PRECARITY, PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PUPIL WELLBEING.

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ABSTRACT.

Precarious employment is now an increasingly common reality for workers in Scotland. The detrimental impact of such employment on the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of workers and their families is well documented. However, little is known of how these issues affect schools. This paper focuses on Scottish primary schools' awareness of precarity and their response to pupils' MHWB needs. Drawing upon the findings from a mixed methods study involving pupils and staff from four Scottish primary schools, I first sought to establish the level of awareness of precarity as well as staff members' perceptions of how MHWB issues affected their pupils. Then, following Antonovsky's salutogenic approach, the means by which schools might improve the promotion of pupils' mental wellbeing were also examined. Analysis of the findings reveals that the prevalence and severity of MHWB issues amongst pupils has increased over recent years. However, there is little awareness in schools of precarious employment as posing a risk factor for their children's MHWB. Other factors were described as impacting pupils' MHWB; I argue that these amount to twin risks of a 'precarious childhood' and a 'digital childhood'. Furthermore, these harms may act in synergy. Lack of awareness of factors such as precarity, as well as doubts about MHWB awareness in schools has led to an increase in scepticism amongst staff members about the true extent of pupils' MHWB issues; this may act as a barrier to supporting pupils needs. Staff members saw greater numbers of staff as key to meeting pupils' needs. However, pupils described a desire for more immediate, modest and contextual improvements in their school's response; improvements which were denigrated by some staff members despite evidence that they may be achievable and effective. Accordingly, this paper argues that 'small wins' in improving MHWB may be obtained by consulting pupils and enacting their suggestions, in a process that also bolsters the school's sense of community and social justice. Furthermore, a more nuanced and informed understanding of employment and its effects on MHWB is necessary in order to adapt to the changes brought about by fifty years of neoliberal policies. This may be achieved by enhancing initial teacher education around MHWB.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

ASD: Autism spectrum disorder.

ASN: Additional support needs.

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

CfE: Curriculum for Excellence.

CT: Class teacher.

CYP: Children and young people.

DHT: Depute Head Teacher.

DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

EPRES: Employment Precariousness Scale.

FSM: Free school meal entitlement.

GIRFEC: Getting It Right For Every Child.

GRR: Generalized resistance resources.

HBSC: Health Behaviours in School-aged Children survey.

HWB: Health and wellbeing.

HT: Head Teacher.

ILO: International Labour Organization.

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

ITE: Initial Teacher Education.

MHWB: Mental health and wellbeing.

MMR: Mixed methods research.

MHST: Mental Health Support Teams.

NT: Nurture teacher.

OAPEC: Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

PHE: Public Health England.

SHANNARI: Safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

SOC: Sense of coherence.

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

WHO: World Health Organization.

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 BACKGROUND: REHABILITATION.

Teaching was, in turn, my rehabilitation and debilitation.

I came to it relatively late in life, following a lengthy period of significant mental ill-health. Teaching seemed to offer a route forward for a thirty-something single father with a rather wretched degree and a barren curriculum vitae. To my surprise, I quickly found it to be a joyful experience. I was unprepared for the potency of the relationships that formed so quickly with the young people who shared the classroom with me. My own schooling had been decidedly didactic in nature; sitting in rows of single desks, apprehensively studying a teacher who remained a stranger throughout the year. I had not expected the children in the class I taught to impose themselves on me with the force with which they did, nor how I would thrive on the experience. They amazed me, daily, their characters often seemingly on a scale beyond fiction. These bonds, and subsequently the belonging, agency and purpose which teaching provided, were truly transformative.

Those early years were amongst the happiest of my life. My probationary year began in August 2006. I was propelled into what felt like a changing of the guard, the forge of a Curriculum for Excellence. Much of the exuberance of that time probably related to the shock of the new. With hindsight, I now realise that pedagogical expectations had shifted in tandem with the curriculum. During initial teacher education, we had been instilled with the need to make lessons fun and engaging, to make the classroom a happy place, and of the imperative of positive relationships. I set about developing these from the first day of my probationary class. This generated some friction between myself and my more experienced colleagues, who cautioned that it was best not to smile before the October week. What spared me from the censorious gaze of my Head Teacher was that the approach I had been trained to enact *worked*, at least with the classes I taught. Had I been cynical, I might have argued that the strength of the relationships I developed could be leveraged in ways that fear and authoritarianism would never achieve. But the truth is that I was not thinking of such things. I simply felt privileged to have the opportunity to know those children and immeasurably enriched from the experience. Opprobrium came in the form of scepticism about my ability to maintain discipline, mutterings about my lines being insufficiently straight. I considered these the most public and yet least important facets of the job. What interested me was nurturing the pupils in my care and helping them in their development. And I had some success in those endeavours. My reward was to be assigned with progressively more children who had various forms of additional support needs (ASN). And the belief that some of those children benefited from my pedagogy remains one of my proudest achievements.

However, change was not restricted to curriculum and pedagogy alone. At first, I had simply thought those teachers who complained of declining behavioural standards somewhat curmudgeonly. Nevertheless, in the years following the financial crash in 2008, the prevalence of pupils with ASN seemed to increase sharply, as did the challenge of some of their behaviours. Although I had insufficient experience to recognise trends, those teachers who claimed to detect definite deteriorations in children's behaviour and wellbeing over time became more insistent. Initially, some of these colleagues ascribed the changes to inclusion, as the number of children in our classes with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) rose progressively. However, this alone did not account for the changing dynamics. The prevalence of children who presented with highly distressed behaviours, but who did not seem to have any diagnosable conditions, soared. Although some children had been subjected to a variety of traumatic circumstances which staff members pointed to by way of explanation, there were others whose behaviour nobody seemed able to account for.

More general factors were also recognised, within all the schools in which I taught. Increasingly, in the recession that followed 2008, deprivation and hardship became more apparent amongst children and their families. From 2009, in the school in which I spent the rest of my career, the catchment seemed to change over time. It gradually shifted from a mixed socioeconomic profile to one that became more decisively tilted towards deprivation. My colleagues and I were quite aware of the risk that poverty presented to our pupils' mental health and wellbeing (MHWB). I can remember Ruby, a girl in p4, confiding in me that she was worried that her parents might lose their jobs. At moderation events attended by staff members from other schools, these issues were often the only point of conversation around tables. Colleagues shared stories from the chalk face, trying to ascertain whether their own experiences were anomalous or typical. Over time, a consensus formed; everyone seemed to think that deprivation was on the rise, that pupils' needs were becoming more severe, and that their MHWB was deteriorating.

1.2 THE BROADER CONTEXT.

Unfortunately, when compared with national statistics, it turns out that the experiences which my colleagues and I shared of teaching classes in 21st century Scotland were not atypical. Firstly, the number of primary pupils in Scotland who had been identified as having some form of ASN had increased dramatically. Over seventeen years, the proportion of pupils with ASN rose *ninefold*, from 4.4% of all pupils in 2007 to 40.5% in 2024 (Scottish Government (2024a; 2025a); latterly, almost a quarter of this group required support for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Scottish Government, 2025a).

Secondly, there is evidence that anger and aggression had increased amongst pupils over exactly the same period as my teaching career. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools survey has

reported deteriorations in pupils' behaviour since 2006, and particularly since 2016, with incidents of violence and aggression recently becoming more common in primary than in secondary schools (Scottish Government, 2023a). This survey also revealed that, within the previous week, 43% of staff members reported at least one incident of pupil violence within the classroom and 11% had themselves been subjected to violence from pupils (Scottish Government, 2023a).

Thirdly, the MHWB of pupils across all Scotland had worsened significantly over recent years. The latest Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey shows that the prevalence of 11 year-old boys and girls who report multiple MHWB problems rose from around 20% (for both sexes) in 2018 to around 30% (for boys) and 40% (for girls) in 2022 (Cosma *et al*., 2023). The same survey revealed that a third of Scottish pupils reported feeling anxious or depressed (HBSC, 2023). MHWB declines as pupils age; by the second year of high school, less than half of pupils reported feeling happy at school in 2021/2 (Scottish Government, 2023a). These statistics, as with almost all indicators for MHWB, were negatively correlated with pupil's affluence and considerably worse for girls than boys at all ages. Although the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly worsened MHWB outcomes for young people (McCluskey *et al*., 2021), these trends predated the lockdowns. Pitchforth and colleagues (2019, p.1282) reported a "consistent and striking increase" in the prevalence of MHWB problems reported by children and young people (CYP) during the period 1995-2014, with the prevalence of long-standing mental health issues more than doubling amongst CYP in Scotland between 2003 and 2014. These statistics, and their implications for schools, will be discussed in detail in chapter three, which will review what the literature tells us about MHWB.

Finally, the nature of deprivation has also changed considerably over the last twenty years. Since the 1960s, poverty has been linked with unemployment in Scotland, with the decline of heavy industries associated with some of the worst wellbeing outcomes in Europe (Walsh *et al*., 2010). However, the current unemployment figures in Scotland are at historically low levels (Scottish Government 2025b). Despite this, there is evidence that these statistics mask a situation in which increasing numbers of workers are in employment that is less secure, less productive and less well paid than was previously the case (Dewan & Ernst, 2020). In particular, the increasing prevalence of part-time, self-employed workers, and the increase in rates of poverty within this group, have been linked to the emergence of a 'gig economy' within the UK (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). Disparate definitions of the gig economy, as with all aspects of precarious employment, make the task of assessing the true number of workers employed within it akin to "nailing jelly" (Huws *et al*., 2017, p.13). These issues will be explored in chapter two, which reviews the literature relating to precarious employment and precarity and will offer definitions of these terms. In the meantime, estimates of the numbers of workers in the UK gig economy in 2021 range from just under half a million (Cockett & Willmott, 2023) to around 4.4 million (TUC, 2021). One

may make two conclusions based upon such data; firstly, there is considerable confusion about what defines a precarious employee, and secondly, there are a great many of them in the UK. Furthermore, these numbers have grown significantly, both within the UK (Kampouri *et al*., 2023) and globally (ILO, 2021). Although data on the gig economy within Scotland are scarce, one survey estimated 14% of the workforce in Scotland are in precarious employment (Fennell, 2025). As I shall describe in chapter two, exposure to precarious employment presents a risk factor not only to workers' MHWB, but also to their children's.

1.3 DEBILITATION.

Towards the end of my teaching career, I understood little of these wider circumstances. I was focused only upon the needs of the pupils in my class, and those of my colleagues. My own personal barometer of the issues which my pupils experienced was based upon the efficacy of my pedagogy. As I passed ten years of service and more, the relational approach with which I had enjoyed so much early success came under increasing strain in trying to meet the needs of some of my most challenging pupils. Forging and developing those relationships still worked with *most* pupils *most* of the time, but it had begun to feel as if there were some pupils whose needs were such that my colleagues and I just could not fully meet them. Within the space of a few years, pupils in my care suffered trauma associated with the murder of one family member by another, parental suicide, and sexual abuse by a parent. Such crimes and tragedies strained our powers of mitigation to the limit. Aside from these extreme circumstances, the prevalence of pupils whose MHWB seemed to be suffering from either attachment issues or deprivation, or issues completely beyond our understanding, was also increasing. Behavioural norms seemed to be collapsing around us, as assaults on other pupils and staff members became commonplace. It seemed as if the influence of positive relationships was no longer sufficient to ensure that children always felt safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

As the children's wellbeing came under increased pressure, so did that of the staff members. Teachers became ill with stress, several took long-term leave. Two support workers retired early and one simply quit. There was a bewilderment amongst staff members, a perception that a gradual yet profound change had occurred amongst our pupils, but that we did not properly understand the nature of that change nor how to mitigate its effects. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept towards Scotland, some of my colleagues were so exhausted that they confessed to welcoming the respite from class contact which lockdowns brought. I certainly shared their weariness, to the point of feeling burnt out. Sixteen years into my teaching career, I had felt my ability to support my pupils gradually wane, just as their needs and challenges had waxed. The resumption of formal schooling after the lockdowns brought even more severe challenges. On return, I learned that a former pupil had taken his own life. Shortly thereafter, whilst in school, a pupil in my

class self-harmed so significantly that it could have been considered a suicide attempt. Events such as these haunt me, and they precipitated the decision to end my teaching career. I had given as much as I could, and it was time to cede my position to someone with as much energy and vigour as I had felt as a probationer.

1.4 STUDY RATIONALE, AIMS AND QUESTIONS.

Nevertheless, I felt compelled to further study these issues which had so debilitated me, and which had affected some of my pupils to such a terrible degree. I had completed my Master's degree whilst teaching, and thoroughly enjoyed the academic experience. I began to consider whether I might better understand pupils' needs through research. This, then, is the path that led me to the present study, and these are the experiences which have motivated me throughout. In addition to guiding me from teaching towards research, these experiences have also influenced my position as a researcher. Just as was the case whilst I was teaching, throughout the present study I have felt a desire to advocate for children's rights, and for their views to be heard and considered. This position will undoubtedly have influenced every stage of the present study, and will be discussed in detail in section 4.2.

Nevertheless, motivation alone was not sufficient to address the issues which had so harmed the pupils in my care and confounded my teaching career. I had learned during my Master's studies that a successful research project required defined and focused aims. In order to establish these, I first considered what was understood, and what was not, within my areas of interest. These issues, which will be discussed in greater detail throughout chapters two and three, can be described in the following terms.

Firstly, the MHWB of Scottish primary pupils is a pressing issue, in both practical and policy terms. As mentioned in section 1.2, the prevalence of MHWB issues amongst pupils has increased significantly over the past quarter of a century. Furthermore, teachers in Scotland have a statutory responsibility to provide support to all the pupils in their care, ensuring they enjoy the highest attainable standards of mental health (The Children and Young People [Scotland] Act 2014; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [Incorporation] [Scotland] Act 2024). Improving pupil wellbeing is considered one of the Scottish education system's main aims in terms of recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic (Scottish Government, 2022).

Secondly, it is widely accepted that poverty is one of the most commonly cited factors associated with poor MHWB outcomes for pupils (Fitzsimons *et al*., 2017; Scottish Government, 2024). Schools are aware of this association and consequently focus upon mitigating the effects of poverty as best they can (Scottish Government, 2023). Nevertheless, as mentioned in section 1.2, the nature of deprivation in Scotland has changed in recent years, with increasing numbers of working families experiencing poverty

(Scottish Government, 2020; 2025). This is in part explained by the rise in precarious employment (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). Poverty and precarity, although related, are distinct concepts (see section 2.2). Compared to poverty, precarity is a fairly nascent concept which has arisen due to relatively recent changes in the nature of employment. It is nevertheless a known determinant of MHWB, as shall be detailed in chapter two.

Finally, as I discuss in chapter three, little is known about exactly how primary schools in Scotland are seeking to support the MHWB of their pupils. This is in contrast with the relatively prescribed support frameworks which primary schools in England rely on and is likely due to the autonomy which a Curriculum for Excellence affords individual Scottish schools. As each school's context differs, so may the nature of its response.

In light of these points I wanted to determine whether schools were aware of these changing socioeconomic factors, the risks that these changes might pose to pupils' MHWB and the responses, if any, that schools were adopting. I resolved to design a study which can be seen as including these related aims. In addition, as previously mentioned, I was determined that the voices of the pupils themselves should be heard in the study. This had always been important to me during my teaching career, and I had witnessed the profound and positive effect that listening to pupils had had on their wellbeing. To this end, I sought to understand what the pupils felt that their schools could do to better support their MHWB. Following an examination of the literature, these aims crystallised into the following four research questions, which will be revisited at the end of the following two chapters:

> RQ1: Are Scottish primary schools aware of precarity and its impact on children and young people's MHWB?
>
> RQ2: In what forms do school staff members perceive MHWB issues to be manifesting among children and young people in general, and how do they account for them?
>
> RQ3: What, if anything, are schools currently doing to support the MHWB needs of all their CYP?
>
> RQ4: How might schools meet the MHWB needs of all CYP more effectively, and what might be the barriers and affordances to further action?

1.5 OUTLINE OF THESIS.

With these aims in mind, I designed the present study accordingly. The thesis proceeds next with a review of the relevant literature. I felt it necessary to outline all that I could learn in relation to two topics: precarity and MHWB. Although interrelated, these are both supported by a considerable body of work and I therefore decided to devote a separate chapter to each. The following chapter, chapter two, defines the terms precarity and

precarious employment and describes both the historical and policy context as well as relevant theoretical frameworks. It also outlines what is known about the impact of precarious employment upon the health and wellbeing of workers and their families, as well as the position of schools in relation to these issues. The chapter ends with the proposal of one research question which relates to schools' awareness of these issues.

Chapter three reviews what the literature reveals about MHWB. Once again, terms are defined and theoretical stances described. As a result, the present study will position itself as proceeding from a health promotion perspective; specifically, it will adopt a salutogenic approach based upon the arguments of Aaron Antonovsky (1979). The policy context regarding MHWB will be outlined thereafter, from a global to Scottish perspective. Next, two determinants of MHWB will be examined in particular, since they emerged as of particular importance within the findings of the present study: the COVID-19 pandemic, and digital devices. Finally, in recognition of the locus of this study, a detailed account is given of what is currently understood about the nature of MHWB support in schools. This ultimately points the review toward what is currently *less* well understood within the literature. As a result, three further research questions which relate to the MHWB of pupils are proposed.

Having thus established that which is understood, and that which is less so, as well as having justified the most appropriate theoretical position and perspective of the present study, attention then turns to *how* the present study sought to address the chosen research questions. Chapter four concerns the methodology selected to achieve these aims. It will proceed from the metaphysical to the practical level, commencing with a justification for the pragmatic paradigmatic stance of the researcher. Next, the rationale behind the mixed methods research design will be offered, alongside a detailed description of the partially mixed, qualitative dominant design used. Details of the sampling method chosen will be set out, followed by a description of the chosen methods of data generation and analysis. Finally, ethical issues will be discussed.

The thesis then proceeds to the presentation of findings. These have been separated into three chapters. The first two, chapters five and six, set out the findings from the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interviews with school staff members. Chapter five arranges themes which relate to the *issues* which staff members perceive their pupils to have faced. These three themes, each divided into sub-themes, describe staff members' awareness of precarity and the risk it poses; their perceptions of how MHWB issues manifested amongst their pupils; and their views on factors which they associated with those MHWB issues.

Chapter six is similarly arranged but focused upon staff members' perceptions about the *response* their school offered to try to meet their pupils' MHWB needs. Three more themes are described; the first relates to the role of curricular programmes and outside agencies.

The second details the personal approaches employed by staff members, and the third outlines various deficits which staff members felt hindered their response.

Chapter seven is devoted to the findings from the pupils, which were generated by means of a 'draw and write' art activity (Wetton & McWhirter, 2005). In line with the salutogenic approach (Antonovsky, 1979) adopted by the present study, the pupils were asked to suggest ways in which their school might better promote their MHWB in the future. Findings from the pupils' data were arranged into three themes. Firstly, pupils sought changes to their school's environment, curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Secondly, pupils expressed a desire for more outdoors and physical education. Thirdly, pupils in two of the four schools clearly stated their view that introducing pets to their classroom would support their MHWB.

The final substantive chapter, chapter eight, discusses these findings. Through consideration of similarities and differences between the findings from adults' and pupils' perspectives, as well as in the comparisons with the reviews of the literature, an analysis is presented and novel insights are described. Some were expected, such as the lack of awareness amongst staff members of the risks posed by precarity. Others were far more surprising. Overall, I will argue throughout this thesis that the present study provides evidence for three main points. Firstly, that children are at risk of harm from what amount to the twin factors of a **precarious childhood** and a **digital childhood**. Furthermore, it is likely that these harms act in synergy. Secondly, school staff members' uncertainty about what is behind the increasing prevalence of MHWB issues amongst their pupils, as well as scepticism about the effects of MHWB awareness in schools, is fuelling increasing levels of **scepticism as to the extent of MHWB issues**. This scepticism is likely a barrier to meeting pupils' MHWB needs. Finally, I shall argue that these MHWB issues may be mitigated by means of **engaging with and valuing pupil voice**. The present study offers evidence of the efficacy of this approach, the pathways by which it might work, as well as the disparagements which some staff members express about its worth. It is into these few themes that I feel I can distil all of the four years' effort which has gone into the present study. This, then, is my thesis.

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW: PRECARITY.

As outlined in the introduction, one of the main areas of interest upon which the present study has focused is the effect of family member's precarious employment on their children's MHWB. Furthermore, one of the present study's most important findings concerns the harm to children's MHWB that participants perceived to be associated with various forms of uncertainty; the previously mentioned 'precarious childhood'. In light of these themes, it seems rational to begin this thesis with an examination of what the literature tells us about these issues. Consequently, this chapter will offer evidence in support of one of the central arguments of this thesis, that exposure to precarious employment harms the MHWB of workers' families. Furthermore, it will position the present study in relation to what is currently understood, as well as highlighting areas in which the present study seeks to make a novel contribution to this literature.

Seeking the definite from the precarious seems absurd. It may be that gaining *insights* are as close as something so inherently chaotic and unstable may allow. However, the effort must be made, since precarity (as defined in section 2.2 below) is familiar to a significant and growing number of people, and the evidence points to miserable outcomes for many of those who experience it. I will therefore begin by reviewing the definitions of terms; next, I shall describe relevant theoretical frameworks; followed by what we know about the effects of precarity on the health and wellbeing of those exposed to it. Finally, I shall look at the response to precarity from the perspective of governments, relevant financial institutions and the education sector. Prior to all of these considerations, I will first briefly outline the historical context which shapes contemporary understanding of precarity, in order that the circumstances that have led increasing numbers of workers to experience precarious employment are made clear.

2.1 HISTORY.

The concepts of precarity, and precarious employment, emerged following the collapse of the Keynesian-Fordist model of capitalism that characterised wealthy nations' economic structures in the three decades after World War II (Fletcher, 1989). During this period economies in the global north were shaped by a Fordist approach to industrial production and accumulation of capital, in which production and wages were driven up in a symbiotic 'virtuous circle of growth' (Jessop, 1992). At this time, a Keynesian model of state economic intervention prevailed, which involved the reduction of interest rates alongside massive investments in infrastructure projects, as epitomised by the US Federal Aid Highway Act (1956). Originally budgeted at $25 billion, it was at that time the largest public works project in history (Weingroff, 1996). This policy of dirigisme was a reaction to the perceived failure of laissez-faire economics, which had culminated in the Wall Street Crash (1929) and the ensuing Great Depression. With its roots in Roosevelt's New Deal, from 1933 onwards,

Keynesian economic policies generated a post-war boom sometimes referred to as the 'Golden Age of Capitalism' (Marglin, 1991). Unemployment remained low and stable, inflation modest, and workers enjoyed generous welfare programmes, strong labour unionisation and protective regulations (Benach *et al*., 2014).

However, in response to escalating public debt and inflation, President Nixon issued an executive order in 1971 which imposed import tariffs and froze workers' wages, as well as withdrawing the USA from the Bretton Woods monetary system, in a move which came to be known as the 'Nixon Shock' (Lehrman, 2011). The Bretton Woods system had tethered the dollar (and by proxy, many other international currencies) to the price of gold. Nixon's action resulted in enormous fluctuations in the value of international currencies, as well as a period of 'stagflation' in America (characterised by high inflation as well as high unemployment) (Grubb *et al*., 1982).

The 'Nixon Shock' was followed by the 'Oil Shock'. In 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) began attempting to use the supply of oil to leverage US policy in the Middle East (Mitchell, 2010). OAPEC announced an embargo on oil deliveries to countries which had supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War, resulting in the near-quadrupling of oil prices in the USA (Corbett, 2013). The combination of stagflation and instability, energy shortages and price rises, as well as rapid technological advancements, heralded the demise of the Keynesian-Fordist economic model in the global north. An era of economic stability and cooperation was waning. As the age of globalisation dawned, and brought with it macroeconomic changes in global competition, companies raced to become more cost-effective, resulting in downward pressure on wages and increasing use of offshore employment (Kalleberg, 2009). Standing (2011, p.43) refers to this period (1975-2008) as the 'Global Transformation', when the economy "was 'disembedded' from society as financiers and neo-liberal economists sought to create a global market economy based on competitiveness and individualism."

This new mantra of competition and flexibility, epitomised by the free market policies of Reagan and Thatcher during the 1980s, became such an orthodoxy within the economic policies of wealthy countries that by the mid-1990s it was central to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's strategy to reduce unemployment in member states (OECD, 1994). However, 'flexibility' seemed to empower the employers more than the employees, whose ability to organise, and whose rights and regulatory protections, were progressively emasculated. This undermined what has been called the 'standard employment relationship', in which workers (usually men) in Fordist economies had largely enjoyed full-time continuous employment, from a single employer, in a single location, and had received a social wage (Mückenberger, 1989). In further assaults on the ideal of a standard employment relationship, manufacturing declined steeply in affluent countries as globalisation increased (Brady *et al*., 2007), sweeping programmes of privatisation were

initiated (Megginson, 2005) and technological advances rendered some roles redundant (Boyer, 1988). Standing (2011) argues that it was this remodelling of labour conditions into a new, flexible form, in which risk and insecurity were transferred from employer onto employee, that was the main driving force behind the increase in precarious employment in affluent economies.

It is however important to highlight divergent perspectives around the concept of precarity. Munck (2013) points out that viewing precarity as a novel concept only represents the view from the northern hemisphere, and that it is merely a contemporary iteration of long-standing, disparaging labels which have traditionally been assigned to marginalised sections of society. Neilson and Rossiter (2008) propose that it is more accurate to view Fordism as the exception to the rule, and precarity the norm, rather than the other way round. Similarly, Kalleberg (2018) argues that one cannot think of precarious work as a departure from a standard employment relationship when that was historically only the experience of a tiny fraction of the world's workforce. Although some countries in the global south had pursued 'developmentalist' economic policies in the 1950s, which were similar in nature to a Keynesian approach (and had in many cases reaped great rewards for their workers), these proved short-lived, largely due to the nefarious activities of the Central Intelligence Agency (Klein, 2007). Such contested views serve to highlight many questions and discrepancies within this field. So, within this context of rapidly changing social, economic and political conditions: what exactly is meant by precarity?

2.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS.

As this section will outline, there are various and contested definitions of both precarious employment and precarity. In basic terms, the former is generally viewed as work which is insecure in some form or other; the latter is a conceptual state which connects uncertainty and insecurity to detrimental health outcomes. Beyond these broad characterisations, as the following paragraphs will show, precise definitions vary considerably. Nevertheless, understanding how young people within the present study are affected by these concepts will require the establishment of clearly defined terms.

Precarity was first mentioned in the literature some seventy years ago (Day, 1952). Subsequently, French authors began to give the term novel connotations during the 1970s. They described 'précarité' variously: in reference either to a precarious *social* condition (experienced directly by families, or in relation to employment); or to the precarious employment *contract* itself; or more recently, to a generalised social *threat of insecurity* (Barbier, 2002). Since then, its use has grown exponentially, arguably becoming a "defining feature of contemporary economic and social life" (Masquelier, 2019, p.135). Nevertheless, despite a burgeoning body of literature, there is no universally accepted definition of precarity (Symeonaki *et al*., 2023). It has become a rather nebulous term, having been used

to describe a wide range of groups of people, including workers (Kalleberg, 2009), migrants (Banki, 2013), the elderly (Phillipson, 2020) and the young (Means, 2015). It has been associated with issues as diverse as climate change, racism, education, sexuality, gender, citizenship, and the pandemic (Stewart-Robertson, 2022). For the most part, its use may be divided into two camps: the first is a broader, ontological concept, in which sense it often seems synonymous with a general condition of insecurity. This view regards precarity as "a psychosocial concept that links structural inequities with experiences of alienation, anomie, and uncertainty" (Blustein *et al*., 2024, p.1). The second perspective describes a narrower, more defined concept, in which precarity is generally used in relation to employment conditions. In this conceptualisation, precarity:

> … is a condition resulting from an employment regime in which deregulated labour markets give rise to various types of insecure work; in which social protections are minimized; and in which the ability to plan a coherent future is compromised (Walsh, 2019, p.459).

Many authors writing from this latter, employment focused viewpoint have taken inspiration from two French academics, both of whom sought to describe the effects of a new, neoliberal capitalism: Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Foucault described the 'art of government' as fostering and guiding competitive mechanisms which sought to normalise the individualism and competitiveness of workers, forcing upon them a new reality of personal responsibility, competition, and precarious life (Masquelier, 2019). Foucault argued that this new spirit of entrepreneurial subjectivity would encourage workers to depend upon themselves rather than rely upon the state (Peters, 2001). However, Bourdieu's (1990) criticism of what he saw as an artificial divide between the subjective and objective contained an implicit indictment of Foucault's description of precarity as a subjective experience. Since Bourdieu saw the subjective and objective as being intertwined and inseparable, he sought to describe that which he felt Foucault had not; the objective mechanisms which organise and influence individuals' behaviour. He argued that these occurred within reciprocal interactions between individuals and their 'habitus', or social space (Bourdieu, 1990), which are influenced by the insidious conditioning and 'inert violence' of socio-economic structures (Bourdieu, 2000). Masquelier (2019, p.145) eloquently encapsulates Foucault and Bourdieu's positions thus:

> So, while in the work of Foucault the acceptance of risk and responsibility surfaces as an outcome of an almost magical interplay of various contingent forces compelling individuals to adopt an entrepreneurial conduct, Bourdieu offers a range of conceptual tools capable of grounding it in the actions of political elites aimed at cultivating flexibility as an empowering and economically beneficial principle of economic and personal life.

Pierre Bourdieu saw precarity as 'flexploitation', a new form of domination "based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into

submission, into the acceptance of exploitation" (Bourdieu, 1998, p.85). Bourdieu's views have informed those of authors such as Arne Kalleberg, who have focused more narrowly upon the experience of precarious work, which Kalleberg (2009, p.2) defines as "employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the point of view of the worker." Kalleberg's emphasis upon the shift in liability from employer to employed is echoed by the International Labour Organization, which similarly defines precarious work as "a means for employers to shift risks and responsibilities onto workers" (ILO, 2011, p.5). Standing (2011, p.11) refocused this stance, turning attention from the phenomenon itself to those who experience it, whom he termed collectively as the 'precariat', a "class-in-the-making." In so doing, he has attracted considerable criticism. Despite Standing's assertion that the precariat is far from a homogenous group, he argues (2011) that they are defined by their lack of labour-related forms of security, and that they share a common sense that their labour is instrumental, opportunistic, and insecure. Conversely, Frase (2013) retorts that there is simply too much heterogeneity between groups experiencing precarity to label them a social class, although this presumably depends on how one defines a social class. Seymour (2012) goes even further, accusing Standing of theoretical incoherence and extravagant rhetoric. Other authors have defended Standing's concept: Savage and colleagues (2015) argue that despite the danger of stigmatisation inherent in naming any deprived social class, the concept of a precariat is useful as it highlights the way that the vulnerability of these groups is linked to their structural location in society.

In addition to these views, some authors have espoused a different, broader view of precarity. In her initial works (about *precariousness*) Judith Butler describes it as "a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself" (Butler, 2004, p.31). She argues that it is a relational concept, universally yet unequally experienced amongst people: however, she considers it essential, as the understanding of one's own precariousness allows the recognition of it in others, which she sees as the foundation of ethical relations (Ruti, 2017). In later works, when she addressed *precarity* directly, she aligned it clearly with social justice and marginalisation, defining it as a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2016, p.25). This holistic, existential perspective, which seems to equate precariousness with vulnerability or insecurity, has been influential in the literature: Tsing (2015, p.2) defines precarity as "life without the promise of stability." Similarly, Berlant (2011, p.193) views it as having become normalised across society rather than the domain of the marginalised: "precarity has saturated the consciousness and economic life of subjects transnationally and across populations."

Broader conceptualisations of precarity, such as that cited here by Butler (2016), are highly relevant to the present study and will form part of the discussion in chapter eight. Nevertheless, they are not the main focus of the present thesis. This is in part due to the

fact that if one accepts such wide definitions of precarity, in which it becomes almost synonymous with vulnerability, then it becomes more difficult to analyse effectively (Millar, 2017). Although some authors have attempted to study both objective and subjective dimensions of precarious employment (Jørgensen, 2016; Shukaitis, 2013), most studies have historically focused upon only one indicator of precarious employment, that of employment insecurity (Allan *et al*., 2021). This measure, which has received the greatest level of attention in the literature, is usually defined in terms of one's expectations around the continuity of employment (Davy *et al*., 1997; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Heaney *at al*., 1994).

Despite this, many authors stress the importance of viewing precarious employment in wider terms. Benach and colleagues (2016, p.234) see it as a "multi-dimensional construct encompassing dimensions of employment insecurity, individualized bargaining relations between workers and employers, low wages and economic deprivation, limited workplace rights and social protection, and powerlessness to exercise legally granted workplace rights." Rodgers (1989) was the first to try to define this multifaceted nature of precarious work, highlighting what he saw as its four features: the degree of certainty of continuing work, the extent to which one has control over one's work, the level of protection afforded by laws and regulations, and the income derived from it. More recently, Kreshpaj and colleagues (2020) reviewed the literature in an effort to identify how precarious employment was defined by researchers. Although cautioning against interpreting their findings as "yet another multi-dimensional definition" (2020, p.241) they identify three commonly cited domains of precarious employment: employment instability, income inadequacy and a lack of rights and protection. These would seem to streamline, rather than radically alter, Rodgers' original (1989) proposal, and clearly informed the views of Irvine and Rose:

> … there is growing consensus that precarious employment is best conceived as multidimensional, involving core components of employment insecurity, income inadequacy and lack of rights and social protection (Irvine & Rose, 2024, p.420).

Much of these attempts to define the domains of precarious employment are motivated by calls to assess its impact accurately (Kresphaj *et al*., 2020). A widely used quantitative tool, the Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES; Vives *et al*., 2010), is based upon Rodger's (1989) four domains of precarious employment, with the addition of two further criteria: vulnerability and the capability to exercise rights. It has been shown to have good psychometric properties and reliability in the assessment of precarious employment (Vives *et al*., 2010). Furthermore, when used in comparison with unidimensional measures of precarious employment, the EPRES scale captured a broader picture of detrimental health effects amongst a group of Chilean workers (Vives *et al*., 2020a). As most quantitative surveys into the health effects of precarious employment in the past have relied on a

unidimensional measurement (Jaramillo *et al.,* 2022; Jaydarifard *et al*., 2023), Vives and colleagues (2020b) conclude that both the extent of precarious employment, and its impact on workers' health and wellbeing, may have been underestimated (Vives *et al*., 2020b). Hajat and colleagues (2024, p.236) agree, arguing that any attempt to assess the effects of precarious employment which is based on only one dimension:

> … fails to recognize that these unfavorable features of employment often co-occur and require a multipronged approach… compared with unidimensional constructs, multidimensional constructs produce stronger associations with health outcomes.

It seems clear therefore that precarious employment is a concept best defined by several dimensions rather than one. Accordingly, for the purposes of the present study, I will adopt Kreshpaj and colleagues' (2020) three domains as a working definition (see figure 2.1 below). Employment will be considered precarious if it has more than one of the following features: unstable or insecure terms, inadequate or unpredictable income, and a lack of rights and regulations.

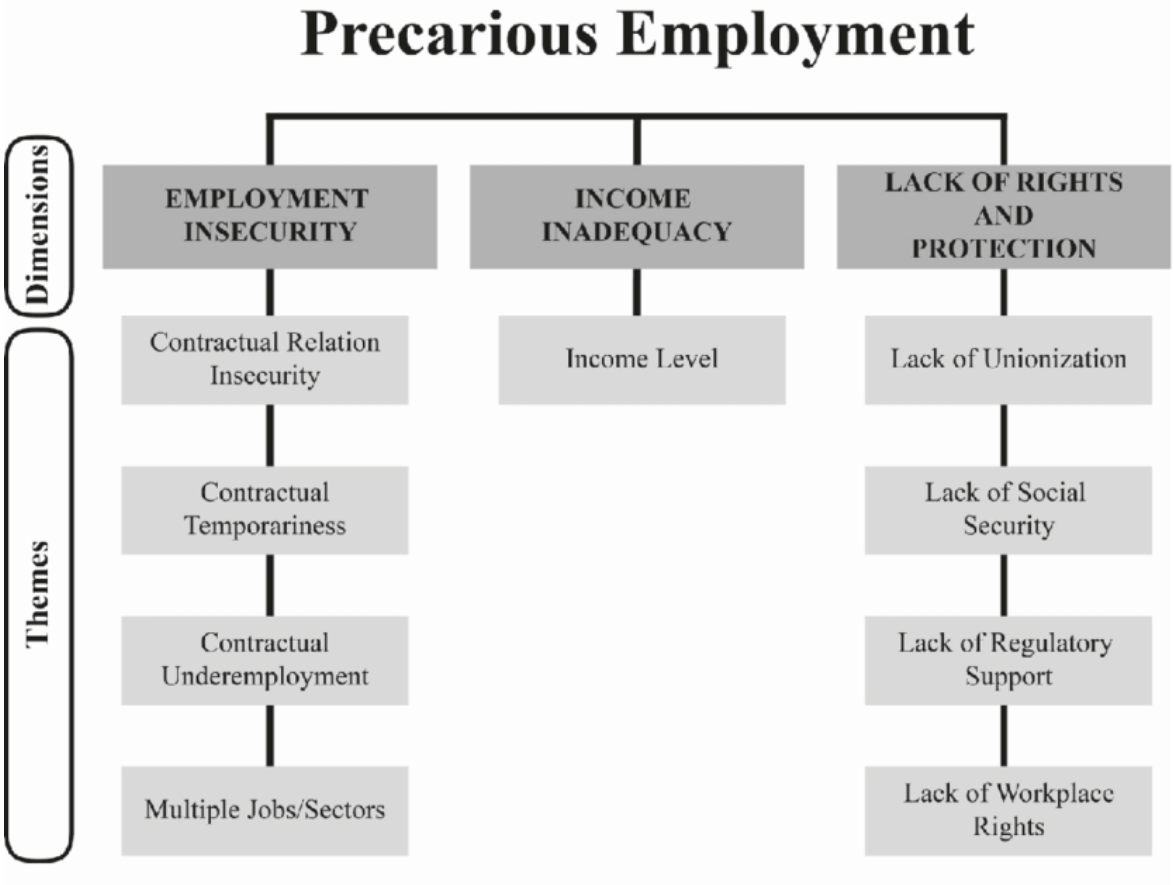


Figure 2.1; dimensions of precarious employment (Kreshpaj *et al*., 2020).

Having thus adopted a definition of precarious employment, it is worth establishing the distinction between it and a related issue, that of working poverty. In Scotland, the most

commonly used measure to determine if a household is experiencing relative poverty is if the household income falls below 60% of the median UK household income (Scottish Government, 2019a). Those in *working poverty* are defined in the same terms despite someone within the household being in receipt of paid work (Scottish Government, 2019b). This category seems to be increasing over time; the percentage of the working-age population in relative poverty who live in working households has risen from 48% in 1996-99 (Scottish Government, 2018) to 61% in 2021-24 (Scottish Government, 2025a).

Inadequate income is therefore a common denominator shared by both those in working poverty and precarious employment, as it is one of the three defining features of the latter (Kreshpaj *et al*., 2020). The difference between the two working situations relates to the *other* two dimensions of precarious employment: security and rights (Kreshpaj *et al*., 2020). This can be exemplified in the comparison between two fairly common careers in Scotland.

Firstly, a hospital cleaner working for NHS Scotland in 2024 earned around £24,000 for a 35 hour week (NHS Scotland, 2024a). If they were the only worker in a household, this would presumably leave them below the Scottish Government's measure of relative poverty which was recently set at around £22,000 after housing costs (Scottish Government, 2025a). Having said that, although hospital cleaners are subject to changing shift patterns, the number of hours they work a week is fixed at a minimum of 35 (Scottish Government, 2025b). As a consequence, although their pay is insufficient to escape working poverty, the hospital cleaner can at least expect a constant level of pay each week. In addition, they enjoy relatively strong employment rights and protections (NHS Scotland, 2024b).

In contrast, an experienced classroom teacher working on supply in a Scottish school at the same time as the cleaner would have earned around £230 a day, from a potential salary from a full working year of over £54,000 (SNCT, 2024). However, control over the hours they worked would be limited. In fact, it has recently become so difficult for teachers on supply lists in Scotland to find sufficient work that some are leaving the country; others are in such debt that they have even attempted suicide (Williamson & Lyst, 2026). Although *potentially* paid enough to avoid experiencing working poverty, the supply teacher has in reality become a recent example of precarious employment (EIS, 2023). Furthermore, certain rights such as statutory sick pay are only available to supply teachers following 18 weeks of unbroken service (EIS, 2018).

Both the hospital cleaner and supply teacher are therefore at risk of experiencing working poverty. The difference between the two is that the supply teacher, due to the insecurity and uncertainty around the terms of their employment, is also exposed to precarity, a concept which will be defined in the following paragraphs. As such, the hospital worker would be situated within the left hand set of the diagram shown in figure 2.2 below, whereas the supply teacher would be in the middle region.

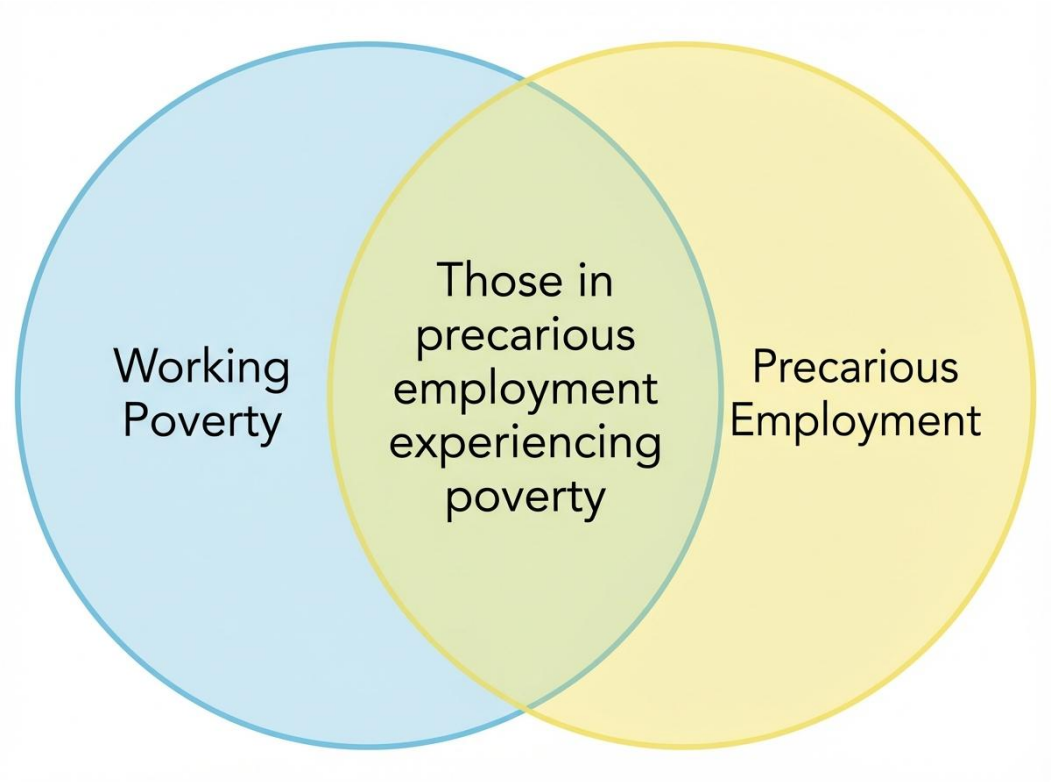


Figure 2.2; Venn diagram illustrating the overlapping concepts of working poverty and precarious employment. Please note that the regions are not intended to represent scale.

