

PUPILS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN SCHOOL

Preliminary Report for the Healthy Schools' Team

Northmoor LEA
(pseudonym)

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May 2004

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Acknowledgements

The research team would like to begin by thanking Northmoor LEA for their support and organisational commitments to ensuring that this research took place, special thanks in this respect are extended to Cassie Wilson (who also provided us valuable support through acting as a researcher for our project), Sue Elliot and Kate McCarthy. This work would not have been possible without the help and interest of the three schools who gave us access to their premises, pupils and staff. Key staff in these schools worked hard to make our time with them run smoothly and efficiently and we thank them for their efforts, especially when they were always so busy with school business. We were further supported by conscientious work of a number of additional researchers (Janette Birch, Zoe Hodnett, Anna Kagan, Diane Lockley, Emily Nash, Diane Pape, Karen Shalders and Katherine Stone) and administrative support from Marilyn Chambers. Finally, we reserve our biggest thanks for all the pupils of year 8 and 10 (in the teaching year 2002-3) in Eastbank High School, Appleton High School and St Joseph's Catholic High School. Without them this work would not have been possible and we hope that the results of their honesty and enthusiasm to talk to us about their feelings at school will contribute to making their schools healthy and happy environments.

Executive summary

Northmoor LEA Healthy Schools Team commissioned the current research to find out about the factors influencing pupils' emotional well-being in three designated schools in the Northmoor area. The research explored both positive and negative well-being as well as issues of participation within year groups 8 (12/13 year olds) and 10 (14/15 year olds) in the schools. The research involved a participatory framework in which the principles of collaboration, inclusion, empowerment, attention to context and complexity of social experience were emphasised.

The work began with separate consultation groups for adults and pupils in each school. In these, research participants were able to influence the design of the methodology making it relevant within the school context and for the different age groups. While the data collection focused strongly on accessing pupils' perspectives, adult perspectives (teaching and administrative staff) were also included. In total, over 300 pupils and staff contributed to the research.

A multi-methods approach was adopted in which in-depth semi-structured interviews, experiential walks, diary journal keeping and written work generated qualitative data from pupils. Adult staff took part in semi-structured interviews. These multiple methods permitted a wide range of pupils of different abilities and interests to have a stake in the research. A large data set of extremely rich information was generated and analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The results of this process are outlined below.

In terms of positive well-being, positive feelings induced by school included feeling happy, having self-confidence and assurance, pride, independence and autonomy and raised self-esteem. These positive feelings were linked to good relationships, primarily with friends, but also with teachers, and to the way that school was organised. Established relationships, that were caring, valuing and reciprocal, not only enhanced motivation and learning, but were what made school worthwhile. Positive feedback, interest, respect and trust from, and availability of teachers all led to positive self-esteem.

The way lessons were organised and the schools' facilities had a positive impact, particularly in the extent to which they enhanced opportunities and time for developing and maintaining friendships. Good facilities and physical layout and high standards of maintenance and décor within the schools, as well as the pattern of the school day (in particular breaks and going home time) were important, again for the enabling of friendships to develop and be maintained. Some physical features of the school were directly linked to feeling good, and organised conduct of lessons, along with some aspects of reward systems underpinned feelings of calm and achievement. Positive experience of school and the opportunities it presented were seen to facilitate future success in terms of careers.

Whilst some features of school contributed to positive well-being, other features led to reported negative well-being. Negative feelings arising from school ranged from boredom, frustration and irritation to fear, terror and hate. Feeling low, scared and 'like shit' were reported. To some degree these feelings arose in relation to both high and low expectations of staff in relation to pupils' academic abilities. The school environment was sometimes thought to be grim, rules were often considered to be arbitrary and senseless. Uniforms were disliked and there were few opportunities for pupils to express their individuality, a feeling exacerbated by the degrees of surveillance experienced throughout the schools.

The main vehicles through which negative well-being emerged were the behaviours of (some) teachers, and relationships with teachers and peers. Teachers' actions that appeared to be arbitrary, inconsistent, unnecessarily punitive, humiliating and disrespectful (such as being shouted at), all led pupils to report feelings of intimidation, de-motivation that manifest as a generic dislike of school. What was reported as inappropriate physical contact and favouritism towards some, contributed to others feeling belittled. Bullying by other pupils was the main source of some feeling scared and vulnerable. Differences between pupils were frequently the source of verbal and physical abuse, and some parts of the school were seen to be more dangerous than others. On the whole anti-bullying policies were thought to be ineffective and the perceived lack of action by teachers to allegations of bullying were thought to make matters worse.

A sense of belonging for pupils came from a sense of familiarity with people and a friendly atmosphere in the school, as well as from being given trust and responsibility. Pupils who participated in the school communities, both in terms of decision making and by their involvement in extra curricular clubs and (mostly sporting) activities, reported feeling gains in self-worth and self-fulfilment, and feeling good through their commitment to others. Some pupils thought that being involved in different activities could accrue future career benefits.

Participation in decision-making (such as being school, course or year representatives) led to feelings of control and opportunities to exercise power over how the school operated (for example, through taking part in interviews for the appointment of new teachers). Participation in general created additional opportunities for socialising with friends. Barriers to participation included peer pressure not to consort with teachers or appear to be too keen, pressure of academic work, a lack of encouragement in school, commitments to home life or to activities in pupils' local communities. For some, there was a feeling that the types of opportunities on offer were unsuitable, either because they were gendered and thereby inaccessible, or because they did not fit with their interests.

To a certain extent adult perspectives of school life agreed with pupils'. Largely, however, their perceptions differed. Adults working in the schools identified sources of positive well-being arising from a sense of achievement and success, and considered the schools to be happy places overall. Most

importantly, along with pupils' views, positive feelings arose, primarily from friendships. In contrast to pupils, adults thought that uniforms gave a sense of belonging. For some, though it was particularly frustrating to have to enforce uniform rules, when it was clear that this was adding to pupils' stress. Participation was seen as strengthening confidence, and building character, although it was recognised that not all pupils took up the opportunities. A clash between the cultures of schools as work versus places for participation was noted.

Whilst the frightening consequences of bullying were acknowledged, in contrast to pupils, adults thought this was largely dealt with appropriately through existing policies. Academic work and expectations created pressure for pupils, both in terms of peer pressure to underachieve and school and curricular pressures to attain high levels of achievement. The physical layout of the school was a source of feeling threatened, humiliated and hurt, especially in dark corridors. This was often linked to the patterns of the school day, with changeover periods and break times being particularly stressful. Adults identified pupils themselves as sources of tension and stress, in particular if they were disorganised in relation to being prepared for their lessons. This then set up a cycle of de-motivation which led to further disorganisation.

The findings indicate that well-being was tied to a complex interaction of multiple factors, strongly patterned around pupils' relationships with peers, teachers, school policies and the physical environment and the opportunities these presented for inclusion and participation in the school environment. Each of these were sources of enhanced well-being but could simultaneously threaten pupils' well-being. There are many implications for the building of healthy schools from these research findings. These are outlined in relation to a growing literature on well-being in schools.

1 Introduction

In England and Wales there are approximately 8.5 million children in 30,000 State schools. One thousand of these schools are centrally funded (known as grant maintained schools). The remaining schools are funded through local education authorities. This study was conducted in three schools across a semi-rural area of North West England.

1.1 Psychosocial well-being in schools

The World Health Organisation (WHO) adopts an expansive definition of health that incorporates physical, psychological and social well-being and identifies the key determinants of health as social, economic and broader environmental factors. WHO defines health promotion as achieved through fortifying the individual (for example, through increased coping skills and resilience to illness) and changing the social, economic and environmental conditions that provide the context for human experience (for example, changes to social, economic and cultural institutions and the environment). The term *psychosocial well-being* is increasingly used to signify a concept of health to include this complex web of psychological, social and broader environmental factors. Indeed, the term is increasingly preferred to narrower concepts, such as *mental health* and *physical health*, by social and welfare services. This expands the concept beyond the level of the individual to the levels of the group, family, organisation, community and society and thus creates multiple sites of explanation and intervention. The psychosocial well-being of an individual is therefore a complex web of human capacity, social ecology and political and cultural contexts and manifests itself in the form of human, social and cultural capital¹. These forms of capital become available to the individual to enable them to respond to changing life events. The availability of these resources is seen as critical for successful and adaptable responses to challenges posed by life events and changing social conditions of living.

1.1.1 Human, social and cultural capital as resources for well-being

Human capital comes in the form of physical and psychological resources such as physical and psychological health, knowledge, skills and abilities. These are all human forms of capital that contribute to psychosocial well-being. These resources can be secured through, for example, the provision of adequate health care and educational services. Risks to human capital include impoverished mental health, physical illness, and loss of educational opportunities and opportunities to practice and use skills and knowledge.

¹ Although the concept of capital has predominantly been used by economists, it has increasingly become part of the language of social scientists and has gained currency in the language of social policy makers.

Though important, human capital is insufficient alone. Social networks, social support and social connectivity also promote our well-being. Social support is a powerful mediator of health and can offset the negative human costs of stress and illness. Thus a person with an extensive network of friends, family and associates may have greater social capital than the individual who has more limited social networks. Threats to social capital can occur when the changes that happen in organisations impact upon the social networks of members of those organisations. In the workplace, job redesign, relocation, downsizing and expansion all create changes in social networks within the organisation. Old network members are lost, new ones gained and pre-existing ones are reconfigured. In schools, streaming by age and/or ability has a massive impact on how social networks form and norm.

Cultural capital refers to socially valued sets of beliefs, dispositions, and knowledge. It is expressed through the attainment of educational credentials, performance of socially valued practices and the membership of socially valued groups. Threats to cultural capital can occur through changes to power relations within and between social groups that confer negative social identities upon the knowledge, beliefs and practices of groups of individuals. This can occur, for example, through changing relations between different gender, ethnic and age groups.

Human capital, social capital and cultural capital are so intimately entwined that they may be impossible to tease apart. For example, the knowledge and skills that an individual possess are produced through culturally sanctioned educational programs (for example, the national curriculum and national qualifications). Thus, skills and knowledge (human capital) are acquired through cultural processes and are situated within specific cultural meanings and values (cultural capital). Further, particular physical and psychological states are embedded with cultural meanings and values (for example, social categories constructed around gender, ethnicity and age) and our social connectivity to others (social capital) is determined by cultural responses to our physical and psychological constitution (human capital). Thus each of these domains (the human, the social and the cultural) is interdependent and any unitary level of intervention is likely to reverberate across multiple levels. It is clear, then, that educational programs can affect individuals' social connectivity to others and their cultural standing in society. Furthermore, the human, social and cultural capital complex, as well as psychological and emotional well-being will affect an individual's ability to develop through educational programmes.

1.1.2 Sites of intervention

In terms of human resources, interventions can seek to promote positive physical and psychological health through healthy eating initiatives, physical activity and the learning of problem-solving and coping skills. At a social level, interventions aim for the restoration and/or creation of satisfying social networks that provide supportive, satisfying, life-enhancing sets of social relations. At a cultural level, interventions can seek to influence the

establishment of norms and the patterning of social status to confer opportunities for young people to gain respect, dignity and positive social recognition. Thus, in the context of educational institutions, psychosocial well-being can refer to the support of a child's psychological and social development through the provision of secure and stimulating learning environments that permit self-expression, self-actualisation, self-confidence and positive self-esteem.

1.2 Social policy context

The rights of children have received almost universal recognition and acceptance since the ratification of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. These rights include being treated without discrimination, having opportunity to develop to the fullest, being protected from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and having opportunities to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. This international agreement ensures children have civil, cultural, economic, social and political rights. The convention was strengthened in 2002 with two additional protocols in relation to the involvement of children in armed conflict, the human trafficking of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In England, the rights of the child were first legislated for by act of parliament in 1889 in what became commonly known as the 'children's charter'. One hundred years later, the Children's Act gave every child the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation. This was followed in 1999 with the Protection of Children Act. One year later, the Children and Young People's Unit was established in government to promote joined up policy on issues affecting children and young people and to give children and young people a say in policy decision-making processes.

Around the time of our research, a number of social policy changes and political activities were taking place that affected the status of young people in the UK. England gained a new Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge)² and Charles Clarke replaced Estelle Morris as Minister for Education³. Further changes were occurring in the Department of Health through the activities of the National Children's Taskforce and the implementation of the National Service Framework to improve the lives of young people, established in 2001. Changes were also taking place in services such as the SureStart programme (a government scheme that supports parents of 0-4 year olds in under-resourced communities) and government proposals to develop 'children's centres' in every community in the UK offering childcare and nursery education. All these activities were seated within a broader level of heightened attention in society on childhood poverty. In 2003, the UK Labour government's pledge to lift one million children out of poverty by 2005. In

² This was viewed as a controversial appointment, with Margaret Hodge being at the centre of complaints over how she dealt with reports of child abuse at London council whilst she was Islington Council Labour leader. The controversy became heightened over her handling of these complaints when they resurfaced following her appointment as Minister for Children.

³ Estelle Morris resigned suddenly from her post following criticisms over English students' A-level examination results

relation to young people there were political debates around the lowering of voting age from 18 to 16 years.

1.2.1 Secondary Education Social Policy⁴

Social policy changes have also specifically been reforming the educational provision for young people. In the Department of Education and Skills there had been a period of intense activity in the provision of educational services for young people immediately prior to and during our research.

The UK government has placed increased emphasis on raising the standards of academic achievement in primary and secondary education. A non-ministerial government department known as the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was employing teams of inspectors to report on the quality of secondary education provided by state schools. Under OFSTED, every school is inspected every 4 to 6 years. The data from these inspections was being published widely. Additionally, tests were being set of students to measure the extent they were acquiring the skills and knowledge set out in the National Curriculum. Young people were required to sit National Tests at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. These test results were being published along with statistics on student attendance in the form of league tables. Controversial 'value added' league tables were introduced at the end of 2003 to show the relative rather than absolute academic performance of students⁵.

The National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies were also being extended from primary into secondary schools. These strategies aimed to improve teaching and the management of how teaching of literacy and numeracy was conducted. These social policy changes resulted in increased testing of secondary school students and the introduction of an increased flexibility in the national curriculum (including both academic and vocational subjects) and greater choice available to 14-19 year olds. In February 2004, the Working Group of 14-19 Reform⁶ published an interim report that proposed a more flexible curriculum for this age group and suggested the replacement of GCSEs with a new set of diplomas. The final report was due out in the autumn of 2004. Further, reform in primary school, that included measures to identify 'failing schools' and increase diversity in the types of school available, was being extended to secondary schools. This had given rise to school improvement initiatives such as Beacon Schools (an initiative that sought to raise education standards through disseminating the good practice of successful or best performing schools) City Academies (publicly funded independent schools that sought to raise educational standards

⁴ The educational policies for England are broadly similar to those in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales though there are some variants among the devolved authorities of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Here, we concentrate on those policies that have been implemented in England.

⁵ Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales had scrapped school league tables because they were so unpopular.

⁶ The Working Group of 14-19 Reform was established by the Government following publications of [14-19 opportunity and excellence](#) to develop proposals for long term structural reform of 14-19 learning programmes and qualifications. For more details, see <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/>

through innovative management and teaching practices) and teacher reforms (schemes that sought to recruit and retain high quality teachers such as the National College for School Leadership at Nottingham University).

1.3 Academic context: a sociology of childhood

Historically, research on and involving children has tended to view the child as passive. Dominant has been research largely constituted of adult views of childhood or reporting on childhood that is infused with adult values and viewpoints (Shamgar-Handelman, 1994). Such perspectives are deeply structured by mainstream theoretical perspectives adopted by developmental psychology that view childhood as a developmental stage in relation to adulthood, and not a socially discrete social role in itself.

This conceptualisation of young people is being challenged by a social science movement known as the 'Sociology of Childhood'. Here the view of the child as passive is challenged by the view that young people are active, change agents (James & Prout, 1997). Under this re-conceptualisation of childhood, young people are seen as not only shaped by but as shapers of their experience of childhood. Rather than viewing childhood as a passage to adulthood whereby young people come under the influence of adult values and viewpoints, children are viewed as active social agents who are engaged in interdependent relationships with adults and their peers rather than dependent upon relationships with adults. Children and young people are becoming constituted in social scientific thought as active, competent social agents.

A Sociology of Childhood advocates research practice that conceptualises children and young people as active sense-makers and sets the researcher's task to access the life experiences of children and young people and render these in a way that is authentic to them. The child's and young person's view is held to be valid in its own right and not validated by references to the adult's view. This research is being accepted in a socio-political climate where increasingly it is believed social policy that affects children and young people should be grounded in the child's and young person's experience and perspective (for example, Bibby & Becker, 2000). This further implies that policy makers should grant children and young people opportunities to take part in the planning and decision-making of policies that affect them. In relation to research methodology, such concerns and aspirations encourage social constructionist work where knowledge and narratives are viewed as intermittently connected to power and the protection of certain interest groups over others. Under this paradigm, power is not viewed as evenly distributed among all members of society. Society is viewed as organised hierarchically and as shaped by those who have the greatest access to power. Members of the hierarchy are conceived as occupying status and social roles that influence their degree of participation in society and access to power (Hacking, 1999). Some authors suggest that the study of childhood can give us an understanding of how the issues of power, control, hierarchy and status operate within society more broadly. Thus childhood is viewed as a political

microcosm for the broader political structuring of society and as an insight into how power operates to maintain social order (Jenks, 1996).

1.4 The Concept of Healthy Schools

The concept of healthy schools begins with the notion that if pupils feel happy and safe in their school environment then they are more likely to achieve their potential because the atmosphere is more conducive to quiet concentration, social and academic learning (Weare and Gray, 2003). In general, healthy schools might be described as those in which there is mutual respect between peer groups, pupils and teachers. They are places where conflicts are minimised and handled in a balanced way, places where fairness and justice are upheld and working hard for social and personal gain is paramount. As such, it is proposed that pupils within healthy schools benefit from high levels of self-esteem, confidence and self-belief. Weare and Gray (2003) have found that schools adopting a healthy schools programme of action achieve greater educational and work success, improvements in pupil behaviour, academic experience, greater social cohesion and mental health improvements. Furthermore, healthy schools enjoy higher levels of pupil involvement in school life. The impact of developing emotional and social health at school also has potential to improve working conditions for staff by affecting the ethos of the school and creating a positive environment for all (Carlisle, 2004).

However, research in the area of healthy schools is relatively scarce and confusing terminology has characterised the field where 'emotional health and well-being', 'emotional literacy', 'social competence', 'emotional intelligence' and a range of other descriptors have been used interchangeably. It is, in this sense, also disconcerting to find that the search for good practice in terms of healthy schools is often built upon insubstantial foundations. Currently, little is known about pupils' emotional life at school and how school organisational structure, processes and relationships are integral to this. Without such knowledge it is difficult to implement strategies for improving emotional health.

In the current project, the research focus is placed upon gaining an understanding of the ways pupils feel at school, what makes them feel happy and what makes them feel sad and so on. The conceptual model of health and well-being adopted in this research encompasses both positive and negative well-being and emotional health. Moreover, health and well-being is viewed not just as a product of individual behaviour and psychologies, but intrinsically related to the social, community and physical environment which provides the context for school life. As such the research focuses on the following domains and their relationship to positive and negative well-being:

- Peer relationships
- Children-teacher relationships
- Participation in school life
- Autonomy and empowerment

- Personal/shared meanings
- Organisational structures
- Rules and discipline
- Place based roles and routines
- School cultural context

This conceptual model provides a framework for understanding the emotional tones of school life in which the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the pupils emerged from the research.

1.5 Research aims

The aims of the research were to:

- Examine the social and emotional health and well-being of pupils in schools.
- Understand what makes pupils happy at school
- Understand what makes pupils unhappy at school
- Explore how schools can promote health and well-being
- Explore notions of pupil participation
- Articulate processes of equality and power as negotiated between teachers and students

These aims were addressed within a holistic and participatory research framework. We describe this in our methodology chapter.

2. The methodology

2.1 The schools⁷

Three schools took part in the research. These were approached by Northmoor LEA and agreed to participate. The schools were:

- Appleton High School
- St Joseph's Catholic High School
- Eastbank High School

The schools were all co-educational, expected all children to wear school uniforms and none had a sixth form. All three schools offered academic (GCSE) and vocational (GVNQ) courses.

Appleton High School: Appleton was a beacon school for academic success and a DfES designated technology college (affiliated to the Technology Colleges Trust). This school offered 150 pupil places each year (now 180) and admission criteria were based on living in the local area or children with siblings already in attendance. It had developed links with local community activities and groups. Their OFSTED review reported many positive aspects of the school including 97% of lessons found to be good or very good, strong leadership and management, a positive attitude to learning amongst pupils, above average performance in maths and English, resources, facilities and an environment supportive of learning. Learning support applied to both special needs children and those designated as 'gifted'. The school presented itself as caring and professional, modern and effective with good relations between pupils and staff and in partnership with parents. Sports activities were encouraged and the school offered a wide range of lunchtime and after school clubs, outings and events. Children at the school were expected to work hard towards their potential, be polite and disciplined. In the latter case, a system of assertive discipline was in place, where individual children and whole classes could lose credits (as opposed to gain them). Classes with the most credits at the end of the week or month would be rewarded with small gifts (such as sweets). A similar negotiated system of rewards existed for the teaching staff. The majority of children leaving Appleton High went into further education (54% pupils gained 5 or more C grade GCSE's in 2002) rather than (un)employment.

St Joseph's Catholic High School: This was a high school linked into the local community and underpinned by the Christian (Roman Catholic) faith. 170 pupils were admitted each year with admission criteria based on the catholic faith predominantly, children with siblings at the school, and a small percentage of children of other denominations or faiths. The school catered for children with special educational needs including 'gifted' children and those with disabilities. A code of conduct specified good behaviour in an orderly and peaceful environment. An open school policy allowed pupils to enter school

⁷ Information in this section is taken largely from school prospectuses.

before the beginning of the school day and premises were accessible at lunch times. In addition, a merit system was in operation to reward pupils for good behaviour. A number of sports teams were in evidence and other school clubs were available. The majority of 16 year old school leavers went into further education (80% pupils gained 5 or more C grade GCSE's in 2002).

Eastbank High School: This was designated as a 'College of Technology' supported by a state of the art technology extension and an open door policy to the Resource Centre. The school promoted a three-way partnership between pupils, parents and staff which aimed to encourage students to aim high but also to develop their levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, to respect themselves and their environment. In line with this, Eastbank, in opposition to the other schools involved in the research, allowed pupils to wear 'permitted jewellery'. The recent OFSTED reported that the school exemplified an outstanding ethos, clear vision and commitment from the management and excellent teaching. Extra-curricular activities include computer, art and science clubs, cable TV, an environmental group and Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, alongside a limited range of sports teams. Special needs education was prioritised within the school in terms of resources, expert teachers, learning mentors, classroom assistants and environmental improvements. The school environment had been recently improved with a building programme of new blocks for art, French and geography and new science labs. In terms of academic achievement, the school hoped to double their A* to C indicators over the next few years. Indeed, the proportion of A to C grades is rising, from 27% in 2002 to 44% in 2003.

