

Understanding home-school partnerships following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

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I, Joshim Uddin, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance, support and help from some individuals who contributed their valuable time to ensure the completion of my research. It is a great pleasure that I can now thank these individuals for their time and support.

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To my mum and dad, who were the entire motivation for starting a research degree in the first place. I did it! And I hope I made you proud.

The COVID pandemic of 2020–2021 marked the most significant disruption to education in history, reshaping the dynamics of the home-school partnership. Amid these unprecedented challenges, this research seizes the opportunity to examine how these partnerships evolved during the crisis and to propose actionable recommendations for their improvement. A mixed methods approach was used, beginning with an initial online survey that informed the development of questions for follow-up semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with a sample comprising students, parents, and staff from a diverse secondary school, framed within a case study methodology to guide the research. The transcripts from the 30 interviews were coded using thematic analysis which revealed four major themes. These themes were based around communication, learning experiences, wellbeing and socioeconomic influences and inequalities.

This study highlights a potential shift in the traditional power dynamic between teachers and parents, with greater influence moving toward parents. This change is attributed to the increased interaction between families and schools during closures, which has fostered a new understanding of the relationship between home and school. However, the findings also highlight a potential over-reliance on digital communication methods. Furthermore, there is growing apprehension that families with lower socioeconomic status may be disproportionately affected by the increasing dependence on digital education delivery, risking further exclusion.

Recommendations for the future of the home-school partnership on the basis of this research are to more effectively combine digital communication with face-to-face communication, for schools to reflect on the trend towards moving resources online, and for schools to continue the work on understanding the home situation of families so that digital divides can be minimised. Finally, it is recommended that all stakeholders in education prioritise the rebuilding of crucial social connections, particularly for younger students, in order to maintain and improve the home-school partnership moving forwards.

Impact statement

This study examined the impact of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the home-school partnership within a high-deprivation London borough offers significant contributions to educational policy, practice, and academic discourse. By employing a mixed methods approach, this study has unearthed nuanced insights into how the pandemic has reshaped the home-school partnership, with a particular focus on how digital communication has affected the power dynamic between home and school, and the impact of lost social connections.

The pandemic-induced shift to online learning highlighted the critical role of digital technology in maintaining educational continuity. Findings from this research emphasised the importance of access to digital platforms to facilitate effective home-school communication. This has implications for educational policy, suggesting a need for investments in digital infrastructure and training for educators and parents to leverage these tools effectively. As digital communication becomes an integral component of the home-school partnership, policies must also consider digital equity to ensure all families, regardless of socio-economic status (SES), have access to necessary technologies.

The exploration of personal experiences revealed that while digital technology was crucial in facilitating education during school closures, it cannot fully substitute for the rich, informal learning opportunities that in-person schooling provides. This insight into the hidden curriculum, the social, emotional, and behavioural skills developed through direct interactions, calls for a balanced approach to education that values both digital innovation and the irreplaceable benefits of face-to-face learning environments. Therefore, future educational strategies should aim to integrate these effectively, using a hybrid model that supports academic learning while nurturing social skills and emotional connections.

This research revealed that many students, staff, and parents believe that academic setbacks caused by learning loss can be addressed in the medium term through adapted curricula and adapted exams designed to bridge learning gaps. However, the long-term impact of missed social connections remains a significant concern, even years after schools reopened.

Furthermore, this study highlighted a potential shift in the power dynamic between parents and schools. Teachers reported that parents felt more confident about taking an active role in their child's education, extending beyond traditional activities such as attending parents' evenings.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand and address the profound impacts of the COVID pandemic on education. By providing detailed insights from students, parents, and teachers into the changes in the home-school partnership within a context of significant challenge, it offers valuable lessons for educators, policy-makers, and researchers alike, aiming to support the development of resilient home-school partnerships that can navigate any future educational crisis.

The implications for practice are clear: schools need to prioritise the development of lost social connections during the school closures and ensure that the move towards online educational delivery does not leave behind families from lower socioeconomic statuses. For policy, the research highlights the necessity of investing in digital infrastructure, addressing digital divides, and crafting policies that support a comprehensive approach to education that values academic success, emotional wellbeing, and social development equally.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strong partnerships between schools and families are widely recognised as key drivers of student success, enhancing both academic performance and socio-emotional well-being (Sheldon & Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2012; Willinski et al., 2022; McClain, 2024). Traditionally, parental involvement centres on creating a supportive home environment and assisting with homework (Epstein, 1993; Caplan, 1993), with much research focusing on how parents can effectively extend school-based learning into the home. However, the onset of COVID-19 drastically altered the dynamics of home-school partnerships, necessitating a re-evaluation of these traditional roles and interactions.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the most significant disruption in global education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners across over 190 countries (UN.org, 2020). School closures impacted 94% of the world's student population, escalating to 99% in lower-income regions. This resulted in an estimated loss of 2 trillion hours of in-person instruction (United Nations, 2020; UNICEF, 2022), highlighting the scale of educational interruption. In the UK, the situation was similar, with school attendance dropping to just 14% during the summer term of 2020 (Cullinane et al., 2022). These statistics emphasise not only the logistical challenges brought about by the pandemic but also illuminate a broader crisis affecting educational access.

Against this backdrop, the dynamics of home-school partnerships, which are crucial for educational success, were significantly altered. The collaborations between home and school were particularly vital during school closures, helping to bridge significant gaps in learning and communication (Agostinelli, 2020; Constantinou, 2023). As such, the school closures caused by

the COVID pandemic provides a unique lens through which to examine the evolution of the home-school partnership. While some studies have highlighted the rapid implementation of digital learning strategies during the pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Francis and Weller. 2022), there is limited research on how these adaptations have influenced collaborative practices between parents and schools after schools reopened. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the pandemic's potential long-term impacts on home-school partnerships. Given that schools and parents were forced to work together in new and unfamiliar ways, it seems likely that the pandemic may have impacted on the home-school relationship; this is the phenomenon that this thesis seeks to explore.

The enforced home-based education during the pandemic required parents to quickly develop skills necessary for facilitating their children's learning, including gaining familiarity with online educational platforms. Schools had to enhance their support to families, ensuring access to necessary technology and providing training to maximise the efficacy of remote learning. Simultaneously, students had to adapt to learning within their informal home environments, which often involved sharing spaces and resources, potentially complicating family dynamics and impacting the effectiveness of home-school partnerships.

Now that schools have been operational for approximately four years following the initial pandemic closures, it is an opportune moment to explore how the nature of these partnerships has evolved. This research investigated the adjustments in home-school interactions prompted by the pandemic, evaluating their effectiveness and sustainability in the post-pandemic era. Insights gained will aim to inform future educational strategies, ensuring that potential benefits, such as increased parental involvement and the rapid adoption of technology, are sustained and seamlessly integrated into standard educational practices.

The original contribution of this research lies in its examination of home–school partnerships in a post-pandemic context through a mixed-methods case study of a secondary academy in Inner London. While I had previously worked at this school, I left before any data were collected, ensuring that my role as a researcher was distinct from my former professional position. At the same time, my prior experience provided valuable contextual knowledge of the school and its community, which informed the design and interpretation of the study while remaining balanced by appropriate ethical safeguards. Previous studies have often focused on parental support as a function of aiding schools, rather than exploring the partnership as a relationship between equal stakeholders (Gerdes et al., 2021). The prolonged period of remote learning and the resulting shift in communication dynamics offer a unique opportunity to delve into the nuances of these partnerships and ascertain whether these partnerships changed given that the national lockdown and the resulting closure of school buildings forced schools to engage with parents and students in fundamentally new ways. This change provides a unique opportunity to understand aspects of the home-school partnership that were previously unexplored, particularly how education being relocated to homes rather than school buildings has reshaped the interactions and mutual perceptions of schools and families. This thesis will explore these altered dynamics, providing new insights into the evolution of home-school partnerships in the wake of unprecedented educational disruption, and will offer recommendations aimed at strengthening these essential relationships for future challenges.

The purpose of this study is to understand how these new ways of working together may have firstly affected the home-school partnership, and secondly to understand what implications there may be for the home-school partnership in the future. For simplicity, this study will refer to COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, Coronavirus, and Novel Coronavirus collectively as COVID.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on home-school partnerships and how they resulted in my research questions. Chapter 3 presents

the mixed methods design of the study, including sample selection. Chapter 4 details my initial survey methods and chapter 5 presents the results from this survey results and explains its role in shaping the semi-structured interviews described in chapter 6. Chapter 7 analyses the interview findings and chapter 8 discusses these findings in relation to the research questions. Finally, chapter 9 offers conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE

This chapter examines the existing literature on home-school partnerships, with a particular focus on the impact of COVID-19. Through the analysis of studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence, it seeks to shed light on the complexities of educational collaboration among schools, parents, and children in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

A search of literature published between January 2020 and January 2025 was performed using the SCOPUS, SSRN, BEI, and Web of Science databases. I then set up a Google Scholar alert with the search terms “COVID education partnership” and “COVID+education,” focusing on publications from 2019 onwards. Filters were applied to include peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and preprints published in English. Works were excluded if they focused on highly specific populations (e.g., dentistry students) or particular types of education (e.g., medical or nursing education).

Section 2.1 reviews the literature on the impact of school closures on home-school partnerships, starting with how these partnerships were defined before the COVID pandemic. A working definition involving schools, parents, and students was established to guide the analysis of pre-pandemic relationships. This foundation enabled an examination of how school closures, including those caused by COVID, have influenced these partnerships.

Given the ongoing development of research on COVID-related closures, it was useful to first consider studies on the effects of school closures on lost learning which is discussed in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 examines global events causing prolonged school closures, particularly their impact on academic outcomes and the potential deterioration of home-school partnerships.

One significant change during school closures has been the role of digital technology in maintaining education, which blurred boundaries between home and school (Anderson, 2020). This is addressed in Section 2.4, which explores the influence of digital communication on home-school relationships. Section 2.5 examines how socioeconomic status (SES) has shaped these partnerships, particularly during the school closures caused by the pandemic. As the United Nations (2020) highlights, COVID disproportionately affected lower SES groups. This section connects lower SES disparities with access to digital technology, revealing their impact on educational outcomes during school closures.

Finally, aligning with the National Education Union's (2020) emphasis on prioritising wellbeing during the reopening of schools, my research examined the broader impacts of school closures beyond curriculum disruptions. This objective forms a key focus of my study, detailed in section 2.6, with the goal of strengthening home-school partnerships for the future.

2.1 Defining the home-school partnership

My research centred on exploring the effects of COVID-related school closures on the dynamics of the home-school partnership. To accomplish this, it was crucial to lay a foundation by defining the concept of a home-school partnership. This section initiated this by exploring various definitions attributed to this term.

The significance of the home-school partnership in educational research is well-documented, with studies linking it to enhancements in student behaviour (Sheldon and Epstein, 2001), attendance (Sheldon, 2007), self-regulation (Marti et al., 2001), and various academic outcomes

(Jeynes, 2012). Hattie (2009) posits that robust parental engagement throughout a child's schooling can lead to an equivalent of an additional 2–3 years of learning. However, research suggests that parental involvement focused on school-based activities, such as attending informational sessions or volunteering, does not consistently lead to higher academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Instead, studies emphasise that parents' participation in home-learning activities tends to have a greater impact on student outcomes than involvement limited to school-based initiatives (Lehrl et al., 2020; Hartas, 2024). Consequently, school leaders are encouraged to promote forms of parental engagement that extend learning opportunities beyond the school environment (Goodall, 2015; Chan & Ritchie, 2016).

Gerdes et al. (2021) devised a Framework for Interdisciplinary Collaboration (FIC), focusing on the collaboration between child support services, educational professionals, which included teachers, and parents. Building on the findings of Gerdes et al. (2021) regarding collaboration between schools and child support services, this research drew valuable insights to develop a working definition of the term 'home-school partnership.' This strategic approach not only provided a framework for my study but also played a role in shaping the design of my research instruments. Gerdes et al. define a family-school educational partnership as a collaborative interaction crossing the boundaries between two equal stakeholders. Within these boundary crossings, teachers and parents engage in the exchange of skills, information, and viewpoints (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). A deeper analysis of this concept reveals that the primary themes of such a partnership encompass collaboration, coordination, and cooperation, with cooperation emerging as the most frequently observed type of partnership (McNamara, 2012). In the realm of educational partnerships, parents and teachers are considered to be prime candidates for fostering a successful partnership owing to their shared objective of ensuring the wellbeing and success of the students (Epstein, 2018).

However, according to the argument presented by Williams et al. (2002), there appears to be a decline in parental partnerships at the secondary school level. This decline might be attributed to the fact that school communication with parents often occurs through the students, and direct lines of communication between schools and parents are relatively infrequent (Hornby and Lafael, 2011). Moreover, research by DePlanty et al. (2007); Paulson and Sputa (1996); and Liu et al. (2021), on communication between students and parents, reveals a discrepancy in perceptions of parental involvement in that students tend to report lower levels of parental engagement than their parents do.

Crozier (1999) and Crozier and Reay (2005) demonstrate that parental involvement in education is strongly shaped by both social class and ethnicity. Their research shows that working-class and ethnic minority parents often struggle to engage with schools in the ways that are institutionally expected. This is partly due to a lack of cultural capital valued by schools, for instance, not fully understanding how the education system operates or lacking confidence when interacting with teachers. As a result, schools may unintentionally marginalise these parents, limiting their opportunities for meaningful involvement.

A dominant model of parenting, often based on middle-class norms, encourages active involvement in areas such as school governance, parent associations, fundraising, and supporting learning at home (Crozier and Reay, 2005; Vincent, 2017). As Crozier and Reay (2005) argue, parents who do not fit the expected model of engagement, often those from working-class or minority ethnic backgrounds, may feel unsure about how to participate in their child's education. Crozier and Reay go on to state that these parents may see teachers as the experts and view education as something that happens primarily at school and that these perceptions are frequently shaped by parents' own experiences of schooling, which influence their confidence and understanding of their role. Crozier (1999) highlights how such experiences are often mediated by both social class and ethnicity, contributing to feelings of exclusion.

Even parents with high levels of education or professional backgrounds can feel hesitant about questioning schools. Vincent (2017) found that although many regular parent attendees had professional jobs and knowledge of the education system, they still showed deference when trying to advocate for their children. In contrast, Wilson and McGuire (2021) found that working-class parents are often judged more harshly. They argue that in academic research and popular media, working class parent are sometimes portrayed as either uninvolved or overly demanding. In addition, they reported that some working-class mothers also report feeling judged by schools because of their background, which makes it harder for them to engage.

The COVID pandemic highlighted further differences in how parents supported their children's learning. The literature has shown that parents with university degrees were more likely to take an active role in learning at home, while those without degrees were more likely to monitor learning rather than teach directly (Walsh et al., 2020; Bates et al., 2021). This reflects ongoing differences in confidence, knowledge, and access to resources between families.

To address these inequalities, Vincent (2014) argues for a more equal and meaningful form of communication between parents and teachers. Vincent suggests that parent-teacher meetings should not just focus on academic results, but also include conversations about the child's interests, wellbeing, and home life. This approach would help build trust and give all parents a stronger voice, especially those who may feel less confident in school settings. Building on this, Gerdes et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of balanced agency in educational partnerships.

Goodall (2018) expands on this by arguing that an imbalance, marked by teacher dominance and parental involvement limited to supporting school-directed activities, can undermine effective collaboration. Tett and Macleod (2020) similarly highlight the critical role of headteachers' perceptions, noting that partnerships are more effective when headteachers view parents as equal agents rather than assuming a directive role. This perspective aligns with

Gerdes et al. (2021) and Horvat et al. (2010), who argue that home-school partnerships are most productive when schools actively foster closer collaboration with parents, going beyond simply responding to parental interests and concerns. Tett and Macleod's argument provides insight into how the home-school partnership could be sustained or even enhanced amidst prolonged school closures due to the COVID pandemic through a change in the partnership dynamics.

My research builds on Goodall's analysis by exploring the impact of COVID-related school closures on the perceived imbalance in parental involvement, as defined by Epstein (2018). It specifically examines contemporary perceptions of roles within the home-school partnership among schools, parents, and students, with the aim of identifying shifts or continuities in these dynamics. In addressing the issue of unequal agency, Tett and Macleod (2019) highlight the importance of strengthening collaborations among schools, parents, and students, particularly at the secondary level where disparities in the partnership tend to widen. This holds particular relevance in understanding how parents perceive the balance and equality within the home-school partnership. The pandemic, coupled with subsequent school closures, provides an opportunity for an original contribution to research through identifying the priorities of each participant in these educational partnerships. Moreover, it presents an opportunity to analyse the potential for fostering a more resilient home-school partnership in the future.

Another framework considered was the Family Provider Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) Conceptual Model (Forry et al., 2021), which divides the home-school partnership into three distinct components: family-specific knowledge, teacher practices, and attitudes. This model is similar to the FIC in that it posits that all three participants in the home-school partnership are focused on improving outcomes for students. The FPTRQ suggests that empowering families through facilitating parental wellbeing will enhance child development, and that children's

learning will be improved when a focus is placed on supporting parents' engagement (Keengwe and Onchwari, 2022).

While the FPTRQ model emphasises the quality of interactions and shared decision-making among families, service providers, and children, the FIC encourages collaboration among various disciplines or groups, fostering integrated efforts towards common goals. In my research, which focuses on the dynamics of the home-school partnership in the post-COVID era, the FIC proves to be the most suitable. The FIC's emphasis on collaborative efforts within educational environments closely matches my research aims, providing a well-structured method for examining and potentially improving the interactions, communication, and cooperation between students, parents, and staff. Given the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic, the flexibility of the FIC and its concentration on interdisciplinary collaboration appear particularly well-suited to navigate the complexities of the home-school partnership landscape I am investigating. Adopting the FIC's framework for my research provides a comprehensive framework to assess and compare the dynamics of the home-school partnership post-COVID compared to before the pandemic. It highlights the significance of collaborative efforts among students, parents, and staff members within the educational setting, allowing for a structured analysis and potential enhancement of the partnership dynamics.

In contrast to a parental partnership, which tends to focus on a contribution by all parties in the partnership, there is much research on the term parental involvement which tends to describe the ways that parents can support the work of schools. Parental involvement can be categorised as involvement with homework, management of the home environment and communication with the school (Epstein, 1993; Caplan, 1993). Parental involvement is generally viewed as a combination of quantitative assistance (e.g., homework assistance and helping with questions), and qualitative assistance (e.g., assistance in searching for the answers and task organisation)

(Ribiero et al., 2021). Wilder (2014) conducted a meta-analysis on parental involvement, identifying several key categories in existing research: parent-child communication about school, educational expectations and ambitions, homework monitoring and assistance, home supervision, participation in school activities, reading with children, parenting style, communication with the school, and parental attitudes toward education.

Whereas the majority of studies argue for the benefits of parental involvement and its link to student achievement, Mattingly et al. (2002), when conducting a meta-analysis of 41 studies focusing on parental involvement programs, could not find empirical evidence that the parental involvement programmes improved student outcomes. Research by Singh et al. (1995) suggests that parental aspirations and support with learning at home were stronger indicators of students' achievement than any specific type of school-based parental involvement. According to Singh et al., high parental aspirations influence key aspects of parental involvement, including communication with their child, involvement with their homework and management of the environment to support learning. In my previous Institution Focused Study (Uddin, 2020), I used large-scale data from the Millennium Cohort Study to support Singh et al.'s conclusion, emphasising that homework support, managing the home environment, and aspirations for post-16 education are the most critical aspects of parental involvement. However I challenged the notion that communication with schools plays a significant role in parental involvement. This finding aligns with the parental involvement models proposed by Stracker et al. (2002) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), which focus on the motivations behind parental engagement in education. Notably, parental aspirations for their child's success consistently emerge as key driver of parental involvement. However, Hartas (2024) presents a contrasting perspective from the particular context of home-schooling during the COVID pandemic. Hartas finds that parents with lower educational aspirations are more likely to support their child's

learning in a situation such as this, perhaps reflecting greater needs for support faced by certain groups of pupils.

These insights establish a framework for understanding the nature of educational partnerships and parental involvement before the pandemic. This framework serves as a reference point for my research, enabling a comparison of pre-pandemic dynamics with post-pandemic findings. Through this comparison, my study assesses shifts and continuities in parental involvement and educational partnerships within the context of the pandemic.

It is important that any working definition of a parental partnership considers cultural differences where levels of involvement with schools can be influenced by a perceived power dynamic. For example, research has indicated that certain cultures perceive the school and teachers as being figures of authority that need to be listened to rather than simply being 'involved' with (Chan and Ritchie, 2016). Evidence also suggests that parent school partnerships are often not equal and that parents are not considered as equal participants within the partnership (Billman et al., 2005), with multilingual families often feeling powerless as they perceive teachers as experts and parents as learners (McWayne et al. 2022). This could become problematic as an effective home-school partnership requires an assumption that both teachers and parents possess knowledge and skills which are productive for students' learning and wellbeing (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

The school closures caused by the COVID pandemic have required parents and schools to collaborate in new, and perhaps closer, ways. As such, any working definition of home-school partnerships that I use for my research will need to consider a partnership where the mechanisms such as communication may be different compared to pre COVID times, and where parents could feel empowered regarding their interactions with school compared to pre-lockdown levels of involvement.

The FIC, developed by Gerdes et al. (2021), establishes a connection between the concept of boundary crossing among schools, students, and parents and the psychological processes of trust and identity. With the closure of school buildings due to lockdowns prompted by the COVID pandemic, trust and identity may be crucial components for achieving coordination, cooperation, and, ultimately, collaboration which according to Gerdes et al., represent different stages along a partnership continuum. The FIC offers a comprehensive framework for examining the home-school partnership in the context of post-school closures and serves as the guiding theoretical foundation for this research.

In order to examine the home-school partnership meaningfully, it is necessary to establish clear boundaries around how the concept is defined and what aspects are included or excluded in this study. In this study, the home-school partnership is conceived as a collaborative, reciprocal relationship between schools and families, characterised by trust, mutual respect, and open communication in support of students' academic and emotional development. It encompasses both formal and informal interactions between parents, teachers, and students, with communication recognised as a central component (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). The COVID pandemic fundamentally disrupted the traditional dynamics of this partnership, particularly as prolonged periods of remote learning shifted greater responsibility onto families and challenged existing modes of engagement.

A key area of focus within this research is the impact of *learning loss*, both actual and perceived, on the quality of home-school relationships. Rather than being viewed solely as a measurable academic outcome, learning loss is treated here as a potential source of stress and anxiety for students, parents, and teachers alike. This anxiety, in turn, may affect the frequency, tone, and openness of communication, factors widely recognised in the literature as foundational to effective home-school partnerships (Epstein, 2011; Harris and Goodall, 2008). Increased concerns over student progress and accountability during the pandemic may have

altered how stakeholders interact, with implications for trust, support, and shared responsibility. Therefore, while this study does not use learning loss as a proxy for the partnership's success, it does consider its influence on how the partnership is experienced and enacted during a period of educational disruption.

Now that I have a framework with which to analyse my home-school partnership data, the next section will introduce some studies which analysed the impact of school closures on the home-school partnership.

2.2 Learning loss during COVID

As discussed above, the literature has indicated that home-school partnerships were complex in many ways, even before the pandemic struck. As such, this next section examines what is currently known about the impact of school closures on the home-school partnership. To begin, the seasonal and predictable deterioration of students' engagement with their schools during holidays, as evidenced by their reduced involvement in learning (Fuchs-Schündeln, 2020; Maldonado & De Witte, 2020), has been well-documented. However, the impact of sudden school closures on these partnerships remains relatively under-researched. Unlike during holidays, remote teaching efforts continue during unexpected closures, potentially leading to different dynamics in the student-school relationship. Fuchs-Schündeln et al. (2020) analysed the impact of pandemic-induced school closures on educational partnerships; using data which compared learning loss during summer holidays, they argued that a learning gap of more than a year can appear as a result of sustained school closures. At the onset of the COVID pandemic, UK-based research highlighted a decline in student performance compared to previous years, as documented by Engzell et al. (2021). This downturn was further supported by Dorn et al. (2020), who identified learning losses attributed to the slower progress made during remote education and the inconsistent quality of teaching which marked the initial phase of school

closures. Dorn et al. (2020) indicated that students were, on average, up to four months behind in certain subjects by the beginning of the 2021–22 academic year, highlighting the widespread impact of the pandemic on educational outcomes. A survey of 1,000 parents in Germany by Wößmann et al. (2020) revealed a significant drop in the time students dedicated to school activities, from 7.4 hours per day to just 3.6 hours during school closures. Similarly, Cullinane et al. (2022) reported a decrease in learning time in the UK, from 6.3 hours to 4.5 hours during the first round of closures. Wößmann et al. further attributed this decline to a notable reduction in direct teacher-student interactions, highlighting a shared global challenge, maintaining student engagement and learning continuity amidst widespread school closures.

Evidence on learning loss during the early stages of the COVID pandemic reveals a complex and uneven picture, with early research suggesting varied impacts across student groups and subjects. Although test data indicate that younger children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly affected, researchers caution against drawing firm conclusions too early. Many initial studies relied on predictive modelling or early-stage assessments conducted just as schools were reopening, when strategies had only recently been implemented and were in their infancy. The timing of data collection also significantly shaped findings. For example, results from the first lockdown in March 2020 may differ from those of subsequent closures, when schools had the opportunity to refine strategies and provision.

Across literature from the early stages of school closures, some core barriers to learning were identified: reduced time spent on learning activities, diminished quality of work, inequalities in access to digital technology, and short-term reductions in attainment. Sosu and Klein (2020) reported that absence rates in Scotland increased during the pandemic, particularly among children from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Cattani et al. (2021) observed a decline in learning time across subsequent lockdowns, with higher SES children more likely to

return to school when partial openings were permitted. However, this assumes that time in schools equated to learning time which may not have been the case.

In terms of the quality of learning, some teachers reported that work returned by students during remote learning periods was of lower quality than expected (Cullinane and Montacute, 2021). Lucas et al. (2020) found that fewer than 40% of pupils submitted work for marking, and that pupil engagement was significantly lower in more deprived areas. A lack of suitable devices exacerbated educational inequalities during school closures. Andrew et al. (2020) reported that 10% of primary pupils either had no device or relied solely on a mobile phone for schoolwork. Similarly, Cullinane and Montacute (2021) found that in the most deprived areas, 15% of teachers stated over a third of their pupils lacked access to a device, compared with just 2% in more affluent schools. Anders et al. (2023) further highlighted that students from lower SES backgrounds were disproportionately disadvantaged, studying for fewer days per week and hours per day, receiving less support at home, and reporting a greater sense of being held back by school closures. They were also less likely to access private tuition. In some cases, families without digital access were given paper-based learning packs, but these tended to encourage more passive forms of learning (Andrew et al., 2020).

Findings on the initial impact of school closures on attainment appeared to indicate modest effects. An early analysis by the Department for Education (2021), using data from the Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning, suggested that younger children experienced the most significant learning loss, particularly in mathematics, where losses were estimated at up to three months. Subsequent research, however, demonstrated that these effects extended into secondary education (Anders, 2024). In 2021, mathematics attainment fell by 3–5 percentage points, with no equivalent decline in English (Burge and Benson, 2021). The decline was most marked in schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students, reflecting a persistent pattern of mathematics learning loss and highlighting how school-level

disadvantage shaped the impact of the pandemic (Benson et al., 2022). Blainey and Hannay (2021) expanded on this and found that while test scores had declined across all subjects and year groups at the beginning of the autumn term, by the end of the term many children had already begun to recover. These results align with large-scale studies in the United States, which also reported more significant losses in mathematics than reading (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), but suggested that recovery was possible once children returned to school (Johnson et al., 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest that while school closures did result in some measurable learning loss, particularly for younger children and in specific subjects such as mathematics, the overall scale of the impact may have been smaller than anticipated, and recovery may be achievable with sustained time back in school. Wider literature on education recovery points to the importance of school leadership, flexible curriculum planning, and attention to mental health (Harmey and Moss, 2020), and there is evidence from other school closures across the world that slowing the pace of curriculum delivery and giving space for reflection and creativity, can support reintegration and re-engagement with learning (Taylor and Moeed, 2013).

Bdair (2021) is an example of research which provides a potential explanation for any minimal academic loss amongst nursing students. Bdair (2021) identifies several potential benefits stemming from the shift to online learning during the pandemic. Among the positive outcomes highlighted are the flexibility of the learning environment and the organisation of time, which have been seen to contribute to improved academic achievement. Additionally, the findings suggest an increase in students' motivation towards becoming more independent learners.

In contrast to studies centred on academic performance, Trung et al. (2020) examined the impact of COVID-induced school closures on educational partnerships, broadening their analysis to include a wider range of factors beyond test scores. Their study collected information

on demographics, student learning habits, and self-perceptions of learning during closures, using a snowball sampling method that yielded 420 valid responses from an initial 920 clicks on their online survey. This methodology and response rate offer insights for my own use of online forms for data collection.

Trung et al.'s study, based on a sample of 420 students in grades 6 to 12 during the first two weeks of school closures in Hanoi, provides an early snapshot of student experiences that is broadly comparable to the UK's secondary system. However, the timing raises questions about reliability: responses were likely shaped by the initial shock and uncertainty, which may not reflect longer-term adaptations by students, families, or schools. While the study offers valuable insight into immediate reactions, its findings should be interpreted with caution when drawing conclusions about sustained patterns of home-school interaction. Trung et al.'s research highlights the critical role of parental support, the maintenance of learning habits, and educational progress during school closures. Their findings are consistent with Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) concept of educational partnerships, which emphasises the collaborative effort between schools and families to support student learning. This alignment highlights the importance of strong partnerships in sustaining educational outcomes during disruptions.

Further, the study highlighted that students prioritised an effective learning environment, access to resources, and family support during closures, which aligns with key elements of Akkerman and Bakker's partnership model, suggesting its relevance even in disrupted contexts. Trung et al. highlighted a gap in the exchange of viewpoints within home-school partnerships, emphasising the need for future research to better capture the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers. Addressing this gap, this study aims to deepen the understanding of home-school partnerships during school closures.

Research indicates that COVID and resulting school closures disrupted educational partnerships, possibly associated with parents' lower SES (Trung et al., 2020). However, little is known about how this disruption has manifested and why some students experienced minimal impact on the home-school partnership. To address these questions, it is important to broaden the scope beyond the impact of COVID-related closures and examine other historical worldwide events leading to closures to understand their impact on the home-school partnership and learning.

2.3 Historical school closures

The preceding section focused on the impact of school closures caused by the COVID pandemic on educational partnerships. In this section, I aim to broaden the scope by examining a range of historical global events which, like the pandemic, have caused significant disruptions to education. By delving into these comparable scenarios, the aim is to unearth their impact on the home-school partnership and help uncover strategies to maintain or improve these partnerships.

During periods of rapid change in education, such as the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic, societies can quickly adapt their methods of educational delivery. While these changes can be abrupt and discontinuous, they also have the potential to be transformative (Foucault, 1972). Prior to the development of COVID, Lamb et al., (2013) analysed the impact on home-school partnerships following Hurricane Katrina. Their analysis aimed to quantify the variation in the home-school partnership by correlating the level of learning loss among students. Their argument suggested an inconsistency in any decline within the home-school partnership, specifically when examining the impact of learning loss. Notably, the study revealed that a considerable number of students did not demonstrate any learning loss based on post-event test results. This observation hints at the potential minimal impact of school closures on

the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and students, as students were performing just as well through maintaining effective communication and support. However, a caveat to this argument lies in the assumption that the quality of the school-student partnership can be singularly measured by test scores. This overlooks the significance of assessing the partnership's quality and the influence of wellbeing on the overall effectiveness of the home-school partnership. Through examining data beyond test results to explore the home-school partnership during school closures within a London context, this research aims to make an original contribution.

Regarding the home-school partnership, adapting the curriculum upon students' return to education could be a strategic measure to mitigate any long-term academic setbacks. In analysing curriculum responses to the earthquake in Canterbury, Christchurch in 2011, Taylor and Moeed (2013) found that teachers who were further away from the epicentre, used the earthquake as a 'teachable moment' for a brief period of time before returning to their usual curriculum and attempting to resume the teacher-student partnership as it was before the crisis. Yet for those closer to the earthquake epicentre, the response was to teach about the earthquake for a sustained period of time, with Taylor and Mooed describing this as a distance-decay effect. A potential explanation given for this was an increased pressure felt by teachers closer to the epicentre to develop the partnership with pupils by dedicating more teaching time to the perceived student trauma and exchanging views as opposed to exchanging information and content.

This is somewhat contradicted by Forte et al. (2016), who argued that as psychological distance increases, the efficacy of an online class decreases. This perspective is grounded in Moore's Transactional Distance Theory (1997), which takes into account factors such as student autonomy, dialogue, and structure in the educational process. According to this theory, Transactional Distance (TD) is a psychological and pedagogical separation of student and

instructor, as well as a geographical one. Forte et al. using student evaluations posited that psychological and pedagogical separation, or TD, between student and teacher is reduced when the course structure encourages and requires increased dialogue and interaction.

Forte et al.'s (2016) research focuses on university students, a demographic potentially more accustomed to engaging in educational discussions and interactions online compared to secondary school students. This distinction is critical, especially when considering the context of emergency remote teaching brought about by the COVID pandemic, which led to widespread school closures. University students, who are generally older and perhaps more self-directed, may navigate the challenges of online learning with greater ease than secondary school students. Thus, the applicability of Forte et al.'s findings to the broader educational landscape, particularly during crisis-induced online learning periods, requires careful consideration of these age and context-related factors.

When the educational development is not made at the same rate as in prior years, it is referred to as 'learning loss' (Pier, et al., 2021). Contrary to claims by Lichand et al. (2021) who attributed academic learning loss solely to remote learning, there are studies that provide alternate evidence regarding learning loss. For example, academic learning loss was not observed in secondary school students in Belgium (Maldonado and De Witte., 2021), and students' grades remained stable in Sweden (Nilsberth et al., 2021). Hampton et al., (2023) also found no difference in children's self-esteem in comparison with pre-COVID levels and claimed the gap between girls' and boys' achievement had reduced. What is more, Gopalan et al., (2021) found that some students progressed more in terms of results as a result of online teaching.

Barrett et al. (2012), in discussing the impacts of school closures argued that there is a delicate balance in finding the optimal amount of support that schools should provide to pupils, with too

much support or too little support both having a negative impact on the child regarding established partnerships and reverting back to their prior academic achievement. This balancing act between the level of support that a school provides could suggest an opportunity for parents to play a bigger role in managing and directing the home-school partnership following a crisis such as COVID.

Barrett et al.'s findings align with Moss (2020), who emphasised the necessity of adjusting school curricula in both pace and content. Moss argued that after a widespread crisis, students should have opportunities to express themselves, facilitating emotional recovery and resilience building. However, this adaptation must be balanced carefully to ensure it does not hinder the process of catching up on essential subject content. This could be an example of exchanging views as part of the partnership as argued by Akkerman and Bakker (2011) and collaborative partnership (McNamara, 2012). It is notable that Taylor and Moeed (2013) referred to adaptations in learning rather than subject specific content which is supported by Moss (2020) who argues that some apparent learning gaps may be transitory rather than long term. This raises the question as to what is more important to the maintenance of home-school partnerships during crisis education? For example, is it catching up on subject content through information sharing, or allowing time to discuss, process, and communicate viewpoints on the disruption event itself? This will be further discussed in the final part of this chapter where wellbeing in the home-school partnership is discussed.

Another comparable event to the COVID pandemic was the Ebola outbreak (2014–2016), which led to school closures lasting 5 to 9 months and affected over 9 million students in West Africa. Carvalho et al. (2020) reported that a month after the pandemic's end, 25% of Liberian students had not returned to education. Fisher et al. (2018) highlighted increased student isolation and happiness issues, while Santos and Novelli (2017) noted that the closures created a 2-year backlog of students applying for entrance exams, exacerbating existing weaknesses in the

education system. However, despite the prolonged school closures, it is noteworthy that the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS, 2016) found "no empirical evidence that learning outcomes suffered as a result of the Ebola outbreak" (ACAPS, 2016, p. 29). This would suggest that school closures can have minimal effect on the home-school partnership where academic learning outcomes are concerned. The literature suggests that examining curriculum changes to address learning loss, alongside the allocation of time to either subject content or student wellbeing upon school reopening, could provide valuable insights into how schools prioritise their educational partnerships with students.

The COVID pandemic has significantly altered the ways in which schools communicate with parents and students to maintain the home-school partnership. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how communication can be utilised to sustain the home-school partnership and this will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Communication and its impact on partnerships

With school closures disrupting the usual communication channels through students, school staff were compelled to engage directly with parents. This shift necessitated a more direct and potentially more effective line of communication, as highlighted by Williams et al. (2002), indicating a potential change in the way educational partnerships adapted to school closures.

Therefore, my research needs to examine whether the school closures have altered how school staff communicate with parents and students and what impact this has had on these educational partnerships. According to Anderson (2020), the swift integration of technology in schools may have resulted in increased communication among students, staff, and parents. As this research aims to compare the pre- and post-COVID dynamics of the home-school partnership, it is crucial that my research instruments effectively measure the influence of modified communication methods and potentially increased interaction frequency on this partnership's dynamics.

Harris, Jones and Cooze (2020) highlight the importance of connection as both a means and an outcome of learning, a concept that aptly reflects the challenges of maintaining home-school partnerships through online communication during COVID. The sustained closure of schools required school leaders and parents to adapt quickly to using technology effectively to communicate skills, information, and viewpoints to maintain educational partnerships. As a result of school closures, not only educational content but also information delivery moved online. For students, the informal moments in their partnership with their teachers where social relationships could have been built disappeared overnight (Harris and Jones, 2020). The widespread availability of educational resources online, many of which are free, has the potential to significantly transform the dynamics of learning and parental involvement in education. This accessibility could shift the balance of power within home-school partnerships, potentially empowering parents by enabling them to take a more active and substantial role in their child's education. Consequently, this shift may alter the landscape of educational engagement, with parents possibly perceiving themselves as more equal partners in the educational process due to the abundance of readily accessible online resources.

The implications of this shift will be further explored by this study and in doing so offers an original contribution to the field of home-school partnerships.

The literature emphasises the importance of communication between a school and parents, suggesting that this communication may not be as school-centric as it was pre-COVID, which, according to Tett and Macleod (2020), could be conducive to more effective educational partnerships going forward. The COVID pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to analyse the relationship between schools, parents, and children at a time when communication was perhaps more frequent than usual. For example, parents may have required more information from schools at a quicker pace during school closures as face-to-face contact was not possible. This suggests that the quality of communication, and the impact of any changes to previous

communication within the partnership, is an area that needs to be further understood. It also suggests that the use of technology to maintain and develop partnerships, as mentioned by Hargreaves (2020), will need careful management, as school leaders will need to ensure that there is not an assumption that the quality of the partnership regarding the exchange of skills, information, and viewpoints were unchanged through the use of technology. Huang et al. (2024) provides an example of research demonstrating negative 'spillover effects,' where increased parental contact with teachers inadvertently harmed student attainment. This occurred because teachers had less time to dedicate to their students. Given this, the present study must examine whether the transition to digital communication has led to any unintended negative consequences for the home-school partnership.

Regarding digital communication, Kuusimäki et al. (2019) conducted a study using a Finnish sample to investigate the impact of digital communication on partnerships between homes and schools. They asserted that, for Finnish parents of both primary and secondary aged children, effective communication is paramount in maintaining a home-school partnership. Their findings highlighted that parents in the study particularly valued feedback related to studies, behaviour, and more sensitive issues such as safeguarding concerns. Goodall and Vorhaus (2010), drawing from a UK-based study, concurred that effective communication is vital for building trust and a close partnership between schools and homes. Once established, this partnership allowed for both parties to communicate difficult as well as positive messages, fostering further development. Notably, many descriptions of parental involvement emphasise the importance of communication between schools, students, and parents (Epstein, 1995). Throughout school closures, the shift to online communication modes like emails or virtual meetings likely influenced the quality and frequency of interactions. It is crucial for my research to effectively gauge the impact of these communication method changes on home-school partnerships. This assessment includes examining how students, staff, and parents perceive this shift and whether

they believe it has enhanced or hindered the home-school partnership compared to the pre-COVID era.

As mentioned earlier, parental partnerships with schools tend to decline at the secondary school level compared to primary education (Williams et al., 2002). This decline might be attributed to differing communication expectations between the two phases. Communication channels tend to work more effectively at the pre-school and primary stages due to more opportunities for informal communication with the school and its teachers, which is less frequent at the secondary school level (Russell and Granville, 2005). Regarding priorities, parents in Russell and Granville's (2005) study found ongoing feedback about their child throughout the school year, and regular feedback about performance and behaviour, most useful, aligning with the findings of Kuusimaki et al. (2019). Russell and Granville highlight the importance of perceived direct benefits to their own children as a key motivator for parental involvement in school partnerships. This perspective suggests that parents are more inclined to engage in collaborative efforts with schools when they can clearly see the positive impact of their participation on their child's education and wellbeing. This insight suggests a potential strategy for enhancing parental partnerships post COVID: by demonstrating and communicating the tangible benefits of parental involvement, schools may encourage greater participation.

