Supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children – perceptions of parents, guardians and designated teachers.

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Introduction and Overview

This document is comprised of three parts, namely, a literature review in relation to the subject matter, an empirical paper, and a reflective chapter. The literature review explores research in relation to attachment theory, early childhood trauma and home-school partnerships, in addition to a synopsis of government policies and legislation relating to the changing support for previously looked-after children, with the Department for Educations' (DfE, 2018a; DfE, 2018b) statutory guidance being the main focus. The empirical paper consists of a qualitative research study, in which four Designated Teachers, five Adoptive Parents and five Special Guardians (from one English Local Authority [LA]), were interviewed to gain their perceptions of how to support previously looked-after children's educational achievement and emotional wellbeing. The reflective chapter then provides an account of the whole research process, from its initial conceptualisation to the formulation of research questions and design, ethical considerations, my learning as a developing researcher and the proposed dissemination of the research.

This area of research is of direct relevance to educational psychology practice. A study in 2014 found that fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014) and the Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) found that approximately four out of five adopted children in their survey needed more educational support than their peers, with seventy-nine per cent of their participants agreeing that their child's adverse early experiences have impacted on their ability to cope academically. In relation to Special Guardianship, sixty-two per cent of Special Guardians surveyed believed their children had physical and mental health needs with only a third having a formal diagnosis, and of those diagnosed, thirty-eight per cent had attachment disorder (ASGLB, 2021). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are therefore well placed to support individual children, their families and schools (Gore Langton, 2017), because they understand the complex impact of past adverse experiences (Dunstan, 2010) and attachment difficulties (Gore Langton, 2017).

Whilst this is a demonstrably important area for research, it is also important that there is transparency in relation to the researcher's positionality (Bourke, 2014), and that any personal or professional experiences are reflected upon, that may have

drawn the researcher to this topic or may have influenced this research (please see the reflective chapter for further information). Korstjens and Moser (2018) state that reflexivity needs to be employed for qualitative research paradigms, as it needs to be acknowledged that as a qualitative researcher, throughout the whole research project, from the initial interest in the phenomenon under study, to the design of the interview questions and the analysis of the data, you contribute to the construction of meaning and are unable to remain completely removed from the study (Willig, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2019). It must therefore be acknowledged, that this research has been conducted through the lens of a Trainee EP, who due to educational and professional experiences (as detailed in the reflective chapter), has developed a special interest in the subject of attachment theory and early childhood trauma and the impact that it can have on previously looked-after children. This interest drew me to want to ascertain and understand, from a critical realist epistemological position, what underlying mechanisms may be maintaining factors in relation to academic underachievement and how to best support previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing.

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List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Terminology
ASF	Adoption Support Fund
ALB	Adoption Leadership Board
ASGLB	Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board
BEd	Batchelor of Education
BPS	British Psychological Society
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DDP	Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy
DfE	Department for Education
EBSCO	Elton B. Stephens Company
EdPsyD	Educational Psychology Doctorate
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
EThOS	E-thesis online service
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority

LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MSc	Master of Science
NG	Nurture Group
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NMT	Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics
PACE	Playful, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VIG	Video Interaction Guidance
VS	Virtual School
VSH	Virtual School Head

Part One: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a dearth of evidence in England in relation to previously looked-after children's[1] educational needs and emotional wellbeing, but what little data does exist suggests that they are a vulnerable group whose profile of needs align closely to looked-after children, and therefore may require additional support to thrive at school. This literature review aims to provide a synopsis of the literature and a critical analysis of the research in relation to attachment theory, trauma, home-school partnerships, government policy and the impact on the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. This will inform the formulation of relevant research questions in relation to this subject matter.

Previously looked-after children have often experienced some form of trauma in their early lives, whether that be abuse, neglect or loss of a parent (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019a). These early adverse experiences can result in disrupted attachments (van den Dries et al., 2009), mental health difficulties (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014) and poorer educational outcomes (Brown et al., 2017), which is why it was pertinent to explore early childhood trauma in this literature review. It is also suggested that there is a close connection between early childhood trauma and attachment difficulties, as trauma can negatively impact attachment relationships. The significance of exploring attachment theory and attachment relationships in this literature review, is that there is a recognised association between academic attainment and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010). Attachment theory proposes that infants have an innate tendency to form emotional bonds with a primary caregiver or attachment figure, someone to provide a secure base from which to explore-this exploration being essential for emotional and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1969). The association between academic attainment and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010) is demonstrated by the correlation between placement stability and attainment, and the findings that the more placement moves a child has (reducing the chances of forming an attachment

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[1] A previously looked-after child is defined as a child who is no longer looked after by a local authority (LA) in England and Wales because they are subject to an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement order.

relationship with a caregiver), results in the decreasing likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE], 2017). Previously looked-after children often live with a foster family while suitable permanent parents/guardians are identified (Harwin et al., 2019a; Selwyn et al., 2014) with as few as 0.3 per cent experiencing one stable foster placement (Selwyn et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important that previously looked-after children are supported in school, a regular, stable environment, where they can use their classroom as a safe base (Geddes, 2006; Mascellani, 2016).

Historically, at a systemic level, schools and Local Authorities (LAs) have focused on looked-after children's needs, however, there has been a recent shift in focus towards previously looked-after children (Gore Langton, 2017), which will be outlined in this literature review. The Department for Education (DfE) Statutory guidance to promote the education of previously looked-after children (DfE, 2018a), acknowledges that previously looked-after children start school at a disadvantage due to their often adverse life experiences prior to being in care, with many of them having special educational needs. The Virtual School (VS)[2] has an important statutory role to ensure that previously looked-after children have the best opportunities to reach their full potential in education. The Virtual School Head (VSH) provides information and advice to Designated Teachers for previously looked-after children in maintained educational settings, to promote better educational outcomes (DfE, 2018a).

The role of the Designated Teacher in relation to supporting previously looked-after children was outlined in the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance, stating that the Designated Teacher must undertake "the responsibilities within the school to promote the educational achievement of…previously looked-after children on the school's roll" (p.7). Additionally, the Designated Teachers should "understand the importance of involving the child's parents or guardians in decisions affecting their child's education, and be a contact for parents or guardians who want advice or have concerns about their child's progress at school" (DfE, 2018b, p.12). Equally, Hutchin

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[2] The Virtual School (VS) acts as a local authority champion to promote the educational attainment of children who are or have been in care, so they achieve outcomes comparable to their peers. The VS does not exist in real terms and children do not attend it - they remain the responsibility of the school where they are enrolled. The VS is simply an organisation created for the co-ordination of educational services at an operational level.

(2010) emphasises that parents/carers know their children best, and therefore, building close partnerships with parents/guardians can promote a deeper understanding of the child, their development and needs. Research into parent/carer-school partnerships has highlighted the positive impact on behaviour (Feinstein & Symons, 1999), increased self-esteem and lowered the risk of exclusion (Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003) and better educational outcomes (Hattie, 2008). These home-school partnerships will therefore be further explored in the literature review.

In a guide commissioned by the DfE in 2014, it stated that 50 per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), demonstrating the importance of understanding how to best support the needs of these children. As previously looked-after children will experience separations, loss, and the development of new attachment relationships to parents or guardians, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) provides an applicable theoretical framework for this research, in addition to Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which attempts to explain the complex processes that contribute to different developmental outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is often depicted with the child in the centre of concentric circles, representing the microsystem (family, friends, school), mesosystem (interactions between family, school, multi-professional agencies), exosystem (education and political systems and reforms), macrosystem (societal and cultural values) and the chronosystem (changes over time). The model is transactional, in that the interactions of characteristics, factors, processes and values, can contribute to and be influenced by interactive processes.

It was decided to carry out a narrative literature review, which is a broad, unbiased description and explanation of the related research that has previously been conducted, and it outlines how it informs research and assists in formulating the research questions. A narrative literature review also allows for a critique of the available theory and literature. The aim of this review was to discuss and arrange the literature based on themes related to understanding the theories, debates and disputes that have defined this area, and a narrative review will provide a synopsis of psychological theories, synthesise and critically analyse recent studies, and explore the rationale for this area of research.

The literature searches were carried out using the University of East Anglia's electronic database which is powered by EBSCO (which includes peer reviewed, academic journal articles related to Education and Psychology). The areas explored and key words used were: previously looked-after children; adopted children; special guardianship; attachment theory; trauma; attainment or achievement gap; designated teachers; home-school partnerships. The database EThOS (e-thesis online service) was also valuable to discover what other trainee Educational Psychologists (EPs) have researched recently. Additionally, statutory government guidance was referred to, for example, the DfE, current legislation, and the NICE. Searches for research articles dated from 2000, to ensure that they are current and relevant. Any articles prior to that are considered either seminal or still significantly relevant to this research, through further exploration of their data and findings. It is acknowledged that this literature review is based on the researcher's choice of word searches, and subsequent inclusion of studies, and even though attempts to provide a completely unbiased review of the current situation has been made, the researcher recognises that the literature review will be influenced by those choices.

This literature review begins by examining the changes in policy and legislation in relation to supporting previously looked-after children, to highlight the enduring difficulties that they continue to face in relation to trauma and loss, emotional wellbeing and academic attainment. It then explores attachment theory and trauma (early childhood trauma in particular) and the recognised impact that this can have on the educational attainment and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. Finally, the literature related to home-school partnerships are explored in relation to improving the educational outcomes for previously looked-after children.

Relevant Policy and Legislation

The examination of policy and guidance was a main driver in relation to this research, most notably the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance for the Designated Teacher, as it was this guidance that appeared to highlight the continuing difficulties that previously looked-after children face, and the need for them to be better supported at school. A previously looked-after child is defined in the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance as a child who is no longer looked after by an LA in England and

Wales because they are subject to an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement order. Adoption is a legal process by which children who cannot be raised by their birth family become permanent and legal members of their new family, and a child is no longer looked-after once the final Adoption Order is made. Adopters become legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was biologically theirs.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were introduced in December 2005 through an amendment to the Children Act 1989 by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and is a private law order made on application to the court by a potential Special Guardian (although the birth parents of a child may not become that child's Special Guardian). Research highlighted that many older children did not want to sever legal ties with their birth family (as is the case of adoption), so the SGO provided alternative legal status and more security for these children, than long-term fostering (DfE, 2017). An SGO appoints a person(s) to be a child's Special Guardian and transfers parental responsibility to the person(s) named in the order. Parental responsibility is also retained by the child's birth parents but the Special Guardian could exert parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility (DfE, 2018b). Special Guardians therefore have responsibility for making key decisions in the child's life, and are also expected to maintain family ties (Hawin et al., 2019a). Statistics for the number of children leaving care via Special Guardianship has been increasing (Wade et al., 2014), however, there has been growing concern that Special Guardianship was being used for very young children (where initially an SGO was intended to permanently place older children who wanted to maintain ties with their families) (Harwin et al., 2019a). A further distinction within Special Guardianship is the fact that some children will not have had previous care experience prior to an SGO being made, and will therefore not be eligible to access the educational entitlements that a previously looked-after child would be able to continue to access, once leaving care on an SGO, for example, statutory support from a Designated Teacher (DfE, 2018b).

This research will focus on adopted children and those under special guardianship and not a child arrangement order, as these children may still be living with a birth parent (as they tend to be used during a divorce or separation when parents cannot agree on arrangements themselves), and their needs may be

different. In this study then, adopted children and those under special guardianship, will be referred to collectively as previously looked-after children, because although there are distinctions, the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance refers to them as such, and it was considered important to maintain this consistency in language.

Previously looked-after children often face disruptions to their learning and are likely to experience more social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties than their peers. For example, they may have difficulties with social skills, forming trusting relationships, managing their feelings and coping with change or transitions (DfE, 2018a). SEMH is one of the four areas of children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) identified in the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice* (DfE, 2015a) and this research is therefore relevant to applied psychology practice and the EP, as it is their duty to adhere to the DfE (2015a) statutory guidance, to support children and young people, parents/carers and school staff.

In relation to adopted children, when the Adoption Order is complete, the child will no longer be looked-after, "however, his or her educational, social and emotional needs will not change overnight…Schools and designated teachers will, therefore, need to be sensitive to the arrangements for supporting the educational needs of children post-adoption" (DCSF, 2009, p.30). Adoption UK (AUK, 2014) stated that there is a misperception that adopted children will be fine when living in a stable, caring home, however, the VS argue that "adoption was not a "magic wand" and identified that issues regarding traumatic histories were not wiped away when a child was adopted and that unfortunately without support, adopted children can come back into care" (Simpson, 2012, p. 158). This is echoed by Rolock (2015) and the large-scale United States study that tracked 21,629 children after ten years of permanent placement, and found that thirteen per cent of the children/young people were returned to foster care or experienced another type of interruption in care. Liao (2016) stated that risk factors for placement permanency identified for both adopted children and those under special guardianship included caring for a child with SEND, or children with multiple previous placements or maltreatment.

In relation to children under SGOs, Harwin et al.'s (2019a) study found that as a result of their lives prior to the SGO and the neglect and abuse they may have

suffered, these children's emotional and behavioural difficulties were wide-ranging and serious. It was reported that children aged from 2-14 years of age exhibited high anxiety and challenging behaviour at home and school, and that school attendance was a concern (Harwin et al., 2019a). All these difficulties are likely to complicate the child's upbringing and require sensitive support.

There have been a number of amendments and additions to government policy over the years to improve support for previously looked-after children. In 2014, the Government extended Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding (DfE, 2014) (a government grant paid directly to schools) to include previously looked-after children, acknowledging the lasting impact of trauma and loss in these children's lives and the vital role of schools in supporting these children's social, emotional and educational needs, following their difficult start in life (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014).

The Children and Families Act (2014) entitled previously looked-after children to free early education and priority admission to school.

From 2015, previously looked-after children were incorporated into the category of children considered 'disadvantaged pupils', in the DfE reports for GCSE results in England (DfE, 2019a).

In 2015, the government introduced the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) in England to provide therapeutic services for adopted children to enhance support and improve outcomes for children and families. In 2016, this was extended to children who were previously in care, awaiting an SGO (DfE, 2017).

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 4) extended the duty of an LA to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children (which came into force in September 2018) (DfE, 2018a). As a result, the remit of the VS (which has been a statutory role since 2014), was expanded and must also include the promotion of educational achievement of previously looked-after children in England and Wales (DfE, 2018a). The DfE (2018a) guidance replaces the 2014 statutory guidance called: *Promoting the educations achievement of looked-after children.* The VSH's role is to provide advice and information to parents/guardians and designated teachers on how to best support previously looked-after children (DfE, 2018b). These changes to the Children and Social Work Act 2017, to widen the remit of the VSH's role to include adopted children was welcomed by Brown et al.,

(2019), who stated that it highlights the vital importance of understanding the detrimental impact of early trauma for adopted children.

Similarly, following the Children and Social Work Act's 2017 amendments to section 20A of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, the DfE (2018b) outlined the new statutory guidance for Designated Teachers in relation to supporting looked-after **and** previously looked-after children (which came into force in September 2018). The DfE (2018b) guidance replaced the 2009 statutory guidance called: *The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked-after children,* demonstrating an acknowledgement of the need to also support previously looked-after children. Almost ten years previously, the Department for Children, Schools and Families document (DCSF, 2009) in relation to the responsibilities of the Designated Teacher, already acknowledged the important role of Designated Teacher for adopted children, but it was not a statutory duty. The new DfE (2018b) guidance states that the role of the Designated Teacher has been made statutory to "ensure that effective practice becomes universal" (p.8), suggesting that not all previously looked-after children are being effectively supported.

The Designated Teacher should be supported by the VSH, who will provide them with information and advice, to improve educational settings' awareness of the needs and vulnerability of previously looked-after children. This information should include promoting good practice to identify and meet these children's needs, and guidance on the use of the PP+ funding (DfE, 2018a).

In 2019, the DfE pledged a £45 million boost to the ASF, which has provided over twenty thousand adoptive and special guardianship families with therapeutic support since its launch in 2015. The £45 million is more than double the original investment, highlighting the government's determination to support previously looked-after children (DfE, 2019b).

The increasing number of policies, legislation and statutory guidance over the years to support previously looked-after children demonstrates a priority at government level, however, it could also be indicative of the continued difficulties, both educationally and emotionally, that these children continue to face, and could suggest that to date, these policies have had little effect on improving the lives of previously looked-after children and their families. Therefore, more than ever, there

needs to be a better understanding of how to support previously looked-after children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing.

The significance of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a highly influential concept that is much utilised in the literature related to previously looked-after children. Attachment Theory originates from the seminal work of John Bowlby (1958), a British psychologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, who argued that infants have an innate biological tendency to form emotional attachments with a primary caregiver and that there is a critical period for developing this attachment, usually before the age of 3 years. Bowlby suggested that continual disruption of the attachment between the primary caregiver and infant during this critical period could result in persisting cognitive, social and emotional difficulties (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Bowlby (1969) posited that through attachment relationships with a primary caregiver, the child develops an Internal Working Model of relationships, which involves expectations of others' behaviour towards them (whether positive or negative), and as a result, will influence their future relationships. An insecure attachment occurs when the infant's needs are not met and a secure attachment does not develop with their caregiver. Consequently, a negative Internal Working Model of others emerges, that they are inaccessible, untrustworthy or unresponsive, which has an adverse effect on their cognitive development and emotional wellbeing (Bowlby 1969).

Mary Ainsworth, an American-Canadian developmental psychologist, who worked with Bowlby at the Tavistock Clinic in the late 1950s, further elaborated on Bowlby's research in relation to attachment theory and created an assessment to measure attachment relationships between mothers and their children. Ainsworth et al., (1978) argued that the tendency for children to form attachments with a primary caregiver is innate and universal, however, there are observable differences in the quality of those attachments, based on strategies that children develop when faced with a strange or stressful situation. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) created the 'Strange Situation' procedure to examine attachment security with their primary caregiver, where a mother, child and stranger were introduced, separated and reunited, to observe the process of rupture and repair. As a result, Ainsworth and Bell (1970) identified three main attachment styles, namely, secure (B), insecure avoidant (A)

and insecure ambivalent/resistant (C). A securely attached child will seek out their primary caregiver when unhappy and will be easily soothed, whereas an insecurely attached child will demonstrate resistance or avoidance (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Mary Main (a former student of Ainsworth), during her doctoral research (Main, 1977), noted that five out of forty-nine children in her sample, were "difficult to classify" (Main & Solomon, 1990, p.126) in relation to Ainsworth and Bell's (1970) three main attachment styles. Main and Solomon (1986) then identified a fourth attachment style, namely, disorganised attachment (D). Although the 'Strange Situation' has been criticised in relation to its validity[3] (Lamb, 1977; Lamb et al., 1984), Wartner et al.'s (1994) 5-year longitudinal study, which was designed with Ainsworth, Main and Grossman, found that it achieved consistent results in that the concordance with the four attachment styles (A, B, C, D) at 12 or 18 months to 6 years, was 82 percent.

At a similar time to Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) work, L. Alan Sroufe (a Clinical Psychologist) began his 30-year Minnesota longitudinal study. Sroufe followed Ainsworth's Strange Situation method with 200 mothers viewed to be at risk of parenting difficulties because of the associated struggles with poverty, found that developing a secure attachment with a primary caregiver has lasting benefits for children (Sroufe et al., 2005). For example, attachment is critical because of its connection to social relatedness and emotional regulation, so a secure infant trusts its primary caregiver and as a result, feels confident to function autonomously in their social and educational worlds. The Minnesota Longitudinal study (Sroufe et al., 2005) has faced criticism in relation to their use of the Strange Situation categorisation method, with Fraley and Spieker (2003) arguing that Sroufe et al.'s (2005) data may not be as reliable as the study suggests, as they question the validity of the categorisations that the study used. Although Sroufe (2003) acknowledges that the 'Strange Situation' categorisation method is not completely reliable, he is concerned "that readers of the Fraley and Spieker (2003) article will use their questions of taxonomic status of Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) categories as evidence that the entire paradigm is invalid" (p. 415), which Sroufe (2003; 2005) has subsequently defended.

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[3] See below 'Critique of Attachment Theory' for further information

In relation to adopted children, van den Dries et al.'s (2009) quantitative meta-analyses of 39 adoption and 11 foster studies found that a reason for attachment insecurity in adopted children is that they all experience separation from, and loss of, their birth parents. Attachment theory suggests that these experiences of separation and loss may negatively influence subsequent attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1973).

In relation to SGOs, Harwin et al.'s (2019a) large scale mixed method study of children under an SGO in England, using case files and focus groups, found that the children experienced a range of difficulties in addition to neglect and abuse. These experiences have taught the children that adults are not always available, responsive, predictable or dependable, and this is likely to impact on attachment relationships (Geddes, 2006; Geddes, 2017). Wade et al.'s (2014) SGO study, analysing 230 case files and 20 semi-structured interviews with a sample of Special Guardians and 10 children, found that over a quarter of the sample had attachment difficulties when the SGO was made.

One concern of the DfE (2015b) Special Guardianship Review was whether the special guardian was a 'connected person' with an established relationship with the child or entirely unknown. Harwin et al., (2019a) stated that this was important as the strength of the bond with the child and Special Guardian was a predictor of more positive outcomes relating to placement stability. This suggests that having a bond or secondary attachment relationship (Bowlby, 2008) with the guardian could support a smoother transition and promote the development of a secure attachment with them, rather than having to develop an attachment relationship with a stranger. Wade et al.'s follow-up to their original SGO research approximately 60 months later, found that two-thirds of those children who were in successful placements, had a close attachment to at least one adult in the family (Wade et al., 2014). Schofield and Beek (2018) argue that the Internal Working Model is changeable and malleable and when with consistent, available attachment figures, a child can change their negative Internal Working Model to believe that their world is a safe place, suggesting that the Internal Working Model that Bowlby (1969) proposed, may not be as fixed as once thought.

In relation to adoption, Vorria et al.'s (2006) quantitative study of 61 children in Greece adopted from institutional care after spending their first 2 years of life in the institution, found that placement age may play a vital role in development of new attachments with adoptive parents, and that children who were adopted after twelve months of age, are at a higher risk of developing insecure attachments. Furthermore, the older a child is when entering care is also a predictor of significant mental health difficulties (Tarren-Sweeny, 2010) and placement breakdown (Meakings & Selwyn, 2016). Children adopted before their first birthday may have experienced adverse conditions for a shorter time than children adopted later (Bowlby, 1973), or alternatively, it may be easier for children adopted early to become securely attached because they receive sensitive care from their adoptive parents during the 'critical period' (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973). However, Macvarish et al., (2014) argue that too much predictive power is placed on the first three years, and that in terms of neurological development, older childhood experiences are just as significant as those in infancy. They stated that brain development continues into adulthood and that the brain should be viewed as plastic and resilient instead of fixed or determined. Recent research has found that protective factors that include forming secure attachments with adoptive parents can mitigate the impact of early adversity (Cage, 2018, as cited in Brown et al., 2019).

The significance of attachment relationships/styles is that there is a recognised association between academic achievement and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010). For example, Jacobsen et al.'s (1994) longitudinal study of 121 children found that attachment styles predicted differences in cognition and academic achievement, with assessments carried out at 9, 12 and 15 years of age. Equally, Teo et al., (1996) and Pianta and Harbers (1996) found that attachment styles and quality of early caregiving were predictors of academic achievement in both primary and secondary school. Farrell and Humphrey (2009) argue that the link between low educational attainment and children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (characterised by parenting that is inconsistent, indifferent, lacking displays of affection and sometimes aggression and rejection) has been a concern for years, referring to a number of studies in the late 80s, early 90s. Although, Farrell and Humphrey (2009) do state that majority of 'hard evidence' was reported thirty years prior (for example, see Roe [1965] and Rutter et al., [1975]),

demonstrating the significant amount of time that this has been a concern, and it continues today. Grimshaw's (1995) study of pupils in a residential school for social, emotional, behavioural difficulties proposed that it had still not changed since the 1960s-70s, as the sample of pupils (whose chronological age was 12 years) had a reading age below 10 years. Farrell et al.'s (2000) later study with eighty-nine pupils in a residential school for social, emotional, behavioural difficulties similarly confirmed previous research findings and this relationship between low educational attainment and children with social, emotional, behavioural difficulties. Brown et al.'s (2017) systematic review found that educational systems have overlooked adopted children, highlighting a gap in the literature, and that after nearly a century of adoption research, an achievement gap persists. Brown et al., (2017) suggest this is perhaps as a result of interactions between different factors such as emotional adjustment and attachment security, and as a result, adopted children still appear to struggle to achieve their best possible outcomes in education. In relation to special guardianship, due to it being a relatively new legal order, there is less research compared to adoption, and the evidence-base it limited (Harwin & Simmonds, 2020). However, Wade et al.'s (2014) study identified that a third of children living in special guardianship had accessed therapeutic, educational or behavioural services and that the children's emotional and behavioural needs were associated with lower academic progress at school. Additionally, DfE statistics appear to confirm the persisting attainment gap between children under special guardianship and non-looked-after children (DfE, 2014a, as cited in Gore Langton, 2017; DfE, 2020).

For many previously looked-after children, not only do they suffer initial adverse experiences with their birth family, but their difficulties can be exacerbated when entering the care system if key professionals change frequently, making it difficult to maintain the stability and security these children need, resulting in further social, emotional and attachment difficulties (DfE, 2012). In relation to adopted children, when the child enters care, they live with their foster family for an average of two-and-a-half years, and only as few as 0.3 per cent experience one stable foster placement (Selwyn et al., 2014). Fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), many of them for SEMH difficulties, due to the impact of attachment and loss, which can result in difficulties related to their learning, behaviour or social and emotional development at school.

Behavioural difficulties in school can result in exclusions, with the most recent exclusion rates for England (Academic Year 2018/2019) highlighting that fixed period exclusions have increased for previously looked-after children (DfE, 2021). There was a fall in exclusions in 2020, according to the Adoption Barometer Survey, by Adoption UK (AUK, 2021), although, they state that this is to be expected due to partial closures of schools during lockdowns, however, adopted children are still significantly over-represented. Brown et al.'s (2017) systematic review of fifteen adoption studies found that in all but one study, there was an association with low academic achievement and increased emotional or behavioural difficulties. In relation to SGOs, more than a quarter of the children were in foster care while their case was being heard and a suitable permanent carer identified (Harwin et al., 2019a). NICE (2017) stated that there is a particular correlation with placement stability and attainment, where the more moves a child has, reduces the likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades, compared to those with a single placement. Geddes (2006) argues therefore, that it is important that these children are supported in school, a secure, stable environment, where they can use a classroom as a safe base (Geddes, 2006; Mascellani, 2016). Geddes (2003; 2005; 2006) work builds on attachment theory and how different attachment styles demonstrate how children present in the classroom in relation to their behaviour and learning. Geddes' (2003; 2005; 2006) books are based on her thesis (Geddes, 1999) and work as a psychoanalytic therapist and teacher, and has created a framework to support staff to understand a child's behaviour through an 'attachment lens'. She created the 'learning triangle' (the relationship between the teacher, child and learning task) and based on a child's attachment style, provides the teacher with strategies to support the child. Geddes (2017) posits that attachment styles, and therefore, Internal Working Models, are able to change, and that school staff can provide a safe, secure relationship that can positively change their Internal Working Model. There may be limitations to Geddes work, in that her 'learning triangles' framework (Geddes 2005; 2006) was not peer reviewed, and the framework has not been evaluated for its effectiveness, although, anecdotally, her books are widely recommended by educational psychologists to schools to support them.

The DfE (2018b) have recognised that not only do looked-after children require support from a Designated Teacher, but so do previously looked-after

children, as many have experienced similar disruptions to their lives and learning, and their need for support will most likely continue after they have left care. For many, the emotional influence of their experience and gaps in their learning, may have resulted in barriers to progress, as Brown et al., (2019) states, the evidence that the attainment gap persists between adopted children and their non-adopted peers, is likely to be due to their pre-adoption experiences. Educational attainment data found that at Key Stage 2 and 4, previously looked-after children were more likely to reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths, than looked-after children, however, they were still less likely than non-looked-after children to reach expected levels (DfE, 2020). Attainment and progress scores in Figures 1 and 2 below, also appear to illustrate that attainment for children under special guardianship, across all categories, is lower than that of adopted children. Figure 1 displays the Key Stage 4, average Attainment 8 score[4] for non-looked after children, looked after children, adopted children and children under special guardianship, by SEND in England in 2019[5] (DfE, 2020).

Figure 1
Average Attainment 8 Score 2019 (DfE, 2020)

_____
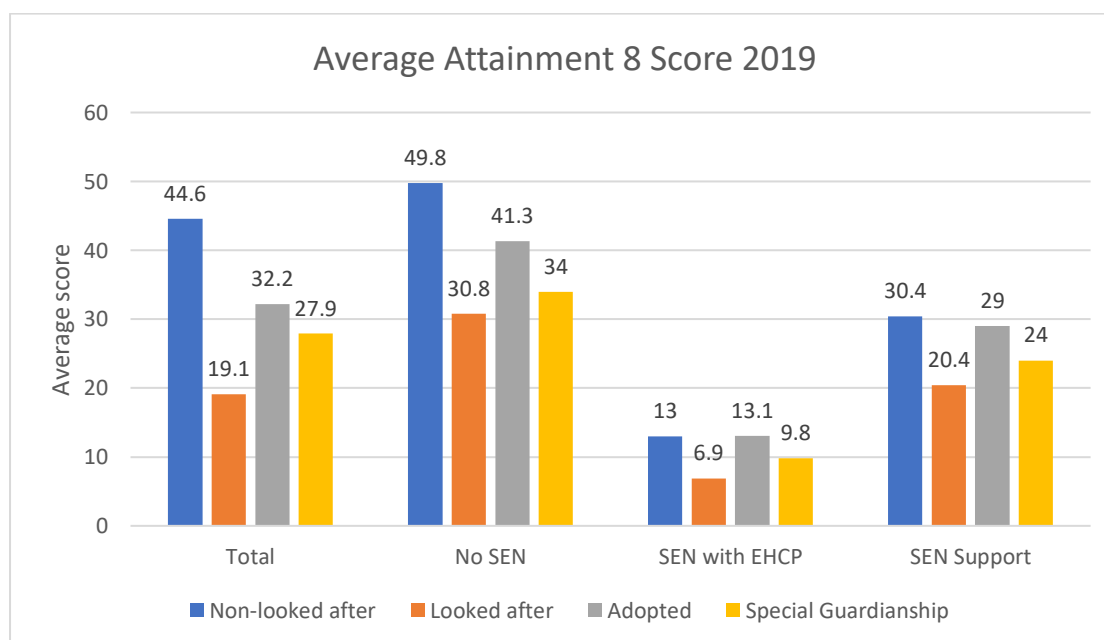
[4] Attainment 8 measures the average attainment of pupils in up to eight subjects in Key Stage 4.
[5] Total refers to state-funded schools, non-maintained special schools and alternative provision.