Having thus defined both working poverty and precarious employment, and described the distinction between the two, consideration must now turn to the concept of precarity. Given the previous focus upon the role of employment conditions, it seems reasonable to justify adopting a view of precarity that is grounded in this narrower definition rather than the broader ontological paradigm espoused by Butler (2016). Furthermore, as the present study is concerned with the proxy effects of precarious employment upon the MHWB of primary school pupils, it seems reasonable to settle upon a definition that frames precarity as a concept which describes a social determinant of MHWB. Consequently, when the term 'precarity' is used henceforth in the present study, it will refer to:

> … a concept that links the forms of indeterminate and insecure work associated with the so-called gig economy, the uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity such practices engender, and poor health and wellbeing of both workers and members of their families (Kirk, 2021, p.167).

It should be noted that in this definition offered by Kirk, the 'gig economy' is used as an illustration (rather than a definition) of precarious employment. It is also worth mentioning here that the term 'gig economy' similarly proved to be a useful exemplar when discussing precarious employment with participants in the present study, as will be seen in chapter five. This is perhaps due to the fact that it is likely a more familiar term than 'precarious

employment/ employee'; in addition, gig workers often experience all three of the domains of precarious employment outlined by Kreshpaj and colleagues (2020). However, the terms are not interchangeable: the gig economy will be examined and defined in section 2.6, below.

Having reviewed what the literature has to say about *what* precarity is, attention next turns to *how* it operates. If precarity is a concept that connects precarious employment with detrimental health outcomes, what then are the mechanisms by which such a process occurs?

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.

Notwithstanding a wealth of evidence which connects precarious employment with detrimental health and wellbeing outcomes, historically there has been a conceptual gap in terms of explaining *how* these effects occur (Hajat *et al*., 2024; Julià *et al*., 2017; Vanroelen *et al*., 2021). This is despite being situated within a rather crowded theoretical field concerning social determinants of health. As such, this section will commence with a brief theoretical overview of social determinants, before examining conceptual frameworks which seek to link various aspects of precarious employment with MHWB.

In general terms, it has been accepted for some time that social factors are powerful determinants of health (Marmot, 2010; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003); there are undisputed correlations between low socioeconomic status and poor health and wellbeing outcomes (Mowat, 2019). For example, the estimated life expectancy of a male born in Glasgow at the turn of the millennium ranges from 54 to 82 years, depending on whether he was born in Calton or Dalmarnock, or Bearsden or Milngavie (Hanlon *et al*. 2006). Mental health outcomes are similarly worse for those experiencing low socioeconomic status, especially amongst children and young people (Fitzsimons *et al*., 2017; Kirkbride *et al*., 2024; Reiss, 2013). Thus, depressive symptoms and anxiety are 2.5 times more common amongst 10-15 year olds from low socioeconomic status households than amongst those from their more affluent peers (Lemstra *et al*., 2008). However, identifying the *specific* factors associated with these outcomes remains challenging. Pearlin (1989) described a constellation of such factors, rendering not only the identification, but thereby the avoidance, of pathways between low socioeconomic status and poor health and wellbeing problematic. Link and Phelan (1995) proposed Fundamental Cause Theory to explain such associations, arguing that experiencing low socioeconomic status affects health and wellbeing through such a multitude of mechanisms that their association is maintained even when some of the intervening mechanisms are altered or disrupted. They pointed to myriad resources which people experiencing low socioeconomic status might lack, and which render them less able to cope with stressors. Pearlin *et al*. (2005, p.206) characterised such stressors as being

"built into the warp and woof of social and economic life", as well as to the fact that they are prone to proliferate over lifetimes.

Duncan *et al*. (2017), in their review of mechanisms linking poverty and low socioeconomic status to negative childhood outcomes, identified three overlapping and complimentary theoretical models: family/environmental stress perspective, resources and investment perspective, and cultural perspective. The first model, developed by Glen Elder (Elder *et al*., 1985), argues that economically disadvantaged families experience more stressors than their affluent peers, and that the results of these stressors are manifested in a wide range of negative parenting and environmental factors, thus negatively impacting children (Evans, 2004). For example, less affluent families may have to forgo certain things in order to pay bills; but beyond such material deprivation, additional stress caused by their circumstances may spill over into relationships, risking outcomes such as poorer attachment and nurture. The potential range of stressors extends well beyond the family of children experiencing low socioeconomic status; they are common in neighbourhoods afflicted with violence, crime, poor services and schools, and higher levels of pollution (Duncan *et al*., 2017). The second model (resource and investment) is based upon Gary Becker's (1991) Household Production Theory, which sees childhood development as being influenced by resources (such as time, money *etc*.) that parents invest in their children. Poorer parents have fewer resources available to them; as a result, their children are therefore less likely to enjoy books, quality schools, childcare, safe neighbourhoods, foreign holidays. Such investments are typically key to supporting learning and wellbeing. The third, cultural, perspective draws upon Oscar Lewis' (1969) Culture of Poverty Model. Lewis argued that families in poverty are at risk of responding to marginalisation with maladaptive behaviours and values that create a 'culture of poverty'. Lewis describes features of such a culture; crime, drug use, promiscuity, as being not only a response to poverty but also a cause of future poverty, likely transmitted from one generation to the next. One of the implications of this model is that outcomes and behaviour are normalised and ingrained and are therefore unlikely to change as a result of short-term financial support. Finally, Duncan *et al*. (2017) also point to advancements in neuroscience as beginning to provide a fourth perspective, with clear evidence emerging of associations between family income and the size of the brain's surface at age three (Noble et al., 2015). Nonetheless, such studies also struggle to establish any causal relationships and are largely unable to unpick the vast array of variables affecting physiological changes in brain structure.

Some twenty years ago, the literature around *job insecurity* was often described as being somewhat theoretically underdeveloped (*e.g*.; Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Despite a great deal of research since, De Witte and colleagues (2016) still found this to be the case, having identified infrequent mentions of theory in their review of the literature on the association between job insecurity and health and wellbeing. They described the few theories that are cited: Jahoda's (1982) Latent Deprivation Theory;

general stress theories, such as Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1999) or Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989); work stress theories, such as Karasek's (1979) Job Demand Control Model; and social exchange theories such as Siegrist's (1996) Effort-Reward Imbalance. These and other relevant theories will be briefly reviewed next.

Jahoda's (1982) theory posited that the benefits workers receive from employment are both manifest (*i.e*. income) as well as latent (*i.e.* daily structure, social contacts, purpose, identity, activity) in nature. She considered that these latent benefits correspond to basic human needs and therefore must be met in order to preserve mental health, a theory which has since been supported by empirical studies (Batinic *et al*., 2010). The anticipated loss of these benefits can be as damaging to workers as the actual loss itself (Vander Elst *et al*., 2013). Appraisal Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory essentially argued that workers who are caught up in insecure employment situations come under strain as they assess their coping resources to be insufficient to deal with their situation, or expend resources in the attempt to cope, thus depleting their reserves and damaging their health and wellbeing (HWB) accordingly. Karasek's (1979) Job Demand Control Model predicted that low sense of control over one's job, coupled with high levels of job demand, causes higher stress to workers, and thus poorer HWB. Effort-Reward Imbalance (Siegrist, 1996) viewed job security as a reward which is obtained as a result of a worker's effort. Job insecurity thus represents an imbalance in this association, which leads to strain and poorer health and wellbeing. Of all these theoretical bases, Klug and colleagues (2024) found that Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory is one of the most commonly cited in research into the effects on workers of job insecurity. However, they went on to argue that frequency of reference alone does not necessarily entail veracity, and that in some such studies:

> … the investigated mechanisms are sometimes only weakly linked to theory or could be linked to other theories as well, which means that we are hence still very much in the dark when it comes to explaining why certain consequences occur (Klug *et al*., 2024, p.1976).

Furthermore, as outlined previously, job insecurity represents only one aspect of precarious employment. Benach and colleagues (2014), in an attempt to clarify multidimensional pathways connecting various aspects of precarious employment and HWB, reviewed models from the literature which may have some bearing. The first, the Pressures, Disorganisation and Regulatory Failure Model (Underhill & Quinlan, 2011), suggested that economic pressures, employer disorganisation and weakening of employee's regulatory protections all contribute to deteriorations in occupational health and safety. The second, the Employment Strain Model (Lewchuk *et al*., 2003), described employment which is characterised by relationship uncertainty, effort required to find/ keep employment, and poor support. The more these characteristics act in concert, the greater the strain felt by employees, which in turn is associated with poorer HWB outcomes (Lewchuk *et al*., 2008). Frustrated by the lack of an overarching, multidimensional, and widely accepted theoretical model explaining

precarious employment's links to HWB, Benach and colleagues (2014) went on to present their own theoretical model, outlining three main pathways between precarious employment and adverse HWB outcomes. Firstly, precarious workers are more likely to experience **working conditions** associated with harmful health consequences. These may be either physically and/or psychosocially more demanding, damaging, or dangerous. In addition, their work may involve less training, support and protection than other jobs, and they may suffer poor social contacts or even isolation. Secondly, precarious workers may experience **limited control** over their professional and personal lives, leading to psychosocial stress. Feelings of insecurity, injustice or powerlessness; or lack of opportunity, reward or identity, are powerful stressors associated with harmful outcomes. Finally, the **social and material** consequences of precariousness hinder employees' ability to lead fulfilled lives; they impact personal and family plans, and are associated with relative and absolute economic deprivation, which in turn impacts a wide range of social functioning. In fact, the social and material consequences of precarity and deprivation tend to feed back onto each other, fuelling cycles of chronic poverty (Green & Hulme, 2005).

Although there is as yet no consensus within the literature, Benach and colleagues' (2014) framework has become one of the most frequently accepted explanations of the mechanisms by which precarity affects workers (Utzet *et al*., 2020). The present study's description of pathways by which precarious employment harms those exposed to it will be revisited in section 2.5, as attention turns to the families of those workers, and how they might be indirectly affected by such employment. In the meantime, having reviewed the relevant theoretical bases for precarity, what then does the literature tell us about its effects? What is the evidence concerning the impact of precarious employment on workers' health and wellbeing?

2.4 IMPACT OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support the theoretical proposition that precarious work is a social determinant which negatively affects the health of workers and their families (Blustein, 2008; Lübke, 2021; Vancea & Utzet, 2017; Van Aerden *et al*., 2016). These health problems manifest in both physiological and psychological form. Studies have found significant associations between dimensions of precarious employment and headache, skin and hearing problems, fatigue, backache and muscular pain (Matilla-Santander *et al*., 2021). In a longitudinal study in the U.S.A., persistent job insecurity had a greater association with self-reported health problems than smoking (Burgard *et al*., 2009). Studies have linked job insecurity with coronary heart disease (Ferrie *et al*., 2013) and suggested it as a possible cause for early mortality (Case & Deaton, 2015). However, the greatest weight of evidence is to be found supporting associations between aspects of precarious employment and workers' MHWB (Vanroelen *et al*., 2021). These include correlations with anxiety (Wilson *et al*., 2020);

depression (Ferrie *et al*., 2005), emotional exhaustion (Piccoli & De Witte, 2015) and general decreases in mental health (Gray *et al*., 2021; Reichert & Tauchmann, 2017; Rönnblad *et al*., 2019; Utzet *et al*., 2020). This is hardly surprising as job security, and having a sense of control over one's work, are known to be protective factors against mental health difficulties (UCL IHE, 2012).

In the first meta-analysis of studies in the field, Sverke *et al*. (2002) reported significant detrimental mental health effects for workers facing job insecurity. In addition, they also noted the tendency for studies which examined only one dimension of job insecurity to underestimate overall effects on workers. Precarity is nuanced and complex in its relationships, affecting different individuals and communities in various ways (Kirk, 2020). This makes generalisations difficult, but as previously mentioned it also renders research that is overly fixated upon single aspects of precarity at risk of partial or inadequate findings. In an attempt to broaden the scope of previous reviews, Llosa *et al*. (2018) conducted another meta-analysis of the literature associating perceived job insecurity and mental health. Instead of relying on only one psychological health variable (as had both Sverke *et al*. [2002] and Cheng and Chan [2008] before them) they included five domains of mental health: psychological wellbeing, measurements on depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and satisfaction with life. They found significant links between job insecurity and four of the five domains, with that of psychological wellbeing being limited by a lack of research evidence. The authors found 'especially strong' links between job insecurity and both depression and anxiety. However, although Llosa and colleagues (2018) examined a broader range of outcomes, job insecurity remained the only dimension of precarious employment considered. More recently, Jaydarifard and colleagues (2023) conducted what they claim as the first systematic review to apply a multidimensional definition of precarity in seeking to understand the consequences of precarious employment on health, social and workplace wellbeing outcomes. Utilising Kreshpaj and colleagues' (2020) three dimensional definition, Jaydarifard and colleagues (2023) found that precarious employment is associated with increased stress, lower levels of life and job satisfaction, and lower emotional wellbeing amongst workers.

In a field which is dominated by quantitative research, Irvine and Rose (2024) conducted a thematic synthesis of qualitative studies of the effects of precarious employment upon workers' MHWB. They identified four themes which workers themselves associated with precarity. Firstly, **financial instability** (both in terms of income inadequacy and volatility) led to feelings of stress and anxiety. This could be felt both directly and indirectly (*e.g*., insufficient income forcing workers to be constantly available for work, thereby impacting social and family relationships). The second theme, **temporal uncertainty***,* resulted in difficulties in planning, in both the short-term (*e.g.* child care) and long-term (*e.g*., buying a house, getting married). The latter point caused workers to feel isolated and trapped in a childlike status, denied the opportunity to achieve the "social markers of adulthood" (Irvine

& Rose, 2024, p.428). Thirdly, workers reported feelings of inferiority and exclusion due to a perceived **marginal status**, both in the workplace and society. This left workers feeling devalued, peripheral and less likely to establish workplace friendships. Finally, a sense of **employment insecurity** led workers to overwork and overperform in order to demonstrate their value to an employer. The sense of subservience and powerlessness that this caused was associated with stress, anxiety, self-doubt, depression and reduced self-esteem. Irvine and Rose concluded by arguing that many of their findings describe latent rather than manifest attributes of work. They therefore went on to suggest that Jahoda's (1982) Latent Deprivation Theory, although originally intended to describe the risks of unemployment, may offer a better account of the dangers of precarious employment than stress theories:

> Our analysis indicates that people in insecure work may (to a greater or lesser extent) be deprived of the latent benefits of time structure, social contacts, social purpose, status and identity… which are causally related to mental wellbeing (Irvine and Rose, 2024, p.432).

In this last point, the authors raised the issue of causal status. Although such studies offer compelling evidence of an association between precarious employment and MHWB, showing a causal relationship between the two is usually considered problematic as they are likely correlated with myriad unobserved factors. Longitudinal studies offer the possibility of resolving this difficulty as they allow for temporal order of associations to be observed. This is crucial as it represents one of Taris' (1990) four conditions which allow for associations to be interpreted as having a causal relationship (temporal ordering, strength of association, theoretical plausibility and exclusion of plausible rival hypotheses). De Witte and colleagues, in a review of thirty years of longitudinal studies in this field, found *all* of the studies which met their inclusion criteria showed that perceived job insecurity had a significant detrimental effect on workers' mental health. They conclude:

> … there is clear evidence for the impact of job insecurity on future mental/psychological well-being… [the] analysis of depression and anxiety also points towards normal causation (De Witte *et al*., 2016, p.25).

Longitudinal studies have for some time shown that precarious employment should be regarded as an important social determinant for subsequent development of health problems in previously healthy people (Canivet *et al*., 2016). In one such early example, Beale and Nethercott's (1986) longitudinal study recorded the health of a factory workforce over eight years. They recorded the greatest rise in health problems amongst the workforce in the two years *prior* to the factory's closure, concurrent with the first rumours that the factory was in trouble. This strongly suggests that the greatest rise in health and wellbeing problems is associated with the anxiety of impending precarity. This is a proposition supported by Dekker and Schaufeli's (1995) influential study which found that continued insecurity about potential dismissal from a job can be more detrimental to the health and

wellbeing of workers than actual dismissal itself. In a similar study, Iversen *et al*. (1989) found a rise in health problems amongst the *families* of workers facing the threat of unemployment. This led Ferrie to call for further research: "In addition to the effects on individuals, the wider impact of job insecurity on the family and on society in general requires further investigation" (2001, p.75). This focus on the family, and children in particular, is clearly of fundamental importance to the present study's aims. As such, a review of the literature about the proxy effects of parental precarious employment on the MHWB of their children forms the next section. What harm to children is associated with parental precarious employment, and by what means does it occur?

2.5 IMPACT OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT ON FAMILIES' HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

"Precarious work, with its inherent uncertainty and instability, makes workers and their families ill. It is this relationship that the word precarity seeks to capture" (Kirk, 2020, p.1). But to what extent and by what means does precarity, which is experienced directly by adults, indirectly affect their families, and specifically their children? One obvious pathway which might explain such a link is that of deteriorations in family relationships caused by stressors; especially if this affects parenting. This was one of the areas Han and Hart (2022) sought to illuminate, in a multidimensional survey of American parents taken during COVID-19 related lockdown. The authors used the EPRES instrument (see section 2.2), as well as questions relating to part-time work and nonstandard work schedules, to assess precarious employment. In addition, four measures of parental aggravation and two relating to child happiness were taken. All responses were quantitative and Likert-scale style in nature. Han and Hart found that aspects of precarious employment (particularly in relation to vulnerability at work, low material reward and job loss) were significantly associated with higher parental aggravation and lower child happiness. The authors cited a stress theory, Family Stress Model (Conger *et al*., 2010) as a possible mechanism via which economic hardship and pressure might cause emotional distress, contributing to decreases in parental supportive behaviour and positive parent-child interactions. Although Han and Hart warned that their findings might have been affected by stress related to the lockdown, they are broadly in keeping with those of Mauno and colleagues' (2017) review of the literature in this field, which pre-dates the pandemic.

Mauno *et al*. examined a single aspect of precarity, job insecurity, and its effects on families' wellbeing. They included only quantitative studies as they found "no published qualitative studies on this topic" which matched their definition of job insecurity (2017, p.722). Six of the seven included studies described significant and detrimental outcomes experienced by employees' children. The authors concluded that their review :

> … indicates that there is empirical evidence supporting the negative relationship between parental job insecurity and children's wellbeing,

> motivation, and school performance. Thus, job insecurity crosses over from parents to children" (Mauno *et al*., 2017, p.737).

In their report, Mauno and colleagues cited three theoretical models which might explain their findings. The first, Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources model, has been mentioned previously (see section 2.3). The second, Spillover Theory (Lambert, 1990), relies upon an holistic view of a worker's life, where events and experiences occurring in one domain cause emotions and behaviours, which will in turn spill over into other domains. It is noteworthy that, although supported by a great deal of empirical evidence (Larson *et al*, 1994; Nolan *et al*., 2000; Rook *et al*., 1991), most studies relating to the Spillover model have only examined within-individual experiences (*i.e.* how the work experiences of an individual affect their wellbeing at home) (Mauno *et al*., 2017). The third conceptual model cited, Crossover Theory (Bolger *et al*., 1989), extends Spillover Theory by proposing that stressors which are brought home from work are then transmitted to other individuals; a between-individual model based upon emotional contagion. Despite finding that all three theoretical models are complementary and supported by the evidence, Mauno *et al*. (2017, p.738) conclude with a familiar theme: "research in this area would certainly benefit from more unified and holistic theoretical model(s)".

Crossover Theory is clearly a conceptual model of relevance to the present study. Westman (2001) identified three mechanisms by which it might operate. The first, direct crossover, involves the extent to which the experience of an individual elicits a direct response from another, a result of empathic connection. The second, indirect crossover, involves the impact upon others of an individual withholding positive social behaviours as a result of experiencing stress. The third, common stressors, occurs when all individuals are exposed to the same stressors. In a recent meta-analysis of studies examining work-family stress crossover, Li *et al*. (2021) found that stress does indeed cross from one domain to another; individuals' perception of work stressors were positively associated with family members' psychological distress.

In another highly relevant study, Treanor (2016) sought to understand pathways via which a mother's financial vulnerability affected their child's social, emotional and behavioural (SEB hereafter) wellbeing; either directly, or indirectly, through the mother's emotional wellbeing. She found strong associations between financial vulnerability (more so than simply low income) and maternal emotional distress, and that children's SEB wellbeing is negatively associated with both. Interestingly, Treanor found two-thirds of the effect of financial vulnerability on the child is experienced indirectly, via the mother's distress. Treanor drew upon Runciman's (1966) Theory of Relative Deprivation, which postulated that comparisons which individuals make between themselves and their reference groups may lead to subjective injustice and distress. This seems a highly relevant theory in an age of social media; as such it will be further discussed in later sections (5.3.1; 8.3.2; 8.3.3).

Treanor (2016) argued that Runciman's theory might explain some of the indirect distress felt by mothers, who are at risk of comparing themselves with more financially secure peers. The subjective influence of these comparisons may in fact be greater than that caused by the objective situation itself (Ragnarsdóttir *et al*., 2013). In addition, the detrimental effects on children of exposure to financial vulnerability may be long-lasting: Cheng *et al.* (2020) found that income volatility in childhood was a predictor of mental health difficulties in early adulthood. Interestingly, the authors found that although families at the bottom end of income distribution experienced the highest level of income volatility, the negative mental health impact of such volatility was greatest amongst families in the middle of the income distribution. This seems to support Treanor's finding that financial vulnerability acts on children's wellbeing in different ways, compared simply with low income itself. Treanor and Troncoso further reinforced this argument with a later (2022) study, using nine annual waves of the Growing Up in Scotland survey. The authors sought to identify associations between parental 'work intensity' (defined by insecure hours and job loss or gain) and child conduct or emotional problems, and concluded:

> Overall, it seems that both instability and disadvantage in combination, rather than persistently low work intensity or persistent poverty and material deprivation on their own, are at play when it comes to poor mental health outcomes in children. The key aspect of employment as a route out of poverty seems to be in its quality and stability and its ability to provide sufficient income to families. This is especially pertinent in a Scottish and UK context where two-thirds of children living in poverty have a parent who is working (Treanor & Troncoso, 2022, p.6).

Similar results were found by Walther and Pilarz (2022) in their secondary analysis of a US survey; the authors found that several dimensions of parental precarious work were associated with their children's behaviour problems. More recently, Aronsson and colleagues (2025) conducted secondary analysis of a large Swedish longitudinal survey and found that children of parents employed in precarious jobs were at significantly greater risk of developing mental disorders four years later, than those of parents whose jobs were secure. They conclude that:

> The current evidence on how parental precarious employment influences the health of adolescents is scarce… there is still limited research on how parental precarious employment, measured as a multidimensional construct to fully grasp its complexity, associates with adolescents' mental health over time (Aronsson *et al*., 2025, p.60).

There seems little doubt that the effects of precarity can permeate through families, inflicting harm upon the wellbeing of young people, through likely myriad mechanisms and pathways which as yet remain insufficiently understood. Given the evidence of harm that the literature has provided, one may wonder about the extent of governmental awareness

of, and response to, this threat. The present survey of the literature will therefore examine next the policy context which might seek to mitigate precarity.

2.6 GOVERNMENTAL POLICY.

Internationally, workers' rights are nominally protected by the United Nations thus:

> Everyone has the right to… just and favourable conditions of work… to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself [sic] and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and… the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, art. 23).

Furthermore, the United Nations has set a goal of achieving "full and productive employment and decent work for all" by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Most of the oversight and implementation of these goals is tasked to a United Nations agency, the International Labour Organization (ILO), which seeks to promote workers' rights to collective bargaining and a safe and healthy work environment (ILO, 2022). Having described precarious employment as one of the "most important trends over the past decades", the ILO called on member states to strengthen social security systems and legal protections for workers (ILO, 2011, p.1). This was deemed necessary given "the strategies of global companies to exploit regulatory arbitrage" (ILO, 2011, p.47).

Nevertheless, these global ambitions can seem at odds with the apparent aims of several international financial institutions which have historically promoted globalisation and deregulation of economic systems. Chief amongst these is the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which offers loans to nations contingent upon 'conditionality'; this involves a range of policy reforms which typically undermine workers' rights (Lee & Woo, 2021). Reinsberg and colleagues (2019) undertook analysis of IMF-mandated labour market reforms in seventy developing nations between 1980 to 2014 and found that they significantly reduced both individual and collective labour rights. Similarly, the World Bank has historically argued that labour market regulations are obstacles to investment (Bakvis, 2006); as recently as last year, the World Bank warned that strict labour regulations may encourage companies to hire workers informally, thus undermining their protections (World Bank, 2024). In a 2019 report about the changing nature of employment, they offered an optimistic view of the future:

> People living in advanced economies are anxious… They hold a view that rising inequality, compounded by the advent of the gig economy… is encouraging a race to the bottom in working conditions. This troubling scenario, however, is on balance unfounded (World Bank, 2019, p.2).

To mitigate any potential negative outcomes of such changes for workers, the World Bank advocated a universal, guaranteed minimum level of social protection, funded by more

efficient tax collection and increased duties on sugar and tobacco (World Bank, 2019). This palliative approach is shared by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Their 2019 report 'The Future of Work' warns of the "hollowing out" of the middle class due to technological advancements and the emergence of precarious jobs (OECD, 2019a, p.3). However, the response which they advocate seems to focus upon increasing workers' ability to adapt to such a situation, such as recommending improved adult learning services to support workers' transition through multiple jobs, as well as making means testing more responsive to changing situations (OECD, 2019a). It seems that such institutions favour structural reforms which risk exacerbating precarious employment, whilst recommending mitigations that arguably may be insufficiently protective of workers.

Within the UK, there have been recent policy developments in terms of addressing workers' rights. These developments arguably represent the first significant reversal of nearly fifty years of neoliberal policies, which were first adopted during the Thatcher government in 1979, perpetuated by the 1997 Blair government, and then accelerated by Cameron's government following the 2008 financial crash (Dorey, 2022). The current Starmer government's Employment Rights Bill (2024) recommends the introduction of greater protection for UK workers and claims to address "one-sided flexibility" (DfBT, 2024a, p.1). Specifically, it seeks to eliminate zero-hours contracts, end 'fire and re-hire' practices, strengthen collective redundancy rights and statutory sick pay and repeal some previous legislation which had curbed Trades Unions' powers (Employment Rights Bill, 2024). The government projects that over two million workers in the UK may benefit from the right to guaranteed hours (DfBT, 2024b); this would certainly seem to reverse the historical trend of deregulation in UK employment legislation.

Despite this, some have criticised the UK government's approach as being insufficiently robust, largely due to a failure to resolve definitions about workers. Previously, The Labour Party had outlined an intention to change the current three-tier classification of employee (employed, worker, self-employed) to a single status of 'worker' (other than those they termed the "genuinely self-employed"; The Labour Party, 2022, p.8). These three current categories of employee each enjoy very different levels of rights and legal protection: for example, employees are entitled to statutory redundancy pay, maternity/ paternity leave, *etc*., whereas the self-employed have few rights in comparison (Cockett & Wilmott, 2023). This is a distinction which is open to abuse by some employers in order to deny workers their rights. Indeed, a 2017 independent review into working practices had concluded that government should focus upon "clarifying the line between 'worker' status and self-employment as this is where there is greatest risk of vulnerability and exploitation" (Taylor, 2017, p.32). This risk was later exemplified in the case of Uber drivers, whom the Supreme Court ruled were workers rather than self-employed, as Uber had claimed (Uber BV v Aslam, UKSC 5, 2021). The Labour Party had proposed that their 'single status worker' would close this legal loophole. However, this intention has been dropped from the current iteration of

the Employment Rights Bill, which instead promises a consultation period in which to consider what would undoubtedly be complex legal changes (CIPD, 2025). Implicit within this move is the risk that the bill would not ultimately offer *all* workers the protections it details, as was pointed out during Parliament Committee hearings:

> So this issue absolutely has to be addressed… Many of the measures contained in the Bill would not be effective, unfortunately, if this issue was not grappled with (Deakin, 2024)

As employment law is a reserved power, rather than a devolved one (Scotland Act, 1998), the situation in Scotland is broadly similar. The Scottish Government has however enacted a 'Fair Work First' policy which outlines five dimensions that fair work should offer employees: an effective voice, fulfilment, opportunity, respect and security (Scottish Government, 2023d). These are voluntary aims for all Scottish employers except for those in receipt of Scottish Government grants, who are obliged to pay employees at least the 'Real Living Wage' (Cominetti & Murphy, 2024) as well as demonstrate that "all workers have access to effective voice channels at both collective and individual levels" (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.7). This action may be informed by a previous Scottish government review of young people's experiences of precarious work. The findings of this review lamented both the lack of a universally accepted definition of precarious work, as well as the paucity of evidence about the experience of workers in precarious jobs in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021a). However, the report highlights the findings of an earlier study (Stuart *et al*., 2016), in which Scottish workers earning less than £20,000 a year were asked what made a job 'decent'. The five most frequently cited responses were; decent pay, paid leave, no discrimination, job security, and a supportive manager. One other relevant study which conducted research into the Scottish labour market reported that the "majority of evidence suggested a deterioration in job quality. In particular, we heard of an increase in poor-quality, low paid and insecure work" (Scottish Parliament, 2016). It is notable that in the same study, 62% of respondents reported health problems resulting from their job, 88% of whom mentioned stress, depression or anxiety.

Unlike employment law, education law *is* a devolved matter. Schools are a crucial site for promoting social justice and questioning neoliberal forces (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2024). They are also in a uniquely influential position to support their pupils' MHWB (Barry *et al*., 2017), as will be considered in detail in the next chapter. Given the evidence which has already been outlined in the present study, which points to rising levels of precarious employment, the proxy impact of such employment upon children's MHWB, as well as the increasing prevalence of MHWB issues amongst pupils generally, it seems reasonable to expect that schools will be experiencing these issues directly. Given the stated study aims of the present thesis, establishing a clear understanding of what is known about Scottish schools and

precarity is clearly crucial. What then *do* we know about the situation in Scottish schools in relation to precarity?

2.7 PRECARITY AND SCHOOLS.

Firstly, it is beyond doubt that schools in the UK are already confronting issues to do with *poverty* and MHWB amongst their pupils. Teachers who replied to a recent UK survey estimated that 35% of pupils came to school hungry at some point in the previous year; two in five staff members reported having to provide pupils with direct support at their own expense (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). Children growing up in, or transitioning into poverty, are more likely to experience MHWB difficulties by the age of eleven than their more affluent peers (Fitzsimmons *et al*., 2017). It seems likely that most teachers working in Scotland will be aware of the link between poverty and pupils' MHWB; inequality and its consequences are both increasingly acknowledged in schools and a central plank in the government's education policy (Knifton & Inglis, 2020; McKinney *et al*., 2020; Scottish Government, 2022). Not only are the MHWB consequences of inequality notable from a young age, they also magnify as children get older. In a significant longitudinal study involving primary pupils in Glasgow, Marryat and colleagues (2018) found that at age four, 7.3% of children in deprived areas of the city had mental health difficulties compared with 4.1% of their more affluent peers. By the time the children had reached seven years old, that gap had widened to 14.7% and 3.6% respectively. Given such findings, it seems reasonable to assume that many Scottish primary teachers, especially those who work in the most deprived areas of the country, are aware of the link between poverty and pupils' MHWB.

However, a similar assumption cannot be made in regard to teachers' awareness of a link between pupils' MHWB and *precarity.* In fact, the literature has next to nothing to offer in terms of primary research involving schools and precarious employment. This is despite a great deal of political and philosophical discussion about precarity and the changing nature of education. For example, Standing (2011, p.116) is not alone in arguing that the education system itself has become an agent of the neoliberal market society, as competition and commodification have suppressed education's former role as a "liberating, questioning, subversive process." Standing goes on to argue that if the pupils who graduate from this new technical-instrumental model of education (which is supposedly designed to shape the workers of the future) subsequently find themselves in unsatisfactory and precarious employment, they may well experience what he portrays as the affective outcomes of precarity: anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation. It seems more likely that Scottish teachers may recognise these outcomes in some of their pupils than the concept of precarity itself.

Clearly, these 'four A's' (Standing, 2011) are not the exclusive consequence of precarity. It would be nonsensical to identify anger or anxiety in pupils and consequently claim it as

prima facie evidence of exposure to parental precarious employment. Nonetheless, given the dearth of primary research into the effects of precarious employment upon workers' children's MHWB, signs of these outcomes amongst pupils would at least be of interest to the present study. As will be outlined in chapter five, school staff members in the present study described signs of all four amongst their pupils; anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation. As mentioned in chapter one, evidence points to the increasing prevalence of anger (in the form of violent or disruptive behaviour) and anxiety amongst Scottish pupils. Alienation and anomie, although correlated (Seeman, 1991), are less well documented, perhaps due to their perceived ambiguity.

Although anomie is a concept which has proved difficult to define (Orru, 2024), Durkheim (1952) saw it as a state characterised by a lack of individual behaviour guidance and caused by the sudden collapse of social norms due to rapid social transformation. Durkheim considered these norms and values to be inherent within structured societies and acting as a constraint on individuals. He argued that as societies undergo periods of accelerated change, so the social cement that continuity and tradition reinforce comes under strain and loosens. In the ensuing erosion of social ties in favour of individualism, behavioural norms and respect for authority may begin to disintegrate (Atteslander, 2019). Consequently, societies' commitment to shared values, rules and standards deteriorate and individual's MHWB and standards of behaviour deteriorate (Bernburg, 2019).

Merton (1938, p.676) further extended Durkheim's theory by proposing that anomie becomes more likely when "the channels of vertical mobility are closed or narrowed in a society which places a high premium on economic affluence and social ascent for all its members." Although written nearly a century ago, this could arguably describe contemporary society, in which social media amplifies a simulated world of conspicuous consumption and material envy, whilst neoliberal reforms have (for many of the population) progressively emasculated opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. In fact, Yan and Peng (2025) recently showed that the use of social media can exacerbate the effects of anomie amongst users. These themes will be revisited in chapter eight.

In the school environment, anomie is manifested "by the failure to comply with the rules, and broken relationships between students as well as in relation to teachers and authorities in general" (Tvrdoň *et al*., 2021, p.353). Anomic behaviour may include violence and aggression, bullying, conduct disorders, depression, internet addiction, poor school performance and truancy (Sârbu *et al*., 2022). As such, it may be seen as something of an umbrella concept, encompassing elements of anger, anxiety and alienation.

There is little doubt that precarity is a factor generally unacknowledged in the literature examining the increasing prevalence of children's MHWB issues (Kirk, 2021; Vanroelan, 2021). In a relatively rare study in this topic, Fuller and colleagues (2025) noted a dearth of

research which examines the association between the employment *quality* of parents and their children's MHWB and school performance. They conducted secondary analysis of a Canadian survey and found that children of parents in precarious employment suffered worse MHWB and academic outcomes than children of parents in any other category of employment studied. The authors conclude:

> As a predictor of child health and family socio-economic status, parental employment is often captured as a dichotomy of employed versus unemployed. Our study highlights that this distinction does not appear to capture some of the important drivers of child mental health and development (Fuller *et al*., 2025, p.5).

As the findings in chapter five will show, there is some evidence to support the idea that school staff members do indeed hold dichotomous, or at least simplistic, views of parental employment. Although there is a great deal of research into the effects of parental *un*employment on children's academic performance or wellbeing at school, this review of the literature could not identify a single example of primary research within the UK which examined associations between parental *precarious* employment and its effects on children, nor any similar research into schools' associations with precarity. Given such a gap in our understanding, questions such as what schools are doing to mitigate precarity, or to support pupils whose parents are experiencing precarious employment, seem misguided. As there is no evidence of these measures being undertaken in Scottish schools, any proposal to measure or describe them would be senseless. Given the absence of literature on this subject, it seems reasonable to start at a considerably more exploratory level. As such, the first research question which arises from this review is:

> RQ1: Are Scottish primary schools aware of precarity and its impact on children and young people's MHWB?

2.8 CONCLUSION.

It is clear that precarity is a significant and growing concept; perhaps even one of the defining socioeconomic issues of our time. It is also beyond doubt that it has a marked negative correlation with mental wellbeing in adults and their families; furthermore, there is evidence which suggests a causal relationship. However, precarity is an emerging topic in academia, and perhaps as a result is conceptually ambiguous and contested. It is also likely to be little understood in one of the key sites that offers the possibility of mitigation of its effects: schools. Having reviewed what the literature has to say about this *determinant*, the next chapter will outline what we know about the *outcome:* mental health and wellbeing.

CHAPTER THREE. LITERATURE REVIEW: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING (MHWB).

Following the preceding chapter's examination of precarity, this chapter will set out the findings from a review of the literature concerning MHWB. Given that MHWB forms the focus of much of the findings from school staff members in the present study, and all of that of the pupils, it is clearly of utmost relevance. Amongst other points, this chapter will highlight literature which clearly relates to all three of the main arguments of this thesis, as set out in chapter one. Firstly, evidence will be presented that children are being harmed as a result of exposure to digital technology, and social media in particular. Secondly, this chapter will describe the emerging theoretical arguments which relate to growing scepticism about the extent of MHWB issues amongst CYP. Thirdly, this chapter will present strong evidence from within the literature that engaging with and valuing pupil voice in schools improves MHWB outcomes for those pupils, through a variety of pathways.

Beginning with the definitions of terms and a consideration of the relevant theoretical bases which inform various paradigmatic stances, this chapter will then progress toward the issues which have influenced the participants within the present study. Salient policy frameworks are described and analysed, as well as some key determinants of MHWB, before finally the literature about MHWB and schools is analysed. Having then drawn conclusions from the literature's implications, three further research questions will be presented.

3.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS.

MHWB are terms which in some contexts have become almost interchangeable (Huppert & So, 2013), to the extent that they are occasionally presented as a single concept (*e.g.*, 'health and wellbeing *is* important'; Spratt, 2017). Norwich and colleagues (2022) argue that the terms have been insufficiently examined and must be distinguished from one another. On this basis, I will commence with definitions of mental *health* before considering those of *wellbeing*.

There is no universally agreed definition of mental health (MacDonald, 2006). This is in part due to the contextual influence of historical and cultural norms, as well as differing philosophical perspectives. Consequently, Ereaut and Whiting (2008, p.5) describe it as having a 'holographic' quality, with different meanings projected by different agents. Efforts to contrive succinct and precise definitions which accommodate these influences and stances have proved challenging. For example, Galderisi and colleagues' (2015) contribution extends to 81 words, with the addition of further notes defining some of the terms used therein.

One of the most commonly cited definitions within the literature is that of the World Health Organisation (WHO), who define mental health as:

> … a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community (WHO, 2004, p.10).

Despite its ubiquity in the literature, it has been criticised for a perceived over-emphasis on positive emotions and functioning (Palumbo & Galderisi, 2020); the latter aspect has been seen by some as a feature of the neoliberal commodification of mental health (Esposito & Perez, 2014), in that 'normalcy' is equated with socioeconomic productivity. The WHO definition has also been criticised as too narrowly focused on academic and policy agendas to accommodate myriad competing global perspectives (Manwell et al., 2015). In what may have been an attempt to broaden its terms, a postscript was later added implying that children's mental health is distinct from that of adults, and linking the former firmly to developmental and academic achievement:

> With respect to children, an emphasis is placed on the developmental aspects, for instance, having a positive sense of identity, the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, as well as to build social relationships, and the aptitude to learn and to acquire an education, ultimately enabling their full active participation in society. (WHO, 2013, p.6).

These additional criteria have been portrayed as recognition that the determinants of mental health are broad and social; consequently, individuals cannot be expected to pursue positive mental health entirely on their own (Brown & Shay, 2021). A further criticism relates to how the terms are situated. The preface of the WHO definition makes clear their view that mental health "is a state of wellbeing"; this seems to position mental health as a component of wellbeing (Keller, 2019) or at the least, they fail to distinguish clearly between the two concepts. This association between mental health and mental wellbeing has been described by Norwich and colleagues (2022, p.807) as "mental health *as* wellbeing", which they characterise as one of the most commonly used concepts that they identify in the literature. This may reflect, or encourage, the widespread use of the two terms as interchangeable.

Mental wellbeing is arguably even more contentious a term than mental health (Camfield *et al.,* 2009). It can be seen as a 'softer' term than mental health, which mitigates some of the latter's "medicated and negative connotations" (Weare, 2010, p.6). Despite this, it has been employed both as a criterion and as an aspiration in numerous, and diverse, governmental and international policies (McLeod & Wright, 2016; OECD, 2019b).

Wellbeing has often been portrayed as having an objective and subjective level, these levels being distinct yet intertwined (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). Objective wellbeing is influenced by external structures, and by factors such as income and wealth, housing, work

and job quality, health, knowledge and skills, and environmental quality (OECD, 2020). It is measured in terms of how these 'needs' are met; the extent to which one has the resources required "to meet basic needs in terms of social norms and values" (Norwich *et al*., 2022, p.810). Given its dimensions, it is usually the subject of national and international policy interest and assessed through large scale surveys (Voukelatou *et al*., 2021). Subjective wellbeing, on the other hand, reflects an individual's happiness, life satisfaction and positive affect (Diener, 1984). Consequently, definitions are typically broad in scope: "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life" (Diener *et al*. 2002, p. 463).

Subjective wellbeing has been contested by two schools of thought since (at least) the Ancient Greeks' time (Ryff *et al*., 2021). The first, **hedonic** approach sees wellbeing as closely analogous to happiness and measured by the balance between an individual's life satisfaction and positive and negative affect (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The alternate, **eudaimonic** approach gives greater weight to an individual's self-realisation of potential (Waterman, 1999). Ryff (1989) proposed six key dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing: self-acceptance, positive relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth. Notably, these dimensions have a distinct overlap with the six processes which, decades earlier, Jahoda (1958) had identified as contributing to mental health. Theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and Ryan and Deci's (1985) self-determination theory, with their focus on the satisfaction of social, egotistical and purposeful needs, are clearly rooted in this approach.

Despite an apparent divergence between the two views of subjective wellbeing, there are overlapping areas (Deci & Ryan, 2008). For example, a sense of greater autonomy and positive relationships might be expected to be associated with an increased feeling of life satisfaction. This overlap can be seen in the three components of mental wellbeing identified by Keyes (2006, 2014): emotional, psychological and social. These draw upon both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, as they include both affective and functional aspects.

This blend of the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of subjective wellbeing can also be found in Public Health England's (PHE) guidance for schools for the assessment and monitoring of the MHWB of CYP: "we define mental wellbeing as children and young people's happiness, life satisfaction and positive functioning" (PHE, 2016, p.6). Furthermore, in developing this guidance, PHE researchers asked pupils at a school in London how they would express these components. The result was that the pupils described a state of positive MHWB as:

> Children and young people feeling good, feeling that their life is going well, and feeling able to get on with their daily lives (PHE, 2016, p.6).

Although broad, this last definition has sufficient advantage that I decided to use it within my own research (see figure 3.1 for the visual cue of this definition, as presented to pupils in

participating classes). There are several reasons for so doing: firstly, it is a measure of subjective wellbeing. Soffia and Turner (2021) highlight the importance of considering wellbeing as subjective when working with young people. They argue that this is a democratic approach: participants may decide for themselves what issues matter to them and not allow others to make assumptions on their behalf. Secondly, as previously mentioned, it incorporates a blend of hedonic ('feeling good') and eudaimonic ('feeling that their life is going well') aspects. Thirdly, the terminology is written by, and for, young people. Incorporating a definition of MHWB that nine to eleven year-olds will understand is clearly of fundamental importance to the methodology of this study, as will be outlined in the following chapter. Finally, the emphasis of this definition is on the promotion of positive MHWB. This perspective aligns closely with one of the main theoretical bases informing this research, as will be described in the following section.