The decline in partnerships at the secondary level may have been impacted by the school closures, potentially due to the transferral of communication to online methods. This shift could perpetuate the informal communication that was more common at the primary level but now through email or virtual means at the secondary level, making teaching staff appear more accessible. For my research, it will therefore be crucial to determine whether this transition indeed occurred through enhanced communication methods and to evaluate the lasting impact on the home-school partnership post schools reopening. This involves understanding how

students, teachers, and staff perceive these changes and their effects on the partnership dynamics.

Digital technology's role in facilitating communication between schools and parents has significantly increased, as highlighted by Teras et al. (2020). This development calls for an exploration of how digital technologies have shaped the home-school partnership in the aftermath of COVID-induced school closures. By examining changes in communication within these partnerships post-COVID, my research aims to make an original contribution.

Furthermore, the pandemic presents an opportunity to enhance partnerships beyond pre-COVID levels through long-term changes in communication methods. This potential improvement could stem from parents gaining a deeper understanding of education and pedagogy while participating in their children's home education. A critical aspect of my research involved comparing pre-COVID and current home-school relationships, aiding in the development of research instruments designed to capture this evolution. The anticipated findings aim to highlight strategies that could be incorporated into school policies to strengthen home-school partnerships moving forward. This notion is supported by Toquero (2020), who suggests that the experience of school closures will lead to a collective realisation that digital tools should complement rather than replace face-to-face learning, enhancing educational experiences.

Beckman et al. (2018) suggest that SES influences, but does not fully account for, disparities in digital access. The “digital divide” refers to unequal access to devices, reliable internet, and digital literacy, factors disproportionately reported among lower SES households yet not confined to them. Further evidence indicates that digital exclusion also affects families across income groups, highlighting the need to view technological access as a multifactorial issue rather than a direct expression of SES. These barriers can exacerbate the digital divide by making it more difficult for some families to participate fully in online learning, access school

communications, or support their children's education at home. For example, families with limited devices may struggle when multiple children need to access lessons simultaneously, or when parents lack the digital skills to navigate school platforms or engage with teachers. As schools increasingly rely on digital tools for information sharing, homework, and parental engagement, these disparities risk leaving some families further behind, thereby deepening existing inequalities in educational access and outcomes and harming the home-school partnership. Families without consistent access to technology may have been significantly impacted during school closures (Beckman et al., 2018; Han & Li, 2025), experiencing reduced exposure to communication, particularly the sharing of skills, information, and viewpoints, in boundary crossing between equal agents (Gerdes et al., 2021; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). This finding is supported by studies conducted by Mishra et al. (2020) and Han and Li (2025), which identified unstable network connections among families from lower SES backgrounds as the greatest challenge in online teaching. As a result, some learners experienced disruptions in their education (Litvinov, 2021).

Ceviker et al. (2023) seek to provide additional nuance in our understanding of the digital divide by distinguishing between first-level and second-level digital divides. The first-level digital divide refers to the disparity in access to technology and the internet, highlighting the fundamental issue of whether students, parents, and teachers have the necessary digital tools and connectivity. This level of the digital divide is more visible and has been consistently identified in numerous studies (Azubuike et al., 2021; Francis and Weller, 2022; Williams et al., 2021) as a significant barrier to equitable education.

The second-level digital divide, on the other hand, delves into the variations in how technology is utilised by different families and the differing benefits they derive from online education. This aspect of the digital divide examines beyond mere access, focusing on the quality of engagement with digital resources and the effectiveness of their use in supporting educational

outcomes. It encompasses factors such as digital literacy, the ability to leverage technology for learning, and the extent to which online resources are integrated into the learning process. By distinguishing between these two levels of digital divides, Ceviker et al. (2023) highlight the complexity of the issue, emphasising that solving the problem of access alone does not automatically translate into effective or equitable use of technology in education.

An implication for my research is that my sampling methods do not inadvertently exclude families with limited access to technology, including second-level digital divides, as the literature, including insights from Ceviker et al. and related studies, suggests that the partnership between these families and their schools could be the most negatively affected by the school closures. Further discussion of the impact of lower SES on the quality of the home-school partnership is provided in the next section.

2.5 Home-school partnerships and socioeconomic status

Education policymakers are increasingly recognising that assumptions about children's access to technology may be misleading, potentially excluding some young people from partnerships with their education and social networks based on their socioeconomic status (SES) if such assumptions persist (Beckman et al., 2018). Agostinelli et al. (2020) explored the influence of SES on educational partnerships, emphasising that parents' ability to support learning at home depends not only on access to appropriate technology for all children in the household but also on their own educational background and job flexibility for remote work. Their findings, which predated the COVID pandemic, reflect a time when the role of technology in education was significantly less prominent (Anderson, 2020). Hartas (2024) echoed these observations, finding that families with socioeconomic advantages were more likely to provide home learning support and sustain communication with schools. This suggests that pre-existing disparities in

educational partnerships may have worsened in the pandemic era, given the increased reliance on technology for communication, instruction, and school events.

When considering the impact of school closures on the home-school partnership, it is crucial to assess how vulnerable groups, especially those from lower SES backgrounds, are affected.

COVID-related school closures have starkly highlighted education inequality, particularly in impoverished areas where nearly two-thirds of leaders reported a lack of basic technology as a significant barrier to maintaining communication and partnerships with schools (Darling and Hammond, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2023) which could further hinder these particular students from progressing academically. However, there is discussion of a potential revolution in education to support the home-school partnership that could outlast the virus itself, with some education providers already enhancing previous partnerships (Pelicano and Stears, 2020).

Regarding the parent-child partnership, working parents have reported strain on their time, resources, and ability to manage parenting and homeschooling needs (Fontanesi et al., 2020). During the COVID lockdown, parental involvement in their child's online learning became a significant factor in home-school partnerships. Dong et al. (2020) observed that many recognised the importance of actively supporting their child's education, a perspective closely linked to lower SES. However, school closures also introduced challenges; Orgiles et al. (2020), in a study of 1143 Spanish and Italian parents, found that difficulties such as concentration issues, boredom, and parental stress disrupted these partnerships. Despite these struggles, some parents identified positive outcomes, particularly in language development, as their children demonstrated improved proficiency in their mother tongue. This reflects findings by Khalid and Singal (2023), who reported that, despite the hardships, many parents viewed the period of school closures as resulting in a strengthening of the family as a unit. This would suggest that there is potential for some aspects of the home-school partnership to have improved after COVID, even for families from lower SES backgrounds. At the same time,

increased parental responsibilities, particularly for those with children with special needs, created additional stress. Fontanesi et al. (2020) highlighted that some parents took on multiple roles, often without external support, a concern echoed by Eshraghi et al. (2020).

While digital inequalities and stress are not unique to a pandemic, they consistently affect many students, especially those from low-income backgrounds (Francis and Horn, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2018). This stress on parents could impact the parent-child partnership, with challenging child behaviour affecting parental adjustment and, reciprocally, parental adjustment influencing child behaviour (Mocho et al., 2024). Long closures have been associated with at-risk and disadvantaged students being less likely to return to education following school closures (Kissinger, 2020). While this study will not specifically analyse pupils with special needs, findings from these studies help understand the complexities of COVID's impact on partnerships between school, parents, and children. For example, the bidirectional relationship between parental stress and children's challenging behaviours suggests that increases in child difficulties during the pandemic may heighten parental stress and compromise coping abilities, thereby influencing their subsequent collaboration with schools. Strengthening links to support families becomes crucial in dealing with the multitude of issues arising from school closures, presenting an opportunity for this study to investigate the home-school partnership with a focus on how each participant collaboratively navigated challenges during COVID-induced closures.

2.6 The importance of wellbeing during school closures

As schools reopened, a crucial aspect to examine is the correlation between the home-school partnership and the wellbeing of students, parents, and teachers. The National Education Union (NEU, 2020) conducted a survey involving 23,000 teacher members, revealing that 84% of respondents prioritised the mental health and wellbeing of returning pupils. This indicates that concentrating solely on academic outcomes may not be the most effective approach to

measuring and comparing the home-school partnership, with students, parents, and staff requiring a period of readjustment to focus on their wellbeing. As the lines between school learning and home learning became blurred during school closures, participants in the partnership may have experienced significant stress which could have impacted their roles as a parent, student, and teacher. The issue of wellbeing and its impact on the home-school partnership compared to pre COVID will be crucial in my research to examine whether it has changed following school closures and how relevant it is now to students, staff, and parents.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, the issue of student wellbeing and the role of the home-school partnership in supporting it were gaining prominence, as reflected in emerging policies and frameworks. This shift marked a departure from viewing mental health as solely the responsibility of the individual student, towards a wider institutional responsibility for promoting wellbeing within schools and universities.

One theoretical approach adopted by schools before COVID was care theory. This is evident in the work of Noddings (2002) who emphasised the importance of responsiveness, such as listening to students and addressing their individual needs, thereby advocating for a student-centred approach to wellbeing. Similarly, Tronto (1993, 2005) highlighted the relational nature of care, identifying key components such as attentiveness (noticing the needs of others), responsibility (accepting the duty to care), competence (providing effective care), and responsiveness (recognising the vulnerability of the care recipient). Central to this model are the principles of trust, reciprocity, and contextual understanding (Goralnik, Dobson and Nelson, 2015; Goralnik et al., 2012). This relational approach to care has direct applications in teaching and learning environments, where responsiveness to students' emotional and academic needs is paramount (Goralnik et al., 2012; Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006).

Evidence indicates that, even before COVID, wellbeing strategies were beginning to be embedded within curricula rather than treated as optional additions. Kift and Field (2009) argue that student engagement is strengthened when the curriculum motivates learning, promotes a positive climate, and encourages active participation. In this context, wellbeing initiatives sought to build emotional resilience, academic self-efficacy, and sustained motivation (Crawford et al., 2016), effectively shifting co-curricular support into mainstream curricular practice.

White (2017) and Wren-Lewis and Alexandrova (2021) argue that student wellbeing is not merely the absence of mental illness, but a broader psychological condition that enables individuals to flourish. Jiang et al. (2025) expand on this view by emphasising the need to conceptualise wellbeing through both psychological and sociocultural lenses. They argue that cultural contexts significantly influence how wellbeing is understood, noting that in some cultures, wellbeing may be more closely associated with strengthening communal bonds (Neubert, 2020). This suggests that any post-COVID strategies for improving student wellbeing will need to take into account cultural variation in how wellbeing is perceived and experienced. Alexander (2020) also identified a 'research gap' in pre-COVID literature, noting the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student wellbeing.

Jiang et al. (2025) argue that while pre-Covid research on wellbeing often prioritised concerns about mental health, less attention was given to the positive outcomes associated with wellbeing. To address this gap, they identified six interrelated themes through which wellbeing can be understood: health, autonomy, learning engagement, values, equity, and school culture. These themes provide a useful framework for reviewing how wellbeing was conceptualised in the pre-COVID literature. Although they have become more widely addressed in recent years, each theme was also evident in the pre-COVID research, albeit sometimes in fragmented or implicit ways

Using Jiang et al.'s (2025) framework, health can be understood as a central dimension of wellbeing. Stentiford et al. (2021) emphasise that both physical and mental health are integral to students' overall wellbeing, with poor health consistently linked to negative outcomes. Studies by Ahmed and Schwind (2018), Mann et al. (2021), and Willis et al. (2021) demonstrate that low levels of mental wellbeing and compromised physical health are strongly associated with diminished student wellbeing, echoing earlier findings by Galloway et al. (2013).

Closely connected to health is the theme of autonomy. Countryman and Rose (2017) argue that students' wellbeing is enhanced when they are empowered to make decisions about their learning and personal development. This is reinforced by research showing that opportunities to pursue interests, set personal goals, and manage time foster a stronger sense of self-efficacy and independence (Cheng et al., 2021).

Engagement in learning represents another important theme. Kariippanon et al. (2018) and Soutter et al. (2014) highlight that students report greater wellbeing when actively involved in stimulating and meaningful educational activities. This engagement nurtures intrinsic motivation and reinforces the perceived relevance of learning (Bücker et al., 2018), strengthening the connection between wellbeing and active participation in school life.

The theme of values situates student wellbeing within a wider social and cultural context. Uchida and Rappleye (2024) show that respect, empathy, and inclusivity at the societal level help students feel valued and accepted, while Oishi et al. (1999) emphasise that students' interactions with their social environment are mediated by prevailing cultural values. Such findings suggest that wellbeing is not only shaped within schools but also influenced by broader social norms.

Equity also features prominently in the literature as a determinant of wellbeing. Clarke (2023) and McKinney de Royston and Madkins (2019) argue that systems valuing holistic

development, rather than relying solely on standardised measures, promote fairness and inclusion. Ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources is particularly significant for disadvantaged students, underscoring the link between wellbeing and wider educational justice.

Finally, school culture is identified as an important context for wellbeing. Mann et al. (2021) show that a positive school culture, characterised by mutual respect, inclusivity, and a sense of community, creates a safe and supportive environment. As Odenbring (2018) and Willis et al. (2019) also argue, wellbeing is most effectively fostered when approached as a collective, school-wide endeavour.

The pre-Covid literature recognised strong associations between wellbeing and a range of positive outcomes. However, there was limited research into how these outcomes influenced the home–school partnership. While schools were acknowledged as having an important role in facilitating wellbeing, little attention was given to how partnerships between home and school might themselves contribute to fostering wellbeing. This gap is particularly significant when considered alongside post-COVID research, which has highlighted the wellbeing of parents and teachers, as well as students, as central to sustaining effective educational relationships.

In this context, Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) definition of partnership, as the exchange of viewpoints, becomes especially relevant. Their framing suggests that wellbeing is not only an outcome but also a condition that enables constructive dialogue and collaboration, reinforcing its importance in understanding the dynamics of home–school partnerships.

Analysing the wellbeing of teachers, students, and parents can provide insights into the impact of school closures beyond subject knowledge and skills. By broadening the scope beyond academic performance, this study aims to provide an original contribution to research through gaining a clearer understanding of the overall partnerships between schools, students, and parents. This clarification is crucial, considering that the mental health of teachers, students,

and parents may pose a greater long-term challenge than the virus itself (Harris and Jones, 2020). Researchers, such as Barker et al. (2021) have also highlighted the impact of wellbeing on educational partnerships during school closures, asserting that the wellbeing of students should be a higher priority than their academic learning.

Regarding the wellbeing of parents, it has been argued that some parents were trying to play multiple roles during the school closures with many taking on the role of being a parent, employee, and a teacher (Logan et al., 2021). Consequently, parents' wellbeing declined, and their quality of co-parenting declined (Feinberg et al., 2021). In contrast to this, there are studies that argue that school closures presented an opportunity for family wellbeing to improve (Garcia and Pumacahua, 2024), with Bozkurt et al. (2020) arguing that parents felt closer to their children and their education as they had an opportunity to get a clearer picture of their children's learning environment.

It is acknowledged that learning includes more than just subject knowledge, with the hidden curriculum, learned through social interactions both at home and in school, playing a pivotal role in students' wellbeing and development (Killick, 2016). The hidden curriculum encompasses the informal learning derived from social interactions, serving as a complement to the structured educational framework. Killick suggests that synchronising the hidden curriculum with the formal curriculum can significantly elevate the potential for transformative learning and bolster wellbeing. In the context of school closures, my research intends to examine the influence of these disruptions on the hidden curriculum, particularly its role in social interactions. The focus will be on assessing whether an increased parental presence at home during this period has helped offset any negative effects on wellbeing that may arise from diminished social interactions within the school environment.

Previous studies on parental involvement in the UK predominantly focused on what parents could do to support schools. However, insights from studies such as Barker et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of wellbeing during crisis moments in education. This suggests that schools may need to explore alternative means to support parents and students beyond delivering subject content. By addressing these diverse needs, schools can potentially maintain or enhance existing partnerships. Constantinou (2023) presented research indicating potential positive impacts of the COVID pandemic on aspects of wellbeing. Through conducting 13 interviews with teachers and performing a thematic analysis, Constantinou suggested that one of the notable benefits was an increased focus on student wellbeing and mental health. This shift was attributed to the adoption of hybrid lessons during school closures, which provided an opportunity to place greater emphasis on these aspects.

In a related study, Jones and Palikara (2023) found that teachers observed a significant change in parental engagement, which became more digital, flexible, and focused on wellbeing throughout the period of school closures. Despite these positive developments, teachers expressed scepticism regarding the sustainability of these benefits. They doubted whether the increased emphasis on wellbeing and the enhanced flexibility in parental engagement would persist beyond the pandemic, reflecting a concern over the potential loss of these positive changes once traditional schooling resumes. The importance of wellbeing in these partnerships aligns with the core focus of my study, which seeks to understand the school-parent-student relationship. This focus could also shed light on the aspects of educational partnerships that schools prioritise long term to address the impact of the school closures.

The first section of this literature review "Defining the home-school partnership," established the conceptual framework, outlining the key elements of an effective partnership between homes and schools. The second section, "Learning loss during COVID" examined the challenges and adaptations observed during COVID, focusing on shifts in learning during the school closures.

The third section, "Other school closures and learning loss," explored historical examples of school closures, highlighting lessons on mitigating learning loss to assess the effectiveness of the home-school partnership during the pandemic.

"Communication and its impact on partnerships" analysed how technology transformed communication between schools, parents, and students, revealing both benefits and challenges. Finally, the sections on "Home-School Partnerships and socioeconomic status" and "The Importance of Wellbeing During School Closures" examined the interplay between socioeconomic status, wellbeing, and the home-school partnership, highlighting disparities and the need for equitable support systems.

This literature review explored the complex dynamics of home-school partnerships, providing the foundation for my research questions. The study to follow will reflect on the continued relevance of existing literature, investigating changes arising from the closures, and identifying lessons to guide strategies for sustaining and enhancing home-school partnerships in the future.

2.7 Research questions

Existing literature on the home-school partnership often emphasises quantitative metrics, positioning my study as an original contribution by employing a mixed methods approach. This present study investigates how school closures caused by the COVID pandemic may have impacted on the home-school partnership, focussing on one particular secondary school situated within inner London. Hence, I propose the research questions below.

- 1) How have school closures, as a result of the COVID pandemic, affected the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children?**

2) What lessons can be learned from the impact of school closures caused by the COVID pandemic to support and improve the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children in the future?

These research questions have been shaped from the literature covered in this review, triggering a need to examine the impact of the COVID pandemic on parent-school relationships. The research questions have been formulated based on my understanding of home-school partnerships from the literature review above but now examining the impact of a global pandemic resulting in long term school closures on these partnerships. By addressing the research questions, I aim to analyse these educational partnerships to identify strategies that all participants (schools, parents, and students) can use to strengthen them in the future.

Although my study is based in London, its inclusion of a diverse demographic enhances its broader applicability. While the findings may reflect the unique characteristics of an urban setting, the varied backgrounds and experiences of participants offer insights relevant to a range of educational contexts, including less diverse ones. Additionally, my research contributes to understanding how educational partnerships function and are perceived in 'normal' circumstances outside of school closures.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I outline the research design chosen to address this study's research questions on the home-school partnership. I begin by specifying the case study under investigation and then explain how a mixed methods approach was employed to gather evidence relevant to the research questions. This is followed by a description of the sample used in the study. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations that emerged during the research.

3.1 Case study

To address my research questions, I selected a design that would enable in-depth exploration of the home–school partnership. A case study approach was chosen, focusing on an all-boys secondary academy in Inner London with approximately 750 pupils aged 11–18. The school is situated in a borough characterised by stark social and economic contrasts, with areas of considerable affluence alongside neighbourhoods in the most deprived quintile nationally. Levels of child poverty and eligibility for free school meals are consistently above national averages, and educational outcomes vary widely. The borough is ethnically and culturally diverse, with more than half of residents identifying as from minority ethnic backgrounds and a high proportion of households where English is not the main language spoken.

Within this context, the case study school reflects many of these characteristics. Around 35% of students are eligible for free school meals, highlighting significant socioeconomic disadvantage; the intake is highly diverse, with 86% of students coming from minority ethnic backgrounds and 43% speaking English as an additional language. Despite this, the school is high-performing according to its Progress 8 score and is part of a multi-academy trust. Its location within a 2 km radius of numerous primary and secondary schools, together with good transport links, contributes to the diversity of both staff and student populations. These borough- and school-level factors provide an important backdrop for interpreting how the home–school partnership was experienced during periods of disrupted schooling.

The case study approach allowed for close examination of these dynamics in a setting where relationships between families and the school were likely to have been significantly impacted. Evidence from the United Nations (2020) suggests that low-income parents were disproportionately affected during the pandemic, while Beckman et al. (2018) highlight the role of access to quality technology as a key facilitator of effective home–school partnerships. In this

school's context, reduced access to technology, combined with lower levels of parental confidence and fewer resources to support learning at home (Agostinelli et al., 2018), may have further challenged parental engagement. These conditions made the setting particularly appropriate for investigating how home–school partnerships evolved during school closures, providing the range of responses necessary to address my research questions.

This focus provided vivid accounts that provided real world experience (Wellington, 2015) of the home-school partnership through school closures which helped to answer my research questions on how the home-school partnerships have been affected in a post COVID educational landscape. As I am interested in participants' viewpoints of the complexities of the home-school partnership, a case study approach best provides opportunities to explore the discrepancies and conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants (Adelman, 1993) which also helped to understand the home-school partnership. A case study approach allowed me to see the situation through the eyes of the participants (Cohen et al., 2018) which was suitable to answer my research questions.

Attempting to mitigate Shaughnessy et al.'s (2000) argument that case studies may carry bias due to the researcher's dual role as both participant and observer, I sought to address this concern by adopting a sequential exploratory design with two distinct data collection phases (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2011). This approach enabled me to rely on participants' responses, strengthening the evidence base for constructing my interview questions, and mitigating potential bias arising from my direct involvement in the case study.

3.2 Mixed methods design

Having decided on a case study methodology, as it allowed the research to focus on participants' viewpoints of the home-school partnership within a particularly relevant context, I then decided to use a mixed methods approach to my research design to help answer my

research questions. The COVID pandemic and the resulting school closures created a unique context that significantly influenced the home-school partnership. This unprecedented situation made it challenging to immediately identify the key aspects necessary to address my research questions effectively. As a result, my research design needed to reflect the uncertainty regarding the important viewpoints about the home-school partnership from the perspective of students, staff, and parents, to be able to answer my research questions.

I approached my mixed methods data collection in two distinct stages. The initial stage was the primarily quantitative stage where I used a questionnaire with mostly Likert scale questions, plus an open-ended question. The participants' responses to this questionnaire helped to establish the themes and questions that a subsequent semi-structured interview in stage two could probe in more detail. In the semi-structured interview phase of my research, I engaged with a smaller sample of 10 participants from each of the distinct groups (students, parents, and staff). This approach was designed to delve deeper into patterns and trends concerning the home-school partnership, which were initially identified in the first stage of my mixed methods study.

While a purely quantitative approach could have provided more data to analyse patterns and relationships in the home-school partnership, I was concerned it would lack the depth needed to explore the nuances of these partnerships. Specifically, the “how” aspect of my research question, how the partnerships have changed, would have remained unanswered. Conversely, while a purely qualitative approach would have allowed deeper exploration of the home-school partnership, it would have been limited by the reliance on existing literature to frame my interview questions. This literature is still evolving due to the COVID pandemic being so recent. A mixed methods approach to data collection provided more flexibility in the face of such uncertainty (Dawadi et al., 2021), allowing me the best opportunity to answer my research questions. It did this by providing a more exploratory analysis of educational partnerships, albeit with the trade-off of less depth than would be possible using a single approach (Denscombe,

2014). This exploration of patterns of opinions tied in well with my research questions which involve exploring the home-school partnership following school closures caused by COVID. This research design produced an approach to my research where specific observations then progressed on to detecting themes and patterns in the data (Azungah, 2018). This approach was suitable to answer my research questions as I moved from specific observations from an established framework; in my case the FIC, and existing literature on parental partnerships (Epstein, 2011; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011; McNamara, 2012). Epstein (2011) identified communication and the management of the learning environment as key components of the home-school partnership during more 'normal' times. My research design aims to explore how these themes have evolved following the reopening of schools. A mixed methods approach enabled me to initially discover what the current themes are in the home-school partnership following the pandemic and then use semi structured interviews to understand how and why these themes had changed, if they actually did, following the school closures.

With my explanatory sequential design, primarily quantitative data was collected first through an online survey. The analysis of this data then helped to uncover patterns and relationships within the data, for example through the use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA). With this approach, the second stage, using semi-structured interviews, then helped to explain the findings from the first phase of data collection.

There are concerns regarding how effectively designs and data obtained from a mixed methods approach can be combined, particularly regarding the opposed paradigms of positivist versus interpretivist epistemological approaches (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). To address this issue within this specific context, my research methodology combined the strengths of two approaches. A large-scale survey, analysed primarily through quantitative methods, was used to inform the framing of the subsequent semi-structured interview questions and to guide the sample selection (May & Etkina, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The quantitative analysis

of the initial online survey employed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore the responses from parents, teachers, and pupils. EFA was used to examine the covariance among the responses in order to identify meaningful groupings based on their relationship with latent factors (Bryant and Yarnold, 1995, in Grimm and Yarnold, 1995). For example, this analysis revealed patterns suggesting that communication could be a concern for participants, which helped to shape the themes addressed in my research questions. The findings from the EFA directly informed the development of questions for the subsequent semi-structured interviews.

Using a sequential exploratory design (Ivankova et al., 2006), these semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into the survey results and helped clarify the emerging themes. This approach promoted a closer integration of the mixed methods design, as outlined by Creswell & Plano Clark (2011). The interviews allowed me to probe specific themes in detail, such as how changes in communication since school closures have impacted the home-school partnership. Additionally, the questions for the initial online survey were slightly modified depending on whether they were directed to students, parents, or staff, ensuring that each group could reflect on how the partnership between themselves, and the other groups had been affected.

A potential issue with this approach was the time lag between the two different data collection methods and the subsequent data analysis. This delay might have led to the participants I intended to interview for my semi-structured interviews being unavailable, or significant changes in the dynamics of the partnerships between staff, students, and parents due to the rapidly evolving post-COVID educational environment. To mitigate this risk, I conducted the semi-structured interviews immediately after participants were selected and became available.

To increase flexibility, I included an open-ended comments section in the survey, encouraging participants to provide additional responses. This process allowed me to identify potential candidates for the semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling, particularly in cases

where the sample size was reduced due to participant withdrawal or unavailability between the survey and interview stages. I selected participants who had expressed particularly strong views on the home-school partnership in the survey, and from this group, I used purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of interviewees, considering factors such as ethnicity and gender.

As my sample for the interviews was based on responses from the initial survey and the interesting patterns identified within them, the issue of potentially losing participants only became clear after completing the first stage of my mixed methods approach.

3.3 Sampling

In response to a 2020 UN report titled "Education during COVID-19 and beyond," which highlighted the disproportionate impact of school closures on families in deprived areas, my case study focused on a secondary academy situated in a high deprivation area of inner London. This setting provided a useful backdrop for examining the nuances of the home-school partnership under these circumstances. This study involved students, parents, and staff from a school with a diverse population of 750 pupils spanning Years 7 to 11.

To ensure a broad dataset, questionnaires were distributed to all students, parents, and staff through email and text message reminders. Based on prior experience with electronic surveys at this school, I anticipated a 50% response rate from students and staff, and a 30-40% response rate from parents. This approach was expected to yield approximately 375 student responses, 225 to 300 responses from parents, and around 60 responses from staff. The actual participation rates were slightly different, with a 30% response rate from parents (yielding 226 responses), 39% from students (resulting in 295 responses), and a notable 63% from staff (totalling 75 responses), including both teaching and non-teaching personnel such as community liaison staff. This latter group's insights were invaluable for exploring facets of the home-school partnership beyond academic learning, such as addressing wellbeing concerns, a

theme highlighted in the literature review (NEU, 2020). I intended to use EFA which typically requires a sample size large enough to ensure reliable and valid results. A common guideline (Mundfrom et al., 2005) suggests a minimum of 5 to 10 participants per item in the survey, with an ideal total sample size of at least 300 participants. Given the anticipated response rates in this study—375 student responses, 225 to 300 parent responses, and 60 staff responses—the total expected sample size is within the recommended range for conducting EFA. This provided sufficient data to explore meaningful patterns and relationships among the variables in the home-school partnership context.

Following the questionnaire phase, 10 respondents from each category. students, parents, and staff, were selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews. This selection process followed an approach similar to that outlined by May and Etkina (2002), which emphasises identifying participants based on responses that reveal particularly interesting, diverse, or unexpected perspectives. In line with this, participants were purposively selected based on the strength and clarity of the views they expressed in the survey, whether positive or negative. This deliberate strategy was employed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and attitudes toward the home-school partnership, particularly during the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic. Including participants with strongly held views, both supportive and critical, enabled a more in-depth and nuanced exploration of the factors that facilitated or hindered effective collaboration. Staff members chosen for interviews were specifically those with close interactions with the student and parent participants, aligning with the study's focus on assessing the partnership's dynamics.

However, this approach is not without limitations. By focusing on participants with pronounced opinions, there is a risk of over-representing more extreme or atypical perspectives, potentially overlooking the more moderate or ambivalent views held by a broader section of the school community. Nevertheless, the richness and depth of data obtained through this method

provided valuable insight into the lived realities of the home–school partnership and contribute meaningfully to the study’s aims.

Purposive sampling was then employed to ensure the sample's diversity reflected varied ethnic backgrounds, acknowledging research suggesting different parental involvement priorities across ethnicities (Goodall, 2018; Chan and Ritchie, 2016; Billman et al., 2005). This method was pivotal in identifying interview participants capable of providing detailed insights into the evolving home-school relationship. Table A1 in the appendix shows a breakdown of participants for the semi-structured interviews by gender and ethnicity.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The school used as the case study for this research was also my former place of employment; I was employed there as a senior leader from September 2018 to August 2021. Following ethical approval from the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee in July 2022, I began collecting the quantitative data in September 2022. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2023 and September 2023. As such, I was no longer employed by the school at the time of data collection. However, my previous position inevitably shaped my positionality as a researcher. While my familiarity with the school’s context, structures, and stakeholder relationships provided valuable insight into the dynamics under investigation, it also required a reflexive approach to mitigate potential bias. I remained critically aware of how my former leadership role could influence both participant responses and my own interpretations. To address this, I ensured that participation in both the survey and interviews was fully anonymised and voluntary, thereby minimising perceived power imbalances. During data analysis, I adopted a reflexive stance and used verbatim transcripts to support a transparent and rigorous thematic coding process. By drawing on multiple stakeholder perspectives, students, staff, and parents,

and through conscious reflection on my dual role as former insider and external researcher, I sought to ensure ethical integrity and depth in exploring the evolving home–school partnership.

My research focused on the relationships between teachers, parents, and students.

Consequently, there was a potential ethical issue regarding the balance of power, which might have influenced the respondents' answers and subsequent behaviours, especially during the semi-structured interviews. To mitigate this risk, I maintained consistency in the tone and order of questions and allowed participants ample time to reflect on their responses. For instance, I requested suggestions before progressing to subsequent questions, facilitating an environment where participants felt no pressure to provide the 'correct' response. Moreover, following Williamson's (2007) guidance, I ensured participants were fully aware of potential discomforts that could arise from discussing their relationships with students, parents, and teachers, which might lead to negative reflections.

For the initial questionnaire, I emailed participants an information sheet outlining my research. The electronic form's opening screen included an introductory where participants confirmed they had read the information sheet and consented to participate, including parental consent for student participants. For interviews, I arranged face-to-face meetings where potential participants received an information sheet explaining the research aims, including the possibility of negative reflections. These meetings provided opportunities to ask questions and clarified that participants could withdraw at any time without repercussions – an assurance particularly important for students. During these meetings, participants primarily sought clarification regarding the aims of the research and the possibility of accessing the findings. I explained that a copy of the completed thesis would be made available to them. Questions were also raised about the anticipated duration of the interviews, and I advised that these were expected to last between 40 minutes and one hour. Following these discussions, I was satisfied that participants

had a clear understanding of the study's purpose and the nature of their informed consent. Written consent was then obtained to ensure informed participation and parental consent was obtained for student participants before they were interviewed.

The initial questionnaire sample included all teachers, students, and parents from the school. Parents were contacted via a text message linking to the questionnaire on the school website, while teachers and students received email links. Distributed through Microsoft Forms, the questionnaire allowed participants to skip uncomfortable questions, reducing potential discomfort. The opening page reiterated key details from the information sheet and sought consent. For non-English speakers, Microsoft Forms offered translation into their preferred languages, although this option was not used by any participant. Given the high proportion of students and families in the school community for whom English is an additional language, this was somewhat unexpected. One possible explanation is that those who chose to participate were already confident in their English proficiency, suggesting an element of self-selection that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

For the semi-structured interviews, I designed questions to prompt participants to reflect on their opinions while minimising distress. By focusing on the pandemic's impact on the home-school partnership across the school, I reduced the pressure on individuals to provide socially desirable responses.

Confidentiality was upheld by restricting interview data access to myself and pseudonymising participants after selection. Quantitative survey responses were stored securely on my university network and initially remained non-anonymised to identify participants for the semi-structured interviews based on interesting response patterns (May and Etkina, 2002). Once selected, participants were pseudonymised as Parent 1, Student 1, or Staff 1, for example,

ensuring anonymity throughout the study. Ethical approval for this study was granted through the process of the UCL IOE Research Ethics committee in May 2021.

After detailing the research design that guided this study and supported data collection to address my research questions, the next chapter begins by presenting the phase one data collection methods, specifically an online survey. It then explains how the survey results shaped the development of semi-structured interview questions for phase two of data collection.

4. INITIAL SURVEY METHODS

Having outlined this study's research design, this next section sets out how I collected the initial survey data used as part of the analysis. This encompasses a description of the initial survey's design, including the selection and piloting of the survey instrument. I then clarify the process of analysing the survey data, illustrating how this analysis not only generates its own set of findings but also informs the subsequent phase of the research design which involves the development of semi-structured interview questions.

The initial phase of data collection in my mixed-methods approach involved conducting a primarily quantitative online survey. This survey asked participants to respond to a range of statements about the home-school partnership, the insights from which were instrumental in shaping the subsequent phase of the research design. While this first phase was crucial for gathering broad, generalisable data on participants' perceptions and experiences, it inherently lacked the capacity to delve into the nuanced "how" aspects of the research questions. This limitation suggested the need for an integration between the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. To bridge this gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, the findings from the initial survey informed the development of semi-structured interview questions for the subsequent second phase. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the themes that emerged from the initial survey, enabling a more detailed

investigation into the mechanisms and processes underlying the home-school partnership. By combining these two phases, the research design leverages the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, facilitating a richer, more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

A pilot study was first conducted, with the majority of items in the pilot survey presented as statements using Likert scale response options. Additionally, there was a question asking participants to prioritise components of a partnership, such as the sharing of skills, viewpoints, and information (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). The survey also included an open-ended question at the end, asking participants for their opinion on how the home-school partnership has changed following school closures. The Likert scale items focused on how the home-school partnership for staff, parents, and students may have been affected by the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic. 5-point Likert scales were chosen to allow for subsequent exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and to obtain an increased response rate when compared to using only open-ended questions (Babakus and Mangold, 1992; Sachdev and Verma, 2004). Additionally, a 5-point Likert scale helps to provide evidence of more distinct thought patterns through more response options (Sachdev and Verma, 2004) when compared to a simple yes/no option. The trade off in depth of responses was partially addressed through an open comments question at the end of this survey. The open-ended question also helped to identify potential participants for the subsequent semi-structured interviews, as per May and Etkina (2002), for whom the home-school partnership had been most affected by school closures.

The initial questions for the phase one survey were influenced by Ferrara (2017) and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) who used the National Standards for Family School Partnerships in the US to construct a survey to understand family-school partnerships. The questions used by Ferrara and the CDE were adjusted for my research using the framework of a partnership as defined by Gerdes et al. (2021) and Akkerman and Bakker (2011). This was achieved by asking participants their viewpoints on the sharing of skills, knowledge and viewpoints as well as their opinions on collaboration, cooperation, and coordination. The survey questions were also influenced by my literature review to include a focus on wellbeing, communication, and leadership by schools. The questions I asked, and their link to theoretical constructs suggested by Gerdes et al. (2021) and Akkerman and Bakker (2011) are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Survey instruments and their link to relevant theoretical constructs. (Bold type indicates questions that were removed after a pilot survey. Italic type indicates the new wording of questions that were amended after a pilot study.)

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT	STUDENTS	PARENTS	STAFF
Boundary crossing between equal agents	1) Can you rank the following in how important they are to you? (1 = most important, 3 = least important). Sharing of information about what needs to be done regarding my learning; sharing of skills regarding how to learn more effectively; sharing of my opinions between myself, my parents, and my teachers?	1) Can you rank the following in how important they are to you? (1 = most important, 3 = least important). Sharing of information; sharing of skills; sharing of viewpoints?	1) Can you rank the following in how important they are to you? (1 = most important, 3 = least important). Sharing of information; sharing of skills; sharing of viewpoints?
Sharing of Skills	2) I understood what was expected for me to be successful at school during COVID related school closures 3) The school shares information about my progress and how to improve my learning at home	2) I understood what was expected for my child to be successful at school during COVID related school closures 3) The school shares information about my child's progress and how I can support my child's learning	2) I understood what was expected for my students to be successful at school during COVID related school closures 3) The school shares information about my students' progress and how parents can support learning at home

Sharing of Information	4) The school makes it easy for my parent/guardian to be involved in my education 5) The school communicates with home in many ways (e.g., calls, texts, emails, letters) 6) My parent/guardian receive training and help from the school about how to help with my homework	4) The school makes it easy for me to be involved in my child's education 5) The school communicates with me in many ways (e.g., calls, texts, emails, letters) 6) I receive training and help from the school about how to help with my child's homework	4) The school makes it easy for parents to be involved in their child's education 5) The school communicates with home in many ways (e.g. calls, texts, emails, letters) 6) parents receive training and help from the school about how to help with their child's homework
Sharing of viewpoints	7) The school asks my opinion about issues and concerns about missed learning as a result of COVID 8) It is easy for my parents/guardians to bring up issues or concerns with the headteacher and teachers	7) The school asks my opinion about issues and concerns about missed learning as a result of COVID 8) It is easy for parents to bring up issues or concerns with the headteacher and teachers	7) The school asks parents' opinion about issues and concerns about missed learning as a result of COVID 8) It is easy for parents to bring up issues or concerns with the headteacher and teachers

Collaboration between equal agents	9) The school gives opportunities for my family to connect with other families 10) My parents/guardians receive training and help from the school about how to help with my homework 11) I have the chance to participate in the decisions about my education	9) The school gives opportunities for my family to connect with other families 10) I receive training and help from the school about how to help with my child's homework 11) I have the chance to participate in the decision-making process about interventions and support for my child	9) The school gives opportunities for families to connect with other families 10) Parents receive training and help from the school about how to help with their child's homework 11) Parents and students have the chance to participate in the decision-making process about interventions and support for students
Coordination between equal agents	12) The school helped the community during COVID school closures	12) The school helped the community during COVID school closures	12) The school helped the community during COVID school closures

Cooperation between equal agents	13) My parents/ guardian regularly checks the learning I do at home 14) My parent/guardian receive training and help from the school about how to help with my homework	13) I regularly check the learning my child is doing at home 14) I receive training and help from the school about how to help with my child's homework	13) Parents regularly check the learning their child is doing at home 14) Parents receive training and help from the school about how to help with their child's homework
Trust	<u>15) I have a better relationship with my teachers after COVID</u> 16) I feel welcome at my school 17) My parent/guardian regularly checks the learning I do at home	<u>15) I have a better relationship with my child's teachers after COVID</u> 16) I feel welcome at my child's school 17) I regularly check the learning my child is doing at home	<u>15) I have a better relationship with my students and their parents after COVID</u> 16) Parents feel welcome at school 17) Parents regularly check the learning their child is doing at home

Identity	18) School staff respect and value the diversity of the families in the school 19) The school gives opportunities for my family to connect with other families about COVID concerns 20) The school helped the community during COVID school closures 21) How would you describe how the home-school partnership has changed as a result of lockdowns caused by the COVID pandemic?	18) School staff respect and value the diversity of the families in the school 19) The school gives opportunities for my family to connect with other families 20) The school helped the community during COVID school closures 21) How would you describe how the home-school partnership has changed as a result of lockdowns caused by the COVID pandemic?	18) School staff respect and value the diversity of the families in the school 19) The school gives opportunities for families to connect with other families 20) The school helped the community during COVID school closures 21) How would you describe how the home-school partnership has changed as a result of lockdowns caused by the COVID pandemic?
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Notes. The theoretical constructs here are based on Gerdes et al. (2021) and Akkerman and Bakker (2011).

