time and are a bit more lenient, I am perfect in their lessons really.

INT: Ah so you are well behaved in their lessons. So the relationships that are more positive, what is positive about them?

P: Even when I am not in lesson they still come and talk to me and say if you need this and that you can come and talk which I wasn't going to but yeah...

INT: That's really nice. Do you go and speak to them?

P: No.

INT: But it was just knowing that you could?

P: Yeah

INT: That is really lovely. If you needed support from a member of school staff who would you go to?

P: No one. I deal with everything on my own. I don't need teachers telling me unless it is like to do with work then yeah.

INT: I see so you deal with things on your own. So if it was to do with work you would go to the subject teacher?

P: Yeah.

INT: You didn't go for support but if you had to choose anyone in the school that you would go to for support then who would it be?

P: If I had to say someone it would be...Miss L, who was my history teacher when I started here but then she is in the special room helping the special kids out as well.

INT: Awh really and how would you describe her?

P: Oh she is always helping me in every way she can. In lessons. If I need to come out and go to her office. Anything that I need help with, she does it and I could talk to her. She is caring. Even when I am in the wrong, she still tries to calm me down and get my point across and everything.

INT: So you felt like heard by her in that time.

P: Yeah.

INT: That is really good. Who is your favourite member of school staff?

P: Got to be her yeah.

INT: So apart from being caring and helpful, what else is so great about her?

P: She is like that to everyone pretty much. She helps with my work and that. When in the detentions, if I wanted to walk out then I would walk out but like if she is in there, I do not walk out because of respect really.

INT: Yeah sounds like because she treats you with respect then you treat her the same way.

P: Yeah. She makes things a bit easier for me at school.

INT: Brilliant that is so nice to hear. Can you remember a time when she helped you?

P: Yeah in my 3 hour detention. Half hour into it, I was throwing stuff and that and I was going to go and she took me into her room and I was there the whole time. She gave me stuff to keep me occupied with.

INT: Yeah so she helped you then, that's really good. So what do you think helps you to have a really positive relationship with school staff?

P: You just sort of know. You feel bad if you were rude to them, that is how I would look at it.

INT: Yeah so you feel bad because you like them. Do you think there is anything that the school do to help you have more positive relationships with school staff?

P:Nah.

INT: Is there anything that they could do to help you have more positive relationships with school staff?

P: They do not need to be so strict. I have never seen a school have a three hour detention.

INT: That is long.

P: Especially three hours for doing absolutely nothing.

INT: Really, like what sort of thing?

P: It gets ridiculous, there can be about 15 people in there everyday.

INT: Gosh that is a lot. So do you think there is anything that people do at home to help you have more positive relationships with school staff?

P: Not really. I don't think so.

INT: No. And is there anything that you do to help you have more positive relationships with school staff?

P: I don't need to be as a naughty.

INT: Not being so naughty you think. It sounds like that is teacher dependent.

P: Yeah but then sometimes it is out of lesson.

INT: Is it? And why do you think that is?

P: I don't know it is just silly things in the moment... As a kid, in it.

INT: Okay that is helpful and would you say there was anything particularly negative about school staff that you see the most?

P: Less strict. They think they have power over you. If they want you to be quiet when you are saying something then you just have to be quiet. Either you be quiet or get sent out.

INT: And would you then be quiet?

P: Oh no, I get my point across either way.

INT: You do. And how would you describe your least favourite member of school staff?

P: All my English teachers.

INT: Ah okay and what isn't great about them. The new rules came in and they thought they could just do whatever. Do the slightest thing then you just get sent out. I missed like ages of English. Sent out of their lesson everyday.

INT: Gosh really. What words would you use to describe them?

P: What words am I allowed to use?

INT: (laughs) I knew that is what you were thinking, I could tell by your smile. Appropriate, descriptive words.

P: I don't know how to. They don't really care about you. As long as you just sit there, be quiet, do your work, they don't really care. They do anything to make their job easier at the end of the day.

INT: Do you think?

P: Yeah.

INT: And how did they impact on your experience at school?

P: I was getting in trouble every lesson. I was missing every lesson. At first I thought it was calm because I was out of English but then after a while it would just happen constantly and then I would think what is the point and then I would just give up. Then they put me in top set from bottom set and then they gave me some work in the room with a teacher and I did the work every lesson and did not get sent out once.

INT: Really. Well you are sitting very well as well talking to me. What words do you think they would use to describe you?

INT: Not good ones.

P: I don't know, not good ones, I was not the best of kids. I was quite bad. Some of the things I did was not necessary.