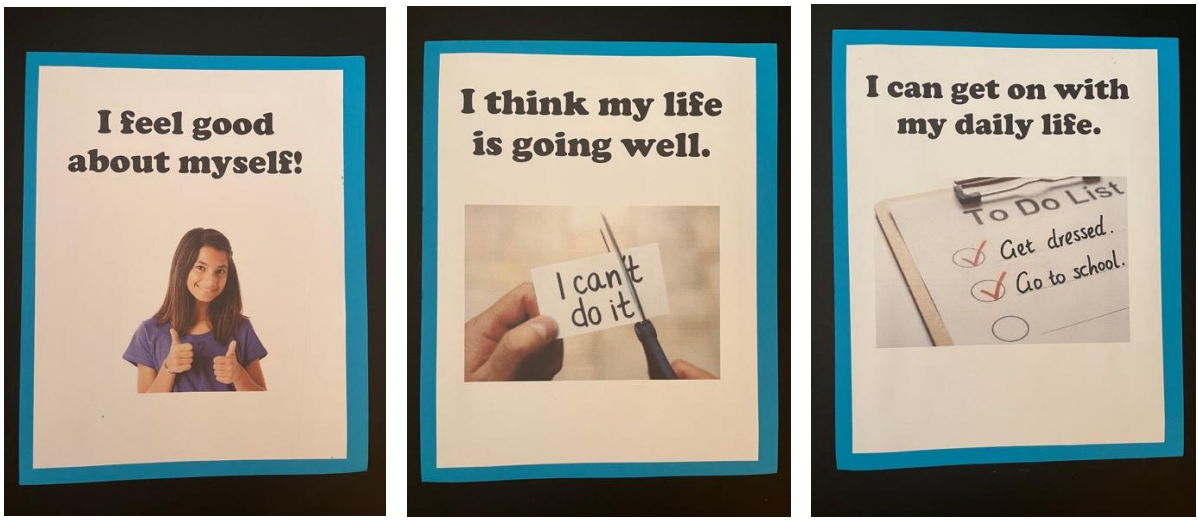


Figure 3.1; the definition of mental wellbeing as shared with participating classes.

3.2 THEORETICAL STANCES.

Historically, the various paradigmatic stances which inform approaches to the perception and treatment of MHWB issues have been characterised as being separated into one of two cultures; that of the objective - scientific, or the subjective - humanistic (Kimble, 1984). The main paradigms that emerged within these cultures during the twentieth century can be broadly divided into **biomedical**, **psychoanalytic**, **behavioural**, **cognitive**, **social** and **humanistic** approaches. Cloninger (2020) warns that the history of psychology and the treatment of MHWB issues is often told through these schools of thought, and in so doing there is a risk that differences between theories are accentuated. However, the theories and their protagonists merit some description, in order to position more recent developments; to this end I will give a (very) brief account of these paradigms.

The **biomedical** school of thought views psychological issues as resulting from pathological disorders of the brain, which are consequently best managed with pharmacological

treatments (Deacon, 2013). It is based upon the use of diagnostic scales to determine mental illness, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Historically rooted in such procedures as lobotomy, insulin coma therapy and electroconvulsive treatment, it has since focused upon the discovery of chemical compounds which will deliver effective treatment. This approach is based upon Paul Ehrlich's proposition in 1907 of a hypothetical 'magic bullet' agent, which would precisely target pathogens whilst inflicting no collateral harm on the recipient (Tewabe, 2021). The ensuing search for such agents led to breakthroughs including the discovery that paretic neurosyphilis could be treated with penicillin (Mahoney *et al*., 1943); this was followed throughout the 1950s by a rapid series of discoveries in the pharmacological treatment of psychosis, depression, mania, anxiety, and hyperactivity (Moncrieff, 1999). Research involving data drawn from this period in the use of the first generation of antidepressants led Schildkraut (1965) to posit his hypothesis that mental illnesses such as depression could be accounted for (and therefore treated) by chemical imbalances. Nevertheless, it is now accepted that other factors, including genetic and environmental, are also implicated in depression (Albert *et al*., 2012) and probably in other disorders.

There is little doubt that biological factors do affect the MHWB of individuals. For example, specific genes have been discovered that link to the regulation of dopamine and serotonin activity in the brain (DiMaio *et al*. 2003; Malhotra *et al*. 2004). Notwithstanding such discoveries, critics have assailed the wider biomedical stance for a variety of reasons. Some have argued that the assessment of MHWB issues is largely a cultural judgement rather a matter of empirical fact (MacDonald, 2006); others that a pathogenic model empowers clinicians at the expense of patients (Nelson *et al*., 2001). In his highly influential article, George Engel accused exponents of the biomedical approach of assuming erroneously that complex phenomena are derived from single principles, with no allowance for social, psychological and environmental dimensions of illness, and thus "the existing biomedical model does not suffice" (Engel, 1977, p.132). Despite these criticisms, the biomedical approach has assumed a dominant position in psychiatry (at least in the global north) for the past half century. However, this period has coincided with burgeoning levels of pharmacological prescription, increasing prevalence of MHWB issues, and a lack of clinical innovation (Deacon, 2013).

Psychoanalytic theories, which focus on the unconscious mind, became very influential in the UK education system in early- to mid-twentieth century (Winship, 2021). Underlying unconscious or repressed conflicts, often experienced during childhood, are held to be responsible for adult disruptive behaviours and personality (Taylor, 2009). To treat these, individuals must develop an awareness of, and insight into, their unconscious thoughts or emotions, usually achieved through talking therapy. Despite his medical background, Freud became the primary theorist in this field; in proposing his psychoanalytic theory he sought

to provide an alternative to purely biomedical approaches. Other theorists, such as Albert Adler, sought to revise Freud's principles and placed greater importance on social and familial relations (Cloninger, 2020). Psychoanalytic approaches have been subject to criticism, both on a theoretical and evidentiary basis. Popper (1959) argued that experiments which verified scientific theories were insufficient to prove that theory unless they were balanced with attempts to refute it; a doctrine he called 'falsifiability'. He claimed that the fact that almost any behaviour could be explained by psychoanalysis meant that it could not therefore be effectively refuted and thus was not scientific. Others have criticised psychoanalytic approaches as having an insufficiently rigorous empirical basis; however, this is disputed by those who point out that assessments such as randomised controlled trials are unsuitable for those undergoing psychoanalysis due to the long-term, open-ended and highly personal nature of the therapy (Seligman, 1995).

Behavioural theories, on the other hand, do not include the concept of the unconscious in their explanations of mental illness. Rather, they are interested solely in observable, measurable and objective behaviours, which they portray as learned responses to a stimulus (O'Regan, 2022). Much of this theoretical approach is based upon the work of Ivan Pavlov, and was later extended by Thorndike, Watson and Skinner during the 1920s-1950s. Proponents define treatment in terms of 'correcting' problematic behaviour by the application of stimuli. Criticisms of behaviourism by authors such as Chomsky (1959) facilitated the emergence of **cognitive** psychology, a theoretical stance which focuses upon the mental processes (such as memory and perception) which affect responses to situations or stimuli. Drawing heavily upon the earlier work of Piaget, cognitivists, such as Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, considered that thoughts, feelings and behaviours were all connected (Mandler, 2002). As a cognitive approach began to be blended with some behavioural practices, cognitive behavioural therapy emerged. This approach, which primarily seeks to identify and put into practice strategies which alleviate symptoms and problems caused by specific mental issues, may in some instances be used in conjunction with medication. It has been shown to be effective in the treatment of a wide range of mental health issues (Butler & Beck, 2000; Hofmann *et al.,* 2012).

Around the same time as the emergence of cognitive psychology, **social** theories of psychology also began to emerge. These theories, which often drew upon elements of other grand theories within psychology, focused on understanding the influences of, and interactions between, the environment, cognition, and behaviour (Eiser, 1986). Allport (1968, cited in Chadee, 2011, p.3) defined social psychology as "an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others". Although they accept other causal factors, including biological elements, social theories tend to regard the influence of social forces as the most significant cause of mental illness (Tyrer & Steinberg, 2013). There is a wide range of individual theories within this field, such as Bandura's (1977) social learning theory,

Festinger's (1959) concept of cognitive dissonance and Tajfel's social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Bandura (1977) proposed that people's behaviour could be modelled by others, a process he saw as being influenced by self-efficacy. This model has been widely used to successfully treat the symptoms of depression, anxiety, addiction and personality disorders (O'Regan, 2022).

However, the failure of any of these theories to provide an all-encompassing conceptual explanation for mental health issues, or for any to be completely refuted by other theories, has led some recent authors to call for a synthesis of approach, particularly when dealing with the needs of young people. Cooper and Jacobs (2011) call for a 'bio-psycho-social' approach (Engel, 1977), in recognition that each theory can account for certain effects, and that neurological, social and environmental factors exert influence in reciprocal systems. This holistic view sees a wide range of factors, each potentially negative, augmentative or compensatory in nature, all interacting in a complex, multilateral manner. As Engel (1977, p.132) states:

> To provide a basis for understanding the determinants of disease and arriving at rational treatments and patterns of health care, a medical model must also take into account the patient, the social context in which he [sic] lives, and the complementary system devised by society to deal with the disruptive effects of illness, that is, the physician role and the health care system. This requires a biopsychosocial model.

Ultimately, the link between all of these theories is their focus on the assessment, understanding and treatment of particular aspects of mental *ill*-health. **Humanistic** theories sought a different approach from this model, moving traditional conceptualisations of mental health from what was seen as a reductionist fixation on illness and the unconscious, to a focus on health; a more holistic, interpersonal and positive perspective (O'Regan, 2022). Carl Rogers (1961), one of the key founders of the movement, argued that to progress through Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs, humans needed to experience genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy, values which were closely aligned with the principles of nursing. Several nurses, such as Jean Watson, are amongst the movement's leading thinkers: Watson developed the theory of human caring, which includes concepts such as holistic care, subject as person rather than object, and individual perception of experience (Watson, 1999). Watson drew upon Victor Frankl's (1959) eudaimonic theory of meaning, which posited that individuals are predisposed to look for meaning and purpose in life, and that the meaning they ascribe to situations leads either to increased suffering or to purpose and reason to live. Frankl's theory, and therapeutic methodology, have been shown to reduce suffering and increase quality of life for adolescent patients with terminal cancer (Kang *et al*., 2009). Despite seeming at odds with a predominantly biomedical (Western) mental health care system, Benjamin (2011) argues

that humanistic methods tend to be employed to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged, and that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Humanistic methods have been criticised by some for what they regard as a failure to adhere to scientific methods; a "breakdown of objectivity" (McMullen, 1982, p.221). In response to this, Martin Seligman and colleagues proposed a 'positive psychology' paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology draws on the principles of its humanistic roots, while seeking to introduce an empiricism and scientific rigour to its research methodology (Resnick *et al*., 2001). It proposes three domains of happiness: pleasure, engagement and meaning, and is grounded in the doctrine that:

> … troubled persons want more satisfaction, contentment, and joy, not just less sadness and worry. They want to build their strengths, not just correct their weaknesses. And they want lives imbued with meaning and purpose. These states do not come about automatically simply when suffering is removed (Duckworth *et al*., 2005, p.630).

Despite differences between the two schools of thought (DeRobertis & Bland, 2021), humanistic and positive psychology are expressions of a wider movement which has seen the focus of research and policy begin to change from the treatment of illness to the promotion of health. Writing in The Lancet, Patel and colleagues (2023, p.658) argue that a narrow biomedical framing of mental ill-health has failed to address a wider set of determinants, the targeting of which will require:

> … a shift in focus, away from the treatment of diagnosed mental health conditions, to an equal, or even higher, priority for the prevention of mental health problems and the promotion of mental health… treatment alone will never be sufficient to reduce the global burden of mental ill health.

In this article, Patel and colleagues reason that the past fifty-year period, characterised by the limitations of a purely palliative approach, must now give way to a new era of prevention and mental health promotion. Health promotion has been defined in the Ottawa Charter as "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health... Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities" (WHO, 1986). This charter, which Lindström & Eriksson (2006, p.241) describe as "the 'genetic code' of the movement", reframed a debate that had until then been largely directed towards understanding and explaining mental *illness*. All too often, mental health had been seen simply as an antonym of mental illness (Vaillant, 2003). However, research now strongly suggests that health is not merely the absence of illness, but also includes the attainment of higher levels of subjective wellbeing (Keyes, 2013). The focus on the latter dimension over the former is exemplified by a salutogenic orientation (Antonovsky, 1979), addressed in the next section.

3.3 SALUTOGENIC ORIENTATION.

Salutogenesis was shaped and defined by humanistic psychologists such as Rogers and Maslow, as well as the sociologist Antonovsky (1979), who coined the term. Antonovsky, driven by a desire to explore the origins of health rather than simply identify the source of diseases, proposed the concept of salutogenesis in an attempt to fill a theoretical void that he perceived in health promotion (1996). Dissatisfied with a dichotomous, pathogenic orientation to health, which he argued led to an artificial division of people into the 'well' and the 'not well', Antonovsky instead proposed a continuum model, on which he argued that we are all to be found. Antonovsky suggested that to move people towards the healthy end of the continuum, a holistic view of each person must be adopted, focused on nurturing the best in people as well as addressing their problems, and that their own resources can be strengthened in order that they might cope with life's stresses more effectively.

In order to explain *how* people might move to the healthy end of this continuum, Antonovsky (1996) proposed a theoretical concept which he called the 'sense of coherence' (SOC). He described this sense, one which he argued is shaped by life experiences, as the extent to which one perceives the world as meaningful, comprehensible, and manageable. Antonovsky (1987) devised two scales by which SOC may be measured; a 29-point scale and a shorter, 13-point version, both of which have been found to have high levels of feasibility, reliability and validity (Antonovsky, 1993). These scales measure the three domains of SOC identified by Antonovsky: roughly one third concern perceptions of life's meaningfulness, another third relate to comprehensibility, and yet another manageability. SOC can be seen in terms of a personal disposition, a 'way of looking at the world' in moments of stress or adversity and is not a static construct but rather can be strengthened or weakened over time (Hewis, 2023). As Langeland & Vinje (2013, p.301, emphasis added) put it, to have a strong SOC is "to be *motivated* to cope with stress, to believe that the *challenge is understood*, and to believe that *coping resources are available*". Strengthening this SOC, Antonovsky argued, is key to empowering people to improve (or at least maintain) their health in the face of inevitable stressors.

In addition, Antonovsky (1979) proposed a further concept, 'generalized resistance resources' (GRR). GRR defy immutable categorisation as they vary between individuals and situations, but Antonovsky listed some fairly widespread exemplars, such as social support, material goods, religious faith, and knowledge and intelligence. Whether biological, material or psychosocial in nature, they act essentially as health-promoting assets which can be employed by individuals, groups or society at large. Capable use of GRR is mediated by an individual's SOC, but over time will also contribute to the development of a stronger SOC; thus, the two concepts are dynamic and highly reciprocal (Lindström & Eriksson, 2010).

Studies of salutogenic approaches tend therefore to assess the effect of a particular GRR on the SOC of a group, or to measure the association between SOC and particular health outcomes (Hewis, 2023). Although there is a huge body of literature relating to such studies, relatively few involve children and young people (Jensen *et al*., 2022). However, sufficiently numerous studies exist which examine the relationship between young peoples' SOC and MHWB to allow Länsimies and colleagues (2017) to review the literature in this field. They found that a SOC amongst adolescents was inversely associated with depression and anxiety (particularly in girls); it also moderated the association between stress and depressive symptoms. More recently, Schaefer and colleagues (2023) conducted the first meta-analysis of the relationship between childhood SOC and mental health problems in young adulthood. They found a strong inverse association between SOC and mental problems in young participants; this association increased with participants' age and was particularly strong in relation to internalising symptoms (such as depression).

Longitudinal studies examining SOC involving children and young people are relatively rare. In one such study, Carlén and colleagues (2020) found that a strong SOC protected young people's mental health when assessed three years later. In another longitudinal study involving German schoolchildren, Krause (2011) sought to identify the individual and social resources required to develop SOC and promote mental health, as well as how these resources might be activated. She found that the sense of belonging, and of self-worth, are fundamental factors which may be developed in early school, and which may in fact act synergistically: "If a child feels accepted and acknowledged, he/she feels recognized and gets feedback, which strengthens the self-worth" (2011, p.528). These findings were supported by García-Moya and colleagues (2013); based upon secondary analysis of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study data, they reported that a supportive school environment was related to pupils' SOC. This is in line with extensive evidence that these concepts are positively associated with pupil wellbeing (Korpershoek *et al*., 2020) and suggests that factors such as a sense of school belonging, and a positive, inclusive school ethos are effectively GRR which can be encouraged and employed by individual schools.

Other points reinforce the idea that schools are well placed to promote a salutogenic approach. In order to develop a strong SOC, Antonovsky (1987) claims that young people need to experience consistent relationships, perceive the need to learn, and feel that they have some influence or participation in social situations. In addition, a salutogenic orientation ought to involve a focus upon all the people in a system (not simply those at risk); promote salutary factors (and not simply remove risk factors); and focus upon the whole person (and not only on specific risks or harms). These principles are a very close match for those espoused by health promoting schools (Jensen *et al*., 2022; Scottish Government, 2007). Furthermore, as the negative association between SOC and mental ill-health increases throughout adolescence, interventions which seek to foster a SOC are likely most effective if enacted from an early age (Schaefer et al., 2023). As the positive effects

which should result from such interventions have been shown to persist throughout one's lifetime (Dundas *et al*., 2014), the potential of schools to support young people's lifelong mental health is clear.

Antonovsky's theory has since been extended, notably by Keyes, who showed that symptoms of mental health and mental illness are not simply opposing ends of a single continuum, but rather "constitute distinct but correlated axes" (Keyes, 2005, p.546). Keyes illustrated this model in figure 3.2 below (Keyes, 2014). Keyes found that although mental health and illness were related, the connection was only moderate. As Slade (2010) points out, it is possible to experience wellbeing and mental illness at the same time. Two reviews of scientific articles which specifically tested mental health and mental illness as two distinct constructs found the dual continua model to be a more credible explanation than a traditional bipolar model (Iasiello & Van Agteren, 2020; Magalhães, 2024). Although diverging from Antonovsky's original single continuum model, Keyes' work actually bolsters the salutogenic position, as it suggests that strengthening the indices of mental health is as important as reducing those of mental illness. Keyes argues persuasively that, overall, mental health should be seen as the sum of one's position on *both* continua, and he offered means by which to measure positive mental health (2005), in order to complement assessment tools for mental illness. Keyes (2007) divided symptoms of good mental health, which he characterised as 'flourishing', into three domains: emotional (hedonic), psychological and social (eudemonic). Thirteen symptoms of these domains of positive mental health were described, in what Keyes deliberately set out as an inverted version of DSM symptoms of mental ill-health.

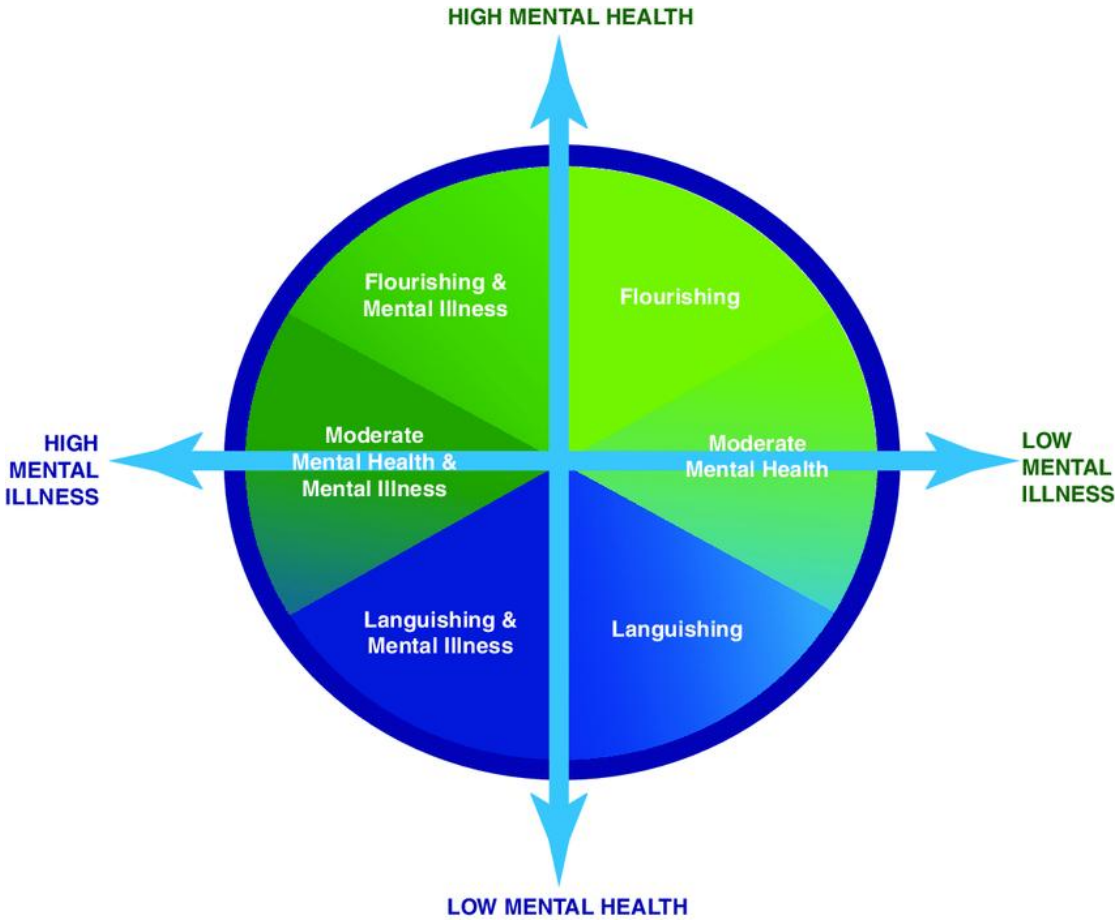


Figure 3.2; dual continua model of mental health and mental illness (Keyes, 2014).

Norwich and colleagues (2022), in their critical consideration of the discourse around mental health and wellbeing in education, broadly support Keyes' dual continua model. However, they argue that the 'mental illness' axis would be better framed as 'mental health' and the 'mental health' dimension would be better framed as 'mental wellbeing'. Reframing the axes in this manner, they suggest, would align the dual continua model with the World Health Organisation definition of mental health (2004). It also matches Keyes' theoretical model with general MHWB discourse, in that 'mental health' and 'mental wellbeing' are usually referred to as two separate, yet related concepts, with mental wellbeing typically seen as the focus of promotion in schools, and mental health generally referred to in terms of targeted intervention. Rebranded in this way, Keyes' dual continua model of mental health/ wellbeing, as an extension of a salutogenic approach, provides an excellent theoretical basis for the present study. As such, the focus of inquiry can then be seen in terms of what schools can do to promote the mental wellbeing of *all* pupils, in an effort to move them towards the flourishing end of the mental wellbeing continuum. The need for this is profound: Keyes (2014) showed that those whose level of flourishing declined to, or remained at, a moderate level over ten years were three and a half times more likely to develop a mental health difficulty than those whose level of flourishing remained constantly high. This led Keyes to conclude:

> The question is no longer whether we have any alternative to treatment for reducing mental illness – we do… The most important next step for researchers and practitioners is to discover how to get more people to stay or become flourishing (Keyes, 2014, p.190).

Further discussion about the theoretical underpinnings of the present study will be set out in chapter four: Methodology. For now, having considered the definitions of terms and the relevant theoretical models, as well as having reflected on which will best support the scope and intent of the present study, attention turns to the domain where theoretical perspectives are framed in such a way as to influence practice: *i.e.* governmental policy.

3.4 MHWB POLICY.

The relevant policy frameworks will be outlined in this section, beginning with the global position before moving to the national perspective. Common themes emerge at all levels, such as evolving theoretical approaches, issues to do with funding, rising demand for MHWB support, and the nexus of all three: how best to target that support.

From a global perspective, children's MHWB is protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Furthermore, the United Nations has included the promotion of MHWB as one of its Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). The task of promoting MHWB globally is led by a United Nations agency, the World Health Organization (WHO). Although the WHO has, since its foundation in 1948, committed resources to improving mental health (Bertolote, 2008), its most notable efforts have taken place since the turn of the present century. In 2001, in an unprecedent move, the WHO chose to focus its annual report exclusively on mental health, setting out the scale of issues worldwide and outlining ten recommendations (WHO, 2001). Although these included a call for the education sector to become actively engaged in improving the mental health of communities, the WHO attracted criticism because of their biomedical framing of mental health problems (Patel *et al*. 2023). By 2013, when the WHO published the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 (WHO, 2013) the shift in emphasis towards acknowledging the importance of MHWB promotion, in addition to treatment, was clear (Saxena *et al*., 2013). By 2020, the WHO was advocating that "[u]niversally delivered psychosocial interventions should be provided for all adolescents" (WHO, 2020, p.xi).

Furthermore, for the first time, the Action Plan set out proposed actions and targets for member states; these terms were later extended until 2030 (WHO, 2019). Progress towards meeting the targets in this plan are outlined in the WHO's triennial Mental Health Atlas, which assesses performance of individual member states. The most recent Atlas reported that there had been steady improvements in the implementation of new policies and laws. However, it also stated:

> Progress values for 2020 indicate that the targets committed to by WHO Member States have not been achieved… the global targets can be reached in 2030 only if there is a collective global commitment over the next 10 years across Member States to make massive investments and expanded efforts at the country level relating to mental health policies, laws, programmes and services (WHO, 2021, p.2).

The "massive investments" required of Member States seem less likely in light of the USA's recent withdrawal from the WHO (Executive Order 14,155, 2025). Prior to its withdrawal, the USA was by some distance the largest financial contributor to the WHO, providing $1.284 billion between 2022-23 (WHO, 2024). It has been argued that this may represent the greatest crisis for the WHO in its history (Buse *et al*., 2025) and risks triggering a 'domino effect', with other countries following suit (Yamey & Titanji, 2025).

Within the United Kingdom, there is a long history of policy difference between the four home nations, with Scotland diverging to the greatest extent (Bell & Grant, 1978; Stephens, 1999; Sturt, 2013). As both health and education are devolved powers within Scotland, its MHWB policy will be examined and analysed separately. By way of comparison, a brief outline of recent MHWB policy in England will be given first.

Following many years of underfunding in the English health sector, there has been a recent increase in awareness of, and spending on, MHWB support. However, there seems to be some uncertainty about the focus of that support. In 2017, Theresa May's Conservative government published 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: A Green Paper' (Departments of Health and Education, 2017), which prompted NHS England to establish Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in schools. The number of these teams was increased to 498 by 2024 as increases in funding for children and young people's mental health services were promised (NHS England, 2019) and delivered (HM Treasury, 2020). MHST have three main functions: to help in promoting whole-school emotional wellbeing, to provide psychological interventions for CYP with mild to moderate mental health problems, and to facilitate access to other services for CYP with more complex mental health needs (Departments of Health and Education, 2017). Nevertheless, there is some evidence that MHST staff felt confused as to whether the focus should be upon targeted interventions or whole-school MHWB promotion. Many felt that most of the time was spent on the former, and that this had become predominantly a clinical service rather than an educational one:

> The way in which the programme had been set up was considered by some participants to have given primacy to activities in line with the goals of NHS mental health services rather than those focused on broader notions of wellbeing (Ellins *et al*., 2024, p.717).

Ultimately, the rise in funding for MHWB support since 2020 has to be seen in the context of the previous ten years of health care underfunding, which Lord Darzi called "the most austere decade since the NHS was founded" (Darzi, 2024, p.98). The British Medical Association's analysis of the Office for National Statistics data estimates a £429 billion underspend on NHS England between 2009/10 and 2023/24, compared with the average annual funding increase over the previous decade (BMA, 2024). This reduced level of financing, combined with huge rises in demand for mental health support from CYP have left services struggling to cope: "it is evident that the current capacity of mental health services is grossly inadequate" (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023, p.49).

In contrast with the historical lack of funding for English MHWB services, there has been no shortage of policy developments. Successive recent governments have proposed reforms to MHWB policy, including recent commitments to reform the Mental Health Act and a pledge to improve mental health provision for young people (Prime Minister's Office, 2024). Despite the current government having paused some of its predecessors' strategic reforms (Garratt, 2024), there remains an extensive yet disparate array of MHWB policies for English schools to adhere to (Donnelly & Brown, 2022), including some statutory guidance on teaching MHWB (Department for Education, 2019). However, this approach may have resulted in some confusion. In a survey of teachers from all four UK nations, Donnelly and Brown (2022) found that only 62% of English teachers were aware of educational wellbeing policy, compared with 82% in Scotland; when asked to name a policy in this area, many English teachers gave impertinent or incorrect answers. The authors speculate that Scotland's higher rate of policy awareness amongst teachers is due to the adoption of more cohesive, over-arching frameworks, in comparison with the "piecemeal" policy landscape in England (Donnelly and Brown, 2022, p.458).

The most significant of these Scottish over-arching frameworks are the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE; Scottish Executive, 2004) and Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC; Scottish Executive, 2007; Scottish Government, 2008a; 2012). The CfE elevated health and wellbeing (HWB) to one of three core areas of curriculum, on a par with literacy and numeracy (Scottish Government, 2008b) and made it the responsibility of all teachers (Scottish Executive, 2006). In addition to teaching relevant experiences and outcomes, guidance clearly states the expectation that pupil wellbeing should be supported through the development of positive relationships and school ethos by all school staff members (Education Scotland, 2016). GIRFEC, a multi-agency approach which aims to improve the wellbeing of all Scottish CYP, includes an assessment tool which uses the acronym SHANARRI (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included; Scottish Executive, 2005). This allows CYP to be measured (or in many cases, measure themselves) in these eight areas. Although widely used, they are subjective assessments; there is evidence to suggest that some educational practitioners lack confidence in their ability to measure children's wellbeing against the indicators (Peill, 2022). In addition, they

have received criticism as representing a particular form of wellbeing that has been devised in order to suit assessment (Coles *et al*., 2016). Nonetheless, a CfE and GIRFEC have contributed to an holistic approach which has sought to relocate children's wellbeing from a discrete subject to one that is endemic to schooling in general (Spratt, 2017).

Arguably, fewer changes in government north of the border have enabled a greater continuity of policy than has been the case for the UK government, and afforded sufficient political capital to adopt more progressive MHWB concepts. The Scottish Government's original Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027 (Scottish Government, 2017) focused many of its planned actions around schools, with an emphasis on improved training and interventions. However, citing the changing circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government has reassessed the aims of this strategy (2021b). Two years later, the new Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy was published; it echoed the WHO's statement that "[t]here is no health without mental health" (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.2; WHO, 2004, p.10). In addition to the conspicuous addition of the word 'wellbeing' to (and the removal of a time-frame from) the title, the new strategy was more clearly focused on mental health promotion as well as acknowledging the social determinants of mental health (Dewison *et al*., 2024). To this end the strategy embraces a biopsychosocial model of determinants, with poverty recognised as the biggest factor. It also includes the aspiration to "[p]romote positive mental health and wellbeing for the whole population" (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.6).

Despite this aspiration, questions remain not only about *when* it might be realised, but also about *how*. Having conceded that "the current system is not delivering as we would wish" (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.15), the Government outlined nine desired outcomes in the document. These tend to be broad and commendable but rather vague. For example, the outcomes state the desire to achieve "[i]mproved overall mental wellbeing and reduced inequalities. Improved quality of life for people with mental health conditions" (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.15). In an effort to calibrate how success will be measured, the Government published an accompanying document, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan, which promises to set out the actions necessary to meet the promised outcomes. It also undertakes that the Government will "work with partners to enhance mental health and wellbeing support in educational settings" (Scottish Government, 2023e, p.17). Four action points within this area have particular relevance to schools. Firstly, the Plan promises to work with the Mental Health in Schools Working Group to monitor the impact of MHWB support provided in schools. This does not suggest any new actions, simply oversight of existing ones; in addition, the aforementioned working group does not seem to have published any minutes since August 2021 (Scottish Government, 2021c). Secondly, the Plan states that it will respond to any issues which emerge from the Health and Wellbeing Census (Scottish Government, 2023b) and the Behaviour in Schools Research Report (Scottish Government, 2023a). Controversy around the former caused the Scottish

Government to withhold data from researchers (Scottish Parliament, 2025). The only recommendations outlined within the Behaviour in Schools report which directly relate to MHWB are a brief mention that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) should be easier to access, and school staff members' perception that the COVID-19 pandemic is the major factor in an apparent decline in pupils' MHWB since 2016. The third action point promises the development of new MHWB resources to help staff support pupils, including the update and digitising of a resource called 'Cool in School' (Fife Council, 2007). The Education Scotland website which features resources to support pupils' positive mental wellbeing was last updated in 2024 and has links to training programmes and resources which have mostly been provided by various outside agencies and charities, as well as the updated 'Cool in School' programme. Finally, the Plan promises to ensure all pupils over the age of ten will have access to counselling services (this clearly excludes most primary pupils) and to "consider learning from" the recommendations of a report on counselling in schools (Scottish Government, 2023d, p.17). The report in question recommended that the Scottish Government should "expand all school counselling provision to all primary and special schools in Scotland" (Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, 2023, p.23), a recommendation which, as yet, has not been enacted.

In light of this, the Scottish Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its accompanying Delivery Plan are at risk of seeming well-meaning yet largely ineffective documents, at least in regard to their consequence for Scottish primary pupils. Furthermore, the Scottish Government is accused of offering a paucity of detail about how it will act to mitigate the social determinants which it has identified as impacting MHWB (Dewison *et al*., 2024). Although there is a risk that these determinants are seen as intractable, Patel and colleagues (2023) point out that they often involve a range of more proximal intermediate factors. As many of these are modifiable, given sufficient political will, they can be addressed. Accordingly, it has been argued that the social determinants of MHWB:

> … represent the most modifiable set of targets for intervention currently available to prevent the onset of mental health problems and disorders, and to promote positive mental health in our populations. (Kirkbride *et al*., 2024, p.58).

Having examined the various policy frameworks which relate to MHWB and schools, the focus of attention will now turn to two determinants of MHWB which are of particular relevance to schools: digital devices and the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 TWO DETERMINANTS OF MHWB: DIGITAL DEVICES AND COVID-19.

Firstly, a caveat. As outlined in the previous chapter, the social determinants of MHWB are innumerable. In selecting two for analysis, one is thus certain to commit an error of

omission. However, not all determinants can be discussed; therefore, a line must be drawn somewhere in terms of limiting the scope of the present study. This limit has been drawn by the participants themselves; in addition to the influence of poverty and precarity which were outlined in the previous chapter, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the use of digital devices were common themes which arose from findings of this study and therefore merit inclusion. All but one school staff member discussed the perceived risk and detrimental effect on their pupils' MHWB of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns. This will be addressed after the other commonly cited determinant, that of digital devices. As mentioned in chapter one, one of the main arguments within the present thesis is that children are being harmed by exposure to what will be presented as a 'digital childhood' (this will be discussed in detail in chapter eight). The evidence for this which arises from the findings of the present study will be set out throughout chapters five and six. The evidence found within the literature is outlined next.

The effect on MHWB of CYP's exposure to digital devices is a novel yet potentially profound issue. Its origins lie in the period 2010 to 2015, which Haidt (2024a, p.35) calls the 'Great Rewiring of Childhood'. These years saw a coincidence of new technology (such as Instagram and the first iPhone to have a front-facing camera) with a surge of adolescent anxiety and depression. Haidt (2024a) associates the two, arguing that during this period many of the global north's CYP's social lives moved from a traditional play-based world to a digital smartphone-based domain with continuous access to the internet, with pernicious results.

The effects of digital media on MHWB are a relatively nascent topic for research and some authors argue that insufficient time has elapsed since the technology became available to draw firm conclusions about its impact (Vuorre *et al*., 2021). Nevertheless, many authors present findings which suggest that there are circumstances in which the use of digital devices by CYP can be detrimental to their MHWB. Three large surveys of adolescent users of digital media (smartphones, computers, social media, gaming, internet) reported substantially higher psychological well-being for light users (less than an hour a day) compared with heavy users (more than five hours a day); heavy users were significantly more likely to feel unhappy or suffer from depression or suicidal ideation (Twenge & Campbell 2019).

One of the areas of digital media which has been subject to the most research is the use of social media. There have been some conflicting findings: for example, Huang and colleagues' (2022) meta-analysis found statistically significant detrimental effects of problematic social media use on life satisfaction, self-esteem, depression and loneliness. However, Valkenburg and colleagues' (2022) 'umbrella review' of social media use and CYP's MHWB reported inconsistent findings across many studies, mainly due to heterogeneity of definitions of MHWB. Amongst the inconsistencies were the definition of 'problematic'

social media use, and the separation of such use from the remainder. Clearly, social media use is not universally detrimental; it can be a positive influence in some CYP's lives, with the potential to foster social connections and a sense of belonging (Smith *et al*., 2021). The relationship between social media use and MHWB is complex; although it has been associated with anxiety, depression and suicidality, much depends on the characteristics of the social media user and their experiences (Weigle & Shafi, 2024).

Another impediment to consistent findings relates to limitations common to many studies, which are sometimes an indirect result of regulatory failings. For example, Sala and colleagues (2024) note that in most studies, time spent on digital devices is usually assessed and reported by the participants themselves. In an attempt to mitigate this issue, Barthorpe and colleagues (2020) asked participants to record time spent on social media by means of an app; consequently, they found that greater use of social media by thirteen to fifteen year-old girls' was associated with self-harm, depression and reduced self-esteem. This dependency on participants' self-reporting is in large part due to social media companies' historic resistance to sharing data with researchers. The European Union's attempt to force social media companies to share these data formed part of the Digital Services Act (European commission, 2022). However, the implementation of this Act has been criticised by many European politicians as having been far too slow (Rankine, 2025). In the UK, the Online Safety Act (2023) mandates social media companies to enforce a ban on children under thirteen years old from having their own accounts. Prior to the implementation of this Act, it was estimated that between 30% and 38% of five to seven-year olds used social media in the UK and 40% of CYP admitted to having given a false age to access a site (OFCOM, 2024). Aside from the primary risk that such underage users will see inappropriate content online, it is surely inevitable that inaccurate data will be acquired, given such a high level of inaccurate profiling.

Despite such inconsistencies, many individual studies do suggest that social media use is associated with deteriorations in MHWB. In one notable study, Braghieri and colleagues (2022) examined the staged rollout of Facebook to US colleges between 2004 and 2006. As each college gained access to Facebook's network, there was a rapid uptake of Facebook use by students; this led to a "staggered and sharp introduction" (Braghieri, 2022, p.3661) across US campuses. By comparing these data with mental health surveys and college-level data, the authors found that the introduction of Facebook at each college was associated with a negative effect on students' mental health, with the length of exposure to Facebook associated with increasingly negative outcomes. In addition, there is some evidence that users of social media themselves see it as being potentially harmful. In a qualitative study involving English adolescents, O'Reilly and colleagues (2018a) reported that CYP believe that social media use can lead to anxiety and see it as addictive.

Furthermore, not everybody faces an equal level of risk. There is overwhelming evidence of a gender disparity in CYP's use of digital media (Twenge & Martin, 2020). Girls are not only much more likely to use social media sites (Haidt, 2024a; Leonhardt & Overå, 2021), they also seem to be more vulnerable to negative effects on their MHWB (Twenge & Farley, 2021; Twenge *et al*., 2022). Kelly and colleagues, in their analysis of a large-scale UK survey, found that girls who used social media were particularly at risk of online harassment, body image issues, poor sleep and low self-esteem, all of which in turn related to higher depressive symptom scores (Kelly *et al.*, 2019; Liu *et al*., 2022). Similarly, girls' use of social media has been linked to body image problems and disordered eating (Khalaf *et al*., 2023; Scully et al., 2023). Kleemans and colleagues (2018) showed that body image issues amongst teenage girls were directly linked to exposure to digitally manipulated images, easily achieved by using filters that are common to many social media sites. As a result, online comparisons are not synonymous with real world comparisons (Warrender & Milne, 2020). Although the pathways by which social media use might affect MHWB are, as yet, not fully understood, online comparison is likely a key mechanism linking social media use to MHWB issues for girls, especially depressive symptoms and disordered eating (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022). In general, CYP's developing sense of self-concept and identity and heightened tendency toward self-presentation (Orben *et al*., 2024) are also likely to increase their vulnerability to harmful outcomes.

The association between digital media use and boys' MHWB is less clear cut than for girls (Haidt, 2024a). Boys tend to spend less time on social media and considerably more time online gaming (Leonhardt & Overå, 2021). Problematic use of such games (defined in terms of time spent gaming and lack of self-regulation) has been associated with raised levels of inattention, anxiety, depression, behavioural and emotional problems (Coutelle *et al*., 2024). The increased prevalence of this phenomenon led to the inclusion of an internet gaming disorder category in the latest edition of the DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Social media's influence on shifting norms around masculinity may also be harming boys (Rice *et al*., 2021). Misogynistic influencers, as well as those who promote risky behaviours (related to gambling, alcohol, nicotine *etc*.) seem to be having an increased effect upon boys' thinking (Bouguettaya *et al.,* 2020; NASUWT, 2025; Over *et al*., 2025) with likely detrimental impact upon their MHWB. In addition, there seems little doubt that smartphones, in particular, have increased the likelihood that CYP will see pornography from a younger age than prior to the availability of this technology. In a recent survey of UK schoolchildren, 10% of nine year-olds said that they had watched pornography, rising to 27% of eleven year-olds and half of thirteen year-olds (Children's Commissioner, 2023). Although males are not the only users of pornography, they are the most frequent. In a recent YouGov survey, 23% of British males stated that they watched pornography several times a week compared with only 3% of females (Kirk, 2022). There is evidence that this can have detrimental effects on MHWB: Wright and colleagues (2017) found that pornography consumption by males was associated with lower interpersonal satisfaction outcomes. It has

also been linked to gender stereotyping and increased risk of male sexual violence against females (Chatterjee & Kar, 2023), as well as increased risk of loneliness (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2023).

Irrespective of gender, age or location, all of these aspects of digital media use increased suddenly and significantly during the COVID-19 associated lockdowns as people were forced to confine themselves to their homes. However, it was amongst six to ten-year olds that screen time increased, more than in any other age group during this period (Trott *et al*., 2022). There is an abundance of literature which seeks to describe the impact of this period on the MHWB of CYP, an in-depth analysis of which lies for the most part beyond the scope of this study. Of greater pertinence is understanding the legacy of COVID-19 restrictions and, in particular, the impact on CYP since their return to formal schooling. This issue is a significant theme in the present study, and will be set out within chapter five, as school staff members describe the effects of lockdowns on their pupils. This forms the next section of the literature review into determinants of MHWB: what are the enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Scottish primary pupils?

There is little doubt that many CYP faced significantly increased levels of adversity during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the UK (Department for Health and Social Care, 2022) as well as throughout Europe (WHO, 2023). Globally, the detrimental effects of school closures on CYP's academic progress (Jakubowski *et al*., 2025) and MHWB (Lee, 2020; Mazrekaj & De Witte, 2024) is well documented. Increased prevalence of depression (Racine *et al*., 2021) and anxiety (Sayed *et al*., 2024) has been noted amongst CYP, with symptoms including an increased need for reassurance, inappropriate behaviour and decreased attention span (Meade, 2021). Girls, children with neurodiversity, or those living in areas of high deprivation were particularly affected (Samji *et al*., 2022).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of longitudinal studies into these issues (Wade, 2020). In addition, as yet, very few studies have investigated the "dynamics of mental health or the changes in mental symptoms of children and adolescents after school reopening" (Rong et al., 2024, p.488). These latter authors found high levels of depression and anxiety amongst CYP returning to school, which gradually declined thereafter: this is ascribed to the shock of adjusting from confinement at home to the school environment. There is some evidence that for some pupils with additional support needs (ASN), these elevated levels of depression and anxiety did not decline as clearly over this period (Kripkauskaite *et al*., 2021).