2.2 Participants

The research was inclusive in its approach. Key stakeholders were identified within the school context who have a role to play in the emotional environment, and these people liaised with the research team. Through discussion with these stakeholders, it was agreed that the work would focus on both boys and girls in years 8 (12-13 years old) and 10 (14-15 years old). In addition, a diverse range of adults engaged in different roles at school were involved. This included teachers, administrative staff, caretakers, learning support assistants and library staff - all people with a different role to play in the emotional well-being of pupils in the schools.

Across the different data collection methods, a total of 557 pupil involvements and 24 adults participated in the research as indicated in Table 2.1 below. Volunteers were invited to participate in the pupil consultation groups; adults were invited to participate by virtue of their position in the school; pupil participation in interviews and guided walks was through random selection across the class groups in a each year; participation in completing diaries was voluntary, and organised by Year tutors; participation in the free writing was organised through class activities (usually in personal and social development sessions).

Table 2.1: Numbers of participants from the different schools

	Appleton	St Joseph's	Eastbank
Pupils free writing*	157	8	84
Male pupils	56	55	55
Female pupils	56	57	55
Adults ⁺	8	8	8

* Some pupils participated in more than one method

+ Adults were involved in more than one method including consultation groups

2.3 Research approach

The research methods formed a case study approach (Yin, 1984). Case studies are considered a suitable methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). The benefits of this technique allow investigators to scrutinise “contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (Robson 1993: 146). Similarly, the approach enables the use of several layers of evidence; affording “rich or ‘thick’ description” (Robson, 1993: 148) that unravels lived experience from insider perspectives. The case study approach taken in this research was both flexible and adaptable to the particular circumstances of the schools. To strictly pre-structure the methodologies used and data collected would have been counterproductive within the very different school settings (see Robson, 1993). The research was qualitatively driven.

However, case study approaches have been criticised on the grounds that statistical generalisation is not achievable. While this is the case in the present study, both analytical generalisation and naturalistic generalisation can be achieved. Thus, theory generation and the congruence of the research results with everyday life experience is prioritised (Stake, 1995; Tellis, 1997).

A multi-methods approach underpinned the three case studies, incorporating:

- consultation groups discussions;
- semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with pupils and adults;
- experiential school walks with pupils;
- written work; and,
- weekly diaries.

These different methods engaged participants in talking about their school, writing down their feelings about school, giving day by day accounts of school life in diaries and using the school environment as a cue to support telling stories of events at school. In addition, the research design allowed for optional data collection methods such as:

- Art work and accompanying group discussions
- Camera work and accompanying group discussions
- Participatory drama productions
- Participatory music productions

Although such optional methods were offered as methodological tools, in effect none of these took place in any of the schools due to the busy school year.

Each of the data collection methods used have been described below.

2.4 Methods

2.4.1 Consultation groups

In line with the participatory and inclusive approach to this research, pupils in years 8 and 10 and adults in each school were invited to take part in consultation discussion groups. The purpose of the groups was as follows:

- To ensure key stakeholders were aware of the research
- To encourage pupils to have a voice in designing the research
- To enable adults within the school to help design the research
- To introduce the research team to the school

Consultation group lasted from 30 minutes (adults after school groups) to 45 minutes for pupil groups. Adult, year 8 and year 10 groups met separately (and without teacher presence in the case of pupil groups) so that participants felt free to air their opinions. Lunch was provided for pupil groups meeting over the lunch break. Before the commencement of each group, the purpose of the groups was explained and pupils asked to sign a form indicating their consent to participate. Groups were structured as follows:

- To introduce the aims of the research
- To gather immediate information about 'life at school'
- To present the different ways and collect new ideas about data collection
- To work in small groups to design the written task, diary and think about interview questions.

2.4.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995) were conducted with pupils and adults. This involved the development of a set of questions which served as the basis or guide for the interview but were not intended to be adhered to rigidly. One of the benefits of the flexible format of the semi-structured interviews was that it facilitated unforeseen conversations and hence, enabled participant perspectives to be explored. This semi-structured approach encouraged the pupils and adults to tell their own story which Smith (1995) suggests allows for greater opportunities for participants' 'inner perspectives' to shine through.

The interviews were conducted face to face in the schools settings and lasted between 20 minutes and 45 minutes. Before the interviews took place, the interviewees were given standard information about the purpose of the

interview and the research project in general and were encouraged to ask questions and seek further clarification, as well as to sign a form indicating their consent to participate (see appendices).

The pupil interviews began with a general discussion about the school day and progressed to issues of discipline and rewards, places in the school, lessons, different times of the day, school rules, relationships at school and participation in school life (see appendices). 10 boys and 10 girls were interviewed in each school (5 boys and 5 girls in each school year) giving a total of 60 interviews with pupils.

The adult interviews facilitated talk around issues of well-being and power at school, typical school day, stressors and highlights of school, school atmosphere and participation in school life. Adults interviewed were informed in advance about the scope of the interviews, and were encouraged to think about the issues from a gendered perspective (see appendices for interview schedule). In total, 6 adults were interviewed in each school, giving a total of 18 adult interviews.

All interviews were tape-recorded, a then transcribed and the information was organised into meaningful themes through a process known as thematic analysis.

2.4.3 Experiential school walks

10 pupils in each of the two school years in each school took part in guiding a researcher around their school and talking about the different places in their school. This allowed children less comfortable with the interview situation to take part in the research. There were no schedules designed for walks, pupils were simply asked:

“we would like **you** to take one researcher on a guided tour of the school, taking them to places you like to be in, places you dislike, places that are comfortable, places that are uncomfortable, anxiety provoking, interesting and so on. Wherever you think will give the researcher a good idea about what it feels like to be a pupil in your school. The walk should take around half an hour in all.”

Instructions for the school walk are given in appendices. School walks were tape recorded and later transcribed to aid thematic analysis.

2.4.4 Diary

In each of the schools, pupils in the consultation groups helped to design emotional well-being journals. All pupils in each year were given the opportunity to keep a journal and fill it in for a period of one week. These were written anonymously. The colour gender coded journals contained instructions on how to fill them in (see appendices), an A4 page per day divided into sections for before school, lessons, breaks and after school (see appendices). Sections of the diary were designed to allow freely written expression of

thoughts and feelings and pictorial representations of feelings. Volunteers filled in diaries in years 8 and 10 with a total of 56 diaries completed altogether. Out of the journals received, a maximum of 10 journals were randomly selected for analysis (5 boys and 5 girls) per year per school.

2.4.5 Written work

The consultation groups provided ideas for different forms of written work and different titles around which the written work was based. These differed between the schools. Again, all of years 8 and 10 were encouraged to produce written work in each of the schools. The written work was produced and collected anonymously and facilitated by a youth worker rather than involving teachers. This allowed pupils free expression of thoughts and feelings about school. Pupils were asked to write in the form of:

- An essay,
- A story,
- A poem,
- A list
- A letter
- A comic strip

For pupils less confident in writing, drawing a picture was also allowed. Pupils were given instructions and a choice of titles for this work (see appendices). Titles were created within the consultation groups:

- My feelings at school
- What's wrong and right with school?
- What could change to make my school better?
- A day in the life of school – the highs and lows
- My life at school

In general, a better response rate was gained from year 8 pupils than year 10 and substantial written work was received only from Appleton and Eastbank, with very little from St Joseph's.

2.5 Ethical Issues

The research was conducted according to the British Psychological Society ethical guidelines (BPS, 2000). Pupil and adult participants in the study participated on a voluntary basis. Informed consent was gained through the use of information sheets detailing the aims of the work, how it would be conducted and what would happen with the data. Written consent was obtained from each participant before data was collected (see appendices), participants kept a copy of the information sheet and the consent form for future reference. Participants were assured of anonymity, were briefed and debriefed and were given opportunities to withdraw from participation at any stage of the work. In addition, prior to research beginning, the study design was approved through the departmental ethical committee of the Department

of Psychology and Speech Pathology at Manchester Metropolitan University. As in any research involving young people and children, all researchers involved in data collection had received a clear Criminal Record Bureau police check.

The research team met at regular intervals to discuss any emerging ethical issues arising out of their observations whilst in the schools.

2.6 Writing up and presenting our findings

Results of our analysis of pupils' and adults' data are given in the following four chapters. To begin with pupil well-being is covered in two chapters on positive well-being and negative well-being. Then, a chapter on the dynamics of participation covers reasons for participation and barriers against participation. Finally, the last chapter of results overviews briefly adult perspectives on well-being and participation in school.

All chapters of results include interpretation of data, whereby interpretations are supported with evidence given in direct quotations from data sources. Quotations are identified in terms of gender, data source and school year from which they were drawn (for example: Kirsty interview, year 10; or male, written, year 8). In all cases, real names have been anonymised using pseudonyms.

Within this report, special attention has been paid to the use of terminology for identifying participants. We have used the term *pupil* as this was the label used by young people and adults in this project. However, we are aware this label may not necessarily be the term preferred by young people, but rather may reflect the label imposed upon them by the educational sector. We considered using the generic label *student*, but this would not have been authentic to the way young people in this project labelled themselves. We have used the gender terms 'male' and 'female' throughout due to concerns for consistency between the labels we used for young people and adults– we could have used the terms 'boy' and 'girl' but this would have meant that to be consistent, we would have had to refer to adults as either men or women, which may have sounded contrived.

3 Positive well-being

Material on pupils' experiences that contributed to positive well-being are evaluated in this chapter. Here pupils talked about those aspects of school that made them feel good about themselves. It is particularly interesting to note the diversity of ways in which pupils derive positive emotional experiences within school. The pupils' talk around positive well-being served as a counter to the, at times, quite distressing materials they shared with us on negative well-being. We have organised pupils' experiences of positive well-being under the following themes:

- Friendship
- Teachers
- Teaching and learning
- Resources, activities and the environment

3.1 Friendship

Friendships were the most commonly expressed reason for pupils feeling good at school. This was the same for male as for female pupils as well as for year 8 and for year 10 pupils. Material detailing the importance of friendships was contained in multiple forms of data, including interviews, diaries, experiential walks and written work. Pupils placed a considerable importance on having friendships at school and showed us the strong links between feeling good at school and being with friends. For some, being with friends was the only good thing about school. Figure 3.1 illustrates the main sub-themes that we identified in our analysis.

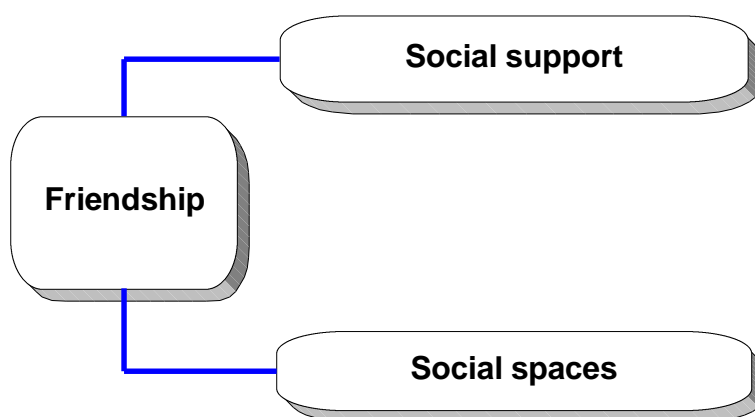


Figure 3.1: Friendship: sub themes

3.1.1 Social support

Talking to friends was described as a positive part of the school day and served an important social support function of providing companionship

[*We talk about*] ...what we did at the weekend, what we gonna do outside of school. Organise to go 'round to who should ring up your mates. (Andy, interview, year 8)

Hang out with my friends sit in the canteen or on the grass talk about things (Male pupil, written, year 10)

I get to talk to my friends. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Companionship was an important function of friendships and gave pupils a feeling of being socially included.

Natalie: ...when I was in first year [I got messed about by other kids] 'cause I never knew anyone apart from T but she was never in school, and then when I started mixing with everyone, then they was all right with me.

Researcher: So you was a bit lonely at first?

Natalie: Yeah I used to hate coming school when I first started cause I had no friends.

Researcher: You make friends quite quick though don't you?

Natalie: Yeah.

Researcher: So what do you think about coming to school now?

Natalie: I don't know, sometimes, after the holidays, I want to see me mates so I'm dead excited. Then I get in school and see all me mates...(Natalie, interview, year 8)

They understand you and don't put you down and all this...stuff like that (Grace, interview, year 10)

My friends don't leave me out and desert me (Female written year 8)

At other times, this social support could be more instrumental.

Tamsin: Yeah, my best friends are B and J.

Interviewer: How do you feel on days when they're not in?

Tamsin: That..erm...that I want them to be in so that I can talk to them.

Interviewer: Does it make you feel sad or lonely?

Tamsin: Yeh `cos they're not there helping me with my work. (Tamsin, interview, year 8)

For Adam, a year 10 pupil, friendships were purely instrumental and this reduced the importance of friendships to him once his instrumental needs were met.

It took me a couple of weeks to settle in but I'm alright. The hardest part was, I'm not too bothered about making friends, it's just going to classrooms because I didn't know where I was going what I had next so I was just kind of tagging along with people but I didn't really...I'm

not bothered really about friends. As long as I do well in GCSE's ...
(Adam, interview, year 10)

Having your friends around to offer such support had an important impact on classroom experiences.

... with your best friend you've got someone talk to who can help you with your work if the teacher's like doing something then they can help you. You can, like, but if you sit near someone else who you don't really get on with then you could get on with them and make a new friend so... (Holly, interview, year 8)

This was particularly important in a crowded classroom.

Researcher: So do you feel that being able to talk to your friends during class might help your work?

Tamsin: Yeah.

Researcher: Rather than ask the teacher?

Tamsin: Yeah `cos sometimes they have to go to other people and might not be able to. You could just ask someone else `cos they might be able to help you.

Researcher: So in the situation when you know you're not suppose to talk and when you need help and so does someone else, what do you normally do?

Tamsin: Just have to solve it but if I can't then have to wait for teacher is the teacher can come and help.

Researcher: How long is that usually?

Tamsin: It depends on how many have their hand up..If it's hard for everyone.

Researcher: Does it happen a lot in class, people needing the teacher's attention?

Tamsin: Yeah. (Tamsin, interview, year 8)

Moreover, a combination of instrumental support and companionship could help pupils achieve academic success through peer group forming and norming processes.

I hang around with some of me mates erm just like the lads in my year who I have most lessons with and some that I don't but I've just been mates with em for a while and just hang around school an' the, most of em are in the same sets as I am, so they all have a good opinion of school anyway, 'cos were all like in quite high sets.. so we all just get on with our work and do our work and just talk about school and that ... you talk to them during the day, you talk to them more than your teachers do so, they're more part of your school life than your teachers are the rub of on you quite a bit so say if you started hanging round with someone really rough, then you'd probably end up turning out rough if you hang round with them enough..cos they're just a big part of your day. (Martin, interview, year 10)

For other pupils, friends helped make schoolwork more fun, which helped them engage with their studies.

... where you just ... have a laugh, but you still do your work because you're enjoying it and that 'cos you're actually occupied while you're talking. Because if you're just sat there learning it gets boring. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Having friends made settling in at school a more pleasant experience, an easier transition from primary to secondary school:

Well I knew most of them from my primary school, so that was better, 'cos ... most of them came here, so that was better 'cos I knew who everyone was in the year, that was good. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

Well, when I first got here I thought 'Oh God, I don't know anyone, nobody's going to like me because I'm grim and I don't know what I'm doing, I don't like it here'. But then I started to make some friends and it was...it just turned out to be a lot better and everyone stopped asking me all the same questions and sort of, people have started to like be interested now and there's just a few people that don't really care but I can't be bothered to deal with them ... (Adam, interview, year 10)

Moreover, friends were an important source of security and provided safety in an environment populated by bullies.

Well I spend most of my time with my friends and ... I hang around with some from other years as well and I just I feel safe there and happy because they'll look after me, some of the older ones, if they see you getting in trouble they'll, they'll help you and everything. (Julie, interview, year 10)

3.1.2 Social spaces

School was regarded as containing a multitude of social spaces that held opportunities for pupils to forge new, meaningful and satisfying friendships with their peer group. The opportunity to make new friends was something that, for example, Holly spoke highly of.

I've got a few best friends who I've known from nursery and erm .. she doesn't live far away. Just down street from me.. and she .. I hang about with her in breaks and dinners and sometimes after school I don't hang about with her as much as I use to. `Cos I've met new friends here now. Erm...but she's made new friends as well so it doesn't bother any of us..erm..'cos we see each other enough at school and we sometimes hang about after school anyway so. Erm...like but she's..as I've said I've got my friends and she's got hers. (Holly, interview, year 8)

The social spaces created within schools were usually located outside of the classroom and contained particular characteristics or resources such as having a place where you can sit and somewhere that is quiet. Pupils actively sought out such spaces for the expressed purpose of meeting with their friends.

Places where it's quiet so you can talk. ... Just somewhere to sit and maybe outside ... (Tamsin, interview, year 8)

Having the chance to make regular use of the same social space gave Holly and her friends opportunities to get together. Holly talked about the importance of having a regular place to meet.

On the ... court because erm..like everyone goes there because ...all our friends go there so if we picked another meeting place half of them wouldn't turn up `cos they go to [there] ... and we'd be like half of us so it's better really just meeting up in one place everytime .. then if you want go somewhere from there you can go. (Holly, interview, year 8)

Some students favoured those parts of the school where they could be social with their peers.

Its alright near our form room because ... if you're in our form room you can just sit up there, you can talk to your mates up there and stuff like that, or anyone, like sitting outside and stuff like that, you're inside and you can talk to people when they come up ... (Duncan, interview, year 10)

Break and dinnertime

Break and dinnertimes created temporal spaces for pupils to relax, play, enjoy their friendships, and exercise a degree of autonomy in terms of engaging in self-directed rather than other-directed behaviour.

Well erm..at break you can like go in canteen if you want something to eat. ...get time for go toilet if you need it. You can spend time with your friends who are not in same class as you. (Holly, interview, year 8)

Break time was one of the only times in the school day when friends could meet together and talk. This was often described as the best time of the day.

... you're not in lessons and you get to sit with the mates and talk about stuff, or all sit together. (Pat, interview, year 8)

Here, socialising in friendship groups was enjoyed, but also friendships between different classes and different years were made possible.

Break times provide a chance to meet up with friends in a different class. (Written year 10)

Pupils also enjoyed break and dinnertimes because they could eat and drink. This information was reinforced in the written lists of school 'likes' completed for us by pupils. In class, eating and drinking was not allowed, hence breaks constituted one of the only opportunities for pupils to address their hunger and thirst.

For the males, breaks gave them an opportunity to play sports, predominantly football.

... I play basketball in the basketball nets, play football with me mates. Walking round, talking round. (Andy, interview, year 8)

What I like about school is that you can play rugby and football at break times. (Male, written year, 10)

It was in the diary data that changes in moods consequent on school breaks and playing football were most apparent. Feeling bad during lessons was immediately transformed into feeling good at break time. Harvey's (year 8) diary entries demonstrate this:

Tuesday

Before break: Felt bad because I had form for an hour and it was boring.

Break time: Felt good because I played football with my mates.

After break: Felt bad because lessons were rubbish.

Dinner: Good because I played football.

Afternoon: Bad because I had rubbish lessons.

After school: Good because it was end of school.

Break times were in some ways symbolic of a release from the necessity of school attendance, an end to work and the start of relaxation, an end of enforcement and the start of freedom. This can be seen in the written work where pupils indicated what they liked about school. Here students listed: 'end of day' (Female, year 10); 'end of term' (Female, year 10); 'home time' (Male, year 10); 'finish at 3.20' (Female, year 10); 'holidays' (Male, year 10); 'school holidays' (Female, year 10); 'dinner time because you don't have to go in lessons' (Male, year 10); and, '2 breaks a day' (Male, year 8).

The importance of finding times in the school day and places in the school grounds for meeting with friends took on particular importance given the government's increased emphasis on parental choice over where to send their children to school. Because of this increased choice, some children's homes were quite widely geographically dispersed. Thus, some pupils did not have the opportunity to meet their friends outside of school hours because they did not live closely enough to one another.

Your friends, suppose you have your friends and that, because there's certain friends that you don't see out of school because you live at different places so you come and see your friends and lessons you like

if you're meeting someone, you look forward to that... (Reece, interview, year 8)

... they live in different places and you wouldn't see them cause you wouldn't travel to where they live they don't live where you live so you just see them in school. (Rebecca, interview, year 8)

Gendered social spaces

Friendship formed across gender groups, not solely within gender groups.

Holly: Well at dinners a few of us will meet up again at basketball court and erm we'll like just do same things really then what we do at break. Football and things like that and rugby.. 'cos where we sit on the basketball court there's like a slope ... and we sit on that right in the corner and at the side there's a field with a bit of grass and everyone plays rugby on there so..

Researcher: Which do you prefer to play?

Holly: Rugby `cos it's funny when all girls jump on one boy (laughs).

Researcher: How does the boy feel then?

Holly: (Laughs).. a bit annoyed....(Holly, interview, year 8)

The fact that it was accepted that male and female pupils spent time together was a normal aspect of school life for Holly.

Researcher: How do the boys feel about playing football with the girls?

Holly: They find it all right. They're not really bothered `cos like they're all like...we all hang around with boys and girls so their not bothered about hanging about with girls `cos they dont' get ashamed `cos other people do it. (Holly, interview, year 8)

Unfortunately, however, forging cross gender friendships could be used by other pupils as an opportunity to humiliate their peers, even where innocuous behaviours were involved such as females sitting in class next to males.

If you sat next to a boy the girl can feel intimidated, say if it's a dead popular boy and you're not so popular girl, they might take the mick...if you sit next to a boy (people think) you fancy them...(Anne-Marie, interview, year 8)

3.2 Teachers

Teachers were very influential in affecting pupils' experiences of well-being. We identified a number of ways this could happen and have illustrated these in figure 3.2.

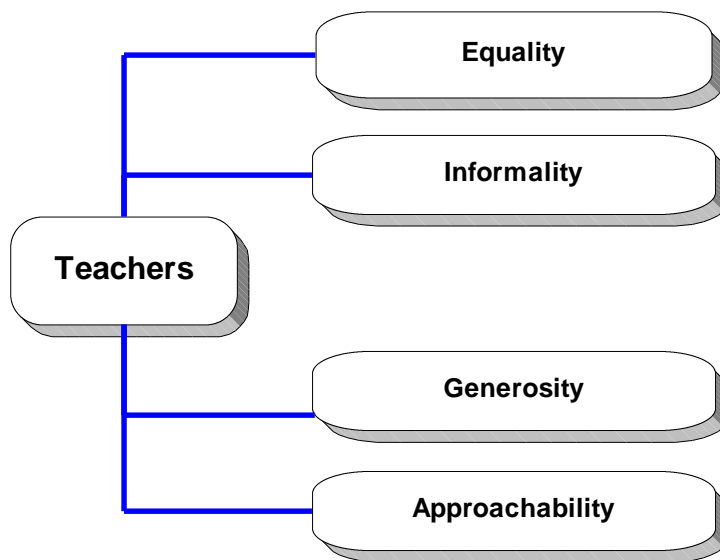


Figure 3.2 Teachers: sub themes

3.2.1 Equality

Establishing relationships where teachers and pupils felt equal was described as promoting positive well-being. When pupils felt on 'the same level' as their teachers, this made them feel good about themselves.