According to Kasunic (2005), there are three criteria that need to be met to ensure valid responses to survey questions. These are that participants are able to:

- 1) Understand the question
- 2) Be capable of providing the information requested
- 3) Be willing to provide the information requested

To evaluate the effectiveness of my survey questions, I conducted a preliminary pilot study using an online survey at a neighbouring school. A small, random sample of three participants from each group (teachers, students, and parents) was selected for the pilot. The pilot survey, consisting of 21 questions (as shown in Table 4.1), was administered online via Microsoft Forms to members of a secondary school community. The feedback gathered helped refine the questionnaire for its subsequent use. Feedback indicated that responses dropped off after question 15, with participants either skipping these questions or selecting the “Unsure” option, suggesting there were too many questions. This observation aligns with the findings of Revilla and Ochoa (2017), who recommend a survey duration of around 10 minutes, and not exceeding 20 minutes, in line with the average adult's attention span as noted by Cape and Phillips (2015). They further highlighted that questions positioned towards the end of a survey typically experience higher non-response rates, suggesting the need for careful consideration of survey length and question placement.

The pilot study showed that the average adult response time per question for my online form was one minute per question. Assuming that a student's attention span is likely to be lower, this suggested an optimal number of questions between 10-15 for my final survey. Many of the questions that were poorly answered were based on the earlier definitions of a parental partnership involving cooperation, collaboration and coordination. The pilot suggested that the wording of these questions required refining as the majority of participants gave a response of “Do not know”. Following Kasunic (2005), the pilot survey revealed that my internal questions, those directly aimed at addressing my research questions, were not suitable for asking participants in their original form. Directly inquiring whether their home-school partnership had been affected did not yield meaningful responses, highlighting the need to amend these questions for greater effectiveness. Due to the nature of my research questions focusing on participants' opinions on partnerships, my questions needed to be more nuanced rather than

directly asking participants what their opinions were and so, considering the argument of Revilla and Ochoa (2017), these questions were removed following my pilot study. This change shortened the survey duration and improved the response rate for all questions. The remaining questions yielded sufficient responses to inform my interview questions and were retained in the final survey.

Initially, I planned to ask participants to prioritise information, skills, and viewpoints based on their perceived importance to a home-school partnership. However, feedback from the pilot survey revealed confusion about the distinctions between these terms, with many participants considering them equally important. While this aligns with Akkerman and Bakker's work, highlighting the value of sharing skills, viewpoints, and opinions in partnerships, I chose to remove Question 1 to avoid confusion that might influence responses to subsequent questions.

Based on insights from the pilot study, I strategically repositioned the more sensitive questions towards the beginning of the questionnaire. While ensuring these questions were not placed immediately at the start to avoid deterring participants, I aimed to capture responses to these critical items before potential drop-off points. Subsequently, I removed a number of questions (which are indicated in bold in table 5.1). I also changed the wording of the question which originally read as "*I have a good relationship with my teachers*" to "I have a better relationship with my teacher/parent/child since schools reopened". This was altered to provide a measure of comparison to pre COVID times which was more useful to answer my research questions compared to the original form. Following the amendments as a result of the pilot study I was left with a final list of 13 questions which are shown in the next section.

4.1 Variables used

The previous section detailed the refinement of my initial survey instruments to address my research questions on home-school partnerships. This section begins by presenting the final set of questions for the stage one survey and the response options available to all three participant groups. While Table 4.1 linked these variables to existing literature, Table 4.2 below outlines the possible responses and their coding for the EFA.

Table 4.2 Showing the coded variables used in this study alongside the possible responses for the participants.

Question ID	Question Text	Response Options
Better_Relationship_PostCOVID	I have a better relationship with my teacher/parent/child since schools reopened	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Feel_Welcome	I feel welcome at the school.	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Respect_Diversity	School staff respect and value the diversity of the school community	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Parent_Involve	The school makes it easy for parents to be involved in their child's education	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
School_Parent_Comms_Various	The school communicates with parents in different ways	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Opinion_On_Missed_Learning	The school asks my opinion about issues with missed learning as a result of school closures	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Family_Connect	The school gives opportunities for families to connect with each other	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Share_Progress_Info	The school shares information about students' progress	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Check_HW	Parents regularly check their child's home learning	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Parent_Training_HW	Parents have received training and help regarding how to support their child's learning at home	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Connect_Community_To_Resources	The school connects families to educational resources in the community that supported during school closures	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Helped_Community	The school has helped the community during school closures	1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Home_School_Partnership_Changes	How would you describe how the home-school partnership has changed as a result of lockdowns caused by the COVID pandemic?	Open-ended responses

In this section I have outlined the final choice of questions for the stage one survey, the variables used for the EFA, and their available responses. The next section will move onto the next part of the overall research design and explain the EFA data analysis technique that I used. For the research design to be effective, the initial stage of data collection needed to inform the development of the subsequent interview questions, ensuring they were well-suited to address the research questions.

4.2 EFA data analysis

One of the aims of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is to summarise a set of variables so that relationships and patterns can be more easily identified (Yong and Pearce, 2013). As such, I used EFA to regroup the variables from my questionnaire into a group of factors based on shared variance between the responses to my questionnaire. Factor analysis works on the idea that the answers to my survey are influenced by a smaller number of hidden (latent) variables (or factors) that share a common variance (Bartholomew, Knott, and Moustaki, 2011). These factors are not directly measured but are hypothetical constructs that can be used to represent the variables from my questionnaire and help to identify patterns that I can use to construct my semi-structured interview questions (Cattell, 1978). The method posits that variables included in the analysis reflect the manifest measurements of one or more of the latent factors. Essentially, this process allowed me to see the bigger picture from my stage one survey data for parents, students, and staff, by identifying these latent variables. This process was conducted separately for each of the parent, student, and staff samples.

To inform a judgement on whether there is sufficient correlation between the variables to proceed with factor analysis, Bartlett's test of sphericity was conducted (Yong and Pearce, 2013). If there were insufficient correlations to proceed with factor analysis, I may have needed to analyse what the issues were regarding my data collection plan not aligning with the data I was intending to capture. If this eventuality had occurred, I would have proceeded with the semi-structured interviews with the questions based on the literature on educational partnerships cited above, along with any themes that were commonly mentioned in the open comments section of the questionnaire.

I then conducted a Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) test to ensure my analysis was appropriate. The KMO test measures the extent to which a set of measures are related to each other by

partitioning variance into shared and unique components. It is important for there to be some level of correlation between the measures (or shared variance), which is indicated by higher values of the KMO, but not too much that may indicate issues with multicollinearity.

Multicollinearity refers to situations where two or more variables are highly correlated which makes it difficult for any analysis to distinguish their individual associations, which could lead to unreliable or misleading results. The intention here was to identify the responses that while correlated, provide unique information to the factors that are attempting to be identified.

Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) advise that the KMO value should be above 0.5 and up to 0.8 to avoid the issue with multicollinearity mentioned earlier (Hair et al., 2006).

The EFA also helped me to identify the fewest number of factors that accounted for the largest amount of covariance within the entire observed data for each participant. The process was finalised by categorising responses into themes based on their covariance, and then comparing these themes with those identified in the literature on partnership frameworks (Gerdes et al., 2021; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011; McNamara, 2012).

EFA typically relies on Pearson's correlation matrix, which presupposes that the variables are continuous measurements. This assumption, when not met, can result in the underestimation of the strength of covariance (Baglin, 2014). Given the categorical nature of the survey questions in this study, I used a polychoric correlation matrix instead (Kolenikov and Angeles, 2009). This approach is better suited for analysing the underlying relationships between categorical variables. To determine the number of factors to retain, factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 will be considered. In this context, an eigenvalue represents the amount of variance explained by a factor, relative to the total variance captured by the correlation matrix. A factor with an eigenvalue exceeding 1 signifies that it accounts for more variance than any single item within that factor, thereby justifying its retention for further analysis (Kaufman and Dunlop, 2000).

Bryant and Yarnold (1995) highlight that factor rotations simplify factor loadings, thereby facilitating the interpretation of factors. The rotations adjust the way factors are positioned by rotating the axis to make the relationships between the variables and the factors clearer. This helps to better understand which variables group together under each factor, making the overall structure of the data easier to interpret without changing the actual data itself. The primary goal of this procedure in my research was to interpret these factors to develop questions for subsequent interviews. Consequently, after conducting the initial EFA, I proceeded with an oblique rotation based on its results. This decision was informed by the understanding that oblique rotation does not assume the factors to be uncorrelated, unlike orthogonal rotation (Costello and Osborne, 2005). This assumption is more aligned with the reality of my research, where the underlying latent constructs are generally expected to be correlated. Thus, oblique rotation was deemed more appropriate for revealing the nuanced relationships among the constructs in this study.

Once the factors were identified, I analysed the responses that loaded onto each identified factor and assigned a name to that factor that best represented the variables that it predicted. EFA was used instead of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as the phenomena of researching partnerships following the pressure of a global lockdown of education is relatively recent, and as such there is little existing research to confirm or pre group the questions for the subsequent interviews. A drawback of using EFA is that often the factors posited are difficult to label (Watkins, 2018). However, as my primary aim was to use the findings from the EFA to frame the questions for the subsequent semi-structured interviews, more tentative labels based on the literature and my theoretical framework could be assigned to these factors as appropriate. The online survey questions were intended to identify themes according to the questions that covary with each other which can then lead to more granular analysis through the semi-structured interviews used in the second stage of my methodology.

I kept the items that showed strong relationships (with factor loadings above 0.4) and grouped them into specific factors which is consistent with statistical norms (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996; Yong and Pearce, 2013). Next, I measured the internal consistency of each factor using a measurement known as Cronbach's Alpha. Internal consistency tells us how well the items within a factor work together to measure the same concept. Ideally, I wanted a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.8 (Chan and Idris, 2017) which indicates good consistency among the items in each factor.

In addition to the EFA, I also used the open-ended question at the end of each survey to help identify themes and to help label the factors that emerged through thematic coding analysis of these responses.

5. INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS

Following the online survey data collection, the section below presents the results for students, parents, and staff from the case study school, each group's results detailed separately for clarity and insight. The findings from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) shown here helped to inform the design of the semi -structured interview questions that were used in the second stage of my data collection.

As mentioned by Watkins (2018), an issue of using EFA is that often the factors posited are difficult to label. I labelled the factors below by examining the questions that load onto them with a value greater than 0.4, with the aim of summarising the main theme these questions were exploring. Factor analysis identified coherent patterns within the participant datasets, indicating that these factors warranted further exploration through semi-structured interviews.

5.1 Results for students

Before beginning the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), I conducted a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, which evaluates sampling adequacy by measuring shared variance among variable pairs and determines if variables have sufficient commonality for factor analysis. Upon applying the KMO test to my dataset of 12 variables from a sample size of $N=295$ observations, the outcome was a KMO score of 0.322. According to the guidelines provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), this score is on the lower end of the spectrum, indicating that the shared variance among the variables is not as substantial as is preferable for factor analysis. Generally, KMO values range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater suitability for factor analysis. Scores above 0.6 are typically considered acceptable, with values closer to 1 being ideal as they imply a higher degree of shared variance.

Despite the relatively low KMO score of 0.322 in my analysis, it still falls within the range that Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) consider to be acceptable for proceeding with an EFA. This acceptance is based on the understanding that while the shared variance is not optimal, there is still a sufficient basis to explore the underlying factor structure of the dataset.

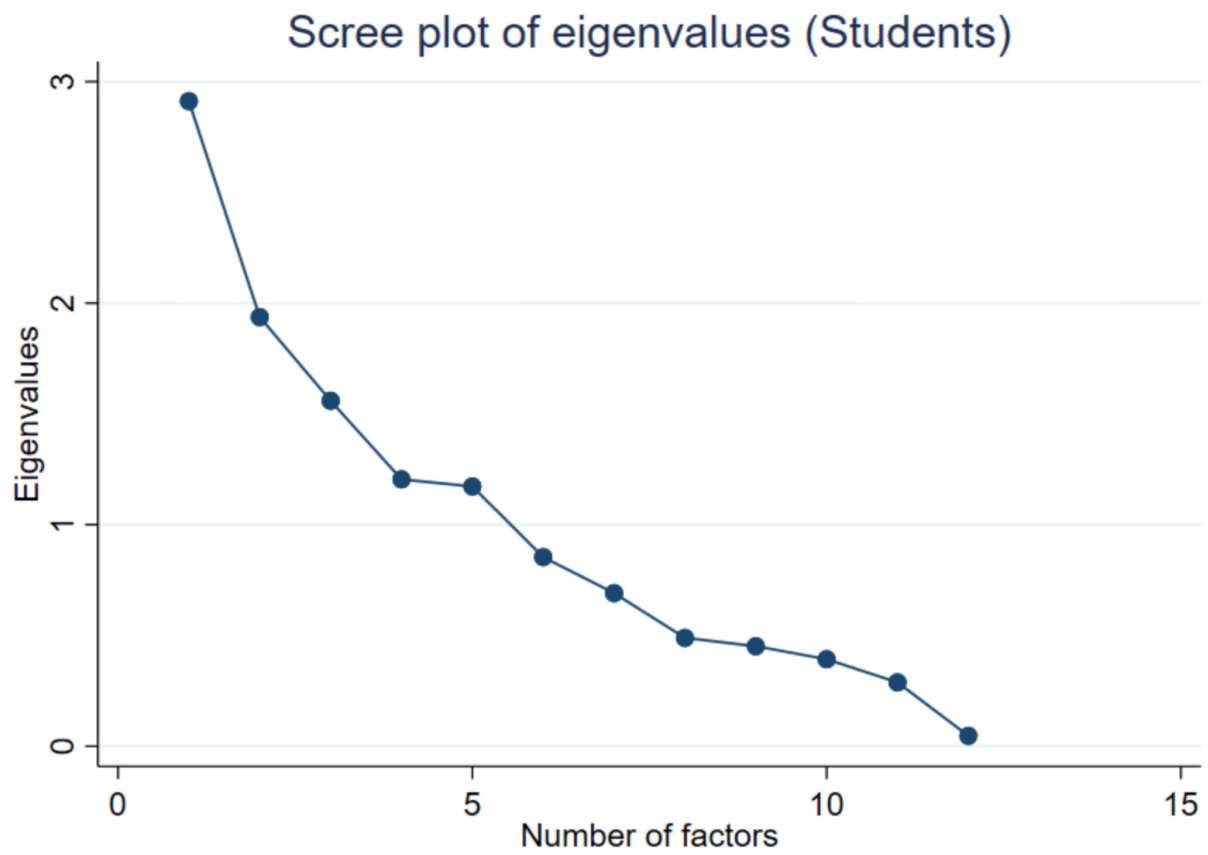
In this context, an acceptable KMO score, even one that is generally low, implies that while the dataset may not be in the ideal range for factor analysis, it still possesses enough common variance among variables to justify the exploration of its factor structure. The interpretation of the EFA results, therefore, should be conducted with a nuanced understanding of these limitations, ensuring that conclusions drawn are carefully weighed against the initial data suitability as indicated by the KMO test.

Next, I carried out a Bartlett's test of sphericity, which checks whether there is enough correlation or patterned relationships amongst the variables, against a null hypothesis that the variables are unrelated and therefore unsuited for structure definition. In this case the test

yielded a score of 1352, with the figure being statistically significant ($p = 0.008$, indicating a low probability that we would see a result as or more extreme than this assuming the null hypothesis of no correlation is true), thus supporting the use of EFA. A polychoric correlation matrix was estimated for the 12 retained questions, as the variables were ordinal in nature. This was followed by an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the matrix, with oblique rotation applied to account for the likelihood of correlated factors (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

The oblique rotation of the EFA estimated the presence of five factors with an eigenvalue of at least 1, where the eigenvalue shows the amount of variance explained by each factor; an eigenvalue of 1 means that a factor explains as much variance as any single variable which is crucial to identify meaningful patterns. Although the scree plot in figure 5.1 below shows a more distinct 'elbow' after four factors, Kaufman and Dunlap (2000) recommend that researchers consider factors with an eigenvalue of at least 1 since this implies that the factor captures more variance in the data than any single individual variable within it, making it valuable for understanding the underlying structures in my data. Consequently, I proceeded with five factors in the factor analysis to maximise the potential for these factors to inform the development of my semi-structured interview questions. Before removing variables with a factor loading below 0.4, the five factors identified in the analysis cumulatively explained 73% of the variance in the measured variables. This indicates a substantial portion of the overall variance was captured by these factors, highlighting their significance in the dataset. Also shown are the Cronbach's Alpha score for each factor which measures the internal consistency of the variables. A higher Cronbach's Alpha score indicates a higher shared covariance between the variables that each factor loads onto (Taber, 2018).

Figure 5.1 Scree plot showing the eigenvalues for students



Notes. N = 295

Table 5.2 below numbers the questions to aid in identifying co-varying statements for the EFA.

Table 5.2 Factor loadings for students for each question (S.Factor 1 means student factor 1 etc)

Variable name	S.Factor 1	S.Factor 2	S.Factor 3	S.Factor 4	S.Factor 5
1. Opinion_On-Missed_Learning	0.8390	0.0186	-0.1493	0.367	-0.3246
2. Feel_Welcome	0.8005	0.2483	0.1298	-0.1457	0.0813
3. Parent_Training_HW	-0.7096	0.1283	-0.142	0.109	-0.3461
4. Family_Connect	-0.3677	0.3494	-0.352	0.1229	0.3464
5. Respect_Diversity	-0.0838	-0.8578	-0.0311	-0.2396	0.1044
6. Connect_Community_To_Resources	-0.257	0.6600	0.2115	-0.037	0.1145
7. Helped_Community	0.4103	0.6441	-0.056	-0.171	-0.1368
8. Parent_Involve	-0.0089	0.202	0.9107	0.0406	0.088
9. School_Parent_Comms_Various	0.0887	-0.2625	0.6383	0.2383	-0.0747
10. Share_Progress_Info	-0.0843	0.1743	0.1899	0.9013	-0.0395
11. Check_HW	0.3193	-0.0594	-0.1407	0.6868	0.4355
12. Better_Relationship_PostCOVID	-0.043	-0.0695	0.0491	0.0801	0.9267
Cronbach's alpha (before non-retained factors were removed)	0.7447	0.5059	0.5335	0.5068	0.5041

Notes. Bold figures indicate loadings in excess of 0.4

After excluding predictor statements with factor loadings of below 0.4, the five factors identified were predicted by the following statements.

Student Factor 1 Statements

- 1. The school asks my opinion about issues and concerns about missed learning.
- 2. I feel welcome at the school.
- 3. Parents have received training and help from the school about how to help with homework (Negative loading).
- 7. The school has helped the community during COVID.

After conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on all the items in the questionnaire, the EFA identified factors onto which were strongly loaded. The next step was to review the items that loaded onto each factor to identify and assign a relevant factor label. The factor analysis revealed that these questions consistently moved together, indicating that they are related and measure a similar concept. As mentioned earlier, I assigned a name to this factor that best represents the variables it predicted, and it became evident that they collectively represented a specific aspect of the school experience.

I labelled Student Factor 1 as "School Support and Inclusivity" as this label encapsulates the core theme identified by the factor analysis. The four statements within this factor reflect key aspects such as feeling valued, being welcomed, receiving support, and participating in the school community. The high loadings on these statements (above 0.4) indicate how strongly each variable is associated with the underlying factor. A higher loading signifies a stronger association with the factor. In this case, "Opinion_On-Missed_Learning" (0.8390) and "Feel_Welcome" (0.8005) have high positive loadings, suggesting that there is a meaningful

factor based on the shared variance of these statements. The loading for "Helped_Community" (0.4103) is moderate, indicating a positive but less strong association with the underlying factor.

The negative loading on "Parent_Training_HW" (-0.7096) suggests an inverse relationship with the factor. This implies that this statement is pulling in the opposite direction to the other statements which covary together. One potential explanation for this negative loading could be that in an inclusive and supportive school environment, students feel more confident and capable of handling homework independently, reducing the perceived need for additional parent training. Alternatively, it could indicate that in highly supportive school environments, other forms of support (e.g., teacher assistance, peer collaboration) may be more readily available, making parent training on homework less critical. This may also illustrate a common issue in secondary schools, where students tend to perceive lower levels of parental engagement than actually exist. This perception gap is supported by research from DePlanty et al. (2007), Paulson and Sputa (1996), and Liu et al. (2021), which suggests that students often underestimate the extent of their parents' involvement in their education.

Hence, the label "School Support and Inclusivity" effectively summarises the shared concept represented by these Likert scale questions. This label emphasises the critical role of a positive and supportive school environment where students feel valued and connected, which aligns with the notion of boundary crossing. By fostering an inclusive atmosphere, schools facilitate the exchange of skills, information, and viewpoints among students, teachers, and families, thereby enhancing overall wellbeing and academic success (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011).

Student Factor 2 Statements

- 5. The school connects families to education and resources.
- 6. The school has helped the community during COVID.
- 7. The school respects diversity (Negative loading).

The factor analysis indicated that there is a meaningful factor based on the shared variance among these statements. This means that there is a common underlying cause or factor that these statements collectively represent. The analysis shows that this factor tends to predict agreement with statements about the school connecting families to education and resources (0.6600) and helping the community during COVID (0.6441), but disagreement with the statement about respecting diversity (-0.8578).

The label "Community Engagement and Support" aptly captures this factor, suggesting boundary crossing to build partnerships (Gerdes et al., 2021), which aligns with my research on home-school partnerships. It highlights the school's critical role in providing resources and support, particularly during crises like the COVID pandemic. However, the negative loading for "Respect Diversity" indicates a need to understand why perceptions of community support may correlate with a lower emphasis on diversity. This suggests that while the school is seen as supportive, there might be perceived gaps or trade-offs in its approach to inclusivity and respect for diversity.

One possible explanation is that efforts focused on immediate community support might overshadow or deprioritise diversity initiatives and could be an example of the tension discussed by Barrett et al. (2012), in finding the optimal amount of support that schools should provide to students in crisis events. Understanding these dynamics can help the school balance its support

strategies to enhance both community engagement and inclusivity (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Barker et al., 2021).

Student Factor 3 Statements

- 8. The school makes it easy for parents to be involved in their child's education
- 9. Parents have received training on how to support with homework

The factor analysis revealed that these statements share a meaningful factor based on their common variance. Specifically, the underlying factor predicts agreement with the school's efforts to facilitate parental involvement in their child's education (0.9107) and a moderate positive association with parents receiving training to support homework (0.6383).

This factor indicates a shared perception among respondents that the school is committed to fostering strong home-school communication and parental involvement. By ensuring parents are well-informed and equipped to support their children's education, the school enhances the overall educational experience.

Thus, the label "Home-School Communication" aptly encapsulates the essence of this factor. This label highlights the school's dedication to creating a supportive partnership with parents, facilitating their engagement in their child's learning process, and maintaining open communication channels for effective collaboration.

The high loading on "Parent_Involve" suggests that respondents perceive significant efforts by the school to involve parents actively, while the moderate loading on "School_Parent_Comms_Various" emphasises the importance of diverse communication strategies to support this involvement. These findings align with existing literature on the

benefits of parental involvement in education, which emphasises the positive impact on student achievement and well-being (Epstein, 2011).

Student Factor 4 Statements

- 10. The school shares information about students' progress with my parents
- 11. Parents regularly check the home learning that students are doing

This factor predicts agreement with the school's efforts to share information about students' progress with parents (0.9013) and a moderate positive agreement with parents regularly checking home learning activities (0.6868).

These loadings indicate that respondents perceive a strong link between the school's communication about student progress and the active involvement of parents in monitoring their children's learning at home. The high loading for "Share_Progress_Info" suggests that the most significant aspect of this factor is the school's proactive communication regarding academic progress, while the moderate loading for "Check_HW" highlights the important but slightly less central role of parental involvement in checking homework.

Therefore, the label "Academic Communication" accurately summarises the shared concept represented by these statements. This label highlights the importance of effective communication between the school and parents regarding students' academic progress and the active role parents play in supporting their children's education. This focus on academic communication is crucial for strengthening the home-school partnership, as emphasised by Epstein (2011) and McNamara (2012), who argue that regular and transparent communication between schools and parents significantly improves educational outcomes and fosters a supportive learning environment.

Student Factor 5 Statements

- 11. Parents regularly check the homework that students are doing
- 12. I have a better relationship with my teachers and parents as post COVID

This factor predicts an agreement between the perception that COVID-related circumstances have improved relationships between students, teachers, and parents (0.9267) and a moderate agreement with parental involvement in checking homework (0.4355).

These loadings suggest that student respondents who see an improvement in educational relationships post-COVID also tend to believe that parents are involved in their children's homework. The high loading on "Better_Relationship_PostCOVID" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the students' perceived enhancement of relationships between students, teachers, and parents due to the experiences during COVID. The moderate loading on "Check_HW" reflects a supportive role of parents in their children's education.

Therefore, the label "Educational Relationships" aptly encapsulates this shared concept. This label highlights the significance of improved interactions and relationships in the educational process, emphasising the positive impact of increased parental engagement and the strengthened bonds between students, teachers, and parents post-COVID. These improved relationships are crucial for creating a supportive and collaborative educational environment, as supported by Moss et al. (2020).

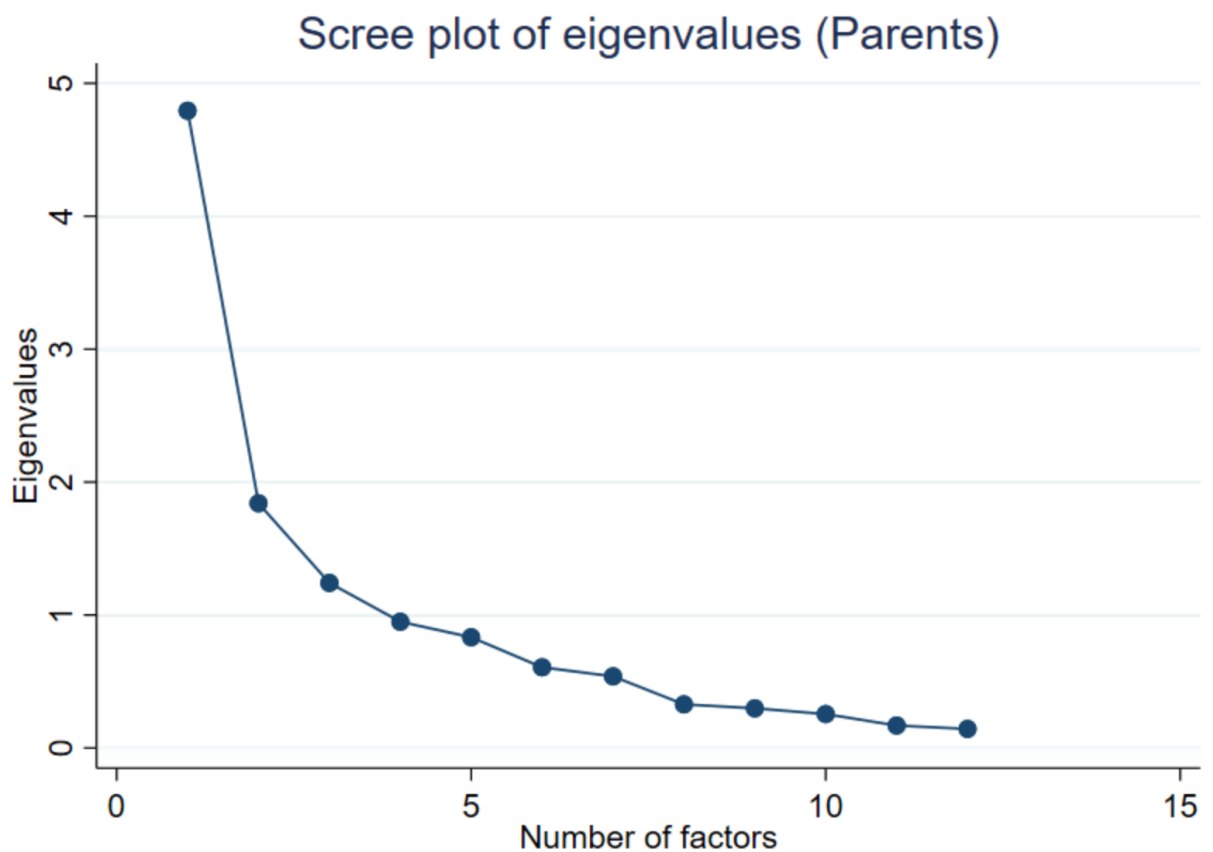
Further exploration of these dynamics can offer valuable insights into how the challenges of COVID-19 contributed to strengthened educational relationships. The increased communication and collaboration during remote learning may have fostered a deeper understanding and partnership among parents, teachers, and students. This highlights the importance of sustaining

these strengthened relationships to support students' academic progress and emotional well-being.

5.2 Results for parents

For the parent participant group, Bartlett's test of sphericity score was 1401.686, and the KMO score was 0.75.

Figure 5.3. Scree plot showing eigenvalues for parents



N = 226

Table 5.4 Factor loadings for parents for each question (P. Factor 1 means parent factor 1 etc)

Variable name	P. Factor 1	P. Factor 2	P. Factor 3
2. Feel_Welcome	0.9572	0.0573	-0.241
5. Respect_Diversity	0.8937	-0.0099	-0.0516
9. School_Parent_Comms_Various	0.7506	-0.3075	0.1993
8. Parent_Involve	0.5666	0.3327	0.092
4. Family_Connect	-0.176	0.9681	-0.1064
3. Parent_Training_HW	0.0174	0.7847	0.0555
12. Better_Relationship_PostCOVID	0.1113	0.7795	0.1157
1. Opinion_On_Missed_Learning	0.4234	0.4909	0.0386
11. Check_HW	-0.3905	0.058	0.8943
7. Helped_Community	0.2544	-0.0727	0.6693
10. Share_Info_Progress	0.2764	-0.0262	0.6291
6. Connect_Community_To_Resources	0.0971	0.1482	0.4525
Cronbach's alpha	0.8214	0.8328	0.6683

Notes. Bold figures indicate loadings in excess of 0.4

Parent Factor 1 Statements

- 2. I feel welcome at the school
- 5. The school respects diversity
- 9. The school communicates in various ways
- 8. The school makes it easy for me to be involved in my child's education

This factor predicts agreement with feeling welcome at the school (0.9572), respecting diversity (0.8937), utilising various communication channels (0.7506), and facilitating parental involvement (0.5666).

These loadings suggest that respondents perceive a strong link between the school's inclusive atmosphere, its respect for diversity, its effective communication practices, and its efforts to involve parents in their child's education. The high loading on "Feel_Welcome" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the welcoming environment, while the other statements contribute to the overall perception of inclusivity and communication.

Therefore, the label "Inclusive Communication" aptly summarises this shared concept. This label aligns with the research emphasising the importance of effective communication to maintain partnerships (Epstein, 1993; Caplan, 1993) and highlights the significance of creating a school environment that fosters a sense of belonging, values diversity, maintains effective communication with parents, and actively encourages their involvement in their child's education. These elements are crucial for building a supportive and inclusive school community (Anderson, 2020).

Parent Factor 2

- 4. The school gives opportunities for families to connect
- 3. I have received training on how to help with homework
- 12. I have a better relationship with my child post COVID
- 1. The school asks my opinion about missed learning

The loadings on these statements suggest a common factor that manifests through these four statements. The loadings also indicate that there is agreement between the statements that are relevant to the school's efforts to provide opportunities for families to connect (0.9681), offer training on supporting homework (0.7847), foster improved relationships post-COVID (0.7795), and seek parents' opinions on missed learning (0.4909).

These loadings suggest that respondents perceive an agreement between the school's initiatives to engage families, provide necessary resources, and promote positive relationships. The high loading on "Family_Connect" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the school's effort to create opportunities for family engagement, while the other statements contribute to the perception of family empowerment and relationship building.

Therefore, the label "Family Empowerment and Relationship Building" aptly summarises this shared concept. This label highlights the importance of a school environment that actively engages with families, provides resources and training to support parents, and encourages strong relationships between parents and their children. This label aligns with research by Gerdes et al., (2021), suggesting that these efforts are crucial for fostering a collaborative approach to addressing educational needs and enhancing family involvement in education.

Parent Factor 3

- 11. I regularly check homework
- 7. The school has helped the community during COVID
- 10. The school shares information about my child's progress
- 6. The school connects my family to resources

The factor analysis revealed that these statements share a meaningful factor based on their common variance. This factor shows an agreement between the statements relevant to parents regularly checking homework (0.8943), the school's assistance to the community during COVID (0.6693), sharing information about children's progress (0.6291), and connecting families to resources (0.4525).

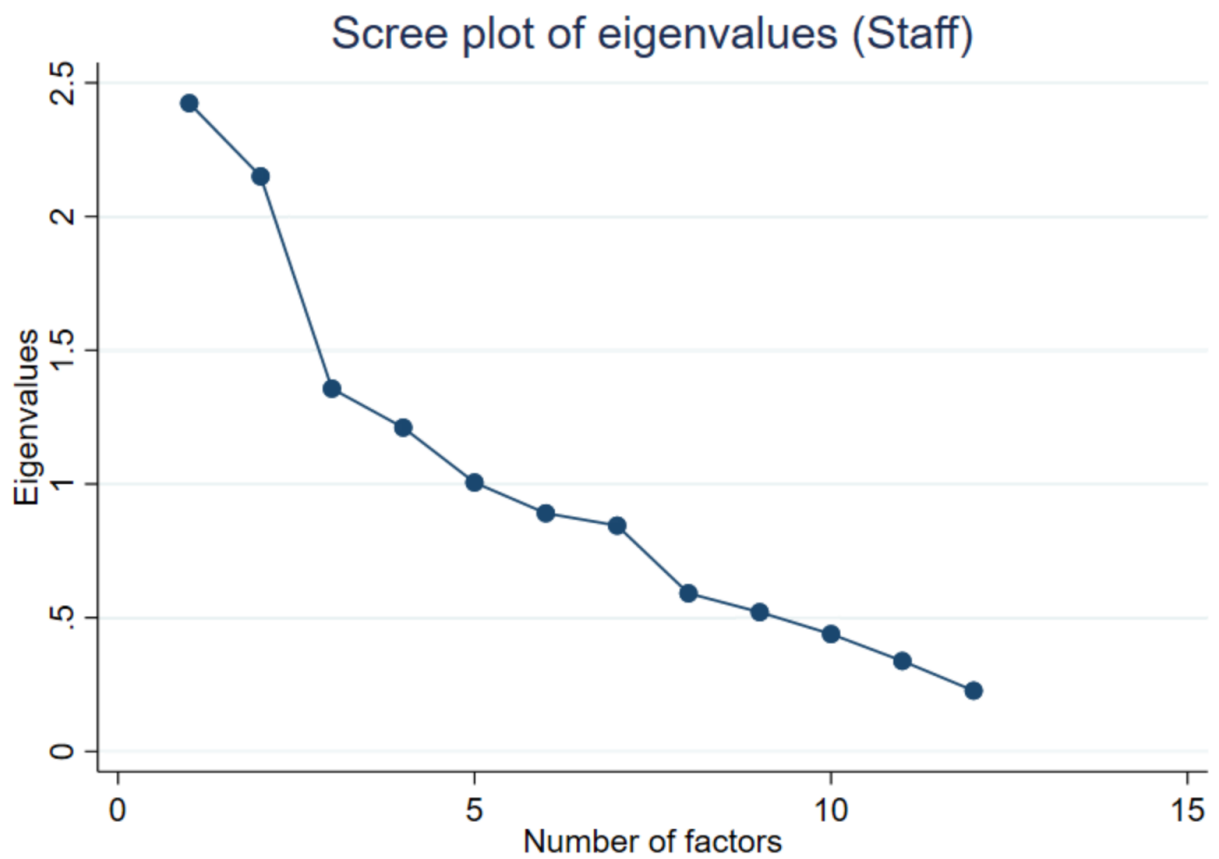
These loadings suggest that respondents perceive a strong connection between the school's efforts to engage with the community, provide academic support, and maintain open communication with parents. The high loading on "Check_HW" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the active involvement of parents in their children's homework, while the other statements reflect the school's broader efforts to support families and foster a learning community.

Therefore, the label "Learning Community" aptly summarises this shared concept. This label highlights the importance of a school environment that actively engages with families, supports parents in their educational roles, and encourages strong community ties. These efforts contribute to creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment, essential for student success and family engagement (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011).

5.3 Results for staff

For the staff participant group, the Bartlett's test of sphericity score was 78.690, and the KMO score was 0.503

Figure 5.5 Scree plot showing eigenvalues for staff



N = 75

Table 5.6. Factor loadings for staff for each question (T.Factor 1 means staff factor 1 etc)

Variable name	T.Factor 1	T.Factor 2	T.Factor 3	T.Factor 4	T.Factor 5
School_Parent_Comms_Various	1.0228	-0.2974	0.0381	-0.0581	0.1331
Parent involve	0.4989	0.2292	0.0447	-0.2494	-0.0274
Info Progress	-0.3771	0.9508	0.0773	0.0352	0.0567
Check HW	0.1754	0.5638	0.2203	0.1124	-0.1851
Feel_Welcome	0.4238	0.4613	-0.1196	-0.0282	0.2402
Better_Relationship_Post_COVID	-0.0266	-0.3449	-0.8633	0.0063	-0.0128
Opinion_On_Missed_Learning	-0.0887	-0.164	0.7013	0.0408	-0.0599
Respect_Diversity	-0.3478	0.074	0.0147	0.8292	0.307
Helped_Community	-0.2236	0.1656	-0.0554	0.6485	-0.2144
Parent_Training_HW	0.2581	-0.2332	0.5032	0.5214	0.0554
Family_Connect	0.2511	0.0557	-0.1363	0.2754	0.9116
Connect_Community_To_Resources	-0.073	0.004	0.3034	-0.1917	0.6777
Cronbach's alpha	0.4262 (2)	0.4883	0.533	0.5735	0.4947

Notes. Bold figures indicate loadings in excess of 0.4

Staff Factor 1 Statements

- 9. The school communicates with parents in various ways
- 8. The school makes it easy for parents to be involved in their child's education

The factor analysis revealed that these statements share a meaningful factor based on their common variance. This factor shows an agreement between the statements relevant to the school's communication methods with parents (1.0228) and a moderate agreement with facilitating parental involvement in their child's education (0.4989).

These loadings suggest that respondents perceive a strong agreement between the school's diverse communication strategies and its efforts to engage parents in the educational process. The high loading on "School_Parent_Comms_Various" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the school's use of various communication channels, while the statement about parental involvement supports this perception.

The label "Home-School Communication" aptly captures this factor, emphasising the crucial role of effective communication between schools and families in fostering parental involvement. Researchers like Wilder (2014) and Epstein (2011) have highlighted the importance of home-school communication in building strong relationships between schools and families. By labelling this factor as "Home-School Communication," my research aligns with existing literature on home-school partnerships, reinforcing the significance of communication as a foundational element in supporting home-school partnerships.

Staff Factor 2 Statements

- 10. The school shares information about students' progress
- 11. Parents regularly check the homework set
- 2. I feel welcome at the school

This factor shows a strong positive agreement between the school's efforts to share information about students' progress (0.9508), parents regularly checking homework (0.5638), and feeling welcome at the school (0.4613).

The high loading on "Info Progress" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the school's communication about students' progress, while the other statements contribute to the overall perception of a supportive and inclusive learning community.

The label "Learning Community" effectively captures the shared concept between these two statements. This label reflects the idea of boundary crossing, as suggested by Akkerman and Bakker (2011), to foster a supportive school environment where staff feel welcomed and a platform to strengthen the home-school partnership. These efforts are essential for creating an environment that promotes a sense of belonging among students and families, ultimately enhancing student success and family engagement with schools (Gerdes et al., 2021).

Staff Factor 3 Statements

- 12. I have a better relationship with my students post COVID
- 1. The school asks my opinion about missed learning
- 8. Parents have received training on how to help with learning at home

The factor analysis revealed agreement between the statements expressing a higher perception of the school's efforts to seek parents' opinions about missed learning (0.7013) and providing training on how to support their children's homework (0.5032). However, these two statements disagreed with the perception of improved relationships between parents and their children post-COVID (-0.8633) according to staff.