In Scotland, demand for both child and adult mental health services during the pandemic grew faster than the capacity for services (Cooke *et al*., 2022). It seems likely that in addition to prevalence, the severity of mental health issues also increased, at least for some: there was a higher rate of hospitalisation of those on waiting lists for mental health support in

Scotland post- pandemic than had been the case before COVID-19 (Cooke *et al*., 2024). Furthermore, the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children study (2022) found that 38% of Scottish 11-15 year olds reported that the COVID-19 lockdowns had had a negative impact on their MHWB (Inchley *et al*., 2023). By comparing slightly different timings of lockdowns between England and Scotland, Serrano-Alarcón and colleagues (2021) suggested that the imposition (and lifting) of lockdowns had a greater impact on MHWB than the wider effects of the pandemic itself.

As is the case globally, the literature is less detailed in its description of the situation in Scottish schools after pupils returned from the final lockdown. Some data exist which relate to perceptions of pupils' behaviour: over 72% of respondents in a survey of Scottish teachers stated that the amount of violence and aggression they experienced had grown in the years since the COVID pandemic (E.I.S., 2023). Three-quarters of surveyed staff in Scottish schools thought that pupils' behaviour was worse in 2023 than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020 (Scottish Government, 2023a). In addition, a review submitted to the Scottish COVID inquiry described schools as reporting high numbers of 'distressed' CYP in the period after the lockdowns ended (McCluskey *et al*., 2024). Significant numbers of schools also reported issues with CYP suffering reduced levels of confidence and ability to work independently (Education Scotland, 2022).

However, these reports tend to be either anecdotal or survey-based quantitative studies. Once again, despite a wealth of qualitative research into teachers' experiences during the lockdowns, there are (at the time of writing) far fewer studies which describe the situations faced by school staff and CYP as the lockdowns ended. In one of a few exceptions, Lacey and colleagues describe a 'wartime' feeling; although their study describes many primary pupils in England who seemed overjoyed to return to school, younger pupils or those with pre-existing ASN found the return more challenging and "difficulties had been amplified for these children" (2024, p.1990). In another study, Scottish headteachers outlined a range of challenges they faced on return to school, several of which relate to pupil wellbeing (Mowat & Beck, 2023; Mowat & Beck, 2025). Reduced pupil attendance, difficulties accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the need to adapt school practices to a higher prevalence of MHWB issues amongst CYP, were described. Finally, in a qualitative study involving Scottish primary teachers who had experience of working both before and after the COVID-19 lockdowns, Donaldson and colleagues (2022) reported that participating teachers felt overwhelmed and under significant pressure, which in turn hindered their ability to support their pupils' MHWB.

This limited evidence suggests that for many staff and some pupils, the return to school after such a significant episode was not always an easy process. Many pupils suffered MHWB issues during the lockdowns and these may have persisted beyond the resumption of formal schooling. As outlined in chapter one, the desire to describe how some of these

issues are perceived by Scottish school staff members is therefore one of the aims of this study (see section 3.7 below). Another, central aim of the study clearly relates to the means by which schools support their pupils in the face of these issues. This forms the next focus of this chapter: what does the literature tell us about MHWB and schools?

3.6 MHWB AND SCHOOLS.

There is a vast body of literature investigating MHWB and schools, dating back to 1955 when William Wall's publication 'Education and Mental Health' reframed a discussion that had previously focused on mental *illness* in schools. In an effort to focus exclusively upon the most relevant aspects, this section will outline why schools are associated with MHWB programmes; the nature of those programmes; the evidence which supports them; the role of parents and school staff members; criticisms of MHWB promotion programmes; future directions for MHWB promotion; and pupils' perspectives about MHWB promotion.

Schools have become a key setting in which to enact mental health promotion initiatives (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Khan, 2016). This is because most young people attend schools, and so schools are well-placed to offer near-universal support and to reach vulnerable or marginalised groups within the school's social setting (Sanchez *et al*., 2018). In addition, the proportion of their time that young people spend in school (Sturgeon, 2006), the fact that young people are still developing the coping mechanisms, skills and resources which will help to develop their mental health (Barnes, 1998; Sawyer, 2012), and the knowledge and insight teachers have about their students (Hoover & Bostic, 2021) together make schools an optimal setting to promote mental health. In addition, CYP seem to be willing participants: in a recent survey of over 3000 teenagers in the UK, nearly 93% thought MHWB should be taught in school (Cortina *et al*., 2021). Similarly, evidence from Scotland suggests CYP would like greater mental health support from their schools (McCluskey et al., 2021).

Interventions which are aimed at supporting the MHWB of CYP in schools are typically either targeted or universal in nature. There are sound reasons for implementing both models in schools (McCrone, 2025). Clearly, pupils who suffer the most serious degrees of mental ill-health will require a greater level of MHWB support; their needs would therefore risk being insufficiently addressed in simply offering all pupils a homogenous programme of MHWB promotion. The dual continua theoretical model which the present study has adopted is designed to accommodate both targeted support (including pharmacological treatment) for those suffering poor mental health, as well as universal promotion of mental wellbeing, in order to move everyone toward the flourishing end of the continua. Nevertheless, as the stated focus of the present study concerns the promotion of wellbeing, targeted MHWB interventions in schools have therefore been considered to lie beyond the scope of this review.

There are several arguments which support the use of universal programmes of MHWB promotion. Firstly, they align with current prevailing theoretical and academic arguments, as well as global (*c.f*. Cefai *et al*., 2021 for a European Union perspective) and Scottish policy directives, as previously outlined. Secondly, there is widespread evidence to support the proposition that whole-school interventions designed to support pupils' MHWB are associated with a range of improved outcomes for young people. Various systematic reviews and meta-analyses of relevant studies show that interventions can reduce pupils' levels of depression and anxiety (Dray *et al*., 2017; Fisak *et al*., 2023; Zhang *et al*., 2023), improve social and emotional skills and behaviour (Durlak *et al*., 2011; Durlak *et al*., 2022; Goldberg *et al*., 2019; O'Connor *et al*., 2018; Sklad *et al*., 2012), improve primary pupils' coping skills (Fenwick-Smith *et al*., 2018) and improve levels of subjective wellbeing (Mendes de Oliveira *et al*., 2022). This is particularly true when such programmes are sustained for more than one year (Hunter *et al*., 2021). Thirdly, there are ethical arguments in favour of universal interventions. They are intended to be inclusive and positive in nature and as they involve the whole school population, they reduce the likelihood of stigmatising groups or individuals (Greenberg *et al*., 2017; Mahoney *et al*., 2020). For these reasons, the World Health Organisation (2020; 2022) recommends that interventions designed to promote mental health should be delivered universally, and provided for all young people in schools.

One key aspect of a successful whole-school approach is the committed involvement of all stakeholders within a school community (Weare & Murray, 2004). Goldberg and colleagues (2019) found that the inclusion of a community component in school MHWB programmes was found to be a significant moderator for improved social and emotional outcomes. Parental involvement is of particular importance, as it has been positively associated with improved pupil MHWB (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Schools have adopted a wide range of methods to build more positive relationships with parents (Graetz *et al*., 2008), in an attempt to foster a sense of participation for both young people and their families (Tomé *et al*., 2021; Weare & Markham, 2005). Unfortunately, the successful involvement of parents has traditionally been a challenging issue for schools (Baker *et al*., 2016), whose staff may be at risk of holding prejudicial or misinformed attitudes about some parents (Cameron *et al*., 2022) and may as a result confuse involvement with true engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2023). Indeed, Epstein and Sheldon (2006) argue that the term 'parental involvement' does not adequately share the burden of responsibility and should be replaced with 'school, family, and community partnerships'. Some evidence for this new model of community partnership has emerged as a result of adversity: in a time of shrinking support for families from external agencies, schools have increasingly attempted to offer a wide range of compensatory assistance (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Accordingly, teachers have progressively taken on elements of the role of social workers (Webb & Vulliamy, 2002) as well as that of psychologists (Corcoran & Finney, 2015).

However, there is strong evidence to suggest that some teachers lack confidence in the assumption of these new roles and would welcome additional training, particularly in relation to supporting the MHWB of their pupils (O'Farrell *et al*., 2023). In a recent survey of Scottish primary teachers, Maclean and Law (2022) found that despite a willingness amongst teachers to support the mental health needs of their pupils, many teachers felt they had neither the skills nor the knowledge to properly do so. Similarly, de Leeuw and colleagues (2020) showed that teachers are often quite limited in their range of strategies to support young people with social and emotional needs. As a result, mental health training is one of the most consistently cited requests by teachers (Shelemy *et al*., 2019). Garwood and Van Loan (2019) found that following specific training, probationary teachers reported significant changes in their attitudes and practice towards pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties. It seems likely that teachers would benefit from further training, both in terms of supporting those pupils in need of targeted interventions as well as in delivery of universal MHWB promotion. This is a matter of some importance as improving teacher participation and engagement in MHWB promotion programmes has been found to increase their effectiveness (Baffsky *et al*., 2023).

Notwithstanding the importance of teachers and the wider school community's role in MHWB promotion, it is the CYP themselves who are the most important and yet most frequently overlooked stakeholders in this process. "It does not matter how well designed an intervention is if it does not reach and engage young people" (Kuyken *et al*., 2023, p.538). It seems self-evident that a successful programme should at least respect the concerns and views of CYP (Giles-Kaye *et al*., 2022; Neill *et al*., 2022; Yeager *et al*., 2018). Despite this, studies which include pupils' voice in the design and implementation of MHWB support in their schools are rare; those that exist tend to focus on secondary school (Forshaw & Woods, 2023). In the only study I could find within the literature which involved investigating the perspectives of CYP about the MHWB promotion strategy in their school, Brown and Dixon (2020) found that 65 first and second year pupils in seven English secondary schools identified resilience as the key concept they associated with mental health interventions in their schools. However, their perceptions were overwhelmingly negative: resilience was seen as a message delivered from 'on high' in a didactic, repetitive and meaningless manner, usually in relation to stress associated with exams, or school work. Pupils saw it as having a 'push on through at all costs' meaning that had resulted in the opposite effect: demotivating pupils, undermining their confidence, and reducing the likelihood that they might seek MHWB support. "Not one student in our sample claimed to have achieved a stable sense of resilience as defined through the schools' 'push-on-through' logic" (Brown & Dixon, 2020, p.389). When further asked to identify something that their school did which *did* support their MHWB, pupils in three of the seven schools described a dedicated open access 'safe space' room which was "deeply valued by students… when feeling overwhelmed" (Brown & Dixon, 2020, p.392). This latter point is a finding that is of

particular relevance to the present study, as will be outlined in section 8.5.2 of the discussion chapter.

Brown and Dixon's (2020) findings are in keeping with other studies which have caused some authors to question the approach of universal MHWB promotion in schools altogether (Foulkes *et al*., 2024). Cilar and colleagues (2020) raised concerns about potentially detrimental outcomes of some interventions: although 32 of the 57 studies they included in their review showed positive effects, 16 had at least one negative effect on students. This issue was further explored by Guzman-Holst and colleagues (2025). In a review of 112 school-based mental health interventions, they found ten had reported at least one negative outcome such as decreased subjective wellbeing, or increased depression or anxiety, with vulnerable groups of CYP at most risk of such outcomes. Although the authors included both targeted and universal programmes within their review, all ten associated with negative outcomes were universal in nature. In one example of such negative outcomes, Rose (2007) raised the possibility of 'co-rumination', wherein CYP were more likely to discuss, and propagate, negative emotions as a result of learning about them. On a similar theme, Foulkes and Andrews (2023) presented what they term the 'prevalence inflation hypothesis', which posits that increased MHWB awareness leads to a higher prevalence of overinterpretation of mild forms of distress as more serious mental health problems. Whilst this hypothesis has attracted considerable attention in the literature (Ahuvia, 2024), it has yet to be empirically tested.

Furthermore, not all researchers are persuaded by the methodological approaches of studies into MHWB promotion programmes. Several reviewers of the literature concerning universal MHWB promotion programmes in schools point to mixed or underwhelming results from such programmes (Dunning *et al*., 2022; Mackenzie & Williams, 2018). For some time, small positive effects have been considered justifiable in light of the scale of population who are experiencing those benefits; however, some authors argue that small effects require only small errors in study design to become no effect at all (Cuijpers, 2022). Finally, due to issues such as the heterogeneity of study types, quality, and variables measured (O'Reilly *et al*., 2018b), comparisons are not always possible and occasionally inconsistent conclusions have been drawn. For example, Mendes de Oliveira and colleagues (2022) observed that most of the programmes they reviewed that showed a positive effect were conducted by teachers; in contrast, Cilar and colleagues (2020) recommended interventions would be better conducted by healthcare professionals.

As will be discussed in chapter eight, the doubts expressed by authors in the two preceding paragraphs are shared by many of the participants in the present study; consequently, Foulkes and Andrews (2023) 'prevalence inflation hypothesis' is highly relevant to this thesis. Findings from interviews with school staff members, as set out in chapter five, will show that many staff members in the present study are sceptical as to the effects of both

MHWB awareness, and to a lesser extent, MHWB promotion programmes. The potential contagion of this scepticism, and the risk this poses to the MHWB support which schools offer their pupils, will form one of the main arguments of the present thesis.

Such doubts about whole school MHWB promotion programmes have led researchers to investigate other approaches which might support the MHWB of CYP. For example, Andrews and Foulkes (2025) recommend refocusing attention exclusively onto targeted interventions in school. Other authors have increasingly turned their attention to indirect mechanisms which seem to affect pupils MHWB. In their examination of which between-school variables (*e.g.* school quality, size, pupil-to-teacher ratio, and the provision of social and emotional learning programmes) affected first- and second-year secondary UK pupils' MHWB, Ford and colleagues found few statistically significant factors, with one exception. "The only operational, and thus obviously tractable, feature of schools associated with mental health of young people was teacher-rated school climate" (2021, p.1473). Hinze and colleagues (2024) reported very similar findings; both studies support an earlier review of the literature about associations between school climate and pupils' MHWB, in which the authors concluded:

> The findings of our review provide strong evidence of the importance of the school climate in influencing adolescents' mental health… As such, attending to the psychosocial school climate is a manageable way in which schools can promote student mental health" (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018, p.135).

Such results have led some to declare "the need to shift away from teaching general psychological skills used in treatment programmes in a universal way" (Birrell *et al*., 2025, p.94), in favour of efforts to improve school climate. This has been associated with an increased sense of connectedness between pupils and their school, often defined as a feeling that CYP belong in some way to their school (Finn, 1993; Osterman, 2000). In a study involving 648 English primary schools, this sense of school connectedness has been found to be positively associated with pupils' MHWB (Patalay *et al*., 2020). Similarly beneficial MHWB outcomes may result from a sense of connectedness to a year group, or to a particular class or teacher (especially in primary schools), rather than to the whole school (Donaldson *et al*., 2025).

This sense of connectedness was explored by Brown and colleagues (2025). These authors reject what they see as an individualistic approach to MHWB promotion, which uses universal programmes to build skills in individual children, exemplified by the Scottish Government's emphasis on building skills and competencies in CYP. Instead, they propose an alternative, collaborative approach, which would emphasise support structures and communities around each pupil:

> The paper advances an original relational approach, which we call Connected Belonging, that links identity-building and affirmation to wellbeing through strengthening students' sense of belonging across the different arenas of their daily lives: school, social life, local community and wider society (Brown *et al*., 2025, p.1).

As Brown and colleagues point out in the above definition, a sense of connectedness is fundamentally a relational approach. Notwithstanding the importance of peer relationships, a key factor in building this sense lies in the relationships the CYP have with adults in school (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019; McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010; Mental Health Foundation, 2016). Of particular significance is CYP's perception that their teachers are caring and supportive (Reddy *et al*., 2003). Ensuring these relationships are positive therefore becomes of utmost consequence in creating the right school climate, and thereby a sense of connectedness and improved pupil MHWB. Indeed, in reviewing the literature about what pupils with emotional or mental health difficulties saw as positively influencing their school experience, Cosma and Soni (2019) reported that young people overwhelmingly voiced a need for good relationships with staff and having a meaningful pupil voice. It seems likely that achieving these goals may contribute to the development of a stronger sense of coherence amongst pupils (Antonovsky, 1996).

The development of pupil voice in schools is, as has been set out in chapter one, one of the key arguments of the present thesis. There is as yet no accepted definition of pupil voice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Littlefair, 2023), in part due to divergence of views around both terms (Noyes, 2005). Lundy and Cook-Sather regard it as "a metaphor that signals students' presence, participation and power in conversations" (2016, p.266).

Lundy (2007) emphasises the need for educators to view pupil voice not merely as a moral imperative and indicator of good pedagogy but rather as a legal requirement, as set out in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). In practice, however, successful implementation of this statutory duty is dependent upon the cooperation of adults, whose commitment to Article 12 may be variable. In order to conceptualise pupil voice in schools in a manner that aligns with children's rights, Lundy (2007) proposes a model that comprises four elements: space, voice, audience and influence.

The first of these, space, is aimed at enabling children to freely express their views. This involves giving children the autonomy to determine which matters to discuss. It must be a safe space, in that children should feel free to offer their views without adults accusing them of being cheeky or challenging (Lundy, 2007). In addition, it should be an inclusive space, such that all children's views are equal and not dominated by the articulate (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

The second element, voice, is a right which ought to be afforded to all children capable of forming their own views (United Nations, 1989). It is this reference to capability which leaves the enactment of Article 12 somewhat open to the interpretation of those very adults whose responsibility it is to hear those voices. As Lundy (2007, p.935) argues, children's right to have their views given due weight is "not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not." Furthermore, in line with Article 5 (United Nations, 1989), it is the responsibility of the adults to support and enable children to share their views.

Similar issues around the contingency of children's rights on responsible adults emerge with the third element, that of audience. Although Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) calls for 'due weight' to be given to children's views, there is "no guarantee that their views will be communicated to or taken on board by those adults who are in a position to give them effect" (Lundy, 2007, p.937). This is closely associated with the fourth element, influence. Not only must children have a receptive audience to whom they may air their views, there must be tangible results which demonstrate to children that their views have been acted upon. As Robinson and Taylor (2007) argue, pupil voice must be seen to be a transformative process, rather than simply a performative one (Alderson, 2000). Lundy (2007) points out that this will likely involve a cultural shift within most schools, in which children's views are not merely heard and respected, but become embedded and integral to decision making.

Furthermore, these four elements; space, voice, audience and influence seem closely aligned with recent Scottish Government policy (2021):

> It is important not only to enable and listen to and act on views, but to ensure these views influence decisions across the school community and that young people are aware of the impact sharing their views have [*sic*] had… Children and young people have much to contribute in terms of what supports their own mental health and wellbeing and what is likely to impact negatively upon it and it is essential that their views and experiences are fully heard and acted upon where possible. (Scottish Government, 2021, p.15).

As is suggested in the above statement, listening to and acting upon the voice of pupils not only informs improvements to the MHWB support which schools can offer pupils, but is in itself a factor which can help support their MHWB. This determinant operates in various different ways. Firstly, the development of pupil voice in schools is a crucial aspect in strengthening the aforementioned relational approach as well as a predictor of a sense of school belonging (Smyth, 2006). In addition, the use of pupil voice in adapting and implementing MHWB promotion programmes improves pupils' MHWB both indirectly,

through improving the programme, as well as directly. One of eight principles of a whole school MHWB promotion approach outlined by English authorities states that:

> Involving students in decisions that impact on them can benefit their mental health and wellbeing by helping them to feel part of the school, college and wider community and to have some control over their lives (PHE/ DfE, 2021, p.19).

Despite this, the literature suggests that "the voices of young people appear to have been almost completely overlooked" (Atkinson *et al*., 2019, p.3). Carter (2025) argues that even those few programmes which have considered pupils' views do so in a manner that is often little more than tokenistic (Hart, 1992). She concludes:

> … the journey towards effective universal school-based mental health interventions requires a shift in perspective. Instead of viewing students merely as recipients of support, we must recognise them as active participants in the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes that affect their lives. By fostering environments and processes where their voices are heard and valued, we can create more impactful interventions that not only address immediate mental health concerns but also empower students to take charge of their well-being. This shift is crucial for ensuring that universal approaches to mental health in schools are not only effective but responsive to the needs of all students (Carter, 2025, p.97).

One way of achieving this is by means of meaningful consultation with CYP. Foulkes and Stapley (2022) contend that there is a dearth of qualitative research into CYP's perspectives about MHWB programmes; such studies as there are "have been conducted on children, rather than with them" (Bannirchelvam *et al*., 2017, p.306). Similarly, in their review of studies into school MHWB support programmes, O'Reilly and colleagues (2018b, p.659) concluded that "more work needs to include the child's voice… and therefore, there is a need for more qualitative work in this area." More recently, Maclean and Law reached the same conclusion:

> … a priority should be given to further research that seeks the views and perspectives of children in relation to mental health education and the role of teachers and schools in supporting their needs (Maclean & Law, 2022, p.2371).

In an effort to address some of these issues, Mulholland and Parker (2024) conducted focus group inquiries in 21 primary and 13 secondary UK schools, asking pupils about their understanding of mental health and what factors they associated with it. Three themes emerged from their findings: firstly, relationships play a key role in CYP's MHWB. As a result of the priority given to this by participating pupils, the authors "therefore take it to be a critical consideration in understanding the mental health of young people within school

contexts" (Mulholland and Parker, 2024, p.15). Secondly, pupils need to feel a greater degree of agency in schools. The authors linked this to pupil voice; pointing to the rising prevalence of MHWB issues amongst CYP, they argued that "it is only by listening to young people's experiences and providing them with the support they need that this trend may be reversed" (Mulholland and Parker, 2004, p.19). Thirdly, pupils expressed a desire for greater control over their school environment and the performative pressures:

> A notable theme throughout accounts related to the lack of control many young people feel they have over their environments, and what is expected of them… there is also perhaps a need to consider further the degree to which school environments contribute to this [feeling of stress]. Clear evidence emerged within accounts suggesting that pressure to perform, and a culture of comparison, can affect young people's emotional state (Mulholland and Parker, 2004, p.19).

This 'culture of comparison' aligns closely with the risks posed by what the present thesis terms a 'digital childhood'; this will be discussed in detail in chapter eight. However, Mulholland and Parker end their findings on a note of optimism:

> We suggest therefore that the experience of being consulted in the process of this research had the potential to enhance the pupils' wellbeing, at least in part through supporting positive relationships in school… If we hope to transform pupils' lives for the better, we do need to find out from them what might enable this (Mulholland and Parker, 2004, p.20).

Deference to pupils' voice is surely the most fitting note of all on which to end a review of the literature about issues which affect them. The literature has identified schools as an effective and appropriate arena in which to promote MHWB; has justified the use of both targeted and universal means by which to support pupils' MHWB; offers evidence to support the holistic promotion of MHWB; suggests that this would be improved by the strengthening of communities and training of teachers; shows that MHWB is dependent on positive relationships; and argues forcefully for the involvement of the pupils themselves. Such doubts and criticisms which have been levelled against MHWB programmes in schools can effectively be addressed by embracing pupils' voice. The beauty of this latter approach is that it offers the prospect of improving school climate, the efficacy of MHWB promotion programmes, and pupils' sense of agency, control, and belonging; all of which are pathways to improved pupil MHWB.

3.7 CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, it seems clear that not only is there a huge body of literature in the field of CYP's MHWB, but that it is an evolving area; both theoretically, and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of practice. Despite, or perhaps because of this, some gaps

have emerged. The lack of literature describing Scottish primary school staff members' perceptions of the MHWB issues that their CYP face post-pandemic (as outlined in section 3.5 above) has prompted one further research question:

> RQ2: In what forms do school staff members perceive MHWB issues to be manifesting among children and young people in general, and how do they account for them?

Addressing this question may illuminate recent developments within this aspect of Scottish education. Furthermore, in general terms, relatively little is known about how Scottish primary schools support the MHWB of their CYP. This is likely to be influenced by the contextual autonomy schools enjoy as a result of a CfE. As there are few prescribed means with which Scottish schools should act, Scottish schools seek to support the wellbeing of their students in a wide variety of ways, resulting in myriad programmes and initiatives. As a result, there is little knowledge of what they are they choosing to do or how effective they are. In addition, much of the research into how best to support the MHWB of pupils tends to be either quantitative in nature, focused on factors affecting MHWB, situated in secondary schools, and/or exclusive of CYP's voice.

For example, although Mulholland and Parker's (2024) study included pupils' perspectives and relied on qualitative data, the focus of their research was on English pupils' perceptions of *factors* influencing their MHWB, not about what they could do to better promote MHWB. In contrast, Brown & Dixon (2020) did ask their participants what was done by their school to support their MHWB; nevertheless, this was a relatively minor aspect of their study, and the participants were English secondary school pupils. As these studies were, in my judgement, the closest to the present study in aims and performance which I could find in the literature, I would argue that the present study adds to that literature by seeking qualitative data which describes the views of Scottish primary school pupils (as well as staff members) about what their school could do to promote their MHWB. This resulted in two final research questions:

> RQ3: What, if anything, are schools currently doing to support the MHWB needs of all their CYP?
>
> RQ4: How might schools meet the MHWB needs of all CYP more effectively, and what might be the barriers and affordances to further action?

How these questions will be framed and answered forms the next chapter of this thesis: Methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.

Following the review of what is known about both precarity and MHWB in the preceding two chapters, and the consequent framing of the present study's four research questions, the next section of the thesis turns to how these questions were addressed. This chapter contributes to the overall thesis by detailing the philosophical foundation of the inquiry as well as the instruments by which the study aims were realised. Those aims; to better understand Scottish primary school's awareness of precarity, staff members' perceptions of pupils' MHWB issues, and the nature and efficacy of schools' response to these issues, were the origin of this methodology.

This chapter will therefore set out all aspects of the methodological approach used within this research study, from the **pragmatic philosophical stance** adopted and the **mixed methods research** (MMR hereafter) approach which is supported by it, to the **methods of data generation** and **analysis** used. If the research questions themselves can be seen as detailing the 'what' this study seeks to understand, and the methodology the 'how', in outlining the chosen sampling strategy I will also explain the 'who' and the 'where'. However, it seems logical to begin with the 'why', the justification for the choices made. This **rationale** forms the first three sections of this chapter; the remaining sections will describe the **process** of the study design.

4.1: PARADIGMATIC STANCE.

Paradigms were described by Thomas Kuhn as representing "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn, 1970, p.175). Kuhn's definition seems to blend elements of ontology, epistemology and axiology ('beliefs', 'values') with methodology ('techniques'). This breadth has allowed more recent authors the space to emphasise certain aspects over others, with some prioritising ontological constituents to the extent that paradigms become synonymous with 'worldviews' or belief systems (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Morgan (2007), in an examination of these variations within the literature, argued that the concept should be 're-Kuhnified', proposing a narrower definition of paradigms as "systems of beliefs and practices that influence how researchers select both the questions they study and methods that they use to study them" (2007, p.49). I favour this definition as it reminds the researcher to be aware of the assumptions that they inevitably bring to any study. In light of these assumptions, many authors recommend that researchers clearly state their philosophical stance (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Such a declaration assists the reader in the process of interpreting and evaluating research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). However, surprisingly few studies do include such a declaration (Coates, 2021). It is therefore appropriate to set out in detail the nature of, and justification for, the paradigmatic stance which supports this study.

At the risk of exercising what Biesta (2020) refers to as a 'confessional approach', I intend to approach my research from a pragmatic stance. Several points have persuaded me of this. Firstly, as described in chapter one, my experience as a teacher has been one of immersion within the issues that my study seeks to address. Towards the end of my career, my best efforts were not enough to support the MHWB of all the pupils in my care. Therefore I am motivated to seek action in a different way, in the hope that this might mitigate the suffering of young people. This urge is central to pragmatism; the word itself is derived from the Greek word πράγμα (pragma), which translates as 'action' (Pansiri, 2005). Actions are seen as pivotal by pragmatists, who view them as the way to effect change in the world (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This represents a fundamental difference between pragmatism and constructivism: although both paradigms value the acquisition of understanding from a social and environmental context, constructivists see that understanding as useful in and of itself, if it is of interest to others (Walsham, 1993). Pragmatists view understanding as useful in that it is instrumental in relation to change: "An empiricism which is content with repeating facts already past has no place for possibility and for liberty" (Dewey, 1931, p.24). Goldkuhl (2012) considers that researchers must choose whether the understanding that they seek is to be appreciated for its interest, or for its potential to change. I am persuaded that the latter is of greater importance.

This is closely related to my second point, that of social justice, which is strongly associated with pragmatism (Morgan, 2014a, 2014b). Pragmatism is rooted in the quest to reduce human suffering and improve our condition, through inquiry (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This is in part due to its focus upon future possibilities; pragmatists see consequences as more relevant than antecedents (Hothersall, 2019). Whilst Deweyan pragmatism has been criticised by some authors for its lack of focus on power structures and hegemony (Nelsen, 2016), pragmatism has a history of grappling with contemporary social issues and inequality (Collins, 2012). The deteriorating MHWB of CYP is certainly one of the most pressing social issues of the day, and it is symbiotically intertwined with inequality (Afifi, 2007; Jones *et al*., 2021; Reiss, 2013).

Finally, pragmatism's inherent synechism, the tendency to regard everything as continuous, (Johnson & Gray, 2010; Pierce, 1893) is an outlook that I identify with. The notion that positions are to be found arranged along continua (rather than at dichotomous poles) is in keeping with other theoretical stances I have adopted (such as salutogenesis; see section 3.3). In general terms, it seems self-evident to me that we do not live in a black and white 'either/or' world (Cohen *et al*., 2018), but rather an iridescent one, represented by infinite nuance. If one single conceptual system were capable of explaining the world, then presumably ontological arguments would be long since resolved. Myriad perspectives have only added to our understanding of the world; I see no reason to regard them as mutually exclusive in their entirety, and confronting the dissonance between them surely provokes

new learning (Festinger, 1959). I am comfortable with the idea that the world is composed of multiple 'realities', in which meaning is constructed in the interactions between people and their environments; but that there are also objective realities which may impact individuals. Within my chosen field of research, it is beyond doubt that a constellation of social, cultural and environmental factors affect mental wellbeing in unique and unpredictable ways (Pearlin, 1989) however, it is also known that quantifiable neurological and genetic conditions exist which impact mental wellbeing, such as chromosomal links to Alzheimer's (Schellenberg *et al*., 1992) or schizophrenia (Straub *et al*., 1995).

Having thus described my paradigmatic stance, I will now examine how the subjectivity inherent to all qualitative research may have influenced the present study.

4.2 REFLEXIVITY.

This section will consider the role of reflexivity within the present study. It will outline definitions of terms, rationale and purpose, and finally present four dimensions of reflexivity in the context of which I will analyse my position and attitudes in relation to the present study.

Reflection is a trait that is both required of, and practiced by, teachers in Scotland (Brookfield, 2017; GTCS, 2021; Schön, 2017). However, although the concepts are related, there is a distinction between reflection and reflexivity (D'Cruz *et al*., 2005; Finlay, 2002a; Walsh, 2003). Olmos-Vega and colleagues (2023, p.242) offer the following definition of reflexivity, which they synthesised from a range of definitions derived from their review of the literature:

> Reflexivity is a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes.

These practices are clearly of some importance, as both the context and subjectivity that are particular to an individual researcher constitute fundamental and intrinsic features of any qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In light of this, reflexivity therefore enables the qualitative researcher to acknowledge their position and to be clear about where this has influenced the research process (Finlay, 2002b). Many authors therefore consider reflexivity to be an essential factor in improving the quality of qualitative research (Berger, 2015; Dodgson, 2019; Holmes, 2020).

Gentles and colleagues (2014) identify four purposes found within the literature with which researchers seek to employ reflexivity. The first two, to *neutralise* or *acknowledge* a researcher's influence, have been described in turn as unattainable (Pillow, 2003) and

inconsequential (Olmos-Vega *et al*., 2023). The third, to *explain* influence, has been criticised as encouraging researchers to adopt a *mea culpa* confessional approach (Lingard, 2015; Pillow, 2003; Webster, 2008). I am persuaded that the last of the proposed purposes, that of *capitalising* on the influence that a researcher will inevitably bring to a qualitative study, is the one that I find most appropriate. This is in part because I do not consider that the subjectivity that is inherent to qualitative research should be seen necessarily as a detrimental factor, but rather as an asset of the researcher which forms an integral part of data generation (Finlay, 2002a; Koopman *et al*., 2020; Olmos-Vega *et al*., 2023). Having decided upon the purpose of reflexivity within the present study, I will next consider my position in relation to the present study, using Walsh's (2003) typology of reflexive practices as a framework. This typology comprises four dimensions of reflexive processes: personal, interpersonal, methodological and contextual.

The first of these dimensions, *personal* reflexivity, is "focused upon the researcher and the attitudes and expectations that shape the research project" (Walsh, 2003, p.55). In my own case, several of these autobiographical factors have been alluded to within chapter one of the present study. Any attempt at personal reflexivity must acknowledge that I have likely been influenced not only by my experiences of teaching pupils who suffered MHWB issues, but my own past issues as well. I have no doubt that these have made the subject of my research somewhat close to my heart; such studies are considered the most likely to be influenced by the researcher's assumptions (Musgrave, 2025). In this case I suspect that my background has increased the likelihood that I might seek to advocate for those facing MHWB issues. In particular, having in the past experienced others' (as well as my own) doubts as to the true extent of my own issues, I may have been more likely to assume that those pupils who profess to experience similar issues should be taken at their word, rather than questioned or viewed with scepticism. Such an attitude has clear implications for one of the main findings of the present study, that school staff members have demonstrated levels of scepticism about the true extent of MHWB issues amongst pupils (see section 8.1). I have to consider, therefore, that my own assumptions may have influenced this finding.

Having reflected upon this possibility, I would highlight two points of note. Firstly, I am satisfied that the present study offers particularly strong evidence in support of this finding; almost all staff members expressed some level of scepticism about the extent of the MHWB issues their pupils seemed to experience (see section 5.3.4). Having reviewed the interview transcripts, these doubts were typically expressed by interviewees without having been prompted to do so. Assessing levels of scepticism about pupils' MHWB was not an aim of the present study, nor was it addressed by any question in the interview schedule. Consequently, this subject arguably reflects the views of participants over and above a narrow focus upon the present study's research questions. Secondly, the heuristic model which I propose to explain how staff members' scepticism may be spreading (see Section 8.1.3) is not presented as a *rebuttal* of the prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes and

Andrews, 2023; see section 3.6). I have accepted that the latter hypothesis, which proposes that greater awareness of MHWB issues amongst CYP may be leading to increased levels of misguided self-diagnosis, likely *does* account for some of the increase in prevalence of MHWB issues amongst CYP in general (see section 8.1.2).

The next dimension of reflexivity, *interpersonal*, for the most part concerns the relationship between researcher and participants (Walsh, 2003). One of the first considerations I made in this regard was that of my position relative to other participants in the present study; specifically whether I might have been perceived as an 'insider' (*i.e*., a teacher) or an 'outsider' (*i.e*., a researcher) (Merton, 1972). Dwyer and Buckle describe 'insider' researchers as "sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants" (2009, p.55), although they suggest that researchers inevitably sit on a continuum between insider and outsider. I feel quite certain that many of the school staff members who participated in interviews felt that I was closer to the insider end of the spectrum; a 'member of the group' (Chammas, 2020). All knew that I had worked as a teacher for many years prior to the study; I refer to that career in most of the interviews, and many had already shared professional dialogue or anecdotes with me prior to the interview.

The literature suggests that there are clear advantages to being an insider researcher (Greene, 2014). For example, insider researchers usually have enhanced knowledge of a phenomenon, as well as greater ease of access to and interaction with participants, than do outsiders. This last point certainly seems to have been the case in the present study. I was occasionally quite taken aback at how strikingly candid and open some interviewees were in sharing their attitudes (see section 6.3.3), and I certainly formed the impression that my perceived insider status was in part responsible for this level of apparent trust and openness.

Conversely, some authors argue that insider researchers may be less dispassionate or detached, and their findings consequently risk being seen as less trustworthy than outsider researchers (Kanuha, 2000). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) caution that two main risks present in insider qualitative research. The first is that interviews may be shaped by the researcher's experiences, rather than by the interviewees. Having reviewed the interview transcripts, I am satisfied that in each instance, this risk was mitigated by keeping to the structure of the interview schedule and speaking considerably less than the interviewee. Highlighting my contributions to the conversation in yellow within the transcripts has provided some visual reassurance that I achieved these mitigations satisfactorily. The second risk is to the analysis of data. In order to improve the trustworthiness of *all* data generated by means of interviews, a process of co-coding was employed at the beginning of the data analysis phase of the study (Busetto *et al*., 2020). This process, undertaken independently by the

researcher and lead supervisor, led to a shared understanding and agreement of codes used throughout the analysis of interviews (Coulston, 2025).

That said, my position relative to other participants was not as clear as it had originally seemed to me. At the point of data generation and analysis, three years of full-time research and immersion in the relevant literature had changed my identity from that of purely teacher. I had moved from what Chavez (2008) terms a 'total insider', to a position further within 'the space between' insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009); more so than I was probably conscious of at the time. However, at this point another salient thought arose. In my previous career I had never truly felt myself an insider in relation to other teachers. My loyalty and affinity had been to the *pupils* in my school, more so than to my colleagues, a perspective that had at times caused some tension in the staffroom. Was there then a risk that, influenced by my position, previous experiences and assumptions, I might accordingly be more likely to emphasise the views of the pupils over the teachers?

There is undoubtedly a tension between the findings from the adult participants in the present study, and those of the children. It is true that my findings include implicit criticism of school staff members' scepticism about the extent of pupils' MHWB issues; no such criticisms are levelled at the pupils. In addition, another finding argues that pupil voice is being insufficiently attended to in schools. But did the study design render this finding almost inevitable? It is perhaps unsurprising that, if asked what their school could do to better support their MHWB, pupils will suggest a range of unrealised ambitions; are the sum of these then likely to imply that their views are not generally heeded? I have to accept that these outcomes are possible and may indeed be due to the influence of my positionality.

At the same time, having thus acknowledged and explained this potential influence, I ought also to consider how I capitalised upon it (Gentles et al., 2014). Firstly, it seems clear to me that my *perceived* insider status has enabled me to generate candid, powerful data. This is a clear example of opportunity flowing from subjectivity (Finlay, 2002b). Furthermore, if my position has influenced me to advocate for pupils' perspectives over others, I am content that this is a tenable and principled stance. My lived experiences led me to conduct the present study, have likely influenced every aspect of it, and I see no reason to try to 'detach' this influence from the research (Turelli *et al*., 2023). It is those life experiences, firstly as pupil and then as a teacher, that have positioned me as a researcher who views the pupils as those with the least power within Scottish primary schools (Freire, 2017).

The third dimension of reflexivity, that of methodological aspects, requires the researcher to consider critically the nuances and effects of their methodological decisions (Walsh, 2003). The first step in this process should involve a thoughtful review of one's paradigmatic orientation (Olmos-Vega *et al*., 2023); this has already been outlined in some detail (see section 4.1). In addition, much of the rationale for the study design and methods of data

generation have also been included in chapter four (see sections 4.3, 4.6 and 4.7). Beyond these points, the most obvious and consequential decision which merits discussion here concerns the inclusion of pupils as participants within the study. This was not a decision that was taken lightly; crafting an ethical application that included child participants and was of sufficient quality to pass the University of Strathclyde's School of Education Ethics Committee took seven months, numerous iterations, and some perseverance. During this time, I was advised that progress might be achieved more easily were I to consider restricting my study to adult participants. So, why did I consider the inclusion of pupils as participants to be of such importance?

In answering this question, I am confident that my position has the support of many other authors (see section 3.6). Within the literature concerning MHWB promotion, vanishingly few qualitative studies have included primary pupils as participants and there are clear calls for this to be addressed. Nevertheless, merely addressing gaps within a body of literature is arguably an approach unlikely to challenge assumptions prevalent within that field (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). In consideration of such theoretical assumptions, I would argue one of the most obvious might be the apparently widely held attitude that professional adults are best placed to propose strategies aimed at promoting children's MHWB. In turn, I am conscious that one could as easily argue that children are no more likely to be able to suggest a panacea. However, I am persuaded that in order to seek positive change for participants who are themselves suffering detrimental outcomes, it is both a moral and a practical imperative to include them within the research (Baum *et al*., 2006). As outlined in previous paragraphs, it is my conviction that in this instance, it is the pupils whose voices have not been heard, and yet ought to be. The inclusion of data generated with the participation of pupils from Scottish primary schools is one of the novel contributions to the literature that my thesis claims to offer. As such, this may be the most prominent example of how my perspectives impacted the study, and how I sought to capitalise upon them.

Finally, *contextual* reflexivity involves the researcher seeking a deeper understanding of the nuances of the context in which they conduct research. The issue most apparent within this dimension concerns decisions taken during fieldwork in school four. Data generation within this school differed in terms of participant selection; specifically, three class teachers were interviewed instead of one. This change did not originate with me but was actually the suggestion of another participant, the classroom assistant who worked within the class which I had been observing. The interview questions I had asked her about changes in pupils' behaviour and MHWB over time had caused her to reflect, and she suggested I might benefit from interviewing the other two teachers who had classes at the same stage as the observed class, as these teachers had taught for many years at school four. As they were willing to do so, and my supervisors agreed that I might, I decided to interview them both. It is clear to me, however, that other factors influenced this decision. I felt that participants

within school four had the potential to generate particularly powerful data. This was due to certain contextual factors; it had a large ASN unit within it, its catchment was unusual in that it was split between affluent and deprived areas, and I had been particularly struck by how open participants had already been with me during interviews. I must acknowledge that it seems highly likely that this last point was significant in causing me to extend my data generation in this school, in a manner that I had not considered in other schools. Had I not done so, the present study would not feature data generated with Ms Brooke or Mr Reavey (see chapters five and six). In this instance, I regard the decision to extend participation to include these teachers as one which reflects an opportunity offered by contextual nuance.

Nevertheless, contextual reflexivity ought also to include a consideration of how the research itself impacted the context (Olmos-Vega *et al*., 2023). Beer (1997, p.126) argues that qualitative research can affect not only all the participants involved (including the researcher), but also the phenomenon itself: "Interviews augment experience, rather than simply reflecting it. They alter meaning, instead of just delineating it. They change people." I believe that there is indeed evidence of this amongst some of the interviewees (see Ms Ahmad's comments, section 6.3.3). Ms Strand also hinted at a level of reflection that seemed to have arisen at the end of her interview:

> "Yeah. I feel like I've just been like… (laughs) all my internalisation of all my feelings regarding the education system and additional support needs and children that are dealing with, kind of mental health issues and emotional issues… I feel as if I've just went, "Here's all the reasons *I think*…!" (Laughs.) (Ms Strand, PT, School 4).

Such comments served to remind me that research will indeed affect participants, cultures and contexts. I can only wonder what unanticipated chains of thought, and potentially of actions, emanated from the inevitable disturbance that research will cause in a school, and hope that I left behind me some positives in my wake as well as minimising the inevitable anxieties and doubt. Indeed, the adults were not the only participants who shared indications that they had been affected by the process. I was particularly struck by a comment from one child in school two, articulated during my final visit to their primary seven class. As part of the member checking process, I was sharing my giant jigsaw piece with the class in order to satisfy both them and myself that my interpretations of what they had told me matched their intended meaning. One of the illustrations depicted their desire for the school to organise a variety of sports teams, and we were discussing this theme when one of the pupils asked me if the study meant they would actually get these teams when they went to secondary school next year. As I explained that it was not necessarily so, the pupil seemed disappointed; a stark reminder that no matter how clearly one thinks one has explained the study, participants risk experiencing reactions that one can neither predict nor control.