Appendix M: Extract from school staff interview transcription

INT: Brilliant. How would you describe your relationships with young people who are looked after?

C: So I guess it is really interesting, I have been in the pastoral system for a number of years and a lot of the time the children come with labels. You know LAC, SEN and you know my relationship with the children is really important for me to be able to do more job. So I would say that I have a really good relationship with them. I am really lucky because I have the time to build those relationships and have conversations with them outside the classroom as head of year as I am not in the classroom all the time. I have been teaching for so

long now that I have learnt that if you do not have good relationships then your behaviour management is shocking. So you have to have those relationships but it is not really any different from looked after students. Sometimes they need us a bit more than your bog standard student but a lot of the time you cannot tell them as they are milling around with everyone else.

INT: Yeah okay lovely, that is so positive to hear that you have good relationships with them and what words would you use to describe your relationships with young people who are looked after?

C: A lot of time I am that supportive adult that offers them stability. They know that I am not going to change and I am here. I guess, I am not sure what in particular but they know that I am here and they know they can come and speak to me.

INT: Yeah and I am sure that means so much just them knowing that.

C: Yeah and a lot of the time they will not speak about stuff happening outside of school and I think sometimes they often wonder if we know. We don't necessarily unpick that, we just let them come here and be the same as everyone else.

INT: Brilliant and what is positive about these relationships?

C: I guess it is really nice when they come and chat about what they did at the weekend or about the people that look after them and open up about that. It was really interesting, the student you were talking to earlier, he has never really spoken about the time that he was in emergency foster care but in his last reintegration meeting, he started speaking about things he enjoyed doing and when he was speaking about that he said when I was living with, I can't remember what his name was, we went kayaking and I really enjoyed that. Now we are in the summer term, I have known him since September and now he has started to open up more and let his guard down and talk about things that are going on right now in his life but also bits that are challenging or difficult...which is really nice. You never know what you are going to get with teenagers but they know that we have their back.

INT: Yeah that is really nice I imagine to have that kind of relationship. What do you think facilitates school staff, like yourself, in forming positive relationships with CYP who are LA?

C: It is that time. It takes time. With any student, you think they need a trusted adult and we could be that person but sometimes it is the English teacher because they like reading and do not want the head of year. So it is about not forcing myself on them but they know that I am here. I always make sure I check in but I do not ask them if they want to talk to me. So it is about time and knowing that I am here so if they need me they know where I am but I am not forcing myself on them.

INT: Yeah, I am sure that is so powerful them just knowing that you are there for them. So is there anything the young people do to facilitate those relationships?

C: Like, they do, as you can only have a relationship if there is buy in from them. Most LAC in the year group, do not actively seek me out to tell me things but they know I am the person to go to if something goes wrong. They have positive relationships with teachers and tutors and then with me, they know they can come to me but have not spent as much time building that one. That is nice because they do not need me and nice they do not need me. Any time I have a meeting, they will acknowledge in a meeting that I am a trusted adult. Often think that is because they are year 7 so don't seek me out as much, whereas I think when they get a bit older they know they can lean on their head of year a bit more as they know they have more time and so have had time to build those relationships.

INT: Yeah that is really interesting isn't it, that element of time coming through again. Is there anything that school do to facilitate those relationships?

C: Yeah so this school is about community and making people feel involved. They know that we care about them and they care about us I think. On the last day they all come in with their hand written notes and some of them have been into a shop and bought chocolate with their own money. That is how it works here and how it is.

INT: Awh that is so sweet, bless them. And do you think that there is anything that external services do to facilitate those relationships?

C: In previous schools, there were lots of external agencies involved but not so much here and part of that is probably because we are a new school so takes time to build links and need them. That is something I would like next year is to have more external agencies involved with the year groups to give them that support. Sometimes parents and carers, rather than the young people themselves, think what else is out there? What do we do when they are not in school?

INT: Okay that is interesting what you say about being a new school. What, if anything, do you think would improve your relationships with CYP who are LA?

C: I always think it would be really nice to have some time with them outside of school. I would love to do something on a Saturday morning and go and do something. Logistics is hard as well as keeping that professional boundary but I think that it would be nice to spend time with them away from school.

INT: Yeah so like doing things outside of school. Anything that young people or school could do to improve those relationships?

C: I know I sound like a broken record but it is time and spending that time with us. We have a residential organised for the year group next year and bonds the year group and teachers with students. They need to say that they want to come for that to work.

INT: Brilliant and do you think that there is anything else school do to facilitate those relationships?

