

'You have to go on a journey'. Looked After Children's experiences of primary to secondary school transition.

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Impact of COVID-19

The disruption caused by Covid-19 has impacted this research project. Due to Covid-19 restrictions the researcher was unable to visit schools or conduct face to face interviews. It was therefore not possible to undertake the research project as originally planned. The wider context of Covid-19 also impacted the recruitment process, participant recruitment criteria and research timeline.

The planned work would have fitted the thesis narrative by including the accounts of participants who had recently transitioned to secondary school (including those in year seven). Due to this cohort having such a disrupted and unique experience of primary-secondary transition, a decision was made to exclude this year group from the research project and instead focus on participants in years eight and nine. To mitigate against risks involving face to face contact, interviews took place remotely.

Every effort was undertaken to adjust the project in accordance with the pre-existing research question.

Abstract

Starting secondary school is a significant time for all pupils. It can be particularly challenging for vulnerable groups such as looked after children (LAC), many of whom have already experienced challenges, instability, and other significant transitions in their lives. Previous research concerning LAC and education has mainly focused on the academic outcomes of LAC, which has been found to be consistently low compared to their non-looked after peers. Previous studies have also focused on educational interventions for LAC, although evidence of impact is lacking. Research focusing on the perspectives of LAC themselves regarding their educational experiences is scarce, particularly regarding secondary school transition.

This study explored the lived experiences of two young people who are looked after and who have transitioned from primary school to secondary school. Semi-structured interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four overarching themes emerged which summarised the LAC's experiences: 1) A journey of risk and reward 2) social network 3) fantasy and reality 4) coping with change. Key findings and implications for Educational Psychology practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of looked after children (LAC) who have transitioned from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the national and local context regarding LAC and education, to outline the researcher position and to provide a rationale for this research. The chapter will also include an examination of relevant policy and legislation. Key terminology will be defined including 'looked after children'. Personal reflections will be presented in first person to reflect the individual and unique nature of the reflections and experiences of the researcher throughout the thesis.

1.2 Looked After Children

A child is considered to be looked after if they are under eighteen years old and in the care of the local authority (LA) (Children Act, 1989). This definition includes children and young people (CYP) who are subject to a care order which means the local authority is responsible for their care, or subject to a placement order which allows the local authority to place CYP for adoption (Children Act, 1989). In March 2019, the number of LAC in England had risen by 4% from the previous year to 78,150 (DfE, 2019). This reflected a consistent rise over preceding years (DfE, 2019). In 2019, the majority of LAC were living in foster placements (72%), 12% were living in children's homes, secure units or semi-independent living accommodation, 7% were living independently and 3% were placed for adoption. The reasons for becoming looked after were varied. 63% LAC entered the care

system due to experiencing abuse or neglect, 14% became looked after due to family dysfunction and the remaining 23% became looked after for other reasons including parental illness, absent parenting, child disability and family in acute stress (DfE, 2019). This demonstrates that LAC's experiences of the care system are not homogenous but vary significantly due to the variety of reasons for entering the care system, and where they are placed. For example, a child who is placed for adoption due to absent parenting when they are under 5 is likely to have a significantly different experience to a child who is placed in foster care aged 16 who has experienced abuse or neglect. This research project will aim to recognise and acknowledge the varied and unique experiences of LAC.

This research project also recognises that being categorised as a LAC is only one aspect of a CYP's identity. CYP who are looked after are not a homogeneous group. Instead, there are a range of interacting factors which contribute to LAC's identities and experiences. The interactivity of factors such as ethnicity, gender and class has been defined as 'intersectionality' (Gopaldas, 2013). Intersectionality can impact an individual's experience of privilege and oppression (Gopaldas, 2013). In 2019, a higher proportion of LAC were male (56%) compared to female (44%) (DfE, 2019). Although there is limited recent data regarding the intersectionality between gender and LAC status, data from 2005 has found that looked after girls outperformed boys academically (DfE, 2005). Age is another factor which can impact LAC's experiences of education (Mannay et al, 2017). Over recent years, the age at which CYP become looked after has been increasing (DfE, 2019). 13% of LAC are aged 4 or under, 24% are aged 16 or older and 18% are aged 5 to 9 years (DfE, 2019). The biggest group (39%) are aged 10-15 years (DfE, 2019). Such interacting

factors are likely to impact LAC's experiences, for example the initial age in which CYP enter the care system has been found to impact academic attainment (Sebba et al, 2015). It has also been claimed that LAC's experiences have been undifferentiated in previous research and not enough attention has been paid to the experiences of different social groups (Berridge, 2007; Quarmby, 2014). This research project has aimed to present the experiences of the participants with reference to individual and contextual factors.

1.2.1 Inequality Within the Care System

LAC are from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. While the majority (74%) of LAC were of White ethnicity in 2019, this percentage has been decreasing over recent years (DfE, 2019). This is partially due to the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking CYP in the UK (DfE, 2019). In March 2019, 10% of LAC were from a mixed ethnic background and 8% were from Black ethnic backgrounds (DfE, 2019). According to the most recent census data, 87% of the UK identified as White (Office of National Statistics, 2012). Although this figure is likely to have changed over the last decade, this nevertheless indicates that individuals from a Black and minority ethnic background (BAME) are overrepresented within the LAC community. One study by Bywaters et al (2018) found that Black Caribbean children are 20% more likely to be in care than White children. The study suggests that this phenomenon can partly be explained by area deprivation, family poverty, and austerity policies. The ethnic inequalities within the care system are mirrored by inequality in other sectors such as access to mental health services (Bhui et al, 2018; Memon et al, 2016), and education outcomes (Skopek & Passaretta, 2018). Although further work clearly needs to be done to understand and address the ethnic

disparities within the care system, the disparity appears to reflect wider systemic, systematic and structural discrimination within the UK. This research project acknowledges that it has taken place within this context.

1.3 Looked After Children and Education

1.3.1 National Context

It has long been recognised that LAC on average have poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Jackson, 1994; Stein, 1994). In addition, LAC are five times more likely to be excluded compared to other pupils (DfE, 2020). A report conducted by the Rees Centre (Sebba et al, 2015) analysed data from the National Pupil Database and the Children Looked After Database for the year group eligible to take their GCSEs in 2013 and found that 60% of LAC attended mainstream schools while 40% attended alternative provisions such as special schools and pupil referral units. CYP attending provision outside of mainstream school are likely to achieve lower educational outcomes than their peers (Ofsted, 2016; Pirrie & Macleod, 2009). In 2019, LAC achieved an average 18.8 attainment 8 score, which is significantly below the national average score of 44.4 (DfE, 2019). The attainment gap is wider for secondary school aged LAC compared to primary aged LAC (DfE, 2019; Sebba et al, 2015). Regarding higher education, care leavers are considerably underrepresented. Only 12% of those previously in care pursued higher education in 2017-2018 compared to 42% of other pupils (Office for Students, 2020). The difference in post-education outcomes is demonstrated by a report by the Department for Education (DfE) which analysed the data relating to a year group of care year leavers. It was found that 37% were not in employment, education or

training (NEET) (DfE, 2018a), compared to the national average of 11.5% (Office of National Statistics, 2019). In addition, while 1% of the population under 18 are looked after, 24-27% of individuals in the adult prison population have experience in the care system (HM Provision and Probation Service, 2019). Low academic outcomes are associated with becoming both unemployed and entering the criminal justice system (Robson et al 2008), it is clear that more needs to be done to understand the educational experiences of LAC and improve outcomes.

1.3.2 Local Context

The LAC in the present study were under the care of an inner-city local authority (LA) in London. The LA is densely populated and is one of the most deprived in the country (Karnad, 2019) and 31% of CYP live in low-income families (Taylor, 2018). The population within the LA is diverse with 66% of CYP from BAME backgrounds which is above the national average (Holder, 2017). Within this LA, the attainment gap between LAC and their peers is reflective of the national picture. The average attainment 8 score for pupils within the local authority in 2018 was 46.3, while for LAC it was 18.2 (Taylor, 2018). Similar to the national trend, the data also indicated that LAC performed better in primary school compared to secondary school (Taylor, 2018).

1.3.3 Relevant Policy and Legislation

Government policy and legislation has been introduced over recent decades to attempt to promote the education of LAC and decrease the attainment gap. This included the introduction of Personal Education Plans for LAC (Hayden, 2005), these were introduced in 2000 with the aim of providing a coordinated educational support

plan for LAC which includes input from the child, the LA and the education setting (DfE, 2018b). The virtual school was implemented in a small number of LAs from 2007 and became a statutory requirement for all local authorities from 2014 (Children and Families Act, 2014). The virtual school role was created to provide 'corporate parents' for LAC and to advocate and oversee the educational attainment of LAC within an LA (Berridge 2012). Regarding schools, the designated teacher for LAC role was introduced in 2009 (DfE, 2018b). Designated teachers were also implemented to improve education outcomes for LAC, by advocating for LAC's educational attainment and wellbeing within a school system (Waterman, 2020).

1.4 Transition

Starting secondary school represents a significant transition for CYP. For many pupils, beginning secondary school presents increasing social, organisation and academic pressures (Boone, & Demanet, 2020). Secondary school transition also coincides with considerable developmental changes as a result of the onset of adolescence (Youell, 2006). This transition can be particularly challenging for those from vulnerable groups such as LAC who are more likely to be entering secondary school at a lower attainment level compared to their peers (Brewin & Stratham, 2011). The majority of CYP entering year seven also have to adapt to unfamiliar peer groups and manage being taught by a greater number of teachers (Boone & Demanet, 2020). From an ecological systems perspective, children's wellbeing and development is impacted by multiple and interacting systems within the child's world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem is one of the most influential systems regarding a child's development and includes both the family and school system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A change within the microsystem, such as school transition,

is therefore likely to be significant for CYP and could impact young people's wellbeing and learning. LAC are more likely to have had previous experiences of instability and change within their microsystem, such as experiencing changes of caregivers and home environments (Rock et al, 2015). Many LAC also experience care placement instability. In 2018-2019 5,800 LAC experienced unplanned endings to placements, with 31% of this group having less than 24 hours' notice (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Experiencing recent or historic changes of care placement could impact the way in which some LAC respond to other changes, such as school transition (Brewin & Stratham, 2011).

There are a number of challenges associated with primary to secondary transition which are common for the majority of pupils. These include increased feelings of anxiety (Evangelou et al, 2008), a reduction in feelings of belonging (O'brennan & Furlong, 2010), and experiencing social relationship difficulties (Zeedyk et al, 2003). Such challenges are thought to be temporary for the majority of pupils (Evangelou et al, 2008; Zeedyk et al, 2003). Regarding LAC's experiences, the small number of studies which have explored secondary school transition suggest that this educational period is particularly challenging for this group (Brewin & Stratham, 2011; Francis et al, 2021). The latter study was based on interviews with 36 LAC. Many referred to particularly challenging transition experiences and problems which persisted beyond the transition period. Some participants talked about difficulties associated with finding a sense of acceptance among their peers and building friendships (Francis et al, 2021). This is supported by research by Wood & Selwyn (2017) which found that LAC were more likely to experience bullying compared to other pupils. This was thought to be due to stigma associated with

being in care which has also been identified in other studies (Mannay et al, 2017; Warham, 2012). Forming new friendships is also thought to be particularly challenging for some LAC due to the impact of previous adverse relational experiences. Such experiences can cause long-term difficulties regarding the ability to form and maintain relationships (Phillips, 2007).

Some LAC referred to the challenge of transitioning to secondary school without familiar peers, causing feelings of anxiety and loneliness (Francis et al, 2021). This is thought to be more common for LAC compared to other pupils because they are likely to move to new locations multiple times as a result of changing care placements, according to a recent review of children's social care (MacAlister, 2021). Conversely, transitioning to a secondary school with peers from previous settings was also identified as a difficulty for some LAC. In the study by Brewin and Stratham (2011), some LAC referred to coming into contact with peers who knew them in a previous context when they were coming to school with unclean clothes, or when they were experiencing bullying or displaying challenging behaviour. Some LAC also felt that this caused them to revert to previous negative behaviour. Both studies highlight some of the reasons why LAC are particularly vulnerable to experiencing difficulties during the primary to secondary transition. The studies also suggest that such challenges are complex and variable. However, such findings are based on relatively small sample sizes and should therefore be treated with caution. In addition, a study by Brady and Gilligan (2018) explored care leavers' overall experiences of education. School transitions were highlighted as a particularly challenging and important time for LAC which could either positively or negatively impact subsequent experiences of education. This study therefore also

suggests that secondary school transition is an important time for professionals working with LAC to pay attention to. The limited number of studies which explore this period of education for LAC means that more research is needed.

1.4.1 Risk and Protective Factors

There are a number of risk and protective factors which can positively or negatively impact CYP's development (Fraser et al, 2004; Shpiegel, 2016). Many LAC have entered the care system due to having experienced adverse childhood experiences such as neglect or abuse (NSPCC, 2019). As a result, LAC are more likely to have insecure attachment styles (Farnfield, 2014; Hillman et al, 2020). This can impact CYP's learning, wellbeing and ability to build and maintain relationships (Bowlby 1982; Geddes, 2006; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). LAC with attachment needs might therefore find transition particularly challenging due to the increasing social and academic changes and challenges. Regarding protective factors school can be an important support system for LAC, offering a sense of belonging which is associated with child and adolescent development, academic achievement and resilience (Roffey et al, 2019; Taylor, 2012; Turluc et al, 2013). On the other hand, adverse school experiences such as social exclusion can have a negative impact on CYP's wellbeing and school engagement (Arseneault, 2017; Hutzell & Payne, 2018). LAC have reported experiencing bullying as a result of a perceived stigma related to being in care (McClung & Gayle, 2010; Wood & Selwyn, 2017). It has been suggested that educational transitions can be turning points for vulnerable groups such as LAC, helping to shape CYPs' overall educational experiences (Brady & Gilligan, 2018).

1.4.2 Previous Research

Despite LAC being a particularly vulnerable group regarding school transition, little is known about how this particular community experience this phenomenon. One small scale study conducted in Wales in 2011 found that a number of factors can impact the ways in which LAC experience school transition. This included within-person factors such as pre-existing social skills and capacity for resilience, in addition to systemic factors such as school policies and multi-agency working (Brewin & Stratham, 2011). Although this study offers some useful information regarding the factors which can hinder or support school transition, the findings were based on a small sample in one geographic location in Wales. Due to the location and time period, this research does not reflect recent and pertinent policy changes which have occurred within England, such as the implementation of the virtual school in local authorities and designated teachers becoming a statutory requirement within schools (DfE, 2018b). More research is therefore needed to further understand LAC's experiences of school transition.

1.5 Educational Psychology and Looked After Children

Educational Psychologists (EPs) promote positive outcomes for CYP, regarding emotional wellbeing and learning outcomes (Frederickson et al, 2015). Not only is there a well-documented gap in attainment between LAC and their peers (DfE, 2019; Sebba et al, 2015), but there is also a gap in emotional wellbeing. A report by the National Society of the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) reported that 45% of LAC are thought to have a mental health need compared to 10% of non-looked peers (NSPCC, 2019). LAC are also four times more likely to

have a special educational need or disability (SEND) than the rest of the population (DfE, 2016). Regarding both emotional wellbeing and learning needs, there is clearly an overlap between the needs of LAC and the interests and expertise of EPs. EPs are well-placed to promote positive outcomes regarding LAC's wellbeing due to understanding and applying psychological theory pertaining to LAC's needs, including attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) and trauma informed practice (Cavanaugh, 2016). It is also likely that EPs will come into contact with this group during their practice due to the high proportion of LAC having a diagnosis of SEND (DfE, 2016). Research which helps illuminate LAC's experiences of school is therefore likely to be valuable for EP practice.

Despite the lack of research into this area there are a few examples of the ways in which EP services have enacted positive change for LAC. A study by Peake (2011) explored and described a rapid response service for LAC who were at risk of school placement breakdown. This involved offering support and specialist advice for school staff through collaborative consultation. Teachers' perceptions of the service were evaluated over two years and responses suggested that the teachers valued the expertise of the EPs and the opportunities to share difficulties and work collaboratively. A doctoral research project by Whitehouse (2014) investigated designated teachers' perceptions of working with EPs. Similar to the study by Peake (2011), this study found that designated teachers valued the input of EPs and expressed a desire to work with EPs more consistently (Whitehouse, 2014). However, there was a lack of understanding in both studies about the EP role, and a perception that EPs specialised in learning rather than social and emotional wellbeing. While both studies were small-scale and therefore cannot be generalised

to all educational staff working with LAC and EPs, these studies suggest that the EP support is of benefit and value, and greater clarity for service users regarding the EP role could be beneficial.

1.6 Researcher Position

My interest in LAC's educational experiences and outcomes originally stemmed from my experience working with CYP who have experienced the care system. I worked with LAC who were in foster care or had been adopted during my roles as a learning mentor in a secondary school, working in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and during my time as a Trainee EP. Despite the enormous challenges that these young people had faced during their childhoods, I was continuously struck with how resilient they were. The LAC I worked with showed determination to do well academically and socially, despite the difficulties they had faced and were facing. At the same time, I was all too aware of the negative outcomes for LAC, both nationally and locally. Such low outcomes included the academic attainment gap, under-representation in further education and over-representation in the criminal justice system and NEET communities. Working with individual LAC caused me to become curious about the role of education, and the factors and experiences which influence LAC's outcomes.

My interest in the school transition experience for LAC, and other vulnerable groups, also developed during my time as a learning mentor in a secondary school. I supported year seven pupils academically and pastorally and I was aware of the significance of this school transition experience, and how difficult some LAC found it to settle into the new environment. This transition sometimes resulted in challenging

behaviours which were not reported by primary schools, suggesting that secondary school transition had impacted some LAC's emotional wellbeing. I was aware that not only was the move to secondary school a significant transition for pupils, but it occurs at a time of significant biological and psychological change when young people are becoming adolescents and are developing their independence and identity (Schaffhuser et al, 2017; Youell, 2006). I became interested in the multiple and complex factors which contribute to pupils' experiences of primary-secondary transition, and particularly what this experience feels like from the perspective of those in vulnerable groups, such as LAC.

My interest in LAC's experiences of school transition also developed during the Child, Community and Educational Psychology doctorate at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. My knowledge of attachment theory developed, and I became particularly interested in the impact of attachment difficulties on learning (Bowlby, 1982), particularly the ways in which pupils' early relationship experiences can contribute to the attainment gap between LAC and their peers. I also developed my knowledge of ecological systems theory and I became interested in the impact of CYP's surrounding systems, such as the family and school microsystems, regarding wellbeing and learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Starting year seven presents both significant systemic changes, and changes of social relationships. I therefore became increasingly curious about LAC's experiences of these changes.

1.7 Research Rationale

There is clearly a need for EPs and other professionals to affect change and promote positive outcomes for LAC (Roffey, 2016). This is particularly important in

light of the well-documented differences in academic attainment, emotional wellbeing and economic and social outcomes between LAC and their peers (Brady & Gilligan, 2018; Butterworth et al, 2017; Power & Rafael, 2018). Primary-secondary transition is a significant time in LAC's educational journeys which can positively or negatively impact pupils' sense of belonging and school engagement, among other factors (Brady & Gilligan, 2018). Despite this, there is a dearth of research which explores the impact of transition for LAC, particularly regarding LAC's perspectives. There are calls for more research to include the voices of looked-after children due to the majority of research in this field being adult-centred (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016). This research project aims to present an in depth understanding of two LAC's experiences of secondary school transition. It is hoped that this research project will enable those working with LAC to feel more curious, empathetic and equipped to affect positive change during this time of educational transition and beyond.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review Aim

The purpose of the literature review was to describe the way in which the literature pertaining to LAC and education has been explored. The aim of the review was not to provide an exhaustive account of literature related to this topic, but to provide a context and rationale for the current research project, including the research questions and methodology.

Careful consideration was given to the scope and breadth of the literature included in this review. An initial search was undertaken for literature pertaining to LAC and transition from primary to secondary school, but only 2 articles were generated. The search was therefore broadened to include LAC and education (from reception to year 11). This was to gain an insight into the current research trends in this area, including common areas of focus and areas which have been underexplored. Research focused on early years and further education were excluded due to differences in the structure and context of these stages of education. Including these areas of education was therefore thought to be too broad for this literature review. The systematic approach to obtaining and appraising the literature is outlined below. The literature is presented according to themes, and strengths and weaknesses of the studies are explored.

Literature Review Question: what does the current literature tell us about looked after children and education?

2.2 Search Strategy

2.2.1 Databases

The databases most relevant to LAC and education were explored. These were 'PsycINFO', 'PsycArticles', 'ERIC', 'Education Source' and 'Soc INDEX'. 'PsycINFO' was chosen because it is the most comprehensive database for psychology and includes many different fields. 'PsycArticles' were chosen because it includes journals by the Educational Publishing Foundation, and therefore includes research from across educational contexts. 'ERIC' and 'Education Source' were searched due to the relevance to educational literature and 'Soc INDEX' was searched because it includes journals pertaining to social psychology and social work. Google Scholar was also searched for relevant articles to avoid the risk of missing relevant articles which were not included in the databases, along with searching through reference lists. A breakdown of the number of articles produced by each database can be found in Appendix A.

2.2.2 Search Terms

To obtain articles relevant to school education, the following search terms were used 'school', 'educat*', "academic outcomes" and "academic achievement". These were searched with the Boolean operator 'OR'. This search was combined with the following search terms to produce articles relevant to LAC: 'LAC', "children in care", "children looked after" and "looked after children". The Boolean operator 'OR' was also used within this search. The two searches were combined using the Boolean Operator 'AND' to obtain articles pertinent to both school education and LAC. All search terms were applied to article abstracts to find relevant papers.

2.2.3 Limiters

A number of limiters were applied to the searches. This included articles written in English, articles from peer reviewed journals and articles published between 2010 and 2020. Although it is acknowledged that there is some grey literature which is relevant to the topic, such as reviews, theses and unpublished articles, the decision was made to only include peer-reviewed published articles. This literature review does not intend to offer an exhaustive overview of all literature pertaining to LAC and education, but to offer an overview of the research available through a thorough and systematic literature search. This is to gain an insight into trends in the current literature, research gaps and possible directions for future research. Careful consideration was given to the range of dates to be included and it was decided that only articles from 2010 were to be included. This is to reflect the current and recent practices and policy affecting both the social care and education system. Many of the results were international studies so the locations were limited to the following: 'United Kingdom', 'England', 'Scotland', 'Wales' and 'Northern Ireland'. Search results were limited to articles relevant to the United Kingdom due to the variability in social care and education systems internationally.

2.2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The initial search was conducted on 7th August 2020 and yielded 131 results. After the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and duplicates were removed, 20 articles remained. An initial screening process then took place in which the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the abstracts of the studies obtained through the database searches. The searches also produced a number of

'borderline' articles which had some relevance to the topic. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were then applied a second time, according to the information provided within the body of the article. Although there will always be an element of subjectivity when undertaking this process as a researcher, this was thought to be the most equitable and robust way to sift the literature. The full inclusion and exclusion criteria are outlined in Appendix B.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to produce articles most relevant to LAC and school education. Studies were not limited to mainstream education and those including special schools and alternative provision such as pupil referral units were included. This is to reflect the educational experiences of LAC, with one report claiming that up to 40% LAC attend alternative provision (Sebba et al, 2015). The research participants were not limited to a particular group but included both LAC and key adults such as parents and carers, teachers, social workers and virtual school staff. This is to include a wide variety of perspectives, and to identify patterns and trends regarding dominant, and less dominant, voices within the literature base. It has been acknowledged that there is a dearth of literature which includes LAC's perspectives within this literature base (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016), only including the perspectives of LAC would therefore have yielded a low number of results. The criteria included exploratory and experimental studies and excluded theoretical or reflective articles. Although it is acknowledged that the latter would have offered an insight into attitudes towards the social care system and education, this review was concerned with trends within the research and such articles were therefore excluded from the systematic review. An example of some of

the articles excluded from this review is provided in Appendix C. The included articles are presented in Appendix D.

Some studies were excluded because they were not focused on education. A number of the studies produced by the literature search were instead focused on LAC's mental health (Bonfield et al, 2010; Cocker et al, 2018). This trend in the literature reflects LAC's elevated risk of experiencing mental health problems (McAuley & Davis, 2009). It was observed that a number of the excluded research articles were concerned with challenging experiences that some LAC face, for example adolescent pregnancy (Craine et al, 2014) and self-harm (Harkess-Murphy et al, 2013). It is notable that such results were included among a search for 'education' and 'LAC' and this raises questions about some of the narratives pertaining to LAC and education within research.

2.2.4.1 Borderline Cases. Careful consideration was given to the borderline cases, using the exclusion and inclusion criteria. For example, the literature search produced two studies which evaluated the same intervention, a book-gifting programme for foster children in Northern Ireland (Dymoke & Griffiths, 2010; Mooney et al, 2016). After carefully considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria, one was included because the results were related to attitudes towards school (Mooney et al, 2016), and one was excluded because impact of the intervention was not related to school engagement or academic progress, the outcomes were instead evaluated within the context of the home (Dymoke & Griffiths, 2010). It was difficult to make this decision because it would have been useful to compare the studies within the review but applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria in this way seemed to be the most

equitable option. In addition, one study was focused on the educational experiences of unaccompanied, asylum-seeking young people (Ott & O'Higgins, 2019). Although unaccompanied minors are also LAC, it was decided that this study would be excluded from the review because the population is likely to have unique needs in comparison to the wider LAC community. Although it is acknowledged that research into the educational needs of this group is an important area, this topic is likely to benefit from a separate research project.

2.3 Method of Critical Appraisal

Once the literature had been screened and the exclusion and inclusion criteria applied, 20 articles remained. Qualitative research was evaluated using the 'Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist' (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2019) and quantitative research was evaluated using the 'Evaluation Tool for Quantitative Research Studies' developed by Long et al (2002). These were used to assess the quality of each study according to various criteria including the appropriateness of the research design, recruitment strategy, data collection process and other areas. The checklists were used to aid the researcher's understanding of the overall quality of the studies included in the literature base, and to identify common trends and limitations. Due to the remit of this research project, it is not possible to present the critical appraisal analysis in full for each study, but an example of how this was applied to one study is provided in Appendix E.

2.4 Research Overview

The key features of the studies were extracted and are presented in Appendix F. The review will critically consider the articles according to common themes.

Almost half of the studies identified through the literature search were concerned with academic attainment and trajectories of LAC. Just over a third of the studies evaluated the impact of specific interventions for LAC and four studies were focused on lived experiences of education. Only one study offered an in-depth exploration of LAC's transition from primary to secondary school. The implications of the research trends will be discussed, along with strengths and limitations of the studies. Wider implications for future research and educational practice will also be considered.

2.5 Themes

2.6 Theme One: Academic Outcomes

The largest group of studies were focused on the academic attainment of LAC. Of the twenty studies included within this review, eight were focused on this area. Two studies compared achievement of LAC to non-LAC peers across a range of domains (Jackson et al, 2010; Rees, 2013). And six studies explored the factors contributing to LAC's educational outcomes (Berridge, 2017; Berridge et al, 2020; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017; Melkman, 2020, McClung & Gayle, 2010).

2.6.1 Achievement Compared to Peers

Two studies compared the academic achievement of LAC with non-LAC peers, along with other factors (Jackson et al, 2010; Rees, 2013). The study by Rees (2013) aimed to measure the cognitive and literary abilities of LAC, along with mental

health and emotional literacy. A variety of measures were used including the British Abilities Scale (BAS) (Elliot & Smith, 2011) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman et al, 2010). The findings of the study suggested that LAC did less well than non-LAC peers across all domains. However, the authors warned against over-generalisation of the results due to 16% of LAC meeting positive exception criteria. It is also worth critically considering the tools used to draw such conclusions. The BAS is a standardised assessment which offers quantitative scores in certain areas of cognitive ability and has therefore been criticised for being too reductionist and culturally biased (Billington, 2017; Usmani, 1999). Using such standardised measures only offers a snapshot of an individual's ability, especially when results are not triangulated with achievement in the classroom and observation. In addition, the achievement of LAC participants was not measured against a matched control-group. For example, a higher proportion of LAC have SEND compared to the rest of the population (DfE, 2016). Measuring outcomes against a matched group with similar needs could offer a more valid indication of areas of strengths and difficulty (McAuley & Davis, 2009). The study by Rees (2013) took place in secondary schools in one local authority, which had a lack of ethnic diversity compared to the rest of the UK. Ninety-nine percent of the sample population were White British. This is not representative of the LAC community which consists of a much higher proportion from ethnic minority and Black backgrounds (Kirton, 2016). Due to such limitations, it is therefore important that the results of the study are considered with caution, otherwise there is a risk they could contribute to negative expectations around LAC's achievement.

The study by Jackson et al (2010) measured resilience, self-perception and academic attainment in young people attending specialist provision for Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties (EBD), which has since been categorised as to Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs (DfE, 2014). The aim of the study was to identify whether LAC had any specific needs compared to their peers. All pupils in years seven and nine undertook standardised measures designed to elicit their resilience, self-perception and attainment. The authors concluded that while LAC scored lower for resilience compared to their peers, their academic attainment was higher. The study is valuable because it questions the common discourses around LAC and academic achievement and suggests that interventions should instead focus on other aspects such as resilience. However, the study was based on a small sample size of sixteen children, only four of which were from a LAC background. The sample was therefore too small for the findings to be generalisable. In addition, the sample was drawn from a specific population, CYP who were considered to have EBD. Although many LAC have additional emotional needs, not all do. This is another reason why the findings are not generalisable to the wider LAC community. Nonetheless, the study does highlight the importance of critically reflecting on potentially destructive narratives and discourses around LAC and academic attainment.

2.6.2 Contributing Factors to Difference in Achievement

Care Factors. Five studies used quantitative data from national and local databases to explore LAC's educational trajectories and identify factors which impact outcomes (Berridge et al, 2020; Melkman, 2020, McClung & Gayle, 2010; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017). Unsurprisingly, all of the studies found that care

factors had a significant impact on educational outcomes. Studies by Sebba et al (2015) and Sutcliffe et al (2017) found that length of care is associated with educational achievement. However, while Sebba et al (2015) and Sutcliffe et al (2017) found that children are likely to perform better academically if they entered into the care system at a younger age, and for a substantial length of time, Melkman (2020) found that more time in care in primary school is a risk factor for academic performance. The latter study only considers primary school data, whereas the first two studies consider LAC's educational achievement at the end of secondary school. This highlights the difficulties in identifying specific variables for CYP with unique experiences and backgrounds. The positive impact of being in care for a long period is consistent with the study by Berridge et al (2020) which found that more care stability is related to better academic outcomes. McClung and Gayle (2010) also sought to identify care factors which impact education and found that placement type and reason for becoming looked after both have an impact on academic achievement. It is worth noting that all of the studies identify the impact of variables which the education system has limited control over. All of the studies so far suggest that social care and the home environment have the biggest role in academic outcomes for LAC.

2.6.2.1 LAC's Perspectives: Factors Within the Education System. Two studies also aimed to identify the factors associated with academic outcomes for LAC using qualitative methods (Berridge, 2017; McClung & Gayle, 2010). LAC were interviewed and the findings are consistent that care factors have an important role. For example, in a study by Berridge (2017), twenty-six LAC were interviewed about their care and educational experiences. A key finding was that the young people felt

more able to engage with education once they felt that the difficulties in their home lives were being addressed. However, while the quantitative studies identified factors outside the educational system which impacted on academic achievement, data from interviews with LAC raised the importance of factors within the education system. Both qualitative studies claimed that the LAC participants talked about the importance of relationships with teachers. This was echoed by the findings of a mixed methods study which included interviews with looked after young people (McClung & Gayle, 2010). Despite the perceived importance of teacher-pupil relationships, only three quarters of the participants felt they had one adult to talk to, and many felt unsupported by teaching staff (McClung & Gayle, 2010). Another key finding was that young people felt that bullying and social exclusion had a negative impact on their education. These findings from the qualitative studies highlight the importance of gaining CYP's perspectives, because this rich experiential information is missing from quantitative databases. Such findings are also likely to be more empowering for educational professionals because the young people have highlighted within-school factors which affect their learning and development. Although care factors are clearly important on LAC's educational progress, the education system remains powerless to change this. However, professionals working in the education system such as EPs can impact teacher-pupil relationships and promote inclusivity and positive peer relationships in schools. While such results should be considered with caution due to the relatively small sample sizes, the findings highlight the importance of including LAC's perspectives and voices within this research field.

2.7 Theme Two: Impact of Specific Interventions

Research into the educational trajectories of LAC has demonstrated that LAC are more likely to achieve lower academic outcomes than non-LAC peers (Berridge et al, 2020; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Melkman, 2020; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017). The research so far has suggested that this is due to a range of factors including care factors, experiencing social exclusion, and negative relationships with teachers. Despite the clear need for impactful educational interventions, there is a lack of evidence for effective interventions within the literature. The present literature search produced seven articles focusing on educational interventions for LAC. Three were aimed at the adults supporting LAC including school staff (Turner, & Gulliford, 2020), and the virtual school (Drew & Banerjee, 2019; Sebba & Berridge, 2019), two studies evaluated the impact of academic interventions (Mooney et al, 2016; Raspin et al, 2019), and one study evaluated the impact of a programme designed to improve emotional wellbeing and school engagement (Francis et al, 2017). A meta-synthesis of interventions for LAC will also be included within this literature review (Liabo et al, 2013).

2.7.1 Targeted Interventions

Two studies evaluated interventions designed to improve academic outcomes for LAC. One study evaluated the impact of the 'Letterbox Club' in Northern Ireland (Mooney et al, 2016). This is a book gifting programme in which foster children are sent books through the post. The aim of the intervention was to improve literacy skills through indirectly encouraging children to read. The intervention was evaluated using a randomised control trial design. One hundred and sixteen children took a reading ability test and completed a reading enjoyment scale before and after the intervention. In addition, a selection of participating children and foster carers were

interviewed. It was found that the programme had no impact on children's literacy skills or engagement with school. This was thought to be due to the lack of training and support given to foster carers. The programme was also criticised for not being underpinned by theory (Mooney et al, 2016). Indeed, the programme appears to lack contextual understanding about the needs of LAC.

The second study was which aimed to evaluate an academic intervention was conducted by Raspin et al (2019). While the Letterbox Club intervention can be criticised for not being theoretically informed and lacking in training for key adults, the latter study was designed to evaluate the impact of the ARROW literacy intervention for LAC which is based on cognitive and learning theory and is delivered by a trained tutor. ARROW is a computer-based programme using self-voice feedback. It is designed to improve spelling and reading ability. The study evaluated the impact of the programme for thirty-three LAC in Key Stage Two. The study found that participants made significant improvements in spelling and reading, but there were some considerable limitations with the study. The study was small-scale and only based on the performance of thirty-three children within a narrow age range. The results are therefore unlikely to be representative of the wider LAC population. In addition, there was no control group measure. It is therefore unclear whether the specific intervention led to improvements in literacy or whether common aspects of the intervention, such as small group adult support, could have been equally effective. There were also some limitations with the measures that were taken. The Schonell reading and spelling tests were used which were standardised in 1971 (Kiely et al, 2011). In addition, the same measures were taken prior to and after the intervention which means results could be affected by re-test bias. These factors

undermine both the validity and reliability of the evaluation measures. Despite the positive results, the quality of the study is not robust enough to make claims about the effectiveness of the ARROW intervention for LAC.

The studies evaluating interventions so far have not been able to offer robust evidence for effective interventions. A similar finding was found in a study by Francis et al (2017) which evaluated the impact of Theraplay, an attachment-based therapeutic intervention. Twenty children from one local authority participated in the programme and the impact was evaluated using pre- and post- intervention strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ). The results indicate that there was a slight improvement in overall scores, although this was not significant. Qualitative feedback also indicated a positive improvement in behaviour following the intervention. There were a number of limitations with the study, for example there was no control group. It is therefore unclear which aspects of the intervention led to positive outcomes. Due to the small sample size and limited geographic area in which the study took place, it is not possible for the findings to lead to robust claims about the effectiveness of the intervention. All three studies evaluating interventions for LAC have been designed for primary school children which raises questions about the lack of evidence-based interventions and support available for LAC in secondary schools. The lack of robust evidence for interventions for LAC is consistent with the findings in the meta-analysis by Liabo et al (2013). Twelve studies were included within this meta-analysis. Promising interventions were identified within the review, but none were found to be robust enough to provide evidence regarding effective interventions for LAC.

2.7.2 Systemic Interventions

Three studies included within this literature review focused on the effectiveness of the adults supporting LAC. Two of the studies were focused on the impact of the virtual school. Both studies aimed to explore the ways in which virtual schools support LAC's academic outcomes and psychological wellbeing (Drew & Bannerjee, 2018; Sebba & Berridge, 2019), with a particular focus on transition in the former study. The studies identified a range of ways in which virtual schools can support LAC, including building positive relationships, working with foster families and schools, and mentoring. However, both studies found that the practises of virtual schools varied across local authorities. For example, in the study by Sebba & Berridge (2019), some virtual school staff claimed to have positive relationships with social care services, while some had difficult relationships. Some virtual school head teachers claimed that they could influence important decisions such as persuading a school not to exclude a child (Sebba & Berridge, 2019). This is problematic because it raises questions of equitability; LAC could be advantaged or disadvantaged depending where they live. It is worth noting that the only participants recruited for both studies were virtual school staff themselves, mostly virtual school head teachers. The findings were self-reported and based on responses to a questionnaire (Drew & Bannerjee, 2018), or semi-structured interview (Sebba & Berridge, 2019). The responses could therefore be biased, and it would therefore be useful for future research to triangulate the findings by including the perspectives of key stakeholders such as teachers, carers and LAC themselves.

The literature search produced only one study which evaluated an intervention for school staff, Circles of Adults (CoA) (Turner & Gulliford, 2020). This

is a structured group problem solving intervention. The participants in the study were staff supporting LAC at risk of exclusion. Measurements were taken for attribution and self-efficacy before and after the intervention, but no significant change was identified. Target Monitoring Evaluation scores were used to measure goals and actions before and after participating in CoA. A significant difference was measured for the perceived success of achieving specific goals in the test group compared to the control group. However, this should be treated with caution because due to the small sample size, only four CoA groups agreed to take part in the study, along with only two control groups due to sample attrition. Qualitative feedback from the participants suggest that the staff valued taking part in the group, particularly the time and ability to reflect on the CYP they were working with. However, it is worth considering whether this benefit is specific to the CoA intervention or whether simply having a reflective space was helpful to the staff members. Furthermore, the participants were recruited through convenience sampling. It is possible that they already had an interest in this way of working, and findings might therefore not be representative of other education practitioners' experiences with this intervention. It would be useful for future research to measure the impact of CoA on a bigger scale to elicit more robust data on the effectiveness of the sessions. Overall, the research base for interventions for LAC, and those supporting them, is significantly lacking. While some studies indicate potentially promising results (Francis et al, 2017; Raspin et al, 2019), the findings are generally based on small-scale studies which often have considerable limitations or lack the perspectives of LAC themselves.