This negative loading suggests that respondents who view the school's engagement efforts positively may not necessarily see improved post-COVID relationships between parents and children. This could be due to several reasons. One potential reason is the increased strain and stress during the COVID period, which may have strained teacher-child relationships. Another reason could be a shift in the school's focus post-COVID, with more emphasis on academic recovery and parental involvement, possibly at the expense of supporting relational aspects between teachers and children. Additionally, the differing priorities of teachers might play a role; they may perceive the school's efforts to seek opinions and provide training as beneficial, but these efforts might not directly address or improve the personal dynamics with their students, especially under the unique pressures of the post-COVID environment.

The label "School Engagement Effectiveness" effectively captures the shared concept represented by these questions. It highlights the school's efforts to actively engage with parents, seek their input, and provide valuable training, even if these efforts don't necessarily correlate with improved family relationships post-COVID, according to staff. This label also suggests an area for further exploration in my semi-structured interviews, particularly in understanding changes in the home-school relationship and ways to enhance it. It also acknowledges the complexities of post-COVID home-school dynamics (Harris and Jones, 2020).

Staff Factor 4 Statements

- 5. The school respects the diversity of the school community
- 7. The school has helped the community
- 3. Parents have received training on how to help with learning at home,

The factor analysis agreement between the statements relevant to the school's commitment to respecting diversity within the school community (0.8292), actively supporting the broader community (0.6485), and providing training to parents on how to support learning at home (0.5214). The higher loading on "Respect_Diversity" indicates that the most significant aspect of this factor is the school's commitment to inclusivity, while the other statements reinforce the perception of a supportive school community.

The label "Supportive Community" effectively captures the shared concept, encompassing all the statements while emphasising the school's role in positively impacting its community. This includes fostering inclusivity, supporting the broader community, and empowering parents to be actively involved in their child's education (Harris and Jones, 2020; Epstein, 2011). By strengthening its connection with the community, the school facilitates boundary crossing, which is a key objective of a home-school partnership, as highlighted by Akkerman and Bakker (2011).

Staff Factor 5 Statements

- 4. The school gives opportunities for families to connect with each other about COVID concerns
- 6. The school connects families to education and resources in the community that can help their child

The factor analysis revealed agreement between the statements concerning the school's efforts to provide opportunities for families to connect with each other regarding COVID concerns (0.9116) and connecting families to educational and community resources to support their child's development (0.6777).

These loadings indicate a strong perception among respondents of the school's dual role in facilitating family connections and linking them to external resources. The high loading on "Family_Connect" highlights the significance of the school's efforts to help families connect, particularly around COVID-related issues, reflecting the importance of community solidarity and mutual support during challenging times. The statement about connecting families to community resources further reinforces the school's role as a hub of support and information.

During the COVID pandemic, families faced unprecedented challenges affecting their daily lives and children's education. By offering opportunities for families to connect and discuss these concerns, the school can play a vital role in alleviating stress and uncertainty. This communal support system enables parents to share strategies, provide emotional support, and build a network to navigate difficult times.

Thus, the label "Home-School Support" aptly captures this shared concept, reflecting the school's commitment to creating a supportive environment where families can connect, share concerns, and access necessary resources. This approach suggests an effort to achieve boundary crossing, as described by Akkerman and Bakker (2011), to maintain or improve the home-school partnership. By facilitating connections among families, addressing shared concerns, and providing access to valuable resources, these efforts are crucial in building a resilient and empowered school community (Barker et al.,2021).

5.4 Similarities and Differences Across Participant Groups

The factor analyses conducted across students, parents, and staff revealed insightful perspectives on the dynamics of the home-school partnership, each group highlighting distinct priorities and perceptions that reflect their unique roles within the partnership. Comparative analysis below delves into the similarities and differences among these groups, using relevant figures to emphasise key points.

Table 5.7 below shows a summary of the factors identified for each participant group. These factors helped to refine my choice of questions for my subsequent semi-structured interviews.

Table 5.7 Factors identified among each participant group

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Students	School Support and inclusivity	Community Engagement and Support	Home-School Communication	Academic Communication	Educational Relationships
Parents	Inclusive Communication	Family Empowerment and Relationship Building	Learning community	N/A	N/A
Staff	Home-School Communication	Learning Community	School engagement effectiveness	Supportive Community	Home-school support

A key similarity is the emphasis on communication across all groups. Students and staff both highlight "Home-School Communication," emphasising its potential crucial role in fostering strong connections between the school and families. Although parents do not explicitly list this factor, their focus on "Inclusive Communication" and "Learning Community" reflects a similar prioritisation of effective communication within the school environment.

The concept of a "Learning Community" is also shared by both parents and staff, indicating a common understanding of the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in education. However, the way this concept is perceived differs slightly between the two groups. Parents focus more on inclusivity and the fostering of supportive relationships, while staff emphasise the effectiveness of school engagement and support systems.

Differences emerge in the focus on inclusivity. Students prioritise "School Support and Inclusivity," while parents emphasise "Inclusive Communication." This suggests that students are more concerned with the direct support and inclusive practices within the school, whereas parents view inclusivity through the lens of how communication fosters a welcoming environment.

Community engagement is another area where differences are observed. Students highlight "Community Engagement and Support," seeing the school as a potential key player in supporting the broader community. Staff, while also recognising the importance of community support, focus more on the structural aspects of "Supportive Community" and "Home-School Support," indicating a more systemic view of the school's role.

Lastly, students uniquely identify "Educational Relationships" as a significant factor, indicating a strong focus on the personal dynamics between students and educators. This focus on relationships is less explicitly addressed by parents and staff, who may prioritise broader structural and communicative aspects of the school environment.

5.5 Negative loadings

Certain statements in the factor analysis displayed negative loadings, indicating that perceptions moved in opposite directions compared to other statements within the same factor. A notable example is the staff opinions on whether relationships had improved post-COVID, which had a negative loading of -0.8633. This contrasts with the positive loadings on statements about whether parents received training on supporting homework and whether staff opinions were sought regarding missed learning. These three statements loaded onto the factor labelled "School Engagement Effectiveness."

The negative loading of -0.8633 on the statement regarding improved post-COVID relationships suggests an inverse relationship with other statements in the factor, such as providing parental training and seeking input on missed learning. This negative loading offers an interesting insight, especially in light of the mixed survey responses. Among students, 37.9% agreed that relationships had improved, while 27.5% disagreed; staff showed similar patterns, with 37.2% agreeing and 26.6% disagreeing. Parents were even more divided, with 21.5% agreeing and 29.5% disagreeing, and 48.4% remaining neutral.

Although the survey responses were not predominantly negative, the negative loading indicates that perceptions of effective school engagement efforts do not necessarily translate into improved post-COVID relationships. This could be due to lingering challenges in re-establishing trust and connection after the pandemic's disruptions. The mixed survey responses, where many participants remained neutral or disagreed, reflect these ongoing uncertainties. The negative loading captures this tension, suggesting that while engagement efforts were acknowledged, they may not have fully addressed the complexities of rebuilding relationships in the post-pandemic context.

My semi-structured interview questions needed to probe this further to uncover how the home-school partnership has changed following school closures and why the relationship is better in some instances but worse in others.

Another noteworthy negative loading was found among student participants regarding the statement on whether their parents received training on how to support homework, with a loading of -0.7096. This contrasts with the positive loadings on statements about students feeling welcomed at school and being asked for their opinions on missed learning. All three statements loaded onto the factor I labelled "School Support and Inclusivity."

Survey responses reflect this divergence: 62.1% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their parents received training on homework support. Parents were somewhat more positive, though 51.3% still expressed disagreement. Teachers were evenly split, with 57.1% responding neutrally. This suggests a lack of clarity or awareness across the groups regarding parental training, despite the literature highlighting the importance of communication and partnership in home-school relationships (Epstein, 2011).

The Framework for Interdisciplinary Collaboration (FIC) also emphasises the importance of information sharing and collaboration, which appears to be inadequately reflected in these survey responses. This disconnect suggests a need for my interview questions to probe the effectiveness of communication about home learning, particularly how it evolved post-school closures. One potential explanation is that students may not be fully aware of their parents' involvement in their education or the training they received, as suggested by research from DePlanty et al. (2007), Paulson and Sputa (1996), and Liu et al. (2021).

The final negative loading, again observed among student participants, related to the statement about whether the school respects the diversity of the school community, which had a negative loading of -0.8578. This contrasts with the positive loadings on statements about whether the

school has helped the community and connected it to resources post-COVID. All three statements loaded onto the factor labelled "Community Engagement and Support."

Interestingly, despite this negative loading, a majority of students, staff, and parents agreed with the statement that the school respects diversity, with 93.1% of students, 88.6% of staff, and 54.4% of parents (with 20.7% neutral) either strongly agreeing or agreeing. This discrepancy between the positive survey responses and the negative loading suggests that while students acknowledge the school's efforts in community support and diversity, they may perceive these efforts as somewhat disconnected or insufficiently integrated into the overall community engagement initiatives.

The negative loading may indicate underlying concerns among students that, despite the school's broader community efforts, there are gaps in how diversity is respected or addressed within these initiatives. It could also reflect a perception that while the school is active in community support, these actions may not fully align with the principles of inclusivity.

Given this, my interview questions required understanding of participants' priorities once schools reopened, to see if issues related to inclusivity emerged organically as areas of concern. Exploring participants' priorities provided an opportunity to identify whether these themes surfaced in relation to their broader experiences with the school's efforts to preserve partnerships. Additionally, understanding how these priorities have evolved since the school closures could provide insights into the effectiveness of the school's ongoing efforts to maintain or improve the home-school partnership.

5.6 Open-ended questions

The analysis of the open-ended statements from students, parents, and teachers revealed both key similarities and differences in their perspectives. One consistent similarity across all groups was the positive sentiment regarding the partnerships and relationships between parents and schools, indicating a shared recognition of strong collaborative efforts. However, differences emerged in their views on learning and teaching. Students generally downplayed the negative impact of school closures on their education, expressing confidence in the continuity of learning, while parents and teachers were more critical, with many expressing concerns about the quality of learning during this period. Wellbeing concerns were another area of divergence; students and teachers were more likely to express negative views, citing increased stress and challenges during remote learning, whereas parents were more focused on the broader impact of these changes on family dynamics. Communication and information sharing were also areas of contention, with parents expressing significant dissatisfaction with the quality and frequency of updates from schools, a sentiment less commonly echoed by students and teachers. Additionally, socioeconomic status (SES) emerged as a concern, particularly among teachers and parents, who noted its impact on the effectiveness of home-school partnerships and student learning, though this issue was less frequently mentioned by students.

Given these findings, the semi-structured interviews needed to further probe the specific impacts of lower SES on the home-school partnership and learning experiences, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Additionally, the interviews required exploration of the dissatisfaction with communication and information sharing, investigating the underlying reasons and potential improvements. Wellbeing concerns, especially the support mechanisms that may have been lacking during remote learning, also warranted deeper investigation. Finally, the interviews needed to examine the differing perceptions of learning and teaching quality, and how the positive perceptions of partnerships might be leveraged to enhance the overall

educational experience, while addressing any potential concerns about increased parental involvement.

Table 5.8 below categorises the open-ended comments for each participant group

Table 5.8 open-ended comments by participant group.

Theme	Students	Parents	Teachers
Partnership/Relationship	20 comments, all positive	40 responses: 36 positive, 2 negative, 1 neutral	13 responses: 11 positive, 2 negative
Learning/Teaching	31 comments: 9 positive, 20 negative, 2 neutral	20 responses: 4 positive, 15 negative, 1 neutral	5 comments: 3 positive, 2 negative
Wellbeing	15 comments: 5 positive, 9 negative, 1 neutral	21 responses: 1 positive, 9 negative	8 comments: 4 positive, 3 negative, 1 neutral
Information/Communication	3 comments: 1 neutral, 2 negative	23 responses: 3 positive, 19 negative, 1 neutral	6 comments: 2 positive, 2 negative, 2 neutral
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Not frequently mentioned	3 comments: all negative	2 comments: both negative, specifically regarding lower SES impact
Specific Concerns (e.g., SEN)	1 mention of confidence, 1 mention of moving on with a neutral comment	1 parent mentioned concern about the specific impact on SEN students	Not specifically mentioned
Back to Normal/COVID	Not mentioned	6 comments: neither positive nor negative	Not specifically mentioned

6. SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW METHODS

The previous chapter outlined the results from the initial online survey and explained how Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and open-ended comments were used to identify key factors within the survey. This chapter details the methodology for the second phase of my mixed methods approach, focusing on the semi-structured interviews. It begins by explaining how the findings from the initial online survey informed the development of pilot interview questions and describes how the pilot study refined these questions into their final form. The chapter then presents the final set of interview questions, designed to delve deeper into the insights gained from earlier research stages and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the home-school partnership dynamics. The chapter concludes with an overview of how the interviews were conducted and how the interview transcripts were coded to identify the main themes expressed by each participant group.

6.1 Framing of interview questions

After using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to group survey responses into factors based on shared variance, I identified patterns in how certain statements clustered within each factor. This process revealed key themes, such as specific concerns and sentiments among participant groups, which informed the development of my interview questions. These insights directed the interviews' focus, allowing for a deeper exploration of participants' interests and concerns.

Based on the themes uncovered by the EFA, I then developed interview questions that directly addressed these insights. This analysis offered a clear understanding of the underlying themes, which informed the creation of semi-structured interview questions. These questions were designed to prompt participants to share their views and experiences freely, to promote an examination of the identified themes from the initial online survey.

In crafting these questions, I aimed to cover both common perceptions and unique viewpoints within each factor, seeking to gather comprehensive insights. The goal was to generate interview questions that would offer in-depth understanding of the identified factors, thus enhancing the qualitative aspect of my study with detailed data that complemented the initial quantitative findings.

Tables A2-A4 in the appendix show the response frequencies, and brief analysis, for each question in my initial survey for all participants.

Open-ended questions results

The inclusion of an open-ended question in the survey provided valuable insights into the opinions regarding the home-school partnership, revealing distinct patterns among the different groups of respondents. The responses were grouped as follows:

For students:

- Concerns about wellbeing
- Opinions on the effectiveness of online learning (both positive and negative)
- Appreciation for the support of the school
- Appreciation for teachers
- Questions regarding progress
- Comments on a closer home-school partnership

For parents:

- Concerns about missed learning
- Appreciation for teachers
- Questions regarding progress

- Requests for information about progress (parents' evenings for example)
- Request to focus on wellbeing

For staff:

- Importance of quality of information rather than quantity
- Belief that parents understand education more now
- Improved relationships with students
- Concern about lower SES
- Concerns about low ability students.

The process of how my semi structured interview questions were refined from these results from the first stage of my data collection and the EFA is explained in more detail in the section below.

6.2 Semi-structured interviews- data collection

After the initial survey, my research on the home-school partnership transitioned into a qualitative phase. This mixed methods approach was essential for a comprehensive analysis, allowing me to delve deeper into themes that emerged from phase one of my data collection. Through this second stage of data collection and analysis, I aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing home-school partnerships. This section begins with an outline of the design of my semi-structured interviews, continues with how the EFA helped to further refine my final choice of questions, and concludes with how I analysed the interview responses to help answer my research questions.

The second phase of my data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a total of 30 participants, comprising 10 students, 10 staff members, and 10 parents. As previously mentioned, Shaughnessy et al. (2000) highlighted the potential for a social desirability response bias. This bias could lead participants to provide what they believe to be

the 'correct' answers rather than their genuine opinions on educational partnerships, particularly because they see me as part of the research process. I recognised that this bias was likely to be more pronounced among students, who might feel pressured to provide 'correct' answers (Krumpal, 2013). To mitigate this, the semi-structured interviews were carefully designed to encourage participants, especially students, to share their personal thoughts and beliefs in a more expansive manner.

To achieve this, I introduced contextual background to the questions where appropriate, a strategy endorsed by Bergen and Labonte (2019), to facilitate a deeper and more honest exchange of views. Additionally, I employed a technique aimed at minimising the tendency of participants, especially students, to default to what they perceived as the 'right' answer. This involved asking them to reflect on how the pandemic has impacted the home-school partnership not just from their perspective but also considering the broader experiences of families within the school community. This approach of indirect questioning is recognised for its effectiveness in reducing social desirability bias, especially when dealing with socially sensitive topics (Fisher, 1993; Bergen and Labonte, 2019).

As I wanted to gain comparable data across different groups in the home-school partnership, setting up these interviews required consideration of the people involved, the location of the interview and the conduct of the interview (Mills, 2011). To standardise this process as much as possible, I conducted these interviews online as online interviews can be a useful platform for asking more sensitive questions on views that may require a more reflective response (Heflich, 1997). Although I was aware that this may have resulted in my having less rapport with participants and potentially losing the subtle nonverbal clues that can help to contextualise interviews (O'Connor et al., 2008; Carter et al., 2021), the increase in flexibility, regarding parents in particular, given that they may otherwise have been hard to reach was a crucial benefit of conducting interviews online. Research also suggests that the quality of responses

gained through online research is similar to the responses by face-to-face methods (Denscombe, 2003 and Lobe et al., 2022). If participants had not had the required technology, they would have been offered the opportunity for a face-to-face interview. However, this was not required by any of the participants.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded using a Dictaphone. While Microsoft Teams offers a built-in transcription feature, it is not always reliable. Therefore, I reviewed each interview to ensure accurate transcription before beginning the coding process.

The semi-structured interview questions were shaped by insights from the EFA of the questionnaires, responses to the open-ended question, and existing literature on the home-school partnership. More detail on how these interview questions were formed is provided in the next section.

6.3 Semi-structured interview questions

The EFA helped to group my questions into latent variables or factors based on their tendency to vary in common with one another. (Bartholomew, Knott, and Moustaki, 2011). These factors represented the variables from my questionnaire and helped to identify patterns that linked with my literature review which I could then use to construct my semi-structured interview questions. Finally, the analysis of the response patterns helped to identify particular issues that my semi-structured interview needed to answer. The open-ended questions from my initial survey also helped to identify areas that my interview questions needed to probe deeper to understand the home-school partnership. As a result of these responses, I included questions regarding wellbeing, progress in learning, whether the home-school partnership had improved, and influence of lower SES on the above themes.

The themes suggested by the EFA and open-ended interview questions mentioned in the previous section were grouped together as follows:

- Partnerships, relationship, and home-school support
- Community engagement
- Wellbeing
- Information/communication methods
- Learning community
- Teaching/learning/progress of students
- Changing priorities regarding the home-school partnership
- SES

These results and concerns were broadly consistent across student, parent, and staff responses. After aligning these with the findings from my literature review it suggests that the issues that needed to be further explored by my interviews to help understand the home-school partnership, and in turn answer my research questions, fell into the following categories:

- Communication
- Teaching and learning
- Partnerships and the learning community
- Learning at home
- Rebuilding education
- Wellbeing
- SES
- Lessons for the home-school partnership.

6.3.1 Interview

My interview questions are shown below, with the full interview preamble, questions, and individual prompts for students, parents and staff provided in the Appendix. These questions were designed to identify key viewpoints and concerns, guiding more detailed exploration of the home-school partnership following school closures. The questions in bold represent the questions that were posed to students.

Communication

1) Tell me a bit about how you communicated with the school/parents/students before the COVID pandemic happened? How would you describe how this changed, if at all, once schools reopened?

Teaching and learning

2) How would you describe teaching during the lockdown period? Has it changed now compared to before the pandemic? Who or what is responsible for this change?

Views on education

3) Looking back across the COVID pandemic, has your relationship with the school/parents changed?

Partnerships and the learning community

4) What are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? How does each fit into the home-school partnership? Do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?

4b) (This was the wording for the student participants) What are your thoughts on the relationship between parents and teachers? Are they equal partners? How does each fit into the home-school partnership? Do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?

Learning at home

5) Were there any differences in how you/students learnt at home during the lockdowns? How did parents/teachers support the learning?

Rebuilding education – (Adaptations to) partnerships

6a) Has the home-school partnership changed since the school closures? What is the school doing this term? (to maintain or improve partnerships)

6b) Are there any particular priorities (shaped by your circumstance?) when children first came back/ now?

6c) (for student participants) What things are most important (based on your experience?) when children first came back/ now?

6c) Who's been important in helping you maintain the home-school partnership? (in answer to any of the issues highlighted above)

Wellbeing

7) How would you describe how wellbeing was dealt with by the school before, during, and after the pandemic? Has it taken on more importance since? Who for? And why?

SES

8) Do you think SES has affected the home-school partnership since the COVID pandemic? Is there a bigger change from before the pandemic? If so, what would you suggest are the main reasons?

8b) (Question for student participants) Do you think the income of a family has affected the home-school partnership since the COVID pandemic? Is there a bigger change from before the pandemic? If so, what would you suggest are the main reasons?

Lessons for the home-school partnership from this year for next year

9a) In your school – is there anything you will carry forward regarding the home-school partnership from this year to next year? Anything you learnt along the way you want to hold on to for how you work with parents/teachers/students

10) If you were able to send one simple message to the DfE/ Schools Minister/ Ofsted) via this research regarding the home-school partnership, what would it be?

6.3.2 Pilot for interview questions

I piloted my interview questions with one student, one staff member, and one parent from different schools to assess their clarity and effectiveness in generating responses relevant to my research questions.

The pilot results indicated that most questions were well understood and elicited detailed responses. However, questions 3, 4, 6, and 10 required refinements. The original questions, their prompts, and the subsequent changes are outlined below.

Question 3 (Looking back across the COVID pandemic, has your relationship with the school/parents changed?). This question was well answered by all participants, but the two sub-questions regarding resources and decision-making were ineffective. Students struggled to understand the prompts, while others repeated prior responses. As a result, these prompts were removed from the final interview questions.

Question 4 (What are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? How does each fit into the home-school partnership? Do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?). This question was answered in detail by all participants; however, the prompts were revised to clarify that they referred specifically to the local community.

Question 6 (Has the home-school partnership changed since the school closures? What is the school doing this term? (to maintain or improve partnerships). This question was answered well, but the prompt regarding resources caused confusion amongst participants and failed to elicit detailed responses. Since it was not directly relevant to my research questions, it was removed from the final interview questions.

Question 10 (If you were able to send one simple message to the DfE/ Schools Minister/ Ofsted/government) via this research regarding the home-school partnership, what would it be? This question was changed to *“If you were able to send one simple message to the **government**, what would it be?”* to add clarity.

6.4 Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews

After clarifying the research design for my interviews and finalising my interview questions, this section will detail the process of how the interview data was analysed to address the research questions concerning the home-school partnership following school closures.

The semi-structured interview questions were chosen to elicit detailed input from participants, capturing nuances that the phase one survey questions could not due to their inherent limitations, such as the inability to explore participants' reasoning and personal experiences in depth. To analyse the responses from the semi structured interviews effectively, I employed thematic analysis, specifically using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). An alternative analytical approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborne, 2015), was considered due to its focus on exploring the impact of life events from the participant's perspective. This method aligns more closely with an interpretivist epistemological stance, emphasising subjective meanings and the interpretation of social phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). However, according to Smith et al., the focus with IPA is on a detailed understanding of individual cases whereas my focus is on understanding overall themes across participants to explain and understand the data from the phase one surveys to help answer my research questions. As such, thematic analysis is a more suitable approach to answer my research questions when compared to IPA.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its suitability in situations with fewer participants, as it allows for cross-case analysis of themes before examining individual cases in detail. Despite the limitations in analysing individual cases, thematic coding offers a flexible approach that provides a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). The objective of this thematic analysis is to identify patterns in the data that describe the viewpoints of the home-school partnership rather than merely summarising the data (Maguire and

Delahunt, 2017). In this study, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, focusing on semantic themes that capture the explicit meanings conveyed in participants' statements. Rather than conducting a latent analysis to uncover the underlying ideas shaping these meanings, I concentrated on the surface-level content. This approach aligns with my epistemological stance, which recognises the existence of multiple realities shaped by participants' perceptions of the home-school partnership. As such, reflexive thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate method, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how participants articulate and interpret their experiences of the school closures and their impact on home-school partnerships.

With reference to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, I intended to follow its principles but adapted it to suit my study's specific purposes. Initially, I read the interview transcripts and generated initial codes. The open-ended comments question in my initial, provided a useful reference point that guided the generation of some of these codes and influenced the language used to label the codes. These codes were open codes that I subsequently refined and modified in a cyclical approach throughout the coding process. As I analysed each individual interview, I adjusted the codes as appropriate, depending on emerging trends, sometimes resulting in second or third iterations for specific codes. Subsequently, I reviewed each code across interviews within each specific subset of participants (students, parents, and staff) to assess the potential for further refinement and analysis. This process focused on grouping related codes under overarching themes, particularly those aligned with the theoretical framework concerning the sharing of skills, information, and viewpoints. This approach also ensured that the emerging themes effectively addressed my research questions on the home-school partnership.

6.5 Coding of the semi-structured interviews

Whilst conducting the thematic analysis of my research on home-school partnerships, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, starting with familiarising myself with the data. This initial phase involved reading each interview transcript twice and correcting any transcription errors from the Microsoft Teams recordings, using NVivo for support.

During the open coding phase, I conducted a line-by-line examination of the transcripts, identifying significant text segments that captured concepts or themes that were important to home-school partnerships. I assigned descriptive labels to these segments, facilitating easy information retrieval for later analysis.

The generation of initial codes was both iterative and recursive. As I coded the initial transcripts, I regularly revised the codes to ensure they were accurate and consistent, gradually building a comprehensive set reflecting the diverse ideas and concepts shared by participants. NVivo was instrumental in managing the growing volume of codes, allowing me to create and group related codes under broader themes such as communication, community, technology, home environment, online learning, and wellbeing.

Moving to the next analysis phase, I focused on identifying emerging themes from the coded data, looking for patterns, similarities, and connections among codes. This involved a reflexive approach, continuously ensuring the codes accurately represented participants' experiences and perspectives on the home-school partnership. I also considered the frequency and depth of each code, prioritising those that were mentioned frequently and held significant weight in the narratives.

The thematic analysis culminated in a set of coherent themes that provided a robust representation of participants' experiences within the home-school partnership context, offering

valuable insights for further exploration and interpretation of the data. This approach facilitated efficient data exploration and provided a solid foundation for generating meaningful insights into the dynamics of home-school partnerships in the post-COVID context. Table 6.1 below illustrates this process by presenting two example codes identified across all interviews, along with their corresponding subcodes. The full set of codes and subcodes can be found in the Appendix, detailed in table C1.

Table 6.1 Example of two initial codes and their subcodes

COMMUNICATION

- **Additional method**
- **Comparison**
- **Criticism**
- **Direct**
- **In a partnership**
- **Online**
- **Outside classroom**
- **Peak of communication**
- **Recommendation**
- **Communication – direct**

COMMUNITY

- **Support**
- **Uncertainty**
- **COVID change**
- **Preparation**
- **Crisis of identity**

Following this initial coding phase, I identified key themes and patterns related to the home-school partnerships by reading through each of the codes, identifying how they can be combined, and then linking it to quotes from the interviewees to provide context. One prominent

theme that emerged was the shift in communication methods during COVID. For instance, a participant mentioned, *"Before COVID, I didn't really use my email much... If I needed to contact a teacher, it would generally be one of my subject teachers."* (student 7). This quote suggests a positive change in communication practices, aligning with the code "Communication improvement".

A similar theme that emerged was the challenges of communication during COVID. A participant expressed, *"Often it was difficult to have the same clarity without being in person... I found that particularly hard as a slightly socially awkward person."* (student 9). This quote reflects the difficulties encountered in maintaining effective communication, supporting the code "Challenges of communication during COVID". More examples of the codes and their supporting quotes are shown in table 6.2 below. (All codes are in the appendix).

Table 6.2 showing some examples codes and their corresponding quotes

Quote	Code
"So I think that communication between the pupils and schools was definitely a bit more complex before the pandemic."	Communication improvement
"Often it was difficult to have the same clarity without being in person... I found that particularly hard as a slightly socially awkward person."	Challenges of communication during COVID

"The main way of communication, I would say, was via emails, letters, or physically speaking to your teachers."	Communication method
"I think the pandemic definitely taught the school how to base itself around online systems."	Online communication
"The communication outside of school between teachers and pupils definitely increased."	Communication frequency
"Partnership has remained unchanged between the pandemic and now."	Partnership unchanged
"It was more difficult to differentiate between leisure time and school time during online learning."	Learning barriers at home
"Teachers have been the main ones helping keep up and improve the partnership."	Home-school partnership key people involved
"The amount of communication we have with teachers or the resources they put out online is definitely a good thing."	Communication improvement

"Wellbeing should be spoken about and given thought by the school and pupils."	Wellbeing communication
"Schools helped families with lower incomes or without devices to participate in online lessons."	School community
"The gap that was minimised during the pandemic has stayed minimised."	SES gap post lockdown
"We've learned that schools had to give more support to families with lower incomes."	School community

Drawing upon these initial codes, I conducted a further analysis to refine and consolidate the codes. Throughout the analysis, I ensured that the identified codes were coherent, and provided meaningful insights into the home-school partnership during COVID. I also paid attention to the context of the quotes and their relationship to my broader research objectives. Additional codes that emerged included the impact of remote learning on parental involvement, the power dynamic between parents and teachers, the school's support for the community during COVID, socioeconomic status (SES) and digital divide, and the importance of blended learning and support for students.

The initial code list consisted of various codes representing different topics related to the home-school partnership. These codes captured aspects such as communication methods, challenges

faced, wellbeing initiatives, SES factors, and more. To streamline the analysis, similar codes were identified by carefully reviewing each code and comparing them to others. Codes that represented similar or related concepts were grouped together, forming consolidated codes that captured the most common opinions given by each of the participants. After identifying similar codes, the next step was to merge them into a single code. This merging process helped avoid duplication and reduce the total number of codes while still capturing the essence of the original codes.

After merging similar codes, I created a table summarising the prevalence of each code. Table 6.3 below, shows an example with student codes, and Tables C2-C3 (in the appendix) display the remaining codes for parents and staff. Each table shows the code label, the total number of times it appeared across all participants, and the number of unique participants who mentioned the code. The merged codes and adjusted counts informed the creation of the final table of codes, which was then used to develop distinct themes from the emerging patterns. This involved synthesising the grouped codes, extracting the main ideas, and formulating concise and meaningful descriptions for each theme. The goal was to capture the essence of the interviewees' statements within each theme. By following these steps, the tables provided a suggestion of potential themes and allowed for easy comparison and analysis of the data, and the production of themes on the home-school partnership.

The initial themes were reviewed and refined to ensure clarity and coherence. This process involved removing redundancies, refining the wording, and verifying that each theme accurately reflected the underlying concepts expressed by the interviewees. The goal was to enhance both the clarity and interpretability of the themes, ensuring they provided meaningful insights into the data.

In the table below I have shown the student code distribution

Table 6.3 Student responses

Code	Number of Times Mentioned	Number of Participants
Communication during COVID and use of online platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)	23	10
Shift from in-person to online learning during lockdown	19	10
Challenges of online communication (e.g., sporadic communication, preference for in-person meetings)	19	10
Dissatisfaction with constant accessibility and pressure of online communication	17	8
Academic pressure on the home-school partnership due to accessibility and communication	16	8
Appreciation for flexibility during lockdown	14	8
Disproportionate impact on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds during COVID	14	7
Decline in academic performance and missed educational opportunities during COVID	12	7

Importance of equal access to technology for all students during COVID	11	7
Lack of accountability in remote teaching during lockdown	9	7
Factors affecting productivity and hindered learning during lockdown	9	7
Insights into effective learning strategies during lockdown	9	7
Personal and empathetic side of teachers during COVID	9	7
Lack of lost learning	8	7
Development of independence in managing education during COVID	8	7
Increased parental engagement in education during COVID	7	7
Negative aspects of parental involvement in their child's education during COVID	7	5
Direct communication between parents and teachers during COVID	7	5

Shift in school's sense of community during COVID	6	5
Sense of connection and interaction between students from different year groups before COVID	6	5

I began by thoroughly reviewing each of the code frequency tables, which represents data from different groups: students, parents, and teachers. This step helped me become familiar with the dataset and gain an understanding of the topics and issues discussed by each group in relation to the home-school partnership during the COVID pandemic.

Next, I carefully examined each code in the tables and grouped similar codes together based on their content. Codes that conveyed similar concepts, themes, or experiences were combined into broader categories. For example, codes related to communication during COVID and the use of online platforms were combined into the theme "Communication and Online Platforms during COVID." Once the codes were organised into categories, I identified overarching themes that emerged from the data for each group. These themes represented the common topics or issues that were frequently mentioned by the participants in each category. For instance, the theme "Academic Impact of COVID on Students" emerged from codes discussing the decline in academic performance and missed educational opportunities during COVID. After developing the initial themes, I further examined the relationships between themes and merged related themes, ensuring that the resulting themes were relevant to literature on the home-school partnership and relevant to my research questions.

Each final theme was named to succinctly capture its essence. The themes were organised into columns for students, parents, and teachers to differentiate the main focus of the themes based

on the perspectives of each group. Throughout the process, I consistently reviewed the data and the emerging themes to validate their relevance and accuracy. I ensured that the themes accurately represented the content of the codes and captured the key insights from each dataset.

Finally, I organised the themes into a table with separate columns for students, parents, and teachers which is shown in table 6.4 below. This layout provided a clear overview of the key topics and issues raised by each group regarding the home-school partnership during the COVID pandemic. Using thematic analysis, I derived meaningful themes from the code frequency tables, offering a comprehensive understanding of students', parents', and teachers' experiences and perspectives on the home-school partnership following school closures.

Table 6.4 Themes extracted from semi-structured interviews

Student Themes	Parent Themes	Teacher Themes
Communication and online platforms during COVID	Communication and support during COVID	Communication and relationship building during the pandemic
Academic impact of COVID on students	Educational and emotional struggles during lockdown	Parental involvement and impact during lockdown
Technology and access during COVID	Wellbeing and social connections	Learning experiences and mental health during lockdown
Parental involvement during COVID	Community engagement and school initiatives	SES influences and inequalities
School community and student interaction		School preparedness and support

Based on the data in this table, my final themes that encompassed opinions from all participants were:

- 1) Impact of communication to build relationships during lockdown**
- 2) Learning experiences during lockdown**
- 3) Wellbeing and social connections**
- 4) Socioeconomic influences and inequalities**
- 5) School as communities**

After completing the initial phase of thematic analysis and identifying the key themes, I then completed a review of my transcripts, participant by participant. During this phase, I sifted through the data to locate and extract relevant supporting quotes from parents, teachers, and students. These quotes, which aligned with the identified themes above, helped to substantiate the findings chapter of my research, providing firsthand insights and voices from the participants to enhance the depth and authenticity of my study.

Table C4 in the appendix shows a selection of quotes to reinforce each of the five thematic categories for each participant. All supporting quotes can be referenced in the appendix

Table C5 in the appendix illustrates the next stage, where I organised supporting quotes for each theme, categorised separately for parents, teachers, and students. These quotes provide the foundation for the findings section and can be referenced in full in the appendix.

This chapter outlined the methodology for the semi-structured interviews and the coding process for the transcripts. The next chapter will explore how these results addressed the research questions central to this study.

7. FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I discussed how I identified the themes from the semi-structured interviews which were:

- 1) Impact of communication to build relationships during lockdown
- 2) Learning experiences during lockdown
- 3) Wellbeing and social connections
- 4) Socioeconomic (SES) influences and inequalities
- 5) School as communities

This section aims to analyse each of these themes, using them to structure the findings from the semi-structured interviews. Where appropriate, it will also incorporate findings from the initial online survey to provide additional supporting evidence. The themes of communication and schools as communities were linked together and are detailed below.

7.1 The role of communication during school closures

The findings from my study indicated that the educational landscape witnessed a shift in communications due to the COVID pandemic and its subsequent school closures, challenging the conventional norms of the home-school partnership. Data from my study revealed that the restrictions on face-to-face interactions prompted students, staff, and parents alike to explore new avenues of communication, giving rise to an altered dynamic. The subsequent subsections illustrate the evolving dynamics of communication within the home-school partnership throughout the various phases of school closures, and the current landscape following the reopening of schools. The sub themes that emerged from this were: face-to-face versus virtual communication, communication linked to wellbeing, and increased parental involvement. Findings from each of these sub themes are presented below.

7.1.1 Face-to-face versus virtual communication

The semi-structured interviews showed that the outbreak of the pandemic marked a shift in the dynamics of communication within the home-school partnership. Student 1 captured the pre-pandemic reliance on conventional modes, recalling that "the main way of communication... was via emails... speaking to your teachers." However, the pandemic catalysed a digital transformation in education, leading to an increased dependency on online platforms, as echoed by Student 2, who affirmed that "during COVID, it was all via Zoom or via Microsoft Teams." This shift was reflected not only in students, but also in teachers and parents. Teachers such as Teacher 2 noted the shift from traditional face-to-face interactions towards more prevalent online communication, highlighting that even after schools had reopened "a lot of communication has moved online, but some face-to-face interaction is coming back."

The interview data revealed that this transition to digital communication channels appeared to have created both opportunities and hurdles for the home-school partnership. For example, Student 4 emphasised the struggles in accessing resources during lockdown, stating that "just getting resources from my teachers was the biggest struggle." Parent 3 echoed this sentiment, reminiscing that "when COVID happened, it did all fall apart completely. Nobody knew what to do." which suggests significant difficulties, at least initially, which the home-school partnership had to overcome. This is also borne out through the online survey data with a notable 33% of students expressing strong disagreement with the effectiveness of communication practices at the school. In contrast, parents and staff views were much more positive, with 85% of parents and 91% of staff showing their approval through agreement or strong agreement, highlighting a disparity in perceptions between different groups within the school community.

While transition to online platforms facilitated an increase in interaction frequency, the data indicated that it posed challenges for students in obtaining immediate feedback or effective

visual cues such as body language or nuanced tone of communication, as highlighted by Student 9 who claimed that "the main challenge was the lack of in-person communication because I felt like it was harder to ask questions. It was hard to get the right response back when you're not kind of seeing visual clues." Parent 6 added to this, expressing concerns about the lack of intimacy in online conversations, stating that "it was quite difficult for the child to make direct contact with the teacher... You've got everyone listening to what you say, you can't have a more intimate conversation." These quotes suggest that there have been considerable challenges in communication which could remain problematic now that schools have reopened, given that some online communication methods such as students communicating with their teachers through Microsoft Teams appear to have persisted. Recognising the intricate nature of the home-school partnership, staff emphasised the value of face-to-face meetings. Teacher 1 articulated the significance of genuine understanding, asserting that "There's no substitute for face-to-face interaction; it allows for a deeper level of interpersonal knowledge." Similarly, Teacher 2 acknowledged that "relationships are enhanced through in-person interactions." This suggests that students, parents, and teachers all valued the opportunity to meet in person, arguing that being physically present helped to nurture and sustain the home-school partnership which may have been affected by the transition to online communication.

However, amidst challenges, online platforms appear to have offered increased accessibility and convenience. Student 10 expressed gratitude for the speed and ease of communication, emphasising that they felt communication had improved by providing more avenues of communication and that "COVID kind of changed that, which is useful in some ways, you can email and arrange meetings on the same day, and it was very, very quick and easy."

Student 1 further highlighted the change in communication and its subsequent impact on the home-school partnership, stating that "the primary means of interaction were through emails,

letters, or direct conversations with teachers." They went on to report that one of the benefits of moving to online communication was the increased frequency of communication, as "communication outside of school, between teachers and pupils definitely, increased...as you don't need to be here." This again suggests that there is a potential for the home-school partnership to have improved post COVID through this change in communication. Student 2 provided an account of the transition to online tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, highlighting the fluidity of this transformation with the remark, "during COVID, our communication quickly shifted predominantly to Zoom and Microsoft Teams and it worked." Student 4 illustrated how students recognised numerous benefits of online communication in upholding the home-school partnership, as articulated when they stated that:

"Before COVID, if I ever have any queries or questions, I just run to the office...and just wait at the office 'til someone appears. But post-COVID it is just a quick message on Teams or a quick email to get my answer. Done. Dusted."

The perspectives of parents further support the conclusion that communication has altered the home-school partnership post-COVID through increased convenience. As Parent 1 stated, "once school started again, we were in contact much more intensively. I think the transition to being able to do the online parents evening has been very good." The implication is that whilst the disruption to traditional communication methods could have harmed the home-school partnership at the beginning of the pandemic, the increased frequency of virtual communication may have now improved the partnership as suggested by the comments of Parent 6 who stated that "At the beginning of lockdown, there was very little communication at all, really. And then gradually, I think everyone worked out a bit more how to do things online." This implies that, following COVID, all involved parties have enhanced their collaboration by adopting new methods of communication, thereby strengthening or preserving the partnership between home and school.