Some [*teachers*] are great, some are on your level and sort of get the laugh in class as well as...like they have a laugh at you and make you laugh and make you feel very good...(Geoff, group interview, year 8)

Pupils felt better when they were treated as mature people. The freedom to 'go out at dinner' (female, written year 10) was often mentioned among older pupils. Any opportunity to leave the school seemed to be important for the pupils and to enhance their sense of well-being. It may be that they were responding to the feeling of being stifled within the highly controlled school environment or to the feeling of being recognised by school staff as mature enough to represent the school in the outside world.

I like the way we are treated - like adults instead of like primary school children. (Male, written, year 8)

For some pupils, they just wanted to be treated with respect, or, as one year 10 male pupil said, like a 'normal person'.

If they treat you like an adult you get on with them better than the dead strict ones. ... Like the math's teacher, she asked me to get on with me work 'cos like I'd been talking for most of the lesson and I just did it 'cos she was dead polite to me. She talked to me like I was a normal person. (Aden, interview, year 10)

Equal relationships with teachers were also described as reciprocal relationships. Pupils recognised that to establish an egalitarian relationship, both parties consider the needs and feelings of the other.

Researcher: How about how you get on with people in the school? Do you get on with teachers ok?

Holly: Yeh. Erm...like if you treat them all right they'll treat you ok.

Researcher: What do you mean by all right?

Holly: Like if you're friendly and lively with them, they'll be the same back. So they just erm..like giving you what...erm...

(Holly, interview, year 8)

3.2.2 Informality

Pupils described that well-being could also be enhanced when a teacher acted less formally with pupils. Teachers could improve the emotional atmosphere at school by relaxing with pupils and having some fun in class. Pupils thought that this sort of relationship did not detract from learning and academic striving. Learning, they explained, is more likely when pupils feel comfortable.

Researcher: How do they (*teachers*) make you feel very good then?

Geoff: Just by like joking and laughing like obviously they are not strict but you know you just don't mess around with them kind of teachers ...like Mr X, he's very good you can have a laugh he tells jokes but you always, because of that he gets the learning over to you in a better way...

Damon: You learn, you learn all the stuff but in like a funny way say like Mr X in (*subject area*), ... if we're learning how to say something he'll like break the word down and give us an easy way of remembering it and like gets some people doing actions and you have to try and guess it and...it's a better way of learning really (Geoff and Damon, group interview, year 8)

And as Jennifer said,

Yeah, like we've got one Drama teacher in particular Miss X, she's really good, she's dead funny an'.. she acts dead childish an' it's funny but not, she's strict but childish. (Jennifer, interview, year 8)

It is an unhappy reality that fun teachers seemed to be the exception rather than the rule in all of the schools participating in the research, so much so, that particular fun teachers were singled out for comment. Unfortunately, having a laugh was juxtaposed against appreciating when a teacher did not shout at you.

Researcher: What makes it a good lesson?

Natalie: I don't know, it's just the teacher, she doesn't shout at you or anything, she lets you have a laugh with her (Natalie, interview, year 8)

3.2.3 Generosity

Another way in which teachers could improve well-being in school was to create an atmosphere whereby pupils felt they were giving the pupils extra time and attention; taking their work seriously and putting pupils well-being and educational attainment first. In these circumstances, pupils felt teachers had their best interests at heart:

Damon: ...like when you got like Mr X...'cause like Mr X...you know he'll talk to you when he's talking to me or something he'll like expand on it more you know you can just talk to him you know what I mean he'll just talk to you but like with other teachers they'll just tell you the work then heads down do what you can.

Geoff: There's another teacher called Mr X he's not...he's a very good teacher because he's...

Damon: You can't like mess around in class but he's a really good teacher...he spends his own time writing all the stuff down for you...if you've got a test he'll explain every question on it ... (Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

Participants shared their reflections on what a good teacher was like, and the key to success was that such teachers made pupils feel valued and important. In other words, good teachers are those that:

Make me feel unique (Female, written, year 10)

3.2.4 Approachability

Pupils really appreciated those teachers who would take the time to talk to them about their concerns, their lives and their opinions. Often, pupils complained that at school, teachers often acted as if their opinions did not count. Being approachable involved taking time to get to know pupils.

... the teachers are really nice to you and they talk to you, they'll stop and talk to you, if you need to just talk about anything... (Kerry, interview,, year 10)

Approachability was seen as necessary for teachers to find out what student problems were occurring and to address such problems in an appropriate and effective way. For example, Damon expressed the value of such teacher-pupil relationships in relation to bullying;

Damon: Mr X is like really good for like talking to.

Geoff: And he's good with problems like...

(Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

3.3 Teaching and learning

Pupils found some of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of school life to be related to lessons and learning. The multiple ways teaching and learning inspired a sense of well-being are highlighted in figure 3.3.

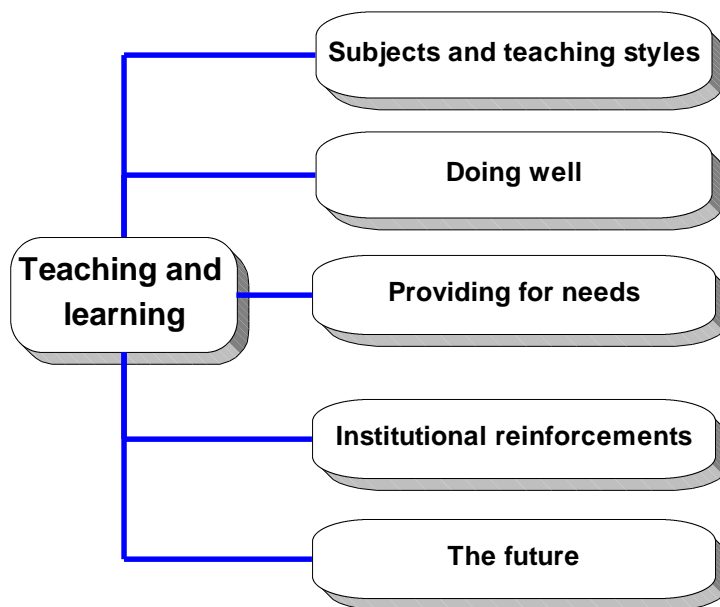


Figure 3.3: Teaching and learning: sub themes

3.3.1 Subjects and teaching styles

The diary data indicated which subjects were most popular amongst pupils. These were Art, Drama, Music, English, Health and Social Care and Information Technology (IT). Physical Education (PE) was a particular favourite amongst most male and some female pupils:

PE is good fun and we have a laugh. (Female, written, year 8)

I like PE - have double PE everyday (Male, written, year 8)

The reasons why pupils preferred these subjects concerned the opportunities such subjects created for freedom of expression and for working in groups. Furthermore, the lessons pupils valued most were those that nurtured a relaxed teaching atmosphere and promoted social interaction. This material was previously discussed under the theme of friendship, but here it was much more closely tied to teaching and learning experiences.

I like stuff like, you know, IT an' Art an' stuff like that ... its sort'a like more the moving round and you know hands on doin' stuff, whereas like Maths you're just like you know sat down bored (laughs) (Alison, interview, year 8)

Anne-Marie: ... I like the way that the teachers organise stuff for the lessons and stuff because they don't do it like so.... You're [not] totally on yer own.

Researcher: Oh right, so you can work with other people?

Anne-Marie: Yeah

Researcher: Why do you think its good though that you can work with other people rather than just work on your own?

Anne-Marie: Because you can..like tell each other ideas and stuff and help each other in your work an erm.... Discuss things instead of just...like 'cos you can come up with more ideas and stuff instead of just a few, like one or two. (Anne-Marie, interview, year 8)

For some, the subject was intrinsically interesting in itself, especially if the work involved personal input:

When... you can talk so long as you, like in Art yer doin' yer work but the teacher will let you talk at the same time erm, and you're not writing all the time... Drama's good ... 'cos you get to do your own thing, you know you get given an idea but.. most of 'em you get told what to do (Jennifer, interview, year 8)

Others suggested that being with their friends was the main ingredient to enjoying being in class.

Well I just, the just interesting lessons I'm with most of my mates anyway so you can talk a bit and do your work and its just easier an you can, I know they just seem, the just seem better than the rest of them. (Martin, interview, year 10)

3.3.2 Doing well

Pupils were keen to show us that some aspects of school engaged them deeply and that doing well at school had a substantial impact on their sense of well-being. Enjoyment of a subject was based on the pupil's feeling that they were 'good at it'.

(Feeling very happy) Enjoying my German lesson, giving some good answers, understanding it. (Jade, diary, Monday, year 10)

John: IT's my best subject yeah...

Researcher: Is that the one that you enjoy most?

John: Yeah and PE as well

Researcher: ... is there a reason that you like both of those subjects better?

John: Cos I'm good at it...(John, interview, year 10)

Grades and examinations

In an everyday way, 'doing well' meant getting good grades for school and homework. A good mark could make a pupil happy throughout the day.

(I like) Getting good grades (Female, written, year 10)

(Feeling happy) I was on prefect duty. I also read my report and strangely it wasn't bad! (Kim, diary, Monday, year 10)

Got my oral!!!

On a high because its over and I've got an A*.

My oral's set me in a good mood for the rest of the day.

(Jade, diary, Wednesday, year 10)

Doing well in examinations was also very important for most pupils:

Geoff: The sport and the actual exam marks are very good...

(Geoff, interview, year 8)

(I like) Passing exams (female, written, year 10)

In this way, pupils could demonstrate to their teachers, their guardians/parents and to themselves their positive motivation and capacity to learn.

3.3.3 Providing for needs

Several pupils thought school was a good place to be, not necessarily for the short-term gains, but for longer-term gains such as competitive qualifications and the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Getting qualifications (Female, written, year 10)

I like school because I get taught a number of things (Female, written, year 10)

I learn so I can go onto further education (Female, written, year 10)

Good career prospects (Male, written, year 8)

The need for professional help to pass examinations was recognised and pupils were happy that their schools were able to provide this. The schools were also described as caring and supportive places that gave vulnerable pupils the help they needed to achieve their potential.

There are a few things that are good about the school and that is the amount of support given for the younger children. The Paired Reading Scheme for the younger children and the Mentoring Scheme for the older children (Female, written, year 10)

Seeing how their school supported others convinced some pupils that if they needed help, then the school would help them out too.

In general, pupils were comfortable that their school was a competent and effective educational institution and that they would benefit from their time there.

I feel that there is a very reasonable system of education (Female, written, year 10)

I feel that (*name*) is a very good competent school. The staff in the school are very laid back with some exceptions but as a prefect I must have a biased opinion towards the school (Male, written, year 10)

Good standards of education (Male, written, year 8)

Geoff: I think it's definitely one of the best schools round here and I think it's probably one of the best schools anyway (Geoff, interview, year 8)

3.3.4 Institutional reinforcements

Though the issue of school discipline featured in our chapter on negative well-being, some pupils also described how it could contribute to positive well-being. Here it was viewed as being a positive help in creating an orderly and safe environment in which pupils could study and learn. Furthermore, discipline supported by rewards and praise comprised an attractive aspect of school life that could create fulfilling experiences of well-being for pupils.

The notion of assertive discipline was picked out by pupils to highlight how good behaviour was expected at school and the loss of merits was indicative of failure to live up to institutionally expected high standards of behaviour. Some pupils felt that peer pressure combined with such institutional expectations produced a calm and safe environment conducive to study. As one male stated, he liked the school because of, 'Well behaved lessons' (written year 8) and another female recounted that the good thing about school was, 'Not getting told off' (year 8 female). The positive outcomes of the discipline system also meant that good behaviour and hard work would also be recognised. Andy explained the ways in which merits linked specific behaviours to rewards:

We got a merit system as well ... If you get three merits a term you've got a bronze, a silver and a gold award. And if you get three 'd' merits you can't get them ... You get merits for good homework, good in class, helping teachers, generally being good. (Andy, interview, year 8)

A range of different rewards were available for pupils at school. In the lists some pupils produced for us on what made them feel good when at school, they included such rewards as: 'Getting good notes in journal' (written, year 10); 'Praise from teachers' (male, written, year 8); and, 'Getting certificates' (male, written, year 8).

One form of reward that was particularly valued was receiving praise from a teacher. Pupils often sought praise and were pleased when teachers acknowledged their achievements. Natalie described this in some detail when anticipated praise was not received. This was particularly important for Natalie since she had been in trouble for bad behaviour and had been proud of behaving well. It was important for her that her parents heard good news about her.

Researcher: What about praise at the school?

Natalie: They send post cards of praise and [a teacher] was supposed to be sending me one but I've still not got it, ...he said `I'll send you a post card of appraisal'

Researcher: Right and it hasn't come? Was that recently?

Natalie: No, No, it was about four week ago now.

Researcher: So you would have done it by now? So what do you think's happened?

Natalie: I don't know, probably forgot to post it or something.

Researcher: That's quite a shame isn't it?

Natalie: Yeah.

Researcher: You know if, like that, you've done something quite good in class, will the teachers praise you in front of the other kids in class?

Natalie: Yeah, Yeah. (Natalie, interview, year 8)

Pupils also enjoyed the system of privileges that operated within schools. This particularly applied to year 10 pupils. Such privileges includes the use of a common room, permission to leave school premises during dinnertime and taking greater responsibilities for the running of the school by becoming prefects or 'form senior students'.

Julie: I've always wanted to be a senior student 'cos I thought, I like the idea 'cos we had a really nice senior student when we were in those years. I was dead sad to see her go 'cos we're got dead friendly with her.

Researcher: So you'd like to do the same, be that person to someone younger.

Julie: Yeah, help the little people. Second it will look good on my CV, which is important. That's mainly why I did the fast track. Cos it would look good later on. ... and I just like the idea of being senior student, and you get a card.

Researcher: Will it make you feel more responsible?

Julie: Yeah. I've got quite a good form actually. (Julie, interview, year 10)

3.3.5 The future

Pupils recognised that their school was playing a part in preparing them for the future.

It gives you an education (female, written, year 8)

Get a good job. (Male, written, year 8)

Natalie was highly motivated to learn in some lessons because she wanted to be a nurse when she leaves.

Researcher: ... What are the good things about school?

Natalie: Well I wanna get good G.C.S.E's 'cos when I'm older I wanna be a nurse. That's why.

Researcher: You could go to university as well.

Natalie: Yeah.

Researcher: I think, to be a nurse, sometimes don't you? So you're working hard?

Natalie: Yeah in the lessons I want for thingy, get a degree and that.
(Natalie, interview, year 8)

While some pupils were goal oriented within school, others had been identified by the school as very able and were fast tracked (when pupils were considered to have the ability were entered for extra GCSE's). Martin below expressed the importance this may have for his future choices.

... well smarter children ... have the option of doing ... extra GCSE's instead of getting 2 options you didn't get to pick, and you got 2 GCSE's and you got 2 lessons of Geography, 2 lessons of History so that's, like, your normal 2, and you get 2 lessons of IT, but in IT you got a double GCSE which is like... 2 GCSE's for doing 1 GCSE's work, so your getting 4 where your meant to be getting 2 ... it'll help you get into college and that, 'cos you've got more chance... at doing more GCSE's so you can pick a wider range of subjects when you go to college or uni, or if you want to go straight into a job. (Martin, interview, year 10)

However, the use of a two-tier system inevitably created negativity and division within year groups. Whilst it created positive self worth/esteem for those selected, the opposite may be the case for those not considered for fast tracking due to perceived lack of ability.

In general, pupils responded well to discussions about possibilities for their own futures. It appeared that making the future less abstract motivated them in their studies and helped to make them feel good about themselves:

I felt good after break because instead of French we got to talk about our careers in ten years time. (Garth, diary, Tuesday, year 8)

3.4 Resources, activities and the environment

Throughout the guided walks, interviews and written pieces, pupils recorded how they liked the range of learning resources offered by the school. Moreover, they were keen to describe the ways in which the physical environment of the school influenced the way they felt. The key sub-themes are detailed in figure 3.4.

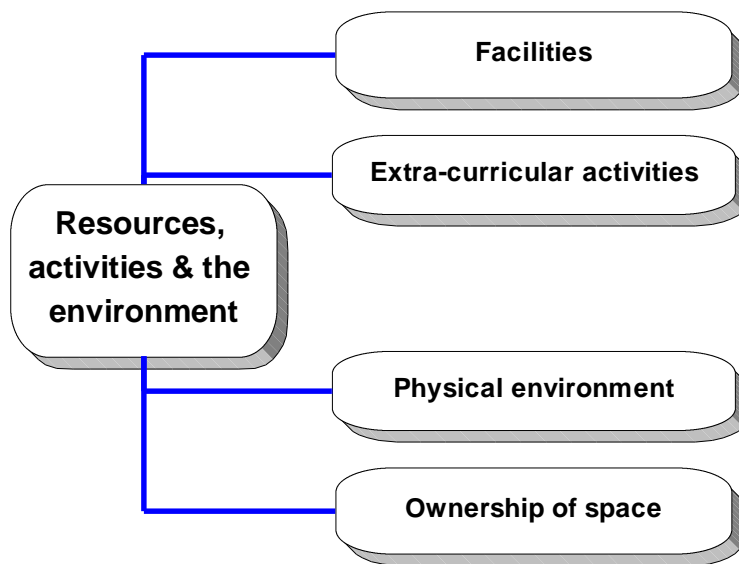


Figure 3.4: Resources, activities and the environment: sub themes

3.4.1 Facilities

Pupils were appreciative of the facilities available at their schools. Some felt the schools offered 'great facilities' while others were more discriminatory over which facilities were of a high standard. Computing facilities were often highlighted in this way, as were sports facilities and specific learning resources such as libraries, white boards and drama facilities.

Many of the pupils, both male and female, thought the computing facilities offered by the schools were of a high standard in terms of both quantity and quality. Pupils enjoyed the freedom to use computers both for work and for recreation.

Geoff: I like it the ... learning and resources centre...it's got a computer

Damon: It's got like a big computer room and the IT [Information Technology] rooms are good we've got three IT rooms now well four IT rooms and they're making another so we've got you know...

Researcher: Do you get to use the computers regularly?

Geoff: You can go on them...

Damon: Break...

Geoff:...and a lot of people play games and you get...

Damon: If someone's waiting for a computer to work they'll be told to get off...but we've got about 100 to 200 computers probably and we'll get the new IT room we'll probably get about that much

Geoff: There's probably about 40 in each IT room I'd say.

(Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

Both male and female pupils were also appreciative of the sports facilities available in their school. In two of the schools, sports were rated very highly amongst the pupils and their success in local schools competitions was

something the pupils talked about with great pride. In the guided walks, pupils often took researchers to the sports areas to show them places the pupils enjoyed being in. This was echoed in the written tasks when many participants from years 8 and 10 wrote that what they liked about their school was the sports facilities.

Pupils further cited a number of different learning resources they found valuable and made their school experience more positive. These included such resources as the library, drama theatre, availability of whiteboards in place of chalkboards and a science room. One pupil mentioned the availability of laptop computers as something extra and useful that her school provided. Some pupils clearly took pride in their range of high tech learning facilities:

... we've got the computers as well. We've got four computer rooms ... we've got two smart boards which are linked to the computers we get shown what to do and we follow that ... upstairs we've got info-technology rooms and in the library. (Andy, interview, year 8)

3.4.2 Extra curricular activities

Pupils described extra curricular school activities positively. These were both 'in- and-out-of-school' activities. Pupils particularly appreciated in-school extra curricular activities such as sporting activities, after-school clubs and special events such as non-uniform days. Listed below is a range of different activities pupils from years 8 and 10 specified they liked about school.

Non-uniform day (male, written, year 8)
Clubs at lunch and after school (male, written, year 8)
Sports day (female, written, year 8)
Rugby league success (written, year 10)
School plays (written, year 10)
Arts fund week (female, written, year 8)

Kath, in her diary, wrote that despite feeling tired after a late night, she and her friends...

Also have a play to do, which we are all excited about. The play went really well, we had an excellent...late night again, can't think. (Kath, diary, year 8)

In terms of sports, the chance to participate in an enjoyable activity as well as feeling included were important to pupils:

Geoff: I know we're saying all bad points here about school but it's very good for sport
Damon: Sport's really good
Geoff: Like Sports Day, that's very good as well
Damon: And they let everyone have a chance in a team no matter how bad they are and they do every sport and we're always in leagues and the rugby team just won the English school's final, you know. I think

they went to Cardiff to play it and the year 7s were in that as well, you know, in all the leagues and it's a really good school.
(Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

Here, the reasons for liking school revolved around the perceived fairness in sport and this transferred to an evaluation of the whole school as a 'really good school'.

In terms of out-of-school activities, pupils mentioned that they particularly liked school trips, holidays and charity. A number of these activities were mentioned in pupils' written work where they were asked to list things that made them feel good at school. For example:

I like the end of term trip, that is all! (male, written, year 10)
Go on more school trips than other schools (male, year 8)
Go on some good outings and holidays with school (female, written, year 8)

Charity work (female, written year 8)

It would appear that events and activities, which took pupils out of their everyday routines, were very much enjoyed, especially when holidays to foreign places were available:

Andy: ... Alton Towers ... lots of people are going on that. I had to ask Mr X if I could give him money to go on a skiing holiday... [to] ...
There's another few holidays going on as well to Belgium and Spain.
(Andy, interview, year 8).

In general, out of school extra curricular activities of different varieties help the pupils to feel special within the otherwise anonymising school environment.

3.4.3 The physical environment

The general atmosphere in some parts of the school engendered positive feelings, and this was linked to the condition of the physical environment and décor. Where in chapter three we show how pupils described their well-being being negatively affected by a poorly maintained physical environment, here well-being was described as enhanced by a well maintained physical environment. Holly and others described their favourite parts of school.

It's like dead bright, good fun. It's a block, it's not a very big block it's like just got two [type of technology] rooms. Erm...like you...it's bright and colourful. There's like paintings on the walls like children have done from this school. There's like glass boxes with erm..like things that people have made in erm..there's computers give you more knowledge `cos you can go on internet and things like that. there's building and graphics that helps you with your drawing and cooking.
(Holly, interview, year 8)

I know I said I like Drama more ... I like the areas as well because its more bright and you know done with all different things like that.
(Alison, interview, year 8)

Jennifer: Erm..the history rooms are nice...the Geography rooms...are okay erm
Researcher: Whats the difference between nice and okay?, What makes the difference?
Jennifer: Nice is like where its bright and good to be in, erm okay is like where its quite boring ...
Researcher: Good because its nice, it's a sunny room, its decorated nicely or what?
Jennifer: Yeah so its like light and decorated dead nice and stuff..erm.. the English rooms are okay but they get really stuffy.
(Jennifer, interview, year 8)

Pupils talked about the importance of environment in affecting how pupils felt whilst in school. Often this was linked to lessons the pupils liked and to the rooms where they had their lessons being bright and airy. Pupils also felt positive about outside spaces.

It's been like sunny recently it's really good, like we've got erm really good garden areas an a playground if you want to play, and like we've got the hill over there, you know to sit down, that's where we normally go an eat our sandwiches. (Alison, interview, year 8)

Researcher: Right...tell me about different places around the school now are there any places where you feel you like to be you feel comfortable happy?
Adam: Outside on the grass
Researcher: That's where you prefer to be?
Adam: Yeah, just be yourself fooling around being a kid.
(Adam, interview, year 10).

Being outside of the school buildings equated to a feeling of freedom and self-determination beyond the strict rules imposed by teaching staff. This was where even older males could think and act 'yourself'. Some pupils described their canteen as a good place to be. Some cited the reason for this being the 'burger bar', others because 'the dining room is nice and clean' (Female written year 8).