Figure 2 displays the average Progress 8 score for non-looked after children, looked-after children, adopted children and children under special guardianship, by SEND in England in 2019 (DfE, 2020). Progress 8 aims to ascertain the progress a pupil makes from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. A score of -0.5 means they make approximately half a grade less progress than average.

Figure 2
Average Progress 8 Score 2019 (DfE, 2020)
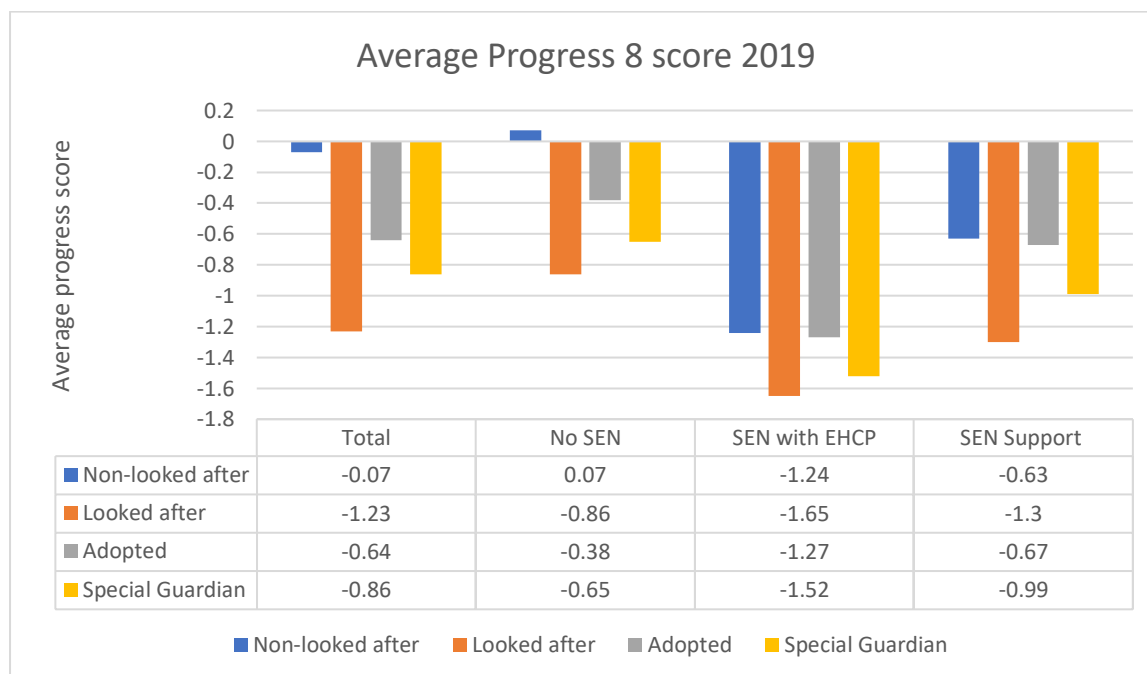
Average Progress 8 score 2019

	Total	No SEN	SEN with EHCP	SEN Support
Non-looked after	-0.07	0.07	-1.24	-0.63
Looked after	-1.23	-0.86	-1.65	-1.3
Adopted	-0.64	-0.38	-1.27	-0.67
Special Guardian	-0.86	-0.65	-1.52	-0.99

Previously looked-after children's often-disrupted educational experiences, insecure attachment relationships and high proportion of SEND appear to be the underlying mechanisms and maintaining factors in relation to their attainment and wellbeing. Supporting previously looked-after children will therefore require considered planning, and it is now the Designated Teacher's statutory duty to ensure effective practice to promote their educational attainment (DfE, 2018b).

Critique of Attachment Theory

Attachment theorists argue that insecure affectional bonds in early childhood during a critical or sensitive period are a strong predictor of behavioural difficulties in later life (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). However, critics of attachment theory argue that the association between early attachment and later behavioural difficulties is not due to the affectional bonds during a critical period (Lamb et al.,

1984). Critiques of Attachment are not recent, and Michael E. Lamb (now Professor of Developmental Psychology) has been a critic since the 1970s. After a comprehensive review of the literature and data in relation to Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) Strange Situation experiment, Lamb et al., (1984) found that due to the fact that the attachment figure's caregiving style or behaviour is likely to remain constant over the years, it is actually this consistent caregiving style that can influence future outcomes, either positively or negatively. Lamb (1977) additionally suggested that the Strange Situation lacked validity due to the fact that it measured attachment style to the mother and did not take into consideration attachment styles in relation to fathers, grandmothers or other primary carers. Furthermore, White et al., (2020) argue that a child diagnosed with Disorganised attachment through the Strange Situation does not necessarily show these behaviours in a naturalistic setting like the home or caregiving conditions contributing to it, and that Disorganised attachment can be changed, even among very high-risk families. Murray (2014) suggests that if caregiving behaviour and sensitivity improves, the predicted trajectory from insecure early attachment to negative behavioural outcomes is reduced. Macvarish (2014) argues that Rutter's own study in relation to children raised in Romanian orphanages suffering extreme deprivation, has been 'misused' to support the idea of critical periods. According to Macvarish (2014) Rutter had a more open understanding of the influence that early year's experiences can have, stating that "The ill effects of early traumata [sic] are by no means inevitable or irrevocable...the evidence runs strongly counter to views that early experiences irrevocably change personal development" (Rutter, 1987, cited in Macvarish, 2014, p.8). Critics argue that too much deterministic power is given to the first few years of life (Macvarish, 2014; Schofield & Beek, 2018) and more consideration should be given to wider environmental, contextual and systemic factors. Lewis (1997) argues that it is difficult to predict future outcomes due to the complexity of human life, and numerous possible causes that can occur during childhood, suggesting a predetermined linear model should be reconsidered.

Similarly, Sroufe (2005), reflecting on the 30-year Minnesota longitudinal study (Sroufe et al., 2005) stated that the infant-caregiver attachment style is related to outcomes only probabilistically, and in the context of complex processes and developmental systems. Interestingly, Sroufe (2005) highlights Bowlby's lesser-

known proposal that child development is a non-linear or transactional model, that "turns at each and every stage of the journey on an interaction between the organism as it has developed up to that moment and the environment in which it then finds itself" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 412, as cited in Sroufe, 2005, p. 350), echoing some attachment critics' views.

The above criticism of attachment theory therefore suggests that there is not necessarily a critical period and that there is the possibility of positive future outcomes, as studies have demonstrated that circumstances can improve, through supportive relationships at school. Gopnik et al., (1999) state that attachment does not occur in a critical period, and that adverse early life experiences can be reversed by subsequent nurturing relationships with adults. Goldberg (2014) suggests that early attachments to a primary caregiver are a foundation for future social relationships, although, they also argue that this can be improved by subsequent positive experiences with teachers, peers and other significant adults. Ubha and Cahill's (2014) mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) study with teachers and pupils from a mainstream English primary school, found that insecurely attached children (after an intervention to establish a secondary attachment relationship with a Learning Support Assistant [LSA]), formed secure attachments with the LSA, and as a result, their emotional wellbeing and behaviour improved. Similarly, South et al.'s (2016) study with 106 participants (including teachers and foster carers from England) taking part in a qualitative Delphi survey, found that by providing a consistent adult at school who regards the child positively, and the creation of a safe base, establishes a level of connectedness which not only improves educational attainment, but emotional wellbeing, despite earlier adverse experiences.

There is increasing evidence to support school staff by delivering attachment-aware training (Rose et al., 2016), because attachment-aware practices in schools enables children to feel safe, meet unmet attachment needs and increase their capacity for learning (Bhagvanji, 2020). This is also important for Designated Teachers and highlights a possible theoretical framework for them to use in supporting previously looked-after children in school.

Early Childhood Trauma

Trauma is defined as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014) and the literature suggests a close connection between attachment and early childhood trauma. This is pertinent as the majority of previously looked-after children may have experienced some form of trauma, whether that be abuse, neglect or loss of a parent (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019a). In reviewing the literature in relation to trauma, it is interesting to note the prevalence of practicing clinicians who have been influential in this area, and will be discussed below.

Crittenden (a psychologist from the United States [US] who studied under Ainsworth from 1978 to 1983), through her empirical research, found that traumatised children have a tendency to develop one particular attachment strategy, namely, either Insecure Avoidant or Insecure Ambivalent/Anxious/Pre-occupied. Crittenden (1992; 2017) suggested that these children are intuitive at organising their behaviour around danger and that attachment strategies are their solutions to danger. Crittenden (1992; 2017) posits that disorganised attachment does not exist, and that some children may move between the Avoidant and Pre-occupied strategies, depending on what will work best in a specific environment, thus organising and reorganising their behaviours in relation to the danger. This can appear disorganised, but it is an organised, adaptive behaviour and can also explain the reason that school and home sometimes see very different types of behaviour from the child.

Treisman (2017) uses the terms 'relational trauma' or 'attachment-related trauma' coined from her experience as a Clinical Psychologist and trauma specialist, researcher and author. She has worked with the National Health Service and Social Services, has extensive experience in the area of attachment, and works clinically with families and systems. Treisman (2017) states that these relational traumas and/or disrupted attachments can begin in the in-utero period and include children who have experienced trauma within the context of their interfamilial relationships

with caregivers. Treisman (2016, as cited in Treisman, 2017) argues that the most appropriate intervention for those children who have experienced 'relational trauma' should be relationships, stating that "relational trauma requires relational repair" and that "relational repair requires safe hands, thinking minds and regulated bodies" (p.17). This suggests that with the creation of positive relationships with trusted adults, who will be a reliable, safe base for them, their Internal Working Model and negative views of adults that they formed due to the trauma they experienced, can be changed.

Siegel (2001) integrated his knowledge of attachment theory and brain development, from his work as a clinical professor of psychiatry in the US, to review findings from a large range of scientific disciplines to analyse the relationship between brain development and human relationships and concluded that "attachment research suggests that collaborative interpersonal interaction…can be seen as the key to healthy development" (p.72). Siegel (2001) argued that impaired self-regulation can be seen in children with unresolved trauma or grief, where the brain has been unable to integrate aspects of the trauma or loss. However, he suggested that the brain continues to develop in response to relationships throughout our lifetimes, and that we benefit from secure attachments which Siegel (2001) proposed has five components, namely, collaborative communication, reflective dialogue, interactive repair, coherent narrativization and emotional communication. Siegel (2001) described these components in infancy and early childhood as contributory factors in a child's ability to develop emotional well-being and resilience.

Hendry (2017) argues that Siegel's work in relation to traumatised children has influenced the work of Hughes (2004; 2006; 2014) who has integrated Siegel's ideas into his attachment-based treatment, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). Hughes, a clinical psychologist in the US, developed DDP over 20 years, centred around his extensive experience working with children and families together, and based on close scrutiny of the relevant literature. DDP is a relationship-based therapy focussing on empathy and unconditional positive regard and aims to heal the complex psychological difficulties of looked-after and adopted children. DPP can support children who have been abused or neglected in the early years within their birth families, by helping them to recover from the trauma and experience secure

attachments within their current family, with Hughes (2014) stating "a therapeutic relationship that is modelled on the principles of attachment and intersubjective relationships is likely to be a good formulation for meeting the therapeutic needs of these children" (p. 4). The aims of DDP are to support both the child and caregiver to feel safe to enter into interactions with the therapist and each other. This enhances attachment security while supporting the child to process, connect and make sense of their experiences, helping them regulate their emotions. The acronym PACE is used, that is, "playful connections, acceptance of the child's inner world, curiosity about the meaning underpinning behaviour and empathy for the child's emotional state" (Hughes, 2015, p.358) to help the carers to care for the child in a way that is therapeutic and healing. DDP is particularly popular in the UK as it does not focus on the provision of therapy, as social care and health often have limited resources and options for direct therapy, and therefore a model that guides the provision of support is appealing (Hughes, et al., 2015).

However, questions have been raised about DDP's clinical relevance and effects as Mercer (2014) argues that there are serious issues about the statistical analysis of the data, the design was nonrandomised and the evaluation was non-blinded. Hughes et al., (2015) do acknowledge that DDP cannot be considered an 'evidence-based' intervention yet. They explain that achieving such status is difficult, especially in the case of therapies, which at their core is the therapeutic relationships with their clients. Hughes et al., (2015) argue that DDP has at its core safety, positive regard, empathy acceptance and curiosity, and it would not be ethically or clinically feasible to deny a child access to these or withhold them in a control group of a clinical study, simply to conduct an experimental study to validate the intervention. Instead, they suggest the thorough analysis of case studies and practice-based evidence where pre and post measures can be used to analyse outcomes.

Another key researcher who suggests a close connection between attachment and trauma is Perry (2001; 2002; 2006; 2008; 2009). Perry is a psychiatrist in the US with 30 years of clinical experience and research in relation to children's mental health and neuroscience, and the impact of abuse, neglect and trauma on the developing brain. Perry (2009) has integrated concepts of neurodevelopment into a clinical approach, explaining that there are four core principles from neurodevelopmental studies that have implications for professionals.

Firstly, is *sequential development*, where the brain develops in a hierarchical fashion, from the brainstem (the least complex) to the limbic and cortical areas (the most complex). The brain develops from the bottom to the top and synapses will be more active at different times and will therefore be more sensitive at certain times (sensitive periods) (Perry, 2009). If harm is done in utero (drugs or alcohol) or in early childhood (neglect or trauma) it can disrupt development as the higher areas of the brain depend on the lower parts developing 'normally'. The clinical implications highlight the timing of developmental experiences where a traumatic experience will impact an 18-month-old differently to a 5-year-old. It also has implications for positive experiences as the developmental stages have an impact on how caregiving, therapeutic or educational experiences influence the brain, for example, somatosensory nurturing will more quickly and effectively positively influence the attachment neurobiology of an infant compared to an adolescent. Perry (2009) suggests that to overcome early negative neurodevelopmental experiences, therapy should first focus on the regulation of anxiety and impulsivity as a dysregulated child will have difficulty in participating in and benefiting from interventions for social skills or reading for example. As a result, suggested interventions such as therapeutic massage, yoga, balancing exercises, music and movement and somatosensory interventions providing patterned, repetitive neural input is likely to diminish anxiety, impulsivity and dysregulation (Barfield et al., 2009; Perry, 2009; van der Kolk, 2015).

Secondly is *use-dependent modification,* where the brain is user-dependent, meaning that if a child's stress response is repeatedly activated, the brain will adapt and develop in response to this (Perry, 2009). In terms of neglect, a child deprived of consistent, attuned nurturing for the first 3 years who is then adopted and begins to receive love and nurturing, may not benefit from these experiences with the same malleability as a 'typical' infant and as a result, this later love could be insufficient to overcome the dysfunctional organisation of the brain that mediates social emotional interactions. Perry (2009) suggests that patterned, repetitive activity, as mentioned above can be effective, but that one hour of therapy will not be enough to change the impact of early trauma and that the child needs to be in a stable environment with a nurturing caregiving relationship and that within this relationship, the patterned, repetitive activity is most valuable.

Thirdly is the *disproportional valence of early childhood,* that is, the brain has sensitive periods of development, and the neurodevelopmental sensitivity that enables positive development in response to predictable, nurturing experiences, also makes the infant or young child vulnerable to adverse experiences because their brain is so malleable at these sensitive periods of infancy or early childhood (Perry 2009).

Fourth is *the relational mediation of major developmental experiences* where the impact of relationships on the developing brain in infancy is especially important for stress modulation. Perry (2009) stresses that there are individual differences to how people cope with trauma and overcome it, for example, genetic factors, but that the importance of healthy relationships to protect from trauma is extremely important. Perry (2009) states that the relational modulation of stress is mediated by systems in the brain, including the neural networks involved in bonding, attachment and social communication. At birth, the main source of patterned somatosensory interactions providing neural input to the developing stress-response system is the primary caregiver. If the caregiver is depressed, stressed, inconsistent or absent, the neural networks for stress response and relationships develops abnormally and then the child is more vulnerable to future stressors and less able to benefit from nurturing relationships that may buffer future trauma (Perry, 2009). Early experiences with caregivers create templates for the child's brain and whether humans are safe and predictable. Perry (2009) argues that social connectedness is a protective factor against neglect, abuse or trauma, but state that when you remove a child from an abusive home, you may also remove them from their safe social network at school, and these new, unfamiliar adults can activate the stress-response system and making them more symptomatic and less able to benefit from efforts to comfort and support them. Perry (2009) warns that this well-intended intervention results in impermanent relationships such as numerous foster homes and schools and that therapeutic work may be ineffective when there is relational instability and constant transitions.

Perry (2009) argues that the most effective intervention process is to initially address self-regulation, anxiety and impulsivity before the focus on therapy. A key component of Perry's (2009) Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) recommendations is whether the child currently has relational stability and positive

adults in their lives, because if they have multiple transitions, unpredictable family life and relational poverty, they will not improve, even with the most effective evidence-based therapy. Perry (2009) suggests co-therapeutic activities where both parent/caregiver and child can engage in mutually beneficial services, but that sometimes, where the relational environment is unstable or impermanent, for example, foster care, the outcomes for the recommended interventions is poor.

Another US psychiatrist and author, who since the 1970s has been researching neglect, abuse and trauma and early caregiver experiences, is van der Kolk (2005; 2015), who states that secure children learn the vocabulary to identify their emotions and it enables them to communicate how they feel and devise efficient response strategies. Their parents are able to help their upset child return to a feeling of safety and calm and the security of the attachment mitigates against trauma. However, children with insecure attachment have difficulty relying on others and are unable to regulate their emotions by themselves (van der Kolk, 2005). Children with developmental trauma will have difficulties with dysregulation, impulse control, dissociation, attention, cognition and social relationships (van der Kolk et al., 2005) and van der Kolk (2005) argues that there are three areas that professionals should focus on when working with children with developmental trauma. Van der Kolk (2005) stated that only once a child is able to change their habitual reaction from fight/flight/freeze, will they feel safe to explore, play and enjoy activities with others, which will give them a sense of competency and mastery. Van der Kolk (2005) argued that children with trauma act fearfully or aggressively to anything new, including carers and teachers, who tend to impose rules to keep them safe, although the child will perceive these protective factors as punishment and the carer and teacher as a perpetrator. However, he warns that professionals working with these children need to understand the necessity for the child to maintain control, and that they should help the child to realise that they are now in a safe environment, even though internally, they do not feel safe. Van der Kolk (2005) also argued that these children often cannot focus on learning because they are unable to relax as they are either hyper- or hypo-aroused but never truly calm and that activities that sooth and calm are therefore essential. Van der Kolk (2005) stated that at the centre of therapeutic work with these traumatised children is to help them find new ways of coping, but that unfortunately, medication is often used which prevents children from

acquiring the skill to deal with their uncomfortable physical sensations, and argues that to process their trauma, they first need to develop a safe space.

Hambrick et al.'s (2019) large scale quantitative study of 2155 children aged 8-10 from the US, Canada, Europe and Australia found that for children who have experienced early trauma, the attainment gap between them and their peers widens over time, and they can struggle in profound ways, because the skills needed to master developmental milestones were built on fragile neurological foundations. Hambrick et al., (2019) has found that the experience of early trauma and loss, in isolation, does not determine the child's future outcomes and there are important factors that can protect against the impact of early adversity, namely, a safe and available adult at the time of the trauma. Age when the trauma occurred does influence later wellbeing, and abuse, stress and loss in the first 8 weeks of life has the most significant impact on later wellbeing. However, the quality and quantity of safe relationships is more influential than their early trauma.

Gruhn and Compas's (2020) meta-analytic review found that there is growing evidence suggesting that relational trauma, for example, abuse and neglect, can negatively impact a child's ability to regulate their emotions and result in coping strategies such as avoidance, suppression and emotional outbursts. Blodgett and Lanigan's (2018) research found that within education, trauma can affect a child's ability to learn, establish and maintain positive relationships and regulate their emotions and behaviours in the classroom. Trauma-informed practice is gaining in popularity across the Anglia region, and can be defined as "developing an understanding of how trauma works, including how events can re-traumatise individuals. Helping individuals to reduce their stress levels and being mindful of their past traumas is key when supporting others" (McDonnell, 2019, p.66). Perry (2009) recommends teacher training in relation to trauma, as developing their use of trauma-informed working can positively impact their behaviour management approach when working with children who have experienced trauma.

This chapter highlights that a large proportion of research and literature around infant and early childhood trauma is in relation to abuse and neglect from the US, and Brown et al.'s (2017) review found a possible underestimation in research relating to the effects of early childhood trauma, that was particularly concerning for

the United Kingdom (UK), as they only found one UK study (with a small sample size) that met their inclusion criteria. Only 10 per cent of the 222 studies initially considered were from the UK (most were from the US) and further substantiates the claim that research into educational outcomes for adopted children in the UK is scarce (Brown et al., 2017). Due to special guardianship being a relatively new legal order, there is even less research in the UK (compared to adoption), with limited empirical studies investigating children's outcomes and few opportunities for longitudinal studies because of its recent introduction (Harwin & Simmonds, 2020).

Even though the majority of research into early childhood trauma is based in the US, there appears to be consensus that stable, positive, healthy relationships are vital to supporting these children (Hughes, 2014; Perry, 2009; Siegel, 2001; van der Kolk, 2005). The DfE (2018b) statutory guidance states that it is a Designated Teacher's responsibility to ensure staff understand what can affect how previously looked-after children learn and achieve and how to support them. Designated Teachers should make all staff aware of the psychological, social and emotional effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from their birth families and how this may affect their behaviour, and that some children may have difficulties building trusting relationships with adults at school because of their experiences (DfE, 2018b). When using a trauma-informed lens to view children's behaviour, school staff will understand that due to their trauma, their behaviour is arranged around danger and it is a survival strategy or attachment style that they have created to protect themselves (Crittenden, 1992; 2017). Repeating Treisman's poignant words that "relational trauma requires relational repair" and that "relational repair requires safe hands, thinking minds and regulated bodies" (Treisman, 2016, as cited in Treisman, 2017, p.17) and it would therefore be reasonable to suggest that fostering secondary attachments in school would better support children who have experienced trauma.

Home-School Partnerships

The role of the Designated Teacher in relation to supporting Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians of previously looked-after children was also highlighted in the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance. Designated Teachers should have an understanding of the importance of including the child's parents/guardians in decisions that may

affect their child's education and be a contact person for parents/guardians to offer advice or to discuss any issues in relation to their child's progress at school (DfE, 2018b). Research into home-school partnerships has highlighted the positive impact that these relationships have on a child's behaviour (Feinstein & Symons, 1999), how it increases their self-esteem and lowers the risk of them being excluded (Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003) and a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement, found that there were better educational outcomes (Hattie, 2008). Furthermore, a large-scale study of 4000 pupils found that home-school connections are a major factor in increasing wellbeing, and in encouraging educational aspirations (Hay et al., 2015, as cited in Brown et al., 2019),

Boonk et al's (2018) review analysed 75 studies (the majority of which were from the US) examining the impact of parental involvement and academic achievement, and the findings confirm that parental involvement is related to children's academic attainment. One of the consistent and positive relationships found, were for parents holding high aspirations for their child's academic attainment. Lee and Bowen's (2006, as cited in Boonk et al., 2018) US study found that one type of parental involvement was the strongest predictor of academic achievement, that is, the parents' educational expectations for their child. Additionally, Chen and Gregory's (2010, as cited in Boonk et al., 2018) US study found that, students who described their parents as having higher expectations for their educational achievement, obtained higher results. Furthermore, the students were rated by their teachers as more engaged in the lessons compared with peers, who had lower parental academic expectations (Boonk et al., 2018).

A survey of UK parents found 72 per cent of mothers would have liked more involvement with the school in relation to their child's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Involving parents and guardians is considered an essential aspect of effective education for children with SEND, however, this does not always happen as there are a number of aspects that parents/guardians and schools may disagree on, which could form a barrier to this occurring (Seligman 2000, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Teachers and parents/guardians could have differences in goals, agendas and personal attitudes which are embedded in their own educational, historical, economic, class, ethnic or gendered experiences (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Some parents/guardians may believe their child can do better academically and want more

support from the teacher, or conversely, some teachers may want more support from parents, to continue at home what they are doing at school (Seligman 2000, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Research highlights adoptive parents face many challenges with school for example, a lack of understanding of adoption, communication, information sharing and ostracism, which can leave them feeling "battle weary" (Phillips, 2007, as cited in Lewis-Cole, 2019, p.1). Parents/guardians could also feel marginalised through lack of curricular inclusion or insensitive remarks from school staff in relation to their "non-normative" family, with Goldberg and Smith (2017) stating that knowing there is an adopted child in class does not necessarily ensure teachers implement more sensitive or inclusive practice.

If children become known in a school for displaying challenging behaviour, their parents/guardians could feel they are being blamed and become tired of the constant bad news, resulting in a reluctance to attend the school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; DfE/PAC-UK, 2014). There is a correlation between the more disruptive the child's behaviour, the less a parent/guardian remains involved with the school, and when schools are considering suspension/exclusion because the behaviour has become so severe, conflicts can occur, which create barriers to successful involvement (Parsons 1999, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Similarly, Embeita (2019) states that home-school boundaries become increasingly resistant during exclusions, "as interactions around problems with children are often framed by conflictive communication" (p.19). If this occurs, school and parents/guardians should agree the most suitable means of communication for them both and school should remember to include positive news and highlighting the child's strengths (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014). An alliance based on respect, trust, open and honest conversations result in more effective collaboration (Stother et al., 2019). Therefore, it is vital to form positive working relationships from the start, rather than waiting for a problem to arise, and it also provides an opportunity to identify early on, the most effective support for the child (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), as parents/guardians know their children best, and therefore, building close partnerships with the school and teachers can promote a deeper understanding of the child, their development and needs (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014; Hutchin, 2010).

Teachers are more accountable than ever in relation to children's educational attainment (due to publications of national test scores) and are frequently required to

take responsibility for roles that they have sometimes received little training on, for example, working together with parents/carers (Hornby, 2000, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The benefits of training for teachers to work successfully with parents/guardians is recognised and has been promoted in UK policy documents (DCSF, 2007), however, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) stated that the UK government did not require this and therefore it did not happen enough.

Training is also deemed important in the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance, and it states that the VSH should ensure that adequate training is available to support, amongst others, the VS themselves, Designated Teachers and parents/guardians, to promote the educational attainment for previously looked-after children. In the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance for Designated Teachers, the senior leadership team (SLT) should ensure that the Designated Teacher has adequate training opportunities and sufficient time away from other commitments to enable the support of previously looked-after children. It is widely agreed that Designated Teachers should be allocated two days per year to attend training specifically in relation to the impact of educational achievement of *looked-after children* (DfE, 2018b). The statutory guidance further states that due to the fact that previously looked-after children often have comparable difficulties and challenges to looked-after children, it is possible to incorporate supporting and meeting the needs of previously looked-after children during training days for looked-after children (DfE, 2018b), again, demonstrating an acknowledgement of these children's enduring needs, even after adoption or a special guardianship order.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates the effect that trauma and attachment relationships can have on previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment. When children leave care into adoption or special guardianship, they will not necessarily have found their "happy ending" as the impact of trauma, abuse or neglect does not disappear immediately (Gore Langton, 2017, p.16). There is twenty times more probability that an adopted child will be excluded from school (AUK, 2018), a similar number to that of looked-after children, and for children under special guardianship, the numbers are even higher (ASGLB, 2018). However, adverse life experiences can be reversed or improved by subsequent

positive attachment experiences and nurturing relationships with teachers and other significant adults (Goldberg, 2014; Gopnik et al., 1999; Gore Langton, 2017; Treisman, 2017).

Brown et al.'s (2017) systematic review found that educational systems have been overlooking adopted children, a vulnerable group who may be better supported by increasing awareness and understanding of the impact of trauma and loss on development. They state that after nearly a century of adoption research, an achievement gap persists, perhaps as a result of interactions between different factors such as emotional adjustment and attachment security, and adopted children still appear to struggle to achieve their best possible outcomes in education. Brown et al.'s (2017) review found a possible underestimation in research relating to the effects of early childhood trauma, and was particularly concerning for the UK, as they found research into educational outcomes for adopted children in the UK is scarce (Brown et al., 2017). Similarly, in relation to Special Guardianship, Harwin et al.'s (2019b) and Simmonds et al.'s (2019) English reviews of the evidence relating to Special Guardianship, found that research in general in relation to Special Guardianship, compared to looked-after children (and even adoption), is limited.

From these studies mentioned above and the review of the literature in this research, it is apparent that there is less research in relation to previously looked-after children than looked-after children, and this does not appear to have changed substantially from Berridge and Saunders' (2009) study, more than ten years later. This is concerning, because studies suggest that previously looked-after children align closer to looked-after children in relation to educational attainment and emotional wellbeing, than non-looked-after children (DfE, 2020). In light of Brown et al.'s (2017) and Harwin et al.'s (2019b) reviews, highlighting the dearth in research in relation to previously looked-after children, it is considered vital to ascertain the facilitators and barriers to their educational attainment and emotional wellbeing, to gain an understanding of how to better support them. It would be reasonable to suggest that with the release of the statutory guidance (DfE, 2018a; DfE, 2018b) and additional funding pledged to boost the ASF (DfE, 2019b), there appears to be a national acknowledgement that previously looked-after children require continued support after permanent placement, and therefore gaining the views of Designated

Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians would provide insight into the barriers and facilitators to supporting them.

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board's Annual report (ASGLB, 2019/2020) highlighted the extension of the VSH statutory role to include previously looked-after children and stated that they were "interested in the implementation and impact of this" (p.14). The ASGLB asked VSHs for their views in relation to the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance, but to date, have not consulted with Designated Teachers relating to the DfE (2018b) guidance. Lewis-Cole (2019) suggests that with the emerging role of Designated Teachers and previously looked-after children relating to the DfE (2018a & 2018b) guidance, further research to explore Designated Teachers' views would be beneficial.