Yet, there exists a nuanced tension: the rapid adoption of virtual platforms during school closures accelerated an educational shift that now requires management to maintain the benefits of both face-to-face and virtual communication. Teacher 3 observed that the school “shifted to online formats for events like parents' evenings and forums.” This again suggests that after the pandemic, a lot of school communication has continued to take place online. However, the data suggested that these participants believed that it is essential to combine online communication methods with face-to-face interactions to achieve optimal outcomes. This need is emphasised by Teacher 2's recognition that “face-to-face interaction has gained greater importance post-pandemic,” highlighting the growing acknowledgment of the indispensable nature of personal interactions.

The evidence suggests that the shift towards digital communication channels due to the COVID pandemic may have long-term implications for the home-school partnership, introducing both benefits and limitations. While digital platforms have transformed the way students, staff, and parents communicate, the findings from this study suggest that face-to-face communication remains crucial. Participants agreed that a blend of virtual and in-person communication methods is essential for the most effective and dynamic interactions. This approach could ensure that the convenience of digital communication is balanced with the irreplaceable value of direct, personal interactions.

7.1.2 Communication and wellbeing

Participants reported that the shift in educational communication post-COVID resulted in some positive effects on the wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents. Students, in particular, found that communicating online gave them more confidence to not only participate in lessons more often without distractions, but it also resulted in an improved partnership with their teachers. Student 7 exemplifies this by expressing that “Once the lessons became more

interactive, I found it easier to ask my teachers questions in real life." It appears that through opening up the potential to communicate with their teachers online during school closures, some students became more confident in talking to their teachers in person once schools reopened.

There is also evidence from the interviews that teachers also adapted their communication during the school closures to maintain connections. An example of this is that the transition to digital communication allowed for more frequent communication and informal communication which allowed partnerships to form and develop through regular contact with parents. Teacher 4 emphasised the value of regular check-ins with parents to ensure wellbeing by affirming, "We regularly checked in with parents to ensure they were coping with home-schooling which was not happening before the pandemic." This change in communication appears to have persisted even after schools reopened as suggested by Parent 1 who agreed that "once school started again, we were in contact much more intensively. So, e-mail primarily, but sometimes phone calls as well, with heads of learning with the Special Educational Needs team." Student 1 also agreed that "the communication outside of school, between teachers and pupils definitely, increased." This suggests the potential for a permanent positive change in the home-school partnership through increased interaction between teachers and parents to support the wellbeing of students.

A notable strategy that emerged to improve the home-school partnerships was tailored communication, exemplified by Teacher 6's practice of sending "personalised emails." This commitment to individual attention extended to addressing students' emotional wellbeing during uncertain times. The weight of these considerations is emphasised by the insights from Teacher 6 and Teacher 7 regarding their altered attention to students' wellbeing and their pivot to more personal communication during critical situations. Teacher 6 expressed dissatisfaction during

school closures, noting, "During COVID, I was dissatisfied with the approach to addressing wellbeing. We were discouraged from inquiring about our students' emotional states."

Meanwhile, Teacher 7 detailed a change in communication patterns: " Pre COVID, we communicated largely via email. During the pandemic, there were a lot of phone conversations, especially with vulnerable students, calling them at home every week." The proactive initiatives undertaken by teachers during lockdown highlight the significance of maintaining connections to improve the home-school partnership. Teacher 4 described a weekly routine of phone calls aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of students and their families, stating, "We regularly checked in with parents to ensure they were coping with homeschooling and that the students were faring well."

The shared understanding of the importance of personalised communication and genuine support is emphasised through multiple perspectives. Student 6's reflection on the value of human interaction is evident in the comment, "Sometimes the ability to have a human conversation is really important in conveying the issues you're having." This resonates with Parent 6's recognition of the mental health support of staff as shown by the appreciation of "the presence of teachers online... feeling that I can speak to anyone about my wellbeing." Teacher 4's insights about maintaining relationships through "making parents feel supported as well... knowing that you care about their children." also aligns with these sentiments. These combined perspectives highlight the significance of open and empathetic communication to improve wellbeing in the home-school partnership and suggest ways that the partnership has changed and potentially improved post COVID.

In the post-COVID educational landscape, it has become evident from my data as well as the literature (Toquero, 2020), that a balanced communication strategy, which considers both efficiency and the quality of relationships, is vital for the overall wellbeing of the community. This approach points towards a promising path for enhancing home-school partnerships in the future,

emphasising the importance of integrating both direct and virtual communication to foster stronger connections and improved collaboration.

7.1.3 Increased parental involvement

The semi-structured interviews indicated that parents and teachers experienced an increase in communication between home and school both during the school closures and after schools had reopened permanently. Parent 1 highlighted the significance of this, mentioning, "Upon the resumption of school, our communication became significantly more intensive." However, concerns arose regarding the increased reliance on digital communication, reflected in Teacher 7's observation of a "heightened neediness from parents." This suggests that increased parental involvement does not always enhance the home-school partnership. If teachers are expected to be constantly available, similar to their role during school closures, the added demands may have negative consequences.

Parental experiences further suggested an increasing desire for communication during lockdown which persisted once schools had reopened. Parent 1 acknowledged an increase in communication by stating "We interacted with several different individuals; one was particularly effective at maintaining regular contact and engaging in conversations with me or my child." Parent 1 added, "Upon the resumption of school, our communication became significantly more intensive, primarily through email but occasionally through phone calls as well."

However, amidst this increased involvement, concerns regarding the overreliance on digital communication tools were suggested from the interview data. Some parents expressed reservations about the potential drawbacks of excessive reliance on online platforms, particularly regarding intimacy and direct interaction. Parent 6 expressed concerns about the lack of intimacy in online conversations, highlighting the difficulty children faced in directly

contacting teachers with the comment: "it was quite difficult for the child to make direct contact with the teacher." These sentiments were echoed by Parent 5 who mentioned that "the real challenge is that you want to be able to have those quick and easy conversations... but obviously the teachers' first priority is teaching and the availability to be able to have a conversation or to have an email conversation may not be there." This statement suggests that some parents are aware of their increased demand from teachers and that teachers' availability is different now compared to when schools were closed. This understanding suggests calling attention to the need for a balanced approach between online and in-person communication methods, an understanding of which could lead to more effective home-school partnerships in future. Analysis of data from the initial online survey sheds further light on the aspect of home-school communication and parental involvement. It reveals that a significant majority (83%) of students, acknowledged the school's role in promoting parental involvement through either agreement or strong agreement. This sentiment was similarly reflected among 56% of parents and an even higher proportion of 94% of staff, indicating a generally positive perception of the school's efforts in facilitating home-school communication.

These findings suggest that communication plays a complex role in maintaining the home-school partnership. Although the transition to online communication has often led to more frequent interactions, a trend that has continued post-lockdown, there is a risk that an expectation of constant communication could ultimately undermine the home-school partnership moving forwards.

7.1.4 Communication and the school community

The transformation of schools into dynamic communities, driven by the COVID pandemic, is a theme reflected in the diverse opinions of students, parents, and staff. These perspectives suggest that the shift towards integration through adapted technology, improved

communication, and collaborative engagement reshaped the concept of a school community. Data from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) reveal a strong belief in the importance of school community support, with students, parents, and staff all highlighting this factor and its significance in the initial online survey.

The semi-structured interviews indicated that students and parents believed that effective communication is a fundamental underpinning of a strong school community. Student 5 highlights this by stating, "I think the main thing is keeping those lines open and keeping on top of things and organised so that parents can feel that they can expect a speedier response." Similarly, Parent 1 highlights the challenge of balancing teaching and communication priorities: "I think the real challenge is that you want to be able to have those quick and easy conversations... but obviously the teachers' first priority is teaching and the availability to be able to have a conversation or to have an email conversation." Teacher 1 further acknowledges the importance of maintaining this partnership: "The parents who have continued, who have been engaged in the children's learning during the lockdown, you definitely want to maintain that good partnership between parents and home and school. [It] is definitely a good recipe for success for students."

This study strongly suggests that the pandemic has gradually reshaped traditional communication methods between teachers and students/parents. As Student 2 noted, "Communication between the pupils and schools was via emails, letters, or physically speaking to your teachers, but the pandemic shifted a lot of school online and because of that the whole school system learned how to use the online system." This transition appeared to mark the emergence of a digital communication period which changed how parents and schools connect within a virtual community, potentially strengthening the home-school partnership through increased frequency of communication, which tends to decline at secondary schools (Williams et al., 2002).

The interviews also revealed the pandemic's impact on parents' confidence and their interaction with schools. Many students noted an improvement in communication and trust with educational institutions during this time. For instance, Student 6 noted, "The skills I developed and the confidence I developed during that time sort of did reduce the anxiety... I feel like I'm much better at communicating with the school because I feel like I can sort of trust and rely on people." This change emphasises the pivotal role of the school community in nurturing resilience and empowering parents to actively participate in their child's educational journey.

Moreover, the integration of technology within the school community receives notable recognition. Many individuals in this study appreciated the benefits it brings. The significance of maintaining an online presence and fostering independent communication is emphasised by Student 6: "I think online presence is definitely something that should continue... Having the ability to sort of self-communicate online and be independent but also seek the things that your parents would have formally sought... I think anything that contributes to that, that the school can do, with homes, is really important." Similarly, Parent 7 highlights the convenience of online parents' evenings, stating, "Yeah, they were in person, aren't they now? That's right. I keep doing them online because it's so much easier." These perspectives highlight the importance of continuing and enhancing technological integration to support both students and parents effectively.

Although technology successfully facilitated community interaction during isolation, and some features like online parent evenings have continued, the overall data indicates that while technology can supplement in-person interaction, it cannot fully replace the need for face-to-face connections. Therefore, the data suggests that a balance of both is required to sustain a strong school community. While technology increased the frequency of interactions during the pandemic, the irreplaceable value of in-person connections and the sense of a school community remains paramount. Student 10 highlights this by stating, "There was definitely a fact

that the school kind of fractured itself within it. The school became less of a wider community and more just year groups and all. It feels like we are building one up again.” This sentiment is further echoed by Student 6, who expressed concerns about the authenticity of social interactions during school closures: “People tended to, if you were seeing someone, it would be because they were your friends rather than because they were in your class... It felt like the school was just a kind of skeleton during COVID.” Parent 7 also emphasises the importance of community by comparing their experience to that of primary schools: “I always liked primary school for the community around it... it felt like a hub, and you felt that you not only made friends and met people, but also other parents and teachers.”

This comparison with communication at primary schools by Parent 7 suggests that by enhancing digital communication, the home-school partnership at the secondary level has the potential to mirror the primary school experience, where informal conversations between parents and staff are more frequent. This suggests that greater use of digital tools could facilitate more casual and ongoing dialogue, strengthening relationships between families and secondary schools. Teacher 4 emphasises the importance of unified efforts by saying, “I think just making sure that... making sure that parents are involved and feel supported, the kids feel supported and that the children feel like parents and teachers and the school are working in unison and not kind of against each other.”

7.1.5 Summary of the Impacts of Communication

The evolution of the home-school partnership amidst the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic has signified a transformation in communication dynamics among students, parents, and staff as shown by the interview transcripts. The findings detailed in this section on the impacts of communication illustrate a significant departure from traditional communication norms, showcasing a pivotal shift in how educational stakeholders interact and collaborate. The

impact of school closures compelled a rapid adaptation to virtual platforms, fostering innovative communication methods that challenged conventional face-to-face interactions. While face-to-face communication was appreciated for its depth and personal connection, the pandemic accelerated the integration of digital tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, offering flexibility and increased frequency of communication. However, personalised care and emotional awareness emerged as cornerstones in nurturing the home-school partnership, emphasising the importance of tailored communication to address students' wellbeing during times of uncertainty. The role of educators extended beyond academic support, as evidenced by their proactive outreach to ensure students' emotional welfare which suggests a change in the home-school partnership post-COVID. However, this shift was not without challenges, as increased parental involvement resulted in heightened expectations and communication demands on teachers which could potentially harm partnerships.

Moreover, the varied perspectives expressed by students, parents, and staff underline the multifaceted nature of communication within the home-school partnership. Disparities in perceptions regarding the effectiveness of school communication practices highlight the complexities and diverse experiences among stakeholders. Despite differences in viewpoints, a common thread resonates - communication has changed post COVID which has affected the home-school partnership.

The changes in communication caused by the school closures also appears to have reshaped the traditional view of schools, elevating them from purely educational settings to essential hubs within the community. The pandemic has not only altered the methods of communication but also accentuated the school's crucial role in supporting and engaging with the community. Consequently, schools are now recognised as integral elements of the community fabric, playing a pivotal role in supporting families, embracing diversity, and fostering inclusivity. This shift reflects a deepening appreciation for schools as centres that extend beyond academic

instruction to offer tailored support, meeting the varied needs of their communities. Thus, this transition marks a significant change in the home-school partnership, leading to the potential of more collaborative, supportive, and inclusive educational environments in the post-pandemic era which could subsequently improve the quality of the partnership in the future.

In essence, the post-COVID landscape signifies a shift in how educational stakeholders communicate, collaborate, and support each other. The combination of traditional face-to-face interactions with the integration of digital communication tools has reshaped the dynamics of the home-school partnership. This transformation suggests the resilience and adaptability of stakeholders in navigating the school closures and suggests that effective communication remains vital, regardless of the method, for nurturing and sustaining robust home-school partnerships in the future.

This theme has centred on aspects of the home-school partnership related to communication beyond teaching and learning hours. The next section will expand on these findings but with a focus on how changes in communication within the home-school partnership affected the learning experience of students.

7.2. Learning experiences during school closures

The rapid transition to online learning during the COVID pandemic significantly altered students' learning experiences, with the interviews suggesting that some students became more independent and took greater ownership of their education. However, for other students, the absence of in-person teaching and the lack of non-verbal communication during online lessons made learning more challenging. In addition, many students, parents, and staff expressed that the impact on social development was a greater concern than academic learning loss during school closures. This shift in focus has important implications for the home-school partnership, as any anxiety experienced by students, parents, and teachers about catching up on missed

learning could strain the partnership. However, if the anticipated anxiety over learning loss turns out to be less significant than expected, it could ease pressure within the partnership, allowing other priorities to take precedence. The following sections will explore the findings in this study related to learning experiences and concerns about lost learning, with a focus on student perspectives and parental roles.

7.2.1 Student Perspectives: Autonomy, Challenges, and lost learning.

My findings suggest that remote learning provided some students with newfound autonomy in their educational journey, allowing them to exercise greater self-direction in online lessons. This increased autonomy has the potential to reshape the home-school partnership, as students may become more confident in taking a larger role within the partnership, potentially reducing their reliance on teachers or parents. This shift could lead to a more balanced and collaborative dynamic, where students actively contribute to their own learning process. This was evidenced in the data with Student 2 highlighting that "Online lessons were more about how much you wanted to participate... more up to yourself." This is confirmed by Student 4 who stated: "I'd say before lockdown or before COVID, I would just, you know, it's kind of like listening to a teacher take things on board and like, just memorise. Just try and memorise, whereas post lockdown I feel like we've kind of understood, like cool, it's about working up not just throwing it at you and hoping for the best" (Student 4). The suggestion that learning experiences have changed, especially in terms of how students interacted with their teachers and experienced varying degrees of autonomy during school closures and after the reopening of schools, is echoed by Student 7 who stated that

"At first it was a bit more difficult to contact teachers. I'd say specifically before we started doing online Teams lessons when everything was just set work on Show My

Homework (an online platform for setting homework). But once the lessons became more interactive, I found it easier to ask my teacher's questions in real life."

This suggests that, after the initial shock of school closures, learning experiences may have improved for students who were proactive and appreciated the increased autonomy. These students appear to have benefited from the new way of working, feeling more encouraged to ask questions and take greater control of their learning. However, there were clear challenges in learning as not every student enjoyed the extra autonomy. For example, student 8 suggested that "I think often it was difficult to have the same clarity without being in person." with Student 9 agreeing that "I think the main challenge was the lack of in-person communication, because I felt like it was harder to ask questions." These observations concur that the educational experience underwent a transformation during school closures, with the nature of this change, whether positive or negative, often depending on individual students' learning styles. The data suggested that some students who thrived on autonomy were more likely to respond positively about home learning during lockdown as they appeared to enjoy the opportunity to manage their own learning pace and schedule. Conversely, some of the students who relied more on direct, physical interactions for motivation and understanding faced challenges adapting to this new mode of learning as they missed having the opportunity to get direct support from their teachers in the classroom. This has potential implications for teaching practices, as it suggests that some students may benefit from increased autonomy moving forward after the pandemic and the home-school partnership may need to adapt to support this shift.

There remains debate over whether the varied learning experiences during lockdown have resulted in lasting learning gaps or 'learning loss' (Pier, et al., 2021). Any gaps that persisted after schools reopened have the potential to increase anxiety for both students and parents, and in turn potentially straining the home-school partnership. However, it appears that for students who embraced their newfound autonomy during remote learning, this sense of ownership

appeared to boost engagement, mitigating concerns about learning loss and ultimately strengthening their relationships with both school and parents.

This is highlighted by Student 6 who expressed that "during COVID was when I sort of experienced an increased independence in communicating issues... I'd email teachers if I wasn't able to be there for a Team's lesson, I'd make sure I emailed them immediately. I'd communicate with them; I could ask them about any work I might have missed." Student 6's experience suggests a broader implication: that the shift to remote learning, while fraught with challenges, could also have presented unique opportunities for students to develop skills such as self-management, problem-solving, and direct communication.

There is also a concern that a perception of lost learning could harm the home-school partnership through increased anxiety. Teacher 1 exemplifies this by worrying that "learning loss could become a self-fulfilling prophecy" suggesting that concerns about lost learning are not merited in evidence but could cause anxiety amongst parents and students. Parent 6 agrees with this and suggests that "there is no such thing as lost learning, we just learn in different ways." Student 6 however, offers an alternative viewpoint on how much learning was lost by arguing:

"I think undoubtedly there was lost learning, and I think I think it's less the content that is going to be felt more like it felt to a greater extent than people. I think it's sort of the skills like... the school environment is a really important one beyond just the content that you learn. But the skills developed throughout that time, whether that be friendships like social interactions, things like that, I think they all form a really important role of a person that I think was lost."

This quote reflects on the impact of the COVID pandemic on the home-school partnership, emphasising that the most significant loss experienced during this period was not necessarily

academic content, but rather the social skills that are typically developed within the school environment. This suggests that schools, students, and parents may need to prioritise the rebuilding of these social skills, perhaps over academic skills in the short term, in order to rebuild and potentially improve the home-school partnership in the future. Student 6 appears to acknowledge that while some learning content was inevitably missed, the deeper and more consequential loss pertains to the broader set of skills and experiences that are cultivated through regular school attendance. The quote highlights the school's role as more than just an academic environment; it serves as a space where students develop essential social and emotional skills, reinforcing the importance of schools as communities, as previously mentioned. These skills include building friendships and engaging in social interactions. These skills are essential to a student's development, influencing their identity, interactions with peers, parents, and teachers, and the home-school partnership. Deming (2017) also highlights their importance in the labour market, suggesting that their loss could impact future employment prospects.

Student 6 suggests that the disruption caused by the pandemic and the shift away from traditional, in-person schooling led to a gap in these vital areas of personal growth. This gap signifies a loss not just in educational content but perhaps in the overall development of students as individuals capable of thriving in a social context. This insight calls attention to the need for a renewed focus on these non-academic aspects of education in the post-COVID era, hinting at the potential for changes in how home-school partnerships approach the development of these life skills moving forward.

These findings suggest that some students developed a deeper understanding of which aspects of their education to prioritise. Similarly, parents gained a new perspective on their role in the home-school partnership and attitudes to learning which is explored in the next section.

7.2.2 Parental roles and attitudes towards learning

The semi-structured interviews suggest that parents assumed multifaceted roles whilst navigating remote education, balancing increased responsibilities and emotional strains. Through observing the impact of restricted social interactions within the home-school partnership on their children, parents faced challenges in aiding their children's education while managing their own commitments. Parent 1 acknowledged this strain, expressing, "Family tension arose from attempting to help teach", highlighting the complexities within households amidst the shift to remote education. An additional complication for parents to manage was how students coped with the various lockdowns, with the lack of social connections during these periods, and the impact they had on their children's personalities. This sentiment was echoed by Teacher 4, who mentioned that they "remember [students] coming back to school after the second lockdown... Their [students'] personalities had completely changed, and so that made it quite difficult to build relationships" (Teacher 4). This demonstrates that the education of these students was challenging for students, teachers, and parents.

Throughout the school closures, the interviews suggest that parents strived to support their children's educational journey, which was especially challenging amidst limited direct interaction with schools. This was further emphasised in the initial online survey data where 68% of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that they support their child with their home learning. The survey also showed that 22% strongly agreed or agreed that they had a better relationship with the child post COVID, and 48% responding neutrally to this statement.

Parent 7's positive experience of supporting Maths education at home, illustrated by their remark that they "actually found doing maths... easier," aligns with Teacher 1's observation of engaged parents ensuring their child "be on the computer on time." These examples suggest that some parents played an active role in maintaining learning continuity, consistent with the

survey findings in phase one. This collaboration could strengthen the home-school partnership moving forward.

However, Teacher 6 highlighted challenges in engaging certain families, noting that some students "weren't joining your online lessons, which added stress due to the extra effort required to follow up." This suggests that while the relationship between teachers and more engaged parents may have strengthened, the pandemic presented different challenges for less engaged families, particularly those impacted by socioeconomic factors. Teacher 4 also observed that students became "a lot more introverted" upon returning to school, indicating that the disruption may have affected students' social development. Teachers now seem more aware of families who did not fully engage during school closures, suggesting that these families may require more frequent involvement moving forward to maintain a strong home-school partnership.

Parent 1 reinforced the emotional toll, stating, "The difficulty... not really being able to see friends... was physically painful," highlighting the significant impact of limited social interactions on children. This could call for a shift in the home-school partnership, focusing more on rebuilding peer relationships that were lost during the closures. The interviews suggest that while some parents maintained a strong home-school partnership but were concerned about their children's social development, others, particularly those less engaged, experienced a deterioration in the relationship. Schools will need to address this decline in different ways to rebuild and strengthen the partnership with these families.

7.2.3 Summary of Learning experiences during lockdown

The interviews of students, parents, and staff indicate that all of these groups have acquired a new understanding of which aspects of learning are deemed most essential and which parts will need a greater emphasis moving forwards. The school closures have evidently prompted a re-

evaluation of educational priorities, highlighting the importance of adaptability and relevance in learning content.

The combined insights demonstrate how learning was preserved, adapted, and even improved through increased student autonomy in some cases, innovative approaches, and collaborative efforts. However, there are suggestions that although the implications of lost learning on the home-school partnership may have been minimal, the social development loss caused by the sustained school closures could have a more lasting impact on partnerships at home and at school which may require a concerted effort to repair and ensure lasting damage is not done.

The interviews suggest that in addition to learning subject content, all parties in the home-school partnership are now more aware of the importance of social connections and the need to work together to maintain students' wellbeing. This is further discussed in the next section.

7.3 Wellbeing and social connections

The shift in perspectives towards the emotional and social benefits of schools has led to an increased emphasis on wellbeing among students, parents, and staff. This newfound prioritisation of well-being is evident across all participant interviews, highlighting its impact on the home-school partnership. It has led to a transformation in well-being culture, with all participants becoming more aware of mental health and well-being. Additionally, there is a shared desire among all groups for schools to integrate well-being into the curriculum. These themes are further discussed below.

7.3.1 Transformation in Wellbeing Culture

The interviews suggest that the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic, initiated a change in the culture of wellbeing within schools. Teacher 1 highlighted this shift, noting an increased societal consciousness and freedom in expressing concerns about the pandemic's

impact, in the comment "People became much more aware of the effects of the pandemic and much freer to express how they were feeling." This change was not just exclusive to staff but also resonated deeply with students and parents. Student 7 articulated an increased focus on mental health with the statement, "I definitely feel like I know more, where I can go if I need, especially with mental health and stuff, there's just been more focus put on that." Similarly, Parent 1 observed an upsurge in discussions about managing stress within the family, stating, "I think there was a lot more in the way of discussion about managing the kids' stress and managing family stress as well." This was further emphasised by Parent 3's observation that "recognition of it [wellbeing] may have been enhanced."

Similarly, Student 6 emphasised the significance of open communication in addressing personal issues, highlighting the development of valuable skills during the pandemic: "I think the skills I developed and the confidence I developed during that time sort of did reduce the anxiety of that... I feel like I'm much better at communicating with the school because I feel like I can sort of trust and rely on people." These insights suggest a significant shift in the approach to wellbeing as a result of the pandemic, hinting at the potential for strengthened home-school partnerships through a shared understanding of the role of wellbeing in academic success.

The influence of the school closures on student wellbeing and their social connections is illustrated through a variety of viewpoints, offering a nuanced understanding of how the home-school partnership has evolved in response to these challenges. Student 4 reflects on the profound mental health impacts of school closures, noting how these experiences have had a lasting effect on educational engagement and success: "Just how big an impact COVID and the lockdown had on people's mental health... affects their education now." This perspective emphasises the intertwined nature of mental health and educational outcomes, suggesting that the ramifications of the pandemic extend far beyond immediate academic concerns to influence long-term learning trajectories.

Complementing this, Parent 2 expresses concern about the emphasis on academic recovery post-pandemic, particularly the potential negative effects of an intensive catch-up agenda on students' mental health and resilience: "There is some need for considering the impact of catch up on their students' mental health or their resilience. This comment points to a growing recognition among parents and educators of the need to balance academic objectives with the imperative to support students' emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Together, these insights suggest a shift in the home-school partnership towards a more holistic approach to education, one that equally values mental health and academic achievement as schools navigate the post-pandemic landscape. This evolution reflects a broader understanding that student wellbeing is foundational to effective learning and that fostering resilient, mentally healthy students requires concerted efforts from both homes and schools. As such, these perspectives highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced focus on both academic catch-up and the promotion of students' mental health and social-emotional skills as integral components of educational recovery and success in the aftermath of the school closures.

Additionally, some students experienced positive shifts in family dynamics during lockdown. Student 8 shared their experience, "My family got closer during lockdown. We live in a small flat, and we were all working and studying from home, which brought us together," showcasing the diverse impacts of the pandemic on familial relationships and home life. However, some participants were not satisfied in how wellbeing was dealt with by schools with Student 3 noting a gap in support as there was "not much focus on wellbeing, mental health in school." Teacher 2 also observed a change in educational priorities post-pandemic, suggesting the need for comprehensive support systems: "Before the pandemic, I don't really remember hearing much about it, the only things mentioned were... Let's help them. Let's not give them more work or something like that." These comments suggest that the school closures resulting from the COVID pandemic were pivotal in bringing mental health and wellbeing to the fore for students,

parents, and teachers. The interview data suggests a growing recognition of the need to integrate mental wellbeing effectively in education and that more needs to be done within the home-school partnership moving forwards to focus on wellbeing.

Together, these viewpoints suggest that students, parents, and teachers are all more aware of what wellbeing is, and how important it is for academic success, where the need for a balanced and integrated approach to education that equally values mental health and academic success is increasingly recognised. The data also suggests that there is a clear call for action to bridge existing gaps in wellbeing support offered to students, parents, and staff to ensure that mental wellbeing is effectively woven into educational strategies moving forward. These perspectives highlight a growing consensus on the importance of a holistic educational approach to the home-school partnership, while also highlighting areas, such as curriculum design to promote mental health, where further development and focus are needed to truly support the wellbeing of students in the post-pandemic landscape.

7.3.2 Curriculum Integration

The importance of integrating wellbeing education into school curriculums was a key theme in the interviews. Teacher 1 highlighted this by stating, "Training our children to manage their mental health as part of a curriculum is something that definitely should be." Parent 3 echoed this sentiment, supporting the inclusion of wellbeing in educational programmes as a "good idea to manage stress." Student 5 also advocated for equipping students with "things that we can do to make sure we're looking after ourselves," thereby endorsing a formal and structured approach to mental health education. These perspectives collectively suggest a shared agreement among teachers, parents, and students on the necessity of systematically incorporating wellbeing strategies into the curriculum.

Student 7 noted a post-pandemic shift in educational priorities, acknowledging the increased emphasis on mental health in schools: "It's definitely taken on more importance. I still don't think it's a flawless system, and there's probably more the school could do." This observation recognises the progress made by educational institutions while also acknowledging areas needing further improvement. Teacher 5 reinforced this by saying, "There is now, more so than ever, a big push on wellbeing, but it was also an understanding that everyone was going through a really difficult time, and people were a lot more aware of it and sensitive to it."

This shift suggests a move towards a more holistic educational approach, where wellbeing and consideration of students' home environments are integral to their academic journey. For instance, Parent 5 noted, "I think the social side has taken a bigger knock," while Parent 3 pointed out that "some students found it challenging to stay motivated during remote learning, which impacted their mental wellbeing and overall learning experience." These views highlight the need for flexible educational approaches and the importance of adapting to new methods of delivering education in a post-pandemic world.

Parent 2 emphasised the critical link between wellbeing, academic success, and socio-economic status, stating, "How chaotic your household is, to have that kind of space for children to learn in an adequate environment is important." This comment highlights a link between the home environment and students' learning experiences, a topic explored in more detail in Section 7.4.

However, balancing wellbeing support with academic responsibilities emerged as a concern. Teacher 8 pointed out the challenges of this balance: "We've still got jobs to do, kids to educate, and a limited budget in which to do it, so that balancing act is difficult." This statement reflects a potential unease about the time spent on wellbeing activities, which was also shared by some parents and students. Parent 2 expressed concern about the potential negative impact of

intensive catch-up strategies on students' mental health, questioning whether "catch-up is going to be actually positive for the young person or whether it's going to be detrimental because it's going to weigh too much on their mental health or resilience." Teacher 7 agreed, stating, "The biggest thing is the discourse around exams and progress, and how we talk to kids about needing to hit their targets." This tension between prioritising wellbeing and achieving academic results could affect the home-school partnership if parents, students, and teachers have differing views on the balance between student wellbeing and academic achievement.

The open comments in the initial online survey revealed additional insights into wellbeing concerns. Students expressed a clear desire for more attention to mental health, especially regarding the impact of missing GCSE exams on A-level performance, and a desire for teachers to prioritise wellbeing. Parental feedback echoed these concerns, emphasising the need for a better balance between academic learning and mental health support, with some criticising that "the school did not prioritise students' wellbeing."

In contrast, staff opinions were more varied. Some noted that "certain students thrived without distractions" (Teacher 5), which may have improved their wellbeing. The interview findings suggest a more nuanced view with an overall impression that students, parents, and staff are now more aware of the wellbeing of families due to the additional information gained during school closures. This is exemplified by Teacher 2 who stated that "Obviously there was much more communication with parents who needed it, you know, and who may not have been flagged up before, like maybe they didn't meet the threshold." The extent to which wellbeing improved or deteriorated during school closures appears to have varied widely, influenced by numerous factors, with lower SES being a significant one. While some positive observations were made, particularly regarding increased awareness of wellbeing, these were balanced by concerns shared by students and parents and there appears to be a growing recognition of the need to prioritise student wellbeing, rather than focusing solely on academic outcomes

These findings suggest a disparity in perceptions of wellbeing among the different groups. While students and parents predominantly expressed concerns about the adequacy of wellbeing support during school closures, staff offered a more nuanced view, acknowledging both benefits and challenges. This disparity highlights potential areas of tension within the home-school partnership, suggesting a delicate balance between providing wellbeing support and maintaining a curriculum focus. Addressing this balance is crucial for sustaining or improving the home-school partnership.

The evolving priorities in education post-pandemic reflect a growing emphasis on wellbeing as a potential positive outcome. While students and parents see this shift as essential, teachers express concerns about balancing academic priorities with wellbeing. The pandemic has provided an opportunity for educational institutions to re-evaluate and potentially strengthen the home-school partnership through better integration and understanding of wellbeing strategies. This approach, whilst not without its challenges, could support academic catch-up while also supporting the emotional wellbeing of students, recognising that educational success is as important as student wellbeing, as agreed upon by all groups in this study.

The increased focus on wellbeing has significant implications for the home-school partnership in the post-COVID era. Schools could integrate wellbeing support into their curricula and routines, establishing robust support systems and conducting regular check-ins with students. As Teacher 4 mentioned, "Maintaining those relationships and making parents feel supported, the parents do appreciate the communication and knowing that you care about their children." Teacher 7 expanded on this by suggesting that "The single biggest thing you can do for people, be it students or adults, is having supportive conversations and actually taking the pressure off in terms of workloads."

7.3.3 Summary of Impacts of Wellbeing and Social Connections

The interviews suggest that, for some families, the interconnectedness of family and school environments and its impact on students' wellbeing became more pronounced during the pandemic. Students, parents, and staff welcomed the increased appreciation of wellbeing and emphasised the necessity for schools to engage more actively with families in supporting wellbeing. Teachers, however, appeared to be pragmatic regarding the delicate balancing act of promoting student wellbeing whilst simultaneously focusing on academic success. The pandemic catalysed increased awareness around wellbeing, leading to potential opportunities for its integration into future educational strategies. However, balancing support for wellbeing with academic responsibilities is a delicate task, requiring ongoing attention and adaptation, as mentioned by teachers. This multifaceted perspective emphasises the need for a holistic approach to supporting wellbeing in educational settings, considering the diverse needs and experiences of all students.

The improved understanding and appreciation of wellbeing in the post-COVID home-school partnership indicates a clear shift toward prioritising wellbeing alongside academic learning. However, teachers caution that this should not be at the expense of time dedicated to academic results, and there needs to be careful management of time to achieve an optimal balance. In essence, the post-COVID era presents an opportunity to redefine the home-school partnership by creating a curriculum that effectively balances wellbeing with academic success. This approach would foster environments where children feel supported not only academically, but also emotionally and psychologically.

Moreover, the pandemic appears to have highlighted the interconnectedness of family and school environments in affecting students' wellbeing. The acknowledgment by students,

parents, and teachers of the link between wellbeing and SES is discussed further in Section 7.4 below.

7.4.SES influences and inequalities

The COVID pandemic brought to light the critical role of socioeconomic factors within the educational landscape in reshaping the home-school partnership. This section now examines the findings from the semi-structured interviews that were relevant to this theme.

7.4.1 Digital Divide

The interview data revealed that the transition to online learning during school closures exacerbated the challenges posed by the digital divide, significantly affecting students' access to education. Student 3 highlighted a key aspect of this challenge, stating, "During COVID, it was probably a problem because to join Teams, meetings and stuff, you have to have Wi-Fi, devices that were capable of it." This statement indicates the technical barriers to participating in remote learning. Echoing this concern, Student 9 elaborated on the broader implications of inadequate digital access, stating, "if you didn't have a stable connection, if you didn't have the space to do it in your house, if you didn't have the security to do it in your house... it came to the forefront during COVID." This comment highlights how the school closures magnified existing inequalities, making the digital divide a critical issue for many students.

Parents provided further insights into how the home environment plays a crucial role in learning, linking these challenges directly to lower SES. Parent 2 observed, "The fact on how chaotic your household is... is very much dependent on that socioeconomic status," suggesting that a disruptive home environment can hinder learning. Parent 4 elaborated on this by highlighting the disadvantage faced by children in unsuitable study environments, stating, "If your home environment is not conducive to study, then that is a massive disadvantage for those children."

These comments from parents illuminate the strong connection between a family's SES and the quality of the home learning environment, indicating that these factors have become even more significant to the home-school partnership in the post-COVID landscape.

Together, these reflections illustrate the intertwined nature of technological access, SES, and the home environment in shaping students' educational experiences during remote learning. They indicate the heightened importance of addressing the digital divide to strengthen the home-school partnership, suggesting a need for targeted support and resources to bridge this gap and create equitable learning opportunities for all students in the aftermath of the school closures.

Teachers had similar concerns about the digital divide and offered a broad view of these issues. Teacher 4 mentioned the challenges of resource sharing in crowded homes, "I know when I was teaching there was eight or nine siblings, all sat in one room trying to access learning." Teacher 8 highlighted the broader implications: "During COVID, it certainly affected it a lot because of all those homes that either didn't have broadband or didn't have laptops." Both comments suggest a growing awareness among teachers about the impact of lower SES on learning environments and the difficulties students face. This increased understanding could significantly influence home-school partnerships, demanding attention moving forward.

Students like Student 10 expressed concerns about the widening educational gap due to disparities in support. Student 10 observed, "I knew so many people did so much worse on their GCSEs and A levels who weren't from the same socioeconomic background as me," highlighting their opinion of the impact of socioeconomic disparities on academic performance. Parent 1 pointed out the overlooked needs of certain demographics: "It's maybe those families that sit slightly outside [of financial assistance] but still need support." Parent 7 reflected on perceived variations in learning experiences linked to socioeconomic differences, stating, "The

gap must be huge... Because I think the kids that were in school... I don't think there was much being taught." While it must be recognised that participants were expressing their perceptions of the 'digital divide' and its impact on access to education, their views align with existing research. Beckman et al. (2018) and Han and Li (2025) found that families without consistent access to technology were among the most affected by school closures, while Mishra et al. (2020) identified unstable internet connections in lower SES households as one of the greatest challenges for online teaching. In contrast, Student 2 offered a more optimistic perspective: "And I think that that gap, well that gap that was minimised has stayed minimised," suggesting that, from their viewpoint, educational disparities had been reduced and remained relatively narrow. These contrasting perceptions highlight how the impacts of school closures on learning were experienced and perceived differently across stakeholder groups, and how public narratives may have influenced parental interpretations of the home–school partnership. However, Teacher 1's observation starkly contrasts with this perspective: "You still understand that there are parents who struggle to just be able to do the basic things for their children." This statement highlights the persistent challenges families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds face in providing essential educational resources for their children. These resources encompass support, access to technology, and managing the pressures of family life. Teacher 7 also highlighted the challenges of accessing educational provision encountered by families with lower literacy levels by stating: "You know, I don't doubt there are kids from a lower sort of economic background whose parents haven't got the literacy in the way those systems work." Parent 5 acknowledged that "the disparities have always been there, but COVID just made it even more apparent," highlighting how the pandemic intensified perceptions of existing socioeconomic inequalities. This sentiment is echoed by Teacher 4, who stated, 'I think we're more aware of it (SES), but I also think the gap has gotten bigger.'" Similarly, Teacher 5 agreed with perceptions that "the gap has gone bigger." These reflections suggest that students, parents, and teachers are not only more aware of socioeconomic disparities, but that many

perceive the socio-economic gap to have widened as a result of school closures. While some of these views are grounded in participants' direct experiences, for example, challenges related to access, engagement, or support, others appear to reflect broader societal narratives or commonly held assumptions about inequality during the pandemic. This blend of personal observation and wider perception highlights the extent to which concerns about socioeconomic inequality became more visible and widely acknowledged within the school community during this period.

The school closures highlighted the impact of lower SES on students' learning experiences, as reported by students, parents, and teachers alike. Student 2 highlighted the difficulties faced by families with limited resources, noting that "Wi-Fi problems, technological problems...made it a bit difficult." Moreover, the shift to online learning gave teachers a rare glimpse into their students' home environments, revealing disparities that had previously been less visible. This deeper understanding may have allowed teachers to see their students as individuals with diverse home situations, rather than just part of a collective group. This insight, as a natural consequence of the pandemic, has shed light on the need for a more empathetic and informed approach to the home-school partnership. It suggests that teachers and schools should leverage their newfound understanding of the varied circumstances faced by disadvantaged families. By doing so, they can foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, recognising and addressing the unique challenges that these families encounter. This approach not only acknowledges the difficulties highlighted during the pandemic but also offers a pathway toward strengthening the home-school partnership through greater empathy and targeted support.

In response to the evolving educational landscape during the pandemic, both parents and teachers were required to adapt rapidly. Parent 4 reflected on the changes in educational delivery, contrasting the simplicity of traditional methods with the current scenario: "It was really

simple [before]. You had a textbook; you had an exercise book... the dynamic has changed." In line with these changes, teachers sought innovative ways to engage with students. Teacher 6 highlighted the increased emphasis on tutoring as a proactive measure, stating, "We've got a lot more tutoring... lots of schools have been given funding for extra tutoring." This development is indicative of efforts to mitigate any potential learning gaps arising from the transition to online education. This pivot to a technology-focused educational approach following COVID brings to light potential ramifications for the home-school partnership. As education becomes increasingly reliant on digital tools and resources, there's a risk that this dependence could widen the gap between families with varying levels of technological access. This disparity not only threatens to magnify educational inequalities but also to dilute the vital connection between families and educational institutions. Such a scenario highlights the critical need for schools and families to collaborate closely, ensuring that comprehensive support is available to bridge the digital divide. By doing so, it is essential to guarantee that every student has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality education and maintain robust communication channels with their schools, thereby reinforcing the home-school partnership in the face of evolving educational landscapes.

