

**EXPLORING STRATEGIES IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL CONVERTER  
ACADEMY: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF SUPPORT FOR MINORITY  
ETHNIC, ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE, AND ECONOMICALLY  
DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS**

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## **Abstract**

The English Academy school system, first introduced in the early 2000s, is one of the most comprehensive school reform initiatives to have been implemented in recent decades in England. Most academies are conversions of pre-existing state schools, and while extensive research has been conducted on secondary school academies, research on primary school academies is yet limited. The present research has looked at the ethos, values, and teaching methods of a converter primary school academy in a low-income area of Greater Manchester. The study focused on the assistance provided to students from underrepresented ethnic groups who spoke English as an additional language and those who were economically disadvantaged through the eyes and first-hand knowledge of teachers and parents who assisted students in their daily learning. A qualitative research design was used in conjunction with a single case study approach. A semi-structured interviewing process was used to interview the Headteacher, Associate Heads, teachers, teaching assistants, and parents. On the website of the academy school, content analysis was performed to examine Ofsted reports, the curriculum, the ethos and values, and significant initiatives put in place to support student learning. The data gathered provided convincing evidence that the academy did not entirely accommodate itself to the needs of minority ethnic, EAL and economically disadvantaged learners due to concerns about insufficient funding and high mobility rates within the academy. The school had perceived staffing issues, and there were conflicts between how the academy wanted to run itself and how much autonomy it needed to do so. Cultural capital was recognised as important at the academy and was discovered in a new and distinctive way. A large part of this was related to aspects of marketisation and competitiveness through which the academy attempted to meet the standards and expectations of other organisations such as Ofsted and the Department for Education.

## **Covid Impact Statement**

The pandemic of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on research, particularly data collection. The academy school that was taking part in the research denied access to the school where the interviews were taking place due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures put in place to slow the spread of the virus. This put a pause on my data collection. Even after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, I contacted the school to continue carrying out interviews however, it was impossible to continue data collection because the school no longer allowed access to the school's premises for the continuation of research. If the school had allowed access after the COVID-19 pandemic, more staff and parents at the academy would have been interviewed, allowing for a larger sample size and a more diverse group of participants to take part in the research, allowing for more robust conclusions.

If I had been able to continue collecting data, I would have interviewed considerably more parents, particularly those from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds, such as Indian and Bangladeshi. This would have provided me with more detailed responses from varied minority ethnic backgrounds, allowing me to do data comparisons. To help overcome these issues, existing data was used, which was available on the academy school's website, in addition to data collected through interviews with staff and parents at the academy before the COVID-19 pandemic. The research methods were modified to account for the constraints imposed by COVID. To account for the reduced availability of participants, the sample size was reduced. The COVID-19 pandemic presented numerous challenges in the research process, necessitating creativity and flexibility when working with the data I had already collected.



# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis investigates the English academy school system, which has evolved into one of England's most extensive school reform initiatives in recent years. In England, academy schools are publicly supported institutions that receive direct funding from the Department for Education and are independent of local authority control. Compared to the state schools managed by local governments, the academies programme gives these somewhat independent schools more freedom. Many liberties granted to academies provide schools with the authority to select what they view as the best curriculum for their pupils, the power to decide how to spend their resources, and much more.

Given the recent controversy surrounding the idea of all English schools becoming academies, academies make for an intriguing case study. Gavin Williamson (2021), then Education Secretary, has stated unequivocally that the recent epidemic has demonstrated that "it is no longer possible for schools to be solitary entities" because they require the "safety net of a robust family." (DfE, 2021). In his speech, the minister stated his intention to work toward a single-model education system in which all students are educated in academies across the country. It is not in dispute that there has long been discussion about converting all schools into academies.

All English schools were supposed to become academies by 2022, but the government was understood to have abandoned this goal in 2016. The DfE has stated that only underperforming schools will be required to transition to academy status and that this proposal will not be implemented. Since the Education Secretary has stated his support for converting all schools in England to academies, it has become critical to examine how successful academy schools

have been in achieving their original goals and objectives of eradicating disadvantage in educational settings, which was originally one of their proposed aims. The government appears to be changing its stance on making all schools in England into academies. In this thesis, the academy school system has been investigated to examine how successful academy schools have been in supporting minority ethnic, English as an additional language, and economically disadvantaged learners. This decision was made considering recent debates about all schools in England becoming academies, as well as a lack of research on primary school academies.

The academy school project is built around three key goals, established to ensure that academy schools serve their original function. Curtis *et al.* (2008) identified the three primary goals of academy schools:

1. Raising student achievement by breaking the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of economic deprivation with historically low academic performance
2. Increasing school diversity and choice
3. Creating inclusive and mixed ability schools

The establishment of academy schools is directly related to the desire to improve student achievement by addressing problems associated with the economic disadvantages that students in underprivileged communities face. According to reports, concerns about underachievement among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have persisted in many primary schools (Demie, 2018). It is understood that academy schools have the goal of ensuring that economically disadvantaged children are continuously supported throughout their primary years by utilising additional funds received from sponsors. Increased funding is thought to be advantageous for assisting economically disadvantaged pupils (Yaghi, 2023).

The influence of neoliberalism and the privatisation of the academy system have been identified by researchers such as Steven (2015) and Wilkins (2017) when discussing funding and private sponsors. The privatisation of academy schools is a focus of the present study because it serves as an example of the influence of the transition to neoliberalism (West and Bailey, 2013; Hursh, 2007; Evans and Davies, 2015). Harvey defines neoliberalism as "corporatization, commodification, and privatisation of previously public assets" (2005: 16). This perfectly captures the academy school system, which can be understood as the transformation of a state-owned asset (managed by local governments) into something resembling an organisation with independent governance and administered by academy councils. As a consequence, of the privatisation of these institutions, academy schools now have more autonomy and flexibility in how they operate. This is significant because it implies that, in comparison to state schools, academies are perhaps better able to serve students from minority ethnic groups (EAL) and those from low-income families.

According to Ball (2017), neoliberalism has transformed the British education system through four mechanisms: performance management, competition, choice and voice, and measures to strengthen public servants' capability to deliver improved public services. Performance management has been investigated through teacher monitoring and school monitoring. According to Ball, (2017) performance is managed through national targets, demonstrating that schools serve the purpose of economic competitiveness. As school leaders are given more autonomy, competition increases as parents' freedom to choose from a variety of schools or even start their own, grows. As a result of increased competition, parents are expected to choose better-performing schools, raising standards across the board as schools adopt more creative approaches to meeting 'consumer' needs. Schools have become more competitive and marketised because of privatisation methods, acting more like businesses with competitive decisions and funding-recruitment links (Ball, 2021). Schools seem to be

more concerned with their performance levels because these are displayed in league tables, ensuring that this is the focus.

Competition can also be understood through endogenous privatisation mechanisms such as the academy school system. This is essentially understood to be marketisation, as privatisation frequently results in schools competing for students, making them more like businesses, as well as allowing successful schools to take over and manage failing schools (which the academies system has done). Neoliberal education reforms demonstrate a transition from a professional ethical regime to an entrepreneurial competitive regime. Schools can be seen as serving economic purposes by raising academic standards to develop the human capital deemed necessary for the economy's competitiveness (Sahlberg, 2006). Schools attempt to meet the need for human capital by raising the academic achievement of working-class students.

There is widespread agreement that the marketisation of education aims to raise economic "standards" to develop the future workforce that the economy requires (Ball, 2021). As a result, there is more competition among schools, and rather than focusing on meeting students' educational needs, they compete for market share. According to a 2017 National Audit Office, there has been little cooperation between most academies and nearby secondary schools, which may see one another as "competition." This indicates that school competition has increased.

According to the Department for Education (2014) report, one of the perceived benefits of the academy system is that teachers are given more autonomy, allowing schools and administrators to be the primary drivers of systematic improvement (overcoming underachievement and

performing well in exams). Teachers are given the authority to carry out plans and provide additional assistance to students who require it. The report also shows that teachers are typically aware of their student's abilities and the additional assistance they may require if they are struggling with some basic topics or performing poorly. It is argued that giving teachers the upper hand allows them to advocate for critical school reform tactics.

The report demonstrates how academy schools benefit from privatisation because they can tailor their students' education to their specific needs. This could be viewed as a significant shift away from England's highly centralised education system and toward one that is more privatised and self-sufficient. However, there are numerous explanations for why academy schools are failing to meet their initial goals and objectives, particularly when it comes to overcoming issues of disadvantage that students face. This is something the present study set out to explore.

## **1.1 Overview of the research**

The research aimed to explore the strategies used by the academy to support minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. These were explored through the perspectives of teachers, teaching assistants, the academy leadership team, and parents, who were all considered when examining these initiatives. Four crucial issues were investigated:

1. The ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage.
2. How do the academy's strategies impact minority ethnic learners (EAL) and those that were economically disadvantaged?

3. Teacher's experiences of working within a converter primary academy school to support educationally disadvantaged learners.
4. Parent's experiences of the academy in supporting their children's learning.

The single case study design was used. It entailed conducting an in-depth investigation of a primary school converter academy in a disadvantaged area of Greater Manchester. The case study enabled an investigation of the academy school in its actual setting and involved interviews with the headteacher, associate heads, teachers, teaching assistants, and parents at the school. Parents and academy staff were questioned about their children's education. The interview process specifically involved asking teachers about their experiences working with economically disadvantaged, minority ethnic, and EAL pupils to gain an understanding of the support provided to such students as well as the challenges faced by academy staff members concerning the resources provided.

Economically disadvantaged pupils within this thesis refer to pupils that attended the academy school and were either on the Pupil Premium programme (funding for economically disadvantaged pupils) or were in receipt of free school meals. Similarly, minority ethnic pupils refer to the different ethnicities that made up the academy's student population. Many minority ethnic pupils within the academy also spoke English as an additional language. English as an additional language are those pupils whose main language spoken at home is not English. Minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged groups often intersect with pupils frequently belonging to more than one of these categories. For instance, a minority ethnic pupil may also be economically disadvantaged. These definitions are in line with the definitions provided by the academy's leadership team.

In accordance with the headteacher at the academy school, approximately 34% of students were from minority ethnicities at the time the research was conducted in 2019. According to the academy's website, all its students, who came from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds and social groups, felt welcome and included. The data from the study revealed that inclusion was a recurring theme. The research demonstrates the various ways in which the academy claimed to be inclusive and was, to some extent, inclusive, but there were still barriers to overcome when attempting to support students from minority ethnic backgrounds, English as an additional language, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **1.2 Thesis outline**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, explains the purpose of the study and how it was carried out. The introduction discusses the main concerns that the research has addressed, as well as why research at the academy school was necessary. The second chapter, which includes the literature review and is an important part of the thesis, is presented next. The literature review provides a critical evaluation of previous studies conducted by academics and authors. Additionally, it aided in the decision to conduct the research at an academy school to analyse aspects of disadvantage and inequality because gaps in this field of study had been discovered. This allowed the gathering of in-depth data and information on a variety of aspects of English education.

In Chapter 2 (the literature review), the history of the English educational system is thoroughly examined, providing a comprehensive understanding of how educational practises and policies have changed over time, with the academy school system being the most recent development. This chapter also evaluates academy schools in general, with a focus on family

background, disadvantages, and overall effectiveness. The connection between working-class people and inequality is investigated, with a focus on Diane Reay's (2019) book on miseducation. Reay's work is important in the thesis and is frequently cited when discussing disadvantages and inequalities. The second chapter concludes with a discussion of social mobility and a critical evaluation of the literature on various aspects of cultural capital.

The third chapter focuses on the methodology and approach of the research. It begins by thoroughly describing the study's aim and objectives and establishing its purpose. This chapter is critical because it provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology and strategy used for conducting qualitative research. Following that, the chapter describes the single case study research design used, as well as participant recruitment and data collection techniques. This chapter looks at the researcher's analysis methods, including the use of thematic analysis.

Chapter 4 contains the preliminary findings from the content analysis of the academy school's website. This chapter examines the key themes that were found which included: inclusion, school policies, parents, attainment, disadvantage, and Ofsted reports. From this analysis, it became clear how significant the ethos and values of inclusion were to promoting the academy school. A great deal of information was identified on the website specific to instilling values of inclusion. For example, it was found on the website that; school assemblies were delivered through the '9 Habits' (which formed part of the ethos) and these taught individuals how to treat one another. Everyone at the academy was encouraged to conduct themselves in an inclusive manner using the 9 habits which were to be: compassionate, patient, humble, joyful, honest, hopeful, considerate, forgiving, and self-controlled. Parents were also represented as playing an important role within the academy as the website mentioned how



each half-term, parent, and child workshops on various aspects of the curriculum were held, allowing parents to support their child's learning at school.

This is followed by Chapters 5 and 6, which focus on the study's findings based on semi-structured interviews with academy staff and parents. These two chapters are critical because they show how the academy supports students from minority ethnic (EAL) groups and those from low-income families, as well as how it approaches issues of inclusion. Chapter 5 demonstrates important findings that were found with the main theme identified as 'inclusion'. Inclusion was a very broad theme which consisted of several different sub-themes. The academy staff illustrated and reported various ways in which they aimed to ensure inclusion for all pupils, and these were through the themes of Special Educational Needs (SEN) inclusion, minority ethnic inclusion, economic disadvantage, parental inclusion, and inclusion through the use of resources. An in-depth understanding of inclusion in this context is one way in which this research makes an original contribution to knowledge. Some of the key findings of this research based around the area of inclusion, which make it original are discussed below.

Within the theme of inclusion, SEN inclusion was an important sub-theme found. It contributed to the originality of this research as past research has explored the demographics of SEN pupils within academies (Black *et al.* 2019 Long, Roberts and Danechi, 2020), however, it has not explored the types of strategies used by staff (within primary academies) in support of these pupils.

Support for minority ethnic and EAL pupils was also an important sub-theme found within the theme of inclusion. Previous research explores the number of pupils that attend academy

schools, however, fails to explore in depth how primary academies support minority ethnic pupils who speak English as an additional language. For example, within this section on inclusion, the findings illustrated that the academy had a nurture room in place, in support of minority ethnic learners (EAL).

The academy was also found to ensure inclusion through the intervention of ‘family learning week’. This included workshops where parents came in and took part in learning activities with their children. However, the attendance of minority ethnic parents to these workshops was low. Minority ethnic parents were found to be aware of these workshops but chose not to go because they were pressed for time. It was clear that the academy's teaching staff had pre-conceived notions about minority ethnic parents not attending parent workshops, but little was being done to ensure that they did.

Following on, Chapter 6 discusses some key over-arching themes revealed by the data, such as the role of cultural capital, funding, National Curriculum, the language of policymakers, Christian values, ethos and values, mobility and transience, and conflicts between academy and local education authority demands. One area within this chapter that contributes to the originality of the research is the theme of ‘cultural capital’. In the data cultural capital was identified in a new and distinctive way by the staff at the academy and was expressly linked to and connected with funding. This was a little different to the general idea around cultural capital being known as, the essential knowledge children need to prepare them for future success.

The funding crisis experienced by the academy presented a new finding as previous studies have explored how funding is managed within academy schools however; they have not explored the barriers faced by academies when there is a funding crisis and how this hinders how the academy can support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners and fulfil its original aim of being inclusive and improving academic achievement.

Another finding within Chapter 6 was based on the curriculum adopted by the academy. The National Curriculum was found to be used by the academy however, been adapted in ways intended to support minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged pupils. This adaptation aimed to ensure it was broad and balanced and involved the teaching and exploration of different cultures with importance given to the wider community. This theme based on the curriculum of the academy presented new findings which have not been studied before by other researchers.

Chapter 7 focuses on pupil and staff mobility. There were common concerns raised by staff concerning having too many new arrivals in the classroom, and a high number of disadvantaged pupils disrupting learning. Difficulties in retaining key and recruiting new staff were acknowledged as another challenge to supporting minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners to fulfil their full potential, here, the academy's deficit budget was seen by leadership staff to be a key factor.

Finally, Chapter 8, brings the research to a close. It describes the nature of the investigation as well as what has been discovered. The findings are summarised in the chapter, along with recommendations for future research. The benefits and drawbacks of the research are discussed, and what could have been done differently is identified. The key contribution to

knowledge that is made concerning inclusion, cultural capital, ‘God-given potential’, the language of policymakers, and tension between LEA and the needs of the academy, staff and pupil mobility is also outlined.

The following chapter is an important element of the study since it examines both prior and current studies on the English education system. It provides a thorough review of the relevant literature and investigates the limitations and strengths of prior studies conducted in schools. The literature evaluation is a crucial aspect of the study because it aided in the development of a new topic for research, so aiding in original contribution.

## **Chapter 2      Literature Review**

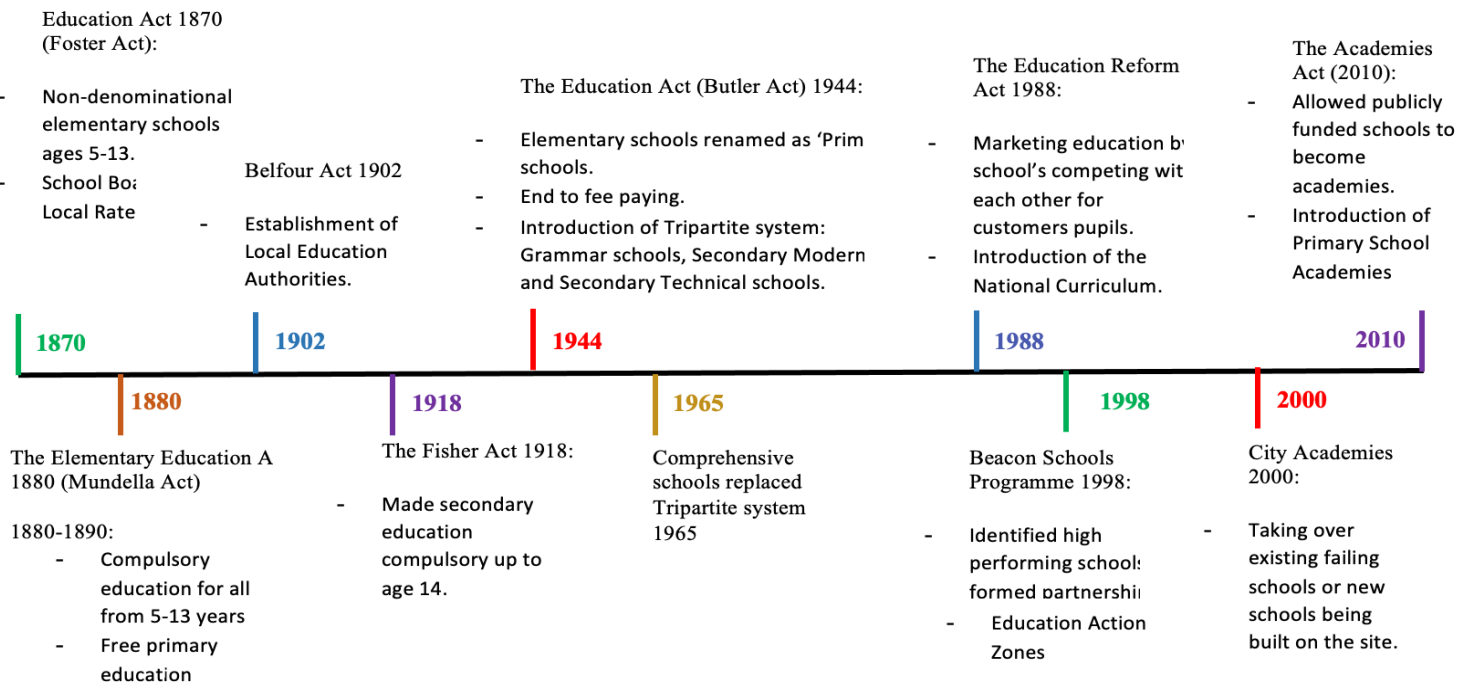
This study investigated the strategies used by a primary school academy to serve minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. Numerous recent studies have concentrated on the ethos and values of academies, with little to no attention paid to the strategies of academies (Di-Finizio, 2022; Morrin, 2018). Only a few studies have looked at family backgrounds (Duarte, Escario and Sanagustin, 2017; Bolu-Steve and Sanni, 2013; Reeves, 2012), without a focus on the support provided to these pupils within academy schools. There has also been little research on 'primary school' academies, with most of the attention focused on secondary school academies. We will begin by looking at the literature on the history of England's educational system.

### **2.1 A Comprehensive Guide to Education History**

Several academics (Gillard, 2018; Westberg and Primus, 2023) have studied the history of education in recent years. It is critical to recognise that many academics and theorists examine the evolution of the English educational system from perspectives and viewpoints that are unique to them. The history of education is important because it explains why the current educational system is structured the way that it is. The development of policies and the Education Acts to address issues related to disadvantage is supported by an understanding of the history of the educational system. The literature makes it clear that the educational system in the past was quite biased in the way it catered to students from both wealthy and poor families. It is believed that it gave disadvantaged students a worse quality of education while catering more to the requirements of wealthy students (Sanderson, 1995). Below is a timeline of the history of the changes made to education in England over the years:

Figure 1.1 History of Education

### Timeline of the history of education in England



England's educational history may be traced back to 1870 when the Education Act practically mandated the establishment of non-denominational elementary schools for students between the ages of 5 and 13. The Foster Act is another name for the Education Act of 1870. (Phillips, 2004; Lawson and Silver, 1973). The first policy put in place in Britain was affected by the Education Act, which included a new system. The Act had two sections, including the creation of local rates and school boards (public entities in England and Wales) (McKeag, 1905; Newton, 1936; Gillard, 2011). The school board's main goal was to guarantee that schools were effective and that they had the necessary facilities (mostly managing schools in zones where they were required). In situations where the current voluntary provision was insufficient, the school board had the authority to construct and operate non-denominational

schools (Bergen, 1982). The school boards played a significant role in the development and administration of schools in places where they were needed.

The Act was essential because it asserted the necessity for schools to ensure that high-quality education was delivered, and it was crucial that the school boards had the financial resources to cover learning for the poorest students (parents had to pay no more than nine pence a week). This demonstrates that the government had a mechanism in place to assist the most disadvantaged students. This indicates how important it was to guarantee that everyone had access to education of some kind (Benavot and Riddle, 1988).

According to Muller (1987), the idea of a class system was used to stratify the educational system in 1870. Notably, children from lower-income households were more likely to attend church schools, if they were lucky, but the majority would only learn at home. As a result, less fortunate children were prevented from attending school and receiving an education (Gillard, 2011; Lazar and Darlington, 1982). This demonstrates social segregation through status cultures (on which more below), whereby less fortunate students were denied the opportunity to attend school.

Poorer students were denied access to a quality education or even any education at all. This demonstrates that the education system has always been unequal and how the Education Act of 1870 entrenched injustices that are still present in the educational system today. The connections between status cultures and inequality are discussed by Bourdieu (1974). Status cultures include a person's ethnicity, social class, and cultural traditions. Working-class or mid-

dle-class social status is frequently linked to a person's lifestyle, education, and culture. Bourdieu (1974) saw education as a "conservative force" since it upholds existing societal systems, and the ways in which they are stratified.

The Act sparked debate concerning the availability of religious education and public support. In general, the public wanted schools that would support non-denominational education, while churches felt scared that their control over school administration would be lost. This was a contentious issue because the local government, which ran the schools, now had the authority that the church had hitherto enjoyed (Parker, Allen and Freathy, 2020). Church schools do still operate today, however, and there have lately been discussions about non-religious schools joining Church of England Academy chains (Pring, 2018). Since Church schools still exist and religious education is maintained and preserved within state schools, the Church's power over schools has not entirely been lost.

According to historians, the state began to involve itself more in education in 1880, and starting in 1881, schooling was made compulsory between ages 5 and 10. This can be seen as significant because it was the first step taken to guarantee that all students, regardless of wealth, attended school to receive an education (Bergen. 1982). The Act of 1870 can be considered to have offered genuine opportunities for social mobility, and educators have since worked to expand on this idea. This is clear given that the Act established mandatory schooling for children up to the age of 10, with the option to raise this age to 16. By pursuing an education and eventually entering the workforce, children were given the opportunity to climb the social class ladder.



According to the literature, parents were given little accountability during this time, while teachers were allowed more freedom (Lawson and Silver, 2013). Accountability is crucial because it provides instructors and teachers with the chance to improve their own knowledge and abilities and raise student accomplishment to guarantee that children receive the optimal learning results (Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011). Greater autonomy and freedom enable educational institutions and their administrators to serve as the main forces striving towards systematic improvement (Gilbert, 2012).

Additionally, it shows the first step in securing equality for all children in England by guaranteeing that underprivileged students received the same standard of education as their wealthy peers. The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) for primary education were subsequently introduced by the next Education Act, that of 1902 (Andrews, 2016). In England, the councils in charge of education are generally known as LEAs. They have existed since 1902 and continue to function. By putting policies and laws pertaining to schools into effect, LEAs support the English educational system. The academies policy has overturned the 1902 policy that once put the local government in charge of the management and the administration of most state-funded schools.

When the LEAs were first established in 1902, their duties included appointing staff, inspecting schools, and establishing the curriculum (Lawson and Silver, 2013). The Department for Education, which is in charge of providing education in schools, has gained ground as a result of the LEA's diminished position. It is the DfE's duty to assist disadvantaged students in achieving more (Department for Education, 2015).

Many academics have written about the expansion of the education system through 'mass schooling' from 1870 to 1940. Benavot and Riddle (1988) investigated the expansion of mass education. They discovered that social, economic, political, and religious factors were far more influential in determining the expansion of mass schooling from 1870 to 1940 than in later periods. Many historians argue that the expansion of elementary education is linked to industrialization, urbanisation, and the resulting need for schooling (Carl, 2009; Benavot and Riddle, 1998 and Stephens, 1999). Because of the growth of cities and the differentiation of economic and work roles, elementary education expanded. This demonstrates how the education system evolved from solely focusing on assisting children to obtain an education to local governments adapting their policies in support of preparing and equipping children to enter the labour force.

Mass schooling can be viewed as a foundation for social class segregation, as it historically reinforced separate education systems: one designed exclusively for the children of the governing upper class, kept isolated and “uncontaminated” from the children of the working class (Benovet and Riddle, 1998). Schools back then could be identified as wanting children who would be excellent for the workforce. As a result, it was expected that middle-class children would be more likely to attend school because they would have had the financial means and requirements to enter the workforce. Clark (1961) shows in his work how middle-class children were given advantages as they were encouraged to excel and get good jobs. Poorer students, on the other hand, were not encouraged to succeed (Clark, 1961; Harbison and Myers 1964; Trow 1961). To some extent, this is debatable because mass schooling was required to provide a suitably trained and motivated labour force, which removed educational barriers to working-class mobility (Brown and Lauder, 1991).

Collins (1971) contends that struggle and competition among various class and status groups resulted in large-scale educational expansion. He argues that the primary role of educational institutions is to communicate precise 'status cultures' both inside and outside of the classroom. Status groups are used to understand status cultures. These are associational groups that share common cultures (family and friends) and a sense of status equality based on participation in common culture, such as language type and style, as well as values (Collins, 1971). Bourdieu mentions these status cultures. Bourdieu (1990) contends that the education systems of industrialised societies serve to legitimise class inequalities. These class inequalities are visible in the mass schooling system, which introduces competition between working-class and middle-class students.

After mass schooling, the educational system continued to develop, and it is widely acknowledged that the Butler Act, which was implemented in 1944, represented the next major policy change (Jeffereys, 1984; Lawson and Silver, 2013). Primary schools became the new name for elementary schools under the Act. In maintained schools, there was an end to "fee" paying, and church schools were brought under state regulation as well. The Tripartite system was introduced in 1945 (McCulloch, 2002).

Grammar, Secondary Technical, and Secondary Modern schools made up the Tripartite system; each remained distinct due to the way they catered to various aptitudes. For pupils who excelled academically, grammar schools were established, and as a result, they were given the chance to take the GCE (General Certificate of Education). This is crucial because it exposes an unfair system that divides students into groups based on their aptitude. It might be argued that the system was unfair since it gave students with higher achievement levels more opportunities than it did students with lower achievement levels.

Some, like Saunders (1995), argue that the education system is meritocratic. Meritocracy in this context suggests that students who perform well academically are rewarded with better opportunities, such as access to higher-status occupations, while those who perform poorly face fewer prospects. However, Saunders acknowledges that the system also reflects and reinforces existing inequalities, as children from wealthier families often have access to better resources, which enhances their chances of success. This apparent contradiction highlights education's dual role in promoting meritocratic ideals and systematic disparities. Other functional theorists, such as Parsons (1961), also view the education system as meritocratic, arguing that it serves as a mechanism for role allocation by matching individuals' abilities with appropriate occupations. Parsons believed that schools act as a bridge between the family and wider society, teaching universal values like achievement and equality of opportunity.

The tripartite system, introduced by the Education Act of 1944, exemplifies these ideas but also reveals the limitations of a meritocratic system. The system allocated students to one of three types of secondary schools: grammar, secondary modern, or technical based on their performance in the eleven-plus exam. The eleven-plus exam was designed to assess pupils' abilities at age 11 and determine their placement within the tripartite system. The eleven-plus tested areas such as verbal reasoning, English, Mathematics, and English. It aimed to identify pupils' aptitudes and direct them to the type of school that would best match their natural abilities. Since grammar schools were primarily attended by children from middle-class families, these children had the opportunity to take the GCE, opening more opportunities for them.

It is possible to interpret the eleven-plus exam as reinforcing social class divisions (McCulloch and Sobell, 1994). This can be interpreted as a reflection of how many working-

class children failed to get into grammar schools, allowing disparities to continue, but middle-class students could do well in school and hence enter Grammar schools. Students who were gifted and skilled in mechanical engineering or other scientific fields attended the secondary technical school. The secondary modern school was for pupils who were a poor fit for the other two school types (Cook, 1999). By this, children were admitted to these schools based on results of the eleven plus exam, which they took when they were 11 years old. This once more exemplifies segregation in that children from lower-income families were more likely to attend secondary contemporary schools. Secondary Modern schools were not concerned with academic success and did not offer GCE or O Levels.

Critics, such as Boliver and Swift (2011), claimed that children who failed the 11-plus were labelled as failures and would suffer as a result. There were many discussions about offering better educational opportunities and doubts as to the reliability of the 11-plus as a system for classifying pupils (Boliver and Swift, 2011). The tripartite system was rejected by the Labour government (Rubinstein and Simon, 2000). Although the Butler Act granted students the ability to go to secondary school, the tripartite system restricted the opportunities available to many students. Many children developed their capabilities considerably later, but secondary modern schools were incapable of meeting their educational needs and so did not enable them to fulfil their potential (Banks, 1988).

Due to the tripartite system's failure, comprehensive schools, which accepted all pupils regardless of background and aptitude, were established in 1965. (West, 2007).

Comprehensive schools were secondary institutions that did not admit students based on their aptitude or academic performance. Comprehensive schools still exist today and are a part of an LEA or self-governing academy. Boliver and Swift (2011) looked at Comprehensive schools and social mobility. Their findings illustrate that going to a Grammar school rather

than a Comprehensive school does not make children from lower-class backgrounds more likely to be upwardly mobile, but it assists in moving them further if they are. This is questionable, though, as it disregards several other elements, such as the child's intelligence and other strengths that may help them flourish.

Comprehensive education serves as an example of a move toward educational equity for all. Scotland and Wales both converted entirely to comprehensive secondary schools in the ten years between 1965 and 1975. Statistics show that in England, the percentage was around 90%. The goal of comprehensive schools was to guarantee that all students were offered an equivalent level of education (Cuban, 1990). However, the policy during this time again illustrated forms of social segregation. The policy put in place included the requirement of catchment areas. Admissions were centred on the catchment area or location. A catchment area is a geographical region that encompasses each comprehensive school and controls the number of students admitted there. The goal of comprehensive schools was to guarantee that all pupils received an education that met the same standards (Cuban, 1990).

However, catchment areas perpetuated inequities because children from middle-class neighbourhoods had a higher chance of attending excellent schools, whilst those from socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods were more likely to attend fewer desirable schools (Conway, 1997). Since many reputable schools in the current educational system still accept students based on catchment areas, inequalities continue to exist. Numerous parents frequently relocate to make sure their children attend the top schools, which is a persistent problem. In contrast to working-class families who are unable to do so owing to economic hardship, preventing them from attending the best schools, middle-class families are said to be more likely to move to meet the catchment area requirements for schools (Croft, 2004).

The "governing body" system was formed in 1980 by the Education Act, which was followed by the implementation of comprehensive schooling. The governing body was formed to oversee the provision of elementary education in areas lacking sufficient voluntary school places. These boards were responsible for building and maintaining schools, funded by local rates, and had the authority to set policies, manage resources, and implement laws regarding school attendance (Aldrich, 2006). The governing body system is still in place today; however, not all governing bodies are subject to local government regulation. The governing body or academy council is no longer obliged to meet annually with the "complete governing body," as required by governing bodies of state schools, thanks to the implementation of the new academy school system. The governing body is crucial in ensuring that schools are run effectively.

There is little doubt that the Conservative government led by Thatcher from 1979 to 1990 implemented several measures and interventions to help raise student achievement. To ensure that parents were informed of their children's progress, meetings with parents were established in 1986 (Berrouagh and Djallab, 2022). This might be viewed as the first step towards granting parents the responsibility of making sure their children were functioning at the necessary level. This demonstrates accountability since parents were informed of their child's achievement and subsequently received help from teachers to make sure children were dedicating extra time to learning outside of school hours (Gillard, 2011).

The establishment of the "public accountability framework" by the Education Reform Act of 1988 resulted in a significant shift in the educational system; it is still in use today (Gilbert, 2012), albeit with some minor modifications brought about by neoliberalism, the privatisation

of education, and the introduction of academy schools. The Act introduced marketisation. Marketisation is a phrase used to describe how schools compete with one another for students in an "education market" to raise academic standards. Parents were seen as customers who chose where to send their children. From the onset of industrialisation until the implementation of the current system, competition among schools has been a constant trend (Lawson and Silver, 2013). Schools are constantly competing with one another, and parents compete to enrol their children in the top institutions. The Education Reform Act was put into effect in 1988 as English society advanced through marketisation, which featured elements of choice, standards, and increasing competition (Lupton, 2011).

The Education Reform Act of 1988 established choice, allowing parents to designate the school of their choice. Allowing parents to select the school that their child attended, despite showing parental equality, raised more problems. To ensure their child attended the best schools, parents frequently felt burdened and incurred additional fees that they could not afford (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Middle-class children may have profited from educational competition as their parents would have been able to put their children in the best schools, while ethnic minorities and the working classes may have found their options limited (Ball, 2006). Good schooling is often found to be expensive for working-class pupils as it involves children needing further material resources such as books, electronic devices, and travel expenses to meet the educational requirements of the school.

Similarly, Ball (1994) acknowledges that schools must spend far more on marketing themselves to parents, which results in pupils with special education needs not being acknowledged and therefore less being spent on their education. There are many disputes around marketisation. According to Bartlett (1993), marketisation has caused schools to



"cream-skim" the top students, who also have the lowest teaching costs. Additionally, Bartlett stated that marketisation had resulted in "silt-shifting," whereby pupils with learning disabilities who do not do well and are more expensive to train are disregarded (Hill, Greaves and Maisuria, 2008). This serves as another example of an unfair system where children are chosen based on their aptitudes and their perceived cost.

Another argument against the marketisation of education is that wealthy parents can relocate to other cities to enroll their children in the best schools (catchment region), while parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds cannot (Whitty, Power and Edwards, 2006). In this context, Bourdieu's ideas of habitus and field, which are found in his book on 'The Field of Cultural Production' (1993), are crucial. According to Bourdieu, culture categorises and limits people based on the characteristics they possess. Parents from minority ethnic origins, for example, can have less familiarity with the educational system and are hence less inclined to enrol their children in the top schools. Following the notion that parents have the right to select the school their children attend, schools are expected to compete with one another (Ball, 1997).

To standardise educational provision, the National Curriculum, which was implemented in 1988, featured subjects that were to be taught and studied by all students attending state schools. The National Curriculum hinted at a potential movement in favour of equality because, in the past, teachers had more freedom to choose what they wanted to teach, and as a result, knowledge and learning varied among schools. Consistency became one of the success factors for England's educational system because of the emphasis on offering "fair opportunities" (Wyse and Torrance, 2009). This may have strengthened the case for England's need to create a National Curriculum with standards to ensure equal access to

education. Currently, state schools still use the National Curriculum. Regardless of the school they attend, all state school pupils are taught the same subjects and content using the National Curriculum. The then government claimed that to some extent, equity for all students was ensured by the numerous interventions put in place, such as comprehensive education, parent-teacher conferences, and the national curriculum (The Schools White Paper, 2010).

The fact that these initiatives continue to support students from middle-class families raises several problems, particularly regarding the national curriculum. Many sociologists such as Althusser (1971) have talked about education as a form of ideological state apparatus. The national curriculum encourages teachers to instil English language principles in students, which is another crucial point to make (Gasper and Gluyas, 2019). It pushes students to speak Standard English, which may not be known to economically disadvantaged (working-class) and minority ethnic students (due to a focus on exact grammatical correctness). Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to speak English with restricted language codes (Bernstein, 1962). Research has shown a clear correlation between the language spoken and subsequent academic achievement (British Census, 2011).

In addition to the National Curriculum, there was an increased requirement for schools to be regulated and monitored from the 1990s. In this case, the Office for Standards in Education, a government organisation that oversees and monitors the calibre of education and educators in the UK, was established in 1992. Based on performance, these organisations (Ofsted) began to create league tables and reports on schools. By creating reports on schools that are made public, Ofsted continues to monitor schools today. This promotes competition amongst

schools because parents may evaluate schools using league tables to make sure their children attend the top schools.

SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) were also introduced in 1990. SATs were presented after each key stage of learning (Wilson and Brundrett, 2007). The purpose of these exams was to ascertain how well students were doing. This can be viewed as a change from a more centralised educational system that previously only concentrated on the school to a more individual-based one where students' academic progress was tracked. All students are still evaluated at the end of each key level, so SATs are still a component of the system today. It is argued that this gives parents and teachers an understanding of how their children or pupils are faring. Monitoring student progress may enable schools to marketise themselves better and may enable them to implement interventions and methods to help with the improvement of student learning.

New Labour adhered to the 1988 Act, and education policies remained unchanged after 1997. Parental involvement in student's education is a crucial step that the authorities have made to ensure that all children receive some level of parental support. To ensure that parents participate actively in their children's education and are informed of their development, several schools have implemented specialised tactics and programmes (Hannon, Nutbrown and Morgan, 2018). In 2011, the Department for Education issued a review of best practices in parental engagement. This review set out to offer additional assistance to parents to make sure their children were making progress. The review was based on assumptions that minority ethnic parents often lack knowledge or interest in their children's education. This review by the Department for Education could be argued as being flawed as it fails to consider that

many minority ethnic parents may have different cultural understandings of education and may engage in non-traditional forms of support.

Additionally, New Labour tried to address the academic underachievement in some schools. One example of this is the creation of Education Action Zones. The goal of Education Action Zones is to increase standards in disadvantaged communities and produce high-achieving students. These Action zones lacked sufficient innovation since they failed to have a major influence on raising standards and levels of achievement in secondary schools (Smithers and Woodward, 2001). Another solution was the Beacon Schools Program, which gave money to successful schools to help their less successful neighbouring schools (Smith, 2015). The Labour Government placed a strong emphasis on the development of schools via diversity and cooperation, and this initiative ran from 1998 to 2004.

This strategy of developing schools via cooperation is used by local authorities to impel schools to assist nearby schools, and it is also clear in the academy school system (2000). The academy school system is made up of multi-academy trusts, where several schools are listed under a trust and are obliged to collaborate closely to ensure that the schools maintained within the trust are developing through the shared use of teaching strategies.

The Academy school's initiative, which was implemented in 2000, was the next significant establishment after the introduction of Education Action Zones. It was effectively introduced to challenge the high number of concerns being expressed by David Blunkett (then Secretary of State for Education and Skills) regarding schools in deprived areas which were not providing a good education to the pupils attending them (TheGuardian, 2014). At the time, there were many schools in England that were struggling to provide quality education to their

pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. David Blunkett (2000) in his report, gave evidence of the underachievement in schools. He stated the following:

*“One in seven secondary schools have 25% or less of their pupils with 5 A\* to Cs at GCSE. Far too many of these are below 15% and a large proportion of them are in the most heavily populated areas of the country. However, deprivation need not lead to low performance, as demonstrated by the chart below relating school performance to the proportion of pupils from low-income families entitled to free school meals. While the chart shows that overall, there is an association between levels of deprivation and school performance it also shows the wide variations in performance between schools with similar intakes. Very many schools in challenging areas succeed in achieving high standards and government policy is targeted at increasing the number substantially”.*

The above comment made by David Blunkett gives evidence of the underachievement and political concerns raised at that time. It illustrates concerns in relation to schools in economically deprived areas where children were underachieving (Pennell and West, 2003). This is also important as it links to the different ideologies that underpin educational policy. The initial goal of the academy programme was to improve secondary school performance (Maxwell and Rubin, 2000). These institutions were frequently referred to as City Academies. City Academies are supposedly ‘under-performing schools which, under New Labour, were closed and reopened with funding and control from private businesses for the purpose of overcoming issues of underperformance (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). This has been interpreted by educational leaders such as West (2013) as an expansion of school privatisation, because local governments no longer have jurisdiction over the schools in question (whereas only independent schools were previously free from state control).

City academies were autonomously managed by private companies. The Labour government changed the name of what was formerly known as city academies to allow for the development of academies both in inner cities and in disadvantaged rural communities (House of Commons, 2021). And then there was a rapid expansion of academies under both the Coalition (2010-2015) and Tory governments (2015 to present day). The academy

initiative was expanded to the primary sector, in 2010, following the success of secondary school academies in overcoming underachievement in underperforming schools (Boyask, 2016). Eyles and Machin (2018) explored the success rates of secondary school academies. Their research illustrates secondary school pupils' performance in academy schools to be positive and significant. This suggests the motivation driving the expansion of the academy school system, as the government appears to regard academy schools as increasingly successful.

The policy for academies was reformulated and extended by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. Academy schools were not just limited to sponsored academies where schools closed and reopened as academies to tackle underachievement. The program was extended to allow any school to convert to academy status and this was through the introduction of converter academies (Bolton, 2014). Converter academies are successful schools that wish to take on academy status. The table below shows the various types of academies and when they were established.

Academy Type	Established	Purpose
Sponsored Academies	2000	Set up to replace underperforming secondary schools.
Primary Academies	2010	
Converter Academies	2010	Successful schools that have chosen to convert to academies to benefit from the increased autonomy that academy status is said to bring.
Free Schools	2011	Whole new state schools, which operate as academies. They have been set up in response to demands from groups of local parents for better educational provision within their local community.

Figure 1.2. Academy School Types

Even though academy schools are subject to Ofsted inspection, they are not obligated to adhere to the National Curriculum. The idea of turning all schools into academies was indeed a hot topic of discussion. David Cameron stated that he wanted “every school an academy... and yes local authorities running schools are a thing of the past” in October 2016. (Perraudin, 2015). About 200 secondary schools were turned into academy schools and re-established before 2010. Some of these were essentially failing schools that needed improvement (West and Wolfe, 2018).

From 2010 to the present, both primary and secondary schools have been allowed to convert to academy status. 2,440 of the 16,766 primary schools in England in 2015 were academies, and the remaining ones were under the control of local authorities (Cook, 2016). We can make a comparison here with the most recent data which suggests that, as of January 2022,

39% of primary schools were academies or free schools in England, (Government, 2022), and the remaining ones were under the control of local authorities. This demonstrates a large increase in the number of academy schools in England. Andrews (2016) argues that according to the then Coalition government, all schools were expected to be academy schools or be on the path to becoming one by 2020. Damian Hinds, a former education secretary, claimed that he wants more schools to become academies to take advantage of the greater benefits academy status provides to schools, pupils, and staff (Department for Education, 2019).

Examining the history of the education system in England reveals that educational policies have been problematic at times, and it is understood that the new academy school system that has been put in place embodies aspects of privatisation and marketisation. Stephen Ball (2008) in his book "The Education Debate," cited several issues with educational policies. First and foremost, he criticises education programmes as having economic goals. Equity, according to him, is frequently related to the accomplishment of other objectives and purposes, typically economic, and is rarely articulated as a key goal of policy in and of itself (2008: 153). This is a crucial point since it appears that long-standing educational practices have moved from being pro-integrationist to being pro-market (Walkenhorst, 2008).

In his work, Walkenhorst shows how there is a clear indication of this transition. He contends that the process of formulating policies has changed, moving away from a semi-community model and toward a transgovernmental one. Transgovernmentalism is defined as the process of internationalising policymaking through the interaction of government agencies or officials. The policies have a pro-market orientation as there has been a shift in policy aims.



There has been an increase in competition through marketisation. However, it is important to understand that not all features of educational policies are pro-market. Many policies continue with the aim of increasing teacher and student exchanges and have a focus on implementing funding schemes and information platforms (Walkenhorst, 2008). The importance of these policies is explained by the OECD (2021) with the innovation of school-level practices that help teachers collaborate to improve pupil learning. The OECD defines professional learning communities as having elements of cooperation, a shared vision, a focus on learning, reflective inquiry, and the de-privatisation of practice. They emphasised the significance of formal and social conditions in schools in fostering the development of professional learning communities, such as school size, resource availability, school autonomy and management, and school culture.

To conclude, the history of the education system shows evidence of how the government, local authorities and the Department for Education have tried over several years to create an education system that equally and fairly caters for all pupils, providing them with the same opportunities. There is no doubt that disparities still exist, policies and Education Acts have been shown to only partially address concerns associated with them. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the new academy school system to discover whether these institutions are assisting in eradicating the educational disparities faced by students from minority ethnic, EAL and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The following section examines the available literature and statistics on academy schools.

## **2.2 Academy schools: What You Need to Know**

In England, there are different types of academies, including sponsored academies, converter academies, and free schools. Each of these forms of academy was established with a specific goal in mind. In 2000 City Academies were first introduced to replace underperforming schools and were later branded as ‘Sponsored Academies’ (Eyles and Machin, 2019). In 2010, the programme was then extended as part of the coalition government’s plan to broaden the academy programme. The state created free schools in response to community demand. Free school academies are independent, non-profit institutions that receive state funding and are open to all students (West and Wolfe, 2018). The government also extended the programme to allow primary schools to convert to academies and these schools were branded as ‘Converter Academies’ (Eyles and Machin, 2019). Converter academies are successful schools that have converted to academy status to benefit from the increased autonomy that academy status allows.

### **Demographic of academies**

In comparison to the national average, sponsored academies had a higher attendance of minority ethnic students, according to Department for Education data from 2018. Similarly, according to a 2019 DfE study, schools that became sponsored academies had a greater number of minority ethnic students in attendance (23%) than converter academies, which had 21%. Gorard (2009) noted that there were two main problems relating to academies that needed to be addressed: firstly, are they more academically effective than comparable non-academy schools; and secondly, are they reducing socioeconomic status-based segregation?

Gorard (2009) used official figures for school compositions and looked at the cohorts of new Academies in England, from 2002 to 2006). According to Gorards' research, sponsored academies enrol more than their fair percentage of disadvantaged pupils, whereas converter academies enrol significantly fewer. This may be because sponsored academies were first established to replace failing schools. Many of these underperforming schools that were given sponsored academy status were situated in socioeconomically deprived areas. As a result, they might have already had a sizable contingent of economically disadvantaged students present.

The findings in Gorard's study illustrate that many state schools which converted into academies in the city of Salford should not have been converted as they did not adhere to the academies' aims of taking on disadvantaged pupils. Four of the academy schools in Salford reduced their intake of FSM (Free School Meal) children. Thus, instead of alleviating poverty-based segregation, these academies have made it worse by forcing other local schools to accept more students with FSM. This demonstrates how academy schools may not be accomplishing their initial goal of reducing underachievement and disadvantage.

The primary school academy programme is still relatively new, meaning that it is crucial to give it time to progress and develop, even though Gorard's study examines how academy schools are deviating from their initial aim. Investigating a school that has changed to academy status would be beneficial since it would enable the researcher to examine the extent to which the school continues to accept students from economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds.

It is acknowledged by Eyles, Machin and McNally (2017) that certain academies do not enrol enough disadvantaged students, and this shows that they are failing to fulfil their original intention of establishing mixed-ability schools. One may claim that it has no impact on reducing segregation. Since one of the goals of academy schools in economically deprived areas is to reduce segregation (Gorard, 2008), it was crucial to find out if this was the case.

This suggests that sponsored academies, as opposed to converter academies, potentially provide a greater level of challenge because they enrol more students from minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is important because it reveals one of the reasons why sponsored academies could encounter more difficulties or have varying degrees of success when compared to converter academies. According to statistics from the DfE's 2018 report, minority ethnic students made up 29.2% of students in primary converter academies and 37.5% of students in primary sponsored academies. This shows that sponsored primary schools had a higher percentage of minority ethnic students enrolled than state-funded schools, which may be related to the location of the sponsored academies.

In general, the proportion of students in primary-sponsored academies who qualify for and use free school meals is marginally higher than the national average across all state-funded primary schools (DfE, 2019). In comparison to all state-funded primary schools, where 14.2% of students were reported to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in January 2018, in primary academies the figure was 15.5%. In sponsored academies, 22.0% of primary school students were eligible for and claimed FSM, as opposed to 14.2% in all state-funded primary schools (DfE, 2019).

There may be several causes for these discrepancies. One of the factors may be the wide range in the percentage of students who qualify for FSM in free schools. Alternatively, it is possible that because free schools are very new, they are not yet as well equipped as other schools to assist parents in making FSM claims for their children. Having explored the demographics of academy schools in terms of minority ethnic students and economic deprivation, the following section explores the strengths and limitations of the academy schools' programme.

## **2.3 The Impact of Autonomy, ethos, and values – the strength and limitations of academies**

Autonomisation is an important concept that requires exploration when looking at academy schools. Autonomisation here is referred to in connection with academies taking control of the learning that takes place within their schools. Local governments govern state schools, whereas academy schools operate independently to some extent. State schools are required to follow the National Curriculum, giving them less leeway over what they teach. In comparison, academy schools have freedom over their curriculum and how they choose to govern their school. James Meek, who is mentioned in Reay's book on 'Miseducation', has referred to how the Labour and Conservative governments "have been involved in a process of semi-privatisation of education that leaves it ripe for the introduction of flat fees for usage in the future" (2017: 47). This is described concerning autonomisation, where state-run bodies continue to be run by the state but on a non-profit basis.

Academies are renowned for giving staff members more freedom with the teaching methods and curriculum they choose to use as opposed to state-run schools. This makes the 2020 study by Thompson, Lingard, and Ball, which looked at autonomisation at six different schools in

Northern England, significant. Thompson et al (2020) argue that there is a widespread notion that the benefits of academization are that it improves student performance by offering greater autonomy for headteachers. Interviews with the headteachers of these schools revealed their thoughts on the autonomy they had been granted. The results show that headteachers voiced concerns about their academies becoming less autonomous than they once were. It was discovered that the headteachers still expressed a desire for autonomy after reflecting on how the promised autonomy had fallen short of their expectations. This demonstrates one of the misconceptions held by headteachers who seek academy status because of the perceived autonomy it will give them yet are given very little control.

Similar concerns around autonomisation and teaching are presented in research by Elton and Male (2015), where teaching staff felt undervalued. Elton and Male investigated a primary school that was classed as a failing school and had to become an academy. Their findings implied that the staff at the academy disapproved of the new administration and believed that there was little being done to encourage and support voluntary change. The staff believed that their needs and concerns were not being considered by the new leadership structures. Their data also suggested that the loss of parental involvement and staff motivation appeared to be the schools' largest losses, with staff members also reported feeling isolated.

In comparison to this, West and Bailey (2013) argue it is through the change of policies that education standards have been raised through choice and diversity. They point out that locally elected public bodies have changed and the role of private providers dependent on state monies has increased. Reay (2017) illustrates how the privatisation of academy schools has given teachers more freedom over how they teach, and the strategies used to deliver education.

However, Reay claims that, as teachers have autonomy concerning issues of equality, they are less likely to stick to the equality principles. This is debatable, and it is crucial to explore this further in terms of the strategies adopted by academy schools, which can be seen as having a clear guideline for teachers to reach their objectives of overcoming educational inequalities experienced by economically disadvantaged pupils. Teachers can implement strategies in support of overcoming inequalities experienced by pupils, for example, by providing EAL learners with extra time to complete tasks in the classroom.

Like this, other research has shown the conflicts that headteachers in academies encounter. The research was undertaken by Thomas (2020) at two separate academies. Her study concluded that both headteachers struggled to establish a Christian educational culture due to external pressures that limited their autonomy. This study is important because it demonstrates how, despite being given autonomy, academies encounter external constraints that make it challenging for them to successfully develop their schools. This calls into question how independent academies are.

The studies above have demonstrated some of the limitations of academy schools in England and how some are struggling to meet their original aim and objectives. There is a great deal of contradictory evidence concerning the ‘successes’ of academy schools, while some show the beneficial effects of academy status on underperforming schools (Huntley, 2017; Leo, Galloway and Hearne, 2010).

Passy (2016) has investigated the changing of pupil behaviour in schools situated in areas of socioeconomic deprivation by examining the techniques with which coastal academies approached the mission of changing their predecessor schools’ culture of under-performance.

Ofsted acknowledged a relationship between student performance and deprived coastal towns. Ofsted illustrates that disadvantaged coastal towns have “felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up standards for the poorest children” (Ofsted, 2013).

Passy carried out a longitudinal study on one coastal secondary school academy followed by a comparative analysis of six underperforming coastal secondary schools that had converted to academy status by 2010. The schools were in areas of high economic disadvantage. According to the findings, behaviour is managed on three different levels — the classroom, the person, and the school — in coastal academies using a variety of strategies (Swinson, 2010). It was discovered that these coastal academies were able to alter the behaviour of the youngsters in the classroom simply by prioritising the requirements of the students.