Lastly, the present study has undoubtedly changed me. As previously mentioned, it is no exaggeration to say that it has altered my very sense of identity. That said, the most conscious changes are as a result of interactions with other participants. They, and their views, have a tendency to linger in the mind. In researching the literature for this section, I found Dwyer and Buckle's description to have resonated with me:

> As qualitative researchers … we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.61).

I certainly feel that I carry with me the individuals I was privileged to meet during this study, beyond simply working with their transcripts (or jigsaw pieces), and to my lasting benefit. I hope that I have returned even a small measure of this benefit to them.

Having examined some of the key positions, viewpoints, assumptions and decisions which undoubtedly influenced this research process, it seems clear that my subjectivity has affected every stage of the study. My perceived insider position likely afforded me access and candour which another researcher may not have received. It also likely influenced a level of advocacy for pupils' perspectives that other studies would not have included. I have no doubt that others would question this latter aspect of my stance; it has been argued that some researchers idolise the concept of pupil voice, which is complex and fraught with issues such as power imbalances and problems around authenticity (Spyrou, 2011). Nevertheless, in a subjective world, I am content that my outlooks and arguments are grounded and defensible. In the process of turning back upon and taking account of oneself (Holland, 1999), I hope that I have exposed some of the factors and influences which have affected the process, as well as how I have sought to capitalise upon these opportunities to the benefit of the present thesis.

The next sections of this chapter will address the detail of the present research project, beginning with the rationale for the study design. I will begin by defining, justifying and describing the selected study design, before moving onto the sampling strategy.

4.3 RATIONALE FOR MMR STUDY DESIGN.

Many authors advocate forms of philosophical pragmatism as a paradigmatic stance capable of supporting a MMR approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2012; Morgan, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Drawing upon the pragmatic

views outlined above, and guided by the research questions, a MMR design was chosen as the most appropriate means to generating data which might answer the research questions.

Definitions of MMR are diverse; Johnson and colleagues (2007) sought a definition of MMR from 36 authors, which resulted in 19 different definitions. The analysis of these provided five themes, from which Johnson *et al*. (2007, p.123) composed the following definition, which I will adhere to within this study:

> Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

It is generally accepted that the researcher who plans to use a mixed methods research design must have good reasons for doing so, and that these must be clearly outlined (Bryman, 2006; Cohen *et al*., 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters & Freshwater, 2015). Greene and colleagues' (1989) influential list details five categories of justification for a MMR approach. According to their descriptions, this study's research design is based upon the purpose of 'complementarity', which:

> … seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another [in order to] increase the interpretability, meaningfulness, and validity of constructs and inquiry results by both capitalizing on inherent method strengths and counteracting inherent biases in methods and other sources (Greene *et al*., 1989, p.259).

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data acquired through the art activity can be justified in these terms. Specifically, the quantitative data generated by means of the content analysis of pupils' pictures provides categories and prevalence of pupils' views around what schools could do to better support their MHWB. However, the qualitative data produced through the conversations with the pupils offers "elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification" of these categories, (Greene *et al*., 1989, p.259). Both quantitative and qualitative findings from analysis of the pupils' work will be set out in chapter seven. In so doing, the trustworthiness of this data is improved due to the level of explanation made possible, the addition of detail not otherwise included in the illustration, and the opportunity to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the drawings is aligned with the pupil's intended meaning. Therefore, the use of a MMR approach in this regard both enriches understanding of the issue and offers the prospect of offsetting weaknesses inherent in the use of only one method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Having established *why* methods of data generation were mixed, attention then turns to *what* aspects of data were mixed and *how*.

4.4 MMR STUDY DESIGN.

There is a wide variety of MMR designs described in the literature (Bryman, 2006). Guest (2013, p.145) cautions that many of these are overcomplicated, and points to the "laudable" simplicity achieved by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009). These latter authors condense all MMR designs into three dimensions: the **level** of mixing (partially mixed versus fully mixed); **time orientation** (concurrent versus sequential), and **emphasis of approaches** (equal status versus dominant status). The lucidity and flexibility offered by their approach has convinced me to describe the design of the present study in these terms.

Firstly, this study involves a **partially** mixed approach, in that only one aspect of data generation (the 'draw and write' activity, see section 4.9.3) involves the mixing of methods; all other data produced and analysed within the present study are qualitative. Secondly, as I had but a short period of time in each school, and I do not consider that the production of one phase of data need be dependent on the other, I planned a **concurrent** design (Morse, 1991). The design meets Onwuegbuzie and Johnson's (2006) three conditions for concurrent design: both types of data were produced separately, but at approximately the same time; the analysis of neither data type were built on the other; and results from analyses were not consolidated until both sets of data had been generated and analysed separately.

Finally, the study predominately relies upon qualitative data, making the design **qualitative dominant** (in keeping with Johnson and colleagues' [2007] description). Pursuing a qualitative dominant approach to data generation also aligns with guidance offered by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) and Grinnell and colleagues (2018). These authors assert that the extent of prior knowledge about a topic should determine the nature of the inquiry, which is described in terms of exploratory (low prior knowledge), through descriptive (some prior knowledge) to explanatory (high prior knowledge). The closer the researcher feels to the exploratory end of the spectrum, the more the phenomenon requires qualitative data to begin to acquire understanding, and *vice versa* (Sofaer, 1999). As little was known about most of the study aims, such as schools' awareness of precarity and pupils' views on improving schools' MHWB support, this study is fundamentally exploratory in nature. I therefore felt justified in seeking predominately qualitative data.

In the terms set out by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009), these features therefore amount to a **partially mixed concurrent qualitative dominant** design. This study design is supported by the researcher's paradigmatic stance, is framed by the limited prior knowledge of the subject, aligns with the research questions themselves, and accommodates the practical constraints inherent in any research project. The design also has implications for the sampling strategy used, the rationale for which will be set out in the following section.

4.5 SAMPLING.

As the majority of data sought in this inquiry was qualitative, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate strategy to employ (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The strength of this approach lies in identifying information-rich cases for study (Patton, 2015), therefore care was taken to select schools and classes which seemed likely to offer the greatest insights into the research topic. The research questions shaped the criteria for sampling, in terms of both context and participants (Bryman, 2012). The characteristics of interest in this study are precarity, and the two areas that follow from it: pupils' MHWB, and schools' response to these issues. The first consideration was therefore in which contexts these characteristics might be most prevalent.

Some deliberation must therefore be given to the question of where precarity would most likely be experienced, as this would facilitate the study of the phenomenon, as well as suggest a greater chance that the school might be aware of it. This approach directly addresses RQ1 (as set out in section 2.7). Two issues complicated the resolution of this query. Firstly, there is a dearth of data about precarity within Scotland, with no data available which directly illustrate levels of precarity on a local or school catchment level. Secondly, such data as do exist are neither wholly applicable nor comparable, due to previously described problems around definition (see section 2.2).

For example, one of the most comprehensive relevant datasets (the UK Labour Force Survey) features one measure which relates to precarity; the prevalence of zero-hours contracts. According to this survey, the number of people employed in Scotland on zero-hours contracts has nearly doubled (from 46,000 to 82,000) over the past thirteen years; these workers now form 3.1% of the Scottish workforce (ONS, 2025). Reporting on a related measure, StandOut CV claimed that 14% of the Scottish working population (aged 16-75) works in the gig economy. This statistic is based on data that show this proportion of workers find paid tasks at least once a week via an online platform or 'app' (F.E.P.S., 2020). However, only 3.4% of these latter gig economy workers report being on zero-hours contracts. Although many workers identified in *both* of these surveys might presumably be described as in precarious employment, they are clearly two virtually distinct groups. This example is indicative of the difficulties around measuring, comparing and analysing levels of precarious employment.

Localised data exist which illustrate measures *related* to precarity; however these are also open to interpretation due to variations around definition. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is clearly such a dataset; one of the seven domains of deprivation it measures is employment, and all seven are related to precarious socioeconomic situations. However, the employment measure reports only those of working age who are involuntarily *excluded* from the labour market through unemployment, sickness or disability, or as carers

(Scottish Government, 2020). This group is clearly completely distinct from those in precarious employment. Furthermore, the SIMD is a relatively blunt assessment tool which can serve only as a general indicator of deprivation (Clelland & Hill, 2019). Despite this, it is beyond dispute that deprivation is unevenly spread across Scotland. Between one and three percent of Scots living in rural areas or remote small towns live in the most deprived decile of the SIMD. In contrast, 11% of those in urban areas live in the most deprived decile, rising to 16% in the largest cities (Scottish Government, 2021d). There is little doubt that the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland are concentrated within its cities.

Given the associations between deprivation and precarious employment (Henley, 2023; O.N.S., 2018), it is unsurprising that cities and urban environments have long been associated with precarity (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). This has been attributed in part to the scale, proximity to others, availability of amenities and itinerance of population that cities and urban areas feature (Davidson & Infranca, 2015), as well as a relatively high proportion of service sector employees (Johnes, 2019). However, despite Banki (2013) and Waite's (2009) call for researchers to examine the role of place in precarity, the overwhelming majority of studies seem content to leave the urban environment as the "locus rather than the focus" (Hannerz, 1980, p.248). Simpson and colleagues (2021) are exceptions to this situation; in their study of the experiences of manual workers in Blackpool, they found that contextual factors unique to the area contributed to the precarity experienced by the participants. Interestingly, some of these factors seem contrary to those found in large urban areas, such as a lack of mobility and a sense of provincial inferiority. It seems clear therefore that precarity is not an *exclusively* urban phenomenon. McKee *et al*. (2017) showed that in some contexts, Scottish rural youths can face greater precarity than their urban peers. Similarly, Neal and colleagues (2021) reported increases in precarity across rural communities in England, Scotland and Wales following Brexit.

Due to the dearth of data around the distribution of precarity, and in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, an initial decision was therefore made to include a range of catchments within the proposed study. Of the forty sampling strategies outlined by Patton (2015), the most appropriate was deemed to be maximum variation sampling (in which a wide range of samples are chosen, in order to document diversity and identify common patterns). The aim is not to claim that findings may be generalisable (Donmoyer, 1990), but rather that any common patterns that emerged would carry additional interest and value precisely because of, and despite, the heterogeneity of samples.

This led to the question of on what basis should schools be categorised, in order to determine an appropriate variety? It seems most likely that levels of precarity will vary according to location (urban or rural) and relative affluence or deprivation of catchment. In order to maximise these varieties, four categories therefore emerge: urban affluent, urban deprived, rural affluent, rural deprived. Accordingly, these four categories formed the initial

focus for selection of catchments. This approach seemed to satisfy the second of Stake's (2006) three criteria for selecting multiple case studies; that of diversity across contexts. However, as the study progressed, Stake's other two criteria (is each case relevant to the study? Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and context?) provoked some reappraisal of this strategy. Following a visit to an urban school located within a particularly affluent catchment (school two; see section 4.8), so few examples (and little awareness) of precarious employment were found that the decision was taken not to visit other schools in such highly affluent areas. This resulted in the proposed study within a 'rural affluent' catchment being swapped for a different school; in the interests of diversity, an urban school was selected which had a catchment area positioned across both affluent *and* deprived areas.

The location of the final four catchments was further dependent upon the outcome of ethical applications at local authority level; this will be discussed further in section 4.7. Within each of these four catchments, one primary school was chosen. There were several reasons for selecting primary rather than secondary schools. Firstly, primary schools offer a more suitable context for a condensed fieldwork approach (Walker, 1974a; 1974b; see section 4.6 for details). My previous experience as a primary school teacher meant that it would take less time to 'acclimatise' to this context, which facilitated data generation. In addition, the nature of primary classes allows for immersion in one class for a full week, since pupils will spend most of that week together within a single classroom. Finally, primary teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to know their pupils' backgrounds, largely due to the difference in time each will spend with their pupils (Marucci *et al*., 2018). This awareness is vital in addressing RQ1; primary teachers are more likely to be able to correlate pupils' behaviour which they observe in class, with insights into those pupils' lives outside the school.

Within each primary school, one class was selected from either P6 or P7. There are two main reasons for restricting the scope of the study to the upper primary classes. Firstly, older pupils are more likely to experience mental health issues. A review of UK school children aged 5-10 found that the prevalence of mental health problems in this group, as well as the severity of issues, appeared to increase as they grew older (Khan, 2016). Secondly, it seems likely that mental health literacy will improve (as with general literacy) as children grow older, and therefore upper primary pupils will be more likely to be able to articulate issues to their teacher than younger pupils. The choice of class was clearly the preserve of the Head Teacher, although they were asked to identify a particular class which fit the study criteria. Having thus identified the participants within each school, the next consideration was the nature of the research conducted therein. The most appropriate model for the present study was deemed to be that of condensed fieldwork, as described in the following section.

4.6 CONDENSED FIELDWORK.

Condensed fieldwork was proposed by Walker (1974a) as a means by which case studies involving schools could be conducted on a greatly reduced timescale by using participant researchers who can draw on prior experience of working in schools. Walker argued that this allowed for the "collapsing of the normal time-scale of participant observation studies of schools" to week-long visits (1974a, p.24). It has been dismissed as 'blitzkrieg ethnography' by Rist (1980), although this characterisation was based upon the notion of applying the model to a quick succession of day-long visits to different sites in a foreign country. However, many authors (*e.g*. Ruddock, 1993) agree that it is a valid and effective means of acquiring in-depth information and understanding from a school setting, and it has been used to gather data in a wide range of contexts (*e.g*., Abrahams & Reiss, 2012; Crossley & Vulliamy, 1996; Ferreira *et al*., 2021; Scott, 1997).

Indeed, Stenhouse suggests that a researcher who is deeply familiar with the setting they are observing may produce records which are harder to criticise than those produced by social scientists operating in unfamiliar settings. This, he argues, is due to the participant observer's increased "experience of interaction with others in the relevant social situation: he (*sic*) is positioned by action" (1978, p.35). This is similar to Walker's reasoning:

> As researchers we tend to think of classroom observation in terms of formal methods and procedures. The truth is that classroom observation is a form of research daily practised by pupils, teachers, teacher educators and advisors and inspectors… to a considerable extent they depend on their skill as observers in formulating next steps in terms of action… we take this 'natural practice' of classroom research as a starting point. (Walker, 1974a, p.23)

I considered that condensed fieldwork was a fitting strategy for this proposed study on several grounds. Firstly, as previously outlined, it relies on the prior teaching experience of the researcher. As a relative novice to research, it seems logical to make use of such assets as I can bring to bear in a study. My previous career allowed me to make what Blythe (1969) describes as a "strange journey in a familiar land"; strange, in that although the setting was relatively familiar, my role in it was not. Secondly, it is an effective method of rapid data production (Hutchinson *et al*., 1988). In view of the relatively constrained time frame for the proposed study, this was clearly an attractive possibility. Thirdly, it suggests at least one potential means by which my findings might have impact. I intend to revisit the participating schools once my findings have been published, in order to present the results directly to the schools involved in the study. This direct dissemination of findings to the participants is in keeping with MacDonald's conceptualisation of democratic evaluation, which Walker (1974b) firmly associated with condensed fieldwork:

> The basic value is an informed citizenry, and the evaluator acts as broker in exchanges of information between groups who want knowledge of each other.

> His (*sic*) techniques of data gathering and presentation must be accessible to non-specialist audiences (MacDonald, 1974, p.15).

Although the genesis of data generation in a condensed fieldwork study is to be found in observations, Walker (1974b) contends that it also relies upon interviews to extend and clarify understanding, a process he again claims is enhanced by the educational researcher's awareness of the educational setting. Accordingly, these methods of data production form a prominent part of the study design, and will be described in detail in section 4.9.2 below. However, as effective methodologies and ethical issues are generally considered to be interdependent (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998), I will first outline some of the ethical considerations raised by this study.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Ethical considerations are of paramount importance at every stage in a study (SERA, 2005). Cavan (1977, p.810) describes ethics as the "matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others." They are grounded in national and international law (*e.g.*, Data Protection Act, 2018; The Children [Scotland] Act, 1995; UNICEF, 1989) and are overseen within the U.K. by scholarly associations (BERA, 2018; SERA, 2005). Guidelines provided by these organisations, as well as University ethical codes and Local Authority stipulations, established the ethical parameters in which this study operated.

Gaining ethical approval for this study proved a lengthy and difficult process at every stage, perhaps unsurprisingly given the sensitivity of the subject and the inclusion of primary-age participants. Once approval had been granted by the University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A), permission to conduct research was sought from Local Authorities, in line with SERA guidelines (2005). Eight authorities were approached in all, of which three approved the research request. Permission was then sought from head teachers working within these authorities. No incentives were offered to any participants.

Once permission had been granted to conduct research within a school, an initial meeting was held with a senior leadership team (SLT) member. Visits were then made to participating classes in order to introduce myself, explain the nature of the research and answer any questions. Pupils were reassured that if they had questions and did not feel comfortable airing them, they could ask their teacher, or parent or carer at any stage. At this point participant information sheets and consent forms were distributed to all participants (see Appendix B). These served to explain procedures and offer assurances of confidentiality (Cohen *et al*., 2018). The information sheets were differentiated according to participant: pupils, parents and carers of pupils, school staff members, SLT members.

Informed consent was sought from participants, on an ongoing and voluntary basis (SERA, 2005). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage (up to the point of

data analysis) for any, or no, reason and without incurring any consequence. Pupils were reminded of this as a class immediately prior to the art activity, and were told that they could tell either their teacher or parent or carer later, in private, if they had changed their mind. Although all pupils in the participating class took part in the classroom data generation activity, only data from pupils who had returned both their own and their parent or carer's consent forms were included (SERA, 2005).

The need to ensure participant confidentiality was addressed by several means. Firstly, to protect participants' privacy, they were given numeric codes as identifiers. A logbook connecting participants' names to numeric codes has been kept in a locked location, at the University of Strathclyde. Interviews were recorded on a Local Authority approved digital device which was password protected. Recordings were sent from the device to the researcher's University email account and then deleted from the device. Recordings will be kept on password protected University servers until successful completion of the researcher's doctoral examination; at this point they will be deleted and the pages from the logbook shredded. Finally, pseudonyms were created for all participants (see section 4.8) in order to present their views in an anonymous fashion.

The most important concern in this study is ensuring that the interests of the child are served (SWSG, 1997; UNICEF, 1989). Although the potential for pupils to experience discomfort or embarrassment during the art activity (see section 4.9.3 for details of this) could not be discounted, it is unlikely to be any greater than that caused by any similar classroom activity. This method of data generation was originally designed to combine methodological trustworthiness with a sense of familiarity to participants (Wetton & McWhirter, 2005). In addition, it is a co-constructed, inclusive research method that seemed to be received very positively by most, if not all, participants in this study. Its participatory and enjoyable nature is easily understood and not dependent upon linguistic proficiency (Kara *et al*., 2021). Children who did not want to draw were allowed to work with a partner; those who did not want to speak or write could do so through a trusted peer or staff member (or not at all), just as they would do in any typical classroom activity. Compared with other methods of data generation involving children, the drawing task mitigated the sense of hierarchy between researcher and participant. The accessibility of the task, as well as the process of encouraging the participants to interpret their drawings (whilst the researcher adopted the role of listener) makes this "comparatively more horizontal and more ethical than alternative textual strategies" (Literat, 2013, p.88). Similarly, the approach involves far less sustained interaction with an adult than interviews would, nor is it predicated upon the researcher's communication advantage (Mitchell, 2008). Finally, as drawing "evolves as it progresses- it is a process" (Cain, 2010, p.265), the children have considerably greater editorial control over their material than would be the case with other methods of data production (Kara *et al*., 2021). Further details about the process of this method of data generation will be outlined in section 4.9.3.

Interviews (see section 4.9.2 for details of these) are another ethically sensitive area of research. Thought and attention must be invested before each one to ensure that they are positive experiences for all participants (Husband, 2020). Effort was made to put participants at ease by allowing them to suggest the location of the interview, and then engaging in general conversation prior to beginning the interview. Participants were thanked and reassured of the importance of their contribution (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is vitally important (particularly having adopted a problem-solving-orientated pragmatist stance) to remember that the interview is not a 'data collection' tool. It should ideally be an affirming and enriching experience for participants (Cohen *et al*., 2018). To this end I followed Robson's (2016) advice of listening more than I speak. Nobody likes to be interrogated, nor is interrogation an effective means of eliciting honest perspectives.

Observations (details of these are set out in section 4.9.1) were focused upon classroom and social space practices and routines, as well as pupils' and adults' behaviour, and were undertaken only in terms of naturally occurring daily events. Other than an initial introduction and explanation of the consent procedures, and the art activity, there was no direct interaction with the pupils, beyond my simple presence. If a pupil initiated communication with me, I responded simply, as a teacher would. The intention was to minimise the extent of my intervention at all times, as this reduced the impact on the normal routines of participants (SERA, 2005). It also mitigated the risk of the unexpected. As Simons and Usher (2000) warn, ethical issues have a tendency to arise unpredictably, from almost any situation.

4.8 SCOPE.

The selection criteria previously outlined (see section 4.5), applied to each school in the study, resulted in the following study participants: the pupils of one p6 or p7 class, the class teacher(s) and any support workers working with that class, and one member of the school SLT. This offered a range of perspectives, from the pupils to the school leadership, about the issues highlighted within the research questions. Additionally, some schools had staff members whose remit was of particular relevance to the study's aims (for example, home link workers or nurture room teachers). In such cases these staff members were also included as participants.

Altogether, four schools were included in the study. The total number of participants included sixteen adults and 77 pupils. Details of these participants' roles and locations can be seen in table 4.1, below:

	Depute Head Teachers	Class Teachers	Nurture Teachers	Home Link Worker	Classroom assistant	Pupils
School 1	1	1	1	1	0	19
School 2	1	1	1	0	0	24
School 3	1	1	1	0	0	15
School 4	1	3	1	0	1	19
Total	4	6	4	1	1	77

Table 4.1: Number and distribution of participants in the present study.

Details concerning each of the four schools and their participating staff members can be found in table 4.2, below:

School number:	School context:	Participating staff member's role and pseudonym:	Date of interview:
1	Large, urban, deprived.	DHT: Ms Doyle.	23/05/23
		Nurture teacher: Ms Fenton.	25/05/23
		Class teacher: Ms Simpson.	26/05/23
		Home Link Worker: Mr Johnson.	23/05/23
2	Large, urban, affluent.	Nurture teacher: Ms Lees.	25/10/23
		DHT: Ms Clarke.	24/10/23
		Class teacher: Mr Singh.	27/10/23
3	Small, rural, deprived.	Nurture teacher: Ms Chan.	07/03/24
		DHT: Ms MacDonald.	06/03/24
		Class teacher: Mr Galloway.	08/03/24
4	Large, urban, split between affluent and deprived.	DHT: Ms Ahmad.	12/03/24
		Principal teacher: Ms Strand.	13/03/24
		Class teacher 1: Ms Holloway.	14/03/24
		Class teacher 2: Mr Reavey.	08/05/24
		Class teacher 3: Ms Brooke.	05/06/24

		Classroom assistant: Ms Kaminski.	14/03/24

Table 4.2: Profile of Participating Schools.

Finally, details concerning the participating pupils are set out in table 4.3, below. Please note that each pupil's surname initial denotes which school they attended: A. stands for school one, B. for school two *etc*.

School 1 Large, urban, deprived. (F=9, M=10)		School 2. Large, urban, affluent. (F=15, M=9)		School 3. Small, rural, deprived. (F=11, M=4)		School 4. Large, urban, split between affluent and deprived. (F=11, M=8)	
1.1	Amanda A.	2.1	Abdullah B.	3.1	Aihan C.	4.1	Aleksandr D.
1.2	Brian A.	2.2	Bianka B.	3.2	Bethany C.	4.2	Brianna D.
1.3	Christopher A.	2.3	Catarina B.	3.3	Clara C.	4.3	Cathy D.
1.4	Dmitri A.	2.4	Dragana B.	3.4	Declan C.	4.4	Dominik D.
1.5	Esme A.	2.5	Eleanor B.	3.5	Emilia C.	4.5	Ethan D.
1.6	Farid A.	2.6	Frank B.	3.6	Fiona C.	4.6	Fatima D.
1.7	Gordon A.	2.7	Gurpreet B.	3.7	Genevieve C.	4.7	Giovanni D.
1.8	Harry A.	2.8	Huan B.	3.8	Hamza C.	4.8	Heidi D.
1.9	Isha A.	2.9	Isaac B.	3.9	Ivy C.	4.9	Ikechukwu D.
1.10	James A.	2.10	Jade B.	3.10	Jayda C.	4.10	Jasmine D.
1.11	Kacey A.	2.11	Kalpita B.	3.11	Kayla C.	4.11	Kai D.
1.12	Li A.	2.12	Laylah B.	3.12	Logan C.	4.12	Lily D.
1.13	Maya A.	2.13	Mark B.	3.13	Madison C.	4.13	Muhammad D.
1.14	Noah A.	2.14	Nancy B.	3.14	Nabil C.	4.14	Noor D.
1.15	Orlagh A.	2.15	Omar B.	3.15	Olivia C.	4.15	Oliver D.
1.16	Praise A.	2.16	Penny B.			4.16	Paris D.
1.17	Quinn A.	2.17	Qabita B.			4.17	Queenie D.
1.18	Rory A.	2.18	Ravindra B.			4.18	Rylee D.
1.19	Sana A.	2.19	Sammy B.			4.19	Shiv D.
		2.20	Taylor B.				
		2.21	Ulrich B.				
		2.22	Violet B.				
		2.23	William B.				
		2.24	Yasmine B.				

Table 4.3; Participating pupils' pseudonyms.

Each of the four schools were visited in turn throughout the study, beginning with school one and ending with school four. Unlike the other schools, the research conducted in school

one was undertaken over two phases; the first visit consisted of the week-long observation and interviews with staff members, whilst the second visit was exclusively for the classroom activity. The reason for this was that prior to the first visit, ethical approval had only been granted for observations and interviews with school staff. Although I felt satisfied that I could address my first three research questions by means of these methods, I considered that in order to do justice to the fourth question (about how schools could improve the MHWB support they offer their pupils), the views and perspectives of the pupils themselves ought to be represented. This concern led to the design of the 'draw and write' classroom activity (described in section 4.9.3). Once ethical approval had been granted for this, I returned to school one in December 2023 and conducted the activity with *two* classes, as the class I had originally observed had been split into two classes since returning to school. In the cases of all subsequent schools, the classroom activity was conducted with the observed class, and within the same week.

4.9 METHODS OF DATA GENERATION.

The condensed fieldwork approach described earlier (see section 4.6) provides a framework for the methods of observation and interview used to generate qualitative data. The use of these methods will now be described in detail, followed by an account of the classroom 'draw and write' activity which generated both quantitative and qualitative data. These methods form the core of the present study's attempts to address its aims: to gain insights into schools' awareness of precarity, the nature of MHWB issues their pupils may be facing, and of the ways schools are trying to meet the MHWB needs of their pupils.

4.9.1 OBSERVATION.

Initial, naturalistic observations were modelled on a narrative system (Simpson & Tuson, 2003), without the use of any prepared schedules. Field notes were recorded, based upon observations of participants undertaken during the natural setting of the school day. Examples of these notes can be seen in appendix C. Approaching the situation with as open a mind as possible, the aim was to "seek patterns of behaviour in specific situations, to understand specific cases and perhaps to compare the findings across cases" (Simpson & Tuson, 2003, p.48). Observations therefore had little structure or restriction on content focus, beyond an interest in CYP who demonstrated emotions associated with precarity; anger, anomie, anxiety and/or alienation (Standing, 2014). In addition, school staff behaviour or practices which might support (or undermine) the MHWB of pupils were noted. These broad areas of interest relate directly to RQs 2 and 3, and indirectly to RQ 4. Data were collected in written shorthand and symbolic form in order to accelerate the pace of recording. In order to mitigate the danger of misinterpretation inherent in a design which involves a high degree of inference of data (Maxwell, 1992), observations were supplemented with ongoing, informal conversations with adult participants. Establishing and maintaining a free and open dialogue allowed me to continuously check that

participating school staff members' perceptions of observed events matched my own. It also facilitated the establishment of relationships with participants and accelerated the process of 'getting a feel' for the situation (Schensul *et al*., 1999). However, an empathic relationship with participants had to be balanced with a degree of detachment, requiring me to develop what Merriam (1998) terms a 'schizophrenic' role. Participation must be balanced with observation, as "too much of the former compromises the latter and vice versa" (Watts, 2011, p.303).

As the process of data generation and analysis progressed, certain patterns and categories of interest emerged which related directly to my research questions. A table of these categories can be seen in appendix D. Despite the emergence of these categories, only three examples of notes from observations have been included in the findings chapters. The observations served instead to offer a means of informing the discourse during subsequent interviews; to "learn what constitutes appropriate questions, how to ask them, and which questions may best help you to answer the research questions" (Kawulich, 2012, p.154). They also served to increase the trustworthiness of the study by offering a means of triangulation (Denzin, 1970; 1978). The combination of qualitative data production by means of observations and interviews is a well-established example of within-method triangulation (Carter *et al*., 2014). The intention was to check "the consistency of findings generated by different data generation methods" (Patton, 1999, p.1193) by cross referencing the results of observational data with those provided by interview. For example, in school one the class teacher was observed physically restraining a distressed pupil. This event was raised in the interview with that teacher; it emerged that she had recently been trained in safe restraint techniques due to that pupil's difficulty in managing his emotions. This type of comparison has the potential of "exposing unique differences or meaningful information that may have remained undiscovered with the use of only one approach" (Thurmond, 2001, p,255). Observation is therefore a method which is naturally complemented by the use of interviews; the latter method of data generation will be described in the next section.

4.9.2 INTERVIEWS.

Interviews are a potent means by which researchers can shift the focus of data generation; from seeing data as somehow external to participants, to viewing understanding as constructed between participants (Cohen *et al*., 2018). As such, they differ from other means of data generation, and are essentially social encounters in which two parties interchange their views (an inter-view) on a theme of mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). They are one of the most widely used means of qualitative data production, as they allow for face-to-face engagement with participants, are a relatively flexible tool, and offer ongoing opportunities to check that interpretation of meaning is accurate (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). In addition, they are an excellent method by which to understand the perceptions

and interpretations of participants (Seidman, 2006); this makes the interview a fitting method by which to address RQs 1 and 4, and arguably the best method for RQ 2.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate means of addressing the present study's aims. This is due to their inherent flexibility, which encourages the generation of data "when feasibility is indistinct" (Ruslin *et al*., 2022, p.25), as tends to be the case in an exploratory study. The elasticity of the schedule gave scope for participants to contribute other unforeseen topics of conversation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as allowing for the addition of questions particular to that interviewee, which were based upon observational data (as previously discussed in section 4.9.1 above). The interviews were conducted with two groups of adult participants in each school. Firstly, I interviewed a member of the school's senior leadership team (SLT) with responsibility for health and wellbeing issues. I then interviewed the class teacher and support staff who work with the observed class, as well as other relevant staff members such as teachers who worked in nurture facilities. All interviews were held individually, to allow participants to speak as freely as possible. Interviews averaged around 30 to 40 minutes in length and were all conducted within the school, in a location of the interviewee's choice. Each began with an assurance of confidentiality, a request for verbal consent and an explanation of options to withdraw as well as the anticipated use of study results (Rabionet, 2011). Once permission was received from the interviewee, I used a school iPad to record the interview.

Each group had slightly different schedules, tailored to their own professional remits (see appendix E for interview schedules). The SLT interview questions were weighted towards obtaining an understanding of the whole-school perspective, whilst the class teacher(s) and support staff interviews were more focused upon interpreting participants' views about the observed class. The SLT interview was therefore conducted closer to the beginning of the study period as possible, in order to develop contextual understanding of each school. Conversely, the class teacher(s) and support staff interviews were held as close to the end of the study period as possible, in order to better inform interview questioning.

The questions were grouped into three sections (see Appendix E). The first section concerns pupil's behaviour, wellbeing in general terms, and MHWB. The questions in this section address the second half of RQ 1, and particularly focus on RQ 2. The second section concerns the socio-economic circumstances of the schools' parents and carers, and any perceived associations with pupils' MHWB. This section directly addresses RQ 1. The final section of the schedule focuses on the school's response to pupils' MHWB needs; this section addresses RQs 3 and 4. The sections were ordered thus to encourage a flow to the questions and avoid leading participants by the use of initial direct questions relating to the main subjects of inquiry. In addition to the opening question about the interviewee's length of service, the next question was about their perceptions of pupil behaviour. I found these to be relatively non-challenging subjects of conversation which most staff members seemed

eager to talk about. This helped ease participants into the interview in as relaxed a frame of mind as possible (Robson, 2016).

Having described the observation and interview processes, I will now turn to the final method of data production in this study, the 'draw and write' classroom activity. It is a distinct method, in that it generates both qualitative and quantitative data, and because it involves a separate group of participants, the school pupils.

4.9.3 CLASROOM ACTIVITY.

This classroom activity outlined in the following section was designed in order to understand the pupils' perspectives, particularly around RQ4. Without including the views of pupils, the present study would really only be answering the question, "How do *primary school staff* consider that the MHWB needs of their children might be met more effectively…." The risk in so doing would be that the adults' views would not necessarily represent those of the pupils. Indeed, according to Soffia and Turner (2021, p.8), the majority of indicators used to design policies which are intended to support children's MHWB needs "rely on adults' conceptions of children's needs." In order to address this, Fazel and Hoagwood (2021, p.157) argue that studies into school MHWB programmes have "entered a new stage in research in which young people's participation… needs to be at the forefront." The absence within the literature of pupils' views regarding the MHWB support that their school offers them is central to the present thesis. Although it has already been discussed at some length (see section 3.6); as it relates to one of the main findings of the present thesis, it will be discussed further in chapter eight.

In the meantime, one means of achieving pupils' participation is through increased diversity in research methods and designs (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). It is in this spirit of diverse research methods that the 'draw and write' activity was selected. A detailed lesson plan for this activity, which was undertaken near the end of the week by each participating class, is included in appendix F. The 'draw-and-write' method was pioneered by Noreen Wetton in 1972 (Wetton & McWhirter, 2005). It has been shown to be an appropriate method for "eliciting the pupils' opinions on the qualities schools need to possess and develop to promote health" (MacGregor *et al*., 1998, p.317). Wetton's approach involves sharing an initial stimulus with children (which may be simply a discussion), then asking them to draw something in response to the stimulus as well as write a few explanatory words around their drawing (Kara, 2015). Wetton established that children were able to visually convey emotions which they could not express as clearly either orally or in writing (Wetton & McWhirter, 2005). Her methods have been replicated in many contexts since, including assessments of how children coped during COVID-19 lockdowns (Idoiaga Mondragon *et al*., 2022). This method of data generation is part of a wider arts-based research movement which is increasingly recognised as a legitimate and useful methodological approach (Blaisdell *et al*.. 2019; Greenwood, 2012); some have gone so far as to describe it as a new

paradigm (Pentassuglia, 2017). Mason (2018, p.168) sees a twin advantage in such approaches, describing creative methods as "not only more likely to produce better research with more resonance and insight, but also more ethically and morally appropriate."

Following a general class discussion about MHWB (see figure 4.1 for associated visual cues), each pupil within the participating classes was given a blank, jigsaw piece-shaped card to draw and/ or write their thoughts about what their school could do to better support their MHWB (see figure 4.2, below).

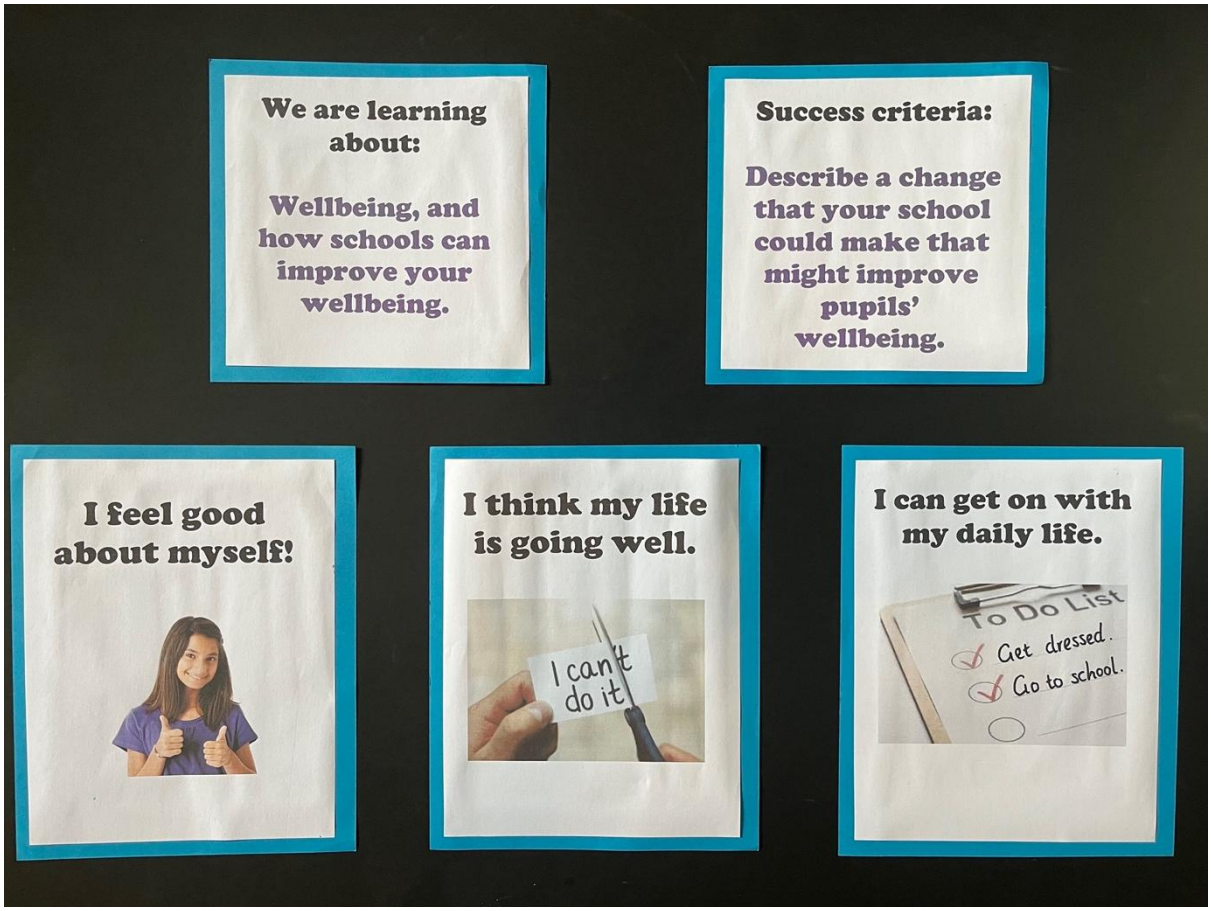


Figure 4.1: The visual cards associated with the 'draw and write' classroom activity. The learning intention and success criteria cards refer to 'wellbeing' rather than MHWB in an effort to reduce any feelings of stigma which pupils may experience. In this activity, it was made clear during the introduction and discussion that 'wellbeing' referred to mental wellbeing, which was defined in terms of the three features in the bottom row of cards.

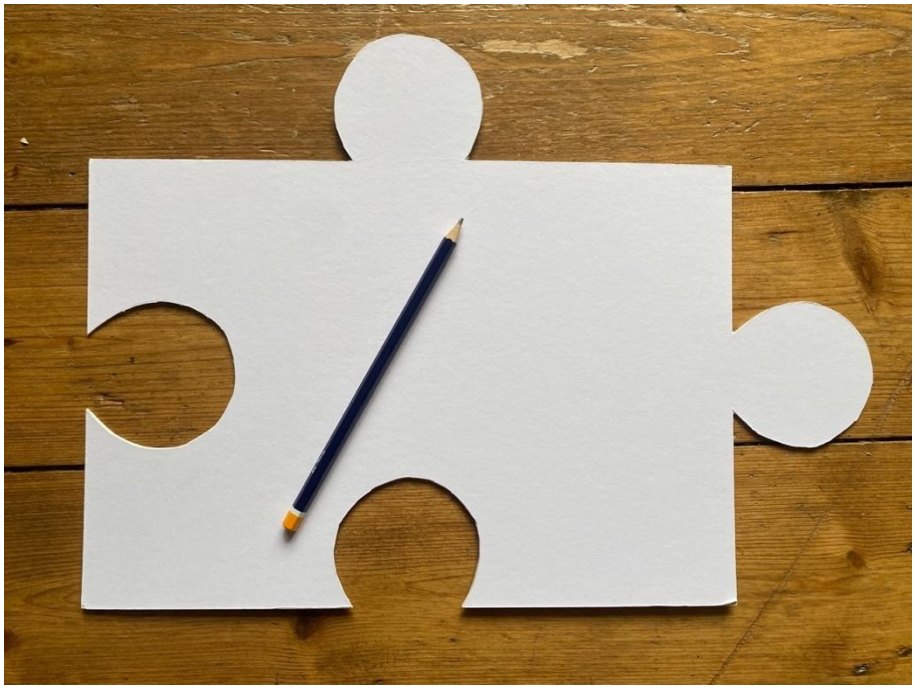


Figure 4.2; an example of the blank jigsaw pieces given to each pupil.

These 'jigsaw' cards were designed to convey to each participating pupil the concept that their views and ideas, represented on their individual jigsaw pieces, would come together with other pupils' contributions to form a bigger picture, illustrating what action schools could take to better support pupils' MHWB. The intention was (in part) to act as a metaphor for participatory research (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). As described in more detail in section 4.10.2 below, the drawings each pupil contributed were subject to content analysis, providing quantitative data. Whilst drawing, individual conversations about how schools could better support pupils' MHWB were conducted between participating pupils and the researcher. Lyon (2020) argues that 'draw and write' activities offer a relatively natural and less intimidating form of entry for a researcher to begin such conversations with participants. Notes of these conversations were taken during the conversation and fixed to the back of each card, providing qualitative data. Pictures of the completed jigsaw pieces, and the notes from conversations on the back of each piece, can be seen in Appendices G and H. The between-method form of triangulation offered by this activity (Carter *et al*., 2014) is an example of what Flick terms a 'strong program of triangulation', as it offers "a source of *extra knowledge* about the issue under study and not just as a way to confirm what is already known from a first approach" (2018, p.532, emphasis in original). This approach therefore adds depth to the design and extends the methodology.

Having detailed the processes by which data was generated in this study, attention then shifts to what Thorne (2000) describes as the most complex phase of research: the interpretation and analysis of the data.

4.10 DATA ANALYSIS.

The analysis of data within the present study was separated by type into thematic analysis and content analysis; these will be described in turn in the following sections.

4.10.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS.