3.4.4 Ownership of place

There were a number of places within the boundaries of the schools where pupils felt a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership helped create places that pupils felt comfortable in and wanted to be in. This was particularly the case for the 'common room' that was available to older pupils.

Researcher: Yeah, there's a year 11 common room is there?
John: Yeah

Researcher: How do you feel about that?

John: Yeah I think its good yeah, 'cos like all the older kids can hang around, it's a good idea I think yeah (John, interview, year 8)

Owning your own space was important within different year groups, as the right to occupy school places made the pupils feel safe and secure both from older pupils and teachers.

Damon: I like the yard when it's only our year but I don't like walking through the year 10 yard ... (Damon, interview, year 8)

... all the years have different groups and the hang around in different areas but somewhere for just the year 11's it won't be a bad place, because its just..well since we've come to this school its always been a privilege to go into the year 11 common room as far as we've seen it, so by the time that people get into year 11 they see it as a privilege and they see it as its theirs now, an its theirs to like hang around in an that so, its just somewhere that you hang around an that (Martin, interview, year 10)

The corridor outside the Drama Theatre was a space that Year 10's had claimed as their own.

.. there's no classrooms or places in school you like, there's just places that you go to hang round and things like that, but we hang around all over the school we stay outside Drama Theatre and sit on the radiators, we just 'cos it's like if you sit you get a load of em sat on the radiator, 'cos its quite a big long one and you get some sat on the rack at the side on the bag rack and you just hang round and you can fit quite a couple of people round there and we just hang round we don't really like anywhere in the school we just go there to talk and that (Martin, interview, year 10)

Form rooms were often seen in terms of ownership and sites of friendship formation and maintenance.

It's alright near our form room because ... if you're in our form room you can just sit up there, you can talk to your mates up there and stuff like that, or anyone, like sitting outside and stuff like that, you're inside and you can talk to people when they come up (Danny, interview, year 8).

3.5 Summary

Positive feelings induced by school included feeling happy, having self-confidence and assurance, pride, independence and autonomy and raised self-esteem. These positive feelings were linked to good relationships, primarily with friends, but also with teachers, and to the way that school was organised. Established relationships, that were caring, valuing and reciprocal, not only enhanced motivation and learning, but were what made school

worthwhile. Positive feedback, interest, respect and trust from, and availability of teachers all led to positive self-esteem.

The way lessons were organised and the schools' facilities had a positive impact, particularly in the extent to which they enhanced opportunities and time for developing and maintaining friendships. Good facilities and physical layout and high standards of maintenance and décor within the schools, as well as the pattern of the school day (in particular breaks and going home time) were important, again for the enabling of friendships to develop and be maintained.. Some physical features of the school were directly linked to feeling good, and organised conduct of lessons, along with some aspects of reward systems underpinned feelings of calm and achievement. Positive experience of school and the opportunities it presented were seen to facilitative future success in terms of careers.

However, whilst some features of school contributed to positive well-being, other features led to reported negative well-being.

4 Negative well-being

Material that related to pupils' experiences of negative well-being at school was often very powerful and emotive and we believe of considerable cause for concern. For example, we found in one female pupil's written work the following:

I want to enjoy school but I can't 'cos I get pulled down by bullying and depression which I've been going through for a while. At the moment the main goal I have in life is not to have a nervous breakdown before I'm sixteen. I'm leading towards a nervous breakdown with the worry of school lessons, work, pupils and some teachers. (Female pupil, written work, year 10)

We have organised pupils' experiences of negative well-being under the following themes:

- Academic stress
- Bullying
- School Rules
- The management of school space
- Relationships

4.1 Academic stress

Figure 4.1 outlines the sub-themes that contributed to our understanding of academic stress and negative well-being for pupils.

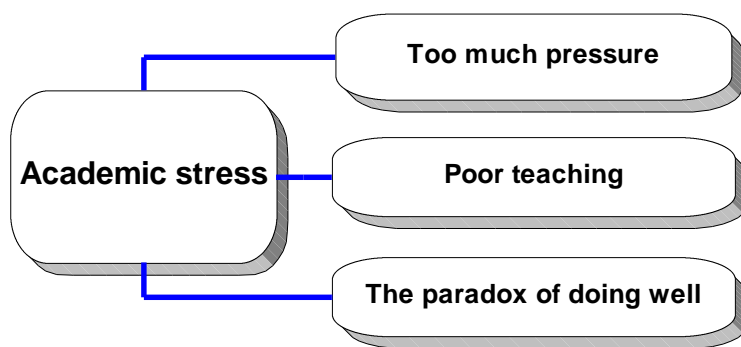


Figure 4.1 Academic Stress: sub-themes

4.1.1 Too much pressure

Time and again, pupils would complain about the stress of schoolwork. Pupils felt under pressure from the amount of work they were expected to complete, including amount of homework and in-class assessments.

Pupils felt that teacher expectations were too high. Tests and examinations were often experienced as adding pressure rather than providing markers of pupils' academic progress to aid the learning process. Such pressures often culminated in pupils feeling stressed and pressurised.

School makes me feel stressed when things don't go right, when exams come up and pressurised when teachers predict high grades for you and you feel you have to meet them. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

For some pupils, heavy workloads led to feelings of inability to control their life, and more, inability to enjoy activities which were non-school related.

Teachers give homework on all the wrong days and we have to work for hours every night to stop it piling up. We aren't adults yet - we have to play as well. I don't have enough time to do homework. My whole life is built around school. (Female pupil, guided walk year 10)

We get way too much homework - some of my friends and I get really stressed over it. We hardly see each other after school. I work until I go to bed. We have been working since 9 am in school and I think when we get home we should be having fun not working 'til late. (Sue, diary, year 10).

The problem of overwork was voiced particularly amongst year 10 pupils.

Year 10, Oh my God! It hits you. Work, work and more work. It is really hard at school for me. I find it hard to keep up with coursework and schoolwork. Especially doing statistics and triple science. I keep thinking work will die down but it doesn't. And to think it gets worse in year 11. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

The whole experience at school, especially in year 10, was described as an unremitting grind with too many subjects and too much work to fit into too little time.

The homework really does get on my nerves. We're sitting exams in two weeks. Instead of giving us something useful to revise from, they keep giving us more and more coursework and homework. It does get you down after a bit. Work, work and more work. ... I can't be arsed with school anymore. (Female pupil, year 10, written *emphasis in original*)

Perhaps one of the most poignant expressions of the impact of academic stress was found in one female pupil's written work where she felt that the

academic expectations of the school overrode any real concern of teachers for pupils.

They (teachers) don't care about our welfare, all they care about is us getting good grades and making this school look good. Why should we? This is not a good school. (Female pupil, consultation group, year 10)

What is most disturbing here is that the emphasis on academic achievement was not perceived in terms of personal benefit to pupils, but in terms of benefits for the school.

Pupils described their curriculum and teaching timetables as overcrowded and that this contributed to their study pressures.

I do want to come here to learn, but I think they squeeze too many lessons in. Six lessons a day! I think it would be better if we had a double P.E. [*physical education*] lesson and a double French lesson. (Simon, interview, year 10)

4.1.2 Poor teaching

Pupils had experienced many different styles of teaching by the time they were in year 10 and were able to recognise those teaching styles they felt worked best for them.

Well it isn't the things that we do it's the teacher, how she teaches it, really makes me like it more, but if she's not teaching it very well it gets a bit boring. (David, interview, year 10)

For some pupils, frustration is an overwhelming experience in relation to teaching styles. They wanted to learn but felt they were unable to achieve this, partly blamed on teaching styles, and the inability of some teachers to explain their discipline in an uncomplicated and interesting way.

By the way she explains it, ... and how they teach it and the things that they do to associate other things with it, and just things like that and when we do, like in science practicals she doesn't really explain it very well so we don't really know what we're doing. (Oliver interview, year 8)

Pupils evaluated poor lessons as those where writing predominated and where any in-class talking/discussion was discouraged or even punished. Pupils identified poor teaching as characterised by the teacher talking *at* rather than *with* the class and where the teacher relied more on discipline and less on nurturing a respectful and relaxed social environment.

The lessons would be more fun if the teachers weren't as strict and you could have a bit of laugh but still get your work done. (Written, year 8)

Pupils did not see fun and learning as mutually exclusive but felt that teachers might.

Academic stress was also induced through boredom during class time. Pupils were very clear about the sorts of teaching styles that were boring. These were usually where lessons were predominantly based around one activity, usually writing and especially copying notes.

If it's writing it seems you don't like the teacher as much `cos they're making you write more. ...[My favourite would be] discussion or something like that...Poster work, doing posters and things like that. (Tamsin, interview, year 8)

For some pupils, feelings of boredom pervaded their whole experience of being at school.

School makes me bored. I'm in year 10 and I'm just bored of getting up early in the morning and going to school. I have been going to high school for four years and I'm just bored of doing work, day in day out. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

4.1.3 The paradox of doing well

Doing well at school, both academically and in terms of popularity with staff could paradoxically result in negative well-being for pupils. The problem was that adults constantly reinforced the values of academic success while pupils were being pulled by their own peer group value system in which academic success and being a popular pupil among teachers was ridiculed and could lead to the pupil being reviled. This was particularly the case for male pupils who were attempting to perform in terms of their peer group's expectations of masculinity (rejecting authority, maintaining independence, being good at sport,) as well as living up to parental and teacher expectations (accepting authority, developing interdependence and being good at academic study). Male pupils who met teachers' expectations at the expense of their peer group's expectations were reviled by other male, as well as sometimes female, pupils.

I dislike being bullied because I did OK. Not fair. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

I am always on time and I always have the right equipment but I still get poked, laughed at and punched. (Male pupil, written, year 8)

4.2 Bullying

Bullying negatively affected pupils' well-being in school with feelings described variously from irritation and frustration to fear and terror. In serious cases, being bullied meant pupils feared for their personal safety, expected social humiliation and experienced considerable levels of anguish. The experience

was not confined to school, encroaching also upon pupils' lives outside of school.

At the moment I am being bullied and school is a nightmare. My bully is older than me and stronger. I could stand up for myself but she has friends and an older sister. You probably think I should go and tell a teacher - she would probably get a telling off. But its not just school - she lives near to me, she shouts abuse to me in front of my friends and threatens me. She also catches the same bus as me - that is a nightmare because on the bus there is nowhere to hide, there's nowhere to run (Female pupil, written, year 8)

The emotional strain caused by being bullied was palpable in such accounts,

People call you [names] and you have no one to blame but yourself because of the way you are. It hurts, you get lower and lower by the time you go home you feel like crying (Female pupil, written, year 8)

Bullying was very disruptive to a pupil's social network, causing problems in maintaining supportive relationships and leading to social isolation.

Yeah, he's always getting bullied, all the time. He won't have any friends cause people who want to be his friend will think 'Oh I'm not being his friend cause everyone will pick on me as well as him'. It's awful. I used to stick up for him but there was like older people and if I stuck up for him they just hit me. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

The feelings of loneliness could be quite profound and have a dramatic impact upon a pupils' experience of school.

School makes me feel really lonely, like an outsider.... Whenever I am at home. I dread the next day, coming into school because I don't know what to do with myself, or who to make friends with and how! (Female pupil, written, year 10)

From our data we were able to discern a number of important sub-themes that further expanded upon pupil experiences of bullying at school. These are illustrated in Figure 4.2. We examine each of these sub-themes in turn.

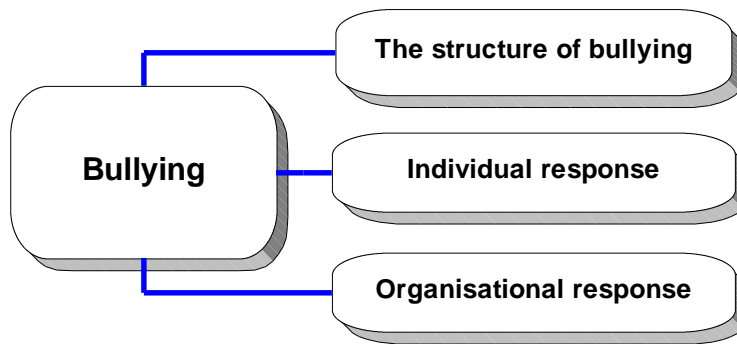


Figure 4.2 Bullying: sub-themes

4.2.1 The structure of bullying

Pupils talked about bullying operating structurally across social categories of age, gender and race. In general, any way a pupil could be differentiated from the group was perceived as grounds for bullying.

Social categories of difference: age, gender and race

The reasons given for being bullied varied along a number of social categories that pinpointed a pupil as 'different'. Bullying occurred when the use of social categories of difference highlighted a perceived weakness or vulnerability in a pupil:

My friend...he's a bit tall but he's a bit tubby and he wears glasses, ... He's always getting bullied, he won't have any friends ... it's awful. (Kirsty, interview, year 8)

People mock me because I'm different (Female pupil, written, year 8)

In many cases of difference, physical appearance was implicated. To avoid being bullied your physical appearance had to be viewed as either not too unattractive but at the same time not too attractive.

You have to look right because if you don't look right you get picked on ... but thing is the people that are pretty ... they get picked on. But if you're ugly you get picked on too. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Pupils felt they were constantly monitored by their peer group for evidence of difference. For some pupils this had a considerable impact upon their sense of self-identity.

'Cos everywhere you go there's people like I'm going to put you down for the way you are 'cos you're not exactly the same as them then you're wrong. So there's nowhere you can be yourself in school ... I suppose at home it's not that bad because you're in your own area ...

but in school there's people all over the place. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Being constantly vigilant about what you do, what you say and how you appear could have an extremely stressful impact on everyday life, especially when such pressure become so insidious that pupils feel they could not 'be themselves'.

Pupils described how the likelihood of being bullied and of being a bully depended upon the school year group you belonged to. Bullies were often described as originating in year 9. Year 7 pupils were viewed as the easiest to pick on. However, they were not believed to be capable of putting up much of a fight with year 9 pupils and thus did not represent a sufficient challenge – they were viewed as unsatisfying targets for the bully. Year 8 pupils were those most likely to be bullied as they were believed to be capable of putting up more of a fight than year 7, but were often physically still too small to cause a serious challenge for year 9 pupils.

... everyone knows that they can tell them [year 8s] what to do and they'll do it because they'll think ooh they're older than me... but most of the people they're not bothered with year 7s it's always year 8s which is my year and we're known to get it but it's always the year 9s that [are] the bullies ... year 11s just get on with it. (Brian, interview, year 8)

Though year 11 pupils were viewed as too busy getting on with their schoolwork and exams to be involved in bullying, they were still known for putting their weight around.

In maths, I don't go to maths anymore because, say if you're year eight, all the year 11s will just push past you and push you out of the way and go in front of you without even thinking what they're doing (Lilly, interview, year 8)

Pupils were also bullied according to the activities they were involved with at school. This bullying was gendered.

... to be a lad you have to play football. If a lad doesn't play football it's like, 'Ooh he's a girl look at him'... And it was a teacher that said to him erm like they was doing like a dance they were messing about he [the teacher] goes, 'God you do dancing but you haven't got your tutu on now' and that really upset him. (Gordon, interview, year 10)

Furthermore, racism was a factor in bullying.

Well when I first moved to the school I got a bit of bullying 'cos of my colour. Since then, there used to be this boy called Adam, he used to call me racist names. (Kirsty, interview, year 8)

4.2.2 Individual response: dealing with bullying

In general, pupils accepted bullying as part of everyday life, a natural extension of the school day. Both female and male pupils tended to have specific strategies for dealing with bullying. These included:

- **Avoid the bullies**
Pupils made limited use of social spaces in the school and sought to keep out of the way of bullies and potential bullies.
- **Don't show any emotion**
Male pupils would seek not to show their emotions (such as feeling upset or angry) to the bullies because this would goad the bullies on to further bullying tactics.
- **Ignore it**
Pupils coped with bullying through denial. The rationale for this coping strategy was that as they felt nothing could be done to prevent bullying then it was best to try and ignore it in the hope that it might eventually go away.
- **Laugh at it**
Male pupils described humour as a way of coping with bullying. Laughing was often directed at the bully's victim which would help ensure the bully would not turn on you next.
- **Group protection**
Female pupils would often seek the protection of a group of close friends. This would provide physical safety and emotional support.

A pupil's social network could do much to both prevent bullying and to reduce its harmful effects on the individual.

I used to [get bullied] when I was in first year cause I never knew anyone apart from T but she was never in school, and then when I started mixing with everyone then they was all right with me. (Davina, interview, year 10)

Sometimes, seeking the protection of the group involved carefully planning their social network membership. Thus, a pupil's social network might not wholly include friends, but include popular figures who effectively could provide protection from the unwanted attention of bullies.

The one option for dealing with bullies that was universally derided among male pupils, was telling the teacher. It was generally felt that teachers would not listen or take the complaint seriously. If the teacher did take the complaint seriously and punished the bully, the bully could then become even more vitriolic in their bullying:

Some of them feel scared and stuff they won't talk about it to anyone, just in case the person that's bullied em like, starts bullying them again 'cos they've gone and told on them. (Justin, interview, year 8)

Furthermore, telling parents was described as being 'a sissy', something that male pupils could in fact be further bullied for.

4.2.3 Organisational response: preventing it

Different schools had different organisational responses to bullying. Pupils discussed the following in some detail: school bullying policy; bully boxes; counselling and understanding; and surveillance.

School bullying policy

Pupils felt school bullying policies were ineffective and that teachers had little interest or power to intervene.

Bullying policy is a waste of time, teachers make no effort to attempt to sort it out. (Female pupil, year 8, written)

It makes me angry that the teachers always say this and that about the Bullying Policy but all it is, is a thick booklet that they hand out to parents saying how they won't tolerate bullying. But they are just useless words on paper. No action is ever taken. (Female pupil, written, year 8)

The above quotations are underpinned by a sense of anger and helplessness in the face of bullying.

Bully boxes

Bully boxes are premised on the practice of informing teachers anonymously about bullying. Some pupils felt the boxes were very useful in this respect.

One of the biggest problems is bullying and we have got bully boxes around the school and Mr X ... sorts the bullying out, so you can put your notes in the bully box and he sorts it out. There isn't much bullying going on anymore. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

However, other pupils identified problems with using 'bully boxes'. Pupils were generally guarded against the practice of informing on bullies through fear of repercussions, especially when you could be seen using a bully box, or when bully boxes could be broken into and their contents read by other pupils. As such, the bully boxes failed to make pupils feel safer at school.

A lot of people don't want people to know that they're being bullied and they [bully boxes] are in like public places where people can see you like putting them [notes about bullying] in and also people have like bent boxes to get notes out .. so they're easy to get into, even though they have got locks on ... (Tamsin, interview, year 8)

In effect, many pupils felt safer not telling their school about bullying in case their tormentors found out and this then aggravated the situation.

Once I wrote a letter in the blue [bullying] box for him [a friend who was being bullied] but ... [the bully] will ... find out you've done it and then they'll threaten you so you won't do it again. But the teachers don't do anything to stop people from threatening you... (Caroline, interview, year 10)

Moreover, pupils had their own informal 'school code' among peers that characterised staff-pupils relations as 'them and us', where informing on fellow pupils to teachers was viewed as reprehensible.

So you're not allowed to snitch ... there's no point in telling 'cos it just makes things worse (Robert, interview, year 8)

There was also a concern that teachers were not implementing the bullying boxes policy appropriately. There was a perception among the pupil population that teachers would do very little in response to reports of bullying left in the bullying box. Thus, the risks of getting caught putting a message in the box were often not felt worth taking.

...you put things in the bully boxes and you never get anything back never. ... 'cos I remember my friend C put something in the bully box when she was getting bullied off another girl and she put it in the bully box three times and nothing ever came back to her... (Robert, interview, year 8)

Surveillance, bullying and school rules

Some participants viewed teacher surveillance as a means to prevent bullying.

...'cos sometimes the dinner ladies about, walking about most of the time, and if they see anything that they thinks goin' on they just try and sort it out (Justin, interview, year 8)

Well the school toilets are the place where all the girls just go and put their make-up on. They don't really get bullied there's nothing ever happens in toilets because that's supervised. (Robert, interview, year 8)

However, such surveillance was viewed as ineffective when bullies were aware of and anticipated the teachers' surveillance. Also, bullies were seen as structuring their bullying during those times and places when teacher surveillance was at its most sparse or non-existent.

...sometimes they're watching, but sometimes they're not 'cos they're not always aware of bullying, and when its gonna happen... [bullying happens] usually at dinnertimes and at end of school ... 'cos at the end of school they think that the teachers aren't gonna get em ... (Justin, interview, year 8)

Even when there was a staff presence, this did not always mean staff were vigilant or would step in to prevent bullying.

It can even happen in buildings because they (*teachers*) just walk past they don't say nothing. (Robert, interview, year 8)

One domain of school life that caused a lot of concern amongst both female and male pupils were school buses. Pupils felt highly vulnerable on the bus because of the lack of adult supervision together with the mix of different genders and ages. Many felt powerless to protect themselves from both rough and tumble and aggressive bullying.

Well first of all I've got the bus ride which isn't very good because you've have the people messing about and they're like bullies and that I've not got surnames but you still have bullies on [the] bus ... If you're not within a gang in a school well they kind of take over the bus and if you're sitting in a place where they just fancy sitting, you have to move. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Such negative experiences framed the day for many pupils, beginning the morning with an edgy drive and ending the school day on an unpleasant note.

4.3 School Rules

School life was regulated by a number of rules that pupils were required to abide by. Figure 4.3 outlines five sub-themes that contributed to our understanding of school rules and negative well-being for pupils.

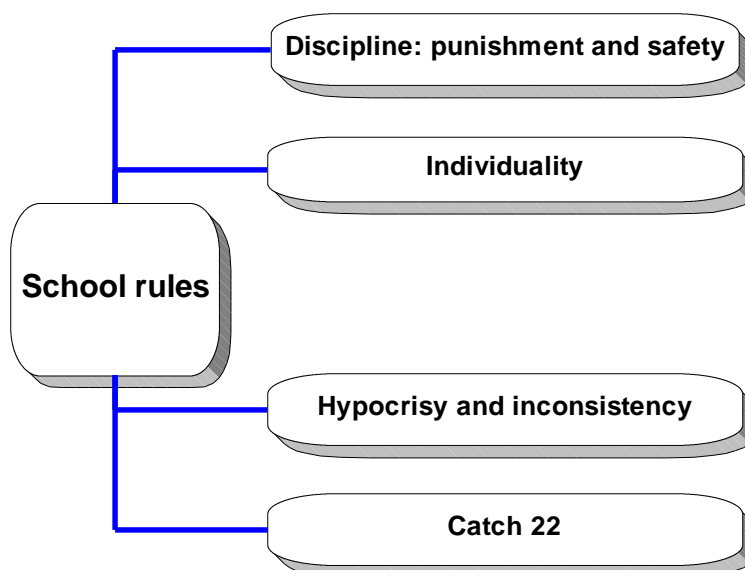


Figure 4.3 School rules: sub-themes

4.3.1 Discipline: punishment and safety

Pupils felt variously happy and unhappy about how punishment was metered out in their school. They were all very clear, however, about the types of punishments used. These included detentions, isolation (for example, sitting in the corner) and suspensions. In spite of its name, one particular assertive discipline system, the 'merit system', functioned to focus the pupil's attention on the metering of punishments rather than rewards, or at least the removal of rewards.