2.8 Theme Three: Lived Experience of Education

The perspectives of LAC have so far been underrepresented in many of the studies reviewed here. The literature search only produced two studies which solely focused on LAC's lived experiences of education, and two studies which focused on teacher perspectives (Edwards, 2016; O'Donnell et al, 2020). Regarding the perspectives of LAC, Mannay et al (2017) sought to explore how LAC perceive the 'looked after child' label, and the way in which this influences their experiences of education. A study by Warham (2012) explored the narratives of two young people who were looked after, with a particular focus on their perceptions of school. The study by Manney et al (2017) included pupils from both primary and secondary school while the study by Warham (2012) aimed to represent the views of two pupils who had attended secondary school. Regarding the study by Mannay et al (2017), the primary and secondary pupils appeared to experience school differently. The primary school children made almost no references to the 'looked after child' label and appeared to have similar aspirations to their peers. In contrast, the secondary school pupils appeared more aware of the label and made explicit reference to their LAC status. The secondary school pupils also reported that they felt that this label had a negative impact on their experience of school. Although such views are based on a relatively small study, this is consistent with the literature exploring LAC's educational trajectories which also indicates that LAC tend to do better at primary school, with educational performance decreasing over time (Melkman, 2020). It would be useful for future research to explore this phenomenon in more detail to identify and understand LAC's primary and secondary school experiences in more depth, to inform effective support.

Both studies exploring the lived educational experiences of LAC presented similar findings. Participants in the two studies claimed that they felt negatively positioned by those around them. In the study by Warham (2012) the LAC claimed that they did not want to be seen as different to their peers, but they felt they were positioned that way by school staff. Similarly, the young people in the study by Mannay et al (2017) felt that the LAC label was stigmatising. In addition, the participants in both studies felt they were positioned outside the dominant discourses of success, while some of the young people in the study by Mannay et al (2017) said they felt they were seen as failures as a result of the LAC label. Despite this, the young people in both studies demonstrated positive aspirations, and there was a desire to evade negative stereotypes and create their own narratives of success. As with all studies, it is important to be aware of the contexts which could have shaped the CYP's experiences. The participants in the study by Warham (2012) had both experienced school exclusion. This is likely to have had a profound impact on their educational experiences. Regarding the study by Mannay et al (2017), the CYP were recruited through Foster Network events in Wales. It is therefore possible that the young people had foster parents who were particularly engaged in their education. This means that more vulnerable voices might have been missed from the research. While the perspectives represented in these studies are valuable and offer an important insight into the lived experiences of LAC, it would be useful for future research to gather a wider range of perspectives to increase our understanding of LAC's educational experiences in a range of contexts.

2.8.1 Teachers' Experiences

In addition to exploring the lived experience of school, a study by Edwards (2016) aimed to explore teachers' experiences of working with pupils who are looked after. Fourteen key stage two teachers were interviewed, and it was found that the teachers experienced emotional labour when interacting with LAC. Emotional labour is referred to, within the study, as the process of suppressing true emotions and sublimating them for more socially appropriate emotional responses. It is associated with negative side effects such as burnout (Brackett et al, 2010). Edwards (2016) found that although many of the teachers within the study experienced emotional labour, it could be mediated through factors such as feeling supported by others. Another study by O'Donnell et al (2020) explored physical education (PE) teachers' experiences of engaging LAC in PE and school sport. They found that the teachers felt there was a lack of shared knowledge in the school about LAC's behaviour and experiences, and they could benefit from more training and professional development to understand and support the needs of LAC. The studies highlight the importance of recognising the experiences and challenges that teachers face, and the ways in which they can be supported to understand and build positive relationships with LAC. This is particularly vital because teacher relationships were cited by LAC as one of the most important factors to help them achieve in school (Berridge, 2017; McClung & Gayle,).

2.9 Theme Four: Transition

The literature search only produced one article which aimed to provide an in-depth exploration of the primary-secondary transition experience for LAC (Brewin & Statham, 2011). This study consisted of interviewing a range of individuals involved

with LAC's transition, including foster carers, teachers, education support officers, social workers and LAC themselves. It therefore provided a range of perspectives. The researchers found that there were a number of strategies which supported the transition to secondary school for LAC, including information sharing between stakeholders, offering holistic support to pupils and making sure support is individualised to address the particular needs of each child. Some of the findings were consistent with other studies included within this literature review, for example LAC expressed the importance of being treated the same way as their peers, to avoid feeling different. This was echoed in the studies by Warham (2012) and Mannay et al (2017) in which LAC also expressed not wishing to be seen differently to their peers. Although this study offers a useful starting point when considering the experience of primary-secondary transition for LAC, there are a number of limitations with the study. Firstly, the study was located in one small area in Wales. It is therefore possible that local contextual factors will have affected the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Secondly, although LAC's views are included within the study, they only make up a relatively small proportion of the overall participants. It would be useful for future research to continue to explore and present young people's perspectives. As we have seen from other studies, the support available for LAC is likely to vary depending on the location in which they live (Drew & Bannerjee, 2018; Sebba & Berridge, 2019). It would therefore be helpful for future studies to include other geographic regions.

2.10 Concluding Commentary

The aim of this literature review has been to provide an overview of literature pertaining to LAC and education. It has not intended to provide an exhaustive account of the literature, but an overview of key findings, themes, limitations and areas for development. Twenty articles have been included in this literature review which can be divided into four main areas. The largest group of articles focused on the academic outcomes and trajectories of LAC. All but one of the studies which compared LAC's attainment to non-LAC peers found academic outcomes were lower for LAC (Rees, 2013; Berridge et al, 2020; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017; Melkman, 2020, McClung & Gayle, 2010). The study which was the exception compared the academic achievement of LAC to their peers in a specific sample population, children who were attending a specialist provision for emotional and behavioural needs (Jackson et al, 2010). This raises questions about whether it is valid to compare LAC's academic performance to peers who have not been matched according to specific characteristics which could impact academic outcomes, especially due to the increased prevalence of special educational needs (SEN) among the LAC population (McAuley & Davis, 2009).

A number of factors were identified which impacted educational outcomes for LAC. These included factors associated with the care system such as length of placement and placement stability (Berridge et al, 2020; Melkman, 2020; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017). LAC themselves highlighted factors within the education system which impacted their progress, such as relationships with teachers and experiencing social exclusion (Berridge, 2017; McClung & Gayle, 2010). This not only highlights the importance of including young

people's voices within research, but also suggests that the education system is well-placed to affect change for LAC.

Despite the education system being well-positioned to intervene in LAC's educational outcomes, the literature review has demonstrated that there is a dearth of evidence regarding effective interventions. The second largest group of literature reviewed in this chapter focused on evaluating and exploring specific interventions for LAC. However, the studies either did not show evidence of effectiveness (Mooney et al, 2016), or were not robust enough to make claims about the impact of specific interventions (Drew & Banerjee, 2019; Francis et al, 2017; Sebba & Berridge, 2019; Turner, & Gulliford, 2020; Raspin et al, 2019). This was consistent with the findings of a meta-synthesis of interventions for LAC conducted in 2013 (Liabo et al, 2013).

The third group of studies explored the lived experiences of LAC and the teachers supporting them (Edwards, 2016; Mannay et al, 2017; O'Donnell et al, 2020; Warham, 2012). It is worth noting that this was the smallest group of studies included in this literature search. This suggests that the research base is currently focused more on academic outcomes compared to focusing on the lived educational experiences of LAC. Despite the literature suggesting that LAC tend to have more positive educational experiences in primary school compared to secondary school (Mannay et al, 2017), and tend to do better academically earlier in their education (Melkman, 2020), only one study explored the experience of primary to secondary transition for LAC. This area appears to be underrepresented in the field, along with LAC's perspectives of this experience. The lack of research in this area has

contributed to the rationale for the current research study. The research question for this research project is outlined below.

Research Question: How do looked after children experience transition from primary to secondary school?

3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims and purpose of this research project. It will outline and justify the chosen methods of data collection and analysis, along with presenting the underpinning ontology and epistemology. The quality of the research will be explored, along with ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Purpose

This research project took an exploratory approach. As demonstrated in the literature review, the amount of previous research exploring the lived experience of transition from primary to secondary school for LAC was limited. The literature review demonstrated that the majority of research exploring the education of LAC has focused on academic attainment rather than lived experience, while LAC's voices have been somewhat overlooked. This research project aimed to explore LAC's perspectives and therefore aimed to elevate their voices, offering a small number of LAC the opportunity to tell their own stories. Although the research project does not aim to be emancipatory, it is acknowledged that participating in the research will have given the young people an opportunity to reflect on and process their experiences, which might have enabled them to make connections and better understand past experiences (Murray, 2003). It is hoped that through feeling listened to in a non-judgemental space, the young people will have felt that their voice and experiences are valued and important.

3.3 Researcher Positioning

Researcher reflexivity is integral to qualitative research (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). This research project understands that the researcher cannot be an objective outsider. The researcher's previous experiences, preconceptions and biases will therefore have inevitably shaped the way in which the project was executed, interpreted and presented. Throughout the research process, the researcher has kept a research diary to reflect on the experience of undertaking the project, including emotional reactions, considerations, and links to previous experiences. It is acknowledged that the researcher's interest in this topic has come from their own experiences. The research diary extract included below demonstrates the link to previous experiences of working with LAC. Pseudonyms are used and identifying factors have been removed to protect the CYP's anonymity and confidentiality.

[Extract from research diary 12.10.19]. Why am I interested in LAC's experiences of transition? I have worked with LAC in KS3 as a learning mentor in [redacted] secondary school. The LAC seemed lost and appeared to be grappling for something. One child I worked with, Susannah, shocked and confused everyone by displaying extreme and challenging behaviour, despite being 'fine' at primary school. What was it about transitioning to secondary school that unsettled her so much? LAC would sometimes be overlooked in classes, for example one boy I worked with, Daniel, was asked to write a postcard to his mum or dad in an RE lesson, even though he was in foster care. When I suggested he could write it to whoever he wanted, I saw that he had written 'dear teacher'. Was he looking to the teacher to be a

surrogate parent? I don't think a primary school teacher would have made that mistake with Daniel [...].

It is clear from the research diary that I had made a number of assumptions about LAC's experiences of secondary school. With Susannah, I had assumed that the transition to secondary school had contributed to her challenging behaviour. With Daniel, I had assumed that the teachers in secondary school found it difficult to hold him in mind, and that he was looking to build relationships with his secondary school teachers. I had also made an assumption about primary schools being nurturing environments in which LAC are able to build positive relationships with their teacher and feel kept in mind. I had therefore made assumptions about the impact of having multiple teachers on children's experiences once they have transitioned to secondary school. Recognising these assumptions was helpful for me as a researcher because I was able to identify preconceptions which were based on limited evidence. Such assumptions were based on snapshots of experiences while the views and perspectives of children such as Daniel and Susannah were unknown. I was unable to know whether my interpretations of their behaviour were correct, regardless of whether they were representative of other LAC's experiences.

3.4 Research Design

This was a qualitative research project which utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data from two LAC who attended mainstream secondary schools in London. The data was then analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The research project aimed to answer the following research question:

How do looked after children experience transition from primary to secondary school?

3.5 Research Orientation

3.5.1 *Ontology*

Crotty (1998) claimed that a researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective is fundamental to research, directly affecting the decisions made throughout the research process. It was therefore a useful starting point to consider the ontological and epistemological perspectives which underpinned this research project. Crotty (1998) described ontology as concerned with existence and the structure of reality, which leads to the question 'what is there to know?' (Willig, 2013, p.12). Ontology therefore refers to the assumptions that individuals make about the nature of the world, such assumptions can be broadly categorised as 'realism' or 'relativism' (2013, p.12). Those who take a realist perspective are likely to think that a reality exists which is independent of the individual, whereas those who take a relativist perspective are likely to believe that there are multiple ways of interpreting the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and reality is constructed and understood by those living within it (Robson & MarCartan, 2016). By adopting a relativist ontology, this research assumes that there is no single truth or reality which exists. Instead, the world can only be experienced imperfectly and the way an individual experiences reality is affected by their previous experience and context. As is outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), an individual's reality is interpreted through mental constructions, although some constructions might be shared between people or across cultures.

3.5.2 Epistemology

While ontology asks 'what is there to know?' (Willig, 2013, p. 12), epistemology asks 'how, and what can we know?' (Willig, 2013, p.12). Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and to the way in which we interpret the world and construct what we know (Mertens, 2009; Willig, 2013). The epistemological perspective which underpinned this research project was constructivism. The philosophy of constructivism developed in opposition to dominant positivist western theories about knowledge (Yilmaz, 2008). While positivist ideologies take the view that objective truths exist, constructivism takes the perspective that truth and knowledge do not exist independently to human minds, but is developed through experience (Hendry et al, 1999). Knowledge is not therefore passively received but actively constructed by individuals (Maclellan & Soden, 2004). Although constructivism is sometimes used interchangeably with constructionism, this research project takes the view that the positions are different. Constructionism is understood in the context of this research as relating to shared meanings about the world which evolve through shared experiences and interactions (Robson, 2011), constructivism is understood as the way in which humans individually construct knowledge through engagement with objects in the world (Crotty, 1998). This research project has not sought to identify an objective truth about transitioning from primary to secondary school, for example whether the experience is overall positive or negative. The research perspective is based on the view that individuals will have constructed their own unique narratives and understanding according to their own experiences.

3.6 Participants

3.6.1 Sample Homogeneity

Two participants were recruited for this research project. Homogeneity within the sample is considered to be necessary for IPA research (Smith et al, 2009). This is because a homogenous sample allows for a particular phenomenon to be explored. Both participants within this sample were looked after and had experienced transition from mainstream primary to mainstream secondary school within London within the last three years. They also both entered the care system before leaving primary school, which ensured that the participants had experienced the whole of the transition process, including any pre-transition and post-transition support, as a LAC. It was originally planned that the participants would be in year seven to explore recent experiences of transition, however due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic it was acknowledged that this particular cohort would have had unique and disrupted experiences of education which would not be typical of transition to secondary school, it would therefore impact the homogeneity of the sample if some participants had experienced a significantly disrupted transition process and others had not. Further consideration of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this research project can be found in the discussion chapter. This research project has focused on the perspectives of those who were in years eight and nine in the academic year 2020-2021. This was to allow for the most recent transition perspective which had not been directly affected by the pandemic.

It was acknowledged that a large proportion of LAC are in specialist provisions such as special schools and pupil referral units (Sebba et al, 2015), however it was decided that it was not within the scope of this research to include

participants who attended specialist provision due to variations regarding support and educational experiences within these settings. While it was not the aim of this research to exclude any perspectives, it was decided that this particular research project would focus on the experiences of CYP in mainstream settings, to increase the likelihood of homogeneity within the sample.

3.6.2 Sample Selection

Two participants were recruited for this research project. The participants were both considered to be LAC according to the following definition 'under eighteen years old and in the care of the local authority (LA) (Children Act, 1989). Due to the participants being in year eight and nine, it is acknowledged that a number of years had passed since they had experienced school transition. This is likely to have impacted the data because the participants might have had difficulties recalling their experience, and memories might have been affected by more recent experiences of secondary school, both positive and negative. On the other hand, the passing of time might have allowed the participants to process and reflect on their transition experience and to deepen their understanding of the process. It is also acknowledged that while the young people's experiences of finishing primary school and starting secondary school were not directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, for example they did not experience school closure during primary school or within the first term of secondary school, nevertheless their most recent experience of education was significantly affected prior to and during the data collection taking place. Such recent experiences could have impacted their overall feelings towards secondary school, thus impacting the way they could have interpreted their school

transition experience. Such considerations were reflected on in the researcher's research diary, as illustrated by the following extract:

[Extract from Research Diary 01.04.20]. 'After discussion with my research supervisor I think that Including the perspectives of year 7 will lead to a different project and detract from research aims. The new project would be 'how looked after children experienced primary-secondary transition within the context of the covid-19 pandemic'. It therefore makes sense not to include this year group'.

3.6.3 Participant Recruitment Process

Including LAC's perspectives in research is often found to be challenging, particularly regarding recruitment, issues of access, retention and obtaining consent (Quarmby, 2014; Quarmby et al, 2019). This research was no exception. The covid-19 pandemic added additional challenges to the recruitment process. The data collection was originally intended to take place in the summer term in 2020, but this coincided with a national lockdown which included national school closures. The original aim was to carry out the research within schools, but this was not possible. Participant recruitment began in the autumn term of 2020. It was acknowledged that many schools, local authorities and families were under increasing pressure due to the continuing covid-19 pandemic, including managing the emotional, financial and practical challenges of the pandemic. This context is thought to have impacted the recruitment process and the response rate was significantly lower than expected. The recruitment process was expanded and lengthened as a result of the increased challenges. While recruitment was originally intended to take place through one

virtual school, there was an attempt to recruit from another virtual school and secondary schools across London were contacted over a five month period, as agreed by the Tavistock Research and Ethics Committee (Appendix G-H.ii). Despite every effort to recruit six-eight participants, two participants agreed to be interviewed.

It is acknowledged that there are both opportunities and limitations regarding a small sample size. One limitation is that the range of perspectives and experiences explored and presented within the research project are reduced. However, there are a number of strengths, for example a smaller number of interviews allows for a deeper level of analysis to take place. Warnock (1987) asserted that exploring a particular phenomenon in more depth allows the reader to be closer to the universal. This particular research project does not aim to present generalisable data, but aims for theoretical transferability, a process by which the reader is able to learn more and think differently about an aspect of their professional experience (Smith et al, 2009). For professionals working with this group, it is thought that two rich and in-depth accounts of school-transition experiences will promote a greater understanding of the complexity, nuances, challenges and opportunities of the school transition experience, which can be taken account of in professional practice. A further exploration of the strengths and limitations of the recruitment process can be found in the discussion chapter. The researcher is incredibly grateful to the young people, school staff and virtual school staff who supported or participated in this research project.

Both participants came to be recruited through one virtual school. It was therefore acknowledged that the LAC were known to the virtual school staff member

so it was emphasised that the recruitment process should be equitable. Regarding this research project, an equitable recruitment process involved offering all LAC who fit the criteria an equal chance of taking part, regardless of factors such as ability, ethnicity, or type of care placement. The recruitment strategy included randomly grouping all potential participants into batches of ten. One group was to be randomly selected to be contacted first and depending on the response rate another batch would then be contacted until the correct number of participants were identified. However, there were only ten participants in the local authority which met the criteria, all ten were therefore contacted. Without this strategy, there was a risk that the virtual school link might have been more likely to select LAC who were more confident expressing themselves verbally, thus excluding pupils who have difficulties with verbal communication or who were less confident. This would have had an impact on the data collected because those who are more confident might have had more positive experiences within school. Despite this effort, it was not possible for the recruitment process to be completely random. For example, pupils who were going through a particularly difficult life experiences, such as a foster placement breakdown, were not included. One of the most important ethical principles underpinning this research project was protection from harm. The researcher was in agreement with the virtual school that if a young person was deemed to be especially emotionally vulnerable at the time of the research then this was thought to be a justifiable reason to exclude them from the selection process. Although it is not always possible to predict how an individual will respond to research, it was considered to be a good enough reason if the risk of harm was felt to be higher than normal.

Ten LAC within a local authority in London met the criteria to take part in this study. Participants were required to be 'looked after children' according to the definition provided by the Children Act (1989). They must have become a LAC at least one year before leaving primary school, in order to have experienced the whole transition process as a LAC. They must also have attended a mainstream secondary school in London in year 8 or 9 in the 2020-2021 academic year. These criteria were developed to provide homogeneity within the sample, which is necessary for IPA research with small sample sizes (Smith et al, 2009). No LAC who met the criteria were deemed too vulnerable to take part by the virtual school and therefore none were initially excluded. Information sheets and consent forms for foster carers and LAC were emailed to foster carers by a virtual school member of staff. Foster carers were invited to discuss the research project with LAC in their care, and they were asked to respond by email to the researcher if the LAC in question was interested in taking part. Two foster carers responded. Both the carers and LAC were asked to sign and complete the consent forms. The LAC's social workers were also asked to provide consent for the young people's participation. Despite attempts to repeat the process in another virtual school, no other willing service was identified. Designated teachers in secondary schools across London were also contacted to increase the number of participants but no other participants were recruited through this method. The designated teachers were identified through links to the researcher.

3.6.4 Participant Information

Contextual information relating to the participants is outlined below. This is to provide context for the reader. Pseudonyms are provided and further details are

omitted to protect the identity of the participants. The following information was provided by the LAC's foster carers and therefore reflects their own language.

Table 1.

Contextual Information about Participants.

Name	Asif	Liam
Age	13	13
Year Group	8	9
Ethnicity	Pakistani	Mixed-race
School history	1 primary school 1 secondary school	2 primary schools 1 secondary school
Years in care	7	7
Placement history	1 care placement	3 care placements

3.7 Strategies for Data Capture

3.7.1 Semi Structured Interviews

Various methods of data collection were considered, along with respective strengths and limitations. Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate data collection method for this research project. This was guided by the ontological and epistemological orientation. Semi-structured interviews are a data collection method which enable the unique experiences and perspectives of participants to be heard. Constructivism is underpinned by the assumption that

individuals' realities are constructed through their unique fragments of experience. Individual interviews therefore felt more appropriate than data collection methods such as focus groups. Interviews were also deemed more appropriate than other data methods such as written questionnaires because they allowed for richer and more in-depth information than would be obtained through completing a written form. Interviews also allowed additional aspects of verbal communication such as inflection and tone of voice to contribute to the understanding of the young people's experiences. Alternative types of interviews were considered but were not deemed appropriate regarding the aims of this research. Structured interviews are based on pre-existing categories and are therefore more suited to research which is deductive rather than inductive. This research project aimed to be exploratory and therefore took an inductive approach to data collection. However unstructured interviews did not seem appropriate either because this research project was concerned with exploring a particular theme, and therefore required the interview questions to have a particular focus. Semi-structured interviews were therefore considered to be the most suitable option because while there is enough structure to explore particular themes related to the research question, there is also flexibility within the interviews which allows for the participants to influence what is included (Smith et al, 2009).

3.7.2 The Interview Schedule

An example interview schedule can be found in Appendix I. Some of the questions were designed to be open to allow the participants to have a sense of ownership and control over the content of the interview (Smith et al, 2009). This was important because the aim of the research to be exploratory and to gain an understanding of individual's experiences from their unique perspectives. At the

beginning of the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to draw a visual representation of their experience. The first questions were therefore about the content of the drawing. This drawing was designed to give each young person an opportunity to reflect on their overall experience. Follow up and prompt questions were used when necessary throughout the interviews.

3.7.3 Drawings

Drawings were included as part of the data collection method because this was considered to be a creative way for the participants to engage with and reflect on their experiences as a whole. It was also hoped that drawing their experiences would help the young people to remember how they felt. Accessing memory from multiple perspectives has been found to be an effective way of gathering rich information, particularly when drawing on creative and visual strategies (Smith et al, 2009). In addition, representing a phenomenon visually allows individuals to convey their experience without being dependent on verbal communication skills. When planning the research project, the researcher was aware that the sample would be relatively young and therefore might not have the skills, confidence or experience to be able to fully articulate themselves verbally. It was hoped that the drawing would offer an additional way to express how they felt, and it was also hoped that drawing pictures would help the young people to feel at ease and would be experienced as a positive and enjoyable activity.

3.7.4 Remote Data Collection

Due to the covid-19 pandemic it was not possible to carry out the research face-to-face. The interviews therefore took place remotely, on Zoom, while the young people were at home. The implications of remote data collection, including both benefits and limitations, are explored in the discussion chapter. The interviews were audio recorded using a dictaphone and stored securely on an encrypted device. Every effort was made to ensure that the data collection process was ethical and avoided harm. This included setting up the meetings with foster carers to ensure that no contact information was shared between the participant and researcher and ensuring that the foster carer was physically nearby during the interview. Further information regarding ethical considerations can be found in the ethics form in Appendix H.

3.8 Data Analysis

Considerable consideration was given to a variety of methods of data analysis when designing this research project. The strengths and limitations of a number of methods were discussed in both small group research sessions and one-to-one supervision sessions. IPA was considered to be the most appropriate method of data collection regarding the aims and objectives of this research project. Before considering the rationale for this method, the justification for discarding other methods will be outlined below.

3.8.1 Alternative Approaches

3.8.1.1 Narrative analysis. The first data analysis method which was considered for this research project was narrative research. This method of

qualitative data analysis explores the stories and events which are organised and sequenced by the narrator (Riessman, 2004). This was initially appealing because the researcher was interested in the ways in which LAC had constructed their individual narratives. In addition, it was thought that this method would facilitate a positive interview experience for the CYP because telling stories and constructing narratives can offer individuals the opportunity to understand potentially confusing events (Murray, 2003). However, this method was based on an assumption: that the participants would recount their experiences in a linear and chronological structure with a clear beginning, middle and end. In accordance with the underlying constructivist epistemology, this research project acknowledges that the participants were likely to have experienced transition in a variety of ways according to their own individual experiences, contexts and perspectives. The young people might not therefore have experienced transition in a linear way. Therefore, narrative analysis was not considered to be the most appropriate method because it might not have suited the ways in which the young people made sense of and presented their experiences. The extract from the research diary below demonstrates this thinking:

[Extract from research diary 10.01.20]. 'Narrative research is dependent on the participants seeing their experience as a sequence or story. The CYP might not have experienced transition this way and might remember it as fragmented experience. Another approach might allow for more flexibility'.

3.8.1.2 Thematic Analysis. This method of data analysis was also considered. Thematic analysis is commonly used within qualitative research to

identify and extract shared or common themes within data (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This method involves identifying passages of text which represent the same idea (Gibbs, 2007). Thematic analysis is often used within social constructionist research because it is concerned with shared or common experiences. However, this research takes a constructivist perspective and is therefore concerned with the individual experiences of the young people. In trying to only identify shared themes between participants, it is possible that some of the individual perspectives and experiences could be lost. In addition, one limitation of thematic analysis is that it is often limited to describing data, with less emphasis on deeper interpretation (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Due to the constructivist and relativist paradigm of the research, IPA was considered a more appropriate method of data analysis due to enabling in-depth exploration and interpretation of individual experiences, alongside shared elements.

3.8.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered the most appropriate data analysis method for a number of reasons. IPA is not designed to provide generalisable data, but instead aims to provide an in-depth understanding of individual experiences (Smith et al, 2009). The approach is designed to enable researchers to examine how individuals make sense of significant experiences in their lives (Smith et al, 2009). This was relevant to this research project because it aimed to explore the in-depth experiences of individual LAC, rather than provide data which is representative of the wider community. IPA provides an 'understanding of the part to illuminate the whole' (Oxley, 2016, p.60). This project does not aim to provide information that is relevant to all LAC, but instead aimed to provide a deep

and in-depth understanding of two individuals' experiences. It is hoped that this will be useful to those supporting LAC, such as EPs, teachers, social workers, foster carers and the virtual school, among others. This is because the research aimed to demonstrate the complexity and importance of the school transition experience for LAC.

IPA was also selected for this research project because it is an inductive approach. IPA research does not aim to test a priori hypotheses, but instead allows findings to emerge through the data (Smith et al, 2009). The inductive approach of IPA therefore suits the exploratory nature of this research project in which the participants are seen as the experts in their own experiences. This exploratory approach is appropriate to the research project due to the lack of pre-existing studies regarding the school transition experiences of LAC. In addition, IPA analysis is concerned with individuals' experience of a phenomenon, rather than with the phenomenon itself (Smith et al, 2009). IPA is also concerned with the ways in which individuals have experienced a phenomenon within a particular context (Smith et al, 2009). This suits the aims of this research project which is concerned with the individual's perspectives of school transition, rather than exploring the school transition itself.

Overall, IPA analysis suits the underlying epistemological and ontological stance of this research project. IPA is idiographic, meaning it does not aim to make assumptions or generalisations about a particular group, but is instead 'concerned with the particular' (Smith et al, 2009, p. 29). This is in accordance with the constructivist view that reality is constructed through interactions between the

individual and the world (Elliot et al, 2000). This approach to data analysis is also consistent with relativist ontology. Just as relativism does not claim that a reality exists separate from individuals' understanding and constructions, IPA does not aim to find a universal truth unlike a positivist approach. Instead, IPA approaches are concerned with exploring in-depth, individual constructions of experience. IPA research is underpinned by three main theories, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al, 2009). These are explored in further detail below, with references made to this particular research project.

3.8.3 Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA

3.8.3.1 Phenomenology. The concept of 'phenomenology' has been defined as the philosophical approach of the study of human experience (Smith et al, 2009). IPA is a phenomenological approach to data analysis and it therefore aims to derive research themes from the in-depth accounts of lived experiences (Wagstaff et al, 2014). Phenomenology is well suited to research in the field of psychology because it is concerned with rich information about human experiences (Smith et al, 2009). The philosophy of phenomenology was suited to this particular research project because the aim of the project was to provide rich and in-depth insights into the unique lived experiences of LAC experiencing a particular phenomenon, school transition. Husserl was the founding father of phenomenology and he stated that experiences should be examined on their own terms and in the way that they occur (Smith et al, 2009). Rather than a deductive approach which develops hypotheses based on existing theories, phenomenology is well suited to an inductive approach in which themes are derived from the accounts of experience themselves.

3.8.3.1.1 The History of Phenomenology. The development of phenomenology over time is explored here to offer a deeper understanding of the theory which underpins this method of data analysis. As the first thinker associated with phenomenology, Husserl was interested in attempting to capture the essence of experience. He believed that the essence of an experience can be understood through reflection and attempting to observe our perceptions of the world (Smith et al, 2009). He therefore believed that through consciously observing our perceptions and experiences, an individual could bring a degree of objectivity to it which will enable them to understand its essence. While the importance of reflecting on human experiences continues to be a central component of phenomenology, and therefore IPA, later thinkers criticised the idea that an individual can be an objective observer of experience (Smith et al, 2009).

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre extended Husserl's ideas further. Although there were fundamental differences in their ideas, they all emphasised the flaws of being able to reduce an experience to its essence, and emphasised the innately connected nature of experience, individuals, and surrounding context. Heidegger asserted that human beings are intrinsically part of a world with objects, language and relationships (Smith et al, 2009). He argued that an individual cannot step outside their inner world to see an object or experience with objectivity. A person is always experiencing the world within a context. While Husserl believed that consciousness was the fundamental tool for understanding the world, Merleau-Ponty thought that the world could only be experienced and understood through the body (Smith et al, 2009). He argued that humans are bodies in the world and therefore the importance of physical perceptions in understanding the world should not be

overlooked. This again emphasises the importance of the subjective experience over the objective.

While Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty emphasised the significance of the context in which the world is experienced, Sartre questioned the idea that individuals are static and therefore have an 'essence' (Smith et al, 2009). He claimed that 'existence comes before essence' (Sartre, 1948, as cited in Smith et al, 2009, p.20), meaning that the self is not an objective entity to be discovered, but is always developing and changing. Sartre claimed that this change occurs as a response to unique contextual and intrapersonal experiences. Sartre, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, emphasised the worldliness and context of human experiences (Smith et al, 2009). They claimed that an individual's experiences cannot be removed from the environment, language and context in which they take place.

3.8.3.1.2 Phenomenology and the Current Research Project. The idea that an experience cannot be isolated from the context in which it has occurred was central to the perspective of this research project. This study did not aim to capture an essential and objective 'essence' of the young people's experiences. Instead, it is acknowledged that it was impossible to explore the transition from primary to secondary school without acknowledging the unique and inherently linked role of the context, relationships and other unique factors which will have impacted this phenomenon. Phenomenological philosophy lends itself well to the constructivist orientation of this research project. It is acknowledged that each participant's perception of transition was unique, based on their particular catalogue of experiences. It is also acknowledged that the researcher cannot remove themselves

from the context, environment or language which allowed them to explore the experience of another. The researcher's own unique experiences of the world will therefore have influenced the way in which they can understand and interpret another's, which leads to the second theoretical underpinning of IPA: hermeneutics.

3.8.3.2 Hermeneutics. This concept refers to the theory of interpretation (Smith et al, 2009) which is central to IPA research. Schleiermacher, while mainly referring to the process of interpreting religious and historical texts, argued that not only does the linguistic context shape a piece of text, but there is a uniqueness in the way that individuals use language which is imprinted upon a text (Smith et al, 2009). This is also relevant to interpreting text within psychological research because it is helpful to consider both the unique meaning expressed by the individual, and the context and social discourses which shaped their experiences and use of language. Schleiermacher, controversially, also claimed that thorough analysis of a text offers a better understanding of the speaker than they have about themselves (Smith et al, 2009). This has been criticised by later thinkers such as Gadamer who claim that the author does not have the authority to claim a better or truer understanding than the individual (Smith et al, 2009). This research project takes the view that it is not possible to produce a true understanding of an individual's experience, which would be more relevant to a realist ontology and positivist epistemology. Instead, there are multiple ways in which meaning can be interpreted and understood. While it is not possible to replicate a first-hand account of another's experience, IPA research can aim to produce a 'coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description' (Larkin et al, 2006, p. 104). It is hoped that a thorough analysis of the participants' accounts has led to meaningful interpretations which might not have been

immediately apparent to the young people themselves, or to the researcher before engaging with the interpretative process. As is claimed by Heidegger, phenomenology can bring something to light which otherwise lies disguised or latent (Smith et al, 2009).

Both Heidegger and Gadamer were concerned with the importance of being aware of one's own biases and pre-conceptions when interpreting texts, which might only emerge during the analytic process (Smith et al, 2009). The researcher was engaged in a double hermeneutic process (Smith et al, 2009). This means that there were multiple layers of interpretation at play. The participants tried to interpret and make sense of their own experience, and the researcher tried to make sense of the participant's interpretation. The difference is that the researcher is able to systematically and thoroughly apply skills of interpretation and conscious awareness (Smith et al, 2009). From a constructivist perspective, it is acknowledged that the way the researcher understands and experiences the world is shaped by exposure to a range of previous experiences. In accordance with the views of phenomenological thinkers, it was not possible for the researcher to step out of their own experiences and biases to objectively interpret the interview data. The researcher therefore aimed to become aware of assumptions, preconceptions and biases which emerged during data analysis, using the research diary and research supervision sessions as a tool for reflection.

Schleiermacher took the view that interpretation is not a mechanical process, but a craft (Smith et al, 2009). IPA is a dynamic process which is dependent on the hermeneutic cycle in which an understanding of the part is dependent on its

relationship to the whole (Smith et al, 2009). With this in mind, the data analysis process was one in which the part and the whole were considered individually and in relation to one another. For example, the interview transcripts were analysed individually, then with relation to one another, and finally themes were linked to the wider context. Within this research process, it is hoped that by understanding the part (the responses to the semi-structured interviews), the reader can gain a better understanding of the whole (the experience of school transition for LAC). It is also hoped that this part (an in-depth understanding of school transition for LAC) might help shed light on another whole (the overall educational experiences of LAC). It is hoped that this will aid the process of theoretical transferability; while individual experiences are understood as unique, professionals working with LAC are able to learn from them and apply this learning to their own practice.

3.8.4 Idiography

IPA is an idiographic approach which means it is related to the particular (Smith et al, 2009). This is relevant to the constructivist and relativist orientation of this research which assumes that individuals are unique and experience the world in distinctive ways which cannot be generalised. IPA is committed to the in-depth interpretation of individual experiences rather than nomothetic research which aims to establish laws and general patterns of behaviour (Ponterotto, 2005). The latter is better suited to positivist research which aims to identify trends across groups. There is a tension within IPA research regarding the commitment to attend to the individual experience, while also exploring and presenting links and commonalities between the experiences of multiple participants. However, as Thackerey (2015) suggests, this can be a productive tension which enables IPA research to honour the individual experience and attend to shared elements of experiences simultaneously. While

nomothetic approaches allow for data analysis to occur without reference to the individual, in IPA research data is preserved within individual accounts first, before links are made between them. This allows for each individual account to be considered alongside the context of the person's unique experience and identity. Regarding this research project, both participants' accounts were analysed separately before themes were identified between them.

Due to the number of participants in the present research, and the aim of the research project to represent and honour individual experiences in detail, a case study approach was considered. A case study has been defined as '[...] detailed, intensive knowledge about a single 'case' or of a small number of related 'cases'' (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.80). However, the research instead stayed with greater fidelity to the IPA process outlined in Smith et al (2009). This allowed for greater flexibility regarding the analysis and presentation of the participants' accounts. The IPA process outlined in this chapter allowed for the participants' accounts to be presented idiographically, while shared themes were also explored and presented.

3.8.5 Theoretical Underpinnings Overview

This section has aimed to demonstrate the ways in which the theoretical underpinnings of IPA are suited to the aims of this research project. Phenomenology is concerned with the exploration of human experiences. This is relevant to this research project because it has aimed to explore the lived experience of being a LAC while adapting to leaving primary school and starting secondary school. Regarding hermeneutics, this study has aimed to provide interpretations of the

participants' experiences which are meaningful and while remaining mindful of the limitations of understanding another's experience. Finally, this research project is from a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology and is therefore based on the perspective that individuals' narratives and understanding of the world are uniquely constructed. An idiographic approach is congruent with this worldview because it allows for the in-depth study of individual experiences. IPA is therefore appropriate for this research project and lends itself to a rich and meaningful understanding of human experience.

3.8.6 Critique of IPA

Willig (2013) outlines three of the main limitations of IPA research which pertain to: the role of language, the suitability of accounts, and explanation versus description. These will be considered in turn. Regarding the role of language, Willig (2013) raises concerns about the reliance on language within IPA research. Rather than offering a direct insight into experience, the ability to verbally express an internal experience is inherently flawed and limited (Willig, 2013). This is particularly the case for the sample within this research project. The participants are relatively young and therefore might still be developing their communication skills. This is likely to have an impact on their ability to verbally communicate their perspectives. Willig (2013) argues that a transcript offers insight into the 'ways in which an individual talks about a particular experience within a particular context, [rather] than about the experience itself' (2013, p. 94). This research does not claim to have obtained a direct insight into the LAC's experience of school transition, but it does offer an insight into the ways in which an experience is understood and expressed within the context of the interview with the researcher. This research project acknowledges that

there are multiple contextual factors which will have influenced the participants' responses, and therefore aimed to analyse and present the findings with an awareness of these factors.

Willig also questioned the suitability of accounts. Similar to the role of language, Willig questioned whether participants are able to communicate the richness of their experience in sufficient detail. To help mitigate against this limitation, the participants in this research project were invited to represent their experience visually, using drawings. This was used as an aid to prompt conversation and offer an additional source of information. This was felt particularly pertinent to the participants who might not have felt confident in verbally communicating with an unfamiliar adult. While this does not solve the problem entirely, it does offer an additional medium of communication.

Regarding the third limitation of IPA, Willig claimed that phenomenological research is limited to describing experiences rather than explaining them or adding to our knowledge of causal factors. This research aimed to go beyond description and offer a rich interpretation of the young people's experiences. Within the discussion chapter, the findings were linked to theory and the wider context and were therefore offered a further level of interpretation. The researcher has also taken the view that a detailed description of significant human experience is valid and useful, particularly for vulnerable groups whose voices are often overlooked within research such as LAC. For professionals working with this group, a rich description and interpretation of some LAC's experiences of school transition is thought to offer the reader an opportunity to learn more and think differently about their own

professional experiences, in accordance with theoretical transferability (Smith et al, 2009).