All qualitative data generated through this study were subjected to thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). It is an effective, widely used process for describing and interpreting qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998). Furthermore, it is not wedded to any particular theoretical framework and can be used by both realists or constructivists, making it well suited for a MMR design (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed in order to analyse data generated by means of interviews with school staff, as well as through discussions with pupils during the 'draw and write' activity. In the case of interviews, transcriptions were made (see appendix I), utilising some of the notations suggested by Poland (2003). The transcriptions were printed out and numbered according to participant and school (Drever, 2003). Time was invested in this key phase of analysis as many authors agree this forms a strong foundation for all later phases (Bird, 2005). The transcriptions were re-read several times, sometimes as the recording was being played simultaneously, until the entire data set became familiar. Once initial ideas had been noted down, the process of identifying codes began. Codes are "labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.56). These words, phrases or sentences which represented interesting features were highlighted on the printed transcriptions, with annotations made in the margins. Examples of this stage of the process can be seen in appendix J. At this stage the focus remained on describing the data, rather than seeking to interpret meaning (King *et al*., 2019). Once the entire data set was coded, and a 'long list' of codes made, the process of sorting codes into potential themes began. DeSantis and Ugarriza define a theme as "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations" (2000, p.362). This was initially done by cutting and pasting sections of printed transcriptions and arranging them into related groups (Drever, 2003), producing some main themes and sub-themes, as well as a 'miscellaneous' theme (for codes which did not seem to fit elsewhere) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An example of this stage of the process can be seen in appendix J. At this point the themes (as well as the codes within them) were reviewed, according to Patton's (2015) dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. As such, data within each theme must be coherent, and themes must not overlap. This led to the merging of some themes, and the separation of others.

One particular issue that arose was how to approach the identification of themes. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a decision was made to apply an inductive approach to the data, in which themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves, rather than to theoretical perspectives associated with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is in keeping with previously described attempts to mitigate potential prejudice associated with a pragmatic stance (see section 4.1). However, it is reasonable to be guided to some extent by the aims of the research study (King *et al*., 2019). As the process of analysis is determined by choices made by the researcher, it is essential that those choices are made explicit (Nowell *et al*., 2017). In the interests of setting out an audit trail (Koch, 1994; Sandelowski, 1986) documents illustrating key stages in this process can be found in appendix J. Further documents relating to the process of member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) can be found in appendices L and M. These documents are the summarised forms of the interview which were given to each interviewee in order that they could check that my interpretation matched their intended meaning.

Eventually the essence of each theme was identified, along with which aspects of the data they captured , in a process Braun and Clarke (2006) term 'define and refine'. The results of this process of thematic analysis will be set out in chapters five and six. The results of the content analysis of pupils' jigsaw pieces are set out in chapter seven. A description of this process of content analysis forms the next section within this chapter.

4.10.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS.

The drawings in the classroom activity were analysed by means of content analysis, an accepted method for the study of children's drawings (Merriman & Guerin, 2006). Despite Berelson's original definition of content analysis as a "technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1952, p.18), more recent authors have challenged this characterisation (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Krippendorf, 2018; Riffe *et al*., 2022), pointing to the variety of meanings (and levels of meaning) that may be found within images. However, the focus of this research is predominately on the content of the drawings, rather than the production or 'audiencing' of the images (Cohen *et al*., 2018). Therefore the manifest content, rather than the latent, is of particular interest (Ball & Smith, 1992).

However, 'manifest' is distinct from objective, and interpretation of images will inevitably differ. Herein lies the main limitation involved in this method of data generation. Although the risk of over- or mis-interpretation of images cannot be negated (Cohen *et al*., 2018), several mitigating strategies were included in this study design. Firstly, as Literat (2013) recommends, the draw-and-write approach was used in conjunction with other methods of data generation. Secondly, discussions with participants (about individual drawings, during the task, as well as a class discussion about the collected drawings at the end of the activity) helped develop a clearer understanding of the intended meaning of participants' images

(Gauntlett, 2007). These discussions create the conditions for what Mitchell and colleagues (2011, p.29) term a "shared analysis", in which participants are involved in the analysis of their own drawings. In fact, several authors have argued that participants *must* be given the opportunity to offer some written or oral interpretations of their own drawings, for the analysis of those drawings to provide a sufficiently deep understanding of the participants' meaning (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 1999; Guillemin, 2004). As Ganesh (2011, p.238) argues:

> While the subject-produced drawings offer rich descriptive data, the related issues with construct validity will persist, as data collected using drawings will be interpreted through the human perceptions of the researcher. It is not fully possible to discern the author's intent without speaking with the author of the drawing. When drawings are considered as visual data and are analyzed in context, along with other sources of data such as author descriptions of the drawing or image-elicitation interviews, the validity of the inferences that one can make from such data is enhanced, as the inferences will not rely solely on the researchers' interpretations.

Ball and Smith (1992) suggest six basic steps involved in the process of content analysis, of which the third and fourth are clearly of fundamental importance and likely to be the most contested aspects ('devise a set of categories', 'formulate instructions for the use of categories to code material'). It is this process, of identifying categories and sorting the content into them, which is at the heart of content analysis (Cohen *et al*, 2018). In this case, the categories were not pre-determined by theory but rather emerged as a result of a "long soak" in the data (Hall, 1975, p.15). As all of the drawings were examined, along with the participants' comments about them, a provisional list of categories was developed. This was then checked in iterative cycles of examination of the drawings, and the list of categories amended, until it met Rose's (2016) three criteria: categories must be exhaustive (every aspect of the data must be included in one category), exclusive (no overlaps between categories) and enlightening (of interest).

Once the categories could finally be unambiguously defined and consistently applied (Bell, 2012), the images themselves were coded and sorted into the categories. Having done this, the codes could be counted and expressed in both absolute and relative terms (Rose, 2016). The process by which a determination was made as to whether each pupil's jigsaw piece could support a particular theme or not is outlined in the chart shown in figure 4.3, below:

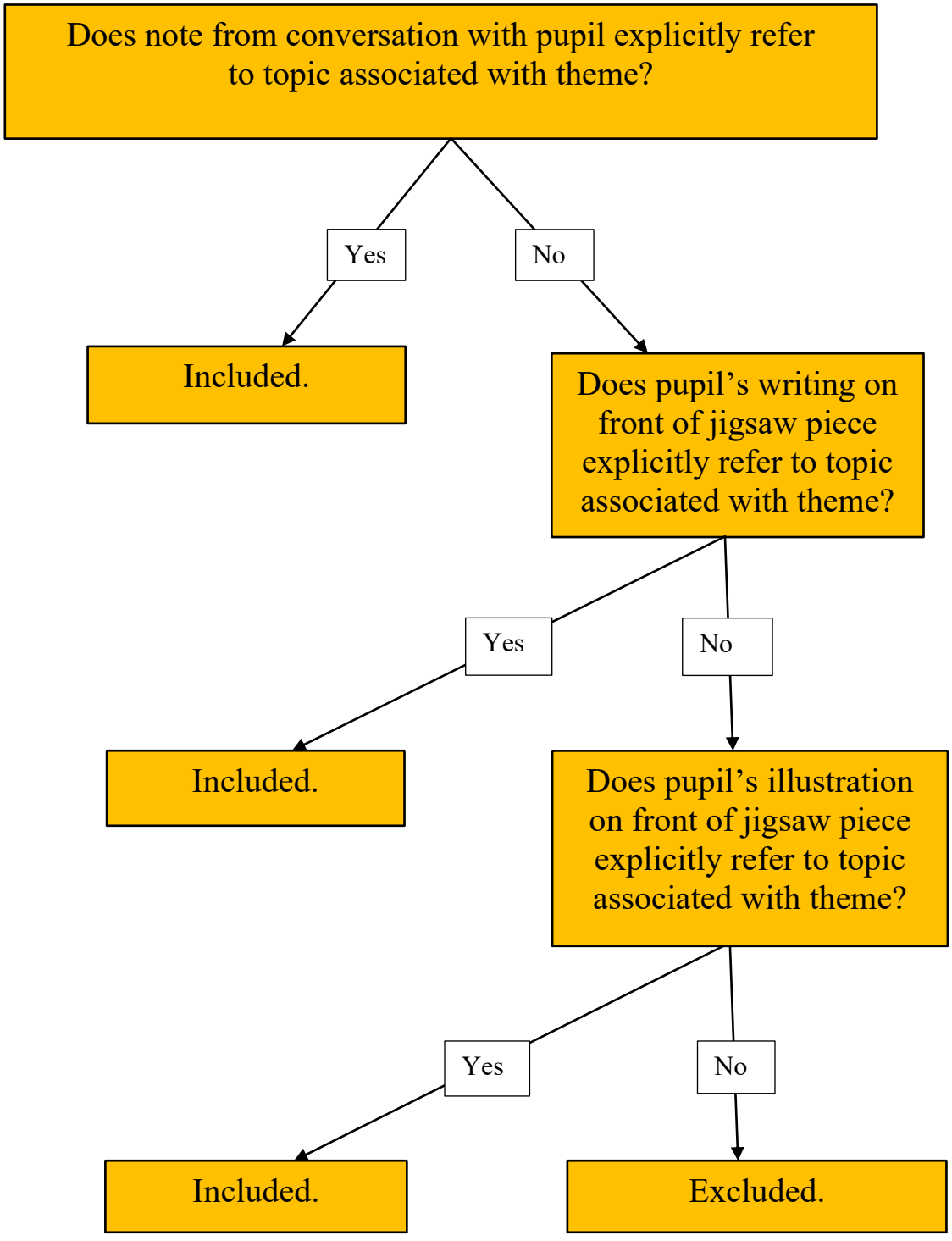


Figure 4.3: process of inclusion/ exclusion for themes arising from pupils' data.

This process was used to determine if a pupil's data could support a particular theme. If included, that pupil's view was counted once towards a certain theme no matter how many

variations on that theme they had expressed. For example, Isaac's jigsaw piece (figure 4.4 below) features a call for more sports teams and a list of sixteen different sports. For all his enthusiasm for the topic, Isaac was counted as one inclusion towards the subtheme 'More P.E. and sports teams'.

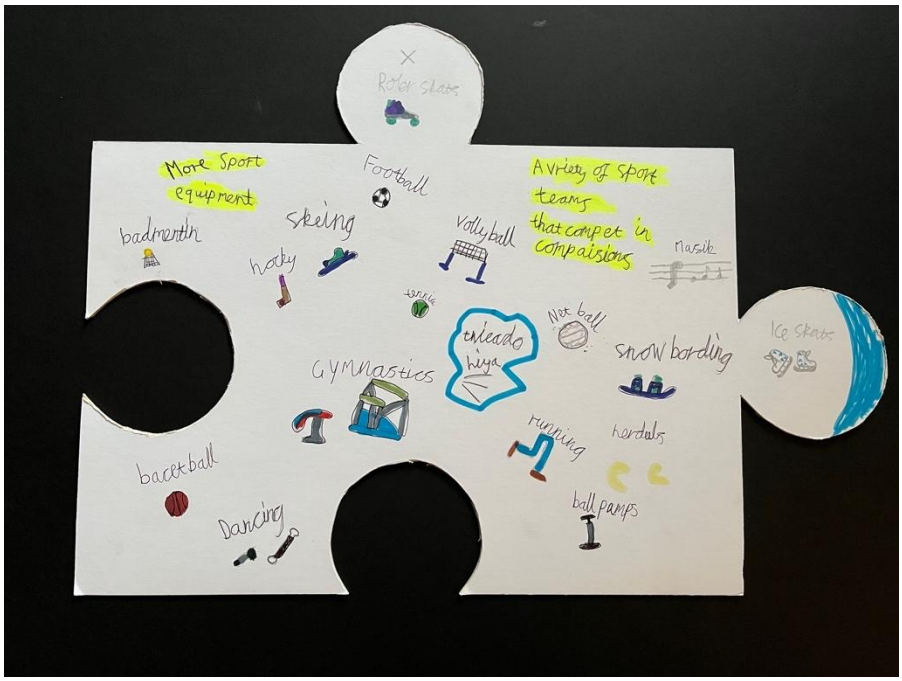


Figure 4.4: Jigsaw piece 2.9, by Isaac B.

However, each jigsaw piece could support several themes if such a variety of topics were expressed by that pupil; numerous such examples are evidenced in chapter seven.

As previously mentioned, the interpretation of illustrations is the most equivocal aspect of analysing each jigsaw piece. The progression set out in the inclusion/ exclusion flowchart (figure 4.3) is therefore deliberate. References to a topic associated to a particular theme were initially sought from the conversation with a pupil, and subsequently from any written notes made by the pupil. These are less likely to have ambiguity than illustrations which have not been explained or clarified. The difficulty of interpreting a pupil's illustration alone, if not supported by either notes or text, can be seen in the example below:

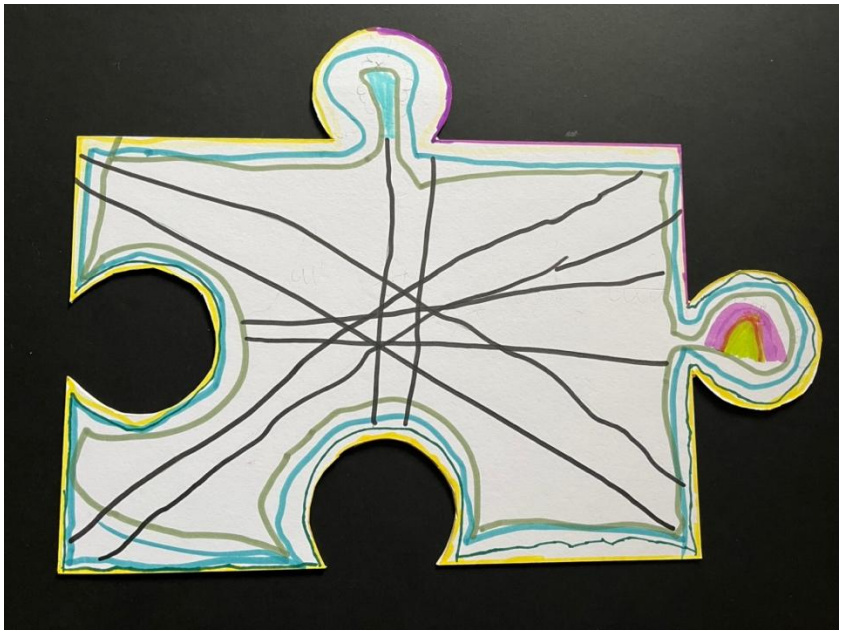


Figure 4.5: Jigsaw piece 1.16, by Praise A.

Praise was the final pupil I spoke to during the draw and write activity at school one. I just caught him before the end of the activity, with only enough time left to tell him that his jigsaw piece looked very interesting, and to ask him what he had drawn. He replied that he wanted different foreign languages taught in school, but that he had not known what to draw in order to represent that wish. He explained that he had therefore drawn an imaginary foreign flag. Had I not caught him in time to explain this, I do not think that I would have been able to infer his intended meaning from the illustration alone. Fortunately, in most cases there was a more clearly identifiable alignment between a pupil's illustration, written text, and notes from the conversation held with them.

Aside from the interpretation of data, one of the main limitations with the 'draw and write' method was that the time allotted to each classroom activity was typically around an hour. Furthermore, once I had introduced the activity and allowed for a short class discussion, there remained only around 35 to 40 minutes for the pupils to actually draw and write on their jigsaw pieces, and therefore for me to speak to pupils individually. As I thought it unethical to speak only to those pupils who were participating in the study, I had around one minute for each pupil. Unfortunately, in the case of five pupils, there was insufficient time to record a conversation with them about their jigsaw pieces. However, in almost all jigsaw pieces, there were sufficient data to link a pupil with at least one of the themes outlined below. These themes will be set out in chapter seven, which describes the findings from all 77 jigsaw pieces in the present study.

Finally, I considered that the most appropriate means of member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) with each participating class was by making a giant jigsaw piece with the main themes drawn on it. This was shown to each participating class and proved a useful visual

cue which enabled a discussion about the themes, what the pictures on the jigsaw piece signified, and whether or not pupils recognised some of their views as being represented therein. These jigsaw pieces can be seen in appendix M.

Having thus detailed all aspects of the methodology which underpins the present study, it is now worthwhile considering how the methods chosen might improve the trustworthiness of the findings. The next section will review the various methods already described with this single aim in mind.

4.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that trustworthiness in qualitative research is supported by four pillars: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The methods they suggested by which these four aims could be achieved have remained central to rigorous qualitative research ever since. These methods have been further developed and expanded upon by other authors, such that Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) compiled a list of 24 methods from a review of the relevant literature. Although rigour is not a binary concept and there is no way of *ensuring* it in qualitative research, the authors suggest that these methods, if followed, offer the prospect of improving trustworthiness and thereby a study's quality.

I have therefore decided to use Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) 'Typology of Methods for Assessing or Increasing Legitimation' as a framework for detailing and assessing the methods used within the present study. From their typology, nine methods were identified which have been utilised here. These have been set out in the table below. The methods and descriptions listed in the first two columns are taken verbatim (or paraphrased) from Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, pp.238-246). The remaining columns detail how each method was used, where in the thesis its use is described, and how each method improved overall trustworthiness of the research.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	APPLICATION IN THE PRESENT STUDY	RELEVANT LOCATION IN THESIS	HOW THIS IMPROVES TRUSTWORTHINESS
Prolonged engagement.	Extend length of fieldwork in order to obtain an adequate representation of the 'voice' or phenomenon under study.	The research involved being embedded within a class for one week, full-time. This in itself was considered too long by several Local Authorities; one denied permission to access schools on the grounds that this timeframe was too invasive. Furthermore, according to the principles of condensed fieldwork, the effects achieved by prolonged research may be accelerated somewhat due to the prior	Section 4.6, Condensed Fieldwork.	Length of observation as well as prior experience as a primary teacher improves researcher understanding of school's culture, builds trusts with study participants, and helps mitigates the risk of misunderstandings between participants.

		experience of the researcher as a class teacher.		
Persistent observation	The goal of persistent observation is to identify characteristics, attributes, and traits that are most relevant to the phenomena under investigation and focus on them extensively.	Initial naturalistic observations were modelled on a narrative system without a prepared schedule. Over time, categories of interest emerged which informed future observations and interviews. Observations were supplemented with ongoing conversations with staff members to mitigate risk of misunderstandings.	Section 4.9.1, Observation. Appendix D	Improves likelihood that the researcher can separate relevant from irrelevant observations. Observations were matched with participants' perceptions in order to ensure alignment. Observations also inform conversations during interviews, allowing for findings to be corroborated or queried.
Triangulation.	The use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources, and theories to obtain corroborating evidence. The present study incorporated elements of data triangulation (i.e., use of a variety of sources in a study) as well as methodological triangulation (i.e., use of multiple methods to study a research problem) (Denzin, 1978).	Mixed method research design chosen on basis of complimentarity (Greene *et al*., 1989). Both qualitative and quantitative data generated/ collected during classroom activity with pupil. Cross-referencing findings from observations and interviews offered a form of 'within-method' triangulation. Co-coding school staff members' interviews offered a form of 'investigator triangulation'. Generating data about a single phenomenon with different sources: school staff members and pupils.	Section 4.3, Rationale for MMR study design. Section 4.9.3 Section 4.9.1, Observation.	Pupils' qualitative data enhanced and clarified the categories provided by their quantitative data. The process also allowed pupils an opportunity for shared analysis. Researcher's interpretation of the data drawn from the jigsaws is therefore much more likely to match pupils' intended meaning. Co-coding data with supervisors mitigated risk of misinterpretations. Cross-referencing data generated with different sources and by different methods supports 'thick descriptions' Geertz, 1973).
Leaving an audit trail.	Researcher should maintain extensive documentation of records and data stemming from the study.	Every aspect of the research was discussed, shared and evaluated with both supervisors throughout. Raw data, in the form of complete interview transcripts and photographs of jigsaw pieces, were included in full in the appendices. Categories of interest used in observations as well as examples of observation notes and interview codes were included in appendices. Descriptions of analysis	Appendices H, I. Appendix D, C, J	Increases transparency and allows external auditors to assess dependability and confirmability (Halpern, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

		techniques were set out in Chapter four.	Section 4.10	
Member checking/ informant feedback.	Researcher should systematically obtain feedback about data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions from the study group.	During interviews, I would routinely try to offer participants a summary of my understanding of their answer and check if this matched their intended meaning. Interviewees were provided with a written summary of their transcript and asked to check that this matched their intended meaning. A feedback session was arranged with each participating class in which a giant jigsaw piece was used as a basis for discussion about the themes derived from pupils' data.	Section 4.10.1, 4.10.2 Appendices K,L,M	These techniques are an effective means of mitigating the possibility of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the participants' 'voice' (Maxwell, 1996).
Checking for researcher effects/clarifying researcher bias.	Researchers must be open about their position and subjectivity.	The present study includes a detailed section on reflexivity.	Section 4.2	Reflexivity details the most apparent ways in which the researcher has likely influenced every stage of the study, thus increasing transparency and thereby trustworthiness.
Theoretical sampling	Researchers should attempt to construct an approach to sampling that is based upon the theoretical foundations of the study.	The present study utilised a purposeful sampling strategy which was based upon what is already known about precarity. On this basis schools were selected according to school size, affluence of catchment, and urban or rural situation.	Section 4.5	This approach mitigates the risk of over-reliance on non-representative participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994).
Rich and thick description.	Researchers should collect data that are detailed and complete enough to maximize the ability to find meaning.	Interviews were transcribed in full by the researcher, without the use of software or any other techniques designed to accelerate the process. All transcriptions were included in full in the appendices.	Appendix I	This method immersed the researcher in the data such that they became thoroughly known. Transcribing entire interviews mitigated the risk of drawing conclusions from selected notes and confirmation bias (Becker, 1970).
Effect sizes.	Qualitative researchers should avoid the use of terms such as 'many', 'most', 'some' *etc.* without quantifying what these terms mean.	The presentation of quantitative data in the chapter outlining findings from the classroom activity helps to frame the prevalence of themes.	Chapter 7	Offering complementary, precise numeric data in the findings chapter mitigates the risk of misunderstanding the prevalence of each theme.

4.12 CONCLUSION.

I have no doubt that the route from research proposal to published results is rarely as direct and predictable as a Roman road. Indeed, numerous methodological iterations were considered before those outlined above were settled upon. However, I am confident that the methods outlined above set a credible and most appropriate course, from the aims of the present study to its goals. Those aims; to explore awareness of precarity in Scottish primary schools, the schools' perceptions of factors and manifestations associated with pupils' MHWB, and schools' response to meeting the MHWB needs of pupils, guided the design of the present study. The instruments set out in this chapter form the pathway that connects those original aims with the ultimate findings of this thesis. Those findings; that children are being harmed by exposure to both precarious and digital childhoods, that school staff members are increasingly sceptical as to the true extent of the MHWB issues afflicting their pupils, and that engagement with pupils' views offers them an effective means of MHWB support, are outlined in next three chapters of the present study. The first of those chapters begins with the views of school staff members on the nature of the issues which they and their pupils faced.

CHAPTER FIVE. FINDINGS PART ONE: SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS' PERCEPTION OF THE ISSUES FACING THEIR PUPILS.

This chapter sets out the findings from interviews with school staff members in relation to their perception of the *issues* their pupils face. As such, it is of crucial importance to the overall thesis. This chapter will directly address two of the main study aims; the extent of school staff members' awareness of precarity, as well as their perceptions of factors and manifestations associated with pupils' MHWB. These aims were reflected in RQ1 and RQ2 (see sections 2.7 and 3.7 respectively). Furthermore, it will offer evidence in support of two of the main arguments of the present thesis; that children are being harmed by exposure to the twin threats of a 'precarious childhood' and a 'digital childhood', and that staff members are increasingly sceptical about the effects of MHWB programmes as well as the extent of issues that their pupils face. These arguments will be discussed in detail in chapter eight.

Analysis of these interviews with school staff members revealed several themes which relate to the nature of the issues faced by their pupils. The first theme describes staff members' awareness of precarity and its associated risks to pupils' MHWB. The second theme details staff members' perceptions and experiences around pupils' MHWB issues; how they manifest, the prevalence and severity of the issues faced by pupils and the perceived effects of the pandemic. The third theme outlines staff members' views on factors associated with pupils' MHWB issues, including links to theoretical mechanisms and doubt and uncertainty around the true extent of the situation.

5.1. THEME ONE: LITTLE AWARENESS OF PRECARITY.

One of the most apparent themes to emerge from interviews with school staff was a general lack of clarity about precarious employment. This can be divided into four subthemes. Firstly, it became evident that for some members of staff, there was a lack of awareness of the *concept* of precarious employment. Secondly, there was a clear lack of awareness of the *prevalence* of precarious employment in school communities. The third theme describes how school staff members *perceive and categorise employment*. Finally, school staff described perceived links between types of parental employment and pupil's MHWB.

5.1.1: THE CONCEPT OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IS NOT UNIVERSALLY UNDERSTOOD.

Although staff members were not asked directly about their understanding of precarity, several interviewees gave responses which suggested a lack of certainty about the *concept* of precarious employment, as is the case in this exchange:

Mr Bell: To what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community are employed in unstable jobs? Zero hours contracts, gig economy, temporary work, things like that?
Ms MacDonald: I couldn't tell you off by heart… we do have probably a high level of unemployment… I would probably say about… thirty percent are probably unemployed…
Mr Bell: And of the remaining seventy percent, what sort of employment…
Ms MacDonald: I would say, I wouldn't… there's not many… I would say, are in professional capacity jobs, I would say mostly are factory workers, shops, working in the supermarkets, erm, d'you know maybe like… manual, joiners, plumbers… I wouldn't say there'd be many that I can think of that's zero….
Mr Bell: Zero hours contract…
Ms MacDonald: … hours contract… but I think that's probably because of this area. D'you know? I don't think there would be much employment with that kind of thing here…
Mr Bell: Things like gig economy, when I say gig economy I mean people who are only paid on completion of individual tasks, like taxi drivers, delivery drivers…
Ms MacDonald: Yes, ah-hah. I think we'd have quite a few of them, as well…
Mr Bell: Quite a few of them, okay…
Ms MacDonald: Mm-hmm.

- Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

In this response, Ms MacDonald begins by shifting the focus of her answer onto what may perhaps be more certain territory, namely the extent of unemployment amongst parents and carers. This was a feature common to many of the interviews. When prompted to describe those *in* employment, she mentions a variety of jobs before replying that she thinks there would not be many parents or carers employed on zero-hours contracts. Only when a definition of gig economy workers is offered does she consider that there might be "quite a few" amongst the school community. Another example of conceptual misunderstanding (in reply to the same question about the extent of parents and carers within the school community who are employed in precarious jobs) is offered here:

Mr Bell: … so, do you see that as being a group of parents and… a type of employment you're aware of, in the community?
Mr Galloway: Yeah, it's a type of employment I'm aware of, and there are a few, erm, pupils whose parents, erm, were on, erm… furl, furlough?

- Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

Mr Galloway then describes one pupil's mum and her experience of receiving COVID-19 related furlough payments over Christmas. Although some contracted employees on zero-hours contracts were eligible for furlough payments, many others (particularly those without a sufficiently long history of tax payments to HMRC) were not. Furthermore, the impression is given that the interviewee is conflating two quite separate situations and

suggests a lack of understanding about what precarious employment is. However, this theme is largely inferred from the interviews. The next subtheme, which describes the prevalence of precarious employment, emerges from the interviews more explicitly.

5.1.2: "THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO FIND THAT OUT." LITTLE AWARENESS AND NO DATA AROUND THE PREVALENCE OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT.

Staff members were asked directly about their awareness of the *prevalence* of precarious employment. As such, this theme is clearly defined and explicitly stated during interviews. Several interviewees were quite blunt when asked about their understanding of the extent of parents and carers working in precarious employment in their school community:

> Mmmmmmm. (Pause). I don't know. I would.. (laughs)… I would incline to default to the, erm, the stereotypical opinion of this area [a very affluent catchment], but actually I have absolutely no idea.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

> I wouldn't know numbers, but I would actually add to that a lot of them would be unemployed… I would assume. In this area.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

As mentioned earlier, this last answer is similar to several others in that it immediately shifts the focus of conversation from precarious employment to unemployment, either because the interviewee feels more informed about the latter or because they associate precarious employment with unemployment. However, there seems to be a lack of knowledge around prevalence of unemployment too. The following reply came to the same question about the extent of precarious employment amongst parents and carers:

> **Ms Ahmad**: I don't know if I could give specifics of that. I don't know exactly. I know, from some families I work with I know, they don't work…. I know there is a lot of parents in this catchment don't… are not employed?
> **Mr Bell**: Mm-hmm. What sort of, roughly what sort of proportion of parents do you think are long-term unemployed?
> **Ms Ahmad**: Phhhh. (Long pause.) I don't know. I don't know the answer to that one.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

Other staff members were somewhat less forthright about their lack of knowledge of parental employment but still clearly struggled to answer the question. Mr Reavey once again begins his answer to the question about the extent of precarious employment by referring to the unemployed:

Mr Reavey: I would say a decent amount of unemployed to… to low, to more… to work that you would be more concerned about job loss…
Mr Bell: Ah-hah.
Mr Reavey: Would be quite a reasonable… reasonably *high* number, erm… really hard to pin… when you speak to children, a lot of them do work in things like… the local supermarket, which might be... I know they still do a lot of, "You're twenty hours this week, you're thirty the next." Erm, like cafes, erm, things like that… and there's quite of lot of unemployment, if a child sees that you're… I've spoken to a bit, dad loses… dad lost his job. So I would say that… a reasonably high proportion…
Mr Bell: A reasonably high proportion. Now if I pushed you towards a rough fraction?
Mr Reavey: [Slow audible exhale.]
Mr Bell: You'd find that difficult?
Mr Reavey: Very difficult.

- Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher).

It is clear that much of this uncertainty is driven by a lack of data around parental employment. Mr Johnson was asked about his knowledge of the extent of precarious employment in the school community:

Specific data or numbers to be able to reflect, I'd say no.

- Mr Johnson (School 1, Home link worker.)

Ms Strand was asked a follow-up question about the extent of long-term unemployed in the school community:

Ms Strand: (Pause. Sighs.) That's hard to quantify, without actual physical data.
Mr Bell: Ah-hah.
Ms Strand: Erm, I would only be guessing at best...
Mr Bell: Ah-hah.
Ms Strand: … er, and it would be a rough guess. Erm, but perhaps… I'm thinking about where we are, and who we work with, and… probably about half.
Mr Bell: … do you get to see any data or are you judging your awareness and understanding of home circumstances more from just chatting to the pupils?
Ms Strand: Probably just the children I know, and I work with most closely, that… I'm judging it on that… I do obviously get to see the SIMD details and things like that, but as to what the children... sorry, what the parents do, or carers do, as a profession, then no, we wouldn't really be privy to that.

- Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

As Ms MacDonald suggests, it seems clear from many of the interviews that the children (and sometimes other parents) are the school staff members' main source of information about home circumstances:

> **Mr Bell:** … are there any other sources of data that you can draw upon, apart from SIMD and free school meal entitlement, to gauge where… where parents and carers are at financially, or are you more likely to just sort of know, instinctively?
> **Ms MacDonald:** We do kind of *know*, we know like, the parents who are employed, who are unemployed…
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

The only data sources mentioned which schools hold and might shed some light on the socioeconomic situation of families are SIMD data and Pupil Equity Fund/ Free School Meal Entitlement data. However, these do not include detail about parental employment and seemed less valuable to teachers than anecdotal information. One teacher described how they acquired knowledge of their pupils' families' employment through a class topic:

> … we've been doing 'The World of Work' the past fortnight, and it's interesting just hearing… about different jobs and again how the kids are like, "Oh my dad does this," or, "My mum does this!" And a lot of the kids are like, "Oh I *don't* want to be such-and-such because that's what my dad does."
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher)

A member of staff from another school described an attempt to gather information on parental employment for similar reasons:

> **Ms Clarke:** … funnily enough, quite a number of years ago… we were trying to find other ways to be able to connect to parents, to get them to come in…
> **Mr Bell**: Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Clarke:** … to talk about their careers, and jobs and things like that.... And in one, er, document that we used when children enrolled with us, we put on a wee bit for them to put what their occupation was… so that we were getting that information nice and easily and then it would be easier for us to maybe phone people up directly…
> **Mr Bell**: Yeah...
> **Ms Clarke:** … to say, "Would you be able to, would you like to come and talk about your job, blah blah blah…" But it's not something… I think that fell away, and doesn't… doesn't get done any longer, erm… but there really isn't… there's no… reason for us to find that out, or to be shared… to have that information shared with us.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

This last comment was particularly striking and seemed to encapsulate the attitude of many school staff. It may suggest a certain complacency and a tacit assumption that there is no need for staff members to be better informed about the detail of parents and carers' employment. Without such data, school staff members must rely on hearsay in order to form perceptions of parental employment. The next subtheme that emerged from this area

of conversation describes these perceptions and questions whether they are sufficiently nuanced.

5.1.3: "PROFESSIONALS, NON-WORKING AND… NON-PROFESSIONS?" PIGEONHOLING PARENTS.

Most of the school staff members spoke about types of employment in fairly simplistic terms. Three distinct strata emerged quite clearly from the interviews: professionals, employed, unemployed. Parents and carers were overwhelmingly allotted to one of these pigeonholes:

> Erm, in my experience most of our… parents have, I'd say, professional jobs? You know, the majority that I've spoken to, you know they have… jobs that they… you know, doctors, lawyers, erm, teachers, pharmacists…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

> I would say that in our locality, there are a *minority* of families that have what we would probably class as *professional* jobs. I would say that the *minority* [presumably she means 'majority' here] either are non-working or are in… manual or, I'm trying to think how you would describe… in non-professions? Is that the right…?
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

> **Ms MacDonald**: … we do have probably a high level of unemployment… I would probably say about… thirty percent are probably unemployed…
> **Mr Bell**: And of the remaining seventy percent, what sort of employment…
> **Ms MacDonald**: I would say, I wouldn't… there's not many… I would say, are in professional…
> **Mr Bell**: Mm-hmm.
> **Ms MacDonald**: … capacity jobs, I would say mostly are factory workers, d'you know, shops, working in the supermarkets, erm, d'you know maybe like… manual, joiners, plumbers…
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

> **Mr Bell**: Okay. And the, the division that you see, that you seem to characterise there, is… is basically… employed or unemployed?
> **Ms Ahmad**: Mm-hmm.
> **Mr Bell**: Is that fair to say?
> **Ms Ahmad**: Yeah.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

Whilst these three categories might seem useful, in that they can neatly compartmentalise any parent or carer into a broad, distinct group, they are clearly stereotypical and risk oversimplification in their generality, not to mention the attachment of stigma. However, when this reduction of employment types is considered alongside the previously discussed

lack of awareness around precarious employment, it suggests an outdated and traditional form of stereotyping that is no longer an appropriate way of viewing employment. As the number of U.K. workers now meeting one definition of precarious employment has reached one in eight of the total national workforce (T.U.C., 2024), it may be viewed as inappropriate to simply group these workers in an 'non-professional employed' category alongside other workers who may enjoy stable and secure employment and pay. One of the main dangers implicit in so doing is that the impact on families and pupils' MHWB will be overlooked. It is this last subtheme, of school staff members' awareness of the impact of socio-economic status on MHWB outcomes, that will be examined next.

5.1.4: "YOU CAN SEE THAT… WHEN THERE'S A FAMILY GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME, SOMETIMES THERE'S A CHANGE IN THE CHILD."
STAFF LINK SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS TO PUPILS' MHWB.

There was overwhelming acknowledgement amongst interviewees of an association between deprivation and pupils' MHWB issues:

> **Ms Kaminski:** I mean poverty in this area is… probably a part of that. Well, it *will* be a part of that.
> **Mr Bell**: Thinking of the children who suffer mental health and wellbeing issues…
> **Ms Kaminski:** Mm-hmm.
> **Mr Bell**: Can you see any patterns between them and [their] parent and carer's occupations?
> **Ms Kaminski:** Generally what you could say is they come from poorer… they come from poorer families.
> **Mr Bell**: From poorer families?
> **Ms Kaminski:** Yes.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

> **Mr Bell:** Any insight into what's driving any of these changes [in pupil's MHWB]?
> **Ms MacDonald:** Within this area, I would say probably… the levels of deprivation, and the effects that can have… have a huge impact.
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

> **Mr Bell:** Do you have any awareness of any association between financial insecurity and impact on pupil wellbeing? (Pause.) Is that something you come across much, or is it on your radar?
> **Mr Johnson:** Er, yes… frequently there's young people that come to me and say, "I need to be a school lunch today."
> "Why?"
> "Oh… my mum and dad don't get paid 'til next Thursday."
> "Oh great, where does your mum and dad work?"
> "Mum and dad don't work, it's the benefit man."

- Mr Johnson (School 1, Home link worker.)

This last comment refers to hardship which would seem to be related to parental unemployment. However, some staff members also expressed confidence that they could see more nuanced associations between pupils' MHWB and the socioeconomic *stability* of their households:

> **Mr Bell:** Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic stability of the pupils' household, and their mental health and wellbeing?
> **Ms Fenton:** Yeah. I would say there is, definitely. Erm, and you can see that… when there's a family going through a tough time, sometimes there's a change in the child… so the child may *not* have needed support before… all of a sudden, there's a crisis, and so they are needing support, and sometimes when you unpick what's going on, yes, there is some sort of financial crisis, or poverty, or some event that has happened that they are then… the fallout from that. And that child might only need, the family might only need support for a short period of time to get over that, sometimes they need longer-term, just depends on… so yeah, there's definitely a correlation…
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

> **Mr Bell:** Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic stability of pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes?
> **Ms MacDonald:** Yes, I definitely see that. Absolutely.
>
> - Ms Macdonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

In some cases, the interviewee was able to make links between parents and carers in precarious employment and the MHWB of their children. This answer also serves as a good example of the difficulty in unpicking myriad factors which impact MHWB, as they will rarely influence in isolation.

> **Mr Bell:** Can you see any associations between the pupils whose parents and carers fall into that unstable work category and… and pupils' mental health and wellbeing?
> **Ms Simpson:** Erm… (sighs) the one… the kids that kind of stand out in the class to me, yeah I can see… a link… I would say, erm… whether it's because maybe parents are working kind of unsociable hours as well, might have a, erm, a kind of role to play in that, or if they're single parent backgrounds and maybe not like seeing them as much due to obviously having to work, and they're relying on maybe grandparents, but yeah, I would say it's… presents more in those kids.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class Teacher.)

The responses cited in this section suggest that school staff are relatively aware of the impact of poverty, instability and 'tough times' on their pupils' MHWB. However, when taken in concert with the first two subthemes, the risk is that whilst they can see the effects

on their pupils, they may be less informed about the factors associated with them and therefore less able to make the connections necessary to best support their pupils. The following conversation with Mr Galloway seemed to exemplify this situation, as he apparently moves from seeing *no* association between parental precarious employment and pupil MHWB, to acknowledging that there is a link when "things are tough at home." This gives the impression that he was perhaps only just realising the link as he spoke, in the consideration of individual children within his class:

> **Mr Bell**: Are there any associations between that type of employment [precarious] and children who are experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues?
> **Mr Galloway:** If I just think of my class, I would say no, I actually find the opposite... I wouldn't say… that their children suffer more health and wellbeing, I wouldn't say that at all…
> **Mr Bell:** … you see no association between children suffering mental health and wellbeing and the parents and carers who are in unstable jobs…
> **Mr Galloway:** Yep. Ah-hah.
> **Mr Bell:** Is that fair? Is that a fair assessment?
> **Mr Galloway:** Erm, which sounds really odd, and I appreciate that (slight laugh) but when I'm thinking of our full-term unemployed [*I assume he means full-time employed here*], they work incredibly long hours, a lot of our parents, and so their children tend to perhaps be more attached than the children in here, I'm thinking of [second girl's name], I'm thinking of [sixth girl's name], erm, who… family make-up, mum and dad being different, and being passed between different people, erm, working long hours… they tend to have more of a kind of… not over-reliance but a bigger relationship I'd say with the people in school because they're the ones that they see the most, erm…
> **Mr Bell:** Okay.
> **Mr Galloway:** And again, I can see, in terms of the people that are on these [precarious] sort of contracts… you *can* see a link when… things are tough at home…
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

Finally, two other points emerged that are worthy of mention here. The first is that some of the staff working within the affluent catchment (School 2) were the only participants to report no awareness of a link between socioeconomic status of parents and the MHWB issues of their pupils:

> **Mr Bell:** Do you see any connections between pupils… you're supporting and what their parents do for a living?
> **Ms Lees:** No. I'm not.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

However, it seems likely that there was simply less socioeconomic diversity apparent amongst parents and carers within this school, and that this may account for an inability to form any associations with pupil's MHWB. The second point, more widely expressed, was that of pupils from affluent backgrounds who also suffered MHWB issues:

> **Mr Bell:** Do you see any associations between the children who are experiencing these mental health and wellbeing issues and the socioeconomic stability of their background? Or not?
> **Mr Reavey:** Erm… [Sighs. Pause.] I'm not… sure. If there's a massive correlation there. I mean, that's hard, again, to… to really think into. What… [Sighs. Pause.] What I would say is… the children that are… have a more challenging… home life… Definitely show… some of the larger behaviours, in terms of… inability to control anger, or… respect towards… that kind of thing.
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Mr Reavey:** On the flip side of that, some of the children that I've put forward for the chat with… to have that counsellor speak with them about their anxiety… off the top of my head, it's not the ones that are coming from the more deprived areas.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher).

This issue will be explored in greater detail in the analysis of conversation relating to the second theme, concerning staff members' perceptions of the MHWB issues their pupils are experiencing.

5.2. THEME TWO: MHWB MANIFESTATIONS. INCREASING PREVALENCE AND SEVERITY OF THE 'FOUR A'S'.

Members of staff were asked initially about their perceptions of pupils' behaviour, and subsequently about pupils' MHWB. Several made connections between the two:

> **Mr Bell:** So, a similar sort of question to the behaviour one… have you noticed any changes in mental health and well-being over time?
> **Ms Doyle**: I suppose… it's the same as the behaviour because behaviour is… all, all behaviours are emotions so…
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

> **Mr Bell:** Right, so I'd originally asked you about… have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour over the course of your career… Have you noticed any changes in pupils' mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career?
> **Ms Strand**: Yeah. I think that… can sometimes go hand in hand?
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Interviewees' views on these issues can be separated into four subthemes. Firstly, there is a strong sense that pupils' *behaviour and MHWB have deteriorated* over the course of staff

members' careers. Secondly, there is universal agreement that the pandemic acted as a catalyst in these deteriorations. Thirdly, the *'four a's'* (anger, anxiety, alienation and anomie) were issues commonly identified amongst pupils. Lastly, members of staff in two schools described how some pupils 'masked' the issues they felt from school staff.

5.2.1: "THE NUMBERS ARE… *BIG*."
PUPILS' BEHAVIOUR AND MHWB HAVE DETERIORATED SIGNIFICANTLY.

There was a near-unanimous view amongst staff members that they had noticed changes in pupil behaviour over time:

> **Mr Bell:** … over the course of this career, then… have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour…
> **Ms Kaminski**: Oh!
> **Mr Bell:** … and if so, how would you characterise them?
> **Ms Kaminski**: *Massively.*
> **Mr Bell:** Massively?
> **Ms Kaminski**: Massively.
> **Mr Bell:** In what sense? Can you describe that?
> **Ms Kaminski**: Deterioration is the word…
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

The same question often resulted in similarly emphatic answers:

> Yes. Huge.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

> Undoubtedly. Yes.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture Teacher.)

This question was intended as a precursor to more focused questioning about pupils' MHWB. Members of staff tended to give more detailed and considered views about the latter topic, however they were in agreement about the outcomes:

> So, I have seen changes in children's self-esteem, anxiety, lots of worries.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

> I feel there's a lot more children struggling now than what there used to be.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

> … it just feels it's more intense, it's magnified, there's maybe more children in your class… that percentage just feels larger.