So if you get a name on the board then that's just like your name you get a tick you lose your merit and if you lose so many merits [by] the end of [the] year you can't go on a school trip (Robert, interview, year 8)

Some participants did recognise the need for some rules to protect their own and other's safety and that discipline was there to reinforce such rules. However, there were other times when the form that the discipline took could put pupils' safety at further risk. For example, when asked about her feeling towards after school detentions, Ellen stated:

I don't think they should have them cause anyone could get raped going home from school but that's why me dad came in and said I had to do them at dinnertime ... cause my dad said when you finish school there's like 700 people going out of the gates at the same time so no-one could do anything to you then but when you've been in detention you're going home on your own. And there was a pervert about at that time and I was dead scared. (Ellen, interview, year 8)

Moreover, the banning of mobile phones also had the potential of putting pupils at risk.

I think mobile phones should be allowed as long as they are switched off and out of sight. I think this because some people live quite far away from school and if they miss their bus they have no way of getting home (Male pupil, year 10, written)

Though few pupils felt they had any recourse to challenge teacher's disciplinary decisions, they did want such power.

If you get in trouble at school and are called in an office to "discuss the matter" in teachers terms that means they talk, you listen and they don't let you get a word in. ... and then they wonder why you get angry with them. I think teachers should get over themselves and start listening to pupils. (Kim, interview, year 10)

4.3.2 Individuality

School rules were described in terms of stripping away individuality. Laura, for example, was extremely forthright on this matter when she said in relation to school rules,

I leave me outside when I come in school and pick myself back up on the way home (Laura, interview, year 8)

The notion of individuality was linked to the imposition of school rules which were often talked of as trivial, unfair and pointless. For female pupils, rules around physical appearance were particularly difficult to accept, especially in year 10 when appearance mattered a great deal.

Individuality is lost as makeup and nail varnish is banned (Female pupil, year 8, written)

We should be able to wear our own clothes and jewellery - teachers can. We should be able to wear make up - what has this got to do with our education? (Tanya, interview, year 10)

Not only were opportunities for individuality lost through the wearing of school uniform, but also opportunities for a gendered identity. Female pupils saw uniform as disrupting their attempts to display their femininity.

Another thing that really bugs me is the school uniform!! Fair enough we have to wear them but the girls' uniform is black flat shoes (like boys) baggy pants (like boys) baggy shirts (like boys) and no make up (like boys). Girls want to look nice and different from boys sometimes. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

The issue of school uniform caused much anxiety amongst both female and male pupils. Pupils at one school universally disliked their particular school uniform. When travelling to and from school, their uniform was worn with shame and humiliation.

The uniform sucks! (Male pupil, written, year 10)

Moreover, once in school, pupils' attempts to reclaim some individuality through the style in which school uniform was worn also caused friction between the various social groups within school. Teachers could impose sanctions for incorrectly worn uniform.

Jackets are not allowed unless they're the colour of your blazer. Sometimes teachers give you detentions for something of nothing. Teachers make you dress like a Geek with your shirt tucked in and what does it effect if you don't have your shirt in! (Female pupil, written, year 10)

However, pupils could also be ostracised by their peers for not wearing uniform according to current youth styles (often at odds with school uniform

rules). This meant that pupils were often caught between teacher and peer group pressures.

On pupil pointed out the hypocrisy she felt lay behind rules on school uniform:

I think the uniform strips you of your personality, one which adults are trying to get us to clarify. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

4.3.3 Hypocrisy and inconsistency

Pupils perceived there to be one rule for pupils and another for staff and that this undermined the validity of school rules as they viewed such rules as hypocritical.

... teachers walk round with their hoops [earings] in so they're just as likely to get caught as we are walking through corridors. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Such feelings were strongly voiced in relation to the schools' territorial rules that resulted in pupils having to stay outside in the rain and cold.

But I love the way they come and tell you while they've got a hot cup of coffee in their hand, you have to go out in the rain while they're sat in the staff room ... Biscuits and everything yeah they don't know what it's like to be stood out there freezing, feeling really ill. (Laura, interview, year 8)

Pupils identified how rules were also applied inconsistently.

You get your name on board that's a warning then, another one and you lose your merit, and then another and after that you get detention and another after that and you get sent out ... they all like use them (rules) differently. (Mike, interview, year 10)

One of the school rules is you're not allowed mobile phones. But the strict people [teachers] will take them off you some of them don't and you are supposed to take them off you, in the Maths room most of the people don't do that. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

...she'll shout at you but like I've got mates and I know they mess about but they just don't listen, they'll just turn round and carry on and lark yeah because they know she's not going to give them after school detention or they are not going to write home or phone. So that's why they carry on...
(Robert, interview, year 8)

Indeed, the idiosyncratic way rules appeared to be used by teachers were seen as staff vendettas against particular pupils:

I don't know, I think, I don't know, I think she hates me .. 'cos she sends me out and everything ... I walked in and I got me name on [the] board and I didn't know why so I say "Why have I got me name on board", so she ticked (Mike, interview, year 10)

Pupils described how the prospect of being in class with a teacher who disliked them could cast a shadow over their whole day. Sometimes, teacher vendettas were described as based more on a pupil's reputation than as a reaction to any problematic behaviours exhibited by the pupil in class.

My sister and brother weren't that good in school so I have a reputation, which isn't fair. I am not well behaved but I am not well bad. But if anything happens, I'm blamed and me and my friends get much harder punishments than anyone else. (Juliette diary, year 10)

As well as inconsistency in how rules were applied within the school, Oliver viewed there to be inconsistency in the application of rules between schools.

...some of them [pupils] do feel the rules are unfair because obviously other schools are allowed to do other things so its like different schools their friends [at] are allowed to take whatever they want into school, ... I think all schools should have the same rules. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

Gender

There was a perception of school rules being applied in a gendered manner.

... when we lose a merit we get our name on a tape but the girls never lose any merits. The girls are shouting out and then one boy shouts out and then he's lost a merit straight away. The teachers never do anything to the girls. (Simon, interview, year 10)

Conversely, male pupils were sometimes seen to be treated more favourably.

... when boys are naughty they [teachers] expect it, but when girls are that's when they get more punishment because it's not right for them. ... It's not expected, but for boys oh yeah we know you're naughty but it's girls it's like oh my god what have you just said. (Laura, interview, year 8)

Territorial rules were also viewed by participants as gendered.

... I'm on the girls' football team. They always get like 'Oh you shouldn't be on the girls' football team, girls can't play football'. ... 'cos the fields are all football all the lads take over the fields. (Gemma, interview, year 8)

Gender discrimination was viewed as more fully embedded in how wider resources were structured across the school.

Most of the girls were a bit annoyed because all the lads were getting the training erm most of the girls are really good at football better than some of the lads but they haven't got the opportunity to do it, so they've started erm football training session up. (Maisy, interview, year 10)

Such gendered discrimination was viewed as acknowledged by some members of staff who sought to redress it.

Miss did notice that some of them (female pupils) were really good, and she noticed that a lot of people were coming up to her and asking her that they wanted to play football and she only thought it was fair that if the lads got to do it, ... most of the lads in year 11 ... had been doing netball which is like a girls' sport, so they thought that girls should do boy's sport. (Maisy, interview, year 10)

4.3.4 Catch 22

Pupils often talked about their feelings on the paradoxical nature of school rules. Such feelings left them thinking that they were 'damned if they did and damned if they didn't' – popularly known as 'Catch 22'.

I came in and I didn't have my shirt in and she told me to go outside and put it in. So I put it in and done my tie and came in and she said "Right, you've got a late mark now." I said "Why? You've just told me to go out and do it!" She said "yeah but you've got a late mark now". (Lilly, interview, year 8)

The stupidest rule is that you're not allowed to wear a coat when it's raining and in the winter. You can wear one to school but once you're in the school building it has to be in your bag. At break you can't put it on it has to stay in you're bag. ... I think that's the most stupidest rule! ... it's stupid 'cos they take them off you if you're carrying it, say if it was wet through then you wouldn't put it in your bag and get all your books wet, would you? And if you're just carrying it with you they would still take it off you. (Jonathon, interview, year 8)

Yeah, sometimes ... you come in soaking wet and you put all your coats in your bag and your books get drenched and everything [and you get into trouble] 'cos all your books are, you know [wet]. (Anthony, interview, year 10)

Another pupil talked of the quandary created when you arrived early at school on rainy days.

You've got ... the second bell which is like 15 minutes and you're stood outside in the rain for 15 minutes and you're not allowed in. ... I don't think it's right because I mean I know it sounds stupid but you get ill and then when you're off ... you're missing your lessons and you're losing your merits when you're off, you're losing your merits and that means you can't go on the trip at the end of the year because you're ill

and you're only ill because you've been stood out in the rain. ... if you're off you lose your merits you lose 6 merits a day. Normally I only lose like one merit a week, but you lose 6 merits a day if you're off... [If you get here early] you get wet and if you get here late you get detention. (Robert, interview, year 8)

The school rule concerning coats and the territorial rules that resulted in pupils having to wait outside in the rain had a number of knock-on effects. Robert described the feeling of going into class dripping wet from the rain.

All sticky and wet and you feel uncomfortable and you just, you can't like concentrate as much when you're sat there sticky and wet. (Robert, interview, year 8)

The reason why pupils in this school could not put their coats into lockers, was the lockers were not safe. Indeed, there was a culture of petty theft among the pupils throughout the school:

Researcher: You know you got a bag there, do you have to carry that round with you all day?

Robert: All day, the only time you put it down is in lessons.

Researcher: Right even at break times?

Robert: Even at break times

Researcher: Have you not got a locker?

Robert: No 'cos the lockers got broke into, so they don't have lockers any more

(Robert, interview, year 8)

And if you put your bag in like a place it'll be gone... Yeah if you like say I'll go and put me bag down and come back and get it in a bit it'll not be there. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Pupils were simultaneously at risk from crime and from punitive enforcement of school rules. Thus, a pupil who had been a victim of crime in the school could then become penalised by the school for the immediate effects of that crime. This is illustrated by Robert's description of what would happen if you had your books stolen from your locker.

If you haven't got your book you're in detention so you're in detention 'cos someone else has stole your bag. (Robert, interview, year 8)

This is again illustrated by one pupil's experience of being penalised by a teacher for having his school equipment taken without permission.

... [a] lad behind me had my pen and I said "Can I have my pen back", he [teacher] said "Right you've lost your merit" and I said "Why", "Cos you're turning round and talking to them" and I said "I only asked for me pen back" 'cos I couldn't do me work without me pen. (Justin, interview, year 8)

Brinkmanship

If rules weren't so strict then maybe people would behave better because there is not so much to rebel against. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Rebellion took the form of rule-break. Indeed, rule-breaking was a way pupils felt they could gain some control over an environment heavily dominated by systems of control and surveillance. For example, in relation to smoking, one participant told of the way in which pupils managed to avoid being caught.

In the bushes going on batting fields they've [teachers] got cameras that can take pictures but they don't care they'll [pupils] have their back to them [*laughter*]. They're sat like that [turns back to interviewer to demonstrate]. (Robert, interview, year 8)

The school bus provided an opportunity for some pupils to engaging in broader rule-breaking activity.

There're lots of people, even in year 7, and they came down on the school bus smoking weed, in year 7! You could smell it. ... They're all dead small 'cos they don't grow 'cos they smoke so much. They smoke on the back of the bus, they go out the fire escape on the bus they won't be bothered, they stay where they're sitting, they like rule the bus. ... The driver can't do anything really cause there's more of them. In the morning everyone just runs on the bus he'll tell them to come back but they just ignore him and swear at him. (Jonathon, interview, year 8)

4.4 The management of school space

A number of territorial rules were imposed upon school pupils to regulate movement in the school. These rules we feel were sufficiently conceptually distinct from other school rules to merit a separate sub-theme in our analysis as they also related to the maintenance and general upkeep of the school premises. The management of school space related to the use of both temporal spaces in the school timetable and physical spaces in the school building and on school grounds.

Pupils had few spaces in the school that they could call their own. Even access to form rooms could be severely restricted. There were a number of school rules that restricted access to certain parts of the school building at certain times of the day. Access was generally restricted in those parts of the building that tended to get overcrowded. When the weather was inclement, the restricted use of indoor space in the school created problems that were strongly felt by pupils.

We have tried telling people before, like dinner ladies that stand on duty in the corridors we say "Can we just go up to our form room?", and

they say 'No' and then you have to stand outside in the pouring rain, there's no shelters or anything, its freezing. (Oliver, interview, year 8)

The physical space inside the school was described as restricted due to overcrowding. One participant gave the following description of the corridors at their school:

You walk in and you could pick your feet ... because they are all so squashed into one thing ... you can pick your feet up and get carried in the corridor ... Yeah elbowing, squashing you against the walls. (Robert, interview, year 8)

Inclement weather increased pupils' need to use social spaces inside the school building. But with indoor space at a premium in an overcrowded environment this encouraged an increased territorialism of space leading pupils to use bullying to restrict access to parts of the school. Corridors were described as dark, dangerous and squashed where younger pupils could get victimised and hurt. Pupils knew which corridors to avoid if possible because of different spaces occupied by different pupil groups. These were spaces where bullying and aggression was more likely to happen unobserved.

It was not only rules that regulated the use of spaces but also the maintenance of spaces that impacted on pupils' well-being. The physical fabric of school buildings and the general state of upkeep of the school sent a clear message to pupils. Pupils at poorly resourced schools felt they were a reflection of their school: undervalued, worthless, dirty, uncared for.

It's dead grotty and everything `cos it's the oldest block there. ... the tables are just wrecked. There's graffiti all over the tables ... there's no curtains up or blinds or anything. ... you have to put your coat on the back of your chair, there's no hangers. Like your coat always falls off and the floor's dead dirty. ... if you put it back on you feel really dirty. ... you feel dead cold even if it's a warm day. ... That room just makes you feel dirty and horrible... (Holly, interview, year 8)

The toilets are very unhygienic. One, there is no toilet roll. Two, the doors don't lock. Three, the sanitary towel bins are rubbish (female pupil, written, year 10)

The toilets need cleaning, they stink. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

Canteen has RATS! (written, year 10)

There is lots of litter so no wonder we have big diseased rats. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

Dirty floors with chewing gum. (Female pupil, written, year 8)

This was an unexpected outcome of our research: the way space was managed in the school affected emotional well-being, mostly in negative

ways. Many of the accounts of school space and its impact on emotional well-being derived from the guided walks. During the experiential walks, pupils constantly talked about the general air of neglect in their schools and pointed out damp and disrepair in evidence and how this made them feel.

“...it's grim and it makes you feel grim when you're here. Anyone would, wouldn't they? (Male pupil, guided walk, year 10)

Even the food they were served in the canteen did nothing to enhance their self-esteem.

Burgers aren't fit for pigs to eat. (Female pupil, written, year 8)

4.4.1 School as a prison

Throughout the guided walks, pupils reiterated their dislike for school cameras. They felt that the cameras were more for watching children's behaviour than for school security. This meant that personal privacy was difficult to attain, and signalled the fact that staff did not trust pupils, thereby undermining relationships of respect between pupils and staff.

My school is like a prison. Recently they have just got new cameras. The railings are ok and a few cameras but not more than 7 - what are we, dangerous criminals? To make it better get rid and trust us more. It may be for safety but no terrorists are going to come into a classroom wielding a shotgun. (Male pupil, year 8, written)

The notion of school as a prison recurred several times with visual reminders around the school of policies of tightened surveillance and security. This led some pupils to feel caged in and criminalised.

My school is like a prison with spikes all round the edge and too many cameras. It's not like we have Saddam Hussein in the place. Remove the railings and spikes and cameras. (Male pupil, written, year 8)

The fences and bars on the window make the school feel like a jail. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

The school recently has gone like a prison. They are putting locks on every door (the locks that you need a code to open). They are putting bars on the windows. I know its for security after school, but we get it in school, we are treated like vandals. They have got zoom cameras all over school and I hate school. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Surveillance of what were considered private, personal spaces was also evident. One place in the school that was universally avoided whenever possible because of this was the toilets.

There's always a teacher in the toilet and if you're uncomfortable when you're like on toilet and there's a teacher outside and there's like never

no toilet roll ... there is sometimes but usually it gets thrown down toilet or... it's mainly `cos of graffiti I think. But it does make you feel uncomfortable. (Holly, interview, year 8)

Pupils would describe how they tried not to drink at school so that they could avoid having to use the toilet. This led to pupils feeling dehydrated during lesson times.

Surveillance at dinnertime also caused pupils concern. The importance of dinnertime was indicated again and again in the diary data. Dinnertime was not just important because it was free time, but because it was meal time. Pupils often reported feeling very hungry during lesson time, especially during morning lessons. Lunchtime was a chance to satiate their hunger pains. However, for many surveillance practices spoiled their dinnertime.

Dinner time is not long enough. 40 minutes. That is disgraceful. You queue for your dinner, it takes you ages. You eat your food and then the bell goes. Teachers are also around when you are eating your dinner, they just keep hovering round whilst you are eating. Winding you up. You just feel like getting up out of your seat and going to the teacher and giving the teacher a left hook. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Clearly, frustrations with surveillance can be felt deeply giving rise to aggressive feelings and wishes.

4.5 Teacher- pupil relationships

Pupils focused on teacher–pupil relationships as one of the key factors that influenced their moods when in school. Figure 4.5 shows the sub themes that contribute to an understanding of relationships and negative well-being for pupils.

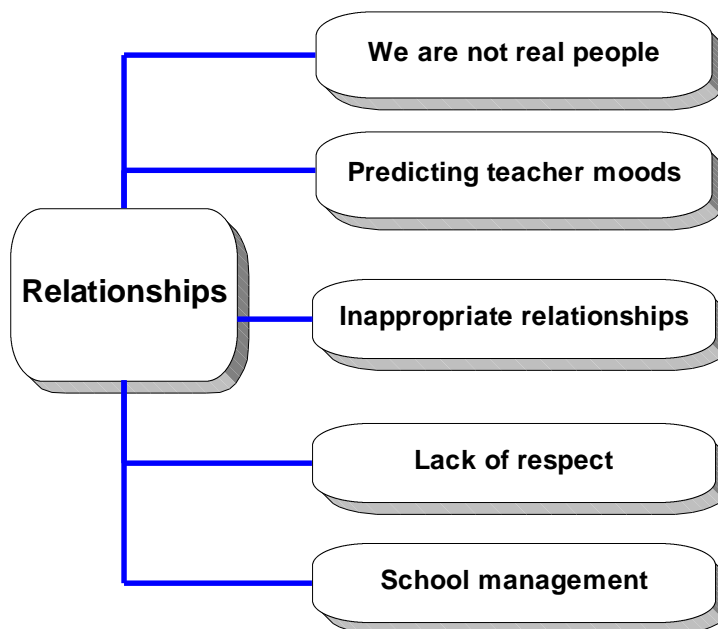


Figure 4.5 Relationships: sub-themes

4.5.1 We are not real people

Perhaps one of the sad moments in analysing this data came when reading many accounts of pupils who simply felt that they were not treated with respect as ‘real people’ at school by staff at school, particularly teachers. Pupils felt they were uncared for and as though they did not count.

They don't like sit and like have a chat to you. They teach, they say what they are supposed to, like what's written on the board. They'll say "do it" and they'll not come over and sit with you or like ... if [you] took leave in the morning they won't ask you where you are or anything like that .. [except for my] D & T teacher. But all the rest I don't think there is any other ones that care... (Don, interview, year 10)

Such feelings could have a dramatic impact on the provision of pastoral support for pupils. When one pupil was asked whether she would feel able to speak to a teacher if she was experiencing problems at home said:

No. Not one that I'd feel I would walk up and tell them ... what was going on if I was have problems at home. (Sally, interview, year 10)

The life experiences of pupils gave them much to talk about.

We have our unique social groups, and deal day in and day out with normal teenage issues. Boys, friendships what we're doing at the weekend, earning money (sometimes the lack of it) what colour my hair will be next month, the latest fashions, new trainers, suntans (or for

some of us sunbeds). Also family situations, or lack of those as well. Stress of homelife does sometimes get on top of you. Some of us live out of suitcases from visiting parents, some of us don't see one or either of our parents... (Female pupil, written, year 10).

Pupils felt most teachers were not interested in hearing about the richness and diversity of pupils' emotional lives, their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Pupils picked up that teachers lacked interest in them and their achievements in lots of different ways, including not being asked about out of school activities and home life, teachers being unaware of special talents (for example, piano playing) and in terms of expectations for standards of work in relation to effort:

They don't really give you much praise say if you've done like loads of work and you feel dead proud of yourself but they think that's how much they're meant to have done anyway. But say if like Katy, my friend she's not as good as most people at English, but I'll help her through if she writes something herself or spell it herself I will praise her and I'll tell the teacher and the teacher won't really be that interested. (Lilly, interview, year 8)

The ways in which teachers categorised pupils could influence the sorts of teacher-pupil relationships that were possible. One social category pupils felt influenced how teachers behaved towards pupils was 'cleverness'. Pupils who were seen by teachers as being clever were said to develop positive relationships with their teachers. This left many pupils feeling that they could not achieve a positive relationship with their teachers since they did not see themselves as clever. Indeed, one boy felt teachers 'looked down' on him because he was not 'not clever'. Another, Giles, thought that his family background was a barrier to positive teacher-pupil relationships.

I think it's 'cos she knows my brother as well though, 'cos he used to be naughty so and that's why she don't like me." (Giles, interview, year 8)

4.5.2 Predicting the teacher's mood

Though teachers were not viewed as taking a keen interest in the emotional lives of their pupils, pupils took a keen interest in their teachers, though for reasons we found disconcerting. Pupils had to be keen observers and predictors of their teachers' emotional states because the teacher's mood had a direct effect upon pupils. Pupils felt anxious that that they would be reprimanded in class not because they had misbehaved but because the teacher was in a bad mood.

Say if you asked your mate for something she'd say "get out now" and send you out and give you detention and everything. ... She can have a good lesson with us but that's only when she's in a good mood. When

she's in a bad mood she's just dead moody and does everything to us like send us out and everything. (Natalie, interview, year 8)

Teachers' moods had a significant impact on pupils' enjoyment of school:

Researcher: What makes you miserable at school?

Jonathon: When Miss X is in one of her moods.
(Jonathon, interview, year 8)

Pupils' ways of coping with a teacher's bad mood would be to avoid making eye contact, keeping still, being very quiet and to always agree with the teacher. Interestingly, no participants talked about teachers being aware of and taking into account pupils' moods as part of their abilities to cope with everyday life at school. The need for awareness of and for modification of behaviour in light of a teacher's mood was viewed as a one-way process.

4.5.3 Inappropriate relationships

Pupils reported on inappropriate teacher–pupil relationships that they had heard about (rumours), witnessed themselves, or had some personal experience of. In some cases this involved acts of physical aggression by teachers.

Researcher: What stresses you?

Giles: Just teachers and the way they act, they think they can just mouth off at you and you're not gonna give it em back.

Researcher: Give me an example, something that's happened to you recently.

Giles: I was in [subject] the other day and the teacher came up to me and pushed me out of the room. So I told him not to push me and then he threatened to suspend me, and then that was it really.

Researcher: What were you doing before the teacher pushed you, pushed you?