3.9 The Researcher and Participants: Reflection of Social and Cultural Contexts

Burnham (2012) introduced the social graces framework, this refers to the invisible and visible differences between individuals including gender, ethnicity, age and education. Such overt and covert differences are thought to contribute to power differences between people (Burnham, 2012). Throughout this research process I aimed to pay attention to such social graces to mitigate against unconscious power dynamics and help individuals feel as empowered and comfortable as possible. This started with recognising my own social graces. I am White British, middle class, educated, female, and in my twenties. There are aspects of my identity, culture and experience which will have led to an imbalanced power dynamic. For example, age, ethnicity and education. I am an adult whereas the research participants were young adolescents. This is likely to have influenced the participants' behaviour and might have influenced the information that the participants felt comfortable sharing. Although I introduced myself as a researcher and trainee psychologist, I was aware that the young people might unconsciously respond to me as a 'teacher figure' due to my age and appearance. This is a process referred to as 'transference' in psychodynamic theory (Curtis, 2015). By speaking to the participants individually I was also aware that I might be thought of as a 'social worker' figure, due to LAC often having experiences of being asked to give their views to a professional who is not a member of school staff. Although such unconscious processes cannot be avoided, it was important to be aware of them. I myself have experience of working

with CYP as a trainee EP and I was aware of trying to respond to the CYP as participants rather than young people who had been referred to the educational psychology service for assessment.

There was also an implicit power imbalance regarding ethnicity. Both of the participants were from ethnic minority backgrounds. This difference might have also affected how comfortable the young people felt about discussing personal experiences. It is acknowledged that such power imbalances are reflected by wider structural and systemic inequality and therefore cannot be eradicated within this research project. However, every effort was made to ensure that the participants felt as empowered as possible. This included an 'informal' information session prior to the interview to give the participants a chance to ask questions and become familiar with the researcher. It also included ensuring that the young people were kept fully informed about the research project, had assented to take part, and were aware that they could withdraw at any time. The interview sessions aimed to offer a non-judgemental and empathetic space in which individual experiences and cultural differences were respected and valued. The researcher was aware that systemic and structural contextual factors regarding race and ethnicity are likely to have informed the participants' experience of education and care, either implicitly or explicitly. This research project is therefore not only focused on the school-transition experiences of LAC, but the school-transition experiences of LAC from an ethnic minority background.

3.9.1 Researcher Identity and the Interpretative Process

My identity, culture and experience will also have influenced my understanding of the young people's perspectives. Most prominently, I have never experienced being looked after. This will have limited my understanding because, as expressed by Merleau-Ponty (Smith et al, 2009), while we can be empathetic towards another's experience, we can never fully share it. However, it can also be argued from a constructivist perspective, that even if I did have experience of being looked after, my experience would be different to those of the research participants and would not necessarily have offered a greater insight or understanding. Conversely, if I had first-hand experience of the care system my interpretation and analysis of the participants' experience might have been unconsciously influenced by my own experiences. There are therefore benefits and limitations of having first-hand experience of the phenomenon being explored within research. Regardless, no researcher will have had an identical experience to that of the participant. This raises the importance of bringing awareness to our own previous experiences as researchers, and the biases and preconceptions these might bring. Such issues were discussed and reflected on within research supervision throughout the process.

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3.10 Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure followed the framework outlined by the Smith et al (2009). The aim of the data analysis process was to reflect on and engage with each participants' account. Although IPA is a flexible rather than structured approach, the following six steps were followed. These are described in more detail below. The first four steps were applied to each of the transcripts individually, steps 5 and 6 involved considering links between the accounts.

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases

3.10.1 Step 1. Reading and Re-Reading

Both interview transcripts were initially analysed separately. Each transcript was read by the researcher several times, while listening to the interview recording. This step was to enable the researcher to be immersed in the data. Listening and reading each transcript at the same time allowed for tone of voice, inflections of speech, pauses and hesitations to be taken into account. The full transcripts can be found in Appendices J-K.

3.10.2 Step 2. Initial Noting

The aim of this step was to explore the semantic and linguistic content of the transcripts (Smith et al, 2009). Three types of initial comments were made which were 'descriptive comments' which simply focused on describing the content, 'linguistic comments' which focused on specific uses of language such as repetition, and 'conceptual comments' which focused on exploring and identifying concepts which were beyond the literal understanding of the text. However, these were treated tentatively at this stage to allow for interpretations to be checked at a later stage in the analytic process. This is to ensure that interpretations of the data come from

within the information provided by the participants rather than being read into or applied to the text (Smith et al, 2009). This is consistent with an inductive rather than deductive process of analysis (Robson et al, 2011).

3.10.3 Step 3. Developing Emergent Themes

Exploratory comments were used to identify emergent themes. This involved recognising phrases within the text which had psychological focus. As stated by Smith et al (2009), this stage involved parts of the text which 'contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual' (p. 92). This stage involved a delicate balance of applying the researchers' interpretation to the text, while ensuring that the themes emerged from the text itself. It was therefore considered important that both individual phrases and words were considered alongside the meaning of the text as a whole. This stage led to a list of themes pertaining to the transcript in question. The exploratory comments and emergent themes for each transcript can be found in Appendices J-K.

3.10.4 Step 4. Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

At this stage, the emergent themes were grouped together by finding connections between them. These were then grouped together under 'superordinate' themes which was a process called 'abstraction' (Smith et al, 2009). Similar themes were grouped together and an overarching name for the group of themes was developed. For example, for one of the participants, Asif, the emergent themes 'losing and gaining friends' and 'odd one out' were grouped under the superordinate

theme 'lonely journey'. The groups of emergent themes and related superordinate themes for both participants can be found in Appendix L and Appendix N.

Not all emergent themes were included at this stage and some were discarded. This mostly involved discarding similar or repetitive themes, as demonstrated in Appendix M. Some themes were also discarded which did not appear pertinent to the text as a whole. Although it is acknowledged that this is was an imperfect process, every effort was made to ensure that the emergent themes felt representative of, and related to, the participants' accounts.

3.10.5 Step 5. Moving to the Next Case

The previous 4 stages were then applied to the second case.

3.10.6 Step 6. Looking for Patterns Across Cases

Once a list of themes and superordinate themes had been obtained for each of the accounts, patterns were explored between the accounts. While aiming to retain a focus on the idiographic nature of each case, convergences and divergences between cases were explored. Shared higher order qualities can aid a deeper understanding of the individual accounts, for example by understanding whether identified themes are unique or common among the participants (Smith et al, 2009). This resulted in four overarching themes which pertained to each case. The relationship between the emergent themes, superordinate themes and overarching themes is illustrated in Appendix O.

3.11 Trustworthiness

Validity, reliability and generalisability are concepts which are relevant to quantitative research but are inappropriate for qualitative research (Yardley, 2011). This is because quantitative and qualitative designs have fundamentally different aims. While quantitative research often aims to minimise bias and the influence of the researcher by using strategies such as structured and standardised questionnaires, many of the benefits of qualitative research cannot be retained without the influence of the researcher (Yardley, 2011). For example, open questions are more likely to illicit disclosures of personal experiences and individual interpretations. In addition, analyses by the researcher are more likely to lead to insightful and covert meanings (Yardley, 2011). Although the influence of the researcher is inherently present in both quantitative and qualitative research, and no research occurs in a vacuum, the influence of the researcher is more explicitly apparent in qualitative research which means the concepts of validity and reliability are not suitable ways to measure the quality and value of such research. As previously stated, this research project does not aim to produce statistically generalisable data due to the constructivist perspective of the research project and the view that the participants' experiences are unique and distinctive. The value and quality of the research will therefore be measured according to Yardley's (2000) characteristics of good quality research which are: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance.

3.11.1 Sensitivity to Context

Ensuring sensitivity to the context in which the research takes place includes an awareness of previous research, especially previous and existing arguments that have been made about the topic (Yardley, 2000). For this research project, a rigorous overview of previous literature can be found in the literature review chapter. This outlines some of the existing trends in research involving LAC and education. This includes the pervasive finding that LAC perform less well academically compared to non looked-after peers (Berridge et al, 2020; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Melkman, 2020; Rees, 2013; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017). Although there are relatively few studies which explore LAC's lived experience of school, those that do suggest that LAC have a more positive experience at primary school compared to secondary school (Mannay et al, 2017) and tend to achieve better results in primary school (Melkman, 2020). The discourses within the research field appear dominated by this gap in academic attainment and alternative narratives of success appear somewhat overlooked. This research is sensitive to this context and sought to enable LAC to give their own insights and narratives regarding a critical stage of their educational experience.

In accordance with the relativist and constructivist orientation of this research project, individuals' understanding of the world is shaped by their context and experiences. It is important that the research findings are considered within the context in which it took place. The participants in this research project are looked after by one inner city local authority and attend mainstream secondary schools in London. Local contextual factors are likely to influence the CYP's experiences of both the care and education systems. For example, participants in rural parts of the UK might have significantly different experiences. Another contextual factor is the

covid-19 pandemic. This research was undertaken during the 'second wave' of the pandemic and after a significant period of school closure. It is possible that not being able to attend school for several months earlier in the year might have impacted the CYP's outlook on education. The school closure is likely to have had an impact on relationships, learning and daily routine for many pupils. This research aims to explicitly name such contextual factors to provide an awareness of both national and local contextual factors. Further exploration of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and other contextual factors can be found in the discussion chapter.

3.11.2 Commitment and Rigour

Within IPA research Smith et al (2009) claimed that commitment refers to the 'degree of attentiveness to the participant during data collection' (p.181). During this research project, care was taken to ensure that the research participants felt comfortable and listened to, for example making use Rogers' (1957) principles of active listening. Smith et al (2009) also refer to 'the care with which the analysis of each case is carried out' (p. 181). The researcher aimed to systematically follow the iterative and inductive processes of IPA analysis outlined by Smith et al (2009).

3.11.3 Transparency and Coherence

Unlike quantitative research, this research project is not replicable. If there was an attempt to replicate the study it is acknowledged that the research findings are likely to be different due to the unique identities, contexts and experiences of the participants. Transparency regarding the processes and decisions made throughout the research project is therefore not required for the purpose of replicability but to give a clear understanding of the processes and context which inform the research

findings. This thesis has aimed to offer a coherent overview of the research project, which is consistent with the underlying theoretical underpinnings of IPA outlined within this chapter. The research process has also aimed to be consistent with the underlying theoretical orientations of relativism and constructivism. Appendices J-O contains a clear audit trail pertaining to each step of the analytic process to provide transparency for the reader regarding the way in which the texts were analysed and interpreted.

3.11.4 Impact and Importance

Both Yardley (2020) and Smith et al (2009) make the argument that qualitative research should aim to offer something of use and importance to the reader. It is hoped that the insight into LAC's perceptions offered by this research project will increase EP's understanding of the transition experiences of LAC, along with other professionals who support this group. It is hoped that this increased understanding will increase professionals' capacity to support this community during this important educational transition. While this study does not aim to offer generalisable data, this research does offer a rich insight which will allow individuals to relate the findings to their pre-existing professional experience and knowledge. Finally, through the process of taking part in the research it is hoped that the participants will feel listened to and feel that their experiences and perspectives matter.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) in June 2020. Ethical approval was also gained from TREC in January 2020 following the request for minor changes to the project design, demonstrated in Appendix H.i and H.ii. However, ethical considerations and practice went far beyond that of gaining professional approval. As is claimed by Willig (2008), ethical issues are present throughout every stage of the research process, from formulating the research question to disseminating the findings. Although relevant to all research, ethical issues are particularly pertinent to qualitative research because human interaction inherently affects both researchers and participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Indeed, it was acknowledged that every interaction taken as part of the research process would have had an impact, whether significant or minor, on both the researcher and participants. In accordance with Brinkmann & Kvale (2008) it was acknowledged that all ethical issues cannot be resolved at the planning stage of the research but could surface throughout and therefore ethical considerations must be an active and ongoing part of the research process. The researcher therefore aimed to be 'ethically attuned' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008) throughout the research process. Further details about ethical considerations taken and measures used to protect participants from harm are outlined below.

3.12.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The anonymity of the participants was respected throughout the research process. This included storing the recorded interview data, transcripts and analysis on an encrypted device, using pseudonyms, and changing or omitting any identifiable data such as the name of the school and any mentioned names of peers, carers or staff members. Due to the small sample size of participants, there was a

limit to confidentiality. It is therefore not impossible that those aware of the research project would be able to identify individual voices. Although the risk was small, the young people and those giving consent were fully informed of such confidentiality limitations before agreeing to participate in the research. It was also explained that confidentiality would not be maintained if there was a safeguarding risk. In this instance, the local safeguarding policy would be adhered to. The young people received information about this within an information sheet and verbally in an informal session prior to the interview. Each participant was also informed before taking part in the interviews that the research findings would be disseminated to stakeholders which might include school staff, the local authority, foster carers and virtual school. The participants were also given the opportunity to be informed of the overall findings after the research project had been completed. The consent forms and information sheets are included in Appendices P-S.

3.12.2 Protection from Harm and Duty of Care

One reason why it was not possible to plan for and mitigate against every possible ethical issue prior to the research taking place is because it was not possible to predict how the participants would react to the interview questions. Due to the constructivist lens of the research, it was assumed that each individual was likely to interpret the interview questions differently according to their unique experiences. Although every effort was taken to ensure that the questions would not cause discomfort to the participants, it was not possible to omit the risk entirely. Due to the need to ask about potentially personal experiences, the questions could have caused distress to a participant, particularly if transition was a particularly stressful time for the individual or reminded them of a stressful period in their lives. This was

particularly pertinent to this research project because LAC are likely to have experienced adverse life events, including other significant transitions such as care placement changes (Rock et al, 2015). Although the researcher aimed to minimise preconceptions about the impact and experience of secondary school transition for this group, the researcher remained aware that previous adverse experiences represent a risk factor for resilience which could therefore impact secondary school transition for some young people. The researcher therefore aimed for some of the questions to be open to allow the young people to be in control of how much information they were comfortable to share. It was also ensured that the participants were fully informed about the aims and process of the research through both the introductory session and accessing the information sheet. This was to ensure that informed consent was gained.

As part of being 'ethically attuned' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008) throughout the interview process, the researcher aimed to be attuned to signs of distress among the participants. Although it was made clear that the participants had a right to withdraw at any time from the interview process, the researcher remained aware that the power imbalance could make it difficult for a participant to feel able to do so. As outlined in the ethics proposal, if a participant showed any visible sign of being distressed, the researcher was prepared to terminate the interview to prioritise the emotional wellbeing of the young person. The researcher was unfamiliar to the young people and the participants were therefore likely to benefit from gaining emotional support from an adult which they already had a trusting relationship with if they became distressed. It was therefore ensured that a key adult was identified within the school who would be available at the time of the interview and could be

approached by the young person if necessary. The researcher was prepared to follow up with the key adult to ensure that the young person had been supported. In the unlikely event that the young person's emotional wellbeing continued to be negatively affected following the interview, the researcher was prepared to signpost them to the relevant service such as the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to gain support. However, when undertaking the interviews both participants appeared relaxed and comfortable and neither displayed signs of distress.

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to present detailed and rich idiographic accounts from the research participants, offering insights into their unique experiences of transitioning from primary to secondary school in accordance with the following research question:

How do looked after children experience transition from primary to secondary school?

4.2 Participant Context

Prior to describing the data analysis, contextual information from each of the participants is presented below. This includes the age, gender, ethnicity, number of care placements and number of school placements for each participant. Individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity are relevant because they influence the way individuals relate to the world and are treated within the world (Burnham, 2012). They also directly influence individuals' experiences within care and education systems. For example, both the LAC population and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in higher education (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020; Gazeley & Hinton-Smith, 2018). And CYP from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have been found to be overrepresented in the care system (Bywaters et al, 2018).

The amount of care placements the participants have experienced is relevant contextual information because this has been found to influence academic outcomes for LAC (Sutcliffe et al, 2017). Many LAC experience a number of changes of placement, which can also result in school placement changes. Multiple school and care placement changes can result in disrupted educational experiences and lower academic outcomes for young people (McClung & Gayle, 2010). Such factors are therefore likely to have contributed to the participants' accounts which are analysed and presented in this chapter. The age of becoming looked after can also impact educational outcomes (Jones et al, 2011). This is also included within the contextual information provided by the participants' foster carers, which is presented below. Pseudonyms are provided to maintain anonymity.

4.2.1 Asif

Asif was male, thirteen years old, and in year eight when he took part in the research project. He had attended one primary school and one secondary school and he had had one care placement. He was born in England and he was from a Pakistani background. He was 6 years old when he entered the care system. Asif appeared to be settled in his current care placement and appeared to have a good relationship with his foster carer, speaking about her positively within the interview. He appeared confident and relaxed throughout the interview process.

4.2.2 Liam

Liam was thirteen years old and in year nine when he took part in the research. He is male and he is from a mixed-race background. He was six years old

when he entered the care system, and he has had three care placements. He has attended two different primary schools and one secondary school. Liam also appeared to have a positive relationship with his foster carer. He seemed nervous during the 'introductory session' and he was momentarily hesitant about taking part. His foster carer offered reassurance and encouragement which appeared to calm him down and give him confidence. During the interview he appeared confident and relaxed.

4.3 Overarching Themes

Four overarching themes are presented. Themes were considered overarching if they were present for both participants. Smith (2011) suggests that for IPA research with one to three participants, each theme should be present from each participant. Each of the overarching themes will be supported by superordinate themes, some emergent themes and direct extracts from the interview transcripts.

An idiographic representation will be used to present the findings. This involves presenting the findings as 'theme within case' rather than 'case within theme' (Smith et al, 2009, p. 85). This is to preserve the individuality of the participants' experience. Although the overarching themes are relevant to each participant's experience the underlying meaning of the overarching themes vary between the two participants. The 'theme within case' structure is also better suited to the constructivist orientation of the research, in which individuals' experiences are seen as unique to the individual's experiences and beliefs.

Four overarching themes emerged from the research. The first theme 'a journey of risk and reward' is related to the young people's emotional experience of

their transition, and the losses associated with primary school and new experiences associated with secondary school. The second theme 'social network' relates to the prominent people who supported or influenced their transition experiences. The third theme 'fantasy and reality' is related to the way the young people imagined secondary school to be, compared to how they experienced it. And the final theme 'coping with change' emerged from the young people's experiences of being presented with new and unfamiliar challenges of secondary school, and how they responded to and managed such challenges.

4.4 Superordinate and Emergent Themes

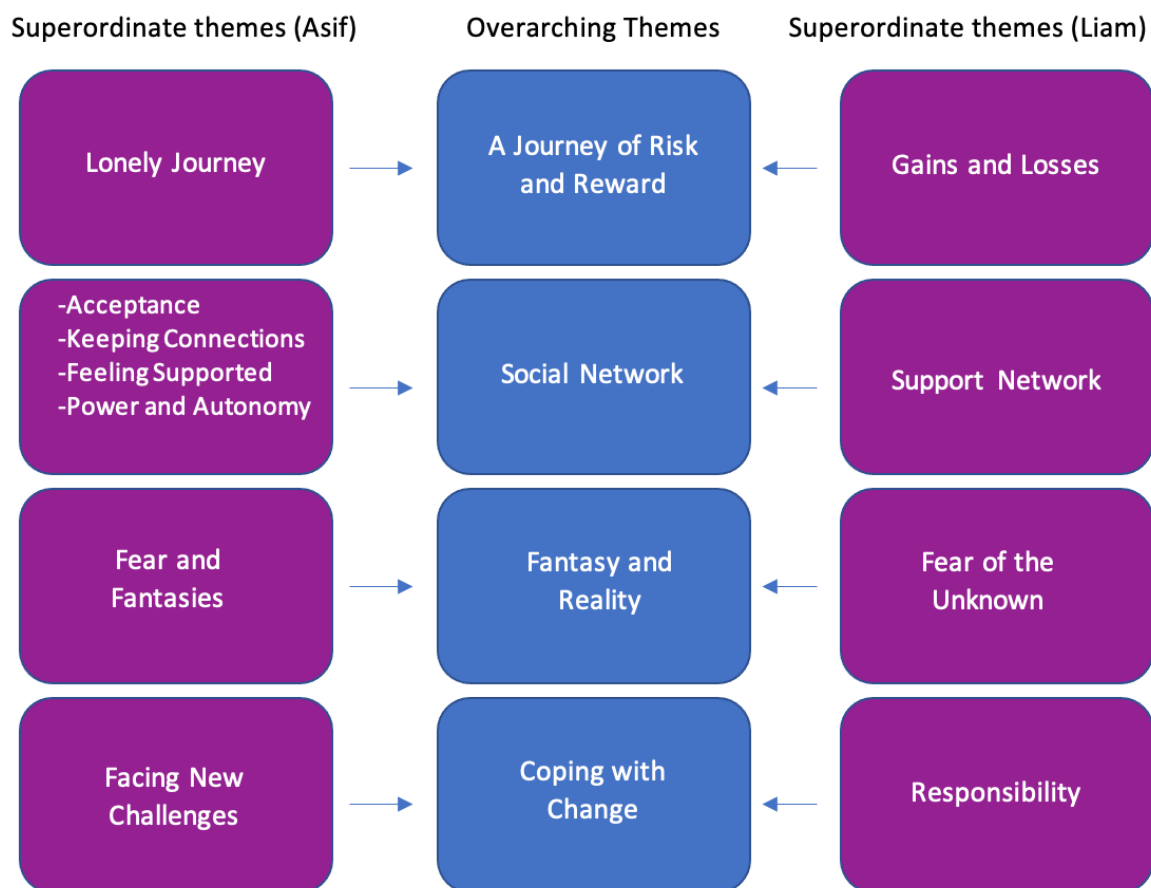
For each of the participants, analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in a number of emergent themes. These were grouped together according to patterns and similarities between them. A title was given to each of the clusters of emergent themes which aimed to describe collective meaning within the cluster. This method is called abstraction (Smith et al, 2009) and is a clear way to present patterns between themes. The relationship between the superordinate themes and overarching themes is demonstrated in *figure 1* below.

After synthesising the themes from the interview transcripts, twenty-six emergent themes were generated from Asif's transcript and seventeen emerged from Liam's. Further details about this data analysis process can be found in the methodology chapter. Although it is not possible to present each of the emergent themes in detail, a number of key emergent themes are presented and explored within this chapter, supported by key extracts from the interview transcripts. The aim is to offer a rich insight into the young people's experiences of primary-secondary

transition, and to provide a justification for the superordinate and overarching themes which emerged from the data.

Figure 1.

Superordinate and Overarching Themes.



4.5 Participant One: Asif

4.6 Overarching Theme One: A Journey of Risk and Reward

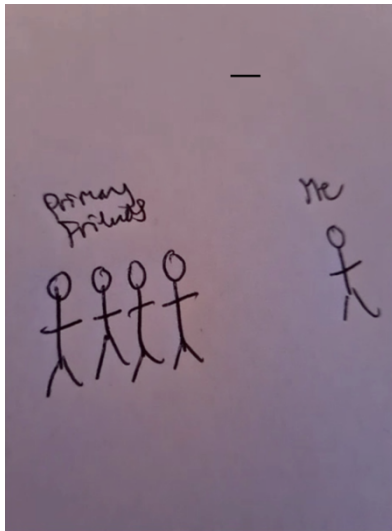
For Asif this theme was related to the contradictory emotional experiences of losing the familiarity and social connections of his primary school, while gaining new experiences and relationships in secondary school. The superordinate theme which was generated from Asif's interview was 'lonely journey'. Asif appeared to have

experienced his primary-secondary transition as an individual and lonely journey.

This sense of aloneness is also depicted in his drawing:

Figure 2.

Asif's Drawing.



Asif was invited to draw a picture depicting his school transition experience. His drawing explicitly showed a stick figure which he has labelled as himself, standing apart from a group of stick figures which were labelled 'primary friends'. The stick figures were faceless suggesting that his feelings about being apart from his primary school friends were not explicitly shown, but the figure representing himself is slightly smaller and higher up than the figures, creating a sense of moving away. The sense of aloneness is clearly apparent in the drawing, which also suggests a sense of being outside of the group or the 'odd one out'. The drawing suggested that leaving his primary school friends behind was one of the most defining and significant features of his school transition experience. The sense of aloneness which is depicted in the drawing is also supported by some of the emergent themes

from Liam's data, which are explored in more detail below, 'losing and gaining friends', and 'odd one out'.

4.6.1 Losing and Gaining Friends

'Losing and gaining friends' was one of the key emergent themes which was related to the overarching theme 'a journey of risk and reward', along with the emergent theme 'odd one out' which is explored below. Asif explains that he was the only pupil from his primary school to attend his secondary school. He therefore had to leave his primary school friends behind and start a new school by himself:

"So what happened was... so no one from my primary school came to my secondary because umm, I mean it was outside [local authority] for one. And like they just went to other schools like [name of school] or [name of school] or something".

Asif's use of language such as "no one" emphasised the feeling of aloneness. This is contrasted by "they" which suggests that Asif viewed his primary school peers as a group who had a collective experience.

The following extract suggests that Asif experienced contradictory feelings about going to a different secondary school than his primary school peers:

"Well I mean cos peop... like obviously my friends were saying like 'come to school, man, come to our school', but err I mean, I mean I like it at my school, yeah, I mean it wasn't the worst thing cos I knew it was a good school,

because I went there for induction day and like I made a couple of friends on induction day at my school and... so I mean on induction day it was a pretty good start cos, cos I didn't really find it hard to make friends like... literally on the first day I made about 5, 10 already".

In the above extract Asif talked about the experience of not being able to go to the same secondary school as his primary school friends, along with the positive experience of making new friends at his secondary school. The extract suggests that Asif experienced ambivalence. He hesitated and repeated 'I mean' three times, which suggests that he could have been struggling to make sense of how he felt about this experience overall.

The phrases 'it wasn't the worst thing' and 'pretty good' also suggest this sense of ambivalence. The phrases suggest subdued emotional reactions, perhaps representing the mixture of losses and gains associated with the experience. Along with referring to his experience of leaving his primary school friends behind, he also talked about his experience of making new friends at secondary school. He emphasised the speed and ease of making new friends, which he stated happened on the first two days of secondary school, the induction day and his first day. The number of friends he made quickly increased from 'a couple', to '5' and then doubled to '10'. Asif appeared to wish to stress the number of new friends he made, which perhaps explained why he felt mixed feelings about leaving his primary school friends behind.

4.6.2 Odd One Out

Not only did Asif refer to the experience of leaving his primary school friends behind to go to a different secondary school, he also referred to the emotional experience of being one of the only pupils at his new school to come from a different feeder primary school:

“Well I mean I guess I was a bit... I was a bit nervous because I didn't know anyone at the school. Because the people at that... cos there's a primary school right next to my school, and like a lot of people that go to my school went to that primary school it's called [name of school]”

Asif described feeling 'a bit nervous' about starting a secondary school in which the other pupils already knew each other. Asif described pupils from his old school going to secondary schools nearby, while the pupils in his new school have come from primary schools nearby. This again suggests that he felt he has had a different experience from others. The use of 'anyone' and 'a lot of people' to describe the other pupils also emphasises the feeling that his experience was unique.

The feelings of nervousness about not knowing anyone was contrasted to the sense of knowing everyone at his primary school:

“[...] my primary school like literally everyone knew each other, err, like we was all friends”

In contrast to experiencing feelings of apprehension about not knowing anyone at his new school, his description of his primary school conjures up an image

of an idyllic environment in which everyone was included and there was no conflict. This sense of being known by everybody suggests a sense of stability similar to a family unit. The sense of being 'known' also suggests a feeling of belonging which might have felt especially important to a young person in foster care.

Asif also suggested that he felt that the other pupils in his secondary school already shared this sense of belonging and 'being known' with one another.

“Cos there’s literally like a fence separating the two schools, so probably nearly everyone from my school went to that school as a primary so I was a bit nervous [...]”

The image of the fence between his secondary school and the feeder primary school emphasises the physical proximity of the two schools. Whereas he has had to travel from another area, this suggests that the other secondary school pupils have had an easier experience by almost staying in the same physical location. Asif’s sense of nervousness could have arisen from feeling like an outsider who was intruding on pre-existing social structures which were established in the feeder primary school. The repetition of 'nervous' suggests that this was a prominent feeling about coming from a different primary school. The use of 'nearly everyone' again emphasises his feelings of being other or separate.

Asif also alludes to feeling concerned about social exclusion and not forming strong peer relationships:

“I mean I thought I would have, like, less friends, as I do now”

This suggests that entering an environment in which he was an outsider felt like a risk to Asif. Overall, the way in which Asif described leaving primary school and starting secondary school alludes to both risks and rewards. Leaving his primary school represented risking losing strong social connections which brought with it a sense of belonging and inclusion. In addition, starting a new secondary school meant stepping into an environment in which he would have to start building social connections and relationships anew, with people who he felt already knew one another. However, the latter also appeared to represent opportunities for Asif and he emphasised his positive experience of gaining new relationships.

4.7 Overarching Theme Two: Social Network

The second overarching theme for both participants is 'social network'. For Asif, there were a number of superordinate themes which are related to this: 'acceptance', 'keeping connections', 'feeling supported' and 'power and autonomy'. These are explored in further detail below. Asif's social network included his peers, teachers, foster carers and the virtual school. He referred to receiving support and reassurance from his social network, along with describing how they influenced his transition experience. Asif's relationships appeared important to him and he alluded to feelings of belonging and acceptance.

4.7.1 Acceptance

Asif recounted his different experiences of being known and accepted in primary school compared to secondary school, particularly regarding his identity as a 'looked after child'.

"[...] I haven't... I haven't even told my whole form yet. But I've told quite a few of the boys in my form... like I told my friend Olly, Aaron, Kwame... surely other people that I've told... like I know there's people I've told outside of my form, like there's my friend Mikey... there's Tommy, Immanuel... there's quite a few that I've told... but I'd say don't tell them at first... don't tell everyone at first"

Asif described withholding an aspect of his identity at secondary school and choosing when to reveal it. He described having told chosen individuals about his 'looked after' status but not revealing it to everyone. This suggests that it felt unsafe to reveal this aspect of his identity to everyone, possibly due to jeopardising his sense of acceptance and belonging in secondary school.

This is contrasted by his experience at primary school:

"[...] cos in my primary I just told everyone straight away cos I was literally about 6 or 7 at the time. So, I mean, no one really cared. But when you get older you are going to start to care. So... yeah... maybe don't tell everyone at once you're in foster care"

Asif appeared to imply that younger children were more accepting of difference, while he feared that adolescents could be judgemental. Confiding in select individuals rather than telling 'everyone at once' suggests that Asif felt it was safer to first gain peers' trust and perhaps build relationships before this aspect of his identity was revealed. Asif appeared to suggest that there is a sense of vulnerability

in being known as a 'looked after child' and that he might have feared being perceived negatively as a result. The extracts above suggest that he tried to mitigate against this by actively managing and controlling others' perceptions of him. This suggests that being accepted and feeling a sense of belonging was important for Asif but felt riskier and more complicated in secondary school compared to primary school.

4.7.2 Keeping Connections

Asif did not appear to wish to let go of primary school completely, but to retain a sense of connection:

"But she was probably my favourite teacher, she was the nicest and I guess I like got to know her the best, like she gave me some books like when I left year four and like I mean I still do visit my primary school sometimes"

Asif referred to a teacher that he was taught by four years previously. He suggested that this relationship was particularly significant because he knew her well. Being given books conjures up the image of being given a gift. This suggests that he felt special to the teacher and he was liked by her. Recalling this memory four years later suggests that the positive connection with that teacher was still valued by Asif. He referred to still visiting his primary school which suggests that he still wishes to stay connected to it.

Asif also described wishing to stay connected to his primary school friends:

“I still play with my primary friends like literally every single day, cos I feel like it felt like I wasn’t really gonna talk with them that much... but I do talk with them like every day”.

Here, Asif compared his fear with his reality. He described initially being afraid of losing touch with his primary school friends, but in reality, he felt he continued to interact with them frequently. Asif appeared to wish to emphasise how often he communicated with his primary school friends through repetition of ‘every day’. Staying connected to primary school friends therefore appeared to be important to Asif and further demonstrates that he wished to stay connected to his primary school experience and relationships.

4.7.3 Feeling Supported

Asif alluded to feeling supported by key figures who appeared to represent positive and consistent relationships throughout his transition experience, particularly his foster carer, virtual school advisory teacher and his form tutor, for example:

“[...] my foster carer Sam, she was sort of like ‘when you get in school you’ll be fine’ cos I was like really nervous getting ready for my first day but when I got in, err, I was fine.”

“cos my form tutor in year 7... was, er, is the same as year 8 actually and my form tutor is quite nice so that also helps, err, and you know, [...] cos my form tutor says even he gets lost sometimes”

Asif referred to receiving emotional reassurance from both his foster carer and form tutor. Both reassured Asif about elements of secondary school that he was concerned about, his first day and getting lost. Asif also described his form tutor as 'nice' which suggests he had a positive relationship with him. In addition, Asif mentioned that he had had the same form tutor for two years, which suggests a sense of a consistent relationship.

In addition to receiving reassurance from foster carer and form tutor, he also referred to feeling supported by the virtual school:

"When I was doing my PEP meetings at my school like, err, someone from the virtual school her name is Sophie, she always tells me like 'if you get a detention it's not the worst thing, obviously it's not what we want'"

The phrase 'always tells me' suggests that he had frequent interactions with Sophie and often received support and reassurance. He also referred to his virtual school advisory teacher by her first name which implies a sense of familiarity with her. Two of the relationships mentioned here, his foster carer and virtual school advisory teacher, were in place prior to his school transition experience. The consistency of these relationships might have been particularly important to Asif during a time when many of his other social relationships were changing.

4.7.4 Power and Autonomy

'Power and autonomy' was another superordinate theme which arose from the data. Asif referred to the professionals who he felt were responsible for making

decisions about the secondary school he attended, and his lack of a sense of autonomy.

“my friend Henry... he was from my football club, he went to a school, I forgot what it was called, err, think it was... err no I can't remember, but it was near [area] and like I cos... when we went to visit there for a par- er, like, like to visit the school, like, I said like that was my top school and obviously everyone knew, everyone knew it's because my friend went there. But I said, it's because of the lovely colourful library and er so I was just waffling...”

Researcher: “So how come you ended up going to the secondary school that you're at now?”

Asif: “Well, er, like someone from the virtual school like they kind of decide... think it was er... do you know Thomas Smith?”

Researcher: “Yeah”

Asif: “Yeah, like he kind of made the list and he put [name of school] as the top school... and I got accepted into that so that's the one I, err, got into”.

Asif expressed a lack of agency and control about the choice of secondary school he attends. He described initially wanting to go to the same secondary school as his friend, but despite this, a different secondary school was chosen by the virtual school. Asif also described attempting to disguise the real reason for wanting to go to

a particular school, by instead mentioning some of the academic elements such as the library. This suggests that Asif did not feel that his views and desires would have been accepted by the adults around him. It also suggests that Asif felt that the academic reputation of a school was more important to the adults around him, and particularly the virtual school, than preserving his friendships.

Asif described this process in a matter-of-fact way and did not explicitly indicate how he felt about the decision, or whether he wished to be part of the process. It is possible that, as a LAC, he was used to the local authority making decisions about his care and education. Asif also appears to have conflicting feelings about the choice of school.

“Err but it wasn’t the worst thing going to [name of school] because as I said I know, I knew it was a good school”.

This suggests there was a sense of conflict between his intellectual understanding of the situation, and how he emotionally felt about it. He mentioned that he knew it was a good school which suggests that he understood why it was selected, and perhaps felt able to trust that the virtual school advisory teacher would have chosen a school with a good reputation. But the use of the double negative ‘it wasn’t the worst thing’ indicates conflicting feelings about the choice of school, most likely because it was different to the school he initially wanted to go to, and the schools his primary school peers would be attending.

Overall, the social network surrounding Asif appeared to have had a supportive impact on his transition to secondary school. He recounted his experiences of receiving emotional support from his form tutor, his foster carer and the virtual school. Asif's experience also highlighted the influence and impact that the local authority had on his educational experience, through the influence of the virtual school. Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings and school decision making processes are unique to CYP who are looked after. From the perspective of Asif, this influence was mixed but predominately positive, due to receiving helpful reassurance in his PEP meetings, and understanding why his secondary school was chosen. However, he also appeared to have mixed feelings about the choices which he felt were made on his behalf, his lack of agency, and the choice of school which set him apart from his friends.

4.8 Overarching Theme Three: Fantasy and Reality

Asif expressed initially feeling anxious about various aspects of secondary school prior to attending. However, once he arrived, he found that the reality was better than expected and his fears were mostly abated. His anxieties were related to a various aspects of secondary school including being taught by strict teachers, experiencing social isolation, homework, getting lost, and receiving detentions. These will be explored in more detail below. The superordinate theme which is used to describe this experience for Asif is 'fear and fantasies'.

4.8.1 *Strict Teachers*

Asif previously recounted his experience of having positive relationships with his teachers in primary school and getting to know them well. He mentioned a particularly positive experience with a teacher in year four, suggesting that such relationships were important to him. The value of such relationships could explain why Asif felt concerned about what they would be like in secondary school.

“Well, err, I dunno, maybe the teachers cos I mean, when I was coming into secondary I was also worrying that the teachers were going to be quite strict, but they are quite nice in my school and... err... no, I get on well with most of them”.

Despite feeling initially worried about his experience with new secondary school teachers, the reality appeared to be better than expected. He described perceiving the majority of his teachers as ‘quite nice’. ‘I get on well with most of them’ suggests that Asif had again formed positive relationships with the teachers, which could suggest a sense of belonging.

4.8.2 Social Inclusion

Asif alluded to feelings of anxiety about social inclusion and social acceptance. This appeared to be particularly pertinent for Asif due to starting a secondary school in which the other pupils were unknown, and he was unknown to them. However, he described finding that the reality was more positive than his expectations.

“I mean I thought I would have, like, less friends, as I do now, because I didn’t know anyone that was going there”

“So it’s just, you know, you just get to know everyone and make sure you’re not hated, I guess”

Not only did Asif refer to making more friends than expected, but he expressed a sense of control in managing how he was perceived by others. This could also be related to managing who was aware of his identity as a LAC, as mentioned previously. This extract also suggests that being ‘hated’ was a possibility in Asif’s mind, perhaps a fear prior to starting secondary school.

Social inclusion appeared to be related to a sense of safety for Asif:

“You know, they’d also give you a bit of reassurance if you went with your friends cos you know, like, you wouldn’t really get lost”

Asif suggested that having positive peer relationships offered him a sense of protection in school from some of his fears and fantasies, such as getting lost. Asif’s friendships appeared to positively influence his school experience, both in terms of belonging and safety.

4.8.3 Homework

Asif’s fantasies were not only related to the social aspects of secondary school, but also the academic aspects.

“I thought it was going to be a lot harder than primary, and I thought the work was going to be a lot harder and I knew... was going to get a lot more homework”

Researcher: “Okay, and was it different? Or was it similar to what you expected when you actually got there?”

Asif: “Well it was quite different, cos the teachers weren’t really strict, we do get... I mean we do get quite a bit of homework but, say, for the past one week, the only bit of homework we’ve had is for revision”.

The repetition of ‘a lot harder’ emphasises Asif’s fear that schoolwork and homework would be significantly more challenging than his experience in primary school. In reality, Asif’s feelings about his amount of homework appeared better than his expectations, although there is a sense of ambivalence. ‘We do get quite a bit’ is contrasted with ‘the only bit [...]’. This suggests that Asif had some contradictory feelings about the amount of homework he has received in secondary school.