- Ms Brooke (School 4, Classroom teacher)

> I think a *lot* more children… are becoming a *lot* more anxious…
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

This last comment neatly encapsulates what many staff members saw as both an increase in prevalence as well as an increase in intensity of MHWB issues amongst pupils:

> **Mr Bell**: When you say that there's been a stark increase, do you mean in the numbers of children this affects, or the severity of the issues within the children?
> **Ms Fenton**: Both.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

Ms Fenton went on to quantify her experience of the issue:

> I would say that I'm probably hitting about 90 children [out of c.320 total school roll] that have been identified, by staff, as requiring some sort of wellbeing input… the needs are quite varied, I would say, but the numbers are… *big*.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

This increase in severity and prevalence of pupils' MHWB issues was universally seen as having accelerated rapidly since the COVID-19 pandemic, which forms the basis for the next subtheme in this area.

5.2.2 COVID WAS THE CATALYST.

The pandemic was a ubiquitous feature of the interviews. It was raised by all but one interviewee, typically unsolicited and in the first few minutes of conversation. Ms Clarke epitomises the views of many interviewees:

> We are seeing, still, the impact in different ways. You know, we're still talking about COVID, and the impact that's it had.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

Several staff members suggested that some of the issues their pupils had experienced were associated with the disruption to an established, stable routine which schools had provided prior to the lockdowns:

> I think COVID did have a big impact on that… that knocked a lot of kids out their routine, you know, of coming to school every day…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is widely seen as a catalyst (in that it acted to rapidly intensify and increase the prevalence and severity of mental wellbeing issues amongst pupils), there is an acknowledgment that underlying issues preceded the pandemic:

> I would say it's been a *gradual* increase… I wouldn't say it's *just* been since COVID, because I have worked, specifically before COVID with… young people who were very violent, and who were not able to cope within the classroom setting. So I wouldn't say it's just been since COVID but I would say it's accelerated, greatly, since COVID, since we've come back.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

> I think definitely we had a deterioration kind of *prior* to COVID… it was already there, I feel, anyway… and then COVID kind of exacerbated it and made it more intense.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Most of the members of staff initially mentioned COVID-19 in response to questions about pupil behaviour. It was generally associated with perceived short-term deteriorations in behaviour, although several staff members also made links to other areas of pupil's development:

> **Ms Simpson:** I would say behavioural needs, and emotional needs, that's been a lot worse since COVID.
> **Mr Bell:** It's accelerated rapidly since then?
> **Ms Simpson:** Yes.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

The increase in severity of issues which staff members perceived since the pandemic also seemed to matched by an increase in the prevalence of issues:

> I would say that we're seeing much higher… significantly dysregulated… levels of behaviour, an increase in… violence and aggression, towards pupils and towards staff. More extreme, more regular, bigger number of pupils that are experiencing that level of dysregulation… and I would say that there's been a *rapid* increase since COVID.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

These views align with many in the profession: more than three-quarters of staff who took part in a survey of Scottish schools thought that pupils' behaviour was worse in 2023 than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020 (Scottish Government,

2023a). The forms in which school staff perceived these deteriorations to manifest in their pupils is the next subtheme within this area of analysis.

5.2.3: FOUR A'S: ANGER, ANXIETY, ALIENATION AND ANOMIE.

Interviewees described a wide range of MHWB issues faced by their pupils:

> **Mr Bell:** In general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school?
> **Ms Kaminski:** I would say… we've got every part of the spectrum. Represented in this school.
> **Mr Bell:** And are these issues prevalent?
> **Ms Kaminski:** Yes. Very much.
> **Mr Bell:** And severe?
> **Ms Kaminski:** Yes.
> **Mr Bell:** … what forms do you see them taking in children?
> **Ms Kaminski:** For me the biggest one's aggression.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

Ms Kaminski had been physically attacked by a pupil two days prior to her interview. Several other interviewees mentioned violence perpetrated by pupils toward staff:

> … the severity of the types of violent and aggressive behaviours that we are seeing is definitely something that I've noticed a *big* change in. Erm, whereas before in primary it would be very *rare* for, adults in particular to get violent incidents… you know, of aggression towards them, now I would say that's a regular occurrence for us to deal with that on a daily, weekly basis.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

> **Ms Simpson:** I can think of obviously one or two in my class that present big behaviours… you know, can be… quite *violent*, erm, kick furniture… kick, punch staff…
> **Mr Bell**: What do you mean by big behaviours?
> **Ms Simpson:** Yeah, the big behaviours are like, you know, getting up, erm, out of their seats, going and kicking furniture, erm, tipping furniture, lifting chairs, throwing chairs, erm… lifting their hands, you know, to myself, erm, kicking with their feet, erm, you know, *refusing* to leave the classroom, you know, endangering myself and the other pupils in the class.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class Teacher.)

Ms Simpson's description of 'big behaviours' in her class was supported by some of the notes taken during observations that week. An example is offered in the picture below:

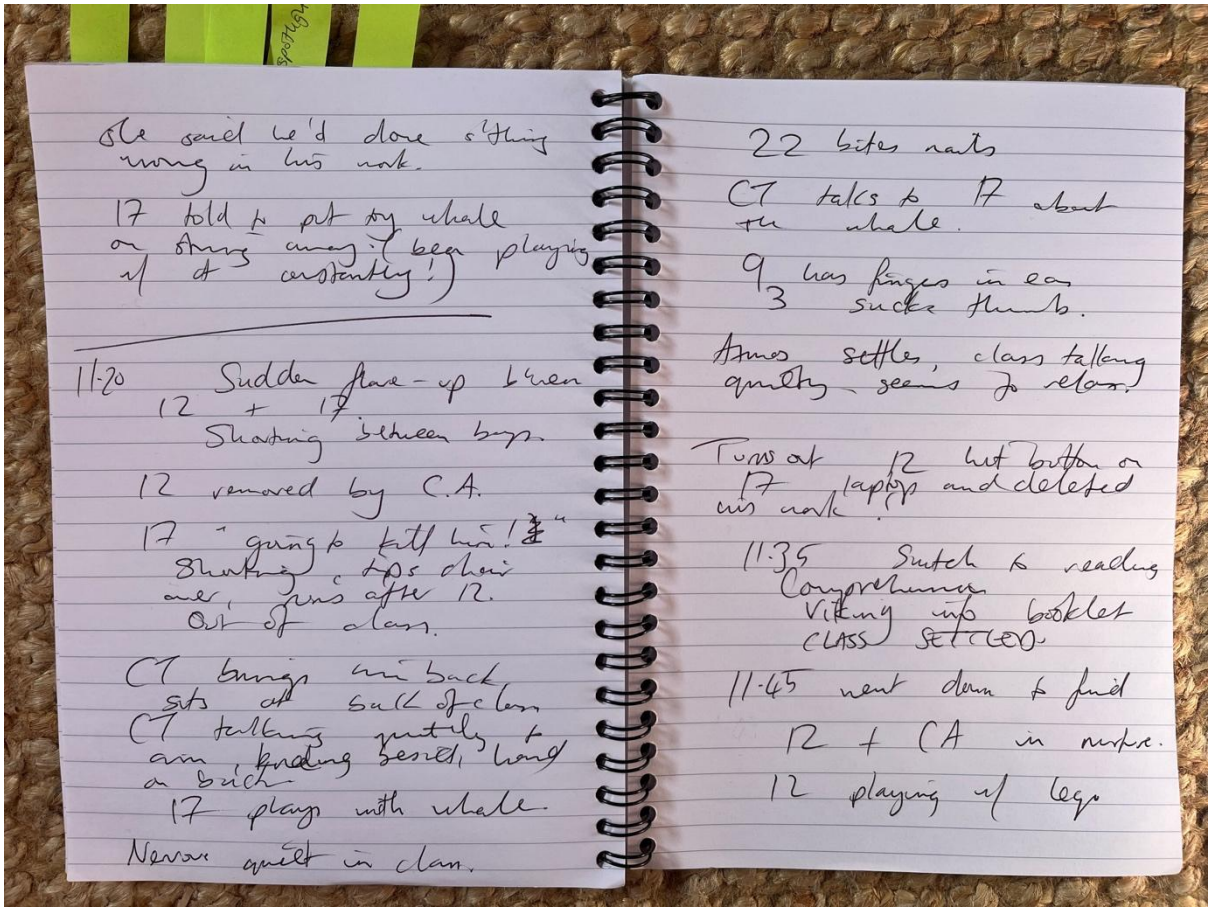


Figure 5.1: Observation notes, 23/05/23.

These notes describe a "sudden flare-up" and "shouting" between two boys in the class. The first one is removed by the classroom assistant, as the second shouts that he is "going to kill him!" The second boy then tips a chair over and runs out of the classroom, presumably in pursuit of the first. He is subsequently brought back in by Ms Simpson, who talks him down at the back of the classroom. The notes describe a "nervous quiet" in the class, with one child biting their nails, another with their fingers in their ears, and a third sucking their thumb. Once the situation had settled, Ms Simpson informed me that the problem was caused by the first boy deleting the second's work on his laptop.

Ms Simpson further described how she had been given training on the safe restraint of violent pupils and routinely had to restrain a pupil in her class. Although anger and aggression was widely described in the interviews, it was not the only issue:

> **Mr Bell:** What sort of issues do you commonly come across?
> **Ms Doyle:** Er, dysregulated behaviour, anger, aggression. The other side of it: anxiety.
>
> \- Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

This succinctly describes the perceived separation of externalising and internalising MHWB issues. For many members of staff, anxiety is the most prevalent issue they face:

> **Mr Bell:** Is anxiety the biggest issue that you see and if there are others how would you describe them?
> **Ms Brooke:** Erm…. (Sighs. Pause.) Anxiety is a big one. Erm, I mean, we've now got a wee group that children can go to… Where they go, and speak to a counsellor… and they make referrals for that and they all revolve around anxiety. Erm, so I would say anxiety is kind of the… (pause.) The main one.
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

> I would say mostly it comes through as anxiety, or worrying about things… erm… a lot of kids are anxious … you know that can then manifest in them not wanting to come to school… I would say yeah, I would say there's probably… well, in my experience, more kids that are more anxious now…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Several interviewees also referred to a perceived reduction in pupils' self-esteem or confidence, which has been linked to issues around anxiety (Manna *et al*., 2016; Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

> **Mr Reavey:** I think a *lot* of children are very *negative* about themselves. Erm, I suppose that comes under *aspects* of anxiety, certainly I suppose, or they all interlink in some way, but I think the children do have, quite a lot of them have got a low, a low view of themselves.
> **Mr Bell:** Self-esteem?
> Ah-hah. Self-esteem is an issue, erm, they don't think massively highly of themselves…
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

> I feel like… children nowadays are starting to be quite hard on themselves, quite down on themselves, erm, you know saying that they're not capable of doing things, and kind of perceive themselves quite negatively…
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

The third most commonly cited MHWB symptom amongst pupils is less clearly identifiable, but could be seen as a form of alienation, in that pupils seem to be distant or detached, isolated or difficult to make connections with:

> **Mr Bell:** What are the ways in which these issues manifest?
> **Ms Simpson:** Just them becoming quite *disengaged*, erm, don't want to enter into a conversation with you, they might sit and *cry*, and don't want to… tell you why, erm, you know, refusing to do certain things in class as well, erm, yeah… just be quite withdrawn…
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

This situation was most noticeably described by the staff at school four:

> You can see some really withdrawn children as well, which worries me, ones that you maybe wouldn't notice…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

> **Ms Holloway:** I see children sort of retreat into themselves, where, erm, they struggle to engage in conversation, they struggle to engage in things they previously would have enjoyed.
> **Mr Bell:** … Difficult to see how that manifests then?
> **Ms Holloway:** It.. it *can* be… it can just be a sort of… for want of a better word, *vacancy*… at times, like, so, you know, I'll be talking and I can see that they are not listening, or they're listening but not *hearing,* if you know what I mean? They're not able to take in what I'm saying…
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

> We see children with quite blank expressions on their face, quite… like, expressionless. So there's no smiling, no matter what you're talking to them about, and you're trying to be joking and things, they just have that kind of blank expression on their face.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

The fourth symptom described by school staff runs like a thread throughout many of the interviews: anomie. As anomie may manifest in multiple behaviours, including aggression and depression (Sârbu *et al*., 2022), one may see evidence for anomie in the previous sections on anger and anxiety. There are also correlations between anomie and alienation (Seeman, 1991). However, several broader features of anomic behaviour were also reported by school staff. The first of these is a general deterioration of respect for teachers:

> I would say there's been big changes just over the past, well three years… huge changes. Especially with regards to respect in school.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

> I would say that pupils have become… a lot less respectful to adults within the school… and behaviours escalate to an extent that they didn't used to be. Children used to… in classes… sit and listen and not answer teacher back but now that's a very common occurrence, which interrupts the learning in the classes… the way they sometimes address adults and what they think is appropriate and not appropriate has *changed…* somewhat.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

One teacher described how a deterioration of norms in his class could be contagious:

> But as the school environment deteriorates in terms of certain things… as lack of respect increases, other children *see* that and they look and kind of go, "Well actually, is that the way that I *can* act in here?"
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Mr Reavey also described how these views were sometimes shared by parents and carers:

> I do think society… in society there is a bit of a lack of respect for… the profession. And I think children probably overhear parents talk *negatively* at times maybe about teachers. I've had pupils say that, "My mum called you this!" Or, "My dad said you're a…." And you're like, "Oh, that's lovely!"
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

> This phrase, '*there is a lack of respect*'. That when boundaries are put in, did our pupils of twenty-odd years ago, fifteen years ago struggle with them? Yeah absolutely they would have, but there still would have been a bit more element of respect of, "Okay, I'll take this consequence," or the parents would maybe have been also supportive of us at times. That's not to say all parents of modern-day don't support us… but there feels a wee shift. Again, not all times and not all pupils. But there is certainly, it feels… or when you speak to other staff… You know, one teacher reported she was slapped full pelt in the face by a primary one pupil.
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Furthermore, some teachers described difficulties in engaging parents and carers:

> I feel there's a… lack of what used to come before with an engagement with the school, an engagement with the homework, an interest in pupil learning... when I think of open days… there's a real lacklustre feeling about who would come in… we've done loads of things, the school, through our poverty-proofing, the key families that we're trying to target are the ones who typically wouldn't turn up to things.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

Ms Kaminski described her horror at what she saw as a collapse in norms around the use of language by her pupils:

> **Ms Kaminski:** You know it's things like language? Erm, so the 'n word'…
> **Mr Bell:** Do you hear it being used here?
> **Ms Kaminski:** I hear it used here all the time.
> **Mr Bell:** All the time?
> **Ms Kaminski:** All the time. I've heard it in the corridors, a child shouting that word at another child who's white. I was with a child… a few weeks ago, who was calling his teacher the shortened version of the word 'Pakistani'… and then a 'b…', the 'b-word'. Erm, the teacher's white. So they're using racial…
> **Mr Bell:** So they've just adopted it as a general sort of…

Ms Kaminski: It's a.. it's an insult.

- Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

Another described the tension she felt as a result of the increasing unpredictability of the classroom violence she experienced:

> … you're kind of constantly on, a kind of knife-edge, you don't know when it's gonna happen, you used to have certain triggers, now it can be anything…
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

A similar description was given by a teacher in a different school:

> My class this year, generally haven't been too bad but you can see them quite emotional when things are just getting a bit too much for them. Maybe wee outbursts of shouting, swearing, storming out of the classroom… last year, it was *much* more explosive, the classroom atmosphere could turn on a knife-edge very, very quickly…
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Anger, anxiety, alienation and anomie can manifest in various and at times severe ways in pupils' behaviour. Other than instances of violence and harm to others, one of the most serious was that of self-harm amongst pupils, as described in several interviews:

> … self-harm, in primary six and seven girls has been a factor recently as well, things that never used to come up, erm, to the extent it is where they're actually harming… children bringing things into school that are not okay, and hurting themselves but also going into the toilets and bringing other girls involved…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

> Pupil last year was self-harming. You know, had unscrewed the blade of the sharpener and was sort of threatening to harm himself that way… Self-*loathing* dialogue, commentary about himself, you know, just, "I'm not good enough, I'm this, and that." Like, scrawling notes, ripping stuff up, erm… Harm to himself. Harm to other people. Erm, climbing up on the roof of the school, climbing over the fence, very unsafe…
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

However, in contrast to such obviously dangerous and alarming displays of behaviour, some staff thought that some of their pupils were trying to supress the issues they faced and conceal any outward signs that they were struggling with their feelings. The perceived attempts by pupils to suppress their issues forms the next subtheme within this chapter.

5.2.4: “MASK, MASK, MASK.”
INTERNALISING AND EXTERNALISING BEHAVIOURS.

Several members of staff in schools three and four described the phenomenon of ‘masking’, in which pupils who are experiencing MHWB issues attempt to conceal these issues whilst in school:

> **Ms Holloway:** So when the grandfather passed away… unless you knew the child, you wouldn’t have known that there was anything going on, there was quite a lot of masking of that behaviour. When you delved into it, when you had a conversation with her, she was able to give more detail and really articulate how she was feeling, but… there was a bit of a front put on, and I see that more in the girls in the class. So the girls in the class who have suffered bereavement, I don’t think you would be able to pick them out.
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Holloway:** The boys in the class… you potentially would be able to.
> **Mr Bell:** Do you think that masking that you talk about, is that simply that they are strong and resilient, or are they bottling things up in a way that might, might be detrimental to them?
> **Ms Holloway:** I would agree with the latter.
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

As Ms Holloway suggested, it was quite apparent that most staff members considered masking to be related to gender:

> **Mr Bell:** Are you saying that girls are more likely to suffer anxiety? Amongst the pupils you’ve taught, in your experience?
> **Mr Reavey:** I think so. Erm, But I also think they’re better at masking it as well. And that’s my bigger worry.
> **Mr Bell:** Some are flying under the radar.
> **Mr Reavey:** Massively.
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.
> **Mr Reavey:** And I think we’re calling it other things sometimes and not realising that that’s… what it is… girls *mask* these things *so*, so well. And you tend to find that you’ll find out a lot more by speaking to a parent about what happens when they go home.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

In addition to an association with girls, the other feature common to descriptions of masking is that of the sudden release of pent-up emotions once out of the school environment:

> The parents that are contacting us, saying, “We’re seeing this at home,” whereas sometimes in school, we’re not seeing it, but a lot of pupils are masking in school, and then, I’m hearing about… I’ve got a list of children where

> parents are saying, "We don't know what to do at home, it's awful, it's this, it's that…" because there's so much masking from their child in school, they're just going home and… exploding.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

However, as the following comments imply, some instances of 'masking' may be conflated with the internalisation of MHWB issues:

> **Mr Galloway:** I think girls have a better ability to mask behaviours and mask how they're feeling…
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.
> **Mr Galloway:** … whereas some boys might act outwardly…
> **Mr Bell:** Yeah.
> **Mr Galloway:** … and then you can sort of interpret that, but I think girls…
> **Mr Bell:** Internalise.
> **Mr Galloway:** Oh absolutely, yeah.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

This view seems to be supported by Ms Ahmad's description:

> So... I think we've got groups we see it in different ways. You get ones where you *see* the big behaviours, about their attachment, their trauma they've got in their life, and it's trying to support them and regulate them. Often, you've got the ones that mask, mask, mask…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

If this is the case, it might suggest that internalising and externalising behaviours associated with MHWB have an association with gender in schools three and four.

Having described the various ways that staff members see MHWB issues as manifesting amongst their pupils, it follows to then outline the factors that they perceive to be associated with these issues.

5.3. THEME THREE: PERCEIVED FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MHWB ISSUES. STAFF ARE AFFLICTED BY DOUBT AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT ISSUES FACING PUPILS.

Four subthemes emerged within this theme. Firstly, several members of staff gave accounts which would seem to lend support to theoretical mechanisms by which pupils suffer poor MHWB outcomes. Secondly, staff members described a range of factors commonly associated with those outcomes. Thirdly, links were drawn between pupils' MHWB issues and both *deprived* as well as *affluent* backgrounds. Fourthly, many staff members questioned whether increased *awareness* of MHWB accounted for some of the apparent deterioration.

5.3.1: "THAT ANXIETY CAN KIND OF SPILL OVER…" LINKS TO THEORETICAL MECHANISMS.

Analysis of interviews with school staff revealed statements which seem highly relevant to two mechanisms by which pupils might suffer MHWB issues. Firstly, some staff members saw stress as contagious, spreading from carers to children in a clear characterisation of the previously discussed Crossover Theory (Bolger *et al*., 1989):

> Lockdown brought a lot of anxiety in children, being at home, and… almost kind of feeding off parents' anxiety. They spent so much time together and the parents were anxious about money, or bereavement… children were there to witness all of that.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

> …what usually happens is, we see the change in the child, before we know what it is that has been the catalyst… there's an increase in arguments, and tension, and you know… All of the things that were *steady* in the house, are *not* any longer.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

> I think sometimes that comes from the family as well… I think sometimes that anxiety can kind of spill over… certainly previously when there's been like a downturn in the economy, people have lost their jobs, you see that sometimes manifesting in the children, because obviously the pressure at home is… they're picking up on it.
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

> **Ms Strand:** When I… was younger… you wouldn't have spoken about mum and dad's finances, you wouldn't have heard them talk about that, you wouldn't have heard about their work struggles, or what's going on with dad's job, or you know, he might be made redundant, or whatever's going on, we would never had heard any of that… but nowadays, people just speak so freely.
> **Mr Bell:** Do you have instances you can think of [in which] families are discussing openly these sorts of issues in front of children, and that's having a detrimental impact on the child?
> **Ms Strand:** Yes.
> **Mr Bell:** You do?
> **Ms Strand:** I do. So, within the [ASN unit] we have multiple children who come in to us and say, and tell us stuff that's going on at home… children who'll come in and tell you about their, kind of, things that are going on in their life, or… "We're poor," or "We've got no money," or you know, that these conversations come up quite a lot, when we're dealing with young people.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Testimony which seems to support another mechanism, Runciman's (1966) theory of Relative Deprivation, came from several staff members. Several staff spoke of issues arising from pupils comparing themselves to peers:

> I think that the pupils that have anxiety, especially as they're getting older, they've got, as they're going through their hormones, this… this comparison that they've got to other pupils that comes into play as well, so there's always conversations about, "Oh, I'm the brightest at this", "I'm better than you at this…"
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

> Their self-esteem is quite low, because they've become aware that children around them are able, to, you know, read and complete work better than they can… that's what they say, you know, that people can do things better than me, and they find that quite hard.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

> **Ms Strand:** Certainly as they get to the upper school, I think that's when we kind of notice the biggest change and the biggest *dip* [in MHWB].
> **Mr Bell:** Okay.
> **Ms Strand:** When they become less ego-centrical and worried about their whole wee world and they start to become aware of the world around them, and they start to realise that there's differences between them and other people, erm, I think that's when it becomes quite apparent.
> **Mr Bell:** So, like a greater awareness and the comparisons that are drawn as a result of that?
> **Ms Strand:** Yeah.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Detrimental comparisons made by pupils inevitably extend into the digital domain:

> **Mr Reavey:** I think they over-analyse everything. But then you can link that back *again* to the social media aspect of… the perfect, everything seems perfect on there, and you're not, it's not real…
> **Mr Bell:** So, that I suppose… that's something to do with the comparison that they are making between themselves and a fictional other really isn't it? Do you.. is that a fair assessment?
> **Mr Reavey:** Yeah! Ah-hah… And you see that, and you start to question, "Why do I live like this, when that's what it could look like," and then you feel… And then it's the whole feeling of, "It's not fair," and that brings out a lot of emotions as well.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Mr Galloway associated this tendency to make online comparisons with girls in his class:

> I think through the social media, I think girls are definitely the ones that are looking at what's out there, they are being bombarded with images… there's a constant comparison, when they're having their chat with their friends, there's a comparison between each other, I think it probably impacts girls more…
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

The potential risks involved in the use of social media by pupils is a commonly held view amongst school staff, who frequently portray it as one of several factors associated with MHWB issues amongst pupils. As has been described in section 3.5, the literature supports this view that social media use is associated with detrimental MHWB outcomes; this will be discussed in more detail in chapter eight. The use of digital devices, as well as several other factors associated with pupils' MHWB, are described in the next subtheme.

5.3.2. "A MASSIVE WEB OF THINGS."
PERCEIVED FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MHWB.

Interviewees were asked about what they thought might be behind the changes in pupil MHWB that they had described. As such factors are widely accepted to be myriad (Pearlin, 1989), it is perhaps unsurprising that a wide range were identified by school staff:

> … there's actually just… it's a massive web of things… When you start to unpick it, oh, there's something else, there's something else…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

However, many of the suggested factors can be grouped into three broad areas: societal changes, digital devices and the internet, and home circumstances. The first of these can be summed up as a general lamentation of the way society has apparently pivoted towards an individualistic consumerism:

> **Ms Strand:** I think there's been a real shift in society as well… There's not the same…. because there's not the same community spirit as there used to be, years ago.
> **Mr Bell:** Ah, okay. Ah-hah.
> **Ms Strand:** I feel like… (sighs.) Here's me getting really deep and philosophical, but… there seems to be a whole shift, that family's not the centre, and it's not all about family… it's… we… idolise material things. And I feel there's a lot of that in it as well, and we're too busy with, "I need the phone, the latest phone,"… and I get instant access to everything in life, and then it's like, "I need to have the best T.V., and my kids need to wear the best clothes," and there's such a focus on that… that I think just the core beliefs of family unit and the family values have sort of been lost a wee bit.
> **Mr Bell:** So materialism is undermining this?
> **Ms Strand:** Yeah.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

> Just general consumerism. Erm… the politics? Politics, budgeting, money, where we are politically, erm, just all sectors, no matter who I speak to… friends, no matter what profession they're in, everything just feels… stretched… It's not just even children, it feels like the mental health of *adults* as well, of how adults cope… with things has come, is just *changing*.
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Several observations about societal change were linked to the rise of digital devices, social media and the perceived impact on pupils:

> I think social media… 'cause they spend hours on it, social media has a *huge* impact, and I don't think it's ever had a positive impact on people… I don't do social media because I know how warped it can be, and these kids are still developing their brain, they're still developing their sense of self, and I think it becomes really warped, with their reality T.V., their social media, this idea of what they 'should be', having all this money, how they should look… when their brains are still developing, it's got a… oh, a huge, huge impact on them. Huge impact.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

In addition to linking digital devices with perceived harm to her pupils' MGWB, Ms Simpson offered her assessment of the prevalence of internet usage within her class:

> **Ms Simpson:** I also think social media has got a huge role to play in it [changes to MHWB] as well… And the fact that kids have access to tablets and phones, erm, so easily.
> **Mr Bell:** Do you think that most of the kids in your class… who are aged, nine or ten?
> **Ms Simpson:** Mm-hmm.
> **Mr Bell:** Uh-huh, think most of the kids in your class have got internet able… devices?
> **Ms Simpson:** Absolutely, yeah. Even if it's through their Xbox or through their Playstation, they are all definitely using it.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

Mr Reavey described his views on the developmental impact of screens on young minds, and suggested that they were being over-used by some of his pupils:

> **Mr Reavey:** Erm, and I would put a lot of that down to… er, the use of screens.
> **Mr Bell:** Social media?
> **Mr Reavey:** I would say the problem is a lot of children are pacified by screens from a very, very young age… if you really think about it, a child at a young age, when they get something and it's that stimulating and bright and flashy and it brings you in… and it has all these endorphins… when you take that away, they

> really can't handle it, so when they're at a young age, I think that plays quite a lot…. But you've got children that sit and *scroll* on TikTok, on YouTube… I think that's *terrible* for the brain, it's… you're talking children at the age of three and four having their own YouTube channels and things like that… Like I have children in my class who I'll say, "What did you get up to at the weekend?"
> "I played my Xbox all weekend."
> Like, "Did you do anything else?"
> "No. I was like, I went twelve hours in a row." And you're just like, phhh.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Ms Strand clearly agreed, and considered that people were becoming dependent upon their use:

> … I've definitely seen an increase in people's *addictions* to their phones, basically. And that's what it is, there's a real addiction to these devices.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

However, it is the final area of perceived factors which was the most commonly cited, that of links to home circumstances:

> The impact that… er, family break-ups can have on pupils is… *huge…* I've just dealt with a situation there that came to light that, erm, a boy within a step family at the moment… with stepdad and new baby… struggling with anger issues and is being violent towards his mum. And he knows he's doing this and… he just can't seem to control his anger… and this is just my personal opinion, but for the kids that jump piggyback backwards and forwards from dad's house to mum's house, and it's different routines in each… and there's animosity between mom and dad, that can *only* be a negative impact on the mental health of children.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

Ms Lees had been describing the support she offered to a group of pupils who had ASD diagnoses. However, when asked about this, she seemed to imply that pupils who had been impacted by home circumstances required greater levels of support than other groups:

> **Mr Bell:** Do you think they [children with ASD] form the majority of the children that you're helping?
> **Ms Lees:** (Pause.) No, I don't actually, no. I'm helping a lot of children… with separation, that they're struggling with parents splitting up and parents moving on and you know, having new girlfriends and boyfriends and just that wider family community. I've got a number of children that are, struggling with that right through the school… and we've had, erm, parents who have… died recently, we've got children who've lost, erm, more recently a dad, just before that a mum died, and there's someone I'm supporting just now who's parent's very, very ill as well. So that… that takes up quite a lot of my time because they need so much support.

- Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

Similarly, Ms Chan also considered that the pupils she supported within her school's nurture group were affected by change and uncertainty amongst their family relationships:

> … I know that in our perspective here, there's a lot of children… that may have been staying with one parent… and then they have moved to live with the other parent… so it's big changes for them… and family, like relationships breaking down, and new partners, and different family units I think can affect the… sort of attachment that children have with people and the trust they have for people… and, erm, that can impact on their self-esteem and how they behave in school.
>
> - Ms Chan (School 3, Nurture teacher.)

This issue of transient family relationships is frequently cited as having a detrimental effect upon pupils' MHWB. Bereavement, addiction, and having a parent in jail were also mentioned; these are all factors which might be expected to have an adverse effect on children. However, another area of interest which emerged concerned an increase not only in the *expected* issues, but also in what might be seen as the *unexpected*.

5.3.3: "BECAUSE… NO. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE BECAUSE IS." THE EXPECTED… AND UNEXPECTED.

A minority of interviewees described how MHWB issues amongst pupils tended to be less prevalent amongst those from affluent backgrounds:

> I definitely think that… of the minority of families that we've got that I would say are in kind of professional jobs… I'm meaning like teachers, doctors, lawyers, you know that kind of 'high spec.' professional… the children that we've got and within families there, are ones that do not come to our attention other than for good things.. does that make sense? Because… No. I don't know what the because is… but… there… We assume that life for them is what you would say is a normal happy nurturing household.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

However, not all interviewees agreed:

> **Mr Bell:** Do you have any views about whether MHWB issues affect some groups of children disproportionately? And if so, which ones?
> **Ms Strand:** (Pause. Sighs.) I don't think it discriminates anymore? I think previously, in years gone by, it might have been something that was more linked with your children in deprivation, or, you know, or children from traumatic backgrounds, or difficulties, but I notice… a real shift, or spread… of it? From children who are coming from families who you would think, you

know… you don't know what goes on behind closed doors, of course you don't but you would imagine that….
Mr Bell: So do you think that in the past you might have been more likely to be dealing with children, er, experiencing mental wellbeing issues, who were from deprived backgrounds?
Ms Strand: Yes.
Mr Bell: And now you are encountering more and more children from, perhaps affluent backgrounds?
Ms Strand: Yes.

- Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Several school staff members expressed their surprise at this apparent increase in prevalence of pupils who suffered MHWB issues despite coming from relatively secure homes:

… although I've got a small class there's *quite a lot* in my class that I would say… are struggling, emotionally, erm, just due to things going on at home… a lot more children in my class as well that you know, kind of present with, like anxiety… erm, you know, for no obvious reason, you know they've got an okay background…

- Ms Simpson (School 1, Class Teacher.)

Ms Holloway: But then you've also got likes of… [third boy's name]… and his mental health is… he really struggles with it. I don't know if you noticed the sentence he wrote out, on his desk, I'll show…
Mr Bell: No, I haven't.
Ms Holloway: Like, so, they were practicing spelling words this morning, and… hold on [crosses classroom to pupil's desk and reads sentence pupil wrote on his desk.] "My life is sometimes busy and too loud."
Mr Bell: Ahhh.
Ms Holloway: Erm, but, on paper… looking at his family life, he's got a mum and dad… and a sister, he's got the sort of… almost nuclear family… who care and support him… Yeah, d'you know, like, they are, I think he is SIMD eight or something like that… on paper he's not a child you would expect to have such mental health issues… yet he does, he's one of our pupils who are, erm, on the waiting list for the [external counselling agency].

- Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Although several such interviews convey a sense that affluent pupils suffering MHWB issues is a somewhat novel and unanticipated phenomenon, the literature does lend support to the views expressed here. There is little doubt that poverty and deprivation have long been associated with anxiety (Ridley *et al*., 2020); as such these could be seen as the entirely expected cases. However, there is also some evidence that children from affluent backgrounds experienced steeper declines in their MHWB than other groups during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Miall *et al*., 2023). This sense that some of what school staff are facing is novel and unexpected may connect with the fourth area of interest within this

theme, which expresses some doubt and uncertainty around the extent of the MHWB crisis affecting pupils.

5.3.4: "*I'VE GOT ANXIETY, AN' WHATEVER!*" IS IT REAL?

Almost all interviewees questioned the true scale of the MHWB problems faced by their pupils, and most framed the question in strikingly similar terms: has the situation deteriorated as much as seems, or is it that we are simply more aware of it now?

> … there are many more children now who have been identified and have diagnoses of dyslexia, autism, ADHD… I don't know why that is. I don't know whether it's because we're better at spotting it? Or, because all of these things are becoming more prevalent, and if so, why?
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

> So it seems more pronounced, and I think there's a lot more pupils that are on our, erm, ASN log for sort of emotional wellbeing concerns, but I think it's because we're a lot more sensitive to it now…
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

> Or is it because we're now more aware of it, we're noticing… children you maybe wouldn't have noticed before… I suppose, as a staff, we've had a lot of training about kind of trauma-informed practice, and attachment theories, are we more attuned to it now and we're noticing it more as well?
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

> I definitely think it feels as if it's more visible nowadays. Erm, but then… I don't know if that's partly to do with my *own* journey, and the job that I do, and… Am I spotting things more? Or am I more aware now, than possibly I was in my earlier career?
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Some staff suggested that this level of increased awareness allowed the pupils to use the issue as an excuse:

> … but I also think that the *down* side of us talking much more about it now is that you have young people that will say, "*I've got anger issues!*" Or, "*I've got anxiety, an whatever!*"
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

Ms Brooke exemplified the type of dilemma school staff members faced when dealing with this uncertainty:

> **Ms Brooke:** Sports Day. There's an example. A child's really quite upset and anxious about it, and you kind of go well, what do you do there? As a teacher

do you put them under the stress of going, "No. You're doing it. Like, get on with it." But this child may… have quite strong, big feelings.
Mr Bell: Yeah.
Ms Brooke: Is that a mental health issue? Or is that this child just really doesn't like it and they still just need to get on with it?

- Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Almost all interviewees voiced similar hesitancy about the true extent of issues their pupils were facing. However, when probed about whether the apparent increase in prevalence and severity of MHWB issues could be explained *only* by this increase in awareness and freedom to discuss the topic, or whether there was in fact an actual increase in issues faced by pupils, most members of staff held a similar view:

It is a bit of both.

- Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

Having presented the findings from interviews with school staff that relate to the *issues* that pupils face, the focus of the next chapter will turn to their descriptions about how they and their schools are trying to *meet* those needs: the response.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART TWO.

SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RESPONSE TO PUPILS' NEEDS.

This chapter will contribute to the overall thesis by focusing upon another of the stated study aims, that of understanding each school's *response* to the MHWB issues faced by their pupils. In so doing, it will address RQ3 and RQ4 (see section 3.7), although clearly only from school staff members' perspectives. It is in the comparison of these perspectives with those of the pupils, as outlined in chapter seven, that evidence arises which relates to another of the present thesis' main arguments, that of valuing pupil voice. The divergent views and attitudes which become clear over the next two chapters inform this point, which will be discussed in chapter eight.

Having outlined three themes which describe the issues which school staff perceive their pupils face, the next three relate to how staff members are trying to respond to those issues. The fourth theme describes *planned* responses, in terms of structural support and curricular programmes. The fifth theme details a more *personal* level of response; how school staff tailor their approaches to meet individual needs. The sixth theme outlines various aspects of *deficits* that school staff described in relation to their response; in systems, themselves and others.

6.1. THEME FOUR: THE PLANNED RESPONSE. THE ROLE OF CURRICULAR PROGRAMMES AND OUTSIDE AGENCIES.

All staff members described various forms of strategic, structural responses designed to meet pupils' MHWB needs. There were notable areas of commonality across all four schools within this theme: all of the schools used either an authority-wide or whole-school health and wellbeing (HWB) programme, or both. All four schools also relied upon the services of a wide range of outside agencies which offered targeted MHWB support for pupils. Finally, all four schools had either a nurture room or an additional support needs (ASN) unit, with dedicated staff members assigned to work exclusively in this capacity.

6.1.1: "I DON'T MIND HOW THAT'S BEING DONE." AUTHORITY AND SCHOOL LEVEL CURRICULAR PROGRAMMES.

When asked about how their school's planned lessons supported pupil's MHWB, most staff members began their answer by describing an authority-wide or whole-school programme:

> Well, we follow our… [name of authority] health and wellbeing framework… That's across [name of authority], we'll all use that.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

Schools two, three and four also used a whole-school HWB package of planned lessons:

> So within the classrooms themselves they use the 'Bounce Back!' scheme.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

> The big one that comes to mind is our PATHS programme, which is from primary one right through the school…
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

However, in keeping with the tenets of a Curriculum for Excellence, it is clear that teachers enjoy a degree of autonomy in terms of how they teach:

> We've got resources and we've got planners, but… as with everything else, it ultimately is coming back to the experiences and outcomes… you know, as long as those are being covered… I don't mind how that's being done.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

Although senior leadership team members mainly talked about the whole-school programmes, class teachers sometimes gave the impression that they preferred to exercise the autonomy Ms Clarke had alluded to when planning HWB lessons:

> We do PATHS lessons as well, and I'll be honest, I think they are a bit… tedious… I tend to find that… you do lessons like health and wellbeing, you need to maybe start with a base and then let it go in the direction that benefits the children most…
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Indeed, most of the class teachers seemed more enthusiastic when describing bespoke lessons which they had chosen in order to meet the specific needs of their class, rather than when discussing the school or authority level lessons:

> **Ms Simpson:** So there's somebody that I follow on Instagram… she's actually got her own resources which I used quite a lot last year.
> **Mr Bell:** These are activities that you're cherry picking yourself?
> **Ms Simpson:** Yeah, that I picked out that I thought were really good, and appropriate to the stage…
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

Several staff members described delivering their own activities designed to teach resilience or equity:

> At the start of the year I always do a bit about teamwork and fairness and equity and you know, so we go through those kinds of lessons because obviously what works for, you know, one child, doesn't work for the rest and then it combats that "Well, that's not fair, why do they get to do that and, you know, why do I not?"
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Ms Brooke: So this year, or not just this year but a few years… I've done a lesson 'equity versus equality'.
Mr Bell: Mmm. Mm-hmm.
Ms Brooke: And showing the children, and…
Mr Bell: It's very important.
Ms Brooke: You sort of lead them, "Oh, is treating everyone the same, correct?"
They're like, "Yeah! That's Fair!"
And you're like, "Great." And you do a wee activity and they quickly realise, hang on, this isn't fair that we're all treated the same.
Mr Bell: Ah-hah.
Ms Brooke: Then that leads into equity. And then I try and… I apply that across into real-life situations in a classroom, of going, "Well see when I say *this* to *that* person of the class, but yet I change the instruction and say this to this person, is that fair?" And they're… it helps them to go, "Right, okay, yeah that is fair."

- Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Finally, all four schools had a nurture room (or, in the case of school four, an ASN unit which incorporated this role). These were clearly relied upon by staff members:

> We've got a principal teacher based in there… and she's there to support pupils as and when required… And that's used… quite heavily, across the school.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

Ms Doyle described the importance of the nurture room in her school as a quiet, safe space which offered pupils both a refuge from, as well as a bridge to the classroom environment:

> So sometimes they go there [nurture room] because it's the only actual space we've got, and a door that can be shut, and give them time to calm down, or whatever… but it also is a space for the likes of the children that need a soft start in the morning, that just cannot cope with going into a class. There's a wee boy in this class with *huge* anxiety issues, he comes in in the morning and needs half an hour before he actually can be fed back into the class again.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T)

The nurture rooms supported pupils with a wide range of needs. Most of the schools still managed to deliver a taught programme of planned social and emotional learning to targeted pupils within nurture classes. However, the level of need in school 1 had impacted the ability to deliver this sort of teaching:

> … some of the lower d… not lower 'less important', but the lower *under the radar kids*, are not necessarily getting the amount of input they deserve, because time is taken up dealing with the crises as they happen, which *has* to be done…

- Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

Nurture rooms were not the only resource struggling to meet pupils' needs in the face of high level of demand. School staff described various outside agencies which offered targeted support to their pupils; although diverse in nature, they were all under significant pressure, with lengthy waiting lists a common issue. These outside agencies form a significant area of interest within this theme and will be described in the next section.

6.1.2: "I FEEL LIKE I CALL THEM ALL THE TIME!" THE ROLE OF OUTSIDE AGENCIES.

A wide range of external support organisations were listed by school staff:

> So... [name of programme] which is a [name of authority] initiative… we've got [first charitable organisation], [second charitable organisation], lots of different people there, that are able to support children and families, which is fantastic… and more and more and more… So, this year, so far, we've made two referrals that have been picked up by them… children that we've referred to [name of authority programme] for their team to help support.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

> We've got a really good relationship with the educational psychology team… School nurse… social work, [first charitable organisation], [second charitable organisation], [local authority community support group], [third charitable organisation], our home link team… gosh who else is there? I feel like I call them all the time! (Laughs.) I think it is about that relationship with your outside agencies and trying to make sure you're approachable and getting on with everybody so you can get the best for the children. 'Cause you really need this team, now, like, it's more than the school level…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

This view that outside expertise and support were very much needed was common. However, there were also many expressions of frustration as some of the outside agencies were too stretched to offer reliable help:

> We had [name of outside charitable agency] coming in… the worker was just trying to get a relationship and a rapport with this pupil, who at that point was *really* struggling mental health-wise, self-harm wise… But what was so hard was, the worker had to stop, had to terminate it because of caseload issues and things like this, and the support had to be pulled. So it's so hard … to get a little bit of external help, and then it's pulled, it's gone… these are the most fragile children that you're trying to help… and they're the ones then, the support comes and then you take it away.
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

In particular, the ability of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to support school pupils came in for widespread criticism:

> The waiting lists are… beyond huge… a child can get put on a waiting list, but then they don't hear back for a year, they don't hear back for two years, and it gets to the point where a kid is at the end of primary school and still doesn't have any input from CAMHS.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

> CAMHS. Mmm. CAMHS, again… I find it frustrating with CAMHS, because now… [they are] not accepting new referrals, unless there is a *huge* wellbeing need… so I find I'm a bit frustrated there, because… I don't know where to go, d'you know… Like, that wee one that I was talking about… I know it's because that service is so overwhelmed, but… I know I need to get that pupil the help *now,* not sat on a three-year waiting list.
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

In the relatively affluent catchment around school two, Ms Clarke described how some parents had decided to take matters into their own hands:

> **Mr Bell:** CAMHS?
> **Ms Clarke:** Yes… (sighs.) Such a long waiting list. Erm, such a long waiting list. And… and that's really difficult, erm, and you kind of have to get *on* the waiting list… What… what we're finding, is that… some parents… who are able to, are going privately.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

The number and range of outside agencies which schools seem to be depending upon for expert and targeted support is clearly indicative of the level of need amongst pupils, as is the waiting times families are enduring to access some of these agencies. In the meantime, school staff must attempt to support their pupils through whatever issues they experience as best they can. The personal and highly contextual means by which staff members seek to achieve this forms the fifth theme and is outlined in the next section of this chapter.