Adoption UK has conducted numerous surveys of Adoptive Parents for their views on how to best support their children, however, it would be reasonable to suggest that interviewing Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians would be valuable further research, to gather their views and experiences, to give them a voice and to make them feel heard. This is especially true in relation to Special Guardians where there is a dearth of research into their experiences (Hingley-Jones et al., 2019), there appears to be much less support for them, and anecdotally, are a hard-to-reach group. Furthermore, there is limited research in relation to adoptive parent/home-school relationships and child psychological functioning and outcomes in adoptive families (Goldberg & Smith, 2017).

Fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), and therefore this topic of enquiry should be of interest to EPs, because they understand the complex impact of past adverse experiences (Dunstan, 2010). Additionally, Gore Langton (2017) argues that there is still scope for EP research into previously looked-after children, and it is reasonable to suggest that it is even more relevant in light of the DfE (2018a; 2018b) statutory guidance.

Considering the DfE (2018b) guidance is so new, there is no research in relation to the Designated Teacher's statutory role to support previously looked-after children (at the time of writing this review). The focus of this research, therefore, will be to gather the perspectives of Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, to ascertain their views in relation to supporting previously looked-after

children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing, to enable them to reach their full potential in education.

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Part Two: Empirical Paper

Abstract

Research suggests that previously looked-after children achieve poorer educational outcomes and experience higher levels of mental health difficulties than non-looked-after children. This research study explored the perceptions of Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians in relation to supporting previously looked-after children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing, following the release of the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance for Designated Teachers (DfE, 2018b). The purpose was to ascertain their views regarding the support that previously looked-after children need to improve their educational attainment and emotional wellbeing with the aim of identifying barriers and facilitators to this support. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive/selective sample of four Designated Teachers, five Adoptive Parents and five Special Guardians. The semi-structured interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA). The main common theme identified between Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians was 'Trauma and attachment difficulties'. Key findings highlighted that trauma and attachment difficulties were a barrier and have an enduring impact on previously looked-after children. Mental health should be at the forefront of any work with them, including providing therapy and counselling to not only support their emotional wellbeing, but their academic attainment. Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceived that teachers did not have a true understanding of trauma and attachment, and that a lack of training was a barrier to this understanding. This lack of training was not only perceived to be on a local level, but national, in relation to Initial Teacher Training. Special Guardians highlighted the disparity in support between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship and how they felt they were at the bottom of a hierarchy. Designated Teachers perceived that the disparity between looked-after children and previously looked-after children was a barrier to better support. They felt that the profile of previously looked-after children needed to be raised and that Designated Teachers should share best practice, in relation to the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance to facilitate more consistently good practice.

Relevant Literature

Introduction

The majority of previously looked-after children are likely to have experienced some form of trauma in their early lives, whether that be abuse, neglect or loss of a parent (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019a). The DfE (2018a) Statutory guidance to promote the education of previously looked-after children acknowledges that previously looked-after children start school at a disadvantage due to their often adverse life experiences prior to being in care, and research suggests that previously looked-after children align closer to looked-after children in relation to emotional wellbeing and educational attainment (DfE, 2020) than non-looked-after children. In a guide commissioned by the DfE in 2014, it stated that 50 per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), demonstrating the importance of understanding how to best support the needs of these children.

The significance of exploring attachment theory and attachment relationships for this research, is that there is a recognised association between academic attainment and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010) and that developmental trajectories can be impacted by the enduring effect of trauma (Brown et al., 2019). Attachment theory proposes that infants have an innate tendency to form emotional bonds with a primary caregiver or attachment figure, someone to provide a secure base from which to explore - this exploration being essential for emotional and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1969). This association between academic attainment and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010) is demonstrated by the correlation between placement stability and attainment, and the findings that the more placement moves a child has (reducing the chances of forming an attachment relationship with a caregiver), results in the decreasing likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades (National Institute for Clinical Excellence [NICE], 2017). Therefore, it is important that previously looked-after children are supported in school, a regular, stable environment, where they can use their classroom as a safe base (Geddes, 2006; Mascellani, 2016).

The role of the Designated Teacher in relation to supporting previously looked-after children was outlined in the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance, stating that

the Designated Teacher must undertake "the responsibilities within the school to promote the educational achievement of…previously looked-after children on the school's roll" (p.7). Additionally, the Designated Teachers should "understand the importance of involving the child's parents or guardians in decisions affecting their child's education, and be a contact for parents or guardians who want advice or have concerns about their child's progress at school" (DfE, 2018b, p.12). Designated Teachers are supported by the Virtual School (VS)[6] who have a statutory role to ensure that previously looked-after children have the best opportunities to reach their full potential in education (DfE, 2018a).

I will begin this section with a synopsis of the literature and a critical analysis of the research in relation to government policy, attachment theory and trauma and the impact on the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. This section will conclude with the rationale for the study and the research questions, which were informed and formulated from the relevant research in relation to this subject matter.

In the following section I will discuss the methodology I adopted for this study, including my epistemological position, data collection and analysis employed to answer the research questions. The analysed data will then be discussed, and the implications of my findings will be considered. Finally, the benefits and limitations of the study will be considered, future research suggested and implications for educational psychology practice put forward.

Relevant Policy and Legislation

The examination of policy and guidance was a main driver in relation to this research, most notably the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance for the Designated Teacher, as it was this guidance that appeared to highlight the continuing difficulties that previously looked-after children face, and the need for them to be better supported at school. A previously looked-after child is defined as a child who is no longer looked after by a Local Authority (LA) in England and Wales because they are subject to an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement order (DfE,

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[6] The Virtual School (VS) acts as a local authority champion to promote the educational attainment of children who are or have been in care, so they achieve outcomes comparable to their peers. The VS does not exist in real terms and children do not attend it - they remain the responsibility of the school where they are enrolled. The VS is simply an organisation created for the co-ordination of educational services at an operational level.

2018b). Adoption is a legal process by which children who cannot be raised by their birth family become permanent and legal members of their new family, and a child is no longer looked-after once the final Adoption Order is made. Adopters become legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was biologically theirs.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were introduced in December 2005 and is a private law order made on application to the court by a potential Special Guardian. Research highlighted that many older children did not want to sever legal ties with their birth family (as is the case of adoption), so the SGO provided alternative legal status and more security for these children, than long-term fostering (DfE, 2017). An SGO appoints a person(s) to be a child's Special Guardian and transfers parental responsibility to the person(s) named in the order. Parental responsibility is also retained by the child's birth parents but the Special Guardian could exert parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility (DfE, 2018b). Special Guardians therefore have responsibility for making key decisions in the child's life, and are also expected to maintain family ties (Hawin et al., 2019a). Statistics for the number of children leaving care via Special Guardianship has been increasing (Wade et al., 2014), however, there has been growing concern that Special Guardianship was being used for very young children and appeared to be taking over the role of adoption (Harwin et al., 2019a). A further distinction within Special Guardianship is the fact that some children will not have had previous care experience prior to an SGO being made, and will therefore not be eligible to access the educational entitlements that a looked-after child would be able to continue to access, once leaving care on an SGO, for example, statutory support from a Designated Teacher (DfE, 2018b).

This research will focus on adopted children and those under special guardianship and not a child arrangement order, as these children may still be living with a birth parent (as they tend to be used during a divorce or separation when parents cannot agree on arrangements themselves), and their needs may be different. In this study then, adopted children and those under special guardianship, will be referred to collectively as previously looked-after children, because although there are distinctions, the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance refers to them as such, and it was considered important to maintain this consistency in language.

Previously looked-after children often face disruptions to their learning and are likely to experience more social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties than their peers. SEMH is one of the four areas of children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) identified in the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice* (DfE, 2015a) and this research is therefore relevant to applied psychology practice and the Educational Psychologist (EP), as it is their duty to adhere to the DfE (2015a) statutory guidance, to support children and young people, parents/carers and school staff.

In relation to adopted children, when the Adoption Order is complete, the child will no longer be looked-after, "however, his or her educational, social and emotional needs will not change overnight…Schools and designated teachers will, therefore, need to be sensitive to the arrangements for supporting the educational needs of children post-adoption" (DCSF, 2009, p.30). Adoption UK (AUK, 2014) stated that there is a misperception that adopted children will be fine when living in a stable, caring home, however, the VS argue that "adoption was not a "magic wand" and identified that issues regarding traumatic histories were not wiped away when a child was adopted and that unfortunately without support, adopted children can come back into care" (Simpson, 2012, p. 158). In relation to SGOs, as a result of their lives prior to the SGO and the neglect and abuse they may have suffered, the emotional and behavioural difficulties of these children was wide-ranging and severe (Harwin et al., 2019a) and these difficulties are likely to complicate the child's upbringing and require sensitive support.

There have been a number of amendments and additions to government policy over the years to improve support for previously looked-after children, including the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 4), which extended the duty of an LA to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children (which came into force in September 2018) (DfE, 2018a). As a result, the remit of the VS (which has been a statutory role since 2014), was expanded and must also include the promotion of educational achievement of previously looked-after children in England and Wales (DfE, 2018a).

Similarly, following the Children and Social Work Act's 2017 amendments to section 20A of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, the DfE (2018b) outlined

the new statutory guidance for Designated Teachers in relation to supporting looked-after **and** previously looked-after children (which came into force in September 2018). The DfE (2018b) guidance replaced the 2009 statutory guidance called: *The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked-after children,* demonstrating an acknowledgement of the need to also support previously looked-after children. Interestingly, almost ten years previously, in the Department for Children, Schools and Families document (DCSF, 2009) in relation to the responsibilities of the Designated Teacher, already acknowledged the important role of Designated Teacher for adopted children, but it was not a statutory duty. The new DfE (2018b) guidance states that the role of the Designated Teacher has been made statutory to "ensure that effective practice becomes universal" (p.8), suggesting that not all previously looked-after children are being effectively supported. The Designated Teacher should be supported by the Virtual School Head (VSH), who will provide them with information and advice, to improve educational settings' awareness of the needs and vulnerability of previously looked-after children.

The increasing number of policies, legislation and statutory guidance over the years to support previously looked-after children demonstrates a priority at government level, however, it could also be indicative of the continued difficulties, both educationally and emotionally, that these children continue to face, and could suggest that to date, these policies have had little effect on improving the lives of previously looked-after children and their families. Therefore, more than ever, there needs to be a better understanding of how to support previously looked-after children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing. Due to the DfE (2018b) guidance still being relatively new, to date, there have not been any studies that have explored Designated Teachers' views of this statutory guidance, and it is suggested that this would be valuable, to ascertain their perceptions of the guidance and how to best support previously looked-after children.

The significance of Attachment Theory

The tendency for children to form attachments with a primary caregiver is innate and universal (Bowlby, 1973), however, there are observable differences in the quality of those attachments, based on strategies that children develop when faced with a strange or stressful situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978). A securely

attached child will seek out their primary caregiver when unhappy and will be easily soothed, whereas an insecurely attached child will demonstrate resistance or avoidance (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Developing a secure attachment with a primary caregiver has lasting benefits for children, for example, a secure infant trusts its primary caregiver and as a result, feels confident to function autonomously in their social and educational worlds (Sroufe et al., 2005).

Van den Dries et al., (2009) argue a reason for attachment insecurity is that these children all experience separation from, and loss of their birth parents and that these experiences of separation and loss may negatively influence subsequent attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1973). One concern of the DfE (2015b) Special Guardianship Review was whether the Special Guardian was a 'connected person' with an established relationship with the child. Harwin et al., (2019) stated that this was important as the strength of the bond with the child and Special Guardian was a predictor of more positive outcomes relating to placement stability. This suggests that having a bond or secondary attachment relationship (Bowlby, 2008) with the guardian could support a smoother transition and promote the development of a secure attachment with them, rather than having to develop an attachment relationship with a stranger.

The significance of attachment relationships/styles, is that there is a recognised association between academic achievement and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010) with the link between low educational attainment and children with social and emotional difficulties being a concern for years (Brown et al., 2017; Farrell & Humphrey, 2009). Initial adverse experiences with their birth family are one reason, but can be exacerbated when entering the care system if key professionals change frequently, making it difficult to maintain the stability and security these children need, resulting in attachment difficulties (DfE, 2012). In relation to adopted children, when the child enters care, they live with their foster family for an average of two-and-a-half years, and only as few as 0.3 per cent experience one stable foster placement (Selwyn et al., 2014). Fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), many of them for SEMH, due to the impact of attachment and loss, which can result in difficulties related to their learning, behaviour or social and emotional development at school. Behavioural difficulties in school can result in exclusions, with exclusion rates for England

(Academic Year 2018/2019) highlighting that fixed period exclusions have increased for previously looked-after children (DfE, 2021). In relation to SGOs, more than a quarter of the children were in foster care while their case was being heard and a suitable permanent carer identified (Harwin et al., 2019a). NICE (2017) stated that there is a particular correlation with placement stability and attainment, where the more moves a child has, reduces the likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades, compared to those with a single placement. Therefore, it is important that these children are supported in school, a secure, stable environment, where they can use a classroom as a safe base (Geddes, 2006; Mascellani, 2016).

The DfE (2018b) have recognised that not only do looked-after children require support from a Designated Teacher, but so do previously looked-after children, as many have experienced similar disruptions to their lives and learning, and their need for support will most likely continue after they have left care. For many, the emotional influence of their experience and gaps in their learning, may have resulted in barriers to progress. Educational attainment data found that at Key Stage 2 and 4, previously looked-after children were more likely to reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths, than looked-after children, however, they were still less likely than non-looked-after children to reach expected levels (DfE, 2020).

Previously looked-after children's often-disrupted educational experiences, insecure attachment relationships and high proportion of SEND appear to be the underlying mechanisms and maintaining factors in relation to their attainment and wellbeing. Supporting previously looked-after children will therefore require considered planning, and it is now the Designated Teacher's statutory duty to ensure effective practice to promote their educational attainment (DfE, 2018b).

Critique of Attachment Theory

Attachment theorists argue that insecure affectional bonds in early childhood during a 'critical period' are a strong predictor of behavioural difficulties in later life (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). However, critics of attachment theory argue that the association between early attachment and later behavioural difficulties is not due to the affectional bonds during a critical period, but due to the fact that the attachment figure's caregiving style or behaviour is likely to remain constant over the years, and it is actually this consistent caregiving style that can influence future

outcomes (Lamb et al., 1984). It has been suggested that if caregiving behaviour and sensitivity improves, the predicted trajectory from insecure early attachment to negative behavioural outcomes is reduced (Murray, 2014; White et al., 2020). This is encouraging for previously looked-after children, as studies have demonstrated that circumstances can improve, through supportive relationships at school (Goldberg, 2014; Gopnik et al., 1999; Ubha & Cahill, 2014). Brown et al., (2019) argue that by providing a consistent adult at school who regards the child positively, and the creation of a safe base, establishes a level of connectedness which not only improves educational attainment, but emotional wellbeing, despite earlier adverse experiences. Rose et al., (2016) suggest there is increasing evidence to support school staff by delivering attachment-aware training because attachment-aware practices in schools enables children to feel safe, meet unmet attachment needs and increase their capacity for learning (Bhagvanji, 2020).

Early Childhood Trauma

Trauma is defined as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014) and the literature suggests a close connection between attachment and early childhood trauma. This is pertinent as the majority of previously looked-after children may have experienced some form of trauma, whether that be abuse, neglect or loss of a parent (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019).

Treisman (2017) uses the terms "relational trauma" or "attachment-related trauma" and argues that the most appropriate intervention for those children who have experienced "relational trauma" should be relationships, stating that "relational trauma requires relational repair" and that "relational repair requires safe hands, thinking minds and regulated bodies" (Treisman, 2016, as cited in Treisman, 2017, p.17). Similarly, Hughes (2014) states that "a therapeutic relationship that is modelled on the principles of attachment and intersubjective relationships is likely to be a good formulation for meeting the therapeutic needs of these children" (p. 4). This suggests that with the creation of positive relationships with trusted adults (who

will be a reliable, safe base for them), their Internal Working Model and negative views of adults that they formed due to the trauma they experienced, can be altered.

Perry (2009) argues that one hour of therapy will not be enough to change the impact of early trauma and that the child needs to be in a stable environment with a nurturing caregiving relationship and that within this relationship, the patterned, repetitive activity is most valuable. Perry (2009) states that social connectedness is a protective factor against neglect, abuse or trauma, but states that when you remove a child from an abusive home, you may also remove them from their safe social network at school, and these new, unfamiliar adults can activate the stress-response system and making them more symptomatic and less able to benefit from therapeutic work.

Hambrick et al., (2019) has found that the experience of early trauma and loss, in isolation, does not determine the child's future outcomes and there are important factors that can protect against the impact of early adversity, namely, a safe and available adult at the time of the trauma and that the quality and quantity of safe relationships is more influential than their early trauma. Blodgett and Lanigan's (2018) research found that within education, trauma can affect a child's ability to learn, establish and maintain positive relationships and regulate their emotions and behaviours in the classroom. Trauma-informed practice is gaining in popularity across the Anglia region, and can be defined as "developing an understanding of how trauma works, including how events can re-traumatise individuals. Helping individuals to reduce their stress levels and being mindful of their past traumas is key when supporting others" (McDonnell, 2019, p.66). Perry (2009) recommends teacher training in relation to trauma, as developing their use of trauma-informed working can positively impact their behaviour management approach when working with children who have experienced trauma.

Although a large proportion of research and literature around infant and early childhood trauma in relation to abuse and neglect is from the United States (US), there appears to be consensus that stable, positive, healthy relationships are vital to supporting these children (Hughes, 2014; Perry, 2009; Siegel, 2001; van der Kolk, 2005). The DfE (2018b) statutory guidance states that it is a Designated Teacher's responsibility to ensure staff understand what can affect how previously looked-after

children learn and achieve and how to support them. Designated Teachers should make all staff aware of the psychological, social and emotional effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from their birth families and how this may affect their behaviour, and that some children may have difficulties building trusting relationships with adults at school because of their experiences (DfE, 2018b). When using a trauma-informed lens to view children's behaviour, school staff will understand that due to their trauma, their behaviour is arranged around danger and it is a survival strategy or attachment style that they have created to protect themselves (Crittenden, 1992; 2017). It could be suggested that attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice to working with previously looked-after children could provide a useful framework for supporting them to build safe, secure relationships with staff to promote their emotional wellbeing.

To date, there have not been any studies that have explored Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' or Special Guardians' views of the DfE (2018) statutory guidance, and it is suggested that this would be valuable, to ascertain their perceptions of how to support previously looked-after children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing.

Training

Teachers are more accountable than ever in relation to children's educational attainment and are frequently required to take responsibility for roles that they have sometimes received little training on (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It is reassuring then to see that in the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance, the VSH should ensure that adequate training is available to support, amongst others, the VS themselves, Designated Teachers and parents/guardians, to promote the educational attainment for previously looked-after children. In the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance for Designated Teachers, the senior leadership team (SLT) should ensure that the Designated Teacher has adequate training opportunities and sufficient time away from other commitments to enable the support of previously looked-after children. It is widely agreed that Designated Teachers should be allocated two days per year to attend training specifically in relation to the impact of educational achievement of *looked-after children* (DfE, 2018b). The statutory guidance further states that due to the fact that previously looked-after children often have comparable difficulties and

challenges to looked-after children, it is possible to incorporate supporting and meeting the needs of previously looked-after children during training days for looked-after children (DfE, 2018b), again, demonstrating an acknowledgement of these children's enduring needs, even after adoption or a special guardianship order.

Rationale for study

The above literature demonstrates the effect that trauma and attachment relationships can have on previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment. When children leave care into adoption or special guardianship, they will not necessarily have found their "happy ending" as the impact of trauma, abuse or neglect does not disappear immediately (Gore Langton, 2017, p.16). There is twenty times more probability that an adopted child will be excluded from school (AUK, 2018), a similar number to that of looked-after children, and for children under special guardianship, the numbers are even higher (ASGLB, 2020). However, adverse life experiences can be improved by subsequent positive attachment experiences and nurturing relationships with teachers and other significant adults (Goldberg, 2014; Gopnik et al., 1999; Gore Langton, 2017).

Brown et al.'s (2017) systematic review found that educational systems have been overlooking adopted children, a vulnerable group who may be better supported by increasing awareness and understanding of the impact of trauma and loss on development. They state that after nearly a century of adoption research, an achievement gap persists, perhaps as a result of interactions between different factors such as emotional adjustment and attachment security, and adopted children still appear to struggle to achieve their best possible outcomes in education. Brown et al.'s (2017) review found a possible underestimation in research relating to the effects of early childhood trauma, and was particularly concerning for the United Kingdom (UK), as they only found one UK study (with a small sample size) that met their inclusion criteria. Only 10 per cent of the 222 studies initially considered were from the UK (most were from the US) and further substantiates the claim that research into educational outcomes for adopted children in the UK is scarce (Brown et al., 2017). Similarly, in relation to Special Guardianship, Harwin et al.'s (2019b) review of English research studies (of which there were only five that met the criteria), and Simmonds et al.'s (2019) English review of the evidence relating to

Special Guardianship, found that research in general in relation to Special Guardianship, compared to looked-after children (and even adoption) is limited.

From these studies mentioned above and the review of the literature in this research, it is apparent that there is less research in relation to previously looked-after children than looked-after children, and this does not appear to have changed substantially from Berridge and Saunders' (2009) study, more than ten years later. This is concerning, because studies suggest that previously looked-after children align closer to looked-after children in relation to educational attainment (DfE, 2020) and emotional wellbeing, than non-looked-after children. Brown et al.'s (2017) review highlighted a number of topics needing further enquiry, for example, the mechanisms that underpin the evident gap in academic attainment between adoptees and non-adopted children; how adoption research could inform education policy and practice to facilitate the best possible outcomes for adoptees; and the mechanisms for support that are most effective for adopted children. In light of Brown et al.'s (2017) and Harwin et al.'s (2019b) reviews, highlighting the dearth of research in relation to previously looked-after children, it was considered vital to ascertain the facilitators and barriers to their educational attainment and emotional wellbeing, to gain an understanding of how to better support them. It would be reasonable to suggest that with the release of the new statutory guidance (DfE, 2018a; DfE, 2018b) and additional funding pledged to boost the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) (DfE, 2019b), there appears to be a national acknowledgement that previously looked-after children require continued support after permanent placement, and therefore gaining the views of Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians would provide insight into the barriers and facilitators to supporting them.

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board's Annual report (ASGLB, 2019/2020) highlighted the extension of the VSH statutory role to include previously looked-after children and stated that they were "interested in the implementation and impact of this" (p.14). The ASGLB asked VSHs for their views in relation to the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance but to date, have not consulted with Designated Teachers. Adoption UK has conducted numerous surveys of Adoptive Parents for their views on how to best support their children, however, it would be reasonable to suggest that interviewing Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians would be valuable further research, to gather their views and experiences, to give

them a voice and to make them feel heard. This is especially true in relation to Special Guardians where there is a dearth of research into their experiences (Hingley-Jones et al., 2019), there appears to be much less support for them, and anecdotally, are a hard-to-reach group. Furthermore, there is limited research in relation to adoptive parent/home-school relationships and child psychological functioning and outcomes in adoptive families (Goldberg & Smith, 2017).

Fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), and therefore this topic of enquiry should be of interest to EPs, because they understand the complex impact of past adverse experiences (Dunstan, 2010). Gore Langton (2017) argues that there is scope for EP research into previously looked-after children, and it is reasonable to suggest that it is even more relevant in light of the DfE (2018a; 2018b) statutory guidance. Considering the DfE (2018b) guidance is so new, there is a paucity of research in relation to the Designated Teacher's statutory role to support previously looked-after children. This study will therefore aim to gather the perspectives of Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, to ascertain their views in relation to supporting previously looked-after children's academic attainment and emotional wellbeing, because they all have unique insights into previously looked-after children's educational experiences, which are important to integrate together. It was felt that just gaining one point of view, for example, only from school or only from home, would not provide as holistic a picture or that richness in data, to truly understand how to support previously looked-after children. This idea is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which attempts to explain the complex processes that contribute to different developmental outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is often depicted as concentric circles, with the child at the centre and then representing the microsystem (family, friends, school), the mesosystem (interactions between family, school, multi-professional agencies), the exosystem (education and political systems and reforms), the macrosystem (societal and cultural values) and the chronosystem (changes over time). The model is transactional, in that the interactions of characteristics, factors, processes and values, can contribute to and be influenced by these interactive processes, which is why ascertaining the views of all three participant groups (from school and from home), was considered to be beneficial.

Research Questions

Considering the above review of the existing literature that previously looked-after children's educational attainment levels are consistently below that of their peers, their emotional wellbeing is impacted by trauma and attachment difficulties, in addition to the changes to the DfE (2018a & 2018b) guidance, making the role of the Designated Teacher for previously looked-after children statutory to better support them, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What do Designated Teachers understand about their new statutory role in supporting previously looked-after children?
2. What are Designated Teachers' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators in relation to supporting previously looked-after children's educational achievement and emotional wellbeing?
3. What are the Adoptive Parents' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children at school?
4. What are the Special Guardians' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children at school?

Methodology

This section details the methodology that was employed for this study, including the epistemological position, data collection and analysis used to answer the research questions.

Design

When this research project was being devised, a decision needed to be made in relation to the most appropriate epistemology, methodology, data collection method and analysis, as these are all dependent on each other (Willig, 2013). This research is an exploration of Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' views and perceptions of how to support the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. This research is not concerned with positivist, prediction (quantitative paradigm), but is focussing on meanings, causal mechanisms, human agency, and how participants manage situations and make sense of their experiences. This research will therefore adopt a critical realist epistemological position and qualitative paradigm, to best extract relevant meaning from semi-structured interview data and to explore their meaning using TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Critical realism emerged from the positivist/constructivist 'paradigm wars', using elements of both approaches (Fletcher, 2017), claiming 'to be able to combine and reconcile ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality' [7](Bhaskar, 1998, p. xi).

A realist believes that the data will provide an understanding of true, undistorted experiences and representations, and that "people's words provide direct access to reality" (Terry et al., 2017, p.21). A relativist, however, would argue that there are no "pure experiences" (Willig, 2013, p.11) and that the data gathered is

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[7] Epistemology is a branch of philosophy focussing on the theory of knowledge, questioning how it is acquired, how reality and truth are perceived, and how people understand their worlds (Frost, 2011). Ontology, however, is the study of existence and what there is out there to know (Willig, 2013). Ontological positions can fall anywhere on the continuum from naïve realist (similar to positivism) to extreme relativist (Willig, 2013).

socially constructed by language/discourse (Burr, 2015). Critical realism can be seen as creating a methodological space in-between realism and relativism (Mingers, 2004). A critical realist would argue that "reality is 'out there' but access to it is always mediated by socio-cultural meanings" (Terry et al., 2017, p.21) and has "an understanding of the social context in which cognitions and emotions occur as well as some recognition of the fallibility of traditional forms of knowledge generation" (Hepburn, 2007, p.17).

For critical realists, language constructs our social realities, however, these are constrained by the limitations or possibilities of the material world. Material practices, to critical realists are not reducible to discourse, instead, material practices are given an ontological status which is independent of, "but in relation with, discursive practices" (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p.102). Bhaskar (1998) stated that "Social practices are concept-dependent; but, contrary to the hermeneutical tradition in social science, they are not exhausted by their conceptual aspect. They always have a material dimension" (p. 4), defining an epistemological position combining human agency but understanding that people's actions will be influenced by mechanisms independent of our thoughts. Therefore, critical realism combines realist and constructionist positions to argue that meaning is made during discourse, however, non-discursive (material) elements also impact meaning. Furthermore, critical realism constitutes an alternative both to naïve versions of realism and to totalizing versions of relativism, combining constructionist and realist positions to argue that while meaning is made in interaction, non-discursive elements also impact on that meaning (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007).

A critical realist method aims to determine the proposed interacting mechanisms which generate a phenomenon, which could be social, psychological or physical (Mingers, 2000; Mingers, 2004). Considering the aim of this research is to explore Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' views and perceptions in relation to supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children, due to the continuing underachievement of previously looked-after children in comparison to their peers, a critical realist epistemological position was taken. This is because it is considered the most appropriate method to extract relevant meaning, ascertain underlying structures and mechanisms maintaining the issues of underachievement and gaining

the participants' perceptions from the data, unpicking "what it is that is working for some people in some contexts" (Matthews, 2010, p.18).

Participants and Recruitment

Purposive/selective sampling was employed (Howitt, 2010), specifically targeting Designated Teachers currently working in a mainstream primary school or secondary school, and Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians with children currently attending a mainstream primary school or secondary school. Special Guardians needed to have parental responsibility for children who have had previous care experience (due to the fact that the DfE [2018b] guidance does not make it a statutory duty for Designated Teachers to support children under Special Guardianship who have not had previous care experience).

After Ethics was approved (see Appendix A), Designated Teachers were recruited through the VS link contact person and Special Guardians were recruited through their SGO Support Team link contact. The initial recruitment for Special Guardians was widened due to only one participant agreeing to take part, however, the same recruitment criteria was not as strictly adhered to by the SGO link contact, and therefore, one of my participants has children in a nursery setting. It was decided to include them as the SGOs are a hard-to-reach group and it was believed that it would be not only important but necessary to include their data. In relation to Adoptive Parents, initially it was suggested to conduct a focus group with them, possibly recruiting them through an Adoption support group meeting that is held in the LA, however, the ethics of this was considered and the fact that the parents may feel obliged to consent because these groups are run by EPs. As a result, Adoptive Parents were recruited through the Post Adoption Team link person.

All the participants were contacted via their respective link person at the VS, SGO Support Team and Post Adoption Team, who used their mailing lists and sent a covering email with my Participant Information Letter and Consent Form attached. The purpose of the research project was explained and they were provided with all the relevant details in relation to consent, confidentiality, anonymity, how to withdraw, and ethics (adhering to the Health and Care Professions Council [HCPC] Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics [2016] and British Psychological Society [BPS] Code of Ethics [2018]) (HCPC, 2016; BPS, 2018). The participants

were asked to contact me via my university email address if they wanted to participate, requesting that they completed and signed the consent form and returned it to me at the same time.

Four Designated Teachers, five Adoptive Parents and five Special Guardians took part in my research and they all came from the same East Anglian County.

Demographics

The demographics for Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians are tabulated below. It is important to note that all the names of the participants have been changed and pseudonyms used to maintain their anonymity.

Designated Teachers

Two Designated Teachers were appointed to the role when they became Head Teachers, one when they became full-time Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and one when they became Deputy Head and Safeguarding Lead.

Table 1

Designated Teacher participants	Length of time as a qualified teacher	Length of time as a Designated Teacher	Current Role
Sydney	19 years	1 year	Head Teacher of a mainstream primary school for 6 years
Beverly	32 years	15 years	Head Teacher of a mainstream primary school for 15 years
Danny	17 years	3 years	SENCo at mainstream

			primary school for 3 years
Taylor	32 years	11 years	Deputy Head of a mainstream secondary school

Adoptive Parents

Table 2

Adoptive Parent participants	Length of time since the Adoption Order	Number of children and type of mainstream school
Amy	4 years	1 child in primary school
Tanya	6 years	1 child in secondary school and 2 in primary school
Blair	4 years	2 children in primary school
Nicole	15 years	1 child in secondary school
Blake	7 years	2 children in primary school

Special Guardians

Table 3

Special Guardian participants	Length of time since the Special Guardianship Order	Number of children and type of mainstream school
Ellen	11 years	2 children in secondary school
Drew	6 and a half years	1 child in primary school
Riley	6 and a half years	1 child in primary school
Sam	2 years	2 children in nursery
Lou	6 years	2 children in primary school

Some participants also had overlapping or dual roles in relation to this study, for example, one Designated Teacher was also an Adoptive Parent; one Adoptive Parent was currently a teacher; one Special Guardian was previously a teacher and one Special Guardian was also a Foster Carer. Due to these dual roles, it appeared that they were aware of other aspects of the situation and were not restricted to just one viewpoint (for example a Special Guardian knowing about Foster children's entitlements and therefore an understanding of the disparities in support) and therefore most likely knew more about the topic under study. It is acknowledged that this could be perceived as a potential limitation to this study, as it may have unintentionally skewed the data, however, it was felt that these dual roles provided a richer and wider perspective that may not have been gained from the participants, if that had not been the case.

Ethics

Ethics approval was sought and gained prior to any data collection (see Appendix A) and consent was gained from participants before interviews were conducted (see Appendix B,C & D). One main ethical consideration prior to approval was the fact that I proposed to conduct a focus group with the Adoptive Parents, as I felt that they would be relatively comfortable speaking together as a group, considering a number of them did attend the Adoption support groups, however, it was felt that it would be difficult to manage issues of confidentiality and anonymity, especially if the Adoptive Parents wanted to speak about their children, so a decision was made to interview the Adoptive Parents separately.

Prior to each interview commencing, participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any time and could request their data be withdrawn up until the point of analysis, and if they did choose to withdraw, they did so without disadvantage to themselves and without providing an explanation.

The researcher was the only person to have access to the raw data (interview recordings and subsequent transcripts) and when transcribed, all participants were given pseudonyms so that they could not be identified. Confidentiality of data was vital and participants' names and contact details were kept securely on a password protected computer. Furthermore, participants' anonymity has been protected as any names and identifying references were altered when transcribing the interviews.

Once hard copies of the interview data were produced, the transcribed data was kept in a locked cabinet, accessible only by the researcher and thereafter, all audio recordings were deleted.

Data Collection

Individual Microsoft Teams interviews were conducted with all my participants and took between 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were all recorded (with prior permission sought) because audio recordings ensured that data provided by the participants was captured accurately. There was a mix of methods of recording as I needed to respect the fact that not all participants wanted to be video recorded, so some were recorded on a Dictaphone, and some were audio recorded on Teams with the participant turning their cameras off. One of the most appropriate data collection methods for TA are semi-structured interviews (Joffe, 2012), which were adopted for this study (see Appendix E and F), because they encouraged open answers to provide rich, detailed responses and enabled probing questions to explore thoughts, meanings and tensions in-depth (Howitt, 2010). From a critical realist perspective, an aim of these interviews was for the participant to develop an awareness of the causal mechanism affecting the situation being researched, based on the participant reflecting on their sense making of a particular context and what resources they felt restricted them to act (Robson, 2002). The interview questions were therefore formulated to identify maintaining factors and underlying mechanisms (barriers and facilitators), through gaining participants' perspectives relating to what support could work, what has worked, and what support could be better for previously looked-after children, with a focus on the DfE (2018a & 2018b) guidance in relation to educational attainment and then the documented association with emotional wellbeing.

Analytic procedure

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that one of the advantages of TA is its flexibility, however, due to the lack of rigorous guidelines in the past, one critique of TA has been an "anything goes" attitude (p. 78). Consequently, Braun and Clarke (2006) have created a guide to TA which is methodologically and theoretically comprehensive and is a method to identify recurring patterns of meaning and themes

in the data, which is what was followed during the data analysis of this research project (please see Analytic Procedure below). TA has been recognised as a method in its own right (Joffe, 2012) and Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that the epistemology of TA can be either realist in emphasis, considering meaning, experience and the participant's perceived reality; or constructionist in emphasis, examining how meanings and experiences are located in discourses within society. TA could be seen as sitting on a continuum between quantitative and qualitative analysis (Howitt, 2010). TA therefore fits the critical realist epistemological position of the researcher and this study.

A realist approach to the production of knowledge presumes that the world and reality can be understood by the researcher identifying patterns of experiences and behaviour that typify human existence, so "…the role of the researcher in this situation is akin to a detective who uses his or her skills, knowledge, and experience in order to uncover what is really going on…" (Willig, 2013, p.15). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue however, that they do not believe in a "naïve" (p. 80) realist position in qualitative research, which involves merely "giving voice" (p. 80) to participants, as "giving voice" still requires the selection and editing of data to support the researcher's analysis. They state that there is not one ideal method or theoretical framework in relation to qualitative research, but what is vital is that the methods and framework aligns with what the researcher wants to find out, and that these choices and decisions are acknowledged and recognised, because "even a good and interesting analysis which fails to spell out its theoretical assumptions, or clarify how it was undertaken, and for what purpose, is lacking crucial information (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thus fails in one aspect" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 95).

Braun and Clarke (2006) further warn that the notion of themes "emerging" (p. 80) from the data portrays a passive picture of the data analysis and the part the researcher plays in their identification, and the selection of themes should not be ignored. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (p.84) and themes are not simply situated in the data but are actively selected by the researcher, and the interpretation during a TA, is influenced by the researcher's views (Howitt, 2010).

Reflexivity is therefore vital when carrying out qualitative research (see Reflective chapter) as "reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research" (Willig, 2013, p.10).

In terms of rigour, the research was carried out independently without co-researchers so did not have additional researchers to provide additional rigours and trustworthiness to the process (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). However, regular research supervision and the opportunity to reflect and discuss the analysis, coding, initial themes and refining main themes with their research supervisor and post-graduate researchers, ensured as much rigour as possible.

Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) six phases of TA, in addition to considering their more recent reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The initial phase involved the researcher becoming familiar with the data. Immersion in this data was done by transcribing the interviews and re-reading the data numerous times, actively analysing the data from a semantic inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The second phase involved the generation of initial codes. Codes are "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Once familiar with the data and with basic notes in relation to the content of the data, the creation of initial codes began by working methodically across the dataset where certain features of the data were identified that could possibly be recurring patterns. Designated Teacher, Adoptive Parent and Special Guardian interviews were analysed separately, and transcripts were highlighted in various colours to differentiate these potential patterns in the data. Extracts were coded using a sematic inductive approach and all excerpts were then grouped together under each different code.

The third phase of this analytic procedure was the generation of initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Once the data was coded and collated across the dataset, the analysis was re-focussed on this generation of themes by analysing the collated codes to ascertain whether certain codes could be combined to become themes.

Initially three common themes between Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians were identified and three common themes between Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians. A thematic map was used to assist with this process and the careful consideration of the associations between codes and themes (see Appendix G for Stages of TA and thematic map example).

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that data analysis entails the continual back-and-forth movement between the dataset, the coded excerpts and the data analysis that is taking place and "moreover, analysis is not a linear process where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more recursive process, where you move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases" (p.86). The fourth phase then entailed reviewing and refining the potential themes, which was done by ensuring that the data within the themes was consistent, but still ensuring distinct divisions between the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest this should be done at two levels, that is, level one involved the reviewing of coded excerpts for all themes to determine whether they form a clear pattern, and subsequently level two, where the cogency of themes were analysed in relation to the dataset, which was done during this analysis by re-reading the entire dataset.

The fifth phase involved defining, refining and naming themes and by this Braun and Clarke (2006) "mean identifying the 'essence' of what a theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (p.92). The themes were also examined in relation to the research questions to check there was not too much overlap across the themes (see Appendix G for analytic procedure).

Phase six was the final phase, where the analysis and discussion was written, creating an analytic story relating to the research questions and linking the analysis to relevant literature in the introduction. The most convincing data extracts were chosen, which illustrate the analytic point being made within each theme. The extracts supported the analysis, ensuring the discussion went further than a mere description of the themes, but included interpretation of the data. This was done by considering Braun and Clarke's (2006) questions in relation to the analysis, for example, what assumptions underpin each theme, what overall picture the themes reveal and what the implications are.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the findings from the data analysis will be discussed in relation to the research questions and the existing literature. The data collected included semi-structured interviews with Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians and was analysed using TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Extracts of the interviews from the participants will be used to elucidate their views.

Summary of Main Themes

Following the semi-structured interviews with the Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians and numerous iterations of grouping codes and refining themes, an overlapping theme emerged for all three groups, as seen in Figure 3 below. Separate overlapping themes also emerged for Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, in addition to individual themes in relation to Designated Teachers and Special Guardians. The themes will be described and discussed in relation to the participant data and extant literature, and will begin with the overlapping, common theme between all three participants, namely, 'Trauma and Attachment Difficulties'. The main theme relating to Designated Teachers will then be discussed, that is, 'The DfE [2018b] guidance is necessary', followed by the common themes overlapping between Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, namely, 'Statutory Support for Previously looked-after children' and 'Staff Understanding of Trauma and Attachment'. Finally, the main theme relating to Special Guardians, 'The Complexity of being a Special Guardian' will be discussed.

Figure 3
Themes of Research

Designated Teachers (DT)
Main Theme: The DfE (2018) guidance is necessary
Subthemes:
i.raising previously looked-after children's (PLAC) profile
ii.disparity between looked-after children (LAC) and PLAC
iii.sharing best practice

Common Theme between DT, AP, SG

Main Theme: Trauma and attachment difficulties
Subthemes:
i. the enduring impact of trauma and insecure attachment
ii. mental health first

Adoptive Parents (AP)

Special Guardians (SG)

Main Theme:
The complexity of being an SG
Subthemes:
i.The disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship
ii.family relationships

Common Themes between SG & AP

Theme 1: Statutory support for PLAC
Theme 2: Staff understanding of attachment & trauma

Common Theme between Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians

Trauma and attachment difficulties

Subthemes:

i. The enduring impact of trauma and insecure attachment
ii. Mental health first

Trauma and attachment difficulties

The theme 'Trauma and attachment difficulties' was apparent across all three groups during the semi-structured interviews. This theme relates to the understanding that the majority of children who are previously looked-after have often experienced the same trauma as children who are looked-after, however, there is the sense that once a child is no longer in care, that they do not need continued support, especially in relation to mental health.

i. The enduring impact of trauma and insecure attachment

All the participants acknowledged that previously looked-after children have usually experienced trauma in their early lives, including abuse, neglect or loss of a parent, and that this trauma had an enduring impact on their emotional wellbeing. Some participants felt that there was the perception that once these children were permanently placed, either through Adoption or a Special Guardianship Order, that they would be fine and no longer need any support. Blake, an Adoptive Parent stated:

> …I think the assumption is that once they've been adopted, jobs done, isn't it? The order is there, job's done, and everything that went before is just going to miraculously disappear…and not be an issue because it's that magic piece of paper that's going to change everything and it makes no difference, does it, to the trauma and that is still there you know, yeah, so that's my feelings and thoughts on that one…(Extract 1, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

Similarly, Taylor, a Designated Teacher said:

> …a child is in Care for a number of different reasons, but it is almost always a traumatic experience. So, they are almost always significantly traumatised, um, and just because they, um, become subject of a Special Guardianship Order or Adoption, doesn't mean they are no longer traumatised, so it doesn't

mean that there is no longer any need for the schools to work in a different way with them…(Extract 2, Taylor, Designated Teacher).

Here, Taylor demonstrates her understanding of the enduring difficulties faced by previously looked-after children and that they continue to need support at school. Furthermore, two Designated Teacher described their school's practice and the support that previously looked-after children require:

> …that's about forming strong attachments with adults, building relationships and giving them a safe space for them to be themselves…'cause those children are gonna turn up with issues, they're going to be…'I can't see Mom', 'I can't see Dad', 'these things have happened, how do I understand them all?' and that, you know, there could have been some really dangerous and traumatic situations [that the children were in]... (Extract 3, Sydney, Designated Teacher)

> …I think attachment is quite often overlooked… I don't think people maybe appreciate the impact attachment does have. …so I think it's really key that people do look at that and do the keeping in mind. I've done a lot of training with staff here following that Attachment awareness training (Extract 4, Danny, Designated Teacher).

In the extract above, the Designated Teachers highlight the importance of attachment relationships and creating safe spaces for previously looked-after children in school, as they are often trying to process the events that they have experienced and the losses of parents. Danny, in Extract 4, feels that attachment difficulties can be overlooked, and that the impact of insecure attachments may not be considered by school staff as having an effect on previously looked-after children. The importance of a safe space at school was echoed by Nicole, an Adoptive Parent:

> …I think the thing is, um, my child, she needs um, the ability to have a safe place to go to in school. Things can often get too much for her and be overwhelming so she needs somebody to be able to run to, when things are overwhelming, and that 'at school mum' is you know, a pivotal person. That's why it's sad that it hasn't worked so well in this year [compared to last year's 'at school mum'], but to be said with that, [my child] is getting on, even though that relationship isn't the best, she is still getting on and progressing with her learning… (Extract 5, Nicole, Adoptive Parent)

Here, Nicole describes an "at school mum", which really captures this sense of an attachment figure at school and how that relationship can be a facilitator to supporting previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment. However, even though establishing secure attachments are vital to

support previously looked-after children, some may require further support, due to the development of mental health difficulties from their relational traumas, as one Special Guardian described:

> …foster children are the same, because I say, my 2 girls, foster children all come from traumas, so do SGO children, because they are taken away from their family and like my girls, because of what mum and dad were doing before they had the girls, I've got one little girl who has got mental health issues…(Extract 6, Ellen, Special Guardian)

As demonstrated by the above extracts, all the participants acknowledged that previously looked-after children have usually experienced trauma in their early lives, which is consistent with the literature that states that the majority of previously looked-after children may have been exposed to some form of trauma, whether that be abuse, neglect or loss of a parent (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019a). Adoption UK (AUK, 2014) stated that there is a misperception that adopted children will be fine when living in a stable, caring home, however, the VS argue that "adoption was not a "magic wand" and identified that issues regarding traumatic histories were not wiped away when a child was adopted and that unfortunately without support, adopted children can come back into care" (Simpson, 2012, p. 158). Blake, in Extract 1, captures this misconception when stating, "because it's that magic piece of paper that's going to change everything and it makes no difference, does it, to the trauma…". Furthermore, Taylor's perception in Extract 2, links well with the past DCSF (2009) document that stated when the child will no longer be looked-after, "his or her educational, social and emotional needs will not change overnight…Schools and designated teachers will, therefore, need to be sensitive to the arrangements for supporting the educational needs of children post-adoption" (p.30). In this extract from Taylor, it shows the Designated Teacher's understanding of the enduring difficulties faced by previously looked-after children and that they continue to need support at school. It is reasonable to suggest that not enough support was being provided for previously looked-after children by Designated Teachers after the DCSF (2009) document was released, which prompted the new DfE (2018b) guidance which states that the role of the Designated Teacher has been made statutory to "ensure that effective practice becomes universal" (p.8).

Not only is the impact of trauma acknowledged by the participants, but so is the importance of secure attachments, and Sydney in Extract 3 and Danny in Extract 4, describe their schools' practice in relation to attachment, to support previously looked-after children. Attachment theory proposes that infants have an innate tendency to form emotional bonds with a primary caregiver or attachment figure, someone to provide a secure base from which to explore-this exploration being essential for emotional and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1969). Through attachment relationships with a primary caregiver, the child develops an Internal Working Model of relationships, which involves expectations of others' behaviour towards them (whether positive or negative), and as a result, will influence their future relationships. An insecure attachment occurs when the infant's needs are not met and a secure attachment does not develop with their caregiver. Consequently, a negative Internal Working Model of others emerges, that they are inaccessible, untrustworthy or unresponsive, which has an adverse effect on their cognitive development and emotional wellbeing (Bowlby 1969). Goldberg (2014) suggests that early attachments to a primary caregiver are a foundation for future social relationships, although, they also argue that this can be improved by subsequent positive experiences with teachers, peers and other significant adults. Similarly, Brown et al., (2019) argue that by providing a consistent adult at school who regards the child positively, and the creation of a safe base, establishes a level of connectedness which not only improves educational attainment, but emotional wellbeing, despite earlier adverse experiences. Treisman (2016, as cited in Treisman, 2017) argues that the most appropriate intervention for those children who have experienced "relational trauma" (disrupted attachments) should be relationships, stating that "relational trauma requires relational repair" and that "relational repair requires safe hands, thinking minds and regulated bodies" (p.17). This suggests that with the creation of positive relationships with trusted adults, who will be a reliable, safe base for them, can change their Internal Working Model and their negative views of adults, that they formed due to the trauma they experienced. Similarly, Hambrick et al., (2019) has found that the experience of early trauma and loss, in isolation, does not determine the child's future outcomes and there are important factors that can protect against the impact of early adversity, namely, a safe and available adult at the time of the trauma and the quality and quantity of safe relationships is more influential than their early trauma. This is echoed by Nicole in

Extract 5, who describes an "at school mum", encapsulating this idea of an attachment figure at school and how that relationship can be a facilitator to supporting previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment. Even though establishing secure secondary attachments are vital to support previously looked-after children (Brown et al., 2019; Goldberg, 2014; Ubha & Cahill, 2014), some may require further support, due to the development of mental health difficulties from their relational traumas, as Ellen describes in Extract 6, which will be further discussed below.

ii. Mental health first

All the participants highlighted the importance of emotional wellbeing and how it should be at the forefront of working with previously looked-after children. They all stated that if a previously looked-after child's emotional wellbeing was not addressed first, then they would not be able to learn. This link between trauma, attachment and emotional wellbeing is described by Sam, a Special Guardian:

> …we feel that there's some historic trauma, maybe around anxiety or attachment-she comes across quite insecure, so we are helping support her with her resilience and kind of confidence…I think it is more their mental wellbeing which I probably would use the funding [Pupil Premium Plus] for because, it is quite a complex setup, and although they can be resilient we know that they are going to have to deal with things a lot differently to children who don't have an SGO…(Extract 1, Sam, Special Guardian)

All the participants perceived therapy or counselling to be vital to supporting their child's emotional wellbeing, for example, Tanya and Ellen said:

> …well I think it's important because you know these children have been traumatised by their previous life experience and you know, they need so much support and it's not, you know, all of my children have therapy outside of school, provided by the Adoption Support Fund (Extract 2, Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

> …obviously she's got trauma, she gets therapy, I have to fight for that therapy, but luckily as I said, we've got the SGO Support Team, they are Social Workers and they do work really hard, but not every county has that (Extract 3, Ellen, Special Guardian)

Sam, a Special Guardian, went further to suggest that counselling be incorporated into their curriculum, and offered to all previously looked-after children annually, even if there were no perceived emotional difficulties at the time, saying:

I think counselling (for children) would help them. I think counselling, rather than waiting for something to go wrong or something to upset them, or something to [inaudible], I think regular counselling sessions, so kind of compulsory counselling sessions, whether its, I don't know, 6 times a year or something. Something that's embedded into their curriculum where they have to go and they've got that consistency because of what's happened to them (Extract 4, Sam, Special Guardian)

When asked what could be done to support a previously looked-after child's academic achievement, one Adoptive Parent replied:

…it's not directly education but um, a stable childhood, mental wellbeing is maintained, you know, well we all know, when we are stressed, we can't remember a thing, so how is a stressed child going to learn, you know? And all that sort of thing and managing the effects of the cortisol and those sorts of things on brain development, what, you know, so I think there's a lot more therapy that should be available to adopted children, or to children even pre-adoption, there's not enough therapeutic input… (Extract 5, Blake, Adoptive Parent).

There was an overwhelming understanding from all participants in relation to the link between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement, and that emotional wellbeing and mental health needs should be met first, in order to be able to support previously looked-after children's academic attainment, with participants stating:

…so I think, for any children, anyway…the whole notion that actually, for children to learn, they have to feel safe and that really what we need to be helping them to do is manage when their feelings are difficult… but obviously children with a trauma history often need more help with regulation and some of the things they do themselves are telling you that they need more help with regulation so you know, if our little one gets to a point… that is a really clear indication to me that they have lost her in terms of, she's not using her thinking brain, she's not going to be able, she's clearly in a much younger, emotional survival state actually… (Extract 6, Drew, Special Guardian)

…I think the key thing is, or for me looking at my children, recognizing that, for an Adoptive child, their learning is so linked to, and probably for most children, but I think, particularly Adopted children, their learning is so linked to their emotional well-being, and want of a better word, their sort of state of inner calm, and I think, um, sometimes it's hard for people to realise that you have to go and look at the two together. It's impossible just to say what are the educational needs of this child. If a child isn't calm in school, then they're not going to learn…(Extract 7, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

Well, you can't learn anything if you're not in the right headspace… So yeah, we really pride ourselves here on a therapeutic approach, and the fact that we are underpinning everything, that if their social emotional is not right, then we aren't going to achieve the academic levels that are needed. Um, so definitely

the link is massive. I don't think the link is always seen and I don't think it's always appreciated to be that big, and they think that if they sat in class quiet then they're learning, but its what's going on under the surface isn't it, that really counts…we set up our own Nurture room here, so a lot of ours access that. We tend to use the Boxall Profile for our children here. …But I just think that the Boxall Profile just helps to highlight those social emotional needs really for classes, but I think that's really key, that it's not all focused on the academic…(Extract 8, Danny, Designated Teacher)

Blake, an Adoptive Parent, went further to suggest that counselling would be beneficial for the whole family, not only the previously looked-after child and felt that the DfE (2018b) guidance should be more holistic, something intimated by all the participants during their interviews, saying:

…so I think that would be my big ask if I could kind of re-write the guidance and stuff like that, would be to kind of, and maybe not to be an education guidance, to be a much more holistic guidance you know, and sit alongside the Adoption Support Fund, the whole kind of package…and it would be really helpful. Um, yeah, but counselling, it's really traumatic for the kids, its traumatic for the parents… maybe that is something that we should all have, as, you know, that access and opportunity to that one-to-one, to that therapeutic support from time to time…(Extract 9, Blake, Adoptive Parent).

As demonstrated by the above extracts, the participants highlighted the importance of good mental health and they all said that if a previously looked-after child's emotional wellbeing was not addressed first, then they would not be able to learn. All the participants felt that therapy or counselling was necessary to support their children, as is highlighted in Extracts 2 and 3, with Sam, in Extract 4 going further to suggest counselling be included in their curriculum. Geddes (2006) argues that children who have experienced trauma and have disorganised attachment are often preoccupied with keeping themselves safe and as a result, the teacher or learning task can raise alarm due to their hypervigilance for threats. While in this hypervigilant state, the child is not able to concentrate on or engage with lessons and learning tasks. This was echoed by Blake in Extract 5 who, when asked what could support a previously looked-after child's academic achievement stated, "a stable childhood, mental wellbeing is maintained, you know, well we all know, when we are stressed, we can't remember a thing, so how is a stressed child going to learn, you know?"

The significance of mental health is that there is a recognised association between academic achievement and attachment difficulties (MacKay et al., 2010) with the link between low educational attainment and children with social and emotional difficulties being a concern (Farrell & Humphrey, 2009). Similarly, Hambrick et al., (2019) found that children who have experienced early trauma, the attainment gap between them and their peers, widens over time and they can struggle in profound ways. Brown et al.'s (2017) systematic review of fifteen adoption studies found that in all but one study, there was an association with low academic achievement and increased emotional difficulties.

All participants understood the link between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement, and that emotional wellbeing and mental health needs should be met first, in order to be able to support previously looked-after children's academic attainment, as demonstrated in Extract 6 and 7. In Extract 8, Danny mentions the therapeutic approaches that they use, including Nurture Groups (NGs), which were developed by the EP, Marjorie Boxall (2002, 2010) with a theoretical foundation based on Bowlby's (1969; 1973; 1982) Attachment Theory, and secure attachment relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978). NGs are an intervention within a mainstream school, for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Boxall, 2002), who have missed out on vital nurturing, attachment experiences with their primary caregiver. Consequently, the children struggle to manage their emotions, resulting in them being either aggressive or withdrawn, having difficulties concentrating and relating to others (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014). "To restore this process in the nurture group, it is crucial that the children become attached. Their needs then become apparent, the adults respond accordingly, and the learning process follows" (Boxall, 2010, p.12).

The DfE (2018b) guidance states that Designated Teachers should work with senior leaders in the school, the officer responsible for links with mental health services (where the school has one), and parents and carers to put in place mechanisms for understanding previously looked-after children's emotional needs. All Designated Teacher participants in this research understood the importance of therapy and counselling to support not only previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and mental health, but the positive impact that it in turn has on academic attainment. However, they all highlighted the barrier that they experienced

in attempting to provide counselling and therapy, and expressed how difficult it was to access those services for previously looked-after children in comparison to looked-after children, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Designated Teachers

Main Theme: The DfE (2018) guidance is necessary

This theme relates to Designated Teachers' perspectives in relation to the new DfE (2018b) statutory guidance. All the Designated Teachers knew about their new statutory role and understood their duties in supporting previously looked-after children. They all felt that the statutory guidance was valuable, where they believe that the profile of previously looked-after children needs to be raised and be at parity with looked-after children, as they have not been provided adequate support to date. However, they did not feel that it went far enough to support previously looked-after children.

Subthemes:

i.   Raising previously looked-after children's profile

ii.   Disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children

iii.   Sharing best practice

i. Raising previously looked-after children's profile

This subtheme relates to the Designated Teachers believing that the profile of previously looked-after children should be raised, to ensure better support for them, as Danny and Taylor explain:

> I do think the previously looked-after just need more awareness about them I suppose. I think it's about making schools aware, isn't it, that they are there? And actually, for them to appreciate their Life Stories, I think is really important. I think sometimes you know they are a little bit overlooked, maybe...(Extract 1, Danny, Designated Teacher)

> …so I think the guidance is necessary, but from a perspective of actually raising the profile of those children…so from my perspective, it hasn't changed the support that's on offer but it has changed our focus in um, looking more carefully at those children and being a bit more proactive in

identifying any issues that those children may continue to have… (Extract 2, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

Taylor perceives that the DfE (2018b) guidance is necessary, to raise previously looked-after children's profiles, and Danny went further to say that it is important that their pasts are not ignored:

> …I think it's quite clear and I think it's really important that they are highlighted actually, the previously [looked-after children] I think it is quite important that that guidance is out there and is explicit as it is to be fair, because it is important that their past isn't just ignored, which I think you know, it certainly can be, and it's great that it goes on till they're, you know, into adulthood now, which is really important as well, until they finish (Extract 3, Danny, Designated Teacher)

Even though the Designated Teachers' perceptions were that the DfE (2018b) guidance was valuable, and that it could raise previously looked-after children's profiles, one barrier to it being successfully implemented was the feeling that it was not quite as rigorous as it could be:

> …so I think the biggest thing about it is, I think it's a little bit, um, it's a little bit woolly, so its statutory guidance but all the way through it, it says, the Virtual School Heads have no Corporate Parenting for previously looked-after children, therefore this is just guidance…um, well as I said, I think it's a little bit woolly, in that it says what, how Virtual Schools and schools and other agencies should be working together, but it doesn't give any kind of specifics…(Extract 4, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

As highlighted in the extracts above, the Designated Teachers felt that the profile of previously looked-after children needed to be raised to ensure better support for them. In Extract 1, Danny states that previously looked-after children can sometimes be "overlooked" and that schools need to have more awareness of them and "appreciate their Life Stories". The DfE (2018b) guidance states that many previously looked-after children have experienced disrupted learning and have gaps in their knowledge, and the emotional impact of their experiences, have most likely become barriers to their progress. Attainment data for previously looked-after children demonstrates that they were more likely to reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths, than looked-after children, however, they were still less likely than non-looked-after children to reach expected levels and do not perform as well as them at Key Stage 2 and 4 (DfE, 2020), confirming this barrier. In Extract 2, Taylor states that the DfE (2018b) guidance is necessary to raise the profile of previously

looked-after children, so that they can be better supported. Even though Designated Teachers already had a responsibility to support previously looked-after children since the DCSF (2009) document, this was not a statutory duty. It could therefore be suggested that with the release of a new DfE (2018b) document and with the duty becoming a statutory one, it will bring it to all Designated Teachers' attention.

Danny, in Extract 3, further references previously looked-after children's past histories and stated that it was vital when considering support for these children. This is significant and relates to the literature, as there is a recognised association between low academic achievement and SEMH difficulties (Farrell & Humphrey, 2009; MacKay et al., 2010). Initial adverse experiences with their birth family are one reason, but can be exacerbated when entering the care system if key professionals frequently change, making it difficult to maintain the stability and security these children need, resulting in attachment difficulties (DfE, 2012). In relation to adopted children, only as few as 0.3 per cent experience one stable foster placement (Selwyn et al., 2014). Fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), many of them for SEMH, due to the impact of attachment and loss, which can result in difficulties related to their learning, behaviour or social and emotional development at school. Behavioural difficulties in school can result in exclusions, with exclusion rates for England (Academic Year 2018/2019) highlighting that fixed period exclusions have increased for previously looked-after children (DfE, 2021). In relation to SGOs, more than a quarter of the children were in foster care while their case was being heard and a suitable permanent carer identified (Harwin et al., 2019a). NICE (2017) stated that there is a particular correlation with placement stability and attainment, where the more moves a child has, reduces the likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades, compared to those with a single placement. Therefore, it is important that these children's profiles and difficulties are raised, and that they are supported in school, a secure, stable environment, where they can use a classroom as a safe base (Geddes, 2006; Mascellani, 2016).

Even though the Designated Teachers' perceptions were that the guidance was valuable, to raise the profile of previously looked-after children, one barrier to it being successfully implemented was the feeling that it was not quite as rigorous as it could be. Taylor, in Extract 4, raised the issue of the statutory guidance being

perceived as guidance only and not seen as a statutory duty because the Virtual School does not have parental responsibility for previously looked-after children and that it not specific enough. This perception of the difference in the guidance for looked-after children and previously looked-after children are now further explored.

ii. Disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children

All the Designated Teachers commented on the disparity between the support that looked-after children were afforded, compared to previously looked-after children, and their perceptions were that the DfE (2018b) guidance did not go far enough to secure the necessary support for them or for previously looked-after children. For example:

> I think its more guidance on what the expectations of what the Virtual School has of schools and how they work with previously looked-after children. That would be really useful…they [the Virtual School] are very focussed on what we should be doing with children that are looked-after you know, you should be seeking support here, there and everywhere you know, you identify through an SDQ what their mental health needs are and put those kinds of things in place. They are very strong on that, but we don't get any of that with previously looked-after, so as a school, we are kind of in the dark as to what the Virtual School's expectations are…(Extract 1, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

Similarly, Sydney praised the VS for their support in relation to looked-after children, however, perceived that the support diminished for previously looked-after children:

> I think what I notice is the difference between previously looked-after and looked-after children…They don't get priority access to counselling, so there's no, so, for example, for the we've got one family with four children at the moment, and the school has arranged counselling, it's all been paid for through the Virtual School. I've managed to source it independently and swiftly, really strong, really quick, easy for the kids, very good. That's not the case for previously looked-after children, there is no access to funding to enable us to facilitate that. There's no joined up thinking as to how that, can have that positive impact, it's not as, perhaps those lack of formal structures lead to a diminishing in that support (Extract 2, Sydney, Designated Teacher)

Sydney further felt that the ceasing of support and funding once a child became previously looked-after could make it less likely that they are adopted or placed under an SGO. It would be reasonable to suggest that this could be detrimental in terms of the child not being given a permanent placement and as a

result, could face further placement disruption, which could in turn impact on their emotional wellbeing and educational attainment:

> …and I think that the support, I mean, I guess it will come down to money, but you know we've had, for example, we had a child who was looked-after whose Foster Carers decided they weren't going to Adopt because they didn't want to lose the support that they were getting from the Social Workers, and I think things like that, that's really telling…because once they are previously looked-after, you're on your own, off you trot, yeah, there you go and I think that's really difficult…(Extract 3, Sydney, Designated Teacher)

Beverley suggested that there should be parity with looked-after children in relation to the support that previously looked-after children are given in schools, saying:

> …[previously looked-after children] could have PEPs [Personal Education Plans] and [schools] 'bid' for money as we do for looked-after children… so that they get the equivalent as looked-after children (Extract 4, Beverley, Designated Teacher).

In this above extract, Beverley not only raises the issue of funding disparities, but suggests that previously looked-after children could have PEPs, another suggestion to provide parity with looked-after children. Some Designated Teachers expressed a sense that the disparities led to schools being less accountable for previously looked-after children:

> I think there should be, you know, if the government are putting in statutory guidance about how we are managing previously looked-after children, then there needs to be some kind of mechanism by which schools and other agencies are accountable for those children and how we manage them…even if that's a kind of, you know, annual report that we send back, anything you know, because otherwise there is a risk that those children get lost…clearly the guidance has come out, so, you know, the government deem it to be important, as do we, um, but if they deem it to be important then they need to put a mechanism in place to manage it, and whether that goes back to Virtual Schools again, or whether there is a different route forwards, I don't know, but some kind of accountability strand of some sort… (Extract 5, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

This was echoed by Danny, who even after preparing and offering to share her paperwork with the inspector, was turned down:

> I think it's so important because I'll have my 2 ½, three hour meeting every September to go over my Looked-after cases and I actually said this year, 'Oh, I've got all this paperwork on my Previously looked-after. Would you like to um, would you like to see that?' 'Oh no, that's fine'. 'Oh Okay' [disappointed expression and laughs] (Extract 6, Danny, Designated Teacher)

Taylor was concerned about a lack of accountability that there was in relation to schools having to report to the VS, stating:

> …I think the whole thing around Previously looked-after children is quite, is a grey area, um, I don't think any of us in schools really have a good fix on how to best manage what we do for those children, so we are all doing the best that we can, we are all finding the routes forward for those children that we can, um, but because there is no kind of accountability, there's no um, I think individual schools are all managing things very differently. You know, I don't have to feed back to the Virtual School as to how we are managing any particular individual children, I don't have to feed back to the Local Authority. There is no one I have to feedback to, so I think it would be very easy to just sit back and forget that they exist, and just treat them like everybody else and not put the support in…(Extract 7, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

All the Designated Teachers commented on the disparity between the support that looked-after children were afforded, compared to previously looked-after children. It could be suggested that with the release of this guidance, the DfE (2018b) have recognised that not only do looked-after children require statutory support from a Designated Teacher, but so do previously looked-after children. However, the Designated Teachers' perceptions were that the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance did not go far enough to secure the necessary support for them or previously looked-after children. Both Taylor in Extract 1 and Sydney in Extract 2 stated that the Virtual School provided "strong" support for them in relation to looked-after children, although for previously looked-after children Taylor stated that they were "in the dark", with Sydney perceiving the "lack of formal structures lead to a diminishing in that support" for them.

Sydney, in Extract 3, further felt that the ceasing of support and funding once a child became previously looked-after could make it less likely that they are adopted or placed under an SGO. It would be reasonable to suggest that this could be detrimental in terms of the child not being given a permanent placement and as a result, could face further placement disruption, which could in turn impact on their emotional wellbeing and educational attainment, as the literature states that there is a particular correlation with placement stability and attainment, where the more moves a child has, reduces the likelihood of them achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades, compared to those with a single placement (NICE, 2017). This is in part due to attachment difficulties and the previously looked-after child finding it difficult to

maintain secondary attachment relationships if there is not consistency with the professionals working with them or instability with their foster placements (DfE, 2012; Selwyn et al., 2014). Sydney's concern in Extract 3 is apparent where he states, "because once they are previously looked-after, you're on your own, off you trot, yeah, there you go and I think that's really difficult…".

Beverley, in Extract 4 suggested that there should be parity with looked-after children both in terms of schools 'bidding' for money and the previously looked-after children having a PEP and some Designated Teachers felt that the disparities led to schools not being as accountable for their previously looked-after children, as Taylor and Danny state in Extracts 5 and 6 respectively. Similarly, in relation to Special Guardianship, some Designated Teachers in Ramoutar's (2020) study also recognised that the processes for supporting children under Special Guardianship, were not as robust as for looked-after children. This disparity was also noted in the literature prior to the DfE (2018b) guidance coming into force, with Brown et al. (2017) stating that while it is a legal duty for Local Authorities to collate and monitor academic attainment for looked-after children, adopted children's progress was not scrutinised, highlighting this lack of accountability, which was a concern for the Designated Teachers in this study. The DfE (2018b) guidance states that when children are no longer looked-after, they will no longer be required to have a PEP but Designated Teachers may "wish to consider what is best for continuity and meeting the child's educational needs… where the designated teacher has a duty to promote their educational attainment. As part of this, designated teachers should maintain links with VSHs who must make advice and information available to them for the purposes of promoting the educational achievement of this group of previously looked-after children" (p. 19). The guidance therefore puts the onus on the Designated Teacher to contact the VS, rather than the VS holding them accountable for the previously looked-after children, which was a concern for Taylor, who states, in Extract 7, "There is no one I have to feedback to, so I think it would be very easy to just sit back and forget that they exist, and just treat them like everybody else and not put the support in…"

Due to these participants being a self-selected sample, it would be reasonable to suggest that they would have a firm understanding of the guidance and their duties and responsibilities in relation to previously looked-after children. Their

perceptions of the lack of accountability, and therefore monitoring to ensure best practice across schools, is somewhat concerning and could be seen as a barrier to previously looked-after children receiving the high quality, consistent support they need. The Designated Teachers did not stop at suggesting accountability for previously looked-after children, but felt that sharing best practice would also be beneficial, which will be explored further.

iii. Sharing best practice

This theme emerged as a proposed facilitator to supporting previously looked-after children, where the participants suggested sharing ideas and resources with other Designated Teachers, to enable more consistent practice and to improve support. The Designated Teacher's perceptions were that consistent, universal support was not currently occurring, as Beverley and Danny stated:

> The more I tell you about what we do, the more concerning it is to realise that it is down to the capacity and skills of individual schools to identify and address needs for looked-after and previously looked-after children (Extract 1, Beverley, Designated Teacher).

> I mean when I took over there wasn't any list of previously looked-after, it was me going, okay, right, well, where are these children? We must have some, we've got 360 of them. Tell me about them. But yeah, that seemed quite a foreign concept when I took over…but I guess if you haven't got that passion, maybe it could go under the radar. (Extract 2, Danny, Designated Teacher)

In the extract above, Danny mentions having a 'passion' for supporting previously looked-after children. Again, because this is a self-selected sample, it would be reasonable to suggest that they all have a 'passion' for these children, but that may not be the case for all Designated Teachers. Taylor and Sydney further reflected on what would facilitate good, consistent practice in all schools:

> I think, if we can do some sharing of best practice, we might be able to come up with a kind of co-ordinated approach so that we are all dealing with it in a similar way you know. It's not unusual that children move from one school to another and to have previously looked-after children managed in similar ways across schools, I think would be more helpful for them… (Extract 3, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

> I think what might be interesting is if they had um, either Designated Teachers or schools or [inaudible] or something, which operates almost like a best

practice or as a beacon, where actually I could perhaps look at some sample files, maybe speak to someone… (Extract 4, Sydney, Designated Teacher)

Taylor goes further to highlight the disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children again, this time in terms of the guidance being ill defined for Designated Teachers and how they should monitor previously looked-after children:

> …it would be quite good to have some kind of um, networking, local networking, you know, a meeting once a term of all the Designated Teachers with a focus purely on previously looked-after children. That would be really useful. We do have networking forums but it's all about Children in Care….I do think there is a need to try and glean best practice from elsewhere and to try and share good practice between us as to how things are done in each individual school. You see, with Children in Care, everything is very well defined… and it's not the same for Previously looked-after children…(Extract 5, Taylor, Designated Teacher)

As demonstrated by the above extracts, the participants suggested sharing ideas and resources with other Designated Teachers, to enable more consistent practice and support. The DfE (2018b) guidance states that "Excellent practice in supporting looked-after and previously looked-after children already exists in many schools. The Designated Teacher role is statutory to help ensure that effective practice becomes universal" (p.8), perhaps an acknowledgment themselves that past support has not been consistent. This perception of inconsistent practice was also expressed by Beverley and Danny, in Extracts 1 and 2 respectively. Taylor, in Extract 3 and Sydney in Extract 4, reflected on what could facilitate "best practice", with Taylor stating, "if we can do some sharing of best practice, we might be able to come up with a kind of co-ordinated approach" to ensure consistent practice across schools.

In Extract 5, Taylor further highlighted the disparity within the DfE (2018b) guidance between looked-after and previously looked-after children, in relation to the guidance being ill defined for Designated Teachers and how to support previously looked-after children. This could be considered a barrier to supporting previously looked-after children and a maintaining factor in the disparity in support, which is concerning as the literature suggests that the majority of previously looked-after children will have experienced some form of trauma (Brown et al., 2019; Harwin et al., 2019a), have experienced numerous carers while waiting for suitable placement

(Harwin et al., 2019a; Selwyn et al., 2014), similar to that of a looked-after child. Additionally, educational attainment data found that at Key Stage 2 and 4, previously looked-after children were more likely to reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths, than looked-after children, however, they were still less likely than non-looked-after children to reach expected levels (DfE, 2020). It would therefore be reasonable to suggest that they require the same support as looked-after children, to ensure emotional wellbeing and better educational outcomes.

Common Themes between Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians

Main Theme 1: Statutory Support for Previously looked-after children

This theme relates to Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' perspectives in relation to the role of the Designated Teacher and the DfE (2018b) guidance. The DfE (2018b) states that Designated Teachers should work closely with parents and guardians because they understand their child's needs best. The Designated Teacher should make themselves known to parents and guardians for support to discuss issues affecting their child's education. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to take part in consultations about their child's needs and strategies to meet their needs, including how Pupil Premium Plus should be used, and their wishes should always be respected.

Subthemes:

i.   Knowledge of the Designated Teacher role

ii.   Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

1.i Knowledge of the Designated Teacher role

There was variability in relation to Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' knowledge of the Designated Teacher and their role. Those that did know about the Designated Teacher stated that their friends and acquaintances often did not know and they had to inform them of the statutory duty that they have in relation to previously looked-after children. Lou and Nicole were not aware of the Designated Teacher, stating:

> um, I don't know a great deal to be honest. Um, yeah…as far as I'm aware I don't have a Designated Teacher. I'm not really 100% sure what that

is…that's [shrugs shoulders] who is the Designated Teacher? I don't know…(Extract 1, Lou, Special Guardian)

I don't think that I've ever been aware that there could be a Designated Teacher for my child. (Extract 2, Nicole, Adoptive Parent)

From these comments and subsequent discussions around the Designated Teacher's role and responsibilities, it was a possibility that the school staff member supporting these Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians was in fact the Designated Teacher, and they simply had not identified themselves as such. Blair said she was fortunate enough to be informed through a course:

…it was sort of almost by chance, and I enrolled in that course. Not every Barnardo's person would enrol in that course, and so I certainly got other friends of Barnardo's, who adopted through them, and all those who are completely unaware of the Designated Teacher situation, so, yeah… (Extract 3, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

Drew did know about the Designated Teacher, however, they had not had any contact with them:

…we have never, ever, ever in our entire time had any meetings or conversations involving the Designated Teacher. It has all been done though the SENCo, who is not the Designated Teacher… (Extract 4, Drew, Special Guardian)

Drew knew who the Designated Teacher was and felt that because her child was at expected levels in her academic attainment, and because her needs were in relation to SEMH difficulties due to trauma and attachment, the SENCo was involved, rather than the Designated Teacher.

There were some positive experiences from Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians too, and when I asked Ellen how much support the Designated Teacher had given her and her child, she replied:

…now, I must admit, now that she's at the new school, 100% I think that they are working with the new policies that have been put in since 2018, they are amazing, if I got that, because I said I took her out of the last school because she's different she was very bullied and they didn't put in what I asked for before she started and it was horrendous. I took her out, okay, and I put her in this new school and they have bent over backwards, I think they are working with the new policies…so one school's got it and one school hasn't…so, you know, discrepancies all round in what each school is doing and what…(Extract 5, Ellen, Special Guardian)

Blair explained that she took the DfE (2018b) guidance with her to school when her child first started, saying:

> …but when she went to school, when we first went, took her into a new school, I actually went in armed with the document [DfE 2018b guidance] and said are you aware of it? Now, in fairness to the school, we had a new Headteacher who had only just become a Headteacher. She wasn't aware of it, but she said 'I don't know about it, but I will find out about it'. But I do think this is the problem. I don't think a lot of people or enough people are aware about it and what, and also, that it's a statutory requirement. I think when they are, it is really helpful because I think, I think it's quite, I mean I, before we had the children I was a teacher. So, I can see both sides, but I think it is quite hard for schools to understand, sometimes the importance of involving Adoptive Parents... (Extract 6, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

As demonstrated by the above extracts, there was variability in relation to Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' knowledge of the Designated Teacher, their role and statutory duty and the consistency of support across schools.

Lou and Nicole, in Extracts 1 and 2 respectively, stated that they were not aware of the Designated Teacher, although following subsequent discussions around the Designated Teacher's role and responsibilities during their interviews, it was acknowledged that it could be a possibility that the school staff member supporting these Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians was in fact the Designated Teacher, and they simply had not identified themselves as such. The DfE (2018b) guidance does state that Designated Teacher should make themselves known to parents and guardians as someone they can talk to about issues affecting their child's education, however, it does also state that every aspect of the role does not need to be carried out by a Designated Teacher and that schools can decide who any other roles are appropriately delegated to. This could also be why a number of the Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians did not know about the Designated Teacher role.

Blair, in Extract 3 said she was fortunate enough to be informed about the Designated Teacher role through a course that she did through her Adoption Agency/Charity, however, it was "by chance" and that not every Adoptive Parent would necessarily go on that course. Drew knew who the Designated Teacher was and felt that because her child was at expected levels in her academic attainment, and because her needs were in relation to SEMH difficulties due to trauma and

attachment, the SENCo was involved, rather than the Designated Teacher. As the DfE (2018b) guidance states, the Designated Teacher has lead responsibility for raising educational achievement, but that schools can decide who any other roles are appropriately delegated to, and therefore, the school appear to be adhering to their statutory duty. However, would it not be reasonable to suggest that having a more holistic view of the child, with one consistent person to support them for all their needs, not be more beneficial, especially considering the literature does state that there is a recognised link between academic attainment and SEMH (Farrell & Humphrey, 2009; MacKay et al., 2010).

Ellen and Blair, in Extract 5 and 6 respectively, demonstrate the inconsistency in relation to the implementation of the guidance, which was echoed in the previous section when discussing the guidance with the Designated Teachers and what they understood about their statutory role, from reading the guidance. This inconsistency could be perceived as a barrier to supporting previously looked-after children, as you can hear from participants such as Ellen, whose child has been negatively impacted by the inconsistent support that they have received, to the degree that they have changed schools.

Blair, in Extract 6, further mentions the importance of schools involving Adoptive Parents in helping to support their child, something which was mentioned by other participants and the literature, and it appears that there can sometimes be tensions in relation to home-school relationships. A survey of UK parents found 72 per cent of mothers would have liked more involvement with the school in relation to their child's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Although, Hornby (2000, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), states that there persists a deficit model of parents by teachers, where parents are viewed as problematic or less able, and are best kept out of schools as a result. Involving parents and guardians is considered an essential aspect of effective education for children with SEND, however, this does not always appear to happen as there are a number of aspects that parents/guardians and schools may disagree on, which could form a barrier to this occurring. This is also discussed further in the section below.

1.ii. Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

While not many Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians knew about the Designated Teacher role, the majority did know about PP+, which is additional funding to support and improve the educational attainment of previously looked-after children. Nicole shared her knowledge of the DfE (2018b) guidance and her experience of PP+, stating:

> …so that's the bit that I know about [PP+] and that's the bit I have advocated for use of it in various different schools, so to be targeted on my child…(Extract 1, Nicole, Adoptive Parent)

In the extract above, Nicole states that she "advocated" for PP+ to be targeted to her child. Blake, however, describes her very different experience with PP+:

> I think the reality is that the money [PP+] goes in the overall kitty and although it's probably used for things that the child does benefit from, so it is kind of that extra nurturey [sic] type stuff, its again, not particularly person centred or um, direct, you know. Um, I would be wrong to say that my children haven't had an awful lot of support from the school, but I don't think we have ever had that really kind of targeted conversation that, 'we've got X amount of money- we could do that' or you know, 'this training would be very useful to this school and useful to my son' or whatever, and I think that's kind of, what I would expect, but I don't think that actually happens, it's not my experience of what happens in reality. I don't get the impression that anyone else I have spoken to has had that experience either, in terms of doing that, so…yeah… (Extract 2, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

This varied experience with PP+ at different schools is apparent in this research, demonstrated in the below extracts from Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians:

> …but it's very, its still, I think hit and miss there, because obviously I know a lot of parents, SGOs, I know a lot, and they are all about the same ages and a lot of the schools are still not up…when I say what my child gets now, it's like, wow, you know, because I've got 1 [child] in one school that is not getting extra and yet I've got 1 [child] in this school which I am so pleased with…she's thriving. They put in the music for her and all the extras that the government has said is now the same as Foster children, so one school's got it and one school hasn't…(Extract 3, Ellen, Special Guardian)

> No, I haven't with her [PP+]. In fact, I think, because, I don't think Adopted, I only know about it because of Looked-after children that have been through my care. And you know all of the children that we've had, it's been very, it's varied greatly from school to school, really greatly, from 'no, we put in one pot and we don't tailor it to any particular child' to one school where I had a child

who's with me for about 5 1/2 years and he was with, in a school, a really good school and they paid for a lot, personally, for him, so it has varied greatly. It hasn't even come up with [my daughter], I think they probably paid for that behavioural person, the child development person, they paid for that out of the increased money they got for her, but we haven't even talked about it at this school…(Extract 4, Amy, Adoptive Parent)

…and it does mean we also have an open dialogue about how the Pupil Premium Plus can be spent, which I think is really useful, because in my experience, that doesn't happen that frequently, it varies so much where the people are able to get their schools to be open to then having input as to how the funding should be spent, but I would say I've been quite fortunate that you know, as this is on an almost termly basis due to Covid, I do have a meeting with the Head who is a Designated Teacher…(Extract 5, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

In the extract above, Blair describes her positive experience with their child's school and involvement in relation to discussing how the PP+ can be spent on their child to support them, however, Amy and Ellen stated that there was not always the collaborative involvement with them in deciding how the money would be spent. Further to this, Drew explained:

…well my experience is, schools interpret the guidance as, 'we get the Pupil Premium, thank you very much, um, but your child doesn't have a PEP' um and there isn't the same kind of seriousness about considering the additional needs of having a complex, um, traumatic start to life and I have had to be a completely broken record, from even before our little one started school, where um, it was, yeah, it has been quite a journey…(Extract 6, Drew, Special Guardian)

From the extracts above, it is apparent that while not many Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians knew about the Designated Teacher role, the majority did know about PP+ funding. The DfE (2018b) guidance states that PP+ is additional funding to help improve the educational attainment of previously looked-after children and to close the attainment gap, although, it is not a personal budget for individual children. Furthermore, it states that it is important for Designated Teachers to become acquainted with those who have parental responsibility, encouraging them to be actively involved. Additionally, Designated Teachers should be accessible and open, so parents and carers feel able to approach them to discuss the education of their child and the support they need. The DfE (2018b) guidance further states that the Designated Teacher should raise previously looked-after children's parents'

and guardians' awareness of PP+ and other support available and encourage parents and guardians' involvement in deciding how the PP+ is used to support their child, and be the main contact for queries about its use. Although Nicole in the previous section stated that she did not know about the Designated Teacher, in this section, in Extract 1, she shared her experience of PP+, stating that she "advocated" for PP+ to be targeted to her child. Nicole, in this extract gives the sense that she was the instigator of these discussions, rather than the Designated Teacher, to ensure that the funding would be targeted for her child.

Blake, in Extract 2, described her perceptions and expectations of the PP+ process with the Designated Teacher (which aligns with the DfE [2018b] statutory guidance), however, her actual experience with PP+ was very different. The reality of her experience was not only different for Blake, but for other Adoptive Parents that she has spoken to. Further varied experiences of the participants in this research was also apparent in Extracts 3, 4 and 5. Ellen, in Extract 3, stated that it was "hit and miss" and had direct, personal experience with two of her children. One of her children, due to the lack of support, was moved to a different school and was now "thriving" whereas her other child was "not getting extra". Amy also has personal experience of the varied support that her children have had, stating in Extract 4 that "it's varied greatly from school to school, really greatly".

Blair, in Extract 5 acknowledges that experiences can vary, but that she has been "quite fortunate" to be able to have regular meetings with the Designated Teacher. Involving parents and guardians is considered an essential aspect of supporting the education of children with SEND, although, this may not occur as there are a number of aspects that parents and/or guardians and schools may disagree on, which could create a barrier to this happening (Seligman 2000, as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). For example, they could have differences in goals, agendas and personal attitudes which are embedded in their own educational experiences (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). PP+ itself is seen as a facilitator to Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians to gain the support for their child's needs at school, and a number of participants have had positive experiences, however, some felt that the school, by acting as a gatekeeper to this fund, was creating a barrier to the support that they believed their child needed, and there was not the collaborative involvement in deciding how the money would be spent.

In Extract 6, Drew additionally states how "schools interpret the guidance" and that there is not the same "seriousness about considering the additional needs of having a complex, um, traumatic start to life", in relation to the support for previously looked-after children and PP+. This interpretation could be a barrier to the "excellent practice" that the DfE (2018b) guidance states is happening at some schools, and it could be a maintaining factor in schools not providing consistently good support. Similarly, in the section above, the Designated Teachers stated that the DfE (2018b) guidance was not specific enough and was open to interpretation, and it could be perceived as guidance only, and not seen as a statutory duty, resulting in inconsistent practice.

Main Theme 2: Staff understanding of trauma and attachment

The enduring impact of trauma and attachment has been discussed in the previous section, however, this theme relates to Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceptions in relation to schools having a true understanding of trauma and attachment. A number of participants stated that the school where their child attends claims to be trauma and attachment aware, but that from their actions, they were not convinced, and suggested training to improve the support for their previously looked-after children.

Subthemes:

i.   A true understanding of attachment and trauma

ii.   Training

2.i. A true understanding of attachment and trauma

This subtheme relates to Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceiving that teaching staff did not have a true understanding of trauma and attachment difficulties, even though they claimed to be trauma and attachment aware, with Blair and Blake explaining:

> …I think their [the school's] understanding of um, the needs of Adopted children. I don't think they were, it came up a lot, the response I had a lot at the time was, 'oh, but all children do that, a lot of children are like that'. Which is probably true, but I think to say, 'oh, that's what all children do' when you've got an Adoptive child is to really misunderstand what early years trauma does. And what impact it has…I suppose really for, teachers to have a better

understanding of what neglect and abuse does to the brain development of a child and what, how it impacts on how they are… (Extract 1, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

…I think that kind of trauma informed approaches and understanding that, and really understanding that, and I think sensory integration, sensory attachment integration, I think is something that's really helpful and important. I think schools often kind of get it to a degree but not the full, they haven't got the full insight into that, so you have your Gym Trails, for example on the sensory side, which does hit the sensory button but they haven't got that little bit extra about why, for an adopted child that would be useful, in terms of filling in those blanks, the early development, truly understanding the regulation… (Extract 2, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

In the extracts above, Blair and Blake felt that even though the schools were aware of trauma, they did not completely understand the impact that it can have on previously looked-after children and how to support them. Riley decided to Home School their child to better meet their needs, suggesting that having a trusted adult would have made a difference to his school experience:

…so he was very distrusting of adults, so for me personally, for him, I think if he'd had that one adult that he trusted, I think his experience at school would have been completely different…I just feel that these children benefit from having one adult that they can go to, that they can trust, um and guidance as well so that one adult can guide them through that school process…um and I think that lots of children that are in care situations, have that same distrust of adults because its adults that have hurt them, more so than children have, um, so it's about having that one person that they can go to, they feel safe with and that they can open up to… (Extract 3, Riley, Special Guardian)

Drew and Blake go further to question the use of behavioural approaches to rewards and sanctions:

…if you are a child who has grown up in your family of origin, and you have a lovely secure base and your attachment figures are safe people that have been with you all the way through, then obviously a behavioural approach [at school]…um, it wouldn't be my preference anyway, but it works because the child isn't ever questioning the safety of the relationship…so inside her little mind is always the possibility that this adult might not be safe (Extract 4, Drew, Special Guardian)

…it's been about getting him home at night, getting him regulated after a day at school, getting him feeling secure, dealing with all of that you know. So homework and sitting down and following a nice little App which all the cosy, you feel like all the other cosy homes are doing and you know, Jonny's got 15 stars and my [child] has got 2, you know, it has no insight into that…I think again, that insight into trauma informed, and again that education piece isn't

there, the knowledge…so I think it's very hard to get people and get schools to plan and support with planning. If they haven't got that information and they haven't got that knowledge and that approach…(Extract 5, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

Drew further feels that the whole school community should be trauma informed, not simply the teaching staff, stating that:

…the biggest thing which I think is more valuable than anything else is everybody having, being able to understand attachment and trauma, um, because it's no good if the midday supervisor is very behavioural, do you know what I mean, if their response to things is, and I suppose for me the fundamental thing is, we know that all children benefit from therapeutic approaches, all children… (Extract 6, Drew, Special Guardian)

In the below extract, Blake refers to the guidance focussing on academic attainment and not focussing enough on the social and emotional impact that trauma can have and how it can impact learning, a seemingly recurring theme during this research:

I think primarily the guidance is about, that underachievement in schools of children who have previously been looked-after and again, I don't think it, it doesn't get to the crux of the issue, the crux of the issue is that the children have got, it's about approach to education, it's about trauma, for me, it's about trauma informed teaching, it's about plugging in those gaps…(Extract 7, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

Tanya, an Adoptive Parent and teacher, acknowledged her own lack of understanding of attachment when she was a newly qualified teacher and before she adopted her child and went on the LA training:

I think it's still important that staff see that and understand what attachment is because I didn't understand that and I can now think of a child that I had in my class some years ago and she, you know, she was very premature and actually thinking about it, a lot of her issues were because her and her mum did just not have a good attachment because they were separated for so long, and actually now I can see how that affected other things, but at the time I didn't know what attachment was…(Extract 8, Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

Lou was surprised that the SENCo had only attended attachment training last year, and was concerned about the fact that she would have to train the rest of the school staff, explaining:

…so the SENCo, you know, it was only last year that the SENCo was sent on a course for Attachment, and I thought, why doesn't she know about attachment? Surely that's a basic…well for me, that was a basic theory and I was quite surprised that she didn't and then it was her job to come back to teach the teachers about attachment, which, you know, she may well do, but if

she hasn't grasped it herself then that isn't going to work is it? (Extract 9, Lou, Special Guardian)

As is demonstrated in the extracts above, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceived that teaching staff did not have a true understanding of trauma and attachment difficulties, even though they purported to be trauma and attachment aware. In Extract 1, Blair felt that even though the schools were aware of trauma, they did not completely understand the impact that it can have on previously looked-after children and how to support them, wanting "teachers to have a better understanding of what neglect and abuse does" and "how it impacts on how they are". In Extract 2, Blake describes her understanding of regulation, which links well with the literature that states children with insecure attachment have difficulty relying on others and are unable to regulate their emotions by themselves and children with developmental trauma will have difficulties with dysregulation and social relationships (van der Kolk et al., 2005). Children often cannot focus on learning because they are unable to relax as they are either hyper- or hypo-aroused but never truly calm and that activities that sooth and calm are therefore essential and argues that to process their trauma, they first need to develop a safe space (van der Kolk et al., 2005).

Riley, in Extract 3, stated that they decided to Home School their child to better meet their needs, suggesting that having a trusted adult would have made a difference to their school experience. This idea of a trusted adult, who they can feel safe with and establish a positive relationship with is supported by the literature, where Treisman (2016; 2017) argues that the most appropriate intervention for those children who have experienced "relational trauma" should be relationships, suggesting that with the creation of positive relationships with trusted adults, who will be a reliable, safe base for them, can change their Internal Working Model and their negative views of adults, that they formed due to the trauma they experienced.

Drew and Blake, in Extracts 4 and 5 respectively, went further to question the use of behavioural approaches to rewards and sanctions. While behaviourist approaches to behaviour management can be effective for certain children, some research literature has criticised this approach, placing fault and the need to change on the child and it does not consider the context (Harold & Corcoran, 2013). In

contrast, trauma informed approaches to behaviour management focusses on relationships and a sense of safety at the centre of classroom management, encouraging nurture and empathy, even while a child's behaviour is challenging. Research has found that when an emphasis is placed on the emotional wellbeing of all members of the school community, it leads to better outcomes for staff, pupil attendance, attainment and positive home-school relationships (Banerjee et al., 2014). Furthermore, secure teacher-pupil relationships predict higher academic achievement and academic motivation (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Drew, in Extract 6, further feels that the whole school community should be trauma informed, not simply the teaching staff.

Although this is a small sample, the majority of Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians felt that school staff did not truly understand trauma and attachment, and it is reasonable to suggest that this is a barrier to their children being provided the best support they require. For example, Blake, in Extract 7, stated that the guidance's primary focus was "underachievement" and academic attainment, and she felt "the crux of the issue is that the children have got…its' about trauma, for me, it's about trauma informed teaching, it's about plugging those gaps…".

The participants, during this research stated that to facilitate improved support for their children, expressed the necessity for staff to have adequate training in relation to trauma and attachment, which will be further discussed below.

2.ii. Training

The Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians had mixed experiences with the schools where their children attended, although the majority perceived that school staff needed some additional training to truly understand the needs of their children. Blake appeared pleasantly surprised with her school, and Drew felt that the additional training their school attended after they suggested it, had made a difference:

> Um and interestingly, my son is going to a school, the school that he is going to, um, seems to have a lot more awareness about that. They have a special, they seem to be very proactive in their training and development and their understanding of trauma, which I think is unusual…(Extract 1, Blake, Adoptive Parent)

…we managed to convince them that having an attachment and trauma lens would be really important, so they did get a little bit of training…after the training [attachment aware and trauma], it did make a difference, so I think they could no longer flip it back as us being kind of neurotic but actually could see that maybe there were things they needed to think about and since then it has been a bit better…(Extract 2, Drew, Special Guardian)

Blair feels that there is value in collaborating and working in partnership with Adoptive Parents as they receive a substantial amount of training before they adopt, explaining:

Understandably, schools can think, 'we know the best way to educate the children', but I think sometimes, because I think currently there's a lack of training for teachers in terms of looked-after and previously looked-after children. I don't think they realise there's actually value in speaking to Adoptive Parents, because we all go through so much training and obviously day-to-day experience on what the impact is of trauma. And you know, early years, trauma, neglect, and abuse, so I think it's a very useful document. I think it's hard to ensure that its full potential is achieved at the moment…(Extract 3, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

Once again, there appear to be tensions in relation to home-school partnerships. Blair perceives that the teaching staff are reluctant to engage with her because the staff believe that they have the expertise in educating children, when the parent/guardian believes that they have more expertise in relation to trauma, because the teachers have not had adequate training.

Not only was training of current staff in school suggested, but that trauma and attachment training should be part of the Batchelor of Education (BEd) or Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), suggesting that this is a much wider issue than individual schools:

…well I think what's really important is that when teachers do their teacher training, you know, I did a full BEd, when teachers do their teacher training, is, that there is you know, a lot of support for newly qualified, you know for people training newly qualified, that they understand what children, you know, that there are children that have been traumatised you know, that, that are in the Care System or, you know are Adopted and how they need support. I think that's very very important. I didn't get any support at all, I know I qualified in 2002, but I didn't get any support. I didn't really know anything about children being traumatised and how that might impact upon their functioning in the classroom. Had absolutely no idea, and even in the first few years of my career, I don't really think I had a lot of knowledge and I think I would have been a better teacher to those children if I had known what I was seeing and how I could support those children. And so, I think that the training um, is still not there. I know that the staff at my, at the primary school, they have done an

Attachment Aware training, but obviously one day is only a small amount (Extract 4, Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

…the Local Authority does run um, Attachment aware courses, um, they're doing their trauma perceptive practice aren't there at the moment... But I, and I think as that's rolled out that will help teachers because I think it's all down to understanding and knowledge, and I think because it hasn't focused, formed part of an integral part of teacher training, I think a lot of teachers are just out of their depth in being able to understand (Extract 5, Blair, Adoptive Parent)

From the extracts in this section, it demonstrates the Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' mixed experiences with the schools where their children attended, however, the majority perceived that some additional training was necessary for school staff, to fully understand their children's needs. The DfE (2018b) states that the Designated Teacher has lead responsibility for ensuring staff understand what can affect how previously looked-after children learn and ensuring that they, and school staff, have strong understanding and training regarding specific needs of previously looked-after children and how to support them. They should work with staff to ensure they have the skills to understand the impact trauma, attachment and other mental health difficulties can have on previously looked-after children and their engagement in learning. It is also important that school staff are aware that these issues will continue to affect previously looked-after children, and that the school will need to continue to respond to their needs. Blake, in Extract 1, appeared surprised with her child's school, stating that they "seem to be very proactive in their training and development and their understanding of trauma, which I think is unusual…" and Drew, in Extract 2, felt that the additional training their school attended after they suggested it, had made a difference.

Blair, in Extract 3, felt that schools should collaborate and work in partnership with Adoptive Parents as they partake in a considerable amount of training before they adopt, stating, "Understandably, schools can think, 'we know the best way to educate the children', but I think sometimes, because I think currently there's a lack of training for teachers in terms of looked-after and previously looked-after children. I don't think they realise there's actually value in speaking to Adoptive Parents". From this extract, there appears to be tensions in relation to home-school partnerships, which could be creating a barrier to their previously looked-after child's emotional

wellbeing and educational attainment. For example, a large-scale study of 4000 pupils found that home-school connections are a major factor in increasing wellbeing, and in encouraging educational aspirations (Hay et al., 2015, as cited in Brown et al., 2019). Boonk et al's (2018) review analysed 75 studies examining the impact of parental involvement and academic achievement, and the findings confirm that parental involvement is related to children's academic attainment. Furthermore, positive working relationships provide an opportunity to identify the most effective support for the child (DfE/PAC-UK, 2014), as parents/guardians know their children best, especially if they have had the opportunity to attend training like Blair, and therefore, building close partnerships with the school and teachers can promote a deeper understanding of the child, their development and needs (Hutchin, 2010).

Additionally, in relation to training, Tanya and Blair, in Extracts 4 and 5 respectively, stated that trauma and attachment training should be part of the BEd or PGCE, suggesting that this is a much wider issue than individual schools. These perceptions were echoed in the Carter (2015) review of initial teacher training (ITT) that stated that they identified potentially significant gaps in a range of courses in areas such as behaviour management, assessment and SEND. ITT should introduce trainee teachers to the most common difficulties they will face and strategies to address these. Trainee teachers should be introduced to how to work with a range of professionals, and parents and carers, to support children with SEND. The Carter (2015) found a lack of training in child development and stated that to teach effectively, trainee teachers need to understand typical expectations of children at different stages of development as well as issues that can have an impact on pupil progress, which also provides a good basis for addressing other priorities such as behaviour management or SEND. The DfE (2019c) ITT Core Content Framework was created in response to the Carter Review (2015), stating that consideration was given to the needs of trainee teachers relating to supporting pupils with SEN, encompassing those pupils identified within the four areas of need set out in the SEND code of practice. Furthermore, the ITT Core Content Framework was reviewed with consideration with how to best prepare trainee teachers to support pupils with their mental health, highlighting the importance of building positive relationships with pupils, parents and carers. However, it deliberately does not detail approaches specific to particular additional needs and provides the opportunity for

providers to tailor their curricula to the needs of their trainees. Although this does go some way to address the issue, it perhaps may not go far enough to ensure that all ITT courses are consistent and will provide trainee teachers with trauma and attachment training. Therefore, it appears that there is not only inconsistency with individual schools and training, but inconsistency with the ITT that teachers receive, causing a barrier to excellent practice and being a maintaining factor in support for previously looked-after children not being universal.

Special Guardians

Main Theme: The complexity of being a Special Guardian

This theme relates to Special Guardians' perceptions in relation to the disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianships and the sense that they are at the bottom of a hierarchy in terms of support for them and their child. They also highlighted the complex family relationships that need to be navigated as a Special Guardian.

Subthemes:

i.   The disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship

ii.   Family relationships

i. The disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship

All Special Guardians mentioned the disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship, with many perceiving it to be an unfair difference, due to the fact that their child had been through the same trauma and loss as a looked-after child, and feeling like they should be afforded the same support. Some felt that even Adoptive Parents were better supported than Special Guardians, creating a type of tiered, hierarchical system, with Drew and Ellen saying:

> …there is no parity, honestly, it's really strange and if you think about children who are in Foster Care and the amount of support and the child's involvement as well…obviously you wouldn't wish for your child to be in Care if you could possibly avoid it but those children, the way in which that is thought about is so different and then children who have been Adopted, there's loads of training, there's lots of support and um, you get a year of paid, you know, equivalent leave, so SGO is like the cheap option. We get nothing. It cost us um, 20 grand, effectively, through loss of earnings and we had to convert our

garage, um, and that's not, you know, it's kind of like, you just, take it on the chin… (Extract 1, Drew, Special Guardian)

…um, and this is what SGOs find very hard, we don't get that support, we don't get that amount of support as, now my little Foster child, she gets everything, you know….My 2 had to have therapy but luckily I got it through the SGO Social Worker otherwise they wouldn't have got it. My children come from trauma, the Foster child gets it naturally, I only have to say one word to her Foster Social Worker and 'oh yeah, we'll put that in place'. I don't get that luxury, SGOs don't get the luxury of that, we have to fight for it and that is the difference and sometimes I sit here and I think it's so unfair because these children, they all come from trauma, because they have been taken away…(Extract 2, Ellen, Special Guardian)

In the extract above, Drew describes the disparity in financial support between Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, stating that they are the "cheap option". Although Ellen states that her children were able to access therapy through the SGO social worker, she gives a real sense of the difficulties she faces and how she has to "fight" for support. Drew further mentions the disparity at school:

I think as a Special Guardian its quite tricky the difference between what looked-after and previously looked-after children get um, because schools, well my experience is, schools interpret the guidance as, 'we get the Pupil Premium, thank you very much, um, but your child doesn't have a PEP' um and there isn't the same kind of seriousness about considering the additional needs of having a complex, um, traumatic start to life…(Extract 3, Drew, Special Guardian)

Not only are there disparities in relation to funding and schools, but Lou and Riley raised the subject of training and support for them, to be able to support their children:

…I have harassed the Social Workers for some training and then they said I could go on to Foster training…after the 3 years, I then harassed the Special Guardian's department in my area to set up a support group and she said there's one, wherever it was, and it was about 16 miles away and I said no, I want one here and then I got another Special Guardian on board who lives local to me, so we both harassed her and set up a group…(Extract 4, Lou, Special Guardian)

Never been told anything really. I had to fight for certain things for him, obviously when he went into school…obviously there is lots that we are going to have to overcome as he gets older, but nobody gives you the training for that, um, so it's kind of, going for advice, asking for advice, asking for leaflets, courses, whatever you can do to help that young person become an adult you know and be able to move forward in life you know…but we've not, he's 7 now but we've not had to deal with any trauma aspect just yet, but we've had

no training on how to deal with that trauma, um, and actually, when that time does present, then we are going to have to find that information for ourselves because we just feel that there isn't the, anyone out there or Social Services hasn't given us the tools that we need to um, be able to go through that…I am very good at getting online and finding out where to go and what to do, so a lot of that I do myself, but we shouldn't have to do that, they need that support, because you have removed them for some reason or another, so these children are always going to need additional support and that includes school as well as going through life, they are going to need that support you know, but the services are just not there right now for them to get that you know…(Extract 5, Riley, Special Guardian)

In the extracts above, Lou recounts how she 'harassed' the Social Workers to be able to have some training (which she attended, but it was for Foster carers) and how she took her own initiative to set up her own group local to her, and Riley stated how she had to 'fight' for certain things for her child, highlighting the difficulties that Special Guardians face in comparison to Foster carers.

In the extract below, Ellen describes the training she had when she was a Foster carer and how beneficial is has been for her, however, she comments on other Special Guardians who have not had training, and how they cannot identify some of the behaviours their child is displaying, are due to trauma:

…they are from trauma, and when I go to the meetings, they all say the same thing, these children have all got trauma and I'm lucky, me and [partner's name] because we have done so many courses with Fostering and [inaudible] even when I got [name of SGO child] I went to courses, I did it myself, I paid for these myself, to find out what is the difference between a child who has ADHD that's naughty and the condition, but now with Fostering, now I get it all free because we do all the courses, so when it comes to [SGO] meetings, I've done all of this, a lot of them haven't, they have taken on these children and I am thinking, that's trauma coming out, that child's got trauma, but they don't know that, they think the child is just being, misbehaving, but no, these children have got trauma, its exactly the same as the Foster children and that should be on the same level, these children should be treated exactly the same...(Extract 6, Ellen, Special Guardian)

Here, Ellen highlights the importance of training for Special Guardians in recognising certain behaviours linked to trauma. Having an understanding of trauma is vital for parents, guardians and teachers, in that it enables them to put the most appropriate interventions and support in place for the child, however, in Ellen's experience, it appears that not enough Special Guardians have that opportunity. Ellen also mentions how children under an SGO often have the same trauma as Foster children, which is echoed in the literature (Harwin et al., 2019a), and that they

should be supported equally, however, this is not the case. Drew further expressed feelings of vulnerability in relation to the disparity between support for Foster Carers and Special Guardians, saying:

> …it is a slightly odd feeling for me to think, that they [the Virtual School] wouldn't support you to the same degree as for a looked-after, and obviously I appreciate that looked-after children don't have another adult that can advocate for them in the same way that someone with PR [parental responsibility] supposedly would, but you can feel quite vulnerable as a parent because obviously, we want to have a good relationship with the school, we always try to be very considerate and compassionate you know, and we have to work quite hard to think about their needs, I don't see much coming back the other way, do you know what I mean, and not feeling like there's somebody else there that has got your back… (Extract 7, Drew, Special Guardian)

As is demonstrated by the extracts above, the disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship is highlighted, with many Special Guardians perceiving it to be an unfair difference, because their child had been through the same trauma and loss as a looked-after child, suggesting that they should be afforded the same support. Some felt that even Adoptive Parents were better supported than Special Guardians, in terms of training courses offered and statutory adoption leave of 52 weeks, creating a type of tiered, hierarchical system, with Drew in Extract 1 stating that Special Guardians are the "cheap option" and describes the disparity in financial support between Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians. Interestingly, in the DfE (2017) statutory guidance for local authorities in relation to Special Guardianship, it states that the local authority could consider it appropriate to make a contribution to things like alterations to the home. Special Guardians are means tested so it may have been that they would not have been eligible, however, it could be a lack of knowledge and information disseminating to the Special Guardians in relation to the support that they are entitled to. Although Ellen, in Extract 2 states that her children were able to access therapy through the SGO social worker, she gives a real sense of the difficulties she faces, stating "SGOs don't get the luxury of that, we have to fight for it".

Drew, in Extract 3, further mentions the disparity at school stating, "I think as a Special Guardian its quite tricky the difference between what looked-after and previously looked-after children get…and there isn't the same kind of seriousness

about considering the additional needs of having a complex, um, traumatic start to life. This extract also creates a sense of disempowerment of the Special Guardian, and that their child's needs may not be as 'serious' as a looked-after child, in a way de-valuing the traumatic experience that their child had. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) stated that involving parents and guardians is considered an essential aspect of effective education for children with SEND, however, this does not always happen as there are a number of aspects that parents/guardians and schools may disagree on, which could form a barrier to this happening. Due to the nature of the DfE (2018b) guidance, and the differences in the statutory duties between looked-after and previously looked-after children, it is reasonable to suggest that this may result in schools not engaging as much with Special Guardians as Foster Carers, and therefore may miss out on valuable opportunities to understand how to best support a child under Special Guardianship who has experienced trauma, by working in partnership with them, as they know their child best.

In addition to the disparities in relation to funding and schools, Lou, in Extract 4 and Riley, in Extract 5, raised the subject of training and support for them, to be able to support their children. Lou describes how she "harassed" the Social Workers until they sent her on training (although it was for Foster carers) and how she took her own initiative to set up her own group local to her, and Riley stated how she had to "fight" for certain things for her child. The DfE (2017) states that to ensure the continuance of the placement with the child and Special Guardian, assistance should be given, including training for the Special Guardian, and the local authority should consider similar services already being delivered, for example, adoption support services, and plan SGO support accordingly. Therefore, in terms of Lou, the local authority were fulfilling their statutory duty in providing training for her, although the fact that it was for Foster Carers could be perpetuating this idea of a tiered, hierarchical system and that Special Guardians are not valued in the same way, and therefore do not have their own SGO training.

In Extract 6, Ellen describes how beneficial the training was that she had when she was a Foster carer, and she reflects on other Special Guardians who have not had training, and how they cannot identify some of the behaviours their child is displaying, are due to trauma. Having an understanding of trauma is vital for parents, guardians and teachers, in that it enables them to put the most appropriate

interventions and support in place for the child, however, in Ellen's experience, it appears that not enough Special Guardians have been afforded the opportunity of training. Simmonds et al.'s (2019) study found that training for prospective Special Guardians was "almost non-existent" and there was no requirement for training or preparation, like with Adoption or Fostering (p.9). Ellen also mentions how children under an SGO often have the same trauma as Foster children, which is echoed in the literature (Harwin et al., 2019a), and that they should be supported equally, however, this is not the case.

Drew, in Extract 7, further expressed feelings of vulnerability in relation to the disparity between support for Foster Carers and Special Guardians stating "it is a slightly odd feeling for me to think, that they [the VS] wouldn't support you to the same degree as for a looked-after…but you can feel quite vulnerable as a parent". In this extract, there is almost the feeling of disbelief that the VS no longer supports them to the same level as when the child was in care. Overall, in this section, words like 'harassed' and 'fight' give a real sense that Special Guardians have to keep persisting to be provided the support that they and their child needs. Due to the differences in relation to the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance and the support that looked-after and previously looked-after children are provided, could this unwittingly be creating a misconception that previously looked-after children require less support after being permanently placed in a stable home, now that they have a guardian to advocate for them. Could this misconception be a maintaining factor and creating a barrier to previously looked-after children being provided the support that they need?

ii. family relationships

This subtheme relates to the fact that all the Special Guardians highlighted the complexity of family relationships that they needed to navigate in relation to the SGO, and contact that they were expected to maintain with family members, with Lou and Sam explaining:

> … I will email [the school], if he's seen mum and he's not coping with that, I will email the school so the teacher knows that this is not going to be a good week for you, you know, yeah, so she can work around that…I can see why it splits families… (Extract 1, Lou, Special Guardian)

…because, it is quite a complex setup, and although they can be resilient we know that they are going to have to deal with things a lot differently to children who don't have an SGO…Although we enjoyed it, being new parents under an SGO, I thought that we were fully equipped, but um, I don't want to say baggage that comes with an SGO, but it is the only way I can describe it, the complications that came with it. You know, we wanted to start a family and were so excited, but it was also really difficult and really challenging and really stressful, you know, mentally exhausting for us when we are trying to protect and you know, look after these girls but also raise a family, and look after ourselves and the impact we had from the birth mother and extended family members was just, not great…(Extract 2, Sam, Special Guardian)

In the extract above, Lou describes the emotional difficulties that her child faces after seeing his birth mother and how this will impact his behaviour at school for the week to come, and Sam states that the impact on them is "mentally exhausting" in terms of having contact with the birth mother and extended family.

Ellen views the contact with birth parents as positive, however, she herself is not able to allow contact with her own birth child and her children under SGO [her grandchildren], demonstrating further complexities to these families and relationships:

Some are lucky and they do see their parents. Mine don't because of the circumstances, I couldn't let them see. Foster children again, they get it at contact centres…we don't get that, we aren't privileged to a contact centre. We have to do all the arranging if they want to see their parents…there is no safety net for our children… (Extract 3, Ellen, Special Guardian)

In the extract above, there is once again this sense of the tiered, hierarchical system in relation to being Foster carers and Special Guardians, with Ellen saying that they are not 'privileged' and that there is no 'safety net' for them. Similarly, Drew said:

...um, but I know people whose relationship has broken down, whose child has, um, you know, maybe no one even thought of…other conditions where their behaviour is really, maybe they weren't aware that the child they were going to be looking after would have any need to be parented differently and they are really struggling, with quite extreme behaviours and there isn't that backup [from the VS] (Extract 4, Drew, Special Guardian)

Drew echoes Ellen's views in relation to the lack of support for their SGO children in comparison to Foster children, and alludes to the fact that family relationships have broken down because of a lack of preparation or understanding of the potential needs of these children and that the lack of support from the VS could result in a placement breakdown and the child going back into care. Not only was it

felt that support was important for Special Guardians, but for their biological children still living at home, with Lou suggesting:

> …it would be good if they had support [therapy] for my children, because obviously we've taken in two traumatised children into our home and I knew it would have an effect on all of us, but I didn't realise quite how much… so I've had to change my parenting style for my children as well as the boys, which is quite confusing you know, all of a sudden you have got all these extra people in the house and everything's different and the rules aren't the same…(Extract 5, Lou, Special Guardian)

As the extracts above demonstrate, all the Special Guardians highlighted the complexities of family relationships. The DfE (2017) states that SGOs were created due to the need for an alternative legal status for children that offered more security than long-term fostering, without severing legal ties from their birth family, like when adopted. This was due in part to research that found a significant group of children who chose not to make a permanent legal break from their birth parents (Selwyn & Sturgess, 2002). Perry (2009) argues that social connectedness is a protective factor against neglect, abuse or trauma, but state that when you remove a child from an abusive home, you may also remove them from their safe social network of extended family and school, and new, unfamiliar adults, can activate the stress-response system and making them more symptomatic and less able to benefit from efforts to comfort and support them. While Special Guardianship appears to be beneficial in terms of maintaining social connectedness and attachments with their birth parents, Perry (2009) does also suggest that if a child continues to have an unpredictable family life, things may not improve, even with evidence-based therapy. This further highlights the complexity of those family relationships and the impact that it may have on them.

In Extract 1 above, Lou describes the emotional difficulties that her child faces after seeing his birth mother and how this will impact his behaviour at school for the week to come. The researcher suggests, given the literature in relation to attachment theory, that this might be a result of the recurring loss of their primary attachment figure during each visit, and the resulting trauma that the child, family and school have to manage. Lou further states how she can understand how this can split families, something that is echoed by Sam in Extract 2, who states that the complications with not only the birth mother, but extended family had been difficult.

These experiences are confirmed by the literature, where Special Guardians in Wade et al.'s (2014) study expressed concerns in relation to the tensions created within the family, and Hingley-Jones et al., (2020), whose research in relation to Grandparent Special Guardians found that managing difficult relationships and contact arrangements was an ongoing challenge for them. Similarly, Ellen, in Extract 3, is not able to allow contact with her own birth child and her children under SGO [her grandchildren], further highlighting the complexities of these family relationships.

Additionally, in Extract 3, there is once again this sense of the tiered, hierarchical system in relation to being Foster carers and Special Guardians, with Ellen saying that they are not 'privileged' and that there is no 'safety net' for them. Drew echoes Ellen's views in relation to the lack of support for their SGO children in comparison to Foster children, stating that "…they are really struggling, with quite extreme behaviours and there isn't that backup [from the VS]" and alludes to the fact that family relationships have broken down because of a lack of preparation or understanding of the potential needs of these children and that the lack of support from the VS could result in a placement breakdown and the child going back into care. Not only was if felt that support was important for Special Guardians, but for their biological children too, still living at home, with Lou stating in Extract 5, "obviously we've taken in two traumatised children into our home and I knew it would have an effect on all of us, but I didn't realise quite how much…".   This experience was echoed in the literature, where Wade et al.'s (2014) study of Special Guardians found that the impact on children already in the home and their needs, also needed to be carefully considered.

These extracts above highlight the difficulties that some Special Guardians face in terms of their relationships with their families, and how they feel they are not supported adequately enough, in comparison to Foster carers. Although it is important to keep those attachments and social connectedness with birth parents, it can result in children becoming dysregulated and school staff need to be made aware of the impact that this can have on a child under Special Guardianship, in terms of temporary loss of attachment figure and the potential trauma of frequently reliving these losses. Perry (2009) recommends teacher training in relation to trauma, because developing their use of trauma-informed working can positively impact their behaviour management approach when working with children who have

experienced trauma. This is where the importance of attachment aware schools training and trauma-informed practice is vital, to provide these children with the support that they need.

Furthermore, for the family, Perry (2009) suggests co-therapeutic activities where both parent/caregiver and child can engage in mutually beneficial services. Similarly, Hughes' (2014) Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), a relationship-based therapy focussing on empathy and unconditional positive regard, aims to heal the complex psychological difficulties of looked-after and previously looked-after children. DPP can support children who have been abused or neglected in the early years within their birth families, by helping them to recover from the trauma and experience secure attachments within their current family, with Hughes (2014) stating "a therapeutic relationship that is modelled on the principles of attachment and intersubjective relationships is likely to be a good formulation for meeting the therapeutic needs of these children" (p. 4). The aims of DDP are to support both the child and caregiver to feel safe to enter into interactions with the therapist and each other. This enhances attachment security while supporting the child to process, connect and make sense of their experiences, helping them regulate their emotions.

While the family relationships are complex for Special Guardians, from the literature in relation to attachment and trauma, it would appear that it is those relationships and connectedness that are also vitally important in supporting these children under an SGO. Additionally, as it has been highlighted in the previous sections, attachment and trauma training and therapy/counselling, are also vital facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and academic attainment.

Summary of findings

This section considers the implications of the findings relating to the research questions and the existing literature, with critical reflections on the limitations of this research study, proposals for possible future research, recommendations and what the EP's role in this area could be.

At the time of this study, as far as the researcher is aware, there has been no study in relation to the (DfE, 2018b) statutory guidance and giving voice to Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, to ascertain their views of the guidance and how to support the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. This research therefore contributes to the gap in the literature in relation to the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children. The four research questions will now be answered in turn, to highlight those barriers and facilitators. The Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' research questions have been merged and answered jointly, due to their overlap, and to reduce repetition.

Research Question 1. What do Designated Teachers understand about their new statutory role in supporting previously looked-after children?

The Designated Teachers who participated in this research had a good understanding of their statutory duty to support previously looked-after children, perceiving the DfE (2018b) guidance to be necessary, to raise the profile of these children and ensure that they were held in mind. However, the Designated Teachers perceive that the statutory guidance does not go far enough to secure the necessary support for them and previously looked-after children, it is "woolly" and not well defined, and is not specific enough, suggesting that the guidance needs some amending to provide more consistent direction, to not leave it open to interpretation. It would be reasonable to suggest that the non-specificity of the guidance itself could be a barrier and maintaining factor in the inconsistent support for previously looked-after children.

Research Question 2. What are Designated Teachers' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators in relation to supporting previously looked-after children's educational achievement and emotional wellbeing?

Barriers

- Designated Teachers perceived that the enduring impact of trauma and attachment difficulties on previously looked-after children, was creating a barrier and maintaining factor in relation to their low academic attainment.

- They highlighted the barrier that they experienced in attempting to provide counselling and therapy, and expressed how difficult it was to access those services for previously looked-after children in comparison to looked-after children.

- The Designated Teachers perceived that the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance was not as rigorous as it could be, identifying a barrier to the guidance being successfully and consistently implemented.

- They perceived that the DfE (2018b) guidance was ill defined for previously looked-after children in comparison to looked-after children and did not make Designated Teachers accountable for the support that they were providing previously looked-after children, as it does with looked-after children. They therefore felt there was a lack of monitoring to ensure best practice across schools, creating a barrier to previously looked-after children receiving the high quality, consistent support they need.

Facilitators

- The Designated Teachers perceived therapy or counselling to be a facilitator to providing the necessary support for previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and as a result, this would enable the children to focus on learning and to achieve better results.

- They understood the importance of an attachment figure at school and how that relationship can be a facilitator to supporting previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment.

- The Designated Teachers suggested that sharing ideas and resources with other Designated Teachers would be a facilitator to supporting previously looked-after children, to enable more consistent practice and to improve the support that is provided for them.

Research Questions 3 and 4. What are the Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children at school?

Barriers

- Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceived that trauma and attachment difficulties had an enduring impact on previously looked-after children and was creating a barrier in relation to them achieving higher academic levels.

- They identified that they had experienced barriers in relation to accessing and providing counselling and therapy for their children.

- Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceived the inconsistency in relation to the implementation of the DfE (2018b) guidance across schools in the LA, was a barrier to supporting previously looked-after children, with one Special Guardian (whose child has been negatively impacted by the inconsistent support that they have received), changing their child's school.

- Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians felt that the school acting as a gatekeeper to the PP+ fund was creating a barrier to the support that they believed their child needed, and highlighted that there was not collaborative involvement in deciding how the money would be spent.

- They perceived that schools interpret the DfE (2018b) guidance and that there is not the same seriousness about considering the needs of previously looked-after children and how to support them. This interpretation could be a barrier to the "excellent practice" that the DfE (2018b) guidance states is happening at some schools, and it could be a maintaining factor in schools not providing consistently good support.

- Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians felt that school staff did not truly understand trauma and attachment difficulties, suggesting that this is a barrier to their children being provided the best support they require. It appears that there is not only inconsistency with individual schools and training in relation to trauma and attachment difficulties, but inconsistency with the ITT that teachers receive, causing a barrier to excellent practice and being a maintaining factor in support for previously looked-after children not being universal.

Facilitators

- All Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians perceived therapy or counselling to be a facilitator to providing the necessary support for their children's emotional wellbeing and as a result, this would enable their children to focus on learning and to achieve better results.

- They understood that an attachment figure at school was important for their child, and how that relationship can be a facilitator to supporting their children's emotional wellbeing and educational attainment.

- Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians felt that PP+ funding was a facilitator to gain the support for their child's needs at school.

- They believed that attachment and trauma training are vital facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and academic attainment.

Additionally, all the participants perceived that the DfE (2018b) guidance should be more holistic and focus on emotional wellbeing and mental health first. They all understood that the majority of children who are previously looked-after have often experienced the same trauma as children who are looked-after, however, there is the sense that once a child is no longer in care, that they do not need continued support, especially in relation to mental health. The enduring impact of trauma and attachment was apparent to the participants, creating a barrier and maintaining factor in relation to low academic attainment. All participants perceived therapy or counselling to be a facilitator to providing the necessary support for previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing and as a result, this would enable the children to focus on learning and to achieve better results. Although this finding was not unexpected to the researcher, due to the literature on this subject, it could be said that because this was a self-selected sample of participants, who all appeared to be advocating for their children, they have a better understanding of supporting these children's needs and what would be beneficial for them. What was surprising was how difficult the participants found it was to access therapeutic support in comparison to looked-after children, either having to 'fight' for it through the LA, to access the ASF, or having to pay privately. What did not become a theme but was noted during interviews and data analysis was that some Special Guardian

participants were not aware that they could access the fund because it is called the ASF. In 2019, the DfE pledged a £45 million boost to the ASF, which is more than double the original investment, highlighting the government's determination to support previously looked-after children (DfE, 2019b), however, this research highlights the fact that is not a simple process, and perhaps there needs to be a more accessible means for Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians to secure the therapeutic support that their children need.

Gore Langton (2017) stated that EP research into previously looked-after children would be valuable in light of the release of the DfE (2018a; 2018b) statutory guidance and Lewis-Cole (2019) suggests that with the emerging role of Designated Teachers and previously looked-after children, following the DfE (2018a & 2018b) guidance, further research could explore their views. As far as the researcher is aware, no such research has been carried out so far and it was considered important to gather the Designated Teachers' views, because they are the professionals who will be implementing the guidance, and therefore consulting them is vital to ensure that the document is fit for purpose, as Hammersley (2000) states, government guidance is usually not done in consultation with the frontline staff who actually carry out the work. The ASGLB did gather the views of VSHs in relation to the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance but to date, have not consulted with Designated Teachers in relation to the DfE (2018b) guidance and therefore, this research provides an original contribution to the literature in relation to Designated Teachers' views of the guidance and how to better support previously looked-after children.

Recommendations

The EP role

From this research, it is apparent that EPs can play a vital role in supporting schools to support previously looked-after children. Kelly (2017) argues that since the 1970s there has been a significant shift in EPs views that were focussed on a child-deficit model to nowadays, where the focus for service delivery is also based on systemic thinking. One model of systems thinking for interventions and training that an EP can provide is supported by the idea of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, cited in Kelly, 2017). For example, the EP considers the microsystem (the classroom); the mesosystem (interactions between family and

multi-professional agencies); the exosystem (social and DfE policies); the macrosystem (societal and cultural values) and the chronosystem (changes over time) and their impact upon each other, and how the EP can support the previously looked-after child and all the systems around them to improve outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to PAC-UK (2014) fifty per cent of adopted children needed educational psychology support, and EPs understand the complex impact of past adverse experiences (Dunstan, 2010). Not only could EPs carry out individual work with these children, facilitating the use of therapeutic techniques with them to support their mental health and wellbeing, but they could liaise with their families to support them and signpost to available services that the LA offer (taking into account the micro- and meso-systems). For example, Gore Langton (2017) states that EPs are well positioned to provide support as they are part of the LA but seen as independent from Social Services, with whom some families have had conflicts and are reluctant to seek help from, due to concerns of putting their child's placement at risk. The Scottish Executive (2002, as cited in Gore Langton, 2017) suggests that EPs could support outcomes for previously looked-after children through consultations with parents and guardians, to discuss their concerns, and to support them through video feedback interventions, such as Video Interaction Guidance (VIG), where necessary. Additionally, EPs could carry out individual work with Designated Teachers, to support them through supervision and mentoring (Ramoutar, 2020).

The EP role could also be more whole school in nature, as EPs are well placed to support schools to improve their knowledge about previously looked-after children's outcomes and explore attachment-aware practice (Gore Langton, 2017). The Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) found that approximately four out of five adopted children in their survey needed more educational support than their peers and seventy-nine per cent of their participants agreed that their child's adverse early experiences have impacted on their ability to cope academically, and eighty-six per cent agreed that they have impacted on their ability to cope socially and emotionally. Similarly, in the ASGLB minutes from November 2021, it stated that sixty-two per cent of Special Guardians believe their children have physical and mental health needs with only a third have a formal diagnosis, and of those diagnosed, thirty-eight per cent had attachment disorder. It is therefore vital for EPs to raise awareness

about trauma and attachment difficulties in schools (Furnivall et al., 2012). In this LA, EPs are already delivering Attachment Aware and Trauma-informed Practice 'Train the Trainer' courses with SENCos, Designated Teachers and Senior Leadership Teams, however, the participants of this research felt that there was still not a true understanding of Attachment and Trauma. This was a very small sample and may not be the case across the Local Authority, but perhaps EPs could support schools further by reviewing the schools' practice to ensure that attachment aware and trauma-informed practice are embedded in these schools (taking into account the exo- and macro-systems). This is important because once this practice is truly embedded in the school, there should be a shift in the emotional wellbeing of these children over time (the chronosystem).

Additionally, it is not only the wellbeing and resilience of the previously looked-after children that EPs could support. Due to the lack of training at ITT level, and some teachers not having an understanding of how to support children with trauma and attachment difficulties, 'Work Discussion Groups' (Geddes, 2006) for teachers that "models much of the secure Attachment characteristics based on trust, sensitivity and containment of anxiety" (p.135) could be facilitated by an EP, to support the teachers through difficult and sensitive issues and provide alternative perspectives. Furthermore, Edwards (2016) discusses the emotional labour experienced by teachers and how this can impact their emotional wellbeing. Edwards (2016) suggests that EPs could offer consultations to teachers regarding emotional management during child disclosures, by developing response scripts, and further, exploring the provision of reflective spaces for teachers to support their understanding of how previously looked-after children's behaviour can impact on their emotions. Interestingly, research has found that when an emphasis is placed on the emotional wellbeing of all members of the school community, it leads to better outcomes for staff, pupil attendance, attainment and positive home-school relationships (Banerjee et al., 2014).

Policy Changes

It is acknowledged that this research is small scale and that more views would need to be gathered to make these findings generalisable, or to have any impact on

policy changes, however, it does highlight a number of issues that should be considered.

Many Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians considered that they should have more say in relation to how PP+ should be spent on their child. The DfE (2018b) statutory guidance states that parents and guardians should be involved in discussions about how the PP+ is spent, however, a number of parents and guardians stated that even when they did have discussions with the school, their suggestions were overruled, and they were informed that the money is not ringfenced. Interestingly, the recent Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) survey recommends the introduction of ringfenced, multi-year government funding for adoption support. This does not relate specifically to PP+, however, it would be reasonable to suggest that PP+ should be ringfenced, as these Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians know their child best, and this could be a facilitator to more targeted support at school for their child.

All Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians in this research believed that even though their schools had some training in relation to attachment and trauma, they felt that they did not truly understand the enduring and far-reaching impact that this can have on previously looked-after children. A number of participants were teachers and reflected on the fact that they received no training in relation to attachment and trauma during their initial teacher training, and how they did not understand how to support previously looked-after children in their class. Best et al.'s (2021) adoption study suggested early childhood trauma training should be included in initial teacher training and similarly, the Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) stated that from initial teacher training and further, educational professionals should be trained (and resourced through targeted funding) to support the needs of previously looked-after children and that training should include an understanding of attachment disorder. This research therefore contributes to, and further supports Best et al., (2021) and the Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) recommendations, and it would be reasonable to suggest that attachment and trauma should be a compulsory module on initial teacher training, so that newly qualified teachers are able to understand the needs of previously looked-after children and how to support them.

The VS

The Designated Teachers stated that they would like Cluster meetings, specifically for previously looked-after children, to improve consistency in following the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance, where good practice is shared, to ensure better outcomes for previously looked-after children, both academically and emotionally. The VS already facilitates meetings and training with the Designated Teachers, and the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance states that due to the fact that previously looked-after children often have comparable difficulties and challenges to looked-after children, it is possible to incorporate supporting and meeting the needs of previously looked-after children during meetings and training days for looked-after children. However, due to the consensus amongst the participants in this research, that there should be parity in support for previously looked-after children, it would be reasonable to suggest that the VS could facilitate and support Cluster meetings with Designated Teachers, specifically for previously looked-after children, so they are afforded the time and attention that they deserve.

The majority of Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians stated that the DfE (2018b) statutory guidance was not widely known about and that they were often informing new Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians about the statutory duty that the Designated Teacher has in supporting their child. They also felt that there was no consistency across schools as to how the DfE (2018b) guidance was being implemented. The VS has responsibility in ensuring that schools are supporting looked-after children, in terms of their PEP, and monitor these with schools, however, they have no such responsibility for previously looked-after children. This was highlighted by the Designated Teacher participants in this research, and this could be causing a barrier to the consistent support that previously looked-after children receive. Perhaps, along with the auditing of PEPs for looked-after children, the VS could also scrutinise the paperwork that Designated Teachers have created to document the support that they have in place for previously looked-after children, to ensure consistency and accountability. Taking it even further, one Designated Teacher suggested that perhaps previously looked-after children should also have annually regulated PEPs. This was echoed by Best et al.'s (2021) study, therefore adding credibility and weight to the significance of this research.

All Special Guardians mentioned the disparity between Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship, with many perceiving it to be an unfair difference, due to the fact that their child had been through the same trauma and loss as a looked-after child, and feeling like they should be afforded the same support. Simmonds et al.'s (2019) review of Special Guardianship found that preparation for potential Special Guardians was "almost non-existent" and "ad hoc" (p.9) and there was no requirement to ensure training is available, as with adoption or fostering. Simmonds et al.'s (2019) recommendations included ensuring potential Special Guardians complete preparation and training to an approved statutory minimum. Similarly, the Special Guardians in this research felt that they should be provided more training, as they thought they had a lack of understanding of what impact trauma and attachment difficulties would have on their child and on their whole family. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature in relation to this issue, highlighting and validating their perceptions and experiences that they do not feel prepared or have the training to support these children. Some 'harassed' the Special Guardianship Social Worker and were offered Foster Carer training and others made their own enquiries into courses that they felt they would benefit from. The DfE (2017) states that to ensure the continuance of the placement with the child and Special Guardian, assistance should be given, including training for the Special Guardian, and the LA should consider similar services already being delivered, for example, adoption support services, and plan SGO support accordingly. Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that having access to the same training that Foster Carers or Adoptive Parents are offered, as a matter of course, would be a facilitator to ensure better support for the child at home and in turn, reduce the potential for placement breakdowns.

A further dimension to this hierarchical system (which was highlighted while recruiting participants for this research) is that if a child under Special Guardianship has not been in the Care system prior to being under an SGO, they are not eligible for PP+ or to access the ASF. This would appear to be a major flaw in the system, and even though my participants all had children who were previously looked-after, to be covered by the DfE (2018b) guidance, it was felt that this needed to be highlighted. It is acknowledged that you would want as little placement disruption for the child as possible due to the detrimental impact that it can have on educational

attainment (NICE, 2017) and mental health (DfE, 2012), however, these children then appear to be penalised for this, even though it is highly likely that they would have experienced trauma and loss and have attachment difficulties. Similarly, Ramoutar (2020) proposes that the recognised impact of early childhood trauma that these children experience, whether they have been looked-after in care or not, should be reason enough for the government to ensure that the necessary resources are accessible to all special guardians equally. Interestingly, the DfE (2017) state that "It is important that children who are not (or were not) looked after are not unfairly disadvantaged by this approach. In many cases the only reason that the child is not looked after is that relatives stepped in quickly to take on the responsibility for the child when a parent could no longer do so" (p.17), however, in reality, it appears that this is not the case, as they are not eligible for either PP+ or the ASF. Ramoutar (2020) goes further to state that a review of the government policy should take place, to extend the statutory duty to support children under special guardianship who do not have previous care experience, to ensure that they have equal status.

This research, it is felt, is particularly important in relation to Special Guardians. There is a dearth of research and literature in relation to their experiences and even though this was a small sample size, it was thought vital to give them a voice to express their frustrations and difficulties. This research contributes to creating a richer picture of Special Guardianship families and their experiences, and strengthens the understanding of the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children.

Limitations of this research

It must be acknowledged that this research involves a small, self-selected sample of participants in one East Anglian County and therefore cannot be generalised to the rest of the England, as it is likely that LAs will provide services in different ways. However, the views, experiences and perceptions of the participants is quite often supported by the literature, and it would therefore be reasonable to suggest that dissemination of the findings to this LA would be valuable, to highlight the barriers and facilitators to the emotional wellbeing and educational attainment of previously looked-after children.

Future research

Essential future research would be to gather previously looked-after children's views in relation to their emotional wellbeing and educational attainment. Gore Langton (2017) stated that there is a paucity of research into previously looked-after children's own views about their educational experiences and needs and that there is scope to carry out a study with the children as co-researchers. This is echoed by a more recent critical review of research into post-adoption by Stother et al. (2019) who found that adoptive children's voices are conspicuously absent from the research. Further research could extend EPs' skills and knowledge to support the people who live and work with previously looked-after children, in relation to the DfE (2018a; 2018b) statutory guidance to ensure better outcomes for previously looked-after children, both academically and emotionally.

As was highlighted in the Literature Review, there have been numerous amendments to policies to improve the support provided to previously looked-after children and their families. However, at the time of writing this, there has been no rigorous policy evaluation since the Selwyn Report (2014), to ascertain whether policy change has had a positive impact in supporting previously looked-after children and their families, and therefore, this would be also be an important topic for future research.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to ascertain Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children's educational achievement and emotional wellbeing, in addition to Designated Teachers' understanding of their new statutory role relating to the DfE (2018b) guidance, in supporting previously looked-after children. The key theme from the data, which was highlighted across all three participant groups was 'Trauma and attachment difficulties'. The participants all understood the enduring impact of trauma and attachment difficulties on previously looked-after children and felt that good mental health (including support in the form of counselling or therapy) should be the primary focus for these children, and consequently, their academic attainment will improve.

This research has highlighted the numerous barriers and facilitators to supporting previously looked-after children. In interviewing the participants, it has given me the utmost respect for them as I have gained a real insight into the difficulties that they face in trying to provide the best possible care and provision they can for these previously looked-after children, and it is hoped that they will continue to "fight" for them and support them.

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Part Three: Reflective Chapter

Reflection is vitally important as a trainee EP, as it supports me to improve my performance and skills. This in turn leads to better practice and future outcomes for the children and young people that I work with (as well as other service users), and employing a reflective model is an effective way to engage with the reflective process. Gibbs (1988) Reflective Cycle supported my thinking throughout my research journey, reflecting on what I was feeling, what was good and bad about the experience, what sense I could make of the experience and what alternatives I had and what I could do better, if/when the experience happened again.

Initial stages

The idea for my research proposal was formulated following university sessions, first-hand experiences as a trainee, and my own reading and reflections on the educational attainment and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children. Both my experiences during my undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Studies and working in a nursery, were fundamental for me to learn about Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1982). While working in the baby and toddler rooms, I could observe parent/carer interactions at drop-off and pick-up times, but also observe secondary attachments developing with staff during the day. My interest in attachment continued while working in schools as a LSA and learning more about children with SEMH and attachment difficulties. For my MSc Psychology dissertation, and I interviewed Educational Psychologists to gain their perceptions of Nurture Groups (NGs), which were developed by the Educational Psychologist, Marjorie Boxall (2002, 2010) with a theoretical foundation based on the seminal work of John Bowlby's (1969; 1973; 1982) Attachment Theory, and secure attachment relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978). NGs are an intervention within a mainstream school, for children with SEMH, who have missed out on vital nurturing, attachment experiences with their primary caregiver (Boxall, 2002).

In Year 1 of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (EdPsyD), I wrote an essay in relation to the historical context of looked-after children, examining various policies over time. My essay highlighted that low educational attainment of looked-after children has been at the forefront of policy since the Labour government came

into power in 1997 (Norwich et al., 2010), however, it was worrying that this has not changed following successive governments' attempts to raise attainment.

During a university lecture in Year 1, with a Senior Specialist EP for looked-after children, I was disheartened to see further statistics that the attainment gaps between looked-after children and those not in care has not begun to close as much as it should, if at all. Additionally, the attainment gap between previously looked-after children and those not in care, although smaller, was still unacceptable. I undertook further reading in relation to previously looked-after children and found there was substantially less research in relation to their continuing difficulties faced in their permanent placements in relation to attachment difficulties and educational attainment.

While on placement in Year 1, I was given the opportunity to attend a meeting with Senior EPs to observe them developing their trauma-informed practice training package, which was aimed to be delivered to all schools within the LA. This expanded my knowledge in relation to attachment but also how to better support children who have experienced trauma. I learned about, amongst others, the work of Dr Dan Hughes and PACE (Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy), Dr Karen Treisman and her trauma informed work, and Dr Stuart Shanker on reframing behaviour, and I knew how beneficial this training would be.

Towards the end of Year 1, I attended Attachment Aware school training for SENCos and Designated Teachers, delivered by the Senior EP specialising in Children in Care and Post Adoption. She herself was an adoptive parent and was passionate about the subject. After the training, we discussed the DfE (2018b) guidance in relation to the new statutory duty of the Designated Teacher supporting previously looked-after children and the enduring difficulties that previously looked-after children face, even after being permanently placed, and a general lack of understanding and support for them. This discussion prompted me to discuss my proposed research with my university Tutor and the Principal EP to ensure that it was a LA priority, which it was.

Literature review

When conducting my literature review, a vital part in identifying gaps in the research, it became apparent that there was a paucity of research in relation to

gaining Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' views in relation to supporting previously looked-after children, which was confirmed by Berridge and Saunders (2009), Brown et al., (2017), Simmonds et al., (2019) and Best et al., (2021) which is concerning, because studies suggest that previously looked-after children align closer to looked-after children in relation to educational attainment and emotional wellbeing than non-looked-after children (DfE, 2020).

There was a dearth of research in relation to Special Guardians' experiences compared to Adoptive Parents (Simmonds et al., 2019), and they are anecdotally a hard-to-reach group, perhaps explaining this paucity. Interestingly, the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) was set up in 2014 to provide leadership and facilitate improvements in performance for adoption, and in 2018 the Board became the Adoption *and* Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), to now cover previously looked-after children subject to special guardianship orders. This appears to be a positive shift for supporting Special Guardianship, although their views in terms of research, was still lacking.

At the time of my literature review, I was also unable to find any research exploring Designated Teachers perspectives in relation to the DfE (2018b) guidance. This could be because the guidance is still relatively new, however, I did find that the ASGLB had asked VSHs for their views in relation to the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance, but did not consult with Designated Teachers for their views on the DfE (2018b) guidance. When reviewing a timeline of policies and guidelines to support previously looked-after children, with the numerous amendments, it was reassuring to know that the government was now more seriously considering the support it had in place, by making it a statutory duty in the DfE (2018b) guidance, but equally concerning because it would not have been necessary if there was adequate support.

Research design

During my MSc Psychology, I learned about epistemology and ontology and qualitative and quantitative research designs, having the opportunity to submit assignments that were both quantitative (using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS]) and qualitative (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA]). For my dissertation, I felt that my position aligned more with a constructionist

paradigm and I carried out qualitative data analysis, using semi-structured interviews and TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, when learning more about epistemology and ontology during our Year 1 EdPsyD university sessions, I learned about critical realism and felt that a critical realist position aligned more with my views, as I felt that it sat in-between realism and relativism, as the literature describes, for example, a realist believes that the data will provide an understanding of true, undistorted experiences and representations, and that "people's words provide direct access to reality" (Terry et al., 2017, p.21). A relativist, however, would argue that there are no "pure experiences" (Willig, 2013, p.11) and that the data gathered is socially constructed by language/discourse (Burr, 2015). Critical realism can be seen as creating a methodological space in-between positivism and interpretivism (Mingers, 2004), with a critical realist arguing that "reality is 'out there' but access to it is always mediated by socio-cultural meanings" (Terry et al., 2017, p.21).

Considering the aim of this research is to explore Designated Teachers', Adoptive Parents' and Special Guardians' views and perceptions in relation to supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children, and after examining the literature in relation to epistemology (Joffe, 2012; Willig, 2013), a critical realist epistemological position was taken. This is because it was considered the most appropriate method to extract relevant meaning, ascertain underlying structures and mechanisms maintaining the issues and gaining the participants' perceptions from the data, unpicking "what it is that is working for some people in some contexts" (Matthews, 2010, p.18).

Data Collection

In considering what data collection method was most appropriate, I found that the majority of research in relation to Adoptive Parents was gathered through questionnaire data and reviews of casefiles, and as I stated above, there was an overall paucity of research in relation to Special Guardians and their experiences (Hingley-Jones et al., 2019). It was felt that gathering their views through either focus groups or interviews would be extremely valuable to give them a real voice for their experiences and truly listening to them and learning about the facilitators and barriers that their children have faced. I did wonder, because the majority of research that had been carried out, was either through surveys or reviews of casefiles, and

not interviews, that it reflected the possible difficulties that researchers have experienced in trying to recruit a substantial sample of Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians for interviews.

In relation to Designated Teachers, it was felt that interviewing them would also be most appropriate, as this may give them a sense of agency because in reality, government guidance is usually not done in consultation with the frontline staff who actually carry out the work (Hammersley, 2000). Interestingly, the ASGLB asked VSHs for their views in relation to the DfE (2018a) statutory guidance but did not consult with Designated Teachers (DfE, 2018b), the ones who are directly implementing the guidance with children and young people. As Hammersley (2000) states, qualitative educational research can be valuable in talking about the complex and difficult role that teachers have, and it can remind policy makers that what they see as an improvement is not always met with consensus as there will be a number of different perspectives. I therefore felt that semi-structured interviews were deemed the best method to understand these perspectives.

Initially, I did consider one focus group with Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, however, after feedback from a university session, where I presented my research proposal, separate focus groups of Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians were suggested by the research tutors and peers, as they have different needs. Focus groups typically consist of participants who have knowledge about the specific topic (Bell, 2005) and Denscombe (2010) states that one-to-one interviews can be disadvantageous because the researcher is limited to one point of view, and therefore including more participants means the data is more representative. Anecdotally, Adoptive Parents would be more likely to engage and therefore there would be a number of participants, which also meant that a focus group would be less time consuming than individual interviews. I did consider possibly recruiting Adoptive Parents through the support groups that are held by EPs in the LA, however, when discussing my recruitment further with my tutor, they felt that the Adoptive Parents may feel obliged to consent to participate because the support groups are run by EPs, and therefore I should consider a more neutral way of recruitment. Additionally, when submitting my Ethics form to the University, they felt that discussing this topic could be emotive and there may be issues in relation to confidentiality regarding their children, the schools they attend and the Designated

Teachers. As a result, Adoptive Parents were recruited through the Post Adoption Team link person, via email for expressions of interest, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with them.

I decided to interview Special Guardians as I was told that they are harder to engage and therefore, individual interviews would give them more flexibility in relation to when and where they could be interviewed, rather than a focus group with a fixed time and place, and I hoped that it would make them more likely to participate. When recruiting Special Guardians, I was asked by the SGO link person about whether the participants' children needed to be previously looked-after (which they did, because the guidance is for previously looked-after children), however, up until then, I had not considered the distinction of SGO children who had not been in care and those who had. The SGO link person told me that if they have not been in care, then they are not entitled to the PP+ or the ASF, which I feel is a fundamental flaw in the system as these children would have experienced the same trauma and attachment difficulties as previously looked-after children, albeit not had as many disruptions to their housing or schooling. I felt that even though these children were not part of my thesis, that they needed to be highlighted as I firmly believe that they deserve the same support.

Additionally, Special Guardians were a hard-to-reach group in relation to my recruitment. I initially only had one Special Guardian participant after the SGO link person emailed my request for participants to guardians with previously looked-after children in primary and secondary school, so I asked the SGO link person to resend my request for participants. This time I had four participants respond, although, one of the Special Guardians had children in nursery, not yet in primary school. Because this is such a hard-to-reach group and because of the paucity of research in relation to their experiences, I decided that it was important for me to include this Special Guardian who had volunteered to participate, to include their voice which they obviously wanted to be heard, and to add value to the research by gathering as many views as I could.

When reflecting on not having a pilot, I do regret it, because when interviewing my first Designated Teacher, they appeared not to understand one of the questions, which I then tried to rephrase, and I am still not sure they fully

understood. I had decided not to do a pilot as I was feeling constrained with time limits to try to interview my participants before the summer holidays so that I could transcribe and begin to analyse the data when schools were shut and placement would be quieter. If any trainee EP would ask me now for advice, I would definitely encourage them to do a pilot.

At times, I was conscious of the dual role of being a trainee EP on placement with a LA and a Researcher. There were times where I wanted to support the participants by almost having an anonymous consultation/problem solving clinic with them, but instead, I needed to maintain my researcher, data gathering role. I did signpost participants to their respective LA support teams, however, I guess I felt like I could have done more in an trainee EP capacity. Although a positive was at the end of one interview where one Special Guardian felt that the interview had been cathartic for her as she had not been given this type of opportunity before, where she could freely express her views as she did.

I also felt that the participants were 'messy' as there was overlap with different circumstances, for example, Designated Teachers being Adoptive Parents, Adoptive Parents being teachers, Special Guardians being Foster carers. In a way it meant that they were aware of other aspects of the situation and were not restricted to just one viewpoint (for example a Special Guardian knowing about Foster children's entitlements and therefore an understanding of their disparities) and therefore most likely knew more about the topic, and it made me reflect on how human lives in general are 'messy' and things do overlap, and if this was not the case, I may have not gained such a wide perspective from them.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via Teams and the majority of participants did have their videos on, but some preferred not to, to ensure additional anonymity when recording the interviews. To get round that, some participants asked if I could simply record the interview on my Dictaphone and not via Teams. Conducting the interviews without the camera on definitely had its challenges as I felt I could not engage as well with them because I could not read the participants' body language, which is such an important part of communication (Beattie & Ellis, 2017). Interviewer effects also need to be considered, where the participant's perceptions of the interviewer may influence responses, for example, the participant providing an answer that they believe I want to hear, rather than their honest views or

experiences (Denscombe, 2010). Also in relation to body language and visual cues, I needed to have an awareness of mine, as it is vital to keep interviewer bias to a minimum because "interviewers are human beings and not machines, and their manner may have an effect on the respondents" (Selltiz at al., 1962, p. 583, as cited in Bell, 2005, p. 166) and I wanted to minimise the effect of my visual cues on the responses of the participants, as these visual cues could have affected the responses of the participants, and therefore producing slightly biased data.

Following the semi-structured interviews with the Designated Teachers, Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians, it was decided to analyse their data separately due to the unforeseen differences in circumstances, that I had not initially considered. I knew that I would have to analyse the Designated Teacher data separately, but I had not realised the differences between the Adoptive Parent and Special Guardians, so to ensure that both their views, perceptions and experiences were highlighted and acknowledged, I analysed their interviews separately.

The data was analysed using TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006) although, TA has been criticised in the past for being "poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged" (p. 77) and not having the "kudos" (p. 97) of certain qualitative methods such as grounded theory or IPA. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that if carried out with rigour and adhering to their six phases of analysis, TA becomes a theoretically flexible method, which can be applied to a variety of epistemologies and therefore, a range of research questions. TA can be either a realist or constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and for this study, a critical realist epistemology was chosen, which fits with TA. TA is a method to identify recurring patterns of meaning and themes in the data, and Braun and Clarke (2006) have created a methodologically comprehensive guide to TA, which is what was followed during the data analysis of this research project. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) warn that the notion of themes "emerging" (p. 80) from the data portrays a passive picture of the data analysis and the part the researcher plays in their identification, and the selection of themes should not be ignored. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (p.84) and themes are not simply situated in the data but are actively selected by the researcher, and the interpretation during a TA, is influenced by the researcher's views (Howitt, 2010). Reflexivity is therefore vital when carrying out qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2019) as "reflexivity

requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research" (Willig, 2013, p.10).

In relation to trustworthiness and quality criteria for qualitative research, I considered credibility and confirmability (Korstjens and Moser, 2018) during the process. Credibility included a 'member check', where all participants who requested a copy of their transcript were provided with it, for them to check and confirm that they agreed with the transcription that I had done. Confirmability focused on the interpretation of the participants views and experiences, being grounded in the data, and I did attempt this as much as I could, however, Korstjens and Moser (2018) also stated that reflexivity needs to be employed, as it needs to be acknowledged that as a qualitative researcher, throughout the whole research project, from the initial interest in the phenomenon under study, to the design of the interview questions and the analysis of the data, you contribute to the construction of meaning and are unable to remain completely removed from the study (Willig, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2019). With a background in early childhood, and a firm understanding of attachment theory and the benefits thereof, there may have been an unconscious bias when formulating the interview questions and selecting particular themes over others to be analysed.

In terms of rigour, I did the research independently without co-researchers so did not have additional researchers to provide additional rigours and trustworthiness to the process. However, I engaged in regular research supervision and had the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the analysis, coding, initial themes, defining and refining main themes with my research supervisor and post-graduate researchers, to ensure as much rigour as possible.

This research has been a challenging but incredibly rewarding learning experience. When I consider my learning process, I think about Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), something that I learned about when creating training for teachers during Year 1 of the EdPsyD in relation to Attachment Theory. Kolb's (1984) ELT describes learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of

grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). The grasping experience comprises *concrete experience* and *abstract conceptualisation* and the transforming experience comprises *reflective observation* and *active experimentation*, forming Kolb's four-stage learning cycle (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001). Concrete experience (new situations or possibilities for reinterpretation) is the basis of reflective observations (observation and reflection of the experience). Reflections are then assimilated into abstract concepts/conceptualisations (resulting in new ideas or modifications) from where new implications for action can be found (active experimentation). These implications can be actively tested (hypothesis testing) and guide new experiences or restructuring as needed. Reflections are vital in ELT, and using Gibbs' (1988) Reflective Cycle (which was created to support experiential learning and designed as a cycle of improvement for a repeated experience) helped me to modify my ideas and actions. For example, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) TA for my MSc Psychology dissertation and I therefore had knowledge of how to carry out the six phases. However, since my dissertation, I attended a lecture by Braun and Clarke who informed us of their 'reflexive' TA (2019), something that I had not encountered before. Therefore, when having my *concrete experience* of analysing the data, I then reflected on my analysis to ensure I was taking this reflexivity into account. From these reflections, I considered some codes and themes that I may not have, had I not known about Braun and Clarke (2019), most notably, the 'Family Relationships' subtheme of Special Guardians. This barrier had not been something that I was aware of prior to my analysis, however, I knew that I had to include it in my thesis because it was such a strong theme for the Special Guardians and I felt that I needed to include it and acknowledge it, so that their voices were heard.

Contributions to the field

It is acknowledged that this study is small scale and therefore cannot be generalised, however, a number of my findings, I feel, contribute to the literature in relation to previously looked-after children, which I believe is valuable due to the overall paucity of research pertaining to them and their educational attainment and emotional wellbeing. For example, Best et al's (2021) adoption study and the Adoption Barometer (AUK, 2021) suggested that early childhood trauma training should be included in initial teacher training and that training should include an understanding of attachment disorder. Participants in this research also suggested

that previously looked-after children should also have annually regulated PEPs, which was echoed by Best et al.'s (2021) study, therefore adding credibility and weight to the significance of this research.

Additionally, Simmonds et al.'s (2019) review of Special Guardianship found a lack of preparation for potential Special Guardians and there was no requirement to ensure training is available, as with adoption or fostering. Simmonds et al.'s (2019) recommendations included ensuring potential Special Guardians complete preparation and training to an approved statutory minimum. Similarly, the Special Guardians in this research felt that they should be provided more training, as they thought they had a lack of understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment difficulties. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature in relation to this issue, highlighting and validating their perceptions and experiences that they do not feel prepared to support these children.

Proposed dissemination

In terms of my findings and recommendations for EPs in relation to supporting schools to understand trauma and attachment, in this LA, EPs are already delivering Attachment Aware and Trauma-informed Practice 'Train the Trainer' courses with SENCos, Designated Teachers and SLTs, however, the participants of this research felt that there was still not a true understanding of attachment and trauma at the schools where their children attended, so this needed to be explored and addressed. I suggested that EPs could support teachers who work with previously looked-after children through consultation (Edwards, 2016) or 'Work Discussion Groups' (Geddes, 2006) that "models much of the secure Attachment characteristics based on trust, sensitivity and containment of anxiety" (p.135) to support the teachers through difficult and sensitive issues due to their lack of ITT training. Part of the Trauma-informed Practice Training does incorporate a module on supporting teachers, although this training is still in its infancy, and I feel that it would be valuable to support the teachers now, through these consultations or working groups. I wondered how my recommendations would be received by the EPs that read my research and whether they would feel like I was either suggesting things that they are already doing (and therefore perhaps seem condescending) or more like in an 'ideal world', things they would already be doing if they had more time, due

to the high number of statutory work. The findings of my thesis will be presented to the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) at their annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) day in July, which focusses on the dissemination of recent research carried out by both trainee EPs and EPs, so I feel I will have to carefully consider how I share that information with them.

Due to the relationship between this research and applied psychology practice, the findings could be used to update the current guidance for the Local Authority's EPS (*Best Practice Pointers for EPs*), on how to best support previously looked-after children. I intend to meet with the Senior Specialist EP for Fostering, Special Guardianship and Adoption (after my Viva Voce), to discuss whether my findings have developed further knowledge and understanding of the research evidence and recommendations of the LA, to further inform EP practice. I will also ask the Senior Specialist EP to disseminate to the VS, the fact that the Designated Teachers wanted group/cluster meetings to have the time and space to discuss previously looked-after children and share good practice, to ensure better outcomes for previously looked-after children, both academically and emotionally.

For my participants, I agreed to provide them with a one-page summary of my key findings, which I will disseminate to them once my amendments from my Viva Voce are agreed.

Summary

This research process has been an intense journey for me, that has been both challenging and rewarding. I have built my confidence and skills in speaking with people about topics that can be sensitive and difficult, although I have also felt a huge sense of responsibility to the participants, to ensure that their voices are heard, really testing my competence in relation to reporting my findings that do their experiences justice. When I look back at my journey, I am able to reflect on how far I have come in terms of developing my competences, both in research and in practice, and I look forward to future opportunities where I can utilise these skills again.

In terms of my findings, supporting Designated Teachers is vital, so that they are able to provide the 'excellent practice' that not only the DfE (2018b) expects them to provide, but also the excellent practice that they clearly want to provide for previously looked-after children. However, they feel constrained by the current

limitations to their statutory role (DfE, 2018b) and the disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children. Attachment Aware and Trauma-informed Practice training are being promoted by this LA, but it will take time to embed, and while government policy is moving in the right direction to support previously looked-after children, more needs to be done, for example, providing easier and better access to support, so Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians are not having to 'fight' for services. While they wait for services to improve for their children though, I am just glad that these participants are fighting for their children, to provide them with the best support that they possibly can.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2020-21

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Jennifer Partridge
School:	EDU
Current Status:	EdPsyD Student
UEA Email address:	Jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	2021_03_JP_IG

Approval details	
Approval start date:	21.04.2021
Approval end date:	31.07.2022
Specific requirements of approval:	
Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.	

Victoria Warburton EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Adoptive Parent Information Letter and Consent Form

UEA
University of East Anglia

Jennifer Partridge
Trainee Educational Psychologist
10th May 2021

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning
Doctorate in Educational Psychology

Email:jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

Supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Adoptive Parents

- **What is this study about?**

    You are invited to take part in a research study in relation to supporting the emotional wellbeing and educational attainment of previously looked-after children. You may be aware that in 2018, the Department for Education published statutory guidance for Designated Teachers, outlining their role in supporting previously looked-after children. I am interested in your knowledge and understanding of the statutory guidance and whether it has had an effect on the support that your child has experienced. Gathering your views will help me to understand Adoptive Parents' experiences with the statutory guidance, which is why I have invited you to participate in this study. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about 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 us 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 received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

- **Who is running the study?**

    The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

    Jennifer Partridge, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East Anglia (UEA)

    (Supervisor – Dr Andrea Honess, Associate Professor in Educational Psychology, University of East Anglia).

- **What will the study involve for me?**

    Your participation will involve one online Zoom or Teams interview (whichever is more convenient for you), that will last approximately 40-60 minutes. A mutually convenient date

and time will be confirmed once I have your consent to participate. Questions will be asked in relation to the Department for Education (DfE, 2018) statutory guidance and what can be done to support your child's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing. For accuracy of data collection, an audio or video recording will be made of the interview, which you may review once transcribed.

- **How much of my time will the study take?**
  It is expected that the interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes. Additionally, any extra time that is needed to review the interview transcripts, if you wish to do so.

- **Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've 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, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. You are also 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. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from the records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

- **Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**
  Discussing matters related to your child's experiences at school may be quite emotive. I am able to stop the interview at any time if you need a break and you do not need to continue if you do not want to. If you disclose anything concerning to me in relation to your child and safeguarding, I will need to follow the Local Authority/School's policy in relation to disclosure/safeguarding.

  The Post Adoption Team support adoptive parents at: [redacted for anonymity]

- **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**
  Your experiences could assist with improving the support that is given to adopted children as the findings of this thesis will be disseminated to the Local Authority's Educational Psychology Service and may be used to update the current guidance for Educational Psychologist working with Designated Teachers and adopted children.

- **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**
  By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about you and your child, for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019). Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The data I collect will be used for educational purposes, as part of the assessment process for my training and doctoral level thesis. The anonymised data and

subsequent information will be shared with my University Tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing my learning progress and achievement. Study findings may be published and I will disseminate my findings to the Local Authority, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

- **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. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk.

- **Will I be told the results of the study?**
  You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary of the findings and can be requested by ticking the relevant box on the consent form below. You will receive this feedback approximately six weeks after passing my viva.

- **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
  The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.
  If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

  Jennifer Partridge
  School of Education and Lifelong Learning
  University of East Anglia
  NORWICH
  NR4 7TJ
  Email: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

  If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my supervisor:
  Dr Andrea Honess
  Email: a.honess@uea.ac.uk

  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 the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk

- **OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**
  You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email it to: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

  This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 researcher, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **I consent to video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....

Signature

....

PRINT name   **Date**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (2ⁿᵈ Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 researcher, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **I consent to video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature

....
....
PRINT name   **Date**

Appendix C: Special Guardian Information Letter and Consent Form

UE:A
University of East Anglia

Jennifer Partridge
Trainee Educational Psychologist
10th May 2021

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning
Doctorate in Educational Psychology

Email:jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

Supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Special Guardians

- **What is this study about?**

  You are invited to take part in a research study in relation to supporting the emotional wellbeing and educational attainment of previously looked-after children. You may be aware that in 2018, the Department for Education published statutory guidance for Designated Teachers, outlining their role in supporting previously looked-after children. I am interested in your knowledge and understanding of the statutory guidance and whether it has had an effect on the support that the child or young person in your care, has experienced. Gathering your views will help me to understand Special Guardians' experiences with the statutory guidance, which is why I have invited you to participate in this study. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about 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 us 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 received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

- **Who is running the study?**

  The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

  Jennifer Partridge, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East Anglia (UEA)

  (Supervisor – Dr Andrea Honess, Associate Professor in Educational Psychology, University of East Anglia)

- **What will the study involve for me?**

  Your participation will involve one online Zoom or Teams interview (whichever is more convenient for you), that will last approximately 40-60 minutes. A mutually convenient date and time will be confirmed once I have your consent to participate. Questions will be asked in relation to the Department for Education (DfE, 2018) statutory guidance and what can be done to support the child or young person in your care's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing. For accuracy of data collection, an audio or video recording will be made of the interview, which you may review once transcribed.

- **How much of my time will the study take?**

  It is expected that the interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes. Additionally, any extra time that is needed to review the interview transcripts, if you wish to do so.

- **Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've 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, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia.

  If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. You are also 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. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from the records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

- **Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**

  Discussing matters related to the child or young person in your care and their experiences at school may be quite emotive. I am able to stop the interview at any time if you need a break and you do not need to continue if you do not want to. If you disclose anything concerning to me in relation to the child or young person in your care and safeguarding, I will need to follow the Local Authority/School's policy in relation to disclosure/safeguarding.

  If you need further support, you can contact the SGO Support Team for advice, guidance or support at: [redacted for anonymity]

- **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

  Your experiences could assist with improving the support that is given to children and young people under a Special Guardianship Order, as the findings of this thesis will be disseminated to the Local Authority's Educational Psychology Service and may be used to update the current guidance for Educational Psychologist working with Designated Teachers and children and young people under a Special Guardianship Order.

- **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**
  By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about you and the child or young person in your care, for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019). Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The data I collect will be used for educational purposes, as part of the assessment process for my training and doctoral level thesis. The anonymised data and subsequent information will be shared with my University Tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing my learning progress and achievement. Study findings may be published and I will disseminate my findings to the Local Authority, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

- **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. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk.

- **Will I be told the results of the study?**
  You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary of the findings and can be requested by ticking the relevant box on the consent form below. You will receive this feedback approximately six weeks after passing my viva.

- **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
  The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

  If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

  Jennifer Partridge
  School of Education and Lifelong Learning
  University of East Anglia
  NORWICH
  NR4 7TJ
  Email: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

  If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my supervisor:
  Dr Andrea Honess
  Email: a.honess@uea.ac.uk

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 the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk

- **OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**
  You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email it to: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1ˢᵗ Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 researcher, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **I consent to video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name   **Date**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (2ⁿᵈ Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 researcher, the school, or anyone at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- ✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **I consent to video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name   **Date**

Appendix D: Designated Teacher Information Letter and Consent Form

UEA
University of East Anglia

Jennifer Partridge
Trainee Educational Psychologist
10th May 2021

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning
Doctorate in Educational Psychology

Email:jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

Supporting the educational achievement and emotional wellbeing of previously looked-after children.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Designated Teachers

- **What is this study about?**

    You are invited to take part in a research study about your understanding of the Department for Education (DfE, 2018) statutory guidance for Designated Teachers in relation to supporting previously looked-after children. I am interested in exploring whether this statutory guidance has had an effect on the support for previously looked-after children, in relation to educational achievement and emotional wellbeing. Gathering your views will help me to understand your first-hand experiences with the statutory guidance, which is why I have invited you to participate in this study. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about 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 us 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 received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

- **Who is running the study?**

    The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

    Jennifer Partridge, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East Anglia (UEA)

    (Supervisor – Dr Andrea Honess, Associate Professor in Educational Psychology, University of East Anglia).

- **What will the study involve for me?**

    Your participation will involve one online Zoom or Teams interview (whichever is more convenient for you), that will last approximately 40-60 minutes. A mutually convenient date and time will be confirmed once I have your consent to participate. Questions will be asked in relation to the Department for Education (DfE, 2018) statutory guidance and what can be done to support a previously looked-after child's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing. For accuracy of data collection, an audio or video recording will be made of the interview, which you may review once transcribed.

- **How much of my time will the study take?**

    It is expected that the interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes. Additionally, any extra time that is needed to review the interview transcripts, if you wish to do so.

- **Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've 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 Virtual School, the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia.

    If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. You are also 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. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from the records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

- **Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**

    Discussing matters relating to your work with previously looked-after children and their experiences at school may be quite emotive. I am able to stop the interview at any time if you need a break and you do not need to continue if you do not want to. If you disclose anything concerning to me in relation to a child or young person, I will need to follow the School's policy in relation to Safeguarding.

- **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

    Your experiences could assist with improving the support that is given to previously looked-after children as the findings of this thesis will be disseminated to the Local Authority's Educational Psychology Service and may be used to update the current guidance for Educational Psychologists.

- **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**

    By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data

management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019). Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The data I collect will be used for educational purposes, as part of the assessment process for my training and doctoral level thesis. The anonymised data and subsequent information will be shared with my University Tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing my learning progress and achievement. Study findings may also be published, and I will disseminate my findings to the Local Authority, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

- **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. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact me at: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk.

- **Will I be told the results of the study?**
  You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary of the findings and can be requested by ticking the relevant box on the consent form below. You will receive this feedback approximately six weeks after passing my viva.

- **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
  The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

  If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

  Jennifer Partridge
  School of Education and Lifelong Learning
  University of East Anglia
  NORWICH
  NR4 7TJ
  Email: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk

  If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my supervisor:
  Dr Andrea Honess
  Email: a.honess@uea.ac.uk
  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 the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk

- **OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email it to: jennifer.partridge@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1ˢᵗ Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 Virtual School, the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

✓

- **I consent to video-recording** YES ☐ NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only** YES ☐ NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....

Signature

....

PRINT name

....

Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (2nd Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part 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 Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher 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 Virtual School, the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ 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. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ 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 understand that anonymised data (interview transcript) and subsequent information will be shared with the researcher's University tutor, external examiners and others involved with assessing their learning.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

- **I consent to video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I consent to audio-recording only**   YES ☐   NO ☐
- **I would like to review 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:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name

....
Date

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Interview Questions to Designated Teachers:

•   How did you become the Designated Teacher at the school? How long have you been the Designated Teacher? How long have you been a teacher?

•   What do you understand about your new statutory role in supporting previously looked-after children?

•   What support/training have you had for your role?

•   Has the Virtual School supported you? If yes, how?

•   What works?

•   What could be better?

•   What support would you like?

•   What can be done to support previously looked-after children's educational attainment? What works / what could be better?

•   What can be done to support previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing? What works / what could be better?

•   What, if any, additional support do you feel would benefit the child?

•   Have you worked in partnership with the school/home?

Interview Questions to Adoptive Parents and Special Guardians:

•   What do you know about the Department for Education (2018) Statutory Guidance to promote the education of previously looked-after children and the Designated Teacher role?

•   Has the Virtual School supported you? If yes, how?

•   Has a Designated Teacher supported you? If yes, how?

•   What can be done to support previously looked-after children's educational attainment? What works / what could be better?

•   What can be done to support previously looked-after children's emotional wellbeing? What works / what could be better?

•   What, if any, additional support do you feel would benefit the child?

•   Have you worked in partnership with the school/home?

Appendix F: Sample Interview Transcript Extract

UEA Researcher: OK, brilliant. So that's kind of well, is there anything else that you think that Previously looked-after children could have that will help with their educational attainment?

Designated Teacher: I mean, I think it's so bespoke, so I think to come up with a program that would work for all Previously looked-after would be really tricky. I think the key is to have the systems whereby schools have got the freedom of flexibility to work with Families and Social Workers to do the right thing for them. I think, you know, knowing one of our children, she's so distracted by, she's insecure socially, so actually a lot of her learning time is spent checking out her friends, making sure that she's appearing to do the right thing so she's not fully focused because she just wants to be seen in the right light…

UEA Researcher: Yeah

Designated Teacher: You can't address that with some spelling interventions. I think similarly, you know one of the other Previously looked-after children, she's worried about her carer 'cause her care is ill. So actually, until there are systems there in the background that can deal with her carer's medical needs and put that to bed, then actually she's also going to struggle in class as well, and so you need the flexibility, you need the funding, but also you need a joined up approach and I feel that that's not always the case.

UEA Researcher: In what in what way?

Designated Teacher: Well, I think the Social Workers make stuff happen, yeah, and if the child hasn't had their dental check-up or their hearing appointment, optician opticians visits then you know the Social Worker will say 'right, well that needs to happen by the next meeting'. There's a plan, these things need to be followed through, but there's no oversight for those other people, so we have some, and frankly, it's kind of overstepping the school's boundaries, I shouldn't be asking a carer whether she's attended her medical appointments, that's beyond my remit, isn't it?

UEA Researcher: Yeah

Designated Teacher: and I think that the support, I mean, I guess it will come down to money, but you know we've had, for example, we had a child who was Looked-after whose Foster Carers decided they weren't going to Adopt because they didn't want to lose the support that they were getting from the Social Workers, and I think things like that, that's really telling.

UEA Researcher: Yeah

Designated Teacher: because once they are Previously looked-after, you're on your own, off you trot, there you go and I think that's really difficult and particularly if these children are given to family members, who may or may not be ready for those challenges or who may have their own difficulties.

Appendix G: Stages of Thematic Analysis

Data extracts with codes applied

Data extract	Codes
…foster children are the same, because I say, my 2 girls, Foster children all come from traumas, so do SGO children, because they are taken away from their family and like my girls, because of what mum and dad were doing before they had the girls, I've got one little girl who has got mental health issues…(SG, Ellen, page 4)	Children experiencing trauma and loss of attachment figures
…we feel that there's some historic trauma maybe around anxiety or attachment-she comes across quite insecure, so we are helping support her with her resilience and kind of confidence…I think it is more their mental wellbeing which I probably would use the funding [PP+] for because, it is quite a complex setup, and although they can be resilient we know that they are going to have to deal with things a lot differently to children who don't have an SGO…(SG, Sam, page 1)	
…well I think it's important because you know these children have been traumatised by their previous life experience and you know, they need so much support and it's not, you know, all of my children have therapy outside of school, provided by the Adoption Support Fund, but you know, children spend so much time at school and you know, there's so many experiences at school that actually you know they need support even with that, and every child is an individual and obviously what each child needs depends on them and their trauma and their experience (Adoptive Parent, Tanya, page 2)	
…everybody that is adopted, is going to have some issues with attachment from the feeling that their birth mother couldn't keep them, so even if they don't really remember it, the fact that they are told that they had a birth mother, means that they are, have a deficit in their head…(Adoptive Parent, Nicole, page 7) …parenting a traumatised child is so completely different. I would say I parent my adopted child so completely differently from my birth child. She needs a completely different skill set… (Adoptive Parent, Nicole, page 9)	
…I think the assumption is that once they've been adopted, jobs done, isn't it? The order is there, job's done, and everything that went before is just going to miraculously disappear…and not be an issue because it's that magic piece of paper that's going to change everything and it makes no difference, does it, to the trauma and that is still there you know, yeah, so that's my feelings and thoughts on that one…(Adoptive Parent, Blake, page 3)	

…that's about forming strong attachments with adults, building relationships and giving them a safe space for them to be themselves…(Designated Teacher, Sydney, page 5) 'cause those children are gonna turn up with issues, they're going to be, they're going to want…'I can't see Mom', 'I can't see Dad', 'these things have happened, how do I understand them all?' and that, you know, there could have been some really dangerous and traumatic situations [that the children were in]... (Designated Teacher, Sydney, page 9)	
…I think attachment is quite often overlooked… I don't think people maybe appreciate the impact attachment does have. …so I think it's really key that people do look at that and do the keeping in mind. I've done a lot of training with staff here following that Attachment awareness training (Designated Teacher, Danny, page 2) There seems to be a void for what we do with these Previously looked-after children in between [while waiting for counselling] because there's no, there's no book, there's no script as to when that trauma is going to come out, is there, you know? (Designated Teacher, Danny, page 5)	
…a child is in Care for a number of different reasons, but it is almost always a traumatic experience. So, they are almost always significantly traumatised, um, and just because they, um, become subject of a Special Guardianship Order or Adoption, doesn't mean they are no longer traumatised, so it doesn't mean that there is no longer any need for the schools to work in a different way with them…(Designated Teacher, Taylor, page 2)	
…so in her first year she had 2 traumatic losses of attachment figure… (SGO, Drew, page3) we managed to convince them [the school] that having an attachment and trauma lens would be really important, so they did get a little bit of training because they were trying to tell me that they were trauma, but I was like, if you were trauma informed, you wouldn't do that…(page 4)	School staff not understanding the impact of trauma and attachment on previously looked-after children
…the adults, not so much, so its again, its him gaining that trust of adults, um and I think that lots of children that are in care situations, have that same distrust of adults because its adults that have hurt them, more so than children have, um, so its about having that one person that they can go to, they feel safe with and that they can open up to…(SG, Riley, page 4) …but we've not had to deal with any trauma aspect just yet, but we've had no training on how to deal with that trauma, um, and actually, when that time does present, then we are going to have to find that information for ourselves because we just feel that there isn't the, anyone out there or Social Services hasn't given us the tools that we need to um, be able to go through that…(page 4)	
…so the SENCo, you know, it was only last year that the SENCo was sent on a course for Attachment, and I thought, why doesn't she know about attachment? Surely that's a basic…well for me, that was a basic theory and I was quite surprised that she didn't and	

then it was her job to come back to teach the teachers about attachment, which, you know, she may well do, but if she hasn't grasped it herself then that isn't going to work is it? (SG, Lou, page 3)

…when I've had other children that have presented, Fostering, that presented with challenging behaviours, I've always found again with the schools, it's a massive mixed bag from, you know, they're not trauma informed, they don't recognise the behaviours as trauma and the child simply gets excluded, you know, and that is it, right to the other end where I've had schools that have been really really supportive and done everything they possibly can in their power get, to make it work for the child (Adoptive Parent, Amy, page 6)

…and so, I think that the training um, is still not there. I know that the staff at my, at the primary school, they have done an Attachment Aware training, but obviously one day is only a small amount… (Adoptive Parent, Tanya, page 2)

I think their understanding of um, the needs of Adopted children. I don't think they were, it came up a lot, the response I had a lot at the time was, 'oh, but all children do that, a lot of children are like that'. Which is probably true, but I think to say, 'oh, that's what all children do' when you've got an Adoptive child, is to really misunderstand what early years trauma does. And what impact it has…(Adoptive Parent, Blair, page 5)

…I suppose really for, teachers to have a better understanding of what neglect and abuse does to the brain development of a child and what, how it impacts on how they are…(Adoptive Parent, Blair, page 6)

…it's about trauma, for me, it's about trauma informed teaching, it's about plugging in those gaps and not having necessarily a curriculum that runs so fast that you can't, that a child who struggles, has no opportunity to go back, so how do you do that? It's not about, um, so I think it's more about educating the schools to understand that… (Adoptive Parent, Blake, page 4)

Codes

Designated Teacher codes

- Therapy, counselling for the previously looked-after child *and* the family (mental health first)
- Emotional wellbeing before learning
- Disparity with DfE (2018) Guidance for looked-after and previously looked-after children (expectations, training, accountability)
- DfE (2018) Guidance is necessary (raising the profile of previously looked-after children's needs)

- Children experiencing trauma and loss of attachment figures
- Wanting a Designated Teacher type 'Cluster' within the LA to share best practice – so there is consistency between schools (or inconsistency) and how they implement the guidance and use PP+ effectively

SG codes

- Children experiencing trauma and loss of attachment figures
- School staff not understanding the impact of trauma and attachment on previously looked-after children
- Variability in who knew what about Designated Teacher and if they knew, friends didn't /not knowing much about the Designated Teacher
- No consistency between schools and how they implement the guidance
- Complex family issues
- Therapy, counselling for the previously looked-after child *and* the family
- Disparity between looked-after, adoption and special guardianship (training etc)
- Emotional wellbeing before learning
- Sense of fighting, pushing, for everything

Adoptive Parent codes

- Not knowing much about the Designated Teacher
- Children experiencing trauma and loss of attachment figures
- School staff not understanding the impact of trauma and attachment on previously looked-after children
- No consistency between schools and how they implement the guidance
- Therapy, counselling for the previously looked-after child *and* the family
- Emotional wellbeing before learning
- PP+ being more targeted
- Relationships with the school
- Teachers needing training

<u>Initial themes</u>

Common themes between all 3

- Emotional wellbeing before learning
- Trauma and attachment difficulties
- Therapy/counselling for the previously looked-after child *and* the family

Designated Teacher themes

- Disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children
- DfE (2018) guidance is necessary
- Sharing best practice

SG themes

- Staff understanding of trauma and attachment
- Statutory support for previously looked-after children

- Inconsistency with PP+
- Complex family relationships
- Disparity between fostering, adoption and special guardianship

Adoptive Parent themes

- Staff understanding of trauma and attachment
- Statutory support for previously looked-after children
- Inconsistency with PP+
- Relationships with the school
- Teacher training

Developing themes

Common themes between all 3

- Emotional wellbeing before learning (Therapy/counselling for the previously looked-after child *and* the family)
- Trauma and attachment difficulties
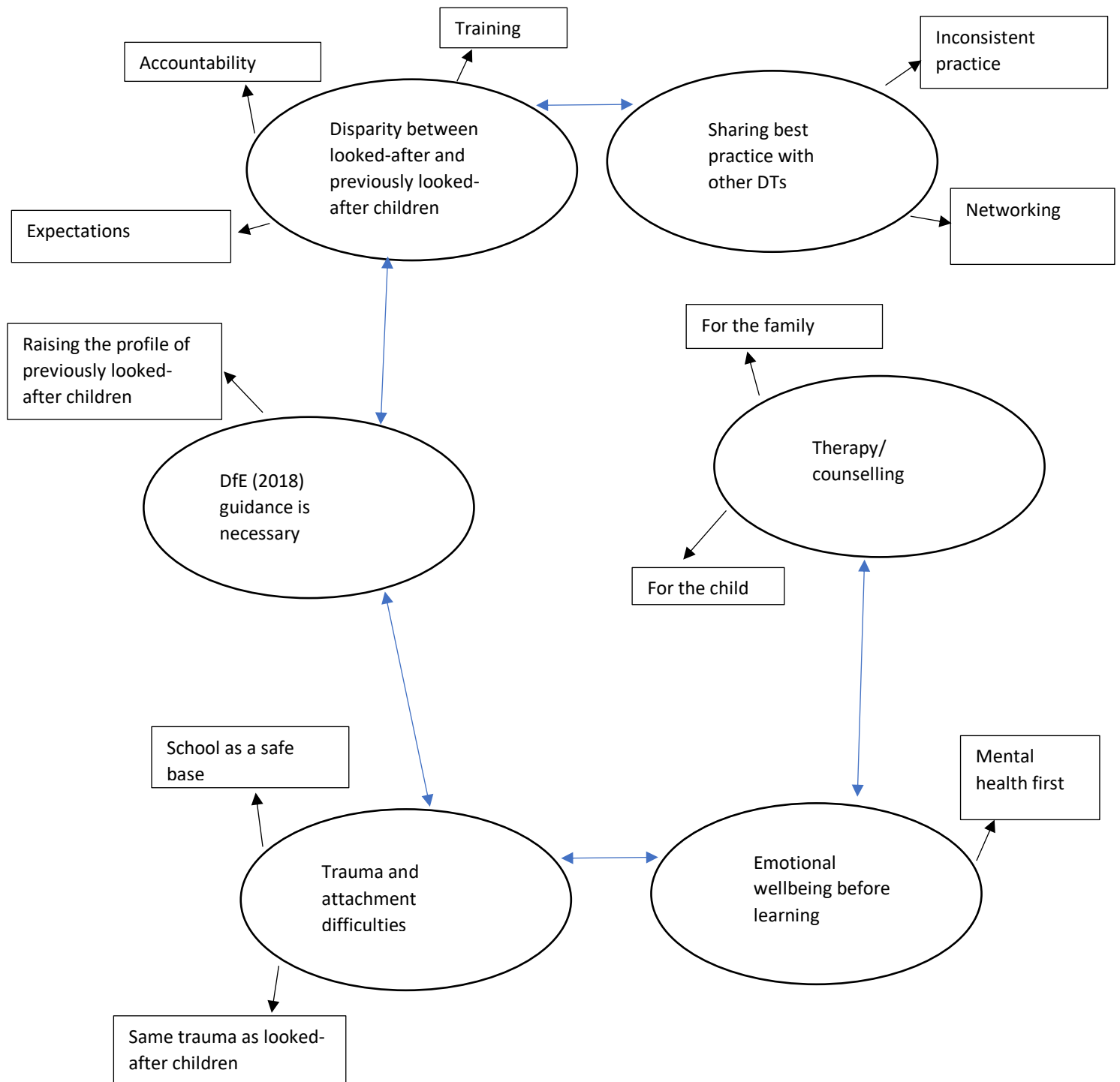
Designated Teacher themes

- DfE (2018) guidance is necessary (Disparity between looked-after and previously looked-after children)
- Sharing best practice

SG themes

- Staff understanding of trauma and attachment (Teacher training)
- Statutory support for previously looked-after children
- Inconsistency with PP+
- Complex family relationships
- Disparity between fostering, adoption and special guardianship

Adoptive Parent themes

- Staff understanding of trauma and attachment (Teacher training)
- Statutory support for previously looked-after children
- Inconsistency with PP+
- Relationships with the school

Initial Thematic Map for Designated Teachers, showing six main themes

Developing Thematic Map for Designated Teachers, showing four main themes

Sharing best practice with other DTs

Inconsistent practice

Networking

Raising the profile of previously looked-after children

Disparity between looked-after and

DfE (2018) guidance is necessary

Therapy/ counselling

Mental health first

School as a safe base

Trauma and attachment difficulties

Same trauma as looked-after children

Emotional wellbeing before learning