4.8.4 Detentions

The following extract again draws attention to the difference between fantasies and reality for Asif. He found he received less detentions than he feared:

“Oh, that was another thing... me getting lost in the school... that was another worry I had. And, like, cos we had the timetable and we didn’t have that in primary, we just knew what the lessons were, but because we had the

timetable... on my first week or two I had to ask so many people, like, 'do you know where 217 is?', 'do you know where 305 is? Thank you very much'... err... and... like cos obviously you could get late detentions if you weren't in your lesson in time. I didn't get a late detention in year 7 which was quite helpful. I only had one detention in total and that was for forgetting my PE shoes and I haven't got any in year 8 yet so I'm pretty happy with that".

Asif appeared to fear being punished for experiences which were outside of his control, such as getting lost. This suggests that he initially feared that secondary school would be a punitive environment rather than kind and understanding. In reality, Asif did not receive the late detentions that he feared although he suggests that this is a result of his own efforts rather than the ethos and actions of the school. He suggested that his own actions, asking for help and directions from others, prevented him from receiving detentions. He mentioned being happy about only receiving one detention in year 7, but it is unclear whether this is due to feeling proud of himself, or for feeling relieved that the school is less disciplinary than he expected.

4.9 Overarching Theme Four: Coping with Change

For Asif, what clearly emerged from the data was a sense of having to navigate a range of new challenges and experiences, leading to the superordinate theme: 'facing new challenges'. This was the result of a number of related emergent themes such as 'overwhelm', 'adapting to change' and 'impact of Covid-19'. Asif alluded to the emotional experience of dealing with such changes, along with adapting to an increased sense of responsibility.

4.9.1 Overwhelm

Asif alluded to the emotional aspect of having to face new experiences and adapt to new challenges. Feeling overwhelmed is referred to implicitly and explicitly:

“Um I mean it was quite scary having the timetable cos you know you had all these different rooms, and all these different floors, and we have... we have more than one building in our school like there’s a science block, that’s the big block, there’s the [name of building] and it was quite overwhelming at first but I got to know, like, where the different rooms were and you had to be... like... cos if you had PE and then you had Art straight after that was the worst. Cos PE was all like in the field area, and then Art was at the very top... it was at the very top of the building so had to, kind of, almost sprint from PE to Art”

The repetition of ‘all these different’ in reference to the rooms and floors emphasises how many new buildings Asif felt he had to navigate and get used to. The use of the word ‘sprint’ emphasises the amount of effort required manage his new timetable and buildings. This conjures the image of pushing oneself to exhaustion. Asif’s descriptions of the buildings ‘the very top’ and ‘the big block’ conjures images of large and looming structures which feel intimidating and almost sinister.

Asif also refers to experience of having more tests in secondary school and the emotional impact of this.

Researcher: “So what does that feel like having lots of tests?”

Asif: "Well I guess it feels a bit nervous cos you think, like, have I revised for this enough? Do I know what's... like... am I ready? And say if you have one every, like, once in a while that's alright because you have quite a bit of time to revise usually, like, they tell you in a week's advance but, er, it's just kind of test upon test at the moment but, er, it's not too bad. Err, but er, yeah it does feel a bit nervous like, you know, they're saying 'you got a test in a week' and then you're like 'oh, okay I've got a week, I've got a week to revise'. But in a week's time, it feels like only a couple of days and... you're like 'oh it's the test already, wow'".

Asif repeated the word 'nervous' which suggests that this is a strong emotional reaction to the increased pressure of tests in secondary school. The use of rhetorical questions such as 'am I ready?' suggests he had been questioning his ability and had been experiencing self-doubt. 'Test upon test' emphasises the sense of overwhelm and suggests that Asif has been finding it difficult to gain control of them. This conjures the image of an endless pile of tests. He describes the feeling of not having enough time to prepare, and tests appearing more quickly than expected. This warped sense of time could represent the lack of control that Asif felt.

This extract also alludes to a sense of responsibility for his academic outcomes. The question 'have I revised enough?' suggests that Asif felt responsible for his own preparation and performance in the tests. The extract suggests both contradictory feelings of control and lack of control over this experience. While he appeared to feel a sense of tests being thrust upon him with not enough time, he

nevertheless felt a sense of accountability towards managing his time and ensuring he was adequately prepared. Rather than the tests supporting his learning, this suggests that they felt like a hurdle and a challenge to Asif.

4.9.2 Adapting to Change

In addition to having to adapt to new practical aspects of secondary school such as navigating the buildings, getting used to his timetable and managing increasing amounts of homework and tests, adapting to new social hierarchies and structures also appeared to be a significant part of his experience:

“And... cos I am in the top, erm, I mean I’m top 5 I would say... I’d say I’m top 5... but err but I mean now, cos I was really overconfident in primary. You know, I was just saying ‘oh, well I’m the smartest’, but I mean in secondary I’m not really like that, I mean, I know that I’m smart, I’m not the smartest, and that’s alright”.

Asif alluded to coming to terms with a new sense of identity in secondary school, as a result of new social structures and hierarchies. His use of language suggests a sense of hesitation ‘erm, I mean’ and ‘I would say... I’d say’ suggests that Asif was struggling to identify and articulate his position among his new peers. In contrast, this extract suggests that he was more confident of his social position in primary school, ‘well I’m the smartest’. He finishes with ‘and that’s alright’ which suggests a level of acceptance regarding the new hierarchy.

4.9.3 Impact of Covid-19

Asif referred to the impact of Covid-19 on his secondary school experience:

Asif: "Well, er, like work wise... like, they do, cos, like, in year 7 they do sets, like set 1, I was in set 1 and err but cos of the... cos of Covid we have to stay in the same classroom for the whole day so can't really do sets at the moment"

Researcher: "Oh, yeah"

Asif: "Cos it's all in one classroom, but, the work we get, like, sometimes it is pretty challenging and sometimes it's easy, like, there's different parts that are hard and easy and no, I like that"

Although Asif only makes a brief reference to Covid-19 it was not mentioned by the researcher and was therefore introduced by Asif. This suggests that it felt like a factor in his secondary school experience. He referred to the impact of the pandemic on his teaching and learning experience. He indicated that he felt positively about not being taught in sets, 'I like that', due to the increased variety of the work. It was possible that being taught in one classroom had temporarily decreased some of the logistic and academic pressure for Asif. It was also possible that reverting to being taught in one classroom with the same group of peers reminded Asif of primary school, and therefore might have brought up feelings of safety and familiarity .

Overall secondary school appeared to represent a number of challenges and changes for Asif. Some of the experience of his new school seemed to have been overwhelming, such as navigating the buildings and increased number of assessments. Asif alluded to the emotional impact of these changes, along with the increased expectations of becoming more responsible for his own learning. Asif also alluded to having to adapt to additional changes as a result of Covid-19.

4.10 Participant Two: Liam

4.11 Overarching Theme One: A Journey of Risk and Reward

Regarding the first overarching theme, the associated superordinate theme which emerged from Liam's interview was 'gains and losses'. Liam used the metaphor of a 'journey' to describe his primary-secondary school transition experience and described a sense of inherent risk associated with this journey. Throughout the interview Liam referred to both losses associated with leaving primary school, and gains associated with new experiences and relationships in secondary school. When invited to draw a picture of his primary-secondary transition experience he drew a road between two buildings and a figure walking between the buildings as a visual metaphor for this journey:

Figure 3.

Liam's Drawing.



“Right, so basically, there’s like a primary school... and then secondary school... and then there’s like a road... and, yeah... so it kind of signifies, like, you have to go on a journey” [inaudible]

Researcher: “That went a bit muffled, could you say that again?”

Liam: “so basically it’s a primary school, with a road connected to secondary school... it’s like... it’s a journey to... to secondary school and you could risk a lot in that journey, like, friends and stuff, but... like... yeah”.

Liam referred to the experience of feeling he was risking ‘a lot’ in the transition from primary to secondary school. Liam drew one single figure on the road between the two buildings. Although he did not explicitly refer to the figure as himself, the drawing suggests that he might have felt alone on his journey, particularly as he later referred to the experience of attending a different secondary school than his primary school peers. ‘Friends and stuff’ suggests that Liam felt there were a number of losses associated with leaving primary school. Liam’s drawing appears to represent both the practical school transition experience of going to a new place, along with the emotional experience of taking the journey alone.

The phrase 'you have to go on a journey' suggests a lack of choice. Liam described the road between the secondary school and primary school as 'connected' and he drew the road as a straight line between the two. This single pathway further suggests that he might not have felt that there were any other options. Liam later described choosing his secondary school earlier than his peers, "then everyone else chose after me". This further emphasizes the experience of having a unique journey which is different to his peers.

Liam described the experience of gains and losses in terms of friendships:

Researcher: "[...] Can you tell me more about what you mean by risking a lot in that journey?"

Liam: "Yeah so what I mean by that is like... say some things might have been easier like making friends and stuff in primary school... and sometimes your friends might not go to the same secondary school as you, so, so, like you have to make new friends. It's kind of like risking a lot because you're losing your friends but you can make it up because you get new friends".

4.11.1 Balancing Risks and Rewards

The phrase 'make it up' suggests that Liam felt that the loss of friendships could be replaced by new friendships, alluding to a balance of risk and reward associated with the transition experience. Liam described the process of making friends as easier in primary school. 'And stuff' suggests that there are other aspects of primary school which were easier than secondary school, suggesting the ease

and comfort of primary school has been replaced by the challenges of secondary school.

Liam alluded to the painful emotional experience of loss.

'It was, like, kind of sad. Cos, like, you might not... say you didn't stay in contact with your friends... you might not see them that often or at all. So it's kind of sad'.

The repetition of 'sad' emphasises the difficult emotional experience of losing friendships. Repetition of 'kind of' suggests that Liam might have felt some mixed and conflicting feelings about the experience. Liam might have felt both sadness about losing his old friends while feeling more positive about making new friends. Liam also suggested that the friendships could continue through staying in contact, but 'you might not see them' suggests there is a sense of uncertainty about whether his primary school friendships would continue.

4.11.2 Teacher Relationships

In addition to losing friendships, Liam referred to losing the relationships with his primary school teachers.

"I mean... you risk... I'm not sure actually... you could risk... I mean you can't... if you stay in touch with people you can't even risk... I don't know... I actually don't know.... I mean, it's more, like, say the relationships you've built up with teachers and that. And having to meet new teachers and new people cos you are in...yeah".

Liam suggested that established relationships with teachers were left behind in the transition to secondary school. This suggests that such relationships were important to him. The phrase 'built up over time' suggests that he felt a sense of being known by his primary school teachers. Liam might have felt that this sense of being known was also lost during his school transition. Liam repeated 'I don't now' which suggests that he was struggling to make sense of what was lost in his school transition. The phrase 'I don't know' might also be due to struggling with the painful emotions associated with loss, which he was finding difficult to articulate. 'Having to meet new teachers' emphasises the lack of choice and control Liam had regarding his transition experience. There is a sense that he had no choice but to go through the process of loss and gain in terms of losing and building relationships.

"[...] You know the teachers, they know you, like, you can get a relationship... not a relationship, like... I mean it's like a healthy relationship with the teachers, you try not to get on their bad side and stuff".

Although Liam refers to successfully building new teacher relationships with his secondary school teachers, there is also an implied sense of risk. Liam referred to trying 'not to get on their bad side' suggesting that relationships with secondary school teachers might be more fragile, and there is an implied danger in getting it wrong. Similar to making friends, forming new teacher relationships feels more complicated for Liam in secondary school.

4.11.3 Independence

Liam also refers to some of the positive experiences he has gained in secondary school. A theme which emerged from the conversation with Liam was 'independence'.

Researcher: "And what about anything that you were looking forward to?"

Liam: "I mean I was looking forward to having to get to go to school by myself, cos, like, that was good... I like going to school by myself and stuff, that was good".

Repetition of 'that was good' suggests that Liam values his increased sense of independence after starting secondary school. Looking forward to this in primary school suggests that Liam felt a sense of readiness about his transition to secondary school, along with increasing responsibilities and independence. The image of travelling to school by himself also reflects the image Liam drew of a lone figure walking along the road between primary and secondary school. Despite the losses he refers to, it is also possible that Liam felt some excitement about being the only pupil from primary school to start at his secondary school. Having to experience the transition journey alone might have increased Liam's sense of independence. Overall, Liam appeared to have mixed feelings about his school transition journey. It is described as neither completely negative or positive, and includes both risks and rewards.

4.12 Overarching Theme Two: Social Network

Throughout the interview Liam referred to a number of key individuals who were involved in his school transition. The superordinate theme which emerged was 'support network'. Liam referred to the support he received from his foster carer, along with his primary school and secondary school teachers. Liam mostly mentioned academic rather than emotional support, suggesting that he found this type of support to be important to him.

Researcher: "Oh, okay, and were there any people that helped you prepare?"

Liam: "Yeah, my aunt, and the teachers, and your family can really be helpful".

Researcher: "And what did your aunt do that helped you?"

Liam: "Umm... I mean... she helped me do my homework and stuff... she didn't give me the answers but... for me... like motivate me. And, yeah, and help me because, like, I didn't really like doing homework".

Liam mentioned the support he received from his foster carer (referred to as 'aunt') around motivating him to do his homework. Although Liam did refer to receiving emotional support from his foster carer in terms of motivation, this was only referred to in the context of helping him with academic work. This relates to the emergent themes 'foster carer' and 'academic support'.

Liam also referred to support from primary and secondary school teachers in terms of academic support.

Researcher: "And what did the teachers do to help you before you moved to secondary school?"

Liam: "They were telling us, like, it wasn't, like, too hard and we shouldn't be too worried about it because we were smart and we could get through it well".

Similar to his experience of receiving support from his foster carer, Liam referred to receiving support from his primary school teachers in the context of reassurance about being able to manage the work at secondary school. Liam also referred to similar support from his primary school friends, who also reassured him that he would do well and would be able to do the work. It is not clear whether this was mentioned multiple times because it was the only type of support that Liam received from his social network, or whether support with academic work felt the most important to Liam.

'Not really... I mean my friends did... because they were nice and they... we were supportive of each other saying that we would do well and stuff... and that helped'.

This suggests that his primary school friends also had an important role to play in helping Liam to feel confident about his academic ability. The extract also suggests that doing well academically felt important for Liam.

Liam also appeared to believe that doing well in school was related to future success and security:

“Yeah cos my teachers... any... and all teachers will try their hardest and get you through secondary school to get you good GCSEs and the job you want. So... yeah”.

Doing well academically appeared to be related to being successful outside of school for Liam, which could explain why support from those around him about doing well academically felt significant.

4.13 Overarching Theme Three: Fantasy and Reality

There was a distinct contrast between the way Liam talked about his expectations and fantasies of secondary school compared to the reality of his experience. As a result of the fears that Liam had before transitioning to secondary school, the superordinate theme which emerged from the data was ‘fear of the unknown’. While he described his experience of secondary school as generally positive, it appeared to be the unknown elements which caused Liam to feel anxious before transitioning. Key emergent themes explored here include ‘bullying’, ‘detentions’ and ‘homework’.

4.13.1 Bullying

Liam expressed a fear of being picked on by older pupils due to his age:

Liam: "I thought it would be like... loads of big people... and like... since I was going into year 7 I thought it was going to be, like, everybody's going to be... like... mean to you, cos, like, you're young".

Researcher: "And was it similar or different to what you expected?"

Liam: "It was pretty different cos everyone was nice".

Liam expressed that he imagined the older students as 'big people', conjuring an image of faceless and intimidating figures looming over him. The extract suggests that he was concerned that the older students would be mean because he was young. This suggests that he felt vulnerable as a result of his relative size and age. Liam described the other students as 'everybody' which suggests that he perceived the other students as a crowd rather than individual pupils. He also might have felt concerned that as an unknown new pupil, he would be the odd one out. Liam was transitioning from a school in which he would have been one of the oldest and biggest pupils to one of the smallest and youngest. His fear suggests that he associated physical stature and age with power and social acceptance. Liam claimed that the reality of his secondary school experience was more positive than his expectations. 'Everyone was nice' suggests that he perceived the other pupils as a crowd rather than individuals, but describing them as 'nice' suggests that he did not feel othered by students and perhaps felt accepted by them.

4.13.2 Detentions

The contrast between Liam's negative expectations and more positive experience of reality is also reflected by the difference between his expectations and experience of detentions:

"Umm... I mean... knowing that the teachers wouldn't always give you detention if you did, like, one silly thing, they wouldn't always just give you detention and stuff... that helped me because I was scared I was going to get detention a lot".

Liam used the word 'scared' which highlights the intensity of his anxiety about receiving detentions. Multiple repetitions of the word 'detention' suggests that this was a key concern for Liam and perhaps preoccupied his thoughts during his school transition. By suggesting that teachers 'wouldn't always' give detentions suggests that, in reality, he has found the school to be less punitive than he expected, and teachers as more forgiving of mistakes. 'Wouldn't always' also suggests that teachers sometimes did give students detentions for doing 'one silly thing'. This adds a sense of complexity and inconsistency regarding Liam's description of his experience of secondary school.

4.13.3 Homework

Liam suggests that the amount of homework he received was overall better than he initially expected. He also suggests that teachers did not give year 7 pupils too much homework to support their secondary school transition experience.

“Oh the work’s... alright... I mean they don’t set too much homework. Enough that it’s, like, you’ll actually like, have to challenge yourself and stuff. But not overwhelmingly... not overwhelm... not an overwhelming amount”.

“They were, um, for the first few weeks they weren’t, like, giving us too much homework so that... um... so that we wouldn’t be so stressed out about homework and getting detentions if we didn’t do it. And, like, yeah...”

This also suggests that Liam perceived the teachers to be more understanding than he initially expected. He also mentions being challenged by homework as positive. This is consistent with the theme of doing well academically, which was mentioned at several points in the interview. This appeared to be an important aspect of school for Liam.

4.14 Overarching Theme Four: Coping with Change

The superordinate theme which emerged from Liam’s interview relating to this overarching theme is ‘responsibility’. A common theme in Liam’s account of his school transition was a sense of having to adapt to an increased sense of accountability and responsibility in secondary school. Liam alluded to this sense of responsibility in reference to behaviour, academic outcomes and seeking support.

4.14.1 Behaviour and Academic Outcomes

Liam appeared to see himself as responsible for both his behaviour and his academic outcomes, and perceived the two as being related:

“I mean... I’m not really that worried... I mean I kind of am because we’re nearing GCSEs and stuff and I don’t really wanna get too much detentions or get sent out of the class because, um, because you wanna get good GCSEs... you wanna be in lessons to get that. But um... I don’t really feel too bad about getting in trouble apart from missing lessons and stuff. But... more confident now [...].”

Liam alluded to contradictory feelings regarding his behaviour and academic outcomes. He appeared to wish to do well in his GCSEs and therefore wished to behave well so he did not miss teaching. On the other hand, he described becoming ‘more confident’ and less fearful of getting into trouble due to knowing the teachers better. These contradictory feelings are reflected in Liam’s contradictory statements ‘I’m not really that worried... I mean I kind of am’. Liam appeared to be at a stage where his initial fears about starting secondary school were being replaced by new fears such as GCSE exams. While his initial fears were related to how others, the teachers and older pupils, would treat him, he then appeared to be more worried about his own academic performance and behaviour which he considered himself to be responsible for.

4.14.2 Seeking Support

Liam referred to a sense of responsibility not only for his academic achievements and his behaviour, but also for seeking support from adults in school.

Researcher: “Okay, and for other children who are in foster care... do you think they need any extra help when they move to secondary school or just the same as everyone else?”

Liam: “I mean, it depends if they need the extra academic help. Then they should ask for it or, um, yeah, they should be supported. But if they don’t... if they feel confident then they, um, they should get it if they want it or need it”.

Liam again interprets ‘support’ as referring to academic support. This again suggests that this was his experience of support during his transition. The extract above suggests that Liam did not appear to think that LAC inherently have needs which are different to others. He instead suggests that additional help should be based on an individuals’ needs. Liam also seemed to suggest that pupils have a responsibility to seek the support themselves. He mentions that pupils should ‘ask for it’ and should ‘get it if they want it’ which indicates that that he thought that young people should be accountable for recognising their own needs and communicating them.

Liam also appeared to see pupils as responsible for seeking emotional support from adults:

“Again... if like... I mean not again... if they need the support they should ask for it and, yeah, and if they are worried about something they should talk to someone about it”

Repetition of the word 'should' also emphasises that it is the responsibility of young people themselves to seek help, further suggesting that LAC are accountable for their own needs.

Liam also suggests that it is the individual young person's responsibility to maintain a positive mindset regarding the transition from primary to secondary school.

Researcher: "[...] is there anything else you would like to tell me about going from primary school to secondary school".

Liam: "Only one thing actually... if you think that something's going to be hard... it's just... making it harder for yourself, so, you're probably better just thinking that it's not going to be easy, but think positively to help you cope with the stress".

This suggests that Liam appeared to believe that LAC have a sense of control over their own experiences of secondary school. He seemed to suggest that LAC have the ability to influence the quality of their experience both negatively and positively by how they choose to think about it. The above extract also demonstrates that Liam found the experience of school transition to be stressful. Referring to 'the stress' suggests that Liam considered stress to be an inherent part of secondary school transition. But despite this, Liam appeared to have a sense of control and responsibility over his ability to deal with this stress, through managing his mindset,

seeking support when it is needed, and taking responsibility for his behaviour and academic achievement.

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to present the findings from the research project within a wider context. The discussion will firstly consider research findings with reference to relevant psychological theory and literature pertaining to LAC and education. This chapter will then critically consider the research process, including strengths and limitations. Implications for EP practice and future research will also be considered.

5.2 Commentary on Findings

In the previous chapter the findings were presented and explored idiographically, in relation to each participant. This was to provide a holistic and individual account of each of the participants' experiences, in accordance with the constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology which underpin this research. This chapter will now provide a commentary on the findings which include convergences and divergences between the two participants' accounts, in addition to placing the findings within the context of wider literature and psychological theory. This is structured according to the four overarching themes:

- A Journey of Risk and Reward
- Social Network
- Fantasy and Reality
- Coping with Change

5.3 A Journey of Risk and Reward

The concept of 'journey' emerged for both participants. Both Asif and Liam referred to the physical journey of travelling to a new location and getting used to new buildings, along with the emotional journey of leaving behind the familiar and entering into new and unfamiliar social groups and experiences. Both LAC shared mixed feelings about the process, which contained elements of excitement, anxiety and sadness. Both accounts shared elements of loss and risk, along with a positive sense of reward and gain. Some of the shared elements of their experiences will be discussed here, along with links to pre-existing research and theory.

5.3.1 Experiencing Loss

Both participants referred to the emotional experience of leaving familiar people and places behind. This appeared to be reflected in both participants' drawings. Liam's picture showed a single figure moving away from the primary school building and Asif's drawing depicted himself apart from a group of primary school friends. Liam explicitly referred to the emotional impact of this loss:

"It was, like, kind of sad. Cos, like, you might not... say you didn't stay in contact with your friends... you might not see them that often or at all. So it's kind of sad." (Liam)

Leaving the primary school community has the potential to be a significant loss for CYP because it can stir up both conscious and unconscious memories and feelings of earlier losses (Youell, 2006). For the participants in this study leaving

primary school also appeared to represent leaving behind familiar routines, peers, staff members and locations. This has the potential to be particularly challenging for vulnerable groups such as LAC, many of whom have already experienced significant losses such as separation from caregivers, separation from siblings or family bereavement (Holland & Crowley, 2013). For individuals who have experienced significant loss, trauma or change, it is possible to experience 'trauma reminders, loss reminders or change reminders' (Mannarino & Cohen, 2011. p. 26) which can cause memories of a previous trauma, loss or change to emerge (Mannarino & Cohen, 2011). The inherent loss and change associated with primary to secondary school transition could therefore remind pupils of previous adverse experiences.

A large proportion of LAC have experienced trauma as a result of neglect and abuse (NSPCC, 2020). Trauma can impact CYP's ability to learn, regulate their emotions, and make and maintain relationships (Blaustein, 2013; Garrett, 2014). Trauma-informed practice approaches can be used within schools to support pupils who have had adverse experiences (Cavanaugh, 2016; Chafouleas et al, 2016). Trauma informed approaches recognise that transitions can be particularly stressful for CYP who have experienced trauma and emphasise the need for supportive practices to be implemented, such as providing advanced warning of changes and additional preparation time (Cavanaugh, 2016). Adverse childhood experiences can also impact the development of secure attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Hillman et al, 2020). Healthy attachment relationships provide a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988) from which a CYP can have their needs met and confidently explore the world. A lack of secure attachment relationships can lead to an insecure attachment style (Bowlby, 1988) which can impact an individual's ability to relate to

others and engage with learning (Geddes, 2006; Pearce, 2016). According to Dent and Cameron (2003) experiencing both trauma and a lack of secure attachment relationships can cause ordinary stresses to be perceived as serious threats. Some LAC are therefore more vulnerable to experiencing an ordinary stressful event such as school transition (Evangelou et al, 2008; Rice et al, 2011) as particularly challenging.

5.3.2 Risking Relationships

A significant aspect of both Asif and Liam's experiences was starting secondary school without their primary school peers and having to form new social relationships. They both referred to this experience:

'well I mean I guess I was a bit... I was a bit nervous because I didn't know anyone at the school'. (Asif)

'[...] and sometimes your friends might not go to the same secondary school as you, so, so, like you have to make new friends. It's kind of like risking a lot because you're losing your friends but you can make it up because you get new friends'. (Liam)

The few studies which have explored the factors impacting primary to secondary transition are consistent with Liam and Asif's experiences. Two studies found that transitioning without primary school peers was a risk factor regarding the success of a school transition (Brewin & Stratham, 2011; Evangelou et al, 2008). One study based in Wales explored LAC's experiences and found that the absence

of peer friendships during transition was associated with a more difficult experience (Brewin & Stratham, 2011). Another study conducted in 2008 aimed to identify the factors which contributed to successful or challenging transitions for a range of pupils. Transitioning with primary school peers was found to be a key protective factor regarding school transition (Evangelou et al, 2008). Although neither study was conducted recently and the findings might therefore be influenced by different legislative and contextual factors, both studies suggest that the challenge of transitioning without peers was not unique to the participants in the current study.

5.3.3 Forming New Friendships

Both Asif and Liam referred to both the negative experience of losing primary school friends, and the positive experience of gaining secondary school friends. Making new friends appeared to be a priority for both young people, although they had different experiences. Asif emphasised the ease in which he formed new friendships whereas Liam mentioned that it was a longer process.

“In year 7 I didn’t really have many friends, then I got some, I started to make friends and stuff, so it wasn’t too bad”. (Liam)

“[...] I didn’t really find it hard to make friends like... literally on the first day I made about 5, 10 already”. (Asif)

The participants seemed to suggest that making friends improved the experience of secondary school. Friendships are also thought to be particularly important for the wellbeing of LAC because they enable CYP from this community to

develop a sense of belonging, and a sense of identity, which is separate from being considered a LAC (Hiles et al, 2014). Friendships are also important because they have also been found to promote LAC's resilience during challenging times such as transitioning out of the care system (Refaeli et al, 2019). The value of friendships could explain why leaving their primary school community felt like a loss for Asif and Liam, and why making new friends felt like a reward. This highlights the importance for professionals working with LAC to be aware of the quality of peer relationships, particularly during times of challenge and transition.

Research suggests that systems supporting LAC such as the virtual school and social care are aware of the importance of friendships for LAC's wellbeing (Drew & Banerjee, 2019; Roesch-Marsh & Emond, 2021). However, statutory guidance for such services to follow when identifying secondary schools for LAC does not refer to the importance of consistent relationships or maintaining friendships. The guidance instead prioritises the Ofsted rating of prospective schools, whether the school can meet the child's needs, and whether the LAC will be able to make maximum progress (DfE, 2018b). LAC are also likely to experience higher than average school placement changes as a result of care placement changes (Maclean et al, 2017). Such changes are common for LAC, for example over a three-year period more than 50% of children in care experienced at least one change of placement in 2019 (Clarke, 2020). It is important that social relationships are considered alongside academic factors during a change of school due to the impact this can have on LAC's transition experiences (Evangelou et al, 2008), and emotional wellbeing (Hiles et al, 2014; Refaeli et al, 2019; Roesch-Marsh & Edmond, 2021).

5.4 Social Network

Social relationships were an important part of both participants' primary-secondary school transition experience. In addition to friendships, relationships with teachers, foster carers and virtual school advisory teachers also appeared to play an important role. These relationships will be explored further in the context of wider research and relevant psychological theory.

5.4.1 Teacher-pupil relationships

Both participants appeared to have positive relationships with teachers in both primary and secondary school. They described teachers as caring and helpful.

"I was also worrying that the teachers were going to be quite strict, but they are quite nice in my school." (Asif).

"The teachers were really supportive so if you didn't understand something they would explain it to you in a different way so it would be easier to understand stuff." (Liam).

A key concern for both Asif and Liam before they started secondary school was encountering strict teachers. Both participants alluded to feeling relieved that secondary school teachers were kinder than expected during the interviews. LAC are more likely to have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Simkiss, 2009) which are linked to poor health and social outcomes in adulthood (Lee et al, 2020). From a risk and resilience perspective, it has been suggested that positive

teacher relationships can be a protective factor against negative outcomes such as poor emotional wellbeing and low academic outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). A study by Winter (2010) also found that positive pupil-teacher relationships can support LAC's emotional wellbeing, the positive relationships enabled LAC to explore and manage unresolved feelings associated with previous experiences, such as guilt and loss. A study by Sugden (2013) explored LAC's perspectives regarding factors which helped them to learn, and close relationships with the teacher emerged as a key theme.

There has been an increased interest and emphasis on the role of school staff to facilitate emotional wellbeing and provide positive attachment-like relationships. The use of 'attachment-like' has developed within research to acknowledge that teacher-pupil relationships are not equivalent to parent or carer attachment relationships (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Teachers are not able to offer the same emotional support as carers due to a number of factors, for example CYP are required to change teachers frequently, particularly in secondary school, and share attention with a whole class (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). However, there are thought to be aspects of teacher-pupil relationships which can fulfil a similar role to that of a secure parent or carer, for example Geddes (2003) suggests that positive teacher-pupil relationships have the potential to positively impact CYP's internal working models. An internal working model is a psychological representation of the relationship with an individual's primary caregiver which impacts future relationships throughout the lifetime (Bowlby, 1988; Holmes, 2014). Internal working models are associated with an individual's sense of self, in addition to expectations of others (Webster & Hackett, 2007). Although teachers cannot offer

the consistency of primary caregiver attachment figures, it has been suggested that they can act as temporary attachment figures (Zajac & Kobak, 2006).

The recent interest in the role of the teacher-pupil relationship is reflected in the number of handbooks for school staff which aim to support schools to understand attachment and build positive relationships with pupils (Bomber, 2007; Brooks, 2019; Carpenter et al, 2017; Geddes, 2006). Developments in neuroscience demonstrate that the structure of the brain is not fixed as a result of early experiences but is capable of changing and developing throughout the lifetime as a result of neuroplasticity (Cramer et al, 2011; Mundkur, 2005). Adolescence has been identified as a critical period regarding neuroplasticity, in which the brain undergoes significant re-structuring (Fuhrmann et al, 2015). From both neuroscience and attachment theory perspectives, positive teacher-pupil relationships in both primary and secondary school can positively impact pupil wellbeing, particularly those who have experienced adverse childhood events such as some LAC.

5.4.2 Foster Carers

Foster carers appeared to be a source of support and reassurance during the primary-secondary transition for both young people.

“Yeah, my aunt [foster carer], and the teachers, and your family can really be helpful.” (Liam).

"[...] my foster carer Sam, she was sort of like 'when you get in school you'll be fine' cos I was like really nervous getting ready for my first day but when I got in, err, I was fine". (Asif).

A positive transition experience can promote personal growth, while an adverse experience can negatively impact wellbeing and learning (Pietarinen, 2010). While primary to secondary transition represents a number of discontinuities for CYP (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008), a sense of continuity within other relationships can support pupils to manage change (Pietarinen, 2010). The participants' relationships with their foster carers could have provided a sense of consistency and stability during this time of significant educational change. The bio eco-systemic model refers to the impact of a number of systems on CYP's wellbeing and development, including the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). The microsystem refers to the systems with which an individual has regular direct experience, and often includes the family and school systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Consistency, stability and predictability alongside flexibility is critical for healthy child development, according to the bio eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), and a sense of disorganisation within a system can cause a block to development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). When there is change within one area of the child's microsystem (school transition), the home environment might therefore provide a sense of stability to prevent a sense of disorganisation. Consistent with the bio eco-systemic model, research has found that placement stability is linked to better educational outcomes for LAC (Sebba et al, 2015), and has been found to positively impact school attendance and CYP's ability to manage school placement changes (Zorc et al, 2013).

5.4.3 The Virtual School

One way in which the two participants' experiences diverged is that Asif referred to the support he received from the virtual school whereas Liam did not.

“When I was doing my PEP meetings at my school like, err, someone from the virtual school her name is Sophie, she always tells me like ‘if you get a detention it’s not the worst thing [...]’ (Asif).

The virtual school is a designated professional, or team of professionals, within the local authority who are responsible for promoting education for LAC (Berridge, 2012). Receiving reassurance from a virtual school advisory teacher could have felt important to Asif because the virtual school teacher-pupil relationship could have represented a sense of consistency between his primary school and secondary school experiences. Virtual school services have been found to vary between different local authorities. Some services mainly work with social care and schools while some work directly with LAC themselves (Drew & Banerjee, 2018). Asif appeared to have developed a relationship with his virtual school advisory teacher, for example he referred to her by her first name and she appeared to understand what his concerns were and offer helpful emotional reassurance. Similar to the relationship with his foster carer, Asif’s virtual school advisory teacher appeared to represent a sense of stability and consistency during a changing time. The other participant, Liam, did not mention the impact of the virtual school during his transition experience. This alludes to the differing perspectives and experiences that LAC can have, even when supported by the same local authority.

Consistent with the study by Drew & Banerjee (2018), a study Sebba & Berridge (2019) found that virtual schools vary significantly regarding their size and structure, quality of personal education plans (PEPs), and level of direct support offered to CYP. There is little information available regarding the direct impact of virtual schools on the educational outcomes of LAC, and even less research is available regarding LAC's perceptions of this support. An article by Rivers (2018) included a personal account of one LAC's experience of education. The young person described PEP meetings as 'horrible' and appeared to feel overwhelmed and anxious about the number of professionals involved and the perceived pressure to meet educational expectations. This is different to Asif's account in which he referred to PEP meetings as positive experiences. The young person in the article by Rivers (2018) appeared to be experiencing a high level of anxiety about their education due to having experienced inconsistent school and care placements. In contrast Asif appeared to have a positive view of education and had experienced consistent school and care placements. This highlights the range of factors which contribute to LAC's experiences and needs. This also emphasises the importance of taking a holistic view of LAC as individuals, taking into consideration contextual factors, to allow services to respond flexibly according to CYP's individual needs.

The bio eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006) also refers to the mesosystem which denotes the interconnections between systems. 'Linkages' refer to experiences and structures which link different microsystems together (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; O'Toole, 2016). Communication between various systems, such as the home and school system, has been found to create a sense of

stability for CYP during times of transition and has been associated with a more positive experience (O'Toole, 2016). Asif referred to the support he received from his personal education plan (PEP) meeting with his virtual school advisory teacher and his foster carer. This could have felt particularly supportive for him because such meetings involve interactions between various systems within his life. Personal Education Plans are designed to be developed collaboratively with carers, the local authority and education settings (Mathers et al, 2016). PEP meetings might therefore create 'linkages' within the mesosystem for Asif, helping him to traverse between the systems of education, social care and his care placement. Research has also found that positive and consistent communication between families and schools not only impacts transition experiences, but also have been found to positively impact educational outcomes (Mires et al, 2018; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). This could be a result of communication creating linkages between systems, which according to Bronfenbrenner promotes wellbeing for individuals because linkages can create a sense of integration between various aspects of a person's world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

5.5 Power and Autonomy

Asif and Liam had different experiences regarding the selection of their secondary schools. Liam described choosing his secondary school himself due to its relatively small size, whereas Asif implied a lack of choice and agency regarding this decision.

"Well, er, like someone from the virtual school like they kind of decide... think it was er... do you know Thomas Smith?". (Asif).

"[...] the one I chose... I went to check out in year five and chose that one."
(Liam).

Statutory guidance for local authorities on promoting the education of LAC states that LAC's views and perspectives should be incorporated into the process of selecting a school (DfE, 2018b). Asif described expressing that he wished to go to the same school as his friend, but instead he felt the virtual school made the decision on his behalf. Despite statutory guidance, Asif's experience demonstrates that LAC do not always feel that their perspectives are incorporated into decisions. This sense of a power imbalance between LAC and professionals is not unique to Asif's experience, it has also been highlighted in a study by Warham (2012) in which the educational experiences of older LAC were explored. The participants referred to a sense of powerlessness and fragmentation when referring to their educational experiences and appeared to feel that care placement and school placement changes were outside of their control (Warham, 2012). Advocating for the voice of the child is central to EP practice. This is therefore an area in which EPs can support services working with LAC. This sense of autonomy is important for LAC. As Rens et al (2018) have claimed, pupils have been found to have more successful transition experiences when they are included in the decision-making process and seen as partners. In addition, Axford (2008) proposed that when LAC have a sense of choice and autonomy over their lives, they are more likely to feel hopeful about the future.

5.6 Fantasy and Reality

Asif and Liam both described experiencing pre-transition anxiety. They appeared to have similar fears which related to strict teachers, too much homework and having detentions. They also both described the reality of secondary school as better than expected.

“ [...] I don't know if it's just me cos I mean cos I know other people do get nervous but I was like really nervous... so... I just want to tell everyone to stay relaxed. It's not really as bad as you think.” (Asif).

Other studies have identified a similar trend that pupils tend to worry about secondary school before they start, including both LAC (Brewin & Stratham, 2011) and non-LAC (Evangelou et al, 2008; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). One study measured pupils' wellbeing before and after secondary school transition and found that only 3% of pupils reported feeling worried or anxious after their first term (Evangelou et al, 2008). The aspects of secondary school which caused anxiety for Liam and Asif did not appear to be unique to LAC but were common concerns for year six pupils, including homework, detentions, strict teachers and getting lost (Evangelou et al, 2008). This highlights the importance of supporting all pupils, including LAC, to manage such worries.

Pre-transition support is especially important for vulnerable groups such as LAC who might be lacking some of the protective factors which help young people cope with the stress of transition. Evangelou et al (2008) found that in addition to moving to the same secondary school as primary school peers, having older siblings was also a protective factor which helped pupils to have a successful experience.

Many LAC are not regularly in touch with their siblings. A report in 2015 found that half of sibling groups in care are not living together (Ashley & Roth, 2015). It is therefore important for schools and other services to be aware of the unique resources, and lack of resources, that contribute to school transition experiences for LAC.

One particular concern for both participants was a fear of social isolation and not being socially accepted.

"I thought it would be like... loads of big people... and like... since I was going into year 7 I thought it was going to be, like, everybody's going to be... like... mean to you, cos, like, you're young." (Liam).

"[...] So it's just, you know, you just get to know everyone and make sure you're not hated, I guess." (Asif).