Giles: Nothing I was just stood there and he went "get out" and pushed me.

(Giles, interview, year 8)

In other cases, this involved psychological threat as in the report of one girl who felt stalked by a male teacher whom she believed was eager to have a more personal relationship with her. There were also reports of teachers flirting with pupils and behaving in a sexually inappropriate way in front of pupils through their use of language and gesturing. This applied both to female and male members or staff.

We have a female member of staff who teaches [subject] who is too flirty with male pupils. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Very perverted [subject] teacher (Male pupil, written, year 10)

We had no way of verifying these accounts of inappropriate behaviour, but it was the pupils' wish to talk about their relationships with staff in this way that is of interest and concern for us as researchers.

4.5.4 Lack of respect

Participants reported teachers' lack of respect for pupils. Pupils complained that staff displayed a lack of common courtesy towards pupils while demanding pupils show common courtesy towards staff.

One day I was walking down the corridor and I opened the door for him (*teacher*) and did he smile or say 'thank you' – no he didn't and when someone opens a door for me I say 'thank you' (Male pupil, guided walk, year 10)

Pupils also thought teachers did not respect the views of pupils.

They tell you to have manners and don't answer back. But what they really mean is children should be seen and not heard and that you don't have an opinion. One teacher told our class was pathetic because we didn't believe in god or have any faith in anything. They push you out of the way instead of saying excuse me. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Some pupils felt that teachers lacked respect for them as young people and as school pupils:

This is what teachers think we are (*accompanied by drawing*) – A PILE OF SHIT!!! (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Teachers, well. I have to admit that I get on with most but some are totally annoying. I hate the way they judge you as a person and they don't even have a clue what you're like... At the end of the day, life goes on and we have to deal with it. But school is basically shit, teachers are shit and it makes me feel like shit! (Female pupil, written, year 10)

The teachers are really hypocritical too. Some are alright, but most talk to you as if you're something on the bottom of their shoe. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

Such accounts and the language pupils used to describe their feelings indicate the depth of feeling that disrespectful behaviour could generate amongst pupils.

While much of the information in this project given about bullying was concerned with pupils bullying other pupils, we feel here was material that clearly suggested teachers were perceived by pupils as bullying pupils. Pupils variously described teachers spreading gossip around the school about pupils, humiliating and making fun of pupils, issuing unwarranted detentions

and victimising pupils. Such behaviours were experienced by pupils as nothing short of brutalising.

By afternoon I have a pounding headache and it doesn't help with teachers are screaming at you and people are torturing you. By 6th lesson I feel as if I should just lie on the floor and die - more screaming more shouting more fucking torturing. (Male pupil, written, year 10)

Miss X, she used to shout at me a lot and she used to make me stay behind ... she used to pick on me... (Kirsty, interview, year 8)

When I arrive at school our form gets totally bollocked by the form tutor so for the first 20 minutes of school I get someone screaming down my ear. (Written year 8)

This was a powerful display of teachers' disrespect for pupils. Shouting was viewed as in the normal repertoire of teacher behaviour towards pupils. Not shouting was seen as a highly valued attribute of teachers who were consequently more likely to be viewed positively.

... if we do something wrong he doesn't like shout at us or anything. That's why I like him. (Simon, interview, year 10)

Participants particularly disliked teachers who shouted at them, and this often led them to dislike the subject that the teacher taught.

In [subject] with Miss X that's the only lesson I really hate ... cause she's just evil she just shouts at you for nothing. (Giles, interview, year 8)

All these behaviours were described in a way that only the absence of the descriptor 'bully' made such behaviours feel qualitatively different from descriptions of the behaviour of pupil bullies detailed earlier.

4.5 5 School management

Pupils articulated problems at school that stemmed from school management. They talked about the impact of responsibilities, roles that senior staff had in relation to everyday school life. Pupils universally took being called to the head teacher for disciplinary matters seriously. However, there were important accounts in which senior staff and the head teacher were criticised for their apparent lack of interest in pupils' general welfare and individual progress. In general, head teachers were described as distant.

What I disagree with about school is the head teacher doesn't get involved in anything (Male pupil, written, year 10)

Pupils wanted a say in the way their school was run, but felt there were too few opportunities for this, or that the opportunities that existed (such as consultation groups) were not taken seriously by school management.

I think senior members of staff should take into account our views on school rules. I think also that higher members of staff should be more in contact with pupils and respect them around school. Most high ranked staff walk around all high and mighty being disrespectful towards pupils that are polite towards them. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

If I was the head teacher of this school, first of all I would show myself, and communicate with the pupils, then I would be aware of the work and problems related with the pupils. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

We have class representatives but we as individuals don't get to put our views across. The school would probably benefit from meeting of more pupils. (Group interview, year 10)

Time and again pupils called for senior staff to listen to their views.

Our head teacher makes an appearance only in final assemblies of the year or when something bad happens. [The head] should have a little more involvement in school. I wouldn't mind if [the head] held meetings once in a while so that people can express their views. ...we had a made a petition and all signed it saying why we disagree with the no-make-up rule and we sent it to our head teacher. However, we were ignored. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

In summary, one girl in year 10 expressed total dissatisfaction with the running of the school when she said,

When I wake up for school, I hate it. I can't wait for the day to be over and I can't wait til I get into college and never have to see school again. Basically, I think school is s**t, the teachers are pathetic, the system is pathetic and school makes me feel s**t inside every single day. (Female pupil, written, year 10)

4.6 Summary

Negative feelings arising from experiences in school ranged from boredom, frustration and irritation to fear, terror and hate. Feeling low, scared and 'like shit' were reported. To some degree these feelings arose from pressures either to succeed and live up to (teachers') expectations or to be working within few expectations, especially if pupils were thought not to be 'clever'. Whilst the school environment was sometimes felt to be grim, rules were often considered to be arbitrary and senseless, bearing little relation to future life demands. Uniforms were disliked and there were few opportunities for pupils to express their individuality, a feeling exacerbated by the degrees of surveillance experienced throughout the schools.

The main vehicles through which negative well-being emerged, were the behaviours of (some) teachers, and relationships, both between pupils and teachers and between pupils. Teachers' actions that appeared to be arbitrary,

interpreting rules inconsistently, picking on some pupils with 'bad reputations', as well as their bad moods and shouting in the classroom, all led pupils to report feelings of intimidation, lack of motivation and dislike of school. Perceived lack of respect and interest in them, made pupils feel they counted for little. What was reported as inappropriate physical contact and favouritism towards some, contributed to others feeling belittled. Bullying by other pupils was the main source of some feeling scared and vulnerable. Differences between pupils were frequently the source of verbal and physical coercion, and some parts of the school were seen to be more dangerous than others. On the whole anti-bullying policies were thought to be ineffective and the perceived lack of action by teachers to allegations of bullying were thought to make matters worse.

One way in which the negative impact of school on pupils' well-being might be ameliorated is through the sense of belonging as a result of participating fully in school life.

5 Participation

This chapter presents, from the pupils' perspectives, thoughts and feelings about participation in school life. This covers:

- Belonging
- Who participates?
- Types of participation
- Benefits of participation
- Barriers to participation

5.1 Belonging

Many schools tried to promote a sense of the school as a community, a place where all stakeholders felt that they belonged. Issues of familiarity, responsibility and atmosphere all contributed to a sense of belonging for pupils.

Although not very many of the pupils we spoke to mentioned such feelings, a sense of belonging did pervade some of the interviews. This related to issues of familiarity, the school as a place where everyone knows everyone else and mix together on friendly and equal terms:

Researcher: What about the relationship between the students in the school what do you think that's like as a whole?

Matt: Well to me it feels like everyone knows everyone, I walked in there and there's people from year 7 hanging around with people from year 11 and talking to people from year 8 and just seems like everyone knows everyone so...

(Matt, interview, year 10)

The overall friendliness of the school was important for Holly, who put the school's friendliness down, in part, to size:

Holly: I wouldn't say [*in most schools that boys and girls get together*] most but some people do but in most it's just like all girls stay together or boys but here it's different.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Holly: Cos it's a small school it's got...everyone knows one another and there's not many people here...and it's a friendly atmosphere all teachers know all pupils names. things like that so it's dead easy for make friends when you first come.

Researcher: So, it sounds like you all get on well together the teachers and pupils and boys and girls?

Holly: Yeh. Even if a new teacher starts like, everyone's really friendly.
(Holly, interview, year 8)

The importance of good relationship with teachers and peers was reinforced by Janet, who (while recognising that different people had different opinions

and experiences) described her school as a community of familiarity and friendliness:

Janet: Erm 'cos its small and every, like a smaller school the all like teachers know yer ..a lot more, its more community so like kids know teachers and like teacher know like kids and everything ... they all get on quite well, there's like certain people who'll just, who are really naughty and everything and just ignore teachers saying they don't get along with any of 'em or anything, but most people have at least like one teacher who they'll like and everything
(Janet, interview, year 8)

For those pupils who felt a sense of belonging, school was the 'right' place to be and taking part in activities in support of their school was almost a self-expectation:

This is my school so I do what I can to make it a better place (Female, written, year 10)

Those who felt they belonged and were very involved in school life often took on roles which gave them a sense of responsibility, as the following quotation illustrates:

Martin: Erh, senior students get allocated to years, you get year 7 year students and year 8 year students, all the other years don't bother having them, its just, you pick out of the year 11's 2 people who are gonna go to each form in year 7 and 8's ... 2 persons to a form and you just look after the kids, the kids come to you and tell you their problems and you're just looking after them, well-being like teachers but you're a helper to the teachers, so erm I'm [a] senior student with another girl in our year 'cos its girl boy

Researcher: And are you looking forward to that?

Martin: Well its.. I, I, I don't, the only reason why I really picked it to be honest is erm.... For the thing that gets written in your record of achievement 'cos I've just heard that's its something good to have in your record of achievement its like..its counted as an employment or something so I just did it for that

(Martin, interview, year 10)

5.2 Who participates?

Intelligence and commitment to academic study was a social category pupils used to describe patterns of participation among the behaviour of peers. Giles felt that pupils who belonged to this social category were the ones most likely to fully participate in school activities:

Researcher: What sort of kids are the sort that get involved in school life?

Giles: All the swatty ones.
(Giles, interview, year 10)

These categories were also supported by the organisational architecture of the school where classes are streamed according to ability:

Natalie: All set ones and that.

Researcher: Set ones? There the top sets? They're quite clever?

Natalie: Yeah.

(Natalie, interview, year 8)

Social categories that made distinctions between those with greater and those with lesser abilities also restricted participation in some other school activities:

Justin: Erh well I'd like to be in the football team but they only pick the dead good people for it and they should have a team with people that are like not the best and not, and not rubbish, they should have like average people playing as well

(Justin, interview, year 8)

In general, pupils were very aware of the social groupings associated with participation and non-participation:

Researcher: In general, for, for clubs, say if we're talking about choir or something. What sort of, what sort of kids are joiners? And what sort?

Kerry: Any kind really, except for from em, the trendies, the smokers.

Researcher: They don't

Kerry: They don't really go. I think one or two went last time I went, just loads of people go, I used to be friends with this girl, em, but she fell out with me so I'm not friends with her anymore, but she goes. She's a librarian and used to be a three P. But she doesn't really go anymore and then there's like, all different kinds, 'cos you get like basketball. Then you have like, I used to be in one where we'd play badminton one Wednesday then we'd change ...

Researcher: That sounds good

Kerry: So we did all that, that's why I joined.

(Kerry, interview, year 10)

Making school feel a safe place to be by improving the social environment may encourage more pupils to participate:

Researcher: Ok I think I've covered most of everything. Ah, do you think you're involved in school life

Laurence: I would say I'm quite involved with work and sports

Researcher: How do you think that they could get you more involved.

Laurence: Stop all the bullying and smoking and the going on. You don't like hanging around at school.

(Laurence, interview, year 8)

5.3 Types of participation

The ways in which pupils thought they participated in school life were very diverse. This included formal participation in organisational aspects of school, such as the school council, involvement in school clubs and teams through to more personal, informal definitions of participation such as simply 'being there'. These are overviewed in figure 5.3.

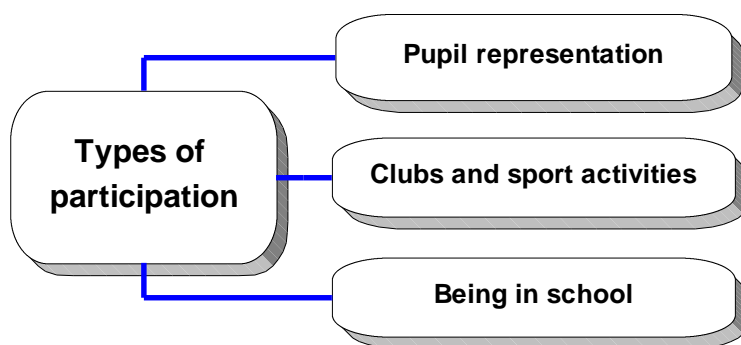


Figure 5.3 Types of participation: sub themes

5.3.1 Pupil representation

Mechanisms for enabling pupils to 'have a say' in school life were evident in the three schools. These included the School Council and variously formed consultation groups, form representatives and prefects. These presented the visible face of pupil empowerment within the schools. In the best instances, pupils could see that such mechanisms represented their interests and aided in improving the school:

Damon: We've got a like form representatives who put things forward at that they work quite well because we went forward for a basketball hoop which we got about a month or two ago and we got...really good and like if the toilets if they do get smashed up a lot like vandalised we get a new one...like the school council work ... but it's not really...

Geoff: It's simple things you know like if there's no toilet roll sometimes which they can't help but it's just like all the time

Damon: The school council is just improving the school it's not like improving the things inside it do you know what I mean it's like it's not improving like...the teachers or telling the way kids think or anything like that

Researcher: So it's more about the actual buildings and equipment and things like that

Damon: It's like about equipment it's not about what goes on inside
(Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

Pupils had a good working knowledge of how the school councils and consultation groups functioned:

Researcher: So how does your school council work like do you have class representatives do you?

Damon: We have like every so often we have a school council meeting and then...so we have meeting and we talk about everything we need to talk about like sometimes we ask around what people think from the year and we talk about it and sir takes minutes and then...we pick 2 people from that meeting to go to the whole school with Miss C and then we take them with us and we discuss everything there and...well I've never been to a whole school so I don't know how that works but things get done but it's just to improve the school not you know how you feel

(Damon, group interview, year 8)

Participation within such decision-making bodies can help pupils feel valued, powerful within the school domain, with a sense that their well-being matters at school. Getting elected to the council in the first place made Holly feel good, as well as nervous:

Researcher: What made you get involved in [*school council*]?

Holly: Erm well we do like a vote...pick two people from each form erm..and then they go on a list and erm a piece of paper goes to every person in year eight and they've got to pick two people off that list to go into the draw because like I've only been put on it this year but and last year there was three more people and two more's been added this year that was me and another girl. Erm and we got voted on this year but..

Researcher: How did that make you feel?

Holly: It was like exciting really 'cos I've always wanted be on school council 'cos it sounds dead exciting 'cos you go places and things. Erm like, 'cos I've got loads of friends they all voted for me as well. When we had our first meeting I felt dead nervous erm but you get use to it after a bit. It's nerve racking when like you're interviewing a new teacher 'cos they're like..

(Holly, interview, year 8)

Holly was a member of the school council and she talked with pride about what they had been able to achieve:

Holly: A lot of times we interview new teachers erm...we like organise like benches for school like, have you seen the green benches around school?

Researcher: Yes.

Holly: We paid for them out of like our council money what we've raised 'cos we did bag packing and things like that...erm we raise money for a mini bus, a new one...erm we've got lockers but they was already in before I came so...they've got lockers...erm...basketball nets I think they got as well.

(Holly, interview, year 8)

Janet, who was also a member of school council, drew attention to the significance of being a part of setting the rules.

Researcher:.. do you feel that's [being a member of School Council]....
Like good being involved?/
Janet: Yeah 'cos its ... 'cos its like young kids and they know what they want so they can like help set rules and stuff
(Janet, interview, year 8)

However some felt that these did not always function in the best interests of pupils themselves. Instead, they were perceived as being dominated by staff decisions at worst, or simply ineffective at best:

Sometimes I don't know why we bother because we say all this stuff and make all the erm decisions and like we say this of that wants doing and then nothing happens (Consultation group, year 10)

Participation in the organisational and decision-making structures within school allowed pupils some degree of control in negotiation of school rules. Indeed, one solution to the political side-effects of having rules imposed upon the school population was for pupils to participate in the construction and implementation of those rules. However, participants more often described their non-participation in the construction of school rules:

Researcher: Do you feel like you get a say in any of the rules?
Albert: [*laughter*] No
Researcher: How does that make you feel if you've got no say?
Albert: Well just have to live with it really, don't I?
Researcher: Yeah, you just got to. You don't think there's any point in trying to change 'em?
Albert: Yeah
(Albert, interview, year 10)

5.3.2 Clubs and sports activities

One other way in which pupils often described their participation in school life was through joining clubs and taking part in sporting activities and team play. Indeed, when asked about the sorts of club based provision the schools made, sports were the most frequently mentioned:

Researcher: Does the school provide enough after school activities?
What clubs are there?
Laurence: There is football, gymnastic, basketball, rugby, trampolining.
You can stay at school and go on the PCs.
(Laurence, interview, year 8)

Being part of the sporting life of the school was very important for some, an opportunity to do well and gain attention and praise from both teachers and

peers. Janet described most of time in school as 'boring', but became more animated when talking about swimming after school in a club:

Researcher: So after school ends, are you happy? Schools ended ... you're like buzzing, schools over with?

Janet: Yeah ...cos then I have me swimming after...I've done some mornings and then I go night as well

Researcher: What time would you have to get up in morning if you were gonna go and swim?

Janet: 20 past 5

(Janet, interview, year 8)

For boys, playing in the school football team was an important mark of sporting prowess and esteem:

Researcher: Do you do quite a lot of sport then?

Solly: Yeah I do quite a lot of football and ermh.. play for all the teams
(Solly, group interview, year 8)

Other than sports, clubs offering access to IT facilities or involving school trips were talked about in favourable ways, as were homework clubs, science clubs (practically oriented) and doing charity work. On the other hand, language clubs and the school choir were not popular amongst any of the participants interviewed.

5.3.3 Being in school

When pupils were asked about the ways in which they felt they participated in school life, many simply answered that 'being there' was a form of participation for them:

Researcher: Okay...so would you describe yourself as being involved in school life?

Chelsea: Yeah I suppose

Researcher: How are you involved?

Chelsea: I come

(Chelsea, interview, year 10)

Moreover, trying hard with school work was also seen as displaying involvement in school and contributing to the school ethos of hard work:

Researcher: Do you think you're involved in school life

Andy: I would say I'm quite involved with work ...

(Andy, interview, year 8)

Participation was also defined in terms of helping the school to run smoothly, as Solly explained:

Researcher: would you describe yourselves as being involved in the school?

Solly: Yeah sometimes 'cos you have to go in office, you do things go round an detentions list an all that
Researcher: oh right doing their jobs for them you mean like running?
Solly: Yeah
Researcher: Running messages
Solly: Yeah
Researcher: Do you like that?
Solly: Yeah its good, I've done it
Researcher: You done it (*asking other interviewee*)?
Gary: No...I'd rather be in class than just slaving for teachers
(Gary and Solly, group interview, year 8)

Although as Gary pointed out, helping teachers can be seen in rather negative ways. Here, the 'them and us' attitude between teachers and pupils excludes reciprocal, helping relationships which are fundamental to well-being.

5.4 Benefits of participation

Many of the engaged pupils expressed the benefits of proactively being involved in school life (see figure 5.4).

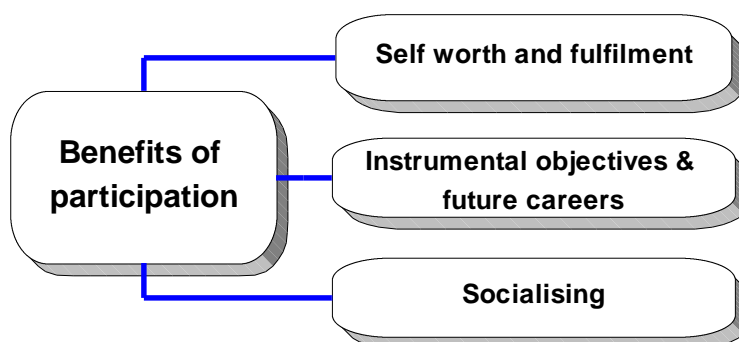


Figure 5.4 Benefits of participation: sub themes

5.4.1 Self-worth and fulfilment

Active engagement and commitment to others contributed to feelings of worth. Furthermore, participation in some types of activities gave a sense of fulfilment. For example, Tamsin took part in a peer education programme and enjoyed the feeling that helping others gave her:

Researcher: What things do you take part in?
Tamsin: Erm...Peer education and what..
Researcher: Can you tell me a bit about that?
Tamsin: Well it's to help the year 6's that are moving up next year to our school and... and we just like help them move and answering any problems they've got like if they get lost or anything like that.

Researcher: ...And what made you feel like you wanted to take part in that?

Tamsin: Just helping really..cos they might have someone who's..they know who's moving up here. ... you could like help them 'cos they might know you from there. ... The primary schools are coming in and it's just a group of year eights who have to talk to them about everything.. They introduce us and so they know us and that.

Researcher: What things do you think are important in that role that then?

Tamsin: Just to be nice and erm try and help them as much as you can.

(Tamsin, interview, year 8)

Taking part in interviewing new teachers, in particular, gave Holly a strong sense of value:

Researcher: So what kinds of things do you ask when you're interviewing them?

Holly: I ask them like what kind of homework did you, would you set for whatever lesson you teach and how much would you set? Would you rather teach mixed or single sexed classes? Erm...would you be interested in any activities at lunch and after school? Things like that..can't remember.

Researcher: So how do you think the new teachers feel being interviewed by you?

Holly: Well, most of them walk in and think like, and say I didn't think they would be this many but..just thinking there'd be about three or four of us 'cos they're shocked being interviewed by a bunch of high school children.

(Holly, interview, year 8)

One key benefit that emerged from the data was that being an active participant in school life helped to smooth relations between pupils and staff, and created the feeling that pupils' opinions were worthwhile. As Geoff said:

Geoff: You get listened to more if you are on the school council don't you

Damon: Erm probably

Geoff: I don't think you could just make a comment to a teacher if you go into the office or something I think it's you get

(Damon and Geoff, group interview, year 8)

5.4.2 Instrumental objectives and future career

Interestingly, not all participation activities were enjoyable and some pupils made it clear that their motivations for participation were more instrumental than hedonistic. For instance, the value of participation in some school activities may be experienced as enhancing self-value for the future, as described by Holly in relation to the experience of interviewing new staff as a member of school council:

Researcher: Do you think this experience is good for you?

Holly: Yeah because it like, it puts a better border in for us when we're like older and things like that and at the end of the interviews we always make up our own questions and erm sort of they answer them and then they ask us questions as well that we answer.

Researcher: So how do you think it will help you in the future?

Holly: If we ever work in like an office or something we'll be like interviewing people so they could...it could help us have more confidence and that like it could make us more like friendlier `cos like and like people are shy so if you do that stuff then you won't be.

(Holly, interview, year 8)

Researcher: Are there clubs and things you can go to, you know after school clubs or sport clubs?