This demonstrates the significance of establishing an ethos and values that emphasise the relevance of individual learning. Individuals can benefit by primarily focusing on the needs of students. However, while the research demonstrates how behaviour is handled in academy schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, it fails to investigate how underperformance is addressed using specific tactics. It emphasises the necessity of putting children's needs first but does not detail the precise efforts undertaken to do this.

Passy's research demonstrates the good influence academy schools have on students' learning by utilizing their own privatized systems. According to Passy's research, the school's ethos and vision provide possibilities within a balanced curriculum, guaranteeing that all students can achieve success and fulfil their potential. The school's ethos can also be seen as having some effect on lessening social segregation difficulties (Engel, Holford, and Pimlott-Wilson, 2010). This may be seen in how they establish strong ground rules for staff to foster an



inclusive environment within schools. Equality and inclusiveness are significant principles that are frequently discussed in academy school visions.

Hatton (2013) explored how the ethos of primary and secondary schools in communities with the highest levels of social deprivation influenced students. Hatton conducted three focus groups and two interviews to gain information about staff concerns about student inclusion and exclusion in academy schools. The study sheds light on how the culture of diverse institutions influences student achievement. This enables us to comprehend the critical role that ethos and values play in children's academic progress. The study contributes to our understanding of how the school's ethos may be valued, which may help to reduce issues of social mobility and deprivation.

In her book, Di-Finizio (2022) maintains that every successful school is driven by its ethos. She contended that the school's attitude allows all pupils who attend there to grow and develop before going on to prosper in life. Holmes and Adams (2021) explored the role of a headteacher in a Church of England primary school. Their findings emphasise the importance of headteachers' religious views, how those beliefs influence their moral standards, and how those principles influence the contribution they make to students' learning. Both studies are significant because they maintain the importance of ethos in schools in terms of supporting students' development, as well as by investigating the significance of the headteacher's faith, which is thought to influence the ethos and values that the headteacher chooses to implement.

Additionally, studies have indicated that schools with a strong sense of ethos perform better overall and accomplish higher levels of success. Pike (2010) conducted a study at an academy school that was formerly renowned as "England's Most Improved Academy" but had a

history of academic underperformance. According to his research, the academy school had a strong set of values that ensured inclusion for all students. In his research, when he spoke to the headteacher about pupil achievement, the headteacher explained how pupils come into school with many struggles as they may have “been an outsider, the youngster who has no self-confidence, the youngster who has no self-worth, the youngster who has a terrible time at home who comes here and actually gains confidence” (2010: 755). He further explained how ethos is important in schools as it ensures pupils have a good time at school and are accepted for who they are. They do their best to succeed as a result, which enables them to achieve.

Gibson (2015) investigated the early stages of ethos and value realisation in sponsored academy schools in England. The study's findings revealed that school leaders employed a range of ways to build the ethos and vision of their academies. Among the techniques used were leadership, branding, educational principles, buildings, sponsor vision, high aspirations, and the development of new policies and procedures. The tactics discussed are important because they show how schools work to raise expectations. I believe that having high accomplishment and aspirational values is vital because it gives teachers the responsibility of ensuring children are working to their greatest potential.

Green's (2013) study on the identity, position, and ethos of jointly sponsored Church academies addresses the same issue. Green (2013) has investigated how the church schools articulated their ethos and vision. The primary research questions were: how do jointly sponsored academies articulate their goals and Christian ethos, and what is the relationship between school structures and academy ethos? Both research questions are extremely important because they provide expert judgement on how ethos and values are used in academy schools. They investigate the critical relationship between school structures and

ethos. However, the research questions are limited in that they focus on the relationship of ethos and values with school structures but fail to articulate how the ethos and values are used to identify important procedures and policies to raise pupil achievement.

Green (2013) focused on newly opened schools; while this provides a fair picture of how the school's vision and ethos are developed; it does not show how they have grown over time to accommodate students' particular needs. It is necessary to research a converter academy school to learn how strategies and procedures have evolved since the conversion. This will aid in acquiring a complete understanding of how the academy school's teachers and governors have or have not changed their ethos, values, and methods to emphasise equality and inclusion, as well as to minimise disparities and deprivation within the academy school setting.

## **Conclusion**

The research shows that academies can create an inclusive environment for pupils, especially if they have a strong ethos and value system (Pike, 2010). As evidenced by case studies such as Pike's research on England's "Most Improved Academy," academies can improve students' behaviour, self-esteem, and academic outcomes by prioritising inclusivity and high aspirations. However, the findings also highlight significant limitations in the academy system: the autonomy promise, which is one of the main justifications for academisation, has frequently been unmet, as headteachers complain about external restrictions (Thompson, Lingard, and Ball, 2020). Additionally, there is evidence that academies are not adequately meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Research by Gorard (2010) raises issues regarding unfair practices that deny economically disadvantaged children access, which is contradictory to the inclusion principles that many schools claim to uphold.

These contradictions raise critical questions around the effectiveness of academisation as a policy for reducing inequalities. While the ethos and values of academies have shown potential to improve individual student outcomes, systematic issues such as forced academisation and inequitable access undermine broader objectives. This highlights the need for more comprehensive strategies that address inequalities at both the structural and procedural levels. The rationale for this thesis lies in its exploration of these contradictions and its contribution to a nuanced understanding of academisation.

## **2.4 Family background; Minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners**

Family background is important since it has a significant impact on how well students perform academically (Weiser and Riggio, 2010). It can be argued to play a role in the obtainment of further educational opportunities (Egalite, 2016). Many academy schools in England have a large proportion of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils in attendance (Government, 2022). It is critical to investigate current and past studies on family history and its implications on student achievement. When investigating family history within schools, two major concepts must be investigated: deprivation and segregation, as these two ideas commonly overlap.

Deprivation and segregation within the academy school system have been the subject of numerous investigations. Deprivation can first be understood as coming from the family, to start with (Wills, 2010). Material, linguistic, and economic deprivation are all possible forms of deprivation. Lack of access to essential resources, such as books and other crucial learning tools, is known as material deprivation. Students' academic achievement is typically

negatively impacted by material deprivation (Lacour and Tissington, 2011). Linguistic deprivation is often encountered by ethnic minority pupils who speak English as an additional language (Figuerola, 2017). Ethnic minority pupils who are EAL often come into school using restricted codes, as illustrated by the key socio-linguistic theorist Bernstein (1962).

It is argued that students from working-class or middle-class backgrounds produce language that can be understood in terms of codes (Bernstein, 1962). According to Bernstein, formal language includes more sophisticated codes and scholarly knowledge, and individuals who have these because of their upbringing (middle class) tend to benefit more directly from educational procedures. Students from lower-income families and those learning English as a second language who use informal codes are disadvantaged (Bernstein, 1962).

Economic disadvantage in education is often about an individual's family background (Machin, 2006). Parents on low income or those who receive additional support from the government are classified as being in the economically disadvantaged bracket. It is widely accepted that middle-class parents can offer their children the essential material resources, linguistic advantages, and financial advantages that will give them a head start (Lareau, 1987; Cox, 1975). Bourdieu (1977) suggests that familial habitus and dispositions, which organise how people view the world and maintain social disparities through unconscious transmission. Children learn many values from their families, which they then bring to school with them. Cultural capital, which is carried down through families, is thought to have an increasing influence on how children socialize and develop as people (Lamont and Lareau 1988). This means that youngsters are taught a variety of abilities through ways of communication (primary socialisation), such as language.

Families, according to Bourdieu (1990), are crucial in forming children's attitudes and ways of thinking. Many researchers have concentrated on family background in connection to social mobility, including Bernard and Hoskins (2017). The movement of persons between socioeconomic strata in society is a common definition of social mobility. In their 2017 study, Bernard and Hoskins looked at how high-performing academies overcame obstacles connected to family background to increase social mobility. The study looked at whether hard-working children from all backgrounds could achieve good exam results in schools that met the coalition government's standards for excellence, increasing their chances of social mobility.

88 students from two high-performing academies made up the sample used by Bernard and Hoskins, who employed semi-structured interviews to gather their data. The results show that participants' attitudes and values continue to be significantly influenced by their family history (Duarte, Escario and Sanagustin, 2017; Bolu-Steve and Sanni, 2013; Reeves, 2012). The outcomes of the study demonstrate the numerous ways in which students admit that their family's values and culture influence their behaviour and ambitions. This highlights how culture and family history can influence a child's learning in some circumstances. According to the study, a significant proportion of participants reported how their parents encouraged and assisted them in participating in extracurricular activities and gaining work experience, and how having positive relationships with their parents helped them feel at ease and learn at home.

Some participants spoke about the support and encouragement their fathers gave them as they pursued their education. This highlights the relevance of early socialisation in children's homes and how it affects their learning. A child's impression of education and the amount of

effort they chose to put in may be influenced by their parents' educational experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. This is consistent with Bourdieu's (1977) thoughts about how a child's ability to learn and receive an education is directly affected by the family.

According to Bernard and Hoskin's (2017) research, there are a few indications that the academy programme is enhancing social mobility prospects by removing barriers such as family background. They discovered that academies could foster an environment where students put in a lot of effort and strive for success. The schools they studied provided examples of the strategies they employed to motivate parents to actively participate in their children's education. This highlights the potential for social stability that academies can provide, as well as the importance of including parents in their children's education. Effective schools, according to the research, can establish cultures in which children work hard to attain extraordinary achievements. According to my understanding, it was critical to investigate what academies were doing to address family background concerns as well as the types of learning environments they had in place in their classrooms.

It is clear from Bernard and Hoskin's (2017) research findings that good schools may foster an environment where children put in effort and strive for success. To know whether academy schools promote an environment where students are encouraged to give extra effort to attain academic achievement, it is critical to examine their organisational principles.

Although Bernard and Hoskin's research is significant, it is important to note that it may be constrained due to their exclusive focus on high-achieving academy schools. Investigating schools that are improving is critical for researching inequality because it offers a better understanding of the expectations and techniques used by schools that need to improve. It is

vital to undertake study on schools classified as good or low performing in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. This study makes it less evident if the impacts of structural and material deprivation can be alleviated, let alone the means required to do so.

Family background has also been explored by Ramberg *et al.* (2021), who explored family background and student achievement through the means of the ethos of the school and the role it plays in a child's education. Ramberg *et al.* found a significant association between three family background characteristics and student achievement: parental education, family structure (students not living with two parents in the same household performed worse than students living with two parents), and the association between migration background and achievement (having lived in the country for a shorter or longer time).

This demonstrates the significance of family background and how it might affect a student's achievement. It is critical to investigate how minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged parents/caregivers assist their children's learning.

## **Conclusion**

Previous studies have shown that a student's family background has a significant impact on their ability to study and develop academically. It continues to be an important influence on pupils' attitudes and values. According to Bernard and Hoskins' (2017) study, pupils acknowledge that their family's values and culture influence their behaviour and goals. Three aspects of the family background — parental education, family structure, and a link between migration history and success — were found to be significantly correlated. This indicates the importance of family background as it consequently has an impact on the pupils' learning.



## 2.5 Inequalities and Social Mobility: A Closer Look

Diane Reay is a key sociologist who has explored social inequalities in education. It is important to explore the work of Diane Reay as it provides an overview of important concerns concerning inequalities and working-class pupils within the education system in England. Diane Reay herself, being brought up on a council estate and coming from a working-class background, has had a keen interest in examining educational inequalities. Reay has explored the educational experiences of the working class and how academies have been promoted as a means of raising working-class achievement. Reay raises many concerns about the education system becoming increasingly privatised due to the growth of business influences.

Reay explains in her recent book on 'Miseducation' (2017) how the working classes are constructed within a new neoliberal status quo that gives more importance to exchange value over use value and economic ends over educational ones. This is a common argument amongst many educational theorists, who argue academies care more about 'money' than pupils. Eyles, Machin and McNally (2017) argue that some academies may prioritise financial efficiency and resource management over the educational outcomes of pupils. Similarly, Simon, James, and Simon (2021) argue that academies can be found operating more like businesses as their focus is on performance. Moreover, there is a common concern with the ways in which academy schools have been reported as taking far fewer children who are on free school meals. This is because such pupils are usually 'costly' as extra funds must be spent on them. She goes on to argue that the working classes continuously must suffer from educational inequalities as there is a "reintroduction of grammar schools that work to mark out the working classes as educational losers" (2017: 12).

Reay reports on the work of Nick Stevenson (2015) and his exploration of neo-liberalism. Stevenson argues we are currently seeing the breaking up of the comprehensive system and writes of how it is rapidly being replaced by an academy system that can be seen as being more selective and more fragmented than the system it replaces. This can be understood by how academies have greater autonomy and are becoming increasingly marketised through competition. Academies are independently run and, therefore, can use their funds to address specific needs.

Academies often receive their funding from businesses who are not experienced in education and, therefore, do not provide adequate educational support (Ball, 2022). State schools receive their funding directly from the local authorities who are experts in the field of education, and they therefore ensure funding is being used for educational purposes rather than business. Bourdieu (1974) has argued that for working-class young people and their families: “The school system increasingly seems like a mirage, the source of an immense, collective disappointment, a promised land which, like the horizon, recedes as one moves towards it” (page 22). Diane Reay has explored how the working classes deal with the constant vision of failure and the obscurity of success that they encounter daily in schooling. She identifies how the working classes must increasingly deal with a lack of recognition, both as successful learners and as valuable individuals as the education system is made to serve middle-class interests. Despite all this, academy schools have been heavily promoted as a means of pulling up working-class achievement.

Andrew Adonis (2008), six years after the first academies were opened, claimed that academies were 'establishing a culture of ambition to replace the poverty of aspiration'. Similarly,

David Cameron claimed that they were "working miracles in some of the most deprived parts of our country". Although there is a lot of research to support academy schools as being effective in overcoming issues of underachievement, research carried out by Reay illustrates the ineffectiveness of academy schools. Reay conducted interviews between the years 2010 and 2016. Her findings revealed that these students were more likely to focus on the barriers to their learning rather than the factors that supported or enhanced it.

Reay reports on the work of Jessica Abrahams (2013), who explored academy schools and concluded that the rules in academy schools are rigid expectations are not met, culture is disregarded, and home circumstances are ignored. This goes against the academy school's original aims of creating mixed-ability schools and increasing school diversity and choice. However, this is not to ignore that academy schools have been reported by many theorists as being successful in raising pupil achievement. Research indicates an average increase of 8 per cent a year in the GCSE test scores among students in academy schools (PwC, 2008).

Reay (2017) argues that there is an issue with the working class wanting to be upwardly mobile. She argues that the socially mobile individual is frequently caught between two worlds, and never fully integrated into either. Reay has carried out a lot of research on working-class students which illustrates how young people are trying to put something right that is not their responsibility. They are trying to correct wider historic social ills that they have not personally caused. For instance, one individual whom she interviewed explained how he wants to do well at school to make his mother proud of him as she was unable to get an education herself. This illustrates how young people, particularly among the working classes, are caught between their desires and wanting to fix something that they have not personally caused. Reay explains how working-class children are striving to want something different, something

more than their parents had. This not only implies that there is something wrong with your parents' life but that there is something intrinsically wrong with them and there remains an emptiness to becoming somebody if your parents remain nobodies. Middle and upper-class young people do not have to go through the following issues as they are privileged in many ways.

Having explored the arguments put forth by Reay concerning inequalities. It is important to explore issues related to social mobility as these often coincide with aspects of inequality. Social mobility is understood as the movement of pupils or families through a system of hierarchy or stratification. Social mobility continues to be a concern for many sociologists and academics (Cole, 2022; Bellani *et al*, 2022). The gap between the rich and the poor has grown bigger. Instead of greater income and social equality, the income and influence of individuals from rich families have increased (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). The government in England has a national plan (DfE, 2016) to support children and young people to reach their full potential.

According to recent statistics, the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers is closing (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012), but these pupils remain behind their peers. Academy schools have an objective of raising achievement by 'breaking the cycle of underachievement' and 'low aspirations' in areas of deprivation with historically low performance. It is important to understand that although social mobility may concern many, it should not be considered more important than addressing inequalities, poverty, and deprivation experienced by pupils in schools.

Reay (2017) argues for the importance of overcoming inequalities and supporting children to help them overcome underachievement. She stresses the fact that individuals don't have to try to improve their chances of social mobility as this causes children to feel that they are a failure, and that education is not for them. Instead, schools need to help children on an individual level and provide them with extra support. It is important to explore the extent to which academy schools are doing this and what strategies are being used by academy schools.

She argues in her work that social mobility is "no solution to either educational inequalities or wider social and economic injustices" (2017: 102). She argues that it is an inadequate solution for those individuals whose social mobility was driven by a desire to make things better. Reay argues that we are to some extent forming optimistic attachments to the power structures that oppressed us. Social mobility can be seen as a preferred cure for educational inequalities in societies like England. However, moving someone up or down between or within the social strata does not reduce inequalities. Inequalities that exist within the education system need to be addressed using effective structures which should aim to benefit all pupils and not just those higher up the strata. There is the potential that academy schools can be seen as providing a good learning environment for working-class pupils as they can mould their curriculum according to pupils' needs.

Bourdieu (1974) sees culture as being preserved in the institutional conditions of schools in how they organise themselves, the way the curriculum is delivered, and the way knowledge is classified. However, according to Reay (2017), it is not merely the structures within schools that reproduce inequalities but, the issues related to social mobility, along with the constant

struggle working-class individuals go through to be able to move themselves up in the class system.

Hutchings (2021) investigated the strategies used by affluent parents to provide their children with an educational advantage. The research suggests that a “glass floor” prevents downwards social mobility with parents from higher social groups using a variety of tactics to prevent their children from falling further down the social ladder. The findings of Hutchings's study are consistent with those of McKnight (2015), who uncovered the truth of the "glass floor," which prevents less gifted, better-off youngsters from slipping down the social ladder as adults. It has been discovered that middle-class parents are successful at establishing a "glass floor" that shields their children from social mobility and makes it more difficult for bright children from less privileged families to achieve.

According to McKnight's research, the glass floor is supported by two main pillars. First, it has been observed that parents with more advantages seek out educational opportunities to help their children overcome a lack of academic ability and surpass their more talented but less fortunate peers by devoting time and money to education to aid their children in recovering and obtaining good qualifications. This is crucial as it gives evidence of the importance of parental education and how it has a big impact on children's schooling.

The second pillar that was discovered to support the glass floor was how privileged parents provided their children with advantages in the job market by placing them in unpaid internships and assisting them in finding employment through informal social networks. Both Hutchings and McKnight's studies are important as they indicate the extent to which parents have an impact on the education of their children. Because academics try to address issues of

disadvantage, it is critical to investigate the extent to which parents of economically disadvantaged pupils are made to actively take part in their children's learning through workshops and programmes.

In recent reports, there have been many arguments about social mobility. There are arguments around social mobility being the wrong goal and assertions that we need more equality, as noted by Reay above. The latest Social Mobility Commission report (2017) states that radical reform is required to repair a divided Britain. The report illustrates that reform is needed to overcome decades of policy failures that have left the poor behind. However, this should not be considered the main goal: it is important to put the needs of children first and to help them to excel and do well as individuals. As Reay (2017) argues, we do not need to focus on social mobility, rather the main emphasis needs to be on achieving greater social and economic equality. Resources and energy are required to support and value a larger group of those individuals who are "left behind".

There are arguments that rather than focusing on social mobility, a reduction in poverty and inequality is required (Blundell, 2022). Many working-class and minority-ethnic pupils suffer from material deprivation: they do not have the educational resources to succeed, for instance: books, stationery, computers, and so on. Therefore, schools need to be able to provide children with these resources to ensure success. The focus should not be on making individuals upwardly mobile; instead, the focus should be on overcoming issues of family background and deprivation. David Bell (Annual report, 2005) stressed that children of working-class parents are often, for various reasons, at a disadvantage before they even reach school. Recent research suggests that children's early educational achievement is influenced by factors outside of the school (Rahimah and Koto, 2022). Research also indicates that

during the intervening years education makes no impact on pre-school developmental trends and therefore illustrates that it most certainly does not do what education is supposed to do for working-class children (Thaba and Baharuddin, 2022).

Educational theorists such as Paul Willis (1977) have argued that education is supposedly understood as increasing opportunities for working-class pupils. This is because education is known to provide pupils with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed and move up the social and economic ladder. Reay (2006) argues that social inequalities arising from social class have never been adequately addressed within schooling. Having explored the issues related to achieving equality in schools, Reay has come to an understanding that policy changes that claim to address equity and fairness do not attain this. She reported on data collected over the last ten years, which indicates that the educational gap between the classes has widened over the last ten years. She concluded that social class remains one of the main issues within education and that educational policies have had no impact on this. It is crucial to ensure that schools provide equality for all in terms of educational success while bearing in mind that children from working-class backgrounds are disadvantaged when they initially start their schooling.

It is vital to come up with strategies and procedures to support disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their middle-class peers. Reay in her recent book on 'Miseducation' argues that "social mobility is a process that is constantly troubled by questions of differential values and valuing" (2017: 102). Social mobility cannot in turn help to overcome issues of inequality. It is crucial to provide the working class with the resources required to make that success possible. The curriculum contains bias as there is an agreed sociological understanding that the curriculum supports White middle-class pupils (Bourdieu, 1977 and Reay, 2017).



Rather than focusing on issues related to social mobility, the focus should be on tackling poverty and inequalities experienced by minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils in schools. Richard Chadwick (2017) (Director of programmes and development) has argued for the importance of supporting disadvantaged pupils to develop the essential skills required and asserts that no young person should be left behind because of their socioeconomic background. It is important to understand to what extent academy schools are seen as reducing socioeconomic segregation by creating mixed-ability schools. Walford (2014) has explored several education research papers and focused on the effectiveness of academies in reducing socioeconomic status segregation in England, as well as the growth of Free Schools within England and the effects of academies and Free Schools in England on social justice. He has argued that free schools and old schools such as City Technology Colleges can be seen as examples of increased privatisation and selection. And as a result, can be understood to exhibit their own embedded forms of social (in)justice.

Overall, Reay's work demonstrates how power structures influence how the education system suits individuals. The education system can be perceived as benefiting the middle class students who are not constantly afraid of failing. Although Reay can illustrate how social mobility is not helpful in enhancing success for working-class students, her reasons appear to be limited. To begin, she blames the institutions and education system for the failure of working-class people, and she also fails to pay enough attention to language and ethnicity.

## **2.6 Supporting EAL Learners: Minority Ethnic Pupils**

EAL learners are a diverse and heterogeneous group of learners who speak English as an additional language. EAL learners from minority ethnic backgrounds can be considered an

important case study as one of the academies' main objectives is to create diverse and inclusive schools. There is a widely debated notion that minority ethnic pupils frequently experience linguistic deprivation (Figueroa, 2017 and Sharan & Sachar, 2012). Linguistic deprivation, rooted in cultural deprivation theory, refers to the assumptions that the home environment for certain pupils, particularly those from minority ethnic and working-class backgrounds, lacks the linguistic richness needed for academic success. This perspective has been critiqued for perpetuating deficit views, as it often overlooks the cultural and linguistic values these pupils bring to the classroom. Such assumptions risk framing diverse linguistic practices as inferior rather than acknowledging their potential to enhance the educational experience when properly valued and supported. As discussed earlier, this is explained by Bernstein (1962) in the form of elaborate and restricted codes. Academy schools in deprived areas have a range of minority children in attendance, whose first language is not English.

The Department for Education defines a pupil's first language as "the language to which a child was initially exposed during early development and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or the community" (DfE, 2013: 7). Children from minority ethnic backgrounds often come to school knowing an additional language (English not being their first). The number of EAL pupils that attended the academy that took part in this study at the time was 36%. Academy schools contain a mixture of pupils from various ethnic backgrounds. Commonly, there are children of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and African-Caribbean descent whose first language is not English. Many parents with children from such ethnicities often engage with their children using an additional language other than English. Therefore, when children start school, they come into school knowing little to no English.

Bourdieu (1974) has explored how this has a negative impact on a child when “he” starts school. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital refers to an individual’s dialect and accent in an embodied state. According to Bourdieu (1974) schools legitimate class inequalities as the education system is facilitated by the possession of cultural capital. Children who are from the lower classes do not tend to possess such qualities and, therefore, Bourdieu argues that failure for most of these pupils is inevitable. It takes time for children to begin to understand the English language and teacher-pupil interaction is very limited as they are unable to communicate with one another. This causes the child to be left behind in their learning.

Initially, the local authority created support for EAL provision in schools; however, this was affected by the expansion of academy schools (Arnot *et al.*, 2014). This was in turn due to the loss of local authority funding and support. Before 2011, local authorities provided support to schools through the work of their minority ethnic achievement services, which included: EAL advice, bilingual support for new arrivals, and first language assessment for pupils whose progress is causing concern, staff professional development (raising ethnic minority achievement), and developing a culturally inclusive curriculum (Liu *et al.* 2017). These programmes have proven to be useful for pupils and ensure they are receiving extra support to allow them to catch up with their peers (Cajkler and Hall, 2009). Since these services have been affected by the loss of local authority control with the expansion of the academy school’s system, it is crucial to explore what alternative strategies are being used by academies, if not the same, in support of minority ethnic pupils.

Due to the policy changes as of April 2013, the services explained above are either only free to state-maintained primary schools and are in turn chargeable to primary and secondary academies or (in some local authority areas) not available at all (Arnot *et al.* 2014). Before

the changes, a range of services was available to schools, including EAL advice and guidance, bilingual support for new arrivals, First Language Assessment for pupils whose progress is causing concern (FLA), and staff development regarding school strategies for narrowing the gap and raising ethnic minority achievement; working with Eastern European pupils; developing a culturally inclusive curriculum, and English as an additional language (Arnot *et al.* 2014).

Arnot *et al.* (2014) report research carried out at a primary school in England. The teachers at the primary school highlighted a range of relevant factors which they thought influenced the achievement of minority ethnic pupils who spoke English as an additional language. These included: staff time for support, pupils' personalities and abilities, and support from home. This indicates the important role teachers play in the learning of students, along with the need for the involvement of parents in their children's learning.

Crozier (2001) study is important as it highlights how systemic biases in parental engagement practices contribute to the exclusion of minority ethnic parents. Schools often operate on the assumptions and preconceptions they have of minority ethnic parents and their involvement that reflect White, Middle-class norms, which overlook the cultural capital and contributions of minority ethnic parents. Crozier argues that this deracialisation of parental involvement can create barriers for minority ethnic families, which as a result exacerbates educational inequalities. It can be argued that schools need to develop more inclusive strategies that embrace cultural diversity to reduce inequalities.

As many primary school academies accept minority pupils who speak English as an additional language (especially in disadvantaged areas), it is critical to investigate this common issue surrounding EAL learners and the barriers faced by minority ethnic pupils

within the academy school setting to determine what strategies the academy school employs to help overcome issues related to language barriers and economic disadvantage. Research carried out by Arnot *et al.* (2014) illustrates that many primary schools encourage good relationships between parents and schools. However, they discovered a common concern with parents not attending parent meetings or programs involving parent-child activities, whereas the secondary schools studied showed progress in terms of parents being able to communicate with the school through the encouragement of parents to participate in projects. Many secondary academy schools have programs in place to encourage parents to become involved with the school; it is crucial to determine whether these influences support students who speak English as an additional language.

The research carried out by Arnot *et al.* also illustrated that knowledge about parental background tended to be stronger with headteachers or EAL teaching assistants than with the class teachers or non-EAL teaching staff. This is an important finding as it throws light on the limitations and boundaries concerning the amount of knowledge held by class teachers about each student's family background. Especially as parental background is understood to have some impact on a pupil's learning and values within the classroom-based environment (Egalite, 2016). It is important to explore the extent to which classroom teachers familiarise themselves with the learning and understanding of their EAL pupils.

Research carried out by Corcoran and Kaneva (2021), who explored inclusive communities and EAL learners, indicated the importance of striking a balance between achievement and inclusive values. Corcoran and Kaneva argued that inclusive communities should be developed within education, where each learner is acknowledged as having unique characteristics

and prior knowledge should be built upon to enable a sense of belonging that will in turn support attainment. This study is significant because it highlights the necessity of considering students' specific characteristics and providing them with a sense of belonging, which will help them achieve.

It is understood that in mainstream curriculum classrooms, inter-personal relationships between teachers and pupils are the most important means by which the schools' structures and systems support children's full participation in educational processes (Efthymiou, Kington and Lee, 2016). Not enough research has been done on teacher and pupil relationships and how this affects the classroom. Primary school academies in England can be seen as having a significant body of minority ethnic pupils in their schools. If we compare the results from the reports published by the government on minority ethnic group's attainment (based on GCSE results), in the years 2014 and 2021 not much difference can be found. The 2014 report shows the percentage of Pakistani pupils achieving five A\*-C grades was 51.4%. In the 2021 report, this percentage was 50.5%. Similarly, if we look at the results of Bangladeshi pupils, in 2014 61.3% of pupils achieved five A\*-C grades and in 2021 55.6% of pupils received five A\*-C grades (DfE, 2021 and DfE, 2014). These results indicate that not enough is being done to help all minority ethnic groups attain better results.

In contrast to this, according to the same reports, White English-speaking pupils achieving five A\*-C grades in 2014 was 56.7%, which increased slightly to 58.2% in 2021. This suggests that while the attainment gap between some minority ethnic groups and White English-speaking pupils has persisted or widened slightly, White pupils have experienced decent improvement during the same period. This may suggest that minority ethnic pupils

who speak English as an additional language may not be receiving adequate support to help close gaps in attainment.

Strand (2007) explored ethnic pupils in a longitudinal study of young people in England. His findings reveal substantial social and economic disadvantage among some ethnic groups. It was also found that parents' educational aspirations for their children to continue to further education were significantly higher among all minority groups as compared to the White British. It was found that Black African parents were more involved with their child's schooling than White British parents, who were in turn more involved than Pakistani or Bangladeshi parents. Indian parents were most likely to have paid for private classes or tuition in subjects also taught in school, and White British parents the least likely. Indian parents were also found to be the most likely to have a computer as compared to other ethnic minorities, who were least likely. This demonstrates the diversity of parents' attitudes about their children's learning. It is critical to study parents' perspectives and experiences with the academy school in terms of helping their children's learning.

There is an understanding that ethnic background alone does not determine underachievement. Class and ethnicity often combine to generate patterns of underachievement (Thompson, 2019). Cultural deprivation theorists such as Douglas (1964) argue that minority ethnic pupils often have low academic ambitions due to a lack of parental encouragement. This is an argument that requires further exploration. It is important to find out whether academies encourage parents to take part in their children's learning. Although some minority ethnic pupils achieve great success in school, there are issues concerning the struggle faced by minority ethnic parents who are economically disadvantaged as they may not have the education,

experience, or confidence that is required to ensure that the right choices are made about their child's education (Goodall and Montgomery, 2013).

Minority ethnic disadvantage can also be understood further through the views of Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1977) explores the concept of cultural deprivation. There is consensus amongst sociologists regarding the meaning of cultural deprivation. It is commonly understood as a theory in sociology which claims that individuals from working-class backgrounds cannot simply acquire cultural capital, hindering their access to education and upward social mobility. Bourdieu (1986) argues that there are structural reasons related to class reproduction which illustrate why some classes have cultural capital and others do not. Lareu (1987), building on Bourdieu's ideas around cultural capital, explains that families from different social classes raise their children in different ways. Middle-class families often use a parenting style called "concerted cultivation", which helps children develop skills that schools value. In contrast, working-class families tend to use a "natural growth" approach which may not prepare children in the same way for school expectations. For instance, there are children from minority ethnic families who may communicate in other languages as opposed to English.

Michael-Luna (2015) argues for the importance of schools creating a space for family knowledge, beliefs, and concerns about children's language use and development at home. He argues that when family insights are taken into consideration, teachers can better understand how to create a space that is welcoming and supportive to all students. Similarly, Sawyer *et al.* (2017) mention the importance of having a positive partnership between teachers and families that can help create a collaboration that allows parental cultural knowledge to be added to school structures. Both these studies are important as they demonstrate the need for schools to create environments which allow the cultural inclusion of minority ethnic families.



Since some schools are understood to display a dominant middle-class culture, students from minority ethnic backgrounds who are economically disadvantaged often have less to identify with at the school, and therefore, this can result in them feeling marginalised (Jackson, 2022). The interaction of minority ethnic groups and economic deprivation is an intriguing topic that will be investigated in this research study. As academies become more popular in the English education system, it is critical to investigate how the new schooling system incorporates the learning of minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged students.

Larey (2018) mentions the argument posed by Bourdieu (1974) around schools being instrumental in creating a 'habit-forming force'. Bourdieu believed that schools generate the distinctive habitus of the culture and that it is the culture which divides and imposes boundaries on individuals according to the attributes they possess. Habitus is understood as a system of embodied dispositions that organise how individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. These dispositions usually relate to an individual's class background, education, ethnicity, and so on. It is rooted in family upbringing (socialisation within the family) and is conditioned by one's position in the social structure. It represents how the individual's personal history and group culture shape the body and the mind and, as a result, shape social action in the present. This can be related to the things learnt from an early age from the family (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973). Bourdieu does not blame the parents or pupils but in fact, argues against the culture imposed by schools.

Bourdieu (1974) views culture as being preserved in the institutional conditions of the school in the way in which they organise themselves, the way the curriculum is delivered, and the way knowledge is classified. This can be to how lessons are delivered to pupils. Bourdieu

also uses the concept of the ‘field’, which, he explains, is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located, so, for instance, a school. There is an understanding that because teachers are often middle-class themselves, they are believed to have a middle-class habitus and, as a result, are more likely to relate to similar pupils (Jackson, 2022).

He further argued that working-class failure in schools is the fault of the education system and not because of the culture of the working class. Bourdieu’s work is significant as he blames the structures of the education system as opposed to pupils who are from the working class. It is crucial to explore the extent to which academy schools cater for the needs of economically disadvantaged pupils and those from minority ethnic and EAL backgrounds, as these individuals are often found to be marginalised within the school system. The education system can be seen as forming distinctions between pupils by positioning them within a social hierarchy and, subsequently, creating inequalities. This is an ongoing issue and is perpetuating inequality in schools (Ainley, 2013).

## **2.7 A Closer Look at the OFSTED Inspection Framework for Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is a crucial concept that is often used within the field of education. In recent times, cultural capital has become a term frequently used by educational organisations such as Ofsted and the Department for Education. In September 2019, Ofsted created a new inspection framework that required schools to develop their students’ cultural capital. Much of

the framework stressed the importance of developing pupils through aspects of personal development, learning skills, realising talents, developing character, learning about British values, and diversity, and realising talents. Lander (2019) has critiqued the policy of Fundamental British Values. She argues that this policy reinforces the dominant cultural norms, which do not give importance to the cultural identities of minority ethnic groups. Fundamental British Values may promote inclusivity on the surface; however, they fail to engage with the diverse cultural capital that is present within classrooms and particularly within academies that are striving for inclusivity.

Birkenshaw and Clothier (2021) have explored the recent Ofsted Inspection framework (2019) and conclude that, if cultural capital is deemed to be a necessary educational asset by policymakers, then all children must be equipped with rich and diverse cultural capital that encourages intellectual curiosity and creativity to allow them to thrive in modern-day Britain. Similarly, Nightingale (2020) has also explored the recent Ofsted Inspection framework and how schools are now expected to concentrate on the realisation of a knowledge-based curriculum, which allows all students to acquire cultural capital. They argue that Ofsted's (2019) version of cultural capital remodels cultural deprivation with the aim of inclusion to ranking and simply disguising ongoing exclusion. This can be seen as quite problematic in the sense that it ignores the exclusion that minority ethnic pupils, EAL, and those who are economically disadvantaged have to face on a day-to-day basis within the education system.

Having explored the inspection handbook for schools (Ofsted, 2019) it appears to offer a different definition of cultural capital from that articulated by Bourdieu (1977). Children require cultural capital, or fundamental knowledge, to set themselves up for success in the future. Giving children the best possible start in their early education is the focus. Inspectors

will consider how well teachers use the curriculum to improve the possibilities and experiences available to children, especially the most disadvantaged. Young and Billings (2020) debate how the new framework for cultural capital can cause psychological issues amongst children as they are made to believe that they should be something, have something, or be doing something that they cannot be. Hall asserts the negative impact this has on children as this negative cultural capital passively facilitates marginalisation.

Research carried out by Wilson-Thomas and Brooks (2024) explored Ofsted's new inspection framework (2019). They argued how Ofsted's introduction of cultural capital into early years inspections provides an example of how policy frameworks may marginalise cultural expressions. Ofsted's definition of cultural capital focuses on essential knowledge that is familiar to middle-class pupils. It is important for the academy to consider adopting a broader understanding of cultural capital that values all pupils, and it is important to incorporate this within their curriculum.

It is critical to recognise that everyone possesses cultural capital, which consists of information, skills, and behaviours acquired over time from a variety of experiences and opportunities. The ability to perform well in school, learning how to talk in various social groups or societies, access to higher education, and success at work or in a job are all examples of how cultural capital is thought to help with "getting on in life" or "social status." 2021 (McTavish).

It could be more beneficial to consider first and foremost the cultures, languages, and traditions that children and their families bring, and how we might appreciate and celebrate this,

rather than viewing cultural capital as something that must be "given" or "taught." It is believed that each child and family who joins a setting brings with them unique information and experiences that are connected to their culture and wider family. Languages, beliefs, customs, cultural heritage, hobbies, travel, and employment are examples of this. According to research, children's learning experiences and development can both benefit when the cultures of their families and the children are acknowledged (Husain *et al.*, 2018, and Gazzard, 2018 and Crisfield, 2019)

Reid (2020) argues for the importance of creating a curriculum that offers a broader picture alongside a properly funded co-curricular offering to truly contribute to pupils' cultural capital in a way that is both pragmatic and principled. There are arguments put forth that the funding crisis in schools is having an impact on disadvantaged pupils' opportunities to access their cultural heritage. Similarly, Birkenshaw and Clothier (2021) questioned Michael Gove's legacy on cultural capital and contended that the recent inclusion of cultural capital in the English Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019) caused a stir in some educational circles, with some suggesting it is an indication of "white, middle-class paternalism. Reay (2019) argues that the new requirement was reductionist and elitist. She states that cultural capital is entwined with privileged lifestyles that are taught to the poor and working classes and are not appropriate. It is understood that this approach is flawed as it indicates that some cultures are more valuable than others. Despite this Harford (2019), the national director contends:

"Our new framework puts the substance of education at the heart of inspections -- not just test and exam results -- because it's a well-designed, well-taught curriculum that gives

children the essential knowledge and cultural capital that they need to succeed in becoming well-rounded, informed citizens."

This new structure enforced by Ofsted explains how schools are expected to include cultural capital in their curriculum, which will be inspected in schools. This indicates how the educational system is geared toward producing persons with the 'cultural capital' of the dominant middle-class individuals. This is highly contentious and puts into question the extent to which schools accommodate minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. Connolly and Keenan (2002) explored the schooling experiences of minority ethnic children in predominantly White areas of Northern Ireland. Their findings revealed that systemic racism and racist harassment contributed to a lack of belonging and diminished opportunities to develop or use their cultural capital in school settings. This goes with the argument that schools often fail to value or integrate the cultural resources of minority ethnic learners and instead reinforce the dominant cultural narratives.

## **Summary of the literature**

The literature review investigated the history of the English educational system. It helps us understand how the school system and its policies have developed over time to address issues of inequality. The school system has attempted to construct a fair and equal system that assures all children receive some type of education; nonetheless, inequities persist. Many techniques and programs have been implemented in support of underachieving and minority ethnic students, according to educational policies; yet many characteristics and structures of schools continue to maintain disparities.

These programs are still in use in schools. Academy schools are the most recent schools to be established to provide mixed-ability schools to enhance achievement. According to research on academy schools, some have a strong ethos and principles in place that inspire students to achieve well and work hard (Pike, 2010). There has also been an increase in parental involvement in their child's learning, and this is through the new academies program, which keeps parents informed of their child's development. It is vital to remember that the academy school system (especially for primary schools) is still in its early stages of growth and that academy schools require more time to progress and develop.

Various gaps have been identified in the literature. Not much research has been carried out on primary school academies as they are fairly new. Primary school academies were introduced in the year 2010 (Boyask, 2016) under the Academies Act and since then, new studies have emerged such as Gorard's (2010) study on converter academies and disadvantaged pupils. Gorard's research illustrates that converter academies are taking on far fewer disadvantaged pupils as compared to sponsored academies. Academies are appearing in regions where there are already unequal school mixes, implying that they may not be fulfilling their initial objective of producing mixed-ability schools. However, the Converter Academy school that has offered to participate in the current study is located in a deprived district of Greater Manchester, and the academy school serves many underprivileged students. This information was included in the most recent Ofsted report (2017) on the school. It shows that the proportion of disadvantaged students is more than double the national average. This demonstrates that not all converter academy schools have lost sight of their initial mission.

There has been no research into how academy schools are working to fight difficulties relating to economic inequality and the issues experienced by minority ethnic students, so this is something that needs to be investigated. It is critical to explore whether or if academy schools assist students in overcoming issues associated with educational disparities and deprivation, and if so, how they do so. Although several studies on the ethos and values of the academy school system have been conducted, the study appears to be limited (Green, 2014). It is critical to investigate the ethos and principles, as well as the various tactics utilised by the academy school to address challenges related to educational disadvantage.

There is limited research concerning teachers and the kinds of barriers or support teachers encounter in attempting to help disadvantaged pupils to succeed educationally within the academy school environment. It is crucial to explore inequalities within the academy school's system as the academy school's policy partly aims to tackle issues of deprivation (Machin and Vernoit, 2010; Curtis *et al.*, 2008). It is important to explore what it is that the academy school is doing to raise pupil achievement among minority ethnic pupils who may experience issues related to language barriers, which is something that has not been explored to any great extent.

Several research studies indicate the underachievement and economic disadvantage experienced by Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Black African pupils before the development of primary academies (DfES, 2006; Strand, 2007). It is crucial to explore some of these communities to generate an understanding of the cultural attitudes formed by these communities' concerning education and to gain an understanding of how the academy school helps these pupils overcome the disadvantages they experience in school.



The literature on the history of the English educational system was initially reviewed to develop the study's theoretical context. This made it possible to establish a thorough picture of how England's educational system has developed over time, with the formation of policies that have been modified and formed through time to address problems with inequalities and deprivation. The review of the literature was conducted to examine research that has been undertaken on academy schools, examining a wide range of topics including deprivation, success rates, privatisation of education, and social mobility, with numerous gaps within the literature being discovered.

An annotated bibliography was used to help conduct a successful literature search. By categorising the research according to what was "most relevant" down to "least relevant", this allowed a summarisation of several research findings. The study question, which is related to inequality, economic disadvantage, and minority ethnic students in English schools, was identified with the help of a literature search. This has helped to determine the purpose of the study. Gaps were found in the literature as not much research had been carried out on primary school academies since they are fairly new. Most of the research to date has focused on secondary school academies. This indicated the need for research on primary school academies.

Additionally, little research has been performed on how economic, minority ethnic and EAL disadvantages are overcome in primary school academies. Research was required to explore what academies were doing to support students from minority ethnicities and to explore how academies combat the disadvantages that students face. The types of disadvantages (material, economic, and linguistic) indicated in the literature offered signs of family background having an impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Past research has not fully explored how family background and other forms of disadvantage experienced by minority ethnic pupils within

academy schools were overcome. Further research was required to explore the types of strategies and interventions employed by academy schools to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage experienced by minority ethnic pupils and EAL pupils.

There has been little research on the opinions and experiences of teachers who support educationally disadvantaged pupils in primary academy schools. It was critical to learn about the difficulties teachers experience when working with pupils from low-income backgrounds. Although much study has been conducted on ethos and values, it does not investigate how ethos and values are implemented to assist students in overcoming challenges associated with minority ethnic (EAL) and economic disadvantage. Furthermore, further research was required to investigate the experiences of parents whose children attended the academy school to acquire a better picture of the support their child was receiving from the school. The research gaps enabled the development of appropriate research questions. The research questions reflected the most essential components of the current study. The study's goal was to investigate the approaches employed by a primary school converter academy in a low-income area of Greater Manchester to support economically disadvantaged, minority ethnic, and EAL pupils.

### **Research questions:**

1. What are the ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy school to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage?
2. How do the school's strategies impact minority ethnic learners (EAL) and those who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What are teachers' experiences of working within a converter primary academy school to support educationally disadvantaged learners?

4. What are parents' experiences of the academy in supporting their children's learning?

These research questions sought to investigate the ethos, values, and strategies used by the academy school to address challenges of educational disadvantage faced by minority ethnic students and those from low-income families. I wanted to find out more about the experiences and perspectives of teachers and parents whose students and children attended the academy. The following chapter delves into the methodology utilised to conduct the research.

## **Chapter 3      Approach and Methodology**

The preceding chapter critically examined the literature on the English educational system, focusing on the history of education, academy schools, family background, inequalities, social mobility, and minority ethnic pupils. This chapter will discuss the methodologies and approaches used to answer the research questions after examining the gaps in the literature and outlining the research questions. The study aimed to investigate the methods used by a primary school converter academy in a low-income region of Greater Manchester to support pupils identified by the academy as minority ethnic, EAL, or economically disadvantaged learners. These were examined through the viewpoints of the headteacher, associate heads, teachers, teaching assistants, and parents. The research aimed to gain a detailed understanding of the types of strategies adopted by teachers and the barriers they faced on a day-to-day basis when supporting economically disadvantaged pupils, minority ethnic learners and minority ethnic learners who spoke English as an additional language. To achieve these goals, several key objectives were established.

### **Research Aims:**

The primary aim of the research was to analyse how a converter primary school academy in a deprived area of Greater Manchester supported the learning of:

- 1) Minority ethnic pupils
- 2) English as an additional language pupils (EAL)
- 3) Economically disadvantaged pupils

This was achieved by examining the ethos, values, and strategies implemented by the academy, while also exploring the broader implications for educational policy and practice in addressing systemic inequalities.

### **3.1 Objectives**

- To investigate the ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy to overcome educational disadvantage.
- To explore the impact of these strategies on the learning and development of: Minority ethnic, English as an additional language, and economically disadvantaged pupils.
- To document and analyse teachers' experiences in working with disadvantaged learners, focusing on their perceptions of inclusion, resource allocation, and challenges.
- To examine parents' perspectives on how the academy supports their children's learning and development.

The research aims, objectives, and research questions emphasise the need to explore and generate understanding about various aspects of the academy school. After having conceptualised the study and having established distinct research questions and objectives, an appropriate research strategy was sought to address the aims and objectives. This chapter begins by outlining how the research strategy was chosen, followed by clarifying and justifying the methodological approach used, which was interpretivism. The chapter then discusses data collection methods and data analysis approaches. The chapter finishes by analysing the limitations of the methods adopted.

### **3.2 Developing an Effective Research Strategy**

The selection of an appropriate strategy was crucial to obtain answers to the research questions. The research strategy was an essential part of the study as it allowed careful planning

of how the research was to be conducted. The study under enquiry (the academy school) dictated the type of research methodology required to underpin the work, along with the types of methods used to collect data. The rationale for using the case study analysis approach, which included semi-structured interviews to acquire in-depth answers, originated from keywords in the research questions and objectives, such as 'create an understanding,' 'to investigate,' and so forth. Along with the use of semi-structured interviews, content analysis was carried out on the academy schools' website, which helped to gain an understanding of how the academy operated and allowed for additional information to be gathered alongside the interviews.

### **3.3 Interpretivism: Exploring its Epistemological Stance**

The research utilised a qualitative, interpretive approach. Interpretivism allows the understanding of individual experiences. It is based on the theory that reality is observed subjectively. It was the most appropriate theory to use as it made it possible to immerse oneself into the culture of the school, which allowed the generation of understandings concerning the culture of the school with the observation of first-hand experiences undergone by teachers and pupils (Taylor and Medina, 2013). Interpretivism relies on the researcher and the participants as the instruments to measure social phenomena in the given setting of the academy (Donoghue, 2006). Interpretivism was the most relevant stance as it allowed the exploration of the perspectives and experiences of the academy school staff and parents (human experiences) (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). This made it possible to ask parents questions specific to their child's progress, their experiences of their child attending the academy, and their awareness of any programmes put in place to ensure their child was doing well academically. Simi-

larly, teachers as well as academy leaders were asked questions concerning how certain strategies were incorporated and implemented within the academy in support of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners.

Interpretivism enabled many staff members who attended the academy to present their points of view. Pizam and Mansfeld (2009) outline the significance of interpretivism by pointing out how it enables the construction of meanings as well as a person's experiences, their understandings, and how they interact with them in daily life. An interpretivist strategy was necessary since it yielded high-quality primary data through interviews with academy staff and parents. This enabled the gathering of first-hand views of being a part of the academy. This is important because the data in these studies tend to be more reliable. After all, it entails interviewing numerous individuals in the same field and gathering in-depth information from them (Farrelly, 2013).

### **3.4 Using Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research strategy was employed to answer the research questions using an interpretivist approach. When examining the experiences and viewpoints of individuals, qualitative research is crucial. In contrast to quantitative research, which refers to things' "counts or measures," qualitative research relates to the things' "meanings, definitions, and conceptions" (Bradley, 1993). This theoretical framework permitted the development of thorough explanations of social phenomena inside the academy school setting. Sociologists define social phenomena as the knowledge and experiences that people have in their daily lives. (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Patton, 2005), for example, the academy school's structures, curriculum, and

ethos. This research was particularly beneficial in determining how academy leaders, teaching staff, and parents formed their beliefs and attitudes. It provides insight into the academy school's efforts for addressing economic and minority ethnic disadvantage.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined qualitative research as the study of human behaviour and contexts beyond individual behaviours. According to this work, this includes the attitudes, values, and understandings of parents and teachers, as well as how these have been shaped by the academy school's key structures and ethos. The study went beyond the experiences of parents, teachers, and academy leaders to investigate deeper values and attitudes formed within the academy setting through cultural and economic experiences.

Qualitative study enabled the exploration of the academy school's core structures, such as curriculum, admissions, academy demographics, and more. Teachers who supported the learning of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners were able to give detailed explanations as to why things happened the way they did and why specific strategies and techniques were implemented. This was obtained using 'what,' 'why,' and 'how' questions. This methodology allowed the investigation of the curriculum and the examination of how well it was tailored to the learning and needs of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic (EAL) learners. It provided a thorough understanding of how teachers formed their beliefs and attitudes, as well as how Academy school structures and processes influenced parents.

Qualitative research was crucial because it allowed me to investigate and understand the issues that teachers and parents faced when supporting their pupils. It also provided insight into



why specific programmes and strategies were created, what they were, how they were maintained, and whether they benefited pupils and had a positive impact. Because the research goal was to get a thorough understanding of the strategies utilised by teachers and academy leaders, a qualitative methodology with in-depth data was the most appropriate.

### **3.4 Case study strategy**

A single case study design was adopted. A case study is a research method that looks at a phenomenon in its natural environment (Baxter and Jack, 2008). It enables the focus on a single entity, which in this case was the academy school. It was an effective methodology for comprehending social relations, structures, and processes. Yin (2003) explains the significance of using a case study design when the study's goal is to answer "how" and "why" questions. The study's purpose was to look into how well academy schools tackle minority ethnic, EAL and economic disadvantage from the viewpoints of teachers, academy leaders, and parents. As a result, it seemed most appropriate to explore these within the context of the academy school. Case studies might include either one or more cases. A single case study was chosen since it focused solely on the academy.

A case, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is an event that occurs inside a defined context. This project investigated the strategies employed by teachers and academy leaders to overcome the challenges faced by minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils. These were investigated within the academy school. Fridlund (1997) identifies four important characteristics of case studies: explaining causal links in real-life intervention that cannot be sought through surveys and experiments; being able to describe real-life context in which an intervention has occurred; making an evaluation that can benefit the descriptive mode from

an illustrative case study of the intervention itself; and the case study being used to explore the situations in which the intervention has occurred. Case study designs include questions or propositions, analysis, and interpretation of results. A case study, according to Yin, is "an empirical investigation that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (2009: 14).

The case study was highly useful in gathering thorough information on the school's structures and how the academy school attempted to address issues of minority ethnic and economic disadvantage. By concentrating on the school, it was possible to gain a thorough understanding of the school's demographics, as well as its ethos and values. It also allowed for an evaluation of the school's policies and how they were interpreted by academy staff and parents.

The use of a multiple case study was not required because the intention was not to make comparisons between different academy schools. The case study methodology was useful because it allowed a lot of information to be gathered from the academy itself. Alternative research designs may not have allowed for this. Case study research is especially useful when large samples of similar participants are unavailable, which was the case in this instance because there was a limit to the number of schools that could be involved or participants who could have been interviewed.

It is important to note that case studies have limitations, and while a single case study strategy was the best methodology for the research, it did present a few drawbacks. One major criticism levelled at case study research was that it does not allow for generalisations, making comparisons to other schools impossible. However, whilst generalisations may not be possi-

ble, one can begin to make suggestions as to how there may be similarities or the identification of trends in this academy school case that could apply to and be tested out in research on other academy schools. Another significant limitation that was encountered was subjective feelings, which may have influenced the case study (researcher bias). Sometimes leading questions were asked and therefore, specific areas were discussed rather than allowing the participants to bring up these topics themselves.

### **3.5 The design of the case study**

The most important part of the research process was designing the case study, which required careful planning to ensure the research was carried out in the best way possible. To begin, a review of previous literature was carried out to develop a research question. Based on the gaps found in the literature, the specific research questions that needed to be answered were then identified. The 'primary school academy' was identified as the case. The academy school can be thought of as a "bounded system" in which the complexities of behaviour patterns can be explored. A case study analysis was used to investigate the processes and structures that are a part of the academy school and the behaviour and experiences of individuals within the school's boundaries.