C: We have got some therapies that happen offsite and teachers having chats with them at break and lunch time. I think staff do do that here and try and know what sport they do.

INT: Awh and that goes a long way doesn't it. Anything else that you think external services could do to facilitate those relationships?

C: When have a social worker who engages with you that works really well and knows what is happening. In some situation social worker is part of the team where when having to chase people it becomes more difficult. Again that comes back to relationships and building those relationships and that trust. Sometimes everyone knows what they are doing from where they are sitting, school think well this is what we are doing so we are covered, home know what they are doing and social services are looking at it from a different angle. It is that joined up thinking which is getting better but we are not there yet.

The virtual school say let us know if you need help when we notify them of an exclusion but I do not know what they are offering and I am thinking what is it that the virtual school are saying that they can do?

In terms of Educational Psychologists, it is all done through SENCo who then feed back to me but I am not involved in the meetings. And meetings take time, I don't have time necessarily but it is that joined up thinking and everyone knowing what is going on and thinking what we can offer? I know that it needs to be bespoke and case by case. No good suggesting horse riding if that student doesn't like horse riding. Is there different things that we could do and would that be useful?

INT: Thank you. That is really helpful to know. What do you think are the barriers to school staff, like yourself, forming positive relationships with CYP who are LA?

C: With some students, not all looked after children, there can be trust issues. Staff know and understand when explicitly told but they do not necessarily understand in the moment that actually they have had a lot of adults in their lives and lots of things taken out of their control. Perhaps they are asking them to do something that they do not understand or get. They need to understand why a lot of time and have consistency and for support to be bespoke. Be the same but different, not one size fits all. Just because it worked for that child doesn't mean it will work for this one.

INT: Yeah that makes total sense. Is there anything that the carers might do to act as barrier or facilitator to these relationships?

C: You can see placements working well where the carer is engaged with the school and the student and so is the student and they feel part of that team but others parents engage but you can tell the young person isn't very engaged and they do not know why they are there and how long for and there is some uncertainty. I think carers need to create certainty within the uncertainty as some of them are back with their parents or grandparents and some in foster

placements. It seems to not matter what the placement they are on as long as they feel secure and it is secure.

INT: Yeah that is really interesting isn't it and I guess that is the case with C because he is back with his mum?

C: Yeah and we have asked the social worker how come he is looked after if he is back with his mum and how long will he be looked after for? There are not any answers to that. For me, as head of year, this is hard, in his head he is not looked after but he still has PEP meetings and a social worker and there is that uncertainty because he is classed as looked after but in his head, he isn't. well am I looked after because I might be taken away again

INT: Yeah so do you think that uncertainty impacts his relationships with school staff?

C: It makes it really difficult, with C, I speak to his mum but she doesn't necessarily have full responsibility because there is a social worker involved and then I try and get in contact with the social worker which I am not always able to do. So mum really wants him to do a managed move in September and we are supporting that but then haven't heard from the social worker so do we just go ahead and support with that because we can as a school but I think it would be really helpful for him to have a change of placement and start in year 8 and not get removed. Having the LAC label he can get into any school, social worker did not want him to move school as she does not think it is the decision that he wants but I have spent a lot more time with them and I think it is a lot more complicated than that and I think she should be open to the idea but I cannot get her on the phone. So for me, his mum and C it is frustrating as no one knows what is happening in September and I am his trusted adult that can't tell him that. I can't say that is what happening so when he asks he says "why don't you know, you know everything?" because it is my decision but I don't want to say that it is not just my decision because that undermines me.

INT: That sounds so hard to navigate that, that is really interesting. Is there anything else that school does to create barriers to those relationships?

C: School is really good, time but not necessarily with the students but if I don't sit in on their PEP then I might not know what is happening or then the DSL who sits in on it becomes the person that sat in on that and then it is like who is dealing with that and responsible. Here the deputy head oversees everything in the school and he doesn't want to burden us but then I feel out of the loop as I was not involved but then I have to organise things on the back of that.

INT: Thank you for your answers, they have been really helpful and given me a good sense of your relationships with young people who are looked after in your school. That is the end of those set of questions, next I would really like to find out a bit more about your experiences of being involved in the exclusion process of young people who are looked after if that is okay? The first question is: Can you think of a time where you were involved in the exclusion process of a YP who was LA at the time of exclusion?