This fear could have been exacerbated by attending a secondary school without prior friendships or peers from primary school. Peer support has been found to be the most significant protective factor for pupil wellbeing during school transition (Lester & Cross, 2015). In addition, some studies suggest that LAC are especially at risk of experiencing bullying (Daly & Gilligan, 2005; McClung & Gayle, 2010). It has been suggested that this risk is higher for LAC who are not placed with their siblings and have experienced a high number of placement changes (Daly & Gilligan, 2005). School bullying can have long term negative consequences impacting factors such as mental health and socioeconomic status in adulthood (Arseneault, 2018 &

Schoeler et al 2018). In the short term, the fear of bullying can negatively impact young people's wellbeing (Evangelou et al, 2008). This emphasises the importance of taking LAC's fears seriously and ensuring there are opportunities both before and after transition for LAC's concerns to be identified and addressed.

5.7 Coping with Change

This was the fourth overarching theme. For both Liam and Asif there was a sense of tension between the excitement and overwhelm of the new challenges and responsibilities of secondary school. Asif described having to 'sprint' across the school to get to his classes on time which suggests simultaneous feelings of challenge and exhilaration in adapting to the new experiences of secondary school. This dichotomy does not appear unique to LAC. Zeedyk et al (2003) explored the views of pupils, parents and teachers and found that pupils transitioning to secondary school simultaneously looked forward to and felt worried about facing new challenges. This emphasises that for many pupils experience of transitioning to secondary school is not wholly positive or negative, but can be complex and conflicting. Feelings of ambivalence have been found to be common for those who are undergoing stressful life events (Ong et al, 2006). Rothman et al (2017) suggests that while experiencing conflicting emotions can be anxiety provoking, it can also be functional and beneficial for individuals. Although both studies have focused on the experiences of adults rather than CYP, they help to explain and normalise feelings of ambivalence for the participants and other pupils. Dane (2010) suggests that openness and responsiveness of organisations and individuals have been found to support those who are experiencing ambivalence during stressful life events. It is therefore important that schools, and other systems supporting year six and year

seven pupils, are open and responsive to such feelings, helping CYP to explore and make sense of such potentially conflicting emotions.

Primary-secondary transition is not the only transition that pupils face. Transitions have been conceptualised as 'horizontal transitions' and 'vertical transitions' by Brooker, (2008, p. 25). The former refers to common, every day, transitions such as between home and school, and between the classroom and playground (Brooker, 2008). Vertical transitions are more significant and include starting at a new educational setting. Vertical transitions propel individuals from one system to another, bringing both opportunities and challenges (Pietarinen et al, 2010). For LAC, many have experienced a higher proportion of vertical transitions than non-looked after peers. For example, a significant number of LAC have experienced multiple changes of care placement in addition to multiple school placements (Clarke, 2020). Many LAC will also be required to navigate the vertical transition of leaving the care system when they are 18. Poor experiences of vertical transitions can lead to a sense of disruption, while positive experiences have been found to increase resilience for individuals (Pietarinen, 2010). This further emphasises the importance of supporting vulnerable pupils such as LAC to have positive transition experiences.

5.8 Academic Outcomes

The literature base appeared to be focused on the academic trajectories of LAC, particularly the consistent gap in achievement between LAC and their peers (Berridge et al, 2020; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe, Gardner & Melguish, 2017; Melkman, 2020, McClung & Gayle, 2010). This would suggest that LAC face a

greater challenge than their peers when starting secondary school due to starting at a lower academic level. However, neither Liam or Asif appeared to identify with this dominant narrative and both appeared motivated to do well academically, with a positive view of their individual academic abilities.

“Yeah, cos in my primary I was the... it’s indisputable really... I was the smartest. And, like, cos, Sam, she was telling me like ‘you might not be the top in your Secondary, and, you know, that’s alright’. And... cos I am in the top, erm, I mean I’m top 5 I would say... I’d say I’m top 5...” (Asif).

In addition to having a positive view of their academic abilities, Liam expressed a desire to do well in his GCSE exams and Asif expressed a desire to do well in upcoming school tests. Both appear discordant with the dominant discourses about LAC’s academic attainment. Quantitative studies which present overall trends in LAC’s academic outcomes are valuable because they highlight areas in which more attention and resources are needed, however alternative narratives and individual stories can be lost. There is also a risk that negative discourses can influence teacher expectations of LAC’s academic ability. One study by Mannay et al (2017) explored LAC’s perceptions of the ‘looked after child’ label. Some LAC believed that teachers had lower expectations of them compared to their peers as a result of being in care, and they expressed a desire to resist this narrative and do well academically. LAC’s individual perspectives highlight the importance of seeing the whole child in context, and not making assumptions about LAC based on statistical trends.

Some links between psychological theory and secondary school transition are offered here for consideration for the practitioner psychologist, including the psychological concepts of circular causality, and punctuation. Regarding the former, the relationship between teacher expectations and LAC's academic attainment could be understood as an example of circular causality. This phenomenon occurs within systems and refers to interactions between individuals which influence behaviour (Dowling & Osborne, 2020). From this perspective, there is no single cause of behaviour, but patterns are mutually reinforced. For example, low expectations of some teachers regarding LAC's educational outcomes could impact the academic performance of some LAC, and consequent low academic performance could in turn impact teacher expectations. Although the experience of low expectations from teachers was not explicitly mentioned within this research project, one of the participants, Asif, referred to experiencing a lack of challenge in school "[...] cos in my primary, like, I didn't get pushed that much, as in like, I didn't get really hard challenging work [...]". Although it is not clear whether this was related to his LAC status, it is possible that this perceived lack of challenge was due to an underestimation of his ability by his teachers.

Regarding the concept of circular causality, transitions represent a disruption to persistent patterns. This is related to the concept of 'punctuation' (Dowling and Osborne, 2020). Punctuation is defined as 'the point at which a sequence of events is interrupted [...]' (Dowling & Osborne, 2020). Secondary school transition represents a number of simultaneous discontinuities (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008) and might therefore also interrupt cycles of circular causality between individuals. A small-scale research study by Brewin and Stratham (2011) found that some of the

adults supporting LAC described the secondary school transition as a ‘fresh start’ (p. 375) for some LAC, which gave them the chance to change the way they were perceived by others. This further suggests that school transition can offer a chance for previous interactional patterns to be broken and new patterns to be reinforced. The concepts of circular causality and punctuation highlight the importance of the school transition experience for LAC, and the potential long-term impact on both educational experiences and academic attainment. This is one reason why this research project emphasises the importance of considering LAC’s educational experiences from a systemic perspective, and takes the view that EPs are well placed to enable schools and other systems to consider such factors.

5.9 Identity

An additional challenge for LAC, in comparison to their peers, is managing their ‘looked after child’ identity, and how they will be perceived. Both Asif and Liam entered environments in which their identity was not known. They both alluded to a desire to manage the perceptions of others. Liam described not wanting to be treated differently to his peers and not wanting to have separate support, perhaps to avoid being seen as ‘different’. Asif described carefully revealing that he was in foster care to those he could trust, in order to control what was known about him.

“[...] but I’d say don’t tell everyone straight away cos I haven’t... I haven’t even told my whole form yet. [...] there’s quite a few that I’ve told... but I’d say don’t tell them at first... don’t tell everyone at first.” (Asif).

Both young people did not appear to want everyone at their secondary school to know they were in foster care. This could be a result of a desire for acceptance along with a fear of social exclusion, especially as both participants were concerned about being bullied and not making friends. The desire not to be perceived differently by peers is consistent with other studies. LAC in the study by Mannay et al (2017) also expressed a desire to be treated the same as their peers to avoid being perceived differently. Some participants in the study expressed dissatisfaction about meeting professionals, such as social workers, in school time because this set them apart from their peers. Both the research by Mannay et al (2017) and Liam and Asif's perspectives, highlight the importance of ensuring that support for LAC promotes belonging and inclusion within the school. This again highlights the importance of taking intersectionality into account, seeing all pupils as holistic individuals in accordance with their unique contexts, strengths and needs rather than focusing on one aspect of their identity.

5.10 Context of Covid-19

Although the participants were in years eight and nine when they were interviewed and were therefore reflecting on a primary to secondary transition which mostly occurred prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is acknowledged that the pandemic experience is likely to have had a significant impact on the LAC's experience of school, and therefore could have impacted their views and perceptions of school transition. Memories do not exist in a vacuum but are impacted by recent experiences, particularly if recent experiences are stressful (Schwabe & Wolf, 2010). Both participants would have spent a significant amount of their first or second years of secondary school at home. Although there is not yet any research exploring the

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on primary to secondary transition, a number of aspects of settling into secondary school are likely to have been affected for transitioning pupils including making friends, getting to know the school buildings and developing relationships with teachers. One of the participants, Asif, mentioned the impact that the pandemic has had on teaching and learning.

“Well, er, like work wise... like, they do, cos, like, in year 7 they do sets, like set 1, I was in set 1 and err but cos of the... cos of Covid we have to stay in the same classroom for the whole day so can't really do sets at the moment.”
(Asif).

“Cos it's all in one classroom, but, the work we get, like, sometimes it is pretty challenging and sometimes it's easy, like, there's different parts that are hard and easy and no, I like that”. (Asif).

Although the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was only briefly mentioned, Asif's comments highlight the impact that it has had on his experience of school. Asif was in the first term of his second year of secondary school when interviewed. In addition to having to negotiate the challenges and new experiences of secondary school, he was also having to adapt to the multitude of changes which were introduced as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. At the time of writing, the pandemic is still ongoing in the UK and the long-term impact on young people's learning and academic outcomes is still unknown. It is thought that the impact on learning is likely to vary depending on a number of factors such as the home environment and access to technology (Galea et al, 2020). Those from vulnerable

groups are likely to be disproportionately affected by the disruption of the pandemic due to having less access to face-to-face learning and support, particularly those with SEND (Asbury et al, 2020). This includes many LAC after due to a high proportion having a SEND diagnosis (DfE, 2016). The pandemic has also disproportionately affected those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Pan et al, 2020, Proto et al, 2021) of which there is an overrepresentation in the LAC community (Bywaters et al, 2018). There is therefore a risk that the pandemic will increase the already prevalent attainment gap between LAC and their peers.

Asif referred to a positive aspect of the impact of the pandemic, experiencing a wider variety of challenge regarding his work. This reinforces that the impact of Covid-19 is likely to be complex and varied. Both of the young people appeared to be in relatively stable foster home environments, referring to positive relationships with their foster carers. For LAC who were already experiencing challenges within their care placements, such challenges could have been exacerbated. This could partly be a result of suspensions to respite care and face-to-face visits by social care as a result of the Coronavirus Bill introduced in March 2020 (Crawley et al, 2020). It is also worth highlighting that the interviews took place during a time that schools were open. The participants might therefore have been experiencing a sense of stability and normality. Not long after the interviews took place schools closed for the third national lockdown in England. If the interviews had taken place during this time the responses from Liam and Asif could have been different. The fast-changing external circumstances during the period of this research project highlighted that qualitative interviews, regardless of depth, can only offer a window into a snapshot in time. It is therefore important that the wider context is acknowledged.

5.11 Strengths and Limitations

5.11.1 Sample

The researcher aimed to recruit six to eight participants. However, it was not possible to achieve this number as a result of interacting factors. LAC are already considered to be a challenging participant group to recruit (Quarmby et al, 2020). This recruitment challenge was exacerbated by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, due to school closures and the increased strain on social care services (Comas-Herrera, 2020). Despite actively attempting to recruit participants over a period of five months, a total of two LAC were recruited. It is stated by Smith et al (2009) that there is no right or wrong sample size in IPA research. It is acknowledged that there are both advantages and disadvantages regarding small sample sizes and the number of participants is thought to be dependent upon 'the richness of individual cases' (Smith et al, 2009, p. 44). Analysing two interviews offered an opportunity for more in-depth analysis that would have otherwise been possible if there were a higher number of participants. As stated by Warham (2012), small numbers of participants in qualitative research can enable rich alternative narratives to be explored. From a constructivist viewpoint, the aim of the research was to provide rich depictions of individual perspectives and experiences rather than to provide generalisable data. A smaller sample size was therefore in accordance with this epistemological orientation.

While a small sample size allowed for in-depth analysis and exploration of individual experiences, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to allow the findings to be understood in context. It is also acknowledged that smaller numbers of

participants inevitably restrict the range of voices and experiences which could have been included and explored. There were also similarities between the participants' backgrounds and experiences within this study which again inevitably restrict the range of views included, for example both participants had been in care since they were six years old. The perspectives of LAC who have been in care for other periods of time were therefore excluded. This is significant because the amount of time spent in care has been found to impact LAC's education (McClung & Gayle, 2010). In addition, only boys were recruited, meaning that girls' experiences of primary to secondary transition were not represented. The participants were also both in foster care meaning that the experiences of LAC in other settings such as residential care were excluded from this research project. Neither of the participants had a diagnosis of SEND despite LAC being more likely to have a diagnosis than their peers (DfE, 2016). However, this research project does not attempt to provide representative data, but instead aims to present an in-depth exploration of individual experiences.

5.11.2 Recruitment

The participants were recruited through a virtual school in London which randomly selected ten LAC to be contacted through their foster carers. There was a low response rate with only two out of ten foster carers giving consent. Subsequent attempts to recruit participants were made through another virtual school and through many designated teachers for LAC in secondary schools across London, however, no more participants were recruited. From an ethical perspective it was necessary to be transparent about the aims of the research. This could have impacted recruitment because it is possible that designated teachers or foster carers might have been more likely to select pupils with positive experiences. A number of

designated teachers did not respond to the invitation to support the research project which could have been due to a range of factors such as an increased workload due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions. The participants that were recruited attended schools within different London boroughs, but the same local authority was responsible for their care. Local processes and procedures therefore might have impacted their transition experiences. Although this research project does not aim to produce generalisable data, it is important that such factors are understood in reference to the findings.

5.11.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The research was initially designed to include the perspectives of both year seven and year eight pupils. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic year seven pupils were excluded from the study because their final year of primary school and first year of secondary school would have been significantly disrupted due to Covid-19. It was thought that some of the usual transition opportunities such as induction days would have been different for this cohort. Year seven pupils were initially included because their experience of school transition would have been the most recent and interviews would be taking place within the transition period. However, the inclusion of this group would have impacted the homogeneity of the sample. According to the bio-eco-systemic concept of the 'chronosystem', reactions to experience can change over time (O'Toole, 2014). It is therefore acknowledged that the responses of the participants are reflective of the time at which the interviews took place, including the Covid-19 pandemic context, and are likely to have been different if the interviews took place earlier in their transition experience, or later in their school career. It is

also acknowledged that there are both strengths and limitations related to the age of the participants. Although some of the immediate reactions to secondary school transition could have been forgotten, it is possible that the participants would have had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences over time, which might have led to insights which were not immediately apparent during the transition process. A further limitation of the study is that there was no clear definition or criteria regarding whether pupils were 'too vulnerable' to take part, this was instead subjectively decided by professionals such as designated teachers. It would be useful for future researchers to provide clear definitions to ensure consistent decisions are made to reduce the risk of bias within the recruitment process.

5.11.3 Remote interviews

Interviews with the participants were originally planned to take place face-to-face. This would have involved the researcher visiting each participant twice within their school. The sessions would have included an introductory session, followed by the interview. These sessions were designed to take place in person because this would have allowed for non-verbal communication such as body language and eye contact to be taken into account to enable rapport between researcher and participant. In addition, visiting the young people in school would have allowed the sessions to take place in a familiar environment for the participants.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic it was felt most ethically responsible for the introductory sessions and interviews to take place online to reduce the risk of virus transmission. Both took place on Zoom while the participants were at home. It is acknowledged that there are both limitations and benefits regarding remote

interviews. Regarding benefits, LAC in previous research have said that they disliked being perceived differently to their peers and therefore felt uncomfortable leaving the classroom to see professionals such as social workers (Mannay et al, 2017). By undertaking the interviews at home, the participants did not have to worry about the perceptions of others.

Another benefit of the interviews taking place in the home is that the LAC might have felt more comfortable. One of the participants initially appeared hesitant about taking part in the introductory session. His foster carer was able to reassure him and encourage him to have a go. He appeared to be reassured by the initial session and seemed more confident during the recorded interview. If this had taken place in school his foster carer would not have been present to offer reassurance. Another benefit of the interviews taking place at home was that the participants might have felt able to talk honestly about their experience of school. If the interviews had taken place in the school environment, they might have felt concerned about their views being overheard, or they could have been more likely to unconsciously associate the researcher with school staff. Undertaking the interviews remotely in the home setting therefore might have created a sense of distance between the researcher and the LAC's school experience.

There are a range of perspectives regarding the potential benefits and limitations of conducting qualitative interviews remotely, compared to face-to-face. Seitz (2016) drew attention to potential connectivity issues which can disrupt the flow of interviews, along with the inability to see the other person's body language, and a potential lack of intimacy between researcher and participant. However, others have

argued that technical and internet connectivity issues have improved and other potential disadvantages of face-to-face interviews, such as travel costs and distance, are overcome using remote interviews (Iacono et al, 2016). Regarding the present study, one limitation was that it was not possible to moderate whether other people were listening to the LAC's interviews, for example their foster carer or other children could have been in the same room. This could have impacted the responses given by the participants. Overall, it is acknowledged that there were both benefits and limitations regarding the remote nature of the interviews.

5.12 Implications for Future Research

There are a number of ways in which this research can be taken forward and developed further. This research has helped to identify a gap in the research base: LAC's views regarding primary to secondary school transition experiences. It is therefore hoped that this research project will inspire future researchers to further explore this area. It is suggested that future research could include a wider variety of voices to gain further insight into the range of transition experiences had by LAC, including those who are educated in other settings such as alternative provision and special schools. It would also be useful for future research to explore the views of LAC with SEND and those who have had other types of care placement experiences. It would also be useful for future research to track LAC's experiences of transition alongside outcomes at the end of secondary school. This could provide further evidence regarding the most effective ways to support LAC, leading to further implications for EPs, secondary schools, foster carers and other key stakeholders. It would be helpful for future research to critically consider how to overcome the barriers to accessing this community in order to recruit larger sample sizes.

5.13 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

There are a number of remits in which EPs already support the education and wellbeing of LAC. LAC are four times more likely to have SEND compared to their peers (DfE, 2016). EPs are therefore likely to be involved with CYP from this group through individual assessment work as part of the Education and Health Care Plan process (DfE, 2014), or through traded work with schools. Some EP services also offer consultation to those supporting LAC such as designated teachers for LAC (Whitehouse, 2014). EP services have offered specialist support including rapid response services to avoid placement breakdown (Golding, 2004; Peake, 2011). Recently, some EP services have been working in partnership with the virtual school (Carroll & Cameron, 2017). Despite this, there is more that can be done by EP services to support this group, particularly in light of the academic attainment gap (DfE, 2019) and higher prevalence of mental health needs among LAC (NSPCC, 2019). Through training and consultation, EPs can help school staff and other professionals to support a wider range of LAC to have a positive transition to secondary school, including those who do not meet the threshold for Educational and Health Care Plans or referrals to EP, or other specialist, services. This research project suggests the following implications for EP practice:

5.13.1 Training

EPs are well placed to offer training to primary schools, secondary schools, foster carers and virtual schools regarding psychological theory related to LAC and school transition. This could include attachment theory, and the impact of adverse

life experiences on LAC's abilities to trust adults, form and maintain relationships, and attend to learning. Such training could also emphasise the importance of the school as a secure base for LAC (Geddes, 2006). Training which focuses on other theories and models such as trauma informed practice (Kinniburgh et al, 2017) and the bio eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) could help schools to build their capacity and understanding of the factors which can impact social and emotional development, wellbeing and learning for LAC. Trauma informed practice focuses on the ways in which children's behaviour and development has been impacted by previous adverse events, with a focus on enabling schools and other services to provide a safe environment for CYP. Attachment theory, systems theory and trauma-informed practice all emphasise the importance of establishing positive peer and teacher relationships for CYP. Awareness of the importance of relationships is particularly important for LAC who transition to a school without primary school peers, such as the participants in this study.

5.13.2 Advocating for the Voice of the Child

This research project has demonstrated that individual LAC's experiences and perspectives of education can be outside of negative dominant discourses regarding LAC's educational trajectories. It is therefore important to listen to LAC's voices to avoid assumptions and generalisations which can lead to negative biases and low expectations. Listening to the voice of the child is thought to empower CYP (Mannion, 2007), has therapeutic benefits (Ingram, 2013) and helps professionals to identify appropriate interventions (Billington, 2006). Axford (2008) has also argued that if LAC lack a sense of autonomy over their life choices, they are more likely to lack hope about the future. Listening to the voice of the child is therefore particularly

important for the LAC population, many of whom will have already experienced significant changes in their lives which were outside of their control such as entering into the care system. Advocating for the voice of the child has long been an important part of EP practice (Gersch et al, 1993). Through working at an individual, group and systemic level EPs are well placed to not only explore and represent the voice of the child, but to advocate for their views and perspectives within wider systems. While many EP services already provide support to the LAC population, this research highlights the importance of advocating for this group within all EP services and at transition in particular.

5.13.3 Consultation and Intervention

Consultation is thought to be a central part of EP practice (Farrell & Woods, 2017; Wagner, 2008) and offers a way of working flexibly and collaboratively with teachers, parents and other professionals to support CYP at individual, group and systemic levels. Research has demonstrated that consultation is an effective way for EPs to empower and support those who work with LAC such as designated teachers (Whitehouse, 2014). EP consultation has also been found to help prevent placement breakdown for LAC (Peake, 2011). Consultation can also help identify effective interventions for individuals and groups of CYP (Farrell & Woods, 2017). One of the participants in the present study emphasised that LAC should be offered support according to their individual needs, rather than all LAC having the same needs. The current study also emphasises the importance of supporting LAC's transition experiences before they leave primary school because both participants reflected their experiences of pre- transition anxiety. This appeared to be exacerbated for the participants by not knowing anyone in their new schools. Consultation offers a way to

understand LAC's individual needs in context and to implement targeted interventions. Previous research has demonstrated that there is limited evidence regarding effective interventions for this group (Liabo et al, 2013; Mooney et al, 2016; Raspin et al, 2019), further highlighting the importance of continuing to research this area.

Table 2 provides a further demonstration of the role of the EP in supporting and facilitating the primary to secondary school transition experiences of LAC. Through working directly with the systems which support LAC, and through direct work with LAC themselves, EPs can promote positive school transition experiences at universal, group and individual levels according to the needs of the particular system or individual. Table 2 provides an overview of the four key findings from the research project. Related to each finding are a list of suggested reflective questions to be used with professionals supporting LAC, in addition to some suggested practical strategies. These are grouped within the following areas of practice: 'advocating for the voice of the child', 'training', and 'consultation and intervention'. Both reflective questions and strategies are offered as suggestions, EPs are encouraged to adapt the questions and use alternative strategies according to the particular situation. In addition, an information sheet for EPs providing an overview of the research project and suggested strategies can be found in Appendix T.

Table 2.

An Overview of Implications for EPs.

EP areas of practice	Theme 1: A Journey of Risk and Reward	Theme 2: Social Network	Theme 3: Fantasy and Reality	Theme 4: Coping with Change
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	Both LAC shared mixed feelings about the transition process, which contained elements of excitement, anxiety and sadness.	Social relationships were an important part of both participants' primary-secondary school transition experiences. One of the participants felt he had a lack of autonomy regarding decision making.	Both participants described experiencing pre-transition anxiety. This was related to factors such as detentions, homework and strict teachers.	The changes and challenges of secondary school transition appeared to elicit both excitement and overwhelm for the participants. The LAC did not want to be seen as 'different' to their peers. They highlighted the importance of being seen as individuals with unique needs.
Advocating for the Voice of the Child. <i>Questions for reflection when working with systems supporting LAC</i>	-How can the LAC's voice be included throughout the transition process? -Does the LAC have any particular needs which could impact their ability to communicate how they are feeling?	-Which relationships matter most to the CYP? -Are there any relationships the LAC is worried about losing?	-How does the LAC feel prior to their school transition? -Does the LAC have any particular anxieties? -Does the LAC require support managing such anxieties? -How does the LAC feel about secondary school after they have transitioned?	-What is the LAC's view about their particular needs? -How can the LAC be included in decision-making processes about support and intervention.
<i>Suggestions for practice</i>	-Projective assessment tools could be used by EPs to help LAC express	The LAC's current support network could be explored from the	-Personal construct tools could be used to elicit the LAC's views about school	-EPs can support services to ensure that the LAC's voice is included and

	<p>themselves e.g: -Talking stones (Wearmouth, 2004) -Animal preference test (Rojas & Tuber, 1991). -Sentence Completion test (Tuber, 2012).</p>	<p>child's perspective, for example using a 'Circle of Support' diagram to map relationships and identify potential changes (Frederickson et al, 2005). EPs could support professionals to use this strategy or use it with a LAC themselves.</p>	<p>e.g the ideal school/ classroom (Pittora, 2016). -Visual tools such as the Blob Tree could be used to elicit how LAC feel about their transition experience (Wilson & Long, 2018). -For some children it might be helpful to use self-reported anxiety scales to measure and monitor anxiety such as the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (Spence, 2021). Such resources could be used within individual EP work with LAC, or by professionals supporting LAC.</p>	<p>prioritised within multi-professional meetings and intervention planning. -EPs might use tools such as the Kinetic School Drawing (Oster & Crone, 2004) to explore the LAC's sense of school, including their values, experiences and sense of belonging. Such tools could be used to gain the child's perspective to inform interventions and approaches.</p>
<p>Training</p> <p><i>Questions for reflection when working with systems supporting LAC</i></p>	<p>-What strategies do the school or system already have in place to elicit LAC's voices regarding transition?</p>	<p>-What are current practices regarding decision-making processes? Are LAC included in such practices?</p>	<p>-Are there any LAC who would benefit from additional support to manage school transition anxiety?</p>	<p>-Are there particular strategies or approaches which could benefit all pupils regarding transition, including those who are</p>

	-Are there any other strategies which schools or other systems could receive training in to support LAC to express themselves, both pre- and post-transition?	-Could the system benefit from further training to improve ways to include LAC in decision-making? -Does the system have the capacity to understand and support LAC with particular relational needs (e.g those who have experienced trauma).	-Are staff members familiar with strategies and tools to support LAC to manage and reduce anxiety?	particularly vulnerable? -How can strategies implemented as a result of training be used to support pupils without causing vulnerable pupils such as LAC to feel 'different' to their peers?
<i>Suggestions for practice</i>	EPs could support systems to use Person Centred Planning tools such as PATHS or MAPS to creatively plan positive transition journeys (Tyrell, 2021). Once systems have received training these strategies can be used for future generations of LAC and other	EPs could provide training in tools to evaluate current processes such as target monitoring evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir et al, 2009) to measure whether LAC feel included in decision-making processes. -EPs could offer whole-school or system training to help the system build capacity to	EPs could offer training to support systems to build capacity to support LAC who are experiencing moderate to high levels of anxiety regarding transition. This might include Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training (Osbourne & Burton, 2014). -EPs could also offer training in approaches	EPs could explicitly offer opportunities for reflection to ensure that strategies promote belonging and acceptance, rather than division, when delivering training sessions. This should be built into all training sessions including trauma informed practice (Cavanaugh, 2016), attachment theory in schools (Geddes, 2006),

	vulnerable pupils.	support LAC with attachment needs and those who have experienced trauma including: -Trauma informed practice (Cavanaugh, 2016). -Attachment theory in schools (Geddes, 2006).	and strategies to manage anxiety such as Mindfulness based-approaches (Davis, 2012).	or the Emotional Literacy Support Programme (Osbourne & Burton, 2014).
Consultation and Intervention	-What is the particular LAC's transition journey likely to look like? -What are they likely to lose? And how can they be supported to manage such losses? -What are the risk factors and what are the protective factors for this particular LAC?	-Has the LAC had any previous adverse experiences which could impact their ability to form and maintain relationships? -What are the LAC's current relationships like with peers and adults? -Is the LAC likely to require support to build and maintain new secondary school relationships?	-Have LAC had an opportunity to express and explore fears and expectations with a trusted adult? -Are key adults working with the LAC aware of their views including fears and expectations? -Are there any concerns regarding the wellbeing of any particular LAC? -Will any LAC require additional professional support to manage their emotional wellbeing	Intersectionality: Are there any other factors which could impact the particular LAC's experience of transition such as ethnicity, gender, special educational needs, previous adverse experiences etc. -Does the LAC have any particular needs which will require further support during transition or in secondary school? -How can the LAC's particular needs be supported without causing them to feel

			during school transition?	different to their peers?
<i>Suggestions for practice</i>	EPs could use, or support others to use, therapeutic tools such as the 'Tree of Life' to support LAC to tell their story pre- or -post transition. This is designed to help CYP make sense of difficult experiences and could be suitable for some LAC (Ncube, 2006).	-EPs could support professionals to understand the impact of previous childhood experiences on LAC's secondary school transition experiences, including emotional wellbeing and behaviour. -EPs could support systems to identify LAC who might require additional interventions to support relationship building, such as nurture groups (Colley, 2009).	-EPs might support professionals to identify LAC who are likely to require further professional support to manage their wellbeing during transition. This might include signposting to relevant services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).	-EPs to support schools and other systems to implement interventions alongside a focus on inclusion and belonging, for example targeted strategies to be implemented at a whole-class or whole-school level where possible.

5.14 Implications for Other Systems Around LAC

A document has been provided for other systems to refer to when supporting this population during the primary to secondary transition. This could be used by virtual school staff, social care, foster carers and school staff. This can be found in Appendix U. The document is designed to be a practical and reflective tool. It is

intended to help professionals support LAC both before and after they have started secondary school. The tool is designed to help professionals elicit LAC's perspectives and to consider the impact of LAC's previous experiences. This might include previous changes, losses or adverse experiences which could impact LAC's transition experience. The document provides a list of questions to prompt reflection. Some are designed to be discussed collaboratively with CYP, and some are for professionals to consider independently. Depending on the particular CYP, the child-friendly questions could be discussed in multi-agency PEP meetings, or individually with a trusted adult. The document also provides strategies for eliciting CYP's views. Some are creative and some can be used with CYP who have difficulties verbally expressing themselves. The questions are open-ended to reflect the variety of experiences which LAC have. The document is designed to be flexible and not exhaustive. The questions are based on the findings of this research project and professionals are encouraged to add their own reflections or remove questions if they are not appropriate. Similarly, the recommendations and strategies are not designed to be exhaustive but aim to offer some examples of useful resources which could be beneficial for some LAC.

Table 3.*Reflective Resource for Systems supporting LAC*

Overarching Themes	Key Findings	Practical questions to consider This includes questions for pre-transition when the CYP is in year 6, and questions for post-transition when they are in year 7. <i>Questions in italics are designed to be discussed with the CYP. Other questions are for professionals to reflect upon.</i>	Strategies and Recommendations
1. A journey of risk and reward	Both participants referred to the physical journey of travelling to a new location and getting used to new buildings, along with the emotional journey of leaving behind the familiar and entering into new and unfamiliar	<p>Pre-transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How does the CYP feel about leaving primary school?</i> • <i>What is the CYP looking forward to?</i> • Does the CYP have previous experiences of loss which might impact this transition experience? <p>Post-transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>How does the CYP feel about their new school?</i> ○ <i>Has the CYP had the opportunity to tell their transition story?</i> ○ <i>Has the CYP had an opportunity to recognise and celebrate their courage and what they have gained or achieved?</i> 	<p>Eliciting CYP's views</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals could use creative strategies to enable CYP to articulate their views regarding transition. E.g: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Drawing a picture ○ Using rating scales to explore different elements (e.g how do you feel out of 5 about meeting new teachers). <p>Practical Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some LAC with additional needs could benefit from clear, visual resources to help them understand primary-secondary transition. This could include social stories (Gray, 2021). • For some LAC, previous experiences of loss could re-surface during transition. They might need additional support such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Speaking to a trusted adult

	social groups and experiences. Both LAC shared mixed feelings about the process, which contained elements of excitement, anxiety and sadness.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In some cases, LAC might need therapeutic support such as play therapy, art therapy or advice from the Educational Psychology service or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
2. Social Network	Social relationships were an important part of both participants' primary-secondary school transition experience. In addition to friendships, relationships with teachers, foster carers and a virtual school advisory	<p>Pre-transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Who are the CYP's most supportive relationships?</i> ● Which of these relationships will be impacted by the transition? ● <i>Will the CYP be transitioning with familiar peers from primary school?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, what are these relationships like? ○ If not, how can they be supported to build new peer relationships? ● Who makes the decision about which secondary school the CYP will attend? ● How can the CYP's perspective be taken into account? ● <i>Does the CYP feel included in the decision-making process?</i> 	<p>Eliciting CYP's views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The CYP could be invited to complete a 'circle of support' activity to help them identify supportive relationships in their life. This could be repeated before and after secondary school transition. (Frederickson et al, 2005) ● The CYP could be invited to identify their preferences for secondary school including using visual resources if necessary. <p>CYP's views should be taken into account when selecting a secondary school, according to statutory guidance (DfE, 2018b).</p> <p>Practical Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evidence-based approaches, principles and strategies can support LAC and professionals to build positive relationships. These are particularly important for LAC who have had

<p>teacher also appeared to play important roles.</p>	<p>Post-transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the CYP's relationships like with teachers and other staff members?</i> • <i>What are the CYP's relationships like with peers?</i> • Does the CYP need support building positive relationships? 	<p>adverse childhood experiences. Some examples are included here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trauma-informed practice (Cavanaugh, 2016) ○ Emotion coaching (Emotion Coaching for Professionals, 2019) ○ Strategies based on attachment theory (Geddes, 2006). • Some LAC might require additional support to build positive peer relationships, self-esteem or social skills. Some resources are suggested here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Charities such as Young Mind have a number of resources to help CYP understand and build their self-esteem (Resources for Professionals, 2021). ○ The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) website contains a number of resources to help CYP build social skills, confidence and peer relationships (ELSA Resources, 2021). 	
<p>3. Fantasy and Reality</p>	<p>Both participants described experiencing pre-transition anxiety. They appeared to have similar fears including strict teachers, too much</p>	<p>Pre-transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the CYP have any fears about secondary school?</i> • What is the LAC's previous experience of school like, could this be contributing to any current fears? • How can the LAC be supported to manage any fears or anxieties? <p>Post-transition</p>	<p>Eliciting CYP's Views</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rating scales can be used to help LAC express any anxieties regarding secondary school (e.g. rating each aspect out of 5, 0= confident and 5= worried). CYP could be invited to revisit this post-transition to measure change. • Some LAC might benefit from opportunities to draw their concerns or use visual aids (e.g picture cards). <p>Practical Strategies</p>

	<p>homework and being given detentions. They also both described the reality of secondary school as better than expected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the CYP had specific fears or anxieties, has this now changed? If not, how can they be supported?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) website contains resources to help CYP manage anxiety including booklets, recommended apps, videos and visual resources. This could help some LAC to manage, express and understand anxious feelings (CAMHS Resources, 2021). • The Anna Freud centre website contains information and resources to help CYP manage their emotional wellbeing, relax and manage anxiety. (On my Mind, Resources for Young People, 2021). • Some LAC might benefit from further support if anxieties are persistent. This could include seeking advice from therapy services such as CAMHS.
<p>4. Coping with Change</p>	<p>The participants referred to having to adapt to a variety of changes including navigating new buildings, increasing academic pressure and new social hierarchies. There</p>	<p>Pre-transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How does the CYP feel about upcoming changes?</i> • Has the CYP recently, or are they currently, experiencing any other changes such as a change of care placement or social worker. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, how might this affect their secondary school transition experience? ○ Are there any relationships or systems which can offer stability and consistency? • What are the CYP's previous experiences of change? 	<p>Eliciting CYP's views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual resources such as the blob tree could be used to elicit CYP's current feelings about their primary to secondary school transition (Wilson & Long, 2018). • CYP could be encouraged to think about previous changes they have adapted to, what helped them, and what they did to help themselves. This is to encourage feelings of confidence. <p>Practical Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular multi-agency meetings to co-construct strategies and set clear targets according to the CYP's needs. This might include practical strategies to support organisation, evidence-

appeared to be a sense of tension between a sense of excitement and a sense of overwhelm regarding the new challenges and responsibilities of secondary school.

- How might this impact their experience of adapting to change?
- Is there anything that was found to be helpful or could have been done differently?

Post-transition

- *What is the CYP's experience of adapting to change?*
 - *What has the CYP adapted to that can be recognised and celebrated?*
 - *Are there any changes that the CYP is finding difficult to adjust to? (including academic, organisational, relationships).*
 - *Does the CYP feel they need support in any area?*
-

based interventions to support learning or strategies and interventions to support social skills. The CYP's perspective to be included during such meetings.

- Some CYP could benefit from additional support to prepare for upcoming changes, particularly as change can feel particularly difficult for those who have experienced trauma. This might include visiting the new secondary school and having photos of key staff and locations within the new school to aid familiarity with the setting. Examples of maps and school timetables in advance of the transition could also be beneficial.

5.15 Dissemination of Results

Dissemination of the findings is considered an important step regarding the research process. A summary of the results, along with implications for EPs will be shared with the EP service in the local authority in which this research took place. The information sheet in Appendix T is also designed to be widely shared with EP services. The results and implications for practice will also be shared with the virtual school who facilitated the recruitment process for this research. The participants will also have the opportunity to hear about the findings and the implications for practice if they choose to. In terms of wider dissemination, the researcher will pursue publication options and research forums. One of the key hopes is for this research to raise awareness regarding the possible challenging experiences that LAC could have when transitioning to secondary school. It is hoped that EPs and other agencies will be encouraged to listen to LAC's views, as the researcher has in this research project. It is also hoped that EPs and other staff will be encouraged to consider LAC holistically, as multifaceted individuals with many aspects to their identity. Key stakeholders are encouraged to take into account the wider context and psychological factors when considering individual LAC's needs.

5.16 Researcher's Reflections

Smith et al (2009) purported that the sample size is partly dependent on 'the organisational constraints one is operating under' (p. 44). It has been well documented that LAC have been a hard to access group within research (Dale & Watson, 2010; Quarmby, 2014 & Quarmby et al, 2020). In addition, the research project took place during the coronavirus pandemic. The project was initially

designed prior to the pandemic and the researcher was therefore required to adapt the project in order to continue throughout the uncertain and rapidly changing restrictions, while ensuring the integrity of the original research project. The pandemic impacted many parts of the research including the participant criteria, recruitment strategy and data collection strategies. Virtual schools and designated teachers for LAC in secondary schools were contacted for recruitment purposes, however both services appeared to be significantly impacted by the pandemic as a result of school closures, remote working, and managing increased levels of bereavement, unemployment and other challenges within local communities. This, understandably, appeared to impact services' abilities to engage with this research project. The research therefore reflects the context in which it took place. The researcher is exceptionally grateful to the designated teachers, virtual school staff, social workers, foster parents and LAC who supported this research project under such challenging circumstances.