The insights from students, parents, and teachers offer a comprehensive view of the socioeconomic influences and inequalities, exacerbated by school closures, which have affected the home-school partnership. The digital divide, the critical role of lower SES in educational access and outcomes, and the emergence of resilience and adaptive communication strategies are key themes. These findings highlight the urgent need for continued efforts to ensure equitable access to education and support for all students, irrespective of their socioeconomic background to rebuild and improve the home-school partnership in the future. Student 6's reflection, "So if your parents don't have an awareness of those sort of aspects of the school community, I think you can easily be... quite confusing who to get in touch with, absence emails, things like that," aligns with Teacher 8's perspective:

"sometimes not being able to go to the parent was the way that you would find out about what was going on with the parents and the kids. So it was really difficult." These insights collaboratively highlight the intricate dynamics of socio-economic hurdles between families and schools, and their impact on the home-school partnership during school closures. The teacher interviews revealed that some staff were successful in reaching difficult-to-contact parents through regular phone calls. Teacher 4 mentioned calling to "check that the parents were getting on OK with homeschooling and that the kids were alright." Similarly, Teacher 6 explained that calls were made to "find out what's going on or if parents could get their kids out of bed before they go to work." These personal efforts helped maintain communication and support for hard-to-reach families during remote learning. If these regular phone call check-ins continue, they have the potential to strengthen the home-school partnership by helping to mitigate challenges related to the digital divide for families facing difficulties moving forward.

Moving forward, it is crucial to address these disparities to help create a more inclusive and equitable home-school partnership. Strategies may include enhancing access to technology, considering the diverse home environments of students in educational planning, and fostering effective communication channels between schools, students, and parents. The post-pandemic era presents an opportunity to reassess and strengthen the home-school partnership, ensuring that every student has the resources and support needed to succeed academically and emotionally.

7.4.2 Summary of the Impacts of Socioeconomic influences and inequalities

The COVID pandemic has highlighted the influence of socioeconomic factors on the home-school partnership by exposing and exacerbating existing inequalities, such as unequal access to technology, and revealing the varied home situations of students. Semi-structured interviews reveal that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds struggled with limited access to

digital resources and inadequate learning environments, significantly impacting students' educational experiences. These findings indicate that the home-school partnership has become more critical and complex following the COVID pandemic. Evidence from the interviews suggests that some teachers successfully maintained contact with parents who were hard to reach due to socioeconomic factors and limited access or familiarity with digital communication. In many circumstances this outreach then led to a greater awareness of individual family needs. If regular contact through traditional methods like phone calls continues, this increased awareness has the potential to strengthen the home-school partnership and better support families moving forward.

Experiences shared by students, parents, and teachers during this time paint a vivid picture of the challenges and adaptations necessitated by the sudden shift to online learning. The stark differences in students' home situations, ranging from overcrowded living spaces to inconsistent internet access, highlight the varied impact of lower SES on educational outcomes. Teachers' insights into the difficulties of sharing resources, coupled with parents' concerns about study environments, have deepened their understanding of the socioeconomic disparities that may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The key takeaway is that some teachers are now more aware of individual families' SES, which could have implications for the profession. This new awareness opens the door to a more personalised and equitable approach in addressing students' needs, potentially shaping future pedagogical strategies to better support disadvantaged families and ensure that socioeconomic disparities are addressed more effectively.

Yet, amidst these challenges, the resilience and adaptability of the educational community stand out. The move towards more teacher-led approaches and the rapid adaptation to technology-centric education, while not without its problems, represent an effort to bridge the gap and ensure continuity of learning. However, this shift also brings to light concerns about the potential

for deepening educational inequalities and highlights the importance of maintaining a strong connection between homes and schools.

To improve the home-school partnership moving forward, it is crucial to ensure equitable access to digital resources and create supportive home environments conducive to learning.

Strengthening communication between schools and families, providing targeted support for disadvantaged students, and fostering a collaborative approach to education can help mitigate the impact of socioeconomic disparities and enhance the overall educational experience.

8. DISCUSSION

This thesis explored the home-school partnership in the post-COVID era, focusing on how school closures affected this relationship and the lessons that can be learned to strengthen it moving forward. While extensive research exists on the home-school partnership, the COVID pandemic presents a unique opportunity for original contribution by examining how the partnership evolved under unprecedented and prolonged pressure. The prolonged school closures placed considerable pressure on both schools and families, leading to changes in the partnership that had not been seen before. This study aimed to analyse these shifts and provide recommendations for enhancing the home-school partnership in the future.

In the previous section I set out the findings from both stages of my data collection (initial online survey, followed by semi-structured interviews). These findings were categorised as follows:

- 1) The role of communication during school closures
- 2) Learning experiences during school closures
- 3) Wellbeing and social connections
- 4) Socioeconomic influences and inequalities

In this section I will discuss these findings by linking them back to my earlier literature review and theoretical frameworks on home-school partnerships. I will conduct this discussion under the headings of my research questions, which as a reminder are:

- 1) How have school closures, as a result of the COVID pandemic, affected the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children?**
- 2) What lessons can be learned from the impact of school closures caused by the COVID pandemic to support and improve the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children in the future?**

8.1 How have school closures, as a result of the COVID pandemic, affected the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children?

The findings from this study that address the first research question can be grouped into two distinct areas: changes in communication, and the impact of wellbeing and socioeconomic status (SES) on partnerships. The increased frequency and shift to online communication methods have given some students and parents greater confidence to participate in the home-school partnership, though this has introduced its own challenges. Additionally, the focus on wellbeing and lower SES has prompted a shift in the partnership, with students, parents, and teachers all concerned about how school closures affected wellbeing due to the loss of social connections. All groups in this study expressed more concern over the loss of social interaction than over missed academic learning. Participants also raised concerns that gaps in accessing education have widened due to a lower SES. This change is largely attributed to the increased awareness brought about by the altered communication patterns during school closures. Each of these areas is discussed in more detail below.

8.1.1 Communication and the impact on the home-school partnership

In this thesis, I applied the Framework for Interdisciplinary Collaboration (FIC), which defines a partnership as a collaborative interaction between two equal agents, as presented by Gerdes et al. (2021). Akkerman and Bakker (2011) further elaborate on this framework, emphasising the importance of sharing skills, opinions, and viewpoints between these agents. However, the notion of "equal agents" often appears to be a theoretical ideal rather than a reality. Research by Chan and Ritchie (2016) and Billman et al. (2005) indicates that parent-school partnerships are frequently unequal, with parents not always recognised as equal participants. My findings also suggest that this "equal agent" aspect may require reconsideration, especially in light of the changing power dynamics between parents and teachers.

The evolution of this power dynamic appears to be driven by the increased exposure parents had to the educational process during school closures, when lessons were delivered online. This exposure seemingly boosted parents' confidence in understanding the learning process, leading to a more active role in their child's education. Many parents in this study perceived this increased involvement as a move toward greater equality within the home-school partnership. However, my research highlights a nuanced reality: while some teachers observed an increase in engagement, this was not uniformly felt across all parent groups. Specifically, teachers noted that while some parents became more proactive, others, often influenced by socioeconomic status and access to technology, became more challenging to reach.

Additionally, teachers reported mixed feelings about this heightened parental involvement. Although there were efforts to engage hard-to-reach parents through regular check-ins, some teachers viewed the increased interaction from other parents as undesired interference, describing it as "neediness" due to the persistent demands for information. This tension suggests a divergence in how equality within the partnership is perceived; while parents felt

empowered, some teachers experienced it as an overreach that strained the relationship, reflecting similar findings by Huang et al. (2024).

This complex shift invites further reflection on the FIC and how the home-school partnership has changed following COVID. While there was an enhancement in sharing skills, information, and viewpoints during school closures, not all these changes have been welcomed. My findings suggest that although equality within the partnership increased, the quality of interactions, especially the sharing of viewpoints, sometimes detracted from the partnership's effectiveness. This implies that the framework may benefit from refinement, acknowledging that there may be an optimal balance in viewpoint exchange to prevent potential strain. Ultimately, this evolving dynamic raises important questions about how increased equality influences the home-school relationship, providing insights that could shape future approaches to partnerships in education. My findings suggest that a truly equal partnership may not be universally desired by teachers, as it can be perceived to limit their autonomy and disrupt the educational process, ultimately challenging the notion of an equal partnership as beneficial in all respects.

McNamara (2012) distinguishes between three forms of partnership; collaboration, cooperation, and coordination. Cooperation, according to McNamara, is characterised by partners exchanging information and working together with minimal interaction, often maintaining separate responsibilities. Coordination involves a higher level of alignment, where partners ensure that their efforts are complementary, but they still operate somewhat independently. Finally, collaboration represents the most integrated form of partnership, where partners share goals and work closely together, blending their responsibilities to achieve common outcomes.

While McNamara posits that cooperation is the most commonly observed form of partnership, my research suggests a noticeable shift towards increased collaboration during the school closures caused by the pandemic. This shift was driven by the need for parents and teachers to

work more closely to ensure students continued to learn despite the disruptions. In this context, collaboration became essential, as parents and educators shared responsibilities more equally, navigating new digital platforms and balancing academic and wellbeing needs together. Moving between these forms, from cooperation to collaboration, indicates a deeper, more involved partnership, with all parties playing an active role in the education process. This experience likely bolstered parents' confidence to engage more actively in collaboration, with one parent noting, "I could see what they were learning. We could reinforce it. The whole thing actually was easier." This shift again suggests a more balanced partnership, moving beyond mere cooperation, which often implies a more passive role for parents under teacher guidance.

Moreover, the coordination between parents and staff improved as both parties navigated the logistical challenges posed by remote learning. This period was marked by a collective effort to overcome technological hurdles and find innovative ways to engage in education outside the traditional classroom setting. My findings suggest that the quality of the home-school partnership may have been enhanced during this period, with increased instances of collaboration and coordination compared to pre-pandemic times.

Goodall (2018) highlighted the potential drawbacks of an imbalanced partnership, where teachers typically dominate, on the overall effectiveness of the relationship. However, the shift towards a more egalitarian dynamic observed in my study suggests that home-school partnerships may have become more effective for many participants following the school closures. Furthermore, my research supports Tett and McLeod's (2019) argument that the collaborative aspect of home-school partnerships, particularly at the secondary level, has been strengthened due to the increased cooperation between parents and teachers during the closures.

However, this increase in cooperation was not without its challenges. Agostinelli (2020) highlights the importance of effective collaboration in overcoming communication barriers, and some participants in the study perceived the lack of face-to-face interaction as a significant obstacle to effective communication, thereby reshaping the dynamics of the partnership. This perspective echoes the observed decline in parental engagement at the secondary education level, as discussed by Williams, Williams, and Ullman (2002), and emphasises the significance of direct face-to-face interaction as posited by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) and echoed by the findings in this study.

Nevertheless, my research posits that the school closures may have, to some extent, alleviated these challenges at the secondary level by creating opportunities for informal exchanges reminiscent of those at primary school entrances. The caveat, however, is the trade-off between increased frequency and the reduced depth and quality of communication, which are pivotal at the secondary level to maintain a strong home-school partnership. This nuanced understanding suggests that while technological advancements have facilitated more frequent communication, the essence of an effective partnership, namely the quality of face-to-face interaction remains invaluable to students, parents and staff.

My research outcomes cast doubt on the notion of equal agency within partnerships, as proposed by Gerdes et al. (2021). Feedback gathered from both teachers and students suggests that a partnership characterised by an equal balance does not necessarily equate to increased effectiveness. Specifically, staff members raised issues regarding the negative impact of excessive parental involvement. They argue that such involvement could detrimentally affect students' academic performance and overall wellbeing.

My research findings indicated a significant increase in the frequency of communication between parents and schools both during school closures and following their reopening. This

rise was largely facilitated by the greater use of online communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams, which allowed parents to observe the teaching that their child received firsthand and engage with schools more regularly. As a result, some parents (for example Parent 6 and Parent 7) began to see themselves as more integral participants in the educational partnership.

A key finding is that, although the frequency of communication has increased, the quality of these interactions remains uncertain. Participants across all groups (students, parents, and teachers) highlighted the value of face-to-face interactions, suggesting that digital communication may not fully replace the depth and effectiveness of in-person engagement. Some school staff also reported observed shifts in the power dynamics of the parent-teacher relationship, noting that parents now have higher expectations for constant communication and are more actively involved in the home-school partnership. Teachers have expressed particular concerns regarding certain parents' "heightened neediness" (Teacher 7), as a result of their heightened engagement and observation of online lessons during the closures. This increased involvement sometimes resulted in what some teachers described as counterproductive interference in the teaching process, a change in the home-school partnership which appears to have persisted as schools reopened.

On the other hand, the pivot to digital communication platforms such as emails and Microsoft Teams, prompted by the lack of in-person interaction, seemingly bolstered the partnership for many. The pandemic appears to have strengthened familial bonds, with increased contact due to students being educated at home, leading to numerous reports of improved relationships between students and their family members. The shift to online communication appeared to enable more consistent sharing of information and viewpoints among involved parties, which aligns with the partnership facets outlined by Akkerman and Bakker (2011). The unique

circumstances of the lockdown further amplified this effect by making stakeholders more available for digital interactions during traditional working hours.

This study extends the findings of Chan and Ritchie (2016) and Goodall (2018) by demonstrating that the issue of schools potentially creating an environment of unequal home-school partnerships also applies in a London context. By situating these findings within a London case study, this research reinforces the broader applicability of previous studies. The unequal environment can be characterised by schools valuing parental support but not recognising parents as equal partners in the educational process. This environment contributes to educational inequalities and limits the effectiveness of parental engagement, as schools tend to favour traditional forms of parental involvement, such as attendance to meetings, over less visible but equally important contributions such as facilitating a love for learning at home.

The period of school closures may have nudged some parents and staff towards a more equitable partnership, encouraged by the parents' increased confidence and their expectations of staff responsiveness based on previous interactions. However, findings from this study also indicate that this will only be the case if lessons have been learned from teachers' interaction with parents during the COVID pandemic.

Nonetheless, the expectation for immediate communication from some parents has become a significant point of contention for school staff, revealing deeper challenges within the partnership. My findings suggest that teachers often feel pressured to balance curriculum demands with well-being support, and increased parental involvement can exacerbate this tension. Some teachers reported feeling threatened by the heightened parental oversight, which they perceived as questioning their professional judgement. These issues suggest the need for a partnership model that not only promotes mutual understanding but also addresses the practical implications of such involvement. Specifically, schools may need to establish clearer

boundaries and provide additional support to teachers, helping them manage both their instructional duties and the increasing demands from parents. This approach would enable a more sustainable, balanced partnership that respects teachers' expertise while valuing parental contributions in a manageable way.

8.1.2 Impact on the home-school partnership - wellbeing and SES

Although discussions about the home-school partnership have emphasised the importance of wellbeing as a crucial component even before the pandemic (Epstein, 2011; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011; Baik et al. 2016; Crawford et al., 2016), the COVID pandemic appears to have further shifted perspectives regarding the importance of wellbeing. According to the interviews, students, parents, and staff now place a stronger emphasis on the importance of wellbeing, recognising its integral connection to effective academic learning. My findings reveal that both staff and students now prioritise concerns regarding wellbeing, particularly the loss of social connections, above academic learning loss. This shift emphasises the growing importance of mental health in the educational landscape, building on the work of Harris and Jones (2020), who suggested that the mental health of students, parents, and teachers may present a more enduring challenge than the COVID virus itself. These insights also echo Maldonado and De Witte (2021), highlighting a lasting change in the priorities of educational communities post-pandemic. My study extends the work of Noddings (2002) by revealing that concerns about wellbeing remain a central issue within the home-school partnership, even 3 years after schools have reopened. The views of teachers, however, painted a more nuanced picture, as the interviews revealed a concern about balancing time spent on students' well-being versus time spent on academic content to achieve results, as they "still had jobs to do" (Teacher 7). This builds on Crawford et al.'s, (2016) findings which advocated for wellbeing to be embedded into curricula, as well as the work of Taylor and Moeed (2013), who found that a tension existed after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake in that schools closer to the epicentre spent more time

on well-being efforts and discussions about the earthquake, whereas schools further from the epicentre returned to their standard curriculum more quickly.

During the school closures, a number of students in this study experienced a strengthening of bonds with their parents, a phenomenon that seems to have endured after schools reopened. These students reported feeling more at ease when discussing educational matters with their parents. Similarly, parents in this study noted a deeper connection and collaboration with their children's schools, crediting increased communication and the easier availability of educational materials for this improvement. This appears to be an extension of 'care theory' as posited by Noddings (2002) and Tronto (2005) who advocated for wellbeing strategies to have a student-centred approach, but expanded to include teachers as staff reported an increased pastoral awareness of students' home situations, particularly for those with family responsibilities. Notably, this heightened awareness has persisted even two years after schools reopened, when the interviews were conducted, suggesting that this change in the home-school partnership may have become embedded and potentially sustainable in the medium term.

Although this awareness peaked during school closures—when teachers gained a unique insight into students' home lives—some teachers have continued to maintain frequent contact with families which suggests a continuation of the care theory approach to wellbeing. Even those who have not maintained regular contact still remember the challenges faced by many students, which has shifted their perspective on students' socio-economic situations.

Additionally, many teachers felt that parents gained a deeper appreciation for the daily challenges teachers face, particularly as they attempted to support their children's education at home. However, according to the interviews in this study which were conducted in 2023, some teachers believe this appreciation has diminished, with attitudes seemingly returning to pre-pandemic levels.

This evolving understanding expands on the current theoretical frameworks, such as the FIC (Gerdes et al., 2021), by advocating for wellbeing to be a core component of the home-school partnership, alongside communication, learning support, and the management of the home environment. This research builds on Barker et al.'s (2021) argument that student well-being should take precedence over academic learning. Evidence from the COVID pandemic—and continuing two years after schools reopened—supports this perspective. Additionally, recent research by Garcia and Pumacahua (2024) found that both students and teachers have developed a heightened awareness of well-being post Covid, further reinforcing the importance of prioritising it in education. A central concern among students, parents, and teachers was how school closures during the COVID pandemic affected learning. While some literature downplays the long-term effects of learning loss after short term closures—such as studies by Lamb et al. (2013) and Maldonado and De Witte (2021), which report minimal setbacks—my findings build on this and provide evidence that even after sustained closures of more than a year, There is broad agreement among students, staff, and parents that anxiety about academic learning loss has not impacted the home-school partnership as significantly as initially feared.

A potential source of anxiety that could have affected wellbeing throughout the home-school partnership is the concern around missed learning. However, Teacher 1 in this study voiced apprehension about the 'learning loss' narrative, warning that it could create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Constant emphasis on this issue has, according to Teacher 1, begun to heighten anxiety among parents and students, potentially undermining the home-school relationship. While Lichand et al. (2021) argue that remote teaching methods contributed to learning loss, my findings present a more nuanced view. Some students reported benefits from online learning, such as reduced peer distractions and a sense of one-to-one tuition, which they found more conducive to focused learning. This suggests that the mode of learning, whether remote or in-

person, was not the sole determinant of how students engaged during school closures; rather, individual experiences and perceptions played a critical role.

Ultimately, the findings from this study suggest that the impact of perceived learning loss extends beyond academic outcomes and deeply influences the dynamics of the home-school relationship. The heightened focus on catching up may have generated anxieties that drive parents to seek more control over their child's education, potentially conflicting with teachers' needs for professional autonomy. My research contributes to the broader debate by illustrating how constructions of learning loss, coupled with varied modes of learning, have reshaped partnerships within education, emphasising the need for balance between collaboration and respecting professional boundaries. This has profound implications for future home-school partnership, suggesting a shift towards accommodating diverse perspectives and roles within the partnerships.

My findings also reveal that SES continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the quality and frequency of communication between home and school, particularly regarding access to electronic devices. This study builds on the broader body of research by examining how socioeconomic disparities affect home-school dynamics. In a UK-based study, Cullinane et al. (2022) highlighted the strong link between SES and access to digital devices, reporting that 24% of students from lower SES backgrounds lacked a suitable device, relying solely on a mobile phone or having no access at all. Similarly, Trung et al. (2020) identified the critical influence of SES on disruptions in home-school partnerships during school closures in Vietnam.

My findings confirm that these disparities persist, reinforcing the importance of addressing SES-related barriers to ensure equitable communication and engagement between schools and families. This observation helps explain why students from families with home environments with more space and better access to technology appeared to face fewer challenges in

maintaining and even enhancing their partnership with schools. These families appear to have adapted to new modes of learning and communication more seamlessly, indicating that the digital divide was a pivotal factor in the resilience of home-school partnerships during school closures.

Additionally, numerous students, parents, and teachers noted the significant impact of shifting educational resources online, emphasising that the effects, positive or negative, largely depended on SES and access to appropriate devices. The variation in access to appropriate technology was mentioned by students, staff, and parents as a key feature that affected their ability to communicate and maintain the home-school partnership as it was before the pandemic or adjust to the changes during school closures. These findings build on the work of Anderson (2020), who argued that the COVID-induced school closures forced schools to implement a 10-year digital learning strategy in just a few months. However, SES disparities may not have closed at the same pace and in some cases may have worsened due to the economic impact of COVID. As a result, the digital divide that existed before the pandemic has only been magnified, a concern further highlighted by this study. My findings reveal that students have become increasingly accustomed to using smaller screens, such as mobile phones, for their educational activities. This adaptability has made the home environment more flexible, as learning can now occur in various spaces rather than being confined to a dedicated, structured area. This shift presents an original contribution to research by demonstrating how learning has integrated into more personal and less formal settings, challenging the traditional view that a structured home setting is necessary for a successful home-school partnership, as argued by Epstein (2018).

My findings expand on Agostinelli's (2020) concerns, which emphasised that a parent's ability to support home learning depends not only on providing technology for all their children but also on having flexible job arrangements for remote work. Similarly, Darling and Hammond (2020) emphasised the role of basic technology in sustaining school partnerships during school

closures. My research extends these insights by revealing how the management of the home learning environment has adapted to meet these evolving technological demands.

Additionally, there are some perspectives that suggest that the relationship between SES and the home-school partnership during school closures is more complex. My study revealed a lasting increase in family closeness, as described by both students and parents, which has persisted even after schools reopened. This deepened family connection aligns with findings from Dong et al. (2020) and Orgilés et al. (2020), who observed that parents spending more time at home during school closures felt closer to their children, strengthening the home-school partnership. This closeness also fostered improved family communication, including greater proficiency in their mother tongue.

The findings from this study, to address the first research question on changes to the home-school partnership, indicate that some parents have become more confident in their roles as partners with schools. This increased involvement appears to have made some teachers uncomfortable, as they feel that frequent parental input and requests for information may intrude on their educational responsibilities. This perspective aligns with existing literature by Chan and Ritchie (2016) and Goodall (2018), which argues that schools often establish an unequal partnership at the secondary level. My findings offer a potential explanation for why teachers might prefer maintaining this imbalance.

One reason for the perceived shift towards a more equal partnership is the rise in digital communication, which has surpassed pre-pandemic levels. This change has enabled all parties to gain a clearer understanding of each other's roles within the partnership and for some parents to move from just cooperating in the partnership, to collaborating more with schools. For some students, parents, and teachers, this increased digital interaction has reshaped the home-school relationship post-COVID. However, despite the advantages of digital communication,

there remains a widespread recognition of the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interactions. This is particularly true for parents, some of whom feel that the frequency of digital communication ultimately compromised the quality of the home-school partnership.

Other key changes identified include that concerns over learning loss were less significant than worries about reduced social interactions during school closures and the need to better integrate wellbeing into educational settings to improve the home-school partnership. Additionally, there is an increased reliance on technology, which poses a risk of widening the digital divide, particularly affecting students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

8.2 What lessons can be learned from the impact of school closures caused by the COVID pandemic to support and improve the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children in the future?

While the first research question examined changes to the home-school partnership due to COVID-related school closures, specifically changes in communication and the impact of wellbeing and SES, this research question focuses on the lessons learned from this study that could strengthen educational partnerships in the future. The findings are grouped into five key recommendations: redefining the home-school partnership to establish an ideal balance between home and school, identifying optimal communication methods, improving the learning experience, enhancing wellbeing support, and mitigating the influence of a lower SES on the partnership. Each of these recommendations is discussed in detail below, starting with suggestions for redefining the home-school partnership.

8.2.1 Recommendations for amendments to the definition of a home-school partnership

Tett and Macleod (2019) posited that home-school partnerships reach their fullest potential when headteachers view parents as equals in the educational process. My research

corroborates this to an extent but also uncovers the nuanced complexities characterising the post-COVID educational environment. While the literature suggests that an equal partnership between parents and schools is essential for a successful home-school relationship, my findings reveal a more complex reality. The pandemic appeared to foster closer collaboration between parents and teachers than had previously been the case, seemingly bringing this ideal partnership closer to fruition. However, rather than producing universally positive outcomes, the data show that some teachers were dissatisfied with the increased demands placed on them. Teachers reported feeling overly available to parents, experiencing what they perceived as interference in their professional roles, and struggling to balance parental expectations with their own responsibilities, particularly in managing student wellbeing alongside teaching the curriculum.

This tension suggests that while working more closely with parents as equals is a desirable goal, the current communication practices within the education system may need adjustment. Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the constant availability afforded by access to digital platforms. To maintain a healthy and effective partnership, schools are recommended to establish clearer communication frameworks that balance openness with boundaries. One potential solution is to formalise the frequency and methods of communication, such as setting specific times for updates or creating structured channels for more complex discussions. By implementing clear guidelines that encourage meaningful, regular communication without overburdening teachers, schools can ensure that parents stay engaged while protecting teachers' time and mental wellbeing. This balanced approach could support a more sustainable home-school partnership, enabling both parties to work together effectively without creating additional pressure on teachers.

My findings reveal that pandemic-induced school closures brought significant changes to parent-teacher partnerships. Interviews with participants highlight that increased frequency of

communication and improved digital skills have, in many cases, strengthened these relationships. This presents a new dimension to existing research, complementing the work of Soltero et al. (2021), who identified a growing mutual understanding between parents and teachers during the pandemic which led to changes in the home-school partnership (McClain, 2024). Additionally, my research aligns with Jones and Palikara (2023) and Layne (2023), whose studies in the USA found that teachers felt more empowered and recognised for their efforts in engaging parents. This marks a shift from pre-pandemic observations by Chan and Ritchie (2016) and Goodall (2018), who found that schools often viewed parents as extensions of the school's educational efforts rather than as equal partners. The results from this study, along with evidence from Jones and Palikara (2023) and Layne (2023), suggest that, across different countries, parent-teacher partnerships have had the opportunity to become more balanced.

However, the increase in parent-initiated contact with schools post-pandemic as observed by some teachers in this study has been described by some staff as indicative of "needy" behaviour, a consequence of the intensified communication channels established during the school closures. This change suggests a potential shift in the home-school dynamic which could harm the partnerships. It suggests the nuanced tension between balancing the increased parental involvement with the maintenance of professional boundaries and expertise to maintain the most effective partnerships.

The interviews in this study suggest that the pandemic has prompted some parents to gain a deeper understanding of the educational process, recognising the complexities involved in teaching. This shift echoes the argument made by Goodall et al. (2023), who assert that the responsibility for educating children has increasingly become a shared role between teachers and parents. While this deeper appreciation has been beneficial for some, it also presents a potential drawback. Some parents may feel hesitant to engage in their child's learning, believing

they cannot contribute effectively due to the perceived challenges. This hesitancy risks weakening their partnership with the school, as these parents may become more withdrawn from the educational process. In contrast, some interviews suggested that parents, by assuming simultaneous roles of parent, employee, and teacher during school closures, gained a closer insight into the teaching profession which aligns with the findings by Logan et al. (2021).

In this context, the framework proposed by Tett and Macleod (2019) for an effective home-school partnership may be overly simplistic, as it does not fully account for the complexities of fostering a truly collaborative and balanced relationship. Implementing their theory highlights a critical issue: while an equitable partnership between parents and schools is theoretically desirable, it also needs to respect the professional expertise of educators, as indicated by some of the teachers interviewed. The findings from this study suggest that the balance within home-school partnerships is shifting post-COVID, as all parties seek a new equilibrium that leverages contributions from both parents and educators. However, it is important to interpret these findings with a degree of nuance. Research by Crozier and Reay (2005) and Vincent (2017) highlights that parental partnerships prior to the COVID pandemic were strongly influenced by SES and parents' own experiences of schooling. This suggests that those already equipped with high levels of cultural capital and confidence in engaging with schools were more likely to have established strong relationships with educators. While my findings indicate some positive developments in home-school communication during and after the pandemic, particularly in terms of increased mutual understanding and more flexible communication methods, it is possible that these improvements have been most beneficial for parents who already had a relatively close and established connection with the school.

Achieving a consistent home-school partnership balance requires careful management and this study recommends that schools develop a policy that promotes regular information-sharing beyond the annual parents' evening, yet sets clear boundaries to prevent overburdening

teachers. Such a framework would keep parents well-informed without creating unrealistic expectations around communication frequency, helping to maintain a sustainable partnership that respects the roles and needs of both parents and educators. This evolution points towards a future where the effectiveness of the home-school partnership is enhanced by acknowledging both the unique insights of parents and the professional expertise of teachers to improve the home-school partnership.

While Epstein (1993) and Caplan (1993) identified homework involvement, home environment management, and school communication as key components of a home-school partnership, my findings indicate that, in the post-COVID era, communication with schools has emerged as the most critical and dynamic component. This aspect has undergone significant changes, with both positive and negative impacts, as previously discussed. Although homework involvement did not emerge as a significantly altered aspect in the interviews, its significance is challenging to determine as the unusual conditions of school closures blurred the lines between schoolwork and homework. However, the management of the home environment presents a more complex picture in my findings.

The emphasis on managing the home environment to support education appears to have evolved, with a significant shift toward the home environment being able to facilitate access to sufficient quality digital communication at home, especially during the pandemic when it became crucial for maintaining the home-school partnership. Although creating a conducive learning environment at home remains ideal, it is not always achievable for families with limited resources. The interviews in this study consistently highlighted the importance of clear and regular communication, which proved essential for navigating the uncertainties of school closures. My findings indicate that, while the immediate need for digital access has lessened since students returned to school, the value of face-to-face communication remains evident. This persistence may reflect a reaction to the predominance of online-only interactions during

the COVID pandemic. This suggests that future strategies for strengthening the home-school partnership should prioritise ongoing, effective communication by combining digital and face-to-face methods. This approach aims to reach as many parents as possible, encouraging their involvement in the partnership to the extent that their resources allow. By building on the lessons learned about digital communication during lockdowns, schools can better support parental involvement and improve the home-school partnership.

8.2.2 Recommendations for communication

My findings reveal that despite the increased frequency of communication facilitated by digital platforms during the pandemic, the absence of face-to-face interactions led to a decline in communication quality, adversely affecting the home-school partnership. This adds nuance to the research of Hargreaves (2020), who cautioned that technology alone cannot sustain the level of communication quality that students were accustomed to before the school closures. Looking forward, my findings suggest a refined approach for strengthening this partnership: while the convenience and frequency of digital communication should be preserved, strategic face-to-face interactions remain essential for handling more complex and sensitive issues. This is particularly crucial when supporting students with special educational needs, where in-person discussions can provide the depth and context that digital channels may lack. Additionally, frequent digital updates, such as newsletters and online communications, can facilitate early identification of complex needs, offering a responsive means to address challenges more promptly than was possible before COVID. This balanced approach could help maintain the benefits of digital communication while restoring the quality and effectiveness of the partnership through selective, meaningful in-person interactions.

This approach suggests that the shifts in communication strategies necessitated by school closures could ultimately strengthen the home-school partnership through an improved

frequency of digital communication, and an improved quality of face-to-face communication. This development could help counteract the decline in home-school partnership quality that often occurs as students transition from primary to secondary education. Research by Williams et al. (2002) and Russell and Granville (2005) attributes this trend to shifting communication expectations and the loss of informal interactions between parents and educators. The informal, yet crucial, interactions at the school gate, which often diminish at the secondary level, could find a new counterpart in the blended model of digital and direct communication where digital communication in the form of newsletters helps to convey much of the information that parents need. The evolution of the home-school partnership, particularly in the context of learning not being restricted to physical boundaries due to online resources, presents both opportunities and challenges for future development. While research often highlights stronger partnerships at the primary level, the interviews in this study have revealed possibilities for fostering similar connections at the secondary level through regular check-ins via emails or newsletters which contain the regular information that parents may be more nervous to enquire about at secondary level. The interviews in this study build on the research of Williams et al. (2002) and Russell and Granville (2005), offering insights into how the decline in communication between primary and secondary school can be mitigated. Furthermore, my findings lend support to Toquero (2020), who suggested a post-reopening scenario where all stakeholders in the home-school partnership gain a refreshed appreciation for the role of digital communication as a complement to face-to-face interactions rather than a substitute. This balanced approach recognises the value of direct, personal communication in fostering strong, effective partnerships while acknowledging the expanded reach and convenience offered by digital platforms. A particularly effective example, highlighted by a parent during the interviews in this study, was the school's use of informal coffee mornings. These gatherings not only provided parents with the opportunity to ask questions and receive information from the school but also fostered social and community connections by enabling conversations with other parents. Thus, the evolution

of communication strategies, prompted by the school closures caused by the pandemic, has the potential to rejuvenate home-school partnerships across both primary and secondary education levels and improve the transition between these phases.

8.2.3 Recommendations for enhancing the home-school partnership through improved learning experiences

Despite the significant disruptions to traditional education caused by the COVID pandemic, this study offers new insights into the resilience and adaptability of the home-school partnership during periods of crisis. My findings go beyond previous studies, such as those by Lamb et al. (2013) and Maldonado and De Witte (2021), by demonstrating the pivotal role that strengthened communication channels between parents and schools played in mitigating the effects of these disruptions.

Interviews with students, parents, and teachers revealed a shared confidence in how the understanding of learning evolved during school closures, with this shift continuing to influence education after schools reopened. The pandemic fostered more open communication between home and school for some parents, allowing them to express concerns about missed learning more readily. Teachers reported that many parents felt empowered to communicate more frequently, addressing both academic and well-being concerns. This enhanced dialogue enabled parents and teachers to collaborate more effectively, sharing information about missed content and recovery plans, which reassured many parents that learning gaps could be addressed collaboratively. The interviews also indicated that some students became more independent, with both students and parents developing a renewed appreciation for education. Teachers and students expressed confidence that curriculum adjustments were made effectively, ensuring that topics missed during closures were covered, and most parents were satisfied that any learning gaps could be quickly addressed.

A key insight from this study is the changing focus on balancing student well-being with academic recovery. Teachers reported that while academics remained important, the well-being of students became an equally significant priority in home-school interactions. Parents were also invested not only in missed content but in their children's mental health, signalling a shift in the home-school partnership where both academic and emotional needs were prioritised.

Furthermore, the school closures gave some parents a stronger sense of agency in supporting their children's learning. This increased communication fostered a more collaborative partnership, where teachers felt parents were more actively involved in helping students recover both academically and emotionally. This collaboration allowed teachers to better identify students at risk of falling behind, strengthening the home-school relationship.

Moving forward, it is essential for schools to continue fostering regular communication with parents, ensuring that the channels established during the pandemic remain in place. Schools should focus on maintaining clear and open lines of communication, enabling parents to voice concerns and work alongside teachers to support both academic progress and student well-being. This enhanced communication, built on mutual trust and shared priorities, represents a significant takeaway from the pandemic and offers a foundation for a stronger home-school partnership in the future.

My findings also extend beyond the work of Lamb et al. (2013) and Maldonado and De Witte (2021), demonstrating that learning loss, as characterised by Pier et al. (2021), is far from uniform. While many students remain optimistic about the adaptability of curriculums, and how this flexibility can mitigate learning disruptions, my research acknowledges that some students and parents view certain learning losses, particularly those associated with the slower pace of remote teaching, as irrecoverable. Although these concerns represent a smaller sample,

addressing them is crucial for the continued improvement of the home-school partnership, as persistent feelings of lost learning could impact the well-being of both students and parents.

The shift in communication and learning methods during the pandemic allowed teachers to more effectively identify which students were at risk of falling behind, something that may not have been as easily identified in face-to-face settings. While some content was missed during online learning, the improved communication enabled proactive strategies to close learning gaps during and after school closures. This also led to increased parental confidence in raising concerns with teachers, contributing to the prevention of the widespread learning loss initially feared.

8.2.4 Recommendations for enhancing the home-school partnership through a deeper understanding of wellbeing

In the initial stages of my literature review, I explored the debate highlighted by Moss (2020) and Taylor and Moeed (2013) regarding the prioritisation of academic catch-up versus student wellbeing in the context of education recovery. The evidence gathered from my research strongly suggests that student wellbeing emerged as the predominant concern, above concerns over learning loss, for students, parents, and teachers, both during and following the school closures. Therefore, the focus for schools aiming to enhance or sustain the home-school partnership should indeed be on nurturing wellbeing for students, parents, and staff.

This emphasis on wellbeing was highlighted through the concerns voiced by students, parents, and staff regarding the loss of vital social experiences and interactions that could be crucial to personality development. A particular point of concern which emerged from my interviews was the observation that students entering secondary education missed out on the developmental milestone of being the eldest in their primary schools. Teachers have reported that missed opportunities during the pandemic have, in some cases, resulted in behaviours that appear less

mature than would normally be expected. Such shifts point to potential disruptions in the home–school partnership. Recent research by Anders and Holt-White (2024) further highlights substantial gender differences, with girls reporting lower wellbeing than boys, underlining the need to place greater emphasis on behavioural aspects both at home and within the educational setting.

Although some teachers expressed concerns about the practicalities of embedding wellbeing into the curriculum, such as Teacher 7's remark that "we all had jobs to do," there is evidence that effective implementation is achievable. Crawford (2019) provided examples of successful integration prior to the COVID pandemic, while Jiang et al. (2025) demonstrated how wellbeing could be embedded into post-pandemic teaching and learning models. Importantly, Hennessey et al. (2023) offered evidence from a UK context that wellbeing can be incorporated into school culture without increasing pressure on teachers. Drawing on a case study of the Well Schools initiative, they found that when wellbeing is aligned with a school's ethos and vision, and given equal status to academic achievement, it becomes a natural and sustainable part of school life. According to their findings, a probable key to success lies in embedding wellbeing gradually through policy, practice, and shared language. Rather than positioning wellbeing as an explicit new priority, which can lead staff to see it as an added responsibility, this more integrated approach helps to reduce anxiety about workload and encourages greater staff engagement and long-term buy-in.

The most significant finding from the interviews was that, while concerns about academic learning loss during the pandemic appeared to be minimal for staff, students, and most parents, there was a deeper anxiety regarding the loss of social experiences during school closures. This concern about missed social interactions, rather than academic gaps, emerged as a more pressing issue for many participants. Although learning loss was not a major source of worry for most, the disruption to students' social development and experiences during this time was seen

as having a more profound and lasting impact. Anxiety around missed social interactions could undermine both student wellbeing and the integrity of the home-school partnership if left unchecked. It is crucial for schools to clearly and proactively communicate their specific strategies for addressing both social and academic learning gaps. By providing detailed plans and regular updates to students and parents and increasing the opportunity for social connections across year groups, schools can offer reassurance to students and parents, helping to alleviate concerns and maintain the strength of the home-school partnership. This transparent approach could help ensure that all parties feel supported in rebuilding lost social connections.

My research reveals that one of the most significant and lasting impacts of the school closures was the deepening of familial bonds, with strengthened relationships between parents and children. This highlights how closer family interactions during periods of crisis can positively influence the home environment and, by extension, the home-school partnership. While Orgilés et al. (2020) noted improvements in children's proficiency in their mother tongues during this time, my findings add a new dimension by emphasising the broader emotional and relational effects of the closures. Students consistently reported feeling closer to both their parents and siblings, and my findings also show a collective appreciation among students and parents for the return to in-person schooling, offering fresh insights into the emotional and social impacts of the closures. This appreciation for the school environment and the social interactions it facilitates appears to have remained resilient even after schools reopened. Teachers, too, have noticed a deepening of connections with families, driven by an increase in communication aimed at supporting students more effectively.