C: C has had a lot of exclusions unfortunately. Again comes back to that super complicated situation. Sometimes mum comes, sometimes mum and new partner, sometimes mum doesn't come or the social worker comes. I invite virtual school and social worker every time as if we are saying that they are not okay just to be a family then why are we not supporting them when it is breaking down. When an exclusion happens, it happens because there is poor behaviour that we need to look at as a whole group. It is frustrating as a head of year because I do the reintegration meeting on my own. I do not really know what has happened, C is frustrated as he did not really want to be excluded and I do not know who has spoken to him and what is happening. Now we have had another one and the same conversations and in the recent reintegration meeting we were talking about change of placement but the social worker doesn't want that to happen but doesn't come to the reintegration meeting so isn't actively involved in restorative for that behaviour and looking at the behaviour. As a school, I acknowledge that C has had trauma but also have to look at the behaviours he is exhibiting. Sometimes I think that other professionals think you need to be more understanding but he needs to understand that is not acceptable behaviour, there has to be a sanction. We can put support in place but when we think about what are you doing... suddenly there is very little.

Appendix N: Example of coding transcripts

INT: Making noises. Being late. Well done, are these things that you do sometimes you seemed to come up with these quite quickly?

C: Yeah that is what I do.

INT: Yeah and why do you think you do those things sometimes?

C: I don't know, I get dared to do them. Dared to make noises and stuff. Being late is me though.

INT: Oh really and why do you think that you do it when you are dared?

C: I don't know, they just dare me to play the newest sound out. Everytime a new meme comes out they make me play it out, you know what I mean miss yeah?

INT: Yeah I get you and what happens after you do that?

C: I will get sent out or something.

INT: Oh no, bless you. I can imagine that is difficult. Thank you for sharing that and how does this school make you feel?

C: Oh I don't know. Can we move on now?

INT: Okay yes, I know it might seem like lots of questions but you are doing a great job and giving me really helpful answers. Now on this side of the paper, it is going to be the more positive school. What is the ideal school going to look like, the best school? Thinking about the things we just mentioned for the non-ideal school? Thinking about the rules, classroom, what C may be doing in there?

C: How do you know my name?

INT: Of course I know your name because I have been speaking with your teacher about meeting with you and have been really excited to meet with you.

C: (denies)



LN Lydia Nicklin
Organisational difficulties
Reply



LN Lydia Nicklin
Seeking social approval
Reply



LN Lydia Nicklin
Organisational difficulties
Reply



LN Lydia Nicklin
Seeking peer acceptance
Reply



LN Lydia Nicklin
Exclusion from classroom
Reply



LN Lydia Nicklin
Uncomfortable expressing school-related feelings

C: Yeah. Like a councillor or something.

INT: Oh yeah and why do you think that would be helpful?

C: It would be nice to talk to someone and get out of lesson.

INT: Anything else staff could do to support you better?

C: No more detentions.

INT: Yeah. What do you think helps you to have a positive relationship with this member of staff?

C: No one really with a positive relationship with staff. Just if you like them, you like them and if you don't, you don't like them.

INT: Yeah. Is there anything you do?

C: Who sent you here? Are you a forensic? Are the police going to come in in a minute?

INT: Oh no C, definitely not, you can trust me. Remember at the beginning what I said about my research and I can only reassure you that I work with young people like you everyday and I want to help. So, would you say there is anything negative about your relationships with school staff that you see the most?

C: Yeah. Miss T, no one likes her and she is a waste of space. Her lessons are so boring and she is strict, I walked into her classroom a bit too quick once and she sent me out. She is mean, cunning. Always has a plan to ruin everyone's lesson.

INT: Oh really and can you think of an example of when she has not been very helpful?