The challenges of the recruitment process offered valuable information regarding current contextual factors which impact LAC. A number of LAC were perceived as too vulnerable to take part by designated teachers for LAC due to mental health difficulties. This is consistent with other literature which has found that LAC are at a higher risk of developing mental health problems compared to the general population (NSPCC, 2020). This also suggests that the wellbeing of this group could have been particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The participant recruitment experience therefore reinforced the need to prioritise and support the needs of this group. In addition, although minimising the risk of harm was an important ethical principle for this research project, it is also acknowledged that

LAC perceived as 'vulnerable' did not have the opportunity to share their experiences, creating a barrier to participation. This issue is not unique to this research project and has persisted for several decades. An article by Heptinstall (2000) described the challenges around recruiting LAC, particularly the issue of the involvement of adults acting as barriers to participation. As a result, LAC's voices have been underrepresented within research.

Existing research regarding LAC and education has predominately focused on the education and wellbeing gaps between LAC and the general population. Research has also demonstrated that LAC tend to do better academically (DfE, 2019, Sebba et al, 2015) and have more positive experiences (Mannay et al, 2017) at primary school compared to secondary school. However, when speaking with the participants in this research project the researcher immediately noticed how resilient, insightful and articulate they were. Both demonstrated courage to overcome the inherent challenges in school transition and both appeared motivated to do well in school. They also both expressed positive views about the helpfulness of teachers and their own abilities. Similar to other research which has explored the views of LAC (Mannay et al, 2017; Warham, 2012), the participants' perspectives were not in accordance with the somewhat negative discourses about LAC and education. This reinforced the importance of this research project, and the importance of continuing to include LAC's voices within the research field.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Research Aims and Rationale

This research project has aimed to explore the lived experiences of LAC who have transitioned from mainstream primary to secondary school. The research project has aimed to present in-depth data regarding the perspectives of two LAC following their transition to secondary school. Researching LAC's experiences felt important in light of data which demonstrates that LAC on average achieve lower academic results compared to the general population (Berridge et al, 2020; DfE, 2019; Melkman, 2020, McClung & Gayle, 2010; Sebba et al, 2015; Sutcliffe et al, 2017). This disparity has long term implications for LAC, for example care leavers are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to the general population (DfE, 2018a). It is hoped that by exploring and representing LAC's experiences of primary to secondary transition, professionals such as EPs will be more aware of the significance of this experience for LAC and will feel empowered to promote positive change.

6.2 Methodology

The school transition experiences of two LAC, in years eight and nine, were explored through semi-structured interviews. The participants were looked after by the same local authority in London but attended schools in different boroughs. The interviews were analysed using IPA. Although the participants' experiences were considered to be unique according to their specific contexts, common elements were identified across both accounts which led to four overarching themes: 'A Journey of

Risk and Reward', 'Social Network', 'Fantasy and Reality' and 'Coping with Change'. These are summarised below, along with some considerations regarding the role of the EP.

6.3 A Journey of Risk and Reward

Both participants referred to the emotional experience of leaving primary school and starting secondary school. For both pupils, the transition experience was associated with challenging elements such as leaving behind the familiarity of primary school, and more positive elements such as gaining new experiences and forming relationships with teachers and peers. For both participants the contrasting experiences of loss and gain were heightened by starting secondary school without any primary school peers. Taking into account attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), LAC are more likely to have insecure attachment styles (Hillman et al, 2020). It has been suggested that school can provide a sense of security for children with such needs (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Verschueren & Koomen). This suggests that school transition could be both especially challenging and particularly crucial for this community. EPs are well placed to support schools and other systems to understand attachment theory and the way in which early experiences of relationships can impact both learning and wellbeing for LAC.

6.4 Social Network

Both participants referred to the support they received from key individuals in their lives during the time of transition including foster carers, teachers and school peers. From a bio eco-systemic perspective, both family and school systems are part

of CYP's microsystems and can therefore have a significant impact on wellbeing and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). While LAC experience significant changes in one system, consistent relationships in other systems might offer a sense of stability (Brewin & Stratham, 2011). It is therefore important that consideration is given to other relationships and systems during the school transition period to provide a sense of stability and support for LAC. EPs can have an important role in helping systems to understand the importance of key relationships for LAC (Golding, 2004; Peake, 2011). Consistent and stable relationships have been associated with increased resilience for this group (Preston et al, 2012), suggesting that CYP who feel supported are likely to be better able to manage the challenges associated with educational transitions.

6.5 Fantasy and Reality

Both participants described feeling anxious before transitioning to secondary school, particularly regarding homework, detentions and making friends. Although previous research has suggested that it is common for pupils to experience worries about secondary school prior to transition (Evangelou et al, 2008; Topping, 2011), some LAC lack protective factors which mitigate school transition stress such as older siblings who can offer reassurance (Evangelou et al, 2008). In addition, LAC who have experienced trauma are particularly at risk of finding school transition stressful, because previous adverse experiences can cause ordinarily stressful events to be perceived as significant threats (Dent & Cameron, 2003). It is important that the emotional wellbeing of LAC is supported throughout their education, particularly during challenging periods such as school transition. This is because LAC are at greater risk of experiencing anxiety and other mental health difficulties

compared to their peers (NSPCC, 2019). In addition, the emotional wellbeing of LAC is thought to contribute to the academic attainment gap between LAC and their peers (Bazalgette et al 2015; Selwyn et al, 2006). Through training, consultation and evidence-based interventions EPs can enable schools and other services to identify and support LAC who require additional support during the transition period.

6.6 Coping with Change

Both participants described experiencing ambivalence regarding the new challenges and changes associated with secondary school transition. Some changes were referred to positively by the participants, such as increased independence when travelling to school. Other changes were associated with feelings of overwhelm, such as managing an increased number of tests, navigating unfamiliar buildings, and getting used to new social structures and timetables. Coping with change can be particularly challenging for those who have experienced previous significant losses (Youell, 2006), which is thought to be more common among LAC due to many having experienced separation from caregivers and other family members (Holland & Crowley, 2013). EPs can have an important role in enabling schools to build capacity to support LAC through interventions such as trauma-informed practice (Kinniburgh et al, 2017). Trauma-informed practice approaches recognise the potentially challenging nature of transitions and provide principles and strategies to support pupils according to their specific needs (Cavanaugh, 2016).

6.7 Concluding Comments

Overall, this research has aimed to highlight the importance of exploring, listening to and valuing LAC's individual voices and experiences. There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting LAC during the time of their school transition. Instead, EPs and other professionals are encouraged to consider LAC's strengths and needs individually, holistically and in context to offer the most appropriate support. Finally, it is worth noting that both participants demonstrated resilience and motivation in the face of change and challenges. Individual perspectives and experiences can be lost in large quantitative studies and this research project therefore highlights the importance of representing individual LAC's voices in qualitative research.

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Appendix A: Number of Articles Produced Per Database

	PsycInfo	PsycArticle	ERIC	Education Source	Soc INDEX	Google scholar and additional searches
Articles produced with the following search terms: 'school', 'educat*', "academic outcomes", "academic achievement" AND 'LAC', "children in care", "children looked after" and "looked after children".	37	1	13	37	38	5
Duplicates removed and exclusion/inclusion criteria applied	28	1	12	33	35	NA
Total remaining	20					

Appendix B: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Type of study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Peer reviewed journals -Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies. -Exploratory, experimental and quasi-experimental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Books -Doctoral research -Non peer reviewed journals. -Reviews -Reflective articles -Theoretical articles
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Children and young people who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority (Children Act, 1989) -LAC who are primary or secondary school aged. -Key stakeholders for LAC including but not limited to: carers, social workers, teachers and virtual school staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Children and young people under the statutory school age. -Young people over secondary school age (older than 16). -Non- LAC population.
Study Focus	Focused on looked after children and primary and/ or secondary school education.	Studies focused on a different population, or not relevant to education.
Geographic location	Studies conducted in the UK due to relevance to national educational and social care context.	Studies from outside the UK.
Date published	2010- 2020 to account for relevance to current	Studies from 2009 and before.

	and recent legislative and social context.	
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Appendix C: Excluded Articles Example

Article	Reason for exclusion
Attar-Schwartz, S. (2019). Parental availability of support and frequency of contact: The reports of youth in educational residential care. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 101, 317-328.	Not based in UK (Israel)
Bonfield, S., Collins, S., Guishard-Pine, J., & Langdon, P. E. (2010). Help-seeking by foster-carers for their 'looked after' children: The role of mental health literacy and treatment attitudes. <i>British Journal of Social Work</i> , 40(5), 1335-1352.	Not relevant to education
Cocker, C., Minnis, H., & Sweeting, H. (2018). Potential value of the current mental health monitoring of children in state care in England. <i>BJPsych open</i> , 4(6), 486-491.	Not relevant to education
Hillen, T., & Gafson, L. (2015). Why good placements matter: pre-placement and placement risk factors associated with mental health disorders in pre-school children in foster care. <i>Clinical child psychology and psychiatry</i> , 20(3), 486-499.	Focused on pre-school
Jackson, S., & Cameron, C. (2012). Leaving care: Looking ahead and aiming higher. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 34(6), 1107-1114.	Focused on higher education and further education.
Malcolm, A. (2018). Exclusions and alternative provision: piecing together the picture. <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 23(1), 69-80.	Not directly related to LAC population
McAra, L., & McVie, S. (2016). Understanding youth violence: The mediating effects of gender, poverty and vulnerability. <i>Journal of criminal justice</i> , 45, 71-77.	No direct relevance to LAC and education

Appendix D: Included Articles Grouped by Theme

Articles Pertaining to LAC and Academic Attainment
Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S., Cartwright, M., Staples, E., & O'Higgins, A. (2020). Children in need and children in care: Educational attainment and progress. University of Bristol, University of Oxford. https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Main-report-children-in-need-and-children-in-care.pdf
Berridge, D. (2017). The education of children in care: Agency and resilience. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 77, 86-93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2017.04.004
Jackson, E., Whitehead, J., & Wigford, A. (2010). In an EBD population do looked after children have specific needs relating to resilience, self-perception and attainment? <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 26(1), 69–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360903522793
McClung, M., & Gayle, V. (2010). Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: An investigation of two Scottish local authorities: Could do better! <i>Child & Family Social Work</i> , 15(4), 409–431. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00688.x
Melkman, E. P. (2020). Educational trajectories of children in care across the early education and primary school years: A national cohort study in England. <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i> , 90(6), 720. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000505
Rees, P. (2013). The mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and 'resilience' of 'looked after children': A multidimensional, multiple-rater population based study. <i>British Journal of Clinical Psychology</i> , 52(2), 183-198. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12008
Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., & O'Higgins, A. (2015). <i>The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data</i> . University of Oxford Department of Education/University of Bristol.
Sutcliffe, A. G., Gardiner, J., & Melhuish, E. (2017). Educational Progress of Looked-After Children in England: A Study Using Group Trajectory Analysis. <i>Pediatrics</i> , 140(3), e20170503. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0503
Articles Pertaining to the Impact of Specific Interventions
Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: What is the role of the Virtual School? <i>European Journal of Psychology of Education</i> , 34(1), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0374-0
Francis, Y. J., Bennion, K., & Humrich, S. (2017). Evaluating the outcomes of a school based Theraplay® project for looked after children. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 33(3), 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2017.1324405
Liabo, K., Gray, K., & Mulcahy, D. (2013). A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in school. <i>Child & family social work</i> , 18(3), 341-353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00850.x

Mooney, J., Winter, K., & Connolly, P. (2016). Effects of a book gifting programme on literacy outcomes for foster children: A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Letterbox Club in Northern Ireland. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 65, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.03.009>

Raspin, S., Smallwood, R., Hatfield, S., & Boesley, L. (2019). Exploring the use of the ARROW literacy intervention for looked after children in a UK local authority. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35(4), 411–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1632172>

Sebba, J., & Berridge, D. (2019). The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(4), 538–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600489>

Turner, J., & Gulliford, A. (2020). Examining the Circles of Adults process for Children Looked After: The role of self-efficacy and empathy in staff behaviour change. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 36(1), 32–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1667752>

Articles Pertaining to LAC and Experience of Education

Edwards, L. N. (2016). Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32(1), 54-72.

Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., & Andrews, D. (2017). The consequences of being labelled ‘looked-after’: Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(4), 683–699. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3283>

O’Donnell, C., Sandford, R., & Parker, A. (2020). Physical education, school sport and looked-after-children: Health, wellbeing and educational engagement. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(6), 605–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1628731>

Warham, K. (2012). Engaging with young people through narrative co-construction: Beyond categorisation. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(2), 77–86.

Articles Pertaining to LAC and Transition

Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are Looked After. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27(4), 365–381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.624301>

Appendix E: CASP Checklist Worked Example

Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are Looked After. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 27(4), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.624301	
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes, to explore the factors that support or hinder LAC's transition to secondary school, from LAC & stakeholder perspectives.
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Qualitative methodology was appropriate due to the aim of collecting rich and in-depth data.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Exploratory design to ascertain individual perspectives regarding the factors which impact transition.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Participants were recruited from one local authority in rural Wales. For LAC, all participants who met the criteria were invited to take part (n=14). Foster carers (n=22), teachers (n=19) social workers (n=unknown) and 'Education Support Officers' (n=3) within the local authority were invited to take part. No further details regarding the recruitment of this group are mentioned. The recruitment strategy and potential biases are unknown.
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Semi-structured interviews were used to explore LAC, teachers, foster carers and education support officers' views. Focus groups were used to explore social workers' views. Addresses research issues because a variety of stakeholder perspectives were explored regarding the factors which contribute to secondary school transition.
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Not mentioned.
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Ethical approval was obtained from a university ethics board, in addition to local approval. Consent was obtained

	from social workers, foster carers and LAC themselves. No further details were provided.
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	'Framework analysis' was used to analyse the data. The stages were outlined which included identifying themes, sub-themes and 'main principles'. No audit trail is provided.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	There are clear themes/principles which emerged from the data: -Information sharing between key stakeholders. -Decreasing difference for LAC -Offering holistic support -Offering individualised support.
10. How valuable is the research?	Provides an indication of what has been helpful to LAC from multiple perspectives. However, there were limitations e.g: Limited to one small borough in Wales, local contextual factors were therefore likely to have impacted the study. The focus group approach could have biased the findings from the social workers. Little information was provided regarding the recruitment strategy and relationship to researcher.

Appendix F: Key Features of Articles Included in the Literature Review, Researcher's Notes

Title	Aim/ purpose	Participants	Location	Design	Key Themes	Limitations
Berridge, D. (2017). The education of children in care: Agency and resilience. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 77, 86-93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.04.004	To identify educational and care factors associated with the educational progress and outcomes for children in care between KS2 and KS4.	26 LAC, 17 foster carers & social workers, 1 residential worker, 20 teachers. 2 years after LAC had completed GCSEs.	6 local authorities within the UK.	Mixed methods.	LAC demonstrated agency regarding their education. They felt able to engage with education once the problems in their lives had been resolved. They also felt that relationships with teachers were important.	One cohort were interviewed meaning that contextual factors related to education and care policy could have influenced the young people's experiences.
Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S., Cartwright, M., Staples, E., & O'Higgins, A. (2020). Children in need and children in care: Educational	To identify factors that might explain the 'attainment gap' for CIN and LAC.	-Data from a whole birth cohort of children (471,688) born in England in 2000/01, who started	England, national database	Mixed methods	-Instability regarding social work interventions. More interventions related to lower outcomes which might reflect instability at home. -Those that moved in with relatives or went into care reported more	Focused on one cohort, contextual factors & policy could have impacted findings.

<p>attainment and progress. University of Bristol, University of Oxford. https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Main-report-children-in-need-and-children-in-care.pdf</p>		<p>school in 2006/07. Their progress was mapped to GCSE exams in 2017. -And interviews with 123 children, their parents/carers and Professionals</p>			<p>stability and better outcomes.</p>	
<p>Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are Looked After. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 27(4), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.624301</p>	<p>To explore the factors that support or obstruct LAC's transition to secondary school, from a LAC and stakeholder perspective.</p>	<p>14 children (year 6 and 7), 22 foster carers, 19 teachers, 3 LAC Education Support Officers, and a social worker focus group (n-unknown)</p>	<p>A semi-rural borough in Wales.</p>	<p>Qualitative/exploratory</p>	<p>-Information sharing between key stakeholders. - Decreasing difference for LAC -Offering holistic support -Offering individualised support.</p>	<p>Limited to one small borough in Wales. Local contextual factors are likely to impact the study. Small sample size.</p>

<p>Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: What is the role of the Virtual School? <i>European Journal of Psychology of Education</i>, 34(1), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0374-0</p>	<p>To explore how virtual schools support LAC, both academic outcomes & psychological factors.</p>	<p>Virtual school heads from 29 local authorities.</p>	<p>Various locations in England.</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>Key areas of focus included: -support for social and emotional understanding -Increasing the understanding of attachment and trauma when working with schools and families. -Specific support for transition, including direct work with LAC -Aimed to extend support at the microsystemic level, to include foster carers, schools, and multi-professional working.</p>	<p>Self-report questionnaires which mean possible bias. The data was not triangulated with other sources.</p>
<p>Edwards, L. N. (2016). Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. <i>Educational Psychology in</i></p>	<p>Aimed to explore the emotional labour experienced by teachers of LAC.</p>	<p>14 KS2 teachers of LAC.</p>	<p>Not specified.</p>	<p>Exploratory/ qualitative.</p>	<p>Results indicated that teachers experienced emotional labour when working with LAC. -Clear roles and perceptions of support mitigated this.</p>	<p>Only included KS2 teachers, small sample size.</p>

<i>Practice</i> , 32(1), 54-72.						
Francis, Y. J., Bennion, K., & Humrich, S. (2017). Evaluating the outcomes of a school based Theraplay® project for looked after children. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 33(3), 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2017.1324405	To evaluate an attachment based therapeutic intervention called Theraplay. Aimed to ascertain whether the intervention improved LAC's relationships with a key adult, and whether in impacted their engagement with learning.	20 LAC from 9 schools. 2 children attended a pupil referral unit.	Limited to one local authority within the UK.	Quasi-experimental/ Mixed methods.	Quantitative data showed a slight reduction in some aspects but not significant. Qualitative feedback suggested positive improvements.	No control group. Another relationship-based intervention could have had the same impact. SDQs only filled in by one adult (not triangulated) and small sample size. Varied intervention dependent on need- hard to draw conclusions. SDQ not necessarily most appropriate tool.
Jackson, E., Whitehead, J., & Wigford, A. (2010). In an EBD population do looked after children have	To explore the self perceptions, academic attainment and resilience of	16 children attending a special school for children with EBD. Six children	One special school for EBD (location not	Quantitative/ exploratory	-Results indicated that LAC had lower resilience and therefore more vulnerability than non-LAC. -Self-perception: LAC defined themselves in	Limited to the limitations of the measures. Eg resiliency scales only offer a snapshot. WIAT only offers a

<p>specific needs relating to resilience, self-perception and attainment? <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 26(1), 69–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360903522793</p>	<p>a group of LAC in comparison with their peers attending a special school for children with EBD.</p>	<p>participated from Year 7 (two LAC) and 10 from Year 9 (two LAC).</p>	<p>specified)</p>		<p>relation to others whereas non-LAC did not. -Academic attainment: LAC had higher attainment than EBD peers.</p>	<p>snapshot of ability. Self-perception was based on ability to self-reflect. Not triangulated by observations/ other perspectives.</p>
<p>Liabo, K., Gray, K., & Mulcahy, D. (2013). A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in school. <i>Child & family social work</i>, 18(3), 341-353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00850.x</p>	<p>Meta-synthesis which aimed to evaluate existing studies regarding interventions pertaining to LAC.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>11 studies were included, 7 from the UK.</p>	<p>Meta-synthesis of qualitative papers.</p>	<p>-No clear evidence of effectiveness following interventions. -Review of virtual school heads demonstrated concern that views of LAC were often not reflected by adults. -Education was not seen as a priority by some LAC due to preoccupations with placement change etc.</p>	<p>-Quantitative studies were excluded. -Only 7 studies were evaluated from the UK.</p>
<p>Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S.,</p>	<p>To explore the educational experiences,</p>	<p>67 care experienced CYP aged 6-27. 27</p>	<p>Wales</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>-Primary aged pupils did not make explicit reference to being 'LAC' and expressed</p>	<p>-Potential bias: foster carers might have already been 'engaged' with</p>

<p>Roberts, L., Rees, A., & Andrews, D. (2017). The consequences of being labelled 'looked-after': Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales. <i>British Educational Research Journal</i>, 43(4), 683–699. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3283</p>	<p>attainment and aspirations of LAC in Wales.</p>	<p>Females and 40 males.</p>			<p>ambitions similar to those of their peers. -Secondary aged participants made more references to being 'looked after'. -Secondary school pupils reported feeling they were seen as failures and outside the dominant discourse of 'success'. The 'LAC' label was seen as stigmatising with potential unintended consequences.</p>	<p>LAC's education due to recruitment strategy. -For older participants, those not involved in foster groups were not included. -Possible limitations of the interviews not taking place in the school environment/ foster carers being nearby.</p>
<p>McClung, M., & Gayle, V. (2010). Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: An</p>	<p>To explore the care factors that impact educational achievement for LAC.</p>	<p>Quantitative data (n=1407) LAC from two LAs -Qualitative interviews (n=30). -Participants aged 11-19.</p>	<p>-Two LAs in Scotland</p>	<p>Mixed methods -Analysed a dataset from official records -Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>-Quantitative data: LAC perform lower academically than non-LAC. -Qualitative key findings: -75% of the CYP felt they were supported (& could talk to) at least one adult in their life -60% identified one adult who asked about school</p>	<p>-Limited to two LAs in Scotland (possibly influence of geographic and contextual factors). -Some information not available e.g placement history -Only one of the LAs participated in the qualitative research</p>

<p>investigation of two Scottish local authorities: Could do better! <i>Child & Family Social Work</i>, 15(4), 409–431. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00688.x</p>					<p>-53% identified one person proud of their achievements. -Felt negatively affected by stigma of being LAC. - 43% had experienced bullying</p>	<p>-10 years ago</p>
<p>Melkman, E. P. (2020). Educational trajectories of children in care across the early education and primary school years: A national cohort study in England. <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>, 90(6), 720. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000505</p>	<p>1) to examine the changes in educational achievements of LAC from preschool to the end of primary school 2) to identify subgroups exhibiting different academic trajectories. 3) to explore key predictive factors</p>	<p>National Pupil Database and Children Looked After Database</p>	<p>National database</p>	<p>Exploratory/quantitative</p>	<p>-The findings indicated that LAC lagged substantially behind their peers from preschool and the attainment gap widens over time. -Latent growth analyses revealed four distinct subgroups: a relatively resilient subgroup of children with “stable high” educational achievement over time. - At least 8 out of 10 LAC showed maladaptive educational trajectories. -Risk factors for a included having a diagnosis of SEND,</p>	<p>Only the variables provided in the datasets could be examined. Some potential contributing variables might be missing. A substantial portion of the sample were not included due to missing test results, this could mean data for the most vulnerable group is missing.</p>

	associated with individual, care, and school characteristics.				spending more time in care during primary school. -Attending higher performing schools was a protective factor.	
Mooney, J., Winter, K., & Connolly, P. (2016). Effects of a book gifting programme on literacy outcomes for foster children: A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Letterbox Club in Northern Ireland. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 65, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2016.03.009	To explore whether the Letterbox Club intervention improved reading and enjoyment of reading for children in foster care.	Data from all children in foster care in Northern Ireland, interviews with 20 LAC & 12 foster carers.	Northern Ireland	Mixed methods/ Quasi-experimental	-Quantitative data: No evidence that the project had any effect on outcome. -Qualitative information: this was due to the lack of support provided for LAC & foster carers.	Limited to one geographic region (Northern Ireland).
O'Donnell, C., Sandford, R., & Parker, A. (2020). Physical education, school	To explore the PE and school sport experiences of a small	10 LAC and their PE teachers, and local authority	One LA in England	Small scale qualitative study	-Behaviour and attitude towards PE and school sports is similar to behaviour and attitude	-PE teachers could be biased towards the value of PE. -Small sample size.

<p>sport and looked-after-children: Health, wellbeing and educational engagement. <i>Sport, Education and Society</i>, 25(6), 605–617. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1628731</p>	<p>group of LAC.</p>	<p>professionals .</p>			<p>towards school in general for LAC. -PE staff reported that they felt PE and school sport was beneficial to LAC in terms of building health, wellbeing & confidence etc. However, inconsistent with LAC's views that benefits of PE were negligible.</p>	
<p>Raspin, S., Smallwood, R., Hatfield, S., & Boesley, L. (2019). Exploring the use of the ARROW literacy intervention for looked after children in a UK local authority. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 35(4), 411–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1632172</p>	<p>To explore the impact of using the ARROW intervention for LAC.</p>	<p>33 LAC in KS2.</p>	<p>One local authority in the UK.</p>	<p>Quasi-experimental, quantitative.</p>	<p>-Results suggested measurable improvements (average gain of 10 months).</p>	<p>Limited sample size and limited age. Possible re-test practice effects. Some inconsistency in exposure time to ARROW and possible administrator bias.</p>

<p>Rees, P. (2013). The mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and 'resilience' of 'looked after children': A multidimensional, multiple-rater population based study. <i>British Journal of Clinical Psychology</i>, 52(2), 183-198. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12008</p>	<p>To measure the mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and resilience of LAC.</p>	<p>Entire population of LAC 7–15 years (n = 193) in one local authority.</p>	<p>One LA within the UK.</p>	<p>Quantitative.</p>	<p>-LAC performed less well in all domains compared with the general population. -Results for 16% LAC met the positive exception criteria. -A statistically significant association was found between positive exception classification and two factors: parental contact and attending a mainstream school.</p>	<p>-Only one LA, affected by local context/ demographics. -Nearly all White British (99%) which is not representative of the UK LAC population. -Primary school results not included. -Measured using standardised tools which are reductive and offer a 'snapshot' of ability.</p>
<p>Sebba, J., & Berridge, D. (2019). The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. <i>Oxford Review of Education</i>, 45(4), 538–555.</p>	<p>To identify the virtual school's role included support offered to LAC and perceived key factors that influence academic outcomes.</p>	<p>16 virtual school heads</p>	<p>Various locations in England</p>	<p>Qualitative/ Exploratory</p>	<p>-The status of the VSH seen as a key factor e.g they could influence a school not to exclude a child. -Relationships with other services varied e.g some had good relationships with social care, some saw this as a challenge.</p>	<p>-Research undertaken in 2015 when VSHs became statutory. Too soon to measure the long-term impact on cohorts of LAC. -Based on self-report by VSHs, no data from LAC or other services to</p>

https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600489					<p>-Lack of funding meaning statutory work was prioritised.</p>	<p>triangulate findings.</p>
<p>Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., & O'Higgins, A. (2015). <i>The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data</i>. University of Oxford Department of Education/University of Bristol.</p>	<p>To explore key factors affecting educational outcomes for LAC.</p>	<p>Data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Children Looked After Database in England, for all pupils eligible to take their GCSEs (examinations at age 16 years) in 2013</p>	<p>National databases.</p>	<p>Quantitative.</p>	<p>-Time in care was a key factor. LAC who had been in longer-term care did better than CIN, and better than those who have only been in short term care.</p>	<p>Some data was missing, this could mean data pertaining to particularly vulnerable pupils was not included.</p>
<p>Sutcliffe, A. G., Gardiner, J., & Melhuish, E. (2017). <i>Educational Progress of Looked-After Children in England: A Study Using Group</i></p>	<p>To explore educational trajectory of LAC and identify factors contributing to academic outcomes.</p>	<p>Local authority data. Results extracted from the national pupil database in England.</p>	<p>England</p>	<p>Quantitative: group trajectory analysis.</p>	<p>Children who went into care earlier did better academically.</p>	<p>-The study is not able to claim causality. -Particular criteria for being 'looked after' which meant not all LAC were included.</p>

<p>Trajectory Analysis. <i>Pediatrics</i>, 140(3), e20170503. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0503</p>						
<p>Turner, J., & Gulliford, A. (2020). Examining the Circles of Adults process for Children Looked After: The role of self-efficacy and empathy in staff behaviour change. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 36(1), 32–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1667752</p>	<p>To explore the impact of using Circle of Adults group solving to support staff supporting LAC.</p>	<p>Four staff CoA groups & two comparison groups.</p>	<p>One local authority in the UK</p>	<p>A quasi-experimental explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods design investigating changes in participant causal attributions, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived implementation of subsequent actions.</p>	<p>-Results indicated no significant change for attribution or self-efficacy for the CoA group. -There was a significant difference for actions taken following participation for CoA group. -Qualitative findings state that the staff valued the group, including time & ability to hold the child in mind.</p>	<p>-Convenience sampling- might already have an interest in LAC's outcomes. -Comparison group (PEP) is a different process. -Small sample size, hard to elicit robust conclusions. -Some of the factors (valuing the group and ability to hold the child in mind) might not be specific to CoA intervention.</p>
<p>Warham, K. (2012). Engaging with young people through narrative co-</p>	<p>To explore the narratives of two LAC who had</p>	<p>Two male LAC adolescents.</p>	<p>One local authority in the UK.</p>	<p>Exploratory. Qualitative, narrative approach.</p>	<p>-Two narrative stories were co-constructed. They both indicated a sense of fragmentation,</p>	<p>Only two perspectives in one geographical region.</p>

<p>construction: Beyond categorisation. <i>Educational and Child Psychology,</i> 29(2), 77–86.</p>	<p>experienced school exclusion.</p>				<p>confusion, and a disrupted education. -Both contained a narrative of normality and not being seen as different, felt positioned as 'different' by professionals. -Reflections on rigidity of the school system. -CYP felt that education & social care services acted independently and did not fit together. -Both included narratives of being successful learners & exerting control which contradicts dominant narratives for LAC.</p>	
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Appendix G: Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	An exploration of Looked After Children's lived experience of primary-secondary school transition.		
Proposed project start date	March 2020	Anticipated project end date	May 2021

SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Researcher	Caitlin Thomas
Email address	cthomas@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Contact telephone number	07951084854


SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

<p>Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below:</p>
<p>Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below:</p>

FOR ALL APPLICANTS


'Is your research being commissioned by and or carried out on behalf of a body external to the trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation). <small>*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)</small>	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES , please supply details below:	
Has external* ethics approval been sought for this research? (i.e. submission via Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) to the Health Research Authority (HRA) or other external research ethics committee) <small>*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation/body which is external to the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)</small> If YES , please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies:	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If your research is being undertaken externally to the Trust, please provide details of the sponsor of your research?	
Do you have local approval (this includes R&D approval)?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> NA <input type="checkbox"/>


SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

APPLICANT DECLARATION	
I confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date. • I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research. • I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding our University's Code of Practice for ethical research and observing the rights of the participants. • I am aware that cases of proven misconduct, in line with our University's policies, may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research. 	
Applicant (print name)	Caitlin Thomas
Signed	
Date	19.02.20

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

Name of Supervisor	Dale Bartle
Qualification for which research is being undertaken	Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4)

Supervisor –	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research? YES ▪ Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate? YES ▪ Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient? YES ▪ Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance? YES 	
Signed	
Date	3.4.20

COURSE LEAD/RESEARCH LEAD	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> 	
Signed	
Date	29.05.2020

SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

<p>1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)</p>
<p>This research seeks to explore how looked after children (LAC)* have experienced transition from primary school to secondary school. I am seeking to interview six-eight young people in years 8 and 9. I intend to recruit the participants from secondary schools through the virtual school in the inner-city London borough in which I am currently on placement as a trainee Educational Psychologist.</p> <p>Participants will be asked to attend two sessions. The first will be an informal session in which the researcher will aim to build a sense of rapport with the participant, and will invite them to ask any questions they have about the research. In the second session, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview with each individual participant in which they will be given the option to draw a 'rich picture' of their transition to secondary school, and will be asked a series of questions. Open questions, along with prompts, will enable the researcher to gain a rich description of their unique experience. The research question guiding the research is: 'how do looked after children experience the transition from primary to secondary school?'</p> <p><u>**Original Plan</u></p> <p>The interviews will take place within a quiet space in the school in which they currently attend. Interviews will be audio-recorded and pictures will be collected by the researcher. The interviews will be transcribed and analysed according to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).</p> <p><u>Contingency Plan</u></p> <p>If it is not possible to meet with the participants face to face, the sessions will take place on Zoom. The structure of the sessions will be the same as stated above, the first will be a chance for myself</p>

and the participant to build rapport, and for the participant to ask questions. The second will be a 'rich picture drawing' and interview. A screen-shot of the drawing will be made, so it can be referred to during the interview and included within the thesis. It will be ensured that the screen shot will only include the image of the drawing, and will not include any identifying features related to the child.

*Looked after child: under eighteen years old and in the care of the local authority (LA) (Children Act, 1989).

**Due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, it is possible that restrictions around social distancing and school closures will mean that it is not possible to meet with the participants face-to-face. In this case, an 'original plan' and a 'contingency plan' will be provided, where necessary.

Bell, S., Berg, T., & Morse, S. (2016). Rich pictures: encouraging resilient communities. Routledge.

2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)

Transition to secondary school is a significant time for all young people, presenting new academic and social challenges. From an ecological systems perspective, school forms part of a child's microsystem and impacts their development and wellbeing (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Starting secondary school therefore presents a significant change regarding the system around the child. The individual is required to adapt to multiple teachers, larger groups of peers, and different expectations in terms of independence and organisation skills (Brewin & Stratham, 2011). LAC may find this especially challenging if they have experienced instability within their microsystem, such as multiple placements or changes of carers (McClung & Gayle, 2010). From an attachment perspective, LAC are more likely to have an insecure attachment style (Geddes, 2006). Many children enter the care system due to experiencing neglect or abuse from their carers (NSPCC, 2019). This may negatively affect the child's ability to form positive relationships with both teachers and pupils (Booth-LaForce & Kerns, 2009; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). This may be a particular challenge during transition, which presents new peer and staff relationships. From a risk and resilience perspective (Fraser, Kirby & Smokowski, 2004), transition to secondary school can be a risk to LAC's wellbeing. For example, this group of children may be more likely to experience bullying compared to their peers (Daly & Gilligan, 2005). More optimistically, research by Gilligan (2007) suggests that positive experiences of transition can improve resilience for LAC. This research project aims to explore the ways in which LAC have interpreted this transition, to help inform EP understanding and subsequent practice.

Despite LAC being a vulnerable group, their experience of transition has been largely overlooked in research. This research project aims to provide an in-depth exploration of LAC's lived experience of this transition. The thesis aims to provide an insight into how a small group of LAC have constructed their experiences around transition, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 1993). This insight into children's perceptions aims to contribute to EP's, schools' and carers' understanding of the perceived opportunities and challenges associated with leaving year six and entering year seven. It is hoped that an increased understanding of the needs and experiences of LAC will improve EP capacity to support this community. This includes both direct work with this community, and supporting other people working with LAC such as teachers, SENCos and carers. It is hoped that through the process of being interviewed, the participants will feel listened to and feel that their perspectives matter. In addition, through talking about and visually representing their experiences, the participants may also be able to make sense of potentially confusing sequences of events by making connections and interpretations (Murray, 2003). The interview process aims to give the participants the opportunity to process and reflect on their experiences in a positive environment.

Booth-LaForce, C., & Kerns, K. A. (2009). Child-parent attachment relationships, Peer relationships, and peer-group functioning. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, & B. Laursen (Eds.), Handbook

- of peer interactions, relationships, and groups (pp. 490–507). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011) *Supporting the Transition from Primary School to Secondary School for Children Who Are Looked After*. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27, 4.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *Understanding Children in Context: The Ecological Model of Human Development*. Harvard University Press.
- Daly, F., & Gilligan, R. (2005). *Lives in foster care- the educational and social support experiences of young people aged 13–14 years in long-term foster care*. Dublin: Children's Research Centre, Trinity College.
- Fraser, M. W., Kirby, L. D., & Smokowski, P. R. (2004). *Risk and resilience in childhood*. *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective*, 2, 13-66.
- Geddes, H. (2006). *Attachment in the classroom: The links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school*. London: Worth Publishing.
- Gilligan, R. (2007). *Adversity, resilience and the educational progress of young people in public care*. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 12, 135-145.
- McClung, M & Gayle, V. (2010) *Exploring the Care Effects of Multiple Factors on the Educational Achievement of Children Looked after at Home and Away from Home: An Investigation of Two Scottish Local Authorities*. *Child & Family Social Work*. 15: 409–431.
- Murray, M. (2003). *Narrative Psychology*, in J.A. Smith (ed.) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- NSPCC (2019). *Looked After Children*. Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/looked-after-children/>
- Smith, J., Flowers, P. and Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*. London: Sage.
- Verschueren, K., & Koomen, H. M. (2012). Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective. *Attachment & human development*, 14, 205-211.

3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, tasks assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The research is based on a qualitative design and is underpinned by a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. From a constructivist perspective, it is thought that the participants will have experienced transition to secondary schools in diverse and unique ways, according to their individual experiences. The research is therefore not aiming to gain insight into a single and generalizable truth, but to provide an in-depth exploration of unique experiences.

This research project proposes to collect data through the form of semi-structured interviews stimulated by rich picture drawings. Regarding the interview, the interviewer uses a guide that provides a checklist of topics. However, the interview can be adapted according to the flow of the interview, or to explore any unplanned topics that arise (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Some examples of possible questions can be found in the appendices. This is designed to allow the children and young people (CYP) to co-construct the interview with the researcher, giving them some agency over the flow and depth of the interview. Semi-structured interviews are compatible with the purpose of the research, which is exploratory. This is because it allows flexibility for unexpected topics and aspects of experience to be explored (Mertens, 2008). This interview style also provides participants with an opportunity to express their views in a positive and empathetic environment. While not aiming to be therapeutic in nature, it is hoped that this will be a positive experience for the young people.

Rich picture drawings will also be used to collect data because accessing phenomenon from more than one perspective, especially using creative techniques, can be an effective way of gathering rich data, by enabling participants to open up about their experiences without the constraint of verbal ability (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is also hoped that giving the young people a chance to draw pictures will help put them at ease and give them a positive experience. It will offer

another way to communicate their experiences, which is particularly important for young people with communication difficulties. Semi-structured interviews will allow a rapport to be developed between interviewer and interviewee and will offer a space for participants to reflect, talk, and be listened to (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The semi-structured nature of the interview will offer a dialogue and will therefore not feel dissimilar from an informal conversation for the interviewee. The semi-structured questions will offer a space for the questions to be modified according to the participants' responses. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe, the interview can be seen as a 'conversation with a purpose' (2009, p. 57).

Six-eight young people will take part in the research. The interviewer will meet with each participant for two sessions. This will happen remotely, on Zoom, if it is not possible to meet face to face. The first session will be to build a sense of rapport with the young person. The young person will be informed of the research process and invited to ask any questions. The researcher will engage in a creative and fun activity with the young person, such as a drawing, with the aim of getting to know them and helping them feel at ease. In the second session, the researcher will interview the young person using the interview schedule provided, although questions may be adapted according to the topics that arise in the interview, the rich picture drawing will also take place in the second session. The rich picture will also be a tool for the interviewer to elicit further information about the young person's experience by asking them questions about the drawing. This session will be audio-recorded. The interviews will then be transcribed and analysed using IPA.

SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why this criteria is in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)

Participants included will be 'looked after children' (LAC) (According to the definition in the Children's Act, 1989). Due to the small sample size in IPA research, participants will be from a homogeneous sample, which will ensure that the research question is meaningful to them (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). For this research project, homogeneity will refer to children who has been in care for at least a year before their transition to secondary school. This is to ensure they will have had experience of being 'looked after' throughout the transition process, which will include any support that is put in place prior to transition. They must attend a mainstream secondary school and they must have attended a primary school in year 6. This is to ensure that they will have experienced the transition from primary to secondary school. The participants will be in years 8 and 9 and will therefore have experienced school transition within the last 3 years. 6-8 participants will be included within the sample, from one Local Authority. There will be no exclusion criteria regarding gender, ethnicity or special educational need (SEN), this is to ensure an equitable and ethical recruitment process.