It was critical to identify questions such as "whether individuals at the academy school should be studied, should the academy school's structures be examined, whether is it important to investigate the strategies employed by academy school staff to combat educational disadvantage and whether should the study involve more than one academy for comparison purposes?" These questions were critical in understanding the case and what would be investigated. These questions enabled the development of effective strategies for defining the case.

For example, one of the questions being investigated was, "What are teachers' experiences working within a converter primary academy school in supporting educationally disadvantaged learners?" The case in this example should be the decision-making process of teachers at the academy school, as well as their experiences working with minority ethnic, EAL and economically disadvantaged learners.

After the case was defined and the research questions were developed, the case was bounded. This was crucial because it considered what the case would include and exclude. One common error that researchers make when conducting case study research is attempting to answer a question that is far too broad and has far too many objectives to be studied. Many researchers have discussed possible solutions to this problem. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) discuss the significance of setting case boundaries and how doing so can help to keep research from becoming too broad. For example, it was initially thought that conducting observations might be useful. However, it was understood that doing so would make the case too broad, making the analysis process difficult. It was then decided that semi-structured interviews would be used because they allow for the successful generation of relevant data and analysis. There are several types of case studies, including explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive. Explanatory case studies are used to answer a question by explaining the causal links in real-life interventions that cannot be explored through surveys and experiments (Cousin, 2005). Exploratory case studies are used to investigate situations in which the intervention under consideration has no clear, single set of outcomes. Descriptive case studies, on the other hand, are used to describe an intervention or phenomenon in the context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003).

The most appropriate case study strategy for this research study was the explanatory case study, as answers to the following questions were needed: What are teachers' experiences of

working within a converter primary academy school in supporting minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners? Explanatory and descriptive case studies can be divided into three types: single case studies, multiple case studies, and holistic case studies. Stake (1995) further classified case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. Intrinsic case studies are used when researchers are genuinely interested in a case and wish to better understand it. A single case study is another term for an intrinsic case study. The goal of conducting an intrinsic case study is not to understand a generic phenomenon, nor is it to build a theory.

When trying to accomplish something other than understanding a specific situation, instrumental case studies are used. This type of research provides insight into a problem and aids in the refinement of a theory. Because an instrumental case study does not involve the understanding of a specific situation, it would not have been entirely useful when exploring the perspectives of teachers and their experiences within the academy school. As a result, in this research, it was decided to use an intrinsic case study design with a single case study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that the conceptual framework of the case study serves several purposes, including the identification of who will and will not be included in the study and the description of what relationships may be present based on logic, theory, and experience. Case studies are distinct, to understand the case's boundaries and the complexities of the bounded system's behaviour patterns. The case study approach was useful in exploring the teaching staff's, academy leaders', and parents' perspectives and understandings of the primary school academy.

The website of the academy school was also analysed as part of the case study. Content analysis enabled the use of knowledge from the academy school's website to be compared with the data from the interviews. This allowed for the accumulation of knowledge, allowing for connections to be made and patterns to be discovered about what the teaching staff reported and what was stated on the academy school's website.

### **3.6 In-depth interviews**

Following the adoption of a single case study design, the next step was to investigate the type of method that would be used to obtain detailed answers to the research questions. Because the research entailed gathering detailed information about the perceptions and experiences of academy staff and parents of pupils, interviewing was deemed one of the most important methods for gathering this information. Interviewing is a qualitative research method that collects data by asking questions. There are several interviewing techniques available, including structured interviews in which the interviewer asks questions in a specific order, unstructured interviews that are free-flowing, and semi-structured interviews that fall somewhere in between.

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen because it allowed pre-determined questions to be asked in any order. According to Longhurst (2003), semi-structured interviews are a "verbal interchange" in which the interviewer attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. He emphasises the importance of semi-structured interviews in that they unfold conversationally, allowing participants to explore issues that are important to them. Semi-structured interviews have an informal tone and thus allow for the retrieval of open responses rather than a 'yes or no' answer.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect detailed information from participants. They included the use of an interview guide, which allowed for the preparation of questions ahead of time. This enabled the interviewer to appear knowledgeable and prepared during the interview. When interviewing parents, academy leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants, various interview guides were used (see Appendix Four). For example, when investigating teachers' perspectives, the following themes were included: teachers' knowledge of the academy school's structures, the curriculum, and so on. In contrast, themes such as supporting the child's learning at home and attending after-school clubs were used when interviewing parents. This ensured that the right questions were asked based on the participants being interviewed. The interview guide included a framework of several themes to be explored, including the curriculum, homework, EAL learners, ethos, and values, among others.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted on school grounds. The participants who were interviewed included: 3 members of the leadership team, 4 teachers, 5 teaching assistants, and 6 parents. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes; details of the recruitment process are outlined in the section below. The headteacher granted access to a meeting room where the interviews were conducted, ensuring, and enabling a safe and comfortable environment for the research participants. Each participant was given a detailed participant information sheet to fill out as well as a consent form to sign, which explained what the research entailed and what would happen during the interview. Before the interview, participants could contact the researcher directly to discuss the research and have any questions answered. Participants were also assured that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Before the interview, the participants were informed of what would happen during and after the interview. It was made clear to the participants that if they

wanted to know the results of the study, they would be given an overview of the research findings (not the actual data). After that was all in place, the interviews were recorded.

Each participant was made to feel at ease during the interview process by allowing them to ask questions and move from topic to topic rather than being asked a series of questions. Participants in semi-structured interviews were not required to answer a series of questions in a specific order; instead, they were given a fair amount of freedom to discuss specific topics. Eric (1995) emphasises the significance of this because it allows individuals to feel more at ease and raise topics that are not being discussed. This provided the participants with a more informal and comfortable interviewing approach, allowing them to remain calm and confident throughout the interview process.

Because the study focused on students' economic and ethnic disadvantages, a semi-structured interview technique allowed for informal conversations between the interviewee and the interviewer. Through the modification of questions, sensitive issues could be discussed reasonably (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). Although this did not occur, if the interviewer had observed a participant becoming upset or uncomfortable while discussing a specific topic or issue, the interviewer could have used the interview guide to explore the concept or theme differently.

Qualitative research is an open-ended process, and because of this, it was possible to get more information from participants. Participants were asked questions and according to the responses received, they were then further questioned which allowed for detailed information to be gathered. For example, when a teacher discussed giving EAL students extra time to complete a classroom activity, further questions were asked on how this supported the student to learn about its actual effectiveness. This provided additional information that was ex-



tremely useful. This was also beneficial because it provided more insight into why participants thought the way they did and allowed more of an informal conversation with the participants. It allowed rapport to be built with the participants, enabling them to open and report openly, yielding more information.

Semi-structured interviews proved to be an effective research method. When interviewing participants, language barriers were frequently encountered. The participants in the study were from Pakistani backgrounds, and one of the parents interviewed preferred communicating in Urdu. This barrier was quickly overcome because the researcher is fluent in Urdu. This allowed the participant to feel more at ease being interviewed in Urdu and thus able to provide detailed and in-depth answers in the language with which they were most comfortable. Because of the researcher's ability to converse in Urdu and Punjabi, the issues associated with interpreters were avoided.

### **3.7 Recruitment of School**

The primary school involved in the study was in a deprived area of Greater Manchester. The school was previously a local authority school which converted to a primary academy in 2013. The study focused on a primary school academy rather than a secondary school academy because there has already been much research undertaken on secondary school academies (Bernard and Hoskins, 2017; Farhat *et al.*, 2017; Passy, 2016; Sutton Trust, 2016 and Gibson, 2015). In the recent census 2021 briefing report, it was reported that this specific deprived area in Greater Manchester had a high proportion of Asian and Black residents.

Because this area had a high proportion of minority ethnic residents, schools in this area were expected to have a high proportion of minority ethnic students. It was reported in the academy's most recent Ofsted (2017) report that the number of minority ethnic students attending the academy was slightly higher than the national average, with pupils who speak English as an additional language being broadly average. This enabled the research to be carried out successfully at an academy school, which had a significant number of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners.

According to the academy school's website, the school had a high proportion of disadvantaged students, with the number of students known to be eligible for Pupil Premium funding being double the national average (Ofsted, 2017). This reflected the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils enrolled in the academy school. According to Ofsted reports, students in Year 6 exceeded national expectations in reading, writing, and mathematics in 2016. The primary school had a low rating by Ofsted prior to the conversion, but it had improved since then and was rated as a 'good' school in 2017. (Ofsted). This indicated significant progress, and it was therefore intriguing to conduct research at this specific academy to discover what exactly they were doing to be so successful.

The percentage of each ethnic group who attended the academy at the time of the study is set out in Figure 1, below. This information was obtained from the headteacher who worked at the academy:

### Demographic of the academy school

Ethnic Group	Before 2019	By 2019
White other European		4%
Asian/Asian British	4.6%	5.6%
Black/Black British African	10.9%	10.9%
Other ethnic groups		4-5%
English as an additional language (from minority ethnic groups)		35-36%

Table 1.3 Minority ethnic pupils in attendance in the year 2019

Several primary school academies in economically deprived areas were initially contacted via email. The academy school's Headteacher responded to the email, expressing her desire to learn more about the study. A meeting with the Headteacher was scheduled. She was given information about the study, including the research title and more information about what the researcher intended to investigate, such as teachers', parents', and academy leaders' views and understandings of the school's strategies for overcoming issues related to educational disadvantage experienced by minority students who were economically disadvantaged or spoke English as an additional language.

The purpose of the study and information about the interviewing process were explained in detail to the Headteacher. She agreed to her school's participation in the study. It was possible that the Headteacher agreed to participate in the study in order to demonstrate the good quality of the school and thus may have only provided positive information in her answers. There could have also been bias because she (as a gatekeeper) wanted specific staff members to par-

ticipate in the study. This was quickly overcome by directly contacting staff members via invitation letters (inviting them to participate in the study) rather than relying on the Headteacher to select participants. The Headteacher granted permission to contact teachers and parents directly during the meeting, so the teaching staff were contacted directly during staff meetings and before the school day.

However, the Headteacher indicated that interviewing the Deputy Head might be beneficial because they are well versed in the school's minority ethnic and inclusion policies. It was acknowledged that this could lead to bias as the deputy may have been told beforehand what to mention in the interview. Aspects of bias were monitored and reflected on throughout the research process. The study originally set out to include economically disadvantaged students and EAL speakers of Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi origin. However, due to the inability to obtain participants of Indian and Bangladeshi ethnicities due to participants of other ethnic groups not coming forward to take part, the study was focused solely on the perspectives of Pakistani participants.

### **3.8 Sampling and Recruitment of Participants**

Following approval from the Headteacher to conduct the research at the academy, the next step was to develop a reasonable sample. This was accomplished by identifying an appropriate number of teachers, teaching assistants, academy leaders, and parents to be interviewed to ensure that an appropriate number of participants were chosen for the study. The academy's setup included 9 teachers, 8 teaching assistants, the headteacher, two associate heads and had 203 pupils. The researcher chose to interview the headteacher, both associate

heads (old and new), five teaching assistants, five teachers, and six parents. This sample was used to help gain insight and understanding from various perspectives and roles within the school, and who influenced the education of pupils. The rationale for selecting this sample of teaching staff and parents was to obtain detailed information from the staff and parents. The following table contains information about the research participants:

Table 1.4: Participants that were recruited

Type of participants	Number of participants	Ethnicity
Parents	6	3 Pakistani 3 White
Headteacher	1	
Associate Head	2	
Teachers	4	
Teaching Assistants	5	

The recruitment of participants was a critical stage in the research study because it required the careful selection of appropriate individuals for the study (Yancey and Ortega, 2006). This was regarded as a significant challenge because it included several steps, including identifying appropriate participants, explaining the study to participants, recruiting a certain number of participants (sample size), obtaining informed consent from participants, and ensuring the study was ethical. This was a time-consuming process that included contacting potential participants at the academy school and then waiting for responses. There were frequent issues with hearing back from participants, so this required returning to the school on numerous occasions to recruit participants.

I was limited to interviewing only 6 parents and 4 teachers because of covid, interviewing had to be stopped.

The proportion of academy school staff and parents interviewed was tolerably sufficient because it allowed for in-depth data to be gathered; however, had more parents and teachers come forward to participate in the study, more data could have been collected, allowing for more comparisons to be made. The parents who were interviewed were chosen based on their importance to the study, detail on the recruitment process is outlined on page 22. The research focused on pupils from economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds who spoke English as an additional language within the academy school; therefore, conducting the study on parents from affluent middle-class backgrounds would not have been useful because they would not have been able to provide first-hand information on what it is like to be a parent of a disadvantaged child. Middle-class parents would not have understood the difficulties parents face in ensuring their children receive a good education. As a result, it was critical to ensure that an appropriate sampling strategy was used.

The primary focus was on Urdu and Punjabi-speaking Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi communities. The researcher recognised that Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi communities may have shared cultural experiences to some extent (Bhatti, 2002), and thus, focusing on these specific communities could have assisted the researcher in identifying patterns in the formation of cultural attitudes toward learning. Many gaps in achievement have been discovered among minority ethnic students, particularly among Pakistani and Bangladeshi students (DfES, 2006). Strand (2007) investigated minority ethnic students as part of a longitudinal study of young people in England. His findings revealed that Pakistani and Bangladeshi students face significant social and economic disadvantage. Black African parents were found to be more involved with their child's school than White British parents, who were more in-

volved than Pakistani or Bangladeshi parents. Underachievement is also common among Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Black African-Caribbean ethnicities (Department of Education, 2010 and 2015).

It was critical to interview parents from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities to determine how involved they were in their children's education. These two communities were especially important because research consistently shows that these groups have lower average attainment than White British students (DfE, 2022). It is important to understand that Indian migrants to the UK tend to be from more middle-class backgrounds than Pakistani or Bangladeshi migrants (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007). Strand's research also revealed that Indian parents were the most likely to pay for private classes or tuition in subjects that were also taught in school. Indian parents were also found to be the most likely to own a computer, as opposed to other minority ethnics, who were found to be the least likely. The existing literature demonstrating the successes of Indian students prompted the decision to research Indian communities (Parsons, 2019; Strand, 2007). It would have been interesting to learn what Indian communities did differently from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities when it came to supporting their children's learning. This would have enabled comparisons between Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian communities. Unfortunately, this was not possible because participants from the Bangladeshi and Indian communities did not engage with the study. When handing out participant information letters before the start of school and home time, participants were approached and spoken to. Some of these participants identified as being from Bangladeshi and Indian communities and said they would email to arrange meeting up for the interview, however, ended up not emailing.

It is to be understood that ethnicity alone does not predict underachievement. Indeed, class and ethnicity frequently combine to produce patterns of underachievement (Thompson, 2019). The study focused on Pakistani participants whose children spoke English as a second language. The goal was to collect a sample of parents whose children spoke an additional language to English by asking questions like "Does your child speak an additional language to English?" and, similarly, to collect a sample of parents whose children were from economically deprived backgrounds by asking questions such as "Is your child enrolled in the Pupil Premium programme?".

According to Fugueroa (2017), many minority ethnic students whose first language is not English face linguistic deprivation. It was critical to investigate this among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian communities to learn how the academy school overcame such challenges. The research focused specifically on these groups of participants, and it investigated how the culture in these groups of students' homes influenced individual attitudes and experiences with learning.

To avoid participants having difficulty reading or understanding the information, the participant information sheets, and consent forms were written in simple English. It was made certain that the participants understood everything written on the information sheet and consent form. For those who were unable to read English, consent forms and participant information sheets were available in Urdu or Punjabi. However, none of the study's participants were in need of these.

Recruitment of participants is often time-consuming in that it takes longer than expected (Patel, Doku, and Tennakoon, 2018), and this was especially true for this study. Invitation letters



and posters were used to recruit participants. This was a time-consuming process because there was a long wait to hear from potential participants who were interested in participating in the research. Once a participant confirmed their willingness to participate in the study, arrangements were made for the interview to take place at a convenient time and in a secure location. The interviews were held in a 'meeting room' to which the head granted access. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. This type of sampling technique was critical because it allowed for the recruitment of participants based on their ability to answer questions about first-hand experiences in relation to ethnicity and economic disadvantage.

When recruiting participants for qualitative research, three types of sampling methods are used: purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling method because it involved the researcher relying on their own judgement when selecting participants to participate in the study. It is a less time-consuming method because a sample is obtained through sound judgement, saving both time and money (Goodman, 1961).

Since the study focused on minority ethnic, EAL, and economic disadvantage, there was a bit of a struggle as some parents from middle-class backgrounds did volunteer to participate. This was one of the research's barriers, however, the problem was solved by mentioning that the study was focused on parents whose children received free school meals and those from the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian communities.

Purposive sampling was thought to be the best sampling technique for this study because it allowed for in-depth data collection from appropriate participants from minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This prevented irrelevant data to the research

questions from being obtained, making data analysis easier and more accurate. Purposive sampling was especially useful because it required less time. Purposive sampling, according to Mason (2002), is a natural practice that develops and evolves throughout the research. Mason contends that sampling is influenced by the researcher's analytical goals.

The goal was not to recruit a large sample, but rather to explore the perspectives of specific participants through purposive sampling to gain in-depth information about the academy school's structures and processes, which was achieved. Purposive sampling was made easier by handing out participant invitation letters to parents during home time, before registration, and during a reading café held at the academy on Tuesdays that parents attended. The parents were asked if their child spoke a language other than English. This was done to attract participants of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Indian heritage. The requirement for participants whose children spoke an additional language was also stated in the invitation letter. This allowed appropriate participants to take part in the study.

This type of sampling technique was understood to have created bias because participants were chosen based on whether they were deemed useful for the research study. Participants were recruited through invitation letters and posters displayed on noticeboards in the school's office area. Invitation letters were also distributed to the teaching staff, academy leaders, and parents at the academy school at the start of the school day and at home time. The invitation letters explained the purpose of the study, why it was being conducted, and what it entailed. It also included the researchers' contact information, allowing participants to send an email to the researcher to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. To offer a guarantee of integrity, the email address provided in the invitation letter and poster was a university email

address rather than a personal email address. Below I present a table which gives details of the parents that were interviewed:

<b>Parents of ME and ED pupils</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Parent's Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of children that attended the Academy</b>	<b>Year groups</b>
<b>Parent 1</b>	Pakistani	From Pakistan, came to the UK after marriage	GCSE's	One child	Year 1
<b>Parent 2</b>	White British	Eldest daughter attended the academy before conversion.	GCSE's	One child	Year 2
<b>Parent 3</b>	White British	Had a child at the school before conversion. Two children have SEND	Teaching Assistant Level 2	Three children	3,4 and 6
<b>Parent 4</b>	White British	Had a nephew who previously attended	College	Three children	Reception Year One Year Four
<b>Parent 5</b>	Pakistani	School is at walking distance. Friends children attend.	College	Three children	Year Two Year Four Year Six
<b>Parent 6</b>	Pakistani	From Pakistan, came to the UK after marriage	Studied until Year 8	One child	Year Two

**Table 1.5 Details of parents and their children**

### 3.9 Content analysis of website

Content analysis is an important tool used within qualitative research as it is used to determine the presence of certain concepts and themes. Content analysis was an important part of the research process as it gave meaning and context to the data collected from the academy staff and parents. Bryman (2008) explains the importance of qualitative content analysis is to look out for underlying themes in the texts being analysed by researchers. There are three approaches to content analysis, *viz.*: conventional, directive, or summative. In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. The researcher chose to use a conventional approach to content analysis as this approach allowed the researcher to describe a phenomenon. The content that was used was from the academy school's website. This was very beneficial as it allowed patterns to be found between what was mentioned by the staff at the academy and what was stated on the academy's website.

Grossoehme (2014) argue that with the conventional approach, researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge. This was particularly beneficial as it allowed information to be obtained directly through the school's website without imposing pre-conceived categories. This facilitated the construction of categories and themes, directly from the website. The school's website was frequently viewed to ensure that the most recent data was used, before, during, and after the research had taken place. The school's website was an important tool as it contained general information about the demographics of the school. *i.e.*, the number of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils that were attending. It illustrated the types of programmes put in place in support of parent-pupil learning and provided information on the most recent Ofsted inspection (2017) when the research was being carried out. It also provided further information concerning the school's ethos and values.

Content analysis permitted the emergence of questions and evaluations of the information that was available on the website, and thus, the researcher was able to use this as a basis when asking parents, teachers, and the academy's leaders questions about the structures and procedures put in place by the academy.

Moreover, since one of the research questions was based on ethos and values, the academy's website was particularly useful for this. This was done through an exploration of how the concepts of 'inclusion' and 'equality' were discussed on the school's website. The main categories the researcher was looking to explore included the following: disadvantage, inclusion, underachievement, achievement, and EAL learners. The subcategories included other key terms: parents, curriculum, and ethos and values. The researcher looked for these categories and phrases as a basis for extracting codes from the text of the website. These codes were analysed by giving detailed explanations from the academy's website of why certain policies or procedures were put in place. The researcher made use of Ofsted reports which were available on the schools' website, to explore the judgements made by Ofsted regulators on the processes that take place at the academy with staff and parents. This gave a good basis and allowed for further exploration when carrying out semi-structured interviews with the academy staff and parents. The initial analysis of the schools' website helped shape some of the interview questions and approach to the interviews with staff and parents.

## **3.10 Data Analysis**

### **Organising and managing the data**

Before carrying out the analysis, the interviews were transcribed accurately to avoid any inconsistencies in the data, which might have affected the processes of data analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured whilst carrying out the transcriptions. To ensure anonymity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms as well as the academy schools. Any identifying details were removed from the data. Data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. In presenting the findings, care was taken to report data in a combined form or use of quotes without identifying details to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were transcribed word-for-word. This process was lengthy as it involved listening to the recordings on more than one occasion and was the first stage in analysing the data as I familiarised and immersed myself within it. These transcripts were then stored on a password-protected computer device that was only accessible to the researcher. They were stored on the University of Salford's OneDrive, where they were encrypted. This enabled the safe, secure, and clear organisation of data.

### **Analysis of data**

After the transcriptions were complete, the data was further analysed. Data analysis was an important part of the research process as it involved the identification of the data followed by examining and interpreting the data to find patterns and themes. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently (Hartley, 1994, 2004). Throughout the process of interviewing, analysis was carried out using memos. Memos were an important tool; they consisted of notes of any interesting facts or patterns that were found during the interviewing stage. These were used to make quick notes on new knowledge that was emerging. The memos were then used

as a basis for the research when carrying out the analysis. The memos were used alongside the transcriptions and were matched up with the relevant information the interviewees were given.

Before analysing the data, a suitable approach to analysis was determined. The choice was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a useful approach to analysis as it allows the data to be organised around certain topics, key themes, and questions. Yin has described the process of data analysis as: “examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing...” (2003: 109). Qualitative data analysis involves the distinct steps of becoming familiar with the data; identifying key questions that require answers through the process of analysis; categorising the data and creating a framework; identifying patterns; and making connections (Thorne, 2000).

Data analysis involves the researcher looking for patterns, similarities, and dissimilarities within the data. These patterns and dissimilarities were then tied in with the research objectives. Qualitative data analysis was a crucial part of the research as it involved organising and analysing the data into appropriate codes and categories to successfully conclude (Patton, 1990).

The validity of the research relied heavily on data analysis so, it was important to be cautious when analysing the data, ensuring the data was being represented truthfully and accurately. Qualitative analysis involves the process of examining data that was in-depth to derive explanations for the occurrence of specific phenomena identified in the academy under study. The purpose and use of such analysis made it possible for the data to be interpreted and represented as appropriate findings, and this in turn helped to form a basis for informed and verifiable conclusions.

The study used an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis, which is opposite to a deductive approach, as it was not based on a structured or predetermined framework. Through this approach, the data was collected and then patterns in the data were sought. These patterns were then developed into a theory that gave explanations of why particular phenomena occurred. This process was found to be more thorough and time consuming; however, it was a very useful approach as very little was known of the processes and structures of the academy school beforehand (Thomas, 2003). It was not possible to predetermine what information was to be retrieved from the teachers and parents in relation to the learning processes and strategies adopted by the academy school to help overcome issues related to educational disadvantage. Therefore, an inductive approach to data analysis allowed the development of explanations and meanings from the data collected. This allowed the identification of parent-student and parent-teacher relationships and building an understanding of the academy schools structures and processes.

### **3.11 Thematic Analysis in practice**

The thematic approach was useful in summarising key features from the transcripts and gave a proper structure to handling the data. Thematic analysis was carried out manually using the approach proposed by Nowell *et al.* (2017). The thematic approach proposed by Nowell *et al.* includes a six-stage process: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing up. This was a constructive approach when carrying out analysis as it entailed in-depth and descriptive data. Scharp and Sanders have explored the use of thematic analysis for qualitative research. They described it as a qualitative method for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within a data” (2018: 117).



Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest some important aspects associated with qualitative data analysis, which include: attaching codes to a set of field notes drawn from interviews; noting reflections or other remarks; and sorting and shifting through the transcriptions to identify similarities in words and relationships between variables, patterns, and themes. Although it would have been beneficial to use software to analyse the data, such as NVivo, manual analysis was considered more appropriate as it allowed critical thinking to take place, and while NVivo would have made it easier to manage the data, manual analysis was deemed more useful as it provided more freedom when organising and managing the data.

To begin the process of analysis, the transcriptions were made familiar by reading through them numerous times. This process was followed by highlighting any interesting or important phrases or sentences that were initially found when reading through the transcripts. The dataset was then reduced by taking out information that was not important or irrelevant to the research topic. Data reduction was a thorough process carried out throughout the analysis phase to ensure the data provided were valid and answered the research questions. After the data had been reduced, the next step of thematic analysis involved using the information that had previously been highlighted to come up with shorthand labels (codes). Some of these initial codes included: pupil premium, funds, resources, learning strategies, and so on. The list consisted of over 20 different codes and was quite lengthy (see coding framework in appendix five).

The codes were then put into different categories identified by a common theme. The codes were used to identify patterns and create themes which combined several codes together. The researcher then reviewed the themes followed by naming the themes; these included: cultural

capital, Christian values, mobility/transience, tension between LEA and needs of the academy, and inclusion. The final component of thematic analysis involved drawing and verifying conclusions from the data. Themes and patterns found in the data were used to report individual concepts relevant to the research questions, for instance, a discussion based on the theme 'disadvantage' or 'strategies. The process of thematic analysis was concluded by interpreting the data and stating the implications of the findings, following which important areas for future research were considered.

### **3.12 Methodological limitations**

Having explained the approach and methodology used to conduct the research, it is important to consider the limitations that were encountered. To begin with, qualitative research is not a simple research method. It has limitations due to its subjective nature. Qualitative research was found to be a lengthy process as each step required a lot of time (McGrath *et al.*, 2019). It entailed the production of lots of data which was detailed and in-depth. This was often found to be overwhelming. Key points were pulled out of the transcripts, and these were then arranged into themes and concepts, which was quite time-consuming.

It was also quite challenging when interpreting and analysing the data as audio had to be listened to numerous times to ensure the transcriptions were accurate. Another problem that was encountered was that of bias, as personal experience and knowledge influenced the thought process and the conclusions that were made. Different researchers might have interpreted the same data differently, and this leads to the issue of the verifiability of qualitative data analysis (Burnard, 2008; Sutton and Austin, 2015). Some data that was considered significant may not

have been significant in the view of other researchers. The case study was also limited to just one school, and therefore, the results could not be generalised to other schools.

Another limitation of the research design was that of the interpretivist approach. This type of research did not allow generalisations to be made, since it drew heavily on the views, understandings, and experiences of individuals who were a part of the Academy. Consequently, this may have impacted the reliability and representativeness of the data to some extent. Although semi-structured interviews were very useful in gathering in-depth data from teachers and staff who attended the academy, it was often challenging when trying to keep the school anonymous as content analysis of the school's website provided much detail about the school which could easily be identified through an internet search.

A further limitation is that data analysis contained some bias/subjectivity as subjective decisions were made by the researcher about what would be useful. Other researchers might have interpreted the data differently, using different techniques in the reporting of data that they considered important. Consequently, an attempt was made to limit researcher subjectivity by not leading participants to give specific answers, expressing opinions and the use of follow-up questions were used to clear up any contradictory statements.

Another limitation of the research was the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on data collection. The school that was taking part in the research understandably denied access to the academy where the interviews were taking place to prevent the spread of the virus. Even after the COVID restrictions were lifted, it was impossible to continue data collection because the school no longer allowed access to the school's premises for the continuation of research. If

the school had allowed access after the COVID pandemic, more staff and parents at the academy would have been interviewed, allowing for a larger sample size and a more diverse group of participants to take part in the research, allowing for more robust conclusions.

To help overcome these issues, existing data was used, which was available on the academy school's website, in addition to data already collected through interviews with staff and parents at the academy prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research methods were modified to account for the constraints imposed by COVID.

### **3.13 Ethical issues**

The research adhered to the ethical framework of the British Sociological Association (BSA) 2017 and received approval from the University of Salford ethics panel. (See Appendix Three). The research was also carried out in line with the GDPR Data Protection Act 2018. O'Leary (2004) illustrates researchers as being responsible for the integrity of all aspects of the research process and, therefore, careful consideration of ethical issues before carrying out the research was considered. Ethical issues can arise when using qualitative research and, specifically when carrying out interviews, as they involve direct contact with individuals. As the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of parents and staff at the academy, this was understood to increase the chance of ethical risks. Punch (1994) illustrates the main factors involved in ethical issues in social research, including deception, harm, informed consent, and confidentiality of data. All these factors were taken into consideration by ensuring information was presented to the participants truthfully and consent forms were given. Participants were informed that all data would be kept entirely confidential throughout the research process.

Informed consent is understood to be the founding principle of research ethics. Before researching the participants, it was important to gain informed consent (see Appendix Two). Informed consent involved giving a complete understanding of what the research entailed and how it involved the participants who agreed to take part. Two stages were carried out when obtaining informed consent from the participants: giving information and obtaining consent. Giving information about the research allowed each participant to reflect on the information given. It also allowed the participant to take their time to think about whether they wished to take part in the research without any pressure.

Each participant was then given time to read through the consent form and ask any questions if they were unsure about anything. The consent form contained a few bullet points detailing what would be required during the interviewing process. For example, it stated the agreement of participants to have the interview recorded using an audio device. The participants were required to tick each box (giving consent) before agreeing to participate in the research. Consent was given voluntarily by the participants, and this was completed by signing the consent form. These consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Salford, with the researcher alone having access to them. It was anticipated that each interview would last from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Participants could stop the interview at any point and either take a break from the study or withdraw; however, this did not occur during any of the interviews. Confidentiality was always maintained, from the point of giving the consent form to the point at which data analysis and findings had been recorded.

The interviews took place within the school, in a meeting room (a room provided by the headteacher) where it was thought each participant felt comfortable to talk. Time was allocated at the end of the interview to discuss anything that the participant might have found distressing during the interview, however, this did not occur with any of the interviews that took place. All the interviews that took place were audio-recorded, and care was taken not to use any identifying details during the interviews, for example, names or places, to ensure anonymity. The audio recordings are to be kept for a maximum of three years and were uploaded on the University's OneDrive and then removed from the audio device.

Following the completion of each interview, the recordings were listened to, to ensure that no identifying material was present. Any identifying information was removed, and when participants mentioned names or places, these were allocated a pseudonym to enable transcripts to be anonymised. Confidentiality was ensured as information given by teachers and the leaders of the academy was not shared with the headteacher or any third party.

Professional integrity was ensured by safeguarding the interests of the participants involved by reporting the findings accurately.

The participants taking part in the study included staff at the school and parents. Language barriers were often an issue when carrying out interviews with minority ethnic parents of Pakistani descent. This issue was quickly overcome by conversing in the Urdu language which one of the participants felt more comfortable in speaking. A sensible interview approach was provided as issues related to disadvantages were often discussed during the interviews. Each question was carefully phrased so that the respondents were free to discuss any issue to the extent they wished. When discussing economic disadvantage, parents were asked questions such as "is your child on free school meals?" "Do you take your child on educational trips out

of school such as museums?”. Such questions were chosen rather than asking questions such as “Are you able to afford books for your child?”. This was important because financial discussions are sensitive topics and therefore, careful wording was used when asking participants questions.

All participants who took part in the research were provided with a list of links to which they were directed for further support - these were given within the participant information sheet (see Appendix one). Time was allocated at the end of the interview to discuss anything that the participant might have found distressing during the interview. This did not form part of the study, and the audiotape was switched off before this discussion.

To conclude, this chapter has presented an overview and rationale of the methods, methodology and ethics that underpinned this research. It justified the methods adopted with full consideration of any limitations or problems and how they were overcome. It has also considered the rationale for data collection and analysis. The findings generated from this will be presented in the following findings chapters, beginning with a discussion of the data gathered from the academy schools’ website.

## **Chapter 4      School Website: Content Analysis**

This chapter presents the findings of an investigation of the academy schools' website via content analysis. This analysis of the website was undertaken before conducting interviews with staff and parents at the school. It was an important step in identifying how the school represented itself to the outside world. Through the analysis, several key themes were identified, these themes, which I discuss in detail below, included: inclusion, school policies, parents, attainment, disadvantage, and Ofsted reports. Identifying these themes also provided me with topic areas to discuss and explore in the interviews with staff and parents.

### **4.1 Inclusion, Ethos and Values**

Inclusion is an important term used to describe the processes whereby individuals are included within a group or structure. Inclusive education within schools has been often researched however, with a particular focus being given to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (Bines, 2000; Warnock and Norwich, 2010 and William and Hodgkinson, 2020). There is little research concerning the inclusion of minority ethnic pupils (EAL) and those who are economically disadvantaged. Evans and Lunt (2010) found considerable obstacles in the way of 'full inclusion' and that schools as currently organised frequently find it difficult to meet the wide range of individual needs.

A great deal of information was identified on the schools' website specific to the school instilling values of inclusion. Within the section on 'vision and values' (accessed in 2019), it was reported that the academy is 'an inclusive' school for all children aged between 3 and 11



and that the academy is driven by a powerful ethos which aspires to treat all individuals inclusively (Appendix Six). This initial finding indicated that the academy placed a lot of emphasis on the ethos and values of the school, especially regarding inclusion.

Therefore, this was used as a basis when interviewing teaching staff and academy leaders.

When staff at the academy discussed ethos and values, further questions were posed. It is important to note the importance of ethos and values as presented by past researchers.

Specifically, the work of Pike (2010) is significant as he argues that schools with a strong sense of ethos tend to have elevated levels of achievement and success and better overall performance.

Moreover, within the ‘curriculum’ section on the website, it was stated that the academy sought to teach individuals to include others and celebrate differences. It stated that the curriculum reinforced British values and, consequently, the schools’ ethos and behaviour policies were based on values of respect. Henson (2020) explored Ofsted’s inspection framework in 2020. He argued that according to Ofsted, British values are understood to include aspects of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith. This is important information as it points to the academy as reinforcing British values within its curriculum, and this involves aspects of inclusion. However, it is important to note that every school in England is required to promote British values, and this is particularly important to Ofsted (Ofsted Inspection Framework, 2020). Therefore, it was not something that the academy was doing differently and beyond other schools.

Within the curriculum section on the website, it was noted that school assemblies were delivered through the ‘9 Habits’ (which formed part of the ethos) and these taught individuals how

to treat one another. Everyone at the academy was encouraged to conduct themselves in an inclusive manner using the 9 habits which were to be: compassionate, patient, humble, joyful, honest, hopeful, considerate, forgiving, and self-controlled. This is a significant finding as it illustrates how emphasis is placed on individuals and their vision and values. On the site, it was claimed “The 9 Habits inspire us to behave in a way that enables us to be our best and bring our best to our learning and the community we are a part of (Appendix Six). Being inclusive is a key aspect of character development”. In line with this, these 9 habits were also reported by the staff members at the academy when they were interviewed. These 9 habits form a part of the ethos and values, and can be understood as being very important to the academy.

Furthermore, within the admissions section on the website, it was stated that the academy had an inclusive approach to admissions and pastoral care. The school aimed to create a homely environment for all pupils by communicating responsibly with the parents and carers of pupils, ensuring an inclusive approach to admissions was taken, and in consequence, the academy claimed that it invited parents to learning workshops throughout the academic year. This information is important as it illustrates that the school claimed it was involving parents in the learning of their children. Smokoska (2020) explored parental involvement in schools. Her results reveal that there are two positive correlations between parental involvement and student achievement: parents signing weekly grade reports and parents initiating calls with the school led to better results. This was an important underpinning when interviewing both staff and parents as they were asked a series of questions specifically related to parental engagement with the school. It is also important to consider the demographics of where the school was located. This specific area has a large proportion of minority ethnicities living there (45.3%) and 54.7% White (Census 2021). This may have been one of the reasons why

the academy had a relatively high number of minority ethnic pupils attending as opposed to the reason being inclusion.

In line with the theme of inclusion, there was a 'Community' section on the school's website which provided a brief explanation that the community holds significance for the academy. It was found within this section that the school ran a 'hub' model which included a range of services for the community. It stated that the hub had a set of ethics that were used in the hope of transforming the entire community 'for the better'. It particularly stated that the academy was working hard to include hard-to-reach families, ensuring that they had appropriate access to different services including education, health, employment, access to public funds, and benefits. This suggested that the academy had put appropriate support in place for families and not only for pupils, which demonstrated that the academy was somewhat inclusive. Findings from the interviews found attachment to this ethos and clear support for this, as community inclusion was mentioned quite often by various staff at the academy; however, the hub model itself was mentioned only vaguely by the staff.

The website reported that the academy's priorities were to narrow the gap between pupil premium students and their peers. This ties in well with the thoughts of policymakers who often mention wanting to 'narrow the gap'. The Education Policy Institute (2020) report found that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils was wider than earlier estimates. It was mentioned on the academy's website that the school had new priorities, one of which was: 'to support Academy target for narrowing the gap between Pupil Premium students and their peers'. Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (2019) states that schools need to detail their strategy for narrowing the attainment gap on their website. This information is key as it illustrates that the academy may be looking closely at

what is expected by Ofsted and what they will be looking out for. Whether the academy incorporated this within the school and put in interventions to help ‘narrow the gap’ was important. Evidence was found for this when interviewing Leadership staff 3. As they stated:

*“It’s all about making sure that every child succeeds and making sure that provision is in place to ensure that gaps are closing between disadvantage pupils compared to their, to their peers. In terms of support and funding, families are supported. So, schools identify, what they called, the 20 most vulnerable families and they target those families and support them. Also working with the disadvantaged children they’re identified, and additional funding is provided for, for these disadvantaged pupils. So that additional funding is then used within the school to ensure that gaps are closing.”*

## **4.2 School Policies**

The website specified how the school ensured the provision of good quality education for all its pupils and equality of opportunity for all. This was important information as it implied that all pupils regardless of their economic or ethnic background were provided with the same quality of education. The ethos and values promoted on the academy’s website also illustrated the importance of respecting one another regardless of race, gender, religion, or difference, and this is in line with the school’s framework of equality opportunity and fairness. This was reinforced on the website as it contained a section on policies in which there was a policy named the ‘Equality and Inclusion Policy’. This policy had been recently updated by the school in January (2019). It indicated the importance of the school demonstrating it was maintaining an inclusive and fair environment for all pupils. From the policies put in place and made visible on the website, an emphasis on inclusion was found once again. Hardy and

Woodcock (2013) analysed inclusive education policies. Their research illustrated that fostering more systematic and supporting inclusive policies is possible and essential for promoting conditions for more inclusive educational practices. They also found that a lack of attention to issues of inclusion in policy settings also reveals how more neoliberal conditions have also influenced policy production processes.

According to the 'The Equality and Inclusion Policy' the aim was to provide equality of opportunity for all students, ensuring individual strengths were recognised and all students achieved their potential. It indicated the importance of removing 'barriers to learning' that could hinder or exclude individual students, or groups of students. This was important as it demonstrated the schools' rhetoric around values of inclusion and equality through the removal of barriers that excluded individuals. The policy also stated ensuring all staff were aware of the systems and procedures in place within the academy so that all students had the opportunity to make progress. This policy was important as it again indicated the emphasis on inclusion and the role of staff in ensuring that this was achieved. This was taken into consideration and explored when carrying out interviews with the parents and staff at the academy. In line with this, it was found from one of the interviews with the teachers that they took into consideration this teaching and learning policy whereby they ensured learning was differentiated for pupils based on their abilities. However, it is important to note that although the staff were found to mention the use of policies, this cannot be taken at face value without having observed the classroom teaching that goes on to verify that they were implemented.

Furthermore, the policy stated that the staff at the school should actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that could hinder or exclude individual students or

groups of students. This was important as it reflected one of the research questions on teachers' experiences of working with disadvantaged pupils, and how they helped them overcome educational disadvantage. The policy indicated the importance of removing barriers that did not allow individuals to achieve. It further indicated that attention was given to different individuals and groups of students, which included: disadvantaged students, minority ethnics and students who spoke English as an additional language. These barriers were discussed by the staff at the academy and are examined and analysed in Chapter 5 under the section 'Inclusion'.

Within the policies section, another important theme that was identified was: the use of 'strategies'. The Equality and Inclusion Policy stated the school considering different teaching and learning styles. It specified that teachers and support staff ensured all students were given access to materials that reflected a range of 'social and cultural' backgrounds without stereotyping. This was something that required further exploration when interviewing teachers to find out the types of materials used and how these helped minority ethnic pupils with their learning. This was followed by the indication of a common curriculum experience that allowed for a range of different learning styles. It was important to explore these types of learning styles used by the academy to ensure equal learning opportunities were provided to all pupils regardless of their cultural values, as these are often thought to form barriers which hinder pupils' success.

Although the academy's website mentions several policies, it is important to consider that academies are expected to publish specific information on their website which includes information on policies. Therefore, when carrying out the interviews it was crucial to consider the extent to which these policies were taken into consideration by staff members when carrying

out teaching and learning practices at the school. And although these policies were put in place by the school, it was important to explore the extent to which the teachers abided by these. Especially, as it emerged in the interviews that teachers were not entirely familiar with the policies, despite the Department for Education (2011) noting on their website that ‘Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach’. Having explored the section on policies, another significant theme that was identified was: parents.

### **4.3 Parents**

The website identified the key role of parental involvement in the school lives of the children who attend the academy. According to the website, each half-term, parent, and child workshops on various aspects of the curriculum were held, allowing parents to support their child's learning at school. This was significant because it provided a basic understanding of the types of programmes implemented by the academy to ensure parents participated in their child's learning. When collecting data from parents, this was one aspect that was investigated further. Parents were asked questions about these programmes to identify whether they were aware of the programmes implemented by the school, and the degree to which they participated.

According to the website, the academy school had a 'Family Learning Week' that was implemented and run each year. Parents and caregivers were invited to participate in activities with their children during this week. Additionally, the website illustrated and encouraged home reading and open communication with parents and children regarding their engagement at home through written comments in reading records. Parents were encouraged to leave up to

four comments per week. This finding is significant because it demonstrates how parents were encouraged to participate in their child's learning.

According to the website, documents were shared at the reading workshop (during a Family Learning Week workshop). These documents provided a step-by-step guide for reading with children at home. This was noted by the school as an important intervention implemented to ensure parents participated in their child's learning, and this was further explored when collecting data from parents to find out if they were aware of these programmes and whether they found them useful.

The website's 'Parents' section highlighted the vital role that parents and carers played in the life of the academy, as well as additional opportunities for involvement. It mentioned termly 'parents' evenings' to discuss children's progress. There was a link to the results of a parent questionnaire administered during parent evenings in 2015, 2016, and 2017. The questionnaire was completed by 103 parents over the three years. One specific statement included in the questionnaire was: 'My child makes good progress at this school,'. According to this, 57% of parents who responded to the survey strongly agreed with this statement in 2015, rising to 73% in 2017. This was further investigated through the semi-structured interviews where I asked parents about their child's progress and how it had or had not changed over time.

Another significant statement in the questionnaire was, 'I receive valuable information about my child's progress from the school.' In 2015, 49% of parents strongly agreed with this statement, but by 2017 the figure had risen to 72%. This can be believed by the researcher to be because of the academy's development of interventions and programmes to ensure parents



were involved in their children's learning. Parents were very complimentary about the academy in the 2015 Ofsted report, and they were grateful for the opportunity to be able to express their views through the new 'Parent Teacher Association'.

Although the website was a useful tool for gathering background information about what the academy did to assist parents of students, it was important to note that the website was bound to present the school in a positive light. It was critical to dig beneath these statements by conducting first-hand research and examining the extent to which parents felt supported and involved in the processes of the academy.

## **4.4 Attainment**

'Achievement' was another theme found on the school's website; the school presented data on how all its children were performing. Data (2019) on the academy's Key Stage Two students' performance was available on the website. There was a distinction made between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. According to the data, 69% of disadvantaged students met the expected level of reading, while 88% of non-disadvantaged students met the expected level of reading. The expected level of writing showed similar results. Data showed that 69% of disadvantaged students met their expected level in writing, compared to 94% of non-disadvantaged students. Again, there was a significant difference in the outcomes of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. There was not much of a gap in pupils achieving the expected level in Mathematics (disadvantaged 62% and non-disadvantaged 69%). This demonstrates a significant achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils which was noted and made visible by the school via the website.

It was critical to determine why there was a smaller attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in Maths than in English. The 2015 results presented by Ofsted revealed areas in which disadvantaged students outperformed non-disadvantaged students. In Writing and Maths, 94% of disadvantaged students achieved the expected level, compared to 67% of non-disadvantaged students, meaning that disadvantaged students outperformed non-disadvantaged students. It was fascinating to delve deeper into this and discover what was done differently during the different years and the results within those years. Was extra help given to disadvantaged students? Were additional interventions implemented? At the moment, non-disadvantaged students outperform disadvantaged students.

The Ofsted report (2015) gave evidence that there was improvement within the school from the years 2014 to 2015. The report suggests that in 2014 the attainment level of disadvantaged pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 was lower than that of non-disadvantaged pupils in both English and Maths. In 2015, the data suggests that disadvantaged pupils were making the same good progress as their non-disadvantaged peers in all subjects, and this was because, their progress was closely tracked, and pupils were very well supported in their learning. This was a significant finding because it indicated that the academy was employing effective strategies to close achievement gaps.

## **4.5 Disadvantage**

Moving on from student achievement, the school displayed publicly its dedication to addressing all forms of disadvantage and striving for inclusion and equal access for all students. According to the website, the school offered a 'Pupil Premium' programme for children who qualified for free school meals. It stated that this programme would be used to address some

of the issues associated with social disadvantage, as well as to narrow and eventually "close any attainment gap." The 'Equality and Inclusion Policy' at the school explained the significance of using the pupil premium programme to remove learning barriers so that disadvantaged students' achievement was comparable to that of all students nationally.

The Pupil Premium scheme is used in English schools. Children are eligible for the pupil premium for a variety of reasons. This includes information about their family situation, such as income or occupation, as well as whether they are in care. If a child meets the eligibility requirements, a school will receive the necessary funding for each child per school year. According to the website, the academy school reserves the right to allocate Pupil Premium funding to any pupil or groups of pupils identified as needing additional support.

The website outlined the use of Pupil Premium funding to ensure teaching and learning opportunities met the needs of all pupils for them to be able to make maximum progress and reach their full potential. It stated that the school supported the government's goal of combating all forms of disadvantage and ensuring inclusion and equal access for all pupils. The website noted that the pupil premium is aimed at "narrowing and eventually closing any attainment gap." This is significant because it demonstrates how the academy employed policy-makers' terminology. It also specified that the academy had many pupils who were not eligible for pupil premium funding, but the academy reserved funding for pupil premium pupils for them to have better learning outcomes.

According to the Ofsted report (2015), the proportion of disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding was more than twice the national average, and this was expected to remain the same in 2017. It was critical to investigate the effectiveness of the Pupil Premium

programme and to question parents and academy leaders about this intervention. According to the academy school's report on their pupil premium strategy, 54% of the academy's students received this funding. It stated the amount of funding allocated to the school for the pupil premium in 2019 was £142,655. This was an important finding as it illustrated a sizeable amount of funding being given to the academy to help support the learning of disadvantaged pupils.

## **4.6 Ofsted Reports**

There were two recent reports available on the schools' website which presented Ofsted inspections conducted in 2015 and 2017. In 2015, the school received an overall rating of 'requires improvement.' This was because students had made insufficient progress in the past, Ofsted reported that attainment in reading, writing, and mathematics was below average at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014. The Ofsted report noted the need for teaching improvement because teachers did not always have the highest possible expectations of their students. Additionally, tasks were not differentiated between different ability pupils, preventing them from making good progress and achieving well. However, the quality of teaching at the academy school was rapidly improving, with teachers planning stimulating and interesting activities for students (Ofsted, 2015).

According to the Ofsted Report in 2015, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups was higher than average, while the proportion of students speaking English as an additional language was lower than average. The report noted that the school provided positive support to students who spoke English as an additional language, allowing them to make good progress. It demonstrated that, in 2015, the achievement of minority ethnic groups was

monitored, with the addition of regular pupil progress meetings to identify any students who were at risk of falling behind. According to the school, this allowed them to provide students with the necessary support to ensure that they caught up with their peers quickly and performed well.

In the 2017 Ofsted report, the headteacher was identified as the driving force for improvement and the school was rated as a 'Good' school. It was recognised by Ofsted that the headteacher had assembled a group of enthusiastic leaders who were clear on what they needed to provide the best education possible for pupils. The headteacher was seen to have invested in leaders who trained and developed all members of staff, and Ofsted reported that this had a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. Ofsted (2017) also reported that teachers used assessment information to plan the next steps in learning for different groups of students, which helped pupils make the progress they should have while identifying those who needed extra help to catch up.

In 2016, disadvantaged pupils were reported to be doing exceptionally well. In addition, disadvantaged pupils made among the best rates of progress in reading, writing, and mathematics in the country and were reported as making good progress. It is suggested that this was the result of changes made to engage and motivate these pupils, which were further investigated by the researcher when teachers and parents were interviewed at the academy. The report demonstrates the academy as differentiating learning for different ability groups, which has helped to enable disadvantaged pupils to perform better.

According to the Ofsted reports, the academy had a new tracking system to identify groups of learners who were not making enough progress or had fallen behind. Lower-ability Key Stage

Two pupils had a phonics session every day to help them catch up on their reading skills. This exemplified the critical steps taken to ensure that lower-ability students received the extra reading assistance they required. The school also demonstrated that it was working hard to ensure that students and pupils who spoke English as an additional language made the necessary progress. The school had identified students who arrived at school with little or no English as a priority for improvement by assisting these pupils in developing language skills and helping them to make progress. These interventions and strategies identified in the Ofsted reports as being used by the academy to support EAL learners were further explored when interviewing staff and parents at the academy.

## **Conclusion**

After analysing the content on the school's website, important factors were examined and identified in relation to the academy school's structures and the way it claimed to support disadvantaged and minority ethnic students. These factors included: ensuring inclusion through ethos and values, a curriculum values of 9 habits, policies of equality and inclusion, support for parents, and so on. As part of the interview process, the researcher made good use of this content. The researcher posed questions to parents and teachers about the data available on the academy school's website to gain a thorough understanding of why certain programmes were implemented and how successful they were perceived to be in supporting minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged students. In doing this I was trying to examine whether the claims of the academy website were merely rhetoric, or whether they were being lived up to and implemented in practice.

## **Chapter 5      Inclusion: Supporting the Learning and Development of All Pupils.**

### **Introduction**

Several key themes emerged from the interviews with staff and parents, which included: inclusion, cultural capital, funding, National Curriculum, the language of policymakers, Christian values, ‘God-given potential’, ethos and values, mobility: transient, and tension between the LEA and needs of the academy. This chapter explores the broad theme of ‘inclusion’ that was discovered. The theme of inclusion (in education) refers to the consideration of the needs and diversity of all individuals, which includes everyone, considering the needs and diversity of everyone (Mitchell, 2013). This theme contained several subthemes and different aspects of inclusion: SEND inclusion, ethnic minority inclusion, economically disadvantaged inclusion, parental inclusion, and inclusion through resources.

This chapter examines each aspect of inclusion and draws on relevant literature to analyse the key results obtained from the broader topic of inclusion. Existing research studies show that schools frequently embrace an inclusive approach aimed at engaging all students while ensuring equity (Elvey and Burke, 2013). The findings reveal that the school helps minority ethnic (EAL) pupils to some extent, demonstrating its dedication to diversity. Nonetheless, there are constant worries about the insufficient help provided to parents of minority ethnic (EAL) children, a situation that frequently leads to feelings of marginalisation.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusion is a broad concept that encompasses all learners and is not just limited to those with special educational needs or disabilities. It is found to concern all pupils and marginalised groups such as those groups of pupils that are from minority ethnic backgrounds, EAL, or who speak English as an additional language. Analysis of the data collected via the interviews with staff and parents revealed that inclusion was a recurring theme that emerged.

Hamre (2007) described the concept of inclusion as: “welcoming all students, recognizing their multifaceted identities, and reconfiguring an educational space that capitalizes on everyone’s unique qualities, experiences, and strengths.” (2007: 51). By this, the academy demonstrated various processes of reconfiguring the academy in support of its pupils to ensure an inclusive environment was provided to all its pupils. Notably, the teaching staff at the academy reinforced inclusion as being one of their core values, and it was commonly found in the form of parental inclusion; the policies of the academy; and its resources.

Attempts at inclusion were often found through the distribution of resources and workshops at the academy. The academy staff reported these resources and workshops being put in place in support of minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. The findings indicated the inclusion of these categories of pupils through the academy’s admissions processes, and this was also evident through the demographics of the academy. The academy was part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), and it was reported by Leadership Staff 2 that many of the academy schools within the Trust were in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation. Leadership Staff 1 indicated that the MAT had 52 academies, which consisted of 12 secondary schools and 40 primary schools and that their focus was working with schools in disadvantaged areas:



*“Yeah, high deprivation most of them. I think there’s only two that aren’t so fifty are and two aren’t”.*

This gives us an understanding that the academy was to some degree inclusive when it came to the admission of pupils and was somewhat fulfilling the original purpose of the academy's programme of creating schools in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. Before exploring the different types of inclusion that existed within the academy, it was important to explore the demographics of the types of pupils that attended the academy, along with the demographics of the area in which the academy was located.

The town where the academy is located, in Greater Manchester, was understood to have high levels of economic deprivation and have many minority ethnic groups living there. According to the Manchester City Council census (2011), the town where the academy was located had fewer White British residents, who had been replaced primarily by Pakistani and Black African residents. The town had experienced substantial rises in these groups, with an increase of 1,587 on one side of the town and 1,372 people in the other area from the Black African group and a further 774 and 2,368 people respectively from the Pakistani group. This indicated a significant number of Pakistani and Black African residents in this ‘deprived’ town of Greater Manchester. It is important to consider that this may be one of the reasons why the academy had a large proportion of minority ethnic pupils in attendance and that it was not completely based on it being an inclusive school.

## 5.1 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion

The finding that SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) was key to staff's talk of inclusion will be discussed in this section. SEND was a notable finding because when academy staff discussed inclusion, they frequently identified SEND pupils alongside minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. SEND refers to pupils who have been identified as having Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, if they find it more difficult to make progress than their peers or have a disability that hinders their learning. The academy was found to have a desire and drive at the heart of its ethos to be inclusive of all pupils who were economically disadvantaged, and who had special educational needs or disabilities, and it was found to be relatively inclusive of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and those pupils who spoke English as an additional language.

Male (2019) discovered through their research that merely listening to the voices of pupils with SEND can be an important means of informing inclusive practice. This is an important finding, as it was found in my research on the academy, rather than just listening to the voices of SEND pupils, 'engaging' SEND pupils was regarded as important to ensure inclusive practice. It was intriguing to see Leadership Staff 2 emphasise the importance of SEND pupil engagement:

*"Maple Academy in particular, they are a fantastic kind of hub, of kind of knowledge and expertise. They are a teaching school, they also have an immersive room which is a room you come into, and it's got projectors that project on three walls of the room, floor to ceiling. It also does movements, the floor will move, it has sound, and it has smells. So, you can pump in certain smells. It is very kind of interactive. Sparks your imagination, so for children who*

*struggle with learning for whatever reason or have an additional need, it's brilliant for them in terms of getting them engaged."*

When examining the support provided to SEND pupils, it was observed that Leadership Staff 2 referred to another academy within the Trust. Leadership Staff 2 appeared to recognise the other MAT school as one with an essential hub model intervention in place. This acknowledgement demonstrates how the Trust enabled schools to share best practices among themselves, which could be beneficial in terms of resource sharing. When discussing the hub, Leadership Staff 2 expressed excitement about how it helped to engage pupils, especially those with SEND. These findings suggest that the other academy within the Trust was devoted to inclusivity by investing in important facilities like the immersive room. Maple Academy can be argued as being considerate of the needs of SEND pupils by providing them with an immersive room that catered for their needs. This finding demonstrates the support that was accessible to the academy at which the research was carried out and suggests the good inclusive practices that were shared among the academies within the Trust.

In his study, Yaghi (2021) discovered that, as compared to standalone academies, academies within Multi-academy Trust structures and composition improved policy transfer through the sharing of good practices. My findings show that academies in these types of trusts benefit from collaboration and resource sharing to ensure the greatest inclusive practices. Leadership Staff 2 emphasised the value of receiving training from various academies within the Trust:

*"Maple have region recovery specialists so they do a lot of training. So they have...a room where you can go in and it's got a two-way mirror so she can be working with a child,*

*the child wouldn't know that there are pupils sat on the other side so they can see how to deliver a session in the best way to support a child in their academy that may have similar difficulties and it's very good for training in that sense so we're constantly sharing kind of expertise, advice."*

This provides us with a better understanding of how the academy received support from other academies within the Trust and how this was beneficial, particularly in terms of staff receiving support and ideas of expertise and advice to better cater for their pupils with special educational needs or disabilities. The findings show that one of the Trust schools (Maple Academy) was dedicated to improving teaching methods and supporting pupils with a variety of needs, as indicated by the presence of a region recovery specialist and frequent training. It is understood that teachers and other staff members within the academy at which I carried out the research, could observe and gain an insight into how to effectively offer sessions to pupils with similar needs. This can be understood to support teachers in ensuring that they are using the best practices throughout the academy, ensuring inclusivity. This demonstrates the importance of collaboration in ensuring that teaching staff understand the best practices for inclusion that benefit not only SEND pupils, but also minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners.

Having explored the importance of resource sharing between the academies to support SEND pupils, it is relevant to note that staff at the academy often referred to SEND pupils when asked about the learning of 'disadvantaged' pupils. This gives us an indication of the diverse types of pupils that were perceived as being in the disadvantaged bracket and were not just limited to those pupils who were on free school meals or were receiving pupil premium sup-

port. As opposed to this, research carried out by Black *et al.* (2019) found that within academy schools, a decreasing percentage of pupils were being classed as SEND and this was particularly common within Sponsored academies. It can be argued that this was not the case when I carried out research at the academy. The academy staff frequently reported the high percentage of SEND pupils who attended the academy. The findings show that there was a great deal of overlap between Pupil Premium and SEND: the two often went hand in hand. This became clear during interviews with academy leaders, who revealed that many of their Pupil Premium pupils had SEND needs. When discussing the inclusion of minority ethnic (EAL) or economically disadvantaged learners, staff were seen frequently referring back to or commenting on how they secured the inclusion of SEND students. This contradicts Black's findings since it illustrates how fixated this academy was on referring to SEND pupils.

In my research, I was able to identify the provisions put in place by the academy in support of pupils with SEND. Leadership Staff 2 discussed an exclusively designed provision developed in partnership with external professionals and specialists. This intervention was known as the 'Children with an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Pupils at the academy who had Special Educational Needs or Disabilities were put on this care plan to ensure pupils were receiving the support they required. The EHCP plan detailed the additional support that was to be given to the child, to achieve their potential. Evidence of this intervention was provided in the comment by Leadership Staff 2:

*"We're an inclusive school as I say our pupil premium programme is around 46.6 per cent so our EAL is around 30 per cent and alongside that we have a high SEN need within school and a lot of those children do come into kind of the disadvantage bracket. And you know we've got a high number of pupils who are on EHCPs or have diagnosis, particularly*

*of ASD I think we're on nine diagnosed ASD. So, we're very, very inclusive, so we've got lots of different things set up within school to support."*

The above comment illustrates the variety of disadvantaged pupils within the academy. This includes the percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium funds, EAL, and SEND. This is a significant finding since it indicates the academy's commitment to serving a wide range of pupils. It also demonstrates how the academy takes individual circumstances into consideration, fostering inclusivity. However, it is crucial to remember that many of the children who attended the academy had already been placed on an EHCP, so the academy was expected to follow and update their care plan. Therefore, it is not clear whether the academy can be credited for this, as it is a requirement that must be met anyway.

The 'SEN Information Report' which was available on the academy's website and had been put together by the academy itself indicated that extra funding was used for pupils on EHCPs who required support that was significantly different from what was usually available. It further indicated that parents were told if their child was eligible for this funding and that it must have been an agreed plan in partnership with the Local Authority. This demonstrates the academy getting some support for their funding from the Local Authorities. This question is about the academy's freedom and the extent to which they are understood as being a private institution. It also shows to what extent the academy is actually privatised and its autonomous nature.

Another important aspect to take into consideration is that the use of EHCPs is essential at most schools in England and not an intervention put in place by just academies. It is critical

to recognise that, while EHCPs are widely used, the quality of their implementation and support might differ greatly among schools. EHCPs can be seen as essential for meeting the needs and requirements of SEND pupils. It is important to understand that EAL pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged, may benefit from a similar form of intervention that gives teaching staff an idea of the individual needs of such pupils. At this moment in time, the academy had no such thing in place for EAL and economically disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, the academy cannot be credited for using EHCPs as this intervention is understood to be a necessity when supporting pupils who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (Gordon-Gould, 2023). The most recent Ofsted inspection (2017) specified how the SEND leader used additional funding effectively. He liaised with different agencies and providers to ensure SEND pupils were being given the best support. In the inspection report, Ofsted also stated how the SEND leader ensured staff were well-trained. This is an important finding as it gives us an idea of how SEND pupils were being supported with the help of different agencies. This may be something the academy could incorporate when supporting EAL learners.

The most recent Ofsted (2017) report displayed on the academy's website suggested the proportion of pupils who had support for special educational needs or were on an education, health and care plan was slightly above the national average. This demonstrates the increased proportion of pupils with SEND that attended the academy, which in some ways represented forms of inclusivity. It is crucial to remember, however, that academies must welcome children with Education Health and Care Plans (DfE, 2016): they have the same obligation to admit a child with an EHCP as any local authority school. As a result, while the academy's intake of children with special needs shows forms of inclusivity in that SEND students are given a place at the school, it is understood to be more of a requirement that must be met by

the school, demonstrating how policymakers still have some rights over the academy, removing their autonomy principle. This is backed by the research of West and Wolfe (2018) who argued how the policy (Academies) introduced by the Labour Government (2000) which was expanded by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010, to give individual schools freedom resulted in over 70 per cent of those schools having less freedom than they had before.

The admission of SEND pupils within academy schools can also be linked to ‘choice and diversity’ initiatives that were extended to Special Educational Needs Policy and Practice in the year 2010 when the coalition government extended the academies programme (Norwich et al, 2019). It is crucial to take note of the admission of SEND pupils within the two different academy types: converter and sponsored. New Labour introduced the term inclusive education, which was written into the government's education policy (Norwich, 2014). Norwich and Black's (2015) research study indicates that converter academies have the lowest percentage of SEND children attending the academy, as compared to sponsored academies, which have the highest percentage of SEND children attending. However, this is not the case for the academy at which I carried out the research. The findings show the academy as taking on a higher percentage of SEND pupils. The higher attendance of SEND pupils in sponsored academies may well be because sponsored academies receive their funding directly from charities and other institutions and, consequently, can use their extra funding to support SEND pupils.

It can be argued that a considerable amount of freedom has been given to converter academies. Converter academies are schools that have opted to convert to academy status, whereas sponsored academies are mainly schools that are underperforming and, therefore, were forced



to turn into academies. It can be argued that this may have played a role in the high percentage of SEND children attending sponsored academy schools as compared to converter academies. This demonstrates the uncertainty of the amount of control sponsored academies have, and this can be understood about admissions and the policies they are expected to follow.

After critically examining the reasons for the high percentage of SEND pupils at the academy under study, it is important to reflect on the findings, which show the various ways in which the academy was supportive of children with SEND, as stated on numerous occasions by academy staff. Both Leadership Staff 2 and 3 specifically acknowledged the school having a high SEND requirement and that many of these pupils were also economically disadvantaged. This is evident in the following comment made by Leadership Staff 2:

*“A lot of the children from that group come within the disadvantage bracket or an SEN kind of need and they go out once or twice a week and do an intense motor skills session, that’s a one-to-one or a one-to-two situation and they’re assessed regularly so all these groups that happen are kind of assessed on a three-week kind of basis so they are in there, they’ll assess three weeks and everything changes quite rapidly because obviously it’s quite intense support”.*

The above comment indicates that the academy is aware of the interventions required to support SEND pupils. It demonstrates how the academy provides tailored support for SEND pupils, including intense motor skills lessons. Children participate in these sessions on a one-on-one or one-on-two basis, demonstrating the significance of individual learning needs. Further, Leadership Staff 2 demonstrated that the school wanted to provide varied provision so that every pupil, irrespective of their circumstances, could participate. This displays inclusive

practice since the academy acknowledges the importance of providing tailored support based on the needs of pupils.

The support provided to pupils with special needs or disabilities is supported by evidence, which was acquired when interviewing Parent 4, who was White British and had children with Special Educational Needs. Parent 4 expressed her satisfaction with the support that her children received:

*“Yes, I do get quite a lot of support with especially with like my oldest he’s got autism and then my son he’s having difficulties in Year four, I think I do get a lot of support, I think I’ve had a lot of support to do with yeah. But even my daughter low support in that way but would say the support is very good.”.*

This finding gives evidence that SEND pupils received support. It expresses the parent's satisfaction with the level of support that was provided to her children. The parent believed that she and her children received adequate support from the school to meet the requirements of their needs. This suggests that the academy was supporting SEND pupils, suggesting practices of inclusivity. Ensuring the inclusion of SEND pupils and supporting them adequately with their learning can prove to be beneficial for their attainment. Lindner *et al.* (2023) found that primary school teachers do not favour the inclusion of all pupils when it comes to the concept of inclusion for all pupils. This was because primary school teachers were found to hold a rather neutral attitude towards inclusive education. And the findings showed that inclusion still seems to be a matter of students’ type of disability. This is an interesting finding and there is an agreement with this in my findings as they indicate that the academy was heavily focused on supporting SEND pupils while having less support available for minority ethnic,

EAL pupils, and those who were economically disadvantaged (this is further discussed in the following chapters of this thesis).

From the comment made by Leadership Staff 2 in regards to SEND pupils taking part in intense motor skills sessions, it can be understood that although the academy had this support put in place, there are common arguments amongst past researchers, such as that of Rose and Shevlin (2019), who argue that the withdrawal of pupils from the classroom-based environment has limitations and does not entirely promote inclusive practice. The research findings in my research indicated the support provided to SEND pupils often took place outside of the classroom environment. This support included a motor skills group where SEND pupils were taken out of the classroom once or twice a week to do intense motor skill sessions. SEND pupils were often to be seen as missing out on vital learning that took place within the classroom-based environment. It may be more beneficial if motor skills activities could be integrated within the curriculum, avoiding SEND pupils from missing out on essential learning that goes on in the classroom. The non-inclusion of SEND pupils within the classroom-based environment can be supposed to be a consequence of other factors, such as needing to have extra support available within the classroom through teaching assistants to enable their learning to take place there. Leadership Staff 3 reported that the academy had a staff shortage:

*“I think it’s just schools in general, education in general schools are, worried about this deficit budget that all schools are going to be in sooner or later. So, they’re trying to put things in place, um, in advance to ensure that, that, you know, they’re kind of trying to combat the deficit budget. And what happens is you lose staff. So, you know, we, we are often very, very stretched. So, you don’t have that many staff in the school. Not as many as there used to be.”*

This comment is interesting since it demonstrates Leadership Staff 3's attempt to claim that all schools are having problems with funding, not just their academy. Leadership Staff 3 identified this as an issue for all schools, perhaps to override the fact that the academy was itself struggling to manage and cope with the funding they had. According to the Education Policy Institute (2018), there has been an increase in the percentage of local authority-maintained primary schools that are in deficit. The percentage of primary schools experiencing a deficit rose sharply from 5.2% in 2010–2011 to 7.1% in 2016–2017. This demonstrates that local authority-maintained schools are also experiencing financial difficulties, in addition to academy institutions. It is important to note that the deficit budget is more of a concern for academies than for state schools because state schools have the support of Local Authorities and thus do not have to worry as much about financial issues, whereas academy Trusts are unable to borrow money (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2022). However, it is important to note that the academy was already collaborating with the LEA to some extent and receiving some financial support, although this support was clearly insufficient to meet the academy's needs.

It is important to consider that to ensure inclusive education, schools must provide additional support for SEND pupils within the classroom. However, not having enough support available to support the additional needs of SEND pupils within the classroom, may indicate forms of exclusion. It can be argued that the lack of teaching assistants within the academy is a potential barrier as it hinders the amount of support SEND, minority ethnic (EAL), and economically disadvantaged pupils can receive. A solution to this could be that the academy staff should prioritise their funding to pay for additional teaching assistants that can provide SEND pupils with one-to-one support within the classroom environment. The academy may also

support SEND pupils by helping them to build independent skills. All of these put together, could help to close the funding gap and better support the needs of SEND pupils.

In the year 2019, the local authority was expected to identify each budget share, relevant to pupils with special educational needs. Schools were expected to spend up to £6,000 per pupil depending on their individual needs and were also expected to meet the additional cost of pupils with special educational needs from its annual budget (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2019). It is understood that schools may find it difficult to provide SEND pupils with relevant materials to aid them in their learning due to budget constraints, and this is especially true if they have a large number of SEND pupils in attendance. It can be difficult to balance spending a large amount of funds on SEND pupils, while also trying to juggle and use funding to offer adequate support for minority ethnic (EAL) or economically disadvantaged students. This is something the Academy Trust must work on to better meet the needs of SEND, minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils.

The briefing paper released by the House of Commons by Roberts, Danechi, and Loft (2021) sets out that in the years 2020 and 2021 there would be an investment of £780 million in additional high-needs funding to support children with SEND. This represents an increase of 12% in the funding available. Despite the availability of new resources, such as the nurture room, aimed at enhancing support for pupils with SEND, the school faced a rising staff and financial resource constraint. This highlights a major gap between the academy's objectives for inequality and diversity and the practical limits it faced.

There were conflicts between the school's ethos and desire for diversity and the resources available to achieve it. The granting of £780 million in high-needs funding for children with SEND by the House of Commons is an admirable step forward. However, the school's efforts

to make full use of the limited resources available to pupils with special needs or disabilities highlight the ongoing need for financial support so that the academy can provide the necessary support to SEND pupils. With adequate financial resources, the academy may be able to provide fair educational opportunities for not only SEND pupils but also minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils.

The academy was also found to ensure the inclusion of SEND pupils through funding places for the twenty most vulnerable pupils within the academy who were given access to attend after-school clubs. This was explained by Leadership Staff 2:

*“We also fund places for our twenty most vulnerable and we also make sure there’s a proportion of EAL, disadvantaged SEN, and children that don’t fall into any bracket so it’s balanced, so we are inclusive in that sense and we have a variety of activities that suit kind of all needs so we have dance, we have basketball, we have football we have boot camp we have Lego club...we also have boosters and interventions in school so if there are children who have any gaps or haven’t understood something we ensure that there’s time within the day before school or after school or during the school day when they can go and get that kind of intervention that’s needed.”*

This comment implies that the academy accommodates to the needs of pupils with special educational needs, those who use English as an additional language, and those who are economically disadvantaged. This individualised strategy for meeting the various needs of pupils within the academy demonstrates how the school intends to give tailored support to pupils rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. The academy's strategy of funding places for the twenty most vulnerable pupils to attend after-school clubs exemplifies inclusivity, and if the school

had more funds, it could serve many more pupils who have additional unique requirements. Leadership Staff 2 expanded on his comment about assisting the twenty most vulnerable pupils, adding that this was due in part to the new focus in education:

*“Yeah so, the bottom twenty per cent is kind of a focus now of education and I don’t know if you’ve heard about that recently. So, it’s going to be a focus in education nationally. And what that means is that it’s assuring that no child is left behind and that is the purpose of this new curriculum that all children are expected to progress at the same rate”.*

These findings are significant because they demonstrate the academy's effort to align its support programs with national educational policies. It can be argued that the academy focuses on the requirements of national educational policies and although this would be helpful to ensure minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged children are not being left behind, it is important the academy focuses on the individual needs of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils within the academy and comes up with important support programmes to help close the gaps in attainment.

In accordance with, funding places at after-school events for the twenty most vulnerable pupils, similar comments were made by other teaching staff who discussed how the most vulnerable pupils were also given access to school holiday clubs and visits. Teacher 1 gave a breakdown of the additional programmes and clubs that took place during the half term for vulnerable families. They indicated that the ten most vulnerable families across the school were offered the opportunity to go on educational visits:

*“We do experiences in the half term for vulnerable families called Break Out project which is organised by our safeguarding lead and she kind of targets the ten most vulnerable*

*families across the school... the children go with members of staff from school to places like Manchester Museum or Jump Nation when we've got like a two week holiday block, so rather than them spending a lot of time at home not engaged and not accessing the wider world let's say, they get the opportunity to do things they wouldn't normally".*

According to the evidence presented above, the school tried to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils from poorer and SEND backgrounds received the necessary help to succeed in their educational learning. The school ensured that disadvantaged pupils were supported by providing them with educational trips during the half-term holidays. This demonstrates that the academy ensured SEND pupils were included and gave them support even outside of the school environment. According to Stewart, Watson, and Campbell (2018), school holidays can be stressful for children from families with low incomes. Much of this is due to inadequate provision of proper childcare, restricted access to enrichment activities, and food struggles, which can influence children's health and well-being, causing their learning to stagnate or decline. As a result, the academy's decision to support the academy's twenty most needy families by arranging trips during half-term holidays can be interpreted as backing the pupil's needs and ensuring they are not left behind.

The academy's Ofsted inspection (2017) emphasised the academy's effectiveness in assisting SEND pupils, stating that 'pupils who have special educational needs made strong progress by the end of Key Stage 2 from their starting points in English and mathematics. Teachers monitor their progress carefully.' The Ofsted report further identified that the academy ensured inclusive education was provided to all pupils, that strong progress was being made by SEND pupils and that they were reaching the same level as their peers. This was an important finding as it specifically illustrated the academy as making vital progress when supporting



SEND pupils. The findings further demonstrate the academy as ensuring disadvantaged pupils have access to a wide range of activities which children may not have access to at home, and this implies a broad learning environment provided to SEND pupils.

The academy can be seen as being inclusive through how it takes on a higher proportion of SEND pupils and provides such pupils with additional support outside of the classroom-based environment. However, it is important to note that the academy receives additional funding to support SEND and disadvantaged pupils and therefore, this could be one of the reasons why the academy has been able to provide additional support to SEND pupils (Nurture room). The use of the nurture room was also discussed by Leadership Staff 2 and Leadership Staff 1, who explained the use of the nurture room to support pupils with special educational needs and those who are specifically on EHCP plans. Although the academy may have made good use of funding by putting a nurture room in place, evidence suggests that the school is struggling to make full use of its interventions as they do not have enough staff available to run the interventions. The Leadership Staff 2 further discussed the use of the nurture room for SEND pupils:

*“As their children are in school, they have one-to-one sessions, we have a nurture room set up. In the mornings it’s an academic basis so the criteria for that is, if they are not working within their year group, if they are significantly below so like let’s say for example you may have a Year 5 children whose working at Year 2 you might have a Year 2 child working at Year 1, it’s a variation across the school they go in, in the morning they do Maths and English pitch their level in small groups. There’s two adults to six children. It’s an intense very focused kind of topic led enquiry-based learning which really helps them and take*

*into account their key skills so like they're very much kind of a repetition-based learning environment."*

The above comment illustrated the support given to pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. Pupils were provided with diverse learning methods such as enquiry-based learning and repetition-based learning. It was evident from the comment made by the Leadership Staff 2 that these strategies had been put in place to ensure SEND pupils were able to make progress and to help close the attainment gap between themselves and their peers. Whether this was successful is questionable and requires further research.

The design of the nurture room and its aim to meet the specific needs of its pupils was reported and available to view on the academy's website. The nurture room was very different from the classroom-based environment as it had: a living area, toys, a designated study area, and even a dining room and kitchen. Such an integrated approach indicates a strong commitment to promoting pupils' overall development and well-being. Sloan et al.'s (2020) research on the effects of supporting pupils in primary schools is essential for a review of the success of the nurture room. Sloan et al.'s data showed a slight improvement in the academic attainment of pupils who took part in learning within the nurture room. In contrast to the findings of Sloan et al.'s study, my findings on the academy reflect that staff felt the nurture room was beneficial and spoke positively about it. Further evidence was found for this through an Ofsted inspection report (2017).

This claim is also supported by the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report, which is dated 2017 and is available on the school's website. The report highlights the academy's desire to create a nurture room to specifically support pupils who have Special Educational

Needs or Disabilities, and that this also demonstrates the inclusivity of the academy by supporting those with social and emotional challenges. The Ofsted report demonstrates clearly how the academy was helping pupils with their learning, behaviour, and emotional well-being, which shows how the nurture room facility is beneficial. The official statement of the report stated: ‘Analysis of pupils’ outcomes, behaviour, and emotional well-being has shown that this provision is effective.’

Another comment made by Ofsted during the academy’s 2017 inspection stated: ‘Teachers effectively support pupils who have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and those who need to catch up. These pupils make good progress in class from their starting points. Some pupils attend short-term focused sessions in English and mathematics in the nurture room. These are helping them to make good progress. This further gives evidence of the benefits of the nurture room provision. Importantly, Leadership Staff 1 specifically specified that the nurture room was led by the academy’s learning mentor and was not in use for the academic year of 2019 as the learning mentor was needed to work with Year 4:

*“We’re not having nurture room at the moment. Our learning mentor is going to be supporting in Year Four because we’ve got 40 per cent SEN. The nurture provision is predominantly for SEND pupils because we’ve got such a high percentage.”*

This comment highlights the tension between the resources available and being able to deliver an inclusive experience. The nurture room was not used in 2019 because the learning mentor was needed to assist pupils in Year Four who also had a lot of pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. This demonstrates that there are tensions between what the school desires to do to support SEND pupils, and what they can do because there are con-

straints due to staff being needed to support pupils within classrooms. Consequently, the nurture room provision was not always being used or provided to pupils. This hinders the extent to which the academy was able to deliver an inclusive practice to support SEND pupils.

Having explored the nurture room provision, there were also interesting findings specific to the academy's curriculum and SEND pupils. The curriculum, which was reported by staff to be 'broad and balanced' (Chapter six, page 237 discusses this in detail) and was also found to be based around the experiences and support of SEND pupils. The Leadership Staff 3 explicitly indicated the way in which the academy had based their new curriculum in support of the experiences provided to SEND pupils. They specifically discussed the curriculum being about the inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and other disadvantages:

*“It's about inclusion. It's about including everybody SEN, pupil premium, the different groups that exist within the school, EAL.”*

Further evidence of this is available on the school's website, which gives access to the academy's SEND policy. The policy specifically outlines the use of a balanced and broad curriculum that supports SEND pupils:

*‘Wherever possible children with sensory impairments to be given access to all areas of the curriculum. Wherever possible children with physical disabilities to experience a broad and balanced curriculum. Provide a range of resources to suit individual or group needs example, speech games. Differentiate within class teaching to enable all children to achieve their full potential.’ (SEN Policy, 2020).*

The policy outlined the consideration given to SEND pupils when providing support by using a broad and balanced curriculum. The policy indicated the expectation of pupils being provided with a range of different resources to aid in their learning, and this was aimed to ensure all SEND pupils were achieving their full potential. It is important to consider the extent to which the academy incorporated this policy into their learning and teaching, and this was somewhat explained by the Leadership Staff 2:

*“The purpose of this new curriculum that all children are expected to progress at the same rate. And then if they’re not then the provision is put in place so the way we assess and the assessment for learning we use and the marking system that helps us pick upon things instantly. So, you’re not waiting till the end of the lesson to pick up a misconception or an error: it’s instant.”*

This comment is important as it provides us with an understanding of how the academy assessed pupils’ learning daily. It indicates that the academy made sure to monitor the learning of SEND pupils and if any pupils were falling behind, they were instantly picked up and provided with the adequate support required. Abbott *et al.* (2013) have found successful headteachers to be seen as placing a strong emphasis on identifying individual pupils’ needs for targeted interventions with a significant emphasis on literacy. This is an interesting finding by Abbott *et al.* as it shows that successful headteachers can identify the needs of individual pupils’ and this ties in with my findings which illustrate how the academy aimed to support SEND pupils through the help of interventions (assessments), constant monitoring to ensure SEND pupils were not falling behind, followed by the use of additional resources, and a nurture room which specifically targeted SEND pupils and those that were from minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Teaching Assistant 4 specifically stated how she was supporting a SEND pupil with one-to-one support as he was suspected to have ADHD and autism.

*“I do support with a child who we’ve got in our class as a one-to-one sometimes in the afternoons, to see if he has got ADHD and autism and stuff like that. So, we’re just in limbo with him at the moment”.*

The above comment is significant because it implies two things. To begin, Teaching Assistant 4 can be seen providing targeted one-on-one support for the SEND pupil. Second, because the academy was experiencing staff shortages and teaching assistants were frequently found having to go from group to group due to staffing issues, it demonstrates how the academy had to go out of its way to support SEND pupils and how this could have had an impact the amount of support that was available for minority ethnic, EAL, or economically disadvantaged learners. The teaching staff made no mention of EAL pupils or economically disadvantaged pupils receiving one-on-one support. This demonstrates that the academy's priorities may have been centred around the needs of SEND pupils.

## **Summary**

The data suggests that the academy staff often referred to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils, and these were the first groups to come to mind when discussing the concept of inclusion, rather than minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. The inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs or disabilities was found to be a prevalent theme in the interviews with academy staff. When promoting the academy's dedication to inclusiveness, leadership staff were often seen to refer to SEND pupils and the kinds of support they had in place to cater for their needs.

Overall, the data showed that SEND pupils were the primary concern of the academy when it came to inclusion, and this may partly have been due to the high percentage of SEND pupils in attendance at the academy at the time. How discussions formed around the interventions put in place, such as the nurture room, to support these pupils are important as they show forms of inclusivity. The staff discussed funding places for the twenty most vulnerable families within the academy, and these involved SEND pupils. It was revealed that the academy focused on the twenty most vulnerable families as this was the current governmental agenda at the time. This demonstrated that the academy concentrated a great deal on the demands and requirements of policymakers. This acknowledgement of SEND pupils' inclusion implies that the inclusivity of these pupils was at the forefront of the academy's planning.

## **5.2 Minority Ethnic Inclusion**

Minority ethnic inclusion was an important theme explored when interviewing both staff and parents. Staff were often found to focus on pupils who spoke English as an additional language (EAL) when asked about the learning of minority ethnic pupils and the challenges they faced. There was often an overlap found between EAL, economically disadvantaged and SEND pupils. Some pupils within the academy were EAL and also had Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. Likewise, some pupils were from minority ethnic backgrounds who also had SEND or were at the same time from the economically disadvantaged group. Per this, Leadership Staff 3 said:

*“Disadvantage pupil can be pupil premium. It could be an SEN child. It could, you know, they, it's, it's not just one thing. So, one child could fall under everything. So, we could have a disadvantaged child who is EAL, who is an SEN pupil, pupil premium disadvantage. It's kind of the same, it falls into the same umbrella.”*

When discussing the inclusion of minority ethnic pupils, the staff were often found to refer to the interventions they had put in place for EAL learners, and this suggested that the staff conflated and treated both groups the same. Leadership Staff 2 gave an outline of the number of minority ethnic pupils that attended the academy, followed by the percentage of EAL pupils that were attending towards the end of the year 2019 (October):

*“White Other European we are currently at 4 per cent. Asian or Asian British or any other Asian background we were at 4.6 per cent that has rose recently, so we are now at 5.6 per cent. Black or Black British African it was 10.9 we’ve had at least four to five other pupils so you’re probably looking at...16 to 20 per cent. And then other ethnic groups make up around 4 to 5 per cent. So, we’re probably looking around 40% minority ethnics. So, we’ve got here English as an additional language, it was 27 per cent at the time this report was published, as I say we’re getting new arrivals all the time so you’re probably looking at much higher than that now, you’re probably looking at around 35 or 36 per cent EAL and [the] majority of them coming in have very little English.”*

This suggested the academy had approximately 40% minority ethnic pupils. And from these minority ethnic groups, 35-36% spoke English as an additional language. This data is important as it demonstrates a high percentage of pupils within the academy with EAL needs who may require additional support in English language acquisition. A recent report published by the Department for Education (2019) showed the statistics of the characteristics of pupils in English state primary schools, and it indicated the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic origins as risen steadily over recent years. In primary schools, 33.5% of pupils of school age were of minority ethnic groups and this was an increase from 33.1% in January



2018. The academy could arguably be seen as having a slightly higher percentage of minority ethnic pupils in attendance.

The comment made by Leadership Staff 2 specifically mentioned: *“We’ve got an increase in number; we are kind of in the top 10 per cent of schools in Manchester for EAL”*. The reason for this increase may be because of the increasing numbers of minority ethnic families living in the area where the school was located. The Leadership Staff 2 discussed several interventions the academy had in place in support of EAL learners. One of these interventions included a group session that was run once a week:

*“We also have a recently set up nurture room, because of our high need EAL group. Unfortunately, at the moment we can only run that once a week and we are looking at extending that next year into more frequent... so they’re assessed on a baseline and we have an assessment system that tests phonological awareness of language acquisition... we assess that as a basis and from there we have two EAL groups that kind of run that one day and they’ll either go to one where they’ve got more of the vocabulary acquisition but kind of need the phonetic knowledge to help with spelling, writing, reading. And the other group is for those that don’t have particularly very good English and neither language acquisition to get by on a day-to-day social kind of level and we build it up that way, and that’s regularly assessed’.*

This comment is important as Leadership Staff 2 discussed the use of the nurture room in support of the academy’s high need EAL group. As discussed in the previous section on SEND inclusion, the nurture room was often described as a provision put in place for SEND pupils. The comment above suggests that the nurture room was being used for a diverse group of pupils, which included both SEND and EAL pupils. It also suggests that the nurture

room at the time of this study, was only operating once a week and this demonstrates the barriers faced by the academy as they had limited staffing and resources to make full use of this provision. Critical Race Theory can be used to evaluate the academy's initiatives to assist minority ethnic pupils, especially those who speak English as an additional language. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that racism is deeply embedded in the structures of education, policies, school practices, and curricula that disadvantage minority ethnic learners. In this context, measures like the establishment of a "nurture room" indicate a desire to foster an inclusive environment. CRT emphasises that although these interventions are beneficial, they frequently fall short in addressing deeper structural biases that exist within the curriculum, teaching methods, and institutional policies (Gillborn, 2008).

The findings further suggest that the academy supported EAL pupils by carrying out baseline assessments and using these as a criterion which helped to indicate where EAL pupils were in terms of their phonological awareness and language acquisition. All the leadership staff, Teacher 4 and TA 1 also identified the use of the nurture room in support of EAL learners. Leadership Staff 3 said:

*"Those children who come into school with no English... we've got a little nurture group in the mornings. And the theory is that they attend the nurture group for about four to six weeks, and they get the basic English and then they come into class and then they learn from the role models. Because the worst thing you can do is put them in a room with children who haven't got the language, the rich language. But initially, you have to because it's for their kind of social, emotional and wellbeing. So, once they've learned the routines and learned the kind of basic, then they come back into the classroom and there's an expectation that the children have, there's a rich vocabulary within the classroom for those children".*

A similar comment was made by the Leadership Staff 1 who stated:

*“We have a learning mentor who works with them [EAL] when they first come into school, who makes sure they’re settled in, they have a buddy in class and they start with the more able children so, they’ve got the good language to model to them.”*

This comment illustrates how the academy supported pupils who came into school with little to no proficiency in English. It demonstrates that Leadership Staff 3 and 1 were aware of the importance of providing EAL pupils with a gradual approach to integration within the classroom, which shows forms of inclusivity. Similarly, Teacher 4 also reported EAL pupils attending the nurture room to improve their English language and Maths skills during lunchtime:

*“I’ve got two EAL, so English as an additional language and there is a massive barrier between them but they go at the moment to nurture in the mornings to do English and Maths so they don’t come to my class until Lunchtime and there’s quite a few of them, different classes that go there for a focus on English and Maths just so they’re confident and then others is just, some lower ability but there’s not a massive gap other than the EAL.”*

This is a significant finding as it gives supporting evidence of the use of the nurture room in support of EAL learners. EAL pupils were provided with extra support to enhance their English language and Maths skills through the nurture provision. Studies from different countries (English-speaking) have found that EAL children’s mathematical achievement is usually higher than their English language achievement (Strains and Demie, 2006). According to Strand, Malmberg, and Hall (2015), this is also the case in the UK, where the scores of EAL children on mathematics assessments are always higher than those on reading assessments.

This indicates the important need for the academy to focus more on the English language requirements of EAL pupils and less on mathematics. The nurture room can be understood to provide EAL pupils with the support they require to enhance their English skills, and this gives evidence for inclusive practice.

Considering the comment made by Leadership Staff 2 around the baseline assessment. It is also important to note that the baseline assessment was also discussed by other teachers.

Teacher 2 explained the effectiveness of the baseline assessment as it allowed the teacher to assess where the child was in terms of their English language and speaking skills and then based on that, they were able to provide the appropriate resources required to aid in their learning. It is important to note that many schools in England use baseline assessments to assess the learning of pupils at the beginning of the school year and therefore, the academy was not doing something that set it apart from other schools (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020).

The Standards and Testing Agency (2020) highlights the use of a 'baseline assessment', it specifically mentions the purpose of the assessment and the requirement for it to take place when a child starts their academic year in reception. It further indicates that the baseline assessment provides an on-entry assessment of pupil attainment which is used as a starting point to measure to the end of Key Stage 2. Therefore, this cannot be seen as a specific intervention put in place by the academy, but rather an intervention set out by the government. Since the baseline assessment is used by many schools in England it demonstrates the academy as having an inclusive practice, however, is not seen to go above and beyond what is expected and therefore, cannot be used as evidence in support of the academy being entirely inclusive.

This ‘nurture room’ intervention links back to the research question of the ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy to support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils and to what extent this is evident in practice. Further examples were provided, Teacher 1 explained how they used a variety of approaches in the classroom and how pupils received a lot of one-to-one support from teachers and teaching assistants. Various staff members at the academy specified that when EAL children first arrive, the staff do a basic English assessment to see whether the EAL children can understand simple instructions and if not, they are provided with relevant strategies which may involve pupils playing matching games with pictures and English phrases.

*“We use a variety of approaches and a lot of support from the teaching and learning assistants when they first arrive, we tend to do a little bit of a basic English assessment on them to see whether they can understand simple instructions. If that’s not the case then for example, another boy who arrived who spoke no English in Year Six we started up matching games with pictures and English words”.*

The above comment indicates an inclusive, differentiated classroom practice in support of new EAL learners. It can be argued that this may allow them to feel included through the appropriate tailored support strategies such as matching games. It also offers evidence that the academy does have appropriate strategies and support in place to enhance the learning of EAL pupils. Previous research carried out by Gladwell (2019) explored the support provided to EAL pupils in schools in England. She argued that there is insufficient English as an additional language support in some schools in England and that this prevents EAL pupils from wanting to remain and thrive in education. However, these findings indicate that the academy

is providing support to EAL pupils using additional learning strategies. This includes the use of matching games. It is not just limited to this the findings suggest the academy had a member of staff who volunteered and did one-to-one reading, and this was a supposed benefit for pupils who were EAL as they were provided with extra sessions outside of the classroom:

*“Yeah so, we’ve got a staff member who does specifically EAL sessions in the afternoon for a lot of our new arrivals, basic phonics, basic reading”.*

This gives evidence that the academy had tailored support for EAL and minority ethnic pupils. The academy was understood to tailor their support for minority ethnic and EAL pupils by providing them with one-to-one phonics and reading sessions. This could be understood as being an important step towards supporting the needs of EAL and minority ethnic pupils, ensuring inclusivity. Providing support for reading and phonics shows the academy’s awareness of the importance of targeted support to help pupils develop their language skills, and this in turn can help to bridge language gaps. Demie (2023) identified strategies and success factors which contributed to the rising achievement and tackling of inequalities, and this was through the effective support for minority ethnic pupils and EAL pupils receiving targeted interventions. This demonstrates how significant it is, that the academy was providing targeted interventions to EAL pupils.

Arnot (2014) argues that before 2011, local authorities provided support to schools through the work of their minority ethnic achievement services which included: EAL advice, bilingual support for new arrivals, and first language assessment for pupils whose progress is causing concern. Due to the policy changes of April 2013, these services were only free to

state-maintained primary schools and are in turn chargeable to primary and secondary academies, or in some local authority areas not available at all. This is important information as it demonstrates that many of the services that were once provided for free to state schools are now offered to academy schools but for a fee. This specifies how privatisation of academies may not always be helpful, as these schools often miss out on vital opportunities and interventions which are offered for free to state-maintained schools.

Leadership Staff 2 further identified how the academy has two EAL groups running and how they are focused on either 'vocabulary acquisition' and/or 'phonetic knowledge':

*"We have two EAL groups that kind of run that one day and they'll either go to one where they've got more of the vocabulary acquisition but kind of need the phonetic knowledge to help with spelling, writing, reading and the other group is for those that don't have particularly very good English and neither language acquisition to get by on a day to day social kind of level and we build it up that way, and that's regularly assessed."*

This comment once again suggests the targeted support the academy was providing EAL pupils. And along with this targeted support, Leadership Staff 1 and 2, and three of the teachers indicated the use of a tool known as 'Communication In Print'. They described this as an important resource used by the academy to support EAL pupils with their English. Leadership staff 1 reported this tool being used by minority ethnic pupils who spoke English as an additional language when they first came into school:

*"We use something called Communication In Print, which has pictures and words on, so they can access the lessons. Our learning mentor works with them when they first come*

*into school, who makes sure they're settled in, they have a buddy in class and they start with the more able children so, they've got the good language model to them."*

This comment shows the appropriate resources used by the academy to support EAL learners. Communication In Print was understood as being a support strategy for EAL learners as they were given pictures to match with words. A learning mentor was in place to provide support to EAL pupils, and the children were made to sit with the more able children so that they could pick up the English language. Pairing new pupils with more able pupils can be argued to facilitate social integration and language acquisition. Perry and Vlachopoulos (2023) found in their study that peer support and translation were effective approaches for teaching EAL learners. It is understood to be a proven strategy to provide disadvantaged pupils with role models and to ensure they feel comfortable within the classroom environment. Staff believed that allowing EAL pupils to be exposed to peers who have strong English language skills could prove a helpful strategy in allowing pupils to develop the English language more quickly as opposed to just relying on material resources. Leadership Staff 2 also reported the following about peer support for EAL learners:

*"We sit our EAL pupils with variety of different students of varying abilities because we find that they pick up language quicker and the more children they can sit with the better that is for them."*

The above evidence suggests the academy's acknowledgement of the type of support that helps their EAL pupils to pick up their English language sufficiently. Regarding Communication In Print, it can be seen as an important intervention used by the academy in support of



minority ethnic pupils who speak English as an additional language. The use of these resources can be seen as reassuring in that the academy has support put in place for these learners; however, since only interviews were carried out, it was not possible to assess the outcome of using these resources, in other words, whether they are successful, or not. Teacher 4 also reported the use of Communication In Print in support of pupils who were on the Pupil Premium programme as well as those who were EAL:

*“I do try to that quite a lot with all of them to be fair but a lot of the time you know I try and work with especially, children with lower ability, trying to work with them to make them understand the task because they sometimes need a bit longer to complete the task so, I will sit with them... I always try and use resources with them. Especially like, I don't know if you've heard about communication imprint, so we use communication in print so like if I write a story, I will type it up into that and it's literally written out with the pictures. And that's a massive tool”.*

The above comment indicates the good use of Communication In Print, which allows pupils from different ability groups and those groups of pupils that may not otherwise possess the cultural capital or who may have communication issues (lack of language), to be supported with their learning. Cortazzi and Jin (2007) argued the importance of visual learning for the fundamental development of English language skills amongst EAL learners. Their research found that using pictures and visual resources helped to develop children's metacognitive and written skills. This research helps to somewhat identify and support the usefulness of interventions used by the academy, such as Communication In Print.

Teaching Assistant 1 discussed how the academy had many resources which were tailored towards the support of minority ethnic pupils who spoke English as an additional language, however, they were not being used to their full potential:

*“We also have Alexa in school but that is not used correctly at the moment. It’s kind of been brought in by SENCO who then left, so it’s not been used to its full potential but when I was looking into it, I was like woah this could be used for EAL children. So, at the moment we’ve got a new safeguarding officer in place he’s in the midst of kind of pulling in any resources we’ve got so can give a clearer vision for September of where we’re going to go and have a clearer vision because we’ve got lots of clever resources within school but nothing being used to its full potential”.*

This finding is significant because it illustrates one of how the academy was unable to fully utilise its resources, notably due to staff mobility, which was another theme uncovered within the findings of this study (see Chapter 7 on mobility). To ensure that EAL pupils are appropriately supported with relevant resources, academy staff must liaise with replacement staff and teach them about the interventions in place and how to fully utilise them. Academy staff must use good resource management to ensure the support and inclusion of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils, ensuring that no gaps in their learning are left.

## **Summary**

From the findings, it was evident that the academy had approximately 40% minority ethnic pupils attending in the year 2019. And from these minority ethnic groups, 35-36% spoke English as an additional language. While this demonstrates inclusion in admissions, the town in which the research was carried out already had a high percentage of minority ethnicities living there. Therefore, this could not provide a definite indicator of inclusive practice.

Teachers were found to experience barriers when it came to being supportive and inclusive of minority ethnic learners as there was found to be a lack of resources, which reduced the extent to which teachers were able to support these pupils.

Moreover, the staff at the academy were heard to mention the use of a baseline assessment to assess pupils as a tool for inclusion. This tied in with the research question about the strategies employed by the academy to support minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged pupils. However, although the academy was seen to employ this particular strategy, the baseline assessment was already in use by several other state schools and, therefore, cannot be identified as a stand-alone or significant strategy used by the academy to ensure the inclusion of all pupils.

The academy does have a nurture room, which is different from other schools; however, there was often confusion amongst staff as to whether it was in use at the time when the study was carried out, as there were not enough resources and staff available to be able to run the nurture group sessions. Therefore, it was quite clear that although the academy did have inclusive practices in place, it did not have interventions in place that were significantly divergent from state schools.

There is limited evidence suggesting the academy is including different cultures within its curriculum and day-to-day learning, and as a result, it may not be promoting an entirely inclusive practice. It is important to note that ethnicity often intersects with class, giving a double disadvantage to pupils who are both economically disadvantaged and are from minority ethnic groups. The academy needs to prioritise and particularly focus on the learning of these groups of individuals to help them progress further and achieve. Banks (2007) argued that

ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity should be reflected in all the structures of educational institutions, including the staff, rules and values, curriculum, and students. He illustrated that one way of doing this is by thinking and understanding the different perspectives of contemporary reality, aiming for inclusive cultures.

### **5.3 Economic disadvantage: Inclusion**

Another significant finding was the inclusion of economically disadvantaged pupils. The discussions held around economically disadvantaged pupils were mostly about pupils who were on the Pupil Premium program or were receiving free school meals. The notion of disadvantage has often been linked with chances of success (Hirsch, 2007). The academy aimed to provide economically disadvantaged pupils with additional support to ensure their learning was not limited due to their home circumstances. To begin with, the Leadership Staff 2 described the proportion of disadvantaged pupils that were currently on the roll:

*“Originally, we were quite high, well we are still quite high, we were a kind of 56 per cent originally, we’ve had a significant drop in that number in comparison, so we are currently at 45 per cent. The drop has obviously been because children have kind of moved out of the area and had to move schools and then the children, we get in are generally pupils that are EAL and don’t have recourse to public funds, therefore, don’t qualify for disadvantaged pupil premium status”.*

This specified that the academy had a drop in the number of economically disadvantaged pupils joining the academy and it was supposed that this was because economically disadvantaged children were moving out of the area. The Leadership Staff reported how the number of

EAL pupils had gone up, and the academy struggled to get pupil premium status for these pupils. This suggests the negative impact this may have had on the academy as the reduction in the number of economically disadvantaged pupils meant that there would have been a reduction in funding. Additionally, since more minority ethnic and EAL pupils were attending the academy, they were not receiving pupil premium support. Therefore, it meant that the academy had to use the budget, it had to support minority ethnic pupils alongside economically disadvantaged pupils. Welply (2022) noted how EAL provision is highly dependent on the availability of funding. When supporting the learning of EAL pupils, several resources are often required along with one-to-one support. The Department for Education (2015) stated in their report that almost all the (92.3 per cent) schools at which the report was carried out, reported their most effective strategy in supporting economically disadvantaged learners was wholly or partially through the funding by the pupil premium.

Carpenter *et al.* (2013) have explored the use of pupil premium funding in schools in England. Their survey illustrates that the schools have used different types of support to help pupils they considered disadvantaged. This support consisted of additional support inside and outside of the classroom, subsidising the cost of school trips, resources and out-of-hours activities, and the way in which this resulted in pupils having an inclusive practice. However, it is agreed that the academy was struggling with its resources and staffing as a consequent of limited funding and, therefore, struggling to maintain an inclusive practice. This was evident by what the Leadership Staff 3 said:

*“We look at how best to target funding for the disadvantaged pupils. So, like I said, it could be that some classes do get additional funding. So, a lot of it really is through, the employment of teaching assistants, sending staff on training so they're aware of what strategies*

*to use...you know as an Academy, we've got music sessions...and then obviously any additional adults that we can, unfortunately we don't have that many at the moment, but any that we do, we try."*

Teacher 1 reported that she had the biggest number of disadvantaged pupils in her class (Year 6) and that her class was the highest percentage of pupil premium children in the school; the reasons for this were: home backgrounds, separated parents and new arrivals to the country.

*"I've got the biggest amount at the moment. So, my class is currently the highest percentage of pupil premium children at the moment in the school... I suppose various reasons for that with home backgrounds, separated parents, new arrivals to the country there's a whole variety".*

This finding is important as it gives us a clear understanding of the different groups of economically disadvantaged pupils who were in attendance. One year group particularly had the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils. It also suggests that pupils were attending who had newly arrived in the country. This shows that some economically disadvantaged pupils also came from minority ethnic backgrounds. And this indicates how pupils often require several different interventions to support their differing needs (EAL and economic disadvantage). The teacher further discussed the way in which she supported economically disadvantaged learners within her classroom:

*"I group the children together so like; I will get the more able children to sit with those children who have newly arrived and I believe this benefits our pupils because they are*

*then able to pick up on learning and get help from their peers. The children then feel like they are welcomed and it's good for them, for their learning."*

This is another important finding as it suggests how the teacher was ensuring economically disadvantaged pupils felt included within the classroom environment. She made disadvantaged pupils sit with more able students to allow them to pick up on their learning. The teacher specifically stated how this ensured new arrivals felt welcomed to the school and this gives evidence that the academy was ensuring an inclusive practice for economically disadvantaged pupils. Following on, Leadership Staff 3 explained how the academy ensured the inclusion of economically disadvantaged pupils, and this was through the prioritisation of closing the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils. Leadership staff 3 stated that this was monitored through the appropriate providers and staff within the Trust:

*"It's all about making sure that every child succeeds and also making sure that provision is in place to ensure that gaps are closing between disadvantage pupils compared to their, to their peers. Schools identify the 20 most vulnerable families, and they target those families and support them, also working with the disadvantaged children they're identified, and additional funding is provided for these disadvantaged pupils. So that additional funding is then used within the school to ensure that gaps are closing. So that funding could pay for an additional TA. It could pay for an additional teacher. It could pay for the after-school club. It could be that trips are being subsidised."*

These findings are important as they demonstrate how the Leadership Staff were aware of the needs of economically disadvantaged pupils who attended the academy. They wanted to ensure that gaps in attainment were closing. The academy was found to target and support the twenty most vulnerable families. The additional funds were used to pay for additional teaching assistants, teachers, after-school clubs, and school trips. However, it was clear from the interviews with staff members that the academy lacked sufficient teaching assistants, and as a result, supplementary classes, or sessions to aid economically disadvantaged pupils were frequently unable to take place (see Chapter Six on Funding).

Furthermore, with the comment made by Leadership Staff 3, it was interesting to see the leadership staff using the language of policymakers when referring to “closing the gap”. Closing the gap is a phrase often used by the government and the Department for Education when looking at the attainment gap between working-class and middle-class pupils. This shows that the academy was closely looking at what policymakers were looking out for and therefore, this brings in the debate around marketisation. This alignment with governmental objectives can be viewed as a deliberate response by the academy to position itself positively within the competitive educational landscape in the context of marketisation.

The academy may be attempting to demonstrate its commitment to eliminating educational inequities, an important factor commonly considered when evaluating school performance, by using terminology and priorities that connect with legislators. This makes us question if academies are truly tackling inequality or if their efforts are simply motivated by external factors such as the need to obtain funds, attract students, and maintain a great reputation. This raised questions as to whether the academy was aiming to be inclusive and tackle the needs of



pupils or whether it was aiming to overcome issues that were commonly subject to debate at the time for instance, the expectations of Ofsted (Ofsted, 2019).

Another important finding was how the staff reported the material resources provided to economically disadvantaged learners. Teacher 2 stated that the academy offered new book bags to disadvantaged pupils who may have lost them and were specifically provided with extra support from the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) team, and this involved receiving targeted intervention within the classroom-based environment:

*“It’s more likely in my class especially, it’s more likely that they’re not going to bring their book bags in. I think we do as much as we can to support them in my opinion. Like we’ve offered out new book bags when book bags have been lost. Erm we’re very good at keeping a reading record in school so even if a child’s reading record isn’t coming back from home, we can log what we’re reading with them.”*

This finding demonstrated two important things. Firstly, it indicated the way in which the teacher had a presupposition about disadvantaged pupils as being more likely to not bring in their book bags to school and, as a result, the school having to replace these free of charge. Secondly, the teacher identified the specific issue around disadvantaged pupils not bringing in their reading records. Souchon *et al.* (2020) explored the influence of teachers’ political orientation and values on the success prediction toward students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Souchon *et al.*’s study indicated that there was a clear effect of socioeconomic background on teacher predictions of student success and that this was often found to manifest itself through bias. This ties in with the findings: the teacher could be seen as having

a perspective, even a bias towards their expectations of disadvantaged pupils where they believed they were more likely not to bring in their book bags or have their reading records signed. This gives clear evidence that teachers' experiences of supporting minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners often come with bias or presuppositions.