Solly: Yeah I do the Duke of Edinburgh's award

Researcher: Right, how did that make you feel?

Gary: erm.. good because I'm like getting like, its an extra GCSE so, helps your work and stuff, qualifications and stuff.

(Gary and Solly, group interview, year 8)

5.4.3 Socialising

One fundamental reason pupils gave for participation in school life was to experience the enjoyment of friendships. Pupils would join clubs, take part in sports, as well as become involved in the school council as a social activity in order to spend time with friends:

(I go to the) Computer club because me friends go. (Male, written, year 8)

Chelsea: Well I did go to Duke of Edinburgh for a while but..with Mr Z erm but I started to more music stuff so I stopped going there.

Researcher: What was Mr Z like?

Chelsea: He's good fun because it's just like socialising but work 'cos we've been canoeing and everything.

Researcher: So would that be something that you recommend pupils get involved with if they can?

Chelsea: Yeah I think they should all be encouraged. Even if it's not for an award.

(Chelsea, interview, year 10)

For some pupils, spending time with school friends could be difficult out of school hours because they lived at some distance from each other. School clubs and activities provided a focus for friendship development and maintenance, often with the sanction of teachers and parents.

5.5 Barriers to participation

Participating in school activities was not always described as a positive experience by our interviewees who gave some insights into the role of peer group pressure in influencing patterns of participation alongside many barriers to participation (see figure 5.5).

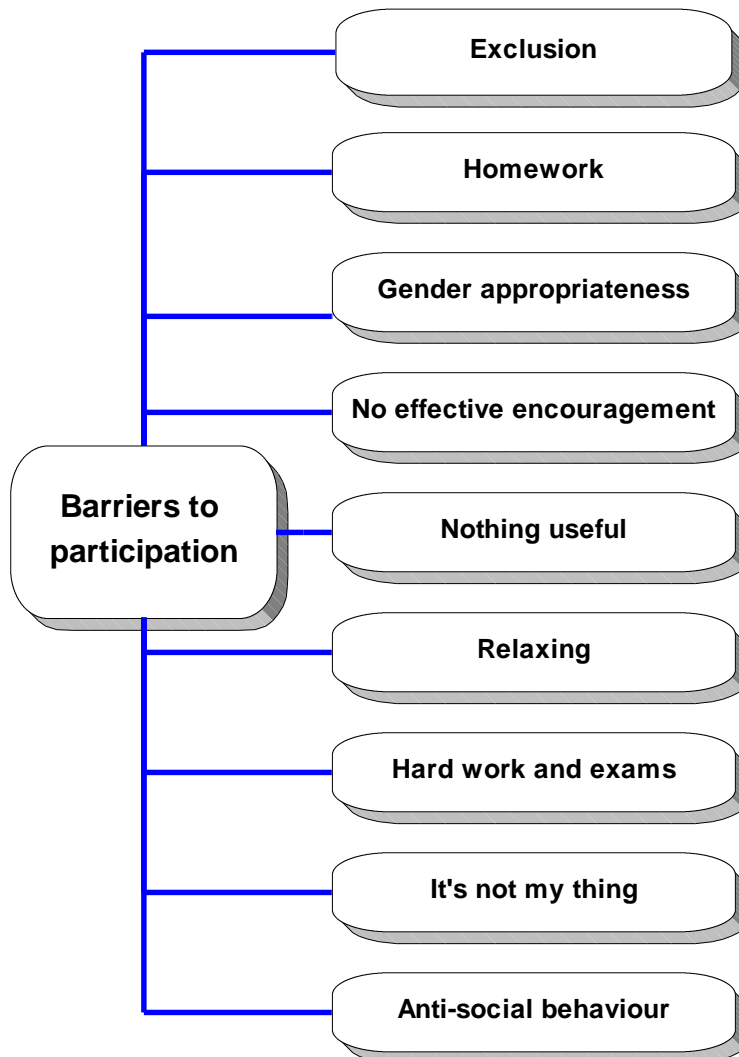


Figure 5.5 Barriers to participation: sub themes

For some of the pupils in this research, the decision to participate in school life was a difficult one to take. They had to balance the positive aspects of doing something which they enjoyed, made them feel useful and often was often accompanied by good relations with staff against the down side of peer group pressure to avoid consorting with staff. In this sense, participation could relate to being excluded from social and friendship groups.

5.5.1 Exclusion

Paradoxically, to participate could result in pupils being ostracised by their peers for 'playing the school game', For some, the stance of 'being cool' meant not taking any part on or interest in school activities, even though

pupils felt that activities could be enjoyable and fulfilling. Moreover, feelings of exclusion were experienced by pupils who were not chosen to represent the school in sporting or other school teams

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, and are there any things that you're not involved in that you'd like to be?

Gary: Erm

Solly: Football 'cos...

Gary: Football and basketball really yeah

Researcher: Yeah so the sport things

Solly: Cos I tried to get in but, all places were gone so

Researcher: Right, so it isn't just anybody who wants to do it can do it? It's a limited number?

Solly: Um, who you know

Researcher: Right, and do you have to be good at it to be able to do it?

Solly: (laughs) yeah, there's a lad called (names lad) he's good at it

Researcher: And does he get to go then? But you'd like opportunities to go even if you weren't gonna be one of the best at it?

Solly: Yeah

(Gary and Solly, group interview, year 8)

Solly and Gary highlight the importance of opportunities to participate being open and available to pupils with a range of different skills, rather than being concentrated on the few able and skilled.

5.5.2 Homework

As seen in the above example, the opportunity for involvement is not just an individual choice, but located with the social affordance structure of the school. Similarly, there were home-based factors which effectively prevented pupils after school involvement. Some of the pupils we spoke to were heavily committed to teams and clubs in their local communities, or had family responsibilities which precluded participation in after school activities as expressed by Maisy:

Maisy: Ah yeh. About activities and that. Right yeh. No I don't, well after school and that no...

Researcher: Right. So what do you do then when you go home when you leave here?

Maisy: Well I tidy up for me mum 'cos erm she's got a problem with her back and so I do that for her. Erm and I use I try and watch anything which she has to bend over for I do all that for her. And hoover as well and wash up. Erm..that's about it and then just watch telly and well she makes me, me mum makes me tea and then me boyfriend calls me and we go out. Or I baby-sit sometimes. Cos I like babysitting. I love kids. I do. I won't want for any when I'm older but I don't know. I want be a social worker.

(Maisy, interview, year 10)

Health problems within the family, childcare responsibilities and employment were all important factors that pupils took into account in terms of their own

capability for school involvement. Furthermore, staying behind after school could make the trip home more difficult to orchestrate, especially when pupils lived at long distances from school:

Researcher: Right you do football out of school, but you're not part of the school team?

Paddy: No.

Researcher: Why's that?

Paddy: I'm not sure really. Just...it's difficult to stay after school 'cos my parents come and pick me up.

Researcher: Would you like to be able to take part in more sports and school activities?

Paddy: Yeah. I like playing football and that.

(Paddy, interview, year 8)

Researcher: Oh, sounds like the sort of thing that girls should be able to do, but you would stay behind to do that would you?

Zoe: I might

Researcher: How would you get home if you did stay?

Zoe: My mum

Researcher: Oh you'd get her to come and pick you up?

Zoe: Yeah

(Zoe, interview, year 8)

In Zoe's case, participation after school would necessitate parents making a special trip to pick her up, thereby requiring family commitments to pupil participation

5.5.3 Gender appropriateness

Gender also acted as a barrier to participation despite interest in activities. Here, both male and female pupils were very aware of which clubs and activities were predominantly located in masculine or feminine domains. Few felt confident enough to break such gendered expectations:

Researcher: Do you do any clubs or activities?

Zoe: Erm theres trampolining and stuff after school

Researcher: And do you do that?

Zoe: I don't [*laughter*]

Researcher: No, not something you'd be interested in?

Zoe: No, I would be interested in erm ... but I've been told that only boys do that after school,

(Zoe, interview, year 8)

5.5.4 Nothing useful

One further reason pupils gave for non-participation revolved around the fact that few school clubs or activities contributed to their personal ambitions. In this respect, pupils felt that lunchtime and after school activities were a waste

of time or took up valuable time for socialising with friends, as in the excerpts below with both Zoe and Matt:

Zoe: I wanna work with animals. I don't know what particularly, I think I wanna work in a zoo because I like working with..like.. different animals
Researcher: Anything going on in school that would be relevant to working with animals?
Zoe: no not really
(Zoe, interview, year 8)

Researcher: Would do describe yourself as being involved in school life?
Matt: No not at all
Researcher: Tell me why you don't get involved, why yer not?
Matt: Because I'm not interested.. I don't want to do anything like that when I'm older I'm more like outside stuff (unable to decipher couple of words)
Researcher: Such as?
Matt: Fixing my bike and working on it trying to, doing stuff, doing the odd jobs outside, then I'm always out with me mates like out on me motor bike or.. I don't wanna do any office work or anything like that when I'm older I wanna work like.. I don't know.. mechanics, my dad owns a business and he has like big diggers and stuff so I've always worked on them as well
(Matt, interview, year 10)

5.5.5 No effective encouragement

Interestingly, although pupils reported that they were aware of the different ways in which participation in school was possible, they also thought that school activities, clubs and opportunities for involvement were not well advertised. They wanted more information, available at key sites around the school and regularly updated:

Researcher: Do you think are encouraged enough to take part in school activities?
Paddy: Not really no. There's a notice at the end of the reception area encouraging you to go but that's it. Most people forget that these things are on 'cos we're not being told enough about them.
Researcher: Can you think of ways to contact pupils to let them know what's happening? Like say email, do you have an email system that you can access here?
Paddy: We've got access to school websites, but not got access to any others. But that would be a good idea.
Researcher: Right. Is there anything else you want to add to the interview?
Paddy: No, not that I can think of. Oh, more school trips.
Researcher: Does that include trips that are part of the curriculum, say for instance, geography field trips?
Paddy: Yeah, I'd really enjoy that and learn as well.

(Paddy, interview, year 8)

Pupils recognised the need for constant encouragement to participate.

5.5.6 Relaxing

Some of the pupils interviewed did not participate in any voluntary school activities, preferring to mix with friends at break and dinner time and to relax at home after school.

Researcher: And then after school what do you do then?

Chelsea: Just go home and watch telly and stuff

Researcher: You just go home you don't belong to any after school stuff or anything?

Chelsea: Not here like...no there's nothing at school at the minute that I'm part of.

(Chelsea, interview, year 10)

Researcher: Well some people, it's alright, some people think ermh that the more you take part and the more you feel that you belong to the school and it belongs to you.. the better it is, some people say that difference depends on the kind of person

Zoe: no way, don't know not really... I just don't like it [*laughter*]

Researcher: What don't you like about it?

Zoe: just the lessons and some of the teachers and stuff I'd just rather be at home.

(Zoe, interview, year 8)

Such sentiments are understandable given that pupils already spend much of their weekday in school. Time at home was valued as well as time to unwind after the pressures of working and social life in school.

5.5.7 Hard work and exams

Some pupils explained that they did not participate at school because they were concentrating on working hard and doing well in tests and examinations. In this sense, they had internalised the key messages of school, but were indifferent to the wider role of school within social and community spheres.

Researcher: Are you part of any clubs or anything after?

Chelsea: No

Researcher: Are there any

Chelsea: Yeah there are but I'm not part of them I mean like I've been in like drama plays and stuff like that...

Researcher: Yeah

Chelsea: And that there's not one like that at the minute

Researcher: Is that when you were further down the school?

Chelsea: Yeah...there's not like I don't think they do as many after school clubs for you when you're older in school 'cos like you've got your GCSEs and everything

Researcher: Yeah sure yeah...is there, is there anything they could do that you would be interested in joining in with?

Chelsea: Not that I can think of...

(Chelsea, interview, year 10)

Researcher: Now the last thing I wanted to find out from you is about the clubs at the school. Are you a member of any clubs?

Kerry: I used to but I don't, I don't really go any more because of my work and stuff, so I'm behind in me (*coursework*)

(Kerry, interview, year 10)

These pupils perceived of school as a place primarily for work and so joining in school activities was irrelevant for them as well as distracting from their main school oriented goals. This was especially the case for pupils in year 10 when the realities of serious examinations looming and the necessity for good quality coursework were evident.

5.5.8 It's not my thing

There were pupils who did not participate on the basis that participation or any form of school involvement was 'not my kind of thing'. They saw themselves as independent of school based values and philosophies

Researcher: You don't...do you not belong to any after school clubs? You're not involved in that at all

Ian: No, no

Researcher: Any reason why not?

Ian: Not my kind of thing

Researcher: Why? What sort of things do they run?

Ian: I don't know, I don't know any of the clubs or anything but I've never been an extra curricular kind of person

(Ian, interview, year 10)

Engaging pupils in extra curricular activities requires not just opportunities available and a lack of social and environmental lack, but also self-perceptions in line with action oriented, social identities.

5.5.9 Anti-social behaviours

Finally, a small number of pupils mentioned that staying after school for extra curricular activities could be a scary experience. This was the case for younger pupils in year 8 who felt that the loneliness of a more deserted school environment felt threatening. Andy expressed this when asked about his involvement in school life:

Researcher: How do you think that they could get you more involved?

Andy: Stop all the bullying and smoking and the going on. You don't like hanging around at school.
(Andy, interview, year 8)

5.6 Summary

A sense of belonging for pupils came from a familiarity with people and a friendly atmosphere in the school, as well as from being given trust and responsibility. Pupils participated in the school communities, both in terms of decision making and by their involvement in extra-curricular clubs and (mostly sporting) activities. For those who do participate, there are gains in terms of feelings of self-worth and fulfilment, as well as feeling good through their commitment to others. Some pupils thought there would be positive advantages in terms of their future careers in being involved in different activities. Being in school was seen as participation. Participation in decision-making (such as being school, course or year representatives) led to feelings of control and opportunities to exercise power over how the school operated (for example, through taking part in interviews for the appointment of new teachers). Participation in general created additional opportunities for socialising with friends. Barriers to participation included peer pressure not to consort with teachers or appear to be too keen, pressure of academic work, a lack of encouragement in school, commitments to home life or to activities in pupils' local communities. For some, there was a feeling that the types of opportunities on offer were unsuitable, either because they were gendered and thereby inaccessible, or because they did not fit with their interests.

6. Adult perspectives on well-being

Adults working within the school setting also had a perspective on children's emotional well-being at school and these need to be taken into account for a fuller understanding of children's life at school. On the one hand, it is useful to see how far adults' perspectives and children's perspective cohere around similar issues indicating a shared experience of school. Alternatively, different perspectives can highlight issues that need to be taken into account when creating healthier school environments. In the analysis that follows, we present and compare adult perspectives with school pupils' understandings.

6.1 Pressure

6.1.1 Peer pressure

Adults believed one of the most stressful aspects of the school day for pupils was peer pressure. They felt cliques were especially problematic, particularly the way they functioned to socially exclude. Peer pressure centred on appearance (wearing the right sorts of designer labels on clothes) and possessions (such as having the fashionable accessories of youth culture, like mobile phones). Moreover, peer pressure to underachieve was also mentioned. In one case, a pupil described to us as a high achiever requested

that the continual mentions of her achievements in assembly to stop as this was causing her problems in peer relations.

There's a lot of jibes made at different kids and you see that in the form. Some kids can sort of laugh it off, but others can't. (Female teacher)

This type of peer pressure was particularly problematic as pupils were also getting torn in another direction from pressure placed on them by the National Curriculum.

6.1.2 National curriculum pressure

Adults described the pressure imposed upon pupils by the National Curriculum as particularly worrisome.

There's high expectation here because the exam results are generally pretty good. Erh so possibly the children will struggle from...would be stressed a little bit about work. (Male teacher)

We get a lot of what I call mental health problems in the school, some caused by stress to do with examinations. Expectations are very high in this school, there's a lot of pressure to get in and some struggle to cope...Pressure comes from both teachers and parents to do well. (Female teacher)

Having to repeatedly switch attention from one lesson to another throughout the course of a lengthy day was acknowledged as demanding, where each lesson may require very different skills to the previous or the next one.

Jumping from Physics to French to Maths, I think that in itself is stressful, we took it for granted, but you don't really appreciate what's going on in their minds when they're going from one lesson to another... peculiar thing to jump from one curriculum to another and the different demands that are there. (Male teacher)

A six lesson day I think is quite tough for some as well, especially if they're six single lessons with a lot of changing, they probably get a lot of homework from that. (Female teacher)

One teacher told of a child so overwhelmed and upset by school work and homework that he was unable to sleep at night and his parents had to inform the school of this situation. Without the support of the school, working independently at home could give rise to feelings of panic and incapacity so that pupils could feel they were failures.

6.2 Being disorganised

Adults saw disorganisation as a source for and symptom of stress. This lack of organisation extended from being late for school, for lessons, not having the correct books or equipment and not doing homework:

A lot of the problems that they have are to do with their poor organisational skills, their lack of ability to even be in the right place at the right time some of them, which causes them a lot of grief, they do get quite upset by that. (Female teacher)

I think sometimes turning up in the classroom without a planner and then being told to get the planner out and oops I forgot it...But one of the main things is maybe the stress of always having the right equipment. (Female teacher)

Key stresses erm I think one of the main things is if they've not done they're homework, they come into school and they've not done they're home work they can stress about that. (Female teacher)

Feeling de-motivated were given by the adults as explanations for being disorganised:

With some of the ones I work with I think they're just de-motivated in general. (Male teacher)

Furthermore, being disorganised was seen as a gendered phenomenon, with boys being more likely to get into trouble for this than girls:

I think a lot of the girls, you can tell with the neatness of their work the girls are better, they're more organised they tend to have things like coloured pencils and pens and stuff. Whereas with the lads if they come with a pen you're lucky. The girls take more of a pride in their work I think than the boys, the boys just get it done cause they've got other things to do, which might sound a bit sexist. (Male teacher)

6.3 Stress, space and safety

Staff felt that it was very important that pupils felt safe in their school. However, this was not always the case. In these adult accounts, corridors were highlighted as problematic and threatening areas for both staff and pupils

Corridors around the old part of school I find extremely threatening personally, for lots of reasons...They're a dark area in my mind, the corridors... 'They're dark and the children turn the lights off on purpose, they are noisy, they are crowded. (Female teacher)

Unsurprisingly teachers saw how pupils' moods changed during transition times between lessons and put this down to the stressful environmental experience of the corridors with pupils 'being rushed and getting hyped up'. Corridors are used during breaks and lunch as meeting places where pupils congregate, especially if it's raining outside. This created tension when

corridors were busy/not patrolled and was described as 'chaotic' with a 'manic' atmosphere.

Moreover, corridors could be uncomfortable and crowded, where younger children could suffer humiliation and physical hurt at the hands of older children.

Between lesson changes they can be places of great, enormous movement of humanity bottled into those narrow corridors... Some don't like walking across the corridor because there's so many people walking together, some of the smaller ones find that quite intimidating. (Female teacher)

Like a bit of a scrum really, everybody going in different directions. (Male teacher)

6.3.1 Bullying and support

Adults, on the whole, reported that bullying did go on at school although this was not a major problem, being 'nipped in the bud' when it occurred. It was acknowledged that being bullied was a very frightening experience for some pupils. One problem here was the reluctance of pupils to seek support from teachers:

When the young year 7's come into the school, they're obviously very frightened and the don't want to go to a teacher because 'Oh you've grassed. (Female teacher)

Bullying was seen as a crucial problem for children who were different, especially those with special needs who sometimes couldn't understand social and relationships rules:

There are certain things that these children don't understand, they don't understand the pecking order, they don't understand that they've got a place in a hierarchy. (Female teacher)

Various practices were in place within the schools to address bullying such as bully boxes, safe areas, peer support, counselling and confrontations between victims and bullies. Adults felt that such practices were working well and that as a consequence, bullying was not a huge problem in their school.

What I've found is that if a child is being bullied, if you get the two children together and say 'now what is the problem?' Then they face each other, more often than not that is the end of the bullying...the bully doesn't like being confronted with what they're doing and because the bullied can see what's happened they can feel quite stronger then. (Female teacher)

A lot of the social pressures are I think due to misunderstanding, and I'm getting a lot of my older girls now, with behaviour difficulties, looking

after the younger children in certain situations, you know I'll say 'so and so, go and check so and so's not misbehaving. (Female)

Some of the interviewees felt that the bright pupils in school, those with special needs and troublemakers were the ones who received all the attention. The majority of pupils who fell into none of these categories tended to go unnoticed in school, watching others in turn getting praised or disciplined. Many of the staff who were interviewed had to think hard about this group, and noted that it was difficult to think about life at school for these pupils.

6.4 Uniforms and school rules

The value of school uniform was recognised by staff in terms of providing a sense of belonging and indicating care in a neat smart appearance:

You could say get rid of the uniform, but I think this school prides itself on kids being smart and would it make a difference to how they behaved if the didn't have a uniform. (Female teacher)

However, some adults told of the problems that the school dress code brought for pupils and how this could be an unnecessary stress placed on pupils. Wearing the correct uniform was seen to be less important than being in school and learning, yet staff felt pressured to uphold dress codes and frustrated at the disciplinary problems this brought:

One thing that's annoying for me is the uniform regulation they've got, if somebody's not got the tie on the get sent straight home, or if they've not got a piece of equipment they get sent home to get it. (Male teacher)

I've had a pupil who was missin' for three days 'cos he didn't have his equipment, so next time I just grab him, here's a plastic bag here's some pens, but that's just an easy way out for 'em. (Male teacher)

I've got a student who comes to me says 'I've got to take me rings off', I'm thinking does it really matter, at least they're here. (Male teacher)

The following interviewee makes the important point that even during their lunch break pupils can't wear their coats or jackets. She suggests that during what she terms 'their time', this seems unreasonable:

Not allowed to wear coat in canteen at lunch time, it's their time. If they've got it with 'em, they may as well put it on. (Female teacher)

Constantly being checked over for uniform irregularities was sometimes seen as an infringement of pupils' liberties:

When you're doing stringent checks everyday, lads lifting their trousers up..Have to check what colour socks they've got on. In this school

brown socks have to be worn, failure to do so leads to immediate action. (Female teacher)

6.5 The good times

Aside from stresses at school, adults were also able to identify the sorts of pleasant and uplifting moments that pupils encountered at school. Most said that their school was a good place to be for pupils, a happy place:

Overall its lovely and I think the kids like being here. (Female teacher)

I think we've got quite a happy atmosphere, because we're a small school, the general tone in the school, its generally a happy place. (Female teacher)

Most staff said that positive emotions experienced at school mainly derived from enjoying the support, the laughter and the shared interests of friendships. However, moods within the school day were changeable with pupils getting stressed at breaks and over lunch and being relatively calm during class time, tired and irritable just before home time.