A list of participants that fit the inclusion criteria will be provided through the Virtual School. This will include all the secondary schools within the local authority. Participants will be contacted in batches of 10, the adult(s) with parental responsibility, and young people, will be sent information sheets and consent forms, and will have the opportunity to ask further questions before giving their consent to take part. The adult with parental responsibility will may refer to a) foster carer b) biological parent c) local authority d) another adult with parental responsibility. The appropriate adult for each child will be contacted for consent, and will henceforth be referred to as 'carer' within this document. Due to the vulnerable nature of the group and possible past experiences of rejection, contacting participants in 'batches' is considered the most ethical way of recruiting. The 'batch' will be randomly selected from the list of potential participants to avoid bias. This method will be repeated until a group of 6-8 participants agree to take part in the research.

Request for change of recruitment strategy:

If this strategy does not produce enough participants then alternative recruitment strategies will take place. A second Virtual School in another London local authority will be approached to ask if they would be interested in supporting the recruitment process for this research project. If they are willing to support then the above process will be replicated in that local authority. In addition, Designated Teachers for LAC in secondary schools in [redacted] will be approached to request whether they would be interested in supporting with research recruitment. A similar strategy will be employed in which designated teachers will be asked to send information to the carers of LAC who match the criteria. The carers will be given an information sheet and consent form and will be asked to email the researcher if the young people in their care are interested in taking part in the research.

Consent forms and information sheets will be sent to the carers of the young people. A child-friendly consent form and information sheet will also be sent to each of the children. It will be made clear that after opting in, they will have the opportunity to withdraw at any stage, without having to give a reason. It will also be made clear that schools, the EP service, carers and CYP will be offered the chance to hear about the overall findings of the research at the end, while the individual comments made by the young people will be anonymised and confidential.

5. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?(Tick as appropriate)

- Students or staff of the Trust or the University.
- Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
- Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)¹
- Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
- Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
- Adults in emergency situations.
- Adults² with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
- Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).
- Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the **National Offender Management Service (NOMS)**.
- Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
- Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).
- Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent³ relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).
- Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
- Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.
- Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

¹If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability³, any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.

² 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)

³ Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

6. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES NO

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment) or from their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness). Where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable.

Adults lacking mental capacity to consent to participate in research and children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable. Studies involving adults (over the age of 16) who lack mental capacity to consent in research must be submitted to a REC approved for that purpose. Please consult [Health Research Authority \(HRA\)](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/) for guidance: <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/>

6.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

If **YES**, the research activity proposed will require a DBS check. *(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance>)*

I have an up to date DBS check.

7. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research? YES NO

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

8. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)

Two versions of consent forms and information sheets will be created. One is for adults over the age of 16 (carers), and one will be for children under 16 (participants) and for those with low literacy levels. The child-friendly information form will include visual pictures to aid understanding and will make it clear that participants can withdraw at any time. The information sheet for carers will provide contact information in case they have any questions. I will also meet with all of the participants prior to the research to ensure they have fully understood the information in the information sheet, and they will be verbally reminded that they are able to withdraw.

SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

9. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? (Tick as appropriate)

- use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)
- use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection
- use of written or computerised tests
- interviews (attach interview questions)
- diaries (attach diary record form)
- participant observation
- participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research
- audio-recording interviewees or events
- video-recording interviewees or events
- access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes
- administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process
- performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction
- investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)
- procedures that involve the deception of participants
- administration of any substance or agent
- use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions
- participation in a clinical trial
- research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)
- research overseas (copy of VCG overseas travel approval attached)

10. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO

If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

11. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist and I have experience of working with vulnerable young people in this role including LAC. My role often involves working with children and young people who have had difficult experiences at home and in school. I have experience building rapport with young people and helping them to feel emotionally contained. I am always aware that any questions about a young person's experience have the potential to be triggering or make them feel uncomfortable. I will be aware of the child or young person's verbal language and body language and if they become distressed I will immediately stop the interview, and will give them the opportunity to debrief. I will also ensure that they are aware of a designated member of staff (such as their head of year) who they can check in with. I will inform the designated member of staff so they are able to monitor their wellbeing and support them as necessary.

12. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)

NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students of our University, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

Transition to secondary school offers new challenges to all young people (Brewin & Stratham, 2011), but LAC are a particularly vulnerable group to be going through this change (Daly & Gilligan, 2005). Research demonstrates that LAC are more likely to underachieve in school compared to their peers (Jackson, 2000; Stein, Pinkerton, and Kelleher, 2000). And the achievement gap is wider in secondary school compared to primary school (DfE, 2019; Sebba et al, 2015). Despite this, there is relatively little research exploring the educational experiences of LAC, and very few exploring the experience of transition for LAC. Hearing the direct experiences of LAC is likely to increase our understanding of the potential challenges and opportunities within transition. LAC are one of the most vulnerable groups that EPs work with and it is hoped that they will be better able to support their needs if they have a better understanding of their experiences. EPs work individually, at a group level and at an organisational level with the systems around LAC, such as schools and foster carers. It is hoped that through gaining an insight into the experiences that LAC have had, they will be better positioned to support both LAC and those around them through secondary transition.

Through being asked about their experiences, the children will have the opportunity to tell their stories to a non-judgemental and interested adult, in a friendly environment. It is therefore hoped that the experience will not only be positive, but will be empowering. It is hoped that the children will feel that their voice and experience matters. In addition, talking through and drawing their thoughts will offer the young people a chance to process and make sense of their experiences.

Brewin, M, & Statham, J. (2011) Supporting the Transition from Primary School to Secondary School for Children Who Are Looked After. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27, 4.

Daly, F., & Gilligan, R. (2005). *Lives in foster care- the educational and social support experiences of young people aged 13–14 years in long-term foster care*. Dublin: Children's Research Centre, Trinity College.

Department for Education (DfE) (2019). Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2018. *National Statistics*. London: Department for Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-las-31-march-2018>.

Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. and O'Higgins, A., 2015. The educational progress of looked after children in England: linking care and educational data. Retrieved from http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2015/11/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenOverviewReport_Nov2015.pdf.

13. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

Due to talking about their experiences during the time of transition, it is possible that the young people may become distressed. If there are any signs of distress during the interview, the interview will be terminated and the pupil will be given the opportunity to debrief. The young person will have been informed, prior to the interview, of a key contact within the school that they can speak to if they become distressed, such as a pastoral lead or the SENCo. The key person will have consented to being available to support the child if they become distressed during the session. They will then make contact with the child if necessary. Their carer will also be informed. In the unlikely event that a young person continues to be distressed they will be signposted to relevant services, such as the school counselling service or CAMHS.

If a safeguarding concern is raised, I will ensure that the appropriate steps are taken, according to the Local Authority and school's safeguarding policy. This will include informing the designated safeguarding lead in the school. The child's emotional and physical wellbeing will always be the priority throughout the research process.

Contingency Plan:

If it is necessary for the sessions to take place remotely over Zoom, the measures and process mentioned above will remain. A pre-arranged key person from the young person's school will be asked to make contact with the child if they show any signs of distress within the interview. Their carer will be informed and they will be signposted to relevant services, such as CAMHS, in the unlikely event that this is necessary.

14. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)

Participants will be offered the chance to debrief at the end of each interview. This will happen either face-to-face or remotely. This will be a chance for the young person to discuss any thoughts or feelings which may have arisen during the process, and for me to check in regarding the participants' wellbeing. They will be reminded that they can speak to the key member of staff if they feel they need to. The young people will also be reminded about confidentiality and anonymity before the interview takes place. Each participant will also be informed that the research findings will be disseminated to stakeholders, such as the school, local authority, carers and virtual school before each interview takes place. They will also be given the opportunity to be debriefed on the findings at the end, which will take the form of a child friendly 'pupil letter'.

15. Does any part of your research take place in premises outside the Trust?**No?**

YES, and I have included evidence of permissions from the managers or others legally responsible for the premises. This permission also clearly states the extent to which the participating institution will indemnify the researchers against the consequences of any untoward event

The research will take place in secondary schools within the local authority. Local approval is included in the appendices.

16. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?

YES, I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>

YES, I am a non-UK national and I have sought travel advice/guidance from the Foreign Office (or equivalent body) of my country of origin

YES, I have completed the overseas travel approval process and enclosed a copy of the document with this application

For details on university study abroad policies, please contact academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

IF YES:**17. Is the research covered by the Trust's insurance and indemnity provision?**

YES **NO**

18. Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place.

NOTE:

For students conducting research where the Trust is the sponsor, the Dean of the Department of Education and Training (DET) has overall responsibility for risk assessment regarding their health and safety. If you are proposing to undertake research outside the UK, please ensure that permission from the Dean has been granted before the research commences (please attach written confirmation)

SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

18. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials. YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

19. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

20. The following is a participant information sheet checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher or Principal Investigator and other researchers along with relevant contact details.
- Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.
- A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC.
- If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.
- A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.
- Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.
- A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.
- Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

21. The following is a consent form checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- Trust letterhead or logo.
- Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.
- Confirmation that the project is research.
- Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.
- If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.
- The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
- (NA) Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.

- (NA) Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

22. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.

- Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?
- The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
- The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers are able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).
- Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
- Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (i.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
- The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
- Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

23. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.

YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

24. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

25. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.

1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 10> years

NOTE: Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance currently states that data should normally be preserved and accessible for 10 years, but for projects of clinical or major social, environmental or heritage importance, for 20 years or longer.

(<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/grcpoldraft.pdf>)

26. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.

Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.

Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.

Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See 23.1).

Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the European Economic Area (EEA).

Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). (See 28).

NOTE: Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.

Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.

Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops). **NOTE:** This should be transferred to secure UEL servers at the first opportunity.

All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

27. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.
N/A
28. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the European Economic Area (EEA).
The transcription software Otter will be used to transcribe the interview data. This software may store data outside of the EEA, but the data will be secured securely and will be password protected.
29. Will this research be financially supported by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or any of its divisions, agencies or programs? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES please provide details:

SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

<p>30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? (Select all that apply)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peer reviewed journal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-peer reviewed journal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Peer reviewed books</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conference presentation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Internal report</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Promotional report and materials</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dissertation/Thesis</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other publication</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Written feedback to research participants</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presentation to participants or relevant community groups</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify below)</p>

SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?
--

NA

SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

- Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant)
- Recruitment advertisement
- Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)
- Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
- Assent form for children (where relevant)
- Evidence of any external approvals needed
- Questionnaire
- Interview Schedule or topic guide
- Risk Assessment (where applicable)
- Overseas travel approval (where applicable)

34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.

Appendix H: Letters of Approval

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement Directorate of
Education & Training Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane London NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 8938 2699
<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Caitlin Thomas

By Email

2 June 2020

Dear Caitlin,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: 'An exploration of Looked After Children's lived experience of primary-secondary school transition'

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me. I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix H.i: Change to Doctoral Research Protocol Request

Change to Doctoral Research Protocol 2019/20

Student name: Caitlin Thomas	
Date: 23.11.20	
Doctoral programme: M4	
Supervisor(s): Dale Bartle	Dr Dale Bartle
Has ethical approval been granted? Please include process (TREC /UREC/IRAS) and date: 01/06/2020	
<p>Please state clearly and simply the proposed changes to your project (methods of data gathering, changes to design etc.)</p> <p>I propose a change to the method of participant recruitment. The original TREC form states that participants will be recruited through the Virtual School in a local authority (redacted). This has not resulted in enough participants so I propose that another Virtual School is contacted in a different local authority and participants are also recruited directly through secondary schools through the designated teacher for Looked After Children contact.</p>	
<p>Please return this form as directed by your supervisor or course lead. You must ensure any changes are also approved by your ethical approval body before you start work.</p>	

Appendix H.ii: Letter of Approval Following Change Request.

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement Directorate of
Education & Training Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane London NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 8938 2699
<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Caitlin Thomas

By Email

20 January 2020

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: An exploration of Looked After Children's lived experience of primary-secondary school transition.


I am pleased to inform you that the Trust Research Ethics Committee formally approved your application.

Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me. Please note that I am copying this communication to your supervisor for information.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Kind regards,



Mrs Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Ethics Committee **Cc.** Course Lead, Research Lead, Supervisor

Appendix I: Example Interview Schedule.

Example opening statement and question:

We're here today because I'd like to find out about your experience of leaving primary school and starting secondary school. I am going to ask you a few questions, and I would also like you to draw a picture.

Before I ask you some questions, I'd like you to have a think about your experience of leaving year 6 and starting year 7, and I'd like to invite you to draw a picture, if you'd like to. Don't worry about what the picture looks like, there is no right or wrong way to draw it. I'd like you to include as much as you can about what the experience was like for you. You can use symbols and words.

- 1) Thank you for your drawing, would you like to tell me about it?

Possible subsequent questions:

- What have you drawn?
- Who is in the drawing?
- What are they doing?
- What did it feel like?

Interview Schedule:

- 2) Can you tell me what it was like to transition from primary to secondary school?

Possible further questions if not raised by the participant:

- What did you think secondary school would be like before you got there? Was it similar or different?
- Were you given any support or help with your transition?
 - What was that like?
 - What was helpful about it?
- Can you tell me what it felt like when you first began secondary school? What does it feel like now?
- If you could go back in time and do it again, is there anything else that could have helped?

Appendix J: Interview Transcript, Initial Comments and Initial Emergent Themes for Participant 1 (Asif)

Emergent Themes	Interview Transcript	Initial Comments
		<p data-bbox="1440 467 2029 616"><i>Descriptive</i> comments focused on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript (normal text).</p> <p data-bbox="1440 703 2029 815"><i>Linguistic</i> comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant (italic).</p> <p data-bbox="1440 858 2029 970"><u>Conceptual</u> comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (underlined).</p>

<p>Leaving primary school friends behind.</p>	<p>Interviewer: Brilliant okay so first of all yes so just to start off with so I I'd like you to think back to when you were in year 6 and you were leaving year 6 and starting year 7. I'd like you to draw me a picture about what that was like for you so, you know, it doesn't have to be really artistic, it can be however you want, you can put in some symbols, some words, just whatever comes to mind.</p> <p>Asif: Okay I'm gonna be honest I don't really know what to draw.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's absolutely fine it can just be a few symbols, a few words, anything, anything that you want. No right or wrong.</p> <p>Asif: Yeah, okay.</p> <p>[gap while Asif draws a picture]</p> <p>Asif: I mean I've just started off by drawing so like... [holds up drawing]</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh fantastic so just keep it there, so what I'm going to do is I will take a screen shot so that I can have a look, fantastic.</p>	<p>Uncertainty about drawing his experience.</p>
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<p>Unique school transition experience</p>	<p>Asif: So what happened was, so no one from my primary school came to my secondary because umm, I mean it was outside [local authority] for one. And like they just went to other schools like [name of school] or [name of school] or something.</p>	<p>No one else from his primary school went to his secondary school. <i>Use of language 'no one' and 'they', generalising experience of everyone else.</i> <u>Might feel that he was the exception, the 'odd one out'.</u></p>
<p>Lack of control about choice of school</p>	<p>Interviewer: I see, and what was that like for you?</p>	<p>Describes primary school friends wanting him to go to their secondary school. <i>Repetition of 'come to our school' suggests that it was said several times.</i></p>
<p>Losing and gaining friends</p>	<p>Asif: well I mean cos peop- like obviously my friends were saying like come to school, man, come to our school, but err I mean, I mean like it at my school, yeah, I mean it wasn't the worst thing Cos I knew it was a good school, because I went there for induction day and like I made a couple of friends on induction day at my school and... so I mean on induction day it was a pretty good start cos, cos I didn't really find it hard to make friends like... literally on the first day I made about 5, 10 already.</p>	<p><i>Language 'it wasn't the worst thing' suggests it wasn't easy?</i></p>
<p>Induction day as positive experience</p>	<p>Interviewer: fantastic.</p>	<p>Describes a positive induction day and making new friends. <u>5 or 10 friends is a large number, wish to emphasise that he made new friends?</u></p>
<p>Getting to know new peers</p>	<p>Asif: I mean now I just know, like, cos there's two sides to the year, there's [name] which has 4 forms in my year [lists the forms], and then there's [name], [lists the names of the forms]. Err so cos I'm in [name of half of</p>	<p>Describes the structure of the year group, the names of the forms and names of 'half of year'. Describes knowing everybody in his half of the year.</p>

<p>Pre-transition nerves</p> <p>Odd one out Different transition than everyone else</p> <p>Peers- lack of consistency Unique school-transition journey</p> <p>Anticipatory fear Better than expected</p>	<p>year] I'm in [name of form]. But I know like, literally, probably everyone in [name of half of year] now.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's good. So what did it feel like to, thank you for your drawing, what did it feel like to go to a different school to your friends?</p> <p>Asif: well I mean I guess I was a bit... I was a bit nervous because I didn't know anyone at the school. Because the people at that... cos there's a primary school right next to my school, and like a lot of people that go to my school went to that primary school it's called [name].</p> <p>Interviewer: Ah</p> <p>Asif: Cos there's literally like a fence separating the two schools, so probably nearly everyone from my school went to that school as a primary so I was a bit nervous, was a bit nervous... but when I came in year 7 but even after the first couple of days I felt alright.</p> <p>Interviewer: So were you a bit nervous before you started but then you were alright when you started?</p>	<p><u>Wish to emphasise social inclusion?</u></p> <p><i>'Well I mean I guess I was a bit...' might find it difficult to articulate negative experience.</i> Describes feeling nervous due to not knowing anyone in new school.</p> <p>Describes being the exception, did something different to the majority from his primary school.</p> <p>Repetition of describing what everyone else from his primary school did. <i>Repetition of 'a bit nervous'.</i> <u>Describes the fence separating the schools, suggests the image that everyone else stayed in the same place while he moved on.</u> Describes feeling alright quickly after starting secondary school. <u>Appears to want to emphasise that he settled in quickly.</u></p>
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<p>Lack of agency</p> <p>Voice of the child</p> <p>Fate is in the hands of professionals</p>	<p>Asif: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, and did you want to go to the secondary school that was near your primary school?</p> <p>Asif: Err, I mean I can't... I can't really remember I think, oh, I do remember one thing like my friend Henry... he was from my football club, he went to a school, I forgot what it was called, err, think it was... err no I can't remember, but it was near [area] and like I cos, when we went to visit there for a par- er, like, like to visit the school, like, I said like that was my top school and obviously everyone knew, everyone knew it's because my friend went there.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ohh</p> <p>Asif: But I said, it's because of the lovely colourful library and er so I was just waffling...</p> <p>Interviewer: So um how come you ended up going to the secondary school that you're at now?</p>	<p><i>Struggling to articulate how he felt 'err, I mean I can't... I can't really remember'</i></p> <p>Describes wanting to go to the same school as his friend.</p> <p>Describes trying to influence the decision about which school to go to.</p> <p>Describes the virtual school making the decision for him.</p>
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<p>Conflicting feelings about choice of school.</p>	<p>Asif: Well, er, like someone from the Virtual School like they kind of decide... think it was er... do you know Thomas Smith?</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah</p> <p>Asif: Yeah, like he kind of made the list and he put [name of school] as the top school... and I got accepted into that so that's the one I, err, got into.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ohh and were you happy with that?</p> <p>Asif: Err yeah I mean I wasn't too sad about it but err like cos obviously I wanted to go to the school that my friends went to... Err but it wasn't the worst thing going to [name of school] because as I said I know, I knew it was a good school.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yep, that makes sense. So um, so if you think back to your primary school, what was that like?</p> <p>Asif: Err, my primary school like literally everyone knew each other, err, like we was all friends, like cos there was two classes and each year and err cos the two classes in my year we just got on with each other, we</p>	<p><u>Lack of control over the decision</u></p> <p>Describes the process of someone else (a professional) making the decision for him.</p> <p>Accepted by the school. <i>Use of 'accepted' suggests the school wanted him.</i></p> <p>Wanted to go to the school his friends went to. <i>'I wasn't too sad about it' suggests that he was a bit sad/ wasn't totally happy.</i></p> <p><i>Repetition of 'wasn't the worst thing' suggests that it wasn't the best thing either. Asif appears to want to be positive, does he find it hard to admit more negative feelings?</i> <u>Disappointment?</u></p>
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<p>Nice teachers at primary school. Positive memories</p> <p>Feeling known at primary school</p> <p>Visiting primary school.</p> <p>Positive primary school teacher relationships</p>	<p>knew everyone and err yeah it as pretty good, primary school.</p> <p>Interviewer: Umm, anything else about primary school?</p> <p>Asif: Err, let me just think, err, I mean I guess we had quite, cos, one of my teachers Miss... err I mean, I'm not even joking her name was Miss Tree.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm</p> <p>Asif: But she was probably my favourite teacher, she was the nicest and I guess I like got to know her the best, like she gave me some books like when I left year four and like I mean I still do visit my primary school sometimes</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh that's nice</p> <p>Asif: And like, you know, just say hello.</p> <p>Interviewer: And what is it that you liked about Miss Tree?</p> <p>Asif: Err well I mean she was pretty nice and like cos I think she was the only teacher cos in my primary, like, I didn't get pushed that</p>	<p>Everyone knew each other in primary school and got on with each other. <i>Repetition of 'knew', 'knew each other' and 'knew everyone- suggests that is important to Asif.</i> <u>Primary school sounds almost idealised, everyone being friends with everyone.</u></p> <p>Mentions one of his teachers.</p> <p>Mentions his favourite teacher, who was nice. <u>'Know me the best' suggests that being known by others is important to Asif.</u></p> <p><u>Still visiting primary school could suggest he is not yet ready to move on completely.</u></p>
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<p>Positive memories</p> <p>Primary school as too easy.</p>	<p>much, as in like, I didn't get really hard challenging work, but I think like erm Miss Tree, she was probably the teacher that kind of challenged me the most and like erm... we did this err club after school it was like a maths club thing and I went to it... that was pretty good. So, um yeah she was just the nicest teacher I guess.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm, so did you like being challenged?</p> <p>Asif: Err yeah, I mean in secondary school it's a lot different to my primary cos like I do get quite challenging work but er in my primary er I didn't get that hard work...</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh okay, so what's your secondary school like?</p> <p>Asif: Well, er, like work wise... like, they do, cos, like, in year 7 they do sets, like set 1, I was in set 1 and err but cos of the... cos of Covid we have to stay in the same classroom for the whole day so can't really do sets at the moment</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh, yeah</p>	<p><i>Repetition of 'nice/ nicest'- suggests this is important to Asif.</i></p> <p><u>Suggests relationships with teachers are important, still remembers his teacher from 4 years ago.</u></p> <p>Liked being challenged.</p> <p>Wasn't challenged enough in primary school.</p> <p>Again mentions not being challenged enough in primary school 'didn't get that hard work'.</p>
<p>Impact of Covid-19</p>	<p>Asif: Well, er, like work wise... like, they do, cos, like, in year 7 they do sets, like set 1, I was in set 1 and err but cos of the... cos of Covid we have to stay in the same classroom for the whole day so can't really do sets at the moment</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh, yeah</p>	<p>Mentions the impact of Covid on secondary school experience, can't have sets because they have to be taught in the same classroom.</p>

<p>More varied work</p> <p>Nicer teachers than expected</p> <p>Fear of strict teachers</p> <p>Reality better than expected</p> <p>New teacher relationships</p> <p>New friendships.</p> <p>Positive new social experiences</p> <p>Finding shared interests</p>	<p>Asif, Cos it's all in one classroom, but, the work we get, like, sometimes it is pretty challenging and sometimes it's easy, like, there's different parts that are hard and easy and no, I like that.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh that's good, and what else do you like about secondary school?</p> <p>Asif: Well, err, I dunno, maybe the teachers cos I mean, when I was coming into secondary I was also worrying that the teachers were going to be quite strict, but they are quite nice in my school and... err... no, I get on well with most of them. And, like, obviously I've made quite good friends at my secondary... and... yeah, cos we chat about, I mean, as much as I'm quite sad like we've got a chat called the [video game] chat which is basically all of us play a game called [name] and we literally just named a chat on whatsapp called the [name of video game] chat and we just always talk about [name] on there, not gonna lie, and football.</p> <p>Interviewer: Is that with your friends?</p> <p>Asif: Yeah</p>	<p>Describes a mixture of challenging and easy work as a positive.</p> <p><i>'Well, err, I dunno, maybe' suggests Asif is unsure about his answer to what he likes about secondary school.</i></p> <p>He was worried the teachers would be strict but they are nice.</p> <p><u>'Get on with most of them [teachers]' and 'made quite good friends' is different to everybody getting on with everybody at primary school. Suggests there are peers and teachers he might not get on with.</u></p> <p>Describes a shared interest with his friends- video games and football.</p>
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<p>New experiences</p>	<p>pretty normal having more than one teacher for a subject cos I've already been in my school for over a year now.</p> <p>Interviewer: Ah okay, and what else about your secondary school? What else would you like to tell me?</p> <p>Asif: Err... I dunno... I mean for lunch, like, it's just literally lunch... most of the time I have these little pasta pots, and err, like it depends what day it is. Like on Monday they might have bolognese sauce or something, I dunno, and err, like most of time I do get pasta, but sometimes I do get like chicken wraps. And not gonna lie there's more bread... there's more wrap than chicken in there...</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh no</p> <p>Asif: But, err, still pretty good.</p>	<p>Describes what he has for lunch.</p> <p>Mentions negative aspects of school food in a jokey way 'not gonna lie, there's more bread... there's more wrap than chicken in there'</p>
<p>Strict teachers</p> <p>Fear of social exclusion</p>	<p>Interviewer: Oh that sounds good, that sounds really good. So if you think back to when you were in year 6, what did you expect secondary school to be like?</p> <p>Asif: Well, as I said, I expected the teachers to be a lot stricter and, err, I mean I thought I</p>	<p><u>Appears to want to defend secondary school experience as 'good'</u></p>

<p>Concerns about schoolwork</p> <p>Homework.</p> <p>Reality better than anticipated.</p> <p>Overwhelming amount of tests</p> <p>Academic pressure</p> <p>Independent learning</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Being known</p>	<p>would have, like, less friends, as I do now, because I didn't know anyone that was going there. But err... I dunno.... I dunno what I thought... I thought it was going to be a lot harder than primary, and I thought the work was going to be a lot harder and I knew... was going to get a lot more homework</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, and was it different? Or was it similar to what you expected when you actually got there?</p> <p>Asif: Well it was quite different, cos the teachers weren't really strict, we do get... I mean we do get quite a bit of homework but, say, for the past one week, the only bit of homework we've had is for revision. Oh, that's another thing, I knew we were going to get a lot more tests. And in year 7 we didn't have a lot of tests but now in year 8 because it's getting to the end of term, we're now getting like a load of end of topic tests. And, err, because I had my music test today, and, er, I had my... err... what... I know I've had my science, my maths... no our maths is next lessons... I know we've had our history... I think we're doing our DT. But, yeah, we're getting a load of tests at the moment for the past couple of weeks because it's getting towards the end of the term. But it was...</p>	<p>Mentions worries about secondary when he was at primary school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Worried the teachers would be strict -Worried it was going to be harder than primary school -Worried there would be more homework. <p>The teachers were not as strict as expected.</p> <p>Do get 'quite a bit of homework' suggests that was as expected.</p> <p>Mentions having lots of tests.</p>
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<p>Secondary school experience better than expected.</p> <p>Increased testing</p> <p>Self-doubt</p> <p>Overwhelm</p> <p>Time pressure</p>	<p>yeah it was quite different to what I thought cos, as I said, I know a lot of people now and... you know... they're quite nice and... yeah... it's good.</p> <p>Interviewer: So what does that feel like having lots of tests?</p> <p>Asif: Well I guess it feels a bit nervous cos you think, like, have I revised for this enough? Do I know whats... like... am I ready? And say if you have one every, like, once in a while that's alright because you have quite a bit of time to revise usually, like, they tell you in a week's advance but, er, it's just kind of test upon test at the moment but, er, it's not too bad. Err, but her, yeah it does feel a bit nervous like, you know, they're saying 'you got a test in a week' and then you're like 'oh, okay I've got a week, I've got a week to revise'. But in a week's time, it feels like only a couple of days and... you're like 'oh it's the test already, wow'.</p> <p>Interviewer: So it feels like it comes round quite quickly. I can understand that. And when you were in primary school, was there anything you were worried about secondary school?</p>	<p>Mentions that people turned out to be nicer than expected.</p> <p>Mentions feeling nervous about tests and doubting himself 'have I revised for this enough? And 'am I ready?'</p> <p><u>'Test upon test at the moment'- overwhelmed by the amount of tests?</u></p> <p><i>Repetition of 'nervous' regarding tests.</i></p> <p>Tests come round more quickly than expected/ less time to revise.</p>
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<p>Not being able to keep up</p> <p>Afraid of the work being too hard.</p> <p>Afraid of teachers being too strict.</p> <p>Fears did not become a reality.</p> <p>Anticipatory nerves</p> <p>Emotional support from carer</p> <p>Fears disappeared</p>	<p>Asif: Yeah I was worried about... like... if I had too much... if I had too much homework in secondary... I wouldn't be able to keep up with it, and, like, err, maybe the work aswell. I thought like, err, like maybe the work might be a bit too hard for me and... but like I said even just the teachers I thought they might be a bit too strict.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm</p> <p>Asif: But err, it's not really turned out like that.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh that's really good. And then what did it actually feel like to go through that school move, of it being your last day of year 6, then it's the summer holidays, then it's the first day of year 7, what did that feel like?</p> <p>Asif: The first day of year 7... before school I was so, I was so nervous. Before I got in I was really nervous I'm not gonna lie. But on the first day of year 7, like, the first couple of minutes, I wasn't nervous, like literally when I got, cos, err, my foster carer Sam, she was sort of like 'when you get in school you'll be fine' cos I was like really nervous getting</p>	<p>Worried that the teachers would be too strict</p> <p>Worried that the work would be too hard in SS.</p> <p>'Not really turned out like that' suggests SS was better than expected.</p> <p>Describes feeling nervous before starting and then being fine once he got to SS.</p>
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<p>Practical preparations</p> <p>Induction day was a positive experience.</p>	<p>ready for my first day but when I got in, err, I was fine.</p> <p>Interviewer: Oh that's really good, yeah, and it's very understandable that you were nervous before. And when you were in primary school, was there anything that helped you to prepare, when you were in year 6?</p> <p>Asif: Err to prepare... err... let me think... I dunno... err... the only thing I can say is just finding out what size you are in clothes and then just buying that.</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah...</p> <p>Asif: That's your clothes shopping done. Err, but err, I don't really know anything else that helped me prepare for year 7.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's okay.</p> <p>Asif: Oh, no I do, the induction day was a big help cos, like, I got to travel to the school and see what's what and... err... you know... I can get to know some people and err yeah... I don't really know what helped me prepare.</p>	<p><i>'Nervous' is repeated 3 times suggesting he was significantly nervous before starting.</i></p> <p><u>Mentions reassurance from his foster carer which suggests this was helpful. Emotional support?</u></p> <p><i>'Err to prepare... err... let me think... I dunno' struggles to think of anything which helped him prepare in year 6.</i></p> <p><u>Mentions clothes shopping to help him prepare. This practical activity might be safe topic? Or might have an emotional element, helping him transition to SS and feel a sense of belonging by buying the uniform.</u></p> <p><u>Appears to shut down the question 'I don't know anything else that helped me prepare for year 7'.</u></p>
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<p>Getting to know people.</p> <p>Practicing independence</p> <p>Kind teachers</p> <p>Knowing what to expect</p> <p>Consistency of staff</p> <p>Form tutor</p> <p>Reassurance from teachers.</p> <p>Fear of getting lost.</p> <p>Adjusting to the timetable.</p> <p>Detentions</p>	<p>Interviewer: That's okay, so what was helpful about your induction day?</p> <p>Asif: Well, err, I think just cos it was my first time seeing the school since like when the parents came with us to the school, that was the first time going to it by myself, err like, I mean the... the teachers were quite helpful and any questions we had they would answer, and, you know, they had quite a lot of information to tell us, so we just, you know, we knew what was going to happen on the first day of year 7... cos my form tutor in year 7... was, er, is the same as year 8 actually and my form tutor is quite nice so that also helps, err, and you know, the fact that we saw some places... cos my form tutor says even he gets lost sometimes. Oh, that was another thing... me getting lost in the school... that was another worry I had. And, like, cos we had the timetable and we didn't have that in primary, we just knew what the lessons were, but because we had the timetable... on my first week or two I had to ask so many people, like, 'do you know where 217 is?', 'do you know where 305 is? Thank you very much'... err... and... like cos obviously you could get late detentions if you weren't in your lesson in time. I didn't get a late detention in year 7 which was quite</p>	<p>Mentions that it was helpful to meet people, see the school and travel to the school on the induction day.</p> <p>Describes the teachers as helpful on the induction day.</p> <p>Describes induction day as the first time he went in by himself.</p> <p>Helpful to find out about year 7 and know what was going to happen (on induction day).</p> <p><u>Describes form tutor as nice, had the same form tutor for two years which might suggest consistency is important?</u></p> <p>Reassurance and normalising the experience from the form tutor 'even he gets lost sometimes'.</p> <p>Having a timetable is new compared to primary school, had to ask lots of people for help.</p>
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<p>Overwhelm</p> <p>Adapting to change</p> <p>Overwhelming amount of buildings</p> <p>Secondary school as punitive</p> <p>Fear of getting into trouble</p>	<p>helpful. I only had one detention in total and that was for forgetting my PE shoes and I haven't got any in year 8 yet so I'm pretty happy with that.</p> <p>Interviewer: Mmm that's good, so what was that like getting used to a new timetable and finding your way around the school?</p> <p>Asif: Um I mean it was quite scary having the timetable cos you know you had all these different rooms, and all these different floors, and we have... we have more than one building in our school like there's a science block, that's the big block, there's the [name of building] and it was quite overwhelming at first but I got to know, like, where the different rooms were and you had to be... like... cos if you had PE and then you had Art straight after that was the worst. Cos PE was all like in the field area, and then Art was at the very top... it was at the very top of the building so had to, kind of, almost sprint from PE to Art. And cos the teacher in Art was quite strict in year 7, but we have nicer teacher now, but she was quite strict so if you was late, you would get a detention. Cos I had Art right after PE and, I dunno, they just kind of rigged me, cos I had to be rushing from PE to Art every single time.</p>	<p>Worried about getting a late detention.</p> <p>Mentions only one detention in year 7, 'pretty happy with that'.</p> <p>Described having a new timetable as scary.</p> <p><i>Repetition of 'all these different': 'all these different rooms' and 'all these different floors'. Emphasises how many floors and rooms there were to get used to.</i></p> <p><i>Uses the word 'overwhelming' to describe getting used to all the different buildings.</i></p> <p><u>Describes the difficulty of rushing from PE to art to avoid getting a detention. Gives the impression of the teacher being punitive rather than understanding.</u></p>
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<p>Primary school as simple</p> <p>Not knowing the building.</p> <p>Better than expected.</p> <p>Helpfulness of others</p> <p>Enjoying social aspects of secondary school.</p>	<p>Interviewer: Oh, yeah, I can imagine... so a lot to get used to. And...</p> <p>Asif: Cos you'd always have to be moving around lots of different rooms Like in primary you just stayed in the same room, and, er, but in secondary, as I said, I didn't know where all the rooms were... and... err... like I didn't know if I would get to my lesson on time or something... I dunno. But it all turned out well.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's good. And was there anything that helped you settle in when you got to year 7?</p> <p>Asif: Err... when I got to year 7... I guess what helped me settle in, I guess, was how helpful the teachers were, like when I asked my questions, and, er, I mean, also I mean asking people like 'where's this room? Where's that room?' and you know they will show me where the room was. That was quite helpful as well because obviously I didn't know at the time, and, I mean, just having helpful people around me.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's really good.</p>	<p><u>Juxtaposition of 'strict' and 'nice', again suggests having nice teachers is significant for Asif.</u></p> <p><u>Rushing between different subjects suggests a fear of detentions.</u></p> <p>Mentions difference between primary (one room) and secondary (lots of different rooms).</p> <p><u>Fear of being late 'didn't know if I would get to my lesson on time', perhaps a fear of being punished?</u></p> <p><u>'But it all turned out well' suggests the fears were temporary/ only in year 7.</u></p> <p>Repetition of the word 'helpful' in relation to people 'just having helpful people around me'.</p>
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<p>Social inclusion as protection Getting lost</p>	<p>Asif: Cos obviously in my form... I had lessons with some people in my form... so I'd go to the lesson with them and we'd just chat instead of me just going there on my own and being silent, so, er, that was quite good that, that I had a chat before my lessons. You know, they'd also give you a bit of reassurance if you went with your friends cos you know, like, you wouldn't really get lost.</p>	<p>Describes going to lessons with other pupils from his forms and chatting on the way.</p>
<p>Hard to articulate what was helpful.</p>	<p>Interviewer: And was there anything else that helped you?</p> <p>Asif: Err... I dunno... no I don't know really.</p> <p>Interviewer: That's okay, and what about if you could go back and do it all again, is there anything you would have liked to have been done differently?</p>	<p>Again mentions fear of getting lost, going with friends gave 'reassurance'.</p>
<p>Anticipatory fear</p> <p>Virtual school</p>	<p>Asif: Err.. you mean like when I moved from year 6 to year 7?</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah</p> <p>Asif: Well I would have told myself to not be so nervous, cos, I mean, the summer holidays, like, cos you would be starting it and it would feel like a couple of days later and you would be starting year 7. And like,</p>	

<p>Enjoyment from social interactions.</p> <p>Common interests with others</p> <p>Reassuring past self.</p> <p>Responsible for outcomes</p>	<p>cos on the last week I was quite nervous... I was really nervous actually... and... I would just tell myself to relax. When I was doing my PEP meetings at my school like, err, someone from the Virtual school her name is Sophie, she always tells me like 'if you get a detention it's not the worst thing, obviously it's not what we want', but I get to school quite early, not because I'm afraid of being late, but if I leave any later, like, the buses will take longer and I will get to school late. Cos I get to school around 8 o'clock and my school starts at 8:30, and, but, another reason is so I can just chat with my friends. Cos on Thursdays I get my rewards on [name of video game] and me and my friends just open my rewards and we're all like 'ohhhh' and we're all just having a fun time before school starts.</p> <p>Interviewer: That sounds good</p> <p>Asif: I'd tell myself not to be so nervous.</p> <p>Interviewer: So was it helpful to have Sophie say things like that in your PEP meetings?</p> <p>Asif: Err... yeah... cos I mean she still does say it. She says 'it's not the worst thing if you do get a detention', like, cos obviously, like, cos I</p>	<p><i>Repetition of 'nervous' three times (before starting secondary school).</i></p> <p>Describes the summer holidays appearing to go really fast. Feeling like a lot of time at the beginning and then going past quickly.</p> <p>Virtual school advisory teacher offered reassurance about detentions in PEP meetings.</p> <p>Mentions that he is not afraid of being late.</p> <p>Enjoys chatting with his friends before school.</p> <p>Describes having a shared interest with friends (a video game).</p> <p>Suggests that he feels he didn't need to be as nervous as he was.</p>
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<p>Fear of getting into trouble</p>	<p>remember in French this year my name was on the bad side of the board... to get a concern like a detention... and, like, cos I was talking with my friend. And after that I literally just shut up and looked at the clock and I had about 40 minutes and I thought I mean that's enough time to get my name rubbed off, so I just stayed silent and the teacher rubbed my name off in the end. And... like... cos... she was saying it's not the worst thing, cos you don't have to be so worried about getting a concern, that'll happen to everyone.</p> <p>Interviewer: So was that something you were worried about?</p> <p>Asif: Yeah, getting detentions</p>	<p>Describes an incident in a lesson where he nearly got a detention/ in trouble.</p>
<p>Importance of reassurance</p> <p>Staying in touch</p>	<p>Interviewer: Yeah... For year 6 children now, who are thinking about moving to secondary school next year, is there anything that could help them, do you think?</p> <p>Asif: Well I would say, like, you know, you don't have to be that worried. It's not as bad as you think. I'd say, like, even if you're not going to the same school as your mates... cos I still play with my primary friends like literally every single day, cos I feel like it felt</p>	<p>Describes reassurance from the Virtual School advisory teacher in PEP meetings.</p> <p>Confirms that he was worried about getting detentions.</p>

Being prepared	like I wasn't really gonna talk with them that much... but I do talk with them like every day. So I would say to them like don't be so worried about leaving your friends... and... you know... but also make sure you are prepared for year 7. Cos it's going to be harder than year 6.	Asif feels that year 6 children don't need to be worried because SS 'won't be as bad as you think'. Still in contact with primary school friends, which suggests it was okay going to a different secondary school.
Early preparation	Interviewer: And is there anything the people around them could do to help them?	
Staying relaxed	Asif: Well, I guess, just kind of reassure them. You know, when it comes to their first day... and... you know... try to prepare early for year 7. And... you know... just try to tell them to relax. Interviewer: And what about for looked after children, do you think there is anything extra that they need?	<u>'It's going to be harder than year 6' suggests that he did find secondary school more challenging.</u>
Revealing identity	Asif: Well cos Sam my foster carer she was like 'you can call me whatever you want to your friends, like, you can say I'm your auntie, your grandma, but I'd say don't tell everyone straight away' cos I haven't... I haven't even told my whole form yet. But I've told quite a few of the boys in my form...	Mentions the importance of reassurance from others for year 6 children. He would tell year 6 children to try and relax.
Uncertainty about social acceptance.	like I told my friend Ollie, Aaron , Dylan...	
Vulnerability	surely other people that I've told... like I	Describes the difficulty of choosing when to tell people you are in foster care.

<p>Felt accepted at primary school</p>	<p>know there's people I've told outside of my form, like there's my friend Mikey... there's Tommy, Immanuel... there's quite a few that I've told... but I'd say don't tell them at first... don't tell everyone at first cos... cos in my primary I just told everyone straight away cos I was literally about 6 or 7 at the time. So, I mean, no one really cared. But when you get older you are going to start to care. So... yeah... maybe don't tell everyone at once you're in foster care.</p> <p>Interviewer: That sounds like some good advice. And do you think there's anything thing else that could help for example the Virtual School or PEP meetings?</p> <p>Asif: Yeah PEP meetings would be quite a good thing cos then like... people in the PEP meetings could, like, you know, tell them what to do to prepare for secondary. Cos I mean you could be like 'what do I do? I don't really know what to do' and your foster carer, you know, they might roughly know what to do but not a lot so, I mean, the PEP meeting could help them as well... and... you know just having regular chats... maybe like chatting to other mums, dads, like seeing, err, like seeing how it was for them.</p>	<p><u>His foster carer suggested using a different name such as 'aunt' or 'grandma' which suggests that other children might not understand?</u></p> <p>Lists the peers that he has told, but he has chosen not to tell everyone he is in foster care.</p> <p>Describes the difference between primary and secondary school, he told everyone straight away in primary and 'no one really cared' but in secondary 'when you get older you are going to start to care'.</p>
<p>Emotional support for foster carer</p>		<p>Importance of asking others if you don't know what to do.</p> <p>Mentions that foster carers might not know what to do, and PEP meetings and meeting other parents might help with that.</p>

<p>More positive reality</p> <p>Negative expectations of secondary school.</p> <p>Anticipatory fear</p> <p>Adjusting to new hierarchies</p> <p>Small fish in a big pond</p> <p>Acceptance of the new</p>	<p>Interviewer: It sounds like you've got some really good ideas. That's all of my questions, is there anything else you'd like to add?</p> <p>Asif: Err... err... I mean just... I mean I know I've said this quite a lot but everyone just stay relaxed! I was just so nervous going into year 7, you know, it's not as bad as I thought. I don't know if it's just me cos I mean cos I know other people do get nervous but I was like really nervous... so... I just want to tell everyone to stay relaxed. It's not really as bad as you think.</p> <p>Interviewer: I think that's some really good advice, thank you. And you've gone through it, gone through the worries, and seen that it can be better than you think.</p> <p>Asif: Yeah, cos in my primary I was the... it's indisputable really... I was the smartest. And, like, cos, Sam, she was telling me like 'you might not be the top in your Secondary, and, you know, that's alright'. And... cos I am in the top, erm, I mean I'm top 5 I would say... I'd say I'm top 5... but err but I mean now, cos I was really overconfident in primary. You know, I was just saying 'oh, well I'm the smartest', but I mean in Secondary I'm not</p>	<p>Repetition of 'stay relaxed' twice suggests he feels this is important. <i>Repeats 'nervous' three times. Suggests he felt very nervous before he started.</i></p> <p><u>'It's not as bad as I thought' / 'it's not really as bad as you think', this suggests that he did have concerns that it was going to be a negative experience.</u></p> <p>Describes himself as 'the smartest' in primary school, compared to being in the 'top 5' in secondary school.</p>
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<p>Adjusting to a larger peer group.</p> <p>Desire to fit in</p>	<p>really like that, I mean, I know that I'm smart, I'm not the smartest, and that's alright.</p> <p>Interviewer: So what's that like? Going from less children to more?</p> <p>Asif: Err... well, I mean, I'm not gonna lie, in my primary there was roughly the same amount of kids in my class as there was in my secondary. Err, like I mean in the whole year there's way more. Like, in my primary there is maybe, say, 50-60 people in a year, now it's about 200/ 300 people. So it's just, you know, you just get to know everyone and make sure you're not hated, I guess.</p> <p>Interviewer: So that feels ok?</p> <p>Asif: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: That's fantastic. Thank you.</p>	<p>Described himself as 'overconfident' in primary school.</p> <p>He appears to have accepted that he is no longer the smartest in his school 'I'm not the smartest, and that's alright'.</p> <p>'you just get to know everyone' suggests that is important to him. <u>'make sure you're not hated' suggests that he has a fear of how others will perceive him/ fear of social isolation? Bullying?</u></p>
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Appendix K: Interview Transcript, Initial Comments and Initial Emergent Themes for Participant 2 (Liam)

Emergent Themes	Interview Transcript	Initial Comments
Negative perception of creative ability	<p>Researcher: The very first thing I would like you to do is to think back to year 6 and moving to secondary school, and I would like you to draw me a picture of it.</p> <p>Liam: Uh-huh, I'm a terrible drawer.</p> <p>Researcher: That's absolutely fine.</p>	<p>Descriptive comments focused on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript (normal text).</p> <p>Linguistic comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant (italic).</p> <p>Conceptual comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (underlined).</p> <p>Negative comment about himself: his ability to draw.</p>

<p>Journey as a metaphor for school transition</p> <p>Losses in school transition</p> <p>Friendships are risked</p>	<p>[Liam draws a picture]</p> <p>Liam: Done!</p> <p>Researcher: Can you hold it up to the camera for me?</p> <p>Liam: It's not good and I did it in green pen... can you see it?</p> <p>Researcher: Just hold it further back a little bit. Yep, I've got a picture of it, fantastic, thank you, so can you describe to me what you've drawn there?</p> <p>Liam: Right, so basically, there's like a primary school... and then secondary school... and then there's like a road... and, yeah... so it kind of signifies, like, you have to go on a journey [inaudible]</p> <p>Researcher: That went a bit muffled, could you say that again?</p> <p>Liam: so basically it's a primary school, with a road connected to secondary school... it's like... it's a journey to... to secondary school and you could risk a lot in that journey, like, friends and stuff, but... like... yeah.</p>	<p>Negative comment about his drawing</p> <p>Describes school transition as a journey</p> <p><i>Uses a road as a metaphor to describe the journey between primary and secondary school</i></p> <p>School transition contains risk</p> <p>Friendships are risked in school transition</p>
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<p>Relationships in primary school are easier</p> <p>Friendships</p> <p>Risks and rewards</p> <p>Aloneness</p> <p>Not many friends in year 7</p> <p>Making friends improved school experience</p>	<p>Researcher: What a fantastic drawing. Can you tell me more about what you mean by risking a lot in that journey?</p> <p>Liam: Yeah so what I mean by that is like... say somethings might have been easier like making friends and stuff in primary school... and sometimes your friends might not go to the same secondary school as you, so, so, like you have to make new friends. It's kind of like risking a lot because you're losing your friends but you can make it up because you get new friends.</p> <p>Researcher: yeah, that makes sense, so I see what you mean... there are risks but also things you can make up. Did you feel that you risked anything when you moved from year 6 to year 7?</p> <p>Liam: yeah, cos I went to... I went to a school pretty far away from where I lived. So none of my friends went to the same school that I did... do.... that I do. And... err... so... like in year 7 I didn't really have many friends, then I got some, I started to make friends and stuff, so it wasn't too bad.</p>	<p>Making friends is easier in primary school</p> <p><i>'You' rather than 'I', perhaps finds it easier to talk generally rather than directly about himself</i></p> <p>Risk: losing friends Gain: making new friends</p> <p>Secondary school was far away</p> <p>Went to secondary school alone, with no friends.</p> <p>Didn't have many friends in year 7</p> <p>Started to make new friends</p> <p><i>'Wasn't too bad' the double negative could suggest a somewhat negative experience</i></p>
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Sadness of leaving friends behind	<p>Researcher: Okay, yeah, and what did that feel like... going to a secondary school that was different to your friends?</p>	
	<p>Liam: It's was, like, kind of sad. Cos, like, you might not... say you didn't stay in contact with your friends... you might not see them that often or at all. So it's kind of sad.</p>	<p><i>'kind of sad' is repeated twice, emphasises the sadness he felt in losing contact with primary friends.</i></p>
Different experience of selecting a secondary school.	<p>Researcher: Yeah, and how come you went to a different secondary school to them?</p>	<p>Losing contact with old friends</p>
Different experience to everyone else	<p>Liam: Because they were all going to ones that were close... the one I chose... I went to check out in year 5 and chose that one. But then everyone else chose theirs after me and I didn't tell anybody what school I was going to because no one asked and I don't really tell people stuff without them asking. And so no one asked, and then... yeah. So, we went to different ones.</p>	<p>Other children were all going on the same journey compared to Liam. Liam could feel like the 'odd one out'.</p>
	<p>Researcher: Oh, I see, so you chose the secondary school that you went to?</p>	<p>Chose his school earlier than his peers</p>
	<p>Liam: Yeah</p>	<p>Didn't tell anyone which school he picked.</p>
Smaller secondary school as less intimidating	<p>Researcher: So what made you choose it?</p>	<p>Chose his secondary school because it was small.</p>

<p>Positive peer and teacher relationships in primary school</p> <p>Friendly teachers in primary school</p> <p>Positive learning experience in primary school</p> <p>Academic support</p> <p>Good relationships in both schools</p>	<p>Liam: I liked it cos it was small and... I don't really wanna get lost at secondary school and stuff. And everyone was nice there... yeah.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay, and, so tell me a bit about your primary school... what was that like?</p> <p>Liam: It was really nice actually. I got on with a load of people, the teachers were nice... yeah... I got through my SATS okay, yeah, I didn't pretty well. And it was overall really good.</p> <p>Researcher: What was good about it?</p> <p>Liam: The teachers were really supportive so if you didn't understand something they would explain it to you in a different way so it would be easier to understand stuff.</p> <p>Researcher: Ahh... and what about your classmates, and the other children?</p> <p>Liam: Oh, I was good friends with all my classmates, yeah, they were nice.</p> <p>Researcher: Brilliant, and what about your secondary school... what's that like?</p>	<p>Chose his secondary school because everyone seemed nice.</p> <p>Speaks positively of primary school.</p> <p>Positive relationships in primary school</p> <p>Nice teachers in primary school</p> <p>Did well academically at primary school</p> <p>Teachers helped Liam to understand learning.</p> <p>Positive relationships with all classmates Classmates were described as nice.</p> <p>Similarities between primary and secondary school.</p>
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<p>Helpful teachers in both schools</p> <p>Teachers help pupils learn</p> <p>Teacher relationships</p> <p>Friendships in both schools</p>	<p>Liam: It's like my primary school, it's nice, I really like it. It's small and I like that, and I have loads of friends. And the teachers... they get you through your tests and stuff which is really good.</p> <p>Researcher: Good, so tell me more about your teachers. They get you through your tests, what do you mean about that?</p> <p>Liam: Less complicated, like something I haven't understood, they would explain it and break it down into... not break it down like... they would like... they would... I don't really know how to say it... they would help you understand stuff easier than you, like, normally would and stuff.</p> <p>Researcher: Ahh, and was that the same in primary school and secondary school?</p> <p>Liam: Yeah</p> <p>Researcher: Okay... so is there anything that's different... or anything that's maybe similar... between primary school and secondary school.</p>	<p>Liam likes both primary and secondary because they are small.</p> <p>Liam has lots of friends in both primary and secondary.</p> <p>Teachers are described as helpful regarding tests.</p> <p>Teachers in secondary school help pupils to understand learning.</p> <p>Teachers are good at explaining. Similar to primary school.</p> <p>Both primary and secondary school teachers are described as nice.</p>
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<p>Amount of homework is better than expected</p> <p>Pre- school transition anxiety about being a small fish in a big pond</p> <p>Fear of 'big people'</p> <p>Bullying</p> <p>Reality was better than expected</p>	<p>Liam: Oh, yeah, I mean, teachers are really nice... the school food's terrible... and I made... I made lots of friends and stuff.</p> <p>Researcher: And what about the work?</p> <p>Liam: Oh the work's... alright... I mean they don't set too much homework. Enough that it's, like, you'll actually like, have to challenge yourself and stuff. But not overwhelmingly... not overwhelm... not an overwhelming amount.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay, that's good. So if you think back to your move from primary school to secondary school. When you were in year 6, what did you expect secondary school to be like?</p> <p>Liam: I thought it would be like... loads of big people... and like... since I was going into year 7 I thought it was going to be, like, everybody's going to be... like... mean to you, cos, like, you're young.</p> <p>Researcher: And was it similar or different to what you expected?</p> <p>Liam: It was pretty different cos everyone was nice.</p>	<p>The food is terrible in both primary and secondary school. He had friends in both schools.</p> <p>Not too much homework in secondary school, but enough to be challenging.</p> <p>Pre school-transition worries about 'big people'</p> <p>Worried about being vulnerable due to being smaller than other pupils. Small fish in a big pond. Worried about other pupils being 'mean'.</p> <p>Everyone was nicer than expected, better than imagined reality.</p>
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<p>Independence</p> <p>Focus on academic preparation for secondary school</p>	<p>Researcher: So was there anything that you were worried about?</p> <p>Liam: Not really, no.</p> <p>Researcher: And what about anything that you were looking forward to?</p> <p>Liam: I mean I was looking forward to having to get to go to school by myself, cos, like, that was good... I like going to school by myself and stuff, that was good.</p> <p>Researcher: And how has that been?</p> <p>Liam: It's been good, not too bad. It only takes about an hour.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay... and then when you were in primary school, was there anything that helped you prepare for going to secondary school?</p> <p>Liam: Parden?</p> <p>Researcher: Was there anything that helped you prepare for going to secondary school when you were in primary school?</p>	<p>Claims not to have been worried before the school transition.</p> <p>Enjoys travelling to school independently.</p> <p>Values increased independence.</p>
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<p>SATs helped adjust to more challenging work.</p> <p>Positive perception of academic ability</p> <p>Reading means doing well</p>	<p>Liam: Umm, I mean, the SATS did because they were challenging... so... for getting ready for secondary school and stuff. And... and... reading really helps me actually. Cos I like reading, and so, I got through English pretty well. I'm still doing pretty well in English now.</p> <p>Researcher: That's good, so how did the SATS help you prepare?</p> <p>Liam: Well basically, say they were more complicated, like, we were learning more complicated stuff... it was kind of like a lead onto what you're gonna learn in secondary school.</p> <p>Researcher: Oh, I see.</p> <p>Liam: It kind of got me mentally prepared for, like, how hard it would be and stuff...</p> <p>Researcher: Oh, okay, and were there any people that helped you prepare?</p> <p>Liam: Yeah, my aunt, and the teachers, and your family can really be helpful.</p> <p>Researcher: And what did your aunt do that helped you?</p>	<p>Talks about being ready for secondary school academically</p> <p>Mentions SATs as challenging which helped him be prepared for secondary school work</p> <p>Talks positively about academic ability, doing well in English. Enjoys reading.</p> <p>Felt that SATs were more complex which prepared him for the more challenging work at secondary school.</p> <p>Secondary school work described as hard.</p> <p>Family and school staff described as helpful.</p>
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<p>Foster carer support</p> <p>Reassurance from primary teachers about managing work</p> <p>Reassurance from primary school peers</p> <p>Smaller secondary school as less intimidating</p>	<p>Liam: Umm... I mean... she helped me do my homework and stuff... she didn't give me the answers but... for me... like motivate me. And, yeah, and help me because, like, I didn't really like doing homework.</p> <p>Researcher: And what did the teachers do to help you before you moved to secondary school?</p> <p>Liam: They were telling us, like, it wasn't, like, too hard and we shouldn't be too worried about it because we were smart and we could get through it well.</p> <p>Researcher: And was there anyone else that helped you?</p> <p>Liam: Not really... I mean my friends did... because they were nice and they... we were supportive of each other saying that we would do well and stuff... and that helped.</p> <p>Researcher: Oh, that's nice, and you mentioned that you visited your secondary school in year 5, how was that? Did that help you?</p>	<p>Foster carer helped by motivating him to do his homework.</p> <p>Reassurance from primary school teachers about secondary school. Mostly about school work.</p> <p>Reassurance and moral support from friends.</p> <p>Positive primary school friendships helped with school transition.</p>
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<p>The help received was perceived as sufficient</p> <p>Fear of detentions</p> <p>Fear of strict teachers</p> <p>Fears did not become true</p>	<p>Liam: Yeah, I mean, because it was small. It made me feel not... so small. It was only like 5 forms, and yeah, so...</p> <p>Researcher: Great... and do you think there's anything else that could have been done that would have been helpful?</p> <p>Liam: Erm... not really no... cos those were really... for me... those were the only things that really helped me. But they worked really well.</p> <p>Researcher: Brilliant. And what about after you arrived in year 7, was there anything that helped you settle?</p> <p>Liam: Umm... I mean... knowing that the teachers wouldn't always give you detention if you did, like, one silly thing, they wouldn't always just give you detention and stuff... that helped me because I was scared I was going to get detention a lot.</p> <p>Researcher: So it helped you to know that they would give you a detention or they wouldn't?</p> <p>Liam: They wouldn't give as many detentions as, like, I thought.</p>	<p>The small size of the secondary school helped Liam to feel less small.</p> <p>Felt positively about the support he received for school transition.</p> <p>Worried about getting detentions.</p> <p>Reassured once he got to secondary school, detentions were less common than expected.</p>
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<p>Teachers' friendliness was helpful for settling in</p> <p>Teachers as supportive</p> <p>Homework</p>	<p>Researcher: Oh I see, and was that something you were worried about?</p> <p>Liam: Yeah.</p> <p>R: And was there anything else that helped you once you got to secondary school?</p> <p>Liam: I mean the teachers help you settle in... they were really nice and stuff. They still are nice... but... yeah.</p> <p>Researcher: What did they do to help you settle in?</p> <p>Liam: They were, um, for the first few weeks they weren't, like, giving us too much homework so that... um... so that we wouldn't be so stressed out about homework and getting detentions if we didn't do it. And, like, yeah...</p> <p>Researcher: That's really good... and did you receive any help because you are in foster care, did you receive any help that other children didn't get?</p> <p>Liam: No</p>	<p>Secondary school teachers were nice, and still are.</p> <p>Not too much homework at the beginning of secondary school to reduce stress.</p>
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<p>Additional support for being looked-after was not felt necessary.</p> <p>Seeking support</p> <p>Additional support related to individual academic ability</p> <p>LAC responsible for asking for emotional support.</p>	<p>Researcher: Do you think you should have done?</p> <p>Liam: No, I was good, I was pretty good academically.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay, and for other children who are in foster care... do you think they need any extra help when they move to secondary school or just the same as everyone else?</p> <p>Liam: I mean, it depends if they need the extra academic help. Then they should ask for it or, um, yeah, they should be supported. But if they don't... if they feel confident then they, um, they should get it if they want it or need it.</p> <p>Researcher: Yeah, that makes sense. And what about any help for things like feeling worried or making friends and things like that?</p> <p>Liam: I mean at my school we have, like, a counsellor, so if we're feeling worried about anything we can just go to her and talk about it.</p>	<p>Claims he had no additional support due to being in foster care.</p> <p>Refers to 'support' as academic support. Thinks positively about his academic ability.</p> <p><u>Appears not to consider LAC's needs as different to other pupils and therefore don't automatically need different support.</u></p> <p><u>Suggests it is LAC's responsibility to seek help if they need it.</u></p>
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<p>Positive mindset is beneficial</p> <p>The young person is responsible for finding someone to talk to.</p> <p>Motivated to do well in GCSEs</p> <p>Responsible for academic outcomes</p> <p>Responsible for behaviour</p>	<p>Researcher: Oh that's good, and then if you think about children who are in year 6 now who are thinking of moving to secondary school next year, what do you think could help them?</p> <p>Liam: I think it's just... have a good mindset and don't be too worried about anything... because... other people can help them get through it and stuff, so, yeah.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay fantastic, and is there anything that the secondary school can do that could help them?</p> <p>Liam: Again if like... I mean not again... if they need the support they should ask for it and, yeah, and if they are worried about something they should talk to someone about it.</p> <p>Researcher: Ah, okay. And... so you've been in secondary school for a few years now... so how does your secondary school feel now compared to when you started?</p> <p>Liam: I mean... I'm not really that worried... I mean I kind of am because we're nearing GCSEs and stuff and I don't really wanna get too much detentions or get sent out of the</p>	<p>Describes the importance of having a positive mindset.</p> <p>Feels that there are people are helpful.</p> <p><u>Indicates that young people are responsible for seeking the help they need themselves.</u></p>
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<p>Pupils are responsible for forming positive relationships with teachers.</p> <p>Loss of teacher relationships in school transition.</p>	<p>class because, um, because you wanna get good GCSEs... you wanna be in lessons to get that. But um... I don't really feel too bad about getting in trouble apart from missing lessons and stuff. But... more confident now. You know the teachers, they know you, like, you can get a relationships... not a relationship, like... I mean it's like a healthy relationship with the teachers, you try not to get on their bad side and stuff.</p> <p>Researcher: I was really interested in what you said earlier about going from year 6 to year 7 being like a journey where you risk things. So is there anything you think you risk when you're on that journey?</p> <p>Liam: I mean... you risk... I'm not sure actually... you could risk... I mean you can't... if you stay in touch with people you can't even risk... I don't know... I actually don't know.... I mean, it's more, like, say the relationships you've built up with teachers and that. And having to meet new teachers and new people cos you are in...yeah.</p> <p>Researcher: I really like that metaphor of the journey, and the risk, and did you think that the risk was worth it.</p>	<p>Mentions having some worried feelings about GCSEs.</p> <p>Does not want to get into trouble at school in case it impacts GCSE performance.</p> <p>Importance of being in lessons to receive teaching.</p> <p>More confident in year 8 compared to when starting secondary school.</p> <p>Suggests it's the responsibility of students to form positive relationships with teachers and 'not get on their bad side'.</p> <p><i>Hesitation: appears to have difficulties understanding and articulating what he means.</i></p> <p>Losing old teacher relationships and having to form new ones.</p> <p>Teacher relationships are another thing to 'risk' on the journey from primary to secondary school.</p>
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<p>Teachers want to help pupils</p> <p>Doing well academically is related to getting a good job.</p> <p>Impact of mindset</p>	<p>Liam: Yeah cos my teachers... any... and all teachers will try their hardest and get you through secondary school to get you good GCSEs and the job you want. So... yeah.</p> <p>Researcher: Fantastic. Those are all the questions I have, is there anything else you would like to tell me about going from primary school to secondary school.</p> <p>Liam: Only one thing actually... if you think that something's going to be hard... it's just... making it harder for yourself, so, you're probably better just thinking that it's not going to be easy, but think positively to help you cope with the stress.</p> <p>Researcher: That's good advice, is that what you would say to children in year 6?</p> <p>Liam: Yeah, that's what I would say.</p>	<p>Teachers are seen positively, appear motivated to help students do well in their GCSEs and get a good job.</p> <p>Mentions the importance of positive thinking.</p> <p>Negative thinking is more likely to lead to negative experiences.</p>
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Appendix L: Emergent Themes and Superordinate Themes (Asif)

Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes
Losing and gaining friends Odd one out	Lonely journey
Being known Revealing identity Vulnerability	Acceptance
Visiting primary school Positive memories Staying in touch	Keeping Connections
Voice of the child Lack of agency	Power and Autonomy
Virtual school Emotional support from carer Peers Form tutor	Feeling Supported
Strict teachers Fear of social exclusion Homework Detentions Helpfulness of others Getting lost	Fear and fantasies
Overwhelm Adapting to change Importance of time Academic pressure Impact of Covid-19 Responsibility	Facing New Challenges

Appendix M: Emergent Themes Condensing Example (Asif)

Initial Emergent Themes	Final Emergent Theme
Leaving primary school friends behind Losing and gaining friends Getting to know new peers New friendships Getting to know people Enjoying social aspects of secondary school	Losing and gaining friends
Independent learning Responsibility Responsible for outcomes	Responsibility
Reality better than anticipated. Overwhelming amount of tests Overwhelm Not being able to keep up Afraid of the work being too hard. Overwhelming amount of buildings	Overwhelm

Appendix N: Emergent Themes and Superordinate Themes (Liam)

Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes
Risks and Rewards Friendships Teacher Relationships Independence Aloneness	Gains and Losses
Behaviour Academic Outcomes Relationships with Teachers Seeking Support	Responsibility
Bullying Detentions Homework Strict Teachers	Fear of the Unknown
Foster Carer Academic Support Primary School Peers Teachers	Support Network

Appendix O: Relationship between Emergent Themes, Superordinate Themes and Overarching Themes.



Appendix P: Adult Information Sheet

Information Sheet: Online

An exploration of Looked After Children's lived experience of primary-secondary school transition.

Who is doing the research?

My name is Caitlin Thomas. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in my second year of studying for the professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I am carrying out this research as part of my course.

What is the aim of the research?

The research aims to find out about looked after children's experience of transitioning from primary school to secondary school. I am interested in hearing children and young people's views.

Who has given permission for this research?

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research. The Local Authority's Educational Psychology Service has also given permission for the research to go ahead.

Who can take part in this research?

I would like to interview children who are looked after and will be in 8 or 9 in the 2020-2021 academic year.

What does participation involve?

After receiving consent from the young people and their carers, I will meet each child for two sessions. Due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, it is not possible to meet with your child face-to-face in school. The sessions will therefore take place remotely, on Zoom. The first session will be a chance for the participants to meet me, find out more about the research and ask any questions. In the second session, I will ask the participant some questions about their experience, and I will also ask them to draw a picture about their experience. The second session will be audio-recorded. I will take a screen-shot of their drawing, but no identifying features related to the young person will be included.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is not much research looking at young people's experience of transition to secondary school, and even less focusing on the experiences of looked after children (LAC). This research project will be an opportunity for LAC to express their views, allowing professionals and carers to learn from their experiences when supporting LAC with transition in the future. This research will aim to be a positive and friendly experience for the young people and will give them a chance to talk about and reflect on their experience.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

Transition to secondary school can be a stressful time for young people, and can be more difficult for some children than others. It is therefore possible that talking about their experience might remind children of difficult times. The questions will be open ended to allow the young people to give as much or as little information as they feel is comfortable, and the interview will be stopped if there is any sign of distress. The children's wellbeing will always be prioritised.

What will happen to the findings from the research?

The findings will be typed up as part of my thesis which will be read by examiners and be available at the Tavistock and Portman library. I may also publish the research at a later date in a peer reviewed journal. You will have the option to read a summary of my findings or the full thesis once the analysis has been completed.

What will happen if the participants don't want to carry on with this research?

Participation in this research is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time before analysis, without giving a reason. Any research data collected before their withdrawal may still be used, unless they request that it is destroyed.

Will information about the participants taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. All records related to participation in this research study will be handled and stored securely on an encrypted drive using password protection. The identity of participants on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than by their name. The data will be kept for a maximum of 2 years. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

Are there times when my data cannot be kept confidential?

Confidentiality is subject to legal limitations or if a disclosure is made that suggests that any harm to self and/or others may occur. In this instance, the local safeguarding procedure will be followed. The small sample size (6-8 children) may also mean that the young people may recognise some examples and experiences they have shared in interviews. However, to protect their identity, pseudonyms will be used and any identifiable details changed.

Will taking part in the research affect any future involvement with the Educational Psychology Service?

No, any future involvement with the Educational Psychology service will not be affected by any aspect of this research, including whether or not you agree for your child to take part, or whether you or your child wish to withdraw at any time.

Further information and contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact me:
Caitlin Thomas
Email: cthomas@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you have any concerns about the research then you can contact Dale Bartle who works for the Tavistock and Portman research department or Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance.

dbartle@tavi-port.nhs.uk

academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix Q: Young Person Information Sheet

Information Sheet: Online

Who is doing the research?

My name is Caitlin Thomas. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I work with lots of children and young people in many different schools.



What is the aim of the research?

I would like to find out about what it was like for you as a looked after child to start secondary school.

Who has given permission for this research?

I study at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, and they have given approval for this research to take place.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for young people who are looked after and who are in year 8 or 9 in the 2020-2021 academic year. I will be speaking to 6-8 young people in total.



What will happen?

If you would like to take part in the research I will meet with you individually twice on Zoom on a computer or device. The first session is for you to find out about the research and ask me any questions. In the second sessions, I will ask you some questions about what it was like to start secondary school. You will also be able to draw a picture. You are allowed to stop at any time.

Why do I want to find out about your experience?

Starting secondary school is an exciting time for young people, but it can also feel like there are lots of new things to get used to. I would like to find out about what it was like for you, including anything that was good and difficult. This will help schools and carers support other children in the future.



What will happen after I take part?

I will meet with 6-8 young people on Zoom to find out about their views. I will then type up what I have heard to be included in my thesis (project) which will be read by examiners. I will also ask you if it is okay to keep a copy of your picture and include it in my thesis (project). I may also publish the research in a journal. This means that other professionals can read it, but your name, the name of your school and local area won't be included so they won't know it's you. You will have the option to hear about what I have found, if you would like.

What will happen if I don't want to take part?

That's absolutely fine. It's completely up to you about whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide you would like to take part and then change your mind later on, that's fine too, you can stop at any time and don't have to give a reason.

Will anyone else know what I have said?

Your name and the name of your school will be changed so no one else will know exactly what you have said. I will be asking 6-8 young people in total so although all names will be changed, some experiences might be recognised. I will explain this to you in more detail when I meet with you, and you can ask me any questions you may have. Your teachers and carers won't be told what you have said unless I think you, or someone else, might be at risk of harm. Only then will I pass on what you have said.

Thank you for reading, ☺
Caitlin Thomas.

Appendix R: Adult Consent Form

Consent Form: Online

Research Title: An exploration of Looked After Children's lived experience of primary-secondary school transition.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

Initial here:

1. I have read and understood the information sheet.	
2. I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and the young people are able to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
3. I agree for the participant's interviews to be audio recorded.	
4. I agree for the sessions with the young person to be carried out remotely on Zoom.	
5. I agree for the researcher to take a 'screen shot' of the young person's drawing. I understand that no other visual recording or photographs will be taken.	
6. I understand that all attempts will be made to anonymise participant details to avoid links to the data, although I understand that the sample size is small.	
7. I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality relating to legal duties and threat of harm to self or others.	
8. I understand that the interviews will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	
9. I understand that the findings from this research will be published in a thesis and potentially in a presentation or peer reviewed journal.	
10. I am willing for the child in my care to participate in this research.	

Your name:

Signed.....

Date...../...../.....

Researcher name: Caitlin Thomas

Signed.....

Date...../...../.....

Thank you for your help.

Appendix S: Young Person Consent Form

Young Person’s Consent Form: Online

Research Title: An exploration of Looked After Children’s lived experience of primary-secondary school transition.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

Initial here:

1. I have read the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.	
2. I understand that I can stop taking part at any time.	
3. I agree for my interviews to be audio-recorded.	
4. I agree to meet with the researcher on Zoom.	
5. I agree for my drawing to be included in the project (thesis).	
6. I understand that my name, and the name of my school, will be changed.	
7. I understand that the researcher will only pass on what I say to my carers and school if they think I am at risk of harm, or someone else might be at risk of harm.	
8. I understand that my interviews will only be used for this research and won’t be shared for any other reason.	
9. I understand that the findings from this research will be published in a thesis (project) and might also be in a presentation or journal.	
10. I am willing to participate in this research.	

Your name:

Signed.....

Date...../...../.....

Researcher name: Caitlin Thomas

Signed.....

Date...../...../.....

Thank you for your help

Appendix T: Information Leaflet for Educational Psychologists.

3) Consultation and intervention

EPs are well placed to offer consultation to systems supporting LAC where there are specific concerns about individual (or groups of) LAC regarding transition

EPs can support systems by working collaboratively to implement effective interventions to meet the specific needs of LAC at an individual or group level



Strategies

Working with professionals

- Circle of Adults¹⁰
- Solution Circles¹¹
- Motivational Interviewing¹²

Interventions for LAC

- Emotional Literacy Support Assistant programme (ELSA)¹³
- Nurture Groups¹⁴
- Circle of Friends¹⁵

SUPPORTING SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Guidance for Educational Psychologists

Based on a doctoral thesis by Caitlin Thomas

Where to find more information about recommended strategies:

- ¹ Oster, G. D., & Crone, P. G. (2004). Using drawings in assessment and therapy: A guide for mental health professionals. Psychology Press.
- ² Tuber, S. (2012). *Understanding personality through projective testing*. Jason Aronson.
- ³ Wearmouth, J. (2007). Interviewing Disaffected Students with "Talking Stones". *Kairaranga*, 8(2), 53-58.
- ⁴ Wilson, P., & Long, I. (2018). *The big book of blob trees*. Routledge.
- ⁵ Moran, H. (2001). Who do you think you are? Drawing the ideal self: a technique to explore a child's sense of self. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 6(4), 599-604.
- ⁶ Pirotta, K. I. (2016). *My ideal school: A personal construct psychology approach to understanding the school constructs of children described as anxious* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East London).
- ⁷ Parker, R., Rose, J., & Gilbert, L. (2016). Attachment aware schools: An alternative to behaviourism in supporting children's behaviour?. In *The Palgrave international handbook of alternative education* (pp. 463-483). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- ⁸ Cavanaugh, B. (2016). Trauma-informed classrooms and schools. *Beyond Behavior*, 25(2), 41-46.
- ⁹ Gottman, J. M., & DeClaire, J. (1996). *The heart of parenting: Raising an emotionally intelligent child*. New York: Simon & Schuster
- ¹⁰ Newton, Colin. (1995) Circles of Adults Educational Psychology in Practice, 11(2), pp.8-14.
- ¹¹ Brown, E., & Henderson, L. (2012). Promoting staff support in schools: Solution Circles. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 28(2), 177-186.
- ¹² Hettema, J., Steele, J., & Miller, W. R. (2005). Motivational interviewing. *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.*, 1, 91-111.
- ¹³ Osborne, C., & Burton, S. (2014). Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' views on supervision provided by educational psychologists: what EPs can learn from group supervision. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 30(2), 139-155.
- ¹⁴ Boxall, M. (2002). Nurture groups in school: Principles & practice. Sage.
- ¹⁵ Frederickson, N., Warren, L., & Turner, J. (2005). "Circle of Friends"—An Exploration of Impact Over Time. *Educational psychology in practice*, 21(3), 197-217.

What's Included?

- 1) The findings from a doctorate research project which explored LAC's experiences of primary-secondary school transition.
- 2) Suggestions for Educational Psychology practice including recommended strategies*.

*Recommended strategies depend on the individual needs of the child or system. This leaflet does not aim to provide an exhaustive list but aims to offer a useful starting point for EPs.

...
Cthomas@tavi-port.nhs.uk
...



Research Project

Title: 'You have to go on a journey'. Looked After Children's experiences of primary to secondary school transition.

Research Question: How do looked after children experience transition from primary to secondary school?

Key Features

- Two looked after children took part in the research project.
- Both participants were male, in foster care, and in years 8 and 9 respectively.
- The participants attended mainstream secondary schools within London.
- Data was collected using semi-structured interviews.
- The data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenal Analysis.
- Four overarching themes were identified, which are presented below.

Theme 1: A Journey of Risk and Reward

Both participants referred to the physical journey of travelling to a new location and getting used to new buildings, along with the emotional journey of leaving behind the familiar and entering into new and unfamiliar social groups and experiences. Both LAC shared mixed feelings about the process, which contained elements of excitement, anxiety and sadness.

Theme 2: Social Network

Social relationships were an important part of both participants' primary-secondary school transition experience. In addition to friendships, relationships with teachers, foster carers and a virtual school advisory teacher also appeared to play important roles.

Theme 3: Fantasy and Reality

Both participants described experiencing pre-transition anxiety. They appeared to have similar fears including strict teachers, too much homework and being given detentions. They also both described the reality of secondary school as better than expected.

Theme 4: Coping with Change

The participants referred to having to adapt to a variety of changes including navigating new buildings, increasing academic pressure and new social hierarchies. There appeared to be a sense of tension between the sense of excitement and the sense of overwhelm regarding the new challenges and responsibilities of secondary school.

What can EPs do?

The research project suggests that there are three main ways EPs can support the secondary school transition experiences of LAC

- 1) **Advocating for the voice of the child**
- 2) **Training**
- 3) **Consultation and intervention**

1) Advocating for the Voice of the Child

EPs can support systems working with LAC to listen to and act on LAC's voices and experiences

In some cases EPs might work directly with LAC to identify perspectives, strengths and needs.

Strategies

Projective assessment Tools:

- Kinetic school drawing¹
- Sentence completion test²
- Talking stones³
- Blob tree⁴

Personal Construct Psychology Tools:

- Ideal self⁵
- Ideal school/ classroom⁶

Examples of Training

Attachment aware schools⁷

Trauma informed practice⁸

Emotion Coaching⁹

2) Training

EPs are well placed to offer training where necessary to systems supporting LAC including virtual schools, foster carers and schools.