Another new finding was how the ways in which the academy provided additional support to economically disadvantaged pupils was not just limited to care whilst in school but also outside of the school. The leadership staff described the academy as providing: *“whole child, whole family community wrap-around care and that’s what our Trust stands for”*. This specifies the community-based nature of the school where the academy did not just support the needs of economically disadvantaged pupils but also the needs of parents and families. This was achieved by taking disadvantaged pupils on trips, providing school uniforms, and so on. Leadership Staff 3 discussed disadvantaged pupils who had had to flee from other countries and thus, when these pupils came to school, they did not have the material resources required for learning purposes. Therefore, the staff at the academy helped to purchase goods for them like P.E. kits and made sure they had everything that they needed. This is evident in the comment made by the Leadership Staff:

*“Our staff are very kind of giving so that’s on the materialistic level. In terms of support when families come in and are new to school whether they’ve got no recourse support, if disadvantaged or not we have a very qualified safeguarding lead who liaises with families and do early helps that bring in other agencies and if families are new to the country or new to the area the academy puts them in touch with other families that they feel may have similar interests or similar languages that can help create a support system for them.”*

This is an interesting finding as it exemplifies the inclusion of economically disadvantaged learners through the appropriate tailored support pupils were given. The academy had a safeguarding team and access to agencies to provide support to families of disadvantaged children. Morris (2017) argued that safeguarding teams and external agencies play a key role in helping economically disadvantaged families, by tackling issues like poverty. These teams work together to provide support for pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them to do well at school. This is in line with the findings at the academy which showed how the academy ensured families received support from one another and had the relevant support systems put in place for them. This demonstrated an inclusive environment whereby the academy aimed to provide supplementary support to economically disadvantaged and EAL families who required it.

Weiss *et al.*'s (2009) research suggests that low-income families tend to have fewer opportunities for involvement in their child's education. They argue that family involvement should be made possible by increasing the chances of families' access to learning support sources being able to share learning goals with them and increasing the opportunities to surround children with a linked network of support. The academy could be seen as increasing the chances of support available to economically disadvantaged families as they were able to form links and associate with other families when needed. This was made possible through parent and child workshops before or after school.

Teaching Assistant 1 discussed the group support she provided to economically disadvantaged learners who were underperforming. She described how she does circle time with pupils and plans sessions with them:

*“We kind of come up with a plan. We meet up and do circle time. We do lots of circle time and I do that in the mornings with my Maths and my English so then we come up with a topic that we’ve got to go for. And then what I do is, going off their assessment, I look for where the gaps are, and I see where I can implement that and fill in those gaps. And that’s basically my job, to fill the gaps”.*

The comment made by Teaching Assistant 1 is important as it shows how the teaching assistant was committed to supporting and understanding the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils. It also demonstrates how the teaching assistant allowed the sessions to be led by pupils and this can be understood as being beneficial as it gives pupils a sense of responsibility and listening to their needs. According to Klem and Connell (2004), teacher support was a significant factor in student engagement. Students who believed their teachers fostered a supportive, well-organised learning environment were more likely to report being engaged in their learning. High levels of engagement were subsequently linked to better test results. Likewise, the teaching assistant was found to offer disadvantaged pupils a supportive learning environment within the academy, demonstrating an inclusive practice.

The Leadership Staff 2 also reported how economically disadvantaged pupils were supported through afterschool clubs of which some were free of charge and others were funded through the child’s PEP (Personal Educational Plan). This is a care plan that children who are under local authority care receive. This plan ensures pupils have targets set and their educational progress is monitored to ensure they are making progress with their learning. The Leadership Staff 2 said that the academy ensured these pupils were able to attend afterschool clubs so that the children did not miss out on social situations, and this demonstrates forms of inclusivity for economically disadvantaged pupils:

*“Afterschool clubs some are free some are not so for example, if you are a WAC pupil so that’s in kind of local authority care whether that be foster care or whatever that may be, that’s funded through the child’s PEP and we use that money to do that so that, they don’t miss out on social situations because that sometimes can be tricky.”*

To conclude, this section has explored new significant findings that illustrate that the number of ‘officially’ designated disadvantaged pupils had decreased, with an increase in the number of EAL pupils. This was demonstrated by the academy staff as being a disadvantage to some extent, as some of the EAL pupils that were coming into the academy struggled to get pupil premium status. The staff at the academy expressed how they targeted the twenty most vulnerable families and supported them through after-school clubs and trips. The Leadership Team were seen to mention the need to close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and similarly, was often found to use the term cultural capital. This need to close the gap and foster the development of cultural capital was also requirements posed by Ofsted in 2019. It can be argued that at times the academy seemed to be focusing on the needs of policymakers as much as focusing on the needs of its pupils.

## **5.4 Parental Inclusion**

Parental inclusion was another theme that emerged when interviewing both staff and parents. A total of six parents were interviewed, three were Pakistani and three were White British. All three Pakistani parents that were interviewed spoke English as an additional language and out of the three Pakistani parents, only one was educated to college level. Regarding, the

three White British parents that were interviewed, all three parents were economically disadvantaged. Parent two had not been to college. Parent 3 had done a teaching assistant course at the school and Parent 4 was educated to college level (See Table 1.5 Details of parents and their children).

## **Parents' Experiences and Perceptions**

Parents expressed that their choice of this academy was related to the school being at a walking distance from their home and therefore, being able to easily get the children to and from school. A clear distinction could be found between the experiences of minority ethnic parents who spoke English as an additional language in comparison to the experiences of White British parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This was illustrated in terms of communication barriers experienced by minority ethnic parents who spoke English as an additional language and often mentioned the struggles they faced when communicating with their children's teachers. It is important to note that the Pakistani parents that were interviewed were able to communicate in English, however, not sufficiently since it was not the main language they spoke. Therefore, I often had to repeat some of the questions in Urdu to ensure the parents understood what was being asked. Two of the Pakistani parents had just moved to the country a few years ago after marriage. The inclusion of parents in the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils has previously been identified as being important when looking at the academic success of pupils (Driessen, Smit, and Slegers, 2013; LaRoque, Kleiman and Darling, 2011).

Home background plays an important role in the learning of children. Many of these ideas are closely connected with aspects of cultural capital, where parents may struggle to familiarise

their children with the type of learning that takes place in school (such as the National Curriculum). In this context, parental inclusion in pupils' learning can be understood as essential. Curtis, Anicama and Zhou (2021) explored school-based parental involvement and found significant positive associations between school-based parent involvement behaviours. However, their research indicates that school-based parent involvement and relationship factors between parents, schools, and teachers are not directly related to achievement, suggesting that other parent involvement constructs may be more relevant, such as the things taught at home.

Parent 2 (White British) who was interviewed stated having an elder daughter who had attended the academy before its conversion took place. Parent 2 had studied until GCSE level and had one child in Year Two. She explained how the school was close to where she lived and was within a walking distance, so she was able to walk her child to school. It is important to take into consideration that ease of access to the school and that 'walking distance' can be understood to be an important factor for parents. And this often may give parents a reason to have a positive view of the school. The parent explained how she had not seen many changes happen at the school since the conversion took place and that the academy had not involved parents more since.

*“Not really any changes, not that much...I'd say no they haven't, it's probably less. They used to invite parents in more, they had a parent's café before”.*

This is a crucial point because Parent 2 expressed her opinion that not many changes had been made at the school since the conversion. Parent 2 talked about how the academy had more parental involvement before it became an academy. And it was done via a "parents café." The parent may have believed that there were more opportunities for parents before the

school changed into an academy, as suggested by this. To guarantee an ideal educational environment for the parents of economically disadvantaged pupils, it can be pointed out that it is essential to establish effective communication and engagement strategies between parents and schools. Gonzalez and Jackson (2013) discovered that reading and maths success were affected differently by schools' initiatives to improve communication and foster parental abilities. This highlights how crucial it is for the academy to give parents an awareness that they can participate in it, and how this should be done through open communication.

Similarly, Parent 3 who was also White British, when asked if she noticed any changes since the school converted into an academy, also stated that there were not any changes to the academy “*Not really. No*”. Parent 3 also reported the school being at a walking-distance as important to her and that she chose the academy for her children because the children’s father previously had attended the academy:

*“My children's father he wanted them to come to this school because he came to this school and his dad, his aunty his grandparents when it was over, I think on the other side of the road when it used to be a community school years ago. He spent all the years. So many years ago. So, he just wanted to keep it sort of in the family so that's why. Especially as some of my son's teachers still remember the dad.”*

Parent 3 made an important point, implying that she wanted her children to go to the school because the family had a long history there. This suggests, at least in part, that the parents had a close relationship with the school. This demonstrates the parents’ feelings of connection and belonging to the school. The parent further stated her contentment with the school:



*“I’m very happy with them here. Very happy. I am happy with the education they receive”.*

This response demonstrates how happy the parent was that their child was attending the academy. It is possible that this was partially influenced by the parent's perception that the school was providing for and looking over her children because the teachers knew the father. And because the parents had an emotional connection to the school, this may have had an impact on how the parent saw the school and their overall satisfaction. This exemplifies how "belonging" affects how included parents feel in the academy.

Parent 3 talked about how she did her teaching assistant level two course at the school and had also previously worked as a teaching assistant at the academy:

*“I’ve done my teacher's assistant level two in school. I did that in school there was a college worker who came in from college, so I’ve done that through school. I couldn’t do the college course so working here. I was doing 10 hours in reception I think this was a couple years ago now.”*

The comment is essential and tells us something crucial about parent 3. As previously mentioned, Parent 3 decided to enrol her children in the academy because their father had previously attended. Parent 3 said in her interview that she had taken a level two teaching assistant course at the school and had also worked there in reception class. This demonstrates the support the academy had set up for parents, allowing them to access professional prospects through the academy. Parent 3 said that a college employee travelled from the college to deliver appropriate training for the course, demonstrating that the academy had partnered with other organisations to deliver relevant training to parents.

It makes sense that doing this might give parents access to more extensive educational resources. More importantly, this shows how the academy was ensuring the inclusion of economically disadvantaged parents. Giving parents access to teaching assistant courses can be seen as beneficial because it enables parents who are struggling financially to get useful experiences and opportunities for education that, ideally, will allow them to secure jobs and lessen financial pressure on the family. Furthermore, this could aid parents who are struggling financially to obtain the essential skills required to successfully support pupils with their learning at home. Researchers Yulianti and Denessen (2022) studied how schools encouraged parental involvement. Their data suggested that invites from teachers had a major impact on parental involvement. This was particularly true of parental participation in school-based decisions and activities like recruiting parents to participate as volunteers. This suggests the positive initiative used by the academy to engage parents.

Parent 3 further stated that her children took part in an after-school club however, that was during the summer. She discussed how she, and her children avoided after-school clubs in the winter due to the cold weather:

*“It's cold and dark now. Like in the summer, my little girl likes the football. But at the minute it is to go home, we're literally home for 20 minutes so it's coming back again. it's just the dark nights. The boys, they've done the football last summer. I mean it's just purely, the cold and the dark cos it gets dark quite early so once mine are in, we get home at half 3. Shoes off, jackets, they'll throw so it's like right go get changed. So, none of them even really ask to go in the winter because they probably can't be bothered to go back and forward.”*

This is an interesting finding because it shows that parent 3 wanted her children to participate in after-school clubs, but some obstacles prevented her from doing so. The parent found it difficult to take some children home while others were in after-school clubs, and then return to collect them, so her children did not participate during the winter months. It is assumed that after-school clubs are beneficial for economically disadvantaged pupils because they provide them with extra activities outside of the classroom and home environment, particularly those in which they may not be able to participate at home. However, as we can see here, that is not always the case and the academy must find alternate means to ensure that pupils and parents desire to participate in after-school clubs during the winter months and beyond, which could include asking parents to participate or volunteer in some of the groups that take place.

It is to be noted that Parent 3 stated that these clubs were not free, however, they were happy to pay for their children to attend them. This was because her son previously attended a private football class which was more expensive:

*“Yeah, you do have to pay. Because they have people coming in to do them like football coaches. You’ve got to pay for them ones but it’s worth it because it’s... when they use to do football, the football coach that use to come in, my partner and son use to go to football somewhere where they do it privately. But It’s cheaper here so it does work out cheaper because I think it’s like two pounds a session, but he pays for my son to go every week, twenty-two pounds a month, which is really not much at all.”*

This comment suggests that the academy had after-school clubs in place; however, they were not free of charge. Parents were expected to pay a fee for the number of sessions they attended per week/month. Parent 3 seemed content with the fee that they paid for the after-school club as it was far cheaper than the private football sessions that took place outside of school. This is a significant finding as it suggests how vital it is for schools to provide after-school clubs to economically disadvantaged pupils as they are more likely to attend if they are free of charge or if there is a small fee. It is understandable that economically disadvantaged parents may be reluctant to allow their children to participate in extra-curricular activities out of school, which may be far more expensive and not affordable.

The comment also suggests that the academy had trained professionals coming into the school to run these clubs. This may be costly and therefore, I suspect the small fee the academy charged may be to help the academy to somehow make up for the costs. However, it is important not to ignore that, some economically disadvantaged parents might be less willing to send their children to after-school clubs as they may appear costly for them. I believe the academy could further support economically disadvantaged pupils by simply offering discounts to after-school clubs for families with multiple children to take away the financial burden on economically disadvantaged parents. The academy needs to think of other strategies to encourage economically disadvantaged pupils or parents to participate.

Parent 2 (White British) said that her child took part in after-school clubs and that she had been attending clubs since she was in reception:

*“She does it once a week at the moment on the Friday’s, she’s been involved. She’s done it all the way from being in reception, she’s done different activities...we have to pay for the clubs. The one that she’s at now is, I think it’s two pounds a session.”*

This extract shows how parent 2 was sending her child to after-school clubs since reception and has taken part in several different clubs, and this demonstrates consistency with participation in extra-curricular activities. This also illustrates the parent’s dedication and interest in developing her child’s experiences and skills. In opposition to this, Parent 4 reported that her children do not attend after-school clubs and that they had attended one or two clubs in the past. However, this then stopped because her children started to attend football clubs at a different institution:

*“No, they don’t. They did before the football started. My other boy used to come to football, and they did school Lego...we don’t attend because we’re occupied with football, mostly every day after school. Like tonight we’ve got to go to Failsworth for half past 4 and he finishes at 6 o clock. And then tomorrow half 3”.*

This comment shows how Parent 4 was committed to a football club outside of the school environment and as a result, this stopped the children from being able to attend other clubs that the academy offered. It is critical to acknowledge the significance of pupils participating in a variety of activities to help them develop personally as well as academically. Although encouraging children to participate in sports might be good, it is also necessary for them to experience other activities. By focusing on one activity, the child may miss out on crucial skills that might be learned through the other groups offered by the school.

A study carried out by Callanan *et al.* (2015) found that disadvantaged children were less likely to participate in activities outside of school. And it was discovered by Callanan *et al.* that there are many benefits of attending after-school clubs. Some of these advantages included: providing opportunities for children to allow them to succeed and providing access to enriching new experiences. This gives evidence that after-school clubs can be beneficial and therefore, the academy ought to ensure that economically disadvantaged children have access to a variety of experiences. The school could simply inform economically disadvantaged pupils and parents and educate them about the importance of attending different clubs.

Parent 1 (Pakistani) was asked if her child (Year One) attended after-school clubs to which she responded: *“No, he is too young at the moment and he gets too tired”*. A similar response was given by parent 6 (Pakistani): *“No, she is too little at the moment so, I don’t like her going to the clubs.”*

These comments by parents 1 and 6 (child in Year Two) show the parent's lack of motivation for their children to participate in after-school activities since they believe their children were too young at the time. This demonstrates the parent's lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of extra-curricular activities. The academy should notify parents about the positive impact extracurricular activities have on their children's learning. Similarly, Parent 5 also showed little interest in her child attending after-school clubs:

*“No, they have to go to Mosque after school, they don’t have time. They learn Arabic and other things at Mosque. They go there Monday to Friday they can’t go to the clubs. But my eldest son always says to me he wants to join the clubs because he loves sport”*.

Parent 5 was not able to send her children to the after-school clubs that took place at the academy, and this was because of other commitments. Her children attended Mosque after school and therefore, were unable to participate in extra-curricular activities. She further discussed how her son has asked in the past to attend the clubs, however, is unable to. This is an important comment as it shows how the parent must juggle between what she deems important for her child and what her child's interests are. This suggests forms of exclusion that may be felt by minority ethnic pupils as they are unable to attend clubs due to other commitments.

The parents seemed to be focused on religion and religious education, and although attending the Mosque would be giving them the cultural capital, they need for one part of their life, it may be limiting them from getting the sort of cultural capital that the academy and Ofsted think is important for educational attainment. Michael-Luna (2015) argues for the importance of schools to create a space for family knowledge, beliefs, and concerns about children's language use and development at home. He argues that when family insights are taken into consideration, teachers can better understand how to create a space that is welcoming and supportive to all students.

This also may create a sense of marginalisation as the pupils may feel left out and excluded from their peers. The academy needs to focus on minority ethnic parents (EAL) and encourage them to take part in the academy, and this could simply be by volunteering in after-school clubs. The school may benefit from approaching minority ethnic (EAL) parents and those who are economically disadvantaged, whose children do not attend after-school clubs to provide them with an understanding of the importance of extra-curricular activities within the school and how this could impact their learning positively.

Overall, it can be argued that some minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged parents are unable to send their children to after-school clubs due to commitments outside of school and therefore, this results in their non-attendance to these clubs. It is understood that the academy may benefit from encouraging and educating parents from these groups about the benefits of taking part in extra-curricular activities and allowing their children to take part in after-school clubs. The academy held activities for the twenty most vulnerable during the school holidays, however, it may benefit from opening clubs during the holidays for both minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils, as they may be more likely to attend then.

Moving on from after-school clubs, it is important to consider the educational opportunities that parents were able to provide their children outside of the school environment. This is important as past research has shown that home backgrounds have an impact on pupils' educational experiences. Family background is important since it has a significant impact on how well students perform academically (Weiser and Riggio, 2010). It can be argued to play a role in the obtainment of further educational opportunities (Egalite, 2016).

Parents were asked if they took their children on educational visits. There were some very interesting findings when interviewing both White British and Pakistani parents. Firstly, Parent 3 (White British) stated how she was unable to take her children on educational visits as her eldest son often got travel sick when travelling on the bus or in busy places. Parent 3 also discussed that she did not drive, and that the children's grandmother had a job and therefore was not able to split childcare duties so that she could take the other children out:



*“It’s a bit tricky because my eldest he doesn’t like buses. He gets very travel sick and also busy places. Sometimes, it’s very hard to find something that they all can do. Unless my mums here but she works, but if it’s something like just say like balls pool my mum will watch my eldest whilst the other two go, because he just doesn’t really like anything like that. So, it very hard to try and do something that they all like”.*

This shows Parent 3’s struggle with getting all her children involved in trips during the holidays. Much of this is because the parent does not drive, and her child has additional needs. The academy must begin to cater for economically disadvantaged parents during half-term breaks by providing alternative activities or experiences for children within the school. This would prevent pupils from missing out on educational trips and opportunities during half-term breaks. Although the school did cater towards the twenty most vulnerable families, it is important to consider that the academy had a large proportion of economically disadvantaged pupils in attendance. Therefore, it is important the academy find ways to offer support to these parents.

Parent 2 (White British) reported that she was able to take her child on educational visits and had access to a library card: *“Yeah, I do, she has a library card. She loves the Manchester Museum and stuff like that”*. Whereas parent 4 (White British) stated not taking her child on educational visits:

*“I don’t take him to the library, and I haven’t taken him to the museum. I’m planning on going but it’s football at the moment, my son’s football mad”.*

This demonstrates the varied responses from the White British parents. Parent 3 struggled to take her children out on trips due to her son having Special Needs and not having childcare support during the holidays. Similarly, Parent 4 discussed how she did not take her child on educational visits, because her child was obsessed with football, but did plan on taking him in the future. Parent 2 reported taking her child on various educational trips such as the library and museum. These findings are significant because they show the wide range of parental abilities when it comes to helping children's learning outside of the classroom. It is crucial to note that the academy should put something in place for those parents who struggled to take their children on educational visits during the half-term holidays to guarantee they do not lose out on any educational experiences. These findings show an absence of support for parents of economically disadvantaged children outside of the school environment.

Pakistani parents gave different responses in relation to taking their children on educational trips. Parent 1 discussed how she takes her child to the park and shopping occasionally:

*“Well, I haven’t really taken him to the museum. We take him to the park some time or he goes shopping with us. But we don’t really get the time to go to other places because my husband is busy with work. He works six days a week so only has one day free from the week, and he likes to spend that time at home resting”.*

Similarly, Parent 5 also reported that her husband often took the children to the library to get books as well as, to the park:

*“My husband takes them to the library sometimes where they will get some books. We don’t really go to the museum, but we go to the park”.*

The comment made by Parent 1 suggests that the parent often took her child out to the shops and the park, however, did not take her child on educational visits. Parent 1 mentioned how she was unable to take her child on educational visits as her husband was working six days a week. This suggests how minority ethnic parents may struggle to support their children with extra-curricular activities, as they have time constraints and because they are so busy working, they are unable to take out time for their children.

It is noted that Parent 6 stated that they were unable to go out often because her husband was working most days of the week:

*“We don’t really go out that much because my husband does taxi, he is busy most of the time. He works during the night; on the weekends, he sleeps sometimes during the day and will go work in the evening. We don’t really get the time to go out.”*

These findings show the lack of educational visits provided by minority ethnic parents and therefore, it is important the academy ensures children are given appropriate experiences whilst at school. The academy provided educational visits for the 20 most vulnerable, however, this did not include giving minority ethnic (EAL) pupils educational experiences. It could be argued that the academy could ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils by funding places for these groups too. This would ensure all disadvantaged groups are getting access to some sort of experience. It may also be helpful if the academy puts interventions in place where these sorts of experiences are provided within the school environment for EAL pupils.

All of the Pakistani parents interviewed expressed satisfaction with the support their child received from the academy, and all of the White working-class parents interviewed felt the same way. However, there were differences in the involvement of Pakistani and White British parents, who voiced differing opinions about their own experiences with teachers. Parents from Pakistani background were discovered to be more likely to struggle when communicating with teachers than White parents, who found the teachers easily approachable.

Out of the three Pakistani parents that were interviewed, two of them expressed being able to communicate with teachers but not doing this. Much of the reasoning behind this was due to English being a barrier. This was evident in the interview carried out with Parent 1 when asked about communicating with teachers to discuss the progress of their child. Although parent 1 was able to communicate in English, she felt that her English was not good enough and therefore, showed little confidence when wanting to speak to teachers:

*“No. I don’t because I find it difficult to communicate in English. My husband speaks to the teacher whenever he drops off my son to school in the mornings.”*

The main issue Pakistani parents (EAL) expressed was the language barrier. It can be understood that it can be stressful for parents who do not speak fluent English to engage in discussions with teachers, particularly when wanting to discuss their child's progress. It is understood that this might lead to feelings of inadequacy and a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate effectively. Michael-Luna (2015) argues for the importance of schools creating a space for family knowledge, beliefs, and concerns about children's language use and development at home. He argues that when family insights are taken into consideration, teachers can better understand how to create a space that is welcoming and supportive to all students.

It is interesting to see parent 1 report that her husband spoke to the teacher when he dropped off his son in the mornings. This suggests that one parent was more confident in their English language skills and therefore, may have taken on the role of communicating with the school.

Parent 6 (Pakistani) identified how she communicated with the teachers and that she would do this towards the end of the school day when going to pick up her daughter:

*Yes, I talk to them when I go to pick up my daughter at the end of the school day. I will always say hello to her teacher and ask her how my daughter was.*

The comment above suggests that Parent 6 was confident and happy to communicate with her daughter's class teacher. This demonstrates the varied experiences among minority ethnic parents (EAL), and the dangers in assuming all have a uniform experience. Teacher 4 reported that she tries her best to communicate with parents during pick-up time:

*"But I do try as much as I can to talk to the parents when they get picked up and things like that to kind of build that relationship, which is really nice."*

The above comment suggests the method that was used by some teachers to try and get minority ethnic parents to confidently talk to the teachers. The teacher expressed how she made sure she spoke to minority ethnic parents when they collected their children from the school. The teacher mentioned "*to kind of build that relationship*", this suggests that teacher 4 was eager to build a relationship with minority ethnic parents (EAL) and was trying to ensure the

inclusion of minority ethnic (EAL) parents by communicating with them and trying to make sure they felt welcomed.

Having explored the engagement of Pakistani parents with teachers it is now important to assess the engagement of White British parents (economically disadvantaged) with teachers.

Parent 2 stated how she found it easy to approach teachers and get appropriate support with anything her children were struggling with:

*“I’ve always approached teachers, and they can give us an update on what Maths and how to approach it. If I think I’m doing the Maths wrong at home, then I sit down with the teacher and say is this how you do it. It’s been brilliant, not a problem. Really good.”*

Similarly, Parent 3 also reported teachers being approachable and easy to communicate with:

*“They’re dead approachable and they’re very easy to talk to. If you need one of them it’s always right, they’re on the door in the mornings so it’s just a quick oh I left the P.E kit or I’m struggling with the homework. There’s always chances to speak, so the communication is good in that way cos there’s always like my friend’s children at another school and she said it’s difficult to access the teachers there.”*

Parent 4 also expressed her contentment with the support she and her children received from the staff at the academy:

*“Yes, I do, like today on a Tuesday I stay with my boy who’s five, in year one to support him with his reading. And the teacher come up to me and said if you want on a Tuesday now, do you want to stay behind for like an extra ten minutes, with my boy as well. And we*

*can go through how to like to break the words down to him and just show him what we do just to know, give him that much support”.*

The interviews with White British parents suggest that economically disadvantaged parents found it easy to approach teachers and communicate with them concerning any issues they had with their child’s learning. Parents expressed that they were able to discuss how their child was doing and what sort of support they needed without any issue. Parent 4’s comment is significant as it suggests that some of the teachers in the academy were very welcoming towards White British parents who were economically disadvantaged and were happy to give their time to provide additional support. Along with this being an important factor indicating teachers were ensuring the inclusion of economically disadvantaged parents and pupils, it also demonstrates how the teachers recognised and gave importance to the individual needs of pupils and parents.

Parent 3 stated that her friends at another school did not find their teachers particularly approachable, providing a contrast between the experiences of parents at the academy and those at other schools. It implies that the positive experience that White British economically disadvantaged parents had at the academy may not have been available at other schools. This displays forms of parental inclusion within the academy.

These findings show us the ways in which Pakistani (EAL) parents were less likely to approach teachers as compared to White British (Economically disadvantaged) parents, who felt comfortable when communicating with the teachers at the academy. This shows us the varied experiences of different ethnicities within the academy. This also gives evidence that language plays a significant role in the learning of pupils. Parents from Pakistani backgrounds

were less likely to communicate with teachers due to not being confident with their English language skills, and it can be argued that this may not help to close the gaps in attainment. The academy may not be taking the minority ethnic pupils family backgrounds into consideration as parents were often found to avoid communicating with teachers. And similarly, teachers and teaching assistants were found to hold certain views about minority ethnic parents. This is evident in the comment made by Teaching Assistant 5:

*“We sometimes find that a lot of the parents don’t speak good English as well so that, that is difficult to communicate with these parents... to put across what you need to say to them to support their child”.*

As teachers faced difficulties when wanting to communicate with parents, this can be understood in relation to the dominant cultural capital the academy holds. O’Brien (2004) argued that working-class parents do care about their children’s education but lack the form of dominant cultural capital that would otherwise allow them to engage more fully with schools. In this case it is language that is the issue that does not properly allow parents to engage with teachers at the academy. Similarly, Brilliant (2001) specifies that there are common issues faced by such parents which include: language barriers, work schedules, time constraints, and discomfort levels with an unfamiliar institution that makes parents think they are not wanted.

The academy can be seen as not putting in enough effort to make sure they provide an inclusive environment for minority ethnic (EAL) parents. The academy often used other parents or children as translators and with this there is often the issue of information being misinterpreted.



Li *et al.* (2023) *study* showed evidence that primary caregivers from low-income and minority ethnic families tended to face a range of barriers when attempting to participate in their children's school learning. This demonstrates the lack of parental involvement in their child's school due to communication and other barriers that stop them from getting involved. It is crucial to evaluate and develop other interventions that may be more suitable to minority ethnic parents. Furthermore, parental involvement was assessed when asking parents about the support they received from teachers when carrying out homework tasks.

Two out of the six Pakistani parents interviewed reported not receiving help sheets with their children's homework and were unaware of why this was the case. This is an important finding as the teachers reported that they provided help sheets with the pupil's homework, and these help sheets could be argued to be of particular use to parents from minority ethnic (EAL) backgrounds. As it is this group who may need this additional resource to help understand the homework and, consequently, support their child with their learning. This is an important element as it indicates one way in which the teachers at the academy may expect parents to be able to support their children with their learning, while failing to understand the struggles of minority ethnic parents who speak English as an additional language.

The White British parents were found to be more engaged with supporting their children with their homework as compared to the Pakistani parents, who were found to often leave their children to complete homework tasks independently. This is an interesting finding and is in line with the findings of Evans *et al.* (2016) who found parents of pupils with EAL, specifically those who have low levels of English or who are new to the English school system, face several barriers including a lack of understanding of the English school system and, therefore, face difficulties in supporting their children with homework and assessment tasks. From the

findings here it is argued that the academy could overcome such issues by using help sheets that may be presented in different languages suited to the languages of the parents rather than simply being written in English. This could be a better aid in supporting parental involvement in the learning of their children. Currently, the academy does seem to provide some help sheets; however, this is not always the case, and when they are used, these are written in English.

All the parents that were interviewed from both Pakistani and White British backgrounds reported being able to provide their children with reading books, which they got from the school and public libraries. A particular trend was found amongst all White British parents that were interviewed in relation to the resources they were provided by the academy. The parents stated that they were given Maths materials which were available through websites, and these included: Purple Mash, Timetable Rockstars, and Sumdog: As Parent 2 reports:

*“She has plenty of books and she has a tablet at home now and school has just provided free Maths things that she can access through school, which is Purple Mash and the new one is Rockstar and there’s another one as well can’t remember...Sumdog, so I can keep up with what she’s doing as well.”*

This is an important finding as it indicates the attempts by the academy to make White British parents feel included. White British parents are given access to additional resources to support their children with their learning at home. This was not found within the interviews carried out with Pakistani parents. Pakistani parents were not found to mention any resources provided by the academy in support of their child’s learning and this, again, may go back to the poorer level of communication that took place between minority ethnic parents (EAL)

and teachers. This challenges the inclusive nature of the academy and indicates that more needed to be done to make sure minority ethnic parents were aware of the resources available and ensure they were given access to additional resources outside of the school-based environment. Pakistani parents reported that they did not have help sheets to support their children with their homework nor were they made aware that additional help could be sought through resources on the internet.

Similarly, the academy leaders often discussed how the academy carried out parental questionnaires that were named 'parent voice'. There was a notable trend of minority ethnic parents (EAL) not knowing about 'parent voice' or of a questionnaire that they were able to fill out. In contrast, amongst the White British parents, two out of the three participants reported they were unaware that the questionnaire was known as 'parent voice' but they had filled out a questionnaire. This is evident in the comment made by Parent 2: "*Yeah, I think I've done one of them. And I was given it, it wasn't online*". This highlights once again the limitations in relation to the level of communication between staff and minority ethnic (EAL) parents at the school. Although resources were available, communication was limited by the academy and, therefore, this could have resulted in the academy's resources not being used to their full potential.

Moles (1993) argues that minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged families are often the groups with whom the staff at the school have the most difficulty in developing effective partnerships. The findings show the academy had several programmes put in place to ensure parents were actively taking part in their children's learning and these interventions included: parent workshops, parent and child workshops, E-safety, bullying, computing, reading, phonics, family learning week, and parent voice. These interventions were identified by all the

leadership and teaching staff. This gives us an understanding that the academy aimed to ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic and disadvantaged pupils by offering parents the opportunity to come in and attend workshops to learn the skills required to support their children. There were also additional workshops put in place that focused on single parents, such as fathers. Leadership Staff 2 discussed how this involved hairdressing, allowing fathers to take part in the care of their daughters by allowing them to practice doing their daughters' hair:

*“We also do workshops across the year where it's parent and child. And it can be anything, it can be for hairdressing, not cutting hair but doing children's hair particularly, for dads and we promote that for dads. And we've got some single dads... dads do a lot of the main care, so we had them come in, both mums and dads practising doing their daughters' hair and those types of things”.*

This comment demonstrates the kind of support given to parents who may have otherwise not had the appropriate resources when wanting to support their children with their day-to-day activities. This gives evidence that the academy considered home circumstances and tried to help provide parents with the relevant support required. The parents that were interviewed did not mention taking part in these workshops, and since only a few parents were interviewed, the data does not provide enough evidence to indicate whether the pupils made full use of these workshops and the extent to which parents took part.

Although parents were allowed to support their children with their learning by taking part in workshops, the data from this research suggests that there was poor attendance of parents at these workshops. The teaching staff expressed disappointment when discussing the attendance of parents at these workshops. Teacher 4 stated that it was minority ethnic parents who

were less likely to come in and support their children with their learning through these workshops and other events. The teacher was asked whether this was due to an issue with English being a barrier for minority ethnic parents, to which they responded:

*“I think it’s because they struggle to communicate with us and I think that’s not a very comfortable situation, so, that is a bit of an issue.*

From the comment above it was evident that teachers had a predisposition regarding minority ethnic parents. They were commonly found to raise concerns about minority ethnic parents not attending workshops. They believed that this was due to the struggle to communicate in English. It was clear the academy had many interventions put in place to ensure parents were taking part in their children’s learning through parent workshops and signing reading logs; however, there was no evidence to suggest disadvantaged and minority ethnic parents were encouraged to attend these workshops. Rather, the teachers were perceived as having their own fixed understandings of why minority ethnic parents were unlikely to attend workshops. This issue has previously been discussed in the research carried out by Drudy and Lynch (1993).

Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggest that parents of pupils from disadvantaged contexts are as interested, any parent, in their children’s education, though many teachers may think otherwise. According to Drudy and Lynch, teachers often point to parents’ lack of attendance at meetings as an example of their lack of interest. However, Drudy and Lynch argue that this is not an accurate reflection of parents’ interest but often relates more to educational experiences during their schooling. With this, the findings of the study specify the issue is around communication, experienced by parents.

In this research, there were similar findings, in two out of the three Pakistani parents who were interviewed reported being unaware of the parent workshops that took place at the academy. Whereas the White British parents stated that they were aware of parent workshops that took place at the academy and that they had received letters informing them about them. Two out of the three White British parents mentioned attending a reading café that took place on Tuesday mornings, where they were able to go in and read with their child. Parent 3 specifically reported receiving letters for parent workshops and her attendance at these:

*“We always seem to get letters when there’s parent workshops. I attend now and again, if I’m not working, I do tend to go”.*

The comment above gives evidence that the White British parents were aware of parent workshops, and this was through the obtainment of letters by the academy. Parent 3 attended some of the workshops if she was available and was not at work on the day. This suggests White British (economically disadvantaged) parents’ attendance at these workshops, and this may have been because the parents were made aware of these workshops. The staff at the academy often claimed that they do include all parents in the learning of their children through the use of workshops, and they were also aware that disadvantaged and minority ethnic parents (EAL) were less likely to attend workshops. However, little was seen to be being done to overcome this. The lack of Pakistani parent attendance to these workshops may have once again been because of communication issues and parents not feeling comfortable due to language barriers.

The teachers at the academy identified disadvantaged and EAL students' parents being less involved in the learning of their children as their reading records were often left unsigned. This is a common finding in the literature, where it is frequently argued that teachers make assumptions based on the involvement of parents in their child's learning. Evans *et al.* (2016) found that staff can often make incorrect assumptions about parental interest based on their involvement in the school processes and as a result, staff are often seen to interpret lack of achievement by pupils as a lack of parental interest. This suggests there may be bias amongst teaching staff that could consequently have a negative impact on the learning of their children. Although the academy does organise parent workshops, the findings suggest that not enough support is in place to encourage parents from minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged backgrounds to come in and take part. Rather, assumptions were often found to be made by the staff at the academy about the economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic' non-attendance. Teacher 2 specifically stated how the academy had provided several workshops for parents:

*"We've done phonics workshops for parents, reading workshops for parents, maths workshops for parents."*

However, from the interviews carried out with both Pakistani and White British parents, there was no mention of attending a phonics or Maths workshop. It can be understood that phonics workshops may be particularly beneficial for minority ethnic (EAL) parents and pupils who struggle with their spoken English. The academy did not do enough to encourage and make sure EAL pupils and parents were attending phonics workshops. Along with parent and child workshops, as briefly discussed before, the academy also had a parent questionnaire put in

place known as 'parent voice'. This was an important intervention put in place by the academy to allow parents to voice their opinions on how satisfied they were with the academy's processes and their children's learning. The Leadership Staff 2 suggested the importance of parent voice as it allowed the academy to get information from parents that the staff themselves may not have been picking up on:

*"Pupil and parent voice tell us a lot and that's something that people forget, it's classed as soft data but it kind of, some things that you might miss they might pick up on... so parents is kind of whole school, are they happy with the school, do they feel that we are, erm, dealing with bullying well. Are we being protective in making their child feel safe?"*

This comment provided evidence that the academy did try to ensure parents were included in their child's learning, and specifically, indicated parents as having a say. However, no evidence suggests minority ethnic parents took part in this process. The findings indicated that parents from minority ethnic groups were often hard to reach and this was not because of language barriers as they all seemed to be able to communicate in English although, parent 1 struggled a little when responding to questions.

These findings can find support in the research carried out by Arnot *et al.* (2014) who illustrate that many primary schools encourage good relationships between parents and schools. However, they do find a common concern about parents not attending parent meetings or attending programmes which concern parent-child activities. The interviews carried out with the parents indicated the low attendance of Pakistani parents at workshops and welcome weeks, as compared to White economically disadvantaged parents that were interviewed. White British parents were found to be more likely to attend parent workshops and be aware



of what was going on in the school. Pakistani parents reported getting letters for the welcome week but choosing not to attend.

The comment made concerning minority ethnic parents not attending workshops due to the English language being a barrier was akin to the comment made about parents being unable to communicate with members of staff. Teacher 2 who was interviewed identified English as being a barrier for teachers and parents when wanting to communicate with one another. This was indicated in the following comment made by Teacher 2:

*“I do find to it that we have a trickier problem communicating with the parents than we do the children.”*

This demonstrates the communication issues faced by the academy when wanting to communicate with parents who speak English as an additional language. It also casts doubt on whether the academy is inclusive. The findings also illustrate that the teachers at the academy will often use the children of parents as interpreters, or to communicate with their parents. It is perceived that the academy does not have proper procedures in place to ensure minority ethnic parents are taking part in their children’s learning. For instance, the academy could possibly overcome this issue by introducing workshops or by producing content in the languages that parents are comfortable with. The findings are directly in line with previous findings of McGorman and Sugrue (2007).

Within the study carried out by McGorman and Sugrue (2007), the teachers highlighted their inability to communicate with parents who have little or no proficiency in English and that this consequently hampers their work. This study is important as it highlights the critical role

that teachers play in fostering positive and effective relationships between schools and parents, particularly those from linguistic minority backgrounds. This indicates the common issue faced by teachers within schools as language barriers can create challenges for teachers and hinder communication. Although the academy claimed to be an inclusive school, the way it operated shows that minority ethnic students and their parents were not entirely included. As acknowledged by academy staff members, who noted that economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic students' parents did not have as much involvement in their children's learning, and that communication was an issue with minority ethnic students' parents. It seems that not enough is being done to address these issues.

## **5.5 Inclusion through Resources and Strategies**

This section explores the way in which the academy made use of resources and strategies to ensure inclusive practice. To begin with, the leadership staff at the academy explained how the academy supported families who were economically disadvantaged. This was an important finding as it showed the way in which the academy was taking individual home circumstances into consideration. The data revealed that the academy Trust had hubs put in place to support disadvantaged parents.

From the interview with leadership staff 2 it was found that the hub consisted of: primary and secondary schools, a church, food bank, and a farm. All these institutions supposedly worked together to develop the community and provide food to disadvantaged families. The Church worked to provide counselling for families who required support. These hubs were understood as being a significant intervention as they helped to ensure families, pupils, and staff all

worked closer together to ensure everyone felt included. The hub model indicated an inclusive practice where the academy could be seen as looking beyond the learning of pupils to support not just them, but parents too.

The Department for Education (2016) stated the importance of providing early help and how this is far more effective in promoting the welfare of children as opposed to reacting later. The hub, although an important invention, was not yet fully incorporated within the academy at the time the study took place, which was in 2019. This was explained by the Leadership Staff 2 and in concurrence to this, the Trust's website was also found to mention the use of the hub model:

*“Working with and within some of the most vulnerable local areas, The Trust’s overall vision is for community. A place where everyone is included, contributing, and reaching their God-given potential.*

Leadership Staff 2 reported the academy as having a strong community where parents and families were involved and considered a part of the academy. The academy had an education charter which was presented in the form of a booklet. The education charter explained what the core purposes of the academy were, which included ‘community and inclusion’. Leadership Staff 2 set this out as being at the heart of everything and staff training being key:

*“Staff training is first and foremost. So, when everybody comes in and works in the academy, they have an induction process that kind of sets out the vision and what our habits are. We also have an education charter that we also have in a booklet that shows kind of*

*what our core purposes are. So, community, inclusion... erm so that's all set out and everyone's on that same page. Community is one of the biggest things that the Trust has in mind and they develop hubs".*

Leadership Staff 2 stated that the hub model was being emulated at the academy and the school was gradually building upon it. This suggested that the academy was still in the process of development, and although the Leadership Staff 2 identified the use of hubs in support of tackling disadvantage and ensuring inclusion, since the academy did not incorporate this at the time of data collection, there was no sign of the support being provided to disadvantaged families through this strategy. This indicated that hubs were a part of the ethos, but they had not yet been implemented at the academy. There may have been further reasons for this, such as the funding issues the academy had, whereby they may have been struggling to make full use of these resources and interventions. It is important to highlight the miscommunication between Leadership Staff 1 and 2, who had different understandings regarding the use of the Hub. Leadership Staff 1 referred to the Academy as using the Hub to run parent classes and carry out various activities:

*"Most academies have a hub model so, erm, some academies that have had the model for longer will have somebody employed just to lead on their hubs, so that means they might run parent classes, erm, do different activities. At our school we have a woman who leads on the hub. She is a class teacher. So, with erm, you know, she organises all our after-school club activities".*

The above comment indicates the confusion and conflicting understandings displayed by the staff at the academy. From the differing views given above it remains unclear to what degree

the hub model was used within the academy. It could be speculated that this may have also been down to the different roles of Leadership Staff 1 and 2. Leadership Staff 1 revealed that they were working at various academies and consequently, this could have been a possible reason as to why they had some confusion concerning the programmes that took place at the academy. As there were contrasting views identified about the hub model, it was difficult to assess whether the academy incorporated this in support of disadvantaged pupils.

The Leadership Staff 2 also discussed having a specific group session that took place in the mornings and the afternoons. Earlier in this chapter we discussed the role of this group, focusing on its morning session. However, this group had a different focus in the morning as compared to in the afternoon. These group sessions were understood to inform inclusive practice as the academy considered the social and emotional needs of disadvantaged pupils within the academy. This is evident in the following comment made by Leadership Staff 2:

*“We have the intervention group and that happens in the morning. In the morning, they do the English and the Maths. In the afternoon it changes focus and becomes more of a, a social and emotional group sessions so it’ll either be a one to one or one to three or four and it’s our learning mentor that runs those and she runs programmes to develop friendships to understand social situations they might have an IEP or an educational psychologist where they need some sensory input and she will help put those things into place and make sure they get what they need.”*

This shows the way in which the academy recognised not only the educational needs of disadvantaged pupils but also understood the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils. The academy had a learning mentor who ran these sessions, and her role was to help pupils to develop friendships to enhance their social skills. They also had the support

of an educational psychologist who was used to aid pupils with their sensory needs. This suggests the academy was supporting the varying needs of disadvantaged pupils.

Along with appropriate learning mentors, the academy was found to have appropriate action plans put in place for economically disadvantaged pupils, and these were based around the funding the academy had. The Leadership Staff 2 described how this funding was used to target the funding for disadvantaged pupils:

*“Well, we’ve got, an action plan for disadvantaged pupils and in that action plan, every year we look at the funding that we’ve got. And we look at how best to target that funding for the disadvantaged pupils. So, like I said, it could be that some classes do get additional. So, a lot of it really is through the employment of teaching assistants, sending staff on training so they’re aware of what strategies to use. It’s about targeting those children, knowing who those children are, making sure that the work is appropriately pitched for them.”*

The above comment indicates how the academy had an action plan which focused on disadvantaged pupils. Within the action plan, the academy looked at the funding they had available to support disadvantaged pupils and the best ways to use the funding to support these pupils. The Leadership Staff 2 also reported how the action plan was reviewed annually, and this demonstrates how the academy was committed to the regular reassessment of the action plan to ensure the appropriate strategies were being used to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils. It is clear the academy was aware of the requirement to use their resources properly to address pupils’ needs and this shows inclusivity of all pupils. The comment further illustrates how the leadership staff 2 was aware of the important need to employ teaching assistants and to ensure staff were trained to make them aware of the different strategies they can use to support disadvantaged pupils.

Moving on from the resources used by the academy leaders, we will now assess how teachers and teaching assistants supported minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. To begin with, teacher 1 was asked how she supported the learning of minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. Teacher 1 specifically identified how she ensured that pupils did lots of hands-on or practical activities:

*“In classrooms, we tend to do as much sort of hands-on practical activities and things that engage the children in their learning. Particularly in topic in science it’s pupil-guided work, so at the start of every topic we ask the pupils what they already know about the topic and what they would like to find out. So, then the subjects are driven by them, what they would like to know about it obviously with teacher input massively guiding it and the national curriculum guiding it but then the pupils feel like they’ve got more of an input of what they’re learning, and I know in our English a lot of people use a mixture of high-quality books alongside films. So that then children who do struggle with reading or writing or children who are disadvantaged can access the learning in a variety of ways.”*

This comment suggests the varying ways in which the teachers carried out learning tasks within the classroom. Teacher 1 noted how she was very keen on encouraging pupils to take part in practical activities that would help to keep them engaged. The teacher was also keen on pupil-guided work by simply asking pupils what they would like to learn. This shows the inclusive practice used by teacher 1 as firstly she ensured pupils were doing hands-on activities as opposed to just doing written tasks, which can be beneficial for EAL learners as they may not always be able to engage in written tasks. Secondly, the teacher was keen on pupil-guided learning which gives economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic (EAL) pupils

the chance to express what they would like to learn, and this may allow them to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. This is a very important finding as it demonstrates the teacher's use of selective strategies to specifically cater towards the needs of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils (EAL). The Teachers Standards (2012) stated that it is the responsibility of all teachers to adapt their teaching to the strengths and needs of all their pupils. The Leadership Staff 2 also reported how the academy took into consideration the individual needs of pupils.:

*“Some children have a withdraw system where they can't concentrate for long periods, so they'll do a bit of class learning but then they'll do something they want to do and backwards and forwards.”*

The Leadership Staff 2 also discussed how the academy ensured that the more able pupils from economically disadvantaged groups were not left out, and how they were achieving well due to the inclusive nature of the school:

*“More able pupils are a group that often kind of get forgotten. We're very big on that here, in promoting that greater depth standard, and we do have, you know, a large chunk of our disadvantaged pupils are in fact classed as more able and they do achieve greater depth standard. And I think that's because of our inclusivity and how we kind of constantly assess and ensure that we're going with the pupils 'needs. We do something called staggered starts, so it's sometimes the more able will automatically get off and do and won't participate in the class input, and it'll be here's your learning, let's see how you go. In 10 minutes, I'm going to come to you, make sure you've collaborated, any issues there are, write those down, write*



*down any questions they might have. And then when I go back to them, or the TA goes back to them, we can then start to support their learning and things like that.”*

This comment is significant as it shows how the academy was aware of the importance of supporting the more able pupils within the academy. The Leadership Staff 2 reported how a large chunk of their disadvantaged pupils were achieving greater depth standards and how this was believed to be because of the inclusivity the academy ensured. Under the new national curriculum framework, at the time this study was carried out, children were assessed against a new set of objectives, which included: working towards end-of-year expectations but not yet meeting the standard expected; working toward end-of-year expectations at the rate expected of their year group; or working at greater depth, which meant working more deeply within the expectations for their year. In key stage two maths and reading, this is referred to as attaining the highest standards. The Leadership Staff also said that disadvantaged pupils were achieving more because of the regular assessment and adhering to pupils' needs. This shows that the academy used strategies of assessing and monitoring to ensure disadvantaged pupils were succeeding. This also gives evidence to show how ensuring disadvantaged pupils are supported with their learning can have a positive impact on their attainment. The DfE published a report in 2015 which provided evidence of the most effective ways to support disadvantaged pupils' attainment. Two of the strategies particularly included having a 'whole-school ethos of attainment for all pupils' and secondly, 'meeting individual learning needs'. Following from this, Teacher 2 stated how teachers ensured that all pupils had access to resources:

*“We make sure that everyone has access to resources. Everyone has access to word mats. For those children that are a lot lower, they would have access to adult support. We do a lot of joint learning. We in English have introduced the widgets which is helping EAL and*

*disadvantaged children with reading and decoding in English because they have picture icons next to the words to help them decode words.”*

This is an important comment as it shows how teacher 2 was aware of ensuring all pupils had access to resources. She discussed the different resources she used within her classroom, and these included: word mats, adult support, joint learning, and widgets. This gives evidence that teacher 2 made sure that economically disadvantaged and EAL pupils were provided with appropriate resources to aid them in their learning. The teacher was seen to focus on the individual needs of these pupils, ensuring that pupils were provided with additional support from teaching assistants. She also made sure to provide EAL and economically disadvantaged pupils with ‘widgets’ which were understood to be used to help pupils with reading and decoding in English. These widgets included picture icons next to the words, and this can be considered a beneficial resource for EAL pupils, particularly, those who usually struggle with their English language.

Similarly, Teacher 4 was found to also use visual resources in support of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils’ learning. The findings illustrate that EAL pupils were often given a separate task from their peers because they could not access the learning due to language barriers. Teacher 4 identified this in the comment below:

*“Use lots of erm, physical resources especially Maths. We’ve got lots of resources that we use: counters, building blocks, that really helps them to physically do things. English, I try and be as active as we can. So, what do they understand from what they’re doing, rather than just hearing it all. So, I do try and mix it around. They [EAL] sometimes have a separate task completely because they can’t physically access what we’re doing. If I’m doing adding*

*in Year Four, I will do adding with them but at a Year One level so that they're able to access that and then I can build them up, so I do try and make it so they can physically access it and build up on their learning individually".*

This comment indicates the exclusive support provided to EAL learners with various visual strategies and resources being used. The academy could be seen to be providing a visual learning environment for minority ethnic pupils who spoke English as an additional language. The resources described in the comment made by the teacher included counters and building blocks. These can be understood as being useful for supporting pupils who may not otherwise be able to understand what they are being taught. Although it would be useful to support EAL pupils with their Maths by allowing them to access learning resources in the languages they are comfortable with, this may not be useful in allowing them to progress with their English language skills. Probyn's (2010) research is useful here as he interviewed teachers and reported that they claimed that it was hard to strike the balance, as while using their mother tongue might help pupils understand the Maths concepts, it also then fails to allow them to progress with their English. Likewise, Teaching Assistant 3 reported using flashcards to support EAL pupils with their phonics:

*"It's mainly flashcards, we do flashcards and sing the phonics songs and then play a little 'do you know what's in the box' things like that".*

When asked how she assisted EAL pupils, teaching assistant number 3 talked about using flashcards to help pupils with their phonics. This demonstrates the individualised support the teaching assistant gave pupils with EAL to aid in their learning. It demonstrates inclusion

since it shows that the teaching assistant was conscious of adopting a variety of strategies to meet the varied learning needs of each of the pupils.

Having explored the useful resources used by teachers to support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners, it is also important to note how there were some barriers faced by members of staff at the academy when accessing resources. Teaching Assistant 1 reported how the academy had a shortage of resources to support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils:

*“At the moment I use the Twinkle resource so that is a programme when they first come in, we introduce them to the new school. We identify which teacher is important to them, and then we do a map of the school, and then from there we then learn. We do like a sharing task where we’ve got to ask and communicate to borrow, it’ll be an activity, but there’s not enough resources for them all to have one each. So, they need to build that communication between them. And there’s one where we play games with them and it kind of builds up until we come to that noun and verbs and so on, So, that helps.”*

This comment from Teaching Assistant 1 emphasises the challenges the academy was facing, notably the lack of resources to support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. It is possible to argue that a lack of resources has a substantial impact on the quality and effectiveness of support programs and interventions. However, Efthymiou, Kington and Lee (2016) put forward the argument that, mainstream curriculum classrooms, interpersonal relationships between teachers and pupils are the most important means by which the schools’ structures and systems support children’s full participation in educational processes. This suggests that material resources along with relationships between teachers and

pupils are essential in ensuring all pupils are fully supported. Teaching Assistant 1 further stated how she was not provided with resources to support her group of pupils:

*“No one kind of gives me, they’ll say right you’ve got this group, this is their need and then I go away and resource that myself then”.*

This is a crucial finding as it suggests that the teaching assistants at the academy were not always properly supported. They were not always provided with resources to support their groups of pupils. The learning experience of EAL pupils may be negatively impacted by allowing teaching assistants to manage resources. This is since teachers are more qualified to choose the best resources that will help EAL pupils with their learning. In contrast, teaching assistants might not have the same level of training as teachers, which could limit their ability to recognise and make use of the best resources for EAL pupils. This shows how the academy was not entirely using resources effectively when handing over learning to teaching assistants.

## **Conclusion**

The findings discussed above are significant as they illustrate the various ways in which the academy aimed to ensure inclusion for all pupils, and these were found within the themes of: SEND inclusion, minority ethnic inclusion, economic disadvantage, parental inclusion, and inclusion through the use of resources. Some of the key findings of this research were based around the theme of inclusion, and this gives originality to this research study. Within the theme of inclusion, SEN inclusion was a key sub-theme found. It contributed to the originality of this research as past research has explored the demographics of SEN pupils within academies (Black *et al.* 2019 and Long, Roberts and Danechi, 2020), however, has not explored the types of strategies used by staff (within academies) in support of these pupils.

Moreover, teaching assistants at the academy were often made to resource their own group sessions as opposed to getting support from teachers. This meant that minority ethnic pupils and those that spoke English as an additional language would not have been receiving the best support as teachers were often not involved in preparing sessions for the teaching assistants.

The staff at the academy were often found to refer to SEND pupils when asked how they supported the learning of disadvantaged pupils. The research findings indicated the support provided to SEND pupils at the academy which often took place outside of the classroom environment. This support included a motor skills group where SEND pupils were taken out of the classroom once or twice a week to do intense motor skill sessions. It can be argued that, SEND pupils were often seen to miss out on vital learning that took place within the classroom-based environment and, therefore, the question arose as to whether the academy was really promoting an inclusive practice. The non-inclusion of SEND pupils within the classroom-based environment may have also been a consequence of other factors such as having to have extra support available within the classroom through teaching assistants.

The Leadership staff could be seen as identifying this as an issue with all schools, perhaps to override the fact that the academy was struggling to manage and cope with the funding they had. This may have potentially been one of the reasons why the academy may not have had some SEND children staying within the classroom whilst teaching and learning went on, as they did not have sufficient teaching assistants to provide individual support to the pupils who required it.

Similarly, the findings indicated that the academy struggled to make full use of its extra provision, such as that of the nurture room as there were increasing levels of shortage of staff

and funding. This indicated that although the academy had access to appropriate resources to support SEN pupils, it required more funding, and this is what the academy was struggling with. This expresses the tensions between the school's ethos and desire for inclusivity and the resources available to deliver this.

Furthermore, this chapter has explored how a decrease in the number of officially designated disadvantaged pupils and an increase in the number of minority ethnic pupils that are EAL disadvantaged the academy. This was discussed by the academy staff as being a hindrance to some extent, as some of the EAL pupils that were coming into the academy struggled to get pupil premium status. Since the academy was already struggling with funding, this meant that the academy had difficulty supporting EAL pupils to their full potential. Previous research explores the number of pupils that attend academy schools; however, it does not pay enough attention to how academies support minority ethnic pupils who speak English as an additional language. Within this section on inclusion, the findings illustrated that the academy had a nurture room in place, in support of minority ethnic learners (EAL).

Important findings were also found concerning economic disadvantage. The findings illustrated that one of the main barriers experienced by the school was having economically disadvantaged pupils attend the academy but not being eligible for pupil premium funding. This meant that staff did not have the appropriate means through which they could support these pupils.

Moreover, the academy was also found to ensure inclusion through the intervention of 'family learning week'. This included workshops where parents came in and took part in learning activities with their children. However, the attendance of minority ethnic parents to these

workshops was low. Minority ethnic parents were found to be aware of these workshops but chose not to go because they were pressed for time and due to language barriers. It was clear that the academy's teaching staff had preconceived notions about minority ethnic parents not attending parent workshops, but little was being done to ensure that they did.

The findings illustrate that the teachers at the academy will often use the children of parents as interpreters. It is perceived that the academy does not have proper procedures in place to ensure minority ethnic parents are taking part in their children's learning. For instance, the academy could possibly overcome this issue by introducing workshops or by producing content in the languages that parents are comfortable with. The findings are directly in line with previous findings of McGorman and Sugrue (2007).

Within the study carried out by McGorman and Sugrue (2007), the teachers highlighted the inability to communicate with parents who have little or no proficiency in English and that this consequently hampers their work.



## **Chapter 6      Bridging Cultural Capital, Policy Language, and the Academy's Values amidst LEA Tensions**

This chapter moves on from the previous chapter's exploration of the theme of inclusion to examine other themes that were identified in the data, such as cultural capital, the language of policymakers, Christian values, ethos and values, and tension between LEA and the needs of the academy. Cultural capital was a key theme found within the study, identifying this contributed to a better understanding of the expectations set out by the academy in relation to overcoming issues associated with the ideas surrounding this concept. It was intriguing to observe how the staff spoke in terms used by policymakers and how their objectives revolved around attaining what Ofsted was seeking in their definition of cultural capital. The staff stated that they used several interventions to help minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils acquire the "necessary" cultural capital. Staff frequently utilised this word when assessing the learning that took place at the school, and it was also discovered that talk around cultural capital and what that represented was an essential finding when discussing the curriculum employed by the academy.

Another key concept discussed within this chapter is the language of policy makers. The staff were often found to use the terminology used by policy makers such as: OFSTED and the DfE. This suggested that the academy was focused on the needs of policy makers as opposed to focusing on the needs of individual pupils. This chapter then goes on to explore the Christian values set out by the academy which further leads into the ethos and values of the academy which are described by staff at the school as being 'at the heart' of the academy. And lastly, this chapter explores important findings in relation to the tensions found between the local education authorities and the needs of the academy.

## 6.1 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital was a significant theme found within the findings of the study. It was a term that was increasingly used by the leadership team at the academy. Cultural capital refers to the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours and skills of pupils which demonstrate their cultural awareness and understanding. The term cultural capital has also been frequently used by sociologists when referring to bias in the education system. Bourdieu (1974) identified cultural capital as familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society. It is often used to refer to an educational culture that benefits White middle-class pupils. It is interesting to explore the context in which the term has been used in the academy studied.

It is important to take into consideration that the area in which the study was carried out had an influx of minority ethnic families moving in and this was discussed by Leadership Staff 2. Leadership Staff 2 spoke about the cultural diversity within the area and how it should be celebrated. She argued that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds can teach their peers and staff about their cultural understandings and beliefs:

*“You know we’re getting more, much more diversity across the city and that’s not always a negative. It’s got to be celebrated, they have so much to teach us and so much to teach pupils, especially about kind of where they’re from, what their culture, what their religion is.”*

The comment above is significant as it illustrates how the leadership staff had an inclusive attitude towards pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. And this shows the way in which

the academy was creating an environment where all pupils felt welcomed. It also demonstrates how the academy took cultural aspects into consideration and believed that other pupils within the academy would benefit from minority ethnic pupils as they could learn about different cultures and religions. Hussain *et al.* 2018 found in their research that children's learning experiences and development can both benefit when the cultures of their families and children are acknowledged. Similarly, Leadership Staff 2 also reported how the academy focused on developing children as individuals to prepare them for later in life, making them employable:

*"If anything, I think the development of children as people and the fact that they have an emphasis on, we want them to get the cultural capital, we want them to be successful in life, we want to prepare them, we want to develop them and have the characteristics that make them employable and makes them resilient to the wider world, you can't get better than that."*

This comment is important as it suggests the academy placed value on developing children as individuals and specifically getting them ready for the wider world. The Leadership Staff 2 discussed wanting children to attain cultural capital and this shows the important value given to cultural capital and cultural exposure within the academy. Along with this, Teacher 1 stated how she believed all children, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, should and do have the chance to succeed:

*"I wholeheartedly believe no matter what background children come from that through school education access regular, they have every opportunity to achieve the best that they can no matter what background they come from."*

This comment is crucial as it demonstrates how teacher 1 had a strong belief that all pupils regardless of their cultural backgrounds, could achieve. This also shows their belief in the importance of ensuring no child is left behind because of their cultural background. While exploring the attitudes of staff within the academy when discussing cultural inclusivity, it is important to take into consideration the new framework that had been set out by Ofsted in 2019 which emphasised aspects of cultural capital. Part of the inspection framework stated that inspectors would be making judgements about the quality of education that schools were providing by taking into consideration the extent to which schools were equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they needed to succeed in life. Ofsted referred to the framework set out within the National Curriculum which defines cultural capital as: “the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best part that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement” (2019:16). This suggests that schools were at the time beginning to be held accountable for ensuring cultural awareness as opposed to just attaining subject-specific knowledge.

It is important to take into account the Ofsted inspection framework in relation to the data collected from the academy staff as they often refer to aspects of cultural capital. This framework was introduced in 2019, which was the time when I carried out research at the academy, it was interesting to see the academy leaders very much focused on ensuring they were providing cultural capital. Birkenshaw and Clothier (2021) questioned Michael Gove's legacy on cultural capital and contended that the recent inclusion of cultural capital in the English Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019) caused a stir in some educational circles, with some suggesting it is an indication of "white, middle-class paternalism. Reay (2019) argues that the new requirement was reductionist and elitist. She states that cultural capital is

entwined with privileged lifestyles that are taught to the poor and working classes and are not appropriate. It is understood that this approach is flawed as it indicates that some cultures are more valuable than others.

This new framework imposed by Ofsted illustrates the way in which schools are expected to include cultural capital within their curriculum, and this is an aspect that will be inspected in schools. This demonstrates the ways in which the education system is gearing itself towards creating individuals who have the ‘cultural capital’ of the dominant middle-class individuals. This is quite controversial and calls into question the extent to which schools and this framework is inclusive of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils.

The term cultural capital was often referred to by staff when discussing the curriculum of the academy, along with the way in which funding was used to support economically disadvantaged learners. Since the academy staff were found to link cultural capital with funding and competitive performance it is important to take into consideration the arguments put forth by Critical Race Theorists who would argue that framing cultural capital through aspects of funding and competitive performance risks perpetuating inequalities rather than addressing them. In order for the academy to align itself with the views of Critical Race Theorists the academy would need to redefine their understanding of cultural capital to include the diverse needs of all pupils.

As noted above policymakers have also frequently used the term cultural capital and it is important, as it illustrates how learning has been shaped to support the individual needs of pu-

pils but in a framework set out by the government. How the term was used is crucial to understanding how the academy aimed to manage and support its pupils who were from minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Cultural capital was also mentioned on the academy schools' website. There was a specific section within the 'Early Years' section on the website which was titled 'Cultural Capital in Early Years'. It stated that: 'The children at the school benefit greatly from a culturally enriched environment'. This shows how the academy gave importance to cultural capital and wanted to ensure pupils developed cultural capital from an early age. This also suggests that the academy was aiming to create an environment that exposed children to a wide range of cultural knowledge and experiences. Within the same section, it stated that the academy invited parents into the school to observe teachers model different skills, one of which was reading:

'Throughout the year parents are invited into school to observe practitioners modelling different skills, including reading. They then have the opportunity to practice these skills and read the books available in our classroom with the children.

In accordance with this, Leadership Staff 3 also discussed the reading workshops: "*The parents come in on a Monday and on a Tuesday morning to read with their children*". This a key finding as it suggests that the academy was trying to ensure that parents were taught the skills to successfully read with their children at home and this in turn could help to develop parents' cultural capital with the skills necessary to support their children's learning.

Leadership Staff 3 reported the academy using a resource called WellComm to screen children's language and speech ability and this was used in early years:

*“We do, we do support pupils with their speech and language. So, we mainly target children when they’re in the foundation stages. We will make sure there are no problems with their language and speech. And what we do do is, we use this kind of tool called WellComm which helps us to screen children’s language and speech when they come into school. And this really helps because we can then provide early help and support, and this avoids issues later on with children’s learning”.*

There was also evidence for this on the schools’ website under the section on ‘Early Years Cultural Capital’ which had a specific section dedicated to ‘Wellcomm’ which was described as a resource used to identify areas of concern in language, communication, and interaction development to ensure early targeted intervention. This shows how the academy gave importance to cultural capital and wanted to provide early help to pupils to ensure they were attaining cultural capital. To ensure this, they were using a resource known as ‘WellComm’ and this was used to support pupils’ speech and language.

Within the same section on ‘Early Years Cultural Capital’ there was also a section titled ‘British Values’. Within this section, it stated how the academy focused on different cultural festivals throughout the year to help promote different cultures: ‘Throughout the year different cultural festivals and special events are planned in and the children spend a day exploring the culture and the festival. British Values are woven into our broad and balanced Early Years curriculum.’ This is an important finding as it demonstrates how the academy focused on the celebration of different cultures and promoted the building of cultural capital.

Cultural capital was identified in a way, which was distinctive to the academy, and this was based around providing an enriching and well-rounded educational experience to economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic (EAL) pupils. It was found to be commonly referred to when discussing the need to ‘close the gaps in attainment’ for minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. It was also discussed in a different way as it was often linked to aspects of funding with a focus on equity and inclusion. It was frequently used when discussing the academy’s curriculum and specifically when referring to school trips and learning about the local heritage. The findings showed funding as being a key concept when overcoming issues related to cultural capital, as discussed in the following section.

### **Funding for Learning and Cultural Capital**

The academy's staff saw funding as an essential factor for overcoming disadvantages, and they were frequently found to link funding with strategies to help overcome issues related to cultural capital. To begin, Leadership Staff 3 stated that the DfE provided the majority of the academy's funding.

*“Well, most of the funding is, it comes through the DfE. You know, like, just like any other school.”*

This was a significant finding as it gave evidence that the academy still had links with the Department for Education and received funding from them. The findings showed that the academy was focused on building pupils’ cultural capital and used its funding to successfully do this. The staff were often found to make links between pupils attaining cultural capital



and supporting disadvantaged and minority ethnic (EAL) learners by using additional funding. The Leadership Staff 3 referred to cultural capital when discussing how the academy supported economically disadvantaged learners:

*“In terms of support and funding, families are supported. Additional funding is provided for disadvantaged pupils... that funding is used within the school to ensure that the gaps are closing so that funding could pay for an additional TA. It could pay for an additional teacher. It could pay for the after-school club. It could be that trips are being subsidised. So, they’re getting that, you know, that cultural capital.”*

This comment is significant as it demonstrates how Leadership Staff 3 associated aspects of funding with attaining cultural capital. The Leadership Staff identified how important it was to the academy, to ensure additional support was provided to pupils through different interventions. The leadership staff believed that by providing additional support through extra-curricular activities it would allow pupils to attain the necessary cultural capital. The academy was seen to acknowledge the importance of offering pupils’ trips and extra-curricular activities, thinking beyond what the curriculum offered. This demonstrates how the academy was ensuring that minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged pupils were given several educational opportunities to help enhance their knowledge and skills.

The comment above can be split into two parts as it provides two important findings. The first part of the comment indicates funding being used to support families and the second half of the comment was about funding being used to access resources. The fact that the academy was aware of the importance of providing support to families is a crucial finding. There are many arguments by educational researchers that report that supporting pupils' families can

have a positive impact on the learning of children (Abouchaar and Desforbes, 2003; Park and Holloway, 2017). The support provided through means of funding was also described by Teacher 2 who, as previously discussed, illustrated the use of funding to provide children with book bags and clothing. This support could be argued as being a head-start for economically disadvantaged children who may come into school not having the appropriate uniforms or equipment and providing pupils with these necessities allows them to be at a somewhat similar level to their middle-class or non-disadvantaged peers. However, many educational researchers and sociologists argue this is not enough to overcome issues related to cultural capital (Bernstein, 1962; Reay, 2004). Although providing material resources may be beneficial, parental involvement is understood to play a huge role in the learning of children.

Wheeler (2017) has explored middle-class and working-class parental involvement. She found middle-class parents to be much more involved in their children's education and have strategies in place to ensure their children achieve their aspirations. Wheeler's research also found middle-class parents to have the educational resources to enhance their children's education as opposed to working-class parents who were less likely to provide their children with the educational resources required to enhance their learning. There is a discrepancy in relation to the extent to which the academy was found to support parents and pupils from minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged families. The Leadership Staff 3 illustrated the way in which the academy supported disadvantaged families through the use of funding to provide families with appropriate material resources. This also demonstrates how important funding is as a whole, as it helps to ensure appropriate interventions and resources are put in place. And for the school to successfully provide pupils with the cultural capital it is important the academy has sufficient funds.

The academy offered parent workshops, which were discussed in the previous chapter on ‘Inclusion’. The staff at the academy illustrated the non-attendance of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic parents at these workshops. The encouragement of working-class and minority-ethnic parents’ involvement in parent workshops and their children’s learning could be seen as absent and was something the academy did not discuss in terms of making improvements. This challenges the extent to which the academy aimed to overcome issues related to cultural capital and is a point that could be debated in contradiction of what the academy says it aims to do, as it is seen as providing unfair approaches which are often not suitable for working class or minority ethnic parents who are unable to attend the workshops. This can be seen as undermining economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic learners (EAL).

There are often arguments made by researchers in relation to the importance of overcoming issues related to family background. Therefore, parental involvement in a child’s education can be seen as a first step towards overcoming issues related to cultural capital and is something the academy can be seen to be not addressing as much as they should. Reay (2004) specifically argued that policy emphasis on parental involvement in schools works to maximise the potential of the already advantaged and is exacerbating class inequalities in education. The mobilisation of cultural capital through educational policies has generated increasing segregation in schools, and this ties in with the academy school’s equality and inclusion policies. The academy school’s website gives access to the equality and inclusion policy, which specifically notes that ‘providing all information in an accessible way, including, where necessary, translated information for parents with English as an additional language’. The academy did not incorporate this strategy when it came to welcoming minority ethnic parents to

parent-child workshops, as parents from these groups were unaware of the workshops that took place at the academy.

The second part of the comment made by Leadership Staff 3 illustrated funding being used to provide disadvantaged pupils with additional teachers and teaching assistants, followed by after-school clubs and supplementary trips. This demonstrates the resources put in place by the academy to provide economically disadvantaged children with additional support. The Leadership Staff was found to make links between providing pupils with supplementary trips and after-school clubs and believed this helped them to acquire cultural capital. Leadership Staff 3 further stated:

*“The Trust are all about developing cultural capital. So, you know, it's about what else can we give the children. It's about the educational experience, it's about their learning, it's about closing those gaps.”*

This is another significant finding because Leadership Staff 3 identifies how the academy Trust is all about growing cultural capital, implying the priority placed on cultural capital and its prevalence throughout the Trust's academies at the time. Leadership Staff 3 emphasised the significance of providing additional support to pupils, namely through educational experiences that would help to overcome achievement gaps.

There were a few contradictions in the comments made by the staff when discussing funding. To be specific, the comments made by Leadership Staff 2 and 3 identified the funding used by the academy and how much funding the academy had in place. Although Leadership Staff

2 noted using additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils, an opposing view was proposed by Leadership Staff 3 who illustrated their concerns and worries relative to not having sufficient funding due to a deficit budget.

*“Funding really, you know like it's not just academies. I think it's just schools in general, education in general schools are worried about this deficit budget that all schools are going to be in sooner or later. So, they're trying to put things in place in advance to ensure that they're kind of trying to combat the deficit budget. And what happens is you lose staff. So, you know, we, we are often very, very stretched. So, you don't have that many staff in the school. Not as many as there used to be.”*

Leadership Staff 3 was seen to defend academies in the first part of the comment where they noted, “It's not just academies. I think it's just schools in general”. They stated that all schools are going to be in a deficit budget situation and therefore, schools are trying to put things in place to combat this issue. This deficit budget has been previously outlined by Morton (2016) who explored funding in schools. Morton illustrated how schools are experiencing real-time cuts in spending per pupil of about 7% by 2019/20. She argued that schools with the most deprived children will be worst hit in the government's proposed reallocation of the existing overall schools' budget.

Current research by the Department for Education (2021) shows that, under the current government school funding policy, the 1,000 schools with the highest number of children with free school meals are facing much deeper cuts in funding per pupil than schools generally. The findings indicated the problem faced by the academy as it had a large proportion of economically disadvantaged pupils. The academy had to consequently provide support for all these pupils, which in fact would require the use of extra funding. It is arguable to what extent the academy was able to use its funding, which was lacking, to support disadvantaged

and EAL pupils. Such pupils often require additional support to develop their learning and bring them up to the same level as their peers. This once again challenges the extent to which the academy aimed to provide cultural capital when supporting minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners.

The findings suggest that the leadership team were keen on providing opportunities for pupils to build cultural capital, however, due to a deficit budget, they struggled to get enough resources. It is understood that schools need sufficient funding to be able to better provide cultural capital as this involves the school arranging trips and clubs which can often prove to be costly. The academy struggled to get enough teaching assistants, and this makes clear the barriers the academy faced in relation to wanting to enhance cultural capital opportunities whilst often not having enough resources and staff availability. Teaching assistants can be understood to play a vital role in supporting EAL learners as these pupils often struggle to engage with national curriculum subjects.

Leadership Staff 2 in an earlier comment indicated that the Trust was “all about” developing the cultural capital and specifically seeing what else they could offer pupils with the aim of ‘closing the gap’. However, it was debatable to what extent the academy was able to develop pupils’ cultural capital and offer pupils additional support to help ‘close the gaps’ in learning. Since the findings indicate the academy had a deficit budget, it is questionable to what extent the academy was able to buy resources for disadvantaged pupils.

Reay (2017) explores academies in deprived areas. She explains how there was an interest surrounding academies and a claim that they would address the social attainment gap. They are also claimed to have been heavily promoting and focusing on bringing up working-class achievement. However, the data from this study indicated that the academy was struggling to support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners due to staff shortages and

not having enough funding. From the research of Bailey and Ball (2016) it is evident that academies are not able at this stage to close the gaps in attainment.

Bailey and Ball's (2016) research indicates that 18 academy chains were prevented from opening new schools because their performance and management abilities were substandard, and 68 academies received letters from the DfE about their poor performance. Reay (2017) concluded that the political hype surrounding academies' transformation of working-class underachievement has turned out to be mere political hype. This is particularly true as Reay's findings showed little evidence that it was transforming attainment for economically disadvantaged learners.

However, it is important to note that although the academy may not have had enough funding to provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils through the employment of extra staff, the most recent Ofsted report (2017) carried out at the academy indicated that the academy made use of additional funding to provide targeted support for individuals and groups of pupils. It illustrated funding being spent effectively on a wide range of strategies and clubs and, as a result, disadvantaged pupils had been found to be making strong progress at the academy. Ofsted (2017) stated that disadvantaged pupils were performing exceedingly well and making good progress in reading, writing, and mathematics.

This indicates the effectiveness of the academy using motivation and engagement of pupils, which may to some extents have a positive outcome in closing the gaps in attainment and in providing cultural capital to disadvantaged pupils. There are clear tensions between the academy's desire to do something and whether they had the funding or resources to do it. So, although the academy may have aimed to motivate pupils and close the gaps in attainment, and in 2017, it seems to have done this to some extent, by 2019 this was often hindered by not having the resources to accomplish this.

The findings so far have indicated the implications and significance of funding as a means of providing resources to enable minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils to build cultural capital. Funding was often found to go hand-in-hand with the learning provided under the curriculum of the academy. The academy used the National Curriculum, and it was commonly described by staff as being ‘broad and balanced’. This is evident in the comment made by Leadership Staff 2:

*“We have a broad and balanced curriculum. We do still use the National Curriculum we haven’t deviated away from that. We think it gives a broad balanced curriculum, develops the skills that are needed for our pupils. So, you know we do kind of stick to that, we use that, we just incorporate.”*

It is important to note that on the academy school’s website, there was a funding agreement document which entailed the agreements made between the Secretary of State for Education and the academy (2013). One of the agreements stated: ‘The curriculum provided by the academy to pupils up to the age of 11 shall be broad and balanced’. This gives us an idea of why the academy may have developed a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum, to be in compliance with the academy’s funding agreement.

### **‘Broad and Balanced Curriculum’**

The academy based its learning around the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum is thought to be one of the main processes for delivering learning within the school. It is argued by some to be the transmitter of cultural capital which is often better suited to middle-class pupils. Many sociologists and educational theorists such as Bourdieu (1974) have argued



against the idea of a National Curriculum as it is thought to be based on the privileges of certain types of pupils, such as white middle-class pupils. The national curriculum has been criticised for its potential bias towards English cultural perspectives.

The National Curriculum although reviewed and updated in 2014, is still frequently found to disregard pupils' different needs and backgrounds and some researchers argue that it remains ethnocentric and not particularly inclusive (Gillborn, 2015; Richardson, 2015). The curriculum frequently fails to address issues of inclusion, resulting in discrepancies in educational outcomes. Schneider and Preckel (2017) argued that there should be inclusivity and diversity within the curriculum to ensure pupils' achievement. They argued the important role teachers must play in helping to create the curriculum. Their research suggests that if pupils' ethnicity or cultural background is disregarded then on average those pupils tend to underperform. This is an interesting finding that we must take into consideration as academy schools have the autonomy to create and use their own curriculum. However, since the academy chose to use the National Curriculum, it is interesting to explore the way in which the academy staff believed their curriculum was 'broad and balanced' and believed it supported the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils.

Leadership Staff 1 at the academy was asked various questions in relation to the curriculum. To begin with, leadership staff 1 made the following comment, which gave evidence that the academy used the National Curriculum:

*"As an academy, we can do our own curriculum, but we cover every single National Curriculum subject and make sure that we cover their objectives."*

And similarly, Leadership Staff 3 noted that the curriculum had been put in place to benefit all pupils, and it was bespoke as it allowed all pupils to access it at their different respective starting points. They particularly pointed out that the curriculum was there not only to support middle-class pupils but was there to support different kinds of pupils according to their different educational needs:

*“The curriculum is there to benefit everybody. It's then how you design your curriculum. Because the curriculum is generic, it's there for everyone and it's been designed to include everybody. Now whether some people might say it benefits the middle class, that I think is an opinion. For me, it's about taking that curriculum and then making it bespoke to your own curriculum. And that's what we've done. We've made it bespoke for our own context and we give the children every opportunity to access it at their different starting points.”*

These comments made by Leadership Staff 1 and 3 are important as they illustrate the way in which the Leadership staff believe the academy had tweaked the curriculum in ways to support the abilities of different pupils and their different starting points. The above comment also suggests the academy covered all subjects within the National Curriculum along with their objectives. Leadership Staff 1 understood that the academy could have its own curriculum, however, they chose to use the National Curriculum. The above comment gives evidence that the academy staff believed they had adapted the curriculum in ways to suit the needs of their pupils. Leadership staff 3 believed that the academy gave the children every opportunity to access it at their different starting points.

When discussing the academy's curriculum, Leadership Staff 2 used the term cultural capital when discussing the interventions, they had put in place in support of minority ethnic pupils:

*“We have lots of cultural capital in our curriculum. So again, on our website, you can see all the trips and visits we have coming into school throughout the academic year. We have six themes for our curriculum this year which are new. So, we have our heritage, children are learning about our local area where they grew up. We have cultures because we’ve got a wide range of different cultures in the school. So, yeah, we have six themes running through”.*

This specific comment is important as the Leadership Staff is seen to emphasise the fact that the academy has ‘lots of cultural capital’ in its curriculum. Leadership Staff 2 expanded on this further by illustrating the various trips and visits they had coming into school, the six themes they have running through the curriculum, such as learning about ‘heritage’ (where children grew up, local area) and learning about different cultures. This finding is key as it suggests the academy had incorporated themes within their curriculum which were about supporting minority ethnic pupils by providing inclusive education. There is further evidence for this within the academy’s website as it states within their section on curriculum that:

*‘We have created our own bespoke curriculum which has been carefully planned based on six key themes based on the cohorts of children who attend our school (Exploration, Adventure and Invention, Our heritage, Cultures, Pride of Manchester, Our World and beyond) and S.T.E.M. with our wider community in mind. We strongly believe pupils should learn about heritage and different cultures, particularly with our changing cohorts’.*

From the comment made by Leadership Staff 2 along with the evidence provided on the academy school’s website, it was evident that the academy had adapted the curriculum in ways intended to support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners.

The curriculum was explained as being broad in relation to the teaching and exploration of different cultures, and importance was given to the wider community. The above comment gives evidence that the academy was promoting community-based learning. Community-based learning is an important practice which consists of schools connecting what is being taught in schools to their surrounding communities which includes: history, cultural heritage, and the natural environments. Alsbury, Kobashigawa and Ewart (2020), carried out research on community-based learning and found that pupils who engaged in community-based learning appeared to have better school attendance, more motivation for learning, and a better classroom environment.

Having explored the way in which the academy promoted a community-based learning environment, we will now assess the way in which the academy leaders mapped out their curriculum. There is evidence for this in the comment made by Leadership Staff 2:

*“What we do alongside it then is it’s mapped out for each subject but then we also map alongside kind of ‘cos we work in topics, we put the curriculum objectives in but then alongside that within the topic it’s mapped out, well these habits are really strong within this subject so their mapped out. And then we’ll bring in well, the building learning power, learning habits these ones fit in perfectly with this curriculum and then it’ll be the, kind of SRE, PSHE focus that will be kind of also threaded through. Basically, everything is entangled into one so you’re not just doing your kind of core academic skills everything’s intertwined together so we map all that, and that’s where our curriculum maybe differs from some local authorities’.”*

The comment made by Leadership Staff 2 indicates that the 9 habits (ethos and values) are mapped out within each subject and through different areas of the curriculum and this is where they believed that their academy was doing something different to other academies. As previous research carried out by Di-Finizio (2022) suggests, every successful school is driven by its ethos, and that it is a school's ethos which enables all students who pass through school to grow and develop before going on to flourish in life. This indicates the importance of ethos within schools, and this may be something the academy is doing which is beneficial for EAL pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged.

Similarly, Leadership Staff 2 and 3 identified that the 9 habits which formed part of the school's ethos and values, were the roots and values that were threaded throughout the curriculum, and that the new curriculum was based around the experiences of the children and were linked to the local community. However, a different perspective was found when interviewing teachers. Teachers were found to express their concerns with the new curriculum. Teacher 1 reported that the curriculum was difficult to access as it included learning barriers, which included not being able to support children sufficiently, and as a result needed to be adapted slightly. Likewise, Teacher 2 also illustrated barriers faced by the curriculum:

*"I think the idea of the new curriculum really is everyone's getting there. We're not, in my eyes. When we worked under the old curriculum and that's nothing to do with the academy now changing. But to the old curriculum you were able to drop back sufficiently enough to support them children. Now the new rationale under the new curriculum, everyone's getting there. So, you need to work out how you're going to do that. So, it's not too different for disadvantaged children. It just may look different in terms of the support they get."*

The above comment made by Teacher 2 showed the barriers and problems posed by the new curriculum which were set around the expectation that all pupils were “getting there”. It indicated that with the old curriculum teachers were able to drop back to support disadvantaged pupils, whereas with the new curriculum this was challenging.

Bunnell (2010) argues that globalisation is changing the way people in England view education. He argued that in England, state-funded schools have particularly emulated post-modern social transformations which include community cohesion and international literacy. He argued that globalisation is the reason to why schools are extending their curriculum to incorporate other subjects which are required for the future. This study is important as it illustrates one of the many reasons why the academy may have a large focus on the community, and our world and beyond.

Dale and Robinson (2010) have argued that primary schools have to address new challenges of global knowledge with a particular focus on inclusive education through the lens of globalisation in the context of curriculum topics to help meet the needs of pupils with EAL. They illustrate that one of the new challenges for primary schools is to create experiences that will broaden children’s experiences of the world around them, beyond their homes and classrooms. This research is important as it illustrates how primary schools are aiming to create experiences that will broaden pupils’ experiences of the world around them. The data from the academy indicated that the school was doing something similar by promoting learning about heritage, cultures, the world and beyond. This gives evidence for how the academy may have had aims following the issues around globalisation and EAL pupils.

Along with this, the leadership team within the academy were often seen to refer to the expectations of Ofsted and the Department for Education. This illustrates the external pressures faced by the academy, regardless of the degree of autonomy the academy had. The six themes that were added to the curriculum may well have been because of these expectations and changes that were being made by Ofsted and the DfE. It was difficult to assess the extent to which the academy was supporting disadvantaged pupils as much of the evidence from the findings illustrated links between the expectations of the DfE and Ofsted and the academy wanting to meet their requirements as opposed to the academy focusing entirely on the needs of disadvantaged learners. Leadership staff 2 particularly discussed how there had been specific changes to vocabulary acquisition in support of disadvantaged pupils. This was evident within the comment made by Leadership staff 2:

*“The curriculum’s changing, obviously there’s been a lot recently with Ofsted and the DfE, you know the department of education to kind of change the way the curriculum’s working and the emphasis is shifting, so there’s a big emphasis on vocabulary acquisition due to the fact that especially disadvantaged pupils aren’t acquiring vocabulary at a rate compared to their peers. So, they come at a lower starting point and have limited vocabulary compared to their peers who have, are coming from a very different background. I wouldn’t want to say affluent because they’re not all affluent, but I’m not necessarily classed them as disadvantaged. So that’s been a big focus coming through from education. So, with that in mind, all our academies are changing their curriculum to incorporate that.”*

This comment specifies that the academy closely observed the expectations and requirements of the DfE and Ofsted with how the curriculum operates. They particularly discussed the importance of ‘vocabulary acquisition’ as disadvantaged pupils were not acquiring vocabulary at the same rate as their peers. Although the academy aimed to incorporate such provision

within their learning, it illustrated the importance given to the needs and requirements of public bodies alongside or even as compared to the importance of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged students' learning. This demonstrates the academy to be focusing on marketisation and meeting the needs of others as much as focusing on the actual needs and requirements of learners within the academy.

The Department for Education (2014) were also found to use terminology similar to that of the academy. This was evident in the DfE's National Curriculum framework document (2014) which stated the following: "every state funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based" (page 5). The leadership team within the academy often referred to their curriculum as being "broad and balanced" and this, therefore, relates to the terminology used by Ofsted and the DfE.

However, it is also important not to ignore the fact that the academy is in fact incorporating important language skills which are required for the success of minority ethnic learners, and this is particularly so within the neoliberal market economy. Vocabulary holds importance in relation to cultural capital and this is specifically in line with the ideas of Brooks, Clenton and Fraser (2021) who explore the factors that affect the reading comprehension abilities of EAL learners. They suggest that EAL learners require targeted language support to enhance academic text comprehension. However, since the academy was beginning to incorporate vocabulary acquisition within the curriculum, this may be a good start towards creating an inclusive environment for minority ethnic pupils, ensuring they obtain cultural capital.



Similarly, EAL learners were provided further support within the subject 'English' through the use of matching games and programmes such as Communication In Print. Leadership Staff 3 stated this when they were asked about the type of support provided to EAL pupils:

*"We use communication in print for the children where they've got words and pictures. So, they'll have a target, they'll have certain words that we would expect them to kind of grasp. So, and it's those words that they will need to be able to construct sentences, we use Google translate to get them to translate back to us if they're unsure about anything".*

Similarly, Leadership Staff 2 reported the use of 'word maps' in support of minority ethnic pupils' learning. The leadership staff mentioned using these 'word maps' which consist of various keywords of specific relevance to the topic the children are focusing on. These tools, such as word maps, were used to help translate the words into the languages of minority ethnic pupils so that they better understand the topic and could make use of the vocabulary. This demonstrates another intervention used by the academy in support of minority ethnic pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Leadership Staff further discussed how the academy had introduced STEM within their curriculum, which focused on science and technology, and this is evident in the following comment:

*"We've also tried to include science and technology, the STEM within the curriculum as well. We feel that the children will benefit from that because there's lots of jobs out there linked to STEM".*

This indicated that the academy did not only focus on the needs of pupils within the school but also acted in a business-like way where it aimed to create the future workforce. However, STEM was addressed only by Leadership Staff 3 and not by any other academy staff. STEM-related subjects were also not discussed anywhere on the academy school's website; therefore, it was difficult to discern the extent to which STEM was incorporated within the curriculum.

Within STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) there is an understanding amongst researchers that there are large disparities in participation between different social groups. Within the UK, evidence suggests that only 15 per cent of scientists come from working-class households (Blundell *et al.*, 2019). It is important to consider the fact that the academy has introduced STEM subjects within its curriculum, and this may help to provide further opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils (EAL). The introduction of STEM subjects allows pupils to explore and enhance the vital skills needed to get a career within this field. This indicates how the academy was overcoming obstacles related to educational and cultural capital by providing all pupils with a similar level of opportunity. However, since all pupils were given the same level of opportunity, there was no evidence to suggest disadvantaged pupils were learning more in these areas. And therefore, just offering the same level of opportunities, does not always encourage more disadvantaged people into jobs in these areas.

With the incorporation of STEM subjects, the comment made by leadership staff 3 illustrated the concerns the staff had in relation to minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learning, and, specific to this the academy, had incorporated community-based learning (local heritage) within their curriculum. However, the academy could be seen as ignoring the main

reason why minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils may not possess cultural capital. The staff were seen as not giving enough consideration to pupils' home circumstances. This ties in with the research of Jessica Abrahams (2013), who reports that she explored academy schools and concluded that the rules in Academy schools are rigid, and expectations are not met; culture is disregarded, and home circumstances are ignored.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings, it is evident that the academy has incorporated and made changes to the curriculum, giving more value to community-based learning, where children are taught about the area in which they live and its heritage. The curriculum of the academy can be seen as beginning to incorporate vocabulary acquisition to support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners to help improve their English language skills. The findings offer evidence that the academy does to an extent give minority ethnic pupils (EAL) the chance to access the curriculum; however, the academy still has a long way to go to overcome issues related to cultural capital.

The leadership team were often found to be using the terminology of policymakers: 'cultural capital', 'bespoke curriculum', and 'broad and balanced' which suggests the academy may have been focusing on or around the requirements of Ofsted and the DfE as opposed to focusing on the learning of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. Much of this could also be argued to tie in with aspects of globalisation where learning about cultures has become of increasing interest. Whilst the academy has autonomy and can create its own curriculum, it seems to be focusing on using the National Curriculum as opposed to creating its own. It may be beneficial for academies to support minority ethnic (EAL) learners

by simply making education more easily accessible to such pupils, and by introducing learning in languages better suited to pupils and their individual needs.

The Leadership team indicate that groups of academies within the Trust work together and as a result, have a similar curriculum to one another, and this allows them to share their resources:

*“We have planned our curriculum alongside erm, another primary school. So, we’ve got a similar curriculum because we’ve planned it together. So, we’re sharing resources as well.”*

Carrington (1999) notes that the role of schools still appears to be induction into the dominant culture through the imparting of set curricula rather than meeting the needs of pupils as learners. It can be understood that the curriculum is in its early stages of development, and the leadership team specified the importance of working with other staff members within the academy to share ideas on how the curriculum should be mapped out. They stated that the academy was not deviating from the national curriculum but in fact was moderating it in ways to support pupils in a better way. However, whilst the academy aims to be inclusive by creating a balanced and broad curriculum, it is often seen that pupils are expected to fit into the school’s expectations.

The academy in this study recognised cultural capital as an important tool for educational success, aligning with Ofsted’s emphasis on the concept. However, its strategies, such as assemblies and cultural activities, often reflected the dominant cultural norms. For instance, the academy promoted themes rooted in British values and Christian ethos, which may have excluded the cultural experiences of minority ethnic learners. This aligns with critiques by

Lander (2019) and Wilson-Thomas and Brooks (2024), who highlight how institutional definitions of cultural capital often fail to account for diverse cultural identities. The low attendance of minority ethnic parents as well as, English as an additional language parents was a common issue. The staff at the academy often attributed this to a lack of interest or time constraints. The staff at the academy were seen to have preconceived notions about minority ethnic and EAL parents. Crozier (2001) has argued that these assumptions often overlook structural barriers including cultural and linguistic differences that limit parental engagement. It is important that the academy provides additional support to minority ethnic parents who speak English as an additional language. This could be through the provision of bilingual support and by simply including minority ethnic parents within the schools' council. By providing additional support to minority ethnic (EAL) parents this could better engage these parents and acknowledge their cultural capital.

It is also important to note that since the academy staff had preconceived ideas about minority ethnic and EAL learners this results in structural biases, which limit the academy's ability to create an inclusive environment for minority ethnic and EAL pupils. The findings give evidence that parents reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes, which illustrates the systematic racism and exclusion documented by Connolly and Keenan (2002). It is important that the academy provides inclusion strategies for minority ethnic and EAL parents and pupils that go beyond the current initiatives to address deeper structural inequalities such as language barriers and lack of cultural capital for minority ethnic and EAL pupils.

From the findings, it is evident the academy was focusing on the requirements set out by Ofsted as opposed to the individual needs of minority ethnic and EAL learners. The members of staff at the academy quite often illustrated the tensions they faced when attempting to meet Ofsted's expectations and supporting diverse learners. Much of this was down to the limited

funding the academy had and the barriers they faced in relation to pupil and staff mobility. It is important to consider the study of Wilson-Thomas and Brooks (2024) who argue Ofsted's framework promotes a narrow understanding of cultural capital, which can conflict with the academy's efforts to include minority ethnic and EAL perspectives. This was evident in the interviews carried out with the staff where participants described the difficulties they faced when attempting to balance curriculum requirements with initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity.

## **6.2 Language of Policy Makers**

As briefly discussed above, the staff at the academy were often found to use the terminology of policy makers. This was a new theme found when interviewing staff members within the academy. They were seen to demonstrate their concerns about funding and gave evidence of ways in which the academy aimed to overcome issues related to minority ethnic and economic disadvantage. The staff reiterated the creation of a broad and balanced curriculum to provide minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners with the required cultural capital. It was interesting to see how the academy had much of its focus directed towards what Ofsted and the DfE were looking out for and their specific requirements.

Leadership Staff 3 specifically reported the Academy Trust as being "all about developing cultural capital". This was an interesting comment made by leadership staff 3 as it illustrated cultural capital as being one of the core aspects within the academy school. When the leadership staff were referring to this, it illustrated how the aim of the academy may have been to meet the aims and requirements of Ofsted and the DfE, who were largely focusing on the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils and trying to tackle the issues that were faced by such groups.

In September 2019, Ofsted created a new inspection framework that required schools to develop their students' cultural capital (Ofsted, 2019). Within this framework, Ofsted was looking at the personal development of pupils and how they were able to develop their character and diversity. This was a very specific definition provided by Ofsted, and quite different to that of Bourdieu (1990) which refers to familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society. He argues that families pass on cultural capital to their children through the introduction of music, theatres, and historic sites and by discussing literature with them. Ofsted's definition of cultural capital is quite specific; however, it did not contain the same critical capacity as that of Bourdieu. He identified three sources of cultural capital: objective, embodied, and institutionalised, whereas Ofsted were seen to specifically focus on merely character and diversity. When talking about character, Ofsted (2019) refer to the behaviour and attitudes of pupils and staff. This includes, judging the extent to which relationships among pupils and staff members reflect a positive and respectful culture. And when Ofsted talk about diversity, they are focusing on developing pupils' understandings and appreciation of diversity and promoting respect for all the different protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act (2010).

It was interesting to see how the academy had begun to incorporate cultural capital within the curriculum they delivered. The headteacher discussed the introduction of six key themes within the school which were all about developing individuals' characters. This tied in with the aims and objectives of Ofsted and the framework they had put in place in 2019. This questioned the inclusivity of the school and the extent to which the academy focused on the needs of its pupils as opposed to the needs of Ofsted and other public bodies. The academy could be seen as focusing on the needs and requirements of Ofsted through the way in which

the staff were seen to mention cultural capital when asked about their aims and the leadership staff often reported the DfE as having a particular focus on vocabulary acquisition.

Ofsted were looking to inspect schools based on their teaching of cultural capital and their diversity and ability to create a broad curriculum. Considering this, it was illuminating to see how the academy had only just begun to develop its curriculum in ways that would incorporate and give importance to the learning of minority ethnic pupils through the introduction of ‘vocabulary acquisition’. Ofsted specifically indicated that they would be looking at whether schools were able to provide a ‘rich and broad curriculum’, and this suggested that the academy was required to focus on the quality and variety of the curriculum as opposed to the levels at which pupils were working. In the school’s inspection booklet, it was specifically outlined:

*“As part of making the judgement about quality of education, inspectors will consider the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. Ofsted's understanding of this knowledge and cultural capital matches the understanding set out in the aims of the national curriculum. It is the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said, and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.”*

The school converted to an academy in the year 2013 and has since followed the national curriculum. However, it has only been since 2019 that the school began to focus on making the curriculum broader with the specific aim of creating a culturally diverse curriculum which allowed all pupils to obtain the cultural capital. The academy started to introduce trips and had



prioritised its learning with attention paid towards the community and its heritage. This highlights the way in which the academy was acting in a more business-like way, where its aims are to marketise and meet the interests of Ofsted and the DfE, who are focusing on learning about the community and other cultures, and as a result meeting the requirements of the inspection framework. The findings suggest that the academy was not always paying enough attention to the individual needs of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners as it frequently ignored pupils' home circumstances and had more of a focus on the teaching of the National Curriculum to meet the needs of the inspection framework.

Similarly, when looking at the Trust's website, it was stated that the Trust's main vision was for the development of the community, where everyone was included. The Trust's website noted 'we're not satisfied with the status quo where it keeps people trapped in poverty, or constantly at risk of inclusion' followed by a report of working with several communities affected by inequality to create change. This demonstrated the way in which the Trust were devoted to developing the community and looking at aspects of improving cultural capital. Subsequently, the academy school was dedicated to community building. The Trust could be seen as aiming to support and meet the needs of minority ethnic and disadvantaged learners, along with trying to meet the requirements and needs of Ofsted and the DfE, although these things at times caused tension.

Along with the development of cultural capital, there had also been a lot of discussion revolving around 'closing the gaps in attainment' and the way in which the Education Policy Institute (2017) explored the trends in the disadvantage gap. The staff at the academy were seen to refer to closing the gap when discussing economic and minority ethnic disadvantage. This

again demonstrated the staff aiming to achieve what was within government education policy. It is debatable whether the academy aimed to overcome issues related to cultural capital or whether the aim was to achieve what was desired by education policymakers and most particularly by Ofsted inspectors. Closing the gaps in attainment and cultural capital both go back to marketisation and choice narratives, where schools marketise themselves and act in business-like ways.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident the academy closely observed the expectations and requirements of the DfE and of Ofsted in relation to the way in which the curriculum was set out. The findings indicated the academy is focused on the expectations of public bodies rather than the actual needs of economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic learners. Cultural capital has been a common theme found within educational debates for many years, and it was remarkable to see the staff at the academy use the language of policymakers. This may tie in with aspects of marketisation and competition, where schools aim to meet the needs and requirements of Ofsted and other educational bodies to ensure they are in line with the regulations.

Research in the past has focused on the policies and framework set out by the Department for Education and Ofsted, however, it has not explored the way in which schools closely observe and use inspection framework to develop different areas within the school. These findings are important as previous research suggests that schools should support the learning of individual pupils. Corcoran and Kaneva (2021) argued that inclusive communities should be developed within education, where each learner is acknowledged as having unique characteristics and prior knowledge should be built upon to enable a sense of belonging that will in turn support

attainment. Previous research focuses on exploring pupil development, however, does not take into consideration the important factors that are involved in putting these structures in place. It can be argued that academies may be focusing on the needs and expectations of policy makers as opposed to focusing on the learning of pupils. Therefore, the academy may not be putting interventions in place that are suitable to their pupils but in fact are putting interventions in place that meet the requirements of policy makers.

### **6.3 Christian values**

The findings showed that the academy staff emphasized that it was driven by a strong ethos comprising of strong 'Christian values.' It was not simply the academy that instilled Christian values in the school, but it was spread across all the schools within the academy Trust. Christian values were a part of the school's ethos, and the academy was built on strong Christian values that included the academy's culture, beliefs, values, and vision. According to the academy school's website, 'Christian values are based on the Christian story that God is love, does not discriminate, and views all of us as different but equal, with rich diversity and equal value'.

According to the Trust's website (See Appendix Seven), under the section on 'vision and values,' the overall vision of the Trust was to ensure community-based learning in which all individuals felt included and were able to contribute to 'reaching their God-given potential.' Similarly, the academy school's website was seen to state that the mission and vision of the academy was to build communities where everyone was included and could 'reach their God-given potential'.

Chadwick (1994) emphasises the importance of a joint Church school ethos and how it is best formed through community negotiation. This demonstrates the importance of having a shared Christian ethos that is spread across all the academies. Teacher 1 explained how the academy had its own Christian values: *"Since we've become an Academy Trust, they have their own Christian based values that they've sort of fed across the chain, and they run into classrooms and into daily practise."* The school's ethos and values were identified on the academy's website, and they included being compassionate, considerate, forgiving, honest, hopeful, humble, joyful, patient, and self-controlled; it is important to note that these were not exclusively Christian values.

These values exemplified a powerful type of character development where children were taught core values and expected to apply them in their daily learning. Having a strong Christian-based value system has numerous advantages as studied previously by Holmes and Adams (2021) who explored the role of a headteacher in a Church of England primary school. Their findings highlighted the significance of headteachers' religious beliefs, how those beliefs affected their moral principles, and how those principles affected the contribution they made to students' learning. Although a strong Christian-based value system may be advantageous, it is important not to ignore that the academy may be perceived as lacking in forms of inclusivity because it is based on a value system that may not be compatible with the values of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged students.

Since the academy had a high percentage of minority ethnic groups in attendance, arguments can be put forth that such groups may have found it difficult to integrate into the culture of the school because they may be unfamiliar with Christianity-based values. The academy must re-evaluate its ethos to include values that other ethnic groups understand. Allen and West

(2009) report that they investigated religious schools in London and discovered that religious schools cater primarily to students of specific religions and ethnic groups, fostering segregation. Teacher 1 identified how the academy upholds strong Christian values:

*“We’ve always had the same like school creed as you like. It’s not a prayer because we’re not a religious school but it’s something that we all sort of say together at the end of assemblies and it’s sort of like a value-based understanding for everyone across the school, but since we’ve become an academy trust they have their own Christian-based values that they’ve, erm sort of fed across all the chain and they run into classrooms, into daily practice, erm, we have assemblies that we go through each month. We have the different value that we focus on”.*

This comment suggested that the academy's value system was heavily Christian-based, and that Christian values were instilled in classrooms and daily practice. Because the academy was deeply rooted in Christian values and they were used in classroom-based learning, this provides evidence of the potential for forms of segregation in which minority ethnic students may have felt excluded and unable to become acquainted with the school's common culture. Parent 6 discussed the barriers and challenges she and her child face when being taught about Christian values:

*“Yes, my daughter is only in year two I am not sure about the things they learn about Christianity, but we have to accept that in English schools our children will be taught about Christianity and I’m okay with that. I think it is important we also teach children about different religions and all the time at home I tell my daughter about Islam that this is what we believe as I don’t like her to get confused as in school, she is taught something else”.*

The above comment is crucial as it demonstrates the way in which the parent felt that her daughter was being taught different religious values within school and to avoid confusion, had to teach her Islamic values within the home to make sure she was not deviating from her own religious perspectives. It is important to note that the Institute for Public Policy Research (2017) has argued that there is no evidence that religious ethos contributes to academic achievement in schools, and therefore, this calls into question the effectiveness of the academy's use of a Christian-based ethos.

Teacher 1 was asked about the ethos and values and how they were incorporated within learning to which they replied:

*“Yeah, at the end of the year each class has a different habit to focus on and we nominate a child whose displayed those habits throughout the year, and they get a certificate at the end of the year for displaying those habits”.*

This comment suggests that the academy focused on different habits throughout the school year and pupils were expected to use these habits and were rewarded for these as a return. This demonstrates a strong value-based system within the academy however, it also calls into question the academy's claim that it does not impose Christian views on anyone, as all students were expected to present these Christian values.

Teacher 1 went on to say that they are not a religious school, and that the creed was mentioned during assemblies to ensure that students understood what was expected of them at school. This finding contradicts the views of the Leadership staff who portrayed the academy as having a strong Christian ethos. It is important to note Pike's (2010) research, which shows

that schools with a strong sense of ethos have higher levels of achievement, success, and overall performance. According to his findings, having a strong ethos within the school ensures that students feel accepted for who they are, which allows them to try their hardest and achieve.

With a strong Christian ethos in place, Leadership Staff 2 was asked if there was competition among the Trust's academy schools. They responded by noting the Trust's collaborative nature, citing one of the reasons for this successful collaboration as being due to having Christian values:

*“We’re very kind of collaborative, so there’s not really that kind of competitive nature within the academies, but I think that’s because it’s based on kind of Christian values and those habits and things are core and because it’s threaded to everything, that element is taken away”.*

The above comment provides us with an important understanding that the academy is founded on Christian values and that Christian habits are central to the school's operations. Leadership Staff 2 makes an interesting comment when they state that they are not a competitive school because their values are based on Christianity and thus that is their primary focus. With the element of competition removed, Leadership Staff 2 can refer to Christian values and their positive nature. Pike's (2010) research demonstrates the significance of Christian ethos for character education because it fosters a tolerant, respectful, and inclusive school. This can be viewed as a positive approach taken by the academy to avoid modes of competition and instead endorse a collaborative role with the Academy Trust. However, it could also

be argued that Christianity can be seen as a device, or a trope used to signal the virtue and worth of the academy's values.

However, this is debatable in the case of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged students who may feel unaccepted and, as a result, may not try their hardest or, as a result, may not associate themselves with the school's values. Cline *et al.* (2002) investigated minority ethnic learning in church schools and discovered that minority ethnic students could clearly articulate ways in which they felt they were different from their peers, some of which were negative. The most important aspects of their self-identity stemmed from their families and included various religious practices. The following section delves deeper into the Christian-based value system with the specific focus on pupils achieving their 'God given potential'.

## **6.4 Academy's Religious values: 'God-given potential'**

First and foremost, the information provided on the Academy Trust's website is critical because it specifically mentions pupils 'reaching their God-given potential.' This reflects the Trust's strong religious culture, in which there is a belief that all students have God-given potential, which is linked to strong religious values. This is a significant finding from what is presented on the Trust's website because Leadership Staff 3 was seen to mention this 'God-given potential' when asked about the academy's ethos and values, to which they responded with a comment about the academy being inclusive:



*“It’s about the ethos, it’s about inclusion and you know that every child has a right to an education and to be the best version of themselves and achieve their God-given potential”.*

This is a significant finding because it indicates that the academy is motivated by the belief that all students have a "God-given potential" that they can achieve. It demonstrates the academy's strong beliefs and understanding about ensuring students achieve their full potential. Leadership Staff 3's comment can be interpreted as emphasising the importance of every child having the right to an education and being the best version of themselves. This is significant because the academy has themes in place that are based on the development of pupils' character and are designed to give students the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This demonstrates that the academy places a high value on character development and has specifically linked this to religious values. It exemplifies how the academy's learning is closely linked to strong Christian values, where pupils can achieve what God has given them. However, because the character initiative was still in its early stages of development and implementation, it was not possible to assess its impact on student learning.