LN
Lydia Nicklin
✎ ⋮

Need for emotional support

Reply

LN
Lydia Nicklin
✎ ⋮

Emotional support

Reply

LN
Lydia Nicklin
✎ ⋮

Disengaged from education

Reply

LN
Lydia Nicklin
✎ ⋮

Less punishments

Reply

LN
Lydia Nicklin
✎ ⋮

Teacher personality

Reply

Appendix O: Example of coding framework

	Systems do not support developmental needs			Inflexible and unsupportive school systems			Foundations of positive school staff-student relationships		
	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)	(self-esteem needs- competence, belonging)
<p>Self-regulation difficulties</p> <p>Participate</p>	<p>Instability in schools</p> <p>Relational difficulties</p> <p>Negative self-concept</p> <p>Need for peer acceptance</p>	<p>Strict and unengaging teaching styles</p> <p>Strict rules</p> <p>Lack of student voice</p> <p>School environment</p>	<p>Positive regard for staff</p> <p>Consistent support</p> <p>Positive perception of staff</p> <p>Flexibility in approach</p>	<p>"Stopped and thought before I done. Stop, think and carry on. Don't act. Stop and think before I called the teacher "gay". (when asked what could do differently to prevent exclusion)</p> <p>"Yeah and I grew up with my dad before I went into foster care. I was not getting looked after properly. I am not in foster care anymore. I have been back with mum for 3 years."</p> <p>"Who sent you here? Are you a forensic? Are the police going to come in a minute?" "how do you know my name?" "are you part of social</p> <p>"I get dared to make noises and stuff."</p> <p>"Strict teachers" (non-ideal school)</p> <p>"You have to go into inclusion before get back into circulation and it is the last day so I can't get back</p> <p>"After lunch they said "right go home" and that was it."</p> <p>"I would not have got angry if she just gave me another chance."</p> <p>"The classrooms all look like this. More than one person on table so you have a partner."</p> <p>"I would not have got angry if she just gave me another chance."</p> <p>"My mum has anger issues sometimes. She shouts mostly but does not hurt me"</p> <p>"Everyone is talking in groups." (ideal school)</p> <p>"Some teachers are really strict"</p> <p>"she gave me a detention because I laughed and smiled."</p> <p>"I got excluded for 3 days."</p> <p>"she kicked me out of her lesson on Monday because she said I was messing about at the back of the</p> <p>"she kicked me out of her lesson on Monday because she said I was messing about at the back of the class and I wasn't. Someone was annoying me so I closed their Chromebook and then she said "get out" and then I said "no I haven't done anything" so she sent Call Out, which is basically like teachers</p>	<p>"No more detentions." (when asked how staff could support better)</p> <p>"You have to go into inclusion before get back into circulation and it is the last day so I can't get back</p> <p>"After lunch they said "right go home" and that was it."</p> <p>"No I don't know what that is." (when asked about the DT)</p> <p>"No you don't really need to get</p> <p>"I got excluded for 3 days."</p> <p>"she kicked me out of her lesson on Monday because she said I was messing about at the back of the</p> <p>"she gave me a detention because I</p>	<p>"ELSA... Like a councillor or something. It would be nice to talk to someone." (when asked how school staff could support better)</p> <p>"Yeah that is the broken glass. litter" (non-ideal school)</p> <p>"Mrs X, she is really nice. I am her favourite student."</p> <p>"Mrs X, she is really nice. I am her favourite student."</p> <p>"Saying hi to them and asking them if they are okay" (when asked what a rice teacher would be like)</p> <p>"She... is nice to talk to. She listens to me, she gives me space to be listened to"</p> <p>"Mrs X... is always talking to me outside of lesson and then everytime I come back from inclusion and exclusion, she is always really happy to see me. Like today I came back from exclusion and she was really happy to see</p> <p>"Got some bins here and benches." (ideal school)</p> <p>"The classrooms all look like this. More than one person on table so you have a partner."</p> <p>"Nice sports</p>	<p>"Mrs X, she is really nice. I am her favourite student."</p> <p>"Saying hi to them and asking them if they are okay" (when asked what a rice teacher would be like)</p> <p>"Nice teacher" (ideal school)</p> <p>"She always gives me other chances."</p> <p>"Miss P (head of year) supported me as she would always give me another chance" (when talking about exclusion)</p> <p>"She always put me on report, made sure I was good. She let me get the bus home when I was excluded."</p> <p>"no one likes her anyway" (when talking about teacher with)</p> <p>"Mrs X, she is like really cool"</p> <p>"She is always trying to help me."</p> <p>"So Miss X is really nice. Nice to stop and speak to them and not get told off by them all the time."</p> <p>"Yeah she always has my back and she is nice to talk to."</p> <p>"Then I got to know for a bit and she is really nice and funny."</p>		

Appendix P: Demographics and contextual information of CYPLA

The general characteristics of CYPLA were identified. There are a higher proportion of CYPLA who are males (56%), in comparison to females (44%). In addition, the vast majority of CYPLA are aged 10+ years (64%) with 10-15 year olds accounting for 39% of the population and 16+ years accounting for 23%. Additionally, 18% are aged 5-9 years, 14% aged 1-4 years and 5% aged below the age of 1.

The majority of CYPLA (70%) are placed in foster placement, where an approved carer looks after them (e.g. carer, relative, friend). The remaining are placed: within secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation (16%); with parents or other person with parental responsibility (7%); for adoption (3%); in the community, living independently or in residential employment (2%); other residential settings (1%).