Relationships between pupils and staff were said to be good, based on mutual respect:

I know people have come in and commented on the friendliness between pupils and the staff...The staff are quite cheerful and I think that goes out onto the corridors and into the classrooms. (Female teacher)

There is communication, there is mutual respect. (Female teacher)

I think its good, they might not get on with every member of staff, but there would always be one that the could get on with. (Male teacher)

Good communication was an important part of this atmosphere:

If you go in that staff room at lunch time, there's not a lot of staff in there...You walk around the school during lunch time and break time and you'll see communication going on. (Female teacher)

However, issues of distrust did surface where one adult felt that pupils tended not to trust staff and visa versa, so that communication between the two distinct groups was somewhat guarded,

If you would give your e-mail out or something like that you'd get rude stuff or silly stuff sent. (Female teacher)

6.6 Working highlights

Staff felt that many pupils enjoyed their work at school. When asked about the highlights of the school day for pupils, one teacher said:

Dinner, break erm no I think genuinely some of these children, a lot of children enjoy the lessons. So they will have favoured areas, so they will enjoy their Art, enjoy their P.E. enjoy their Drama. They will go to these lessons and they will enjoy them. We have a lot of bright children who enjoy the academic side they... I think enjoy coming to school full stop and if they don't like it its just one of the chores that they have to go through. (Male teacher)

The rewards of working hard, achieving at school were seen as highlights of some pupils day although it was recognised that other pupils felt very differently:

Depending on if they've a favourite lesson, favourite teacher I think that would make their day. (Female teacher)

...some pupils will get a buzz from being in a classroom where they love the work and they can engage with it quickly, other pupils are just waiting for the lessons to end so they can go home. (Female teacher)

Experiencing sports could also contribute to happy feelings at school, especially so for boys:

It depends if they like sport, then sporting things. (Female teacher)

Some of the lads I work with they're not too keen on coming to school and doing the academic things but like got a rugby match tonight. That gets 'em into school. (Male teacher)

Going home and the weekend were also reported as highlights:

[lots of laughter] Going home. (Female teacher)

6.7 Participation

6.7.1 The value of participation

From the staff perspective, there were lots of opportunities for participating in school life: from academic pursuits, to sport and practical activities. In addition, schools offered opportunities for school trips to local places of interest as well as holidays to exotic locations for example, Australia, China and Italy (although these were expensive and as such excluded participation of those pupils from less well off families). Pupils' participation both in school life generally and extra-curricular activities was reported to be an extremely important and positive experience for participants, albeit a personal choice:

This school for some of these children is the best place in the world, its like a bag of goodies here, we're offering them experiences and opportunities and some of them grab it with both hands, others don't and that's their choice. (Female teacher)

Participation was thought to build character, confidence and afford opportunities for less academically oriented children to gain in status among school friends (for example, in sports prowess). To participate, children needed to realise the importance and enjoyment of participation, something not all pupils could do:

A willingness to learn a willingness to put ones own self outside that door and give in, and let the activity take you. A lot of our children can't do that and I'm talking not about the vulnerable ones here, but the ones who think they are very hard. (Female teacher)

However, participation could be seen as highly exclusionary whereby school value and effort was placed upon those participating pupils designated well behaved or as 'gifted and talented' sending message of worthlessness to non-participants and creating a 'them and us' division in the playground.

6.7.2 Barriers to participation

What prevented pupils from participating was described in terms of age, with older pupils less likely to participate than younger ones, and 'image' or how they appear to their friends and peers, as the following extracts illustrate.

A lot of children will not allow themselves to be seen to be either enjoying something or being positive about something, that's a very big difficulty with some of those. (Female teacher)

Sometimes its their peers, who they are hanging round with...the stigma, you're a swot, peer pressure. (Female teacher)

Peer pressure I'd say, feeling that I don't do things like that (Female teacher)

Here, the negotiation of friendships and social identities precluded children from feeling free to enjoy themselves in any way at school; to do so lay outside of pupil school code. In addition, living up to perceived notions of masculinity could also prevent boys from participating:

I think the boys don't want to be seen sort of sissy joining in after school activities. (Female teacher)

I think your tough nuts tend not to go unless its something they're really interested in. (Female teacher)

When asked what made the difference between those that participated in school life and those that didn't get involved the following comments were made ranging from busy lives out of school to lack of self esteem:

I think these kids do a lot out of school already...some of them getting home at night as well [is a problem]. (Female teacher)

Genuine interest in something, having a friend who's interested, sometimes I think parents have a say in it...sometimes liking the teacher. (Female teacher)

I just think they've got a higher motivation in general, just in their outlook on life, the want to achieve more. (Male teacher)

Maybe they don't feel good enough, their own sort of self-esteem prevents them from going. (Male teacher)

Perhaps one of the most unsettling barriers to participation lay in the cultural construction of school itself as a place of work, exams and regimentation. A Staff member from one school suggested that participation at school was almost a contradiction in terms:

If things were offered 100 metres down the road they might do it. (Male teacher)

This, combined with feelings of inability and helplessness as well as perceived lack of prospects for the future could militate against any form of school participation

Perhaps the ones who don't participate as much just don't see that they can, they can't change the way things are maybe in their home life and they're just stuck in that sort of rut. (Male teacher)

They just think like they've always lived on this council estate, they're always gonna be here. (Male teacher)

6.8 Summary

To a certain extent adult perspectives of school life agreed with pupils'. Largely, however, their perceptions differed. Adults working in the schools identified sources of positive well-being arising from a sense of achievement and success, and considered the schools, to be happy places overall. Most importantly, along with pupils' views, positive feelings arose, primarily from friendships. In contrast to pupils, adults thought that uniforms gave a sense of belonging. For some, it was particularly frustrating to have to enforce uniform rules, when it was clear that this was adding to pupils' stress. Participation was seen as strengthening confidence, and building character, although it was recognised that not all pupils took up the opportunities. A clash between the cultures of schools as work versus places for participation was noted.

Whilst the frightening consequences of bullying were acknowledged, in contrast to pupils, adults thought it was largely dealt with appropriately through existing policies. Academic work and expectations created pressure for pupils, both in terms of peer pressure to underachieve and school and curricular pressures to attain high levels of achievement. The physical layout of the school was a source of feeling threatened, humiliated and hurt, especially in dark corridors. This was often linked to the patterns of the school day, with change-over periods and break times being particularly stressful. Adults identified pupils themselves as sources of tension and stress, in particular if they were disorganised in relation to being prepared for their lessons. This then set up a cycle of de-motivation which led to further disorganisation.

7 Conclusions

In this research we have sought to offer an expansive understanding of the emotional well-being of pupils in three schools in the Northmoor area. We have maintained a breadth of focus that has ranged from the personal to the organisational. We believe it is important to develop such a holistic focus when considering issues related to emotional well-being as too often it is conceptualised as an intra-psychic phenomena. We believe it is only possible to understand a person's emotional well-being once we understand the person, the environment and the interaction between the two. In relation to young people, school plays a significant part in their lives and is an important environment in which to seek understanding of their well-being. It is currently estimated that 1 in 10 children have mental health difficulties in the UK of which 75% do not get access to services and 90% fail to receive appropriate care. A more positive, friendly and respectful school environment may go some way towards ameliorating such negative emotional well-being that is affecting so many young people.

It was apparent in the pupils' descriptions that the negative experiences of school were powerful and endemic in school life and damaging to the learning environment of the schools. Graphic in this respect, pupils in all three schools gave similar accounts of the sorts of problems they faced and how such problems affected them at school. There were complaints of bullying, academic pressures, relationship problems, organisation and maintenance of school spaces and the affect of school policies and procedures in all schools. A deeper analysis uncovered the critical issues of restricted opportunities, and perceived inequalities. Pupils often felt their social and personal position within school was untenable. There were concerns over the availability of opportunities for pupils to transform their social positions and to develop relationships grounded in mutual respect, trust and reciprocity of care. It is hardly surprising that, in many instances, pupils expressed their alienation from a school life that treated them as second-class citizens. However, the difficulties pupils were articulating were received within the context of a

research process that was experiencing its own difficulties. We feel it important to highlight some of these by reflecting on the problems we experienced in conducting the research as well as the potentials our research raised.

7.1 Reflecting on the research process

The experience of collaboration between Northmoor Local Education Authority (LEA), the three schools involved and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) has been both difficult but also enriching. However, not all of the principles of collaboration were achieved. Initially, the aim of the research was to involve relevant stakeholders in the research design and implementation:

- School pupils
- Adult staff in the schools
- Representatives of Northmoor LEA Healthy Schools' Team
- Researchers at MMU

Difficulties of time constraints, compounded by organisational constraints made it difficult to conduct the work in a fully collaborative way. At a time of ongoing restructuring of educational provision in the UK at primary, secondary and tertiary levels we, as a research team based in an university setting, were not immune to some of the pressures that restricted resources can engender. The problems of finding mutually compatible appointment times between LEA staff, MMU researchers, school staff and pupils meant that consultation groups met less frequently than had been anticipated and that this project can perhaps be better characterised as multiple spurts of collaboration rather than a seamless flow of collaboration.

Nevertheless, each of the consultation groups influenced the course of the research in various ways. For example, diaries were produced in different formats to appeal to different groups of pupils; random allocation of pupils for interviews or walkabouts took account of key teachers' assessments of pupils' capacity to cope, personally, with the process. Key to the success of the consultation groups was the provision of refreshments during lunch-time meetings. Some of the consultation groups came up with ideas for methods of data collection (via camcorders on the top of computers or through mobile telephones) that were innovative. Unfortunately it was not possible to include these methods in the current research but the ideas may be used in future.

It was apparent that pupils were well able and highly motivated to articulate their feelings about school, much of which focussed on the negative aspects of school life. In general, research shows that it is much more likely when evaluating social experiences that people will focus on negative issues (Harré and Secord, 1972). It is often when social breakdown occurs that expectations are contravened and assumptions about the structure of everyday life are questioned. This may have been the case in the research data when pupils expressed most graphically those aspects of school that promoted negative well-being, while remaining relatively less forthcoming and certainly less descriptive on positive well-being.

Nevertheless, the data gained was very rich. The bringing together of the different data sources told a remarkable story about children's life in school. The ups and downs of the school day involved extremes of emotional feelings. In general, the most depressing information derived from the anonymous written work. Here pupils appeared to be able to express themselves in an open and honest way, using their own language as a vehicle for communication. It was in this body of data that the most emotive language emerged.

The diaries gave a slightly more upbeat picture of school life and in this it was evident that the depressing picture of school depicted elsewhere must be seen alongside the pleasures of the school day, the achievements, the friendships, the clubs and leisure activities, and above all the humour that pupils enjoyed. Moreover, the guided walks were an extremely useful addition to data collection techniques because it was in this data that the full impact of the physical environment on emotional well-being appeared. More than this, we saw that the messages a deteriorated environment conveyed to pupils pervaded their sense of self and self-esteem.

The interviews were fantastic occasions where pupils really felt they could talk to an outsider about their school life, without personal repercussions from staff or friends. For the most part, such discussions were free flowing and informative. Participants gave the impression that they felt the interviews were worthwhile and that they were being listened to. Some stated that they were motivated by the potential social benefit of helping to improve their school, others wanted to tell about their lives and others may have been motivated by the desire to escape lessons or to experience a new social situation – the interview. Whatever their motivation, the researchers felt humbled by the ways in which the pupils opened up their lives to strangers.

Some potential sources of data, which were not used in this study, were the direct observations and experiences of the members of the research team. Each of us saw and heard a great deal during our time in the schools. Sometimes we felt buoyant and uplifted as a result of being in the schools, and at other times we felt invisible, humiliated and shocked. Nevertheless, bringing those different data forms from pupils and adults together has provided a complex but comprehensive picture of emotional well-being in schools and the analysis of this has indicated some ways in which schools can improve emotional well-being both for pupils and staff.

7.2 Recommendations

Perhaps one of the key steps forward towards promoting opportunities for improved well-being in schools is a recognition of the clear message in this research that currently some pupils feel uninvolved, alienated and disrespected while in school. There is an imperative here that any changes to school life in a move towards healthier schools should be formulated and implemented with the full involvement of pupils. All pupils (not just those who are motivated and committed) should feel that they have a voice in their

school organisation and structure. Currently, school councils, consultation groups and representatives are seen by some as tokenistic gestures by schools to satisfy OFSTED reports and parental concerns. This is a particularly important area to target for change since this would include the negotiation of rules and redistribution of power within the schools. Here, rule negotiation and power sharing in specific domains could be highly effective such as: requirements for wearing uniforms and signifiers of personal and gender identities; use of school space and facilities especially in non-structured school time; and use of school time for social purposes.

Creating trust and respect are fundamental areas to address within the schools. It is in the intertwined realms of rules and relationships that trust and respect needs to be fostered. The research provided evidence of generalised mistrust between staff and pupils. Building trust is a difficult problem with no single, identifiable solution. However, trust is based on relationships of respect and emphasising respect between staff and pupils is an area that schools can improve on both inside and outside of the classroom. However, this is not just a matter of emphasising polite behaviour of pupils, but of tackling the institutional context where lack of respect is common. Here, the work of Drewery, Winslade and McMenamin (2002) is relevant. They outline the idea behind the promotion of respectful relationships in school based on openness of decisions and behaviour, clarity and communication of reason behind actions, the taking of responsibility and opening up avenues of redress. Focusing on the competencies of staff and pupils rather than their deficiencies may be highly effective in developing respect.

Respect is also consequent upon fairness and personal acceptance. Underpinning many of the pupils' accounts was a discourse of cultural difference and lack of acceptance of youth culture on the part of staff. Acceptance of the maturing young person is part and parcel of everyday life outside of school, such as pupils taking on family responsibilities, working commitments and so on. The recognition of this maturity framed within a youth culture was largely missing from the schools. It is this which Lynch and Lodge (2002) suggest can be implicated in pupil disaffection and which we suggest should be placed as fundamental in the building of care, trust and respect in school.

Moreover, attention to issues of language are important. Respectful language acknowledges that others are important contributors to school communications. Many of the children felt they had no chance to express their points of view, or were not listened to. They felt labelled with bad reputations. The idea of improving communication lines would be to accept that people have different perspectives, values and ways of expressing emotions. Labelling is not effective as a way of engendering trust and respect.

Furthermore, an ethos of care and concern was minimal within the schools. An ethos of care cannot be encouraged simply by words alone, plans or documents outlining such principles, rather codes of practice and behaviour are critical. Here, open discussions with all stakeholders in the school could be a fortuitous activity for schools to further encourage, especially if such

sessions were conducted with the mediation of independent outsiders with little direct management of such sessions by the school themselves. The outcome of discussions could be the development of such codes owned equally (and policed equally by staff and pupils). However, just the formulation of such discussions can have a positive impact on school culture (Drewery et al, 2002) and tends to be more effective in promoting a calm atmosphere than the continual focus on wrongdoing, problems, retribution and punishment.

These sorts of discussions could form part of a more extensively applied practice of capacity building with schools where spaces are opened for democratic, participatory working practices both between teachers and pupils and between pupils and their peers. Such activities were taking place in the schools but they were not viewed by pupils as systemic and, as mentioned above, were perceived cynically by some. There is room to build such activities further so that such practices saturate the school environment and offset the potential for their being viewed as tokenistic and half-hearted.

The research shows that the physical environment not only structures activities within school in ways which can marginalise some social groups at the expense of others, but that the condition of the environment sends strong, often negative messages to pupils about their worth and status within school. Research (for example, Korpela and Hartig, 2003; Evans, 2003) has indicated that attention to the design of places can have huge impacts on well-being. Indirectly, the physical environment may influence well-being through psychosocial processes linked to personal control, socially supportive relationships, and restoration from stress and fatigue, all of which were issues pupils were struggling with at school. Restorative environments (Hartig and Staats, 2003; Herzog, Colleen, Maguire and Nebel, 2003) can be created that can have a dramatic, positive impact upon well-being. With careful planning and commitment of resources (even limited), this could have a major impact upon the positive well-being of both staff and pupils in school. Here, it is important to ensure quality as well as safety, flexible design as well functionality, and the encoding of messages of equality within the spatial design.

Attending to the physical environment of the schools should not be viewed simply as an aesthetic makeover but rather a strategy for improving well-being. Again, it is emphasised that such work is best undertaken with the full involvement of pupils in important decision-making. It is the pupils who are most aware of the social divisiveness of space and the impact of a good quality environment on learning and it would therefore be expedient to benefit from their involvement in decision-making processes.

Changes should be considered at both levels of the organisational culture (for example, the norms, shared meanings, sentiments, philosophies, values and social interactions) as well as to the organisational climate (shared perceptions of ways of behaving, negotiation of rules and importance of ceremonies and rituals). Targeting changes should involve all participants involved in the school. However, changing a school culture is a slow,

progressive process with setbacks and concerns at every stage and immediate results might not be evident.

As a final statement, it is important to note that the current research has focused on pupils' emotional well-being in schools. This is only part of the picture. Understanding emotional well-being in schools requires a more holistic perspective to include staff well-being and impetus to organisational change. The research findings here only go part way to this ultimate goal of creating healthy schools for all.

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9 Appendices

Appendix 1

WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS PROJECT

Information Sheet

This project is about your school and how your school makes you feel. We would like to know why some people get involved in school life and others don't, and what could be done to make school a better place for everyone to be in.

So we are interested in what it is like for you to be in school – what it is like at different times of day, week or term, the different places and different activities you do, as well as with the different people you spend time with (friends, class mates, teachers, dinner time supervisors, librarians and so on).

One thing we would like to include is how much say you have in what goes on at school and how things are decided (rules, discipline etc).

To start off with, we will be talking to groups of both children and adults from the school about how we will find these sorts of things out. We hope we'll be able to meet up with you every now and then to make sure everything is going OK.

The other sorts of things which could be involved in the research are:

- Interviews with children and adults
- Diary keeping
- Creative writing
- As well as some music, drama or art projects.

When we have collected all the information from children and adults at the school we will write a report about the ways in which schools affect children's sense of well-being and this will be available to the school.

We hope you will enjoy being part of this research project. To begin with you will need to sign a consent form to show us that you want to participate and after that you can be involved in the project.

Appendix 2

Well-Being in Schools Project

Pupils' Interview Schedule

School: _____

Year: 8 10

Gender: F M

Ethnicity: White British

Other _____

Introduction

We are interested in your thoughts and feelings about your school. What we want to know from you and other pupils in years 8 and 10 is how school makes you feel and what it is like for you to be in school, the good things and the bad. Once we understand a bit more about school life then we can feed this information back into your school and other schools to try to make school a better place to be.

So to start off with tell me a bit about your typical school day?

Note: Pursue the following issues throughout the interview:

In what ways does well-being in school differ for boys and girls

In what ways does well-being in schools differ between year 8 and year 10 age groups?

1. What sort of things do you do in a typical day at school?

(Ask about feelings, thoughts, evaluations)

2. Who do you spend time with and how do they affect the way you feel?

3. Tell me what its like at different times of the day:

Before school starts

During lessons

Break times

Lunch times

After school ends

4. I'd like to know a little bit about the different places around the school. Is there

anywhere in the school that you particularly:

Like being in? Why there?

Dislike being in? Why there?

6. I'd like to learn a bit about the school rules. Who sets the rules and why?
What are the main rules?
How do you think these rules make the pupils in your school feel?
7. Would you describe yourself as being involved in school life?
In what ways?
Why do you think you get involved/aren't involved?
8. To finish with, I'd like to know something about the relationship between pupils
and the staff in your school. How do you think pupils, teachers and the other
staff in
the school get on together?

What we will do with this interview now is now is analyse it along with the other interviews we've done and make some conclusions about how schools can be better places. Then we'll feed this back to the staff in your school and to Northmoor LEA.

Thanks very much for your time

Appendix 3

Well-Being in Schools Project

Staff Interview Schedule

School: _____

Gender: F M

School Role: _____

Introduction

This project is about pupils' well-being in schools. We want to find out how being in school makes pupils feel. Most research attention in schools is aimed at school league tables, pupils' performance and so on. This project acknowledges that school is a major part of childhood and that the emotional impact of schools on pupils is a serious issue. Our ultimate aim is to feedback information on this to schools and to Northmoor LEA to try to make life in school better for both pupils and school staff. Finding out about pupils' well-being involves talking and listening to the pupils themselves, but also taking into account the knowledge and experience of school staff. This interview is designed to help us understand more about the pupils in your school.

So to start off with I'd like to ask you....

Note: Pursue the following issues throughout the interview:

In what ways does well-being in school differ for boys and girls

In what ways does well-being in schools differ between year 8 and year 10 age groups?

1. Tell me about your role in the school.
2. In a typical school day, what are the key stressors for the pupils?
(Explain)
3. And what would be the key highlights of the day for pupils?
(explain) Special events?
4. How would you describe the emotional tone/general atmosphere of your school?
5. Tell me a little about how you think power is distributed in your school?
(Pupils, teachers, other staff). For example, consultation group.
6. In what ways do your pupils participate in school life?
7. What prevents pupils from participating in school life?

8. What makes the difference between pupils who participate and those that don't?
9. How would you characterise relations between pupils and staff in the school?
10. If you could change one thing in your school that would make life better for everyone at school, what would it be?

Debrief and thanks

Appendix 4

Well-being in Schools Project

Guided School Walk

Introduction

This project is about your school and how your school makes you feel. The research team would like to know why some people get involved in school life and others don't, and what could be done to make school a better place for everyone to be in.

So we are interested in what it is like for you to be in school – what it is like at different times of day, week or term, the different places and different activities you do, as well as with the different people you spend time with (friends, class mates, teachers, dinner time supervisors, librarians and so on).

One way we can learn a lot about the different places in school is by asking pupils to guide us around the school, telling us about the school, who goes where, what happens in different parts of the school and so on.

So we would like **you** to take one researcher on a guided tour of the school, taking them to places you like to be in, places you dislike, places that are comfortable, places that are uncomfortable, anxiety provoking, interesting and so on. Wherever you think will give the researcher a good idea about what it feels like to be a pupil in your school. The walk should take around half an hour in all.

So that we can capture your information, the guided walk will be tape recorded and the tape will later be used in our analysis. At the end of that, we will be feeding back information into your school and other schools which can help to make school a better place to be for everyone.

Thank you for taking the time to tell us more about your school

Appendix 5

How Does School Make You Feel?



Hi everyone in year 8. My name's Cassie and most of you should have met me when I came in to visit your P.S.H.E. lessons to ask if you wanted to get involved in the peer education project. Anyway I'm also going to be working on another project with people in your year and year 10 with the help of some people from Manchester Metropolitan University to find out how school makes you feel. This is your chance to tell us all the good and bad things about school and how all these things make you feel. As part of this we would like all of you to help us by writing about your feelings about school during this lesson. We have talked to a group of people from year 8 and year 10 and they have suggested that the following might be good ideas for titles for the writing. Could you please choose one of the following titles and write about it for us:

1. My feelings at school
2. What's wrong and right with school?
3. What could change to make my school better?
4. A day in the life of school – the highs and lows
5. My life at school

You can write about this in the form of:

- a story
- an essay
 - lists
 - a poem
 - a song
- a comic strip
 - a letter
- an advertisement about your school
 - a script for a play

So, please will you write something connected to one of the titles. Put the title at the top of the page and say whether you are male or female, and then write

whatever you would like to. You don't need to put your name on this, but you can if you want.

Once you have finished you will all put your work into an envelope. The envelope will be sealed and your teacher will ask one of you to take the work down to the office. I will then collect all the work from the office.

Thanks a lot for your help and looking forward to hearing what you've all got to say

Cassie and the research team from Manchester Metropolitan University.

Appendix 6

WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS PROJECT

Consent Form

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study into children's well-being in schools.
- I understand that my agreement to take part in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason
- I understand that whatever I say during my participation in the study, my anonymity will be protected.

I agree to take part in the study

Date _____

Participant signature _____

Confidential number _____

Researcher signature _____

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