Pattaro (2016) explored the literature on character education and found that many studies agreed that character education played an important role in the construction of children's identities. However, there was also evidence from other researchers who have explored character education and have found problems associated with this initiative. Young (2016) argues that character education is not possible as traits are inherited and not taught. This can also be argued in relation to minority ethnic pupils who may have a different value system which they may feel is often ignored, and instead, pupils are expected to hold the dominant values put in place by the school.

Research by Filho *et al.*, 2018 indicates the importance of character development and emphasises individuals as having a positive outlook and a sustainable approach in allowing students to develop themselves and achieve their full potential. The phrase ‘God-given potential’ is not merely limited to the academy school itself. Through research and further study (Van der Walt and Zecha, 2009; Lane, 2017), it was found to be a common phrase used in many primary schools in England that have a strong religious creed. It can be understood as providing pupils with positivity and allowing them to know their worth and, consequently, encouraging them to work to their potential. This can be perceived as a particular benefit for minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners who may require the additional reassurance and belief that they can do well and succeed (Ruairc and Lumby, 2020; Pike 2010).

The ethos statement on the academy school's website indicates that the values are inspired by the life, message, and example of Jesus:

*‘The values themselves are inspired by the life, message and example of Jesus but we make it clear that we will not impose on anyone, the beliefs that underpin our ethos values...We believe that by becoming people who live this way, by becoming the best version of ourselves, whether we are a staff member or students, we are transformed, and we are also able to play our part in bringing transformation locally, nationally and globally’.*

This demonstrates the importance of character development within the academy. The academy has a strong belief in students becoming the best versions of themselves and reaching their 'God-given potential.' However, this can be viewed as a problem with a lack of recognition for non-Christian pupils who may struggle to understand what their God-given potential may be. The school's ethos and values have been stated on the academy's website, and they

include being compassionate, considerate, forgiving, honest, hopeful, humble, joyful, patient, and self-controlled; as already noted, it is important to note that these are not exclusively Christian values. These examples show a strong form of character development in which children are taught core values and are expected to apply them in their daily learning.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, although there are numerous advantages to having a strong Christian-based value system, the academy may be perceived as lacking in some forms of inclusivity because it is based on a value system that may not be compatible with the values of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged students. As demonstrated earlier, parent 6 stated that her child learned Christian values within the academy, which were different to the Islamic values they taught their children at home. This shows the important need for academies to take into consideration the various values that are appropriate to specific cultural and religious groups to allow pupils to be more familiar with identifying and developing their character within the school environment.

The academy may be seen as encouraging values that are not socially acceptable or as creating a culture that limits the child's opportunities. For example, children from minority ethnic groups may become acquainted with values that differ from Christian values and values based on their home lives. Furthermore, because the academy has a diverse population, it makes it more difficult to integrate minority ethnic students into the culture of the school because they may be unfamiliar with it.

The findings show that the academy was motivated by the belief that all pupils have a ‘God-given potential that they could achieve. This demonstrates the academy’s belief system that all children can achieve their full potential and in turn, is expected to help with pupils' character development.

## 6.5 Ethos and Values

The preceding section examined the academy's Christian-based value system. This section focuses on the ethos and values that were put in place to help support the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners. The findings demonstrated the academy’s ethos was based on 9 habits; these were explained by Leadership Staff 3:

*“we’ve got our nine habits. We have a habit every month and it's things like honesty, it’s about self-control and we hold assemblies, so, the children are aware of those, and we have themes around them. So, we try and link the habits to things that we’re doing within school. So, we’ll try and link it to the behaviour policy. We’ll try and link it to the learning that’s taking place, link it to the curriculum. And it’s about the ethos, is about inclusion and that every child has a right to an education and to be, the best version of themselves”.*

The above comment demonstrates that the academy attempted to incorporate its ethos into its day-to-day learning. This ethos was added to the school's curriculum to ensure that students were developing as individuals rather than simply academically. The findings back up previous research on the role of a school’s ethos in creating an inclusive environment (Brown *et al.*, 2011). Brown’s findings highlight the importance of the academy in addressing issues

related to social mobility and deprivation, which frequently prevent students from feeling included.

At a primary school in Wales, the ethos and values of the school were investigated (Casson, 2020). An inclusive ethos and culture were discovered to promote effective pupil participation. Over time, almost all students developed a stronger sense of belonging to their school. Many Key Stage 2 students were found to be capable of speaking confidently. This demonstrates the positive nature of having a strong ethos within the academy. Many researchers have also argued that all successful schools are built around a clear sense of vision and purpose. Barber *et al.* (2010) argues that one of the biggest contributors to success across schools is to set a vision for the school.

Research carried out by Pike (2010) at an academy school illustrates that the academy school in question had a strong set of ethos which ensured inclusion for all pupils. In his research when he spoke to the headteacher about pupil achievement, the headteacher explained how pupils come into school with many struggles as they may have “been an outsider, the youngster who has no self-confidence, the youngster who has no self-worth, the youngster who has a terrible time at home who comes here and actually gains confidence” (2010: 755). He explained how ethos is important in schools as it ensures that pupils have a good time at school and are accepted for who they are. As a result, they try their best to do well, which allows them to achieve. However, this is not always the case at the academy as the data from the parents illustrates the struggles faced by parents due to having a communication gap; this is something that cannot be overcome by the simple fact of having a strong ethos put in place.

The findings also indicate that along with the strong sense of ethos and values within the academy, there is also an emphasis on having a positive mindset when teaching and learning. Leadership Staff 3 indicated the use of positive terminology when referring to pupils. They reported:

*“All our table names are... we’ve got clever clogs, clever cookies, we’ve got brain boxes, they’re all kind of around those same terminologies so we promote positivity that everybody is clever in their own way, and you might not be good at addition, that’s fine. But you might be brilliant at multiplication, so this is why the tables change all the time.”*

According to the above comment, the academy promoted positivity and a positive mindset for all students, regardless of class or ethnic background. The academy promoted the use of positive terminology to promote positivity and inclusivity; however, it was unclear whether all students understood such terminology. Although the nine habits were used at the time the research was carried out (2019-2020), these were at the same time being replaced by a superhero theme. This was implemented in January 2020. Teacher 4 described the superhero theme and how it was used at the academy:

*“The new learning habits we’ve got four different superheroes, and we do mention it all the time in assembly, around the time of school. So, each week we have, we are doing an individual learning habit, so they can understand what that learning habit is, and by the end of the year they’ll have all them, we’ll be using all of them. So, at the moment we’ve done four and instead of just mentioning one a week we’re mentioning all four so that, they can start understanding and then as they understand what it is, they’re doing it in class which is*

*actually showing a massive input already and its only first half term, better than, better than the, erm, what was it, the nine habits”.*

The four superheroes’ themes included: Emotional Enforcer (perseverance and managing distractions), Captain Cognitive (reasoning and managing), Sergeant Social (collaboration and interdependence) and Super Strategic (which is about planning and revising). These themes could be understood to instil core values that are required when learning. This shows that the teachers believed that the superhero-themed ethos would have a positive impact on pupils’ learning. The superhero themes were also available on the academy’s website. These themes were put in place to develop the character of pupils. The superhero theme can be argued as being beneficial in promoting independent learning and this ties in with Farhat *et al.*’s (2017) study which indicated academy schools as being successful in supporting children to become independent learners.

The Trust’s website indicates that the academies within the Trust ‘place character at the heart of education’. Jerome and Kisby (2020) have recently explored the rise in character education in Britain. They report on the report published by the DfE ‘Developing Character Skills in Schools’. The DfE referred to this as ‘any activities that aim to develop desirable character traits or attributes in children and young people’. The research carried out for the DfE found that 97 per cent of schools confirmed they were promoting character, even though only about half were familiar with the terminology, and fewer than one in five had any form of plan or policy relating to character education (Marshall *et al.*, 2017; NatCen, 2017; White *et al.*, 2017). The superhero theme in the academy is fairly new and has been illustrated by the staff at the academy as being used to promote and build the character of pupils. There has been an increase in character education in Britain since the increased importance and emphasis placed

on it by policymakers following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010. There is an understanding of the need for character education in support of the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve social mobility.

Leadership Staff 1 referred to the superhero theme as building learning powers:

*“Yeah, our superheroes are building learning powers. That's not our ethos, it's our pedagogy, how we teach the children and it's developing them to become lifelong learners.”*

This indicated the growth of character education within the academy, and an important distinction was made between the school's ethos and its pedagogy, which was made up of the development of learning powers. Furthermore, there was a lot of discussion around the value system put forth by the academy. This is discussed below.

The staff were found to note the use of policies, such as mentioned above, in their day-to-day teaching and learning, this was an important tool they used to ensure that all children were valued equally. The policies were in place to ensure that teachers differentiated learning tasks, ensuring that every child had access to learning. This was evident in the comment made by Teacher 3:

*“In your teaching and learning policy for learning, you know to differentiate. To ensure that every child in that class can access, it's our job as a teacher that to plan our lessons and provide those lessons to those children”.*

This is particularly important, as it demonstrates that the teachers at the academy were aware of policies that were in place and ensured that they differentiated tasks for different ability



groups, allowing all pupils access to learning. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) illustrate three ways in which an inclusive practice can be ensured for all pupils. They argue for the importance of reducing the barriers to learning and participation for all students, followed by increasing the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of students in their local communities in ways that treat them all as being of equal value, and lastly by putting inclusive values into action in education and society. The differentiation of tasks amongst ability groups showed that the academy was responding to the diversity of students and treating them with equal value. The learning policy which was displayed on the school's website stated the following:

*“In line with the Trust's Learning Policy, we aim to give all students the opportunity to succeed and reach the highest level of personal achievement. We analyse the attainment of different groups of students to ensure that all students are achieving as well as they can. We also make ongoing assessments of each student's progress. Teachers use this information when planning their lessons. It enables them to take into account the abilities of all their students”.*

This illustrates that the academy kept a record of how pupils were doing, and this was through assessments to assess individual pupils' progress. These were used by teachers when planning their lessons. This again demonstrates one of the ways in which the academy tried to value all pupils equally and be inclusive of the needs of all pupils.

## **Summary**

The findings demonstrated the academy to have strong Christian-based values which were not only limited to the academy itself but in fact, were fed through the academy Trust. The

academy was seen to use modes of collaboration with other schools across the Trust to ensure they were providing the same ethos and values, which were strongly associated with a Christian-based value system. It was often reiterated by members of staff that the academy did not utterly impose these Christian values on pupils, which was debatable as the values can be seen used throughout the setting of the school and were particularly mentioned in all the assemblies that took place at the school.

Previous research indicates the importance of a Christian-based value system, as evidenced by higher success and achievement rates, however, it is not possible to say whether that is the case here. The academy may be perceived as dismissing the values of minority ethnic students, who may have their own religious values and beliefs that are simply ignored and not considered. This can result in segregation, inequity, and students feeling excluded. This demonstrates how the academy is geared toward the learning of those who are Christian, which contradicts the Trust's and the Academy's goals of providing cultural capital and educational equality of opportunity for all pupils.

## **6.6 Tension between LEA and the needs of the academy**

### **Barriers to Privatisation**

Another common theme found was the tensions experienced by academy leaders when focusing on the needs of the academy while also catering to the requirements of the Local Education Authorities. The academy collaborated quite closely with local education authorities,

with the Leadership staff determining local arrangements. Leadership Staff 3 was seen to juggle between making decisions that were best for the school and meeting the LEA's expectations and requirements:

*“There's still links with the LEA, there's still work that happens with the LEA because we're still part of the M local authority, so we've still got to meet their kind of objectives as well and their remit because we fall under their banner.”*

The above comment demonstrates how the academy retained some ties to the LEA and therefore was not completely privatised, which is the common misconception when talking about academies. Where they are not run by councils, academies are usually independent of local authority control. They are assumed to have control over their admissions, curriculum, school hours, and much more. This was a significant finding because the academy was seen to maintain close ties with the LEA concerning some structures. Although the local authorities are understood to play a less significant role in the school system, they are still required to play a role in local education provision, by ensuring every child has a school place; ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met; and acting as champions for all parents and families (Bryant, Parish and Reed, 2022).

The academy was able to obtain additional services and support from the local authorities, calling into question the academy's autonomy and privatisation. Tensions could be found between the academy having to comply with some of the LEA's standards, which reduced the school's autonomy, and the academy's leaders wanting support from the LEA, particularly with getting help for their disadvantaged students.

The Academy Trust was found to deliver services for local authorities and national governments along with self-funded initiatives. Since the academy worked with local education authorities, the staff at the academy were often found to express their concerns in meeting the demands of the LEA. This was also consistent with previous research by Thompson, Lingard, and Ball (2020), which investigated aspects of autonomy and discovered that Headteachers expressed concerns about their academies having less autonomy than was initially promised.

Cirin (2014), a DfE employee, has investigated whether academies were using their autonomy. According to his report, nearly nine out of ten academies had obtained services previously provided by their local authority from another source. This finding is significant because it demonstrates the autonomy of some academies, who can obtain services from other providers rather than relying on the LEA for assistance. However, the findings from this study suggest that the leaders of the academy felt they were tied to the requirements of the LEA since the academy was still a part of the M Local Authority. Because the academy was under the banner of the LEA, this calls into question the extent to which the academy was privatised and, as a result, indicates how the academy had to try to meet the needs and requirements of the Trust as well as the needs and requirements imposed by the Local Education Authority.

Giving schools more autonomy, according to Machin and Veroit (2011), has a positive effect. Machin and Veroit contended that increasing amounts of autonomy for academies increases economic incentives for all staff to perform better and allows schools to pursue innovative educational policies that improve students' educational attainment. The academy was able to use its autonomy by making changes to the curriculum that they taught by making it broad and balanced. However, the academy was struggling to make good use of its autonomy

in other respects because the school had funding issues and less control over admission processes. This is a common problem for academies because, where they could previously receive funding from LEAs, this is no longer possible, and they must seek assistance from private sponsors, which is often difficult. According to the Public Accounts Committee (2018), in areas where a high proportion of schools have become academies, local authorities' ability to fulfil their statutory responsibilities, including the duty to provide school places, has been undermined.

The comment made by Leadership Staff 3 illustrated that the academy had less autonomy as they were required to meet the needs of the local authority. The role of the LEA is to provide support services for schools along with assisting the government in implementing initiatives and legislation relating to schools. Evidence on the extent to which academies are using their new freedoms is mixed. A 2014 survey of academies by the DfE found that 87% of academies said they were buying in services previously provided by the Local Authority from elsewhere. However, this does not seem to be the case for this academy in particular, as the academy still has strong links with the LEA. This is evident in the interview carried out with Leadership Staff 2 who said:

*“We still do have contact with local authority, we still do our admissions through them and we still use obviously their SEN services, the early help. So, we still use a lot of things that local authority offers, and I think that’s really important”.*

The above comment demonstrates that the academy was still utilising some of the LEA’s services. The leadership staff seemed to view this positively, demonstrating the significance of

having links with the LEA, because it was assisting the academy in retaining important services. This finding is significant because it indicated the type of assistance the academy required and how it made good use of it. Although the staff at the academy were frequently seen to express their concerns and refer to the barriers they faced because of being under local authority control, this comment reflects how the academy was able to obtain adequate support from the LEA and, as a result, had additional workload lifted off their shoulders.

The academy was able to focus on its core needs while receiving assistance from the LEA. This demonstrates one of how the academy and the Trust were eager to receive additional support from the LEA. Leadership staff 2 also stated that the academy was not required to maintain a connection with the LEA; however, this was something that the Trust had incorporated, and the academy had to adjust and cooperate with this initiative. The Trust kept close links with the LEA and as a result, the academy did their admissions and SEN services through them. This is an important finding because different academy staff members were seen to have differing opinions on how much freedom the academy had when discussing the LEA.

Leadership Staff 2 went on to explain the additional support systems that the academy had put in place in addition to the LEA support. They specified the use of a middle leader's programme as well as shared collaborative practices among the Trust's academies. They also discussed the assistance provided to academy staff through conferences:

*“They have their own kind of middle leader’s programme and their senior leaders programme, heads programme, and executive principals programme so they have those built in. We have something called regional improvement networks so middle leaders get together*

*once a term, share good practice so what's going well, what's not going well. We also have regional and national conferences that can be all academies getting together with specific purposes in mind, so if they're seeing a trend across academies where there's some difficulties and it's kind of across the board that they'll put something in place, and we'll all go and learn together."*

The above comment demonstrates the academy's additional initiatives, in addition to the direct support they receive from the LEA. This can be argued to provide the academy with a broad and secure support system. The academy can obtain resources and work on the policies provided by the LEA while also fostering their own needs through participation in programmes and conferences provided by the Trust to enhance staff performance.

## **Conclusion**

The academy claims to have a strong relationship with the Local Education Authority, which is managed through the Trust. The Trust asserts its commitment to maintaining positive relationships with the LEA. However, the academy's leaders frequently express concerns and raise issues, as they are required to meet the LEA's requirements and objectives. This reliance on the LEA contradicts the principle of autonomy often associated with academies, as the school must continuously refer back to external expectations rather than exercising full independence. As a result, the academy appears to have limited autonomy, restricting its ability to fully utilise and benefit from its privatised status.

The Trust has delegated responsibilities such as admissions and SEND support to the LEA, demonstrating that the academy remains under local authority influence. This dynamic creates tensions between the academy's needs and those of the LEA. According to Wilkins

(2017), most academies have distanced themselves from LEA support by joining Multi-Academy Trusts. However, this particular academy remains closely connected to LEA provided support networks, despite being part of a Trust.

This chapter has revealed several significant findings, particularly regarding the academy's curriculum. While the academy follows the National Curriculum, it has been adapted to create what the leadership team describe as a "broad and balanced" curriculum. A key feature of this adaptation is the introduction of community-based learning which is organised around six central themes, including heritage (focusing on the local area where children grow up) and learning about different cultures.

The leadership team also reported the creation of a "bespoke curriculum", a phrase that is commonly used by policymakers. This suggests that the academy may be aligning itself with the expectations of Ofsted and the DfE rather than exercising full curriculum autonomy. Previous research has largely explored academies' ability to design their own curriculum, but it has not examined in detail how the curriculum is tailored to support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners. The findings suggest that the academy's curriculum is still in the early stages of development and requires further refinement.

Cultural capital emerged as another key theme in this chapter. While cultural capital has been widely discussed by theorists and educationalists, this study identifies a new and distinct way in which it is conceptualised within the academy. Staff frequently used the term when discussing the curriculum. Particularly, when referring to learning about heritage and funding allocation. This reinforces the observation that the academy's staff are using the language of policymakers.



Additionally, Christian-based values play a significant role in the academy's ethos. The phrase 'God-given potential' was frequently used by staff, and Christian values were embedded throughout the Trust's schools. While staff maintained that these values were not imposed on pupils, the data suggests otherwise. For instance, the academy promoted "nine habits" that are embedded within the curriculum, and pupils are expected to demonstrate these characteristics, with rewards given for doing so. This raises concerns that the academy may be prioritising a Christian value system over the diverse belief systems of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners, whose values may not have been fully considered.

Critical Race Theory provides a useful framework for evaluating the academy's efforts to support minority ethnic and EAL pupils. CRT examines how racism is embedded within systems, policies, and institutions including schools. It argues that the education system is structured in ways that often benefit White middle-class pupils while disadvantaging minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners.

Joseph Salisbury (2019) argues that educational policies, school values, and curricula frequently reinforce racial inequalities. The findings of this study align with this argument, as the academy's inclusion strategies tended to reflect dominant cultural values. For example, initiatives such as assemblies and face-to-face parent workshops did not fully consider the cultural backgrounds of minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners. This supports Salisbury's argument that schools must go beyond surface-level inclusion and actively challenge the racism embedded in their practices. A crucial step in achieving this is ensuring that minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged learners' cultures are meaningfully included. Additionally, addressing staff members' preconceived notions about

minority ethnic parents and pupils is essential, and teacher training programmes should be developed to challenge these biases.

While interventions such as the establishment of the “nurture room” demonstrate an intent to create a more inclusive environment, CRT highlights that such initiatives often fail to address deeper structural biases within the curriculum, teaching methods, and institutional policies.

The academy’s association of cultural capital with funding and competitive performance raises further concerns. Critical Race Theorists argue that framing cultural capital in this way risks perpetuating inequalities rather than addressing them.

To align more closely with CRT perspectives, the academy must move beyond promoting the idea of “fairness and opportunity” without addressing structural barriers (Bell, 1992). The frequent reference to students achieving their “God-given potential” overlooks systemic inequalities and may, in fact, marginalise disadvantaged pupils further. Instead, the academy must redefine its approach to cultural capital by recognising and incorporating the diverse cultural and religious traditions that shape the learning experiences of minority ethnic, EAL, and economically disadvantaged pupils. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient, a truly inclusive approach requires valuing and integrating the cultural backgrounds of all pupils.

## Chapter 7 Mobility: Transient

This chapter focuses on one of the interesting themes that were found within the data. This theme was mobility, and the ways in which pupils and staff often just ‘passing through’ the academy. This idea of transience and mobility was commonly found throughout the interviews with staff members at the academy. Mobility in schools can be defined as a child joining or leaving school before the end of their education or during the middle of the school year. Mobility in schools may be for many reasons such as: moving home, getting a new job out of the area or for other reasons like wanting to get better support for their children’s tailored needs. Mobility may also be common amongst staff members within schools for various reasons such as better pay elsewhere, not getting enough support, too much workload, better school environments, and so forth.

This chapter will cover aspects of pupil mobility where pupils leave the academy in the middle of a school year as well as, new arrivals joining the academy in the middle of the school year often speaking English as an additional language and the barriers faced by teachers when trying to support these new arrivals. It will also explore SEN mobility, and the barriers teachers face when having to deal with these kinds of pupils who receive pupil premium funding. The chapter will then look at the impact staff mobility had on the academy and how the academy staff must deal with the lack of teaching assistants. And finally, the findings will demonstrate how the academy has limited staffing where much of this is due to a deficit budget that the academy faced the issues around staff and pupil mobility.

To begin with, staff frequently emphasised how many staff members left the school, resulting in having limited staff availability to fully support minority ethnic and economically disad-

vantaged pupils. The data also showed that the academy had a high number of transient students who either attended the academy for a short period and/or were subsequently moving out of the academy to attend another school or area. This mobility caused issues for the academy, as staff expressed concerns about the difficulties in sustaining and managing the learning of these students. Crowley (2003) investigated poor children's school mobility and discovered a link between residential mobility and the achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Her research found that residential mobility has a significant impact on pupils' academic success. It was discovered that school-based strategies can intervene to reduce the effects of school changes for some pupils. We will now assess the impact pupil mobility had on the academy.

## **7.1 Pupil Mobility**

Dobson (2008) defines pupil mobility as a child joining or leaving school at a time other than the normal age at which children begin or finish their education at that school, whether or not this involves a change of residence. There is widespread agreement that mobility is more likely to be a problem for children who move schools for negative reasons such as financial difficulties or family disruption. According to Coley and Kull's (2016) research findings, moving to a new school is stressful for children and disrupts their academic skills as well as their emotional functioning. As a result, many economically disadvantaged students face school insecurity. It was interesting to investigate the barriers and issues the academy faced with students leaving and having frequent new arrivals.

The data indicated that the academy commonly deals with children moving in and out of school and that this had a negative impact on the academy as well as the pupils. Various research studies demonstrate strong links associated with pupil mobility and economic disadvantage (Demie, 2006; Machin *et al.*, 2006 and Herbers *et al.*, 2013). Demie and Strand (2013) have explored pupil mobility and attainment in primary schools. Their findings suggest that pupil mobility is strongly associated with low attainment in key-stage tests. However, when other pupil background factors known to be related to educational attainment (such as special educational needs and socioeconomic disadvantage) were considered, the negative association with pupil mobility was reduced by half, and it was eliminated when pupils' prior attainment by the end of KS1 test scores at age 7 was also considered. As a result, in that research, no evidence switching schools had a negative impact on educational progress during primary school.

Some of the teachers interviewed at the academy expressed concerns about students leaving the academy and then having to deal with new arrivals. Mobility was reported as a major barrier within the academy by Leadership Staff 3. They expressed concerns, which primarily involved children who attended the academy and then left. This is evident in the following statement made by Leadership Staff 3 when asked about the academy's challenges:

*“Our main barrier is mobility. We have lots of children who come and then go. They might stay for a month; they stay for a year but then they move on. So, that’s quite challenging. The high-level of SEND children are usually our pupil premium children as well, who are usually our kind of hard-to-reach groups as well. So, they fall under the same, they fall under quite a lot of groups so that, that, that can be quite challenging.”*

According to the above comment, the academy's main barrier was pupil mobility. The leadership staff was seen briefly mentioning SEN students on the Pupil Premium programme being the most mobile and how this was challenging. Machin *et al.* (2006) conducted research in UK schools and discovered that children with SEN were more mobile than children without SEND, and similarly, children from minority ethnic groups or EAL learners were more likely to be mobile. This appears to be a common trend in most UK schools and is not limited to academies. It is understood that pupil premium is an entitlement for individual pupils and, as a result, schools are not provided with an adjustment if a pupil leaves or joins another school. This is frequently regarded as problematic, especially given that the academy is already overburdened due to insufficient funding.

The academy can be understood as having pupils who come to the academy and then leave, which can be difficult for the academy's staff. Leadership staff 3 can be seen referring to SEND children and those on the pupil premium programme as "hard-to-reach groups." Accordingly, researchers and policymakers have sought a better understanding of which groups are most negatively affected by mobility and, as a result, which groups must suffer the most from academic problems and other social issues related to mobility. Gibbons and Telhaj (2011) have conducted research in English primary schools and discovered that immobile students with high pupil entry rates in their year groups perform worse academically than students where there is low mobility in the same school, and the disruptive externalities of mobility were found to be statistically significant. This exemplifies one of the many issues that schools face when dealing with high pupil mobility. High mobility rates can have an adverse effect on students who are already enrolled at the academy, as well as the 'mobile' students. Leadership Staff 2 noted that new arrivals are constantly arriving, with the main barrier being that new arrivals know very little English when they first come to the academy:

*“we’re getting new arrivals all the time so you’re probably looking at much higher than that now, you’re probably looking at around 35/36 per cent EAL and majority of them coming in have very little English.”*

Finally, while neo-liberal approaches to mobility often emphasise the benefits of strategic mobility, research has shown that disadvantaged students may be limited in their choices and be more likely to move for reactive reasons (Dobson, 2008). This emphasises the importance of understanding the socioeconomic and other background characteristics of mobile pupils and exploring their patterns of mobility continuously. The above interview extract demonstrates the main issue with new arrivals being that they are EAL, with most of the pupils coming in knowing very little English. Leadership Staff 2 was asked whether the new arrivals were local, to which they responded:

*“Some are having to travel a distance so, we weren’t their first choice but we’re the ones with spaces so, they then had to come in and take a place in our school”.*

This is an important comment because it first demonstrates that the academy is not the first choice for many new arrivals, but because the academy has places available, pupils have been forced to enrol at the school. Second, this comment is significant because it demonstrates that, while the academy has autonomy in selecting its admissions processes, the evidence above suggests that this is not entirely true. The academy's staff appears to have little control over which students attend the academy. This eliminates to some extent the element of autonomy and privatisation. This also illustrates the challenges of a mobile pupil population, as it is understandable that staff may be providing additional support to disadvantaged students

that require funding, and these pupils are shortly thereafter leaving. Then, because there are spaces available, the school is forced to accept new students. Not all students who fall into the disadvantaged category will be eligible for pupil premium funding immediately. This can be difficult for the academy, which must then balance the budget and funding available to support new arrivals. Moving on from funding arrangements it is important to consider the achievement levels in schools with high levels of mobility.

Demie (2002) has investigated pupil mobility and academic achievement in schools. Demie's research shows that the shorter the time spent in primary school, the lower the average performance. She also discovered that free school meals and ethnic background had an additional impact when mobility factors were considered. The study's findings suggest that when these factors are combined with mobility, the performance gaps between mobile and non-mobile groups widen even more. Demies' research shows that high levels of pupil mobility tend to depress school outcomes and have a negative impact on performance measures.

With the above in mind and since the academy expressed concerns about pupil mobility, it was interesting to learn what the academy did to address mobility issues and the impact on pupil learning. When asking staff how they overcame issues caused by mobility, the staff focused on the individual support they provided to new arrivals: such as one-to-one sessions on phonics. The staff were seen to disregard important factors such as individuals' home circumstances which may play a key role in the mobility of the pupil and are important to address to avoid pupils wanting to move schools. Dobson, Henthorne, and Lynas, 2000) have investigated pupil mobility and discovered factors that contribute to successful pupil mobility management, one of which is high-quality educational leadership: headteachers were found to



create a sense of collective educational leadership among their staff, who were committed to managing pupil mobility to maximise learning.

Dobson, Helthorne, and Lynas (2000) discovered that supportive school-local authority relationships were another important factor. These helped schools manage pupil mobility more effectively. Supportive relationships were based on high levels of trust. The local authorities felt at ease providing schools with the resources and freedom they required to respond to the challenges posed by mobile students. This highlights the advantage of having a relationship with the local authorities because they can provide additional support to schools to help them manage mobility issues. However, because of the academy's privatisation, it does not have as many links with the local authority as previously, which has proven to be a limitation of the academy school system.

Similarly, Demies' (2002) research demonstrates the various strategies that may be adopted by schools to overcome issues related to mobility. Demie surveyed headteachers and found common strategies that can be used like the following initiatives: staff training, parental involvement, analysing and tracking pupil performance to inform policy, language support for bilingual mobile pupils, and literacy and numeracy. Leadership Staff 1 at the academy also highlighted mobility as being the main barrier to learning and attainment:

*“Our main barrier is mobility. So last year we had 35 per cent mobility across the school so a third of our school left or came. That's our biggest barrier. But staff I think are very skilled in working with all children.*

The comment above indicates that the academy experiences high rates of mobility however, Leadership Staff 1 believes that the staff are very skilled when working with all children. Teaching Assistant 3 explained how they tackled new arrivals who are EAL. She reported that they did a lot of one-to-one sessions with new arrivals who speak little to no English with the use of phonics lessons.

*“It’s normally as a one-to-one just helping them. We’ve had a lot that don’t speak any English at all in and out. So, it’s just really one-to-one. Starting with basic phonics and things like that. The language barrier is the main issue because, just for instance, we’ve got twins at the moment and because they can speak to each other in their own language they don’t tend to want to speak English because they’ve got each other for support so they speak Urdu to each other and then, then they want us to speak Urdu which obviously we can’t “.*

According to the above comment, teaching assistants at the academy were hired to assist newcomers, particularly EAL, with basic phonics. Staff were required to plan for these pupils which included the basic English assessment, having additional group sessions take place outside of the classroom and then having to monitor, write up and keep a record of the progress of these pupils. This can be seen as a major burden being put on staff as they are having to carry out extra tasks and may be one of the reasons why the academy is having to deal with issues of staff mobility.

The comment also demonstrates that the primary issue, according to teaching assistant 3, was language barriers. Supporting EAL students with phonics could be very beneficial; however, it is far more important to conduct thorough assessments of these students and ensure their

parents are supported to ensure pupils stay at the academy. Additionally, because new students can frequently disrupt classrooms, the academy must implement important interventions to support non-mobile students as well.

Parental support can be viewed as a positive initiative to prevent students from changing schools. This is evident in the interview with Parent (6), who stated that her daughter started at the academy in Year 2 in 2019. She stated that she was dissatisfied with her daughter's previous school because it was not multi-cultural:

*“So far, I am happy. The teachers are very nice and welcoming. I like the fact that the school is multi-cultural, it has different children coming. The previous school my daughter went to wasn't multi-cultural and so I felt a bit left out. I found it hard to make friends or talk to other parents.”*

Parent (6) stated that simply having a welcoming environment for staff and students, as well as ensuring parents and students did not feel like outsiders, contributed to pupils and parents being satisfied with the school their child attended. This can be interpreted as a significant method of dealing with mobility issues. The parent's comment also demonstrated the academy to have a welcoming environment where parents feel at ease, demonstrating inclusivity.

Related to this, academy staff stated that when minority ethnic students who are EAL first arrive at school, they are subjected to a language assessment to determine their level of English speaking, reading, and writing skills. This is clear from the comment of Leadership Staff 2:

*“We also have a recently set up, because of our high need EAL group. Unfortunately, at the moment we can only run that once a week and we are looking at extending that next year into more frequent... so they’re assessed on a baseline, and we have an assessment system that tests phonological awareness of language acquisition... we assess that as a basis”.*

This denotes the steps taken to ensure that students who are new to the school are assessed and that staff are aware of the level at which they are working so that further arrangements (such as group sessions) can be made to support individual needs. The comment also indicates that the academy is struggling to fully utilise its interventions, which could be due to staff shortages and funding issues. This could be another reason why the Leadership staff appear to be struggling to overcome the challenges caused by pupil mobility, particularly with new arrivals. Leadership staff 2 discussed the use of baseline assessments to assess pupils’ phonological awareness and language acquisition when they first arrive; this can be considered beneficial as there is research to support this. Demie and Lewis (2018) and August and Shanahan, (2006) argue for the importance of continuous monitoring and the importance of assessments to provide the right targeted support at the right time to new arrivals.

When looking at mobility, Leadership Staff 2 also made it clear that the academy had a drop in the percentage of disadvantaged pupils that attended the academy, as was evident in the following comment:

*“We originally were quite high; well, we are still quite high. We are kind of 56 per cent originally. We’ve had a significant drop in that number in comparison. We are currently at 45 per cent I think it is. It changes regularly depending on admissions. The drop has been obviously because children have kind of moved out of the area and had to move schools and*

*then the children we get in, are generally pupils that are EAL and don't have recourse to public funds, therefore, don't qualify for disadvantaged pupil premium status. So, although our percentages drop, we've got an increase in the number of children who don't qualify for any kind of funding and therefore are economic deprivation status".*

According to the above comment, the number of economically disadvantaged pupils attending the academy had decreased, which was due in part to a large number of students leaving and new EAL students arriving. These students did fall into the disadvantaged bracket, but they did not qualify for pupil premium status. It is clear from this that the academy was forced to support many newcomers without additional funding. This could also explain why the academy was overburdened and struggling to put appropriate resources in place, as well as having a lack of sufficient funding to accommodate enough staff to provide learning for different groups of learners. Because the academy is dealing with new arrivals who require additional support, getting off to a good start is not possible without the use of additional funding to cover the costs associated with new arrivals. As a result, the academy is put under strain because staff time and resources must be diverted from teaching and learning to supporting these students. This represents the obstacles that the academy must overcome when new students arrive.

Mobility can be viewed as an issue for the academy, as it must deal with expenses, paperwork, and targeted interventions with little to no funding budgets for individual students. Teachers at the academy face challenges in that they must accommodate new students while also monitoring their progress. This can result in a significant workload for teachers who must differentiate learning. This is evident in Teacher 1's interview, in which they stated that

the most disadvantaged students were in their class and that this class had the highest percentage of pupil-premium children in the school. With the reasons being: home backgrounds, separated parents, and new arrivals to the country. The academy not only had to make arrangements for new arrivals, which included dealing with a large amount of paperwork and ensuring that the new arrival received appropriate support, but also had to deal with transient students, who were only attending the academy for a short period of time before leaving. This can be especially difficult when dealing with transient EAL students.

## **7.2 Staff Mobility**

Along with the mobility of pupils, the leadership staff were seen to express their concerns about teacher mobility. The findings highlight the challenges faced by the academy due to a high turnover of teaching staff. Leadership Staff 3 identified funding as a real concern and that they believed it was not just something specific to the academy but education in general. They reported that schools were worried about the deficit budget that schools would be in sooner or later and noted that they were trying to put things in place in advance to combat the deficit budget. They argued that, because of this, schools begin to lose staff and therefore, that the academy was very often stretched as it did not have sufficient staff in the school as compared to the past.

This highlights the academy's difficulties in retaining teachers due to a lack of funding. The academy was likely to have a deficit budget, and it appeared that the academy was having difficulty replacing or retaining staff. Loss of staff could be viewed as an issue because it af-

fects how the academy operates and calls into question the academy's ability to meet the additional needs of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners. Due to staff shortages, it is debatable to what extent economically disadvantaged, and minority ethnic students are supported both inside and outside of the classroom. Parent 1 (minority ethnic) that was interviewed noted that her child required additional support with his English and did not receive any help sheets with his homework and therefore, she relied on her husband to support their son with his homework. However, Parent 2 who was interviewed (economically disadvantaged) reported receiving sufficient support from teachers:

*“Any problems, parents evening and I’ve always approached teachers, and they give us an update on Maths and how to approach it. If I think I’m doing the Maths wrong at home, then I sit down with the teacher and say is this how you do it. It’s been brilliant, not a problem”.*

The comments made by both parents suggest differing views. It appears minority ethnic parents are struggling to get support from staff members from the academy whereas, economically disadvantaged parents found it easier to meet up with teachers and get help from them.

Allen, Burgess, and Simon (2018) investigated teacher shortages in English schools. Their research found a strong correlation between the level of school disadvantage and the turnover rate of its teachers at the school, and since the academy has a deficit budget along with a high number of disadvantaged pupils, this could be one of the reasons for the school's teacher shortage. There is an understanding that disadvantaged students require additional support, and with the high rate of pupil mobility in the school, this may put additional pressure on

teachers, creating tension whereby teachers do not wish to stay. Teacher 2 was found to illustrate her concerns around having EAL pupils join the academy and then having to find appropriate resources to suit the pupils needs:

*“We would love to have more staff in school that can speak a variety of languages but at the moment you would probably need about 15 staff to support the amount of different languages that we get in school. So, I know that's not feasible. I have a high number of EAL learners and the varying of it and obviously dialects as well are very different like we had a Romanian boy come with me in year 4 he's now in year 6 but actually he didn't speak Romanian. He spoke gypsy Roma which was really different. And so, when we tried to access some dual language resources for him he didn't understand them. So, it's really hard isn't it. But you would love to be able to get that support somehow.*

Given the constant mobility of teachers, this can have a significant negative impact on the learning of pupils at the academy. In line with this, Ronfeldt *et al.* (2011) discovered a link between lower student achievement and a high turnover of teachers. This reflects on the academy's overall effectiveness and the extent to which it is assisting in overcoming issues related to minority ethnic and economic disadvantage experienced by students because of the academy's structures.

High levels of teacher or teaching assistant turnover can be understood to consume the academy's economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere, such as for additional support for minority ethnic or economically disadvantaged students. The financial resources could be used to provide students with interventions and programmes that will help them succeed. As a result, other issues the academy may face include the cost of hiring or replacing



teachers, which does not help the academy, especially since it is already operating on a deficit budget. Staff mobility, along with funding issues, can be viewed as a major concern for the academy, and this is something the academy must address if it is to meet its original aims and objectives. Dolton and Newson (2003) explore the relationship between teacher turnover and school performance. Their study shows that high levels of teacher turnover have detrimental effects on pupils' progress and achievement.

The findings show that staff mobility has negative consequences on more than just pupils; it also impacts other members of the teaching staff. This was evident during the interview with Teaching Assistant 1, who highlighted the same concerns about the academy's staff shortfall and how it had a detrimental influence on the quality of support they could provide to EAL students:

*"I think my biggest barrier is, I'm sometimes told to go cover classes and some of the groups don't always take place because we're short staffed... I think this year, the biggest barrier I've had is that we've been mixed. I've got low achievers who are quite timid and so on. But then I've got some that are strong behavioural, or I've got a few autistic children in there that need a different kind of support, so I think this year that's been a battle to get a balance".*

The above comment exemplifies the difficulties faced by teaching assistant 1 at the academy who was responsible for supporting specific groups of students. They noted how difficult it was to support mixed groups of students with varying abilities, yet they had to deal with this because the academy was understaffed. This helps us understand staffing mobility issues and how minority ethnic students who speak English as an additional language and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are not always receiving the best support and thus

their learning could potentially suffer. The academy is sponsored and receives funding from public bodies, and because of this budgeting is more complex and challenging. In contrast, state schools may face less difficulty because their funding is managed by LEAs. This exemplifies the difficulties that the school faces as an academy with the autonomy to manage its funds.

Teacher shortages and staff instability can jeopardise students' ability to learn and can reduce teachers' effectiveness. Likely, the quality of staff (as compared to fully qualified teachers) may be reduced because of teaching assistants covering classes, which has an impact on the quality of teaching and learning provided to students at the academy. According to a recent Sutton Trust report (2019), one-fifth of teachers said that nothing could persuade them to work in a disadvantaged school because these teachers believe that disadvantaged schools are more difficult to teach in and require more effort and skill. The teachers in the report admitted that they preferred teaching classes with higher-attaining students because it resulted in fewer problems for them. The high mobility of students could be argued to be one of the reasons why the academy may struggle to retain staff, as teachers must deal with new arrivals and the numerous challenges that come with this situation, in addition to the academy's funding issues, which limits them when hiring more staff.

According to Reay (2017), while academisation is marketed in terms of increasing educational attainment, the true agenda is privatisation. According to figures revealed by ministers, half of academies in England do not have enough funding to cover their annual expenditure. This is a serious concern that necessitates immediate action. The academy may be perceived as struggling to provide adequate teaching staff to students, which is a serious concern. Additionally, because the academy has a high proportion of economically disadvantaged students

attending, and especially given the academy's high mobility rate, this can pose a real threat to disadvantaged students' learning. This exemplifies the disadvantage that the academy is facing as it gains more autonomy and undergoes more privatisation. This shows that privatisation and autonomy are not always successful and can be a barrier for schools to provide the best education for their pupils.

## **Summary**

Within the academy, student mobility and transience can be viewed as a significant issue. The staff at the academy reported on the high mobility of students within the academy as well as the transient nature of students who stayed at the academy for a short period before moving on to another school. Teachers were found to frequently express their concerns about students leaving the academy while also having to deal with new arrivals. Mobility of students and staff was explicitly identified by Leadership Staff 3 as a major barrier to learning within the academy.

The findings show that the academy has a high number of SEND children who are on the Pupil Premium programme and who are the most mobile, as well as revealing how this is difficult for the academy. The common issue found with the high mobility of SEND children is that the academy has a set amount of Pupil Premium funding, and no modification to this is made when more SEND children arrive. This could pose a serious problem for the academy, which is already underfunded.

The academy's staff expressed their concerns about many of the new arrivals being EAL learners and having to assist these children by providing them with a teaching assistant who conducts one-on-one phonics sessions to help bring pupils up to the normal English-speaking standard. Another significant finding in the data was that of the admissions process. Although

it might be assumed that the academy had autonomy over how they chose to manage their admissions processes, evidence from data shows that the academy had little control over admissions processes in practice because, when places were available, the academy was forced to accept students who would otherwise apply for other school places.

To conclude, the findings demonstrate that student and staff mobility had quite an impact on the learning that took place at the academy. The staff faced several challenges when it came to pupil mobility. Since the academy had an influx of new arrivals, many of whom spoke English as an additional language, this meant that the academy staff had to demonstrate their skills and find appropriate resources and interventions for the pupils to aid them in their learning. The staff at the academy demonstrated further challenges they faced specific to funding. The EAL new arrivals often do not have recourse to public funds and as a result, did not qualify for disadvantaged pupil premium status. The staff found it very challenging as these new arrivals did not qualify for any kind of funding. This meant that the academy had to budget its funding and use the resources it had to support these pupils. Furthermore, the findings showed that staff mobility was a real concern as the academy was often short on staff and consequently, were not able to run their groups outside of the classroom-based environment in support of minority ethnic (EAL) and disadvantaged learners. And this suggests that these pupils were not receiving the support they should enable them to reach their full potential.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis focused on a primary school academy in an area in the Northwest of England and explored the strategies used by the academy to assist pupils from economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds and those who spoke English as an additional language. In this chapter, I bring the thesis to a close. To begin, I recap the research questions that guided the research and discuss how this research has led to the discovery of some of the barriers and issues faced by the academy. I also discuss the autonomy the academy had regarding the choices it made and the actions it took and reflect on the extent to which the academy chose to utilise this. I then discuss some of the strengths and limitations of my research at the academy, as well as setting out considerations for future research. Lastly, this chapter highlights the unique and original contributions made by this thesis regarding the use of a Christian ethos to promote character development, SEND inclusion, inclusivity through cultural capital, and the role and impact of funding and barriers between LEA and the needs of the academy.

This thesis sought to answer four research questions concerning the ethos, values, strategies, and experiences of academy staff and parents. The exploration of limitations in the literature regarding the success of primary school academies documented in Chapter Two of the thesis prompted these questions.

1. What are the ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy school to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage?

2. How do the school's strategies impact minority ethnic learners (EAL) and those who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What are teacher's experiences of working within a converter primary academy school to support educationally disadvantaged learners?
4. What are parents' experiences of the academy in supporting their children's learning?

These research questions were essential as they allowed me to decide what issues to explore and what questions to ask during the interviewing process. I asked staff questions concerning ethos, values, and strategies employed by the academy in support of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. This was followed by questions specific to the strategies employed by the academy in support of these pupils. I also ensured I asked teachers and parents questions relating to what their experiences were in supporting pupils with their learning within the academy-based environment. Direct engagement and participation with academy staff and parents in interviews were required to achieve this understanding. Although observations may have been a useful methodology, they would not have assisted in gaining personal experiences, as required by the questions. Therefore, the most appropriate method was the use of semi-structured interviews to gain detailed answers to the research questions. I added to, widened, and deepened this data by also doing a thematic content analysis of the Academy Trust's website. In Chapter Three of this thesis, I discuss the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of the Academy Trusts' website and note the strengths and limitations of these methods. The success of this research was entirely due to obtaining detailed information from academy staff and parents, specific to the research questions. In the following sections I respond to the research questions that this study focused on, based on the findings from the research.

## **8.2 Reflecting on the academy's interventions: assisting disadvantaged learners**

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the academy's teachers, teaching assistants, associate heads, headteacher, and parents about the academy's interventions in assisting disadvantaged learners. After interviewing the academy staff, it was discovered that the academy had a strong Christian-based value system that existed before the conversion, but that continued. The Multi-Academy Trust instilled this value system throughout their academies, and they were heavily focused on maintaining a Christian-based value system. The academy staff were certain that they did not impose these values on pupils. However, the staff were found to have reiterated that all academy pupils were expected to reach their "God-given potential," which correlated with exclusionary practices as to some degree it disregarded the values of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who did not practice any religion.

Allen and West (2009) investigated religious schools in London and discovered that religious schools catered primarily to students of specific religions and ethnic groups, fostering segregation. Similarly, Public Policy Research (2017) have argued that there is no evidence that religious ethos contributes to academic achievement in schools. Therefore, this calls into question the effectiveness of the academy's use of a Christian-based ethos, especially since, the academy has a large proportion of minority ethnic pupils in attendance. The findings demonstrate that pupils at the academy were expected to develop themselves as individuals using nine habits (ethos of the school) which were based on Christian values.

The Christian values were reflected in the processes of the school, which included the curriculum, classroom-based learning, and assemblies. Students were rewarded for displaying these values. The academy had recently introduced a superhero theme (January 2020) that focused on four superheroes: Emotional Enforcer (perseverance and managing distractions), Captain Cognitive (reasoning and managing), Sergeant Social (collaboration and interdependence), and Super Strategic (planning and revising). These were based on developing the character of individuals, however, because they were so new, it was impossible to assess their impact on the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils. These themes can be considered as potentially a good strategy to support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners as previous research has shown the positive association between character development and pupil achievement. Hatton's (2013) study also demonstrated the significance of school ethos in helping to foster an inclusive environment.

The superhero theme also supported the recent character initiative launched by the Department for Education in 2019. Character education is believed to help students develop spiritually, morally, socially, and culturally, which is a statutory duty of schools as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. This duty applies to academies and free schools under the Independent School Standards (DfE, 2019). Based on this, I concluded that the academy was simply meeting the standards set by Ofsted and the DfE and that they were not doing anything to set them apart from other state schools. It is unclear if the values being taught by the academy's implementation of a Christian-based value system are inclusive and considerate of the diverse cultural backgrounds of minority ethnic pupils. Additionally, even though the leadership team has emphasised their commitment to diversity, they need to consider how parents and pupils of minority ethnicities may feel excluded if the school's value system is primarily centered around Christian beliefs. A balance between Christian beliefs and values



held by minority ethnic groups should be established in the school's value system. By doing this, inclusive practices would be ensured.

Moving on from the school's ethos, within the key theme of 'inclusion' lots of findings were found specific to the strategies adopted by the academy in support of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. It was identified that the academy had at the heart of its ethos, a desire and drive to be inclusive of all pupils who were economically disadvantaged, and who required special educational needs, and it was found to be somewhat inclusive of children who were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The staff at the academy were found to mention SEND pupils when asked about the inclusion of disadvantaged pupils. In the interviews with staff, SEND pupils were the first groups to come to their mind when discussing the inclusion of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. This indicated the diverse type of pupils that were perceived as being in the disadvantaged bracket and that it was not just limited to those pupils who were on free school meals or who were receiving pupil premium support. SEND pupils were the academy's primary concern when it came to inclusion, and this may partly have been due to the high percentage of SEND pupils in attendance at the academy at the time.

The staff noted that there were funding places for the twenty most vulnerable families within the academy and these involved SEND pupils. It was addressed that the academy was focusing on the twenty most vulnerable families as this was the current governmental agenda at the time. This demonstrated that the academy concentrated a great deal on the demands and requirements of policymakers. This acknowledgement of SEND pupils' inclusion implies that the inclusivity of these pupils was at the forefront of the academy's planning.

It was found that pupils were provided with diverse learning methods such as enquiry-based learning and repetition-based learning. These learning methods were put in place to help SEND pupils make progress and to help close the attainment gap between themselves and their peers. These pupils were also put on EHCP plans which set out a child's special educational needs, the support they need and what they would like to achieve. Male (2019) in his study found that simply listening to the voices of pupils with SEND can be a powerful tool to inform inclusive practice. The curriculum was also found to be based on the experiences and support of SEND pupils. The Leadership staff explicitly indicated how the academy had based its new curriculum in support of the experiences provided to SEND pupils. They stressed that the curriculum focuses on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and other disadvantages.

It is crucial to note that the academy may have been heavily focused on the inclusion of SEND pupils, because of funding allocations and legal constraints imposed by the Local Authorities and the Department for Education. The findings suggest, however, that the academy may have overlooked minority ethnic (EAL) pupils' needs and requirements because it was so involved in meeting the needs of SEND pupils. EAL pupils may need specific cultural adaptations to achieve academically. The school needs to make sure that all pupils receive support in order to ensure inclusive practices.

One of the strategies and interventions put in place by the academy was a 'nurture room'. The nurture room was set up in support of pupils who were not working within their year group or were significantly working below the expected level. Pupils attended the nurture room in the mornings up until lunchtime to do Maths and English which involved two adults and six children. The nurture room can be argued to be beneficial in supporting minority ethnic (EAL)

and economically disadvantaged learners who may require additional support with their learning. However, limitations could also be found with the use of the nurture room as it meant that the pupils who attended the group, missed out on essential learning that took place within the classroom-based environment.

Through further investigation, it was found that the nurture room was not something invented by the academy itself. Rather, it was a provision introduced by the DfE and was introduced in many primary schools to support pupils in years 1-3 who were from SEND backgrounds to avoid long-term barriers to learning and attainment. Similarly, another strategy used by the academy was the introduction of vocabulary acquisition. This intervention was put in place mainly in support of minority ethnic pupils who spoke English as an additional language. It is to be noted that Ofsted in 2019 developed their inspection framework which included emphasis on developing pupils' vocabulary.

Along with the emphasis on vocabulary, the academy proposed using baseline assessments to allow teachers to assess where children were up to in terms of their English language and speaking skills and by this were able to provide them with the appropriate resources to aid them in their learning. It is critical to recognise the significance of emphasising vocabulary acquisition because EAL learners frequently struggle with this issue because language constraints often hinder their ability to learn. Simply increasing the vocabulary of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils can improve their general academic performance, hence lowering the achievement gaps between these pupils and their fellow pupils. However, it is also important to consider that the baseline assessments proposed by staff were not something specific to the academy. Many schools in England use baseline assessments to assess the learning of pupils at the

beginning of the school year and therefore, the academy was not doing something that set it apart from other schools (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020).

Another strategy and intervention that was frequently emphasised by members of staff was the ‘hub’. The Academy used its pupil premium funding to support economically disadvantaged learners by establishing a hub; however, due to a lack of funds and staff, it was not in effect at the time of the study. This was a significant finding as it showed how the school struggled to put useful strategies in place in support of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners as they were low on funding. The number of ‘officially’ designated disadvantaged pupils had decreased, with an increase in the number of EAL pupils. This was demonstrated by the academy staff as being a disadvantage to some extent, as some of the EAL pupils that were coming into the academy struggled to get pupil premium status and this meant that the academy had to adjust their finances to accommodate these pupils.

Minority ethnic pupils received additional support through phonics sessions held outside of the classroom environment; however, teaching assistants explained that some of these sessions did not always take place due to a lack of staff. Funding was a barrier faced by the academy and was impacting the level of support provided to minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. This suggested that the academy did not have enough funds to successfully run the school and therefore, demonstrates that academies may not be benefiting from aspects of privatisation. It is well-established that inadequate funding reduces the number of educational resources accessible to minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils, potentially widening the achievement gap between them and their white peers. This is because minority ethnic pupils and those who are economically disadvantaged frequently do not have adequate resources outside of school to assist them with their learning.

Without enough resources, minority ethnic pupils learning may be restricted, resulting in lower academic achievement as compared to their peers. As a result, the academy's approach may not be completely inclusive of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners.