To preserve and enhance the connections fostered during school closures, schools should leverage the deeper insights they acquired about family circumstances. Research by Levy (2023) has shown that home-school partnerships are more likely to develop when teachers take the time to understand the communities that they serve. Similarly, Schneider and Arnott (2017)

suggested that schools lacked awareness of families' cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic circumstances. This reduced understanding led to significant barriers to developing a home-school partnership based on mutual trust. Data from the research by Levy (2023) suggests that the COVID pandemic, despite its challenges, created new opportunities for schools to strengthen their partnerships with families. Participants in this study consistently reported that modifications to communication practices during school closures, such as more regular check-ins, digital platforms for updates, and increased pastoral outreach, led to improved mutual understanding between staff and parents. Many teachers and parents described developing a new appreciation for one another's roles and constraints, which fostered a sense of empathy and partnership. Notably, school staff reported gaining a much clearer picture of the lived realities facing many families. For example, issues such as digital divides, previously under-recognised by some schools, became highly visible as schools engaged directly with families to support remote learning. The unique challenges of the pandemic appeared to provide schools with a more comprehensive understanding of the varied contexts in which students live and learn. My research suggests that building on this foundation could lead to stronger home-school partnerships. Schools can refine their communication strategies to encourage regular, two-way exchanges with families, moving beyond traditional involvement, such as parent-teacher meetings, to recognise the diverse ways families contribute to their children's education. By embracing this inclusive and continuous dialogue, schools can establish a more effective home-school partnership.

The enduring legacy of the pandemic on the home-school partnership appears to be a heightened collective awareness of the importance of wellbeing. This shift in focus towards emotional and psychological health appears to have had a lasting impact, and my research suggests it could offer the most significant long-term benefit to home-school collaboration. If this

renewed emphasis on wellbeing continues to be nurtured, it has the potential to further enhance the resilience and effectiveness of the home-school partnership in the future.

8.2.5 Recommendation to enhance the home-school partnership by reducing the impact of the digital divide

A significant concern emerging from my findings is the acknowledgment across students, parents, and staff of the impact of a lower SES on education post COVID, particularly in terms of access to sufficient quality devices and internet connections as a measure. While the increased availability of online resources has facilitated learning from a diversity of sources, it also raises fears of diluting the in-class learning experience and exacerbating the digital divide. This divide not only threatens to widen the attainment gap based on a lower SES but also challenges the efficacy of the home-school partnership in ensuring equitable educational opportunities.

My research highlights the specific risks that the shift to digital technology poses to the equity of home-school partnerships, particularly across different socioeconomic groups. This adds depth to Anderson's (2020) observations on the surge in digital technology usage, which impacted both communication and the delivery of learning resources. Staff members in my study reported an increased reliance on online platforms for distributing resources and homework. Although this has benefited students and parents with adequate technology access, my findings highlight the concern that it could widen the achievement gap for those less equipped, providing new insights into the digital divide's effect on educational equity.

My research also further highlights the risks posed by the digital divide, building on the concerns of Darling and Hammond (2020), who cautioned against assuming that increased access to digital resources automatically leads to improved learning outcomes. While school closures gave individual teachers the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their students' home

lives, it is crucial that this knowledge is shared across the school. This will help ensure that the variability in home access to technology is not overlooked, especially if a student has changed teachers since the pandemic. Without this shared understanding, schools may mistakenly assume that all students have equal access to resources, potentially disadvantageous to those with limited technology at home. My findings reveal that students, parents, and teachers are all concerned that this oversight could neglect the needs of students who lack proper access at home or whose parents may not have the necessary knowledge or cultural capital to effectively support their children's learning, highlighting the importance of addressing these disparities.

While Pelicano and Stears (2020) posited that improvements in educational support during school closures may primarily benefit families with sufficient technological access, my research extends this concern by emphasising the ongoing risk of widening the achievement gap among different SES groups. My findings indicate that students, parents, and teachers share concerns about the volume of content and resources being distributed online. Schools must be careful not to assume that all households have equal access to digital resources, as this assumption risks deepening inequalities and leaving students from disadvantaged backgrounds even further behind.

To foster a more equitable home-school partnership, schools must critically reassess their assumptions about students' access to technology at home. This study suggests that a more strategic approach is required, one that takes into account the varying levels of access to devices and reliable internet connections. Schools should develop flexible strategies that provide alternative, non-digital learning opportunities for students who lack sufficient technological resources. For example, schools could ensure that all digital materials available online are also provided in printed form, making them accessible to students without reliable internet access. Additionally, online lessons could be blended with in-person instruction, allowing students the option to attend physically, ensuring inclusivity for those with limited

access to technology. This approach would ensure that all students can engage meaningfully with their education, regardless of their socioeconomic status, and prevent the further widening of existing inequalities.

In order to achieve this, it is vital that schools first of all take the time to understand the environment of their students as my findings suggested that some staff were shocked about the living conditions of some families. Following this audit, schools can then identify both first and second level digital divides (Ceviker et al., 2023). This approach highlights the importance of schools considering both the varying levels of technological access and students' ability to use technology effectively. By doing so, schools can work toward ensuring equal opportunities for success among all students.

Addressing this digital divide requires innovative solutions to prevent disadvantaged groups from being left behind. Potential strategies include offering after-school access to technology at school premises or initiating device loan programs, despite the associated costs. The call for increased government funding to support these measures was mentioned by a number of participants that were interviewed and highlights a widespread recognition of the need to close the achievement gap, close the digital divide, and enhance the home-school partnership in a post-COVID landscape. This approach emphasises the critical role of equitable access to technology in fostering a successful educational recovery and sustaining and improving strong home-school partnerships across all levels of SES. These findings expand on Barker et al.'s (2021) work, which also emphasised the importance of addressing inequalities in this new educational environment.

Although concerns about access to high-quality digital resources are significant, my findings suggest that the shift to alternative communication methods during school closures, particularly the move to digital platforms, helped some students and parents strengthen their relationship

with schools. Many felt more confident in maintaining communication in a digital format, which, in turn, allowed them to engage more effectively. For some working-class families, digital communication helped bypass the anxiety they often associate with navigating a school environment that they perceive as predominantly middle-class, reducing the barriers they might face in face-to-face interactions (Ball, 2003).

These findings highlight both opportunities and challenges for the future of the home-school partnership. On one hand, the increased confidence many parents and students experienced with digital communication points to its potential for fostering more inclusive engagement. Schools can build on this by maintaining and expanding digital communication as a way to create a more accessible environment for families who may feel intimidated by traditional, in-person interactions. By offering a combination of digital and face-to-face communication options, schools can foster greater parental involvement and reduce feelings of alienation, particularly among families from a lower SES.

However, the reliance on digital communication and online resources raises concerns for families without access to sufficient quality devices or reliable internet connections. For these parents, the shift to digital platforms may exacerbate existing inequalities, leaving them excluded from important learning opportunities and school communications. To mitigate this, schools must remain mindful of the digital divide and ensure that they provide alternative methods of engagement, such as printed materials or in-person meetings, for families who lack adequate digital access. By adopting a more flexible and inclusive approach, schools can help bridge the gap between families with differing levels of access, thereby aiming to strengthen the home-school partnership for more parents.

In summary, to maintain or improve home-school partnerships moving forward, it is crucial for schools to adapt to the evolving dynamics of parental involvement, recognising that support

from parents can manifest in various, not always visible, ways. Schools should strive to effectively integrate digital communication with face-to-face interactions, aiming for an optimal mix that combines the frequency and accessibility of online methods with the detail and personal touch of in-person communication. Additionally, the heightened awareness and appreciation for student wellbeing observed during school closures should be sustained by integrating wellbeing more deeply into the curriculum. Moreover, understanding the living situations of families, insights that may have been gained during school closures, is crucial. This knowledge is instrumental in addressing first and second level digital divides and ensuring all students have equitable access to education.

9. CONCLUSION

In the previous section, I discussed my findings in relation to my two research questions, which were:

- 1) How have school closures, as a result of the COVID pandemic, affected the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children?**
- 2) What lessons can be learned from the impact of school closures caused by the COVID pandemic to support and improve the educational partnerships between schools, parents, and children in the future?**

This thesis critically explored the changes in the home-school partnership following the school closures caused by the COVID pandemic in 2020/2021, particularly focusing on how communication, learning experiences, wellbeing, and impact of SES changed among students, parents, and staff, and what impact remains now that schools have reopened.

The Framework for Interdisciplinary Collaboration (Gerdes et al., 2021), served as the guiding model for this research, defining a partnership as a collaborative effort that transcends traditional boundaries, characterised by equal stakeholder participation through the sharing of skills, information, and perspectives. While my findings align with the core principles of the FIC, they also illuminate the complexities surrounding the concept of equal agency within partnerships, suggesting that its practical application may require further refinement. Interviews with teachers revealed a perception of increased equality within the home-school partnership, a shift attributed to the disruptions caused by school closures. However, this newfound balance is viewed with some concern. Teachers expressed concerns about the evolving dynamics, particularly noting an increase in parents' expectations for more immediate and frequent communication and a tendency among some parents to have a heightened confidence in their

understanding of educational processes. These issues, as reported by teachers, have at times strained the partnership, indicating a potential misalignment in expectations and understanding between home and school.

This suggests that while the principle of equal agency remains a valuable ideal within the FIC framework, its implementation in the context of home-school partnerships may benefit from a nuanced approach that accounts for the expertise and roles of each party. The challenge lies in fostering a partnership that respects the contributions of both teachers and parents, while also recognising the professional judgement and educational expertise of school staff. While there is evidence of progress, particularly in recognising the value of more empathetic and responsive communication, it would be premature to conclude that the home–school partnership has become more equal across all groups. Future research and practice should remain attentive to the diverse experiences of parents, especially those from marginalised or less advantaged backgrounds, to ensure that the lessons learned during the pandemic are used to support more inclusive and equitable forms of parental engagement. Balancing these elements is crucial for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the home-school partnership.

My research suggested that changes in the frequency and mode of communication between home and school, with an increased tendency towards online communication, has been one of the more prominent impacts of the school closures in relation to the home-school partnerships. The rise in communication frequency now includes a greater number of informal interactions, aligning more closely with the communication patterns observed in primary schools. However, there are also concerns about the negative effects of this increase. Specifically, staff have expressed concerns that parents now expect more immediate responses, leading to a perception of increased demand and pressure on school staff.

Another key finding of this study was an improved focus on wellbeing of students in particular by schools, but also an increased recognition of wellbeing by students, parents, and staff. These changes appear to have persisted since schools have reopened with schools and parents communicating more frequently about wellbeing which in turn appeared to be prioritised more highly in schools.

Before the pandemic, many researchers (Epstein, 1993; Caplan, 1993), identified the management of the home environment as a crucial element of the home-school partnership. My findings suggest that this distinction has now become less clear, with the accessibility of digital devices emerging as equally, if not more, important than the management of the physical environment.

In addressing my second research question, my findings indicate that restoring social connections and development, which were potentially lost during school closures, is considered a more significant challenge by students, parents, and staff than academic recovery. The consensus is that while academic recovery is progressing through curricular adjustments, there is a pressing need for schools to prioritise the development of social connections and wellbeing. This focus is essential for enhancing the partnership between home and school in the future.

The change in communication methods by schools to online methods appears to have persisted even when schools returned to normal, and my findings suggest that this has improved the home-school partnership for many families. However, there is a concern that the frequency of face-to-face communication is diminishing which has had a negative impact on partnerships. My research suggests that in order to improve the home-school partnership, schools would be advised to retain the benefits of online communication regarding increased frequency but combine this with face-to-face interaction for more complicated situations, such as students with special educational needs, in order to achieve the most effective balance.

Finally, my findings suggest that there is now a reliance on digital delivery of resources which will be difficult to reverse, and which has implications for an increasing digital divide that has the potential to harm the home-school partnership moving forwards. Schools need to ensure that there is not an assumption that all students have access to technology by ensuring there is physical availability of educational resources and materials for all families.

My research methodology adopted a case study approach, focusing on a single school located in inner London. This design enabled the generation of rich, contextually grounded data drawn from a diverse sample of students, parents, and staff, reflecting a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The strength of this approach lies in its capacity to explore the home-school partnership in depth, capturing nuanced perspectives and lived experiences during the COVID pandemic. By concentrating on one school, the study was able to explore the complex interplay of localised responses, institutional culture, and stakeholder perceptions in detail.

However, the reliance on data from 30 participants within a single institutional context does impose clear limitations on the generalisability of findings. While the insights generated may resonate with similar urban school settings, they cannot be assumed to represent the broader population of schools nationally or internationally. Furthermore, as with many qualitative case studies, there is a risk of overinterpreting context-specific findings or overlooking structural influences that may operate differently elsewhere. Nonetheless, while the single-case design limits the extent to which findings can be generalised to all schools, this was a highly appropriate context in which to investigate the home-school partnership. The depth of understanding afforded by this approach provides valuable insights into how diverse stakeholders experienced and adapted to the shifting nature of the home-school partnership during a period of crisis and has implications for many other schools and families. Although situated within one specific setting, the findings highlight factors with broader relevance and potential implications for schools and families facing similar challenges. Future research could

address this limitation by broadening the scope to include multiple schools, using a smaller sample of participants from each to explore whether the findings of this study are consistent across different educational settings.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, beginning with an online survey distributed to all members of the school community. This survey informed the development of semi-structured interviews, which provided participants with the space to explore their viewpoints in depth. These interviews, and the subsequent analysis of them through thematic coding, emerged as the most significant source of original insights, allowing for the identification of themes and dynamics not immediately apparent in the literature or survey data.

For future research in this field, it would be beneficial to examine the variations in home-school partnerships across families from different SES backgrounds. An investigation into whether these partnerships have undergone changes for specific groups and the nature of these changes would be particularly insightful. Conducting a longitudinal study, similar to the COSMO research by Anders et al. (2023), to examine the relationship between the exam results of the 'COVID generation' and the home-school partnership could offer valuable insights into the pandemic's long-term impact on both educational attainment and these critical relationships. Although the initial findings of this research suggested that lost academic learning did not appear to affect the home-school partnership at secondary level, verifying this through empirical studies over time would contribute significantly to our understanding of the pandemic's impact on education. A similar study focusing specifically on students who were in Years 7 to 9 during the school closures, as they progressed through their education, could provide valuable insights into how they managed the transition from primary to secondary school and the impact it had on their subsequent learning.

This thesis demonstrates the resilience of the home-school partnership in the wake of the disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic. Historically, catastrophic events often precipitate a 'reset', offering a chance for improvement over previous norms. In this context, the pandemic has served as a catalyst for re-evaluating the constituents of an effective home-school partnership. It has opened avenues for adopting new approaches that could yield long-term benefits for all stakeholders in education. This evolving landscape presents ample opportunities for further research, which can significantly contribute to understanding and enhancing the home-school partnership in a post-COVID world.

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11. APPENDIX

Table A1. Showing a breakdown of participants by gender and ethnicity.

Participant ID	Gender	Ethnicity
T1	Male	Asian
T2	Female	Black/African American
T3	Male	Hispanic/Latino
T4	Female	White/Caucasian
T5	Male	Other
T6	Female	Asian
T7	Male	Black/African American
T8	Female	Hispanic/Latino
T9	Male	White/Caucasian
T10	Female	Other
S1	Female	Asian
S2	Male	Black/African American
S3	Female	Hispanic/Latino
S4	Male	White/Caucasian
S5	Female	Other
S6	Male	Asian
S7	Female	Black/African American
S8	Male	Hispanic/Latino

S9	Female	White/Caucasian
S10	Male	Other
P1	Male	Asian
P2	Female	Black/African American
P3	Male	Hispanic/Latino
P4	Female	White/Caucasian
P5	Male	Other
P6	Female	Asian
P7	Male	Black/African American
P8	Female	Hispanic/Latino
P9	Male	White/Caucasian
P10	Female	Other

Note: In the participant ID column, the abbreviations used are as follows:

- T refers to Teachers,
- S refers to Students
- P refers to Parents.

Table A2. Below shows the response frequencies for the online survey for each question for the students.

STUDENTS

Factor	Factor 1: School Support and Inclusivity	Factor 2: Community Engagement and Support	Factor 3: Home- School Communication	Factor 4: Academic Communication	Factor 5: Educational Relationships
	The school asks my opinion about lost learning (%)	School gives opportunities for families to connect with each other (%)	School makes it easy for parents to be involved (%)	School shares information about my progress (%)	Parents regularly check homework (%)
Strongly Agree	17.2%	0%	27.6%	6.9%	20.7%
Agree	37.9%	6.9%	55.2%	48.3%	17.2%
Neutral	20.7%	13.8%	6.9%	17.2%	31.0%
Disagree	20.7%	34.5%	6.9%	24.1%	13.8%
Strongly disagree	17.2%	44.8%	3.4%	3.4%	17.2%

	Student's views are welcome at the school	School respects the diversity of the community	School communicates in various ways	Parents regularly check homework	I have a better relationship with teachers
Strongly Agree	3.4%	37.9%	20.7%	20.7%	0%
Agree	51.7%	55.2%	27.6%	17.2%	37.9%
Neutral	24.1%	6.9%	24.1%	31.0%	34.5%
Disagree	10.3%	0%	17.2%	13.8%	17.2%
Strongly disagree	3.4%	0%	33.3%	17.2%	10.3%
	Parents have received training on how to help at home				
Strongly Agree	0%				

Agree	13.8%				
Neutral	24.1%				
Disagree	41.4%				
Strongly disagree	20.7%				

Table A3. Below shows the response frequencies for the online survey for each question for the parents.

PARENTS

Factors	FACTOR 1: Inclusive Communication	FACTOR 2: Family Empowerment and Relationship Building	FACTOR 3: Learning community
	Parents views are welcome (%)	School has connected families with other families (%)	Parents regularly check homework (%)
Strongly Agree	0%	0.9%	14.2%

Agree	37.9%	11.1%	53.5%
Neutral	34.5%	32.3%	23.9%
Disagree	17.2%	37.2%	8.0%
Strongly disagree	33.3%	18.6%	0.4%
	School respects the diversity of the community	Parents have received training on how to help at home	School has helped the community
Strongly Agree	31.0%	0.4%	15.9%
Agree	23.1%	21.2%	47.8%
Neutral	20.7%	27.0%	32.3%
Disagree	2.1%	39.8%	3.1%
Strongly disagree	0.7%	11.5%	0.9%
	School communicates in various ways	School shares info about progress	School shares info about progress

Strongly Agree	45.1%	21.2%	21.2%
Agree	40.3%	45.1%	45.1%
Neutral	8.4%	8.8%	8.8%
Disagree	2.7%	18.6%	18.6%
Strongly disagree	3.5%	6.2%	6.2%
	School makes it easy for parents to be involved	My opinions about missed learning are welcome	Connect family to resources in the community
Strongly Agree	10.6%	5.3%	3.1%
Agree	45.6%	32.3%	31.9%
Neutral	29.6%	45.6%	32.7%
Disagree	8.8%	13.3%	29.2%
Strongly disagree	5.3%	3.5%	3.2%

Table A4. Below shows the response frequencies for the online survey for each question for the staff.

STAFF

Factor	FACTOR 1: Home-School Communication	FACTOR 2: Learning Community	FACTOR 3 School engagement	FACTOR 4 Supportive Community	FACTOR 5 Home-school support
	School communicates in various way (%)	Shares info about progress (%)	Asks my opinion about missed learning (%)	Respect diversity of school community (%)	Connects families with other families (%)
Strongly Agree	86%	20%	17.1%	45.7%	8.6%
Agree	5%	60%	37.1%	42.9%	14.3%
Neutral	0%	20%	25.7%	5.7%	48.6%
Disagree	0%	0%	14.3%	2.9%	25.7%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%	5.7%	2.9%	2.9%

	Makes it easy for parents to be involved	Parents regularly check homework	Better relationship with students post COVID	School has helped the community	Connects families to resources in the community
Strongly Agree	37.1%	2.9%	10.6%	28.6%	11.4%
Agree	57.1%	20%	26.6%	62.9%	57.1%
Neutral	2.9%	42.9%	36.2%	8.6%	25.7%
Disagree	0%	31.4%	21.3%	0%	5.7%
Strongly disagree	2.9%	2.9%	5.3%	0%	0%
		Parents views are welcome	Parents have received training to help with homework	Parents have received training to help with homework	
Strongly Agree		54.3%	2.9%	2.9%	

Agree		37.1%	17.1%	17.1%	
Neutral		8.6%	57.1%	57.1%	
Disagree		0%	20%	20%	
Strongly disagree		0%	2.9%	2.9%	

Analysing the above figures question by question

1. The school asks my opinion about lost learning

There is considerable spread amongst the responses for this but with 75.8% of students either being neutral or agreeing with this statement. There is a larger variation of responses for parents with 32.3% agreeing and 18.8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. For staff, 54.2% agreed with this statement but 20% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The variation in these responses suggests that my interview needed to probe communication within the home-school partnership regarding lost learning in order to more fully understand the direction of communication and the impact on the agency of the home-school partnership following school closures.

2. My views are welcome at the school

51.7% of students agreed with this statement, with only 13.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This contrasts with the responses of parents which had a wide distribution with

37.9% agreeing, but 33.3% strongly disagreeing with this statement. For staff, the views were unanimous with everyone either neutral or agreeing to some degree with this statement. The variation within this suggests that there is some disagreement between students, staff, and teachers for this statement and that my interview questions again needed to probe communication and in particular whether each group of participants viewed themselves as an equal partner in the home-school partnership.

3. Parents have received training on how to help at home

For students 62.1% of participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Parents' own viewpoints on this were a little softer, but still with 51.3% disagreeing in some way. The viewpoints from teachers themselves were very evenly split with 57.1% of teachers responding neutrally to this question. This suggests some confusion from the different participants I sampled, particularly since communication and partnership with home learning is an important component of the home-school partnership from my literature review (Epstein, 2011). The FIC also suggests that sharing of information and collaboration is an important part of the home-school partnership, which isn't reflected in my survey responses. As such it suggests that my interview questions needed to investigate how effective communication regarding home learning was between participants, and how this changed following school closures.

4. The school gives opportunities for families to connect with each other

Students disagreed with this statement with 79.3% disagreeing to some degree. The view from parents was slightly softer with 55.8% disagreeing to some degree but only 12% either agreeing or disagreeing. The viewpoints of staff are more evenly spread out with 48.6% of staff participants being neutral to this statement. All three groups of participants responded similarly

to this question which suggested that my understanding of how schools work in partnership with their local communities needed to be explored with my semi-structured interview.

5. The school respects the diversity of the community

Students, staff, and parents largely agreed with this statement, with 93.1% of students, 88.6% of staff, and 54.4% of parents (with 20.7% neutral) either strongly agreeing or agreeing. Given this consensus, my interview questions should focus on how the school communicates this positive sentiment and how the home-school partnership has evolved for participants from diverse backgrounds following the school closures.

6. The school makes it easy for parents to be involved

Students responded very positively to this statement with 82.8% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. A similar response was stated by parents, with 56.2 agreeing in some form, and with staff with 94.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This strong positive feeling suggests a pattern of positive communication from the school to maintain the home-school partnership and that my interview questions needed to probe the ways in which the school had achieved this and the ways this communication had changed (if any) following COVID.

7. The school communicates in various ways

Students again responded positively to this statement, with 48.3% agreeing to some degree and 24.1% being neutral. This was even stronger for parents, with 85.4% either agreeing or disagreeing, and staff with 86% strongly agreeing. As communication is an often-cited component of the home-school partnership and a key section of the FIC, it suggested that my interview questions needed to examine the ways that the school communicates and which features of it contribute to a strong home-school partnership.

8. The school shares information about students' progress

55.4 of students agreed but 27.5% disagreed with this statement. Parents were more unanimous with this question with 76.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing. The viewpoints of teachers were similar with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing. These responses suggested a strong feeling of regular communication. However, it left a gap for my interview questions to probe regarding exactly how it shared this information, how effective it was, and whether this changed following school closures.

9. Parents regularly check homework

There were some disagreements from the groups of participants with this statement with parents being positive (67.7% either agreeing or strongly agreeing), students being relatively neutral (37.9% agreeing, and 31% disagreeing), and staff being negative (34.3% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing). As the FIC argues that information sharing is a crucial part of the home-school partnership, this discrepancy in responses suggested that my interview questions needed to probe exactly why participants have this differing viewpoint on how often parents check homework.

10. I have a better relationship with teachers/parents

37.9% of students agreed with this statement but 27.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. For staff, there was again a mixed picture with 37.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing, but 26.6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. For parents there was a similarly mixed picture with 21.5% strongly agreeing or agreeing, but 29.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 48.4% were neutral about this statement. My semi-structured interview questions needed to probe this further to uncover how the home-school partnership has changed following school closures and whether the relationship is better in some instances but worse in others.

11. The school has helped the community

Parents responded favourably to this statement with 63.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Staff also responded favourably with 91.5% agreeing in some form. My interview questions needed to investigate exactly how the school has helped and whether this changed following school closures and if parents and staff feel that this help is likely to continue now that schools have reopened.

12. The school connects families to resources in the community

The responses from parents were evenly split for this question (35% agreeing in some form, and 31.4% disagreeing in some form. For teachers it was far more positive with 68.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing. The contrast of responses between this and the previous question suggests that I needed some clarity from my interview questions regarding what parents and teachers considered as resources that helped the community during school closures and why this discrepancy exists.

The analysis of these responses has been useful in that they appear to confirm that the FIC is still relevant in a post lockdown world in that sharing of opinions, viewpoints, and information is what constitutes an effective partnership across participants in the partnership.

B1. Interview script

Hello,

My name is Josh Uddin, and I am conducting research on the topic of home-school partnerships. The purpose of this research is to gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of parents, teachers, and staff regarding the home-school partnership.

Your participation in this interview is essential and highly valued. By sharing your thoughts and experiences, you will contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics and challenges involved in creating effective home-school partnerships.

Please note that your responses will remain strictly confidential, and your personal information will be pseudonymised in the research findings. Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any point without any repercussions.

The interview will last approximately 40 minutes, and it will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing your insights. Rest assured that the recordings will only be used for the purpose of this research and will be securely stored.

I encourage you to be open and honest in your responses, as your perspectives are vital in shaping the outcomes of this study. Before we proceed, do you have any questions or concerns about the research or the interview process?

Let's begin the interview.

Communication

1) Tell me a bit about how you communicated with the school/parents/students before the COVID pandemic happened? How would you describe how this changed, if at all, once schools reopened?

Prompts:

Any particular changes before/during/after the school closures?

Were there any key challenges/difficulties?

Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Teaching and learning

2) How would you describe teaching during the lockdown period? Has it changed now compared to before the pandemic? Who or what is responsible for this change?

Prompts

Do you think it is the same for everyone? How so?

What were the key challenges/difficulties?

Is there anything that you wish remained from lockdown teaching?

Views on education

3) Looking back across the COVID pandemic, has your relationship with the school/parents changed?

Prompts:

Is there anything that stands out?

What were the key challenges/difficulties?

How were these challenges solved?

Regarding the decision making – was it done alone/with others, who helped/partners

Were there any differences during the different phases – at first/ last lockdown/ in-between

Partnerships and the learning community

4) What are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? How does each fit into the home-school partnership? Do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?

4b) (This was the wording for the student participants) What are your thoughts on the relationship between parents and teachers? Are they equal partners? How does each fit into the home-school partnership? Do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?

Prompts:

Anything that stands out or that has changed over time, that you learnt through the crisis?

What about other parents/students, would they agree with you?

What about the community? How did you/the school help the community? Has this changed once schools reopened?

How would you describe the home-school partnership during school closures? Has anything changed? For the better or worse?

Learning at home

5) Were there any differences in how you/students learnt at home during the lockdowns? How did parents/teachers support the learning?

Prompts:

Did different people support? Has this change (if any) carried on now that schools have reopened?

Did you enjoy the learning more or less? What would you say were the main differences?

Rebuilding education – (Adaptations to) partnerships

6a) Has the home-school partnership changed since the school closures? What is the school doing this term? (to maintain or improve partnerships)

6b) Are there any particular priorities (shaped by your circumstance?) when children first came back/ now?

6c) (for student participants) What things are most important (based on your experience?) when children first came back/ now?

Prompts:

Any particular curriculum requirements? E.g. catch-up, specific programmes.

Were there any particular resources used? Funding? interventions?

Is there a consensus or disagreement about ways forward amongst staff, parents, pupils?

6c) Who's been important in helping you maintain the home-school partnership? (in answer to any of the issues highlighted above)

Prompts:

Either In school or out of school

Any key staff members?

Wellbeing

7) How would you describe how wellbeing was dealt with by the school before, during, and after the pandemic? Has it taken on more importance since? Who for? And why?

Prompts:

Were there any key issues?

Do you have any recommendations how wellbeing provision could be improved?

Were there any key staff members?

Do you think it should be part of the curriculum?

SES

8) Do you think SES has affected the home-school partnership since the COVID pandemic? Is there a bigger change from before the pandemic? If so, what would you suggest are the main reasons?

8b) (Question for student participants) Do you think the income of a family has affected the home-school partnership since the COVID pandemic? Is there a bigger change from before the pandemic? If so, what would you suggest are the main reasons?

Prompts:

Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

What are the key links between SES and the home-school partnership? Before and after the pandemic?

Are there any lessons that have been learnt?

Lessons for the home-school partnership from this year for next year

9a) in your school - anything you will carry forward regarding the home-school partnership from this year to next year? Anything you learnt along the way you want to hold on to for how you work with parents/teachers/students

Prompts

How might this happen?

10) If you were able to send one simple message to the DfE/ Schools Minister/ Ofsted) via this research regarding the home-school partnership, what would it be?

Table C1: Initial List of codes and subcodes

COMMUNICATION

- Additional method
- Comparison
- Criticism
- Direct
- In a partnership
- Online
- Outside classroom
- Peak of communication
- Recommendation
- Communication – direct

COMMUNITY

- Support
- Uncertainty
- COVID change
- Preparation
- Crisis of identity

TECHNOLOGY

- Device
- Familiarity with technology
- Group v individual

HOME ENVIRONMENT

- Home-school knowledge
- Strictness
- IT knowledge
- Lack of structure
- Learning
- Barrier

- Environment
- Increased accessibility
- Opportunity
- Priority
- Routines and consistency
- Trying to help
- Lost learning concerns
- Evaluation
- Negative support
- New information – students

ONLINE LEARNING

- Choice
- Engagement
- Online teaching
- Benefit
- Criticism
- Unchanged
- Online v virtual communication
- Parent seeking support
- Child partnership
- Teacher dynamic
- Partnership
- After COVID
- Better face to face
- Differently affected
- With students
- Primary v secondary partnerships
- Unchanged
- Unequal partnership
- Interaction
- Strength of partnership
- Resilience
- School support of staff

- Adapting
- SES impact
- Link to learning
- Priorities
- Awareness
- Student interaction
- Student teacher barrier
- Dynamic - worse
- Dynamic - more influential
- Partnership
- Supervision at home
- Teaching
- Parents
- Unchanged
- Time gap uncertainty
- Using IT to learn
- Virtual communication

WELLBEING

- Family
- Lockdown
- Negative
- Importance
- Awareness
- Maintained
- Training need
- Concern
- As part of curriculum

In the table below, I have shown the parent code distribution

Table C2. Parent responses

Code	Number of times mentioned	Number of participants that mentioned the code
Communication with school before and after COVID	29	10
Recognition of educational and emotional struggles during lockdown	17	9
Increased need for support during lockdown due to lack of physical activity	19	8
Regular communication with school mentor during lockdown	14	8
Increased communication with heads of learning and SEN team after school reopened	8	7

Impact due to lack of socialisation and sports during lockdown	19	7
parent -school communication suggestions	15	7
Increased awareness and involvement in children's education during lockdown	18	7
Shift in attitude towards attendance due to COVID precautions	13	7
Increased awareness of diverse needs and support required among families	14	7
Focus on managing anxiety and stress during the pandemic	21	7

Recommendation for a combination of dedicated lessons and integration into form time for wellbeing education	23	7
Desirable aspects from lockdown teaching	14	7
Lack of lost learning	10	6
Changes in the home-school partnership due to COVID	16	6
Power dynamic between parents and teachers in the home-school partnership	11	6
School initiatives to support the local community during lockdown	9	6

Differences in home learning during different lockdown phases and teacher support	12	6
Insufficient administrative support to handle various issues	5	5
Desire for more targeted and concise information about students	17	5
Difference in the role of primary teachers versus secondary teachers	9	5
Advocacy for the inclusion of mental wellbeing in the curriculum	11	5
Recognition of the need for adequate resources and funding for schools	7	4

Importance of maintaining social connections during the pandemic	16	4
Lack of communication and engagement with the school during the pandemic	12	4
Role of teachers in offering emotional and social support to students	6	4

In the table below I have shown the staff code distribution

Table C3. Staff responses

Code	Count (across participants)	Unique participants
Change in mode of communication due to the pandemic	23	10
Importance of building relationships regardless of mode of interaction	21	9
Comparison of learning experiences during first and second lockdowns	20	9
Role of parents during lockdown	19	9
Increased parental involvement and the results of that	19	9

Continuity of relationships with parents before and during the pandemic	17	8
Increase in compensatory behaviour from parents due to perceived impact of the pandemic	15	6
Importance of mental health and its impact on student wellbeing	14	9
Higher occurrence of mental health issues and need for support	14	9
Influence of SES on parental involvement and engagement	13	9
Need for increased funding to support student wellbeing and mental health initiatives	11	5
Value of face-to-face interaction in building connections and understanding	17	9
Readiness and preparation of schools and students during second lockdown	8	6
Lack of lost learning	14	8
School's support for key workers' children during lockdown	11	6
Parental involvement in ensuring punctuality and participation in online learning	10	7
Correlation between parental engagement in online learning and strong relationships	10	7
Pandemic's role in exposing socioeconomic inequalities within the school community	9	6

Advocacy for teacher training and support in addressing student mental health	9	6
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Table C4: Selection of quotes that link to each theme by participant.

Theme	Quote	Participant Number
Impact of communication to build relationships during lockdown	"So, I think that communication between the pupils and schools. Was definitely a bit more complex before the pandemic and the main way of communication, I would say, was via emails. Letters or physically speaking to your teachers. Right. And I think they're definitely the pandemic. It shifted a lot of school online and because of that the whole school system learned how to use it. I think the pandemic definitely taught the school how to base itself around on my system. Which allowed for communication between pupils and teachers. Online so it you know it it's I think the communication outside of school. Between teachers and pupils definitely um, increased. And I think you how you don't need to be here."	S1
Learning experiences during lockdown	"I think at the very start of the pandemic, the schools didn't really know how to. How to communicate properly with students outside of school? But I feel like schools that naturally learn and overcame that challenge. And you know, with time. And I definitely feel like it's reached the point where it can't really get better than this."	S1

Learning experiences during lockdown	"Um. So I think teaching was during the pandemic teaching, I would say was somewhat unaffected. I think that the classrooms did move online, but in terms of the way the lessons were presented or. The general feel of the lessons were similar, however it did. Make it hard. they did. Make it more difficult for students to ask questions or interact more with the teachers There was that kind of barrier between the students and the teacher due to the pandemic or due to it being online. So what was the second part of the question?"	S1
Learning experiences during lockdown	"Yeah. So. Yeah. So the learning online was much more individual. So it was more of up to us whether how much effort we wanted to put in or how much we wanted to interact with the teachers Because of the fact that we weren't in school, there was not pressure to answer questions or or to participate as much in the lessons. So I definitely think that online lessons were more... how much she wanted to participate in the lesson online was very much more up to yourself and how much you wanted to rather than how much you felt like you had to do."	S1
Socioeconomic influences and inequalities	"So I think that between the pandemic and now the partnership, has remained unchanged, but if you look at before the pandemic and now after, the partnership has changed because of that, because of the fact that we had so much home learning or individual learning."	S1

Wellbeing and Social Connections	"Ohh yeah, I definitely think that wellbeing has taken a. Yeah, a more a highest, a higher. Ohh what? I don't know. I don't know why I yeah, it's definitely... Priority? Yeah it has definitely taken a higher priority now after the lockdown, I think that people would definitely thought about the wellbeing of Ohh sorry the school thought about the wellbeing of students during the pandemic and during lockdown just because of the fact that we're so isolated from each other and I feel like the things or the way that the school approached things then has remained and kind of we've carried it on."	S1
Wellbeing and Social Connections	"I don't necessarily think that it should be part of the curriculum, but it should be something that should be spoke about and it should be. Um, you know the school and pupils should think about. I think it should definitely up... I don't think it has such a high priority that it should be part of the curriculum, but it should be. May be brought into school in other ways, so talked about in tutor or form time or in assembly. Or just create an atmosphere where it's easy to talk about such a thing within the class."	S1
school as communities	"Ohh, I don't think I can answer that question, I don't know."	S1
Socioeconomic Influences and Inequalities	"I think there's a smaller change now than there was before the pandemic, just because of the push that schools had to. For example, give lower or give families with lower incomes or families that weren't. Sorry. Didn't sorry that sorry families that didn't have the capability to have the devices such as laptops or computers to be able to do to be able to take part in those online lessons, lots of schools helped them out and..."	S1

Table C5. Supporting quotes from staff for the learning experiences during lockdown

Participant	Supporting Quote
Teacher 1	"For the first lockdown was quite new to everybody... Nobody was really prepared for that, but I think the second one people are... second lockdown in terms of learning and time that we wasted on learning for the first was actually quite not the same as the second. So the second one was much better prepared preparation wise."
Teacher 1	"So there was those parents who were very keen, making sure that child actually wakes up on time and be on the computer on time. So when the lesson starts, they are right there."
Teacher 2	"Yeah, to be honest, it's a similar sort of response to the communication question because. And again, it's going to depend on on your your your particular school, I think here."
Teacher 2	"We really did embrace as much as possible, like going online straight away. I mean, we were on teams pretty much within the first few weeks of the lockdown..."
Teacher 2	"So I think how that has improved. um not improved, or maybe maybe change teaching and learning is again just much like with the communication just bringing us..."
Teacher 2	"Then I think unfortunately, like a lot of and this is no blame on a particular school or you know, because it happened in workplaces across, you know, everywhere that it was suddenly like, Oh my gosh, we're having a pandemic and people, this is gonna really haven't put..."

Teacher 3	"And so for me personally, definitely it's changed... So it is more teacher led rather than independent and I think that was beneficial because I think that held a lot of kids to account as well. And so we did registers, things like that. So there was more accountability for if you were there or not. And obviously there was more of a follow up with that respect."
Teacher 4	"erm the level of engagement was not very high... students weren't joining your online lessons. You were then to call home and follow it up. And I found that quite stressful that added on quite a lot of additional work."
Teacher 4	"I remember coming back to school in the summer term after the second lockdown and the kids were a lot more introverted, a lot more nervous around you. Their personalities had completely changed. And so that made it quite difficult to build relationships. It's kind of like starting from scratch again."
Teacher 5	"There was a bigger push on dual coding and own research, especially in science, because the students had the resources there. We weren't there to over explain."
Teacher 5	"For me personally, I noticed the benefits of having technology in the classroom and the ability to have like if the students have those PowerPoints in front of them, it's now not just a note taking exercise, it's they're actually actively learning."
Teacher 8	"Um. I guess. You see, I think. And when you say lockdown, so you're focusing on the period when we're in lockdown, not when we were back in school and COVID was still around. But just the lockdown... Engagement. So as you say, I touched on it, I think managing engagement of students was difficult... It was harder to do AFL, so I guess in get in, in educational terms engagement and AFL where the where the issues because the normal a AFL cues you would do in a classroom work there."

Teacher 6	"Um teaching was difficult for maths I think because so one of the big difficulties was we couldn't model your work unless you had a tablet."
Teacher 6	"And then the really poor ones will submit half a page and then you know exactly who's done what, who's put in the effort and who do you need to direct your attention to."
Teacher 6	"Yeah, yeah. So it's strange to cause we'll be impacted for however many years and and you don't often take the time to reflect on the differences and similarities of yeah, things that have happened since but yeah, it was. It was a good chat."
Teacher 7	"I find it very frustrating. I think it's good that school offered loads in terms of you know. It felt reasonable in terms of it was basically every other lesson that you would normally have with the class had to be streamed so it wasn't every single period."
Teacher 9	"In terms of lost learning cause it's, you know, actually far more important is reengaging with those studies."
Teacher 9	"There was actually the freedom and the space there to do something a bit different."
Teacher 10	"Yeah, and Oh my God. You know what? I'm not even thought about the exam. I'm annoyed. I've not even thought about this exam stuff. But yeah, like, actually for, you know, just taking one component out of the GCSE taking half of 1 component out for a level. It made such a difference."

Section D: Interview examples

Student 1 transcript

J

tell me a bit about how you communicated with the school before the COVID pandemic happened and how would you describe how this change once schools reopened?

S1

So I think that communication between the pupils and schools. Was definitely a bit more.

complex before the pandemic and the main way of communication, I would say, was via emails. Letters or physically speaking to your teachers. Right. And I think they're definitely the pandemic. It shifted a lot of school online and because of that the whole school system learned how to use it, the whole on online system, sorry. The. I think the pandemic definitely taught the school how to Base itself around on my system. Which allowed for communication between pupils and teachers. Online so it you know it it's I think the communication outside of school. Between teachers and pupils definitely um, increased. And I think you how you don't need to be here.

