LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences of School Inclusion: Exploring the Real and the Ideal

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Access Condition and Agreement

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List of Acronyms

CYP: Children and Young People

EHRC: Equality and Human Rights Commission

EP: Educational Psychologist

EDI: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EST: Ecological Systems Theory

HBT bullying: Homophobic, Biphobic or Transphobic bullying

HCPC: Health and Care Professions Council

LGBT+/LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and other sexuality/gender minority identities.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

PSED: Public Sector Equality Duty

RSE: Relationship and Sex Education

RTA: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SEN/D: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

TA: Thematic Analysis

TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

UK: United Kingdom

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

YP: Young People

Introduction and Overview

This thesis portfolio provides an overview of research exploring LGBTQ+ young people's views on real experiences and ideals around inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools. This document has been written and organised into three sections: Chapter 1: Literature Review; Chapter 2: Empirical Paper; and Chapter 3: Reflective Chapter.

Chapter 1 of this document includes a literature review that describes the history of the term 'inclusion', reflecting on the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusion, as well as the concept's limitations. Exploring *what* inclusive education represents for LGBTQ+ people, literature also highlights LGBTQ+ people's experiences of feeling included or excluded in school. Inclusive education is then reviewed through common themes found within literature, where school culture, school practices, and relationships in school are comprehensively investigated. Recommendations for practice and opportunities for future research are also identified.

Chapter 2 of this document presents an empirical paper that details a qualitative research study. This paper explores the retrospective school experiences of LGBTQ+ young people, as well as their school inclusion ideals, which is an area that has received limited attention within UK educational psychology research. Two research questions, underpinned by a critical realist philosophy and solution-oriented thinking, were proposed and answered. A purposive sample of ten 16-to-24-year-olds was sought, with the final sample containing mixed LGBTQ+ identities. Participants' views were collected using semi-structured interviews held online, and data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Eight themes and one subtheme were developed from the data, with findings highlighting

implications for educational psychology practice, and providing ideas for future research.

Chapter 3 of this document consists of a reflective chapter, whereby the researcher describes aspects of their research process. This chapter includes reflections around the design and execution of this study, with the researcher sharing details around their process of interpreting data. Focus is placed on the researcher's learning as a developing researcher, and additional considerations are provided regarding the researcher's socio-political positionality, as well as their ontological and epistemological stance. The researcher also explores the perceived strengths and limitations of the study, and ends their reflections by describing implications for practice, as well as proposed methods for research dissemination.

Literature Review

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

This thematic literature review highlights a paucity of UK educational psychology research exploring LGBTQ+ children and young people's (CYP's) experiences and ideals of LGBTQ+ school inclusion. Here, the acronym LGBTQ+ refers to people with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and other sexuality/gender minority identities.

Existing research on LGBTQ+ pupil school inclusion is predominantly found in non-educational psychology disciplines, substantiating how LGBTQ+ issues may not have previously been a priority research area within educational psychology. For example, Jones et al.'s (2019) international literature review found an absence of publications in this area, with nearly half of their conducted searches resulting in no relevant articles. Furthermore, whilst UK titles such as *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *Educational & Child Psychology* and *British Journal of Educational Psychology* have published *some* research exploring LGBTQ+ CYP school experiences, these studies are sparse and predominantly dated.

Adding to educational psychology knowledge, this thematic literature review therefore presents themes found across international inclusion literature, synthesising research findings to highlight the school experiences and ideals of LGBTQ+ people. By doing so, this review demonstrates strengths, limitations, and gaps in research, resulting in recommendations for educational psychologist (EP) practices, as well as ideas for future research.

Literature Review Structure

This review begins with a historical overview of inclusive education, describing how the term ‘inclusion’ is prominent but complex within UK educational policy. Critical discussion around the benefits of inclusive education is also presented, despite acknowledgement of the term’s conceptual ambivalence.

Looking specifically at *LGBTQ+* inclusive education, this review critically appraises educational psychology research on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, providing context around the importance of studying LGBTQ+ inclusive *and* exclusionary school practices. Acknowledging how, to date, there has been limited UK educational psychology research on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, the review expands, to include wider literature on LGBTQ+ pupils’ experiences and views on inclusion. Furthermore, the potential short-term and long-term implications of either inclusive or exclusionary school practices are investigated.

Drawing upon prominent themes within literature, this review then explores individual aspects of the school system, highlighting how socio-political factors, school cultures, practices, and relationships, either facilitate or hinder LGBTQ+ pupils’ school inclusion. Following this, recommendations for EP future practices are proposed. This review concludes with ideas for future research, with emphasis placed upon the importance of involving the UK LGBTQ+ community in innovative educational psychology school inclusion research.

Literature Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was undertaken for this review. Firstly, databases including Academic Search Complete, APA PyscARTICLES, British

Education Index, Education Index, and ERIC were selected, based on an evaluation of their credibility, currency and content.

As part of a rigorous search strategy, the research concept was divided into 'lines of enquiry' and incorporated relevant themes such as inclusion, identities, settings, and the perspectives of various school stakeholders. Umbrella terms such as 'LGBTQ+' and 'transgender' were scoped, and then expanded to incorporate related terms such as 'lesbian' and 'non-binary' in order to 'hit' relevant articles. Truncation and phrase searching were applied to the search strings where appropriate, with Boolean operators added to both combine the concepts and maximise the relevancy of results. Limiters such as 'source type' and 'date range' were applied.

As illustrated in the Finalised Search Strategy (see Appendix B), the researcher's database searches were refined to find peer-reviewed articles published in the previous five years. This strategy increased the credibility and currency of hits, but also resulted in an unmanageable quantity of articles, with 6852 hits for the researcher to review. Therefore, the database index was changed from 'keyword' to 'abstract' in order to refine the results further, which led to a more manageable 488 articles for the researcher to review. From this list of articles, the researcher was able to exclude irrelevant literature, but also able to 'backward-chain' to identify pertinent articles from authors' bibliographies, many of which were published before 2017. Overall, searches that looked specifically at UK LGBTQ+ YP school experiences of inclusion led to limited results, therefore sources specifically related to educational psychology were 'hand-searched', including the *Association of Educational Psychologists* and the *British Psychological Society*.

Studies that looked at the historical and political context of inclusive education, as well as the benefits of LGBTQ+ inclusive education, were harvested. Additionally, articles that broadly explored LGBTQ+ YP's school experiences were sought, with specific attention paid to educational psychology inclusion research. Non-educational studies, and those related to non-LGBTQ+ pupils, were excluded.

Following a later review of the researcher's search strategy, that highlighted how the terms "gender diverse" and "gender diversity" had not been included in the initial search, a new search was subsequently re-run. Whilst adding the phrase "gender divers*" hit additional articles, none of these articles were deemed applicable.

Key Terminology

In the UK, *school* refers to education that is compulsory for CYP aged between 5 and 16 years (Gov.UK, 2024). For the purposes of this review, homeschooling is not included as it lacks the same ecosystemic structure of typical school institutions and environments. Within this review, several complex concepts have been explored. To offer some conceptual clarity, key terminology such as *ideal, real, exclusion, inclusion,* and *inclusive education* are defined herein. A wider glossary of terms can be found in Appendix A.

Given the difficulties in defining theoretical terms such as 'ideal' and 'real', this study has adopted dictionary definitions that are widely accepted and offer a consensus of meaning. Here, 'ideal' is defined as "conceived or regarded as perfect or supremely excellent in its kind; answering to one's highest conception" (OED, 2022a), whilst 'real' is "having an objective existence; actually existing physically as a thing, substantial; not imaginary" (OED, 2022b).

When reviewing literature, the term ‘exclusion’ proved difficult to conceptualise, with researchers typically situating exclusion as an antonym of inclusion (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). Therefore, a definition related to education has been chosen, with Estivill (2003, p.19) describing exclusion as “processes [that place] persons, groups [and] communities [...] in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values”.

Acknowledging that ‘inclusion’ forms a complex spectrum of understandings and discourses (Price & Tayler, 2015), this study utilises Booth’s (2005) definition, describing inclusion as “an attempt to put values into action concerned with equity, participation, respect for diversity, community, rights, compassion, and sustainability”. Regarding the concept of education-related inclusion, this review applies *Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights’* definition, where ‘inclusive education’ is described as “a process that addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education” (CECHR, 2017, p.5). Given similarities in the underlying definitions of inclusion and inclusive education, these terms have been used interchangeably herein. Inclusive education as a concept will be extensively reviewed below.

Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusive education has been widely debated and influential across educational discussions and practices (Haug, 2017; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Inclusive education can be viewed diametrically, regarding practices as either inclusive or not (Haug, 2017), or as a continuum rather than an achievable goal (Schuelka, 2018; Hope & Hall, 2018). In response, Krischler et al. (2019) argue for

further culturally relevant and in-depth research, given the lack of an internationally recognised, singular, clear consensus.

Historically, UK discourses tended to limit inclusive education to pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), due to the term being rooted in SEND research (Florian, 2014). Internationally, and more recently within the UK due partly to the *Equality Act 2010*, inclusive education broadened to refer to environments that support everyone regardless of differences, through the elimination of marginalising practices (Arduin, 2015). Thomas (2013) echoes this latter interpretation, positing that inclusive educational principles should be emancipatory and form the core of education.

Inclusive Education: A Potted History

The socio-political landscape of 1960s Britain linked the term 'inclusion' to ethics regarding educational separation and exclusion of CYP with learning difficulties, following civil rights movements that demanded social equality (Thomas, 2013). In 1978, the *Warnock Report* further consolidated links between these concepts when developing policy on inclusive provision for CYP with learning difficulties, coining the term 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) (Education in England, 2012). Warnock's report influenced subsequent educational and socio-political legislation content, such as the *Education Act 1981,* by directly associating 'inclusion' with SEND (Norwich, 2019). Here, a defining feature of inclusive education became the idea that children with SEND should be educated within mainstream provision for the majority of their school day (Price & Tayler, 2015; Schuelka, 2018).

During the 1980s, other communities of learners were somewhat absent from political agendas until Section-28 of the Local Government Act 1988. Here, Section-

28 actively marginalised LGBTQ+ communities, advising Local Authorities (LAs) to *not* “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.

In 1994, UNESCO hosted an international conference in Spain, where 92 governments focused primarily on inclusive education for CYP with SEN, subsequently developing ‘Education for All’ policies (McMaster & Elliot, 2014). The resulting principles of inclusion were published as the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action 1994,* which adopted progressive views on social justice within education, stating that “inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and [...] human rights. Within [...] education, this is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring about a genuine equalization of opportunity” (UNESCO, 1994, p.11).

Here, inclusion was presented as an inspiring new pedagogy (Krischler et al., 2019) and, although focused on SEN inclusion, its overall objective was to serve *all* children (UNESCO, 1994). Salamanca’s principles had significant political impact, compelling governments to consider inclusion from ethical *and* social justice perspectives that prioritise inclusion within education systems (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006).

This ‘Education for All’ movement shifted inclusion definitions *away* from the singular context of SEN. Consequently, inclusion conceptually became a complex spectrum of understandings, discourses and concerns, reflecting themes of diversity and social justice that, in the UK, culminated with the *Equality Act 2010* (Price & Tayler, 2015).

Index for Inclusion

Meanwhile, within education, Booth & Ainscow (2002) developed the *Index for Inclusion*, a toolkit enabling school leaders to review and develop inclusive practices, policies and cultures (Schuelka, 2019; Booth, 2006). Despite difficulties in agreeing a singular definition of inclusion (Haug, 2017), the Index reflected changing socio-political values (Glazzard & Stones, 2021). Such values are observed in Booth's (2005) defining statement:

> Inclusion [...] is seen as a principled approach to education and society; an attempt to put values into action concerned with equity, participation, respect for diversity, community, rights, compassion, and sustainability. The Index supports a detailed investigation of what such values mean for the experience of education in classrooms, staff rooms, playgrounds, homes and communities.

This provided an overview of what Booth & Ainscow (2002) believed educational inclusion was, and how it could be applied throughout learning environments. The Index's second edition introduced three interconnected dimensions that formed a framework for inclusion: producing inclusive policies; evolving inclusive practices; and creating inclusive cultures (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006). Here, the Index specifically used categories of diversity by highlighting the need for inclusive practices that facilitate belonging for CYP of all sexual orientations.

The Index's third edition was adapted further, with social justice values underpinning its purpose. Here, suggestions for embedding inclusion within education were expanded, and included: viewing and treating every person as equal;

supporting belonging; increasing participation for all people in learning activities; reducing exclusionary practices; using diversity as a resource; increasing families and community collaborations; restructuring school policies, practices, systems and cultures to promote equity; and embedding local, national and societal realities within education (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Despite schools aiming to embed inclusive principles within practice, historically speaking, Thomas (2013) observes that this drive for inclusion stemmed from socio-political agendas, rather than from education-specific research. This point demonstrates the influence of wider systems on educational practices, with national initiatives guiding hegemonic changes upon multi-systemic levels, such as those hypothesised by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory*. Furthermore, in 2014, Göransson & Nilholm's comprehensive critical review of inclusive education research found four qualitatively differing definitions of inclusion:

> (a) Placement definition – inclusion as placing pupils with disabilities/in need of special support in general education classrooms
>
> (b) Specified individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of pupils with disabilities/pupils needing special support
>
> (c) General individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of all pupils
>
> (d) Community definition – inclusion as creation of communities with specific characteristics (which could vary between proposals). (p.268)

Evidently, Göransson & Nilholm (2014) illustrate the difficulty of pinpointing inclusion as a concept or an observable practice.

Wider Inclusion Policy

Examining inclusion through a political lens, in 2011, the *Public Sector Equality Duty* (PSED), which forms part of the *Equality Act 2010*, required that publicly funded English LAs adhere to certain equality duties when making decisions and considering their functions. This guidance consolidated “over 40 years of equality law into a single act” (Equality Hub & Government Equalities Office, 2024), describing how organisations should eliminate unlawful discrimination, victimisation, and harassment of people with protected characteristics. Subsequently, PSED described how education providers should publish their equality information and equality objectives, whilst also advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relationships (EHRC, 2022). The Equality and Human Rights Commission described three ways by which education providers can utilise equality duties to advance inclusion initiatives (EHRC, 2014, p.7):

- Remove or minimise disadvantages
- Take steps to meet different needs
- Encourage participation when it is disproportionately low

PSED highlighted how schools are not only duty-bound to prevent discrimination based on protected characteristics but are a key place for promoting understanding and awareness of specific social groups (Carlile, 2019). Furthermore, reviewing the *Equality Act 2010* purely from schooling perspectives, contemporaneous government guidance described how schools should mitigate

exclusionary educational practices that treat lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils less favourably (DfE, 2014).

However, the *Equality Act 2010 and Schools*, which was published to advise school leaders and LAs in 2014, appears to misalign with the PSED guidance on advancing equality of opportunity for *all* people with protected characteristics. For example, point 3.27 states that "no school, or individual teacher is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same-sex couples" (DfE, 2014, p.22), highlighting how LGBTQ+ identities are legally protected in schools, but their lifestyle choices may not be, despite legalisation of same-sex marriage in England and Wales in 2013 (Harris et al., 2021b).

Since the publication of high-profile educational policies in 2014 (e.g., *Children and Families Act* and *Equality Act 2010 and Schools*), there has been a noticeable shift in socio-political LGBTQ+ inclusion agendas, including the updated Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in 2019. The revised RSE programme specifically included the needs of LGBTQ+ pupils (Harris et al., 2021b), and placed responsibility on schools to *fully* integrate an LGBT-inclusive RSE curriculum (DfE, 2019).

However, it could be argued that whilst governmental policies intend to support the inclusion of CYP with certain characteristics, intersectional identities can be overlooked. One participant in Seelman's (2014, p.21) research described the importance of better-recognising intersectional identities, as "we don't come [to institutions] just as trans or just as bisexual". Furthermore, Bešić (2020, p.117) argues that government policies tend to group diverse people together with singular identity markers (e.g., under an 'LGBTQ+ umbrella'), which can oppress individual

differences. Bešić (2020) also highlights how the socio-political action of categorising people reinforces power and privilege imbalances, with institutions such as schools socially constructing, reinforcing, and reproducing perpetual inequality through the classification of social differences.

Crucially, what constitutes inclusive practices should be decided *with* CYP, not *for* them. In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognised ethical implications related to power imbalances between adults and CYP, with Article-12 stipulating “every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously” (UNCRC, 2019). Following Article-12, the importance of the child’s voice was embedded in numerous UK policies regarding school decision-making, including *Every Child Matters 2003*, *Children Act 2004*, and *Youth Matters 2005* (Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Although these policies indicated political aims of addressing power imbalances between adults and CYP in schools at the time, today, inequalities persist (Moffat & Field, 2020).

Despite literature showing socio-political shifts towards wider inclusion thinking, Coughlan (2015) cites former Ofsted chief Sir David Bell, who contended that political parties contrive to adopt inclusive ideologies and use inclusive rhetoric within educational policy for political gain. Subsequently, national educational policies fail to provide long-term solutions or inclusion strategies, advocating instead for vague, non-committal and aspirational political agendas (Schuelka, 2018). By examining legislative and statutory landscapes, it appears that whilst there may be a broader governmental intent to protect LGBTQ+ pupils from exclusionary school practices, LAs and school leaders are under no legal duty to advocate for the wider

inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, e.g., by supporting LGBTQ+ lifestyle choices, or by acknowledging the impact of intersectional identities. Subsequently, schools may choose non-inclusive practices that ultimately reinforce power and privilege imbalances by 'cherry-picking' point 3.27 of the *Equality Act 2010 and Schools* (2014), instead of PSED (2011) that promotes the equal advancement of opportunities for *all* pupils.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Regardless of socio-political agendas, there are arguably few drawbacks in adopting ideological and progressive stances on inclusive education (Norwich, 2014; Haug, 2017). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) calls for policies that address LGBTQ+ inclusion, citing ethical, social, and economic advantages. Furthermore, OECD states that, ethically, LGBTQ+ people are entitled to live openly and freely without fear of discrimination, and that discrimination negatively impacts economic growth. For example, LGBTQ+ discrimination may exclude talent that supports the labour market, or reduce productivity when people suffer reduced physical and mental wellbeing (OECD, 2020). McGuire et al. (2010) and Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) reinforce this viewpoint, stressing the need for school practices and policies to be inclusive given that, in non-inclusive environments, gender-diverse pupils tend to experience decreased psychological and educational outcomes. In schools, OECD (2020) claims that phobic bullying and low investment in LGBTQ+ pupils, reduces educational outcomes, again impacting the economy. Additionally, OECD suggests a social responsibility to *prioritise* LGBTQ+ inclusion, especially as inclusive

approaches that challenge restrictive gender norms can advance wider societal equalities.

Research shows that inclusive education leads to greater wellbeing and sense of belonging for CYP (Glazzard & Stones, 2019), with sense of belonging being “a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioural outcomes” (Allen et al., 2021, p.87). Goodenow & Grady (1993) argue that belonging occurs when one experiences increased feelings of respect, inclusion, and personal acceptance from others within school social environments, with Baumeister & Leary (1995) highlighting how belonging can ultimately counter negative emotions and risks of physical and mental ill-health.

Yet developing sense of belonging within school contexts is complex, and thought to be impacted by interactional systemic factors (Sobitan, 2022). Allen & Kern (2017) highlight that although the concept of sense of belonging incorporates ecological, sociological, relational and motivational theories, most research has centred on motivational theory. Allen & Kern’s Bio-Psycho-Socio-Ecological Model (BPSEM) comprehensively delineates *how* pupils achieve sense of belonging, with personal characteristics, the ongoing interactions pupils have with others, and cultural, economic and political contexts influencing belonging.

Inclusive education teaches YP about diversity and respecting difference, whilst also highlighting the potential moral and legal impact of exclusionary practices such as discrimination and prejudice (Glazzard & Stones, 2021). Furthermore, learning about ideological views through critical educational pedagogy can advance social justice agendas. Glazzard & Stones (2021) argue that such teaching can permeate wider societal systems by producing thoughtful and responsible citizens

that can create an equitable and inclusive future society. This argument is supported by long-standing views held by human rights advocates, who believe that inclusive education produces inclusive societies (EASNIE, 2018). Ultimately, Price & Tayler (2015) state that *all* CYP benefit from inclusive practices that purport to shape the adults they become.

In schools, those endeavouring to embed inclusive educational practices seek to create social change, empowering and supporting marginalised social groups by facilitating individual and collective empowerment (Glazzard & Stones, 2021). However, Arduin (2015, p.105) argues that school practices perform a social function but are also influenced by society, with societal values forming "the bedrock of an educational system". As such, both society and school indubitably influence the way in which CYP are socialised into understanding and practising inclusive values.

Limitations of Conceptualising Inclusion

Considering how society impacts wider understandings, with 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' lacking conceptual clarity (Krischler et al., 2019), these terms are often conflated with the concept of 'social inclusion'. Subsequently, 'inclusion' may be erroneously associated with ideas of overcoming social stigmas and the disadvantages of deprivation (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Consequently, positive aspects of inclusion, such as increasing respect for diversity, can be overlooked or insufficiently valued within education (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015).

Inclusive values often incorporate interactional ideologies, including principles associated with equity, justice, accessibility and participation (Haug, 2017). As such, the act of implementing ideological values is often regarded as unconvincing, with dissonance between what can be ideologically and realistically achieved (Graham &

Jahnukainen, 2011; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Despite consensus that narrow inclusion definitions limit the emancipatory scope for disenfranchised people, critics believe that widening the definition may inadvertently weaken and dilute inclusive theory and practices. For example, developing a diluted definition may lead researchers of SEND to disengage from studying SEND-specific inclusive education (Haug, 2017). Therefore, to avoid such occurrences, future researchers may benefit from establishing clear boundaries and descriptions around their definitions and studies of inclusion.

Strong associations between inclusive education and SEND have also dominated UK educational policy and practices. For example, when Norwich (2014) conducted a systematic search, instead of finding literature on inclusion and protected characteristics such as religion or belief, and sexual orientation, inclusion and SEND-related themes were three-to-15 times more prevalent. Evidently, literature exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP is typically published in European and wider international sources that apply broader definitions of inclusive education. It is therefore important to consider cultural differences when reviewing LGBTQ+ school inclusion literature, as there is reduced generalisability when findings stem from non-UK research (Leonard, 2022). Middleton (2017), however, contests that research conducted in countries such as the USA remains relevant to UK educational practices, provided the reader considers the cultural variations.

Considering the impact of inclusion, there is an imperative to explore whether inclusive practices *actually* facilitate positive change. Schuelka (2018) and Hehir et al., (2012) highlight a need for investment in inclusion research, with evidence suggesting that inclusive education may only succeed if learning incorporates long-

term goals, and if inclusive practices extend to post-school environments, such as further and higher education, or employment.

Sexuality-based Educational Psychology Research

Illustrating levels of investment in LGBTQ+ inclusion research, an educational psychology literature review conducted by Marks (2012, p.71) concluded that, despite inclusion agendas, “sexuality equality remains a low priority in education”. Reviewing wider literature also highlights how LGBTQ+ inclusion-themed educational psychology research, tends to be limited in its quantity and approach, focused predominantly on exclusion, and often gathers the views of educational professionals rather than LGBTQ+ pupils (e.g., Marks, 2012; Russell et al., 2016; Yavuz, 2016; Middleton, 2017; Court, 2019; Charlton, 2020; Moffat & Field, 2020; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b).

Much existing educational psychology or school psychology inclusion research has studied non-UK populations (e.g., Russell et al., 2016; Middleton, 2017; Day et al., 2019a; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b), resulting in limited numbers of publications that specifically study UK LGBTQ+ CYP’s school experiences (e.g., Robinson, 2010; Freedman, 2019; Leonard, 2022; McGowan et al., 2022). Jones et al. (2019, p.1797) argue that “the field of educational psychology is often absent from research on queer students”. Yet Jones et al. (2019) describe how EPs “could provide additional insight towards [...] experiences for queer students in schools”. This highlights opportunities for future educational psychology research, where LGBTQ+ CYP’s views on inclusion could be sought to address gaps in knowledge.

Despite limited educational psychology LGBTQ+ inclusion literature, Robinson’s (2010) influential UK educational psychology research sheds *some* light

on what substantiates positive school experiences for *some* LGBTQ+ pupils. The study explored experiences of 17 post-16 lesbian and gay people, with participants retrospectively considering how schools can improve LGBTQ+ inclusion. Robinson found that if schools focus on future aspirations, such as career and family, they enable lesbian and gay pupils to view themselves as equal to heterosexual peers, despite their differences. Findings also highlighted the importance of support groups and supportive school staff, which can result in CYP expressing their concerns with adults in a cathartic manner, facilitating feelings of acceptance and empowerment. Furthermore, within Robinson's findings, one participant described how seeing openly lesbian and gay staff role-models showed pupils the reality of living life as an 'out' person. Therefore, findings illustrate the importance of gaining LGBTQ+ CYP's views through inclusion research, particularly as school practices appear to affect LGBTQ+ pupils' wellbeing and development.

Robinson's (2010) research is now dated, and school practices and attitudes may have changed (Harris et al., 2021b), especially following the introduction of the 2019 LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE curriculum. Additionally, Robinson acknowledges how their research itself may be non-inclusive as it fails to include views from bisexual or other minority sexualities, with Day et al. (2019a) highlighting the importance of exploring the views of CYP with broader gender and sexuality identities through research. Therefore, future research could build upon Robinson's (2010) work by studying pupils of *all* LGBTQ+ identities.

Gender-based Educational Psychology Research

Looking more specifically at gender-based school research, recent educational psychology studies conducted by Freedman (2019), Leonard (2022),

and McGowan et al. (2022) have been instrumental in gaining views of transgender CYP regarding school experiences.

Freedman's (2019) thesis explored the experiences of four secondary school-aged transgender YP and five mothers (four of whom were parents to the school-aged participants). This research highlighted several negative themes around school experiences, finding that transgender YP face bullying and inadequate school support. Furthermore, participants cited insufficient transgender knowledge, training and experience from staff.

Conversely, Leonard's (2022) research explored the positive school experiences of three transgender YP, with findings highlighting how transgender YP could identify positive factors leading to supportive school practices. For example, through interviews, Leonard (2022) identified how whole-school approaches, use of language, individual teacher support, wider sense of community, and individual within-person factors all contribute to transgender YP's positive school experiences.

Considering *why* transgender YP may have positive or negative school experiences, educational psychology research by McGowan et al. (2022), who gathered the views of 10 transgender YP aged between 11-16 years, found that a central theme to the interpretation of experiences was the YP's sense of acceptance and validation at school. With research highlighting how transgender CYP report very different experiences within school, future research may seek to explore what factors specifically lead to the inclusion of transgender pupils.

LGBTQ+ Inclusion Research Characteristics

Whilst educational psychology literature somewhat improves our understanding of lesbian, gay and transgender CYP's school experiences, LGBTQ+ subgroup research cannot be extrapolated to the wider LGBTQ+ community. Leonard (2022) also suggests that gathering participants from a range of personality types can be challenging due to many people being recruited from LGBTQ+ youth groups, where typically, participants are more confident in communication skills, and more likely to engage in self-advocacy and activism. Furthermore, when considering the generalisability of findings, multi-disciplinary research on the positive experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP is often small-scale and, in some cases, based upon single organisations or persons (Harris et al., 2021b). Therefore, future educational psychology inclusion research may seek to gain views from people with a spectrum of identities and personality types, so that findings are more representative of the wider LGBTQ+ community.

Solution-Oriented Inclusion Research

Considering possibilities for increasing LGBTQ+ school inclusion through research, some researchers have adopted solution-oriented approaches (O'Hanlon, 1999). For example, Burke & Grosvenor (2015) utilised views of pupils gathered through a competition, where CYP's stories, poems, essays and pictures on their perceived *ideal* school were combined to create reflections and summaries called *The School I'd Like*. Although this work evidenced CYP's capacity for imagining a future ideal school environment, which included ideas around schools recognising how different identities should be treated equally, this research was not specific to LGBTQ+ populations.

Conversely, Bartholomaeus & Riggs (2017) conducted a literature search that listed whole-school ideas about what an Australian LGBTQ+ inclusive school *might* look like, by aggregating research related to transgender pupils, staff, and parents. Their research highlighted how schools can promote an inclusive ethos by using signs and posters that celebrate gender diversity, and by adopting policies and procedures that both name and respect gender diversity. Furthermore, Bartholomaeus & Riggs described how schools could incorporate gender-inclusive practices through dress codes and facilities, with individual leaders helping to embed gender-inclusive language and curriculum content. Their findings suggested that schools should provide staff with appropriate training, with pupils given active roles in inclusion initiatives. Sadowski's (2016) USA-based research also emphasises the importance of adopting inclusive approaches, with their findings highlighting the importance of LGBTQ+-friendly curricular, and a welcoming school-wide environment.

When considering the impact of solution-oriented research, Glazzard & Stones (2019) argue that focus on LGBTQ+ inclusive school ideologies allows educators to go beyond simply reacting to exclusionary practices. Furthermore, proactive approaches in schools seek to nurture and empower LGBTQ+ pupils, whilst promoting and developing inclusive attitudes in *all* CYP (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). Yet despite Bartholomew & Riggs (2017) and Sadowski (2016) providing valuable solution-oriented research on LGBTQ+ inclusive schools, their studies do not include UK LGBTQ+ populations. Bartholomaeus & Riggs acknowledge that their ideal gender-inclusive school might look different within different political climates, and therefore their findings may not fully transfer to UK contexts. Furthermore, with

Sadowski's (2016) research no longer in print, their insights are potentially lost, creating further opportunities for future research.

Researching LGBTQ+ Inclusion *and* Exclusion

Looking broadly at multi-disciplinary inclusion research, despite societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people positively shifting (Kelley, 2019), research findings continue to present a mixed picture, highlighting a need to study experiences of school inclusion *and* exclusion. For example, acknowledging that experiences vary between LGBTQ+ individuals, Formby (2015, p.636) concludes that research focused solely on negative and exclusionary school experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP, risks missing "stories of love, friendship and happiness". Yet Harris et al. (2021b) also highlights how CYP with perhaps less socially accepted identities (e.g., transgender or gender non-conforming) can experience comparatively negative experiences. Therefore, literature reminds us that exploration of positive school experiences should not negate the negative experiences shared by many (Formby, 2015).

As societal perceptions change, and research accelerates its investigation of LGBTQ+ CYP's positive school experiences (e.g., Robinson, 2010; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Formby, 2015; McGowan et al., 2022; Harris et al. 2021a; Harris et al. 2021b; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b; Leonard, 2022), this creates opportunities for future research that proactively explores inclusive practices, and the factors leading to LGBTQ+ identity affirmation within schools (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). Such future research might help UK schools to better understand what inclusion means to LGBTQ+ CYP, providing insights into what already works, as well as what more may be needed to facilitate inclusion. After all, as previously illustrated, there are few

drawbacks in investigating people's inclusive education ideologies (Norwich, 2014; Haug, 2017).

Experiences and Consequences of LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Delving into specific research exploring LGBTQ+ CYP's experiences of school inclusion, multi-disciplinary studies have highlighted positive experiences, with Harris et al. (2021b) suggesting that there may be a recent cultural shift in wider attitudes around LGBTQ+ issues. For example, researchers have found pro-gay attitudes in education, with homophobia itself condemned and stigmatised (McCormack, 2012; White et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2021b). However, Harris et al., (2021b) remind us that homophobic attitudes still exist within individuals and institutions and that, instead of being overt, are increasingly furtive to avoid being labelled as homophobic.

Studies on positive school experiences of LGBTQ+ pupils overwhelmingly highlight contributions made by staff. Harris et al. (2021a) surveyed 153 school staff, conducted six student focus groups, and nine staff interviews to establish both teacher and LGBTQ+ pupil attitudes around school cultures and climates, and found that individual staff members can significantly improve LGBTQ+ pupils' experiences. Harris et al. (2021a) found that staff achieve this through championing LGBTQ+ rights, combating prejudice, and by supporting *all* pupils to speak openly about sexuality and gender. Furthermore, school staff advocates have been associated with numerous positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ pupils, with trusted adults facilitating positive schooling experiences, feelings of safety in school, academic attainment,

and increased self-esteem (Leonard, 2022; Kosciw et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2021b; Dessel et al., 2017).

However, until recently, there has been very limited research exploring the positive experiences of transgender pupils (Leonard, 2022). Furthermore, existing research has focused heavily on deficits, revealing little about transgender CYP's resiliency and wellbeing aspirations beyond their gender identity, despite resiliency mitigating the impact of adversity (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). Jones & Hillier (2013) argue that having negative school experiences can inadvertently create positive outcomes, by building resiliency and motivation for LGBTQ+ CYP to engage in activism activities. Despite these findings, caution should be practised in applying such thinking, as these claims could unethically perpetuate the mistreatment of LGBTQ+ pupils.

Notwithstanding limited research on the positive experiences of transgender CYP, McGowan et al. (2022), who gathered the views of 10 transgender YP aged between 11-16 years, highlighted numerous factors supporting positive school experiences, including the effective provision of LGBTQ+ support groups, appropriate use of gendered language, and supportive peers and staff (McCormack, 2012; Leonard, 2022). Furthermore, Leonard (2022) who interviewed three transgender YP who shared positive school experiences, found that schools can be a place of safety and protection for transgender pupils, with zero-tolerance towards harassment, and access to information from external services (e.g., LGBTQ+ charities) being important support measures (Leonard, 2022; Freedman, 2019). Whilst these publications document LGBTQ+ CYP's positive school experiences,

these studies do not directly examine the concept of inclusion when exploring positive school experiences, which future research may seek to investigate.

Experiences and Consequences of LGBTQ+ Exclusion

This section provides only a brief snapshot of exclusionary practices and their implications, as the specific impact of school cultures, practices, and relationships on LGBTQ+ people are comprehensively explored within later review themes.

Despite the clear importance of increasing inclusive practices for LGBTQ+ CYP, a significant proportion of international literature has documented educational practices that lead to LGBTQ+ *exclusion,* including inflexible curricula and pedagogy, unsupportive leadership or policies, and inadequate staff resources and training (Schuelka, 2018). Subsequently, LGBTQ+ CYP consistently describe how UK school environments are unsupportive and hostile (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Kosciw et al., 2013), with extensive Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic (HBT) bullying leading to marginalisation and isolation (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Harris et al., 2021b).

Furthermore, with broader literature highlighting that LGBTQ+ issues are excluded and effectively invisible from school curriculums (Formby, 2013; Harris et al., 2021b), Page (2017, p.13) states that “invisibility is, in effect, invalidation”. This further corroborates research published by Bradlow et al. (2017) who, as part of the LGBTQ+ campaign charity Stonewall, found that 40% of participants had not learned *anything* about LGBTQ+ matters in school. Whilst Stonewall’s publication has been instrumental in illuminating the experiences of UK LGBTQ+ people, this work has received public criticism for methodologies used, with critics arguing that the researchers position LGBTQ+ people as victims (McCormack, 2020).

Although improvements have been documented in the life experiences of LGBTQ+ people overall (Harris et al., 2021a; Bradlow et al., 2017), exclusionary practices are still prevalent and have numerous implications. The absence of positive learning about LGBTQ+ issues can cause learning barriers for LGBTQ+ pupils (Pearson, 2020) and, therefore, it is unsurprising that LGBTQ+ CYP experience reduced wellbeing, and achieve lower levels of academic attainment when compared with non-LGBTQ+ peers (Harris et al., 2021a).

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ CYP continue to be one-and-a-half times more likely than non-LGBTQ+ peers to experience depression and anxiety, and are more likely to develop issues with substance dependency (Moffat & Field, 2020). LGBTQ+ CYP are also at greater risk of domestic violence, self-harming behaviours, suicidal ideation and attempts, and can be expected to have a reduced lifespan compared with non-LGBTQ+ peers (Moffat & Field, 2020; Harris et al., 2021b; McDermott et al., 2017).

The above findings acknowledge that exclusionary practices in schools are far-reaching and long-term, with research that positions LGBTQ+ CYP as victims potentially exacerbating ‘otherness’ thinking. This point offers opportunities for future studies, where researchers could instead empower LGBTQ+ CYP by elevating their voices and status through their involvement in inclusion research.

LGBTQ+ Identity Impacts Experiences

When looking at broader LGBTQ+ inclusion research, literature has tended to base findings on limited participant numbers from LGBTQ+ community subgroups (e.g., Robinson, 2010; Leonard, 2022). Therefore, the following section explores nuances between the experiences of people with different LGBTQ+ identities.

Meta-analyses by Gnan et al. (2019) showed that CYP identifying as sexual minorities are between two-and-three-times more at risk of suicide, with many studies highlighting greater prevalence of suicidal ideation, planning and attempts (Stone et al., 2014). Furthermore, in terms of sexual minorities, Formby (2015) presents specific accounts of negative school experiences, for example documenting how 'out' lesbian or gay pupils were asked to change their clothes for Physical Education away from other pupils, which made them feel singled out and excluded, leading them to avoid future PE lessons or even school entirely.

However, evidence suggests that minority sexualities are not equally impacted by their school experiences. For example, Gnan et al. (2019) found that of all LGBT identities, bisexual pupils reported the greatest occurrence of mental health problems. Gnan et al. proposed that this may be linked to biphobia and questioning around the authenticity of bisexual identities, as well as a lack of bisexual visibility within schools. Furthermore, having an under-represented identity in school could increase feelings of isolation and loneliness, with lack of positive role-models impacting how bisexual pupils perceive themselves as people and learners, negatively influencing aspirations, whilst also increasing risks of self-harm and suicide (Pearson, 2020; Gnan et al., 2019).

There is growing literature exploring the specific experiences of gender-diverse pupils, with increased understanding that transgender individuals constitute one of the most oppressed societal groups, experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation (McGowan et al., 2022; Seelman, 2014). Gender-diverse pupils also suffer disproportionately negative school experiences when compared with cisgendered, heterosexual or sexuality diverse peers, with them facing increased

discrimination, harassment, hate and victimisation (McBride & Schubotz, 2017; Leonard, 2022; Jamel, 2018; Haynes et al., 2017).

Transgender CYP's experiences of victimisation also correlates with mental ill-health (Hatchel et al., 2019; McGowan et al., 2022; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b), with internalisation of negative experiences leading to increased levels of anxiety, social withdrawal, and greater adoption of risky and unhealthy behaviours, such as drinking, smoking and substance misuse (McDermott et al. 2017; Leonard, 2022; Day et al., 2017). Furthermore, Bradlow et al. (2017), who explored the experiences of 594 transgender youth aged 11-19 years, found that 45% of participants had attempted suicide (McGowan et al., 2022).

Research gaining the views of transgender pupils has highlighted the exclusionary nature of school staff behaviour (McBride, 2021). For example, Leonard (2022) found that, at times, staff have accidentally or deliberately misused pupils' preferred gender pronouns. Additionally, Jones & Hillier (2013), who compared the school experiences of 'same-sex attracted' and 'trans-spectrum' CYP, found that 81.2% of trans-spectrum pupils experienced greater levels of bullying. Research highlights that when transgender pupils have reached out to staff, they have received a lack of support, inconsistent approaches that exacerbated the problem, or have felt rejected by the staff involved, despite many staff being in supportive and/or pastoral roles (Formby, 2014; Formby, 2015; Leonard, 2022; Jones & Hillier, 2013).

Transgender pupils have also shared stories where pupils have been disciplined by staff for challenging how others use their names and pronouns, which negatively compounds transgender CYP's experiences (Formby, 2015). Despite transgender CYP describing chequered experiences with staff, Jones & Hillier (2013)

found that instances of bullying increased outside of classroom settings due to minimal staff supervision. Jones & Hillier (2013) argue that increased visibility in gender differences, due to how CYP present outside of formal classroom settings, is likely to increase experiences of bullying. This study highlights how at least the *presence* of staff may provide a protective factor against bullying.

Research on transgender pupil experiences describes how many feel unsafe in communal school areas (Taylor et al., 2011), particularly when using toilets, changing rooms, or during breaks and lunchtimes (Cotton, 2014; Jones & Hillier, 2013). Consequently, many CYP choose to hide during these times or conceal their identity (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Leonard, 2022). The impact of undertaking such behaviour to avoid bullying has been acknowledged by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009), where outcomes for transgender CYP includes reduced confidence, limited engagement in extra-curricular activities, and stunted future aspirations (Leonard, 2022). Furthermore, transgender CYP experience the knock-on impact of wider life stressors associated with their identity, including discrimination from those who feel CYP are too immature to make decisions, and the perceived rejection or lack of support from family members (McGowan et al., 2022).

Despite research overwhelmingly showing how transgender pupils have negative school experiences, it is important to avoid generalisations as each person's experiences are unique and should be judged on case-by-case bases. LGBTQ+ CYP also express their identities differently, with diverse presentations, behaviours and responses leading to varied experiences, some more negative than others (Schneider, 2010; McGowan et al., 2022).

Within the LGBTQ+ population itself, individuals may avoid harassment by naturally going ‘unnoticed’ or actively self-policing their actions, which can lead to feelings of segregation (Harris et al., 2021a). Conversely, some CYP proudly embrace and express their identities, which research shows may result in negative attention, with staff even reprimanding pupils who defend themselves (Harris et al., 2021a). Gnan et al. (2019) propose that action is needed to support LGBTQ+ subgroups, making particular reference to females, bisexuals and transgender CYP.

Therefore, although these findings highlight how studying nuances between the experiences of different LGBTQ+ identities can be helpful, future research may consider whether there are any benefits of excluding specific LGBTQ+ identities from participating in school inclusion research. Harris et al. (2021b) provide justification for keeping research topics and participant populations wide, arguing that research on school cultures requires broad investigation, as:

> without a thorough and careful understanding of how to normalise being LGBT+ and ensuring this becomes part of the culture of the institution, other interventions (although helpful) are unlikely to make a significant difference to the experiences of young people who identify as LGBT+. (p.16)

When considering school cultures, research tells us that heteronormativity, homophobia and cisnormativity are pervasive in UK school cultures (Day et al., 2020; McBride, 2021). Furthermore, literature continues to evidence how schools perpetuate structural inequalities, which increases feelings of isolation and exclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Harris et al., 2021b).

Due to the prevalence of exclusionary practices within UK schools, this literature review has strived to highlight the numerous systemic, practice, and relationship-based factors that impact LGBTQ+ school inclusion. Hereafter, research will delve more deeply into the key themes that have emerged from literature. Please note, although each theme highlights predominantly exclusionary school practices, research on LGBTQ+ inclusion is incorporated to provide a balanced picture of the existing research landscape.

External Factors Influence School Systems

Today, as UK demographics evolve and diversifies, so too do school populations (Pearson, 2020). Schools are fundamental in the context of child development, given the amount of time spent there (Day et al., 2020), and with research demonstrating that individual development is intrinsically linked to wider social, political, and legal networks, it is important to consider how institutions and people construct and culturally respond to LGBTQ+ issues (Leonard, 2022; Formby, 2015).

To help understand the impact that socio-political and legislative systems have on the inclusiveness of school systems, we can apply Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, whilst wider socio-politics impact school systems on microsystemic, mesosystemic, ecosystemic, macrosystemic and chronosystemic levels, when looking at the exosystemic level in particular, research highlights how robust educational policies can be developed, with clear provision for LGBTQ+ pupils psychologically positioning schools as safe inclusive spaces (Russell et al., 2016).

Considering the politics behind educational policies, policymakers at governmental and organisational levels are regarded as instrumental in establishing clear inclusive frameworks for practice (Abbott et al., 2015). More broadly, in UK society, policies that support LGBTQ+ communities have improved substantially, especially when considering the extent to which government created and maintained hostile legislation during the 1980s and 1990s (Harris et al., 2021b). In particular, societal fears around the spread of HIV and AIDS amongst the population led to stigmatisation, culminating in the introduction of Section-28 which significantly impacted educational policy and practice (Harris et al., 2021b). Due to Section-28, ambiguity around what was allowed to be discussed within schools led to teachers' silence on issues concerning sexuality (White et al., 2018).

The educational policy landscape positively shifted for LGBTQ+ people following the *Equality Act 2010*, with schools now "legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to promote equality of opportunity and protect individuals from discrimination" (Harris et al., 2021b, p.2). Furthermore, a shift in governmental mindset was evident following legalisation of same-sex marriage in England and Wales from 2013 (Harris et al., 2021b). However, despite 'sexual orientation' being one of the Act's protected characteristics, this form of identity receives disproportionate questioning around its legitimacy, with policy development continuing to divide policymakers and communities (Moffat & Field, 2020).

Harris et al. (2021b) argue that although school policies have generally improved to facilitate inclusive practices, this is not true for all CYP. Illustrating this point, the DfE (2023) published draft non-statutory guidance for consultation regarding how teachers support 'gender questioning children', with this draft

guidance having notable implications for gender-diverse CYP. Here, the DfE took a ‘parent first approach’ when drafting guidance, whereby schools should involve parents in decisions affecting their children. This guidance is based upon five principles that schools should adhere to if gender-diverse pupils seek to socially transition in school:

1. Safeguard and promote the welfare of *all* children;
2. For schools to be respectful and tolerant places where bullying is never tolerated;
3. Parents should not be excluded from decisions [...] relating to requests for a child to ‘socially transition’;
4. Schools [...] have specific legal duties that are framed by a child’s biological sex; and,
5. There is no general duty to allow a child to ‘social transition’. (p.6)

On a socio-political level, Brand (2023) highlights how this guidance has received mixed reviews publicly, with some generally welcoming it and others vehemently disagreeing. Those who disagree may view this guidance as exclusionary due to its perceived hostility towards transgender people and questioning on whether transgenderism exists (Brand, 2023). A significant criticism is its controversial approaches to ‘supporting gender questioning’ CYP, with critics noting a shift in the political landscape where the term ‘trans’ has been removed. Although this guidance is non-statutory, there is a belief that many schools will be guided by it, with the language used and advice given having implications for school practices (Brand, 2023).

Furthermore, the impact of a societal subgroup known as Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) also has the potential to impact the school system, with TERFs questioning around the biological sex of persons at birth and their stated gender identity, further excluding gender-diverse CYP. For example, Harris et al. (2021b), who conducted a focus group and interviews with teachers and a pupil to explore school experiences in six secondary schools, demonstrated how wider societal mindsets can impact upon CYP's lived experiences. Harris et al. (2021b) found that gender-critical voices who actively challenge transgender ideologies, and propose policy changes under the *Gender Recognition Act 2004*, can gradually impact the LGBTQ+ inclusivity of school systems.

Overall, educational policies highlight the impact of wider socio-political and legislative systems on school inclusion, with school cultures and climates being directly impacted by wider systems over time. Although LGBTQ+ CYP have potentially experienced increased levels of inclusion since the *Equality Act 2010*, future research may seek to gain a more holistic understanding of how wider socio-political factors filter into everyday practices of UK schools.

Considering *how* wider systemic factors impact LGBTQ+ school inclusion, school cultures and climates are reviewed herein. Payne & Smith (2013) describe how school culture differs from school climate, with 'culture' referring to the beliefs and values of an organisation and the people within it, and 'climate' describing how these beliefs and values manifest through interactions between individuals and environments. Ultimately, school climate determines the inclusivity of educational practices and pupils' experiences (Harris et al., 2021a), with both culture and climate

influenced by multiple interactional systems, and schools mirroring wider cultural and societal changes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leonard, 2022).

School Cultures

Harris et al. (2021a), who gained the views of teachers and LGBT pupils through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, found that school cultures continue to function as heteronormative and cisgendered spaces, with leaders failing to question the exclusionary nature of their cultural norms to maintain the status quo.

Furthermore, a literature review by Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b), which explored the experiences of 11-to-16-year-old gender-diverse YP, discovered that high school cultures lead to both affirming and negative experiences for gender-diverse YP. Their review found themes around cisnormativity, transphobia, identity, language, and relationships, and suggested how schools can adopt inclusive practices for gender-diverse pupils, including by schools providing training for educators, and by providing practices and policies that respect individual rights. Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) also argue that schools must consider the whole-school cultural impact of their policies and practices, especially the impact that systemic processes can have on gender-diverse CYP's wellbeing.

School Climates

School climates can act as protective environments for LGBTQ+ pupils, with an inclusive school ethos permeating the "fabric of school life" (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b; Moffat & Field, 2020, p.103). Climates can be improved in numerous ways, with studies highlighting how inclusion can be facilitated by all pupils learning how to develop respectful relationships, by schools providing LGBTQ+ support groups, and

by schools providing physically, emotionally and socially safe environments (Cohen et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2021a).

Despite some schools actively attempting to create inclusive climates for LGBTQ+ pupils, many CYP continue to face unsupportive and exclusionary environments (Bradlow et al., 2017). Lee's (2020) literature review, which argues that LGBT teachers may make exceptional school leaders, highlights how schools maintain 'traditional' values that continue to segregate pupils and staff through the application of cisgendered and heteronormative practices, such as by using rigid binary gender titles, including Mr., Miss, or Mrs. Furthermore, Lee (2020, p.1) argues that "schools remain woefully behind the majority of other workplaces when it comes to LGBT inclusion", with schools heavily impacted by external systems such as conservative rule, parental attitudes, and wider motives around academic standards.

School Practices

Heteronormative and Cisnormative Traditions

Literature documents how schools perpetuate structural inequalities, thus upholding the heteronormativity that unwittingly increases feelings of isolation and exclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Harris et al., 2021b). Although the *Equality Act 2010* prohibits discrimination on the grounds of 'sexual orientation' or 'gender reassignment', schools and local authorities have freedom to determine provision for themselves, with no legal requirement of providing LGBTQ+ inclusive facilities and/or spaces (Allen-Bidell & Bond, 2022; Leonard, 2022). Harris et al. (2021b) found that few schools incorporate inclusive spaces, with many staff unaware of their inclusive social support and provision responsibilities, even when written into policies. The consequences of this

for LGBTQ+ pupils are significant, given that the continuation of non-inclusive practices, such as gendered spaces, leads them to experience social isolation (Harris et al., 2021b).

Furthermore, McGowan et al. (2022) found that, in many instances, teachers still segregate male or female pupils in certain classes by imposing, for example, gendered seating arrangements. Additionally, cisnormative practices are perpetuated through gender-specific uniforms and dress codes (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b), leading transgender, non-binary and/or gender-neutral pupils to feel isolated and excluded. This point highlights how future research may wish to explore what truly facilitates the inclusion of gender-diverse CYP, given that 'traditional' current school practices remain exclusionary. With McGowan et al. (2022) and Seelman (2014) describing how gender-diverse people continue to be significantly oppressed within UK society, Glazzard & Stones (2021) argue that schools can be proactive by changing their traditions to advance social justice agendas that permeate wider societal systems.

LGBTQ+ Facilities and Resources

Considering the use of LGBTQ+ inclusive facilities and resources, Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022a) conducted semi-structured interviews with UK educational psychologists (EPs), who shared experiences of working with and supporting autistic gender-diverse CYP. Here, EPs highlighted how staff attitudes around use of facilities in schools can significantly improve LGBTQ+ inclusion. For example, one of Allen-Biddell & Bond's (2022a) participants described how a Head of Year approached LGBTQ+ needs sensitively, taking time to consider the appropriateness of toilet access and changing room options.

Yet Leonard's (2022) research with transgender CYP describes how participants were offered access to facilities designed for disabled pupils so that they did not have to choose a gendered toilet to use. Despite schools' efforts to create provision, LGBTQ+ pupils' use of facilities 'meant for someone else' has been deemed by some researchers as inappropriate and damaging to self-esteem (Leonard, 2022). Furthermore, research exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ pupils who continue to use gendered facilities, demonstrates how these practices negatively expose them as 'different' (McGowan et al., 2022) illustrating difficulties schools face in attempting to be LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Lancashire County Council (2014) highlight that, in terms of school provision and access, toilets for transgender CYP is a sensitive issue, as individuals *should* be able to choose their preferred facility, but there are often wider concerns linked to increased risks of bullying in school. Leonard (2022) suggests that it may be best to discuss options with each pupil individually, using their preferences in future, especially as, for many, school toilets and changing rooms are dangerous spaces where there is potential for victimisation and harassment (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Murchison, 2019; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b).

LGBTQ+ Support Groups

Many schools attempt to facilitate inclusion by creating groups that offer LGBTQ+ pupils information and support (Leonard, 2022). Literature typically presents such groups as wholly positive, with schools commended for their proactive engagement with LGBTQ+ issues and supporting pupils' sense of belonging (Harris et al., 2021a; Leonard, 2022).

However, Harris et al. (2021b) found that association with an LGBTQ+ group led to stigmatisation and threats of CYP being ‘outed’ in school, especially as some meeting spaces had windows overlooked by general pupil populations. Therefore, some LGBTQ+ pupils may choose to avoid such support groups through fear of being labelled or tormented for being ‘different’ (Harris et al., 2021a). Furthermore, even when viewed positively, support groups can exclude and isolate LGBTQ+ pupils who are not yet ‘out’ regarding their identities (Harris et al., 2021a). At a school-wide level, the creation of such groups can be regarded as counterproductive to wider inclusion ideologies, with ‘extra-curricular’ LGBTQ+ support reinforcing heteronormative and cisgendered school cultures (Harris et al., 2021a).

The above literature highlights how schools remain somewhat ‘traditional’ spaces, where practices, facilities and resources are predominantly gender binary. Although some schools provide LGBTQ+ groups, literature presents a mixed picture regarding whether the provisions support or hinder inclusion. Therefore, future research may seek to gain LGBTQ+ CYP’s opinions concerning which provisions ultimately facilitate inclusion.

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Curriculum

Page (2017, p.13), describes school curricular as “dialogic, a metaconversation between society and schools, among educators, between social classes, among political viewpoints”. However, LGBTQ+ experiences are rarely reflected within the UK curriculum, which sustains heterosexuality as the ‘norm’ (Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021b). Donovan et al. (2023, p.3) describe a ‘hidden curriculum’, whereby “schools play a pivotal role in reproducing and reinforcing a cis-heteronormative set of norms about gender and sexuality [...] through school rules,

culture, and practices". This hidden curriculum starts with early education through gendered materials, teacher attitudes and expectations based upon stereotypes, and through peer interactions (Culhane & Bazeley, 2019). With socio-political agendas using education to create labour forces of the future, this heteronormative curriculum has "profound implications [on how] students come to understand their place in the world, their value, and their roles" (Donovan et al., 2023, p.3).

Wider literature extensively supports this view, demonstrating how curricula design privileges certain societal groups and types of knowledge that reinforce structural inequalities (Hope & Hall, 2018). Harris et al. (2021b) argue that school curriculum and policy can intensify feelings of difference, forcing CYP to conceal their identity, which leads to cognitive and social isolation.

Furthermore, research gaining CYP views shows disconnect between teaching ideologies and realities. Harris et al. (2021b) found that, although many teachers feel they include LGBTQ+ examples within their teaching, pupils fail to notice. Despite this, implications for lacking LGBTQ+ representation across the curriculum are wide-ranging, with Harris et al. (2021b) highlighting that failure to make learning inclusive leads LGBTQ+ CYP to remain ignorant of matters directly related to identity. LGBTQ+ CYP are also under-exposed to positive role-models, and they remain unaware of factors relating to positive and safe sexual relationships (Harris et al., 2021b). Additionally, non-LGBTQ+ pupils fail to learn about the LGBTQ+ community, potentially impacting their societal and world views (Harris et al., 2021b).

Relationship and Sex Education (RSE)

Notable examples of how UK schools perpetuate gender and sexuality inequalities are observed in literature examining the RSE curriculum. Historically, sex education has been regarded as controversial and, therefore, RSE was developed cautiously due partially to traditional attitudes that RSE may corrupt 'childhood innocence' (Moffat & Field, 2020; Moran, 2001b). Such thinking led UK school discourses to position CYP as "asexual, heterosexual, and vulnerable" (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, cited in Marks, 2012, p.72), with the legacy of Section-28 leading teachers to avoid discussing LGBTQ+ issues (Carlile, 2019; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2016). However, educational policy discourse became more LGBTQ+ inclusive when the *Equality Act 2010* declared that state-funded schools have a 'public duty' to promote knowledge and understanding around protected characteristics (Harris et al., 2021b; Carlile, 2019). Since 2010, government-funded programmes have attempted to tackle HBT bullying in schools through Ofsted releasing guidance requiring that LGBTQ+ inclusion is delivered across educational settings (Carlile, 2019).

In RSE, the DfE (2019, p.15) stated that "LGBT families and identities must be taught in a manner that is 'fully integrated into their programme of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a stand-alone unit or lesson'". Formby & Donovan's (2020) study, which conducted surveys, CYP focus groups, and pupil and teacher interviews, looked at how LGBT-inclusive RSE could be supported through innovative youthwork. Through their work, Formby & Donovan devised a rationale for LGBTQ+ inclusive education, which includes supporting pupil mental health, addressing concerns around intimate relationships and sex, and addressing sexual

health issues. However, research conducted by Abbott et al. (2015), where eight teachers from English secondary schools were interviewed about RSE provision, concluded that real LGBTQ+ inclusion is hard to achieve. Despite government initiatives for whole-school approaches at integrating fully inclusive practices, many pupils still experience substantially heteronormative RSE with one-off sessions on LGBTQ+ issues, counter to DfE guidance (Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021b; DfE, 2019). Abbott et al. (2015) argue that some teachers even semantically position LGBTQ+ practices away from the classroom, leaving LGBTQ+ pupils 'in the dark' on important topics.

Determining what constitutes inclusion in RSE is difficult, as LGBTQ+ pupils have diverse needs (Abbott et al., 2015). However, Harris et al. (2022, p.315), who explored views of 14-18-year-old YP in rural America, found that "attention to student voice can reveal the distinct educational needs of certain groups". Regardless, Abbott et al. (2015) argue that RSE continues to prioritise heterosexual identity and practices, despite inclusion agendas.

Primary School Curriculum

A leading concern for LGBTQ+ activists regarding the inclusivity of RSE is that DfE made learning about LGBTQ+ sex education non-statutory for primary schools (DfE, 2019; Stonewall, 2019; Harris et al., 2021b; Formby & Donovan, 2020). The implication here is that school leaders are given autonomy on *how* to incorporate inclusive practices, and that policy recommendations can effectively be dismissed (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Abbott et al., 2015). Furthermore, numerous studies recognise that teachers lack confidence in lesson planning LGBTQ+ content and that primary schools need further support to promote and celebrate LGBTQ+

relationships (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Harris et al., 2021b; Carlile, 2019; Lee, 2020).

The promotion of LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE has presented numerous controversies since its introduction, especially regarding tensions between LGBTQ+ identities and religions or faiths. Certain schools serving faith communities have gained media attention since the RSE policy's introduction, with a case example being parents protesting outside Birmingham primary schools during 2018-2019, petitioning against LGBTQ+ inclusive education for their children (Carlile, 2019; Lee, 2020).

Traditionally, religious doctrine has opposed same-sex relationships and transgender identities (Allen et al., 2014; Carlile, 2019), with research demonstrating that some pupils may hold conservatively religious values similar to their parents/guardians, which impacts how they view LGBTQ+ identities (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Carlile, 2019). Since the introduction of RSE, faith schools have been able to release their own guidance on inclusion, with the DfE delaying publication of faith-based school guidance to avoid political censure (Carlile, 2019). This potentially fails to serve LGBTQ+ pupils in faith schools, who may already struggle to find solace when there is disconnect between their religion and sexuality and/or gender identity. When reviewing religious and faith-based reactions to inclusive education, however, one must remain mindful that not all people belonging to faiths or religions are anti-LGBTQ+ inclusion, as "progressive attitudes towards LGBT inclusivity are found in all streams of society" (Moffat & Field, 2020, p.107).

Harris et al.'s (2021a) retrospective study on school experiences found that many LGBTQ+ pupils had received effective integrated LGBTQ+ content as part of

A-level learning, with many wishing they had received the same experiences at previous key stages. Therefore, critically reflecting on how participants in this study considered the scope of their school inclusion experiences, future research may choose to take a similar approach, gaining LGBTQ+ YP's views once they have traversed the UK schooling system.

LGBTQ+ Representation

In terms of LGBTQ+ representation, Hope & Hall (2018, p.1204) state that teaching and learning in UK schools privileges "some histories, values and ways of 'seeing the world' [...] whilst others stay invisible". Furthermore, when Pearson (2020) surveyed 2003 teaching staff on diversity and inclusion in their schools, findings indicated that over half of participants felt that LGBTQ+ and non-binary groups were not included or represented in teaching topics, resources and materials, with minority gender and sexuality groups receiving the least attention of all protected characteristics. Additionally, 80% of participants believed more could be done, especially as pupils reportedly feel included when their identities are present in what they read and learn about, suggesting that representation can have "significant implications for [pupils'] mental health and wellbeing" (Pearson, 2020, p.11). With research highlighting how 25% of teaching staff were concerned for the mental health of LGBTQ+ pupils (Pearson, 2020), more could be done to authentically embed LGBTQ+ and non-binary experiences, people, and communities, within school teachings and environments.

Apple & Au (2009, p.991) claim that the application of inclusive critical pedagogies in schools allows us to "see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed", so that schools can act as emancipatory allies of marginalised

groups, rather than oppressors (Earl, 2014; Hope & Hall, 2018). According to Cho (2013, p.127) “emancipatory education is essential not only to empower people, but also for them to become subjects of their world”. Atkinson (2021) reinforces this notion, describing how proactively embedding sexualities pedagogy is essential practice under school equality/statutory duties (e.g., *Equality Act 2010)*, with the invisibility of sexual minority groups potentially interpreted by pupils as sanctioned homophobia through institutional silencing (Atkinson, 2021). Conversely, Pearson (2020) considers the positive contributions equal representation can bring, with diverse representation adding to the overall health and happiness of schools.

Literature continues to evidence dissonance between inclusive school ethos and practical application of inclusive pedagogies. For example, Formby (2015) found that some schools blocked access to websites designed to support LGBTQ+ wellbeing, such as ‘Schools OUT’, with staff regarding resources as contentious. Furthermore, Moffat & Field (2020) highlight that staff can believe they are adequately representing LGBTQ+ inclusion by delivering lessons on homophobia, which Formby (2015) argues further casts LGBTQ+ people into the role of victim. Yet the damaging consequences of teachers’ ineffectiveness at adopting inclusive educational practices could be mitigated through schools having access to resources that promote the study of LGBTQ+ relationships (Page, 2017; Moffat & Field, 2020). Therefore, the above findings highlight how school curricular, which may lack LGBTQ+ representation, potentially reinforces gender and sexuality inequalities, which future research could explore so that the wider impacts of this on LGBTQ+ YP’s sense of inclusion are better documented.

Language and Discourse

Inclusive education discourses continue in many countries (Hope & Hall, 2018), with language both influencing and being influenced by social and political agendas until wider transformative ideologies become embedded in school contexts (Day et al., 2020). Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) recognise that language is key in LGBTQ+ educational inclusion, especially when research illustrates how pupils' voices can be silenced or ignored by peers and/or staff. Wyrick (2021) presents a more positive angle, citing extensive literature that documents how inclusive language supports gender-diverse CYP to feel accepted.

To highlight the impact of inclusive language, an ethnographic study conducted by Atkinson (2021) compared the outcomes of schools who do, or do not, embed Moffat's (2014) 'No-Outsiders' programme. Findings were that schools who embed the programme incorporate LGBTQ+ inclusive discourses, whilst schools who do not embed the programme demonstrated zero or limited LGBTQ+ related discourses, which their pupils interpreted as disapproval of LGBTQ+ issues (Atkinson, 2021). Formby & Donovan (2020) argue that when LGBTQ+ issues *are* referenced within schools, it is often within the singular context of RSE, or instances where transgender pupils are silenced through use of gender-specific language, or where same-sex relationships are negatively associated with sexual activity and sexually transmitted infections.

Although there is limited research on the positive school experiences of transgender CYP, international studies highlight the benefits of utilising language to create safe and nurturing school spaces for transgender pupils (Leonard, 2022). Gender-neutral language and respectful use of pupils' chosen names and/or

pronouns has been found to help gender-diverse pupils feel supported, protected, validated, and accepted (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). However, Abbott et al. (2015) claim that some teachers prevent LGBTQ+ educational inclusion through their choice of discourse, with discursive narratives subtly perpetuating inequalities. For example, 'gender identity' is *not* protected by the *Equality Act 2010*, which has implications for transgender CYP as use of gender binary language in schools reinforces power imbalances (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Pearson (2020) also highlight how teachers may approach LGBTQ+ inclusive discourse differently, with findings illustrating that younger secondary school staff may be more at ease discussing LGBTQ+ definitions than older primary school teachers.

Recent findings demonstrate the significant impact that gender-diverse inclusive language has upon transgender pupils, with participants in Leonard's (2022) study describing how staff use of chosen names conveys respect. Furthermore, Evans & Rawlings (2021), who interviewed three transgender YP, identified that the appropriate use of pronouns might be the single most positive and significant action schools can adopt. Additionally, Turban et al. (2017) found that having one's preferred name officially recorded is consistently recommended by transgender pupils, with Leonard (2022) stating that language-use appears as a persistent and central theme in positive school experience research. Despite some schools' efforts, facilitating inclusion through use of language is challenging given that people experience discourses differently. Formby (2015) also notes this, describing how addressing homophobic language in schools can be difficult since language use can be perceived differently between individuals. Future research might therefore gain deeper understanding of what LGBTQ+ inclusive language

means to individual LGBTQ+ CYP as, “until educational institutions and their communities acknowledge, deconstruct and address the unequal power relationships reinforced by the ‘heterosexual us homosexual them’ binary […] the ‘other’ will continue to be othered” (Ferfolja, 2007, p.160).

Relationships

Relationships with Staff

Relationships between staff and LGBTQ+ pupils are believed to significantly affect CYP’s sense of inclusion. According to Abbott et al. (2015), for teachers to promote inclusion, teacher training and workshops on LGBTQ+ issues, including on the appropriate use of terminologies and sexuality resources, may be required. Despite many LGBTQ+ pupils expressing that inclusive education is improving in schools, generally, Harris et al. (2021a) found that schools vary their approaches, with CYP indicating that many staff seem disinterested in supporting LGBTQ+ pupils. Leonard (2022) highlights how relationships with staff particularly impacts transgender pupil experiences, finding that many staff feel ill-equipped in managing transgender-related issues. Yet Ullman’s (2017) Australian research, which surveyed 704 gender-diverse and same-sex attracted teenagers, found that teachers who are positive of gender-diversity can act as a protective factor against mental ill-health for gender-diverse YP.

The impact of staff and LGBTQ+ pupil relationships has been well-documented in European research, with LGBTQ+ pupils claiming that the most damaging experience of homophobia is that coming from teachers (Formby, 2013; Formby, 2015). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ pupils have commonly expressed feeling ostracised by negative experiences with anti-LGBTQ+ staff (Harris et al., 2021a),

which Jones & Hillier (2013) support with findings that suggest LGBTQ+ pupils feel most rejected by school chaplains.

LGBTQ+ Role-Models

Lee (2020) argues that in order to flourish educationally, pupils need talented and diverse role-models who reflect the society in which they live. Leonard (2022) found that having openly-LGBTQ+ staff in schools can provide support for LGBTQ+ pupils, with their shared understanding facilitating inclusive environments. Furthermore, Moffat & Field (2020) argue that being taught by openly-LGBTQ+ staff increases *all* pupils' understanding of difference, with pupils reporting an increased inclusive and accepting classroom culture as a result. Despite acknowledged benefits of having LGBTQ+ staff, Carlile (2019), who studied teachers who deliver LGBTQ+ inclusive education across English primary schools serving faith communities, found that teachers often experience disappointment in schools' lack of school-wide LGBTQ+ inclusion work. Furthermore, due to the legacy of Section-28, many LGBTQ+ staff still fear the negative consequences of being openly LGBTQ+ at work, with Lee (2021) concluding that equality policies do not always help staff to feel safe. Consequently, many teachers hide their identity, which prevents LGBTQ+ pupils from experiencing potential positive role-models within school environments (Harris et al., 2021a).

Peer Relationships

Peer acceptance and friendship helps LGBTQ+ pupils to 'survive' school, protecting their sense of belonging, and preventing them from feeling disconnected and isolated (Freedman, 2019; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). Positive gay-straight alliances within school can also protect LGBTQ+ pupils from victimisation (Day et al.,

2020), foster a supportive and safe school climate (Glazzard & Stones, 2021), and be transformative and affirming for pupils with LGBTQ+ identities (Leonard, 2019; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b)

Yet Bradlow et al.'s (2017) research reviewing the experiences of 3700 LGBTQ+ CYP highlighted how 50% of participants experienced peer bullying in school, with transgender and gender non-conforming pupils citing higher levels of victimisation compared with sexual minority peers. Furthermore, national surveys exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ YP in UK and USA schools have highlighted how derogatory language, including slurs such as 'gay', 'you're so gay', and 'that's so gay' can be frequently heard between peers in school environments, causing many LGBTQ+ CYP distress, even if these slurs are not aimed at them (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2021). Given that HBT peer bullying leads to marginalisation and isolation (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Harris et al., 2021b), literature describes how schools must manage peer relationships through effective anti-bullying policies.

Managing Peer Bullying Through Policy

Policies developed to prevent bullying have received notable scrutiny, with Gnan et al. (2019) finding that early interventions supporting LGBTQ+ positive outcomes can be achieved by schools enforcing anti-bullying policies. Yet Formby (2015) contended that HBT anti-bullying policy is favoured by the UK government as it detracts from wider focus on how the maintenance of heteronormative practices prevent full LGBTQ+ educational inclusion in schools (Carlile, 2019). Formby (2015) further argued that with discourses portraying LGBTQ+ people as victims, staff overlook important factors that might instead facilitate increased mental health and wellbeing as they narrowly focus on bullying.

Furthermore, Formby (2015) observed a disconnect between policy and practice, purporting that focus on HBT bullying reduces teacher confidence in actively including LGBTQ+ identities within the curriculum. As a result of 'black-or-white' schooling, which reinforces notions of 'right-or-wrong' and teachers as authoritarians, rather than addressing homophobia, classroom conversations are often silenced as part of a zero-tolerance approach that, ultimately, perpetuates and maintains heteronormative values (Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021a).

Conversely, Day et al. (2020) challenge the view that anti-bullying policies have negative consequences, sharing Kosciw et al.'s (2013) findings of strong positive correlations between LGBTQ+ self-esteem and comprehensive anti-bullying policies in schools. Furthermore, Kosciw et al. emphasised the positive contributions of anti-bullying policy, where HBT anti-bullying policies highlight how schools affirm LGBTQ+ identities.

Kosciw et al. (2013) argued the importance of schools having their own gender identity policies, with Leonard (2022) finding that transgender CYP who attend schools with such policies experience the least gender-related discrimination. Given how literature documents the importance of supportive relationships for pupils, future research could seek to better understand the impact of staff and peer relationships on LGBTQ+ CYP's school inclusion.

Recommendations for EP Practice

Numerous recommendations for EP practice are proposed following a review of literature. For example, in the UK and as members of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), EPs have social and ethical duties of care to "promote and protect the interests of service users" (HCPC, 2016, p.5). This includes LGBTQ+

pupils, who form a non-trivial percentage of school populations (Jones et al., 2019). Furthermore, EPs adhere to legislation and policy that embeds inclusive thinking (e.g., *Children and Families Act, 2014; SEND Code of Practice, 2015*), including the equality of opportunity for *all* learners (e.g., *Equality Act 2010; Equality Act and Schools 2014;* UNESCO, 1994). Therefore, by attempting to understand LGBTQ+ CYP's views in order to protect and promote their interests, this literature review helps to positively inform future EP practices.

Linking back to key literature review themes, various factors impacting LGBTQ+ CYP's school inclusion could be considered in future practices. For example, EPs could be mindful of the impact of school cultures, climates, and policies on LGBTQ+ CYP. Furthermore, EPs could consider specific school practices, such as school traditions, facilities, resources, support provisions, curriculum content, and access to LGBTQ+ representation, paying close attention to the use of language across the school. EPs could also help schools to foster inclusive staff and peer relationships, being mindful that access to role-models is important for pupils. EPs can therefore embed literature review findings within their thinking, by working with and advising school individuals, groups and systems on how to facilitate LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion.

EPs can support staff education, awareness and school-level training on identity issues (Leonard, 2022; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Marks, 2012; Moffat & Field, 2020), thus enhancing LGBTQ+ pupils' wellbeing through advocacy, problem-solving, and giving CYP a voice (McGowan et al., 2022; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b; Fraser-Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, EPs can support schools and Local Authorities to develop relevant best-practice (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b; Leonard,

2022), with EPs uniquely positioned to share up-to-date evidence-informed practices that positively support LGBTQ+ pupils on individual, school and/or societal levels.

Leonard (2022) highlights the importance for EPs to continue exploring their own competencies around supporting *all* CYP, with Jones et al. (2019) proposing that the field of educational psychology can better understand diverse identities and improve outcomes by becoming culturally responsive. EPs can address issues pertaining to LGBTQ+ pupils' academic experiences, applying psychological, systemic and interactionist knowledge, and exploring school environments and values to enable LGBTQ+ CYP to thrive (Moffat & Field, 2020; McGowan et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019).

Considering how "youth are not a static population, but a population that is constantly changing" (Greteman, 2015, p.429), recommendations for practice also include an ongoing commitment to the production of current educational psychology research. Jones et al. (2019) believe that educational psychology research can build upon current understandings, empirically informing educational practices.

Future Research Opportunities

Given that professional perspectives are often prioritised within literature (e.g., Marks, 2012; Russell et al. 2016; Yavuz, 2016; Bowskill, 2017; Court, 2019; Charlton, 2020), future research would benefit from seeking YP's views on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, particularly as "attention to student voice can reveal the distinct educational needs of certain groups" (Harris et al., 2022, p.315).

Prior research has also tended to be limited in its quantity and approach, and predominantly focused on exclusionary school practices (Schuelka, 2018). Yet Haug

(2017) and Norwich (2014) highlight how there are few drawbacks in exploring inclusion ideologies. Therefore, there are opportunities for research that focuses on what facilitates LGBTQ+ inclusive school practices. Drawing upon ambitious solution-oriented approaches, such as those used by Sadowski (2016) and Bartholomaeus & Riggs (2017), future researchers may increase knowledge on the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, which when applied to practice, allows educators to go beyond simply reacting to exclusionary practices (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

Plugging gaps in knowledge, ambitious research that explores LGBTQ+ school inclusion ideologies, such as that undertaken by Sadowski (2016) and Bartholomaeus & Riggs (2017), could be applied to UK-based LGBTQ+ YP populations. It is worth considering that whilst studies exploring the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school provide new insights, without also investigating real school experiences, researchers may miss opportunities to better understand similarities or dichotomies between YP's aspirations, and existing school contexts. Furthermore, Formby (2015) highlights how research that only focuses on the positives can neglect the negative testimonies shared by many. Therefore, future research could explore LGBTQ+ YP's real experiences as well as their LGBTQ+ inclusion ideals, so that new knowledge is formed on what already works to facilitate inclusion, as well as what more may be needed.

Since existing research tends to focus on subgroups of the LGBTQ+ community, such as lesbians and gay men (e.g., Robinson, 2010), gay men and bisexual men (e.g., Harris et al., 2021a), or transgender people (e.g., Leonard, 2022), future research could examine similarities and differences in the experiences and perspectives of the wider LGBTQ+ community, so that schools can better

understand how to support as many LGBTQ+ pupils as possible. Harris et al. (2021b) argue how it is important for researchers to keep participant populations and research topics wide if we are to learn more about school cultures.

Lastly, with literature highlighting how school cultures influence LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of school inclusion, future research may seek to explore wider systemic factors impacting on schools and their ability to facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion, with Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) highlighting how schools must consider their cultural impact on LGBTQ+ YP's wellbeing.

Conclusion

This thematic literature review highlights how LGBTQ+ inclusive education is considered to have many long-term benefits, such as reduced likelihood of school-based victimisation and mental ill-health, less engagement in substance abuse and sexually risky behaviours, and raised awareness for *all* pupils regarding gender and sexuality identities (Gower et al., 2018; Proulx et al., 2019; Day et al., 2019a; DfE, 2019). Furthermore, research indicates that an LGBTQ+ inclusive school has capacity to champion a range of experiences, abilities, and backgrounds in a thoughtful way that teaches about respect, equal opportunity and acceptance (Pearson, 2020; DfE, 2019; Moffat & Field, 2020).

Yet this review highlights how, to date, UK research exploring the concept of school inclusion has not fully utilised views of LGBTQ+ people, meaning that their views as 'experts by experience' have not always been heard. The 1989 UNCRC Article-12 argues that CYP have the right to express their views, with these views being taken seriously. Therefore, this review highlights how what constitutes

LGBTQ+ inclusive school practices should be decided *with* LGBTQ+ people, not *for* them, by involving LGBTQ+ people in matters that affect them.

Additionally, although certain publications have been helpful in providing schools with practical strategies for embedding inclusive practice, literature continues to indicate trends of UK schools failing to embed inclusive educational practices. Subsequently, this literature review highlights a need for nuanced future educational psychology research, where LGBTQ+ people can share insights related to their experiences and inclusion ideologies, so that increased knowledge on what facilitates LGBTQ+ school inclusion can be applied to future UK schools.

Poignantly, Bartholomaeus & Riggs (2017, p.363) argue that “thinking ambitiously about what inclusive schools may look like offers a counter to the current discussions, which are often negative […] and offers a positive way of looking at what might be possible”. Further emphasising the benefits that nuanced LGBTQ+ inclusion research can bring, Day et al. (2019a, p.427) suggest a need for researchers to better understand “what policies and practices are most effective for creating safer and more supportive school climates for all youth”.

Empirical Paper

LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences of School Inclusion: Exploring the Real and the Ideal

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Abstract

Previous research highlights the benefits of inclusive practices in UK schools. This research explores LGBTQ+ young people's experiences and ideals of LGBTQ+ school inclusion. Research incorporated a critical realist philosophy, and a Big Q Methodology. Using semi-structured interviews, ten 16-to-24-year-old LGBTQ+ young people were asked to share their real school experiences, as well as ideas around the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school. Two research questions were proposed and answered, with data analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Findings highlighted how schools can heed the advice of LGBTQ+ young people as 'experts by experience', with participants providing practical and aspirational suggestions for facilitating school inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils. Overall, findings highlighted how schools are predominantly heteronormative due, in part, to influences from wider socio-political systems and attitudes. However, LGBTQ+ young people described ways that schools can still facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion, including by doing more to support peer relations, by schools considering the impact of gendered practices, and by schools exploring ways to improve the RSE curriculum, so that it is inclusive of all genders and sexualities. Furthermore, schools can increase LGBTQ+ representation across school systems, with LGBTQ+ young people explaining how schools could draw upon the inclusive values of individuals in positions of power within school. Findings illustrated that *if* schools develop practices in these main areas, schools will more closely align with the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, facilitating greater levels of LGBTQ+ inclusion that has positive implications on the development and wellbeing of *all* young people.

Chapter 2: Empirical Paper

Introduction

The concepts of inclusion and inclusive education have been both widely debated and influential across discussions and practices in education (Haug, 2017; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Despite complexities in defining inclusion (Krischler et al., 2019), literature highlights how inclusive education has ethical, social and economic advantages, increasing pupils' sense of belonging and wellbeing (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). Glazzard & Stones (2021) further highlight how inclusive pedagogy encourages critical thinking, advances social justice agendas, and leads to an increasingly equitable and inclusive society.

However, literature observes how the school inclusion of LGBTQ+ pupils can be impacted by numerous factors, including school cultures, climates, traditions, facilities, resources, support provisions, language, curriculum content, quality of LGBTQ+ representation, relationships, and anti-bullying policies. Furthermore, schools are heavily impacted by external factors such as conservative rule, parental attitudes, and wider ideologies around attaining prescribed academic standards (Lee, 2020). Subsequently, LGBTQ+ people have described their school environments as exclusionary, unsupportive and hostile (Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Kosciw et al., 2013).

In terms of school cultures, Lee (2020) highlights how schools maintain 'traditional' values, for example, by segregating pupils through gender-binary practices. Considering use of facilities and resources, for LGBTQ+ pupils, school toilets and changing rooms are dangerous spaces where there is potential for victimisation and harassment (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Murchison, 2019; Allen-Biddell &

Bond, 2022b). Lancashire County Council (2014) highlight how deciding toilet options for transgender CYP is a particularly sensitive topic. With Leonard's (2022) research on transgender CYP describing how participants were offered facilities designed instead for disabled pupils, toilet options are often viewed as inappropriate, and damaging to self-esteem (Leonard, 2022). Consequently, gender-diverse pupils may choose to conceal their identity (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Leonard, 2022).

Many schools attempt to facilitate inclusion by creating support groups for LGBTQ+ pupils, and literature typically presents such groups as positive (Harris et al., 2021a; Leonard, 2022). Yet other research has highlighted how association with an LGBTQ+ group can lead to stigmatisation and threats of being 'outed' in school (Harris et al., 2021b), with Harris et al. (2021a) arguing that the 'extra-curricular' nature of such groups also further reinforces notions of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

When considering use of language across school, gender-neutral language has been found to help gender-diverse pupils to feel supported, protected, validated, and accepted (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). Despite these findings, literature highlights how schools continue to use gender binary language that reinforces power imbalances (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Leonard, 2022).

Furthermore, research indicates that LGBTQ+ experiences are rarely reflected within the UK curriculum, which perpetuates heterosexuality as the 'norm' (Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021b). When LGBTQ+ issues *are* mentioned within the curriculum, it is typically within the context of RSE, where negative associations are made between sexual activity and sexually transmitted infections (Formby & Donovan, 2020). Additionally, with many arguing that LGBTQ+ issues are effectively

invisible from school curriculums (Formby, 2013; Bradlow et al., 2017), Page (2017, p.13) states that “invisibility is, in effect, invalidation”. This corroborates research published by LGBTQ+ campaign charity, Stonewall, who found that 40% of participants had learned *nothing* about LGBTQ+ matters in school (Bradlow et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2021b).

Considering the impact that LGBTQ+ representation, and positive relationships can have on LGBTQ+ CYP’s school experiences, Lee (2020) argues that, to flourish educationally, pupils need talented and diverse role models who reflect the diverse society in which they live. However, many LGBTQ+ staff fear negative consequences of being ‘out’, resulting in identity concealment that prevents pupils from experiencing positive LGBTQ+ role models (Harris et al., 2021a). Conversely, although literature highlights how individual staff can significantly improve LGBTQ+ pupils’ experiences (Harris et al., 2021a; Leonard, 2022), much research describes how LGBTQ+ pupils commonly feel ostracised by negative experiences with anti-LGBTQ+ staff (Harris et al., 2021a).

Looking at peer relationships, Bradlow et al.’s (2017) British survey research on the school experiences of 3700 LGBTQ+ CYP highlighted how 50% of CYP experienced peer bullying in school, with transgender and gender non-conforming pupils citing higher levels of victimisation compared with sexual minority peers. Furthermore, with derogatory phobic language being commonly used by peers in schools, many LGBTQ+ CYP experience distress (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2021). Whilst Kosciw et al. (2013) highlight that schools can support LGBTQ+ CYP through anti-bullying policy, Formby (2015) observes disconnect between policy and practice, with focus on HBT bullying, and reinforced notions of ‘right-or-wrong’,

often silencing LGBTQ+ identities through a zero-tolerance approach (Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021a).

Research highlights how schools are fundamental in child development (Day et al., 2019b), yet literature illustrates that LGBTQ+ CYP are one-and-a-half times more likely than non-LGBTQ+ peers to experience depression and anxiety (Moffat & Field, 2020). Moreover, LGBTQ+ people are at greater risk of self-harming behaviours, suicidal ideation and attempts; and can expect to have reduced lifespan compared with non-LGBTQ+ peers (Moffat & Field, 2020; Harris et al., 2021b; McDermott et al. 2017). It is unsurprising, therefore, that LGBTQ+ pupils achieve comparatively lower levels of academic attainment compared with non-LGBTQ+ peers (Harris et al., 2021a).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that minority sexualities and gender-diverse YP are not *equally* impacted by their school experiences. For example, literature suggests that transgender individuals constitute one of the most oppressed and marginalised groups in society (McGowan et al., 2022; Seelman, 2014).

Harris et al. (2021b) note positive shifts in societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues. Similarly, some studies related to LGBTQ+ people have recorded positive school experiences, with participants recalling relative improvements (Harris et al., 2021a; Bradlow et al., 2017). Notably, McGowan et al. (2022) cited positive testimonies from transgender pupils, where provision was tailored through effective support networks, appropriate use of gendered language, and supportive peers and staff members (McCormack, 2012; Leonard, 2022). Arguably, schools may become havens for transgender pupils, offering zero-tolerance towards harassment and access to external support services (Leonard, 2022; Freedman, 2019).

However, it is important to stress that literature continues to document predominantly negative school experiences for LGBTQ+ pupils, where discriminatory attitudes have become more furtive, yet homophobia continues to exist (Harris et al., 2021b).

Research Rationale

Given the emotional, social, ethical, and economic advantages of LGBTQ+ school inclusion for LGBTQ+ people, and the drawbacks of exclusionary practices, there is compelling rationale for a study that seeks to understand how schools can facilitate LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion. This necessitates a crafted research approach, with Day et al. (2019a, p.427) arguing for “research that provide[s] a more nuanced understanding of what policies and practices are most effective for creating safer and more supportive school climates for all youth”. With studies highlighting how school cultures and practices influence LGBTQ+ YPs’ experiences of inclusion, it is hoped that an ambitious and solution-oriented study of the school system will identify key areas that educational professionals can focus on to make schools more LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Whilst some researchers have focused on the ideal school, e.g., Sadowski (2016) and Bartholomaeus & Riggs (2017), these studies are international and may not be relatable to the UK educational system. Furthermore, Sadowski’s (2016) work is no longer in-print and, as such, their insights are potentially lost. Therefore, prior research has not fully taken advantage of the ideas of UK LGBTQ+ YP.

Determining gaps in research knowledge has helped to establish opportunities for this study. For instance, whilst the researcher acknowledges that some literature has highlighted practical strategies for embedding inclusive practices

across the school system, limited educational psychology research has been conducted on LGBTQ+ YP's views of inclusion, which has implications for those working to support pupils within UK schools. This suggests a need for increased research within this area, so that the views of LGBTQ+ YP can inform wider school practices.

Key educational psychology researchers have tended to study LGBTQ+ community subgroups (e.g., Robinson, 2010; Harris et al., 2021a; Leonard, 2022), rather than the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, which may limit the scope to which their findings can be applied. Therefore, this study seeks to encompass *all* LGBTQ+ identities, so that similarities and differences in perspectives on inclusion can be understood and synthesised into future school practices, potentially supporting *all* LGBTQ+ pupils.

Considering the wider literature, research has typically focused on educational *deficiencies* linked to LGBTQ+ *exclusion*, and limited inquiry to what is *realistic* and *pragmatic* in terms of school improvements. Arguably, therefore, an under-explored dimension to LGBTQ+ inclusion exists, whereby aspirational approaches that draw upon solution-oriented thinking (O'Hanlon, 1999) are limited. This study therefore adopts an innovative approach, where LGBTQ+ YP's *ideal* LGBTQ+ inclusive school is considered.

By investigating YP's real experiences of school practices, as well as their ideal inclusive school, this study hopes to demonstrate similarities and differences between these two dimensions. In doing so, nuances between LGBTQ+ YP's experiences and ideologies can be better understood. In taking this approach, this study therefore hopes to provide recommendations for practice that allow

educational professionals to go beyond *reacting* to exclusionary practices (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

Most importantly, perhaps, a key rationale for this study is that of gaining the views of LGBTQ+ YP. A review of prior inclusion literature indicates that the views of YP are often *not* sought, with many studies privileging the opinions of professionals instead (e.g., Marks, 2012; Page, 2017; Lee, 2020). Booth & Ainscow (2011) suggest that gaining *all* stakeholder views is imperative, especially as school attendees hold the key to what an inclusive school could be. By embracing the concept "nothing about us without us" (Frawley & O'Shea, 2020, p.419), this study therefore acknowledges the importance of gaining LGBTQ+ YP's views, as the researcher believes that *all* people should be able to inform practices that directly affect them.

Research Aims

In response to the rationale outlined above, this study aims to answer two research questions. One research question explores participants' views on the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, whilst the other question explores LGBTQ+ YP's real experiences of existing school systems. By answering these two research questions, it is hoped that this study will address identified gaps in research knowledge.

Recognising that some stakeholders' views are often privileged over others, a second aim of this study is that of harnessing the views and experiences of LGBTQ+ YP as experts by experience. By adopting a qualitative methodology that allows for rich data production (Robson & McCartan, 2016), the researcher hopes to discover LGBTQ+ YP's perspectives on both obstacles to school inclusion, as well as solutions for facilitating LGBTQ+ inclusion. The intent to explore solutions is supported by Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017, p.363), who claim that "thinking

ambitiously about what inclusive schools may look like […] offers a positive way of looking at what might be possible".

Thirdly, and by drawing together the previous two aims, the researcher hopes to positively shape future inclusive school practices by sharing the insightful views and ideas of LGBTQ+ YP.

Research Questions

Two research questions underpinned by a critical realist philosophy and solution-oriented thinking were proposed:

Question One: What are LGBTQ+ young people's real experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion in school?

Question Two: What are LGBTQ+ young people's views on what makes an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school?

Further justification for developing these research questions has been explored within the 'philosophical positioning' section below.

Methodology

Philosophical Positioning

This study embedded a 'critical realist' scientific philosophy, offering an ontological and epistemological stance that fundamentally aligned with research questions and aims.

First theorised by Bhaskar in the 1970s, critical realism offered an alternative to constructivism and positivism, with Bhaskar (1998) suggesting that positivistic research promotes an 'epistemic fallacy' and regards knowledge as value free, which

is reductionist and limits ‘reality’ to what can be empirically tested (Fletcher, 2017; Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021; Scotland, 2012). Constructionism, conversely, views reality as entirely constructed through human discourse and knowledge. As an alternative, critical realism offers a more complex philosophy, describing how, like a positivist approach, a real world exists, but researching reality can never be ‘value free’ due to researchers’ motivations being subjective and therefore shaping the course of scientific inquiry (Scotland, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, much like constructionism, critical realism embraces the notion of subjective experiences around this reality, but argues instead that reality is theory-laden, rather than theory-determined (Fletcher, 2017; Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021; Scotland, 2012).

Therefore, within this study, a critical realism philosophy has been chosen as it sits between positivist and constructionist philosophies, drawing upon their perceived strengths (Willig, 2008). The overarching philosophy of critical realism is that a real world exists, irrespective of our knowledge of it, but our understanding of this world is relative and impacted by how each person construes, reflects upon, and describes it (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Pilgrim, 2020).

Overall, critical realism is primarily concerned with ontology, e.g., the theory of *being*, rather than epistemology, e.g., the theory and study of *knowledge* (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Al-Saadi, 2014). Buch-Hansen & Nesterova (2021) highlight how critical ontology is anti-reductionist and holistic, considering the interactional roles of culture, structures and agency, and the multitude of impacts these factors have on people. Astutely, Morgan (2016) observes that we must

understand the nature of reality before we can claim to gain any helpful knowledge from it.

Within this study, critical realism asks ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions that stem from *ontological realism,* which is the concept that humans are embedded in a pre-existing physical reality (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021). Critical realism seeks to understand individual participant realities before explaining *epistemological relativism*, which describes how subjective knowledge on reality is gained through reflective discussion about experiences (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021; Scotland, 2012; Pilgrim, 2020). Furthermore, critical realism is committed to the concept of *judgement rationality*, which stipulates that those who convey their views of the world do so through rational choosing between multiple theories, highlighting how not all theories about reality are viewed equally (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020).

Critical realism offers a theoretical framework that seeks to explain social situations by better understanding ‘real level’ underlying causal mechanisms that impact all levels of reality (Fletcher, 2017; Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021). With critical realism explaining how “the social world consists of open systems, in which any number of occurrences and events can overlap and interact” (Fletcher, 2017, p.185), this research aims to provide “an account of what is happening in key social mechanisms and processes” (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014, p.22) across school environments.

Utilising a critical realist philosophy therefore allowed for exploration of objective and subjective ‘truths’, with LGBTQ+ YP providing insights into their real experiences, their subjective responses, and their subjective views around the ideal

LGBTQ+ inclusive school. It is here that the study's primary goals reside, as the researcher believes strongly that research that utilises critical realism philosophy can offer an emancipatory function (Scotland, 2012).

Scotland (2012) explains how the critical realist paradigm can also address social marginalisation by judging reality against how it 'ought to be', with Fletcher (2017, p.181) emphasising how critical realism allows researchers to "explain social events", so that they can recommend ways to address social problems. An additional feature of critical realism is the function of 'backcasting', which this study has embraced. Buch-Hansen & Nesterova (2021, p.6) describe backcasting as "looking at the present from the vantage point of some desired future", which itself acts as an emancipatory function. Therefore, backcasting highlights opportunities for schools to achieve preferred futures, as well as identifying potential obstacles (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021). Overall, Scotland (2012) argues that within research inquiry, "finding out is the means, [whereas] change is the underlying aim" (Scotland, 2012, p.13). The researcher therefore feels that a critical realist backcasting approach will help to facilitate both 'finding out' and creating 'change' through this research.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of utilising a critical realist philosophy within research, it has perceived limitations. For example, critical realists acknowledge that knowledge can be fallible and incomplete, with researchers observing only a small aspect of existence that looks at experiential 'tendencies', rather than 'laws' (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021; Danermark et al., 2002).

Furthermore, Braun & Clarke (2022, p.170) argue that as researchers are "part of the world they want to understand; they cannot stand outside of the human and social reality they are observing through their research". However, by

acknowledging this perceived limitation, researchers can reflexively approach all aspects of the research process and avoid claims about objective truths, as “the absolute truth is nowhere to be found” (Panhwar et al., 2017, p.253), and therefore “no-one [can] directly and infallibly read reality as it is” (Buch-Hansen & Nielson (2020, p.148).

Furthermore, Scotland (2012, p.14) argues that emancipation cannot be guaranteed, with some individuals experiencing no positive changes following research participation. However, to counter this argument, other researchers highlight how “scientific efforts [that orientate] towards the common good”, can help to better society (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021, p.8; Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020).

Lastly, when considering the pragmatic application of critical realism, some researchers argue that the philosophy has a “serious lack” of specific and appealing data collection methods and materials, due to being a very broad methodological concept (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014, p.45; Fletcher, 2017). Despite these perceived drawbacks, Fletcher (2017) recognises the flexibility that a critical realist methodology offers as a flexible approach for studying ‘reality’.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In utilising thinking around Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory model (1979) alongside a critical realist philosophy, this study allowed theoretical exploration of systemic influences on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, including factors present at the individual, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systemic levels.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Ecological Systems Theory (EST) provides a systemic structure that helps researchers to consider the positioning of multiple factors potentially impacting upon an individual.

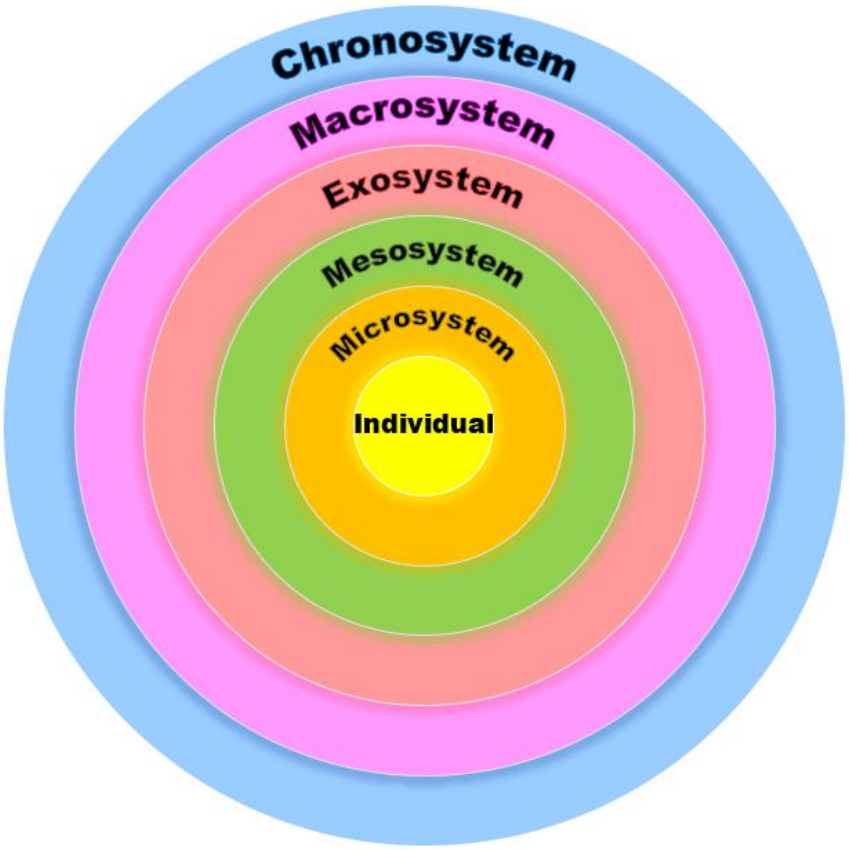

Figure 1:

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory

As such, considering YP's comments through a multi-systemic lens helped the researcher to further utilise solution-oriented thinking, whereby YP could actively reflect on how school and wider systems can interact together to support LGBTQ+ pupils' sense of inclusion. According to Rees (2017, p.217), the incorporation of

systems thinking serves to “open the worker’s eyes to the patterns and features that are common within and between good practices”.

Solution-oriented thinking (e.g., De Shazer, 1985; O’Hanlon, 1999) guided the researcher’s thinking around *how* inclusion could be facilitated within schools. Solution-oriented thinking acknowledges the presence of ‘problems’, whilst also considering ‘what works’ within a current context. Furthermore, as a theory, it offers future-oriented thinking that explores personal constructs of ‘preferred futures’. Harker et al. (2017, p.168) state that the purpose of solution-oriented thinking is “to arrive at a shared understanding of the future without the problem”, with ‘preferred futures’ co-constructed with stakeholders to establish *what* already makes a difference, so that additional ideas can be developed to promote positive change. This study therefore conceptually embedded both systems and solution-oriented thinking. By psychologically orientating research in this way, the researcher felt that LGBTQ+ school inclusion could be investigated thoroughly, resulting in findings that would comprehensively inform future school inclusion practices.

Research Design

Participants

A purposive sample of LGBTQ+ people aged between 16-25 years was sought to provide retrospection of their experiences at schools, as well as their hopes for an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school. Fraser-Smith et al. (2021, p.68) posit that research exploring the reflective views of older YP provides “rich information on pupil perspectives across both primary and secondary [school] settings”.

Participants were sought through promotional material disseminated by gatekeepers working within further education settings and/or LGBTQ+-specific

organisations (see Appendix D). Promotional material outlined the research aims and directed participants to an online ‘participant information sheet and consent form’ (see Appendix E), whereby people could opt-in to the research. To ensure research transparency, this consent form outlined the study, and included information on rights to withdraw.

Ten participants aged between 16-24 years formed the final participant group. The researcher felt they reached a data point of sufficient 'information power’ (Malterud et al., 2015) once comprehensive qualitative data had been gained from a group of participants with wide-ranging LGBTQ+ identities. The final sample contained a mixture of people with LGBTQ+ and sometimes intersectional identities, including: transgender males; a gender queer person; a non-binary person; lesbian females; a gay male; a bisexual male, an aroace transgender male; and a sexuality questioning female. Despite an aim to recruit participants representing as many aspects of the LGBTQ+ community as possible, the final sample did not, for example, successfully recruit anyone identifying as transgender female. The study exclusion criteria included participants who were *fully* home-schooled, as it was felt that their experiences would affect their ability to comment on experiences of a typical school environment.

Qualitative Research Methodology

This study has adopted Big Q Methodology. As such, it is fully faithful to the qualitative paradigm (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). First theorised by US feminist psychologists Kidder & Fine (1987), Big Q Methodology offers a research approach that is both grounded within the qualitative paradigm and utilises qualitative techniques and tools (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For example, semi-structured

interviews were used to gather qualitative information, which Buch-Hansen & Nielsen (2020) argue is a common method of data collection for critical realists. Furthermore, Braun & Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) has been utilised to analyse data.

Although Wiltshire & Ronkainen (2021) describe the characteristics of the qualitative paradigm as hard to define, Robson (2011) highlights the strengths of a qualitative methodology, arguing that it can be flexibly applied to both constructionist and realist research methods. The researcher therefore felt that a qualitative methodology was ideal for a study exploring LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of inclusion, with Silverman (2021) highlighting that such methodologies are commonly used to understand human experiences. Furthermore, the researcher viewed Big Q Methodology as aligning appropriately with a critical realist philosophy, whereby participants' subjective views and insights could help to bring about social equity by informing future school inclusion practices. Buch-Hansen & Nesterova (2021, p.8) further highlight how qualitative methodologies can support social justice agendas, arguing that "scientific efforts" create in-depth social critique that can lead to emancipatory transformations.

Data Collection

Willig (2022) argues that 'good' research involves choosing an appropriate method of data collection. However, various qualitative data collection methods exist that offer insight into social phenomena (Silverman, 2021). As such, during the initial stages of research, methods including focus group interviews or individual semi-structured interviews were considered. Whilst Robson & McCartan (2016) posit that focus groups facilitate collection of a range of data from several participants

simultaneously, a perceived drawback of this approach is that participant confidentiality is less feasible. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, the researcher chose to prioritise anonymity, and therefore regarded individual semi-structured interviews as an appropriate method for data collection. A further perceived advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow people to express personal views and insights, whereby individual understandings of reality can be explored and mediated through investigation of language and culture (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Participants were offered the option of participating in either face-to-face or virtual interviews, with all ten preferring to speak virtually. Braun & Clarke (2013) highlight how virtual interviews offer a convenient and accessible data collection method that helps participants to feel empowered when discussing topics from a perceived distance. However, it should be noted that virtual interviews may have made the study inaccessible for YP experiencing digital poverty, with the researcher also acknowledging the drawbacks of gathering data remotely as some non-verbal communication may be lost (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Participants received a copy of the semi-structured interview schedule (without prompts or probing questions) prior to interview (see Appendix F). To increase the authenticity of views gathered, the schedule consisted of open-ended and broad questions that focused on answering the defined research questions. Open questioning meant that participants could freely express themselves, increasing the likelihood of natural and free-flowing conversation that was both interviewer and interviewee led (Silverman, 2022).

Within interview question one, participants were asked to convey what ‘inclusion’ means to them, so that they could intellectually position themselves early within the process. This action also ensured that the researcher's own knowledge and views on inclusion were less imposing during the knowledge generation process. The researcher hoped that this process would put meaning-making power within the control of the participants, as Kokozos & Gonzalenz, (2020, p.160) highlight that participants should define “for themselves their vision of an affirming, supportive, and liberated school, [with researchers] working in solidarity with them to realize that ideal”.

Following interview question one, the researcher chose to begin with questions around participants’ ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, rather than by beginning with exploration of their real school experiences (see Appendix F). This was purposeful as the researcher considered that beginning with real experiences might limit participant thinking to what is pragmatic and realistic, rather than what is optimal in terms of LGBTQ+ school inclusion. Therefore, by focusing first on ideals, the researcher hoped that participants would be unlimited in their thinking, with their insights translating into new ambitious ideas for increasing LGBTQ+ inclusive school practices.

Whilst the researcher felt that the method of interviews was appropriate for gathering rich, illuminating and accessible data on a sensitive research topic (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2013), some methodological drawbacks were acknowledged, particularly the time-consuming nature of interviews. Within this study, interviews were relatively lengthy, ranging from 45 to 104 minutes, with a mean length of 73 minutes. Although this meant that transcribing, coding and

analysing data would take time, overall, the researcher viewed interview length positively as it suggested that participants felt invested in the research process.

Silverman (2021) argues that interviews narrowly ask participants to apply a singular meaning to complex experiences, and that such data collection methods require researchers to adopt an open and critical mind during analysis. To counter this point, Buch-Hansen & Nielsen (2020) suggest that a critical realist interviewer is more active within the research process and does not view all shared opinions as equally representing reality. Due to this understanding, the researcher commonly applied curiosity and further questioning when responding to interviewee comments, gathering more explicit and in-depth knowledge about specific situations or events, rather than reinforcing the notion of a singular meaning to experiences.

Method of Analysis

During the initial stages of research development, once research questions had been theorised, the researcher explored appropriate methods for collecting and analysing data. At this point, data analysis processes were shortlisted, e.g., Narrative Research, Thematic Analysis (TA) or, specifically, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA).

Initially, narrative research approaches were considered as they offer the opportunity to delve deeply into the life stories of LGBTQ+ YP by gathering multiple forms of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Whilst narrative research approaches allow us to explore people's past experiences within a socio-cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ntinda, 2020), typically, these approaches orientate towards the past, with people finding meaning by trying to make sense of their previous experiences (Ntinda, 2020). However, this approach did not complement the researcher's wider objective of exploring participants' future-oriented ideologies and

would not appropriately answer research question two. Furthermore, whilst this approach seems relevant to research question one, that explores lived experiences, narrative inquiry is based within the social constructivism paradigm, which posits that there is no singular 'truth' to be found (Ntinda, 2020). Given the researcher's critical realism positioning, and research question one's focus on 'real' experiences, other forms of research approaches were considered.

TA was viewed by the researcher as an appropriate method for answering *both* research questions. Within this study, TA was chosen as it allowed the researcher to generate robust insights from multiple YP about both their real experiences *and* potential future solutions for improving school inclusion practices. Variations of TA are the most widely adopted methods for interpreting qualitative information within research, perhaps because TA offers robust and accessible interpretations of data patterns that are crucial to knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Linking to the study's aims, TA fits with a critical realist philosophy *and* the exploration of LGBTQ+ inclusion, as it asks questions relating to "people's experiences, views and perceptions and the construction of meaning" (Gibson et al., 2021, p.1715). Although some researchers regard TA as lacking a predetermined paradigmatic base, this feature of TA can also be regarded as a strength as it offers theoretical flexibility, allowing either inductive or deductive theme generation, meaning that TA can be applied to multiple forms of research endeavour (Trainor & Bundon, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, the flexibility that TA offers receives some scrutiny as, although TA methods are widely understood as having rigour, Trainor & Bundon (2021) claim that TA methods can be applied inconsistently and haphazardly, in a process critics describe as "anything goes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.95).

With Big Q qualitative underpinnings, ultimately, Braun & Clarke's (2022) RTA was selected for this study as it suits qualitative methodologies that recognise how "within a qualitative paradigm, researcher subjectivity – who we are, and what we bring to the research […] is an integral part of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.13). RTA offers an efficient method for identifying, analysing and interpreting rich information, where patterns from coding and themes can be developed across *all* qualitative datasets (Trainor & Bundon, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Gibson et al., 2021).

Therefore, features of RTA, namely recognition of qualitative sensibility and the importance of reflexive research engagement, were viewed as key components of this study. For example, rather than trying to eliminate researcher influence, the researcher's positionality was embraced so that the impact of their assumptions on the research process could be better understood (Holmes, 2020). Furthermore, Burnham's (2012) 'Social Grrraaacceeesss' framework was tentatively considered throughout the process (see RTA Phase One below), so that "rich, detailed and nuanced" findings could be drawn from the subjective values and experiences of the researcher (Trainor & Bundon, 2021, p.705; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Phases of Analysis

Braun & Clarke's (2022) six phases of RTA were applied, and are outlined below.

1. Dataset Familiarisation. Braun & Clarke (2022) describe this phase as the researcher becoming deeply immersed in the dataset so that the content becomes familiar. The researcher began data familiarisation by re-listening to each of the interview recordings. Here, the researcher began making notes for their own

reference about how they were already subjectively interpreting data, reflexively acknowledging their social positioning by tentatively considering Burnham's (2012) 'Social Grrraaacceeesss'. Next, the researcher listened to all interviews again alongside Microsoft Teams transcripts, amending incorrect text to ensure that the verbal data was accurately recorded.

2. Coding. This phase involves systematic and fine-grained movement through the dataset so that small but relevant segments of meaningful data can be identified and given a code label (Braun & Clarke, 2022). After reading over each transcript thoroughly (to ensure participant comments were verbatim), transcripts were coded manually and designated a code label, which were later entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Codes were developed over three rounds of transcript reading to ensure rigour, with the researcher varying the order in which they read transcripts as per Braun & Clarke's (2022) guidance.

Code labels were differentiated based upon whether participants were describing their 'ideal' LGBTQ+ inclusion situation or their 'real' situation, with codes predominantly being *semantic* (overt with explicit descriptions of meaning), but with some being *latent* (implicit with deeper conceptual meaning) (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Overall, descriptions related to ideal inclusion formed 160 codes, which were later reduced to 96 codes when views shared by two or more participants were prioritised. Creating final codes by considering frequency of response is a strategy described by Braun & Clarke (2022, p.55), who highlight how, as researcher "you're looking for some repetition in coding for most, but not necessarily all, codes". Likewise, real experiences initially formed 320 codes, which was later reduced to 208 codes. An example of the coding process can be observed in Appendix I.

3. Generating Initial Themes. Braun & Clarke (2022) describe initial theme generation as the identification of patterns within the dataset that hold some level of meaning. Here, a researcher engages in an active process, constructing themes around existing codes, so that patterns of shared meaning emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Prior to theme generation, consideration was given as to whether the researcher would adopt an inductive or deductive orientation to the data.

Inductive orientation is data-driven and involves engaging with a dataset at its purest level to establish meaning, whereas deductive orientation is theory-driven, where researcher finds meaning by applying their own theoretical interpretations to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Whilst the researcher was keen to adopt an inductive rather than deductive approach throughout coding and theme generation as this is thought to “give voice to participants who can “tell their stories in a straightforward way”, the researcher acknowledges that adopting Big Q Methodology makes “pure induction impossible” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p56).

During initial stages of theme generation, a review of all codes led to the development of ten overarching themes that incorporated ideal and real perspectives. A Visual Thematic Map illustrates these initial themes, as well as their relationships (see Figure 2):

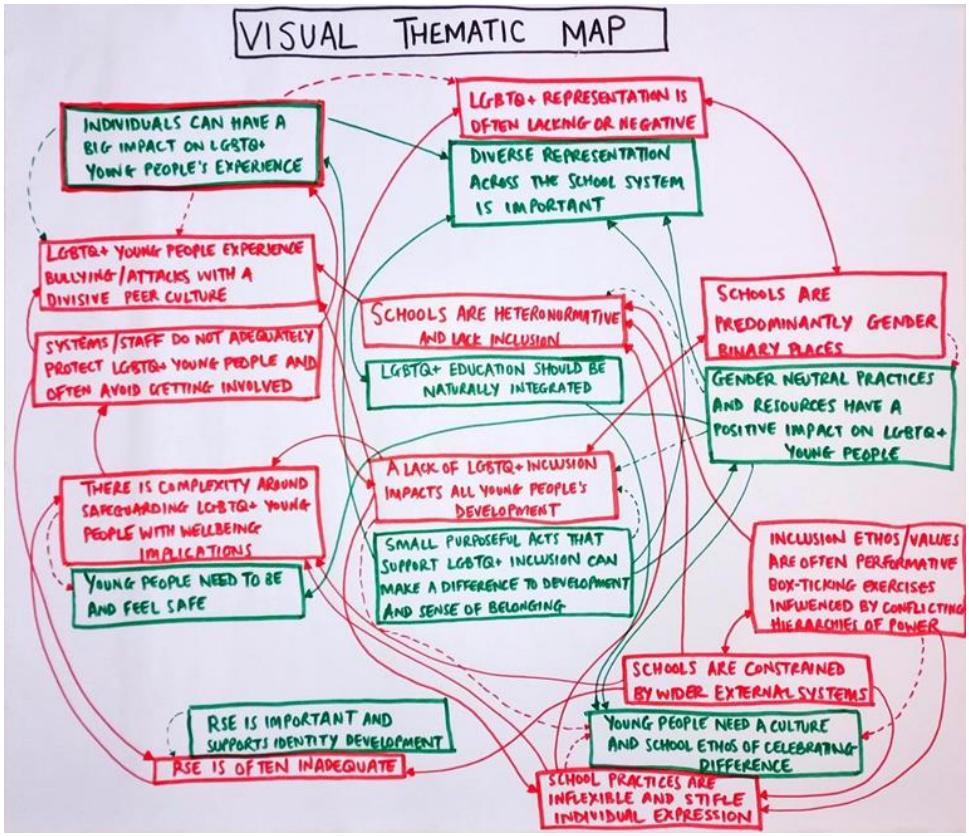

Figure 2:

Visual Thematic Map

During the developing themes process, the consolidation of ten YP's views generated eight areas of interest. Before exploring these areas, explaining how the themes were determined will provide richer understanding of the data analysis process.

Whilst the researcher initially anticipated that 'ideal' and 'real' viewpoints would be explored separately, during the interview process it emerged that YP's concept of their 'ideal' inclusive school was intrinsically intertwined with their 'real' experiences. Consequently, utilising the flexibility that RTA allows (Trainor & Bundon, 2021), it was determined that final themes would broadly illustrate the complexity in which shared perspectives were presented overall, with each theme highlighting

nuances (e.g., tensions, consistencies and differences) between participants' 'ideals' and 'real' experiences. Therefore, each theme addresses both research questions.

4. Developing and Reviewing Themes. Developing and reviewing themes involves undergoing a process whereby initial data themes are honed so that they better reflect core analytic themes, as well as a central organising concept from the full dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Here, during this stage of RTA, the ten themes on the *Visual Thematic Map* were further refined when all 304 ideal and real codes underwent thorough interrogation. Each code was individually reviewed against the ten suggested themes and, subsequently, two themes were subsumed into others. For example, looking closely at the nature of codes, the themes 'inclusion ethos/values are often performative' and 'individuals can have a big impact on experiences' were thought to interact closely, resulting in the creation of a new theme: 'values of individuals with power impact inclusion'. Furthermore, a theme around safeguarding appeared to directly link with LGBTQ+ wellbeing and, as such, became a subtheme. By reviewing and refining codes in this manner, eight rigorous themes with increased numbers of codes were developed.

5. Refining, Defining and Naming Themes. Braun & Clarke (2022) describe this phase as fine-tuning the analysis, whereby themes are clearly demarcated and given a brief synopsis. Due to the rigorous theme generation process, an iterative systematic review of all codes led to the creation of eight prominent themes, with Theme Eight incorporating a subtheme. By integrating ideal and real codes into eight themes with one subtheme, it was felt that final themes could better demonstrate nuances (e.g., consistencies and dichotomies) between existing school practices and participants' views on what might be ideal. Overall, each of the eight themes were formed around a substantial number of codes (ranging from 30 to 75).

6. Writing-up. This phase can begin during prior phases and involves creating an analytic narrative containing data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Once all eight themes and one subtheme had been developed, codes representing each theme were combined to loosely structure the thematic write-up process (see Appendix I).

Please note, as a critical realist, the researcher fully understands that all knowledge is fallible and incomplete (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021). Yet the reader should be aware that the researcher has chosen to 'own' their perspective, as per Willig's (2022) recommendation for ensuring rigour. Therefore, themes have been written up with conviction, as the researcher wanted to present their perception of participants' messages in their strongest form, emphasising the importance of hearing and validating LGBTQ+ YP's views.

Ensuring Rigour

Willig (2022) argues that a qualitative researcher can ensure rigour by applying reflexivity when developing insights into social or psychological phenomenon. The researcher recognised their own positionality throughout the data analysis process, thoughtfully and reflexively approaching data by actively acknowledging the influence of their own values, politics, motives, history, perspectives and biases (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2013). To better inform the reader, the researcher highlights the potential influence of their own lived experience as a lesbian cisgendered person, and an educational professional (trainee educational psychologist). Furthermore, the researcher highlights how their political left-leaning values align with the pursuit of social justice, with Buch-Hansen & Nielsen (2020) describing how leftist views are common amongst critical realists.

To better understand the impact of personal values on the data analysis process, the researcher tentatively considered aspects of their own positionality, using Burnham's (2012) 'Social Grrraaacceeesss' to guide their thinking throughout each phase of the research process.

For example, understanding the influence of researcher values, experiences and knowledge, during the interviews, the researcher predominantly asked open questions and actively listened more than they spoke, reducing the likelihood that participants would respond in particular ways (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Furthermore, prompts for further explanation were only used when necessary, so that interviews were co-constructed through natural and free flowing conversation, where participants could build up their own rich picture of views and experiences. Mostly, the researcher approached participant responses through curious questioning, acknowledging that one can never fully reach explanations for individual stories, as "knowledge is always on the way" (Selekman, 1997, p.36).

Additional concepts commonly used to substantiate rigour within qualitative research methods, e.g., trustworthiness, credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were considered and applied throughout. For example, the researcher faithfully followed Braun & Clarke's (2022) six-phase RTA process, engaging with data analysis on multiple levels, which Creswell & Poth (2018) describe as a rigorous research approach. Furthermore, within the analysis write-up, direct quotes from multiple participant transcripts were used to develop themes, so that consensus or contrasting viewpoints were transparently identified. Creswell & Creswell (2023) argue that through the 'triangulation' and convergence of multiple participant

perspectives, final generated themes embed principles that address the validity of qualitative findings, namely authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility.

Johnson et al. (2020) posit that research trustworthiness is key for ensuring rigour, citing four criteria proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher was able to embed these within this study's research process. For example, credibility (presenting readers with supporting evidence within the analysis process; Johnson et al., 2020) was shown by embedding direct quotes throughout the theme write-up process. Furthermore, transferability (providing contextual information so that findings can be applied to other situations; Johnson et al., 2020), has been demonstrated by the researcher's systematic and thorough approach to the write-up process. For example, research findings have explicitly referred to prior literature, highlighting how the reemergence of specific themes has occurred over multiple contexts and situations. Whilst the researcher acknowledges how this research can only be tentatively transferred to wider research findings, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider how this small-scale qualitative study adds a "rich and in-depth understanding" of specific LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of school inclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.6).

In terms of rigour, dependability (how repeatable a research project is; Johnson et al., 2020), is increased due to the researcher's thorough write-up of research aims and processes. Finally, confirmability (highlighting how results are drawn from reflections of actual data instead of biases and interpretations of the researcher; Johnson et al., 2020) is demonstrated by the researcher closely linking their analysis to direct participant quotations. Whilst the researcher strived to work towards confirmability, acknowledging that no research is ever bias-free (Fletcher,

2017; Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2021), Willig (2022) argues that rigour comes from the researcher ‘owning’ their own perspective.

Willig (2022) describes further strategies for ensuring rigour, including by grounding research in data examples, and by demonstrating coherence within the write-up process, so that final analysis presents as an overall ‘story’ or ‘map’ of the data. Therefore, the researcher adopted these strategies throughout the study, ensuring increased levels of rigour.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines, receiving ethical approval from the *UEA School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee* in April 2023 (see Appendix C). Throughout the study, the researcher adopted BERA’s (2018) ‘Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research’, and embedded ethics related to their professional duties as a trainee educational psychologist, including HCPC (2023) ‘Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists, and BPS (2017) ‘Practice Guidelines’. Furthermore, research transparency was applied throughout the process, with Ryen (2021) arguing the importance of transparency if researchers hope to develop trusting relationships with participants.

During recruitment, although purposive sampling allowed the researcher to consider features of the population they were interested in studying, Silverman (2022, p.294) argues that gaining participants “demands that we think critically” about the parameters of the population. Although the researcher hoped to collect views from people representing *all* LGBTQ+ identities, specifying this aim during recruitment did not feel inclusive or ethical. Ultimately, although diverse LGBTQ+

identities formed the sample naturally, it was not possible to represent all identities. For example, no participant openly identified as transgender female.

Willig (2008) highlights that within semi-structured interviews, sensitive and ethical negotiations should be made with interviewees, with the researcher not asking participants to divulge information that they may feel uncomfortable sharing. Therefore, when considering whether data related to LGBTQ+ identity should be gained, the researcher determined that this would only be noted if participants disclosed this and consented to its use. Consequently, the researcher made a mental note of shared personal information and, during interviews, gained consent for using this information when it was pertinent to research objectives. Despite the researcher's sensitive approach around identity labels, it is important to highlight that critical realism itself "stereotypes participants [and] labels participants as belonging to a particular marginalised group, [and] therefore notions of identity are superimposed" (Scotland, 2012, p.14).

The researcher chose to interview YP aged over 16 years to avoid consent-related issues associated with studying minors, but also to minimise the likelihood that participants were still affiliated with their school(s), thus increasing the likelihood that participants would feel comfortable discussing their experiences. Furthermore, pseudonyms and redactions were applied to transcripts to maximise participant anonymity. To further promote participant discretion, gatekeepers were not informed of which participants chose to participate in research.

Braun & Clarke (2013) note the potential harm and risks associated with interviewing YP belonging to a relatively small community, with LGBTQ+ pupils being particularly vulnerable to negative experiences within UK schools (Harris et al.,

2021a). Furthermore, when considering the mental health impact of research involvement, Scotland (2012, p.14) argues that a critical realist approach explores experiences in-depth, which increases the risk that "blissful ignorance is shattered" for participants. Acknowledging these impacts, the researcher found ways to mitigate potential harms by offering participants opportunities to withdraw from research until the point of data analysis, and by providing a post-interview Research Debrief Form, which contained information on organisations and charities that support wellbeing (see Appendix H).

Conversely, the researcher acknowledges the *positive* impact that research involvement can have on participants, with the BPS (2019, p.12) highlighting that research can "sometimes be useful [to] explore previous experiences of isolation and distress". Although Braun & Clarke (2013) suggest participants can feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues, the BPS (2019, p.12) describe how discussion can be helpful for people to "explore previous experiences of isolation and distress which may have had lasting effects on how a person is able to express themselves".

When considering the ethics of conducting research on inclusion, Norwich (2014) describes that, ethically, inclusive values should be adopted throughout. As such, the researcher embraced this by listening carefully to individual views, by adopting a collaborative research process that respects participant preferences, and by embedding participants' ideas within final research conclusions that hope to inform future school inclusion practices.

Analysis

Each theme contains answers to both research questions, where participants' views around their real experiences *and* their ideal inclusive school are presented concurrently to illustrate similarities and dichotomies between these two dimensions. Findings commence by exploring participants' views around the ideal school, which helps to demonstrate the journey that schools must travel to fully facilitate LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion.

Individual Themes

Eight prominent themes with one subtheme were developed from RTA:

1. Heteronormativity inhibits LGBTQ+ inclusion.
2. Wider socio-political systems and cultural values impact inclusion practices.
3. Systemic peer bullying and staff apathy prevents inclusive school cultures.
4. Gender-neutral practices support inclusion but schools are gender binary and cisnormative.
5. RSE quality has implications for LGBTQ+ young people.
6. Diverse LGBTQ+ representation is important but lacking or inconsistent.
7. The values of individuals with power impact inclusion.
8. Inclusion impacts development and wellbeing.

    8b. School safeguarding policy impacts wellbeing.

A thematic map is illustrated in Figure 3:

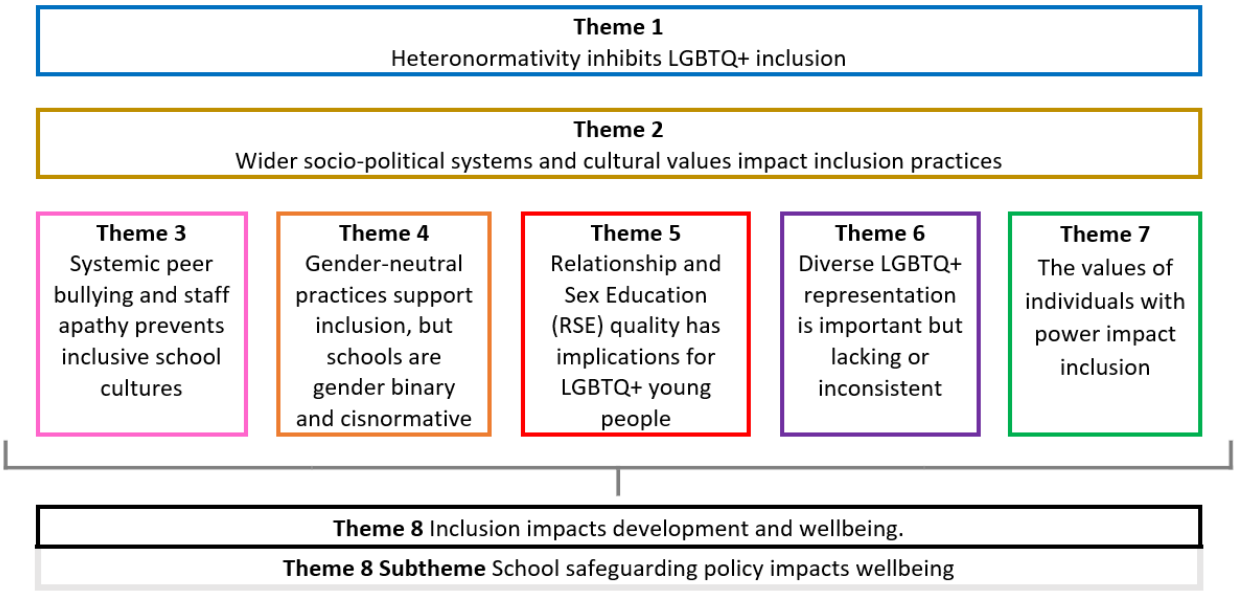

Figure 3:

Thematic Map

Figure 3 illustrates how the researcher mapped themes for analysis. Theme 1 and Theme 2 are broad, highlighting how heteronormativity and wider systemic factors overarch all elements of the school system. Conversely, Themes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 identify individual elements of the school system. Theme 8 also stretches across the school system, but this theme is positioned last as an acknowledgement that all other themes feed into it.

Theme One: Heteronormativity Inhibits LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Theme Definition

LGBTQ+ issues and identities should be naturally integrated into school systems, but schools are fundamentally heteronormative with: limited education of LGBTQ+ subjects; LGBTQ+ issues missing from primary school learning; half-hearted LGBTQ+ resources; and limited support for LGBTQ+ pupils. Therefore,

schools lack LGBTQ+ inclusion due to their prioritisation of heterosexual and cisgender identities.

Theme One: Ideal School

This theme highlights the prominent theme described by participants when considering LGBTQ+ school inclusion: heteronormativity. Atkinson & DePalma (2010, in Price & Tayler, 2015, p.126) describe heteronormativity as “the assumption that the world and everything in it is, and should be, based on a heterosexual model”.

Participants highlighted that for schools to be ideal, instead of heteronormative practices, LGBTQ+ topics must be naturally integrated across the school system.

> **Nate:** “*I don't wanna see necessarily just like an assembly with a 15-minute PowerPoint talking about what it is to be gay because […] that's not what it's like to be gay. That's what it's like to fit into a heteronormative society as a gay person. And I don't think people should have to do that at all”.*

Ideally, subjects such as history would include comprehensive and in-depth LGBTQ+ references, similarly to non-LGBTQ+ histories:

> **Anna:** *“learning about like gay rights and stuff in different ways in the same way that you learn about, like in geography […] gay history would be talked about and like Stonewall and all the stuff like that would all be talked about is, there's like as important as like being about World War Two. So, like you’d be learning about your own history”.*

Max: *“in like history, looking at like maybe LGBTQ+ history like, and how attitudes towards people in the community have changed overtime”.*

Subsequently, learning about LGBTQ+ people and subjects would be normalised and naturally expected:

Steph: *“a more comprehensive education about everyone's differences […] I think certain topics just should be integrated so much into mainstream education that it sort of takes the difference out of them”.*

Furthermore, participants described how the curriculum would further eradicate heteronormativity and cisnormativity by educating about *all* LGBTQ+ identities, including those perceived as receiving less attention, such as transgender and intersex identities:

JJ: *“equal balance between teaching about trans kids, what erm their gender mean to them”.*

Sam: *“they could like mention intersex people because they make up 2% of the population, which seems like a small amount but that is the same amount as there are red-headed people”.*

Participants highlighted how the ideal inclusive school would teach about respecting difference from a young age, with primary and secondary school curriculums tailored to teach all pupils inclusive values in age-appropriate ways:

Steph: *“I would still start it really young and tailoring because people, people learn about all types of families”.*

Max: *“it doesn't even have to be very explicit from a young age, but just like children's books and stuff, if they include just like some gay characters in it”.*

Some participants highlighted the need for ‘sensitivity’ when discussing LGBTQ+ topics in primary schools, which somewhat echoes Epstein & Johnson (1998, cited in Marks, 2012), who argued that schools position LGBTQ+ CYP as asexual and vulnerable. Conversely, participants were expressive about the need to explicitly teach about gender diversity from a young age, especially as CYP can experience gender variance at younger ages (Cotton, 2014).

Alongside curriculum discussions, participants suggested that, to eliminate heteronormativity, the ideal school would integrate LGBTQ+ resources across school spaces, so that pupils have equal access to learning materials that are contemporary, diverse and, preferably, created by LGBTQ+ people:

Anna: *“there would be like plays written by like gay people or about gay people [...] like art, queer artists like you could look at like poetry. You could look at like queer icons from like music. You could look at gay like writers and producers. Like artists and stuff like that. There'd be loads of ways that you can include, like LGBT stuff.”*

Tyler: *“if you're looking at text by like, you know, Shakespeare, also look at maybe texts from like Oscar Wilde or like, have those LGBTQ role models put through the curriculum in just a way that feels natural”.*

Participants described how LGBTQ+ Pride events might be ideal when delivered alongside, rather than instead of, integrated LGBTQ+ topics, with schools’

commitment to diversity noticeable when observing the behaviour of appropriately trained staff:

> **Sam:** *"teachers need to like themselves have education about it so they know how to deal with students".*

> **JJ**: *"with teachers and their diversity training, it needs to be like more…erm harsh, like if they don't pass, if they only scrape a pass, they should re-do it".*

Additionally, participants proposed that the entire system of an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school would utilise LGBTQ+ inclusive language, discussions, and events that openly celebrate diversity:

> **Max:** *"everyone would just be able to be happy with who they are and be open [...] and not feel like they have to hide anything".*

> **Tyler:** *"everyone is [...] accepting and that's really shown in how the staff are [...] it would just create a really nice environment".*

Therefore, theme one highlights how comprehensive education on LGBTQ+ issues and identities should be naturally integrated into school systems similarly to how non-LGBTQ+ identities are, embracing a school culture where heteronormativity doesn't exist.

Considering *how* schools facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion, participants provided suggestions around the ideal schooling journey, whereby primary schools eradicate cisnormative practices through open teaching about gender diversity. Whilst participants acknowledge that heteronormative practices are not easily eradicated during primary school, they describe how pupils should be gradually introduced to

diverse family structures and LGBTQ+ role-models until attending secondary school, where sexuality diversity is explicitly included and celebrated. Given that one's gender and sexuality typically develop at different rates, Harris et al. (2021b, p.16) argue for schools to focus energy on their cultures as, to fully support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ pupils, "careful understanding of how to normalise being LGBTQ+" is key.

Theme One: Real Experiences

In their real experiences, however, participants consistently highlighted how their schools felt fundamentally heteronormative, lacking LGBTQ+ inclusion. Literature substantiates these experiences, arguing that schools are heteronormative and cisgendered spaces where LGBTQ+ experiences are rarely reflected (Harris et al., 2021a; Formby, 2015; Harris et al., 2021b). This is illustrated by participant comments that suggest LGBTQ+ education is lacking:

> **Anna:** *"it's really highlighted how invisible LGBT stuff was in my school […] and how like it just wasn't a thing at all".*

Furthermore, some participants described how, when LGBTQ+ subjects were discussed, these felt reactive rather than proactive, adding to the sense that schools are heteronormative:

> **Max:** *"they only really talk about it, yeah, when it suits them, as in they have a student who identifies in such a way".*

> **Sam:** *"there wasn't that much active inclusion of the LGBTQ community".*

Participants also described how LGBTQ+ issues were noticeably missing from discussions during primary school:

Ali: *“in primary school, I don't think we talked about it at all”.*

JJ: *“my primary school was shockingly bad”.*

This point is underpinned by research that suggests primary schools may need additional support in promoting and celebrating LGBTQ+ relationships (Formby, 2013; Bradlow et al., 2017; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Harris et al., 2021b; Carlile, 2019; Lee, 2020).

One curriculum area frequently highlighted as perpetuating heteronormative values was history:

Anna: *“We weren’t able to talk about, like the Stonewall riots. We weren't taught about any key prominent features in gay history, we weren't talking about, like, when it became legal to be gay”.*

Nate: *“history especially is one thing that needs to be like completely scrapped and reworked from the ground up”.*

Notably, the history curriculum was frequently mentioned as somewhere LGBTQ+ content was missing or inadequate. Reflecting on reasons for this, the researcher noticed how participants were able to give many and varied examples of how LGBTQ+ content could be naturally incorporated e.g., through learning about the persecution of LGBTQ+ people during World War II, or the Stonewall riots. As participants alluded to how the study of history helps us to learn from previous societal mistakes, literature posits that inclusive education can create positive change for marginalised social groups (Arduin, 2015; Glazzard & Stones, 2021).

A recurring aspect that participants mentioned was the use of school resources. Many participants viewed LGBTQ+ resources as half-hearted and heteronormative:

> **Dani:** *"I mean high school, there was no [...] attention, like drawn to LGBTQ+ authors or anything like that".*

> **Oron:** *"the most that there really was just like those kinda like posters that, like, 'some people are gay, get over it' […] and that was about it".*

Many participants indicated that the curriculum prioritised heterosexual and cisgender identities:

> **Tyler:** *"when we did like Oscar Wilde, it was like ohh we wrote this poem because he was in prison cause he was gay, and then that's it. Whereas I definitely remember being like, and here's Shakespeare's family tree, and here's like... do you know what I mean?"*

Furthermore, participants alluded to how the school system itself influenced heteronormative behaviours, which is characterised by the lack of pastoral support offered to LGBTQ+ pupils:

> **Oron:** *"I feel like there was a very consistent, like, lack of support".*

> **Anna:** *"being different really wasn't something to be proud of in secondary school".*

Despite participants predominantly highlighting non-LGBTQ+ inclusive school practices, some did perceive improvements, suggesting that *some* schools are

inclusive in *some* ways, which echoes research that documents recent advancements (e.g., Harris et al., 2021a; Bradlow et al., 2017).

As each participant interview concluded, the researcher noticed how participants often tried to balance their negative school experiences with some positivity. As such, participant comments emphasised the distance between ideal and real inclusion scenarios, with non-inclusive practices reinforced with explicit examples, and inclusive practices presented instead as opinion, rather than being evidenced:

> **Tyler:** *"on the whole, no, I don't think it was inclusive, but I think there were points towards inclusion. I don't think it was a horrible, awful place to go to school. And I think at the time, I don't think I necessarily felt it wasn't inclusive".*
>
> **Anna:** *"in the last few years, I think there has been a real shift, which is good".*

Theme One Summary

Theme One highlights how schools should eradicate heteronormative practices as they inhibit LGBTQ+ inclusion. Participants suggested that schools could naturally integrate LGBTQ+ topics across the curriculum, especially history, with students learning to respect difference by being educated about diverse people and identities in natural ways. Participants highlighted how effective resources, learning materials, inclusive language, and events that celebrate diversity could facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion.

However, participants shared numerous examples of their schools' heteronormative practices. Examples included limited and reactive education of

LGBTQ+ subjects, with LGBTQ+ issues noticeably missing during primary schooling. The subject of history recurred as an example of how heteronormative values prevail within the curriculum, with participants suggesting that school LGBTQ+ resources are half-hearted, and LGBTQ+ pastoral/support services are lacking, illustrating how heterosexual and cisgender identities are prioritised. Whilst participants felt that schools may be improving, this was expressed as opinion rather than being substantiated with experiential examples.

With previous research highlighting how school leaders are often given autonomy over *how* they incorporate inclusive practices (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Abbott et al., 2015), leaders can utilise findings from Theme One to better structure primary and secondary school practices around gender and sexuality development, so that LGBTQ+ pupils are naturally included.

Theme Two: Wider Socio-political Systems and Cultural Values Impact Inclusion Practices

Theme Definition

LGBTQ+ young people want schools to openly celebrate difference, promoting a culture of everyone being their authentic selves. However, schools are influenced and constrained by wider socio-political systems and cultural values, leading to outdated and inflexible practices that stifle individual expression.

Theme Two was developed from the researcher's latent analysis of *all* collected data, where a clear pattern surfaced as participants considered the influence of socio-political factors on school inclusion. During interviews, it was

noticed that participants often deflected attention away from the school itself and onto wider socio-political factors when explaining the negative prevalence of heteronormativity. Subsequently, Theme Two primarily focuses on real experiences, with participants highlighting how culturally schools *should* celebrate difference, yet external forces prevent schools from doing so. Theme Two, therefore, broadly considers the external values and practices that influence school heteronormativity (as presented in Theme One), with one participant recognising the impact on school staff:

> **Anna:** "they were just beaten down by like the general system and not being allowed to do what they wanted".

Theme Two: Ideal School

Theme Two highlights how LGBTQ+ YP view an ideal inclusive school system as one that openly celebrates difference and promotes a culture of everyone being their authentic selves:

> **Steph:** *"to really be inclusive of all cultures and identities and to, really celebrate them as well".*

> **Anna:** *"everybody would celebrate each other's differences".*

Glazzard & Stones (2021, p.2) support participant viewpoints, arguing that "it is critically important that all children are taught to respect all forms of difference" in schools. Glazzard & Stones (2021, p.2) also highlight how education plays a significant role in supporting CYP's understanding of discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes, which they feel has wider societal implications since LGBTQ+ people exist "within all walks of life".

Theme Two: Real experiences

Despite participants' consensus on the importance of embedding a culture of acceptance of differences, participants all described how, in one way or another, school systems are *not* LGBTQ+ inclusive. Conversely, schools oppress individual difference, despite sometimes having good intentions:

> **JJ:** *"they were really trying to be inclusive, but I think they were doing it in the wrong ways".*

Due to the systemic nature in which discussion naturally developed around real experiences, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) has been utilised to show the researcher's thinking at various points throughout theme development.

Overall, participants highlighted how hegemonic processes and financially-driven governmental agendas lead to rigid, outdated, and inflexible school processes. Participants described how this adds to a sense of oppression not only for LGBTQ+ YP, but also for teachers:

> **Anna:** *"it's all about like policies and academies and making money and being run like a business".*

> **Dani:** *"it's also like strict [...] the schedule and like assemblies and things".*

> **Anna:** "*some of the rules and the expectations are so outdated that teachers don't know how to, like, rebel against them almost".*

Participants described how LGBTQ+ inclusion was influenced by school governing bodies, and perceived that teaching about the acceptance of difference

was sidelined by wider agendas of their schools' academic standing with regulatory bodies, and schools' preoccupation with pupils' grades:

> **Nate:** *"the primary school I went to [...] was kinda more focused on trying to get back in Ofsted's good books than provide super-detailed resources to the students".*

> **Max:** *"they were like and we don't have enough time to do both of these things, so we need to sort of prioritise".*

Located within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) EST exosystem, the influence of political governance over schools was the most prominent eco-systemic factor discussed by participants. This highlights how participants potentially feel that those who hold political power do not help to facilitate LGBTQ+ school inclusion.

The sense that national political agendas influence school practices was demonstrated when participants described how grades were prioritised over LGBTQ+ inclusion. For example, some individuals highlighted how schools adapted their practices when dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic:

> **Max:** *during lockdown they stopped doing PSHE because it was just like […] they were trying to focus on more academic stuff […] to just help people get through their exams".*

With COVID-19 representing an unexpected change within the EST chronosystem, the above excerpt demonstrates how schools may quickly react to external influences in ways that are not always LGBTQ+ inclusive. Additionally, the impact of religion on LGBTQ+ inclusion was raised by participants, who typically perceived that religion-affiliated groups oppose LGBTQ+ inclusion:

Ali: *“in primary school we didn't have any, it was very straight and, but also it was it was a Church of England school so a little bit expected”.*

Tyler: *“somebody wanted to do something for Pride Month, but it was, it was like, stopped by the, the church side".*

Participants’ views on the impact of religion on school practices mirrors findings from previous researchers who argue that, traditionally, religious doctrine has opposed transgender identities and same-sex relationships (Allen et al., 2014; Carlile, 2019). Furthermore, with faith schools having increased statutory flexibility regarding how they ‘include’ LGBTQ+ issues throughout the curriculum (Carlile, 2019), many may choose not to include, or worse, may deliberately embed stigmatised thinking, which serves to exclude LGBTQ+ pupils further:

JJ: *“from both an LGBTQ side and also a Christian side, as much as I don't wanna say it because I am Christian, you don't want to associate your school with the church, because of the history there”.*

In addition to religious values, participants highlighted the impact of wider political values on their experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion:

Max: *“maybe school’s turning a bit of a blind eye and [...] probably like we don't have like loads of LGBT+ people in our school, so it doesn't matter like massively […] this part of the country and parts of the country like it, are very much conservative and I think, like the only, very much right wing anyway”.*

Participants highlighted how the socio-political and cultural values of parents can hinder LGBTQ+ inclusion, with schools perhaps choosing to limit LGBTQ+ discussion and content to maintain socio-political ‘neutrality’:

Sam: *“I feel like sometimes secondary schools are like scared of controversy because if they teach too much LGBTQ stuff, they're scared they'll get push-back from overly conservative parents”.*

Lee (2020) reinforces this, arguing that schools are heavily impacted by external systems such as conservative rule, parental attitudes, and wider ideologies around achieving academic standards. Arduin (2015, p.105) also highlights the importance of acknowledging the impact of wider society on school practices, particularly as societal values form “the bedrock of an educational system”.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) EST, ‘religion’ and ‘parents’ factors are located on the microsystemic level and, consequently, are theoretically positioned closest to the individual. This highlights the significant impact that religious doctrine and parental attitudes can have on an LGBTQ+ YP’s experiences of school inclusion.

Holistically, participant comments highlighted the wide-ranging and messy influence that ecological systems can have on UK school practices. Subsequently, their views demonstrate how socio-political influences can cascade through various tiers of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) EST, negatively impacting an individual’s experience of school inclusion in a multitude of ways.

Despite participants feeling that schools are not LGBTQ+ inclusive, their language attempted to defend their school in some way or another, further highlighting how participants viewed schools as constrained by wider influences:

Dani: *whatever motivations they might have, I think like they want to sort of pursue what is right”.*

Despite all participants defending their previous schools, which the researcher feels suggests some sense of emotional attachment and loyalty towards places participants spent a significant portion of their childhood, the sentiment above is that varying priorities and external political agendas serve to maintain equilibrium, leading to lacklustre attempts to embed LGBTQ+ inclusion:

> **Sam:** *"Our generation has come to like expect like we know, like, you know that it's not gonna be as represented in schools because I feel like it's still sort of portrayed as like 'dirty' in a way. Which isn't, it's it's not right but you sort of expect it, so you understand it".*

This point is accentuated by Harris et al. (2021a), who argue that school cultures continue to function as heteronormative and cisgendered places that maintain the status quo.

Theme Two Summary

Theme Two highlighted how ideally, school systems would openly celebrate difference and promote a culture of everyone being their authentic selves. However, participants shared numerous examples of how external systems, cultures, and processes oppress individual differences in schools, demonstrating how schools are not entirely to blame for their non-inclusive practices. Figure 4 depicts the wider systemic factors that participants highlighted as having influences on LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of school inclusion:

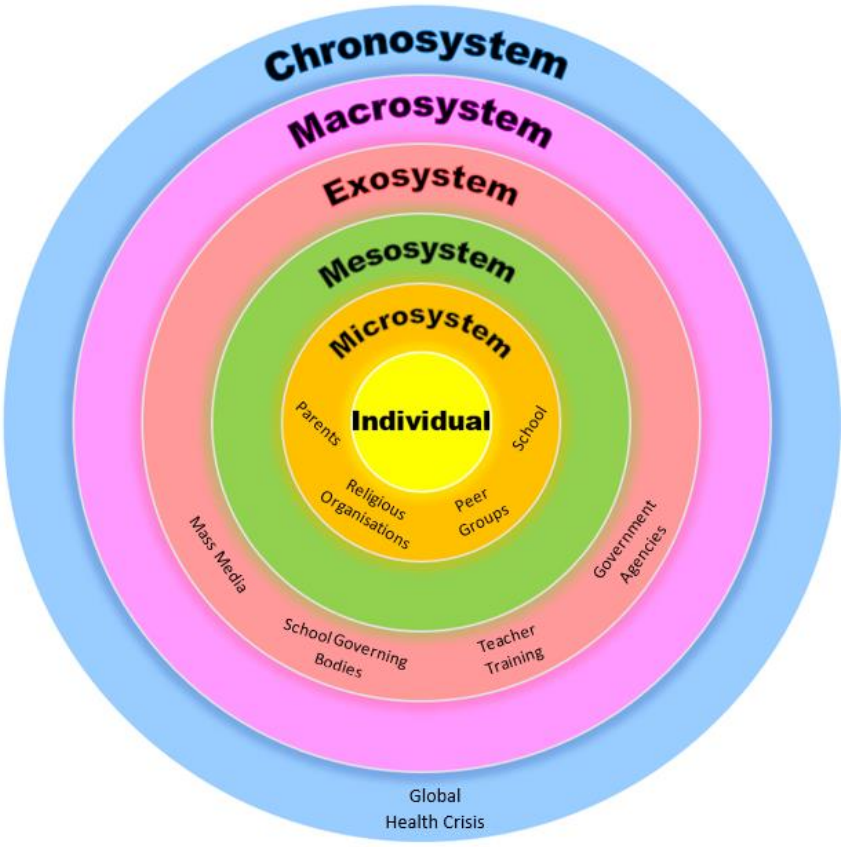

Figure 4:

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (Adapted)

Figure 4 highlights key influencing systemic factors as: hegemonic processes and financially driven governmental agendas; rigid, outdated, and inflexible processes; the influence of governing and regulatory bodies; prioritisation of academic grades; schools' approach to COVID-19; impact of religion and motives of religious-affiliated groups; and wider political and cultural values of parents.

Overall, despite all participants wanting to defend their school, when explaining the messy impact of external factors on LGBTQ+ inclusion, the message of Theme Two is that these ecological systems serve to maintain heteronormativity and cisnormativity within schools.

Participant views also serve to strengthen claims made by previous researchers (e.g., Formby & Donovan, 2020; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022a; Harris et al., 2021b), who argued that schools perpetuate structural inequalities. Theme Two helps us to understand *why* schools may struggle to implement inclusive practices. Therefore, when considering the impact that socio-political factors have on inclusion, schools should consider *how* institutions culturally respond to external influences and pressures. Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) highlight how schools *must* consider the whole-school cultural impact of their policies and practices as they mirror wider cultural and societal systems (Leonard, 2022; Formby, 2015). Theme Two, therefore, helps to identify how schools have *some* responsibility and power in shaping an LGBTQ+ inclusive society.

Theme Three: Systemic Peer Bullying and Staff Apathy Prevents Inclusive School Cultures

Theme Definition

LGBTQ+ young people experience bullying and attacks from a divisive peer culture. Whilst LGBTQ+ YP feel staff can help the development of supportive peer relationships, instead, staff often avoid getting involved, and bullying is inadequately dealt with.

Theme Three relates to one aspect of the school system, namely the interactions between LGBTQ+ individuals and their peer groups (who are located within the EST microsystem). The overarching concept behind this theme is broadly represented by the following participant statement:

JJ: *“there's a lot of harassment and bullying based around the LGBTQ community, but I think if you get a proper handle on it, you can overcome that in a school”.*

Theme Three: Ideal School

Participants highlighted how LGBTQ+ YP feel they need a school culture that promotes respect for difference:

Sam: *“the main thing to inclusivity is just teaching people general respect towards one another and acceptance, because then inclusivity will naturally happen because people don't care about those differences anymore”.*

Goodenow & Grady (1993) echo this sentiment, believing that inclusive education occurs when one experiences increased feelings of respect and belonging, which Baumeister & Leary (1995) claimed can counter negative emotions that increase mental ill-health. Furthermore, Yavuz (2016, p.405) argued for whole-school approaches that “encourage inclusion, celebrate diversity and build connected communities”.

Participants described how belonging to a peer group would occur through mutually beneficial relationships between LGBTQ+ pupils and non-LGBTQ+ pupils. Furthermore, any divisions between these two groups would be bridged, so that a sense of peer belonging was achieved:

Anna: *“relationships would be like really good between everybody [...] all the straight kids would be getting involved with doing Pride Month stuff”.*

Nate: *“it would be a mutually beneficial relationship”.*

Research highlights how positive gay-straight alliances within school can help to protect LGBTQ+ pupils from victimisation (Day et al., 2019b), foster a supportive and safe school climate (Glazzard & Stones, 2021), and be transformative and affirming for pupils with LGBTQ+ identities (Leonard, 2019; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b).

Additionally, participants described how their ideal schools would embed policies and practices that have zero-tolerance approaches to bullying:

Max: *"really strict policies on of no tolerance on any sort of discrimination".*

Steph: *"no tolerance behaviour policy to any bullying or segregation based on anyone's differences".*

Leonard (2022) supports participant views that schools should have a zero-tolerance policy, arguing that schools with intolerance to harassment can offer security for transgender pupils. However, Formby (2015) and Harris et al. (2021a), oppose the idea of zero-tolerance, suggesting that such policies constrict LGBTQ+ conversations, thus maintaining heteronormative values.

As well as zero-tolerance policies, participants felt that bullying incidents should be resolved using transformative measures rather than punitive measures, with re-education considered an effective bullying prevention strategy:

Dani: *"rehabilitation of hateful views, ensure they're rectified through education".*

JJ: *"you need to sit down with the students that are bullying and harassing people [...] and just explain to them the impact it can have".*

Donovan et al. (2023) also highlight how, theoretically, schools can provide educational spaces where critical discussions around abusive attitudes can occur, potentially helping to positively shift social understandings.

Theme Three: Real Experiences

Despite participants expressing how schools can facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion through peer cohesion, resoundingly, experiences shared by participants revealed systemic peer bullying and cultures of LGBTQ+ phobia. Whilst examples given here highlight how language and subtle peer behaviours serve to create a school culture that perpetuates LGBTQ+ pupil division and isolation, some participants described scenarios where they observed overt attacks:

> **Anna:** *"one girl in my school [...] came out and she was bullied relentlessly".*
>
> **Sam:** *"two of my friends in high school who were gay men and they got attacked and called slurs for so long, and the school just did nothing".*

Research suggests how bullying can lead to marginalisation and isolation (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Harris et al., 2021b). Furthermore, when looking at the wider implications of marginalisation, it is argued that social isolation contributes to poorer mental health, including increased feelings of "hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, alienation, and extreme loneliness" (Williams et al., 2005, p.472; Harris et al., 2021b).

Many participants observed that staff often do not adequately deal with bullying or discrimination, by avoiding involvement:

Sam: *"a boy who was being transphobic in my class […] but they never did anything about it. He would just like make fun of transgender people loudly in the middle of class and nothing was done".*

Oron: *"there was only one incident where they actually did anything about bullying".*

Research has further substantiated this point, highlighting how when LGBTQ+ pupils experiencing bullying have reached out to staff, they have received a lack of support (e.g., Jones & Hillier, 2013; Formby, 2014). Participants' experiences correlate with Day et al. (2019a, p.419), where only 12% of participants reported that teachers intervened "most or all of the time" when hearing homophobic comments. Furthermore, McGowan et al.'s (2022) research on the experiences of transgender YP suggested that staff apathy may be partially to blame for inadequate support.

All participants shared stories of divisive use of language amongst peers, with schools appearing to grapple with derogatory insults. Commonly, language describing non-heterosexual or non-cisgendered identities were demeaned and used as slurs:

Nate: *"friends thought it was funny to use the F-slur a lot and it was […] typical […] edgy teen humour".*

Anna: *"gay was being used as a slur […] often like, ohh, that's so gay".*

Research by Bradlow et al. (2017) further corroborates these findings, with a 2017 national survey reporting that 66% of LGBT YP hear verbal slurs containing the word 'gay' being used often or frequently in schools.

One participant described how the word ‘gay’ was inappropriately dealt with by their school, with the school deciding to ban the word entirely, which, arguably, reduces sense of inclusion for gay pupils:

> **Sam:** *“my high school, they banned the word gay […] that can be positive in the sense that it stopped the bullying, but it was negative in the sense that people then couldn't express themselves with it. They couldn't talk about their sexuality to their friends, they couldn't say anything”.*

Walton (2011, p.139) observed that when schools police pupils’ behaviours and discourses with punitive and inflexible “knee-jerk reactions”, they ultimately take a stance that ignores social differences, thus perpetuating inequalities. Such theory may help to explain why bullying activities described by participants were often considered insidious and stealth-like, resulting in staff not noticing:

> **Steph:** *“I became the subject of gossip […] she would […] like whisper, talking about me when I walk down the corridor”.*

> **Oron:** *“people would spread rumours like, ohh so and so is a lesbian, and that would be a bad thing”.*

> **Ali:** *“it's very like subtle, homophobia”.*

Participants also explained how subtle gossip was much more difficult for school staff to manage:

> **Oron:** *“usually just kind of like rumour spreading, social stuff […] there wouldn't be much that could be done about that”.*

Steph: *“there's not much you can do, if a bit of gossip's out [...] can't really stop the spread”.*

Yet participants highlighted how being the subject of gossip was psychologically and emotionally harmful, making LGBTQ+ people feel excluded and isolated:

Steph: *“I felt so excluded that I just, I shut it down”.*

Participants in Robinson’s (2010, p.340) research indicated that they too would hide their sexuality “in order to cope” at school. With the education system implicated in reproducing societal norms that can lead to harmful practices (such as someone choosing to oppress their own identity), schools *must* take ownership of their role in preventing harm (Donovan et al., 2023).

Whilst participants described how school policies that encourage re-education of harmful views are vital in tackling peer bullying, in reality, anti-bullying strategies were experienced inconsistently by participants:

Dani: *“Anti-bullying […] in the school […] they actually had quite a strong presence in that way”.*

Sam: *“they had like an anti-bullying session and they'd make you read out scenarios and you'd have to decide whether it was bullying […] there was one and it […] involved a homophobic slur. I said to the teacher [...] I'm not gonna say the slur’ and she went, ‘No, you need to say it for educational purposes’. I didn't need to say it”.*

Oron: *“anti-bullying’s a bit lacklustre”.*

Whilst re-education may be an effective strategy for dealing with bullying, when considered alongside other school processes, there are concerns that one approach may stifle the other. For example, Formby's (2015) research relating to HBT bullying highlights that tensions between anti-bullying initiatives (such as re-education) and broader unease about sexuality discussions (manifested through a zero-tolerance policy) may ultimately act *against* anti-bullying work.

Considering the impact of divisive peer cultures, participant comments highlighted what can only be described as 'toxic' heteronormativity, where some LGBTQ+ YP experienced being 'outed' by peers. Furthermore, some participants, particularly those from single-sex schools, shared concerns of common and unfounded beliefs amongst heterosexual peers that non-heterosexual students *must* be attracted to them:

> **Steph:** *"one of those friends […] sort of outed me to a lot of people [...] it was dreadful".*
>
> **Anna:** *"being an all-girls school […] it was harder for people to come out because people would automatically assume you'd had a crush on all of them".*

When looking explicitly at bullying in mixed-sex schools, in many scenarios, perpetrators were male peers:

> **Ali:** *"I was walking down […] an outside corridor and a group of boys said something".*
>
> **Sam:** *"it was like 10 or 12 boys against like everyone else who was supportive".*

JJ: *“it was the boy towards the girls”.*

Therefore, how participants experienced bullying appeared to differ depending on whether they attended single- or mixed-sex schools, with the sex of the perpetrator and person targeted impacting the bullying ‘style’. McGowan et al. (2022, p.34) attempt to explain differing bullying styles, with one participant in their study describing rigid gender stereotypes and a toxic masculinity in cisgender males, where “all the boys are like masculine and bullies”.

Considering scenarios where bullying occurs, several participants described how exclusionary practices can exist across the LGBTQ+ community itself:

Sam: *“our deputy head teacher […] she was a lesbian […] she was transphobic”.*

Oron: *“there was this one transgender boy […] he was really unpleasant […] he kind of just didn't believe […] non-binary people existed”.*

Some participants acknowledged their own historic discriminatory views when they attended school:

Oron: *“I kind of fell into this […] hating myself and hating all trans people […] Do you know what a TERF is?”*

Nate: *“it was more like hating on the other students who I felt were like ‘ruining’ the perception that other students had of LGBT people”.*

These comments align with theory on ‘internalised homophobia’ (Maylon, 1981). Jamil et al. (2013) describe how one’s own incorporation of negative beliefs

and attitudes around LGBTQ+ identity can inhibit their perceptions of, and participation in, the LGBTQ+ community.

Ultimately, with participants describing how they have been socialised within an environment where peers are actively hostile towards LGBTQ+ people, the researcher viewed internalised homophobia as another byproduct of non-inclusive schooling.

Theme Three Summary

Theme Three highlighted how systemic peer bullying inhibits an inclusive school culture. Participants suggested that school cultures that promote respect for difference are needed, and described how belonging to a peer group occurs through mutually beneficial relationships. Additionally, participants want schools to bridge perceived divisions between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people, to support sense of belonging. Furthermore, zero-tolerance bullying policies and practices would be embedded, with staff utilising re-education rather than punitive measures as bullying prevention strategies.

Participants shared real examples of how schools have a systemic culture of peer division, where phobic language, subtle behaviours, and/or overt attacks reinforce the isolation of some LGBTQ+ pupils. Participants highlighted how staff often inadequately deal with bullying or discrimination, particularly derogatory slurs, with one school opting to ban use of the word ‘gay’ entirely. Phobic peer gossiping was described as prevalent and can lead to LGBTQ+ pupils feeling excluded and isolated, although participants described how gossip can be insidious and therefore difficult for schools to manage. Whilst anti-bullying strategies such as re-education were viewed positively by some participants, overall, feedback suggested that anti-

bullying practices are inconsistent. Some participants recalled what the researcher terms ‘toxic’ heteronormative experiences, where LGBTQ+ pupils were purposely ‘outed’, with males often viewed as perpetrators in mixed-sex schools, and where LGBTQ+ pupils were accused of being attracted to ‘everyone’ in single-sex settings. Several participants discussed how bullying and discrimination can be rife, even within the LGBTQ+ community.

Many of the views shared throughout this theme reinforce claims in prior literature, where various forms of HBT bullying impact LGBTQ+ pupils’ sense of inclusion. Yet participants suggested ways in which schools can intervene against prejudice and/or hateful views, including with: flexible zero-tolerance policies; re-education programmes that reform views; and, increased staff interventions that promote peer cohesion.

Theme Four: Gender-neutral Practices Support Inclusion but Schools are Gender Binary

Theme Definition
Schools are predominantly gender binary and cisnormative, but gender-neutral resources, facilities and practices can positively impact LGBTQ+ YP’s inclusion.

Theme Four links to Theme One, where participants described how cisnormative practices are present across the schooling journey, despite participants describing how pupils would ideally learn about cisgender and diverse gender identities in equal measure. As such, Theme Four relates to the role that gender

plays in LGBTQ+ people's experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion, and is summarised by the following participant statement:

> **Max:** *"schools are still such a binary place, and I really think that something needs to be done about that. It doesn't have to be major, but […] letting like kids do different sports no matter their gender […] letting them choose […] and not just splitting it based on gender".*

Theme Four: Ideal School

All participants described how the integration of gender-neutral school facilities is crucially important. Despite differing views on how facilities such as toilets and changing rooms should be arranged, it was viewed unanimously that schools should have options that allow LGBTQ+ people to choose facilities best aligned to their identity, and in ways that support privacy:

> **Nate:** *"unisex toilets could be definitely implemented in a way that makes it very like natural".*

> **Sam:** *"gender-neutral bathrooms and gender-neutral changing room options, or [...] cubicles within changing rooms at least. So that gives people some privacy".*

> **Max:** *"in terms of changing rooms, instead of just having like a boy's ones and a girl's one [...] it would just be better if it was like cubicles".*

For most participants, providing individual unisex cubicles meant that pupils could embrace their individual expression whilst reducing the need to use identity labels:

JJ: *“they are then putting themselves in that little box and they're like not being respectful towards themselves and their own gender identity”.*

Anna: *“changing cubicles […] would just eliminate that issue completely”.*

Individual cubicles were thought to offer LGBTQ+ people a greater sense of safety, particularly from those who are opposed to gender-diverse people using facilities that are misaligned with their biological sex:

Oron: *“everyone […] stresses about the bathrooms, about how like, ‘ohh, the transgender are invading our bathrooms’ and I'm like ‘OK, but do you not see how this gender-neutral bathroom solution is a lot more nice in general”.*

DfE (2023a) non-statutory guidance, which is currently under consultation, advises schools on how they could offer ‘gender questioning’ children use of individual toilet cubicles. This guidance states that:

> if a child does not want to use the toilet designated for their biological sex [the school may] offer the use of an alternative toilet facility. This should be secured from the inside and for use by one child at a time, including for hand washing. (p.14)

Yet this guidance asserts that, as a *default*, “all children should use the toilets, showers and changing facilities designated for their biological sex unless it will cause distress for them to do so” (DfE, 2023a, p.14). However, there will be gender-diverse pupils that are closeted (Harris et al., 2021b), and with DfE (2023a, p.14) guidance stipulating that “boys must not be allowed to go into the girls’ toilets (and vice versa) in order to protect all children”, pupils who are closeted, gender-diverse and

experiencing distress, may feel increasingly excluded and marginalised if they are unable to access facilities that allow them to feel safe.

Using gender-neutral language was regarded as key to facilitating LGBTQ+ inclusion, with most participants describing how gender binary language should be avoided:

> **Oron:** *"the idea would just be like a neutral, like, a neutral way to address everyone".*

> **Tyler:** *"there are certain professions that [...] people will associate with a specific gender, so like when discussing things […] just like maybe switching that up [...] just using 'they'".*

Literature has underscored the importance of gender-neutral language and respect for pupils' chosen names or pronouns (e.g., Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b). Furthermore, Evans & Rawlings (2021) argue that appropriate use of pronouns is perhaps the single most positive and significant action schools can adopt, with Leonard (2022) stating that language-use appears as a consistent and central theme reported within positive school experiences research.

To ensure that everyone in school adopts gender-neutral language, participants suggested that education on gender-diverse pronouns and terms should be actively taught. Furthermore, participants highlighted how staff should receive training on respecting pupils' chosen pronouns:

> **Max:** *"teaching about different pronouns and stuff as part of […] grammar […] so, just as part of English".*

Steph: *"teaching children about different genders […] teaching staff about sort of being tolerant and letting the child choose their name".*

Abbott et al. (2015) highlighted how teachers should receive training and workshops on LGBTQ+ issues, including the appropriate use of gender terminologies. However, contrary to participant wishes and findings in research, recent DfE (2023a) guidance around 'gender questioning' pupils in schools states that:

> staff should not unilaterally adopt any changes, including using a new name or new pronouns [for a pupil], unless or until this has been agreed by the school or college in accordance with the proper procedures and, in the vast majority of cases, parental consent. (p.11)

Additional ways participants felt that gender-binary practices should be reduced within existing school systems were mentioned, with focus upon the use of resources. Several participants suggested that swappable pronoun badges could be used to symbolise an inclusive school culture:

Sam: *"school even provided, like, pronoun pins just so everyone knows pronouns and those can be swappable if they change".*

JJ: *"pronoun badges for the staff because that makes them more approachable".*

Participants highlighted how school emails containing the author's pronouns help to support inclusion for gender-diverse people:

Oron: *“pronouns in […] emails. It makes it a lot easier for like addressing people, you don't have to guess”.*

For participants who discussed school uniforms, it was agreed that uniform policies should be flexible, to allow for both personal expression and individual comfort, although ideas expressed were not consistent:

Steph: *“if a boy wants to wear a dress, that's fine [...] in my ideal world, no one would sort of bat an eyelid”.*

JJ: *“you need to be able to quite literally make it more flexible like […] different things that people can change on their uniforms, like swap out […] you can wear whatever you want as long as they're these colours”.*

Burke & Grosvenor’s (2015, p.98) ideal school research supports the view that uniform flexibility promotes inclusion, claiming that uniforms “violate the individual’s right of self-expression”. Burke & Grosvenor further highlight that whilst some argue that uniforms create a sense of equality between different social groups, it is perhaps naïve to think that identical clothing eliminates inequality. Extending this point, Burke & Grosvenor argue that “there is nothing wrong with people understanding each other’s differences. There is nothing wrong with different groups forming their own identities. For superficial sameness to be imposed on one group by another is wrong” (p.98).

In terms of the current socio-political landscape of English schools, recent DfE (2023a) non-statutory guidance related to ‘gender questioning’ pupils provides advice that is in direct opposition to participants’ views here. For instance, the government advises that “a child who is gender questioning should, in general, be

held to the same uniform standards as other children of their sex at their school and schools may set clear rules to this effect" (p.16).

Theme Four: Real Experiences

In their real experiences, participants described inconsistent experiences of school uniform policies, and the uniforms described all featured gender-binary elements. Participants highlighted how uniforms were usually inflexible, uncomfortable, and oppressive of identity expression:

> **Anna:** *"if you wore trousers [you'd] be like […] the weird kid. And, like, it's very femininised school uniforms".*
>
> **Ali:** *"there was only trousers for the boys".*
>
> **JJ:** *"you're limiting people's creativity with uniforms".*

Allen-Biddell & Bond (2022b) echo this view, describing how cisnormative practices continue to be perpetuated through gender-specific uniforms that lead gender diverse CYP to feel isolated and excluded.

Some participants, however, described experiencing some degree of uniform leniency, which they thought supported LGBTQ+ inclusion:

> **Sam:** *"They were quite lenient on the uniform policy, which we were quite lucky about […] I would wear Doc Martins with rainbow shoelaces every day and I never got told off for that. They never really had any like gender uniform restrictions, which was nice".*
>
> **Max:** *"They didn't really care about girls wearing trousers".*

Many participants highlighted how schools continue to segregate pupils based upon their presumed gender, with one participant describing how this adds to a sense of gender division:

> **Max:** *"with this binary way that schools are, I think it very much creates this sort of them-versus-us culture".*

> **Max:** *"the stupidest thing […] like, teachers thinking it's a good idea to have like a boy-girl seating plan".*

McGowan et al. (2022) found that, in many schools, teachers still segregate male or female pupils in certain classes, imposing gendered seating arrangements. However, further analysis of gender-binary practices indicated differing approaches by mixed-sex schools and single-sex schools. For example, three participants described how their single-sex school was so gender-binary that there was no teaching about biological development of the opposite sex, or facilities for those identifying as gender-diverse:

> **Nate:** *"I don't think we learned anything about like periods beyond that they happened".*

> **Anna:** *"they would have assumed that we didn't need to be taught about like boy stuff [...] but actually […] what if people were trans?"*

> **Oron:** *"there was no, like, male facilities even for teachers, they had to use the gender-neutral, disabled bathrooms".*

Although education and training on gender pronouns was viewed as very important in participants' ideal inclusive schools, recollections of real experiences

highlighted that education is lacking, with staff only briefly touching upon gender diversity as a topic, which is often conducted in a performative way that does not, for example, respect students' chosen identities:

> **Sam:** *"I think it was mentioned on a PowerPoint they had but the definition was wrong […] like, 'someone who isn't a girl or a boy' which is like yes, but no, […] you could really try a bit harder".*

> **Max:** *"they only really talk about it […] when it suits them, as in they have a student who identifies in such a way […] and they don't use like she or he or him pronouns".*

Lee (2020) has highlighted how schools maintain 'traditional' values that continue to segregate pupils, such as using binary gender labels. Furthermore, McGlashan & Fitzpatrick (2018) argue that use of binary language can enforce power imbalances.

The option of gender-neutral facilities and single occupancy unisex cubicles were described as part of the ideal school. However, in real experiences, changing rooms were viewed as gender-binary, inadequate, and uncomfortable, especially for gender-diverse pupils:

> **Oron:** *"uncomfortable even […] outside of the context of like being trans. I didn't really enjoy […] getting changed in a cubicle with three other people or like on a bench in the hallway".*

> **Ali:** *"I had a friend […] they had to get changed in the medic, first aid room".*

Research on transgender pupil experiences describes that many pupils feel unsafe using toilets and changing rooms, with gendered spaces leading them to experience social isolation (e.g., Cotton, 2014; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Harris et al., 2021b). Furthermore, one participant explained how changing rooms for female pupils were absent, with male pupils using the only changing rooms available. This point highlights how facilities were inadequate for *all* pupils, indicating that schools espouse practices that perpetuate gender inequalities:

> **Dani:** *"changing rooms […] very binary, […] girls all got changed in the sports hall, and the boys all got changed in the gym, kind of they had their own changing room. So it was very […] separate."*

Experiences of toilet facilities were varied, with physical layouts of toilet blocks being inadequate, and described as mostly gender-binary. The OECD (2020) highlight how it is a school's social responsibility to prioritise inclusive approaches that challenge restrictive gender norms. Yet whilst some participants commented on having gender-neutral toilet options, there was a sense that these facilities were half-hearted and resulted in removing or limiting resources for others, such as staff or disabled people:

> **Max:** *"one cubicle staff toilets that they just slap a gender-neutral toilet sign on".*

> **Ali:** *"they had to remove something from someone else, like the teachers, to be able to do it".*

> **Dani:** *"there is a gender-neutral toilet […] but that […] was just probably erm a disabled one".*

Several participants observed how schools that only provide gender-binary toilets ultimately impact disabled people, with one participant highlighting how their empathy for disabled people led them to behave in a way that oppressed their own identity:

> **Oron:** *"sometimes they just have a disabled cubicle in each like gendered bathroom […] I don't wanna take up that space from people who actually need it if they have mobility issues, I don't want them to be waiting because I decided I don't want to go in the women's".*

Leonard (2022) explored the experiences of transgender people and described how pupils were offered access to facilities designed for disabled people. Here, despite school's efforts to create special provision, LGBTQ+ YP felt that use of facilities 'meant for someone else' was inappropriate and ultimately damaging to their self-esteem.

Theme Four Summary

Theme Four highlighted how gender-neutral resources and practices support inclusion but schools are gender-binary. All participants recommended integrating gender-neutral facilities, noting a preference for cubicles that support privacy and safety, allowing one to embrace individuality without need for identity labels. Participants described how gender-binary language should be avoided, with gender-diverse pronouns and terms being actively taught by appropriately trained staff. Here, swappable pronoun badges and pronoun descriptions in email signatures symbolise an inclusive school culture. School uniform policy should be flexible to promote personal expression and comfort, although ideas on how uniforms facilitate this varied.

Participants described experiences where uniforms had some gender-binary element, with inflexible, uncomfortable, and oppressive features. For participants who experienced uniform leniency, this was believed to support LGBTQ+ inclusion. Schools were perceived to adopt practices that segregate pupils based upon their presumed gender, with differences between mixed-sex and single-sex schools. Education on gender pronouns and gender diversity was often lacking or performative and facilities such as changing rooms were deemed gender-binary, inadequate, and uncomfortable, especially for females and gender-diverse pupils. Toilet facilities varied, and whilst some participants recalled gender-neutral options, these facilities were viewed as half-hearted, and often removed and/or limited resources for others, with one participant choosing not to use the facility, despite this resulting in their own identity oppression.

With the UK recently seeing a “significant increase” of children questioning their gender (DfE, 2023a, p.6), views shared by participants highlight the work that must be done if schools are to facilitate greater levels of inclusion for gender-diverse pupils. However, new (under consultation) non-statutory governmental guidance that advises schools on how to engage with ‘gender questioning’ children, describes how the “belief that a person can have a ‘gender’, whether male (or ‘man’), female (or ‘woman’), or ‘other’ […] is a contested belief” (DfE, 2023a, p.6). This statement highlights a political shift *away* from gender diversity inclusion within schools, and therefore poses a significant area of tension for schools who are trying to be both mindful of educational policy, and inclusive of gender-diverse people. Theme Four therefore highlights how schools who choose to follow ‘gender questioning’ guidance, do so at the expense of gender-diverse pupils’ sense of inclusion.

Theme Five: RSE Quality has Implications for LGBTQ+ Young People

Theme Definition

Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) is important for embedding LGBTQ+ inclusion, supporting LGBTQ+ identity development. However, LGBTQ+ young people's RSE education is often inadequate, and continues to 'other' LGBTQ+ identities and relationships.

Theme Five relates to an element of the school curriculum that participants highlighted as important to the development of LGBTQ+ YP. All participants wanted high-quality RSE that features LGBTQ+ content, and supports the development of *all* sexual and gender identities. Many participants expressed how RSE should be tailored to support pupils' holistic and age-related developmental needs:

> **Nate:** *"I feel like 9-year-olds […] I don't think it's like […] necessary for them to be learning about the intricacies of relationships […] and especially as you get into like Year 9, which is where we had a lot of like the 'how to put on a condom' and 'how to not get gonorrhoea' […]. But […] a lot more of that should be focused on, like, being good for your partner and your partner being good for you because you can't just be expected to stumble out into the world without any clue".*

Research reflects this sentiment, describing how ineffective teaching practices can be mitigated through schools accessing appropriate resources that promote learning about LGBTQ+ relationships (Page, 2017; Moffat & Field, 2020).

Theme Five: Ideal School

A key facet of participants' ideal RSE was that it should teach about LGBTQ+ relationships to reduce YP from engaging in risky behaviours:

> **Nate**: "*more of that should be focused on […] there will be some damaging stuff and you might go through it, and you should be as prepared as possible".*

> **Steph:** ***"****you can be abused in a gay relationship, you can be abused in a straight relationship, so I think just a blanket 'we* need *to teach people about this!'".*

Participants highlighted the need for secondary schools to adopt open discussions during RSE, which they felt should include comprehensive teaching that includes learning about same-sex sex:

> **Oron:** *"there would at least be a decent Sex Ed for, like, especially in terms of like actually being open about […] kind of what protection you can use if like, you're a lesbian having sex".*

> **Anna:** *"Sex Ed would [...] include stuff about, like, gay sex and stuff [..] you'd be just taught exactly the same as any other student would be".*

> **Anna:** *"If the kids had questions, they would be able to ask them without a risk of it being judged".*

Although participants expressed differing ideas around what LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE would look like in primary and secondary schools, there was consensus that RSE would be different at primary school, with age appropriateness that considers one's stage of development. Whilst secondary school RSE would be

detailed and clear about sexuality and gender development, particularly for teenagers, primary schools were thought to have the responsibility of early priming, with young children receiving a general education that might inform them of differing lifestyles, including learning about diverse family structures:

> **Steph**: *"when you're sort of primary age, it's more... it's a lot about families, isn't it, and what different families look like […] I don't think there's any issue, sort of, to introducing that girlfriend and girlfriend, and boyfriend and boyfriend, and things like that at a very young age".*

> **Max:** *"it doesn't even have to be very explicit from a young age, but just like children's books and stuff, if they include just like some gay characters in it".*

Lee (2021) found that the RSE curriculum already does differ between primary and secondary schools, with DfE (2019) guidance prioritising relationship education over sex education. Participants' suggestions regarding primary school RSE education therefore aligns with DfE (2019, p.19), where CYP should be taught predominantly about relationships, namely how "families of many forms [including those with LGBT parents] provide a nurturing environment for children". Furthermore, the guidance stipulates that "schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content" (DfE, 2019, p.19), which participants highlighted as a key feature of their ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school.

Theme Five: Real Experiences

Despite participants describing their ideal RSE curriculum, real experiences were reported to be variable, often half-heartedly taught, and typically failing to

educate on relationships, despite participants understanding that schools are duty-bound to provide comprehensive Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE):

> **Dani:** *"we never had PSHE in high school […] it's probably in the law, right, that you have to have PSHE?".*

> **Ali:** *"you've got PSHE lessons that are the actual like governmented, government-mandated lessons […] it's not just talking about sex and that, it's talking about relationships".*

Participants appeared well-informed that the *Equality Act 2010* declares that state-funded schools have a 'public duty' to promote knowledge and understanding around protected characteristics (Carlile, 2019). Furthermore, DfE (2019, p.15) announced that "LGBT families and identities must be taught in a manner that is 'fully integrated into their programme of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a stand-alone unit or lesson'".

Participants described how RSE tended to focus on heterosexual sexual health, and cisgender biology, which appeared to add to the sense of fear around sexually-related risks, particularly as people were not always sure what information applied to them, or whether the information given was accurate:

> **JJ:** *"we hadn't been properly educated to the point that she didn't know that you could still get sexually transmitted illnesses from a lesbian relationship".*

> **Tyler:** *"there's lots of flaws with sex education in the curriculum, but I think particularly for LGBTQ students, I think they're kinda left to just figure out on your own".*

Abbott et al. (2015) support this claim, arguing that within RSE, teachers continue to position LGBTQ+ practices away from the classroom, leaving LGBTQ+ pupils uninformed on important topics. Moffat & Field's (2020) research found occasions where decisions were made that wilfully withheld important knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ issues, which they felt served to maintain the status quo. Meanwhile, Formby & Donovan (2020) highlight how, when LGBTQ+ issues *are* mentioned in RSE, there are often negative associations between sexual activity and sexually transmitted infections.

Participants appeared to view their real RSE experiences as having wider implications on identity development, particularly within relationships, which is perhaps why relationship education features so highly within participants' ideal schools:

> **Steph:** *"100% I think I would have probably come out a lot earlier, I would have had maybe more relationships, or explored having relationships a lot, a bit earlier than I did".*

> **Nate:** *"I didn't really start getting into relationships until I got out of high school cause, again, I just didn't know what to do in relationships and I didn't know how to like, interact with someone I was interested in".*

Harris et al.'s (2021b) research further highlights schools' failures to make the curriculum inclusive, with LGBTQ+ pupils often left unaware of factors relating to positive and safe sexual relationships.

Theme Five Summary

Theme Five highlighted how RSE quality and content has implications for LGBTQ+ YP. All participants stated the importance of high-quality RSE that features LGBTQ+ content and supports the development of all sexual and gender identities. Many participants expressed the need to tailor RSE to pupils' holistic and age-related developmental needs, to reduce the likelihood of risky behaviours.

However, participants' real experiences of RSE were reported to be variable, whether half-hearted or failing to educate on relationships, despite schools being viewed as duty-bound to provide comprehensive PSHE. RSE also focused on heterosexual sexual health and cisgender biology, which was thought to increase LGBTQ+ pupils' sexual risk, because information disseminated in classes didn't apply to them or was inaccurate.

Robinson (2008, p.116) argues that "children today have become the most 'watched' of all generations, their lives increasingly regulated by adults [due to a] permanent state of alert […] because of their perceived vulnerability to sexual danger". Conversely, pupils "want information that helps them keep safe sexually" (Harris et al. 2022, p.304). Participants have provided evidence that an inadequate LGBTQ+ RSE curriculum not only has implications for sexual safety, but also has negative consequences around the development of healthy relationships for LGBTQ+ people. Robinson (2008, p.116) further accentuates this point, by stating that "denying children knowledge of sexuality […] hinders children becoming aware and competent beings".

Moffat & Field (2020, p.101) described "inherent difficulties" in delivering an LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE curriculum, due to socio-political notions of 'childhood

innocence' and debates around whether CYP should receive education on complex sex and relationship issues. Yet here, participants have provided many valuable insights into *how* schools can facilitate increased sense of LGBTQ+ inclusion through an 'age-appropriate' high quality RSE curriculum.

Theme Six: Diverse LGBTQ+ Representation is Important but Lacking or Inconsistent

Theme Definition
Diverse representation across the school system is important, but LGBTQ+ representation is often lacking, negative, and inconsistent across curriculum areas.

Theme Six weaves through numerous other themes, as LGBTQ+ representation features repeatedly. However, participants explored LGBTQ+ representation to such a degree that it warranted creation of its own theme.

Participants highlighted the importance of LGBTQ+ representation across school environments and practices, placing emphasis on the need to include diverse representation naturally across the curriculum and within school resources, in the same way that non-LGBTQ+ people are represented. The following quotation summarises why LGBTQ+ representation was thought to be important:

> **Tyler:** *"seeing that inclusion in the staff […] as well as the students. So like if you know the school curriculum is really diverse […] it's about […] seeing people that you can relate to, so […] you're seeing people of same race as you, the same gender as you, same like sexuality, religion […]. A meaningful*

curriculum, not just like one-offs here and there. Diversification of staff, like a really diverse staff […] recruiting a diverse group of pupils, which will […] show […] prospective parents […] this is a diverse school […] doing activities […] engaging with, like, Pride Month […] that just shows the values of the school".

Theme Six: Ideal School.

Curriculum content was considered as an ideal way of naturally integrating LGBTQ+ representation across schools. Many participants felt that curriculum content should be contemporary, include resources created by LGBTQ+ people, and feature diverse LGBTQ+ representation across all subjects:

Sam: *"LGBTQ people should be used in, like when people do examples in class [...] maybe when you start to learn about poetry, you could have poetry about like homosexual relationships".*

Anna: *"there would be like plays written by like gay people or about gay people".*

Steph: *"in drama […] using a gay couple […] even like maths questions […] where it's like, 'today so-and-so is getting married to so-and-so'. I think there's really simple ways that you can integrate it".*

Lee (2020) supports this, arguing that, to flourish educationally, pupils need talented and diverse role-models who reflect our diverse society. Stonewall (2022) suggests how LGBTQ+ people can be embedded within both curriculum and resources, for example Alan Turing in History or Frida Kahlo in Art, or by using practical examples within maths, such as by asking pupils to calculate the

percentage of pocket money a child receives from same-sex parents (Stonewall, 2022; Pearson, 2020). These practices can contribute positively on a whole-school level and, as more members of the population are celebrated, the overall health and happiness of the school environment is enhanced (Pearson, 2020).

One curriculum area highlighted as being important for LGBTQ+ representation was history. Some participants were keen to highlight that by studying *more* aspects of societal history, pupils learn from events that had social implications:

> **Steph:** *"history [...] you could […] teach […] about Pride Month and a celebration of differences in primary school. And then perhaps you could do the more in-depth history […], the events like [...] Stonewall and the AIDS crisis […] as you get older."*
>
> **Anna:** *"gay history would be talked about [...] learning about your own history".*
>
> **Nate:** *"in my ideal school yes […] absolutely 100%, queer history".*

Many participants indicated that *how* LGBTQ+ representation is delivered should be sensitive to the recipient's age. However, there was agreement that learning about representation should begin young, and focus on family structures:

> **Steph:** *"I would still start it really young and tailoring, because people […] learn about all types of families […] there's no reason why you couldn't have sort of two boyfriends […] even in like stories or videos".*

Sam: *“you would address like the gay relationships the same as you do heterosexual relationships […] maybe like in story books”.*

Participants also felt that it was important for LGBTQ+ pupils to have diverse staff representation, with the adult population providing positive role-models for all pupils:

Tyler: *“in [an] ideal world, you'd like to see a gay teacher, a lesbian teacher, a transgender teacher, a black teacher or a white teacher, an Asian teacher […] or a disabled teacher. You'd like to see […] something of everything, of all colours of the rainbow, and like all races and creeds […] some of those can coexist […] almost it doesn't matter who you are, there's someone there who you're like”.*

Leonard (2022) highlighted that having openly LGBTQ+ staff in schools provides support for LGBTQ+ pupils due to a shared understanding of LGBTQ+ issues. Furthermore, Moffat & Field (2020) argue that being taught by openly-LGBTQ+ staff increases *all* pupils’ understanding of difference, with one participant in Robinson’s (2010) study describing how seeing openly lesbian or gay role-models in school raises awareness on the reality of living as a lesbian or gay adult.

Some participants highlighted how, where diverse staff populations are not possible, school systems had a duty to represent diverse identities in alternative ways, by using external resources such as guest speakers. One participant explained how this is particularly important within primary schools, where children tend to spend much of their time with one teacher who cannot be a diversity role-model for all:

Tyler: *“getting […] guest speakers […] showing a documentary or showing a video, kind of just pausing and being like, OK […] is this person representative of my class?”.*

Research exploring the views of transgender YP endorses this point, suggesting that access to external services provides an important form of information and support (Leonard, 2022; Freedman, 2019).

All participants expressed how systemic representation of LGBTQ+ identities can help pupils feel they belong, with some participants suggesting that, although ‘positive discrimination’ recruitment processes are problematic, staff recruitment *should* fulfil diversity quotas:

Dani: *“representation matters and [...] diversity quota, but I know that's problematic in a way”.*

Lee (2020, p.4) agrees that schools should invest in recruiting a diverse workforce, arguing that it is crucial that schools attract talented staff “who reflect the full diversity of British society”. Although UK employability law is complex, according to ACAS (2023), schools can take ‘positive action’ when recruiting underrepresented social groups with protected characteristics. However, this does not guarantee an increase in LGBTQ+ people pursuing educational careers given wider recruitment issues within the sector (National Education Union, 2022).

Theme Six: Real Experiences

Participants consistently recognised the importance of embedding LGBTQ+ representation across the school curriculum, but history as a subject was deemed inadequate for lacking representation:

Anna: *“We weren’t able to talk about, like the Stonewall riots. We weren't taught about any key prominent features in gay history".*

Max: *“discussed in like history lessons as well as just talking about like what's going on like politically […] for LGBTQ people [because] gay marriage is legal now, and people can transition”.*

Nate: *“history especially is one thing that needs to be like completely scrapped and reworked from the ground up because it is in a horrendous state”.*

Harris et al.’s (2021a) research on the secondary school experiences of LGBTQ+ YP also noted the inadequate LGBTQ+ history curriculum, with participants sharing accounts of one schools’ history department only discussing ‘homosexuals’ in the singular context of being persecuted by Nazis, positioning LGBTQ+ people as victims.

Stonewall (2020) publishes freely accessible LGBT history learning packs for primary and secondary schools, which contain resources that can facilitate increased inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils. Therefore, it could be argued that the inadequacy of LGBTQ+ representation within the history curriculum perhaps indicates the current socio-political climate of schools, since resources increasing LGBTQ+ representation are easily accessible.

Participants suggested that LGBTQ+ representation is lacking *across* the curriculum:

Dani: *“I think maybe if you were […] doing sociology, I might encounter some LGBTQ+ issues but, yeah, nothing really other than that”.*

Tyler: *"I remember like we did Oscar Wilde […] I think it's another one where I think, on the whole, I don't think really that much".*

Positively, some participants discussed having LGBTQ+ teachers, whom they regarded as role-models:

Max: *"teachers were very good to me and, a lot of them […] made it clear that I could talk to them about anything [and] a couple of teachers at my school were gay as well".*

Overall, however, representation was thought to be lacking, particularly as staff tended to maintain privacy about their identities and personal lives, and some LGBTQ+ staff remained 'closeted' at work:

Oron: *"there was also a […] gay teacher and he was the Latin teacher […] he was kind of quiet. He didn't really talk to people. We only knew he was gay because he talked about going to Rome with his husband".*

Dani: *"[teachers] are entitled to their privacy, and although they could be like really actually like positive role models […] they're human, they worry about how they're perceived as well by students".*

Research acknowledges the legacy of Section-28, finding that many LGBTQ+ staff still fear negative consequences of being 'open' at work (Lee, 2021; Harris et al., 2021a). In turn, this reduces potential positive LGBTQ+ role-models, thus limiting who LGBTQ+ pupils can engage with and learn from.

Participants also described the nature of LGBTQ+ representation within their peer group, with some wider LGBTQ+ representation being seen positively, overall:

Sam: *“there's such a community, and people can see the representation around them”.*

However, some participants reflected on peer representation, explaining how different LGBTQ+ identities are often unequally represented within small peer LGBTQ+ communities:

Dani: *“I don't know that there was actually an openly trans student”.*

Oron: *“I was like one of I think two trans people in my entire year”.*

Pearson (2020) highlights how, for under-represented identities, school environments may increase feelings of loneliness and isolation. When considering the growth of LGBTQ+ communities, some participants sensed a cultural shift, which one participant believes will naturally increase LGBTQ+ representation:

Sam: *“[there] wasn't that many in the older years but then by the time I left, in the younger years, there was like quite a big community going”.*

Despite this perceived cultural shift in LGBTQ+ representation, participants did not feel that this is reflected in school resources. Participants highlighted how books and other school materials offered limited LGBTQ+ representation:

Oron: *“no such thing, sadly […] the library didn't get new books very often […] a lot of the time they were very like subject relevant. The majority of fiction ones […] were quite old”.*

Sam: *“we had the posters around school […] one […] just said, some people are non-binary and that's okay [...] but that's not […] explaining what non-binary people are. It just, it felt like a box they were ticking”.*

Evans & Rawlings (2021) found that LGBTQ+ topics are underrepresented compared to other areas of diversity, with resources typically failing to represent LGBTQ+ identities except for when providing negative representations that perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes.

Theme Six Summary

Theme Six highlighted how diverse LGBTQ+ representation is important but is typically lacking or inconsistent. All participants suggested the need to include diverse representation naturally across the curriculum and within resources, in the same way that non-LGBTQ+ people are represented. Many participants felt that curriculum content should be contemporary and age appropriate, and school should include resources created by LGBTQ+ people. Participants commented that diverse LGBTQ+ representation should be included across all subjects, particularly history, so that pupils can learn from milestone events. Participants felt that it was important to have diverse staff representation but, where this was unrealistic, access to external speakers should be sought, so that pupils have LGBTQ+ role-models. All participants expressed how systemic representation of LGBTQ+ identities will help pupils' sense of belonging.

However, participants described inadequate LGBTQ+ representation across the school curriculum, especially history. Whilst some participants recalled having positive role-models, generally, representation was limited due to staff maintaining privacy about their lives. Whilst some participants noted LGBTQ+ representation within their small LGBTQ+ peer group, others described how different LGBTQ+ identities were represented unequally. Some participants felt a cultural shift may be

underway with the number of people identifying as LGBTQ+, but that this was not reflected in school learning or resources.

This theme highlights the importance of diverse representation across school systems for LGBTQ+ YP, with participants describing how schools have a duty to ensure that *all* CYP have some form of representation, supporting sense of belonging and inclusion. Participants have stated how the curriculum plays a significant role in promoting awareness around diversity, with increased LGBTQ+ representation and role-models helping LGBTQ+ pupils to consider their identity, better preparing them for life beyond school.

Theme Seven: The Values of Individuals with Power Impact Inclusion

Theme Definition

LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of inclusion are impacted by values of individuals in positions of power.

Despite the examples in Theme Seven providing a somewhat bleak picture of LGBTQ+ representation, some participants recalled positive experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion due to individual staff members actively *being* inclusive. Therefore, Theme Seven examines how individuals can positively or negatively impact experiences of inclusion, either systemically or through everyday practices.

One participant highlighted how the values of individuals with power can influence LGBTQ+ pupils' experiences of inclusion:

Tyler: *"I remember particularly the English department being kinda quite liberal […] not being afraid to say something […] so […] she was like, 'well no I'm gonna say it's the famous* gay *person' […]. I don't know if maybe if she dwelled on it more, it would have maybe been that she'd have maybe been told no, like, 'don't focus on his life, just get on with the work'. Or maybe […] she could have done it more. I don't know […]. Maybe I'm giving her too much credit".*

Theme Seven: Ideal School

In their ideal LGBTQ+ school, many participants felt teachers should openly demonstrate their inclusive values:

Anna: *"teachers are like actually showing they're like representing LGBTQ+ people [...] all the lessons have representation in them".*

Max: *"my subject teachers that I knew I could go to about stuff, like the ones that were more like openly spoken about inclusivity and stuff".*

These sentiments echo arguments from previous research, where staff members can improve LGBTQ+ pupil experiences through championing LGBTQ+ rights, combating prejudice, and through supporting *all* pupils to speak openly about sexuality and gender (Harris et al., 2021a; Leonard, 2022).

Individuals who were perceived as having powerful roles in school, such as governors and senior leaders, were viewed by participants as essential for developing a school ethos that embraces equality and celebrates difference. Participants explained how such individuals helped to embed inclusive values within policy, and by influencing staff:

Max: *“governors and senior leadership team being able to talk about, have like as a point in all of their meetings, about any issues that have been raised to do with inclusiveness, [...] any ideas that they have for ways that the school can be more inclusive”.*

Tyler: *“governing bodies should also be inclusive and diverse […] then their policies and things like that will be influenced by them […] the head teacher and the teachers can be as inclusive as they want to be”.*

Participants believed that with powerful individuals integrating inclusive values across the school, this will reduce performative ‘box-ticking’ exercises such as standalone events and one-off LGBTQ+ educational activities:

Tyler: *“including things for those demographics, but not just in a one-off performative way. And you create an environment that those people [...] feel comfortable going to”.*

Max: *“Openly talking about inclusivity and not just talking about it when it suits them”.*

Tyler: *“meaningful things, inside, it will show the people outside that it is an inclusive school”.*

Lee (2020, p.4) supports views shared by participants, arguing that for pupils to flourish, they need authentic school leaders and teachers who are committed to working “in the best interests of their school community”. An inclusive ethos was thought by participants to elevate the status of *all* individuals across school systems, with events that celebrate LGBTQ+ issues allowing everyone to become involved:

Nate: *"If you're a gay student, if you're a gay teacher, join in. If you're a straight student, or a straight teacher, just get in and learn and engage and organise and kind of like unite".*

Participants believed that certain pupils hold *some* power, and suggested that pupils should lead on LGBTQ+ related groups or events that promote diversity and equality, perhaps through equality leaders or ambassador roles. Here, the participants' key message was that schools should provide appropriate opportunities that elevate pupils' voices on agendas relating to LGBTQ+ inclusion:

Dani: *"student-led organisations, which have the power to host events."*

Max: *"it's really important for schools to hear students' perspectives on inclusivity and stuff […] a way that students can share their ideas of what school can do to, like, be better and improve. Whether it's like a club or […] you send a tip in […] just as suggestions for what can be done".*

Greteman (2015, p.429) highlights the imperative that LGBTQ+ pupils' voices are heard and elevated through ongoing purposeful inclusion initiatives, stating that "youth are not a static population, but a population that is constantly changing. Those identities we see in circulation now will not always be, as new identities are invented by the ever-creative youth of the world". As identities evolve, so too might the needs of the LGBTQ+ population, which further supports the impetus for schools to facilitate pupil involvement when decisions are being made regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Participants' ideals around school power hierarchies were perceived as complex, with some arguing that power differentials have a function, whilst others preferring an egalitarian and non-hierarchal approach:

> **Max:** *"[there] needs to be that sort of relationship of a teacher's sort of being higher up than the student, otherwise it would probably be like chaos and students would just do whatever they wanted".*

> **Nate:** *"teachers and students should be comfortable talking to each other as equals, not as like student and master. It should be, 'you are another human who has more experience than me and so I am coming to you to ask about this', instead of you're my teacher".*

The literature review found no research explicitly exploring the impact of staff/pupil power differentials on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, despite acknowledgement that teachers hold authority (e.g., Formby, 2015). With participants agreeing that power imbalances exist, but differing opinions about *how* power should be utilised by schools, further research on the functions and implications of staff/pupil power imbalances may be needed.

Theme Seven: Real Experiences

Despite participant ideals highlighting how LGBTQ+ pupils should have increased representation and power, in their real experiences, school stakeholders were viewed as having disproportionate levels of power:

> **Dani:** *"in high school, you don't necessarily feel […] on a par with the teachers and […] you don't feel like you have the power".*

Sam: *“when I saw it [a homophobic slur written in a book] I went, ‘I’ll read it!’ because I didn't want one, one of the homophobes to get it ‘cause I didn't wanna give that power”.*

Participants’ experiences of power differentials highlight how schools as organisations do not always comply with statutory guidance. For example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2022) observes a school’s duty to ensure that all school members are treated with equal respect, with the *Public Sector Equality Duty 2011* and *Equality Act 2010* stipulating that schools must:

a) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
b) foster good relations across all protected characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Participants considered how uneven power distribution impacted wider school ethos and values, with many participants describing how those perceived to hold power seem to perpetuate a culture where inclusion is half-heartedly approached through box-ticking exercises:

Anna: *“one of the school values was tolerance, and you're meant to be tolerant of other people and […] differences. But again, these were just kind of like words that existed you've, like stuck up on classroom rules”.*

Nate: *“you can put up as many flags as you like but if I don't know that's genuine […] something is being performed”.*

Sam: *“it felt like a box they were checking just to say, like we've done it with support of these students. All sorted. Move on”.*

Again, participants' views indicate school's systemic non-compliance with *Public Sector Equality Duty 2011*, which states how schools "must integrate the general equality duty within all their operations. They should do this rigorously and meaningfully. It should not be treated as just paperwork or a tick-box exercise" (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2022).

Numerous participants also indicated that those with 'protected characteristics' received unequal levels of protection or recognition, resulting in schools prioritising certain characteristics:

> **Steph:** *"things like Diwali and Chinese New Year [but] there's sort of no mention of Pride month".*

> **Max:** *"I almost know for like a fact if someone said like something racist towards a student at my school […] they would have reported it, but I don't think the same attitude is held with, like homophobia and transphobia, because schools don't talk about how serious it is".*

This is despite the *Equality Act 2010* stipulating that schools are "legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to promote equality of opportunity and protect individuals from discrimination" (Harris et al., 2021b, p.2).

Overall, participants described a key component of their experiences as linked to the values and actions of individual teachers and/or other school employees. Several examples of how staff would choose to either provide or withhold LGBTQ+ education and support were given and, whilst some participants recounted positive experiences, others cited non-inclusive attitudes, where staff would actively avoid or oppress LGBTQ+ education and support:

Sam: *“we learnt about poems by Lord Byron, and we learned about his history […] but they completely cut out the fact that he was bisexual.*

JJ: *“one of my friends came out to [the teacher] then we were automatically no longer her favourite students [...], she genuinely avoided us like the plague”.*

Anna: *“he talked to us about like trans and what trans means […] that wasn't […] on the curriculum necessarily [whilst] my RS teacher like I think was quite homophobic, and she made that like pretty obvious”.*

These excerpts demonstrate the variety of approaches taken by staff, with their actions typically perceived as either positive or negative, never neutral. For example, Sam’s quotation highlights how staff make choices that can lead to LGBTQ+ invisibility and silencing, which Atkinson (2021) describes as institutionally sanctioned homophobia. Harris et al. (2021b) remind us, poignantly, that homophobic attitudes still exist within institutions *and* individuals and, instead of being overt, are increasingly furtive to avoid being labelled as homophobic.

Explicit homophobia was described by JJ and Anna, whose experiences echoed research where LGBTQ+ pupils expressed feeling ostracised following negative encounters with anti-LGBTQ+ staff (Harris et al., 2021a). Whilst the phobic actions of staff are significant and damaging to LGBTQ+ YP’s experiences of inclusion (Formby, 2015), Leonard (2022) highlights how more research is needed on how to address staff-led discrimination.

Conversely, some participants identified how individual staff would utilise the power they had to advance LGBTQ+ pupils’ experiences of inclusion e.g., through

additional education on LGBTQ+ identities. Evans & Rawlings (2021) research supports this, finding that positive and supportive learning environments are facilitated through significant individuals, relationships, and dialogues.

The role of certain pupils within school was also deemed important for LGBTQ+ pupils' sense of inclusion. For example, some participants provided examples of how individual pupils holding *some* powers were able to action their inclusive values, leading to what was perceived as the promotion of positive change:

> **Max:** *"they have a student who is elected as head of diversity".*
>
> **Oron:** *"LGBT students in the school could interact, [it] was entirely student-run, like they had a kind of like LGBT club".*
>
> **JJ:** *"I was a student, a student ambassador, and we had a meeting about how we can be more inclusive".*

Despite an increased sense of empowerment, where pupils were given explicit roles and spaces for taking positive inclusion-driven action, participants felt that pupil-led decisions and actions were closely monitored by staff. McGlashan & Fitzpatrick (2018) also noted staff influence over pupil-based societies, with one school's LGBTQ+ group being established, facilitated, and attended by the school counsellor. This highlights how staff may, at times, inadvertently assert their power in situations designed to empower pupils.

Theme Seven Summary

Theme Seven highlighted how the values of individuals with power impact inclusion. Many participants suggested that, ideally, teachers should openly

demonstrate their inclusive values, with powerful individuals such as governors and senior leaders developing an ethos that embraces equality and celebrates difference. Participants explained how such individuals can embed inclusive values into school policies and by influencing staff, which participants hoped would reduce the likelihood of performative box-ticking exercises that serve to maintain façades of inclusion. Participants explained how an inclusive ethos could elevate the status of all individuals across the school system, with everyone involved with events that celebrate LGBTQ+ issues. Some participants highlighted how pupils should lead on LGBTQ+ related groups or events that promote diversity and equality, with a key message being that schools should provide spaces that elevate pupils' voices on agendas relating to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Overall, participants shared differing viewpoints around the complex nature of school power hierarchies, with some feeling power imbalances have a function and others preferring egalitarianism.

In participants' real experiences, school stakeholders were viewed as having disproportionate levels of power, with powerful individuals often choosing to perpetuate a culture where inclusion is half-heartedly approached through box-ticking exercises. Many participants indicated that those with protected characteristics did not receive equal levels of protection or recognition. Furthermore, participants expressed that staff members typically hold power and choose to either support or withhold LGBTQ+ education. Lastly, some participants provided examples of individual pupils in semi-powerful positions, who applied inclusive values to increase positive change within school.

Despite schools' legal equality duties, Theme Seven highlights significant power imbalances between different school stakeholders, with the values and

actions of individual staff appearing to substantially impact LGBTQ+ pupils' experiences of inclusion. Theme Seven also indicates gaps in research regarding the specific functions and implications of staff/pupil power imbalances, with the researcher noticing limited evidence on the impact of pupil-led inclusion initiatives. With participants evidencing how use of power and HBT bullying are inextricably linked, Formby (2015, p.637) argues that "we should be looking at how individuals and institutions construct and respond to LGBT people", so that a balanced power distribution can lead to increased LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Theme Eight: Inclusion Impacts Development and Wellbeing

Theme Definition
A lack of LGBTQ+ inclusion impacts the development of all young people, but small purposeful acts of inclusion can support LGBTQ+ YP's learning, development, wellbeing, and sense of belonging.

Theme Eight considers the impact of ecological systems on the individual. When generating this theme, the researcher considered the idea of cause-and-effect and specifically how other themes feed into Theme Eight, given that inclusion (or exclusion) has developmental and wellbeing implications.

Participants expressed how LGBTQ+ inclusion increases critical thinking, supports healthier social, emotional and sexuality/gender development, and contributes to pupils' sense of belonging. Participants reflected on how schools help to shape a future inclusive society, and this theme is illustrated by this quotation:

Steph: *"[pupils would be] educated on issues, and they would have their own informed, educated opinions, erm, based on what they know and what they've learned and really having to think about it for themselves".*

Theme Eight: Ideal School

Day et al. (2019b) argue that schools are fundamental in the context of child development, given the amount of time spent there. Participants reflected on how an LGBTQ+ inclusive system increases one's capacity for critical thinking, which has wider implications for the social and emotional development of *all* YP:

Max: *"looking at like maybe LGBTQ+ history, like and how attitudes towards people in the community have changed over time […] very much sort of gets people to like be more open-minded and like sympathise a lot more".*

Glazzard & Stones (2021) substantiate this, arguing that inclusive practices are critical in teaching pupils how discrimination and prejudice are legally and morally controversial, with promotion of inclusive attitudes influencing the perspectives of *all* YP, which has long-term societal implications.

A curriculum that embeds LGBTQ+ topics was thought to support social development, alongside pupils' sense of belonging:

Max: *"Kids are like some of the most open-minded people, so if we can […] help them feel like it's normal, then hopefully kids that are LGBTQ+ will be able to accept themselves better […] Kids that aren't [LGBTQ+] will be able to accept their peers better […] educating kids when they're young [...] will also normalise it".*

Some participants acknowledged long-term benefits of an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, describing how reducing the likelihood of detrimental biases and prejudiced attitudes could grow an inclusive future society:

> **Steph:** *“these children are going to grow up and […] societal views will change as children grow”.*

> **Max:** *“educating them at a younger age […] will lead to less biassed and prejudiced in the future”.*

> **JJ:** *“high schools create the society".*

Participants suggested a correlation between an LGBTQ+ inclusive environment and pupils’ wellbeing, with one participant stating:

> **Tyler:** *“an inclusive school would hopefully […] make them feel, you know, the most more secure in themselves, more secure with their identity, happier within themselves”.*

With Pearson’s (2020) research highlighting how 25% of teaching staff are concerned for the mental health of LGBTQ+ pupils, Abbott et al. (2015) describe how teachers can provide pupils with information related to identity formation, in turn promoting a sense of community membership and belonging. Furthermore, Day et al. (2019a) describe potential consequences of inclusive school practices for LGBTQ+ pupils, such as increased academic success, better mental wellbeing, and reduced engagement in unhealthy behaviours.

With participants expressing their want for LGBTQ+ mental health to be supported through inclusive practices at both curriculum and whole-school levels,

Harris et al. (2021b, p.16) describe how “meaningful change requires a focus on the school culture”. In concordance with participants’ views, Harris et al. (2021b) argues that creating positive experiences of inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils requires careful and thorough normalisation of LGBTQ+ identities at institutional levels.

Theme Eight: Real Experiences

Participants expressed how, in their real experiences, schools lack LGBTQ+ inclusive practices, which negatively impacts development for all CYP. Furthermore, the absence of positive learning about LGBTQ+ issues can impact the identity development of LGBTQ+ pupils specifically (Pearson, 2020).

The curriculum area that participants felt had significant impact on pupils’ development is RSE and how the ‘relationships’ aspect is, at best, lacking and, at worst, completely absent. Furthermore, participants observed that the sexuality components of RSE tend to be basic, biological, cisgendered, and focused on sexual health:

> **Steph:** *“they kept it very biological and sort of the risks and the STDs”.*
>
> **Oron:** *“watch this video, and this is what [a] condom is, on kind of straight couples”.*
>
> **Dani:** *“different kinds of contraception, like birth control, whatever. I think that's kind of as far as it went”.*

Formby & Donovan (2020) echo participant views, suggesting specifically that gender-specific language effectively removes same-sex relationships from the

curriculum, impacting what LGBTQ+ pupils learn about romantic and/or sexual relationships.

With schools often excluding LGBTQ+ RSE content, Charley et al. (2023) describe numerous developmental and health implications. For example, inadequate RSE content can hinder gender-diverse pupils from developing informed opinions regarding sexual decision-making. Furthermore, recognising how LGBTQ+ people are at increased risk of sexual coercion, sexual trauma, and victimisation, the lack of teaching on how to stay safe in LGBTQ+ relationships might lead pupils to misunderstand the concept of consent (Charley et al., 2023).

A lack of LGBTQ+ education was thought to create other issues. Crucial to wellbeing, many participants highlighted how reduced access to LGBTQ+ education increased their vulnerability to misinformation, as they sought answers to identity-related questions elsewhere:

> **Nate:** *“looking online for resources on queerness is very [...] hit or miss. You could get something that's genuinely really supportive, or you could get some neo-Nazi complaining about trans people for the 55th time”.*
>
> **Sam:** *“if people are gay [...] they're just gonna learn about it from, like, the internet or, heaven forbid, from like, bloody Pornhub, which is* not *an educational resource”.*
>
> **Oron:** *“You get on the internet as a kid and you're kinda like, ‘well, no one would ever lie to me here!’”.*

Formby & Donovan (2020), who examined how LGBTQ+ inclusive the RSE curriculum is, found that LGBTQ+ YP attempt to acquire missing RSE information

informally and, therefore, are vulnerable to misinformation. Charley et al. (2023) also discuss the developmental implications of misinformation on transgender pupils, whom they identified as being particularly exposed to potentially harmful stereotypes when seeking out information, which can increase feelings of isolation, and decrease self-esteem.

Many participants expressed how services that support identity development are important but that, generally, such services were lacking:

Sam: *“there was nothing in place, really, to help us from the school side”.*

Yet LGBTQ+ youth support services are important, with Formby’s (2015) analysis of two studies finding that LGBTQ+ people value services that validate identities, support the sense of belonging and safety, and do not characterise LGBTQ+ YP as ‘victims’. Furthermore, Formby (2015, p.634) found that some participants described access to LGBTQ+ support services as “the difference between life and death”.

Consensus amongst participants was that transgender communities receive particularly unfair treatment at school, with systems viewed as non-inclusive and unsafe, which participants believed impacts transgender pupils’ development and wellbeing:

Sam: *“there’s no support specifically offered to transgender kids, which I find crazy cause they're like they're the most at risk because they're at risk from other students, they're at risk at home, and they also just are at risk from themselves, cause the suicide rates are so high”.*

McGowan et al. (2022) and Seelman (2014) evidenced the increased vulnerability of transgender pupils, highlighting how they constitute one of the most oppressed groups in UK society, experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation. With evidence highlighting that victimisation in school leads transgender pupils to experience increased mental health difficulties, including anxiety, social withdrawal, and greater take-up of unhealthy behaviours, it is important to understand how identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella experience school inclusion differently (McGowan et al., 2022; Allen-Biddell & Bond, 2022b; McDermott et al. 2017; Leonard, 2022; Day et al., 2017; Day et al., 2019a).

Participants reflected on wider societal implications of schools not embedding LGBTQ+ inclusion, with many providing examples of how pupils receive messages throughout their development, and from multiple sources, that may impact their social and emotional development:

> **Steph:** *“from siblings or parents, or maybe even like TV […] and YouTube".*

> **Sam:** *“little children take things and they just repeat it […] if children have like overly discriminatory parents, that's when they start to learn those views.*

To reinforce participants’ views, Lerner & Simi (2000) argue that sexuality development should be considered within the context of family and peer expectations and values, with Williams et al. (2005, p.473) highlighting how “negative homophobic experiences may be particularly threatening to the youth’s emerging sense of self and wellbeing”. With Robinson (2008, p.118) describing how schools have “access to large populations of children for extensive periods of time, over what is considered the critical malleable period of children’s moral and social development”, it is imperative that schools challenge the harmful stereotypes and

discriminatory attitudes that are present in society. Price & Tayler (2015) accentuate this point, stating that *all* CYP benefit from inclusive school practices that purport to shape the adults they become.

Theme Eight (Subtheme): School Safeguarding Policy can Impact Wellbeing

Subtheme Definition

LGBTQ+ young people need to be and feel safe, but there are complexities around school safeguarding procedures that can impact the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ YP.

During the formation of Theme Eight, a subtheme developed that relates to wellbeing, and warrants specific attention and scrutiny. This subtheme also draws upon criticality of Theme Two, whereby wider socio-political factors, namely legislated safeguarding policies, impact the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ pupils. Here, participants highlighted how safeguarding policies are often prioritised over LGBTQ+ pupils' wellbeing, which affects sense of inclusion.

Theme Eight (Subtheme): Ideal School

Some participants felt that, in an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, safeguarding policies and procedures would not be prioritised over wellbeing. Participants commented on how staff should not be informing parents about LGBTQ+ pupils' declared gender and/or sexuality identity, unless the pupil gives permission. Participants highlighted the impact that such a disclosure might have on a person's development, wellbeing and sense of safety:

Max: *“if kids are like LGBTQ+ [or] questioning […], then their parents need to be informed, and I don't think that's okay. I think that really puts kids at risk”.*

Max: *“I think that it's really important that schools don't do anything about that unless they have direct permission from the pupil […] it discourages kids from being open with at school, with their teachers and friends and it means that if the house isn't like accepting that they don't really have a safe space”.*

JJ: *“safeguarding staff are supposed to be taking care of the children's mental health”.*

When considering wider implications of safeguarding on the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ pupils, DfE (2023b) statutory guidance on ‘keeping children safe in education’ supports JJ's views, highlighting how LGBTQ+ pupils’ risk to vulnerability is:

> compounded where children who are LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff. (p.51)

Further reinforcing participant views, the *Equality Act 2010* stipulates that schools are obliged legally to make reasonable adjustments that protect individuals from discrimination. The *Public Sector Equality Duty 2011* section 3(A) also describes how schools should “remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic”, with school leaders demonstrating awareness of implications for people with protected characteristics when making decisions and/or taking actions (Equality and Human Rights

Commission, 2014, p.7). Overall, although gender diversity is not a protected characteristic, sexual orientation is, and this guidance highlights that fundamentally, equality should not be an afterthought in schools. Schools should keep their practices under review by actively assessing impact and considering equality implications when developing policy and making decisions (PSED, 2011).

Theme Eight (Subtheme): Real Experiences

Despite schools having statutory duties to both promote equality and keep children safe, participants recounted examples of how safeguarding policies were often prioritised, inadvertently resulting in LGBTQ+ pupils feeling marginalised and at increased risk of harm. For example, participants provided instances of how staff would inform parents of LGBTQ+ YP's preferred pronoun identities or identity changes, or participants would fear that staff may do so if a disclosure was made. Participants detailed the impact that informing parents may have on a pupil's overall wellbeing:

> **JJ:** *"part of their school procedure [...] if anyone goes to a member of safeguarding staff, about their sexual identity or their gender identity, they tell the parent, which can be quite dangerous. It can put the children in like a position of danger in their home life".*

> **Steph:** *"nothing […] in a school environment can remain 100[%] confidential […], there's an element of risk or something like that on their wellbeing, […] it will be reported, it will be logged and things like that and it could get out and get home".*

> **JJ:** *"I had a friend who came out as trans to one of our teachers […] they wanted to change their name in the system without their parents finding out […] and their parents were notified, and they were sent back to [anonymised country] for a year, which put them into a really difficult position".*

Despite participants being clear regarding the impact that informing parents can have on LGBTQ+ pupils' perceived and actual safety, as well as their sense of inclusion, recent (under consultation) governmental non-statutory guidance regarding 'gender questioning' children takes a 'parent first' approach. DfE (2023a, p.6) states that schools "should engage parents as a matter of priority, and encourage the child to speak to their parents, other than in the exceptionally rare circumstances where involving parents would constitute a significant risk of harm to the child". However, Brand (2023) highlights how this guidance does not substantiate what constitutes 'significant risk of harm', resulting in difficulties in schools implementing such guidance. Furthermore, this guidance has been criticised for its perceived hostility towards transgender people and for questioning whether transgenderism exists (Brand, 2023). Adams (2024) highlights how school personnel may also lack confidence in following this new guidance due to possible conflicts between this guidance and other statutory obligations (e.g., *Equality Act 2010*; DfE 2023b guidance on 'keeping children safe in education').

When considering the wider implications of this new guidance, it is perhaps premature to predict the impact policy recommendations may have on the wellbeing and safeguarding of LGBTQ+ pupils. Yet when we look back at educational policy of the past, Section-28 of the *Local Government Act 1988* tells us that non-inclusive

and ambiguous policy recommendations serve to both silence and actively marginalise LGBTQ+ people.

Theme Eight Summary

Theme Eight highlighted how inclusion (or exclusion) impacts development and wellbeing. Participants suggested that LGBTQ+ inclusion can increase critical thinking, support healthy social, emotional and sexuality/gender development, and contributes to LGBTQ+ people's sense of belonging, with schools helping to shape future society.

Participants shared examples of how a lack of LGBTQ+ inclusion impacts the development of *all* YP. For example, RSE was believed to negatively impact development due to heteronormative sexual health guidance and missing education on relationships. A lack of LGBTQ+ education was thought to expose LGBTQ+ pupils to misinformation, as they seek information elsewhere. Services aimed at supporting identity development were reported as lacking, especially for transgender YP who may be at increased risk of harm. Participants also reflected on the wider implications of lacklustre LGBTQ+ education, with YP instead relying on learning within the home or elsewhere, where messages may be discriminatory, hateful, and harmful.

Theme Eight's subtheme highlighted how safeguarding policy can impact wellbeing, with participants suggesting that parents should *not* be informed about someone's declared gender and/or sexuality identity unless the YP consents. Participants shared real experiences about how safeguarding policy often trumps LGBTQ+ inclusion and wellbeing agendas, resulting in pupils being fearful of making identity disclosures to staff.

Within Theme Eight, participants provided increased insight into the importance of having LGBTQ+ relationship education and support services, which serves to support pupils' development, wellbeing and sense of inclusion. With participants acknowledging that gender-diverse people face increased risk of exclusion and harm, schools may want to consider how they facilitate inclusion for this population of learners, in order to “reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff” (DfE, 2023b, p.51).

Moffat & Field (2020, p.101) astutely highlight how those seeking to deliver LGBTQ+ inclusive school initiatives “may require the reconciliation and compromise of personal and societal values”. By listening to pupils’ wants and needs, and by evaluating the overall purpose of safeguarding policies, schools can facilitate inclusion by offering LGBTQ+ pupils protection, and a sense of belonging within a society that has historically marginalised LGBTQ+ people (Allen et al., 2021).

Research Findings

Linking themes back to initial research aims, answers to each research question are summarised here:

Question One: *What are LGBTQ+ young people’s real experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion in school?*

Participants shared that schools predominantly lack LGBTQ+ inclusion due to a dominance of heteronormative and cisnormative practices, but schools are not entirely to blame. Schools are constrained by numerous systems in which they operate, with conservative societal values infiltrating every aspect of the school

system to some degree. This has complex implications for LGBTQ+ pupils' experiences of inclusion, particularly their sense of safety, peer belonging, wellbeing, and overall development, which participants describe as having long-lasting consequences on both individual and societal levels.

Question Two: *What are LGBTQ+ young people's views on what makes an ideal* LGBTQ+ inclusive school?

Participants described how, in an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, heteronormativity and cisnormativity are eradicated. This has been facilitated through school-wide integration of gender-neutral resources and practices, high quality curriculum content, especially in RSE and history, diverse LGBTQ+ representation across all environments, and supportive staff and peer relationships.

Furthermore, in answer to both research questions, participants highlighted how the values of those who hold power within the school system, can directly impact LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of inclusion.

Overall, this research has provided insightful findings that plug gaps in literature. The ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school has been explored from the perspective of YP with varying LGBTQ+ identities, who reflected on experiences within, and nuances of, the UK school system. Linking participants' viewpoints on real school experiences to other literature, participant comments largely echo previously published findings, highlighting how barriers to inclusion appear to be widely known. A strength of this study, therefore, is its two-pronged research question approach, whereby exploring inclusion from differing angles led LGBTQ+ YP to provide explicit examples of *how* schools can be more LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Participants highlighted how staff can better support peer relationships, whilst also considering the impact of gendered practices. Schools can also explore ways to improve the RSE and history curriculum, so that teaching is inclusive of all sexualities and genders. Furthermore, schools can increase LGBTQ+ representation across all environments and practices, which is a factor highly valued by participants. Participants also explain how schools should draw upon the inclusive values of those with power, with these people impacting individual and wider experiences of inclusion. Findings suggest that if schools improve practices in these areas, there could be positive implications on the development and wellbeing of *all* CYP, bringing schools closer to participants' vision of a preferred future, whereby LGBTQ+ pupils are *fully* included at school.

By better understanding LGBTQ+ pupils' needs, wants and hopes in relation to the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, this research has helped to positively inform the future work of EPs. For example, EPs can apply these findings within their thinking and practices, working with and advising school individuals, groups and systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Findings therefore provide both practical and aspirational suggestions related to how schools can facilitate the holistic inclusion of LGBTQ+ pupils, with participant solution-oriented responses having implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

Considering wider implications for practice, EPs are ethically obligated to apply research such as this to professional practice. For example, practitioner psychologists' guidelines (BPS, 2017, p.23) state that, for practices relating to mental health, EPs should adhere to the principle of "no decision about me without me".

With participants providing important insights into what inclusive practices look like, as well as their wellbeing implications, EPs have a duty to support educational organisations to deliver evidence-informed inclusive practices.

Furthermore, recognising the role that school staff play in supporting LGBTQ+ CYP, BPS (2017, p.23) guidance highlights how EPs should "develop services, policies and guidelines in collaboration with the people who use their services [...] to ensure that the application of psychological research and theory is understood by and adapted appropriately to the client group and context". To adhere to these guidelines, the researcher considered how this study can be applied by future EPs when they collaborate with CYP and schools.

Below, suggestions for practice have been framed using the *Currie Report* (Scottish Executive, 2002) whereby EPs' main functions fall within five practices of: Consultation; Training; Assessment; Intervention; and, Research. As a reader, please note that in keeping with the general objective of this research, which is to utilise participant views to highlight what is *ideal* as well as what is currently *realistic*, the following implications for practice may be regarded as somewhat ideological in nature.

Consultation

Through whole-school planning meetings and consultations, the EP could act as a 'critical friend' (Costa & Kallick, 1993) to help staff develop a more LGBTQ+ inclusive school. Paying close attention to Theme One's Ideal School, during consultations, EPs could support schools to review their academic calendar, ensuring that there are regular extra-curricular activities that celebrate LGBTQ+ inclusion. EPs could work collaboratively with staff to draw upon participants' ideas

when reviewing school-wide policies. For example, drawing upon findings within Theme Seven, during consultations EPs can support school Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) to consider the role of power across schools. Here, EPs can ensure that those who hold power are making decisions that support LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Within consultations, EPs could encourage staff to review *all* educational policies, ensuring that inclusive values are embedded throughout. In particular, and in response to Theme Three, EPs could help staff review their anti-bullying policy, endorsing approaches that are evidence-informed, and that encourage staff to approach incidents of bullying/harassment consistently and effectively. EPs could help staff to understand how incidents may present differently depending on the sex of the perpetrator(s), which appears particularly significant in single-sex schools where bullying may present differently.

During consultations, EPs can encourage staff to consider ways of strengthening peer alliances, developing LGBTQ+ pupils' sense of belonging. EPs can also share participants' feedback in Theme Three, regarding how to address inappropriate use of language and terminology. Furthermore, looking more holistically at the role that schools play in socialisation (Robinson, 2008), EPs can support staff to embed comprehensive socialisation of inclusive attitudes amongst the school population and, where pupils demonstrate non-inclusive thinking, help schools to invest in effective re-education practices.

Responding to Theme Four, EPs can help SLT to consider the impact of school facilities by reviewing gendered practices such as gender binary titles, uniforms, toilets, sports, and changing rooms, exploring whether they are needed.

Furthermore, EPs can encourage staff to develop appropriate protected spaces for LGBTQ+ pupils, such as support groups.

Drawing upon Theme Six findings, EPs can also help SLT to review their curriculum delivery. This could involve exploring how LGBTQ+ representation can be better embedded across school environments, and by specifically reviewing curriculum content, especially the subject of history. Specifically, EPs can expound findings from Theme Five, and help staff to develop and deliver high-quality LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE, which includes relationship education and sexual health information for pupils of all identities. Notably, and in response to Theme One Ideal School, EPs can adapt their practices when working with primary schools, supporting them to create and deliver age appropriate RSE content.

Responding to findings from Theme Six and Theme Seven, EPs can support SLT to actively investigate *how* pupils with protected characteristics are included *equally* within school contexts, with EP suggesting how schools can review their ethos/values to reflect individuality and diversity. Additionally, EPs can support SLT to consider LGBTQ+ representation across the staff population and, where representation is limited, encourage SLT to involve external LGBTQ+ organisations where possible.

When considering Theme Eight, and the impact of school on LGBTQ+ YP's wellbeing and development from a pastoral/support perspective, EPs can support staff in proactively anticipating LGBTQ+ pupil needs. EPs can help SLT to develop designated pastoral leads in LGBTQ+ matters who, for example, could hold drop-in sessions that pupils attend to discuss issues. Furthermore, in response to Theme Eight's Subtheme, EPs can support staff to manage tensions between pupils' wishes

and safeguarding policies and procedures within school. Here, on a case-by-case basis, EPs could support staff to consider the appropriate actions to take when LGBTQ+ pupils make identity-related disclosures, being particularly mindful of wellbeing implications.

Training

Through bespoke training, EPs can advance LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives, promoting school-wide awareness on the factors that facilitate LGBTQ+ inclusion. For example, responding to Theme One findings, EPs can deliver training on heteronormativity/cisnormativity in school practices, and collaboratively explore how/why these exclusionary practices should be minimised.

With divisive peer culture being a prominent area of discussion from Theme Three, EPs can also reduce pupil isolation and/or bullying through awareness-raising or training for staff.

EPs can draw upon findings from Theme Four and deliver evidence-informed training related to gendered practices, with staff encouraged to consider wider implications of gender binary thinking and practices. This may involve upskilling staff on gender diversity issues or appropriate use of pronouns and terminology, which in turn, staff could disseminate to the wider pupil population.

Furthermore, through training, EPs can support staff to consider where and how LGBTQ+ representation can be naturally embedded across curriculum subjects (as per Theme Six), signposting to helpful resources such as Stonewall's *Home Learning* packs. Primarily, EPs can help staff to recognise differences between inclusive practices and performative 'box-ticking' exercises, encouraging staff to actively consult pupils regarding LGBTQ+ inclusive practices.

Assessment

Drawing from findings in Themes One and Six, where participants highlighted the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusive resources, EPs can work with staff to assess resource appropriateness across their schools. For example, EPs can help staff to evaluate whether LGBTQ+-related resources are up-to-date, inclusive and informative.

Incorporating Theme Three's findings into recommendations for assessment practices, by inquiring about the safety of the physical school environment, EPs may help staff to consider *where* peer-bullying may occur, so that this can be mitigated through environmental adaptations.

Furthermore, EPs can work with staff to monitor and evaluate how school facilities help to support inclusion for gender-diverse pupils, building upon recommendations participants made when discussing their Ideal School within Theme Four. Here, SLT could be reminded by EPs to consider whether there are sufficient spaces for gender-diverse pupils such as gender-neutral cubicles.

By drawing from findings in Theme Two, EPs can remain mindful of the unique eco-systemic structure of each school. To perform holistic school assessments, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) EST can be applied to EPs' thinking, so that EPs are better able to support staff to navigate a multitude of factors potentially impacting upon LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of inclusion.

Intervention

EPs can develop interventions to support staff working with individual LGBTQ+ pupils, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the pupil's individual

identity, needs, strengths and hopes. Drawing upon Theme Two findings within their wider practices, EPs could utilise the views of individual LGBTQ+ CYP for continuous professional development, applying Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979) to reflect upon how they can support schools to mitigate socio-political factors that negatively impact inclusion. EPs could provide systemic interventions, for example, where organisational change interventions such as *Soft Systems Methodology* or *Appreciative Inquiry* are actioned to facilitate LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion.

Further suggested interventions are drawn from findings in Theme Three, where divisive peer cultures negatively impact LGBTQ+ inclusion. For example, EPs can help schools to deliver wider bullying interventions, or specific positively framed person-centred interventions such as *Circle of Friends*, where interventions are designed to support inclusion and sense of belonging. EPs can also initiate wider evidence-informed mentoring and peer support intervention schemes across schools, further supporting peer cohesion.

With Theme Seven highlighting how school stakeholders maintain differing levels of power within schools, EPs could help to balance power by helping staff to establish 'student voice' initiatives. This recommendation is particularly important, given that Theme Eight demonstrates how schools can impact LGBTQ+ YP's wellbeing. It is hoped, therefore, that student voice initiatives will provide protected spaces for LGBTQ+ pupils to share their views on important aspects of inclusion. Furthermore, EPs could promote the inclusion of interventions that support healthy identity development, so that gender and sexuality diverse pupils feel included. Lastly, to further support LGBTQ+ YP's wellbeing and development, EPs can work

with schools to deliver numerous bespoke therapeutically-orientated individual and group interventions, responding to the unique needs of the pupil population.

Research

Within their research activities, EPs can share findings such as these with staff wherever possible. For example, as recognised within Theme Eight Subtheme, by increasing awareness regarding the new non-statutory 'gender-questioning' guidance, EPs can work collaboratively with CYP and staff to manage conflicting socio-political agendas.

To conclude, given the somewhat ideological nature of the above suggested implications for practice, the researcher asks the reader to consider how *any* action that supports schools to think about *how* they include LGBTQ+ pupils is helpful. Furthermore, when considering wider implications for practice, EPs and schools must recognise that "youth are not a static population, but a population that is constantly changing" (Greteman, 2015, p.429), and so should adapt their practices accordingly. Additional recommendations for utilising research to support LGBTQ+ school inclusion practices are discussed below.

Limitations and Future Research

Whilst this study has fulfilled its primary aims of providing insights around LGBTQ+ inclusion and implications for practice, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations, and opportunities for future research.

A potential limitation of this study is the transferability of research findings. Transferability refers to the extent that findings can be applied to other situations (Johnson et al., 2020). The first possible limitation is that of gaining retrospective

views about school experiences. With many of the research participants leaving the compulsory school context relatively recently, there is a chance that LGBTQ+ inclusion practices may have changed within the schools that participants attended. Despite this perceived limitation, these research findings substantially mirror the body of existing literature in this area, showing similarities in findings and, as such, the notion that UK school practices may be slow to change. Therefore, it could be argued that participant retrospective views may be tentatively applied to the existing research context.

Additionally, whilst the researcher has been able to link research findings to prior literature, highlighting how the reemergence of specific themes has occurred over multiple contexts and situations, due to this study using retrospective views and having a relatively small participant sample size (ten individuals), as with much qualitative research, findings can only tentatively be transferred to the wider population of LGBTQ+ pupils in school settings. It is also worth noting that what small-scale research potentially *loses* in transferability*,* it also *gains* in "rich and in-depth understanding" of specific phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.6).

Furthermore, although the researcher did not purposefully investigate rural and/or urban contexts of LGBTQ+ school inclusion, by chance, many participants discussed attending rural primary schools and, for some, rural secondary schools. Whilst the researcher was unable to gain a full picture of whether participants attended predominantly rural or urban school contexts (due to the prioritisation of participant anonymity), the reader should consider how findings on LGBTQ+ school inclusion may differ between rural and urban settings, resulting in these findings only tentatively transferring to either context.

Another potential limitation of this study relates to the participant population. Findings may embody the views of people with particular characteristics, and therefore only a segment of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, Leonard (2022) argues that qualitative research typically attracts participants with certain personality traits, such as those open to self-advocacy and activism. This theory suggests that people who are not confident in these areas may have been excluded from this research. Furthermore, although the researcher aimed to recruit participants with differing LGBTQ+ identities, the final sample did not contain anyone identifying as transgender female, for example. This limitation also highlights how research findings should only be tentatively transferred to existing inclusion literature.

A further potential limitation in this study is the method of data collection and analysis. Although Braun & Clarke's (2022) RTA approach allowed the researcher to generate strong themes from patterns found in several datasets (Trainor & Bundon, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Gibson et al., 2021), by identifying broad themes, it was felt that aspects of each participant's story were potentially lost (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, future research could explore ways of better incorporating individual participant views within findings. For example, when considering Research Question One around real school experiences, narrative research approaches could be used to explore inclusion within participants' socio-cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ntinda, 2020). With narrative research methods typically being orientated towards the past, participants might also be able to find increased meaning on the importance of LGBTQ+ school inclusion, by making sense of their experiences (Ntinda, 2020).

There is wider understanding that findings developed using RTA can sometimes lack confirmability. Johnson et al. (2020) describes confirmability as the

process of ensuring that results are drawn from reflections of actual data instead of the researcher's biases and interpretations. Although confirmability cannot be guaranteed, to bolster the likelihood, the researcher closely linked analysis to direct participant quotations. Although subjectivity is sometimes considered a limitation, within this study, "researcher subjectivity – who we are, and what we bring to the research" was a strength (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.13). The researcher applied critical reflection throughout the data analysis process in recognition of qualitative sensibility, emphasising the importance of reflexive research engagement. Furthermore, critically reflective discussion was embedded throughout the write-up, so that the impact of the researchers' biases and assumptions throughout the process were better understood (Holmes, 2020).

Upon further reflection, another limitation was use of prompts during the semi-structured interviews. Before interviews, the researcher anticipated that verbal prompts regarding inclusion may be helpful for participants. However, in hindsight, the researcher feels that their prior knowledge of inclusion, which influenced the content of interview prompts (see Appendix F), may have inadvertently influenced the directionality of participant responses (Willig, 2022).

Regarding future research opportunities, and responding to the limitation above, the wider concept of inclusion could be investigated further. For example, this research considers the impact of inclusion on LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools, yet literature shows that there is still theoretical ambiguity around the concept of inclusion itself (Haug, 2017). Although the researcher asked participants to describe what the term 'inclusion' meant to them (see Appendix G), subjective understandings of the concept could be further interrogated. This point is especially poignant since the concept has evolved, particularly within socio-political contexts (Thomas, 2013).

Therefore, contemporary understandings could better guide school inclusion practices.

Since this study highlights the reemergence of numerous themes mentioned in previous literature, future research could draw upon the eight themes within this study's findings, perhaps by undertaking in-depth investigations on each individual theme. For example, following findings from Theme Seven, further research could be conducted on the functions and implications of staff/pupil power imbalances, or on the impact of pupil-led inclusion initiatives, which were topics that the researcher struggled to evidence from prior literature. Furthermore, drawing on a gap in research acknowledged by Leonard (2022), future research might seek to understand ways of addressing staff-led discrimination.

Additionally, when considering Theme Four, given the perceived impact that gendered practices and spaces have upon LGBTQ+ pupils, future research could conduct an in-depth study on how gender binarism affects gender-diverse pupils. This final suggestion for future research may be particularly important given the DfE's (2023) draft non-statutory guidance on how schools support 'gender questioning children'. Due to the date of publication, this study was only able to discuss *perceived* consequences of this guidance. Therefore, the researcher hopes that future studies might explore schools' implementation of this guidance, and its impact on LGBTQ+ CYP's school inclusion.

Conclusions

Willig (2022) argues that 'good' research is that which makes contributions to knowledge. This study has therefore fulfilled its purpose by contributing towards the existing field of educational psychology inclusion research. Furthermore, by utilising

the rich, diverse and thoughtfully constructed knowledge of its participants, a key strength of this study is its dedication to authentically representing the views of LGBTQ+ YP.

Significantly, its findings demonstrate how LGBTQ+ YP can provide both practical and aspirational suggestions for facilitating inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils. Therefore, this study highlights how schools can heed the advice of LGBTQ+ YP as 'experts by experience' when exploring ideas related to inclusion.

This study indicates that UK schools are predominantly heteronormative due, in part, to influences from wider socio-political systems and attitudes. However, LGBTQ+ YP describe how schools can better facilitate inclusion by supporting peer relationships, by considering the impact of gendered practices, and by improving the RSE and history curriculum to be inclusive of all genders and sexualities. Additionally, schools can increase LGBTQ+ representation across their systems, practices, and populations, with LGBTQ+ YP further explaining how schools could draw upon the inclusive values of individuals in positions of power. Findings illustrate that *if* schools develop practices in these main areas, schools could closely align with the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, thereby facilitating greater levels of LGBTQ+ inclusion that improves the development and wellbeing of *all* YP.

Given the significance of these findings, particularly regarding their implications for EP practice, it is hoped that there will be an increase in future educational psychology research in this area. By exploring the views of LGBTQ+ people in future research, particularly within the area of inclusion, LGBTQ+ YP are increasingly empowered, with their contributions helping to shape LGBTQ+ inclusive schools within the UK. Furthermore, by ensuring that LGBTQ+ YP's voices are

represented within future research, the inclusion ideologies of participants within this study are fully embraced:

> **Dani:** *“inclusion is about ensuring that we recognise and elevate the voices of minorities [...] especially those minorities that have been oppressed in the past”.*
>
> **Tyler:** *[Inclusion means] “everyone feeling like they have a place to belong, no matter how different they are from each other, and [...] creating that environment that promotes everyone feeling like it's a space they can be welcome to”.*

Reflective Chapter

LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences of School Inclusion: Exploring the Real and the Ideal

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Chapter 3: Reflective Chapter

Introduction

This reflective chapter is written in the first person to emphasise my active role in reflexively undertaking research. Engaging in regular research supervision and keeping a reflective diary has helped me to comprehensively document my research journey. Here, I share my motivations for undertaking research on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, linking personal and professional interests to the wider theoretical and research context. I reflect on my underlying ontological and epistemological position, and guide the reader through decisions I made during the research process. I discuss key learning as a developing researcher, and reflect on perceived strengths and limitations of this study. I highlight key points of personal and professional reflection throughout the journey, and discuss wider plans for research dissemination. I bring this chapter to a close with some final conclusions and reflections.

Motivations

During the 1990s to early 2000s, I attended rural and conservative schools that left me feeling invisible as a lesbian YP. During school, I cannot recall a single experience where LGBTQ+ identities were referenced, which impacted my mental health and sense of belonging, particularly during adolescent years. Since then, and recognising that my experiences are not unique, I have been intrinsically motivated to support the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ CYP. Professionally, figuring out how best to 'reach' this population, my career has taken me on a wonderful journey, including from Further Education Careers Advisor to CAMHS Assistant Psychologist, and now to Trainee Educational Psychologist. It is here that my love of psychology and

education have perfectly aligned, providing me with various means by which to support LGBTQ+ CYP, including through direct work, research, training, and consultations with those who can make a real difference to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP. My ultimate hope is that these research findings will help to inform future school practices, so that all LGBTQ+ CYP feel valued and included.

Impacting Theory and Research

Day et al. (2020) highlight that schools are fundamental in the context of child development, given the amount of time spent there. Reflecting on the implications of this, and the wider impact that positive or negative school experiences have on CYP's mental health, I decided to pursue a topic that both empowers LGBTQ+ CYP and draws upon theoretical thinking that is prominent within the educational psychology context – the theory of inclusion.

Whilst the concept of inclusion has historically been linked to SEND due to the term being rooted in SEND research (Florian, 2014), for me, wider international inclusion definitions have provided a more enticing theoretical window through which to view LGBTQ+ CYP's school experiences. When researching international literature, the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action 1994* provided me with a progressive social justice inclusion ideology that I could thoughtfully apply to investigation of LGBTQ+ CYP's school experiences.

Salamanca stated that "inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights" (UNESCO, 1994, p.11). Along with providing a solid foundation for research-based thinking, *Salamanca* linked inclusion ideology to the education context, describing how "within the field of education, [inclusion] is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring

about a genuine equalization of opportunity" (UNESCO, 1994, p.11). Realising that *Salamanca* encapsulates my personal and professional socio-ethical positioning, this concept would later guide the development of my research topic and design.

During the early stages of literature scoping, I found Leonard (2022), who explored the positive school experiences of three transgender YP. Not only did Leonard's research innovatively explore YP's positive school experiences (which contrasted the plethora of research focused on *exclusion*), but Leonard also highlighted EPs' unique position within research, where EPs can positively support people on individual, group, and educational systems levels.

Reflecting on the perceived opportunities within my professional role to advance inclusion research, I reflexively considered *how* I would utilise the EPs' unique position. Consequently, I decided to gather individual LGBTQ+ YP's perspectives, whilst analysing their views as a group. In doing so, I felt that final themes would help to better indicate similarities and differences in LGBTQ+ identity experiences and perspectives, which is knowledge I could apply to future EP practices. When pondering wider systems thinking, I considered how exploring LGBTQ+ YP's experiences through a lens of inclusion would allow me to holistically understand how wider socio-political factors filter into everyday practices within UK schools. In learning more about socio-political influences, I hoped that this knowledge would help to improve LGBTQ+ school inclusion at both strategic and policy levels.

Educational Psychology Research Opportunities

Despite contributions that EPs bring to research, during my review of literature, I noticed a lack of both UK and international educational psychology

research that explores LGBTQ+ CYP's experiences of school inclusion. As a solution-oriented thinker, I grasped the opportunity to advance research knowledge in this area. However, professionally, I felt disappointed by the scarcity of educational psychology inclusion research, particularly as my training has shown how EPs are ultimately scientific-practitioners who aim to embed evidence-informed thinking.

Given how LGBTQ+ pupils form a non-trivial percentage of school populations (Jones et al., 2019), and therefore EPs are statistically likely to encounter CYP with LGBTQ+ identities, I reflected on the quality of support EPs can currently offer this group of learners without having up-to-date evidence to inform their practices. Furthermore, and reflecting more deeply on my own emotional responses, at this point, I felt a little let down by the socio-political systems around me that meant that LGBTQ+ CYP have *never* been considered a priority within the UK field of educational psychology. Yet I believe wholeheartedly that, as members of the Health and Care Professions Council, EPs have social and ethical duties of care to "promote and protect the interests of service users" (HCPC, 2016, p.5). I felt increasingly motivated to explore LGBTQ+ CYP's sense of school inclusion, knowing that their insights as experts by experience would undoubtedly inform my future practices as an inclusive and socio-ethical practitioner.

Ontological and Epistemological Orientation

To align with my socio-ethical values, a critical realist ontology and epistemology was applied early on within the research process.

I wanted to conduct inclusion research underpinned by a critical realist scientific philosophy prior to deciding any other research design factors. Throughout my doctoral training, I formed a concrete understanding of the critical realist

perspective and felt that it aligned perfectly with my personal values. For example, I felt that critical realism (CR) philosophy would fulfil my desire to create socially just research where I could empower LGBTQ+ CYP by providing an opportunity to elevate their views, thereby advancing the socio-political position of CYP belonging to a marginalised societal group. As Scotland (2012) highlights, CR philosophy can offer an emancipatory function.

As CR is primarily concerned with ontology, e.g., the theory of *being* (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Al-Saadi, 2014), I hoped to understand the real objective experiences of LGBTQ+ YP in school, as well as YP's subjective views around these experiences of being. I could scientifically, systematically, and comprehensively explore LGBTQ+ YP's experiences of being LGBTQ+ in the UK's compulsory education system. With CR also being concerned with epistemology, or the theory and study of *knowledge* (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Al-Saadi, 2014), I could also consider how LGBTQ+ YP's experiences shaped their knowledge of inclusion, as well as schools' capacity for facilitating LGBTQ+ inclusion.

By investigating inclusion this way, I felt I could extend knowledge on inclusion further, with LGBTQ+ YP's subjective views about their *real school experiences*, and investigation into what school LGBTQ+ inclusion *could be*, being combined to generate knowledge-based themes that increase our understanding of practices that facilitate LGBTQ+ school inclusion. Given the flexibility that CR offers as a philosophy and methodology (Fletcher, 2017), it was used to shape thinking around my research questions, wider research design, semi-structured interview questions, method of data collection and analysis, and even how I viewed and explored implications for practice.

Decision-making

Looking specifically at different stages of the research process, I will explain how a CR philosophy and prior research findings impacted my decision-making process. Understanding that ontology and epistemology are “smooshed together” within CR (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.169), this provided me with an idea about how to psychologically position my research questions. I wanted to investigate LGBTQ+ YP’s ideologies around inclusion, as this would offer a nuanced approach to studying inclusion, particularly as I felt participants would be able to reflect on what they want and need from school inclusion as experts in their own lives. I also knew I didn’t want to neglect the opportunity for participants to talk about their real school experiences, as prior experiences indubitably shape our view of the world. I wanted participants to be able to draw upon their experiences, so that they could thoughtfully position their inclusion ideologies, and explain how real experiences of either positive or negative practices have impacted their sense of inclusion.

I decided that I needed two research questions that would represent the two ‘smooshed’ components of CR. One question would represent ‘real’ experiences of being (an ontological realism question), and one would represent the knowledge that had been gained from these subjective experiences (an epistemological relativism question). As part of this second epistemological question, I wanted to utilise a feature that CR offers, called ‘backcasting’. Hansen & Nesterova (2021, p.6) describe backcasting as “looking at the present from the vantage point of some desired future”. Here, I felt that by exploring inclusion from a solution-oriented ‘preferred future’ angle (O’Hanlon, 1999), I could gain more information about the key components of LGBTQ+ inclusion ideology. Therefore, by devising these two

research questions, I thought I could establish the current state of inclusion as well as the ideal state, with participants providing helpful evidence about the similarities and differences between the two that would ultimately determine the journey schools must undertake to ensure that their environments are truly LGBTQ+ inclusive.

To answer research questions, I wanted to utilise a method that would comprehensively evidence the types of practices schools need to adopt to fully include LGBTQ+ YP. I needed a data collection tool that would allow for open yet strategic data collection, and therefore decided upon semi-structured interviews. Here, I could ask participants broad open questions about inclusion that would draw upon their real experiences and ideologies. In terms of my own research objectives, I would embed prior research findings into strategic prompts that I would ask, should participants have difficulty considering the multi-dimensional nature of school inclusion (see Appendix E).

Amending my interview questions multiple times (after testing questions on family members, and bringing them to research supervision), I was happy with the finalised interview schedule. I regarded questions as broad enough to avoid leading participant responses, yet structured enough to aid the data analysis process.

As well as using a semi-structured interview method, I initially considered using participatory methods to gather participant views. Drawing upon Moran's (2001a) Personal Construct Psychology Ideal School technique, (which I have used within my practice), I considered asking participants to find/create and bring to interview an image of their 'Non-ideal' and 'Ideal School'. This technique enables YP to become actively involved in understanding themselves and expressing their views, and can elicit information about the sort of provision YP may need to feel included in

school. This idea stemmed from my hopes that a tangible image would help participants to centre their responses around inclusive practices. However, following an early research presentation to peers as part of my doctoral training, it was concluded that this approach may not necessarily be age-appropriate and, due to increased effort for participants, adding this participatory method might have discouraged prospective YP from getting involved. I therefore decided to move away from this idea, instead asking participants to express what inclusion means to them as an initial interview question to better gauge early on within interviews whether there is a shared understanding of inclusion. Furthermore, by providing participants with a copy of the interview schedule prior to interview, I was pleasantly surprised to find that many participants had invested time in pre-conceptualising their understanding of inclusion beforehand. Here, participants highlighted the complex nature of defining inclusion, which supports previous literature, and highlights difficulties schools have in facilitating a 'one-size fits all' inclusion approach. Participant inclusion understandings can be seen in Appendix G.

For me, deciding on a data analysis approach boiled down to two main motivations. Firstly, I wanted to utilise a rigorous data analysis approach that would generate knowledge that was easily applicable to my practice. Secondly, I was keen to fully embrace my own subjective position as a researcher. I recognised that all researchers bring their own values, politics, motives, history, perspectives and biases (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2013), and reflected on how these factors would undoubtedly influence each and every decision made along my research journey. Therefore, I opted for Braun & Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach. RTA would allow me to generate strong themes from data that could be pragmatically applied to practice, whilst also recognising and

emphasising the reflexivity needed when generating these themes. Braun & Clarke (2022, p.169) describe CR as “the most popular big-theory position for RTA”, which is unsurprising given that CR and RTA worked very well together within my study design.

Developing as Researcher

To highlight my learning as a developing researcher, reflections regarding pertinent moments of the research journey are outlined below. Here, I share my interpretations of the perceived strengths and limitations at key phases of the research process.

Recruitment

A perceived limitation of the research journey was my initial difficulty finding research gatekeepers. Despite my invested effort to recruit gatekeepers, it appeared that the work demands of educators was potentially impacting their motivation to get involved. However, despite these early recruitment issues, later on, this issue was no longer a concern due to four gatekeepers going above and beyond to promote my research to YP in their settings. I found that by promoting my research through college-based gatekeepers was particularly helpful, perhaps indicating the level of investment colleges have in supporting LGBTQ+ inclusive practices. This was also a reflection that I had during data analysis, where participants often alluded to colleges being more LGBTQ+ inclusive than schools.

A further strength *and* limitation of the recruitment process is related to my final research sample. Whilst I was very pleased to end up with a participant pool of mixed LGBTQ+ identities, I was unable to recruit YP identifying as, for example,

transgender female. I reflected on how I could have tried harder to gain responses from gatekeepers in charitable organisations such as Mermaids, but after receiving correspondence that the charity was inundated with research requests, I felt that further line of inquiry might have been inappropriate.

Interviewing

When interviewing, the first two participants confirmed that sharing the interview schedule in advance was effective for answering research questions, with participants sharing comprehensive and varied views openly and thoughtfully. However, early within the interview process, I noticed how my interview prompts may have been inadvertently influencing the directionality of interview responses (Willig, 2022). Although it was not possible to gauge whether these prompts impacted participant responses, I made the decision to lessen their use in later interviews, particularly as participants were already freely engaging in unprompted dialogue during discussions.

A positive byproduct of this decision was that participants appeared to hold increased power throughout interactions. I felt that participants could energetically and enthusiastically share their personal views with me, with them increasingly taking charge of the course of direction in discussions. After gathering comprehensive data from ten interviews, I felt I was ready to begin the data analysis process using RTA.

Data Analysis and Write-up

During the first stage of data analysis, I began coding incorrectly. I had misunderstood the level at which data should be coded, initially coding at the word

level rather than by small units of meaning, as per Braun & Clarke's (2022) guidance. Although this meant that a great deal of my time was unintentionally set aside at this stage, I felt that my word level coding had had positive implications, helping me to comprehensively familiarise myself with the data.

Reflecting more deeply on limitations and strengths within the data analysis and write-up phase, whilst findings likely embody my socio-political positionality, when considering the authenticity of data interpretations, the reader should know that participants demonstrated an abundance of self-reflexivity, providing articulate, thoughtful, and politically-aware comments that highlighted their own intelligent self-awareness, experiences, emotions and introspection (Sherry, 2013). As a result, I felt that very little *interpretation* was needed by me. Furthermore, to thoroughly illustrate participant viewpoints, I included a range of quotations from *all* participants, which Gibson et al. (2021) argue adds context transparency and supplements the researcher's own commentary with extensive data evidence.

Key Learning

Key learning that I take from this process is my need to be flexible in my approach. Despite having my own agendas and hypotheses, if I do not openly accept that the research process may take unpredictable turns, then I risk losing authentic and deeply meaningful participant perspectives.

For example, when beginning this research, my primary goal was to positively frame findings around inclusion ideologies, particularly as prior literature had predominantly focused on educational deficiencies, LGBTQ+ exclusion, and often presented LGBTQ+ YP as victims (Schuelka, 2018; McCormack, 2020; Formby, 2015). Yet during the early stages of data collection, I noticed that interview

responses tended to veer towards negative aspects of non-inclusive school environments. Initially, I focused on how exploring research question one (around real experiences) *might be* detrimentally dominating the narrative. Although I wanted to tease more information out of participants about their ideal school, I felt that doing so would be leading, and create unethical relational power differentials.

Reflecting on *why* participants appeared to favour exploration of non-inclusive school experiences, I concluded that an unintentional but welcomed impact of the research process was that it might be providing a comfortable and safe space for people to openly discuss experiences for therapeutic gains. BPS (2019, p.12) highlight that research can be helpful and healthy for people "to explore previous experiences of isolation and distress [that have] lasting effects".

Furthermore, rather than being detrimental to the process, I realised that by supporting participants to openly discuss their lived experiences, perhaps they were more able to reflect upon what they feel LGBTQ+ YP *need* as well as *want* from school. As such, I considered how participants were better able to frame their views on a preferred future (De Shazer, 1985; O'Hanlon, 1999) within the context of existing limitations and strengths of the school system, making suggestions for change even more tangible and achievable. After all, Selekman (1997) highlights how, in solution-focused work, establishing a clear understanding of the real situation should be our primary focus *before* finding solutions. I feel that by utilising both research questions to highlight nuances between real experiences and ideal LGBTQ+ inclusion, my findings could elucidate the journey schools must undergo to fully facilitate LGBTQ+ school inclusion.

Therefore, this process has taught me to conduct *all* research with openness and flexibility, particularly as I feel that the most fruitful aspect of this journey was that of giving LGBTQ+ YP a platform to express themselves.

Sharing personal reflections around research findings, I am unsurprised by the themes that emerged from data. For example, participant views on how schools are gender binary spaces, and how the current curriculum is inadequate, fits with my experiences working in schools as a TEP, where I find school practices frequently oppressive and outdated. Although my visits to schools are relatively brief, participant views demonstrate that the school system continues to oppress difference, indicating that little has changed culturally since the 2000s. Formby (2015, p.637) highlights that “we should be looking at how individuals and institutions construct and respond to LGBT people”. Whilst this study has determined how school institutions construct and respond to LGBTQ+ issues, an added strength of my findings is highlighting the power of individuals. Here, I refer to the research participants themselves. Whilst the school system appears relatively unchanged, I feel that YP today are very aware of this, and from the conviction of interview responses, I feel that YP have the power to actively challenge the status quo.

Personal and Professional Reflections

I have highly valued this research journey and feel that I have learned much about myself personally and professionally. For example, despite my hope that today’s YP will naturally bring about an evolution in school practices, at times throughout this research process, I personally felt ‘stuck’ emotionally and professionally. One moment of emotional ‘stuckness’ occurred on a Sunday in July 2023, just after completing the seventh and eighth research interviews. I came

across a BBC web article titled *School gender guidance: parents should be in the know – minister* (Russell, 2023). The article described how parents should be told by school if a pupil is questioning their gender identity. In this moment I experienced a visceral reaction, a mixture of anger and disappointment. I saw that the UK government were developing educational policy that was in *direct contradiction* to my participants' ideal school suggestions. Policy suggestions also misaligned with my own psycho-social positioning and, in noticing this, I had to temporarily retreat from my research to ensure that my own biases did not seep into the data analysis process. I believe that my reflexivity in this moment ensured that participant perspectives were authentically represented.

Professionally, once analysis had been conducted and implications for practice considered, I experienced a sense of professional powerlessness. I believed that many of the YP's suggestions for improving school inclusion were not possible to embed due to an over-stretched and under-resourced education system, and significant constraints placed upon EPs responding to high statutory demands. Thankfully, at the time of considering implications for practice, I had been reading around the concept of EPs being a 'critical friend' to schools. I came across work by Hick (2005, pp.121-122), who described how EPs "may gain most from the experience of this critical friend role when they are stimulated to reflect on how far their commitment to inclusion permeates their own professional practice".

Reflecting on this point, and openly anticipating professional constraints, I made the decision to actively take forward suggestions from research participants, working where possible within the remit of my role to promote LGBTQ+ inclusive school practices. After all, as a future qualified EP and member of the Health and

Care Professions Council, I know I will have social and ethical 'duties of care' to "promote and protect the interests of service users" (HCPC, 2016, p.5). I feel that I can best fulfil this duty by wholeheartedly adhering to Article-12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2019) which stipulates that, "every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously".

Dissemination of Findings

To disseminate research findings and implications for practice widely, I plan to create a short summary of findings that can be shared with various stakeholders across the education profession. When working directly with schools, where possible, I also hope to utilise strategies suggested within the empirical paper's implications for practice section. Following publication of findings, hopefully within the *Educational Psychology in Practice* journal, I also plan to create bespoke training related to ideal LGBTQ+ school inclusion, so that educational providers, including local authorities, are further informed about *what* (professionally and ethically) schools should be striving for in terms of including their LGBTQ+ pupils.

Conclusion

Within this reflective chapter, I have shared motivations for conducting research on LGBTQ+ school inclusion, drawing attention to impactful theory and research on inclusion. I have considered educational psychology research opportunities, whilst reflecting on my ontological and epistemological orientation to research. I have shared thinking during key decision points, reflecting on perceived strengths and limitations of specific research phases. I have described what I feel to be key learning for me as a researcher, and have reflected on poignant personal and

professional moments. I have concluded by highlighting my socio-ethical duties as a future EP, and have discussed how I plan to disseminate research findings.

One final reflection to share is the significant value I place on this doctoral research journey. Thanks to the involvement of ten insightful LGBTQ+ YP, I now feel better prepared to support the school inclusion and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ pupils. I conclude by highlighting the research contribution of one participant, whose words will guide my practices going forward:

Anna: *[Inclusion means] having equal opportunities for everybody [and] providing people with the resources that they need. So [...] not having barriers [...] and the idea that everyone matters and [...] embracing all different types of people into any activity that you're doing".*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

It is important to note that identity-related terminology have been tentatively applied to thinking throughout this project as, although these terms are commonly used, individuals describe their identities in different ways, with many choosing not to adopt identity labels.

Aroace

People who experience a lack of, varying, or occasional experiences of romantic and/or sexual attraction, including a lack of attraction (Stonewall, 2024).

Biphobia

“The fear or dislike of someone who identifies as bisexual” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Bisexual

“An umbrella term that refers to a person who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. The term ‘bi’ is also used” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Bullying

A damaging social process that is characterised by an imbalance of power driven by social (societal) and institutional norms. It is often repeated and manifests as unwanted interpersonal behaviour among students or school personnel that causes physical, social, and emotional harm to the targeted individuals or groups, and the wider school community (UNESCO, 2024).

Cisgender

Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (Stonewall, 2024).

Closeted

“A term used to describe a person who is not open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Coming Out

“When a person first tells someone/others about their identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual [or gender-diverse person]. This can be an ongoing process rather than a one-off event” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Discrimination

“The unfair treatment of a person or group of individuals based upon aspects of their identity, whether perceived or actual” (Price & Tayler, 2015, p.23).

a. Direct discrimination: treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others (Equality Act 2010).
b. Indirect discrimination: putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage (Equality Act 2010).

Exclusion

“Processes [that place] persons, groups [and] communities [...] in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values” (Estivill, 2003, p.19).

Gay

“Refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also, a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality – some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Gender Diversity

Refers to “the extent to which a person’s gender identity, role, or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex” (APA, 2015, p.20).

Gender Expression

How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans (Stonewall, 2024).

Gender Identity

A person’s innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth (Stonewall, 2024).

Gender Neutral

“Anything – a concept, an entity, a style of language – that is unassociated with either the male or female gender” (UNICEF, 2017, p.4).

Gender Stereotypes

“The ways we expect people to behave in society according to their gender or what is commonly accepted as ‘normal’ for someone of that gender” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Harassment

Unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone’s dignity or creates an offensive environment for them (Equality Act, 2010).

Homophobia

“The fear or dislike of someone who identifies as lesbian or gay” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Homosexual

“Homosexual might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has an emotional romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term ‘gay’ is now more generally used” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Ideal

Ideal is “conceived or regarded as perfect or supremely excellent in its kind; answering to one's highest conception” (OED, 2022a).

Inclusion

Inclusion is “a process that addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and

communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education" (CECHR, 2017, p.5).

Inclusive Education

Simply put, inclusive education means "inclusion in education" (Norwich, 2014, p.495).

Intersectionality

"Recognition that people have multiple identities, with many people identifying as, for example, LGBTQ+ *and* disabled. The interplay between different forms of oppression is known as intersectionality" (Price & Tayler, 2015, p.22).

Intersex

A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female or non-binary (Stonewall, 2024).

Lesbian

"Refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women" (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Marginalisation

"A form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities" (UNESCO, 2010, p.135).

Non-binary

“An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn’t sit comfortably with ‘man’ or ‘woman’” (Stonewall, 2024).

Outed

“When a lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans [or gender-diverse] person’s sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent” (NAHT, 2017, p.10).

Pronoun

“Words we use to refer to people’s genders in conversation. For example, ‘he’ or ‘she’. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender-neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their” (NAHT, 2017, in Glazzard & Stones, 2019, p.5).

Queer

“In the past, a derogatory term for LGBTQ+ individuals. The term has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ+ individuals who don’t identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation, but it is still viewed to be derogatory by some” (NAHT, 2017, in Glazzard & Stones, 2019, p.5).

Questioning

“The process of exploring one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity” (NAHT, 2017, in Glazzard & Stones, 2019, p.5).

Real

Real means “having an objective existence; actually existing physically as a thing, substantial; not imaginary” (OED, 2022b).

School

In the United Kingdom, school refers to education that is compulsory for children and young people aged between 5 and 16 years (Gov.UK, 2024).

Sense of Belonging

“The subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences” (Allen et al., 2021, p.87).

Victimisation

Treating someone unfairly because they’ve complained about discrimination or harassment (Equality Act, 2010).

Wellbeing

“Wellbeing is a positive state experienced by individuals [...] it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions” (WHO, 2021, p.10).

Appendix B: Finalised Search Strategy

Search No.	String of Related Terms	**Database 1** Academic Search Ultimate (EBSCO)	**Database 2** APA PsycArticles (EBSCO)	**Database 3** British Education Index (ProQuest)	**Database 4** Education Database (ProQuest)	**Database 5** ERIC (EBSCO)
S1	experiences OR attitudes OR views OR perspectives OR voices	3,149,130	67,214	88,994	257,1111	687,289
S2	LGBTQ+ OR LGB* OR lesbian OR gay OR bisexual* OR transgen* OR queer OR homosexual* OR non-binary	292,447	2,980	1,239	216,791	9077
S3	learners OR child* OR pupils OR students OR CYP OR adolesc*	3,279,949	82,952	165,204	3,884,426	1,262,672
S4	inclusion OR exclusion OR inclusiv* OR belonging	652,815	4,365	10,349	520,907	58,178
S5	school OR education OR college	20,850,153	141,906	316,710	4,231,101	1,680,877
S6	S1 + S2 + S3 + S4 + S5	919	38	98	47,537	833
S7	S6 Limited by: Source type Articles	881	38	95	17,916	601
S8	S7 Limited by: Peer-reviewed	860	38	95	17,907	601
S9	S8 Limited by: Date Range 2010-2022	577	37	90	10,005	439
S10	S9 Limited by: Date Range 2017-2022	448	28	66	6,013	297
S11	S10 Limited by: Abstract index	190	13	32	103	150
S12	“ideal school”	12	0	6	34	14
S13	S11 + S12	0	0	0	0	0
Exclusion criteria: • Non-LGBTQ+ young people • Not education related • Irrelevant settings						

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

From: Ethics Monitor <no-reply@ethicsreview.uea.ac.uk>
Sent: 25 April 2023 11:23
To: Natalie Dowle (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher) <[anonymised email address]>
Subject: Decision - Ethics ETH2223-1329 : Miss Natalie Dowle

University of East Anglia
Study title: Exploring LGBTQ+ young people's views on real and ideal educational inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools: a systemic solution-oriented inquiry.
Application ID: ETH2223-1329
Dear Natalie,
Your application was considered on 25th April 2023 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).
The decision is: **approved**.
You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.
This approval will expire on **31st August 2024**.
Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.
It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.
Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.
Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).
I would like to wish you every success with your project.
On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)
Yours sincerely,
[Anonymised Name]

University of East Anglia

Appendix D: Recruitment Documents

Become a Research Participant!

I am Natalie, a Trainee Educational Psychologist and Postgraduate Researcher on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of East Anglia.

As part of my doctoral thesis, I'm looking for young people who might be willing to take part in my research study.

The research study is about LGBTQ+ Young People's views on 'real' and 'ideal' educational inclusion in UK schools.

- Do you identify as LGBTQ+?
- Are you aged between 16-25 years old?
- Were you educated in the UK? (either in part, or fully)

If so, please consider finding out more!

The research study will involve me asking you some questions about your views and experiences of inclusion in UK schools (you will be emailed with the questions beforehand). The interviews can be in-person or online, and will take up to one hour.

If you are interested in knowing more, please read the Participation Information & Consent Request at: https://forms.office.com/e/QrHwnb4Pj3 or scan the QR code 👉 or contact me (Natalie) via email: [anonymised email] **Thank you for your help!**	

I WANT YOUR VIEWS

Do you identify as LGBTQ+?
Are you aged between 16–25 years old?

I want to hear about your experiences as an LGBTQ+ pupil at school in the UK.

I also want to find out what you think the 'ideal school' looks like.

If you are interested, please email Natalie at:

Appendix E: Consent Forms

- Link to digital 'Research Gatekeeper Opt-in' Form: https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=lYdfxj26UUOKBwhl5djwkPdXk1YmkfhNiWgxq0PBH8hUOU9BMzg2MFBTUkwyNTZUSVZNTkhSRVBMSi4u
- Link to digital 'Participant Information and Consent Request' form: https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPageV2.aspx?prevorigin=shell&origin=NeoPortalPage&subpage=design&id=lYdfxj26UUOKBwhl5djwkPdXk1YmkfhNiWgxq0PBH8hUNlRPSzJPRTJXRk1YUVNWWTQ0WTBRUzgxOS4u&analysis=false&topview=Preview

Information Sheet and Consent Form

Miss Natalie Dowle
Trainee Educational Psychologist

24 April 2023

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: [anonymised email]
Tel: [anonymised phone number]
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

Exploring LGBTQ+ young people's views on real and ideal educational inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools: a systemic solution-oriented inquiry.

Link to online Participant Information & Consent Request:
https://forms.office.com/e/QrHwnb4Pj3

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION & CONSENT REQUEST

(1) What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study about LGBTQ+ young people's views on real and ideal educational inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools.

The study explores educational inclusion from the perspective of LGBTQ+ young people. You will be encouraged to share your views on your prior school experiences, as well as your ideas on what would make an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school.

Your opinions and insights will help to highlight how schools can be better inclusive of LGBTQ+ children and young people. You have been invited to participate in this study because your recent school experience as well as your views on what an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school is, will help me to understand what some LGBTQ+ young people want, need and hope for when it comes to feeling included in school.

This Participant Information & Consent Request tells you about the study in detail. Knowing what is involved will help you to decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this Participant Information carefully and email me with questions regarding anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling me that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have been asked to keep a copy of this Participant Information & Consent Request.

(2) Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher: Miss Natalie Dowle. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia. My email is [anonymised email].

The study will take place under the supervision of Mr Ryan Cullen. Ryan is a Lecturer and Research Supervisor at the University of East Anglia. His email is [anonymised email].

(3) What will the study involve for me?
You will be able to opt-in to the study, meaning that you volunteer to be interviewed by me, Natalie. Once you have agreed to participate, I will email the interview questions to you beforehand, so that you can be sure that you would like to participate, as well as have time to prepare your answers if you want to.

Interviews will take place at a day and time that is convenient for you, and will be arranged nearer the time. The interview will take place either at a mutually convenient location which we will confirm nearer the time, or remotely using Microsoft Teams.

The only people present during the interview will be you and me (Natalie, the researcher).

The interview will take up to one hour to complete. If you are happy for me to record your comments, I will use an audio recording device. During the interview, you will be asked to give your views, experiences and ideas.

The interview will contain questions around what you think inclusion means, and also explores your ideas around an ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school. Some questions will be more focused, gaining information about your real school experiences, as well as gaining your views on different aspects of the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school. For example, I may ask you about different themes linked to school, such as: the use of language; what teaching and learning looks like; questions around school staff and other pupils; views on LGBTQ+ related locations, facilities and spaces; types of rules, policies and laws within the school; and various other aspects you consider as important for LGBTQ+ pupils to feel included at school.

After the interview, I will store your recorded comments under a fictitious name (a pseudonym), which means that people outside of the interview will NOT be able to identify who you are. This is called anonymising the data, which many research participants prefer as it means they can speak more openly and truthfully about their views. Any references to specific people, situations, events or places will also be anonymised (or redacted) to ensure your anonymity.

Once interviews have taken place, and after I have written up your interview, you will be given the opportunity to look at your comments, which will be emailed to you as a transcript. You can check whether you are happy with your comments, as well as have the opportunity to amend or add comments (within seven calendar days). If you want to receive this, please tick the relevant box on the Consent Request in the final section of this form.

You will be able to withdraw your comments (either in part, or the whole transcript) up until 31st July 2023. After this date, formal data analysis will begin, which means that all participants can no longer withdraw their comments from the study.

(1) **How much of my time will the study take?**

If you are interested in this study, you need to take time to carefully read this Participant Information. If you decide to participate within this study, the subsequent interview will take up to one hour to complete. If you decide to review your transcript, this may take extra time.

(2) **Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?**

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia.

Even if you do decide to take part in the study now, you can change your mind in the future. This is called withdrawing from the study. You can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by letting me know that you would like to withdraw from the study, on or before 31st July 2023, by emailing me at: [anonymised email]

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

There are no consequences for you if you withdraw from the study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview, and you are free to stop the interview at any time.

Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results.

After the interview, if you decide to withdraw from the study (before 31st July 2023) your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you may be regarded as having increased vulnerability within UK society, and/or face greater levels of oppression as a minority group.

Therefore, it is important to know that, as a young LGBTQ+ person, you may potentially feel increased levels of vulnerability by taking part in research that explores gender and sexuality issues when considering school inclusion.

I hope that you find the research interesting but if you become upset by any of the topics discussed, or if you find any parts of this experience distressing, you may wish to speak to me in confidence.

If you feel that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a dedicated service may help. Please note that the research team are not responsible for any of the services suggested:

- 42nd Street (a charity offering a social work and counselling service for under 25s): http://42ndstreet.org.uk/
- Samaritans (24 hours access): https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/
- NHS Free counselling: https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/
- Information and access to support: LGBT Foundation: https://lgbt.foundation
- You may also contact your GP (Doctors)

You may withdraw from the study up until the point of data analysis on 31st July 2023.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?
You may find being involved in this study helpful, with one piece of research highlighting how some people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community find talking about their views useful, particularly if they have experienced isolation and distress in the past (British Psychological Society, 2019).

By discussing your views as a young LGBTQ+ person, you will help to increase understanding of ways in which schools can support LGBTQ+ inclusion in the future. With more studies focussing on the experiences and views of LGBTQ+ young people, there is a potential for such research to develop knowledge on what is important within school and beyond for LGBTQ+ children and young people.

Also, by discussing your views, research findings can be used to improve the work being carried out by lots of professionals working with LGBTQ+ children and young people, including, for example, Trainee Educational Psychologists and Educational Psychologists.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?
Your personal data and any information you provide during the study will be stored in a password-protected file, in a password-protected folder, on a password-protected computer. Only I will have access to this information.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information & Consent Request, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published. I will make every effort to protect your identity.

Study data may also be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes. The data will be kept for 10 years beyond the last date the data was accessed. The deposited data will not include your name or any directly identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, I will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. You may email me (Natalie) at: [anonymised email]

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to be told about the overall results of this study. If you wish to receive this, please tick the appropriate box on the Consent Request at the end of this form.

The full results of the study will be in the form of a completed thesis. This will be available once the researcher's thesis has been completed, submitted and approved by those marking it.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
If you have a complaint or any concerns about the study, please contact the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Researcher:
Miss Natalie Dowle [anonymised email]
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

Research Supervisor:
Mr Ryan Cullen [anonymised email]
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact:

Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning:
Professor Yann Lebeau [anonymised email]
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?
To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?
According to data protection legislation, Natalie is required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows me to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a university. In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
If you want to take part, please finish reading this Participant Information and then complete the Consent Request in the following section.

(16) Further information
This information was last updated on 24th April 2023.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by me, Natalie, via email [anonymised email]

Please keep a copy of this information

PARTICIPANT CONSENT REQUEST (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information & Consent Request, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

- I understand that the results of this study may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect my identity, I may be identifiable in these publications due to the nature of the study or results.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES NO

Reviewing transcripts YES NO

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
YES NO

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

o Postal: _____

_____

o Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information & Consent request, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect my identity, I may be identifiable in these publications due to the nature of the study or results.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording	YES	NO
Reviewing transcripts	YES	NO

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES NO

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

o Postal: _____

_____

o Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

Appendix F: Interview Schedule and Prompts (Includes Script Ideas)

1. What does inclusion mean to you? *Script: "Don't worry if you're not sure, just say what comes to mind".* *Script: "All of the following questions will relate to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ pupils only".*
2. If you could invent the ideal inclusive school, what would it be like? Prompts: • What would you be doing in your ideal school? • What are the staff and pupils like? • How would you know that it's inclusive?
3. What does an LGBTQ+ inclusive school mean to you? Prompts: • How would you be feeling? • How does it impact you as an LGBTQ+ person?
4. What are the different elements to your ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school? (see prompt sheet below)
5. What were your real school experiences of LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion? (see prompt sheet below)
6. Were there aspects of school life that supported or hindered LGBTQ+ inclusion? *Script: "Can you tell me more about why they were important?"* Prompts: • What areas do you think might be important to other LGBTQ+ pupils, and why? • How might these areas be more or less important for other members of the LGBTQ+ community?
7. When we've been discussing your views on real and ideal LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools, has any part of the discussion stood out to you?

Script: "Why do you think those areas in particular stood out?"
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Ending: *Script: "Thank you very much for participating in this interview, I really appreciate you taking the time to share your views on LGBTQ+ school inclusion with me".*

Prompt Sheet

<u>Ideal School</u>

Language and discourse

- For example, what kind of LGBTQ+ inclusive language would you like to hear from teachers, read on wall displays, or see in reading materials?

Teaching and learning

- What is teaching like in your ideal school?
- Are there ideal books and learning opportunities etc. in your ideal school?

Staff relationships

- Do you think LGBTQ+ pupils would feel comfortable in being open about who they are, or about discussing LGBTQ+ issues with staff in their ideal school? Why?
- What kind of ideal interactions would take place between LGBTQ+ pupils and school staff?

Peer relationships

- Do you think LGBTQ+ pupils would feel comfortable in being open about who they are, or about discussing LGBTQ+ issues with other pupils in their ideal school? Why?
- What kind of ideal interactions would take place between LGBTQ+ pupils and other pupils?

Locations, facilities or spaces

- Are there any locations, facilities or spaces that bring about LGBTQ+ inclusion in your ideal school? e.g., areas such as toilets, changing rooms, and LGBTQ+ societies have been mentioned in previous research.

School systems

- Is the school environment ideal for LGBTQ+ inclusion?
- Are there any activities that take place throughout school that are linked to LGBTQ+ issues, or support LGBTQ+ pupils?
- How are LGBTQ+ issues ideally communicated throughout the school?
- Are parents included in school LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives?
- How do the school leadership team and governors feel about and bring about LGBTQ+ inclusion?

Rules, policies or laws

- Are there any rules, policies or laws that create LGBTQ+ inclusion in your ideal school?

Real School

Language and discourse

- Can you think of any examples of when language used, or conversations you either had or heard felt very inclusive of LGBTQ+ pupils? Can you give examples of the kinds of things that were talked about?
- Was there any language used that you felt was not inclusive? Can you give examples of the kind of things that were talked about?
- Were there opportunities for discussion on LGBTQ+ people and issues? Can you tell me more about this?

Teaching and learning

- Do any parts of the school curriculum come to mind when you consider LGBTQ+ inclusion? If so, why?
- Can you give examples of specific teaching or lessons that were important for LGBTQ+ inclusion? If so, why?

- How do you think books and general learning within school supported or hindered LGBTQ+ inclusion?

Staff relationships

- Do you think LGBTQ+ pupils felt comfortable being open about who they are, or about discussing LGBTQ+ issues with school staff? Why?
- Can you remember any examples of how staff interacted with LGBTQ+ pupils in the schools you attended?
- Can you give examples of the levels of support or guidance that existed between LGBTQ+ pupils and school staff?
- Were there any staff in school that you perceived as a positive or negative role model for LGBTQ+ inclusion? Why do you think this was the case?

Peer relationships

- Do you think LGBTQ+ pupils felt comfortable being open about who they are, or about discussing LGBTQ+ issues with other pupils in school? Why?
- Can you give examples of experiences or interactions between LGBTQ+ pupils and other pupils?

Locations, facilities or spaces

- Were there any locations, facilities or spaces that either supported or hindered LGBTQ+ pupil inclusion? e.g., areas such as toilets, changing rooms, and LGBTQ+ societies have been mentioned in previous research.
- Can you give any examples?

School systems

- What was the school environment like for LGBTQ+ pupils?
- Were there any activities that took place in school linked to LGBTQ+ issues?
- How were LGBTQ+ issues communicated throughout the school?
- Were parents included in school LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives?
- Are you aware of how the school leadership team and governors felt, and either supported or hindered LGBTQ+ inclusion?

Rules, policies or laws

- What examples can you give of rules, policies or laws that might have related to LGBTQ+ inclusion in your schools? e.g., anti-bullying policy and school uniform rules have been mentioned in previous research.
- Can you think of any examples of how certain rules or policies either supported or hindered LGBTQ+ inclusion?

Appendix G: Participant Definitions of Inclusion

Nate: *"Inclusion is where queer people and any minority in general exists without having to conform to the societal model that's expected of them. So non-binary or gender fluid people for example, they don't have to be like, present masculine or present feminine. Trans people don't necessarily have to present as a certain gender or whatever. It's just, it's less about fitting in and more about behaviours and ideas and thoughts being, not seen as like normalised, but understood. It's the ability to be yourself without having to ask for permission".*

Dani: *"Inclusion to me is largely to do with tolerance. This might seem like basic human decency, but I think it's the first step to increasing an inclusive society. Inclusion is about ensuring that we recognise and elevate the voices of minorities, so obviously not just like accepting difference, but actually, especially those minorities that have been oppressed in the past, actually elevating their voices. It's important that social norms don't belittle or demonise minority attributes, so, if you think about like the media and like culture, I think it's important that it's not, like, exclusive as it has been in the past. It also has a lot to do with safety, that people feel comfortable, and not isolated from others".*

Max: *"If a place is inclusive, it means that everyone there, no matter their race, sexuality, gender, religion, etc., feels comfortable and will not be judged in any way whatsoever"*.

Anna: *"Having equal opportunities for everybody. But, as part of that, it means like having equity over equality, so like providing people with the resources that they need in order to meet, in order to have the opportunities. So, like removing all barriers, not having barriers there in the first place and the idea that everyone*

matters and like embracing all different types of people into any activity that you're doing regardless of what they look like, their sexuality, if they've got disabilities, like regardless of any of those characteristics. It's embracing all of them into the culture and celebrating all of their different unique traits, and, the thing being that like differences are good. Yeah, and having like role models for people as well. So it's more like school based but like having a variety, when you're teaching science, having gay scientists, having black scientists, having Indian scientists, having all of those different roles so the kids have someone to look up to".

Oron: *"Inclusion is just like social equity more than anything. Equality is good but sometimes you've got to acknowledge the social inequality of people".*

Tyler: *"Everyone feeling like they have a place to belong, no matter how different they are from each other, and [...] creating that environment that promotes everyone feeling like it's a space they can be welcome to, so not just for the people already there, but for people looking in to see, like ohhh this is a place that includes everyone, and I can go to that".*

Sam: *"It means that everybody is like proportionally represented. So, if you meet people from different minorities, but that doesn't mean they have to be the main representation, but like I said, proportionally cause this is pretty specific, but it's like if 10% of people are gay, it wouldn't make sense to have half of the representation be gay because that doesn't work".*

Ali: *"There's a lot of different inclusion that obviously, if you're talking about LGBT inclusion [...] it's really hard to think about".*

Steph: *"It just means being accepting on lots of different levels of everyone and everything, sort of no matter what. So that could relate to race, class, sexuality,*

disability, and I think a big part of that is to try and make yourself educated on these topics, even if they don't concern you, because then you're able to form opinions based on what you know, but they're in, they're educated opinions, they're not just based on things that you've heard. So actually, I think a big part of it is reading about these topics, becoming educated and then reflecting upon yourself and think actually, what do ***I*** *actually think rather than just sort of what's common, what you've commonly heard been floating around sort of news or media, yeah. I think [...] sort of being very empathetic of everyone and their differences [...]. Also, I've put not to adapt or change your behaviour because of someone's differences, so not to treat anyone any differently. I think within that there's a bit of scope about whether it's to benefit them, so such as I work with a lot of SEN pupils and I adapt my language, I adapt my thinking, I adapt a lot of those things to benefit them and to make it easier for them to understand instructions and things like that. So you shouldn't change your behaviour unless it's to help them, so not because of you, because of them, if that makes sense".*

JJ: ***"****Everyone being able to express who they are in whatever way they feel most comfortable, wherever they want to".*

Appendix H: Research Debrief Form

Thank you for your involvement in my study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the Study:

I previously informed you that the purpose of the study was to explore LGBTQ+ young people's views on *real* and *ideal* educational inclusion for LGBTQ+ pupils in UK schools.

It is hoped that by investigating educational inclusion from the perspective of LGBTQ+ young people, participant views on their prior school experiences, as well as their ideas on the ideal LGBTQ+ inclusive school, will highlight how schools can be fully inclusive of LGBTQ+ children and young people.

Findings will also help the researcher, who is training to become an Educational Psychologist, to think about how they can best support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ children and young people that they work with.

Lastly, it is hoped that this research will add to existing educational psychology research, with LGBTQ+ participants providing some valuable insights in an area that benefits from further investigation. Ultimately, research findings may therefore help to shape future research.

I hope that you have found it interesting and have not been upset by any of the topics discussed. However, if you have found any part of this experience to be distressing and you wish to speak to a member of the research team, please contact University of East Anglia's Primary Researcher Natalie Dowle, Research Supervisor Ryan Cullen, or the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau.

Natalie Dowle:

- Email address: [anonymised email]

Ryan Cullen:

- Email address: [anonymised email]

Yann Lebeau:

- Email address: [anonymised email]

If you feel upset after having completed the study, or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a dedicated service may help. Please note that the research team are not responsible for any of the services suggested:

- 42nd Street (a charity offering a social work and counselling service for under 25s): http://42ndstreet.org.uk/
- Samaritan (24 hours access): https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/
- NHS Free counselling: https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/
- Information and access to support: LGBT Foundation: https://lgbt.foundation
- You may also contact your GP (Doctors)

Right to withdraw:

You may decide that you do not want your data (your interview feedback) used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study, please email the

researcher before 31st July 2023, and your data will be permanently deleted from the online password-protected folder it has been stored in.

If you wish to completely withdraw from the study, please notify the researcher Natalie Dowle (email: [anonymised email]) by 31st July 2023. Your right to withdraw will cease when the researcher begins data analysis on 1st August 2023.

Confidentiality:

Pseudonyms (fictitious names) will be given to participants to facilitate anonymity. This will negate participants being identified by the data they provide.

Final Report:

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please contact the researcher Natalie Dowle via email address: [anonymised email]

Useful Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact Researcher Natalie Dowle, or Research Supervisor Ryan Cullen via the email addresses listed above.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, or complaints to make about your research involvement, you may wish to contact the University of East Anglia's Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at:

- Email address: [anonymised email]

Further Readings:

If you would like to learn more about the school experiences of some LGBTQ+ children and young people in the United Kingdom, please see the following references:

- Bradlow, J., Bartram, F., Guasp, A., & Jadva, V. (2017*). The school report*. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017
- Formby, E. (2015). Limitations of focussing on homophobic, biphobic and transphobic 'bullying' to understand and address LGBT young people's experiences within and beyond school. *Sex Education*, 15(6), 626-640. https://10.1080/14681811.2015.1054024
- Formby, E., & Donovan, C. (2020). Sex and relationships education for LGBT+ young people: Lessons from UK youth work. *Sexualities*, 23(7), 1155-1178. https://10.1177/1363460719888432
- Harris, R., Wilson-Daily, A. E., & Fuller, G. (2021). Exploring the secondary school experience of LGBT+ youth: an examination of school culture and school climate as understood by teachers and experienced by LGBT+ students. *Intercultural Education (London, England),* 32(4), 368-385. https://10.1080/14675986.2021.1889987
- Harris, R., Wilson-Daily, A. E., & Fuller, G. (2021). 'I just want to feel like I'm part of everyone else': how schools unintentionally contribute to the isolation of students who identify as LGBT. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 52(2), 155-173. https://10.1080/0305764X.2021.1965091

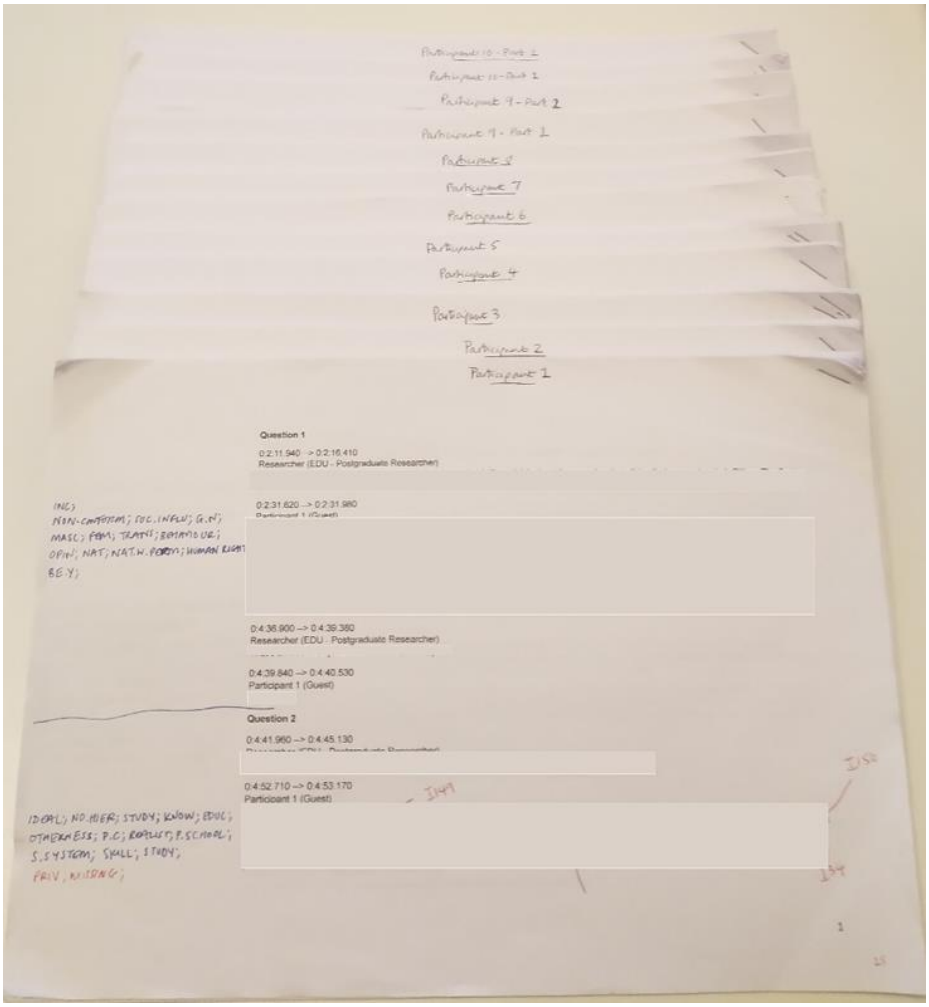
- Robinson, K. (2010). A study of young lesbian and gay people's school experiences. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26(4), 331-351. https://10.1080/02667363.2010.521308

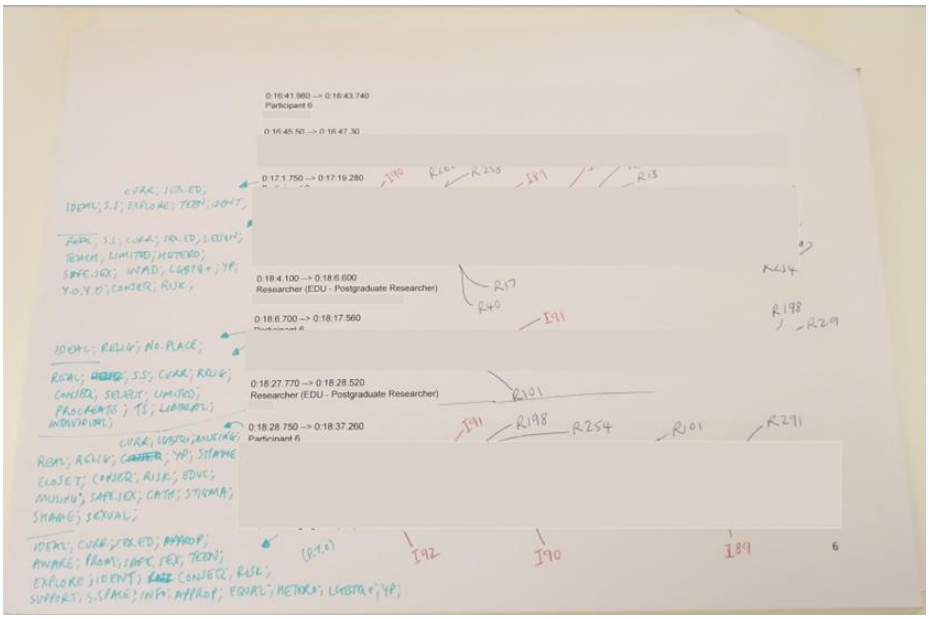
Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference.

Once again, thank you for your participation in this study.

Appendix I: Coding Process and Example Codes

a) Examples of transcript coding by hand:





b) Examples of codes uploaded to Excel (in order of prevalence):

1	ID	CODE (IDEAL)	PARTICIPANTS	No. of Parts
2	I110	FACILITIES.CHANGINGROOMS.OR.TOILETS.CUBICLE.OR.GENDERNEUTRAL.OPTION	7, 4, 8, 1, 3, 5	6
3	I1	CULTURE.SYSTEM.EVERYONE.CAN.EXPRESSION.THEMSELVES.AND.PRESENT.AS.BEYOURSELF	10, 9, 4, 1, 3	5
4	I13	CURRICULUM.SYSTEM.EDUCATE.EVERYONE.ON.LGBTQ.TOPICS.AND.DIFFERENCE	10, 9, 7, 8, 2	5
5	I30	FACILITIES.TOILETS.GENDERNEUTRAL.IMPORTANT	10, 7, 4, 1, 5	5
6	I51	SYSTEM.INCLUSION.LGBTQ.INCLUSIVE.EDUCATION.INCREASES.YOUNGPERSON.AND.STAFF.CRITICAL.THINKING.AND.INFORMED.OPINION	9, 7, 4, 1, 3	5
7	I55	CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.TEACHES.LGBTQ.RELATIONSHIPS	9, 7, 8, 2, 5	5
8	I69	ACROSS.CURRICULUM.INTEGRATE.LGBTQ.RELATIONSHIPS.OR.REPRESENTATION	9, 7, 4, 2, 1	5
9	I87	STAFF.DIVERSITY.REPRESENTATION.OR.GENDERNEUTRAL.BEHAVIOUR.CONSEQUENCE.ROLEMODEL	6, 4, 2, 1, 5	5
10	I96	CURRICULUM.EDUCATION.OR.SPOKENLANGUAGE.AVOID.GENDER.BINARY.PRONOUN	6, 7, 4, 3, 5	5
11	I9	FACILITIES.SUPPORTGROUP.OR.SERVICE.OR.PASTORAL.FOR.MENTALHEALTH.OR.SAFESPACE	10, 4, 2, 3	4
12	I22	STAFF.AND.YOUNGPERSON.BEHAVIOUR.TREAT.EACHOTHER.OR.DIFFERENCE.WITH.RESPECT	10, 7, 1, 5	4
13	I29	FACILITIES.TOILETS.GENDERNEUTRAL.REDUCE.LABELS.OR.INCREASE.GENDER.IDENTITY.EXPRESSION.OR.SAFETY	10, 8, 1, 5	4
14	I32	CURRICULUM.TEACH.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.YOUNG.SUPPORTS.LGBTQ.DEVELOPMENT	10, 9, 1, 3	4
15	I33	SYSTEM.TEACH.YOUNGPERSON.INCLUSION.VALUES.CREATES.INCLUSION.FUTURE.SOCIETY	10, 9, 6, 7	4
16	I42	POLICY.BULLYING.ZERO.TOLERANCE.BULLYING.FOR.DIFFERENCE	9, 7, 3, 5	4
17	I46	CURRICULUM.TEACH.YOUNG.DIVERSITY.FAMILYSTRUCTURE	9, 6, 7, 1	4
18	I56	CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.TEACH.LGBTQ.RELATIONSHIPS.REDUCES.RISK.OR.ABUSE	9, 4, 1, 5	4
19	I58	CURRICULUM.SECONDARYSCHOOL.TEACH.LGBTQ.SEXEDUCATION.OPENLY	9, 6, 4, 5	4
20	I62	CURRICULUM.INTEGRATE.LGBTQ.HISTORY.NORMALISE.HISTORY	9, 7, 4, 3	4
21	I74	CURRICULUM.INTEGRATE.LGBTQ.REPRESENTATION.NATURALLY.ACROSS.CURRICULUM	6, 7, 4, 2	4
22	I75	SYSTEM.PRIDEEVENT.IS.ADDITION.TO.LGBTQ.CURRICULUM.INTEGRATION	6, 4, 2, 1	4
23	I76	SYSTEM.REDUCE.BOXTICKING.OR.STANDALONE.OR.PERFORMATIVE.EDUCATION.OR.EVENTS.WITH.LGBTQ.INTEGRATION	6, 2, 1, 3	4

1	ID	CODE (REAL)	PARTICIPANTS	No. of Parts
2	R039	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.INCLUSION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	10
3	R089	NEUTRAL.DEFENDSCHOOL	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	10
4	R093	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.LGTBQ.MISSING.OR.LIMITED.FROM.DISCUSSION	9, 5, 7, 10, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	9
5	R001	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.COMMUNITY.EXPERIENCE.ATTACK.BULLYING	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1	8
6	R008	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.GAY.SLUR	10, 9, 7, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	8
7	R012	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	10, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	8
8	R011	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.HETERONORMATIVE.LGBTQ.LIMITED.OR.MISSING.OR.INADEQUATE	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 2, 6	7
9	R027	NEGATIVE.INCLUSION.ETHOS.OR.VALUES.BOXTICKING.HALFHEARTED	10, 5, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	7
10	R043	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.CULTURE.GAY.SLUR	10, 9, 4, 8, 3, 1, 6	7
11	R049	POSITIVE.RELATIONSHIP.INDIVIDUAL.STAFF.NICE.OR.SUPPORT.OR.ACCEPT.OR.LISTEN	10, 7, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	7
12	R098	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.LGBTQ.HISTORY.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	9, 5, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	7
13	R140	NEUTRAL.CURRICULUM.PSHE.EXPERIENCE.VARIABLE	9, 5, 7, 4, 3, 2, 6	7
14	R240	NEGATIVE.PRIMARYSCHOOL.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.SPOKENLANGUAGE.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	7
15	R017	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.MISSING.LGBTQ.IMPACT.YOUNGPERSON.EDUCATION	10, 7, 4, 8, 3, 6	6
16	R025	NEGATIVE.PROTECTEDCHARACTERISTIC.UNEQUAL.PRIORITY	10, 9, 7, 3, 1, 2	6
17	R030	NEGATIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.INFLEXIBLE.OR.GENDER.BINARY	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 3	6
18	R038	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.OR.BEHAVIOUR.PEERS.DIVISIVE.BULLYING.SLURS	10, 9, 7, 4, 8, 3	6
19	R040	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.INCLUSION.MISSING.IMPACTS.DEVELOPMENT	10, 5, 7, 4, 1, 6	6
20	R046	NEGATIVE.ENVIRONMENT.GENDER.BINARY.SEGREGATION	10, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	6
21	R080	POSITIVE.STUDENTLED.CHANGE.OR.INVOLVEMENT	10, 5, 7, 3, 1, 2	6
22	R100	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.RELATIONSHIP.EDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	9, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	6
23	R101	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.BIOLOGY.OR.STD.FOCUS	9, 5, 8, 1, 2, 6	6

c) Example of generating themes through codes:

ID	CODE (REAL)	PARTICIPANTS	No. of Parts	Which Theme?
R039	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.INCLUSION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	10	1
R089	NEUTRAL.DEFENDSCHOOL	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	10	2
R093	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.LGTBQ.MISSING.OR.LIMITED.FROM.DISCUSSION	9, 5, 7, 10, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	9	1
R001	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.COMMUNITY.EXPERIENCE.ATTACK.BULLYING	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1	8	4
R008	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.GAY.SLUR	10, 9, 7, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	8	4
R012	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	10, 7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	8	6
R011	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.HETERONORMATIVE.LGBTQ.LIMITED.OR.MISSING.OR.INADEQUATE	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 2, 6	7	1
R027	NEGATIVE.INCLUSION.ETHOS.OR.VALUES.BOXTICKING.HALFHEARTED	10, 5, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	7	8
R043	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.CULTURE.GAY.SLUR	10, 9, 4, 8, 3, 1, 6	7	4
R049	POSITIVE.RELATIONSHIP.INDIVIDUAL.STAFF.NICE.OR.SUPPORT.OR.ACCEPT.OR.LISTEN	10, 7, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	7	8
R098	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.LGBTQ.HISTORY.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	9, 5, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	7	1 7
R140	NEUTRAL.CURRICULUM.PSHE.EXPERIENCE.VARIABLE	9, 5, 7, 4, 3, 2, 6	7	6
R240	NEGATIVE.PRIMARYSCHOOL.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.SPOKENLANGUAGE.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	7, 4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	7	1
R017	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.MISSING.LGBTQ.IMPACT.YOUNGPERSON.EDUCATION	10, 7, 4, 8, 3, 6	6	3 6
R025	NEGATIVE.PROTECTEDCHARACTERISTIC.UNEQUAL.PRIORITY	10, 9, 7, 3, 1, 2	6	8
R030	NEGATIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.INFLEXIBLE.OR.GENDER.BINARY	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 3	6	5
R038	NEGATIVE.SPOKENLANGUAGE.OR.BEHAVIOUR.PEERS.DIVISIVE.BULLYING.SLURS	10, 9, 7, 4, 8, 3	6	4
R040	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.EDUCATION.OR.INCLUSION.MISSING.IMPACTS.DEVELOPMENT	10, 5, 7, 4, 1, 6	6	3
R046	NEGATIVE.ENVIRONMENT.GENDER.BINARY.SEGREGATION	10, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	6	5
R080	POSITIVE.STUDENTLED.CHANGE.OR.INVOLVEMENT	10, 5, 7, 3, 1, 2	6	8
R100	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.RELATIONSHIP.EDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	9, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	6	3 6
R101	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.BIOLOGY.OR.STD.FOCUS	9, 5, 8, 1, 2, 6	6	3 6
R138	NEGATIVE.ROLEMODEL.MISSING.OR.LIMITED	9, 5, 7, 4, 1, 2	6	7 8
R143	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.RESOURCES.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	9, 7, 4, 1, 2, 6	6	1
R213	NEGATIVE.PRONOUN.TERMS.OR.EDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	7, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	6	5
R258	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.HETERONORMATIVE.OR.CISGENDER.LGBTQ.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	4, 8, 3, 1, 2, 6	6	6
R005	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.YOUNGPERSON.NEEDMORE.IDENTITY.DEVELOP.SUPPORT	10, 9, 4, 8, 3	5	3 6
R029	NEGATIVE.RELIGION.IMPACTS.INCLUSION	10, 5, 4, 8, 6	5	2
R044	NEGATIVE.RELATIONSHIP.PEERS.MALE.BULLYING	10, 7, 8, 3, 1	5	4
R064	POSITIVE.RELATIONSHIP.STAFF.TS.INDIVIDUAL.SUPPORT.LGBTQ.EDUCATION	10, 4, 8, 3, 6	5	8
R079	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.DIVERSITY.REPRESENTATION.MISSING	10, 5, 4, 2, 6	5	7
R083	NEGATIVE.LGBTQ.REPRESENTATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	10, 7, 4, 3, 2	5	7
R090	NEGATIVE.SYSTEM.PRACTICES.INFLEXIBLE.OR.INADEQUATE.OR.OUTDATED	10, 5, 4, 1, 2	5	2
R099	NEGATIVE.CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.STD.NEGATIVE.OR.FEARMONGERING	9, 7, 4, 8, 1	5	3 6
R109	POSITIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.FLEXIBLE.LENIENT.OR.GENDER.NON-CONFORMING	9, 5, 7, 8, 3	5	5
R116	NEGATIVE.BULLYING.CAUSES.ISOLATION	9, 5, 4, 8, 3	5	4

d) Example of distribution of 'real' and 'ideal' codes within one theme:

Theme	Code Label	Code	Participant	Part.Nos
5	I110	FACILITY.CHANGINGROOMS.OR.TOILET.CUBICLE.OR.GENDERNEUTRAL.OPTION	7, 4, 8, 1, 3, 5	6
5	I30	FACILITY.TOILET.GENDERNEUTRAL.IMPORTANT	10, 7, 4, 1, 5	5
5	I96	CURRICULUM.EDUCATION.OR.SPOKENLANGUAGE.AVOID.GENDER.BINARY.PRONOUN	6, 7, 4, 3, 5	5
5	I29	FACILITY.TOILET.GENDERNEUTRAL.REDUCATE.LABELS.OR.INCREASE.GENDER.IDENTITY.EXPRESSION.OR.SAFETY	10, 8, 1, 5	4
5	I113	CURRICULUM.ACTIVELY.TEACH.TERMS.OR.PRONOUN.OR.IDENTITY	7, 4, 2, 3	4
5	I10	UNIFORM.STAFF.PRONOUN.BADGE	10, 7, 4	3
5	I117	UNIFORM.PRONOUN.BADGE.SWAPPABLE	7, 4, 2	3
5	I11	RESOURCES.EMAIL.INCLUDE.PRONOUN.IDENTITY	10, 5	2
5	I23	EVENT.OPENDAY.STARTOFYEAR.STAFF.UNIFORM.PRONOUN.BADGE.SYMBOLISE.INCLUSION	10, 7	2
5	I24	UNIFORM.FLEXIBLE.INCLUDES.PROTECTEDCHARACTERISTICS.CREATIVITY.OR.EXPRESSION	10, 1	2
5	I26	UNIFORM.FLEXIBLE.INCREASE.COMFORT	10, 9	2
5	I28	FACILITY.TOILET.GENDERNEUTRAL.ADDITIONAL.TO.GENDER.BINARY	10, 8	2
5	I65	STAFF.EDUCATE.OR.TRAIN.TOLERANCE.OR.AWARENESS.AND.FLEXIBLE.TO.RESPECT.CHOSEN.IDENTITY.OR.NAMES.OR.PRONOUN	9, 7	2
5	I106	CURRICULUM.SEXEDUCATION.EVERYONE.EXPERIENCE.EQUAL.EDUCATION.ON.ALL.GENDER.INFORMATION	6, 4	2
5	I136	FACILITY.CUBICLE.INCREASE.PRIVACY	8, 4?,	2
5	I151	SYSTEM.TREAT.GENDERS.AND.GENDERNEUTRAL.EQUAL	1, 3	2
5	R030	NEGATIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.INFLEXIBLE.OR.GENDER.BINARY	10, 9, 5, 7, 4, 3	6
5	R046	NEGATIVE.ENVIRONMENT.GENDER.BINARY.SEGREGATION	10, 7, 4, 3, 1, 6	6
5	R213	NEGATIVE.PRONOUN.TERMS.OR.EDUCATION.LIMITED.OR.MISSING	7, 4, 3, 1, 2, 6	6
5	R109	POSITIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.FLEXIBLE.LENIENT.OR.GENDER.NON-CONFORMING	9, 5, 7, 8, 3	5
5	R149	NEUTRAL.SPOKENLANGUAGE.STAFF.DEFAULT.GENDER.BINARY.PRONOUN	5, 7, 1, 2, 6	5
5	R036	NEGATIVE.POLICY.UNIFORM.CONFORM.REDUCES.COMFORT	10, 5, 4, 3	4

e) Example of how codes were structured to facilitate theme write-up:

Theme One Heteronormativity inhibits LGBTQ+ inclusion.	
IDEAL	**REAL**
CURRICULUM • Integrated LGBTQ topics and difference (2) - i13, i44 • Integrated LGBTQ+ history in-depth (2) – i62, i61 • Equal amounts for identities (2) – i15, i14 • Educate everyone the same – i8 • Teach respecting difference at young age – i103 • Teach LGBTQ+ values – i39 • Teach trans issues/identity – i18 • Teach intersex – i19	CURRICULUM • LGBTQ+ education is important, lacking, reactive rather than proactive, and half-heartedly teaches respect for protected characteristics (4) – r308, r039, r018, r237, r015 • LGBTQ+ missing from discussion – r093 • Heteronormative and inadequate – r011 • History lacking – r098 • Primary school education/discussion lacking – r240 • RSRE marginalises – r198 • Perpetuates non-inclusion – r081 • Young need more education on family structure – r094 • Misinformation is given – r172
RESOURCES • Integrated across environments – i98 • Equal access – i123 • Contemporary and diverse – i126 • Written by LGBTQ+ people – i127	RESOURCES • LGBTQ+ lacking and half-hearted (2) – r143, r192

PLUS • Pride in addition to integrated curriculum – i75 • Regular commitment to diversity, including from staff (2) – i36, i86 • System is inclusive (promote inclusion through language, discussion) (3) – i94, i118, i145 • Events that celebrate diversity – i50	PLUS • System lacks LGBTQ+ support services, prioritizing hetero/cisgender, treating LGBTQ+ unequally (3) – r142, r211, r220 • System/Staff avoid/oppress LGBTQ+ education – r019 • Pride events and activities are viewed as neutral– r205 • The system is heteronormative, pressure to conform – r253 • Lack of education increases isolation/discrimination – r284 • When included, difference is singled out – r058
	THOUGHTS • Things have improved recently – r216 • Schools can be inclusive in some ways (2) – r229, r242 • Still taboo and stigma (2) – r160, r178 • When included, difference is singled out – r058 • Stereotypes still exist – r193 • Looking back objectively, school was not inclusive – r309 • More LGBTQ+ education is needed – r315