It was also found that funding tied in with aspects of transience and mobility. There was a high degree of staff and student mobility within the school. Staff were found to leave the academy, and this resulted in the academy not having sufficient staff to help pupils who needed extra support. The academy also had a lot of disadvantaged pupils join the academy at the time the study was carried out, and not all these pupils received pupil premium funding. So, there were many barriers faced by the academy at the time as they did not have enough funding, too many disadvantaged pupils joining without pupil premium support, and staff leaving. It can be suggested that staff may have been leaving the academy due to their workload, as often it was reported that there were high numbers of disadvantaged pupils in classrooms and teaching assistants were having to take on additional work which may have resulted in staff feeling overstretched. Welcoming new disadvantaged pupils during the school year may put a burden on existing resources and support systems as teachers attempt to meet their requirements. This can provide challenges with delivering interventions and access to appropriate resources for these pupils.

The academy staff often referred to 'cultural capital' when discussing the curriculum. The academy used the National Curriculum however, staff argued that their curriculum was made to be 'bespoke' and 'broad and balanced'. This was because it involved the introduction of six themes: who am I and who I am becoming, citizenship and the world, heritage and culture, STEM, community, and performance. Cultural capital was referred to often with academy staff identifying it as meaning having lots of cultural aspects added to their curriculum.

Much of this can be argued to tie in with aspects of globalisation where learning about cultures has become of increasing interest. It might be argued that the school established a broad curriculum that reflected the heritage, community, and cultures of pupils from economically minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, pupils from minority ethnic groups and economically disadvantaged families may feel more included and have greater educational outcomes. A balanced curriculum that includes heritage and culture can help reduce the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils.

It was understood that the curriculum was in its early stages of development, and this was specific to making it broad and balanced. The leadership team specified the importance of working with other staff members within the academy to share ideas on how the curriculum should be mapped out. They reported that the academy was not deviating from the national curriculum but in fact, was moderating it in ways to support pupils in a better way.

To summarise, the research question I explored was ‘what are the ethos and values and strategies employed by the academy to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage’. In answer to this research question, it was found that the academy had a strong Christian-based value system where pupils were expected to reach their ‘God-given potential’ and although the school had strong ethos and values in place, the values familiar to minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils were not always taken into consideration. The academy was also torn between trying to provide and develop an inclusive environment and education for all pupils while also wanting to meet educational authorities' requirements and supporting the education of all pupils. And, because schools are legally required to help SEND learning,

there was a strong emphasis on SEND pupil achievement, while the challenges of minority ethnic (EAL) or economically disadvantaged pupils were frequently forgotten.

The academy also lacked adequate funds, limiting the resources accessible to minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils, such as supplementary teaching assistants and teachers. This would not have helped close gaps in attainment and is something that needs to be addressed by educational authorities. The academy used a baseline assessment system to assess the learning of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils, and this was found to be beneficial in support of these pupils.

## **8.3 Supporting All Learners: Teachers and Parents Experiences**

### **8.3.1 Teachers Experiences**

There were interesting findings concerning teachers' experiences whilst working at the academy and supporting minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. Some of the teachers referred to positive experiences they had whilst working with the academy. They discussed how the support they received from the academy's network was great and specifically the funding they were able to pull together from the Academy Trust and resources to support the school. It can be argued that having a supportive academy network and access to vital resources can help create a positive culture within the academy where teaching staff feel supported. Other teachers discussed the barriers they faced when trying to access the curriculum and support minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners.

Some of the teachers were found to express their concerns about the curriculum being difficult to access, and that this generated several learning barriers. They discussed how the academy needed to adapt its curriculum slightly to better support disadvantaged pupils. The teachers discussed that the academy was aware of these issues, and it was something that the academy was trying to focus on and improve. The teachers believed it was not an issue specific to the academy but more so with the national curriculum. This gives evidence that the national curriculum may still contain bias and needs to be adapted more to suit the needs of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged pupils. To make the curriculum more accessible for teachers the academy could provide additional resources and training to meet the tailored support needs of minority ethnic (EAL) and economically disadvantaged learners. From the findings, it was evident that the academy was changing its curriculum to incorporate heritage and learning about the local community, which is important to ensure the education these pupils acquire is more relevant to their lives.

The teachers further displayed their concerns about having new EAL pupils attending the academy in the middle of the year and recognised there often being language barriers present. They identified this as a barrier for themselves as well as the pupils. They expressed how pupils would come in with trauma barriers, language barriers, being new to the country and so on. The teachers found this an issue, however, believed that the academy had a good system (which has been used since 2018) put in place where EAL pupils would do their baseline assessments quite quickly. The teachers recognised it was important that they built good relationships with EAL pupils and ensured that they felt secure and happy. These findings are significant because they demonstrate the academy school's dedication to promoting tolerance and diversity by inviting pupils from various cultural backgrounds. Because many minority ethnic pupils arrive at the academy with language and trauma barriers, it is crucial to note that



the school actively welcomes them by offering tailored support such as baseline assessments. Furthermore, inviting pupils from different backgrounds and staff developing positive relationships with them may have a favourable overall influence since it ensures that all pupils feel protected and supported.

In noting that language barriers were a key issue for EAL pupils' teachers also highlighted how they overcame them using Google Translate or pictures. The teachers also discussed having to differentiate tasks, especially with EAL pupils. They were often given a separate task because they could not access the current learning. This suggests that the academy was ensuring inclusivity by providing tailored support suited to the needs of minority ethnic pupils. However, we must not ignore that, pupils were provided with separate tasks from their peers, and this suggests that EAL pupils would have been left behind and expected to eventually catch up. Although differentiating tasks allows EAL pupils to access learning and ensure inclusion, to some extent it is not entirely helpful as this means there is a potential gap in the attainment levels of these children compared to other pupils.

Teachers also discussed the language barriers they encountered when communicating with parents of EAL students. They identified it as a significant barrier since teachers frequently relied on children to translate for their parents, causing misunderstanding among teachers and parents about whether the correct message had been transmitted. Language hurdles can frequently be a major issue in schools since they prevent minority ethnic parents from accessing key resources, reducing their capacity to actively participate in their child's education. To address these challenges, the school can provide professional interpretation services, creating an inclusive environment whereby parents and teachers can better engage with one another.

Teachers typically expressed fewer concerns about economically disadvantaged learners. The main barriers or concerns highlighted by teachers were around how having a large proportion of economically disadvantaged pupils attending the school, necessitated extra support with book bags and clothes. They reported the lack of resources to successfully support economically disadvantaged pupils. Teachers recognised that these pupils required additional support, but identified how that in itself would not be sufficient. Tackling structural barriers within the academy, such as limited funding, is critical since it would allow the academy to acquire the necessary resources to succeed. To assist in reducing attainment inequalities, the academy needs to provide additional training to teachers so that they may better understand the needs and expectations of economically disadvantaged pupils. One of the teachers described how their class had the highest percentage of pupil-premium pupils and how their disadvantages ranged from unstable home environments to parent separations to recent immigration, demonstrating that the situation is complex and requires a variety of interventions and solutions.

There was often a high number of disadvantaged pupils causing disruptions to lessons as they required one-to-one support, and many pupils came in knowing little to no English. Again, greater funding is necessary to ensure that the right kind of support is put in place. The academy would need to address the vast range of pupil-specific requirements, which would involve further assistance from teaching assistants. This could be one of the reasons for the academy's high staff turnover rate since teachers felt overworked and leaders were not able to give them sufficient support to make sure these problems were resolved. Given the large percentage of pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the academy should concentrate on meeting the requirements of these pupils. It is insufficient to prioritise the needs of SEND pupils over those of economically disadvantaged pupils.

Much of the extra support that was provided to economically disadvantaged pupils took place outside of the classroom-based environment. Since the academy had issues with not having enough teaching staff within the academy due to them leaving, the group sessions that were planned to take place outside of the classroom-based environment often did not happen. This as a result would have disrupted the learning taking place within the classroom and not allowed economically disadvantaged learners to access the appropriate level of support required to help close the attainment gap. It follows that financial concerns must be addressed since they appear to have been the academy's primary barrier, disrupting the resources available for pupils from low-income backgrounds. Additionally, this conflicts with the academy's mission to welcome all pupils.

Whilst exploring the experiences of teachers, the experiences of the leadership team were also found. This formed an important theme as new findings were found specific to the Local Education Authorities and the needs of the academy. The leadership team within the academy claimed to have a strong relationship with the Local Education Authority, which was managed through the Trust. The Trust claimed to be committed to maintaining positive relationships with the LEA. The academy's leaders were seen to express their concerns and raise issues as they were required to meet the LEA's requirements and objectives. This went against the autonomy principle and the privatisation given to academy schools. The leadership team reported their experiences of having to constantly go back and look at the expectations and requirements of the LEA and how they felt pressured to meet their requirements. The Academy Trust and leaders had entrusted the LEA with supporting the academies within the Trust, through processes such as admissions and SEN support. This demonstrates how the academy

was still held under local authority influence, causing conflict and tensions between the academy's needs and those of the LEA. It is because other educational institutions continued to have significant influence over the academy's processes, that it would be reasonable to draw the conclusion that the school was unable to fully enjoy its autonomy. This gives rise to debates over the value of academies and whether they are meeting their original aims.

To summarise, the research question explored was: 'What are teachers' experiences of working within a converter primary academy school to support educationally disadvantaged learners?' From the study, it can be concluded that some of the teachers had positive experiences while working within the academy. They felt they were supported by the academy leaders and believed it was great how the academy was able to pull funds from the Academy Trust to obtain resources for the school. This demonstrates teachers' positive experiences working within the academy setting where they felt they could get the resources they required to support the learning of minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged pupils.

Other teachers were seen to have had negative experiences and concerns regarding the curriculum not being good enough, or there not being enough or appropriate resources to support the needs of economically disadvantaged pupils. As a result, it can be concluded that additional support and training are vital for academy teachers to better understand how to support economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils. Baseline assessments were found to be particularly useful for teachers. Teachers also understood the importance of building positive relationships with economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic learners which ensures inclusivity for these pupils. It can also be concluded that the academy could support pupils further by providing professional interpretation services to ensure parents and teachers are able to discuss pupils learning properly.

### **8.3.2. Parent's Experiences**

I investigated the experiences and perceptions of parents whose children attended the academy. It was interesting to see the different opinions and experiences revealed by the parents. While parents from minority ethnic backgrounds felt less able to participate in the education of their children, partly due to language barriers, White British parents felt very involved and received adequate support. This demonstrates the inequities that exist in parent-teacher communication. Minority ethnic parents did not have the same opportunities as White British parents to express their concerns. It is also noteworthy that an uneven distribution of resources could result in teachers being more sensitive to the requirements of White British pupils, leading to the possibility of Minority ethnic pupils falling behind their classmates. To guarantee that parents as well as pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are better able to articulate their concerns, the school must establish an inclusive environment.

White British parents reported being given access to several Mathematics learning resources such as Purple Mash, Times Tables Rock Stars and Sumdog. The White British parents also noted 'ClassDojo', a form of recognition and reward given to pupils. Parents felt they were able to sit with teachers and get support on how to approach specific topics within Maths. White British parents reported not getting any help sheets with their children's homework, however, they were able to easily overcome this as they approached teachers. In comparison, minority ethnic parents were shown to be less knowledgeable of the school's resources. This reinforces inequality in the education provided by the academy, which can be seen as widening the attainment gap between minority ethnic and White British pupils.

This also demonstrates that the academy was not completely inclusive and had a lot of work to do to make pupils and their parents feel included. White British parents argued that since the conversion took place, the academy had not got parents more involved within the school, rather the level of involvement stayed the same. Some parents reported a parent's café which took place before the conversion took place, however, this no longer operates since the conversion. Some of the parents were also unaware of workshops that took place at the academy or the parent voice questionnaire that the academy carried out. It is worth noting that White British parents were typically able to give their children essential educational resources and take them on educational trips outside of school. However, parents of economically disadvantaged children being unaware of parent-pupil workshops held at the academy and that parent cafés were no longer held after the school was turned into an academy, suggests that the academy reduced parental involvement with the school. If parents are unaware of these workshops, they will be unable to obtain the necessary skills to teach their children, further widening the attainment gap.

The academy provided extra support to one of the White British parents who was interviewed. The parent was given support to complete a level two teaching assistant course at the school and had experience working at the academy (reception class). This demonstrates the support the academy had set up for some parents, allowing them to access professional prospects through the academy. The parent reported how a college employee travelled from the college to deliver appropriate training for the course, demonstrating that the academy had partnered with other organisations to deliver relevant training to parents. This is a notable finding since it demonstrates the academy's support for economically disadvantaged parents in improving their employment and economic stability. These classes may also assist parents

get more involved in their children's education; hence, this was an excellent initiative implemented by the academy that demonstrated the academy's commitment to closing achievement disparities and involving parents. Although this gives evidence that the academy supported the families of economically disadvantaged pupils by providing learning opportunities, it would have been interesting to find out whether minority ethnic parents also had the opportunity to access these opportunities.

The White British parents discussed how their children had access to after-school clubs, and they were happy for their children to attend. They reported that the clubs were very cheap as opposed to the clubs that went on outside of the school environment, such as football clubs which are often quite costly. Therefore, parents felt happy with the overall cost of these clubs. This is significant because it demonstrates how the academy provided after-school clubs at a reasonable cost, which parents appreciated. Economically disadvantaged parents underlined how affordable these activities were in comparison to other clubs outside of school. This is significant because it displays the academy's commitment to meeting the needs of economically disadvantaged parents by allowing them to engage their children in extracurricular activities.

In contradiction with this, the experiences of Pakistani parents with the academy were somewhat different. The parents I interviewed could communicate in English, however, two of them seemed to struggle a little with using terminology and therefore, I assisted them by asking them to relay what they were saying in Urdu or Punjabi. I asked these parents if they approached teachers for support, however they said they avoided doing so due to language barriers and if contact was needed, their partners would approach teachers instead. As discussed earlier this could exacerbate existing inequalities and the academy must work towards providing effective communication with all parents.

I discovered that, while Pakistani parents had some positive experiences with the academy, it was clear that they were unaware of how much they were missing out on by not being involved in the processes that would help their children progress with their learning. When speaking with parents from Pakistani backgrounds, I came to realise that there was a lot of alienation, which was due to them not being able to communicate properly with teachers and thus not receiving appropriate support. Parent-pupil workshops were set up to allow parents to come in and support their children's learning; however, teachers had doubts about ethnic minorities attending these workshops, and nothing was done to encourage these parents to participate. There are several consequences to this, including the fact that teachers' perceptions of minority ethnic parents' involvement might lead to decreased engagement, and that does not resolve the issue. The academy's staff must encourage parents to participate in their children's education, which can be accomplished in part by inviting parents to school and teaching them the value of extracurricular activities. Teachers' perceptions of minority ethnic parents are not helpful, but they do have an impact on the success of minority ethnic pupils.

It was also discovered that Pakistani parents were more likely to leave their children to complete homework tasks independently and were unaware of the additional resources that were available to children. This is important, as it suggests forms of exclusion where White British parents were aware of the resources available to parents to use at home to support their children's learning, whereas Pakistani parents were not aware of these additional available resources. This indicates forms of exclusion which could negatively affect the learning of minority ethnic pupils. It is understood that children of minority ethnic origins could be made more aware of the resources and workshops that take place within the academy by sending letters out to parents in their appropriate languages. Or, by simply approaching parents at



home time and letting them know what support is available to aid their children with their learning.

It was also common that amongst Pakistani parents there was a lack of awareness of the parent workshops that took place at the academy. These parents were more withdrawn from the academy's processes. Overall, it was clear that the academy was not doing as much to assist parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. White British parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds felt very much supported and aware of the academy's processes. Although they were at a disadvantage due to their home circumstances, they were still able to access the resources provided by the academy and approach appropriate staff members for additional support.

Pakistani parents were found to face obstacles when wanting their children to get involved. One parent particularly identified how her children attended Mosque classes after school and as a result, were unable to attend the clubs. The parent stated that their child had asked in the past to attend the clubs, however, was unable to due to the required attendance at the Mosque. This shows how the parent must juggle between what she deems important for her child and what her child's interests are. This suggests forms of exclusion that may be felt by minority ethnic pupils as they are unable to attend clubs due to other commitments.

In conclusion, we focused on the research question 'What are parents' experiences of the academy in supporting their children's learning?'. White British parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds had a more favourable experience than Pakistani parents who spoke English as an additional language. White British parents reported receiving adequate support from teaching staff and finding teachers approachable, whereas Pakistani parents

found it difficult to communicate effectively with teachers and were unable to obtain the help required to support their child's learning. The academy had programmes in place to assist economically disadvantaged parents in enrolling in teaching assistant courses, which would help improve their employment and economic stability. This was good, but more needs to be done to support minority ethnic parents, such as English language courses in which EAL parents can participate.

## **8.4 Strength, Limitations and Future Research**

Using a case study analysis and semi-structured interviews, I was able to investigate the structures of a primary school academy in a low-income region of Greater Manchester in a novel way compared to previous research. After immersing myself in the academy, I was able to gather rich and detailed data that allowed for the collection of meaningful responses. It has enabled me to provide an in-depth analysis of the academy and to identify key issues and how they might be addressed.

This research study, much like others, has some limitations. Firstly, the limited time I had to conduct the research, with the added issue of Covid-19, was challenging. It took a long time to find a school willing to participate in this study. It was difficult because I was limited to finding only an academy school in a deprived town or city, so emailing and approaching schools to participate in this study was a time-consuming process requiring patience. Following successful recruitment, I had to return to the academy on several occasions to extend invitations to potential participants, and it often took weeks to hear back from them. All of this took longer than I anticipated it would, and I will take this learning forward into any future research.

I had initially wanted to interview parents from different minority ethnic backgrounds such as Bangladeshi and Indian parents. However, these parents did not accept my invitation to take part in the study and as a result, I was just limited to one minority ethnic group which provides a one-sided understanding of parent's experiences as opposed to receiving more varied responses from different minority groups. I interviewed White British parents alongside Pakistani parents to allow for comparisons. Future research would benefit from interviewing parents from Bangladeshi and Indian or other minority ethnic communities to learn about their children's participation in academies. It would also be interesting to conduct research at two different academies within a Multi-academy Trust to examine how collaborative the academies are and how beneficial they are, to see if this produces different or similar findings to those reported here.

Importantly, a key limitation I had was that I began conducting interviews near the close of 2019, and they continued into 2020 when a lockdown blocked further access to the school. As a result, data gathering had to be halted, preventing me from completing the number of interviews I had originally intended. Due to the pandemic and the safety of students and staff, the school closed its doors. When the school reopened, the leadership team refused to allow me to return and finish the interviews. This meant that I was unable to do the 15-20 interviews with parents that I had intended to do and was not able to talk to all the staff or do any follow-up interviews with them. However, I was pleased with the interviews I conducted because they yielded a wealth of new information, including around inclusion, cultural capital, which was mentioned in a new and distinct way, the language of policymakers, 'God-given potential', tensions between LEA and needs of the academy, and staff and pupil mobility.

These new contributions to research were identified through the help of semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the academy school and Trusts websites where I was able to gather some important and relevant data.

Recognising and being aware of my influence on the research process, and the subjective nature of research was another issue I encountered. I am from a Pakistani minority ethnic group, and, understandably, this may have impacted the responses I got from parents and staff at the academy. When interviewing White parents, I often had parents stating that they liked the way the academy was 'multicultural'. It is understood that to an extent I may have received certain 'socially desirable' responses from participants due to my ethnicity. Teaching staff also gave more answers specific to 'minority ethnic pupils' as opposed to economically disadvantaged learners. This is where observations may have been more useful and may have avoided this issue and responses informed by subjectivity to some extent. According to Diefenbach (2009), qualitative research is more exposed to the potentially detrimental effects of subjectivity on the research. He stated that this is because social sciences deal with matters that are personal to the researcher.

When conducting interviews with parents and staff, I frequently had to pause to avoid giving any opinions. This was because I was conducting semi-structured interviews, which required a more conversational approach. Similarly, when conducting data analysis, I had to ensure that I set aside my viewpoints and perspectives and, as a result, looked at the data from a variety of perspectives rather than focusing on just one. Further, often, the data gathered from the interviews was then compared to the data available on the academy's website to see if there were any similarities in what was said there compared to the interviews, and this was very useful.

The research findings can also be seen as limited to some extent as they have only provided information specific to one academy and are, therefore, not generalisable. It cannot be guaranteed that the limitations in the support provided to academically disadvantaged and minority ethnic students will be replicated across all academies. In future research, it would be beneficial to carry out multiple case studies, which would allow several different academies within deprived towns in England to be studied. It would be useful to use both observations and interviews to gather detailed information from the academy schools.

## **8.5 Considering Original Contribution**

This thesis makes several original contributions to research, and this was through the help of semi-structured interviews and the use of case study analysis. The case study analysis allowed me to immerse myself in the academy and carry out interviews with staff and parents. This approach has enabled me to present a detailed account of the support provided to economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic (EAL) learners while keeping the original goals of academies in mind - of creating inclusive and mixed-ability schools – in this thesis.

Previous research by Ramberg et al. (2021) has discovered that students with lower results came from less favourable family backgrounds and received less academic encouragement, less access to support from the home, poorer economic conditions, and poorer language conditions. Ramberg et al. stated that such students would benefit from attending a school with a strong ethos, encouragement from teachers, and high expectations for academic performance. After interviewing academy staff, it became clear that, while the academy claimed to have a strong Christian ethos in place with the emphasis on pupils having ‘God-given potential’ it

was not entirely helpful. Much of the Christian ethos was used to promote character development and this was with a superhero theme, which previous research has shown to be beneficial (Pike, 2010). However, in this academy, I claim was not entirely beneficial. It can be argued that such an approach was insufficient to support economically disadvantaged and to an even greater extent minority ethnic learners (EAL), with the negative impact that this had because it reproduced minority ethnic inequalities.

The academy having a strong Christian ethos, did not demonstrate forms of inclusivity but more so exclusivity where the religions of other groups of pupils were not given as much importance with the academy being founded on Christian values. This is something to consider because the academy claimed to be inclusive but proved not to be because it did not take enough account of the beliefs and values of minority ethnic students. This was also evident through the lack of parental involvement, pupil and parent language barriers, lack of funding to support pupils of disadvantaged backgrounds, and the continued use of the national curriculum, despite teachers believing it did not support minority ethnic and economically disadvantaged learners.

Another key contribution to the research was chapter 5 which explored the findings around 'inclusion'. Inclusion was a key theme which produced many distinct findings specific to SEND inclusion which have not been presented before. Inclusion was identified and labelled in various forms such as: SEND, minority ethnic, economic disadvantage, parental inclusion, and inclusion through resources. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities inclusion specifically was a significant finding as teaching staff always seemed to refer to the support, they provided pupils with SEND although the questions I posed were mainly around minority ethnic (EAL) and economic disadvantage.

When considering minority ethnic inclusion, it was intriguing to note that teachers frequently stated having 'lots of cultural capital' in their curriculum and learning. Cultural capital was defined in a novel and different approach, which I refer to as 'inclusive cultural enhancement'; this is an original contribution to research. It was frequently discovered to be associated with inclusive education for minority ethnic pupils and EAL learners. The academy staff discussed having many cultural initiatives in place to include minority ethnic pupils and help overcome achievement gaps. Staff members also linked cultural capital to ensuring that pupils had access to after-school clubs and trips, among other things. The term 'inclusive cultural enhancement' refers to the idea of providing minority ethnic and EAL pupils with a diverse range of cultural experiences, support systems (teaching staff), and school resources to enable inclusive practice for all pupils. It emphasises the necessity of identifying and valuing diversity while also supporting the enrichment of pupils' cultural knowledge, abilities and social capital.

The academy's leadership team made it clear that the academy was particularly focused on the concept of cultural capital and expressed a desire to equip pupils with educational resources and opportunities to enhance pupils' overall development and help prepare them for future success. This is consistent with the classic definition of cultural capital by Bourdieu, which encompasses resources, skills, and cultural knowledge. The research supports a holistic approach to cultural capital, with a special emphasis on providing pupils with a varied range of learning opportunities, such as subsidising trips and extracurricular activities. The academy's strategy can be interpreted as ensuring that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether minority ethnic or EAL, have access to chances for academic and personal growth.

My research contributes to theoretical development by broadening our understanding of cultural capital. The findings illustrate its practical applications in the academic setting. My findings showed a deeper awareness of how cultural capital could be used to alleviate educational disparities and improve outcomes for minority ethnic and EAL pupils. This was interpreted with the academy's implementation of several support systems, including more teaching assistants and teachers, as well as cultural enhancements such as learning about local heritage and subsidising school trips. All these measures were implemented to close attainment gaps.

According to the findings, most of what the academy needed to give to minority ethnic and EAL learners for them to acquire cultural capital was tied to insufficient funding. And, while the academy staff attempted to provide pupils with a variety of opportunities to develop their cultural capital, there were often barriers due to the academy's lack of funding. The academy staff highlighted the lack of resources to hire additional teaching assistants to support pupils, and as a result, extracurricular activities were frequently cancelled. It is known that schools with more funds may be able to provide a broader selection of enrichment programmes that might help students develop their cultural understanding and social skills. As a result, the academy must improve its understanding of how to manage funds so that minority ethnic and EAL learners can gain cultural capital and access to additional cultural experiences.

Another key finding was concerning economic and minority ethnic disadvantage within the theme of inclusion. It was found that the academy had a high percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils in attendance. However, not all these pupils were receiving pupil premium support and for this reason, the academy was often overstretched with funding a significant issue along with not having enough staff members to support these pupils. Additionally, it was found that the academy was not doing enough to encourage minority ethnic parents to



participate in the academy and that parents of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils had less communication with academy teachers. These findings point to considerable variations in support for learning and communication within the academy concerning minority ethnic parents.

The lack of communication between teachers and minority ethnic parents indicates the need for initiatives to promote collaboration between teachers and minority ethnic parents. The academy must also strengthen its communication efforts so that minority ethnic parents feel comfortable talking with teachers. This could be achieved by assisting with translation. By addressing these issues, it could help to ensure inclusivity for minority ethnic parents. These findings are important because they draw attention to issues that perpetuate inequality within educational institutions, thereby advancing sociological understanding.

Even though the academy's staff members believe the school is very inclusive, which it certainly is to some level, much more needs to be done to ensure inclusion when dealing with minority ethnic parents. The results shed light on the complexity of educational disparities by showing how various elements, such as the allocation of funds, the communication barriers with parents who belong to minority ethnic groups and the support systems available to pupils from low-income families can all impact pupil inclusion and equality. Through the identification of these patterns, policymakers as well as educators can acquire a greater understanding of the key factors behind educational disparity and attempt to implement targeted strategies that foster inclusivity and equality within educational settings.

The research I carried out, found new findings specific to the leadership team within the academy and how they struggled to fulfil the requirements of the LEA whilst at the same time trying to use their autonomy to create their own processes within the academy. Tensions were

found between the needs of the academy and the expectations the LEA had set out for the academy. This finding was very important as it has shown that academies may not, after all, have the autonomy they are claimed to have. They are still tied to and around the requirements set out by Ofsted, the Department for Education, and the Local Authorities. This is an issue within academy schools and is something that needs to be addressed as it may place strains on staff and hinder the amount of support staff can provide to economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils.

Staff at the academy made it evident that they had to meet the requirements of the DfE, Ofsted and the Local Education Authorities that often took away the autonomy and the supposed benefits of privatisation that the leadership team felt they were given as part of being an academy. This particularly gives evidence that academies are not ‘all about’ privatisation and autonomy. They are still very much tied by those in authority (OFSTED, Local Authority and DFE) looking over them and somewhat holding their control over them. So, the question to be asked is, do academies have autonomy? From my research findings, it is clear that this academy only had limited autonomy, and that the academy struggled with juggling between creating their processes whilst feeling pressured by those in authority and the need to meet their requirements.

A key struggle for the academy was with funding, and the leadership team frequently discussed the deficit budget under which they were operating. Although the academy had interventions in place, such as a hub where groups were to take place to support disadvantaged pupils' learning, these were not fully incorporated because the academy had insufficient funding to operate and staff them. According to Reay (2017), the purpose of academy schools was

to provide teachers with greater autonomy over how they choose to teach and the strategies they employ to deliver education, and this is not happening in practice. My findings support Reay's points and go further as they demonstrate the relationship between funding and the level of autonomy that academy school teachers may have.

Having discussed my original contribution to research I will now discuss what future research should explore. Future research should investigate more than one academy in various economically disadvantaged towns to see whether funding, staffing, autonomy and privatisation issues, are commonly experienced by staff in primary school academies. I also believe that researching academy schools using observations and interviews is vital because it allows for a significantly more deep and detailed understanding of what is going on within the academy school.

Future research should explore in more detail the extent to which the Local Authorities, the Department for Education and Ofsted have control over the procedures that take place within academy schools. It should also explore the role of funding which may be something commonly experienced by academies and specifically, the impact that COVID-19 has had on the restarting of schools after the pandemic. It is understood that the academy may have had to suffer from further difficulties after the school was closed due to the pandemic and the impact this would have had on the widening of the attainment gap between economically disadvantaged/minority ethnic and other pupils.

Additional research could be conducted on the long-term impact and influence of cultural capital and the concept of 'inclusive cultural enhancement', as well as longitudinal studies on the academic achievement of minority ethnic (EAL) pupils. Longitudinal research could help

to determine whether giving minority ethnic pupils cultural experiences and incorporating culture into the school curriculum improves pupils' academic progress. This would require several years of research to determine academic achievement among minority ethnic pupils.

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# Appendices

## Appendix One: Participant Information Sheets

### Parents

#### Participant information sheet:

##### Study title

**‘An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged’**

##### Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like additional information. Please take your time to decide if you would like to take part in the research. The study looks to explore parents’ experiences of their children’s attendance at an academy school.

##### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to get an understanding of how involved you feel as a parent of a child that is attending the academy school. It wants to find out how you feel, in terms of the ways in which the academy school supports your child with their learning. The study is for educational purposes, and the researcher is carrying out the study to complete a PhD project.

##### Why have I been invited?

The parents of pupils at the academy school have been asked to take part in the study based on their availability and willingness to take part in it. Your involvement in the research study will allow the interviewer to have an understanding of what the academy school is doing to support your child with their learning.

##### Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study. The interviewer will describe the nature of the study and go through the information sheet with you. You will then be asked to sign an informed consent form to show that you have agreed to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw (remove yourself) from the study at any point, which includes after the point at which data has been collected and analysed. However, the interview data cannot be withdrawn (taken away) once the thesis has been finalised and submitted to the examiners.

##### What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed on one occasion. The interview will last around 30–45 minutes (no longer than an hour). The interviewer will ask the participant a few questions in relation to their child's learning at the academy school. The participant will be given time to answer. The interview will be recorded using an audio device once you have given consent. All information recorded will be kept private and confidential, with only the researcher having access to it. The interviewer will make sure the recordings are locked on a password-protected device and they will be deleted once the research process is complete.

### **Travel expenses**

No travel expenses will be involved in this study as participants are to be interviewed within the school environment.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no risks involved in the study and the interviewer does not intend to cause any type of harm to the individuals taking part in the study. However, as the topic under discussion is in relation to issues of inequalities and deprivation, there is a possibility that a participant may become upset. If this happens, then the interview will be stopped, and the tape recorder will be switched off to allow the participant to calm down. If participants are upset, they will be given access to appropriate support services (if further support is required). The links to those services are provided at the bottom of this sheet (see 'Further support').

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The researcher cannot promise this study will help you. However, the information the researcher gets from the study will help to increase the researcher's knowledge in relation to how the academy school operates.

### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researcher (\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*, email: \*\*\*\*\*@edu.salford.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, you can do so by contacting the Research Supervisor (\*\*\*\*\*, 0161 295 \*\*\*\* E\*\*\*\*\*@salford.ac.uk). If the matter is still not resolved, please forward your concerns to Professor Susan McAndrew, Chair of the Health Research Ethical Approval Panel, Room MS1.91, Mary Seacole Building, Frederick Road Campus, University of Salford, Salford, M6 6PU. Tel: 0161 295 2778. E: s.mcandrew@salford.ac.uk

### **Further support:**

**Childcare support:** <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs>

**Support for parents and carers:** <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/parent-support/>

**Trafford Family Information Service:** <https://www.trafforddirectory.co.uk/kb5/trafford/fsd/service.page?id=IF414N9vuKU&newfamilychannel=3>

### **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**

All information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any names, addresses and personal information gathered will be removed. The collection, storage, and disposal of the data will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR

and Data Protection Act 2018. Data stored electronically will be saved on a password-protected computer device at the University of Salford. All signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office. Digital recordings will be deleted on completion of the study. The data collected from the interviews will be anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher and research team. Participants will be given a participant number which they will be mentioned by in the data. The data will only be used for the purpose of this study. It will be kept for approximately two years, depending on the length of the PhD. All data will be destroyed on completion of the study.

**What will happen if I don't continue with the study?**

If you withdraw from the study, all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be deleted and your name removed from all the study files.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be presented truthfully and accurately. They will be included in the PhD thesis that the researcher intends to complete. The results of the study will be available to all participants. If you wish for these to be made available to you, please email the researcher: xxxxxxxx@edu.salford.ac.uk

The results are not to be identified in any report or publication unless the participant has given their consent.

**Who is organising or sponsoring the research?**

The University of Salford is organising the research. All research carried out is in line with the ethical agreement of the University of Salford.

**Further information and contact details**

Contact details of the researcher:

E: \*\*\*\*\*@edu.salford.ac.uk

E: m.awan1@edu.salford.ac.uk

## Participant Information Sheet Teachers

### Participant information sheet:

#### Study title

**‘An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged’**

#### Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like additional information. Please take your time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in the research. The study aims to explore the types of strategies used by academy schools and their teachers to overcome issues related to educational disadvantages experienced by pupils. It looks to investigate the extent to which the academy school system supports pupils who are underperforming, and those who may not have English as their first language.

#### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to gain a detailed understanding of the ways in which an academy school operates and how it can support disadvantaged children in overcoming issues related to learning and language barriers. The study is for educational purposes; the researcher is carrying out the study for the purpose of completing a PhD project.

#### Why have I been invited?

The teachers at the academy school have been asked to take part in the study as they are likely to be familiar with the school's structures. Potential participants have been selected based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study. Your involvement in the research study will allow the researcher to successfully generate an understanding of the extent to which a primary school academy can support educationally disadvantaged learners.

#### Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is entirely up to you whether or not you wish to participate in the study. The researcher will describe the nature of the study and go through the information sheet with you. You will then be asked to sign an informed consent form to show that you have agreed to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any point, including after the data have been collected and analysed. However, the interview data cannot be withdrawn once the final submission of the thesis has been completed and the work has been sent to examiners.

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed on one occasion. The interview is expected to last around 30–45 minutes (no longer than an hour). The researcher will ask a number of questions to the participant in relation to the academy school. The participant will be given time to answer. The interview will be recorded using an audio device, subject to the participants prior consent. All information recorded will be kept confidential, with only the researcher having access to the recordings. The researcher will ensure the recordings are locked on a password-protected device, and they will be deleted once the research process is complete.

### **Expenses and payments?**

No travel expenses will be involved in this study as participants are to be interviewed within the school's environment.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no risks involved in the study and the researcher does not intend to cause any type of harm to the individuals taking part in the study. However, as the topic under discussion relates to issues of inequality and deprivation, there is a possibility that a participant may become upset. If this happens, the interview will be stopped, and the tape recorder will be switched off to allow the participant to feel comfortable. If a participant becomes distressed, they will be given access to appropriate support services (if further support is required). The links to these services are provided at the bottom of this sheet (see 'Further Support').

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The researcher cannot promise that this study will be of direct benefit to the participants. However, the information gained from the study will help to increase the researcher's knowledge in relation to how an academy school operates.

### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please ask to speak to the researcher (\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*, email: \*\*\*\*\*@edu.salford.ac.uk), who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally you can do this by contacting the Research Supervisor (Gaynor Bagnall, 0161 295 6554). If the matter is still not resolved, please forward your concerns to Professor Susan McAndrew, Chair of the Health Research Ethical Approval Panel, Room MS1.91, Mary Seacole Building, Frederick Road Campus, University of Salford, Salford, M6 6PU. Tel: 0161 295 2778. E: s.mcandrew@salford.ac.uk

### **For further support:**

**Childcare support:** <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs>

**Support for parents and carers:** <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/parent-support/>

**Trafford Family Information Service:** <https://www.trafforddirectory.co.uk/kb5/trafford/fsd/service.page?id=IF414N9vuKU&newfamilychannel=3>

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All names, addresses, and personal information will be removed from the study data. The collection, storage, and disposal of the data will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Data stored electronically will be saved on a password-protected computer device at the University of Salford. All signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure office. Digital recordings will be deleted on completion of the study. The data collected from the interviews will be anonymous and will be assigned a research code, known only to the researcher/research team. Participants will be named as 'Informant 1', Informant 2', and so on. The data will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data will be kept for approximately two years, depending on the completion date of the PhD. All data will be destroyed on the completion of the study.

**What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?**

If you withdraw from the study, any information and data collected from you up to that date will be destroyed and your name will be removed from all the study files.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be presented truthfully and accurately in the PhD thesis that the researcher intends to complete. The results will be available to all participants of the study. If you wish for these to be made available to you, please email the researcher:

xxxxxxx@edu.salford.ac.uk

The results are not to be identified in any report or publication unless participants have given their consent.

**Who is organising or sponsoring the research?**

The University of Salford is organising the research. All research carried out is in line with the ethical agreement of the University of Salford.

**Further information and contact details**

Contact details of the researcher:

E: xxxxxxx@edu.salford.ac.uk

### **Participant information sheet:**

#### **Study title:**

**‘An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged’**

#### **Invitation**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like additional information. Please take your time to decide if you would like to take part in the research. The study aims to explore the types of strategies used by the academy school to overcome issues related to educational disadvantage. It looks to investigate the extent to which the academy school supports pupils who are underperforming and whose first language may not be English.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to gain a detailed understanding of the ways in which the academy school operates and how it supports disadvantaged children to overcome issues related to learning and pupil achievement. The study is for educational purposes, and the researcher is carrying out the study to complete a PhD project.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

The Head Teacher has been asked to take part in the study as you are likely to be familiar with the structures of the academy school. You have been selected based on your availability and willingness to take part in the study. Your involvement in the research study will allow the researcher to successfully generate an understanding of the extent to which the primary school academy supports educationally disadvantaged learners.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in the research is voluntary. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study. The researcher will describe the nature of the study and go through the information sheet with you. You will then be asked to sign an informed consent form to show that you have agreed to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any point, which includes after the point at which data has been collected and analysed. However, the interview data cannot be withdrawn once the thesis has been finalised and submitted to the examiners.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be interviewed on one occasion. The interview will last around 30–45 minutes (no longer than an hour). The researcher will ask a number of questions to you in relation to the academy school. The participant will be given time to answer. The interview will be recorded using an audio device once you have given consent. All information recorded will be kept confidential, with only the researcher having access to it. The researcher will ensure the recording is locked on a password-protected device and they will be deleted once the research process is complete.

### **Travel expenses**

No travel expenses will be involved in this study as participants are to be interviewed within the school environment.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no risks involved in the study and the researcher does not intend to cause any type of harm to the individuals taking part in the study. However, as the topic under discussion is in relation to issues of inequalities and deprivation, there is a possibility that a participant may become upset. If this happens, then the interview will be stopped, and the tape recorder will be switched off to allow the participant to calm down. If participants are distressed, they will be given access to appropriate support services (if further support is required). The links to these services are provided at the bottom of this sheet (see 'Further support').

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The researcher cannot promise this study will help you. However, the information the researcher gets from the study will help to increase the researcher's knowledge in relation to how the academy school operates.

### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study you should ask to speak to the researcher (\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*, email: \*\*\*\*\*@edu.salford.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, you can do so by contacting the Research Supervisor (\*\*\*\*\*, 0161 295 \*\*\*\*\*E \*\*\*@salford.ac.uk). If the matter is still not resolved, please forward your concerns to Professor Susan McAndrew, Chair of the Health Research Ethical Approval Panel, Room MS1.91, Mary Seacole Building, Frederick Road Campus, University of Salford, Salford, M6 6PU. Tel.: 0161 295 2778. E: s.mcan-drew@salford.ac.uk

Further support:

**Childcare support:** <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs>

**Support for parents and carers:** <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/parent-support/>

**Trafford Family Information Service:** <https://www.trafforddirectory.co.uk/kb5/trafford/fsd/service.page?id=IF414N9vuKU&newfamilychannel=3>

### **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any names, addresses and personal information gathered will be removed. The collection, storage, and disposal of the data will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Data stored electronically will be saved on a password-protected computer device at the University of Salford. All signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office. Digital recordings will be deleted on completion of the study. The data collected from the interviews will be anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher and research team. Participants will be given a participant



number which they will be mentioned by in the data. The data will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data will be kept for approximately two years, depending on the length of the PhD. All data will be destroyed on completion of study.

**What will happen if I don't continue with the study?**

If you withdraw from the study at any point, all the information and data collected from you will be destroyed and your name removed from all the study files.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be presented truthfully and accurately. They will be included in the PhD thesis that the researcher intends to complete. The results of the study will be available to all participants. If you wish for these to be made available to you, please email the researcher: xxxxxxxx@edu.salford.ac.uk

The results are not to be identified in any report or publication unless the participant has given their consent.

**Who is organising or sponsoring the research?**

The University of Salford is organising the research. All research carried out is in line with the ethical agreement of the University of Salford.

**Further information and contact details**

Contact details of the researcher:

E: xxxxxxxx@edu.salford.ac.uk

## Appendix Two: Participant Consent Form

### Parents consent form

#### Consent Form: Parents

**Title of Project:** An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged

**Name of Researcher:** Mariam Awan

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated 26/12/18 version 1 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered fully. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that information provided by myself will be accessible to the research team involved in the study. ☐
4. I have given consent for the interview to be recorded. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

---

Name of Participant

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Name of person taking consent

---

Signature

---

Date

Teachers consent form

**Consent Form: Teachers**

**Title of Project:** An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged

**Name of Researcher:** Mariam Awan

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated 26/12/18 version 1 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered fully. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that information provided by myself will be accessible to the research team involved in the study. ☐
4. I have given consent for the interview to be recorded. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Head Teacher's consent form

**Consent Form: Head Teacher**

**Title of Project:** An analysis of the strategies implemented by a primary school converter academy in support of minority ethnic pupils and those that are economically disadvantaged

**Name of Researcher:** Mariam Awan

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated 26/12/18 version 1 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered fully. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that information provided by myself will be accessible to the research team involved in the study. ☐
4. I have given consent for the interview to be recorded. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix Three: Ethical Approval Letter



Research, Enterprise and Engagement  
Ethical Approval Panel

Doctoral & Research Support  
Research and Knowledge Exchange,  
Room 827, Maxwell Building,  
University of Salford,  
Manchester  
M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 2280

[www.salford.ac.uk](http://www.salford.ac.uk)

29 May 2019

Dear Mariam,

**RE: ETHICS APPLICATION–HSR1819-072 – An exploration of the extent to which primary school academies support economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils to overcome inequalities and disadvantage experienced in schools**

Based on the information that you have provided, I am pleased to inform you that application HSR1819-072 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/or its methodology, then please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting [Health-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk](mailto:Health-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Clark'.

Professor Andrew Clark  
Deputy Chair of the Research Ethics Panel

## Appendix Four: Interview Guides

### Interview Guide- Teachers/Teaching assistants

<b>Combating educational disadvantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies do you use within the classroom when supporting educationally disadvantaged pupils?</li> <li>• What are the ethos and values put in place to support underachieving pupils?</li> <li>• How do you tackle underachievement?</li> </ul>
<b>EAL learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you support pupils whose first language is not English?</li> <li>• What learning/teaching strategies do you use to help these pupils to succeed?</li> </ul>
<b>Perceptions on academy school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the academy school have certain policies or procedures put in place to support disadvantaged pupils?</li> <li>• Does the academy school encourage parents to take part in their child's learning?</li> <li>• Does the academy school offer any extra support to disadvantaged pupils?</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the academy school's curriculum support disadvantaged pupils?</li> <li>• Is it tailored in ways to support EAL learners?</li> <li>• How does the curriculum differ from the national curriculum?</li> <li>• Do you believe the curriculum benefits disadvantaged and underachieving pupils?</li> </ul>
<b>Homework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to complete their homework?</li> <li>• Do children struggle with their homework?</li> </ul>

## Interview Guide- Academy Leaders/Head Teacher

<b>Combating educational disadvantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies do you use within the school to tackle issues of disadvantage?</li> <li>• What are the ethos and values put in place to support underachieving pupils?</li> <li>• How do you tackle underachievement?</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusion and Inequality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you support pupils whose first language is not English?</li> <li>• Are there policies or procedures put in place to ensure equality for all pupils within the academy school?</li> <li>• How do you ensure all pupils are getting the same benefit and advantage from learning?</li> </ul>
<b>Perceptions on academy school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the academy school have certain policies or procedures put in place to support disadvantaged pupils?</li> <li>• Does the academy school encourage parents to take part in their child's learning?</li> <li>• Does the academy school offer any extra support to disadvantaged pupils?</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the academy school's curriculum support disadvantaged pupils?</li> <li>• Is it tailored in ways to support EAL learners?</li> <li>• How does the curriculum differ from the national curriculum?</li> <li>• Do you believe the curriculum benefits disadvantaged and underachieving pupils?</li> </ul>

## Interview Guide- Parents

<b>Family/educational background</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your first language English?</li> <li>• Have you got a degree or been to college?</li> <li>• Do you provide your children with books?</li> </ul>
<b>EAL learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can your child speak English?</li> <li>• Is English an additional language for your child?</li> <li>• Do you believe not having English as a first language has an impact on your child's learning?</li> </ul>
<b>Perceptions on academy school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your experiences with the academy school?</li> <li>• Are you satisfied with the level of support your child is receiving from the school?</li> <li>• Do you believe your child is doing well at school?</li> <li>• Is your child struggling with anything at school?</li> </ul>
<b>Extra-curricular activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your child take part in after school clubs?</li> <li>• If not what is the reason why your child does not attend after school clubs?</li> </ul>
<b>Homework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your child get homework?</li> <li>• Do you help your child with their homework?</li> <li>• Do you experience any sort of trouble when helping your child with their work?</li> </ul>



## Appendix Five: Coding Framework

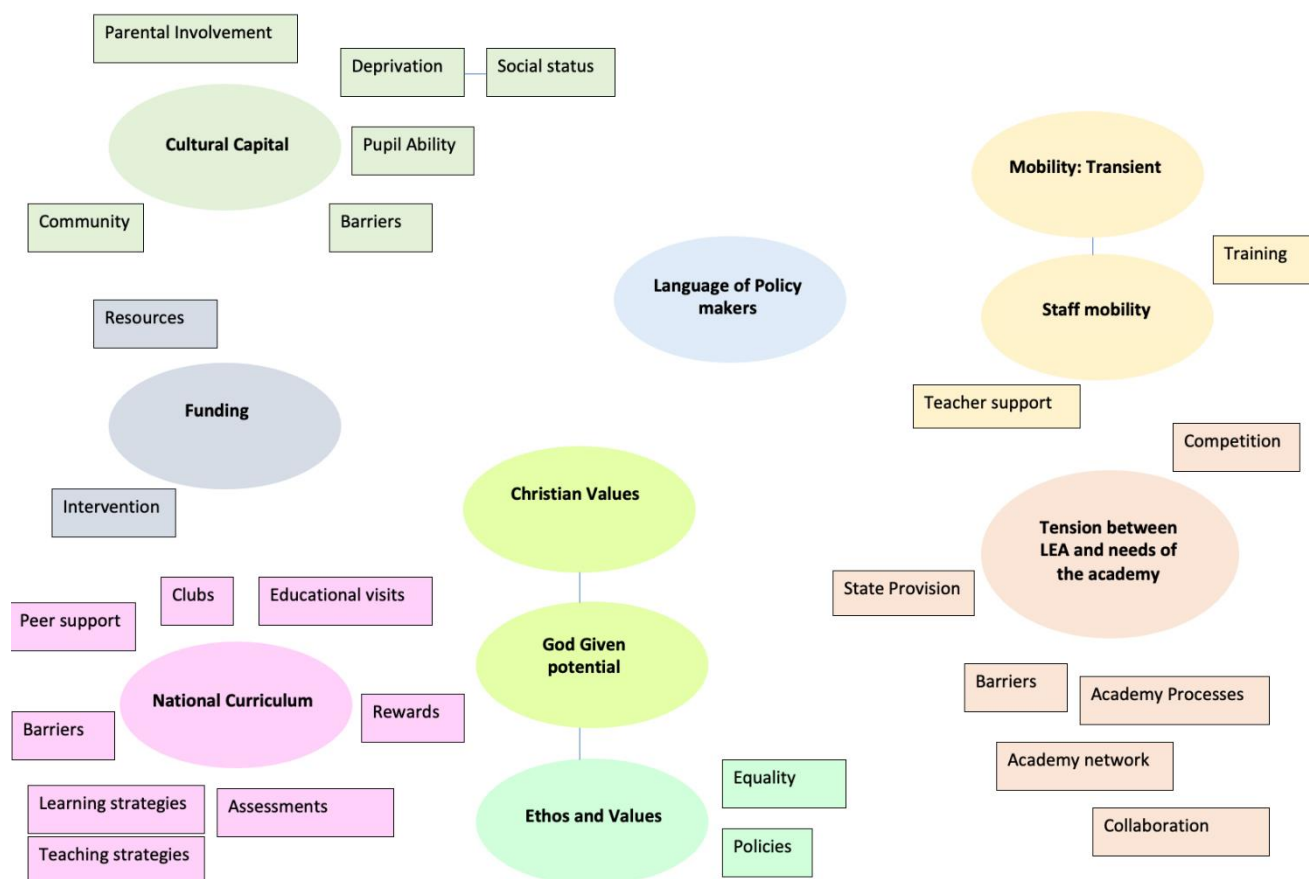
### Initial codes

- Pupil Premium
- Economic deprivation
- Inclusion
- Admissions
- Funds
- Material Resources
- Nurture room
- Groups
- Enquiry-based learning
- Repetition based learning
- Motor Skills group
- Assessments
- Language and Vocabulary acquisition
- Clubs
- Activities
- 9 habits
- Curriculum
- Building learning powers
- Learning habits
- Multi-Academy Trust
- National groups
- Hubs
- Christian values
- Competition
- Knowledge organisers
- Feedback
- Mixed group learning
- Interventions
- Policies
- Staff training
- Parent voice
- Parent workshops
- Pupil voice
- Parents meetings
- Barriers
- Aspirations
- Community
- Ethos
- Cultural capital
- LEA
- DfE
- Communication Imprint
- Role models
- Extra-curricular activities
- Independent learning
- Mobility
- Parent classes
- Class buddies
- Trips
- Reading
- Superhero's theme
- Home backgrounds
- Visual resources
- Phonics sessions
- Experience days
- Adult support
- Word mats
- Widgets
- Relationships
- Dojo points
- Roleplay
- Translators
- Targets
- Counselling
- Equipment
- Conversion
- Experience days
- Book looks

### Searching for themes

- Deprivation
- Equality
- Academy Process
- Funding
- Resources
- Intervention
- Learning strategies
- Teaching strategies
- Assessments
- Pupil ability
- Ethos
- Values
- Academy network
- Competition
- Collaboration
- Training
- Academy policies
- Parental involvement
- Pupils' views
- Barriers
- Community
- Ethos
- Social status
- State provision
- Peer support
- Clubs
- Educational visits
- Teacher support
- Rewards

## Defining and naming themes



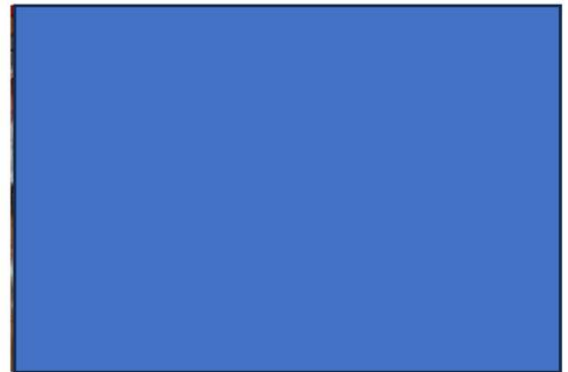
## Appendix Six: Academy School's website

### Vision and Values:

[redacted] is driven by a powerful ethos which aspires to treat everyone inclusively and recognises the importance of a holistic approach to education. As well as continuing to build a strong school and deliver a first-class education, it is also our desire to build an interconnected community, recognising that educational needs do not exist in isolation from the needs of the whole person.

At [redacted] we aim to:

- Create a happy, stimulating, caring learning environment where risk taking and challenge is encouraged
- Awaken and nurture a love of learning that will last a lifetime and provide everyone with the skills to pursue that learning independently and collaboratively
- Enable everyone to reach the highest standard of which they are capable, academically and in other fields such as sport, arts and culture
- Encourage all learners to develop their own interests, passions, enthusiasms, creativity and individuality
- Help learners to understand and care about the world in which they live, and to believe in their ability and responsibility to change that world to make it better
- Empower learners to develop a strong sense of right and wrong, good and bad, equality and justice. Give them the inner strength to act according to these values
- Provide learners with the skills and understanding to live a healthy, successful life, physically, emotionally and spiritually
- Foster respect, tolerance and love for others, regardless of race, gender, religion or difference, within a framework of equality of opportunity and fairness
- Help learners to appreciate human achievements and aspirations and to believe in their own potential to attain great things
- Promote a feeling of pride and confidence in learners' identities; as individuals, as members of our academy, as part of the local community and as citizens of the world



### Curriculum section of website:

- Be inspired to improve the world around them.
- Have the ambition, skills and expertise to thrive in a fast changing, interconnected and communication rich world, with the confidence and technical expertise to thrive.
- Have a network that supports them.
- Be comfortable in who they are and able to continuously explore who they are becoming.
- Be rich in language with a passion for learning.
- Seek to include others, be other-centred and celebrate difference.
- Have a values approach to life and a sense of what is right and wrong through the lived experience of the 9 habits.

## Appendix Seven: Trusts website