J

Yeah, could just going back on that question, any suggestions for improvement and were there any particular challenges regarding communication during the pandemic?

S1

I think at the very start of the pandemic, the. The schools didn't really know how to. How to communicate properly with students outside of school? But I feel like schools that naturally learn and overcame that challenge.

And you know, with time.

And I definitely feel like it's reached the point where it can't really get better than this.

J

Thank you very much. Next question and how would you describe teaching during the lockdown period and has it changed now compared to before the pandemic?

S1

Um. So, I think teaching was during the pandemic teaching, I would say was. Somewhat unaffected. I think that it the classrooms did move online, but in terms of the way the lessons were presented or. The general feel of the lessons were similar, however it did. Make it hard. they did. Make it more difficult for students to ask questions or interact more with the teachers There was that kind of barrier between the students and the teacher due to the pandemic or due to it being online. So what was the second part of the question?

J

And has it changed so compared to before? What's teaching like now compared to before the pandemic? If you were to compare.

S1

So, I think I think teaching within the classroom has generally been unchanged, so teaching before the pandemic in the classroom is the same as it is now, but I feel that lots of. Lots of. Aspects have also moved online. So, Whereas before. You know you you would only have access, for example to files or PowerPoints With the teacher in class whereas now that you can always come back after school And have a look. Or Or for example, if you're not there for some reason, you can always, you know, access the lesson online as well. Well, you know, whereas before you didn't have that opportunity.

J

Okay, thank you. And is there anything you wish remained from lockdown teaching?

S1

I feel like all the good aspects have remained So I I wouldn't necessarily say that there's something that we have then that we don't have now I I definitely think that. Um, you know, although lock down obviously wasn't a good thing, I think that for teaching and for schools, it definitely kind of broadens the ways of communicating between teachers and students.

J

Okay, thank you. And looking back across of COVID, pandemic has your relationship with the school and your parents regarding learning changed?

S1

Ohh, I don't think it has no.

J

No, you don't think change the school. Nothing stands out or.

S1

No, I don't. I don't think it has changed.

J

OK and Next question, what are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? How does each fit into the home school partnership, and do you think that parents and teachers are equal partnership in education?

S1

Ohh.

J

So, looking at the power dynamic, do you think that in The partnership between teachers, students and parents, do you think parents and teachers are equal? Do you think

S1

Okay.

J

one's more dominant regarding learning?

S1

Yeah. Yeah. So., I think that teachers are definitely More dominant within that relationship because I feel like us as students have more direct way of communicating with the teachers due to, you know, the resources have moved online rather than us having to speak with our parents and then have them speaking to the teachers. So, we've lost that middleman, you know, let's say. Within that power dynamics, so we're we're able to have a. Almost like a direct relationship with our teachers, rather than it being through our parents.

J

OK. Thank you. And what about the community? How did the school help the community, if at all? And do you think this changed to once schools reopened?

S1

The community, as in outside school, the general community.

J

Yeah, local community, yeah.

S1

Ohh, I don't think I can Answer question, I don't know.

J

Yeah, no problem.

J

How would you describe the home school partnership during school closures? so if you say some words to describe the partnership, specifically during school closures.

S1

Ohh. Let me have a think.

J

Should we come back to that question?

S1

Yeah, let's come back to this

J

Okay And next question, where there any differences in how you learn to at home during the lockdown? How did parents, teachers support the learning? And did you enjoy the learning more or less during lockdown?

S1

Yeah. So. Yeah. So, the the learning online

was much more individual. So, it was more of up to us whether how much effort we wanted to put in or how much we wanted to interact with the teachers. Because of the fact that we Weren't in school, there was not pressure to answer questions or or to participate as much in the lessons. So, I definitely think that online lessons. Were more... how much she wanted to participate in the lesson online was very much more up to yourself and how much you wanted to rather than how much you felt like you had to do.

J

Okay, thank you. And the different people that supported and has this changed now that schools have reopened?

S1

Support as in.

J

Your learning. Or is it the same that you'd say so did different people support you in lockdown compared to now? Or was it the same people that are supportive?

S1

I would say that this school is a much more supportive now that we've reopened rather than us being at home just because of how much easier it is to communicate. Or sorry, no, the the different type of communication you have face to face rather than through emails or through or through Teams messages for example.

J

did you enjoy the learning more or less. And what would you say were the main differences during lockdown compared to now?

S1

I definitely feel like I enjoyed the learning less Just due to me not being in that school environment. Um, it was it became more difficult to differentiate between leisure time and school time. For example, just because of the fact that now my school time and my leisure time were taking place in the same environment. Um, yeah. And because of that, I definitely feel like it was more difficult to put in the same effort or to get the same amount of productivity.

J

OK, um, have partnerships changed since the school closures and what is the school doing at the moment to maintain or improve those partnerships?

S1

Partnerships, as in relationships between teachers

J

Home school partnership, yeah. So, partnerships regarding your learning.

S1

Yeah. So, I think that between The pandemic and now the partnership, has remained unchanged, but if you look at before the pandemic and now after, the partnership has changed because of that, because of the fact that we had so much home learning or individual learning.

J

Okay and Just looking back, what were the most important things to you when you first came back into like non lockdown teaching and things to you now? Is there a difference? So just repeat, what were the most important things to you just when you came back through from lockdown teaching and what are the most important things to you now? Is there a difference, would you say?

S1

I don't know. I don't think I can answer that question.

J

Yeah, no problem And who's been important in helping you maintain the partnership?

S1

I think that teachers have been the main one in helping keep up and improve the partnership just because of now We have a more direct way of communicating with the teachers.

J

OK, good. And how would you describe how wellbeing was dealt with the school? Before the lockdown, during the lockdown and now, do you reckon it's taking on more importance now and why?

S1

Ohh yeah, I definitely think that wellbeing has taken a. Yeah, a more a highest, a higher. Ohh what? I don't know. I don't know why I yeah, it's definitely

J

Priority?

S1

Yeah it has definitely taken a higher priority now After the lockdown, I think that people would definitely thought about the wellbeing of Ohh sorry the school thought about the wellbeing of students during the pandemic and during lockdown just because of the fact that we're so isolated from each other and I feel like the things or the way that the school approached things then has remained and kind of we've carried it on.

J

Okay. And do you think I should be part of the curriculum, Wellbeing?

S1

Ohh. I don't necessarily think that it should be part of the curriculum, but it should be something that should be spoke about and it should be. Um, you know the school and pupils should think about. I think it should definitely up. I don't think it has such a high priority that it should be Part of the curriculum, but it should be. May be brought into school in other ways, so talked about in tutor or form time or in assembly. Or just create an atmosphere where it's easy to talk about such a thing within the class.

J

Thank you and do you think that income of a family so talking about socioeconomic status of a family has affected the home school partnership since COVID? Is there a bigger change now than before the pandemic?

S1

I think there's a smaller change now than there was before the pandemic, just because of the push that schools had to. For example, give lower or give families with lower incomes or or families that weren't. Sorry didn't sorry that sorry families that didn't have the capability to have the devices such as laptops or computers to be able to do to be able to take part in those online lessons, lots of schools helped them out and.

J

And you think that minimised the the gap would just say.

S1

Ohh. yes. And I think that that gap well that gap that that was minimised has stayed minimised.

J

Cool and what do you reckon of the key lessons we've learned about socioeconomic status from the pandemic? Now that we've come out of it? or any particular thing that we were aware weren't really aware of, and now we're a bit more aware of regarding social economic status and learning.

S1

I don't think I can answer that question, sorry.

J

In our school, is there anything that you'd want to carry forward regarding from the home school partnership from Lockdown to next year, would you say?

S1

Yeah. So, I I definitely think that the amount of the communication we have with teachers or the resources that teachers put out online. Um Is definitely a good thing. I I think that that should be carried on forward for years to come.

J

And final question, if you were to send one simple message to the school's minister, Ofsted or the education secretary regarding the home school partnership, what would it be? So, is there anything that you'd say is the most important part of the home School partnership? Is there anything that you think we need to do a bit more of lessons we've learned from COVID? Basically, if there is one message you reckon you've learned from COVID?

S1

That communication between teachers and students is very important and that the. The the the resources that teachers put out out of class. Make a real impact to a student's education. And. Yeah, just the general communication outside of the classroom helps students with their own education, yeah.

J

Okay. Brilliant. Thank you very much.

Example of interview transcripts (Teacher 5)

Josh Uddin

All right. Question number one, could you tell me a little bit about how you communicated with parents and students during COVID and how would you describe how this has changed now that schools have reopened?

Teacher 5

Um. Primarily during COVID we would have communicated with students primarily through teams and in their lesson, it would have been voice and cameras and with parents it was more emails and we were required to make phone calls to check in on our form group as well.

um

Pretty much the same and all of our lessons and everything go on teams. So, students have access to everything there and I think it's changed slightly from COVID with the amount of check ins that we did with parents, we don't have the same communication as we did, once a week we were required to talk to parents, and now it's gone back to very much like it was before. It's either a positive or negative phone call once in a while.

Josh Uddin

And what would you say with the main difficulties in communication during COVID?

Teacher 5

Um, I think the main difficulties didn't necessarily come from most students. It was we had a lot of students that didn't have access to it, and so a lot of the communication would have been filtered down through SLT rather than us being able to get in contact with them themselves and.

Yeah. Um I suppose The difficulty is that especially with students, you don't really know how much they are interacting. We're not there. um to actually. See them whether they're just sitting there, passively taking the stock, the information in or not.

Josh Uddin

Cool. Thank you. Um, how would you describe teaching and learning during the long time

period? Um. And is there anything that you wish to remained from teaching during lockdown to compared to what we're doing now?

Teacher 5

Um, I think a lot of teachers thought maybe I don't want to say the word complacent, but I don't have another word for it. But we're teaching the same lessons over and over again. They kind of had their curriculum planned for the last couple of years. They had to get a little bit more creative and how they were doing things.

There was a bigger push on dual coding and own research, especially in science, because the students had the resources there. We weren't there to over explain. We had a set amount of time and and that was all really the students then had to take ownership over that work a little bit more.

For me personally, I noticed the benefits of having technology in the classroom and the ability to have like if the students have those PowerPoints in front of them, it's now not just a note taking exercise, it's they're actually actively learning. They can instead of writing out sentences and it's taking them 10 minutes to do a matching up activity, they could do it at the touch of a finger and it just meant that we could cover so much more content. But they had such a better understanding of it. So, I think that extra technology In front of them made such a difference.

Josh Uddin

And is anything you wish stayed that we've lost now that we've recovered from COVID?

Teacher 5

Um also so it it, it is for me the access to the technology that I wish we we were in a position that each student could have a laptop or a tablet in front of them.

And. Yeah, I think something that I wish stayed. Yes, within school there is now, more so than ever, a big push on the wellbeing, but it was also that kind of understanding that everyone was going through a really, really difficult time and people were a lot more aware of it and sensitive to it, whereas now we're just getting on as if nothing had happened.

Josh Uddin

thank you. And what are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? How does each fit into the home school partnership? Basically, do you consider that parents and teachers are an equal partnership in education?

Teacher 5

Um I would I say equal? probably not. There would be a lot of I suppose parents that don't have the education themselves, so they're not able to provide that education, but in terms of motivation and showing the importance of education to their child or our student, I think they are equal in that respect. And you do notice the students who maybe have come from a background where education is extremely important in their family and you can see that they want to do well because of that and we are there to motivate them and the two.

And the parents and teacher motivating that student then means that they can excel even more when you have maybe a student that their parents don't value education as much. You are still trying to facilitate that role to support and motivate, but you can see that it is a struggle. So, in terms of the knowledge. I don't think it's the same, but in terms of the motivation, yes, there has to be this. We all have to be on the same page for a student to excel.

Josh Uddin

And do you think that power dynamics changed? Following COVID, do you think parents are more equal or less equal than teachers now?

Teacher 5

I from my experience I have found that It's a very mixed bag.

Um, and it is very much split down the middle. I find that there are parents that have to home school or help with home schooling um multiple aged children and they found it really difficult and they found us was a new respect for teachers and those parents are extremely supportive of um, behaviour policies and understanding and wanting to do the best that they can for their children. You then also have other parents that go the complete opposite way in which they have gone well, I homed schooled, my child. I can put a laptop in a video on in front of them

and it's not that difficult. So, I don't support your choices in how you are handling these situations in school.

Josh Uddin

Brilliant. Thank you. And what about the community? How do you think schools in general help the community and has this changed now that schools have reopened?

Teacher 5

I think the interaction with the community outside of school is hugely important and I do think there should be maybe a bigger push to those around us. We don't really. As was the school itself. It's such a tight knit community that unless you are SLT, you often don't have to deal with members of the community. We don't often have to talk about um like presenters coming in and so it is difficult I suppose to think about that.

um Yes, sorry. What was the question again?

Josh Uddin

And do you think that sort of support with the communities changed?

Teacher 5

Ohh.

Josh Uddin

Um, now that COVID we're out of COVID. Or do you think it's stayed the same?

Teacher 5

Um I suppose were in a very difficult time at the minute with teachers strikes. And so, I think the view from the Community is shifting again. I do. I do think again. People that I've interacted with. You have the very mixed bag people that have the utmost respect for what teachers do and how much effort they put into it. Whereas others see teachers as they got five weeks off in the holiday and they have an easy life, they it's a nine to three job and that's all they have to do. And I do think it's shifted for a little bit and a little bit more towards the positive and there was a lot of support, but unfortunately because its strike action. I think it is moving slightly again.

Josh Uddin

Um, OK, next questions are about learning at home and were there any differences in how students learnt during the lockdown phases? Did different people support during the two lockdowns that we had? And did you enjoy the teaching more or less during the different phases, or was it the same?

Teacher 5

Um I suppose the the teaching. The first part of that question was how did the teaching change was it?

Josh Uddin

Yeah. So did your teaching change if the reflecting on the first lock time versus the 2nd lockdown? Did your teaching change ?

Teacher 5

Yeah. So, in the first lockdown, as we weren't required to do live lessons and very much, it was information based at using PowerPoints or voice over and I suppose the the students had to be that little bit more self-motivating.

And it was a very basic way of delivering a lesson very similar to them just learning from a YouTube video from the 2nd lockdown, then going to live lessons, We were more aware of um, as was live marking, having a way in which you can access the student work and it became a lot more interactive. The more that people became comfortable with the technology and.

Um with I wasn't coming up with new ways to keep students engaged in their lessons.

And the second part was Ohh did I enjoy it more?

Josh Uddin

Um, I think comparing my phone answered it. It was. Yeah, it's yeah. Didn't do it more or less. Or was it the same?

Teacher 5

Um, I enjoyed the actual online teaching and of those lessons in the second lockdown, a little bit more is a little bit more interactive. You got a little bit more out of the students and some

students found a new interest where they would come and research and put in extra information because they actually had the time to do it um. But It was also very difficult from a mental health point of view, talking to just a screen and you don't have that actual personal interaction. So even though the teaching was more engaging, it did did also take probably more of a toll on a mental health aspect.

Josh Uddin

Thank you. And so, looking at now rebuilding education, how would you describe how the home school partnerships changed since school closures and what would you say are the priorities now to maintain that partnership?

Teacher 5

I suppose the priorities is because a lot of the students that we have in schools now spent a large amount of time out of school, it is now reinforcing that education is an important part of their life and we live in a society where people that didn't complete secondary schools are idolised because they have started a business or they're millionaires, or they've done a lot of stocks and gotten money that way. And I think with that time out of school, students have turned to those people and said, well, they didn't get an education, but they still did this. So, I think the most important thing is between teachers, other members of staff that work in a school and parents, it's just. Reminding students how important education is, and even if you want to be an entrepreneur and you want to start your own business, why wouldn't you give yourself the best chance of doing that? Why would you start from the bottom when you could maybe take two, three steps ahead of other people?

Josh Uddin

Thank you. And have there been any particular staff members that have been or particular people that have been in important in helping you maintain the home school partnership, so any particular staff in school that you think have been really helpful, Pastor or form tutors heads of year?

Teacher 5

Yeah, I think um. It's definitely like pastoral leads and the year heads and in our school the behaviour leads um they have a lot of contact with certain students, which helps to facilitate this kind of home school partnership. We're all on the same page. We know exactly what's going on. We know if there's issues at home that we can then start to help those students again and.

Yeah, mostly like our year leads are form tutors, maybe to a lesser extent Now, they did have a big impact during lockdown because they would have been in contact every single week or every other week with students and parents. And speaking on the phone with the students in your form class. As well as the parents, it really helped to build a foundation for a relationship that we may not actually have time to build necessarily in a form setting.

Josh Uddin

Brilliant. Thank you. And next questions about lost learning. So, there's a lot of rhetoric about lost learning. Where do you stand on that? Do you think students have lots more learning than people realise? Do you think students have lost less learning? Where do you stand on that lost learning phrase?

Teacher 5

Um I think students have lost learning, but not necessarily in the content that they have have to acquire before sitting an exam. I think the social aspect of it, they've lost, a lot of students um don't conform to social or social norms. Now they don't realise why they something is rude. They don't have that same respect for authority as maybe they would have if if they hadn't lost time in year six or year 7.

Um I think the schools and their curriculums are so well built that yes, they may not have covered something in year six, but they see it again in year seven and in year nine. And yeah, there will be some students that know it already. And so, they seem to be ahead, but realistically there's so many opportunities for, especially in a science curriculum for us to see that content again and. To revise it, cause it's all in built into your curriculum plans, I think yes, there's been students that have lost Information, but it's not the information that we kind of expect. It is the motivation. It's the wanting to do well. It's the social side of it rather than the actual education.

Josh Uddin

Thank you. Really detailed answer. Could you just, you mentioned about the social norms that they're missing? And you said that maybe they don't have the behaviour traits, so you'd expect.

Could you elaborate on that? any examples? Would you say would you say that's mainly for the transition to primary compared to older kids?

Teacher 5

Yeah, I, uh, looking at it was the year 7 and eight that we have now because they missed probably year five and year six. They never actually had the opportunity to be the older kids in school that everyone looks up to and they haven't had that kind of their primary school teachers telling them that they have to set an example and be the best version of themselves. But also, with that integration Period that we had we would have had your sixes coming into our summer school and where they were interacting with year elevens, which this was never really would have happened before. And it's fantastic that the the confidence to go and speak to these older year groups, but you then do see this kind of.

Um.

Superiority or overconfidence in which now they're speaking to older year groups, they start to act like older year groups um you now have your sevens and eights that are maybe having conversations that you would say aren't necessarily age appropriate because they're hanging out with older students and they normally you would have in year 9 and 10 where students are hormonal and questioning authority and without a good relationship, that student you may have a falling out with them. We're now seeing that a little bit earlier in sevens and eights where they didn't have a teacher for two years and they didn't have that kind of discipline. If you if you do this, there's a consequence. We can't say that everyone was parented the same and so some students do actually have difficulty conforming to. Yes, you have a right to do this but you also have a responsibility to act responsible with that, right?

Josh Uddin

Thank you. Thank you very much. Next question, you touched on the earlier how would you describe how wellbeing was dealt with schools before the lockdown during the lockdown, and now has it taken on more important since and why?

Teacher 5

Um So I think there was a big push for wellbeing in lockdown. I think the difficulty with it was no one really knew what was coming like up ahead, everyone was kind of in the same boat. And even though people were trying to support each other, that kind of thing of we don't know when it's gonna end. We don't know when we're gonna be able to go get out of our houses again. So,

you still had that kind of if you are struggling with your mental health, you still had that um it's never-ending kind of feeling. since coming back to schools, um in the first year, I would say there was a massive push on mental health and there was a lot of input into trying to reduce teacher workload stress, this idea that it's an open conversation that we can have um a big push on students, mental health and their wellbeing and trying to understand the kind of.

Experiences that they went through in lockdown, and students had vastly different experiences for some people, it was a great three months off because they got to play the Xbox all day. For some people, they had lost a lot of family members and it's dealing with that. There's been provisions put in place. We've got more students in talking to counsellors than ever. We've got more reports of mental health issues. And so, there is that strain on us.

I think now. years later, the shift has now gone solely to the students. It doesn't always necessarily include the teachers in that, um I think there is this thought of where adults, and so we should be able to process things a lot quicker and we should be able to just snap back to what we were normally like. But for a lot of us. A lot of people in teaching that would two parts of or two years of disrupted kind of work and learning that makes a big difference in your career. For me, when we went into lockdown, I was an NQT.

So last year was actually my first undisrupted year in teaching, and it's almost your it's just you're meant to get on with it because this is your job. Whereas I never had that easing in process um, and I think we we need to kind of recognise that for some people, it was two years and not much has changed. For some people, it it was two years, but their formative years in that career or that job that you're doing.

Josh Uddin

Brilliant. Thank you. And do you think should wellbeing should be part of the curriculum, so as opposed to being taught during inform times, do you think it should be a bit more overtly part of the curriculum?

Teacher 5

Um. I think wellbeing is a really important aspect in curriculum, but the difficulty with it is. Um, how students interact with it Um I think there needs to be an importance unwell being, but I'm not so much that it's like done to death. I think we're at this point now where we've been talking about mental health in schools since students are 9/10 years old and teaching the same things.

Yes, if we make it a little bit more age appropriate, but essentially teaching very, very similar things from.

Year 5 to year 11 isn't helpful. You then get a kind of distance from it. You, students don't respond to that wellbeing as well as maybe they should. So, looking at it, I think we needed to look at a different aspect of it and look at the cohort that we have like. Yes, it's difficult to do a bespoke curriculum for every single year, but there's gonna be aspects that are the same. But if you know that one year group, a lot of them have to deal with grief. Then maybe that's what we spend most of our time on and looking at strategies for that. So yes, I think wellbeing should be a bespoke part of the curriculum, but I think we need to be very careful as to how we put that in place.

Josh Uddin

Thank you. A couple more questions. um do you think that the social economic status has affected the home school partnership? Has that affect become bigger since the pandemic or smaller or unchanged? And what would say is the main reasons ,if any, for that change?

Teacher 5

Um I think so. It's a difficult one. Again, families are very different. And I do think at the very start of the pandemic, you essentially were dealing with families that maybe didn't have a laptop or had one laptop between 4 four children, and they were all expected to have different things going on at different times. And so that was very, very difficult for them. And there would have been this missed learning. um at that stage, I think then as we went into the second Lockdown with people.

Knowing how how it was going to play out with then had this big push in the strive to get the students what they need and I do think it is changed. I think there are a lot of parents, especially from I suppose a lower socioeconomic group that have a greater respect for the schools and how they helped them in that hard time, erm and you'll have then.

Maybe families that aren't from a difficult socioeconomic background that can pay for the private tutors and so they have now seen Ohh well, we don't need to lean on the school for as much support as other people.

Josh Uddin

And so do you think that gaps bigger or still the same after COVID?

Teacher 5

No, I think the gap has gotten bigger. We we see a bigger discrepancy in whether people are leaning it and it's leaning on the school for support compared to those that aren't.

Josh Uddin

Brilliant. Thank you. And in your school, is there anything that you want to carry forward regarding the home school partnership from this year to the next, so stuff that's maybe going well, do you think, sort of suggestions for improvement for the home school partnership basically?

Teacher 5

Um I I personally think the communication as in through emails and through phone calls is pretty good. It probably could be better. But I think for me and our school, it would be that in person contact for a lot of us, the only time that we will ever meet a student's parents is when we have another hundred students at parents evening that we're talking to. And it's that thing of having those open evenings having like awards, evenings for the students that you actually get to see.

The parents and how they interact with them and you get to meet them more than once and and you're not just this name or voice on the telephone when you're calling to. To yeah, to to say that you, your child, has been bad in lesson or your child has been really good.

Josh Uddin

Thank you. You OK, carry on?

Teacher 5

Yeah. No, I'm fine.

Josh Uddin

And the final question, if you were to send one simple message to the Department of Education

or the school Minister, via this research regarding the home school partnership, what would it be?

Teacher 5

Difficult one.

Josh Uddin

That's why it's the final one, so one simple message to the powers that be through this research about the home school partnership. What would you like it to be?

Teacher 5

I think the most important thing is that there is support for teachers and parents and just ensuring that like, we're not seen as enemies. And It was, yeah. Again, it's it's that difficult time of where we have teachers strikes that there were now kind of seen as the bad guys for whatever reason or appear to be the bad guys for whatever reason. So, I suppose the message would be that. It's to remember that teachers are there to, I suppose. Sorry, words aren't coming to me. Um, teachers are there to support and facilitate the growth of the students and we can only do that with the support of Parents, the community from. The Ministers of Education and everything, and without all of us working cohesively, it's not us that suffer. It's the next generation. It's the next workforce. It's the next young people that are going to be out ministers for education and they're going to be I'm the doctors that we have to rely on.

Josh Uddin

Brilliant. Thank you very much. That takes us to the end of the questions. Is there anything more you like to add before I stop the recording?

Teacher 5

No.

Example of interview transcripts (Parent 7)

OK, so that's the recording started perfect. OK, so if you're ready, we can get started on the questions.

Parent 7

Yeah, sure.

JU

perfect first question, could you tell me a little bit about how you communicated with schools before COVID and how has this changed in a post COVID environment?

PARENT 7

Um, is this on all subjects or are we specifically on math?

Josh Uddin

This is generally across all subjects. Every question will be about schools in general. I'm not particularly about.

PARENT 7

Okay so. So, you want to know how I communicated with school before?

Josh Uddin

And how would you describe the change if anyone scores have reopened?

PARENT 7

Um, I would say so. My pre COVID experience was primary school more pretty much completely actually. They were both the primary school and the obviously the communication was face-to-face much more at primary school. So, you have much more contact face to face pre COVID in the playground. Seeing teachers going in for events going in for music events or seeing art. Looking at books that looking at the kids work.

So, it was just all in person and very much a community experience, I suppose. And then obviously during COVID and post-COVID the whole thing moved online and in primary school

that was quite noticeable. It was a big change. I think maybe less so at secondary school cause as a parent, you're less involved and you don't get to see the teachers quite so often. But primary it was very noticeable.

Josh Uddin

What would you say with the main challenges regarding communication during COVID?

PARENT 7

Ohh, I think during COVID schools were under massive pressure and I think that we as parents were quite aware that obviously the kids' education was probably suffering in some instances, but you were dealing with people, human beings who were probably going through quite a lot of stress personally, nobody knew quite what their situation was at home. So, it was just difficult. It was very difficult. I mean, the schools, I think the 2nd lockdown, the things had got much easier. The schools had got their act together with how to deliver lessons online and things. So, it was slightly easier. But obviously there was a huge gap. Um, I mean, certain teachers weren't visible and you weren't sure if they're OK and you know, it was all quite difficult for everybody, I think.

Josh Uddin

Thank you. And next question is about teaching and learning. How would you describe teaching and learning during the pandemic? Again, any key difficulties? And also, is there anything that you wish remained from lockdown teaching?

PARENT 7

Um, I think so. Obviously, you teach CHILD um and CHILD has dyscalculia, so his maths is a real struggle and I actually found doing maths with CHILD during lockdown much easier because I was in the lesson and I knew exactly what they were doing and we therefore could support him really well because he's left in a quiet environment, sitting in at our kitchen table. I could see what they were learning. We could reinforce it. The whole thing actually was easier.

And I think it because he's the kind of kid that it's easy for him to focus if it's quiet and it's just him doing 1 to one lessons with me knowing it was primary level and I could see what he was doing. It was actually a benefit. I think it was actually helpful, but that's just in maths. I think in the rest of the subjects, the more cross curricular stuff, that was really difficult. Some of it was very dry. I mean, science was a disaster. It was we were trying to do sort of science at home in

the kitchen. Experiments, but it was not easy. I think the other thing for me is I work from home and I'm part time so I was able to home school their kids. I didn't find it.

PARENT 7

At that, I wasn't like trying to do a full-time job on Zoom. At the same time, so I was able to do the home school with them. So yeah, it wasn't too bad for us, probably because of our setup at home. We had laptops and.

Josh Uddin

Anything you wish remained?

PARENT 7

Ohh.

Josh Uddin

Or anything you would like to see. Maybe you can do a bit more of that still.

Parent 7

Ohh. Uh, I'm not sure if it would be logistically possible. I think actually, how (school name) do it with their, with their teams, remote learning and the blended learning learning. I think that's really useful. So, if your kid is off sick, it is good to know that they can access documents and things which I don't know if (school name) still did before covered because we weren't there, we transitioned to (school name) during COVID.

PARENT 7

But I think having access to teams and having access to documents and lesson plans so that if your kid is off sick that they can still participate. That's that's pretty useful. Yeah.

Josh Uddin

Yeah, to answer your question We've done that a lot more, I guess, like a lot of schools, we now know how use words before resources were all over the place and occasionally be centralised. Now we know the value of teams so we can put them centrally and even if the students don't access it, we know that this is where all of our resources are. Like a central repository. So that's, I think what a lot of schools have done as well.

PARENT 7

Yeah, yeah, that does feel really handy. It's really useful.

Josh Uddin

Um looking back across the COVID pandemic. How's your relationship with your children changed and has your relationship with schools changed?

PARENT 7

I think my relationships with the primary school changed because I just didn't. You know, you just weren't in there doing things like school fairs and face painting. And, you know all the stuff you do with little kids, you just weren't doing all that. So, you kind of had much less contact. And I think they were very stressed. And I think things got very, very difficult for a lot of primary schools. So, I think on that level, the relationships are different. I think relationships with the kids are probably the same. We've got quite a close-knit family. Me and my husband and the two kids and CHIDS's older sister (Child name), and they get on quite well and we have. We were pretty fine in the lockdown. We didn't have many challenges. They they were both willing to do the home school. We had enough computers and Wi-Fi and you know, so we were really lucky in that respect. So now I think in a way, it. Yeah. No, I don't think it affected not negatively affected on our relationships at home at all.

Josh Uddin

Positively?

PARENT 7

Possibly yeah, possibly because it was kind of quiet and we were all here and there was nothing else to do but be together so. Yeah, we've got a trampoline. We put a trampoline in the garden. Yeah. So, we did a few things like that, actually. That was positive cause I don't think we we've got a small garden and I would have never put a trampoline in it had it not been lock down. So yeah. So, I think maybe that was positive. Yeah.

Josh Uddin

Perfect. Thank you. Next question what are your thoughts on the power dynamic between parents and teachers? Do you consider that parents and teachers of an equal partnership in

education and maybe comparing your thoughts for primary to secondary, would you say the balance changes?

PARENT 7

Ohh that's quite difficult one. I don't know. I mean, personally, I I think the I don't know if the power is the right word. But I mean, I have absolute respect for teachers because I I couldn't do it. I mean, I could support during lockdown, but I couldn't actually do it. And I think they see a totally different side of your child.

So, I think I'm not sure if it's. I'm not sure if the power I think the parents have a lot of input too and I think what they call that scaffolding effect. So, I think the more input you can have the better. Um and with someone like Child, I do. he has like a maths tutor who we've always taken him to weekly. And, you know, we do extra on the bits he needs. I think probably going into secondary is more tilted towards the teachers. Maybe at primary there's a bit more balance, family life and teaching. But I think in secondary when it becomes more academic. Um, I would say it's probably tilted towards the teacher more.

Josh Uddin

Thank you very much. And regarding the community, so it probably refers to to both your schools actually, primary and secondary. What would you say schools did? Do you think schools help the community during COVID and do you think that working with the community is changed or improved now that we've reopened?

PARENT 7

I think they did work with the community, but in a different way. I I always liked primary school for the community around it because it felt like a hub and you felt that you not only made friends and met people, other parents and teachers, but there was very much a sort of sense of you being part of it. And like you say, as parents you were involved and I think COVID.

Made it very different. They were almost became like safeguarding kind of health centres in a way. You know, it was more to do with there were kids of key workers who had to be in school and there was testing and it was all medicalised in a weird way, which made it feel a bit odd. And I think it must have been really difficult for teachers because that's kind of not what surely not what they signed up for, but that must have been hard. And I think it was difficult for parents

and they were probably fielding difficult questions from parents and having to make decisions. I mean, I'm not. I can remember, actually, when CHILD 2 was a (school name) student before CHILD 1 i was there. When classes were being sent home because one person had tested positive and you know those kinds of decisions must have been really difficult when. The information was, you know, not really clear. So yeah, I think it must have been very hard and I think it is really the community side of it is really important, especially at primary school. And I guess at secondary as well. I don't have any experience of secondary school pre pandemic. So, I'm not sure how much someone I don't even know if (school name) has a PTA but.

Josh Uddin

I think that's where the resistance comes from. It's it would be logistically quite difficult. Our PTA's will be absolutely enormous.

PARENT 7

Yeah, yeah.

Josh Uddin

Thank you very much. Were there any key differences in how your children learnt during the various lockdown stages? And I guess, did different people support? Were there any particular people that supported? So maybe form teacher too, as teachers, head teachers during the different phases.

PARENT 7

Um, so the first lockdown. I think it was pretty chaotic it was all there was no Zoom-ing. It was all kind of paper. I think it was suddenly packs being delivered. And actually, yeah, there was a teacher at the primary school who literally got on his push bike and cycled around the neighbourhood with Packages delivering in through the door. And yeah, there was that. Then I think the 2nd lockdown, there was more online and it kind of was much more formalised than they had sharing of the screen and everybody who got much more savvy with how to use technology and that, yeah, that definitely worked much better when there was less input from parents at that point. My daughter was in year six at the time, so she completely missed doing the Sats, which I didn't really mind cause I'm not a big fan of them anyway, but I think for her and for the school, that was probably quite difficult.

Josh Uddin

You know, thank you very much so.

PARENT 7

And I think we tried to do extra things in the IT during the lockdown sort of things like, um, my mum's a writer, so we tried to go doing some creative writing stuff online. And. Yeah. Various other sort of people that we could pull in to do remote kind of. Scaffolding and other bits around their learning to try and help, but it was a bit ad hoc.

Josh Uddin

Perfect. Thank you. That kind of leads on to my next question actually. So, and it's regarding rebuilding education. So, we hear the phrase a lot maybe in the media about lost learning. What's your views on lost learning? Do you think that students have lost more than we realise? Do you think maybe they haven't lost as much? Where do you stand on that phrase lost learning?

PARENT 7

Ohh well, I think it's quite difficult cause I think we were quite privileged as a family to have. Access to learning, I think it must. I mean if the ohh no answer from me. Personally, I don't think there was lost learning for my two children and in a way some of it. They may have benefited from, but I think that's because we're in a very privileged position in a house with two parents and then and we all get along and we could do it. I think you'd be really difficult for other kids and I think kids who had any kind of mental health issues and all of that, that must have been really difficult.

For us, I think, OK, I suppose I can only answer for us. Personally, I don't think there was a lot of learning, probably partly because of the ages they were, they were sort of at the end of primary school. So, we could still keep up with it. I think if it had happened.

And (Child name) had been in year 9 or 10, it would have been much harder because I can't help with science and maths in the same way that I could have helped at primary school. So probably not. I don't think there was lost learning for us. And also, I think there's probably opportunities that came out of it or different ways of learning and of our engagement in what they're learning. So, I think it was actually quite helpful for us.

Josh Uddin

Yeah. Thank you very much. What would you say are the main priorities now then for improving partnerships, the home school partnership going forwards and now we are out lock down what would be your most important priorities?

PARENT 7

Ohh. I suppose just communication on where the um and how you can support. I think because I think as they're going to secondary school, it's much harder to see where you fit in.

Where your support can be of use and just how you can do that, I think that would probably be my main one and having relationships with teachers that you can actually see them as, I mean we've only really met all of the teachers for 5 minutes on zoom. I know it's a bit more now. I did go in and meet Child's form tutor, so there has been it's starting to come back. But I think a bit more of kind of face to face would be good. But I know there is more that (school name) are doing so.

Josh Uddin

Yeah, we have um parent forums the third Friday.

Josh Uddin

Yeah.

Josh Uddin

Yeah, yeah.

PARENT 7

Yeah, they were person, aren't they now? That's right. I keep doing them online because it's so much easier. So, I mean, I suppose that's another thing, isn't it? That I can kind of be cooking for dinner at the same time as being at the parent forum. It is helpful.

Josh Uddin

And we we did a we I think we study we do coffee mornings. So particularly for the SEN department.

PARENT 7

Yes, I went to one of those actually. Yeah.

Josh Uddin

Look up. Yeah. So, we were trying to do more this face to face. I agree with you completely. Face to face. Seeing those teachers are totally different ball game than just being behind a screen or via an e-mail.

PARENT 7

Yeah.

Josh Uddin

The next question is about wellbeing. How would you describe how wellbeing was dealt with schools before, during and after the pandemic? Would you say it's taken on more importance now?

PARENT 7

I guess it has taken on more importance now, but I again for my kids, they're wellbeing wasn't really affected by the lockdown. Yeah, I don't know. So, you're saying how how are schools? So how are they dealing with the kids' wellbeing is that? OK.

Josh Uddin

Yeah, mainly. Do you think it's more emphasis on wellbeing? Do you think there should be more emphasis on wellbeing as opposed to just the the subjects that being taught? Do you, do you think wellbeing should be part of the curriculum in a more?

Josh Uddin

Discrete way as at the moment it is taught during form times.

PARENT 7

Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I guess it does seem as though compared to when I was at school that the mental health of teenagers is massive. It's a huge issue now. But I mean, personally, I think it's more to do with the Internet and social media. I just feel like that's the the issue that's probably more of the issue. But yes, I guess it has to be dealt with in schools. I guess schools have now got a bigger, wider issue to deal with than just teaching. So yeah, yeah, I suppose it does have to be. It does have to be looked. It's quite it's quite tricky, one that I think.

Josh Uddin

Would you like to be taught more discreetly? So particularly looking at exam strategies, driving lessons, coping mechanisms and breaking down workloads? Or do you think that should be just done during form times or would be your opinion?

PARENT 7

Um. Hmm, that's tricky. I I personally think probably during form time is enough, but that might be because my kids don't need need it. Child might do a bit more, but he seems fairly able to understand what he needs to do. But yeah, I think for our children personally in form time is fine. I don't think they're wellbeing is has been in anyway. Badly affected, and I don't think there's something more that they could be doing individually in lessons. Yeah.

Josh Uddin

Thank you very much. Next question is about socioeconomic status. Um, do you think that the socioeconomic status has had a bigger impact of the pandemic? And what would you say are the main reasons? So, has socio economic status affected the home school partnership more now? And what would you say are the main reasons?

PARENT 7

Ohh, definitely more now. I mean the fact that if you've got a laptop and Wi-Fi for a start or multiple laptops, um, good Wi-Fi, you know, all of those things, parents that are at home. I think I think it affected it massively hugely yeah.

Josh Uddin

Would you say the gaps gone bigger or that we're more aware of it now or would you say both?

PARENT 7

I probably say both. I think people are aware of it, but the gap must be huge. Because I think the kids that were in school, especially at primary school when they were the key worker kids in school, I don't think there was much being taught. I think they were probably learning more at home with parents at home and a decent laptop.

PARENT 7

Then then in school. So, I think, yeah, I think definitely it would be a big change.

Josh Uddin

Really. Thank you very much. And another question. If you were to send one simple message to the Department of Education or Ofsted or the head teacher via this research regarding home school partnership, what would it be?

PARENT 7

Ohh, so specifically regarding the home school partnership. I think.

Josh Uddin

Anything that you think should be a priority or anything that you think we'll need a bit more work on or? Things that have changed during COVID that you think we may need to be a bit more aware of just on the home school partnership.

PARENT 7

Yeah, that's tricky. I suppose, I suppose listening to kids and parents and and actually taking on board what they're feeling and what they're saying. I mean, I know you can't always do what they want and they you get massively mixed messages from parents like imagine you get 100 different responses from 100 different parents. But I guess listening to the kids as well.

Um and it being and it feeling as though there's some flexibility, I suppose, because there's so many different needs and people have been so affected so differently. I guess some flexibility and listening Would help, but I don't think that's not a criticism of (school name) cause. I think they do do that. You know, for example, with Child, I requested when he started that he only did one language because he's just not. I didn't think would be. It would be useful for him to do 2 languages and year seven and they were fine with that. So I think having that sort of flexibility to understand this particular child and yeah, what might suit them best. Yeah, I think that's cool.

Josh Uddin

Yeah. Thank you. That takes me to the end of my questions of anything more you'd like to add before I stop the recording.

PARENT 7

No, thank you.

Understanding home-school partnerships following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Student Participant 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 me via the contact details below:

- 1) I confirm that I have read and understood the 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 pseudonymised). ☐
- 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. ☐
- 7) I confirm that I am the parent or guardian of the child named below, and I give my permission for their participation in this study. I have signed below to indicate my consent.

Name:.....
....

Signature: Date:

Name of parent/guardian.....Date
.....

Signature of
Parent/guardian.....Date.....

Name of researcher:.....

Signature: Date: