The Office for Standards in Education and the Pupil Premium Grant: Primary Educators'

Understanding and Experiences of Inspection Criteria

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Education Inspection Framework and its link to the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) within England's primary education system. The Ofsted framework enables inspectors to rate schools with one of the following designations: *outstanding, good, requires improvement,* or *inadequate*. By interviewing three primary educators at various stages of their careers, this thesis primarily endeavours to understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the PPG. A secondary goal is to identify the ways those educators respond to factors that cause pupil deprivation while also working towards closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The psychological approach to narrative inquiry, as described by Merriam and Tisdell, is employed so that focus can be placed on the personal thoughts and motivations of the participants (2015, p. 35). To achieve an *outstanding* designation, schools must show that they have closed the attainment gap between pupils who receive the PPG and those who do not. The literature review shows that deprivations faced by some pupils are outside the control of schools and therefore the provision of additional funding to schools does little to impact the root cause of such deprivations. This thesis concludes with a discussion of how primary educators use their scope of influence to reduce the attainment gap. Research has found no link between school inspections and improvement or that the PPG funding has closed the attainment gap calling into question their efficacy in improving the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils. Finally, this thesis positions this study in a post-pandemic climate alongside a recruitment and retention crisis that has led to teaching unions initiating strike action.

Keywords: attainment gap, barriers, deprivation, disadvantaged pupils, Pupil Premium, Ofsted, social mobility, socioeconomic demographic

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale of the Study

This study focuses on England's education system and corresponding funding policies. My interest in this area grew during the near decade that I lived and worked in England as a primary teacher. I completed my Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education in Canada. During my finally year of university, I attended a job fair where I was hired by an agency looking for teachers willing to work in England. After moving to England in August 2011, I worked as a supply teacher for a few months before being hired by a school in suburban community. That school offered education from nursery to year 6 for approximately 400 pupils. I taught at that school for five years in both year 2 and year 3 classes. As I progressed in my career, I decided to move into a senior leadership role and was hired as a phase leader at another school to begin in September 2016. In this leadership role, I was now responsible for ensuring the teachers under my supervision were closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. This professional move also necessitated a physical move to another suburban community. In my role as phase leader, I worked at a junior school for children in years 3 to 6. There were three classes in each year group for a total school population of about 360 pupils. I worked at that school for four years as both the year 4 teacher and phase leader. Both schools were in communities with low socioeconomic demographics and had a high proportion of children in receipt of the PPG funding. England also does not have the same class size cap as Canada, so the classes I taught over my time there had 30 to 35 pupils.

Shortly before I arrived in England, the Coalition Government of the time introduced the Pupil Premium Grant funding policy. This policy was specifically intended to increase the social mobility and decrease the attainment gap of children identified as disadvantaged (Copeland,

2019; Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26; Gorard et al., 2021; HM Government, 2010; Roberts et al., 2021). In my role as classroom teacher, I was responsible for ensuring those students in my class who qualified for the funding received extra academic support. This could be through such means as scheduling specific interventions with either myself or a teaching assistant or providing more uniquely tailored interventions in support of the English and maths curriculums. Five years later, I accepted a position at another school as a phase leader. I spent much of my time conducting book looks (I would select pupils' workbooks to assess the quantity and quality of their work as well as the teacher's marking), observing lessons, and analysing data to ensure that the disadvantaged pupils were being sufficiently challenged. I also had a role to play in the allocation of funding to ensure it was being spent appropriately and in a meaningful manner on those pupils who qualified for the funding such that we could prove a positive impact during Ofsted inspections.

The requirement to justify through record keeping that my staff and I were meeting the needs of our pupils, specifically those who qualified for funding, meant that much of our time was spent on lesson planning, marking, recording data, and staying current with ever changing policies from the Department for Education (DfE). A 2015 DfE survey of teachers found that many teachers cite these reporting measures as unnecessary demands on their time which could be better spent supporting their pupils (Shain, 2016). When this survey was conducted again in 2019, fifty-two per cent of primary respondents reported that teacher workload was a fairly serious problem with seventy per cent saying that they were unable to complete their assigned workload during contract hours (Walker et al., 2019). In the survey, the DfE recognises that despite the 2018 publication of the Workload Reduction Toolkit for schools, there is still serious work to be done to reduce the unnecessary workload on teachers (Walker et al., 2019).

To illustrate these demands, every six weeks schools in England conducted internal pupil assessments in all year groups which were then analysed by the teaching staff. Specific data would be recorded by each teacher to show not only which academic year their pupils were working at, but also which month in that year. In this way, teachers could ascertain how many months' progress their pupils were making between each round of assessments. This meant that the preceding six weeks were spent preparing for those assessments so that noticeable progress and attainment could be evidenced. To further justify our work, we organised our data into categories which specifically highlighted those pupils who qualified for the PPG funding. All of this was so that when Ofsted came to inspect our school, we could show them outcomes of the "intended impact on the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils" (Ofsted, 2022, July 11a, para. 329).

As I progressed in my career, it became more and more difficult to support this endeavour and to encourage this way of teaching within my own team. What I was seeing and engaging in was not teaching. We were no longer supporting pupils and scaffolding their learning. We were now ensuring that outside stakeholders were pleased with the data they received. We were ensuring that the school could continue to receive funding. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), "research topics most often come from observing and asking questions about your everyday activities" (p. 76) which is how my interest in this study's topic began. The research questions explained later in this thesis were developed through questioning my everyday teaching practise in England.

Craske's (2018) study of how a secondary school in England meets the PPG and Ofsted requirements mirrors my experiences in detail. Craske succinctly summarises what I saw develop over the years in my own schools when he states that, "The language of schooling, however, has

shifted away from a softer focus on vulnerability, safety, well-being and contribution, to a harder emphasis on learning, achievement, progress and attainment" (2018, p. 547). Through interviews with three educators, this thesis seeks to understand educators' understanding and experiences of the use of the PPG as a key criterion for earning a high rating through the Ofsted inspection framework.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research is focused on how participants interpret their experience and construct meaning of phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Ntinda, 2020). Interpretive research recognises that reality is socially constructed and that there can be several interpretations of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Ntinda (2020) it is the complexity of this relational composition of people's lived experiences which most interests the qualitative researcher.

To understand how primary educators comprehend the link between the PPG and achieving a high rating through Ofsted's inspection framework, their first-person account needs to be heard. Stories, or narratives, are how we share our daily lives, make sense of our experiences, communicate with others, and understand the world around us (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Biographical, linguistic, and psychological are the most common methodological approaches a narrative researcher may use to analyse their narrative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purposes of this thesis, a psychological approach to narrative qualitative research is used, which as explained by Merriam and Tisdell, "concentrates more on the personal, including thoughts and motivations," and will enable these stories to be heard within context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 35). In this way, personal thoughts and motivations can be gleaned from primary educators who have prepared for Ofsted inspections and supported pupils who

qualified for the PPG funding. It is important when conducting a narrative inquiry that the researcher explores: temporality (the quality of experience through time), sociality (the social conditions where the experiences take place), and place (the physical boundaries of where the event takes place) (Ntinda, 2020). Crossley (2000) takes this idea further when she explains that the link between "experiences of self, temporality, relationships with others, and morality" are fundamental to a psychological approach to narrative inquiry (p. 533).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to explore through case study how individual primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the PPG, and second, to identify some of the ways those educators respond to factors that cause pupil deprivation while working towards closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2014).

This generative study focuses on the perspectives of primary educators in England, so that their stories, as Moen (2006) states, can be used as "thinking tools for the politicians who are making decisions affecting our schools" (p. 65). The goal here is not to solve a problem, but rather to generate discussion, provoke dialogue, and develop debate such that new ideas contribute to further research on the topic (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011; Francis et al., 2017). As Clandinin and Connelly explain, narrative research is interested in the process of research rather than the result (2000). The term *research problems* by its very nature, connotes the possibility of finding a solution. That is not the goal of narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly describe this as a "continual reformation of an inquiry" (2000, p. 124). Watling sums up the idea of using a generative approach to qualitative research best when he explains that he was "searching for

understanding, rather than knowledge; for interpretations rather than measurements; for values rather than facts" (Watling, 2002, p. 267).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to focus and guide the inquiry:

1. What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant?

2. How do primary educators in England describe their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils?

3. What barriers to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' do primary educators in England describe as their most challenging?

4. How do primary educators in England understand their role in improving the social mobility of pupils through the Pupil Premium Grant?

5. How do primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Grant?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are operationally defined in the context of this thesis for the reader to fully understand the nature of this study and the review of the literature.

Attainment Gap

Typically used to refer to the disparity in pupil attainment, performance, and progress on various education measures between different groups associated with social class, ethnicity, and gender (Goodman & Burton, 2012).

Disadvantaged Pupils

Children recorded in the school census as eligible for free school meals (FSMs) at any point in the last six years (Roberts et al., 2021).

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

An independent charity that uses an evidence-based approach to improve teaching and learning with a primary goal of "breaking the link between family income and educational achievement" (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023). While schools are not required to use this resource, in my experience, it has been widely accepted.

Free School Meals (FSM)

It is a requirement that free school meals are provided to eligible, disadvantaged pupils between the ages of 5 and 16 years old (Department for Education, 2018, March 22). This requirement came into effect for all state funded schools with the 1996 Education Act (Department for Education, 2018, March 22). To qualify, children need to be from families who are in receipt of, or have been in receipt of, other qualifying benefits such as Income Support or Tax Credits, within the past six years (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013).

Governors

Each school is required to have a group of volunteer governors who are responsible for assisting in the management of schools. They support the senior leadership team as they develop strategy, policy, budgeting, and staffing needs (Governors for Schools, 2018). Another key role is to challenge the senior leadership team and ensure they are being held to account for their decisions (Governors for Schools, 2018).

Local Authority

A local authority, which is run by publicly elected councillors, is responsible for providing a range of services for a particular geographic region (Local Government Association, 2022). The services are those that deal with the spending of public money such as education.

Ofsted

A regulatory body created through the 1992 Education Act. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is responsible for ensuring all schools are inspected regularly by a rigorous and transparent process using a detailed framework (Elliot, 2012).

Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)

Pupil Premium Grant funding was introduced September 2011 by the government to help improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England (Department for Education, 2021, December 16). It was targeted at eligible pupils from reception to year 11 (pupils who are 4 to 15 years old) (Department for Education, 2010, July 1). Research showed that additional funding may address the attainment gap disproportionately affecting children from low-income families, reduce socioeconomic segregation, and ensure these children benefitted from the same opportunities as pupils from richer families (Copeland, 2019; Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26; Gorard et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021).

Social Mobility

While social mobility is generally applied to a group of people, in the context of the English school system, the definition comes from the Social Mobility Commission. In this instance, social mobility is defined as "the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents. Where there is a strong link, there is a lower level of social mobility. Where there is a weak link, there is a higher level of social mobility" (n.d.). In

other words, social mobility is not a sociological term, but rather a governmental term used to place parameters on policies.

Universal Infant Free School Meals

In 2014, the Government introduced the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) (Barrett, 2018; Department for Education, 2013). This policy meant that the Government would provide free school meals to all children in reception (pupils 4 to 5 years old), year 1, and year 2 regardless of their financial status (Barrett, 2018; Department for Education, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Previous research has focused on the effectiveness of Ofsted for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Much research over the past ten years has examined the effectiveness of the PPG in closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. A large body of research now looks at statistical data regarding all progress made.

This study is significant because it bridges the gap between these two government initiatives by asking primary educators how they understand and experience the use of the PPG as a key criterion for success within the Ofsted inspection framework. This thesis focuses on primary educators' perspectives, recognising the significant role educators play in ensuring the funding is spent in an impactful way and that the attainment gap is closed. Therefore, this thesis examines educators' perception of the burden placed upon them by the Ofsted process, and their level of acceptance of, or resistance to, the process. This can be of significant concern not just to the educators but also to leadership and management teams, as the local authority and governors have the legal right to dismiss educators from their posts due to poor ratings (BBC, 2014; The School Staffing (England) Regulations, 2009).

Limitations

1. This is a small case study. This will allow for specific, personal details to be shared, but will mean this study is generative and not generalizable.

2. The current climate of the teaching profession in England has led to widespread strikes during the time that interviews were to be conducted. This understandably stressful situation caused a number of potential participants to withdraw interest in being interviewed and therefore significantly reduced the size of the case study.

3. This research also faces geographic barriers. I moved back to Canada in 2020 and, although my plan was to use typical sampling to select participants, I was forced to rely on convenience sampling due to the limitation mentioned above.

Summary

This study examines primary educators' perspectives on the use of the PPG as a key criterion by Ofsted in their inspection framework. It employs a psychological approach to narrative qualitative research to focus on the personal thoughts and motivations of primary educators in England. This thesis explores how primary educators within England understand their engagement with Ofsted and the PPG.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review forms the basis of my methodology and my research questions. Much of the literature was chosen to examine the central phenomenon of the study, the use of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) expenditure as a key criterion for achieving a high rating through The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The literature is restricted to academic studies and government documents relating to the use of Ofsted and the PPG in England.

The literature review begins with a description of the psychological approach to narrative qualitative research. It is then divided into six key themes, including an overview of Ofsted, the role schools play in improving the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils, and the policy intent and implementation of the PPG funding and its relation to Ofsted. These six key themes directly relate to the research questions previously outlined. These themes establish the context of the study and are as follows:

1. The Office for Standards in Education

2. Schools as Engines of Social Mobility

3. The Role and Limits of Education

4. The Pupil Premium Grant

5. Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant

6. Shifting Responsibility

The Psychological Approach to Narrative Qualitative Research

The fundamental aspect of narrative qualitative research is the use of stories as data, specifically first-person experiential stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In qualitative research, narrative inquiry is the theoretical approach, not the method of analysis (Stephens & Breheny,

2013). Various methodological approaches can be used to analyse these stories depending on where the researcher wishes to focus their work. Rossiter makes a distinction in her work between the physical science and human science by describing the psychological approach to narrative research as a focus on the "description and interpretation rather than explanation" of the stories told (Rossiter, 1999, p. 78). Rossiter further explains this approach as acknowledging the "cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of meaning making" while also taking into account "the biological and environmental influences" present (Rossiter, 1999, p. 78). The way we as humans choose to tell our stories is as important as the stories themselves and it is this interrelation between language and the narrative process that defines the psychological approach to narrative inquiry (Crossley, M. L., 2000; László, et al., 2007).

The Office for Standards in Education

The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced the National Curriculum, extensive national testing of core subjects, and publication of league tables which publicise the overall performance of pupils and their schools (Case et al., 2000; *Find and check the performances of schools and colleges in England*, n.d.; Strain & Simkins, 2008). This major overhaul and centralisation of the English school system continued through 1992 when the Education Act was introduced (Baxter & Clarke, 2013; Elliot, 2012; Thomas, 1998). It was through the Education Act that Ofsted was formed to ensure all schools were inspected regularly through a rigorous and transparent process intended to promote excellent education in England by ensuring schools were introducing the new curriculum requirements and management approaches (Baxter & Clarke, 2013; Case et al., 2000; Elliot, 2012; Main & Tyack, 2019; Thomas, 1998). Ofsted was to make judgements about a school's effectiveness through classroom observations, interviews with staff, reviewing curriculum documents, and assessing data (Case et al., 2000).

Inspection as Governmentality

At its inception, Ofsted was responsible for inspecting state funded schools and grading them on a seven-point scale (Elliot, 2012). Over time, however, the number of inspectors assigned, the time spent in a school, and the point scale were all reduced as a cost saving measure (Elliot, 2012). Currently four key areas are reported on during an inspection: The Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, and Leadership and Management (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2018; Elliot, 2012; Ofsted, 2021). This four-point scale provides a school with a grading of *outstanding, good, requires improvement,* or *inadequate* (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2018; Ofsted, 2021).

School inspections are a feature of the education system in England whereby the Government can 'govern' increasingly complex education systems (Baxter & Clarke, 2013). However, the concern becomes how inspectors form their judgements and according to Baxter and Clarke, "to what extent these judgements can be considered to be valid, robust and above all consistent" (2013, p. 707).

Ofsted also works as a 'hidden power' as an inspection does not necessarily need to take place for schools and their staff to change their practices (Perryman et al., 2018). The perceived feeling of being under surveillance breeds a culture of performativity and conformativity (Perryman et al., 2018). The idea of being 'Ofsted-ready' whereby senior leaders would partake in learning walks, training, and observation were techniques I engaged in as phase leader to ensure my school was inspection-ready and were techniques also noted in the work conducted by Perryman et al. (2018). Schools have also been found to develop policies inline with Ofsted requirements rather than school priorities (Perryman et al., 2018).

The Education Inspection Framework

From September 2015, Ofsted used the Common Inspection Framework as a set of guidelines, advice, and expectations for how their inspections should be conducted (Ofsted, 2015). In September 2019 this framework was replaced with the Education Inspection Framework. Under this new framework, the key area of The Quality of Education "aims to lessen the reliance on exam results as a measure of school quality" (IG Schools, (n.d.). Initially, schools were provided with transition time to become familiar with the new framework, but national restrictions brought in due to the pandemic caused many schools to put their plans on hold (Ofsted, 2022, July 11b). While as of September 2021, Ofsted resumed inspections, they are cognisant of the fact that schools are still coming to grips with the new framework. Furthermore, from May 2012 to November 2020, any school that had been rated *outstanding* under the Common Inspection Framework was exempt from routine inspections (Department for Education, 2022, November; Ofsted, 2022, July 11a). That rule has since been rescinded and under the new Education Inspection Framework, Ofsted is now required to inspect all schools (Department for Education, 2022, November). These significant changes to the Ofsted inspection framework during a time of heightened stress and uncertainty caused by the global pandemic has led to increased burnout amongst education staff and a corresponding recruitment and retention crisis (National Education Union, 2023).

Recent data by Ofsted was published in December of 2022. It is noted that during this time some schools were not inspected, as routine inspections were suspended or deferred due to COVID. Of the schools inspected, eighty-eight per cent of schools received a rating of *good* or *outstanding* (Department for Education, 2022, November; Ofsted, 2022, December). Unfortunately, only seventeen per cent of schools that were previously exempt from inspection

due to a rating of *outstanding* were able to maintain that grading (Department for Education, 2022, November; Ofsted, 2022, December). Interestingly, data as it relates to schools with the most deprived pupils has not been published since August of 2020. At that time, Ofsted reports that only sixty-nine per cent of schools with the most deprived pupils earned a rating of either *good* or *outstanding* (Ofsted, 2020).

The Impact of School Inspections

Despite the prevalent use of inspections to assess the quality of education, research has found little evidence to support the causal link between school inspections and future school improvement (Gaertner et al., 2014; Jones & Tymms, 2014; Rosenthal, 2004). Some research even points to a negative effect of Ofsted inspections due to staff diverting energy and resources to meeting the requirements of inspection rather than the school's improvement plans (Rosenthal, 2004). A key element of school improvement is the necessary requirement for teachers to listen to and implement recommendations, something that is not guaranteed (Chapman, 2001; Brimblecombe et al., 1996). Furthermore, a 2018 audit found that Ofsted is "unable to demonstrate that its inspection of schools represents value for money" as the office does not record relevant data to make such a finding (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2018, p. 11). This may go some way to explaining why teachers' unions in England have described Ofsted inspections as "unfair, bureaucratic and excessively stressful" (Coughlan, 2019, p. 2).

Schools as Engines of Social Mobility

According to the Social Mobility Commission, within the United Kingdom, England has the highest rate of child poverty (2021). The Commission goes on to explain that it is England's lack of a strategy to address child poverty that is one of its greatest barriers to increasing social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). While certainly not the only, or even strongest,

definition of social mobility, for the purposes of this thesis the following definition provided by

The Social Mobility Commission will be used as it was key in the development of government

policies. The Commission defines social mobility as "the link between a person's occupation or

income and the occupation or income of their parents" (n.d.). The idea was that if the attainment

gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers could be closed or eliminated altogether, then

those pupils would have the freedom to choose their futures and therefore increase their social

mobility. However, according to Eyles et al., this would only be an intermediate outcome as it

cannot tell where children end up as adults (2022). To highlight the importance of social mobility

to government policy, in 2010, the Education Secretary Michael Gove stated that, "Schools

should be engines of social mobility. They should provide the knowledge, and the tools, to

enable talented young people to overcome accidents of birth and an inheritance of disadvantage

in order to enjoy greater opportunities" (Department for Education, July 26, p. 2).

Societal Inequality

Social mobility is closely tied to the social inequality experienced by those within society

who experience disadvantage. According to Francis and Wong, the scale of social inequality

within England is an essential impediment to social mobility (2013). Brown and James point out

that increases in social inequalities in some countries have led to increased policy development

to address social mobility (2020). Unfortunately, the creation of policies to address social

mobility focus on the responsibilisation of individuals and thereby ignore the collective problem

of poverty at the foundation of society (Brown & James, 2020). Education spending is often

presented as the 'great leveller' during political discussions and portrayed as a means to an end –

enabling all children to fulfil their potential regardless of their disadvantage (Buscha et al., 2023;

Eyles et al., 2022). This focusses the attention on schools rather than the economy as a route to

poverty reduction and therefore an increase in social mobility, without accounting for the deep-seated fundamental changes to society needed to reduce the endemic social inequalities facing disadvantaged pupils (Brown & James, 2020; Owens & de St Croix, 2020). Rather than being seen as a cornerstone for poverty reduction and therefore an increase in social mobility, education reform should be viewed as one part of a societal shift towards a more holistic and contextual theory for reducing social inequality (Brown & James, 2020; Levin & Kelley, 1994). Eyles et al., propose taking a systematic, longer-term perspective whereby governmental policies seek to not only develop education reform, but to also consider ways to improve the home learning environment (2022).

Opportunity Hoarding

A hidden downside to the belief that schools can improve social mobility lies within the structure of schooling in England. Parents can research Local Authority maintained schools, seek information on their Ofsted ratings, and then choose which school to send their child(ren). This concept of 'opportunity hoarding' is further demonstrated by affluent parents being able to purchase homes near high-performing schools and pay school fees (Bukodi & Goldthrope, 2019; Eyles et al., 2022). The ability of the middle-class to use their enhanced understanding and insider knowledge of the education system to maintain their advantage and ensure their children prosper, invariably creates schools segregated by class, and therefore keeps social mobility static (Goodman & Burton, 2012; Shain, 2016). Francis and Wong posit that one crucial way to improve social mobility is to prevent the middle-class from "gaming the system" through "radical and firm steps" taken by the government (2013, p. 3).

It is not just the ability of the middle-class to understand and move through the education system that is keeping social mobility static, but the very structure of the education system itself.

In his research, Neelsen found that the education system confirms the existing class differences as it reflects the norms and values of the ruling group (1975). Five years earlier, Bernstein also references reflections in his work when he contends that the lives of working-class children should be reflected in their schooling, but the current system favours the middle-class (1970). Neelsen further explained that using the education system to improve social mobility was impractical and would only lead to marginal improvements as the current education system performs an "executive and affirmative role" (Neelsen, 1975, p. 145). Reay supports this concept in her work when she states that "working-class education is made to serve middle-class interests" effectively expounding that not only can the middle-class 'game the system' but that the system is designed to meet their interests to begin with (2006, p. 294).

By putting the onus on an individual to improve their social mobility through academic achievement, the systemic changes required to allow this are disregarded (Francis & Wong, 2013; Wood et al., 2023). This responsibilisation of individual pupils perpetuates the erroneous idea that through hard work and determination alone one can improve their social class. This meritocratic rhetoric hides the societal factors associated with inequality and suggest that pupils can traverse these conditions simply by making use of the opportunities offered by the education system (Owens & de St Croix, 2020). There is significant evidence to suggest that social mobility is strongly linked with socioeconomic status, implying that equal educational opportunities do not necessarily equate to improved social class (Department for Education, 2018, January 25; Owens & de St Croix, 2020; Parsons, 2016; Zimdars, 2016).

The Role and Limits of Education

According to Neelsen, when assessing the impact education can have on social mobility, the definition of social mobility alters slightly to focus on the movement of an individual from

one social class to another (1975). It is important to note here that while traditionally this meant improving one's standing, there is a growing proportion of individuals who are using their advantages to avoid downward mobility (Eyles et al., 2022). The Social Mobility Commission's State of the Nation report presented evidence that disadvantaged pupils are seven months behind their more affluent peers in their academic attainment (2021). Worse, evidence shows this gap only widens as pupils move through the education system (Copeland, 2019; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013).

The Attainment Gap

Put simply, the phrase *attainment gap* refers to a disparity in education performance between subgroups of pupils (Goodman & Burton, 2012; Main, 2022). What causes this gap, and the subgroup of pupils referred to will change depending on what information is being researched. Some common areas of research seek to find data based on socioeconomic status (like this thesis), social class, ethnicity/race, gender, and special educational needs (Goodman & Burton, 2012; Main, 2022). The Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF) identified, through standardised assessments, that attainment gaps relating to socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender had begun to emerge in children as young as 7 years old (2009). According to Goodman and Burton (2012), this information suggests that barriers to pupils' learning create and compound disadvantage before children have even started school.

Research has shown that the attainment gap in England between socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers continues to persist despite numerous government initiatives aimed at addressing this issue (Lupton et al., 2009; Francis et al., 2017; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain, 2016; Strand, 2011). As this attainment gap is a direct result of social and economic deprivation, studies have found that schools have little or no control over its

reduction (Craske, 2018; Goodman & Burton, 2012; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain, 2016). This is despite increased pressure from outside sources insinuating that it is a teacher's moral responsibility to reduce the attainment gap (Craske, 2018). Bernstein's frequently cited article sums this up succinctly, "education cannot compensate for society" (1970).

Disadvantaged Pupils

The House of Commons defines a disadvantaged pupil as a child who has qualified for free school meals (FSM) at any time during the past six years (Roberts et al., 2021). To qualify for FSM, a child's parents need to have received at least one of several possible benefits provided by the Government (Burns, 2016): Income Support, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Support under the Immigration and Asylum Act, State Pension Credit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, or Universal Credit (The Department for Work and Pensions, 2013, p. 4). These pupils are specifically targeted as they tend to underperform on examinations.

While this definition is useful for developing policy, in her report, Crenna-Jennings delves further into the "key drivers" behind disadvantage and recognises that the "relationship between disadvantage and attainment is highly complex" (2018, p. 4). She finds that disadvantaged children live in environments that are less conducive to healthy family functioning and child development (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). These children are impacted by material deprivation meaning they do not have access to basic resources such as nutritious food, quality housing, and academic resources such as books and technology (Barrett, 2018; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013). They also face overcrowded housing, anxiety, and mental health issues (Barrett, 2018; Owens & de St Croix, 2020). The teachers interviewed in Owens and de St Croix's study identified the acute multiple deprivations that their pupils faced as the cause of

poor motivation and low aspirations (2020). Disadvantaged children will start school with a deficiency in learning skills when compared with their more affluent peers with this gap only widening as they move through the school system (Coleman, 1966; Copeland, 2019; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013). Poor academic performance is in turn associated with higher unemployment in adulthood (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2015). This attainment gap is also shown to be a key factor in stunting social mobility (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2015). It should be mentioned, however, that Taylor found there was "almost no relationship" between children who qualified for FSM and their level of attainment but rather other socioeconomic factors "such as the educational levels of [their] parents" were the cause (2018, p. 47).

The Pupil Premium Grant

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, led by Prime Minister David Cameron, introduced the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) in 2010 with a start date of September 2011, through their 36-page Programme for Government document. One sentence in the document stated, "We will fund a significant premium for disadvantaged pupils from outside the school's budget by reductions in spending elsewhere" (HM Government, 2010, p. 28). The funding was to be used by state funded schools in England to address the attainment gap disproportionately affecting children from low-income families, to reduce socioeconomic segregation, and to ensure they benefit from the same opportunities as pupils from richer families (Copeland, 2019; Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26; Gorard et al., 2021; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). Leading up to this decision, data had shown that disadvantaged pupils "significantly underachieve compared to their peers and a premium, which would involve providing additional funding specifically linked to disadvantaged pupils, would

have the primary objective of boosting their attainment" (Department for Education, 2010, July 1, p. 6). The funding for this program would be provided for those disadvantaged pupils who met the eligibility criteria (were in receipt of FSM) in publicly funded schools from reception to year 11 (pupils who are 4 to 15 years old) (Department for Education, 2010, July 1).

Funding

Schools were given the freedom to spend this additional PPG funding the way they deemed fit. It was felt that schools were in the best position to decide how the premium should be used to support their pupils and their communities (Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26; Morris & Dobson, 2021). The aim of this additional funding was to close the attainment gap and increase the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils. Schools drew on all available resources to raise attainment for all pupils, but especially for pupils on FSM, which was a major part of the Ofsted agenda (Shain, 2016). Directing funding at specific children, those in receipt of FSM, was a unique move by the Government as before this, funding policies were based on whole school needs or geographical contexts (Morris & Dobson, 2021).

An added benefit of the PPG is that the extra funding did not necessarily need to be spent solely on the pupil who attracted the funding (Gorard et al., 2021). This meant that schools had the freedom to purchase resources and fund extracurricular experiences that would be of benefit to the whole school rather than just pupils in receipt of PPG funding. Such resources included teachers, teaching assistants, specialists such as speech therapists, curriculum enrichment activities such as school trips and in-school guests, and specific academic interventions, all designed to give disadvantaged pupils a middle-class experience (Abbott et al., 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain, 2016). For the academic year of 2022 to 2023, children who qualified for PPG through FSM were allocated £1385 ($2337) each, while those who were adopted from care,

or were looked after by the Local Authority received £2410 ($4066) each (Department for Education, 2022, December 16a).

As the education system in England has moved from a softer focus on the well-being of pupils to a harder focus on progress and attainment, recording the use of funding for scrutiny by outside organisations has become ever more important. This record keeping has led to the use of the colloquial terms hard interventions and soft interventions. Hard interventions are those such as funding more staff and school resources both of which can be easily recorded and tracked. Soft interventions such as purchasing a washing machine for use by families in need are less likely to be included in record keeping methods and are certainly not identified as a means to closing the attainment gap, regardless of their importance (Craske, 2018). However, it is these soft interventions that disadvantaged pupils are less likely to possess and yet they play a crucial role in education through provision of wider cultural experiences or a growth in confidence (Barrett, 2018; Social Mobility Commission; 2017; Yeo & Graham 2015).

In 2014, the Government introduced the Universal Infants Free School Meals (UIFSM) (Barrett, 2018; Department for Education, 2013). This policy meant that the Government would provide free school meals to all children in reception, year 1, and year 2 regardless of their financial status (Barrett, 2018; Department for Education, 2013). On the surface, this would appear to be a beneficial program, but unfortunately, it resulted in unforeseen drawbacks. Because families were automatically provided with UIFSM, they no longer applied for this benefit. As this was the criteria for additional funding to be provided for schools to support disadvantaged pupils, many schools noticed a significant drop in their funding after the introduction of UIFSM. This provides an example of where the intent of a policy and its

implementation show an inherent disconnect, as well as how "policies can conflict and undermine each other" (Barrett, 2018, p. 72).

Although the Government described this funding as additional to the school budgets already provided, it came through at the same time as cuts were happening elsewhere. Examples of some of these cuts were the discontinuation of the co-ordination of the National Strategies, the School Development Grant, education and health partnerships, extended schools start-up costs, a music grant, and other area-based programmes (Carpenter et al., 2013; Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Research shows that this led to some schools needing to use their PPG funding just to maintain their existing provisions such as on staffing resources (Abbott et al., 2015; Carpenter et al., 2013; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021).

The Reality of the Pupil Premium Grant

England has one of the largest attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers among all OECD (Organisation for Cooperation and Economic Development) countries (Macleod et al., 2015). Cassen and Kingdon (2007) as well as Shain (2016) support this finding and explain that of European countries, England has the highest correlation between social class and educational performance as well as a high degree of social segregation within its schools. It is therefore understandable that the government would set aside a significant fund as an attempt to rectify this situation. However, simply providing funding does not necessarily address the attainment gap as shown in research that has found the use of the PPG has not made a significant impact on closing the attainment gap (Abbott et al., 2015; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Ofsted, 2013). Furthermore, some research has questioned the use of FSM as an eligibility criterion for receipt of the PPG funding as there will

be some children who experience disadvantages but are not eligible for FSM and will therefore

lose out on the PPG funding (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Taylor, 2018).

Through their research, Major and Machin found no evidence that education systems

consistently reduce the attainment gaps and life prospects between disadvantaged pupils and

their more affluent peers (2018). In truth, evidence shows that educational policy and practice at

best replicates, and at worst exacerbates, existing social inequality leading to social immobility

(Barrett, 2018; Brown & James, 2020; Copeland, 2019; Francis & Wong, 2013; Lupton &

Thomson, 2015; Reay, 2006). Wood et al. go so far as to state that using education to improve

social mobility is "flawed if it is not located in a wider vision of civic engagement in a more

inclusive and fairer society" (2023, p. 2). Decades earlier, although recognising that education

was a necessary precondition for social mobility, Neelsen found that having education equality

did not equate to occupation equality (1975). Indeed, he goes on to state that education equality

is more likely to minimize the importance of formal education rather than improve the social

mobility of the disadvantaged (Neelsen, 1975). The education system as it stands now has failed

to improve the social mobility of its most disadvantaged pupils and while it is important to

continue addressing this area of need, it is equally important to recognise that a child's parents

and home environment have a more profound impact on their educational and occupational

aspirations (Bernstein, 1970; Eyles et al., 2022; Sewell, 1971).

Assessment

The primary education system in England continues to be riddled with significant

inequality corresponding to class, ethnicity, and gender between disadvantaged pupils and their

more affluent peers (Goodman & Burton, 2012; Richards, 2008). This, coupled with the fact that

the English school system relies heavily on the use of standardised assessments to develop and

adapt policy, means that disadvantaged pupils are not represented. According to Whitty (2009) the pressure that the Government puts on schools to close the attainment gap using assessments is inconsistent with their goal of improving social mobility through the PPG. The result is that inequalities derived from social and cultural position are perpetuated rather than removed and therefore the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils stagnates.

In their work, Goodman and Burton posit that ethnicity, social class, and gender are not referenced when pupil performance data are published (2012). A requirement of the continued receipt of the PPG funding is that the data is published, and that progress is shown, but this data is based on standardised assessments which do not consider the social and cultural backgrounds of the targeted disadvantaged pupils. This only perpetuates the idea that the system is part of the problem, not the solution to improving social mobility. Thrupp described this inequality as an "inconvenient truth" when he explained that the current education system has been structured to support White, middle-class values (2007). According to Goodman and Burton, the focus on closing the attainment gap is a short-term solution which "ignores the long-term benefits of investing time and energy in the education of disadvantaged children" (2012, p. 503).

Educators experience pressure to focus on teaching to the test rather than ensuring their pupils have achieved a meaningful understanding of the topic. According to Goodman and Burton, since teachers know that Ofsted assesses how well they have closed the attainment gap between those pupils who attract the PPG funding and their peers, they will focus more on academic criteria (2012). Furthermore, the authors argue that this focus on academic outcomes does not allow teachers to respond to the cultural and social needs of their pupils and forces them to disregard any progress pupils may make in other areas such as relationship skills (Goodman & Burton, 2012). The "social justice challenge," so named by authors Thrupp and Lupton (2006),

specifically refers to the tendency of officials to disregard diversity in school contexts. This continued focus on accountability by governmental stakeholders perpetuates the implementation of approaches that do not address the root causes of the social and economic class divisions that fuel disadvantage and are likely to have little long-term effect (Goodman & Burton, 2012).

Accountability Mechanisms

As with any form of government spending, tracking how that money is spent and its effectiveness are key to the continued provision of that funding. In 2010, the DfE specifically stated that tracking the use of the PPG would be essential for "parents and others to judge how well [disadvantaged pupils] are doing at each school" (July 1, p. 9). However, according to Barrett, accountability mechanisms should be designed in such a way as not to constrain those who are responsible for implementing policy (2018). Within the English education system, many stakeholders are present at various levels – the Government, Local Authorities, governors, leadership teams, teachers, families, and pupils. Each stakeholder has a certain level of accountability although arguably the most risk can be attributed to leadership teams as they are likely to be dismissed by their local authority if they are deemed not to be properly fulfilling their duties after a poor Ofsted rating (BBC, 2014; The School Staffing (England) Regulations, 2009).

From the Government's perspective, a transparent strategy for tracking and publishing the data surrounding the use of the PPG and the corresponding academic improvement of disadvantaged pupils provides a way in which effective strategies can be shared with other schools (Department for Education, 2010, July 1). In support of full transparency, the DfE requires state funded schools to publish their PPG spending details online, including an action plan, and to be accountable through performance measures such as league tables (Barrett, 2018;

Copeland, 2019; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain, 2016). They must also work within a rigorous Ofsted inspection framework to assess the impact of the money spent (Barrett, 2018; Copeland, 2019; Department for Education, 2010, November 24).

To create this data for review by Ofsted inspectors, many schools report investing considerable time and money on developing standardised systems for use across the whole school since no method of recording has been provided by Ofsted or the Government despite the requirement for schools to record data. The systems developed support the monitoring and evaluations of pupil performance to meet Ofsted targets (Shain, 2016). This focus on academic attainment by Ofsted inspectors means that leadership teams increasingly find themselves arguing their case for their PPG strategy and feeling that their work to develop other interventions and systems is marginalised during inspections (Craske, 2018). Yet, the focus on accountability by the Government does not take into consideration outside factors such as deprivation and parental involvement (Goodman & Burton, 2012) leading to the question, just who is accountable?

Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant

Under the key areas of Leadership and Management, the Ofsted inspection framework requires state funded schools to show that the spending of their PPG funding is based on good evidence (Ofsted, 2021). The Ofsted inspection framework requires that eligible pupils "are achieving well, that their attainment is improving, and that the attainment gap is closing, or at the very least not widening" (Anilkumar, 2021). Schools are required to publish PPG performance tables that include data on the attainment and progress of pupils who attract the funding, and the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers (Department for Education, 2022, December 15; Shain, 2016). Of course, it goes to follow that as a school

improves in their provision of quality teaching and learning, the academic attainment of all their pupils will improve which means the attainment gap will remain stagnant.

To reach a rating of *outstanding*, a school needs to show that it is performing exceptionally by "securely and consistently" meeting all criteria throughout the whole school (Ofsted, 2021, para. 188). However, this is based on the judgement of inspectors, which as mentioned earlier, can be called into question due to the inherent human biases involved in decision-making. According to Ofsted, to achieve a rating of *outstanding*, a school must show they are "performing exceptionally" in "each and every criterion" (2021, para. 188). Under the key area of Leadership and Management, leaders must address eight important factors to demonstrate that the school provides education that has a positive impact on all its pupils (Ofsted, 2021). The way that the additional PPG funding is spent is one of the eight factors and as such, leaders need to show that this spending is founded on good evidence (Ofsted, 2021). During the time of this study, Ofsted updated its School Inspection Handbook and now identifies more specifically that Ofsted inspectors will gather evidence regarding the following:

1. The level of funding received by the school in the current academic year and levels of Pupil Premium Grant funding received in previous academic years.
2. How leaders and governors have spent the funding, their rationale for this spending and its intended impact on the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils (Ofsted, 2022, July 11a, p. 71).

If unable to provide this evidence, a school cannot earn a rating of *outstanding*.

Shifting Responsibility

The PPG policy was introduced at the same time as austerity policies were put in place which have been shown to have increased the wealth of the richest, whilst substantially reducing

income for those in receipt of benefits (Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Portes & Reed, 2017; Shain, 2016). The policies introduced during this time reduced family incomes and depleted services through spending cuts to elements of the social security budget (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). According to Craske, this means that the funding policy could be read as part of an overall strategy to shift the responsibility for declining life chances of the poorest children, who experience sustained material deprivation, onto schools (2018).

The provision of the PPG to help the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils is seen by some critics as the Government's way of putting the responsibility onto teachers without considering other reasons and contexts for disadvantage (Burn et al., 2016; Craske, 2018). As Berliner argues, out-of-school factors are likely to have greater influence on pupil attainment than within-school factors (2009). Major and Machin support this argument as they found that forces outside of the school cause bigger socioeconomic gaps in attainment and at most the education system may act as a counterbalance (2018). Wood et al. make the point that shifting responsibility for social mobility onto individuals disregards the systemic changes needed to enable this, and is therefore detrimental to social justice (2023). Craske further argues that the austerity politics in place at this time in history actually caused disadvantage among some pupils (2018). This focus on measurable academic attainment does not account for the general well-being of pupils, something schools are also required to improve (Craske, 2018). Going further, Lupton & Thomson explain that investing in the foundations of secure childhoods would put pupils in a better position to learn, yet the Government relies heavily on an academic-focused school system which those authors describe as yet another example of shifting the responsibility from the wider welfare state to schools (2015).

Summary of the Literature

This literature review highlights the complexity and controversy of funding and inspection for state schools in England. Six key themes were evident when considering the link between the PPG and the possibility of achieving a high rating through an Ofsted inspection: the development and implementation of government initiatives as a key factor in the English school system; using schools as engines of social mobility and a means with which to hide the necessary societal changes; the significant link between economic deprivation and academic attainment; the austerity measures, disregard of cultural backgrounds, and accountability mechanisms negatively impacting implementation of the PPG; the drawbacks of making the PPG a criterion for achieving a rating of *outstanding*; and the responsibilisation of individuals and schools. Governmental and academic research about Ofsted and the PPG as separate entities is readily available. However, literature that explores the link between the two is difficult to find, especially regarding how primary educators understand the relationship and their role within it.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Method

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to explore how primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Grant, and second, to identify the ways in which primary educators attempt to overcome the factors that cause deprivation and work towards closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. To this end, the following research questions were used to focus and guide this inquiry:

1. What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant?

2. How do primary educators in England describe their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils?

3. What barriers to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' do primary educators in England describe as their most challenging?

4. How do primary educators in England understand their role in improving the social mobility of pupils through the Pupil Premium Grant?

5. How do primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Grant?

This chapter is divided into the following seven sections:

1. Design of the Study

2. Sampling Selection

3. Data Collection Methods

4. Data Analysis

5. Validity and Reliability

Design of the Study

The fundamental goal of qualitative research is to understand participants' experiences in context. As this type of research involves working directly with other people, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis since they can be immediately responsive and adaptive and can make use of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Because I obtained data from virtual interviews, qualitative research is most suitable as it allows me to clarify material and explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Basic qualitative research intends to understand how participants make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purposes of my study, I chose to make use of a psychological approach to narrative qualitative research. As previously mentioned in my Literature Review, narrative research is the theoretical approach and not the method of analysis so making use of a psychological methodology helps to focus my analysis of the stories as data (Crossley, M. L., 2000; László, et al., 2007; Rossiter, 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stephens & Breheny, 2013). I am particularly interested in the stories primary educators tell of their experiences navigating England's school system. Their firsthand accounts of how they prepare for Ofsted inspections with a focus on how they support pupils who qualify for the PPG enabled me to understand the meaning of their experiences. Narrative research can make use of a variety of methodological approaches. I have used the psychological approach as I wished to concentrate more on the thoughts and motivations of the participants and emphasize their contextualized knowledge.

Sampling Selection

The goal of this study was to discover, understand and gain insight into how primary educators in England understand the relationship between the Ofsted inspection framework and the key criterion of using the PPG to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. To that end, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate strategy as it allowed for a sample selection from which the most can be learned. In particular, the method of criterion-based selection ensured that the participants interviewed met the necessary criteria. For this study, the participants needed to be primary educators (first criterion); they needed to work in primary schools within England (second criterion); they needed to have experience with preparing for an Ofsted inspection (third criterion); and they needed to have had experience working with pupils who qualified for the PPG (fourth criterion).

Initially, typical sampling was going to be used to select participants who were primary teachers as they generally represented the average person of "the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 97). However, as explained in Chapter 1: Introduction, the teaching profession in England was undergoing mass unrest at the time interviews were to take place, and many potential participants withdrew interest in being interviewed. In response to this change, the sampling selection was widened to teaching assistants, and teachers who had not yet experienced an Ofsted inspection and therefore convenience sampling was used. Although not the initial plan, this change to the study had a positive impact on the findings as it diversified the pool of potential participants available.

The potential participants were contacted through WhatsApp, a free and secure messaging service that we had previously used to maintain contact after I had moved away. First, I reminded the potential participants that I was working towards completion of my Masters and

as part of my thesis, I would be conducting a study that required interviewing educators. The

nature of this interview was explained in detail and then each potential participant was asked if

they wished to participate. Once they agreed, the necessary consent forms were shared and a

mutually agreed upon time to conduct the interview was determined.

Data Collection Methods

The most common data collection method used within narrative research are interviews

(Ntinda, 2020). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), a research interview "is a conversation

that has a structure and a purpose" (p. 5, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 107). Merriam

and Tisdell (2015) further explain that "the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind

of information" (p. 108). Three different types of interviews can be thought of on a continuum.

The first are highly structured interviews where "questions and the order in which they are asked

are determined ahead of time" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 109). The second are semi-structured

interviews where there may be some more and less structured questions, or the wording of the

questions is flexible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Finally, the third type of interview is unstructured.

A researcher will often use this interview type when they are unfamiliar with the phenomenon and

are therefore unable to ask relevant questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative researchers

will frequently make use of a combination of the three styles when conducting their interviews.

For the purposes of this study, a combination of all three styles was used with a heavy focus

on semi-structured interviews. Highly structured interview questions were used to answer

background questions, specifically regarding the number of years of experience, the number of

Ofsted inspections in which they had been involved, and the number of PPG eligible pupils they

had taught. An interview guide was created to enable the researcher to refer to a list of questions

and issues to be explored, however the exact wording of the questions and the order in which they

were asked was not relevant. What was more important was having a natural conversation with participants which allowed for them to find a sense of comfort and to speak freely. As I am familiar with this phenomenon, having been involved with two Ofsted inspections and teaching predominantly PPG eligible pupils, unstructured interview questions were only used if the participant used an unfamiliar term or referred to a unique event and clarification was required.

As participants currently reside in England and I live in Canada, Zoom meetings were set up to conduct the interviews. Using the Zoom program allowed for a transcript to be automatically generated and emailed to me upon ending the video call. I was then able to listen to the audio recording while editing the transcript to ensure it correctly represented what was said during the interview.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), an "important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive […] researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories" (p. 17). Once this data is gathered, researchers can then employ the constant comparative method of data analysis where they "compare one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 32).

For the purposes of this study, interview transcripts were used as the data set. These transcripts were input into ATLAS.ti and coded using that program. Each interview was transcribed and coded shortly after the interview took place so that I was able to write memos while the information was still fresh, and note topics to address with further participants. In selecting which parts of the transcript to code, I chose relevant sections because they were repeated in several places, they were surprising, or they reminded me of a theory or concept

(Löfgren, 2013). Following the explanation provided by Saldana (2016), coded data was then organised into categories from which themes may be derived.

Narrative researchers are concerned with what information stories convey about the narrator and their world and therefore wish to analyse stories as stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Squire et al., 2014). According to Ntinda (2020) researcher narrative constructs of the participant story can be understood through a functional analysis which focuses on what is being conveyed in the story. By combining this with narrative thematic analysis, themes that develop across the participants' stories can be analysed as well (Squire et al., 2014).

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity or credibility is the extent to which research findings are credible, or how closely the findings match reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). External validity or transferability is the extent to which research findings can be applied to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To achieve this level of validity, I applied one of the most important means to achieving credibility, which is a rich, thick description of my inquiry such that my study would be transferable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Tracy, 2010). Within my work, I aspired to the qualitative research quality measures of credibility, consistency, and dependency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The best way to ensure validity and reliability within qualitative research is to make use of triangulation – using multiple methods of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the main source of data collection was the interviews conducted. The information learned during these interviews was then cross-checked with documents collected during the literature review process as well as governmental policy documents related to Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant. Because the research questions for this study centered on primary

educator perspectives, my findings and discussion emphasised the data from the semi-structured

interviews. The documents collected during the literature review were used to compare primary

educator perspectives on Ofsted inspection criteria to the relevant government policy documents.

By making use of a variety of data collection methods and multiple sources of data, credibility of

this research is increased. The credibility is further enhanced to ensure that the research is

trustworthy by using several standard qualitative research techniques. First, as already

mentioned, rich, thick descriptions were used so that this work is transferable. Second, as can be

read in the following section, my subjectivity and reflexivity are discussed in detail. Finally,

once tentative findings are developed, respondent validation was sought to confirm plausibility

(Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Researcher Subjectivity, Reflexivity, and Ethics

Researcher subjectivity and reflexivity are crucial in this study as I share a close and

personal relationship with all the participants. As Richardson (2001) explains, "one's subjectivity

is shifting and contradictory…what we know about the world and what we know about ourselves

are always intertwined" (p. 36).

The "validity and reliability of a study depend [greatly] upon the ethics of the

investigator" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 260). To this end, I have removed myself from the

participants as much as possible. I have ensured that all REB procedures are followed and that

my participants understand their rights. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), "rather than

trying to eliminate [my] biases…it is important to identify them…in relation to [my] theoretical

framework" (p. 16). As Richardson (2001) explains, "no writing is untainted by human hands"

(p. 34). For this study, my theoretical framework, or the underlying structure, comes from my

orientation of education. This is the "lens through which [I] view the world" and therefore will impact how I interpret the data I have collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 85).

Summary

This study utilised semi-structured interviews of primary educators from England. The interview data was triangulated with documents obtained during the literature review process and governmental policy documents related to Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant. The data collected was coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti. These sources of data served to address this study's research questions outlined in Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter details the major themes that emerged from three interviews conducted with primary educators that focused on their understanding of the Ofsted inspection criteria and its link to the expenditure of the Pupil Premium Grant. Two primary teachers and one primary teaching assistant were interviewed. Some identifying information was modified, omitted, or redacted to protect the confidentiality of participants and those mentioned in the interviews. The participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms for use within this thesis. The two primary teachers were Oliver and Stacey, and the primary teaching assistant was Claire.

The first participant, Oliver, is a teacher in his fourth year. He has experienced three Ofsted inspections – one while working as a teaching assistant and two as a teacher. He expressed his frustration with Ofsted's focus on data rather than the child as an individual. The second participant, Stacey, is a teacher in her sixth year. Due to regularly moving schools, she has not yet experienced an Ofsted inspection and offers a unique insight into what that means for her. The final participant, Claire, is a teaching assistant with seven years' experience. In her role, she has worked predominately with children who qualify for the PPG. She has also experienced an Ofsted inspection and offers a different perspective as a teaching assistant as her role and the expectations placed upon her during an inspection are different to teachers'. All three participants cite a lack of sufficient training, both in their preparation to become educators as well as once they were in the school system. This is despite the fact that a key criterion for Ofsted is their knowledge of how to close the attainment gap between pupils eligible for the PPG and their more affluent peers. The three participants point to record keeping as having a large impact on their workload, although this seems to vary greatly between schools, depending on the socioeconomic demographic of the school community. Finally, they all see Ofsted as necessary

to ensure that schools are accountable, however they feel that the current structure of inspections is not fit for purpose. The findings also reference academic sources, policy documents, and social media posts from the Department for Education, Ofsted, and teaching unions, as well as first-person experiential accounts from newspaper articles.

The findings are divided into sections based on the study's five research questions, with further subsections based on the themes that emerged. The first research question: What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant? was addressed in three themes: academic support to help pupils access age-related curriculum expectations, extracurricular experiences offered by the school, and social and emotional support for both childhood development and in response to detrimental external factors. The second research question: How do primary educators in England describe their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils? was addressed in three themes: evidencing the academic progress pupils made, recording the interventions used to help progress pupils' learning, and the use of additional tutoring outside of class time. The third research question: What barriers to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' do primary educators in England describe as their most challenging? was addressed in three themes: the number of Pupil Premium children in a classroom, the external factors that these children face and bring into the school, and the training, or rather the lack thereof, that the participants received. The fourth research question: How do primary educators in England understand their role in improving the social mobility of pupils through the Pupil Premium Grant? was so tightly focused on the socioeconomic demographic of the community in which schools were located that it was addressed without the need to separate it into themes. The final research question: How do primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium

Grant? was addressed in two themes: monitoring the Pupil Premium Grant expenditure and monitoring the progress and attainment of pupils. The final section of this chapter highlights the five emergent themes that were identified during each of the participant interviews. These themes are comprised of the additional non-teaching responsibilities expected of primary educators, how schools prepare for an Ofsted inspection once the call has been received, how educators conceptualise the day of an Ofsted inspection, what educators understand of the expenditure of the PPG, and how educators respond to the accountability associated with a poor Ofsted rating.

Researcher Narrative Construct – Participant One – Oliver

Oliver (pseudonym) began his career in education working as a teaching assistant. During this time, he worked at one school where he started as a general teaching assistant responsible for "doing […] jobs for the teacher, things that would need doing through the day if it was running to the printer, if it was […] helping out, whatever it may be, within the classroom." As his skill and experience grew, Oliver's role "became very focused on specific children that needed one to one support through various SEN [Special Educational Needs] needs […] and then working with them." In June 2013, four years into his role as a teaching assistant, Oliver experienced his first Ofsted inspection and described what he remembers of that experience. After six years in that role, and through encouragement from colleagues, Oliver began working towards earning his teaching degree.

Oliver is now in his fourth year of teaching and has worked at two schools. He comments that the leadership at each school is vastly different and changes the work environment drastically. Oliver worked in a year 2 class in his first school for three years before resigning in April of 2022. As Oliver explained it, this resignation was brought on because he "was not

happy." He describes "the expectations [for staff as being] ridiculously high," so high that they were unmanageable and that "staff morale where I was at the time was awful." It was not until January 2023, shortly before being interviewed, that he began teaching again, this time, in a more affluent area. Oliver decided to return to his career because he "wanted to get back into it." He goes on to explain that he is "enjoying what [he is] doing now. […] You can't base your experience from one school to reflect […] the education system. It does have its flaws. It's hard work, but it can be more manageable."

Researcher Narrative Construct – Participant Two – Stacey

Just a few short months into her first year as a teacher, Stacey's (pseudonym) school closed due to the pandemic. The remainder of her first year she alternated from in-person to online teaching. At the time, Stacey was teaching a mixed years 3 and 4 class in a junior school that catered to children in years 3 to 6. The infant school that fed into her school was down the road and catered to children from nursery through to year 2. In September 2017, the infant school was rated as r*equires improvement* by Ofsted and then later, in January 2020, as i*nadequate*. These ratings led to the decision to amalgamate the infant school with the junior school which had been maintaining a rating of *good* since 2005 with only a slight dip into *requires improvement* in 2015. This amalgamation meant that the headteacher now had responsibility for both the infant and junior schools. In her second year, Stacey was moved to a mixed years 1 and 2 class at the infant school by her headteacher. Stacey details how the work environment was so toxic that she made the choice to leave the school at the end of the academic year.

Like Oliver, Stacey decided to move to a more affluent community and school with an ethos better aligned with her teaching style. While each of these schools has been inspected by Ofsted, Stacey has either left just before the inspection, or arrived just after it has taken place.

This means that although she is familiar with the framework and she ensures that she is prepared for an Ofsted inspection, Stacey has not been directly involved with one during her six years as a teacher. She also has had varied experiences working with children who are in receipt of the PPG funding as the communities she has lived in have had very different socioeconomic demographics.

Researcher Narrative Construct – Participant Three – Claire

Claire began working as a teaching assistant at the same school her children attended. During her seven years at this school, Claire worked as the teaching assistant for three teachers, two of whom were part of the senior leadership team as phase leaders. This offers her a unique insight into the work conducted behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of a school. Working with phase leaders also gave her additional responsibilities as she would be regularly called upon to take over teaching a class because the phase leader had been called away mid-lesson to attend to a problem. When she was able to work as a teaching assistant, much of her time was focused on the PPG pupils. However, although this focus would include an academic support component, much of this work was in support of the pupils' social and emotional development. Claire recognised that it was her "duty of care" to ensure those pupils were properly "safeguarded." Claire would closely monitor the pupils she worked with to ensure that their needs were met. This would include ensuring they had enough food, clothes, and most importantly, a safe space to talk when they needed to.

Over the years, Claire noticed that the needs of the children she worked with were becoming greater, reaching a crescendo after the pandemic. In September 2022, after working predominantly with junior pupils, Claire was moved to a reception class to work with children who were 4 and 5 years of age. Their social and emotional needs were so great that at times,

despite her years of experience, Claire felt unprepared to support so many children in need. She regularly brought her concerns not only to the classroom teacher, but also to the senior leadership team. Unfortunately, these concerns were not addressed, and the needs of her pupils escalated to the point that there were "a number of occasions where [she] was attacked by children." In February 2023, shortly before being interviewed, Claire left her position as a teaching assistant because she "[did] not feel safe" anymore.

Research Question 1: What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant?

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has developed an evidence brief designed to assist schools in "considering potential approaches to Pupil Premium spending" (2022, April 8b, p. 1). They have tiered the potential approaches under three key headings: high quality teaching, targeted academic support, and wider strategies which include such approaches as extracurricular activities and supporting pupils' social, emotional, and behavioural needs (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, April 8b). The evidence they provide closely mirrors that which the participants shared during their interviews. However, the participants did not consider their own high-quality teaching as a significant approach to supporting pupils.

Academic Support

Each participant, when asked how they support children who qualify for the PPG, first responded with a description of the academic support they offered. When Oliver was working at his first school, he ensured that each of his PPG "children [were] read with every day by an adult, whether it be teacher or T.A. or […] a volunteer that comes in." Oliver would also ensure they received "extra intervention throughout the day" in response to areas of need that he had picked up on, which could be evidenced through:

[…] a quick cue card 5-minute session with a T.A. or a teacher in the morning, or they get extra intervention in the afternoon. That could be within the classroom, as a group depending on their ability, and with the work they're working on. It could be that a T.A. from a different class will come and take them specifically to go and do something. It can range from anything academic. Something they've not been able to achieve in the day that they need a little bit of extra work on.

To speak to what she did to support her PPG pupils, Stacey needed to consider the first two schools she had worked at because her current class did not have any children in receipt of this funding. In those schools, more than half of her class comprised children who were receiving the extra funding. Stacey noted that "ninety per cent of the time […] your Pupil Premium children were children that weren't at the age-related expectation" so she would have been "planning adaptations" for those pupils regardless of their funding. It was key that those pupils were "getting that extra to help them to be able to achieve" so she would ensure that they were working in "small groups" or having those pupils work "with an adult during the lesson."

In Claire's case, it was the responsibility of the teacher to make their teaching assistants aware of who is in receipt of the extra funding and to plan appropriately for those pupils which meant she did "a variety of things" to academically support her PPG pupils as it was "at the teacher's discretion." Claire explained that as she gained experience supporting pupils, she felt more comfortable making in-the-moment adaptations to the teacher's plans to best meet the needs of the pupil(s) she was working with at the time. Claire found that depending on the teacher to whom she was assigned, her role might become more of a co-teaching role where she was able to freely use her initiative and experience. One of her responsibilities was to assist pupils with their homework if the teacher had noted that it was consistently not being completed

at home. She would help "a bunch of students" with their English homework by assisting with tabulating their "research and information […] in readiness to be able to write on the Monday morning." Her support also pertained to in-class work where "if the teacher felt that they were on the cusp of learning […] the maths from today, but they just needed that little bit extra to […] keep that momentum going, I'd be doing that."

As noted in Chapter 2: Literature Review, this focus on academic support does not come without inherent disconnects between policy intent and implementation. Studies have found that schools have no control over the attainment gap as it is a direct result of the socioeconomic deprivations their disadvantaged pupils face (Craske, 2018; Goodman & Burton, 2012; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain 2016). This is not to say that schools should cease their use of high-quality teaching and targeted academic interventions, but rather recognise that these approaches will not meet the intent of the PPG funding.

Extracurricular Experiences

It is the responsibility of each school to determine how best to spend the funding to meet the needs of their pupils and wider community (Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26). While this means schools will often spend much of the funding on providing academic support and resources for their pupils, it is not the only option for appropriate expenditure. The idea is to improve the social mobility of these children and provide them with a middle-class experience. To this end, many schools will also use their funding on excursions and special events. Abbott et al. refer to this as curriculum enrichment and found that headteachers were using this funding to provide their pupils with visits to local places of interest they would not normally be able to attend such as museums, galleries, and theatres (2015).

OFSTED AND THE PUPIL PREMIUM GRANT

Stacey remembers a group that would come in to provide music lessons for their pupils. There were so many children who qualified for the funding that the school had to put the children onto a rotation so that by the end of the academic year they had each had an opportunity to receive lessons.

> We opened it up for parents to pay, but it was mainly done to have Pupil Premium children take part of it. And they all did. So, they all got a turn rotating…for learning instruments. There was guitar, drums. There's vocals, keyboard. And that was on every Thursday morning. So, every child at some point was having that experience. And it did a lot for them. Their confidence and having that experience, learning an instrument that they mightn't be able to ever have done if parents had to pay for lessons.

In her school, Claire recalls the funding being used to subsidise a variety of trips. She felt that any form of extra funding from the government could only be considered a good thing and that using it to provide experiences to children who may not otherwise have experienced them was a great way to use that money. One such activity was bowling where "a select group […] were taken out and spent the afternoon […] bowling with some of the adults from the school, and that was actually a really lovely outing for those children." The school that Claire worked at also organised a residential camping trip to a local holiday island for the year 6 pupils each year. It was a fun end of year trip in recognition of their time at the junior school before they moved on to the next stage of their education. This was a trip that families had to pay for, however, Claire explained that the fees for children in receipt of the PPG funding "would have been heavily subsidised or paid for by the school to make sure that those children in particular, absolutely went." Providing trips to their pupils has been identified as a way for schools to enhance the

cultural capital of their pupils which has a positive impact on their social and behavioural skills enabling them to do well in the education system (Barrett, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2021).

Social and Emotional Support

During their interviews, both Oliver and Claire spent a significant amount of time discussing the social and emotional needs of their pupils. They were keenly aware that their pupils were not only in need of academic support, but also support to help them process the significant life events that they may be experiencing. The children who qualified for this funding often came from homes where they were exposed to "[…] traumatic childhood experiences, […] domestic violence, […] drug use, [and parents with] mental health issues" (Claire).

In his response to how he supports the children in his class who qualified for the PPG funding, Oliver explains that although predominately his pupils would be removed by teaching assistants to work in small groups based on the day's learning, they could also be pulled to work on "sharing skills in a game." He also explained that the PPG pupils would get priority for any in-school clubs that might offer support for "the social and emotional side of things."

> If there's a group happening on a Wednesday afternoon that that deals with that kind of
> thing, and I know I've got specific child or a specific group of children that will really
> benefit from that, I can put them forward for that.

Morris and Dobson found that headteachers recognised the importance of addressing issues around behaviour and low aspirations before tackling attainment and would therefor use their PPG funding for pastoral support, employing an educational psychologist, or developing a nurture room or safe space within the school (2021). As with Claire and Oliver, these headteachers acknowledged the need to support pupils with their social, emotional, and

behavioural difficulties prior to addressing their low attainment as they were potential barriers to their learning.

Research Question 2: How do primary educators in England describe their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils?

Interestingly, when describing their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils, each of the primary educators had very little to say about the pupils themselves. Their comments centred more around the bureaucratic aspect of the job.

Providing Evidence of Progress

The Pupil Premium Grant is provided to any pupil whose parents have qualified for at least one of eight possible benefits (Burns, 2016). While this may mean that the grant is supporting disadvantaged children, it does not necessarily mean those children are not attaining age-related expectations within school. Indeed, "evidence shows that academically able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are most at risk of under-performing" (Department for Education, 2022, December 16b, p. 9). Montacute divides this issue into two main areas: identifying, and supporting highly able pupils (2018). For academically able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to be properly supported, they need to first be identified, however the methods available such as testing and teacher identification are fraught with biases that do not take into account the knowledge base or cultural references of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (Montacute, 2018). Further, once academically able pupils are identified, the measures used to support them are often unavailable for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds as they are not financially able to access them, or they can only be found at schools in more affluent communities. These supports include highly skilled and experienced teachers, setting and streaming, and mentoring and tutoring (Montacute, 2018).

For Ofsted inspectors to see that the PPG is being spent wisely, they look at the progress and attainment data for the qualifying pupils. This can then lead to unforeseen difficulties for primary educators who are trying to provide evidence of progress for children who are already meeting their age-related expectations. Oliver described this as being one of his greatest challenges while teaching in a year 2 class. He lamented that the "child may not be improving in such big steps because they are already above." Conversely, you could have "someone who's really struggling and actually the intervention comes in, and they are making huge strides with their achievements and the successes and […] the improvements, that looks great." When referencing the record keeping and data tracking for which he was responsible, Oliver explains that it does "not always translate" well because his school had a "setting for attainment, but also progress, and the two never matched up, because in one case you look at progress it might not look as good, but the attainment's brilliant." He explains that "if [the pupil] come[s] in high and […] leave[s] high, it doesn't look like they've progressed. They have maintained, but they haven't progressed. Whereas someone comes in low and then achieves a lot well then, you've got great percentages."

Claire was also aware of how showing progress can be difficult for primary educators to evidence depending on the circumstances of the child. In her interview, she described siblings who "need[ed] their eyes checked […] need[ed] glasses because they can't see [and] it's been over twelve months [and they] still do not have glasses." This, of course, leads to academic struggle for those children. Unfortunately, situations like this are common for the area in which Claire worked and are a further example of the socioeconomic deprivation over which schools have little or no control (Craske, 2018; Goodman & Burton, 2012; Shain, 2016). Claire agrees

with this when she states that "there's only so much that […] the school can do." Her frustration is further evident when she asserts that:

> …the families have also got to […] have some of the responsibility as to why their children are not progressing. Because if it's something […] so little which […] we know that the NHS [National Health Service, similar to OHIP in Ontario] can cover the cost of glasses. Why, why are you not going and sorting that out for your children?

The school leaders interviewed in Morris and Dobson's study were so frustrated by parents' lack of engagement with their children's needs as well as the cutbacks to health care funding which correlated to long wait times, that they used the PPG funding to employ a private speech and language therapist (2021). The teachers interviewed in Owens and de St Croix's study express similar frustrations with the families of their pupils. Those teachers felt that they were battling against a lack of educational aspirations caused by parents who do not value education (Owens & de St Croix, 2020). Children will internalise these negative messages about education and become demotivated and disengaged with their learning which in turn leads them to underachieve (Francis & Wong, 2013).

Record Keeping

The use of record keeping is a key aspect of ensuring that the PPG is being spent on the correct pupils and in the way it was intended. Within a classroom, these records could be used by the teacher and teaching assistant(s) to appropriately plan for their pupils. The senior leadership team would also have access to these records so that they could closely monitor trends across year groups as well as having the ability to track the progress and attainment made by an individual pupil as they moved through the school. Schools in England have a list of requirements to follow as to the information that must be published on their websites

(Department for Education, 2022, December 15). Within this list are performance measures

including exam and testing results as well as a pupil premium strategy statement (Department for

Education, 2022, December 15). This publicly available data is what Ofsted inspectors will have

access to before entering a school and is also the data that could possibly instigate an inspection

if the results flag concern (Ofsted, 2023).

It is an individual school's responsibility to record, store, monitor, and assess this data in

any way they deem fit (Ofsted, 2022, July 11a). Not only the record keeping itself, but the

development of a format is added to the workload. In her role as teaching assistant, Claire was

keenly aware of the importance of these records. She would be "keeping […] records as to who

you were seeing, what you did, […] how you feel it's going, but you'd also feed that back to

your teacher as well [about] how things [were] progressing" to inform planning. These records

were also kept accessible within the classroom so that they could be added to at any point, by

any adult, who may support a pupil in receipt of the PPG funding.

In his interview, Oliver explained that although he had teaching assistants in his classroom

specifically to support the PPG pupils, with so many, he was also involved with record keeping. He

commented on the significant amount of time it would take him to complete the necessary

recording each day.

> We just had to prove by keeping notes and track in a folder of all the things we were doing
>
> for each Pupil Premium child. Who was working with that child. What the activity was that
>
> was being done. Potentially, how long it was happening for. Which, obviously, if you've
>
> got fourteen children in a class, and you're having to do something with them […] a good
>
> few times a week, especially when you're reading with them every week, that can take up
>
> quite some paperwork time I'll say.

Given the significant number of children he had in his class who qualified for the PPG, he was asked if his school provided additional time outside of instructional time to complete the required paperwork. His response shows a lack of understanding from the senior leadership team about the detrimental effects of unnecessary workloads on teachers.

> No. […] if you had […] a spare 5 minutes during the day, you can jot it down as you do it. So, as you're reading with children, it was easier because you could just write it as they're reading to you, that's fine. But if you want to be very present with them and read with them, then you wouldn't do that. It's just something that was done after school as well as marking, planning whatever it is. You could choose to do that in your PPA [Planning, Preparation, and Assessment] time, your time out of class. But again, it's just that it's something that's added on to the list of things you've got to do.

Stacey's experience is significantly different to Claire's and Oliver's. While working in her previous school, Stacey was expected to refer to the supports she was providing for children in receipt of the PPG funding directly onto her lesson plans. In this way the plans would be accessible to any member of staff who needed to reference them. At her current school, her senior leadership team appears to be cognizant of the new Education Inspection Framework as well as the Workload Reduction Toolkit as they are no longer requiring their staff to keep detailed notes related to the support provided to the PPG pupils.

Additional Tutoring

Due to the loss of learning experienced because of school closures caused by the pandemic, the government brought in additional funding as part of the National Tutoring Programme (Department for Education, 2021, June 2). This funding was to be used to provide extra "tuition to help [pupils] catch up on learning lost during the pandemic" (Department for

Education, 2021, June 2, para. 1). While not necessarily brought in for the sole use of supporting the PPG pupils, Stacey recalls her school using this funding to pay teachers to provide additional academic support to the PPG pupils in their own classes. Stacey described these children as being "constantly in the front of your mind." She would tutor for thirty minutes, twice per week, either before or after school to "go through something with them that they haven't got from the day before" or to "inform their […] learning." Stacey explained that although this support was brought in because of COVID "there were gaps in the learning anyway" referring to the other disadvantages that the PPG pupils face, such as a poor home learning environment and reduced access to basic resources (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). This was a challenging experience for Stacey, one that she took to heart because "they were so far behind from that year 2 expectation, that is quite hard to get to." However, nearly a year after the tuition program was brought into effect, the Education Endowment Foundation released a tweet stating that:

> It was challenging to detect impact across premium pupils in schools that accessed tuition through Tuition Partners, but higher amounts of tutoring were related to better scores in English in primaries and better teacher assessed grades for year 11 in maths & English (2022, October 18).

Prior to the pandemic, research showed that 72% of schools were using their PPG funding to provide individual tuition (Comptroller & Auditor General, 2015). While relatively costly, individual tuition is recognised as being highly effective in improving academic attainment (Comptroller & Auditor General, 2015; Major & Higgins, 2019). The teachers interviewed in Morris and Dobson's study identified tuition as one of their academic intervention resources (2021). This intervention was used in both schools I worked at by giving teachers an opportunity to provide paid tutoring outside of school time if they wished.

Research Question 3: What barriers to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' do primary educators in England describe as their most challenging?

The Pupil Premium Grant was brought in to help close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers (HM Government, 2010). How that was achieved was left to individual schools to determine. Each of the participants described how they worked towards achieving this goal within their classrooms. A key theme noted throughout each interview was that the socioeconomic demographics of the communities in which each school operated played a significant role in how this goal was managed. Each of the participants began their careers working at schools located in communities where a significant proportion of the pupil population was comprised of children who qualified for the PPG. This led to classes where more than half of the children were eligible for extra academic support and access to extracurricular activities. Later in their careers, both Oliver and Stacey moved to communities in more affluent areas. They noted a change in demographics within their classrooms where Oliver only had two children in receipt of this funding and Stacey did not have any.

Number of Pupil Premium Children

In Oliver's case, the largest barrier to closing the gap was the sheer number of pupils in his class who qualified for the PPG funding. His time was stretched beyond what was manageable. He describes trying to meet the necessary expectations as "quite unrealistic." In his first school, fourteen of his twenty-eight pupils qualified for the PPG funding. His school expected him to provide "intervention" for each of these pupils that was "above and beyond what […] all the rest of the children […] would get." This meant that throughout each day, half of his class was being "removed at various times." He compared this situation to the school in which he currently works where only one child in his class qualifies for the PPG funding. Oliver

describes that child's "something […] extra or specific" as "look[ing] a lot different" to what he used to provide.

The expectation that each pupil be provided with specific interventions above and beyond what the other children in the class experience does not correlate with the advice put forward by the Education Endowment Foundation. This calls into question how well the senior leadership team at Oliver's previous school understood how to support pupils in receipt of the PPG funding. In their three-tiered briefing of support strategies, the EEF suggests that some pupils "may require targeted academic support" that "should be carefully linked to classroom teaching" and not "inhibit pupils' access to the curriculum" (2022, April 8b, p. 2). This advice does not suggest that each child in receipt of the PPG funding needs to be receiving support above and beyond what their peers are receiving and by continuously removing children from the classroom, their access to certain aspects of the curriculum is inhibited. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, some pupils in receipt of the PPG funding may be academically-able despite their disadvantaged backgrounds and would require support that ensures they do not under-perform (Department for Education, 2022, December 16b, p. 9).

External Factors

A school does not stand alone in its community but is rather a part of it and therefore must work in unison with that community to best support its pupils. While the research into this area is limited, Crenna-Jennings asserts that children from low socioeconomic communities show worse cognitive skills and school readiness, increased emotional and behavioural problems, and are less likely to graduate (2018). To address this, the staff interviewed in Morris and Dobson's study used their PPG funding to address the wider needs of their pupils by "purchasing resources that otherwise would be paid for by parents" such as uniforms and food

(2021, p. 294). Children who qualify for the PPG funding do so because their parents have qualified for benefits from the Government (Burns, 2016). This often means that to close the gap between these pupils and their peers, the schools need also to address external factors which impact pupil progress. Abbott et al. found that the staff they interviewed for their study strongly believed that the school was responsible to the community because as their pupils improved so too would the community (2015).

During her interview, Stacey described this situation as "fighting a losing battle" because she would spend much of her time supporting these pupils only to send them "back to an environment at home where there [aren't] parents that are educated or interested." The notion that educators are 'battling' against families and parents is not unique to Stacey. In their study, Owens and de St Croix found that teachers were battling against families that did not value education and thereby exposing their children to negative norms and expectations around schooling (2020). Stacey goes on to explain that her pupils were "not being exposed to it at home, and having that [positive] attitude from parents." Here she refers to the lack of exposure to reading or homework as well as an attitude from parents that school and learning are not important. Reay describes this as pupils being left with a sense that education is not something that they or their family are good at which puts them at a disadvantage before they have even begun (2017). Goodman and Burton found that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds had few educational discussions with their families and were instilled with lower educational aspirations (2012).

In Claire's role as teaching assistant, she was often on the front lines, as it were, of supporting these pupils through difficult times. To allow the classroom teacher to continue working with most of the class, Claire would take aside pupils who needed additional support to

work through situations they may have faced at home because "there [were] so many barriers that [could] impact on these kids from the moment that they open their eyes in the morning." This began while the pupils entered the school in the morning as she would be "checking on their welfare [and possible] safeguarding issues." She explained that she would spend "a good chunk of [her] day providing […] emotional […] support." She would be continuously "looking for things that [were] out of […] the norm [of what] you would expect from the child."

Later in her interview, Claire discussed how the situation at her school had become progressively worse due to the pandemic so that "there's so many now, just so many more." She recognised that before any academic learning could take place, the external factors these children faced needed to be addressed so that they can focus on their learning. Claire shared questions she would be internally asking:

> Have the children […] got lunches? Have they had breakfast? Have they got the right clothing for school? […] Have they got their glasses? […] Are they having to go and have stays in hospital?

Fortunately, Claire is not alone in recognising that there is a need for additional support to be made available to those pupils facing external factors of deprivation. In a message from the Education Endowment Foundation put forward in a Tweet, Chief Executive Becky Francis asserts that the "socio-economic inequality in education [that was] entrenched before the pandemic has grown." She goes on to state that "it would be naïve of us not to recognise that factors outside of the school gate […] also play a significant part in the widening attainment gap" (2022, November 24).

Training

Despite government intention for teachers to act as agents of social mobility, none of the participants had been explicitly trained to support the specific and often unique needs of pupils in

receipt of the PPG funding. Indeed, research has identified that the current teacher training is not preparing teachers to work with pupils who are identified as disadvantaged (Burn et al., 2016; Goodman & Burton, 2012; Reay, 2006).

Stacey recalls Pupil Premium being "loosely mentioned" during her teacher training, but nothing specific was taught. She goes on to explain that she has just taken the "direction of leads" [lead teachers] as to how to best support these pupils. When asked if she feels specific training would be beneficial, she felt that for schools where a "high proportion of children are in that category" it would be "really relevant and useful for everyone to have," but not necessarily for schools like where she works now as there are not any pupils eligible for the PPG funding.

Oliver also does not recall any "specific training." However, he describes "staff meetings or twilight sessions after school [where they would] have a phonics catch up training." It was then expected that this training would be applied to the whole class which would therefore include the PPG pupils.

Claire recalls receiving training for "speed reading monitoring" that was used to support year 6 children in preparation for sitting their SATs (Standardised Assessment Tests). This was used to determine if the pupils could read fast enough to be able to complete their papers in the allotted time or "whether children needed […] reading support for their SATs papers." Although this training was not specifically geared towards children in receipt of the PPG funding, many of those children were inevitably supported due to their low progress and attainment.

Given that the first tier of the EEF's evidence brief explains the value of developing high quality teaching, specific training for supporting PPG pupils could be considered irrelevant as addressing their needs could be met through developing a teacher's overall skill set. If the point is to build "teacher knowledge and pedagogical expertise, curriculum development, and the

purposeful use of assessment" then in doing so, schools would improve the progress and attainment of all pupils including those in receipt of Pupil Premium funding (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, April 8b, p. 1).

Research Question 4: How do primary educators in England understand their role in improving the social mobility of pupils through the Pupil Premium Grant?

When the Pupil Premium Grant was first introduced it was Education Secretary, Michael Gove, who said that "schools should be engines of social mobility" (Department for Education, 2010, July 26, p. 2). According to the Social Mobility Commission, social mobility is defined as "the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents" (n.d., para. 11). As detailed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, this was the definition used to determine that the children who were eligible for the PPG were those whose parents had been in receipt of at least one of a possible eight government benefits. Nine years after its inception, in a recent Twitter post, the Social Mobility Commission questions whether "the Government should consider [if] Pupil Premium funding is effectively targeted at supporting disadvantaged students" (2020). They go on to make a distinction among those who experience disadvantage and question "whether differential levels of funding might be more beneficial for those with long-term disadvantage" (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). While each of the participants was familiar with the PPG, none of them had been aware of its origin or the link to the Social Mobility Commission.

When asked to share his opinion about the use of this definition, Oliver stated that "money doesn't reflect how bright [a] child is [...] there's no connection there." While technically true, this statement disregards the material deprivations a child may be facing that are likely to impact on their schooling experience. Children in such situations will not only lack

basic necessities such as nutritious food, but they will also be without resources that support their

cognitive stimulation such as books and technology (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). Oliver's statement

highlights a lack of clarity and accuracy surrounding the use of the Social Mobility

Commission's definition of social mobility as a key determiner for the intent and implementation

of the PPG.

Oliver was also concerned for the children who "don't fit the criteria" for extra funding.

Although as a professional, he would do what he could to help those pupils progress and attain at

age-related expectation, his focus needed to be on those who qualified for the PPG given the

high stakes involved. Oliver's lived experiences within the classroom provide an example of the

apprehension from some researchers around using FSM status as a marker of funding eligibility

mentioned during Chapter 2: Literature Review. Research has found that there will be some

children who experience disadvantages but are not eligible for FSM and therefore do not benefit

from additional funding (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Taylor, 2018).

The concept of 'opportunity hoarding' is demonstrated through Stacey's experiences

working in a community with a high socioeconomic demographic. Many of her pupils have

parents who are highly educated and in full-time employment which provides them the

opportunity to ensure that their children prosper by living near high-performing schools and

paying necessary fees. Her situation perfectly encapsulates what Goodman and Burton

referenced in Chapter 2: Literature Review, where they explain that parents in England can

research schools and send their children to high achieving schools which invariably keeps social

mobility static by creating schools segregated by class (2012).

In her response, Stacey recognised the challenges that different schools face depending

on their community. In her current school, she could only think of one pupil who was receiving

the PPG funding and explains that he will likely 'break the cycle' because "he is such an amazing sportsman that he will go on to get a scholarship and likely get into a private school." While qualifying for the PPG, breaking the cycle through earning a sports scholarship could be viewed as 'the luck of escape' (Sennett, 2012) or 'succeeding against the odds' (Shain, 2016) as the pupil that Stacey refers to will increase his social mobility not through improving his academic attainment (the whole point of the PPG) but through exceptional talent within sport.

Stacey ended her explanation by comparing her current school to the one she worked at previously. Nearly half of the children in that school received the PPG funding. In that case, although she remained positive, she did feel that the disadvantages that those pupils faced might be far above and beyond what a school could cope with.

> I think schools have the power to completely make that change. […] I think in some cases there are children that […] can go on to […] break that cycle. But I think it doesn't happen enough. No, I'm just thinking about the kind of children in [redacted], and sometimes the school can […] only do as much as it can do. Some children will sadly fall into the steps of what they're surrounded by in their day-to-day life around them. So […] I think schools can make it happen. I really do. But I think it isn't happening enough.

Despite Stacey's positivity and hopefulness, research has shown that education systems alone are insufficient for improving social mobility as it is a wider societal issue that will require significant systemic change to over come (Major & Machin, 2018; Wood et al., 2023). Furthermore, research has also shown that the use of the PPG funding has not made a significant impact on closing the attainment gap (Abbott et al., 2015; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Ofsted, 2013).

Research Question 5: How do primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Grant?

It is important to note here, that while this research question was set as its own stand-alone question, throughout the interviews, the expectations of Ofsted were frequently brought up by participants as they answered other questions. When narrowing the focus to just the link between Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant, this research question can be addressed in two themes: monitoring the Pupil Premium Grant expenditure and monitoring the progress and attainment of pupils.

Monitoring the Pupil Premium Grant Expenditure

As described in Chapter 2: Literature Review, for a school to earn an *outstanding*, they must show that the Pupil Premium Grant expenditure is founded on good evidence – that school leaders have a good rational for why they chose to spend the funding the way they did (Ofsted, 2021). When the participants were asked about the role that Ofsted plays in this expenditure, the participants unanimously felt that with such large sums of money involved – £2.68 ($4.52) billion total for the 2022-2023 academic year – Ofsted was necessary to ensure it was being spent as intended (Roberts, 2022). Considering a recent concern raised by the National Education Union (NEU) that "the Pupil Premium is being used to plug budget gaps rather than on the most disadvantaged children," the use of the inspectorate seems not only necessary, but prudent (2019, April 25). This information comes from Sutton Trust's annual polling of teachers where 27% of respondents stated that the PPG was being used to fill disparities elsewhere within their school budget (2019).

Stacey felt that "considering the money that's coming in for these children […] then yeah, it seems like it should be." She later recalls the low socioeconomic community she worked

in early in her career and explains "when you're dealing with […] quite challenging children from tough backgrounds and they're bringing this money in, then, yeah, I think someone should be […] looking to say […] how are you helping these children?"

Claire shared a similar view to Stacey and when asked the same question, responded with an emphatic "absolutely" and then went on to further explain that she felt the PPG pupils needed "to be closely monitored [to ensure that the funding the schools were] receiving is actually going to those children." Claire felt it was important for Ofsted to "be continuing to monitor to make sure that the funding is being used wisely to make sure that these kids are given a fair chance."

One of the ways schools can choose to spend their PPG funding is on staffing (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, April 8b). Historically this has been used to fund teaching assistant deployment and intervention such that they can supplement rather than replace the high-quality provision offered by the class teacher (Department for Education, 2022, December 16b; Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, April 8b). While working at his previous school, located in a community with a low socioeconomic demographic, Oliver was keenly aware that this funding was "going on staffing." At that time, he had three teaching assistants in his class as compared with the high socioeconomic demographic community he currently works in where he only has one teaching assistant.

Monitoring the Progress and Attainment of Pupils

A second area for Ofsted inspectors to assess is the progress and attainment of children in receipt of the Pupil Premium Grant (Ofsted, 2021). When asked if Ofsted inspectors should be monitoring this area, Oliver simply responded with "No." His concern here was the tendency for Ofsted inspectors to simply analyse data rather than understanding individual children within context. He explains that "they are looking at a percentage on a piece of paper that doesn't truly

reflect the personal side of a classroom." This was demonstrated during his maths observation of April 2023 where the inspector was in his room for "literally four minutes" and "didn't really talk to any children." This pattern was continued by another inspector later in the day who came in for "probably 10 minutes" but spent his time "talking to the geography lead and looking through books."

As mentioned previously, Ofsted will report on the four key areas of: The Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, and Leadership and Management, during an inspection (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2018; Elliot, 2012; Ofsted, 2021). However, what they specifically choose to assess, observe, and monitor is known only to them. Often these specific areas will link to a new government initiative, areas of concern picked up during a previous report, or information gleaned from publicly available data. These specific areas may also be in response to communication received from staff or parents. After experiencing three Ofsted inspections, Oliver shows that he is cognisant that inspectors can be monitoring particular areas of a school when he states that "in terms of data and the numbers […] if the school's lucky and Ofsted [inspectors] are looking at it, and it's what they want to see, then great for them."

Claire brought to the forefront an interesting perspective on how Ofsted should assess data. She felt that their observations could not be "black and white" and that if Ofsted inspectors chose to look at specific data, then they should "delve a little bit deeper" into what that data represented. Claire proposed questions that Ofsted inspectors could ask that might help them examine why the data was presenting as it was: "Is it trending the same way? Has it gone up and then all of a sudden, has it dipped? Why is it staying […] static? Is it a slow increase?" She also commented that Ofsted inspectors "run the risk of […] trying to rush through things instead of

actually understanding the why this child isn't progressing." Claire added that Ofsted inspectors should consider looking at the data for the whole class rather than a group of pupils such as those that receive additional funding: "If it's a […] class where they're all trending the same line, then you'd probably be questioning, maybe the teacher, or what's actually been going on in the classroom for that school year."

Emergent Themes

Five themes emerged during each of the interviews that did not directly respond to the study's research questions. They are comprised of the additional non-teaching responsibilities expected of teachers, how schools prepare for an Ofsted inspection once the call has been received, how educators conceptualise the day of an Ofsted inspection, what educators understand of the expenditure of the Pupil Premium Grant, and how educators respond to the accountability associated with a poor Ofsted rating.

Non-Teaching Responsibilities

While not directly related to the research questions, each participant was asked if they had any leadership roles within their schools. This was meant to help position each primary educator in context and in support of the theoretical framework of this study. Understanding the additional, non-teaching responsibilities that participants may have helps to place their "thoughts and motivations" within the narrative construct (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 35). Teaching is not just about being present in a classroom; it also includes the planning and preparation that happens outside of the classroom. These additional tasks are frequently what teachers refer to when they discuss an unmanageable workload (Walker et al., 2019). In addition to the planning and preparation for their own classrooms, both Oliver and Stacey were also assigned additional leadership roles by their respective headteachers.

Oliver remarked that at his first school the staff were "just assigned a subject or a couple of subjects depending on the size of staffing." For each subject the staff were required to "do various things throughout the year" including a "termly report [and] termly data input based on those subjects." This additional work could become quite daunting for those staff who were assigned "two or three" subjects. When asked to elaborate on the specifics of his responsibilities, Oliver prefaced his response by saying that some of them "changed because of the regulations and […] the things that [they] brought in because of COVID. In general, Oliver was responsible for ensuring that resources and policies were "up to date." He also needed to record "pupil voice" to determine "whether [the children] were happy in the subject." This information then needed to be fed "back to senior management."

In 2019, when the Education Inspection Framework was brought in, it included a component of what Ofsted referred to as "deep dives" (Ofsted, 2022, July 11a). These deep dives were a way in which Ofsted inspectors could use observation of a subject and discussion with the corresponding subject leader to gain a deeper understanding of a school's curriculum (Ofsted, 2022, July 11a). In preparation for possible deep dive questioning, Oliver knew that he had to be able to answer questions about what the progression of his subject looked like. This was an area of particular challenge as he was working at an infant school at the time. It meant that for him to be able to answer questions about where the subject was going, he would need to make connections with the junior school.

To help their staff prepare for these deep dives, Oliver's school used staff meetings to "practice […] for some deep dive questioning from potential Ofsted inspectors". Oliver remembers some of the questions as ones where you "wouldn't know off the top of your head [what the answer was but] it was an expectation that you would need to know this information in

case an Ofsted inspector was to ask you these questions." The timing of Oliver's situation added a further level of challenge. The new framework with deep dive questioning came into effect in September 2019. It was not until "mid-October" that the staff at his school were given their new subjects to lead. Ofsted inspectors then arrived in January 2020 to conduct their inspection. Oliver felt that there was not a lot of time to become familiar enough with new subjects to be able to answer deep dive questions from Ofsted inspectors because there was "a lot of information that you're expected to know and understand which […] is unrealistic." In his words, "luckily" his subject was not one of those "to be picked" for deep dive interviews because he would not have felt "confident doing it." In his article about Ofsted's inspection framework, Scott, a retired headteacher, explains that:

> Subject leaders in first and infant schools are being interrogated with the same questions as secondary heads of department. The crucial difference is the former are responsible for delivering the whole curriculum with limited non-contact time to develop a monitor a subject throughout the school (2022).

Stacey's experience with leading a subject is comparable to Oliver's. During her years as a teacher, she has led "English, […] P.E., and […] geography/history," all of which have been assigned to her by the senior leadership team. Stacey was also aware that she was responsible for understanding how her "subject progresses from […] reception to year 6, knowing what the content looks like across the school and […] how it's being taught." To achieve this level of understanding she would ensure that she was "monitoring, […] observing, […] looking at books, [and] talking to the children."

Additional responsibilities were not just expected of primary teachers. As a Teaching Assistant, Claire also found herself in a position where her teacher would email her the plans for

the coming week on "Sunday night." This left her no time to resource the lessons unless she came into work early. To ensure that lessons were properly resourced, Claire would "get in around 8 o'clock [even though her] day [didn't] start officially and pay wise until 8:30." While not assigned this duty by a member of the senior leadership team, Claire felt that for her day to run smoothly, especially considering the deprived children she supported, it was to her benefit to volunteer this additional time. However, increase in workload is a significant contributing factor when considering staffing burnout within schools (National Education Union, 2019, May).

Preparing for Ofsted

Ofsted inspectors will normally call a school the day before they plan to inspect, although for a surprise inspection, this phone call may come just fifteen minutes prior to arrival (Ofsted, 2022, September). Between them, Oliver and Claire have experienced four Ofsted inspections, whereas Stacey, in her words, has "dodged it" thus far. Recalling the first Ofsted he experienced in June 2013, while working as a teaching assistant, Oliver remembers staying at "the school until 11 pm" the day before Ofsted inspectors were due to arrive. In that time, he recalls being "up and down the school" because "there were masses […] of cleaning, tidying, sorting, [and] moving." When asked to specify what he was asked to clean, tidy, sort, and move, Oliver responded:

> …we were helping with displays. We were helping with just kind of general clutter in classrooms. We're making sure corridors and peg areas [and] coat areas were tidy. And then we had big areas under stairs which had all the resources in which […] day-to-day don't tend to stay in a tip top shape. So that was very much kind of sweeping and making sure it was […] very presentable the following morning.

During his most recent Ofsted in April 2023, Oliver recalls only staying at the school until 8pm the night before they were due to arrive. When asked to explain what he was doing during this time,

Oliver responded with "getting my room ready was the biggest thing, because [of] the building works that happened." This Ofsted inspection took place two days into a new term. Over the two-week term break some of the classrooms had renovations to remove and update storage cupboards. The new cupboards were not due to be installed until the next break, and so Oliver describes how he spent his evening trying to tidy up his classroom resources without having anywhere to put them. He also explained how it "was a bit of a push to […] make sure [his displays] were ready" because the new term had just started, and he had not had the "chance to get these things up and running."

When asked what she remembers of her Ofsted inspection from November 2017, Claire described the feeling in the school changing almost instantly. She said that staff went into "panic mode to make sure […] that all the things that they believe[d] Ofsted [inspectors] are going to be double checking and looking at and focusing on are actually all neat and tidy […] prior to their arrival." Like Oliver, Claire explained that much of her time was spent making sure that the school was clean, neat, and tidy as well as ensuring that pupil data was up-to-date and available should it be requested. When Claire was asked to further explain what she meant by "neat and tidy" she responded:

> It is the look and feel of the school […]. Are all the displays all looking […] fresh as a daisy, and all looking neat and tidy. Or are they looking a bit shoddy? [Are] the classrooms all neat and tidy, and looking all […] bedazzled […].

As mentioned in Chapter 2: Literature Review, the goal of Ofsted is to promote excellent education in England by ensuring schools introduced new curriculum requirements and management approaches (Baxter & Clarke, 2013; Case et al., 2000; Elliot, 2012; Main & Tyack, 2019; Thomas, 1998). While it can be argued that there is value in maintaining a neat and tidy school with up-to-

date displays, if Ofsted inspectors were to judge a school as *requires improvement* or *inadequate* due to a perceived lack of tidiness, perhaps then the inspection framework needs to be questioned.

The Day of Inspection

A common thread throughout the participant interviews was the limited time Ofsted inspectors would spend in a school. This, of course, meant that they had to make decisions very quickly and often based these decisions on provided data, rather than developing a more in-depth understanding of the pupils and community. In an article published in The Guardian, the current Ofsted framework "fails to reflect the vastly different circumstances in which schools operate" (Weale, 2023). The framework has been designed to "ensure comparability" and to support "consistency across the inspection of different remits" however with only one to two days to inspect a school, Ofsted inspectors do not have the time to develop a deeper understanding of the school and community before making their judgement (Ofsted, 2023, July 14).

Another concern about the use of Ofsted is the agency's lack of flexibility. As their visits are often surprises, they do not consider the specific circumstances of a school. A school in Farnley, North Yorkshire received a *requires improvement* rating in November 2022. The headteacher, Ms. Head, explained to the media that Ofsted inspectors refused to postpone their visit despite a high proportion of the staff and pupils being badly affected by the flu. She added "[…] some classes were observed being taught by a teacher who wasn't their usual class teacher and the phonics was being delivered by teaching assistants covering for absent colleagues" (Baron, 2023). This lack of flexibility was also noted by Oliver during his most recent Ofsted experience.

The days were shifted around a little bit because of the inspectors. So, they might have said, 'Actually, we need you to do maths at 9 o'clock rather than half past 10'. Which

obviously […] I think that's possibly one of the reasons why I had the behavioural problems I did that day because my children were used to a routine. That's what they […] reflect with […] a good routine is what they need. So, to have that change in a random day is not something that's going to work for them.

This lack of flexibility was mirrored during Oliver's April 2023 Ofsted inspection. At the time of that inspection, two of the senior leadership team members, one of whom was the deputy headteacher, had been on maternity leave. According to Oliver, both members arrived at the school within two hours of Ofsted phoning. Oliver was unaware of whether they came into work because they were expected to, or because they felt an obligation. Considering that only the headteacher would have spoken to the Ofsted inspector on the phone, it can be safely assumed that it was the headteacher who contacted these two members of the senior leadership team. Neither of their roles had been filled within the school and Oliver explained that "a lot of their responsibilities have been shifted or shared, or the headteacher is taking them on as […] best [as] possible at the moment." When asked what those two staff members did after arriving Oliver explained that he did not "know the exact details of what they did" but felt that they "helped, supported, checked the staff were okay, probably did a lot of things behind the scenes in the office with the headteacher that I wouldn't know."

During her interview, Claire remarked on having to "quickly hide away particular students that [we] may not want Ofsted [inspectors] to be […] seeing." When asked to clarify what she meant by this, Claire went on to explain that pupils who were high needs and likely to "throw chairs and tip over tables" were "moved up into a little […] room, or taken elsewhere […] off-premises or doing something else so that Ofsted [inspectors] wouldn't encounter these [pupils]."

Pupil Premium Funding

Interestingly, although each respondent knew about the PPG and knew that they needed to focus on improving the progress and attainment for those pupils, they knew little else about the policy. As a matter of interest, they were each asked if they knew how much funding a single PPG pupil brought in and how that funding was spent in their school. Although they each made sensible guesses, none of them were quite sure of the exact amount a child brought in. They were also unaware that the amount of PPG funding provided for children is dependent on what category they fit under. For the academic period 2022-2023, children can be eligible for Pupil Premium funding under three possible categories: receipt of free school meals, being adopted from care, or for children who are looked after by the local authority. These children draw in £1385 ($2337), £2410 ($4068), and £2410 ($4068) respectively (Department for Education, 2022, December 16a).

As to what the participants did know, Stacey had been told that some of her previous school's funding had gone towards "trips […] uniforms and resources." I also asked Stacey if she had noticed a lack of funding now that she was at a school that did not have many children who received the PPG funding. At the time of this interview, she was unclear if the funding shortfall was due to the lack of the PPG funding or more due to increased inflation and austerity measures. Stacey explained that in September 2022, her school had a staff meeting with the headteacher and "the Finance Manager [and they] were really concerned about how the year was looking." One of the ways her school considered saving money was to remove the "extra P.E. coach." They were trying to avoid this though, because her school uses this extra coach to provide leadership time for staff so that they are prepared for deep dive questioning from Ofsted inspectors.

Oliver was aware that his previous school had used the funding towards teaching assistants' salaries. Given that more than half of his school population was comprised of children who qualified for the PPG funding, his school was able to employ a significant number of additional staff. Aside from general classroom resources like "sharing games," he also mentioned the funding would be used towards having specialists come in to train the staff or work with the pupils "for something that's deemed appropriate by the teacher or highlighted as something they need to work on."

In Claire's school, the funding was also predominately used towards staff salaries. She recalls that teaching assistants who were available to work in the afternoon would take groups of the PPG pupils out for small group work where they might reinforce the maths and English lessons from that morning or pre-teach for the next day.

Accountability

As mentioned in the explanation of this study's significance in Chapter 1: Introduction, the local authority and governors have the legal right to dismiss educators from their posts due to poor Ofsted ratings (BBC, 2014; The School Staffing (England) Regulations, 2009). I shared this information with the participants during the interview and interestingly, none were aware of the power held by the local authority and governors.

Stacey was surprised by this as she does not "even see the governors in [her] school ever" and felt that this power was unjust "when they're not in [the] school every day." Stacey described her role in the school where it felt as if "you live there some days" when you are working "10 hours or so" each day, in contrast to the governors who are "very, very rarely there and [not] seeing the ins and outs, day to day of the job."

Claire brought her response back to what she had said about Ofsted and understanding the reasons behind certain outcomes. She felt that governors should ensure they have looked at the "external factors that you cannot control" before making a judgement. Claire goes on to say that given how the world has changed because of the pandemic, it is "harsh" for any agency to judge a school that "hasn't progressed as much as it did three, four years ago […] because [we live in] very different times nowadays."

Oliver chose to consider the class he had when Ofsted inspected his school in January 2020. He described himself as a "professional [who was] doing the job" but that year he found it "beyond difficult to ensure that every child was progressing when [he] had to evacuate [the] classroom at least three to four times a week in various lessons, and their learning was very broken." These evacuations were prompted by the extreme behaviour exhibited by one pupil in his class and needed to be done for the safety of the pupils and staff. Oliver explains that the Local Authority and governors would have to "look at the experience in the classroom. We're still doing as much as we were doing last year as much as we will do next year, but it's just not working the same for [this class]."

Stacey offered a possible solution in her interview where she posited that "a conversation" between governors and the school would be a better option in the case of a poor rating. She felt that the governors "should be a support […] for the school [and] work alongside each other" to resolve the issue.

Summary of the Findings

This chapter presented the findings from the interviews with three educators working in primary schools in England. Overall, the primary educators shared positive experiences working with pupils, including those in receipt of the additional Pupil Premium Grant funding, but felt the

bureaucratic demands on their time were unrealistic. The two teachers interviewed spent significant time planning and preparing academic support for their pupils in receipt of the PPG funding while the teaching assistant spent much of her time supporting their social and emotional development. Each of the participants commented that their time supporting children in receipt of PPG funding was largely consumed with providing evidence of progress and attainment levels and keeping records of the additional assistance provided. The primary educators felt that the number of pupils in their class who qualified for the PPG, the external factors these children faced, and their own lack of training were all barriers to improving attainment and therefore increasing their social mobility. While the participants acknowledged their role in improving the social mobility of disadvantaged children, they also felt that external factors such as the socioeconomic demographic of the community played a much larger role. In terms of Ofsted, the participants felt that the inspectorate was needed to ensure that funding was being appropriately spent, but they each described specific situations around preparing for an inspection and the inspection day itself that had negative impacts on how they viewed the agency. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings within the context of the Literature Review from Chapter 2, and the personal experience of the researcher who worked in England as a teacher and phase leader.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this final chapter, I review the themes that emerged in the interviews in response to the study's five research questions. In discussing each research question, I make connections between the themes and Chapter 2: Literature Review. I then triangulate my research through comparison with governmental policy documents related to Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant. In addition, I also locate myself within the research by including my own first-person experiences as part of the phenomena being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this chapter, I include a section that places this study within the context of a post-pandemic world as well as a recruitment and retention crisis in education leading to union strikes during the time interviews were conducted. I finish this chapter with a discussion of conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Research Question 1: What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant?

In the interviews, the primary educators were asked to describe what they do to specifically support children who qualify for the PPG funding. This support was generally divided into three themes: academic support, extracurricular experiences, and social and emotional support. Given the nature of the teaching profession, it comes as no surprise that the participants were easily able to explain the additional academic support they provided to pupils who received this funding. As Stacey commented, usually the pupils who were receiving the PPG "were children that weren't at the age-related expectation," so teachers would have been "planning adaptations for their needs" anyway. The support the participants offered seemed to be up to their own professional discretion and was frequently related to what was taught in class. The educators would either pre-teach pupils so that they were prepared for new topics, or

through the use of teaching assistants, provide time later in the school day to consolidate learning

that had happened that morning. Claire specifically recalled that "if the teacher felt that they

were on the cusp of learning the […] maths from today, but they just needed that little bit extra to

[…] keep that momentum going, I'd be doing that." This academic support was more often used

for maths and English given the importance of those two subjects to assessments. However, this

would mean that pupils in receipt of the PPG funding were removed from afternoon subjects

which were often of more interest and less academically challenging. According to the

Department for Education, a key component of a successful school is the use of effective

teachers in each classroom (2022, December 16b). To this end, the DfE recommends that a

portion of the PPG funding is set aside to aid in developing high quality teaching (2022,

December 16b). This professional development would ensure teachers have the necessary

knowledge to use their professional judgement when developing strategies for use with pupils in

receipt of PPG funding.

        In some cases, the support offered was a school-wide program. In Oliver's first school, it

was an expectation that either the classroom teacher or teaching assistant would read with the

PPG children every day. Where this became a problem for Oliver was his desire to read with the

children in his class who were below age-related expectation, but not in receipt of funding. In his

class of twenty-eight, fourteen children qualified for PPG funding, but he also had children who

did not who "potentially needed more help than the Pupil Premium children." This meant he was

attempting to read "with 20, 25, 30 children every day" which he felt was "quite unrealistic."

        School wide programs were not just limited to academic support. The DfE also supports

wider strategies such as "extracurricular activities, including sports, outdoor activities, arts,

culture and trips" (2022, December 16b, p. 7). In this case, the participants interviewed were not

required to plan or organise activities, but rather to make suggestions as to which pupils in their class might benefit the most. Both Claire and Stacey described extracurricular experiences that were made available to the whole school at a cost, however the PPG pupils would not have to pay the necessary fees to participate. Stacey felt positive about the music lessons that her school provided because it "did a lot" for the pupils and helped to build "their confidence."

The DfE recommends that schools make use of the Teaching and Learning Toolkit that is provided by the Education Endowment Foundation to determine which strategies provide the highest impact through additional months of progress made. The EEF explains additional months of progress made as the comparison in progress between pupils who did and pupils who did not receive the intervention specified (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023). According to this Toolkit "arts participation approaches [such as the music lessons Stacey's school provided] can have a positive impact on academic outcomes in other areas of the curriculum" with an average of three months progress being made (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, July a, para. 3).

Claire was equally positive about the year 6 camping trip that was provided free of charge to the PPG pupils because otherwise "they would not have these amazing experiences that the other children would be having." The Teaching and Learning Toolkit is focused on the link between teaching strategies and academic progress and attainment. Therefore, while research shows that outdoor learning can foster creative development (Addison et al., 2010; Bancroft et al., 2008; Borradaile, 2006; Davies et al., 2013; Dillon et al., 2007) and the Toolkit recognises that outdoor learning "may play an important part of the wider school experience," the EEF suggest that there is insufficient evidence to show an impact in months progress made academically (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, July b, para. 5). While such excursions may improve the cultural capital of disadvantaged pupils which has a positive impact on their

social and behavioural skills (Barrett, 2018; Morris & Dobson, 2021), if the point of the PPG

funding is to close the attainment gap, then using it towards proven, evidence-based

interventions would serve as a better use of the funding.

Each of the participants referenced some of the social and emotional needs exhibited by

their PPG pupils, especially in the post-pandemic context. Interestingly though, while each

respondent could describe in detail specific situations that they were aware of, none was able to

describe what their school was doing to support these children. The participants might be aware

of what was going on in a child's life, or the challenges they were facing, but then the question

becomes, what do we do? Claire wanted to make sure that her pupils "knew [she] was a safe

person to talk to" and that she was "always [there for them]." She understood that there was no

point pushing for academic learning to take place because "whatever is affecting them, it doesn't

matter how small it is […] it's going to mess up their education and their learning for that

morning […] or even for that whole day." The EEF recognises that there is gap between

educators' desire to support their pupils, and the knowledge and training to which they have

access. The EEF website states that although educators are already working to address social and

emotional learning within their classrooms, "few teachers receive support on how they can

develop these skills in their everyday teaching practice" (Education Endowment Foundation,

2021, October 27, para. 2).

In general, the support that primary educators offer to children who receive the PPG

funding is no different than what they would do for any child. In their role, they are responsible

for ensuring each pupil in their class makes progress and improves their attainment regardless of

any funding that may be coming in for them. In each interview, the participants explained that

the extracurricular experiences were planned and organised by the school and therefore out of

their responsibility. Chapter 2: Literature Review, explains that schools have the freedom to decide how to spend the additional funding as they are in the best position to determine how it would benefit their community (Craske, 2018; Department for Education, 2010, July 26). This goes some way to explaining why the participants describe varied extracurricular experiences offered by their respective schools.

When discussing the social and emotional needs of their pupils, the participants became emotional themselves. The impression is that primary educators are aware that their pupils need additional support to process what they are experiencing at home, but they are unsure of how to accomplish this. None of the primary educators referred to any specialised training in how to support children facing external factors of deprivation, even though pupils in receipt of the PPG funding frequently come from deprived homes. As mentioned in Chapter 4: Findings, headteachers are aware of the importance of responding to the social and emotional needs of their pupils and will address this through using the PPG to fund nurturing resources such as pastoral support or employing an educational psychologist (Morris & Dobson, 2021). While both valuable resources, one should not forget the educators who work with pupils every day and play a vital role in their development. It can be argued that the educators working directly with these pupils know them best and can better identify ways to reduce the socioeconomic segregation of their classroom (Copeland, 2019). Using the PPG funding to provide training for staff so that they are better able to support pupils who are experiencing external factors of deprivation may prove to be a beneficial use of the funding. It is important to remember that this step would need to be seen as one aspect in a holistic approach to addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils as systemic change is still necessary if societal equality is to be realised.

Research Question 2: How do primary educators in England describe their experiences supporting disadvantaged pupils?

Unexpectedly, when asked this question, each respondent focussed on the unmanageable amount of paperwork that is required rather than their experiences of working directly with a child. They each went into detail explaining the notes and records they are required to keep on how they were supporting children who received the PPG funding. These records are kept so that schools can demonstrate impact to an Ofsted inspector as they will use this information to inform their judgement about the school. Some see this as a "peculiar feature of current education policy in England [where] policy must be seen to be done [and] can take up increasing amounts of time [which] diverts time and effort away from that which is reported on" (Ball et al., 2011, p. 629). When records are kept in response to the perceived needs of an outside agency rather than as a tool to develop a clear strategy of support for pupils, the question arises as to whether the records are an exact representation of the decision-making and spending process of the PPG funding. Here it is possible to recognise how teachers and schools are left pleading their case to an inherently biased inspectorate; a system which removes the reality of the situation altogether.

The education system in England is data driven. Schools are required to publish their assessment results as well as strategic plans (Barrett, 2018; Department for Education, 2022, December 15; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Shain, 2016) Stakeholders such as the DfE and Ofsted expect that progress and attainment are improved upon each term. When this data is examined, however, a clear fault in the system becomes evident. If a child were to enter year 2 with a high attainment level, and subsequently leave year 2 with a high attainment level, the data would show that they have made no progress. On the other hand, a child may be

progressing in leaps and bounds, but if they are not working at age-related expectations, they show as having made no attainment.

In my four years as phase leader in an Ofsted-rated *good* school, analysing this data was a primary responsibility. We would use this information to inform planning for the following term in the hopes that we could align the progress and attainment data. However, what this data does not do, is consider and celebrate the progress and attainment children do achieve. The data also discriminates against those children who consistently exceed expectation as well as those who do not work at age-related expectations. Furthermore, as detailed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, the data used by stakeholders are based on standardised assessments that have been structured to support White, middle-class values (Thrupp, 2007).

Each term I was required to assess my year 4 pupils using standardised assessments. These assessments were presented to all pupils in my class regardless of their current attainment level. This meant that I was required to give a year 4 assessment to a child I knew was not achieving at a year 4 level. These children were also cognisant of the fact that they were not working at age-related expectations and on more than one occasion they were brought to tears as they faced an assessment which they could not complete. When I questioned this practice, I was told that the school needed the data to prove that they were not achieving at age-related expectations. This is in stark contrast to the evidence the EEF provides to schools, which advocates for developing high quality teaching as "evidence indicates that high quality teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve pupil attainment" (2022, April 8b, p. 1). They go on to recommend that schools "focus on building teacher knowledge and pedagogical expertise, curriculum development, and the purposeful use of assessment" (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022, April 8b, p. 1). Given this information and considering my

leadership role within the school, my professional assessment of a child's academic attainment should have been considered sufficient 'proof' that they were not achieving at age-related expectations without requiring them to experience a demoralising assessment. Furthermore, requiring pupils who were not achieving age-related expectations to sit such assessments could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby they internalise messages that they are underachieving and therefore become demoralised and disengaged from education and develop lower aspirations for themselves in response (Francis & Wong, 2013).

When the focus is on data and ensuring the data meets the expectations of an outside agency such as Ofsted, educators are at risk of losing sight of the child in front of them. According to Scott, a retired headteacher, the framework that Ofsted uses is "at the epicenter of the problem…because…it is unfit for purpose in the lower primary age range and early years, its 'outstanding' criteria mainly unattainable due to a secondary model-dominated, subject-driven, knowledge-based agenda" (2022). Interestingly, each respondent still felt there was a place for Ofsted within the education system, especially given the amount of funding a school could receive. However, they each felt that Ofsted inspectors needed to look past the data and see the child in their context and recognise their successes and failures. With the inherent biases associated with Ofsted inspectors, coupled with the lack of data to show that the PPG actually reduces the attainment gap and therefore improves the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils, it is difficult to see a place for Ofsted within the education system where it is of benefit to pupils rather than simply a tool by which the government can monitor and control a highly complex education system.

Research Question 3: What barriers to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' do primary educators in England describe as their most challenging?

Noted in each interview was the significant role the socioeconomic demographic of the community played in 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle'. When working in a school located in a community with a low socioeconomic demographic, most of the pupils will qualify for the PPG funding. Children who are not only from a low socioeconomic family, but also a disadvantaged community experience worse cognitive skills and school readiness than their more affluent peers (Francis & Wong, 2013). It then follows that most of these children are coming from homes that experience significant challenges such as "domestic violence, […] drug use, [or parents with] mental health issues" (Claire). In these cases, before they can begin to consider addressing the curriculum, the primary educators described their most important roles to be supporting children through these life experiences. These "structural inequalities" as described by Owens and de St Croix can only be addressed through large scale government policies and leaving educators to "bear the burdens" of supporting disadvantaged pupils only perpetuates the cycle of marginalisation (2020).

To illustrate this, Oliver briefly described a situation where he had to "evacuate" his class so that one of his students could "continue […] expressing her feelings" by throwing objects around the room. Although there was a plan in place for the child, this behaviour was a regular occurrence that disrupted learning for herself and others. Obviously, the behaviour would need to be dealt with before any academic learning could take place. Providing funding for a disadvantaged child at school does not address their low socioeconomic home life where research has shown that reductions in family poverty has a direct impact on increasing positive school behaviour (Berliner, 2006).

When both Oliver and Stacey moved to communities in higher socioeconomic demographics, these barriers either changed or were removed altogether. Stacey explained that her new school is very close to a hospital and many of her pupils have parents who are employed as nurses or doctors. The location of her school made this question nearly null and void. Stacey does not have any children receiving the PPG funding, which means none of her pupils are identified as disadvantaged. However, it is important to note here, that research has questioned the use of FSM as an eligibility criterion for the PPG funding as there will be some children who are disadvantaged but not eligible for the PPG (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010; Morris & Dobson, 2021; Taylor, 2018). Teachers can only work with the information and funding with which they are provided and while it is likely there were children in Stacey's class who were disadvantaged, without them receiving FSM, she would be unaware of who they are.

During her interview, she even described a situation where she had decided not to send homework home one weekend, and by Sunday night every parent had emailed her asking if this was a mistake. Subsequently, Stacey explained that the pupils in her class will frequently travel into London to see a show in the West End, something that pupils at her previous school never took part in despite being located significantly closer to London. Research shows that due to material deprivation, disadvantaged children are significantly less likely to have opportunities to participate in cultural experiences (Barrett, 2018). However, cultural experiences are vital for children to develop their cultural capital and acquire the skills and capacities to do well in the education system (Barrett, 2018).

As described during Chapter 3: Findings, Claire's experience is significantly different. Throughout her career she has stayed at the same school where a majority of the children qualify for the PPG funding. Claire noted that it has always been a challenge to support these children

given their home life situations but felt that the loss of learning and social interaction due to the pandemic has exacerbated the situation. After being moved from years 3 and 4 to reception, Claire found that many of the 4- and 5-year-old children in her class had had very little social interaction during their formative years, as England was in and out of lockdown during that time. She understands that reception can be difficult at the best of times for such young children, but the ones in her class had no experience with sitting still, sharing, listening, and independence. Research has found that during the first three years of life, the brain undergoes rapid development with the most disadvantaged children showing the largest differences in the physical architecture of the brain (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). In addition to this, by the age of 3, it is already possible to identify differences in academic attainment and social-behavioural development related to the socioeconomic demographic between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers (Francis & Wong, 2013). Given the low socioeconomic demographic of the community Claire worked in, as well as the added impact of the pandemic, it is no wonder then that Claire faced an extremely challenging experience while working in reception.

The first step in the EEF's Guide to the PPG is to diagnose pupils' needs (2022, April 8a). The focus should be on determining what is hindering the child's attainment which could be academic or wider challenges. They suggest using internal data such as:

- Attendance data and levels of persistent absence.

- Teacher feedback on pupils' levels of engagement and participation.

- Behaviour incidences and exclusion data.

- Information on wellbeing, mental health, and safeguarding.

- Access to technology and curricular materials.

In Claire's case, she reported what she was seeing in class "to the teacher, […] the safeguarding people, [and] the SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)" but felt that her concerns were not addressed as there was no change to the programing offered to the identified pupils. In Claire's role as a teaching assistant, her control over this situation was limited, as it is the responsibility of the senior leadership team to ensure that pupils who qualify for the PPG are being adequately supported. Poor senior leadership can be viewed as another barrier to 'closing the gap' or 'breaking the cycle' as it has been identified as a key problem for schools rated as *requires improvement* (Burn et al., 2016). Claire's experience showcases a further example of an inherent disconnect between policy intent and implementation. Without a strong senior leadership team to manage the implementation of government policies, expected improvements to the education system will be absent. Abbott et al. support this in their work as they found that highly effective and dedicated leaders showed commitment to every child for whom they were responsible as they implemented effective use of the PPG funding (2015).

Research Question 4: How do primary educators in England understand their role in improving the social mobility of pupils through the Pupil Premium Grant?

Interestingly, before asking this question, I needed to explain what the term *social mobility* meant to each of my participants as they had not heard it before. Given that it was the definition provided by the Social Mobility Commission that was the basis for determining which pupils would be in receipt of additional funding, I am surprised that the primary educators I interviewed were unaware of the term.

Responses to this question were varied. Oliver saw no connection between the income parents earn and the academic ability of their children. However, this may be due to the use of The Social Mobility Commission's slightly flawed definition of social mobility. They define it as

"the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents" (n.d.) which removes the key aspect of movement between social classes. The OECD's definition is more specific as it "refers to [a] change in a person's socio-economic situation, either in relation to their parents (inter-generational mobility) or throughout their lifetime (intra-generational mobility)" (n.d.). The sociologist Sorokin is widely acknowledge as providing the first definition of social mobility as "any transition of an individual, social object or value […] from one social position to another" (1927, p. 133). The idea is that a society with higher levels of social mobility can be considered fairer as there is equality with opportunities available (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992). In theory, if the goal of education is to provide a level starting point for all children, then the income of their parent's should be irrelevant when considering social mobility. However, as was shown in Chapter 2: Literature Review, the ability of the middle-class to 'game the system' or 'hoard opportunities' provides a continued educational segregation that cannot be addressed without reducing the endemic social inequalities facing disadvantaged pupils (Brown & James, 2020; Bukodi & Goldthrope, 2019; Eyles et al., 2022; Francis & Wong, 2013; Owens & de St Croix, 2020).

Stacey was more positive about her role in improving the social mobility of her pupils and felt that schools could "definitely" make that change in a child's life. However, she did refer to challenges that certain schools might face when most of their pupil population consisted of pupils who brought in the funding. In that situation, she did not see how the social mobility of each pupil could be improved as the teacher's time was stretched. She felt that the change was not happening for as many pupils as it should, but she could not offer a solution to the situation.

For Claire's part, she was just happy that the Government was providing additional funding:

> I'm of the opinion that any support, extra help, for any child is a great thing because they can only benefit from it. And even if it is just time with another adult, spending time […] just a […] smaller group, they can only benefit from it.

While not explicitly saying so, here Claire might unconsciously be referring to the austerity policies that were brought in at the same time as the PPG funding policy. As described in Chapter 2: Literature Review, many schools were left with no choice but to use their PPG funding to maintain existing provisions such as providing teaching assistants due to significant cuts to their school budgets (Abbott et al., 2015; Carpenter et al., 2013; Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Morris & Dobson, 2021).

The additional hours of work that the participants put towards supporting their PPG pupils is an example of the responsibilisation of individuals that is used by governmental policies to suggest that hard work alone will be enough for one to improve their social standing. By putting pressure on education systems and their staff, the Government can hide the societal factors associated with inequality and poverty while simultaneously ignoring the fact that equal educational opportunities do not equate to improved social standing (Department for Education, 2018, January 25; Francis & Wong, 2013; Owens & de St Croix, 2020; Parsons, 2016; Wood et al., 2023; Zimdars, 2016).

What is striking here is the unwavering focus on schools as the driving force behind improved social mobility. It appears the Government expects disadvantaged pupils to increase their social mobility "within existing structures and modes of organisation" which perpetuate societal inequality (Wood et al., 2023, p. 5). The authors go on to suggest that it would seem that

"social mobility is concerned with improved access for some individuals to the benefits of an unfair and unequal society rather than changes and realignment of unjust social and institutional arrangements" (Wood et al., 2023, p. 9).

Research Question 5: How do primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Grant?

Here, the participants distinguished between the funding that a school receives, and the progress and attainment data collected. The participants felt that schools should be monitored in some way to ensure that the funding was spent correctly. Interestingly, although each of the participants had a vague idea of how their schools spent the funding, none was completely confident in their understanding. They mentioned what they might have heard in passing at school, or perhaps if something was mentioned during a staff meeting, but none was able to provide any explicit understanding of the expenditure. This lack of knowledge is likely due to a combination of factors: the unmanageable workload already expected of teachers allows little room for anything else; senior leaders not taking the time to share this information with staff whether intentionally or through not realising how valuable this information could be; or a convoluted budgeting system that does not allow for explicit expenditure to be noted. Given the nature of Claire's role, she would not have been privy to any information shared during a staff meeting because while they were conducted weekly, after school, they were not open to teaching assistants unless specifically invited by the headteacher.

As to the use of Ofsted to monitor the progress and attainment of pupils in receipt of the PPG funding, the participants seemed to support this as long as Ofsted inspectors consider the whole child, rather than just the data provided. Considering the low socioeconomic demographics of the communities that each participant worked in at some point in their careers,

it is not surprising that they considered it important for Ofsted inspectors to be mindful of the

external factors many pupils may face especially considering that a child's parents and home

environment have a more profound impact on their educational and occupational aspirations than

the school can (Bernstein, 1970; Eyles et al., 2022; Sewell, 1971). As explained in Chapter 2:

Literature Review, disadvantaged children will start school significantly behind their more

affluent peers (Coleman, 1966; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013). Furthermore,

research shows that the attainment gap is likely to widen as pupils move through school systems

that replicate, if not exacerbate, existing social inequality (Brown & James, 2020;

Coleman, 1966; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Francis & Wong, 2013; Major & Machin, 2018). The

participants' concerns are validated when considering that schools which cater to a high

proportion of disadvantaged pupils are less likely to receive ratings of either *good* or *outstanding*

when compared with schools with pupils who have a higher attainment level (Roberts, 2018).

This finding is supported through a 2019 report which states that, "Ofsted inspection outcomes

largely correlate with the socio-economic makeup of a cohort" (Social Mobility Commission, p.

35). The educators interviewed each had a strong desire to support their pupils any way they

could, and they understood that this support may not always come through working towards

curriculum requirements.

By suggesting that Ofsted inspectors also consider the data of non-PPG pupils, Claire

posited a thought-provoking idea. It is not just external factors that Ofsted inspectors should be

aware of, but also internal ones. Much like Ofsted's deep dives, Claire suggests that Ofsted

inspectors also "delve a little bit deeper" into the context of the data. She recommended that

Ofsted inspectors go so far as to question the teacher and what has been happening throughout

the school year in relation to the data. This level of questioning would certainly identify trends

within a classroom that could then be compared throughout the school. Given my experience as a phase leader where I was responsible for monitoring my teaching team, senior leaders should be aware of any teachers who might need support long before an Ofsted inspector makes the same observation. In my situation, when this very question was asked of me during my Ofsted inspection, I was able to identify weaknesses within my team and share the plan I had developed for resolving the Issues.

Emergent Themes

Five themes emerged from the findings that did not directly respond to the study's research questions. However, the themes are relevant to how primary educators understand the inspection criteria used by Ofsted. The emergent themes relate to the additional non-teaching responsibilities expected of educators, how schools prepare for an Ofsted inspection once the call has been received, how educators conceptualise the day of an Ofsted inspection, what educators understand of the expenditure of the PPG, and how educators respond to the accountability associated with a poor Ofsted rating. The findings suggest that although educators see a need for Ofsted, the additional workload and stress associated with meeting the inspection criteria are leading to burnout and a retention crisis (National Education Union, 2023).

Additional Non-Teaching Responsibilities

Both Oliver and Stacey described the additional work they were assigned by their headteacher as leaders of a subject(s) for their respective schools. This additional workload does not come with a financial incentive and instead is seen as part of the teaching responsibility. However, due to a lack of funding and a teacher retention crisis, teachers are generally expected to manage this extra responsibility during their own time. According to Pearce, "Head teachers

are having to stretch their budgets, with some cutting services and roles within their schools and this has piled more pressure on teachers who are being asked to take on extra work" (2023).

Further, when Ofsted introduced deep dives in September 2019, this now meant that any subject lead could be questioned by an Ofsted inspector and held to account if they felt the subject was not being delivered across the school as it should. This added stress for teachers, who were already at capacity regarding what was expected of them within their own classrooms, has led to a recruitment and retention crisis within the education system (National Education Union, 2023).

This burnout is not just specific to teachers, with fifty-one per cent of support staff saying that their workload is unmanageable in a survey conducted by the NEU (2019, May). In her interview, Claire explained her need to be at work at least thirty minutes before she officially began due to the need to prepare resources for the day. This is time for which she would not have been paid. According to the NEU, "the working of additional unpaid hours by support staff is a major area of concern" as they report that seventy-six per cent of support staff "work extra hours because their workload demands it" (2019, May, para. 5).

The Department for Education is aware of the unnecessary workload faced by teachers in England. In a Tweet, officials claim that "As part of our Recruitment and Retention strategy we are working with @Ofstednews to radically simplify school accountability, whilst also cracking down on workload and reducing the pressure placed on teachers" (2019). Unfortunately, it would appear that these measures have come into effect too late to prevent teaching unions in England from taking strike action. According to the NEU website, "long hours and poor pay are the main reasons teachers are leaving the profession in their droves" (National Education Union, n.d. a.). The excessive workload and accountability put onto teachers due to Ofsted expectations has led

to a call to replace Ofsted with a "new approach to school and college evaluation which is supportive, effective and fair" (National Education Union, n.d. b).

Preparing for an Ofsted Inspection

Despite what Ofsted officials may say to the contrary, the sheer terror that sweeps through a school when the call comes is palpable. In her interview, Stacey jokingly explained that thus far she has managed to "dodge it," referring to not having experienced an Ofsted inspection yet. When discussing his second Ofsted inspection from January 2020, Oliver said that he "luckily" avoided having to answer deep dive questions when they visited his school. Describing how teachers responded to the Ofsted inspection of April 2023, Oliver recalls meeting in the staffroom shortly after Ofsted phoned and noticing that "everyone was looking at each other with eyes and kind of disbelief and laughing because it was one of those…oh no. […] a lot of, kind of, worry and panic, and all the usual emotions." He then goes on to say he felt "dread" when he learned the inspection was going to be conducted over two days as [he had] only ever done a one day." Oliver's concern here was that of "not knowing what two days looks like. […] how much more would we need to be doing? So that was the initial worry."

The word choices and phrasing chosen by the participants helps to paint a picture of how Ofsted is viewed by educators. As described in Chapter 2: Literature Review, the interrelation between language and the narrative process defines the narrative approach (Crossley, M. L., 2000; László, et al., 2007). This connection between the wording that the participants used when sharing their stories is as significant as the stories themselves. Here, the word choices used by the participants provide a glimpse into how primary educators conceptualise Ofsted. Despite a general agreement that Ofsted does serve a purpose, neither teacher wanted to be faced with

being observed or questioned by an Ofsted inspector. Given the high stakes involved and the

powers that inspectors hold, this apprehension is understandable.

Both Oliver and Claire detailed how they spent their time cleaning the school once they

had received the call. Cleaning is not within their job responsibilities, yet this was an expectation

by the senior leadership team in this situation. Both participants also referenced making sure that

displays were presentable. Neither of these areas relate to the academic progress of pupils, which

should be the primary focus for Ofsted inspectors. This raises the question, is it the senior

leadership team or the Ofsted inspectors who have lost sight of their role? If each of these

schools had not been thoroughly cleaned the night before, would their ratings have been in

jeopardy?

For his most recent Ofsted, Oliver explained that his headteacher called all the teaching

assistants into the staffroom at approximately 1:30pm, and when that meeting was finished, the

teaching staff were called in. It was at this point that Oliver was told Ofsted would be arriving

the next day. The headteacher had asked for teaching assistants to cover all classes so that the

teaching staff could get ready. His headteacher did not specifically request that certain tasks be

completed, but rather asked that "displays [were] up and running [and in] tip top [shape], books

marked, […] all those kind of things, just get going basically, so that we weren't there 'till

midnight that night." Even given that extra time to prepare, Oliver stayed at school until 8pm that

night and he knew that the headteacher was "there later, a lot later" and that "a few people chose

to say later" too.

Unfortunately, I am all too familiar with each scenario as I experienced both during the

two Ofsted inspections of which I was a part. My second inspection was as a phase leader, and I

recall bring all 180 pupils under my care into the hall and showing them a movie so that my

teaching team could have empty rooms in which to prepare. On that day, our call came during lunch. The pupils spent the afternoon watching a movie and then once they went home, my staff continued working long into the night. I arranged with my headteacher for pizzas to be ordered because I knew that no one would be going home any time soon. As the evening progressed, the partners and children of staff members began arriving at the school, not to collect their significant others, but to stay and help prepare the school.

The Day of an Ofsted Inspection

As funding has become strained, Ofsted has had to reduce the time it spends in a school as well as the number of inspectors sent, to one or two days and two inspectors depending on the size of the school. This is a sharp decrease from two decades ago when a team of seventeen inspectors might spend a whole week in a school (Roberts, 2018). During this time, they need to see everything possible to assist in deciding about a school's rating. For his Ofsted inspection of January 2020, Oliver recalled that he needed to change the schedule of his maths class because the Ofsted inspector needed to observe his lesson at a time that suited him. Changes to his timetable were even more prominent during his Ofsted inspection of April 2023. For the first day of inspection, all the staff were told that "between half nine and ten, they'll be looking at maths, so you need to be teaching maths." For the afternoon, the staff were told that the Ofsted inspectors wanted to conduct deep dives for physical education (P.E.) and geography. A timetable was shared showing which teachers were to be teaching which subject. Oliver explained that he chose geography because he "was due to do geography the next day, anyway, so my lesson was kind of planned. So, I just, I said, well, I'll do geography because […] it's kind of ready to go." The teachers who were selected to conduct P.E. lessons had a little more work cut out for them. The school was preparing to start swimming lessons the following week and as

this was the first week back from a two-week break, the staff had planned fun activities for P.E. In this case, Oliver explained that "there was some assistance there, and the lead [teacher] kind of discussed it with them […] it was just kind of what can we do that will showcase something?"

My second Ofsted inspection took place on a Friday. At my school, Friday was the day we had celebration assemblies with parents invited. The remainder of the day was usually spent on the more fun aspects of the curriculum such as art and STEM activities. During this visit, the Ofsted inspector had requested to see certain subjects by certain year groups. I remember having a brief staff meeting in the morning, about ten minutes before the pupils were to enter the building. The headteacher read out names of teachers, what subjects they were to teach that day, and when. It meant that not only were the children unprepared for a change to their usually fun schedule, but the teachers were also unprepared and were left scrambling to create lessons sufficient to be observed by an Ofsted inspector.

What is more concerning is Claire's comment about "hid[ing] away" pupils. Unfortunately, the senior leadership team at her school is not alone in feeling as though they need to do this to secure a favourable rating. A simple search online turns up numerous newspaper articles where headteachers have felt this was the only solution during the high stakes Ofsted inspections. In a recent article, a teacher contacted Ofsted to "warn them that unruly pupils were kept hidden away from inspectors during a visit" (Roberts, 2021, para. 5). In another article, Tom Bennett, the lead behaviour advisor for the DfE, states that "some school leaders are masking issues as they attempt to come across well during inspections. This involves removing badly behaved children from the premises before inspectors arrive and 'spinning' data to present the school in a more favourable light" (Harris, 2017, para. 5). In 2018, Ofsted announced that it was going to investigate rumours that some pupils were being hidden away during inspections

(Busby, 2018). The article cites headteachers as saying that it would be "very difficult for school leaders to arrange for children to be absent with short notice of inspections" (Busby, 2018, para. 5). What this fails to consider, is that schools do not need to organise elaborate excursions to remove pupils from the premises.

During each of the inspections I experienced, children were either removed from the premises or hidden. At my first school, some parents were called, and it was recommended that they keep their child at home as they would find the changes during an inspection challenging to manage. For those children who did come to school, they were sent with a group of teaching assistants to the local shop and park. This outing was well-timed so that they would be out of the building when the inspector observed classes. My second school was in an extremely large Victorian building that had a unique floor plan. During that inspection, certain children were sent with a teaching assistant to a room that was on the highest floor, at the top of a back staircase that was only ever used during fire drills. While escorting the inspector around the school, the headteacher ensured that he did not go to that floor.

The Expenditure of the Pupil Premium Grant

As mentioned earlier, the participants were not completely clear how their respective schools spent their PPG funding. They each listed areas where they thought some of the funding was spent, such as on uniforms, resources, staffing, and extracurricular activities. Considering these areas of expenditure, they felt that this was good use of the funding. They were even more pleased when the dispersal of the funding was planned in such a way as to benefit non-PPG pupils as well, but it is important to remember that improving educational opportunities for all pupils is "not sufficient in itself to tackle national levels of low social mobility" (Eyles et al., 2022, p. 37). The use of resources and the continuous and sustained professional development of

staff are both approaches supported by the EEF to support all pupils within a school, including those in receipt of the PPG (2022, April 8b).

While schools do have the autonomy to use their PPG funding the way they see fit, it is important to ensure that there is value for money and that the way it is spent will directly impact pupil attainment. As an example, while providing school uniforms may be beneficial in promoting a sense of belonging, according to Morris and Dobson, data is inconclusive as to whether providing a uniform has a direct impact on improving attainment (2021). Research has questioned the ability of schools and indeed Ofsted, to be able to show that the PPG funding has had a direct impact on pupil attainment (Gorard et al., 2021; Morris & Dobson, 2021). To start, the PPG funding policy was brought in nation wide without a control group (Gorard et al., 2021). The next hurdle is being able to ascertain whether it was the PPG funding or other potential factors such as demographic, economic, or other policies, that influenced a decrease in the attainment gap (Gorard et al., 2021; Morris & Dobson, 2021). While additional funding for schools can only be seen as a positive, the high stakes involved with the expenditure of the PPG funding when its very goal cannot be proven is another example of an inherent disconnect between policy intent and implementation.

Accountability During an Ofsted Inspection

The final emergent theme concerns accountability and the possibility that the local authority and governors could dismiss educators due to poor Ofsted ratings. While none of the participants were personally aware of this happening, they knew it was a possibility. They each felt that this was an extreme measure, especially given the limited amount of time governors were likely to spend in a school. As with Ofsted inspections, participants felt that the governors' roles should be centred more on understanding why the school received a poor rating and

working together as a team to resolve the situation. I would go further and suggest that governors should be more involved with a school prior to an Ofsted inspection as a way of preventing a poor rating. Their role within the English school system is important and if they choose to take on that responsibility, they should demonstrate its importance, especially considering their role is to work "alongside senior leaders and support teachers to provide excellent education to children" (Governors for Schools, 2018).

The accountability during an Ofsted inspection is not limited to just the governors and senior leaders of a school but also to the Ofsted inspectors themselves. Here we can identify another example of an inherent disconnect between policy intent and implementation. Ofsted inspectors are comprised of headteachers who run schools previously rated as either *good* or *outstanding*. This means that many headteachers who run schools with a high number of PPG children are less likely to become Ofsted inspectors. Their schools are unlikely to rate as *good* or *outstanding* due to the external factors caused by being located within a community with a low socioeconomic demographic. This means that the inspectors who visit schools in communities with low socioeconomic demographics have no first-hand experience running a school within that context and are therefore unable to take such considerations to mind adequately when making their judgements (Roberts, 2018).This give credence to the statement shared in Chapter 2: Literature Review whereby there is concern around whether the judgements formed by inspectors can be considered "valid, robust and […] consistent" (Baxter & Clarke, 2013, p. 707).

Contextualising COVID and Teachers' Strikes

Although not initially a part of this study, the ever-evolving context in which this study exists is important for contextualising the findings obtained through the interviews. As explained within the Design of the Study, qualitative research focusses on understanding participants'

experiences in context. In this section I detail how the pressures from Ofsted, combined with the stressors of living and working through the global pandemic have contributed to unrest in education and strike action.

Arriving in Canada

March 20th, 2020, was the last day that I worked a "normal" day in England as a teacher. At that time, I was a phase leader and teaching a year 4 class. I recall bringing my entire phase (years 3 and 4 which was roughly 180 pupils, six teachers including myself, and approximately twelve teaching assistants) into the hall for a final assembly. I explained what was happening due to COVID and what school might look like for the next few months. I then kept the pupils in the hall where we sang songs, read books, shared favourite moments – all to give my staff time to close up their classrooms without pupils getting underfoot. Fortunately, I had a strong teaching assistant with me that year and she was able to close up my classroom for me while I was in the hall. The next few months included a mixture of not teaching at all, teaching virtually, teaching in-person, or a combination of these. During this, I decided it was time for me to move back to Canada. I knew that it would take me time to settle in Canada and work my way back up to working in a full-time, permanent position, so I used this break in my career to pursue my Master of Education degree. I arrived in Canada August 31st, 2020, and have remained here ever since.

Teaching During the Pandemic

I have kept in contact with my colleagues throughout this time. As a phase leader, I supported them as they progressed in their careers but also as a friend, encouraging them however I could throughout the pandemic. Unfortunately, as the years have dragged on, teaching conditions in England have steadily worsened. During the pandemic, teachers were faced with alternating between teaching in-person and online, and in some cases, juggling both provisions

simultaneously. Classes were put into 'bubbles' so that disruptions caused by the need to isolate would impact as few people as possible. Many subjects could not be taught due to safety measures around sharing equipment and conducting other more practical tasks. The only positive aspect my colleagues shared with me during this time was that Ofsted suspended its inspections for a short while. Indeed, on March 17th, 2020, just three days before schools were closed, officials tweeted, "All routine Ofsted inspections are now suspended – this applies to schools, further education, early years and children's social care providers" (Department for Education).

Teachers' Strikes

The challenges of teaching throughout a pandemic were not the only stressors experienced by teachers in England. Helena, an English Teacher, shares that parents and pupils "do not know what it is like to do this. The mammoth workload and the constant fear of Ofsted mean I work 10-hour days Monday to Friday, topped up in the evening, on the weekend and in the holidays" (Skopeliti & Otte, 2023). In January 2023, the largest teaching union in England (NEU), announced its intention to strike in response to a decade of "significant real-terms cuts to pay and persistently unfunded rises which schools cannot afford" (Department for Education, 2023; National Education Union, 2023). This decision by the NEU came just as I was beginning to contact potential participants for my study. My previous colleagues were aware that I was working on my Masters degree and were initially willing to be interviewed. However, the strain of both COVID and looming strikes had taken their toll and what was initially meant to be a study involving at least eight primary teachers was quickly whittled down to three primary educators with one potential participant responding:

Sorry, I feel bad, but might have to leave it cause just so much on next few weeks no clue

how I'm going to fit in work let alone anything else! (Personal communication, January

28, 2023)

This potential participant demonstrated that the mental load teachers in England were expected

to carry was at such a level that even taking thirty minutes to participate in my study was seen as

too daunting a task. By changing my focus from primary teachers to primary educators, I was

able to include a teaching assistant who agreed to be interviewed. I feel this change has brought a

different perspective to my topic, one that would not have been included had I stayed with my

initial plan.

Leaving the Profession

Two of the participants interviewed had left the education profession at some point

during the time of this study. Oliver left in April 2022 and after some time away, recently chose

to begin teaching again. This time he moved to a different area and school. When asked why he

left teaching, Oliver simply stated, "I think I left because [of] workload […] pressures from

above." Claire left in February 2023, just before interviewing for this study. Weale explains that

the pressure put onto leadership teams by Ofsted "is contributing to the recruitment and retention

crisis in education" (2023). This is supported by Pearce who states that, "The impact of real

terms cuts in pay, the excessive workload of educators, is exacerbated by the lack of recruitment

and high levels of stress and anxiety across the sector" (2023). He goes on to explain that the

"DfE statistics show that nearly a third of teachers who qualified in the last decade have since

left the profession."

Conclusion

This generative study using psychological approach to narrative qualitative research was designed not to provide any solutions but rather to provoke dialogue surrounding the link between Ofsted and the Pupil Premium Grant. Interviewing three primary educators provided insight into their lived experiences with these policies. Overall, they shared positive experiences working with pupils including those in receipt of the PPG funding, but felt the bureaucratic demands on their time were unrealistic. The two teachers interviewed spent significant time planning and preparing academic support for their pupils in receipt of the PPG funding while the teaching assistant interviewed spent much of her time supporting their social and emotional development. Each of the participants commented that their time spent supporting pupils in receipt of the PPG funding was largely consumed with providing evidence of progress and attainment levels and keeping records of the additional assistance provided. The primary educators felt that the number of pupils in their class who qualified for the PPG, the external factors these pupils faced, and their own lack of training were all barriers to providing the best possible support for them.

It is important to recognise that "schools do not operate in a political, social, or economic vacuum" (Shain, 2016) nor are they in a position to "compensate for society" (Bernstein, 1970). This study has disseminated research expounding that the use of inspectorates such as Ofsted show no link to school improvement, that the human element of inspector judgements is questionable, and that there is no evidence demonstrating that the PPG fund has decreased the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. Evidence has shown, however, that government policies that address poverty outside of the school system do make a positive impact.

Implications

True social mobility will only be achieved when significant structural change is implemented to reduce endemic social inequalities, and when education reform is viewed as complementary to this change rather than the sole engine of social mobility. As to what can be addressed at the school level, workload, accountability, and funding are areas where improvements are necessary so that educators can increase their positive impact on pupils. The participants' first-person accounts of their experiences working within the English school system have implications for future policy development as they reveal clearly defined areas where policy intent and implementation have not aligned in such a way as to have the best impact on pupils.

Recommendations

Schools in England are judged by the external community based on the rating they receive from Ofsted, yet the method in which schools earn this rating is fraught with social and cultural inequalities that call its validity into question. The PPG funding is provided to schools specifically for use in closing the attainment gap and improving the social mobility of disadvantaged pupils compared to their more affluent peers. However, the external deprivations these pupils face are due to factors outside a schools' scope of influence and therefore insurmountable solely through the academic supports that a school can provide.

To begin addressing areas where there is inherent disconnect between policy intent and implementation, those responsible for developing education policies should ensure they have made use of evidence-based research but remember that this step would need to be seen as one aspect in a holistic approach to addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils as systemic change is still necessary if societal equality is to be realised.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Lakehead University – Recruitment Script

Good morning / afternoon / evening,

As you know, I am conducting a study as partial completion of my Masters of Education. I would like to interview you regarding your experiences with Pupil Premium and OFSTED. The information gained during the interview will maintain your anonymity through the use of a pseudonym. Your real name will not be used in the dissemination of this research. The information gained during the interview will be used to add to the understanding of teachers' experiences with these government initiatives.

If you consent to being interviewed, I will send you a more detailed information letter and consent form. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you will be able to. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect our relationship if you decide to participate or not.

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you,
Rachel Brooke

Appendix B: Information Letter

Lakehead University – Information Letter

Dear Potential Participant:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project. The title of my research project is 'The Office for Standards in Education and Pupil Premium Funding: Primary Educator Conceptualisations on Inspection Criteria.' My research question is: What steps do primary educators in England take to support the pupils who qualify for the Pupil Premium Fund?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, please read this letter carefully to understand what is involved. After you have read the letter, please ask any questions you may have.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this generative case study is twofold: first, to explore through case study how individual primary educators in England understand the role of Ofsted in relation to the Pupil Premium Fund, and second, to identify some of the ways those educators respond to factors that cause pupil deprivation while working toward closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

I would like to interview you for data gathering purposes. I have chosen you because I am specifically looking to interview participants who have experience supporting pupils who qualify for Pupil Premium. The educators that I will interview also need to have experienced an OFSTED review. Your knowledge and understanding of the policies and procedures surrounding both government initiatives make you an ideal participant. With this research, I hope to add to our understanding of educators' experiences with these initiatives.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?

I would like to interview you regarding your experiences with the Pupil Premium and OFSTED. The interview will be conducted via Zoom and take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. It will be recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript before it is analysed.

WHERE WILL MY DATA BE STORED?

Data collection will occur between 2022 and 2023 and will be securely stored by me while completing the research. After that, I will give the original documents to the Principal Investigator Frances Helyar who will archive digital files in a password protected computer and paper files in a locked filing cabinet

in her office. They will be safeguarded for a minimum period of 7 years, as per Lakehead University's policy.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. As a research participant, your rights include the right to: decline to participate; withdraw at any time until the point of submission of data; remain aware of continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate; refuse to answer any question in the interview process; opt out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn from the database and not included in the study (until completion of the data collection phase of the study; if you choose to opt out any data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed). You also have the right to privacy and confidentiality; and to safeguards for the security of the data.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

It is possible that upsetting memories will surface while discussing personal experiences. You will be able to stop the interview at any time. You may arrange to reschedule or cancel the interview altogether. You also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you wish to speak with a healthcare or education expert regarding any upsetting memories brought forward during the interview, Education Support is a non-profit UK organization which offers educators resources to help them better manage stress and distress. https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/guides/dealing-with-stress-and-trauma-for-staff-in-education-settings/

This research will benefit society by adding a primary source to the current knowledge base about what it is like working within the confines of governmental initiatives.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

Your confidentiality as a participant in the research will be guaranteed, as far as possible, using pseudonyms in the data analysis and reporting processes. Your real name will not be used in the dissemination of this research.

WHAT WILL MY DATA BE USED FOR:

Your data will be used for partial fulfillment of my Master of Education Degree.

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?

The research results in the form of a one-page summary will be available upon request by contacting either the researcher or supervisor.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

You will be able to withdraw from the study up to the point of submission of data. Please contact the researcher or supervisor and make them aware of your choice.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

If at any time, you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, please feel free to contact me by email at rbrooke@lakeheadu.ca or you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Frances Helyar by email at fhelyar@lakeheadu.ca or by telephone, +1.705.330.4010 ext. 2623.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Lakehead University – Participant Consent Form

MY CONSENT:

I agree to the following:

✓ I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter

✓ I agree to participate

✓ I understand the risks and benefits to the study

✓ That I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time, and may choose not to answer any question

✓ That the data will be securely stored by Dr. Frances Helyar, who will safeguard the data on an external hard drive, in a locked file, for a minimum period of 7 years following completion of the research project

✓ I understand that a one-page summary of the research findings will be made available to me upon request

✓ My identify will remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms

✓ All of my questions have been answered

By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I,_____ , (participant name) have read and understood the above information, including the potential risks and benefits of the study. I hereby consent to my participation in the research.

_____   _____   _____

(Printed Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review transcribed interviews. Please check one:

___ Yes, I consent to be audio recorded for the purpose of this research study.

___ No, I do not consent to be audio recorded for the purpose of this research study.

Please check one:

___ Yes, I am interested in receiving a copy of the interview transcript via email.

___ No, I am not interested in receiving a copy of the interview transcript via email.

Please sign and return this form to me. A copy of this consent form will be provided to my supervisor.

Appendix D: Respondent Validation

Participant	Comment	Action
Claire	I do believe that you have captured my words and experiences in education accurately.	No action needed.
Stacey	It all sounds good. There are no changes I would wish to make.	No action needed.
Oliver	I am happy with the summary you sent me.	No action needed.