6.2. THEME FIVE: THE PERSONAL RESPONSE. ADAPTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE AT THE HEART OF SCHOOLS' RESPONSE.

The personal response school staff members make in order to meet their pupils' needs is often by definition individual, or at least a customised version of a broader approach. They are therefore quite disparate in nature, with almost every staff member describing a different approach. However, they can be grouped together in three broad subthemes. The first is the adaptations school staff described which were designed to better accommodate pupils' needs. The second is one particular form of adaptation, which was so frequently alluded to that it emerged as a subtheme in itself: the need to mitigate the detrimental

effect of the 'spotlight effect'. Finally, all school staff described the overarching importance of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with their pupils.

6.2.1 "YOU NEED TO BE THINKING ABOUT *ADJUSTING*…" ADAPTING SCHOOLS TO FIT THE PUPILS.

Several members of staff described a situation in which an apparently increasing number of pupils seemed unable to cope with a typical school environment:

> Some kids were just not… coping for whatever reason in mainstream class, maybe just the family circumstances and things.
>
> - Ms Brooke (school 4, Class teacher.)

> They struggle, they struggle with the routine of school and that can be a factor in their anxiety, they just struggle with a school day. And that can be a contributing factor… because of their needs and how their needs are met in a mainstream school can be tricky…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

> **Ms Kaminski:** I think… they [the school SLT] seem to be very aware… that some kids just can't cope with the traditional methods that the others can cope with and I find that they are very accommodating, but the *numbers* of kids who are now not coping, the numbers of kids who are just wandering out of class, or can't be in class, *that's* getting a bit… alarming. And then… I honestly don't know what else they *can do*. It gets to the point where you're saying… is this just not working?
> **Mr Bell:** The model doesn't fit any more.
> **Ms Kaminski:** Yes. Yes… so that boy that I told you in primary seven… he comes in in the morning and goes home at quarter past twelve every day…
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.
> **Ms Kaminski:** He doesn't come in on a Thursday morning because he can't cope with assembly, at all, so he's only in for a very short time… and when he's in, erm, he's… disrupting the whole class…
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.
> **Ms Kaminski:** … and breaking things, throwing things, shouting, swearing… the language is *awful*. Like, I would be upset as a parent, if my children were being exposed to that on a daily basis. I would really be upset, erm… I just sometimes think their needs are actually too great, for the school, you can't blame… the school.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant).

> I have a wee one who's thinking about home schooling because she cannot cope any more.
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

Either as a direct response to individual situations such as these, or as a more general strategy designed to promote an inclusive ethos, the overwhelming majority of staff members described a range of adaptations which had been made in order to meet the needs of their pupils:

> You need to be thinking about *adjusting*… The child struggling to go into the classroom, you need to adjust for them…
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

These adjustments can be grouped into three categories; adaptations to the school environment, the curriculum, or to general pedagogy. The first of these tends to involve changes to the classroom itself:

> So each classroom's meant to have sort of that furnishing, carpets down, that sort of calm corner, that quiet area…
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

> **Ms Holloway:** In every classroom there's always a wee comfy seat and there's like a sort of calm area…
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Holloway:** … the 'zen den'… they're calling it.
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Ms Holloway went on to describe how staff members from school 4 had applied elements of the Neurosequential Model in Education (Perry, 2020) to their classrooms:

> So it's just trying to make sure that the children are coming into a calm environment, so there's not loads of clutter… there's ambient lighting… fairy lights, or lamps… the backgrounds are.. natural colours… trying as much as possible to have greenery in the class…
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Ms Ahmad offered some more detail about this approach:

> We have the soft start in the morning, we've got the sixty beats per minute music on, we regulate the tempo of music, staff know children should have a structured day, there's a routine no matter what class you're in, should have a morning starter, a visual timetable should be up, so it's that feeling of safety and security for children, they know it's predictable, 'boring is best' as they say…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

In addition to these changes to the environment, adjustments were made to the curriculum to meet some pupils' needs:

> There's a wee bit of… er, leeway in what directions they go with lessons. I think, er… adapting the curriculum and differentiation of work in the different *types* of activity… I think a teacher needs to be aware of all the different styles within the class… er, and be willing to adapt to suit that.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

> For some of them… it's just a completely different timetable. I was then told… actually the plan is that he's taken out. And so they go and kick a ball or run around… just to actually keep him down and calm, and not… causing utter chaos.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

> Yeah, so, trying to find an alternative curriculum where… appropriate, so the wee boy, he didn't have a bike… his mum and dad had separated, mum was unfortunately terminally ill and he wasn't able to cope with the class environment at the time, so we took him out and you know… he was baking and he was doing things like that but then we were also every day having him out on [the bike the school had given him] and teaching him how to… look after his bike, ride his bike… and you know, that was really fulfilling because you were able to then make a difference to that wee boy.
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Other pupils benefited from more modest interventions:

> **Ms Holloway:** Activities-wise, personally I think it comes down to the class, like… I know that my class last year loved to perform. At any opportunity! (Laughs.) So they loved to sing or to dance or… to do a show and that really built their self-esteem and their confidence… Whereas, this class… they love art activities… we would do art as part of the curriculum anyway but I try and weigh it quite heavily towards that… I try and make more opportunities for that 'cause I know that that's where they get their joy.
> **Mr Bell:** So you're tailoring the curriculum to suit the individual mental health and wellbeing needs of a particular class?
> **Ms Holloway:** Yeah.
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Some staff members described the tension they perceived between meeting their pupils' wellbeing and academic needs:

> But you're also having to spend a lot of your day trying to help children… obviously it's really important [to get] a relationship with them in terms of them feeling comfortable in the classroom, that's a lot of your day spent on that but, maybe you're not getting the education aspect, see that, that juggling… that balancing act that you've got to do to make sure you get both, I think it does make it quite difficult…
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Mr Singh: I think, you know, there's a lot of pressure sometimes though as well, in, you know, 'getting through the curriculum…'
Mr Bell: Hmm-mm.
Mr Singh: So… making sure you cover all the Es and Os you need to cover in a term, and actually sometimes for wellbeing, it might… just… be…
Mr Bell: Yes…
Mr Singh: … spending *time* with… you know, not necessarily because you need to get something done, or achieve something but… you know, just that *holistic* view of people…

- Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

In particular, the pressures staff members described as a result of tracking and assessment targets came in for criticism:

> You know if we haven't got the wellbeing right, the children are not going to learn. So, if there was less pressure coming from *way* on high about… attainment, having to be at this specific part at this specific time, and we could give more time over to wellbeing, we'd be able to close the gap. But it might not be… in *their* timeframe, but in the *long* run, I think that would improve things overall.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

As Ms Brooke explained, there may be a risk that the pressure on school staff to meet pupils' attainment targets could indirectly be felt by the pupils themselves, which might subsequently impact their MHWB:

Ms Brooke: So... that pupil we haven't seen for a few weeks now.
Mr Bell: I see.
Ms Brooke: I know if he *does* return, it will literally be trying to give him a positive experience in school…
Mr Bell: Yeah, just anything…
Ms Brooke: And not… expecting too much and that was similar to a pupil last year as well who was… all the while you've got management breathing down your neck looking for on-track pupils and percentages…
Mr Bell: Mm-hmm.
Ms Brooke: And the pupil *last* year could have been an on-track pupil but his mental health was such that he missed so much, his confidence was low, he *was* making mistakes… but with stability and teaching the potential is there. But it still just went so unstable, spiralled, erm… You're putting pupils under pressure to *meet* a statistic to appease someone somewhere, but by trying to push the work up, and make it to the level you should be at, you can sometimes be putting them under… undue pressure.

- Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Taken together, these comments imply that staff members feel that whilst there may be some flexibility allowed in the case of children with the most serious MHWB issues, teachers

are generally under significant pressure to meet attainment targets. Furthermore, in many cases school staff members perceive some tension between securing attainment and positive MHWB for their pupils, with some feeling that the emphasis is on the former at the expense of the latter. Despite the implication that they feel somewhat constrained in terms of adjusting the curriculum they practiced, almost all staff members discussed their ability to make general pedagogical adaptations:

> If we recognise that pupils are finding things difficult, we're quite willing to adapt our practice.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

For many staff members, this meant embracing new styles, activities and tools designed to alleviate the pressures of school felt by many pupils:

> You see a lot of teachers using things like mindfulness… having regulation breaks… people would have sort of, quiet corners or sensory corners, fidgets… some of the teachers are using music as a way of therapy… we've got some individual CD players, retro style! (Laughs.) That they can, you know, put their headphones on, and then listen to their music…
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

Some have found these adaptations easier than others:

> We have… just been much more… aware that kids might need to sit and fidget and they're totally still switched-in and engaging, or… I'm quite a stickler for this, probably old-school teacher… I've had to adjust my thing of going, "No. That's alright, just let him sit and fiddle with that…" So I'm almost having to adjust my expectations of what's acceptable in the class… so it's… it's *me* as a practitioner, having to change as well, of going, "No, that's okay…"
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher).

Ms Brooke went on to describe the difficulties of trying to accommodate varying and sometimes competing needs across an entire class:

> **Ms Brooke:** This phrase of trying to 'Get It Right For Every Child' is *such* a difficult phrase. We're never going to be able to get it right for every child, and I think that's where you feel you're dividing yourself up in so many things… the classroom's too noisy so this child needs ear defenders but actually that's not right for this child, because, no, they quite like it when it's chatty, and this and that, so… Some child needs flexible seating, they need to stand up, but that doesn't work for this pupil so you're trying to constantly tie yourself in knots to meet everyone's needs…
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Brooke:** But you know that you still will be sort of failing in some way…
> **Mr Bell:** Thirty three different needs, you can't…
> **Ms Brooke:** Yep.

Mr Bell: In a class.
Ms Brooke: Should be more… I wish we could rephrase it to 'Doing Your Best For Every Child'?

- Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

In some cases, the needs of pupils demanded a much greater level of adaptation, involving the use of multiple strategies:

Ms Ahmad: I had a wee one last year who… found a mainstream class *really* difficult, erm, so he had.. almost like a privacy board, he really struggled with… the classroom environment…
Mr Bell: Physically isolate him from… like a sensory block?
Ms Ahmad: Yeah. Ah-hah. Like a sensory block. We had that.
Mr Bell: I see.
Ms Ahmad: Erm, I was lucky last year, I had a kind of side room…
Mr Bell: I see.
Ms Ahmad: And he would have to have that time out from a class, and he had to have that dosage of the classroom, and then that sensory rest.
Mr Bell: Yeah.
Ms Ahmad: And that was the way to keep him regulated throughout the day, that he had sensory rest. In the class he had ear defenders, his board, timetable… he was *very* into his laptop, and that's something that made him feel comfortable. So it was about… structuring his day to the 'Nth degree' to make sure he would feel safe, but also providing that sensory rest time, 'cause he just needed that… You could see him, [inaudible, trembling?], you're like, "Here's your time out card," and he would go and have that… the mainstream classroom *is* overwhelming, to a lot of these children, and there's a lot going on in it, erm… but I was so glad for that room because I had a few [pupils] that I had the time to go, "I can see you're struggling right now, I wonder if you'd find it better to go and work next door just now…" This other boy really benefited from sensory rest because he was just completely overwhelmed and anxious, picking, and he just had to be… out the classroom. You think, *so* many needs, so we're trying to… we're trying to work with educational psychologists, we can just devise this environmental checklist and this structured day to try and support *all*, but then there's obviously the exceptions where you just need that little bit more, and… It's a *lot*, though, it is a lot.

- Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

In this account, Ms Ahmad clearly describes how several of the pupils in her class benefited from sensory separation from the rest of the class, either by the use of a privacy board or by relocation to another room. This bears similarities to the next point of interest that arose from analysis of staff members' interviews. Almost all interviewees referred in some form to the need to avoid drawing attention to pupils who were suffering MHWB issues. The risks posed by pupils feeling that they were 'in the spotlight', and the various means by which staff mitigated this effect, forms the next subtheme.

6.2.2 “FEELING THE EYES ARE ON HER…”
MITIGATING THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT.

The ‘spotlight effect’ describes a phenomenon in which people tend to overestimate the extent to which other people are focused on them (Gilovich *et al*., 2000); it is strongly associated with increased levels of social anxiety (Martin, 2004). Several teachers described situations which would seem to be related to this phenomenon:

> We see children refusing to go into class, because they don’t like when they walk in, all the other children look at them, and they’re too anxious to go into class.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

> For some kids it was good for them just to get in there [calming room], out of the… it’s not got any windows, nobody’s looking at them and if they’re distressed at that point, being able to just regulate and calm down…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

In the example given above, Mr Singh described how some children benefited from a level of privacy during moments of distress or emotional dysregulation. A similar situation was observed in Ms Simpson’s class, as outlined in Figure 5.1 below:

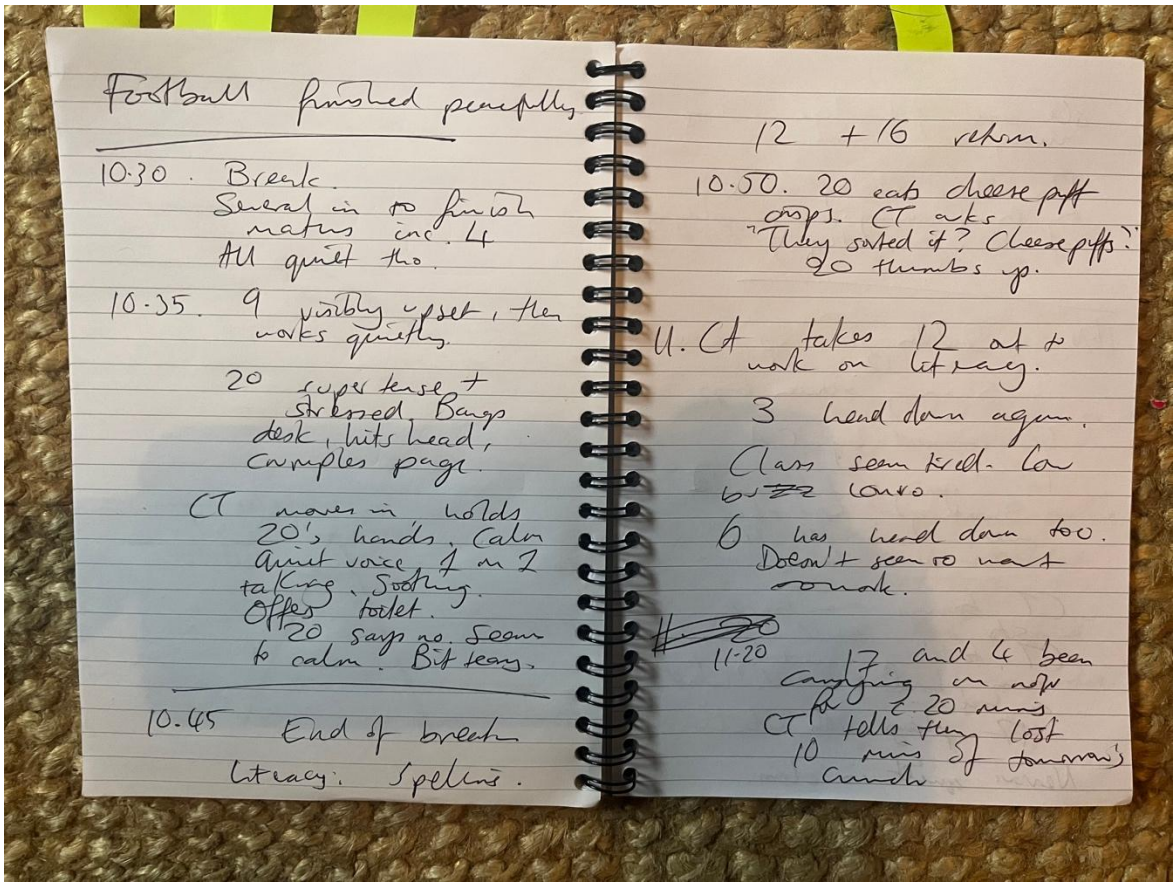


Figure 5.1: Observation notes, 26/05/23

Ms Simpson had kept several children in during break as they had not worked sufficiently hard during maths the previous day. Initially all the children were quiet, although within five minutes, one boy appeared "super tense and stressed." He then banged his desk, hit his head and crumpled his page up. At this point, Ms Simpson moved close enough to the boy that she could hold his hands and speak in a quiet, soothing voice. Once she had stabilised the boy's emotional situation, she offered him a visit to the toilet, which he declined. Ms Simpson's approach during this moment seemed designed to minimise the level of attention which the child might attract from their peers, including the offer of seclusion which a trip to the toilet would entail. Furthermore, at least on this occasion, the strategy seemed to work. As the child ate crisps in class which they had not had time to eat during break, Ms Simpson asked if the crisps had "sorted it", to which the child replied with a "thumbs up."

It was not only during such moments of crisis in which children seemed to value inconspicuous interactions with adults. Many staff members described pupils' desire for privacy when discussing issues with them:

> **Ms Clarke:** Sometimes out in the playground, *that's* where they want to talk to you because it can *look* a lot more anonymous.
> **Mr Bell:** Yeah. I see, of course, ah-hah.
> **Ms Clarke:** Yeah. Because there's so, you know, there's noise round about, children, other people and children won't necessarily hear what we're talking about…
> **Mr Bell:** You're not asking to leave the room to go and have a chat.
> **Ms Clarke:** That's right. So it doesn't… by having that conversation with me, or any other adult in the playground, it's not… you know, they won't feel that there's a spotlight on them.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T)

> **Mr Galloway:** It's just putting… small words again, doing it very discreetly, she's not someone that… that likes it to be visible… having a wee chat with her, catching her outside when the rest of the class aren't there, and just, erm, just asking her, you know, "Are you finding things a little bit difficult? Is there anything we can sort of put in place?"
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Mr Galloway:** "Do you need a wee five minute walk? Can you go and deliver this note to such-and-such a class?" Just to give her that wee break away from being in the class and feeling the eyes are on her…
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher)

Mr Reavey was one of several staff members who described pupils' reticence to draw attention to themselves during class activities. He had devised a creative strategy to support one particular pupil in this regard:

Mr Reavey: So, I've got a child in my class last year and this year who has quite a big anxiety with maths. And they hate asking questions, for clarification 'cause they feel as if that is the focus on them.
Mr Bell: Mmm.
Mr Reavey: And that makes them feel even more anxious. So I've given them a wee red counter. And that red counter is, when we've finished that lesson… if they feel that they need more support but they don't want to look like they're asking for it, then they go past my desk and they put the red counter beside my laptop.
Mr Bell: Lovely.
Mr Reavey: And then, we go back…
Mr Bell: Do they use it?
Mr Reavey: Yeah! Yeah. And if I go back, and I see the red counter there, all I do is I'll pick the red counter up and I'll go over and I'll say something like, to the person beside them, and then I'll say to them if they want some help, and I'd start chatting to them and I'll put the red counter back on their desk again so they know that it's there again if they want to use it again. Wee simple things like that sometimes just…
Mr Bell: But they make a difference?
Mr Reavey: They do.

- Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher).

All of the class teachers and support assistants interviewed were able to describe some form of pedagogical adaptation or strategy which they had used, or had seen colleagues using, in order to support a particular pupil's MHWB. Notwithstanding the value of these approaches, all interviewees cited the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships as representing the foundation on which all other attempts to support pupils depend. The importance of these relationships forms the next section within this theme.

6.2.3: "PULLING AT THAT THREAD UNTIL THEY KNOW THEY CAN TRUST YOU." RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY.

One of the most overwhelmingly apparent themes to emerge from analysis of the staff members' interviews was the importance of establishing trusting relationships with pupils:

> So, relationships is at the heart of everything we do… it's just slowly, always picking away at that and pulling at that thread until they know that they can trust you.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

> Ensure the relationship, allow the young people to build that relationship with you where they trust you and know that you are there for them.
>
> - Mr Johnson (School 1, Home link worker.)

In describing a pupil who was experiencing difficulties after bereavement, Ms Holloway illustrated perfectly how difficult it would be to support pupils if the relationship was *not* there:

> So there's a student who has a charm bracelet and they've got a little charm to represent their grandmother, and you can see them just, like, holding it, so I don't think unless you *knew* the child, you would notice that…
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

An aspect of relationship-building which was mentioned by many interviewees was that of 'checking in', which could be done in various ways. Although often ostensibly a simple social greeting, it is essentially a means by which an assessment of pupils' wellbeing may be made. Many pupils seemed to value this as an opportunity to communicate with school staff about their emotional state:

> What I realised was children needed that check-in time. So that's part of my timetable, I start off the first period of every day and I do check-ins.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

> We have regular kind of check-ins, group check-ins, one-to-one check-ins about their feelings, how they're feeling across the day.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

These check-ins also served to remind pupils that they were individually recognised and valued by staff, the importance of which was one of the strongest points to emerge from this theme:

> That's what I try and do in the morning, with every kid I see; "Hi!" Like I'm really pleased to see them, so that they feel valued, they feel welcomed, "How are you today?" And you know, you wait for the answer… Somebody who is looking at them, they're accepting them, they're valuing them, for who they are.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

> Going along the corridor, it's about acknowledging your children… these are your people, you've got to be there for them.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

Some teachers described going to great lengths to support their pupils, occasionally in quite moving terms:

> The majority [of staff in this school] would be *really* good at relationship-building or just being… here for the children who need them…. All the way to, I mean, bringing in clothes… for children and putting them in their bags for them to go home with without anyone else knowing. And lunches, quite often, as well. Knowing that a child's going home to no dinner. You'll just… very, very

> quietly, put in the excess lunches that we've got that day, you'll put them in a bag for them, and they go home. And we also buy presents for children at Christmas. That go under their tree. But they never know. And actually, one of the boys… I thought, "He's not going to get anything." So I bought him a drone. I remember coming back in January and he came into the class and he's like, "*I got an amazing drone for Christmas!*" And I was like, "*That is amazing!*" And honestly, I could have cried.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

Despite such efforts to support their pupils, and the benefits that are presumably achieved as a result, many staff questioned their ability to respond to the level of need that they saw in their school communities. All interviewees described some form of perceived deficit which impeded their ability to support their pupils to a satisfactory degree. Details of these deficits form the sixth and final theme in this chapter.

6.3 THEME SIX: DEFICITS. STAFF PERCEIVE DEFICITS IN PARENTING APPROACHES, STAFFING LEVELS AND THEIR OWN ABILITIES, WHICH HINDER A MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSE.

In describing their response to the issues faced by their pupils, three areas emerged in which staff members seemed to hold deficit perspectives. The clearest of these is in relation to staffing levels in schools, which interviewees overwhelmingly regarded as insufficient. Another area in which staff described perceived shortcomings was their own ability to support pupils to a satisfactory extent. However, one of the strongest themes that emerged from analysis of interviews with school staff is also the most complex; the role of parents and carers in pupils' MHWB.

6.3.1 "THIS IS GOING TO MAKE ME SOUND REALLY BAD…" PARENTS ARE THE PROBLEM, PARENTS ARE THE SOLUTION.

It was quite clear from analysis of interview data that many school staff members held deficit perspectives about some of the parents and carers in their communities. The overwhelming majority of members of staff spoke disparagingly about the behaviour of some parents and carers during their interview. For many, the perception that some parents were not raising their children in an appropriate manner was seen as one of the main factors associated with pupils' MHWB:

> **Mr Bell:** What are the big factors that you see driving this increase in prevalence in mental health and wellbeing issues?
> **Mr Galloway:** I think, oh… it's almost a… a lack of… and this is going to make me sound really bad, but a lack of, for want of a better word, parenting skills… thinking about some of the environments that children are brought up in… I think, er, solid parent skills seem to be on a decline.
>
> - Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

Many staff characterised the situation as one of competing influences between school and home, with the latter prevailing:

> **Ms Kaminski:** I've got two children from the same family, and their language is foul, they're fighting constantly with other people, they're aggressive, they don't know how to communicate in any other way apart from shouting, swearing, being aggressive… that tells me, it's highly likely…
> **Mr Bell:** That's what the environment is at home.
> **Ms Kaminski:** Ah-hah. So what's the point in me, you know… now, you have that consistency, yes, this is how… "We're not speaking like that…"
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Kaminski:** But the *bigger* influence is home.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

Ms Kaminski went on to reiterate the importance of this influence and to cite an example of aggressive parental behaviour:

> **Mr Bell:** Is it fair to say that you still see the central driving factor for good or for ill as being family circumstances? Upbringing? Home situations?
> **Ms Kaminski:** Probably. Yeah. I would say, yeah, upbringing… and even things like when you hear about when something big happens in school, in terms of a child's behaviour, when we hear about the phone calls that go home, and the attitudes of some of the parents towards school, and how they speak to school staff, it's just reflective of their way of thinking and how they conduct themselves, their aggression. I've seen a parent punching the walls outside the office one day, so aggressive, erm, so no wonder the child's behaving like that.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

Ms Doyle described a situation in which home circumstances were seen as the cause of issues that school was almost portrayed as the cure to:

> **Mr Bell:** What about school makes meeting mental wellbeing needs of pupils *more* difficult?
> **Ms Doyle:** Because you've only got them for five hours and then they go back home, some of them to… what's causing the mental health problems. And you can only guide them and give them support and help and give them ideas of how things can change… but when they go home it's not always… that's not always possible.
>
> - Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

One aspect of parenting which was commonly criticised was a perceived lack of supervision around pupils' use of digital technology:

> Teachers talk about social media, and computers, and screen times and things like that not always being regulated at home. So pupils are getting a chance to watch and do things that they necessarily shouldn't.

- Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

> I think parents nowadays want to be friends with their children… they would rather have an easy life 'cause a lot of parents, erm… work, so to make things easier for them, at home, you know they're maybe like, "Here's an iPad," or, "Here, go and do whatever you want and just give me peace."
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

Concerns about parents' behaviour came from staff members in all four schools. The approaches of affluent families in school 2 were not spared from criticism:

> I think sometimes parental pressure is I think what causes the anxiety. Erm, I had a child here before that, erm, the parents were… "Primary 7, should we get him a tutor? Should we do this, should we do that? You know, he needs to be the best, he needs to be able to… you know, what do you think he's going to be when he grows up?" (Pause, shrugs)… I don't know! You know, he's 11!
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Mr Singh also described how the busy professional lives of some of the parents at his school could impact the lives and routines of their children, creating a sense of anxiety at home:

> …some of the anxieties here are… where parents feel that… maybe they don't give enough time for their kids, you know, a lot of the parents here are… are both professionals that work long hours, you know and… some of the kids go to after-school care before school, they're in after-school care until 5 or 6 o'clock, they often then go from after-school care to home to quickly eat something to go to Guides or whatever and I think some of the parents feel that they don't spend an awful lot of time…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

In other schools, interviewees questioned the parenting choices of families from deprived catchments:

> **Ms Brooke:** There is one family in my class who I know for a fact she is unemployed and life is… just… chaotic for them … erm, tough for the pupils concerned… someone kindly gave the mum money 'cause she was, "I don't have money to feed the boys,"… but then ten minutes later the person who gave her the money saw the mum coming out with fags and a bottle of vodka.
> **Mr Bell:** Oh.
> **Ms Brooke:** And just not able to make sensible choices as a parent themselves.
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

Ms Holloway rather hesitantly described the impact of families involved in crime on their children:

> **Mr Bell:** Anything else driving the mental health and wellbeing needs?

Ms Holloway: Parents? And families, erm….
Mr Bell: Can you describe how that works?
Ms Holloway: Yes, so, erm… in the area there are families who… you would think potentially have links (pause) … to crime or to drugs…
Mr Bell: Okay.
Ms Holloway: … and the children can then talk about that, and you think it's just… really hard for them, like, their wellbeing, it's… not being cared for at home…
Mr Bell: Right. Mm-hmm.
Ms Holloway: … so then they come to school where people are trying to care, and they don't know what that looks like…

- Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

However, just as there was near-universal criticism of some parents from school staff, there was an equally overwhelming view that the involvement of parents and carers was an essential component in the response to pupils' MHWB issues:

> I think a lot of our… issues that we face, it has to be a partnership with the families because as I say a lot of them, it's linked to that… area of deprivation, and trying to get out of that cycle…
>
> -Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

The futility of trying to address pupils' issues without involving parents and carers was pointed out by Ms Kaminski:

> I also think… my colleague and I were talking about this, that there's only so much we can do *in* school about some of these issues. Like, we're only one wee part of it…
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

Similarly, Ms Clarke saw parents and families as intrinsic to the support they offered their pupils:

> What we do here is so much about… individual little people, and the associated adults that go along with them…
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

Ms Ahmad described the tension she felt between viewing parents and carers as a *factor* associated with pupils' MHWB issues, as well as part of the *response* to those issues:

> So I think a lot of really is… parenting, but it's how you're addressing that.. and not offending the people, and trying to keep parents on board with you, and being that *team* with the family…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4 D.H.T.)

Achieving this balance between addressing parental issues whilst keeping them 'on board' is presumably made more difficult by the attitude of some parents towards school. Several interviewees described a range of parental views that might impede cooperation:

> I deal with parents that have major anxiety about coming to the school playground.
>
> - Mr Johnson (School 1, Home link worker.)

This can extend to parents and carers who are even more suspicious of the role of schools, to the point that staff members perceive them to be antagonistic and deceptive:

> **Mr Bell:** What are the barriers to helping [your pupils with their MHWB] as much as you would like?
> **Ms Strand:** (Pause.) Ahhh… I'm going to have to say parental and carer barriers, I think that is a big one, erm…
> **Mr Bell:** How does that work?
> **Ms Strand:** When they're not on the same page as you…
> **Mr Bell:** I see. Right, okay.
> **Ms Strand:** So we've had situations before where they've maybe not agreed with what we're seeing…
> **Mr Bell:** Ah, right…
> **Ms Strand:** … and they're like, "No, don't agree with that, that's not how it is, it's fine at home," or whatever. And sometimes they don't tell us all the truth of what is actually happening at home, so it makes our job really hard, if people at home are saying, "No! Everything's fine! No, he's going to bed at seven o'clock and he's getting up and he's having a full breakfast." When actually the child isn't going to bed until four in the morning and isn't having anything to eat, and they're coming into school grumpy and annoyed, and… So, that type of thing, that… not telling us the truth and…
> **Mr Bell:** Do you think for some parents you're just another authority?
> **Ms Strand:** Yeah.
> **Mr Bell:** That is therefore a threat?
> **Ms Strand:** Absolutely.
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

However, school 1 and school 4 tried to overcome this barrier by employing an intermediary who was seen as less intimidating, as Ms Ahmad explained:

> **Ms Ahmad:** We've got a home link worker…
> **Mr Bell:** I was just going to say…
> **Ms Ahmad:** …and he's very good at literally going out to the houses, and phoning, engaging… I think families, sometimes because he's not a teacher, he can be a kind of 'way in', he's not…
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.. that's interesting…
> **Ms Ahmad:** … that kind of authority figure! I know quite often if a phone call's got to be made, it's better *he* makes it, 'cause of that relationship he's got with

> them… erm, because sometimes they can be quite reluctant to engage, erm, and we know how quickly things can unfold if we don't have that good relationship…
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

In his capacity as a home link worker, Mr Johnson described how his school felt that supporting families was integral to supporting pupils, and how he tried to encourage parents to come to speak to him:

> People here ask about families, not just young people, everybody, they want to know because they want to help solve the problem, and the school is always there… [we] put out communication to say, "We are here, we… we want to work with you, we want to help you," and the school positively and healthily challenges barriers to families that may not feel confident enough to come forward, we go and work with those families and open the door by saying, "Come in and have a cup of tea with us."
>
> - Mr Johnson (School 1, Home link worker.)

This attitude and approach was very much shared by Ms Fenton:

> And so we're finding actually, in my role, I support a lot of parents, as much as I do the pupils, with their own wellbeing… and I'm sort of an outlet for them to come, and share, and [inaudible], so they're then maybe in a better place to support their child at home… as much as it's important to build a relationship with the child, it's also really important to build that relationship with the families… so, having them in, keeping in contact on the phone, getting them to come in for a cup of tea and just offload when the child's not there, those kinds of supports are also really… important I feel, it's not just the child who needs the help, it's often the family as well. And so, building that trust, as well, with the parent, better helps us in school to be able to support the child, because if they've got a safe person, the parent, that they know they can go to, and that they know understands what's going on at home… "Just come in, we'll have a coffee, we'll sit," you know, they can offload, the tissues are there and they need that support as much as the child does.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

Mr Galloway portrayed maintaining such close relationships with parents and carers as a protective factor in pupils' MHWB. He also seemed to suggest that it is easier to achieve these good community relations in a small, rural school:

> **Mr Galloway:** Because it is quite a small village and because most of us are from this area, we… we know the things that are out there, and we know the families, or we've grown up with the families before, you know we know most of the kind of ins and outs and where the wee sticky… sticky points might be.
> **Mr Bell:** So the key to that one is community… erm, community knowledge, and I suppose the relationship with the kids.

Mr Galloway: Yeah. I would say so, oh definitely… it makes a huge difference. And I think that's why… although clearly we have mental health, wellbeing concerns in the school, I think the reason that we maybe don't have as many pronounced ones is because the relationship that we've got…
Mr Bell: Mm-hmm…
Mr Galloway: … and even though we've got some families that are hard to reach it doesn't stop us as a school from… trying to engage, or putting things in place, or going and… and chapping a door…
Mr Bell: Okay.
Mr Galloway: … you know we still try and break those barriers down because if we don't, we've realised that it will impact the child, which will then, potentially impact the.. the rest of the class…

- Mr Galloway (School 3, Class teacher.)

Knocking on the doors of the 'hard to reach' families, as described here by Mr Galloway, was mainly mentioned in the context of visits from home-link workers. However, such dedicated positions are relatively rare. For example, in 2023 Glasgow City Council employed fifty home-link workers compared with nearly 59,000 classroom assistants (Scottish Government, 2024d). Several interviewees mentioned how much they valued their home-link worker, or expressed their desire for one to work in their school. Furthermore, this view was also expressed in more general terms; a consensus emerged amongst staff members that they would benefit from additional colleagues working in almost any capacity. The desire to have increased numbers of staff members, in order to better support pupils, is one of the most consistently mentioned points within interviews and forms the next subtheme within this chapter.

6.3.2: "CLONE HER!"
STAFF MEMBERS WANT MORE STAFF MEMBERS.

All interviewees who were asked what would help their school improve its response to pupils' MHWB needs cited the need for more staff. Most were quite unambiguous about this, clearly identifying it as the single biggest issue:

Mr Bell: What would make your life easier? What would make meeting their needs more achievable?
Mr Singh: (Answers immediately.) It would be staff.

- Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Mr Bell: Can you think of anything that… might improve the situation? (Long pause) That might make it easier to support… I mean in a perfect world…
Ms Doyle: In a perfect world, if we had more staff…

- Ms Doyle (School 1, D.H.T.)

If I had a magic wand I would love more… adults in the room.

- Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Ms Ahmad expressed concern not only that she currently did not have sufficient numbers of staff members, but that she might have even fewer in the future:

Mr Bell: Can you describe any barriers that make meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils more difficult?
Ms Ahmad: People.
Mr Bell: People?
Ms Ahmad: We don't have enough people. (Laughs.)
Mr Bell: Ahh… okay, staff, yeah.
Ms Ahmad: Like, staff, and you just want to have… more people to help these children… you feel like there's just… not enough on the floor to keep everything… running in a smooth…
Mr Bell: Not enough staff?
Ms Ahmad: Yeah… a lot of our classroom assistants this year are not permanent, so you think, what's next year going to look like? If we've got less staff in.

- Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

Ms Kaminski gave the strong impression that the need for greater numbers of staff was a direct result of the level of issues which her pupils were facing:

Mr Bell: So are there any other things that make your life more difficult? Meeting mental health and wellbeing needs?
Ms Kaminski: Yeah, I think just staffing now.
Mr Bell: Staffing.
Ms Kaminski: Yes.
Mr Bell: Okay.
Ms Kaminski: I think, you know…
Mr Bell: So…. not enough staff?
Ms Kaminski: Not enough because of the needs! You know, because if you're getting pulled left, right and centre then people are spread too thinly and…
Mr Bell: Mm-hmm.
Ms Kaminski: You know, the needs are greater.
Mr Bell: More hands on deck.
Ms Kaminski: You need more… ah-hah! You do.

- Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

The value of a home link worker to schools 1 and 4 has been outlined previously; the absence of such a staff member was not lost on Ms MacDonald in school 3:

Ohhh… if I had a magic wand… it'd be lovely to have, like, a home link worker…

- Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

However, Ms Clarke saw the need to simply increase staff numbers as more important than questions about which role or position they might fill:

> **Mr Bell:** What would make meeting their needs easier?
> **Ms Clarke:** (Long pause.) I think it is about… people… we just need more people. And it, you know, it doesn't matter… it doesn't matter in terms of the support… what, what category, job title, whatever, however you want to describe it, these… these people would come in.
> **Mr Bell:** Need more hands on deck.
> **Ms Clarke:** Yeah.
>
> - Ms Clarke (School 2, D.H.T.)

In addition to aspiring to increase the *quantity* of staff, some interviewees regarded the quality of prospective staff members to be an important factor too. Ms Brooke clearly considered the support offered by Ms Kaminski to have been of particular value:

> **Mr Bell:** What would make life easier?
> **Ms Brooke:** (Sighs.) Oh, what would make life easier? (Pause. Laughs.) Erm, without being too… we have had an absolute *godsend* of a classroom assistant… this year, and… clone her!
> (Laughter.)
> **Ms Brooke:** And we would be in a much happier state!
>
> - Ms Brooke (School 4, Class teacher.)

A large part of what Ms Brooke valued in Ms Kaminski was the strength of the latter's relationships with her pupils. Mr Singh clearly saw the ability of staff to form and model such relationships as the central rationale for the need to increase staff numbers:

> **Mr Singh:** It would be… not necessarily smaller classes… but it's that extra pair of hands, because if [first girl's name]'s having a bad day, [fourth girl's name]'s come in upset, [second girl's name]'s come in, and is visibly crying, [third girl's name]'s having a wee tantrum because she's finding her work difficult, and I'm working with [second boy's name], it's the balancing the plates 'cause you know what you want to do for these children, it's… it's… it's staffing…
> **Mr Bell:** Okay.
> **Mr Singh:** It's more money being invested in that. In terms of programmes, there's all these great programmes that can come through, but there is nothing like that relationship that adults can have with the pupils…
> **Mr Bell:** Mmm.
> **Mr Singh:** … it's the key thing to making a difference 'cause you can give them all the sheets and all the information, but unless they're seeing it applied or modelled from the relationship that adults have got, that then becomes really hard for them to have in their head to then apply. For me, it's… a huge amount of staffing in school.

- Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Ms Fenton raised another issue which her school faced, before returning to the common theme:

> **Mr Bell:** What makes *meeting* the mental health and wellbeing of your pupils' needs more challenging? What are the things…
> **Ms Fenton:** Erm… Lack of people? Lack of staffing?
> **Mr Bell:** Resources.
> **Ms Fenton:** Resources, yep. Erm, that lack of funding, lack of space, sometimes as well, these young people sometimes *need* a space away. Our school is very open, we have no doors, there are no… you know, sometimes dysregulation *breeds* dysregulation in others, so if somebody's having an episode in the corridor, and is… careering about, and you know, is being rounded up and helped, that can have a knock-on effect to people in other classes, because they can see and hear what's going on. That can, you know, so… the physical building can present its own challenges.
> **Mr Bell:** I see, mm-hmm.
> **Ms Fenton:** Erm.. but as I say, the number of staff, the number of children in a class, which again comes down to the number of staff, erm… which means that the teaching staff, the support staff are stretched, which, kind of lim… you know, chips away at their capacity to be able to provide for everybody's needs in their class, all the time…
> **Mr Bell:** Anything other than staff?
> **Ms Fenton:** Erm… for me, that would make the biggest difference, to be honest…
> **Mr Bell:** Okay…
> **Ms Fenton:** … the amount of staffing.
>
> - Ms Fenton (School 1, Nurture teacher.)

However, most teachers seemed to be under no illusions that their wishes about staffing levels were likely to be met in the near future:

> But you know, unfortunately… they're trying to cut *down* on teaching numbers, you know, the ratio of teachers to children is going up so…
>
> - Mr Singh (School 2, Class teacher.)

Although he was the only member of staff to refer to the wider political and economic situation in relation to staffing, several interviewees suggested (through facial expressions or tone of voice) that they did not expect their desire for greater numbers of colleagues to be granted. This was comparable in tone to an occasional sense of despondency that seemed to creep in to some of the interviews, as many staff members described the feeling that they were inundated by scale of the situation they experienced in schools.

6.3.3: "ARE WE ENOUGH? … YOU *WANT* TO BE ENOUGH, BUT…"
STAFF MEMBERS FEEL OUT OF THEIR DEPTH.

Many interviewees described a sense of being under significant pressure as a result of the issues their pupils faced. Staff in the most affluent school, whilst apparently less swamped with MHWB issues, still felt under some strain:

> **Ms Lees:** Sometimes I feel as if I need to be in… more than one place. At the same time! (Laughs.)
> **Mr Bell:** You're too stretched?
> **Ms Lees:** So I'm quite stretched.
>
> - Ms Lees (School 2, Nurture teacher.)

Ms Holloway gave a powerful portrayal of situations that had given rise to feelings of impotence and distress:

> **Ms Holloway:** So I'm thinking of a time when… at the start of the year when there was a… police investigation, a child protection case, and my mind was so… busy with that… I found that was where my focus was. And it was then hard to put that to the side to help the other students that needed it? Erm, because of the… intensity, the severity, like…
> **Mr Bell:** It seems to me that some of the issues you face on a daily basis are quite severe here, I mean we had a staff member attacked on Tuesday morning that visibly shook you.
> **Ms Holloway:** Yeah, erm, that's, I mean… that… I think at times…. Almost… (pause.) PTSD is not the right term, but the previous week, my colleague, who was covering the class next to me, had also been attacked… There is a sense of helplessness because I don't want any of them, my colleagues, to deal with what they have to at times. And… But there's not an awful lot… you can do about it, if you're not… *there*.
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm.
> **Ms Holloway:** And even if you *are* there… there's not an awful lot you can do about it.
>
> - Ms Holloway (School 4, Class teacher.)

Pressures such as these might be expected take a toll on most staff members. Several interviewees referred to colleagues who had felt unable to continue in their roles due to challenging situations:

> There had been a classroom assistant for primary seven, erm, but… she was off and refused to go back, so she hasn't been here since Christmas.
>
> - Ms Kaminski (School 4, Classroom assistant.)

> That's the class that… previously, the previous year the teacher had gone off with stress because of.
>
> - Mr Reavey (School 4, Class teacher.)

In common with this sense of feeling under significant pressure, several members of staff voiced a degree of bewilderment as to what was causing the deteriorations in pupils' MHWB that they had observed:

> **Ms Simpson:** You know, *something's* obviously changed that children are now… feeling that way 'cause you know… you tend to see kids coming in and… they've just… got *a lot* of worry… and view themselves quite negatively, and you just wonder where that's come from.
> **Mr Bell:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, so do I.
>
> - Ms Simpson (School 1, Class teacher.)

> There's also, there's an unexplainable element there as well… that's changed the dynamics of children and their behaviours…
>
> - Ms Strand (School 4, Nurture teacher.)

Despite such uncertainty about the causes of the issues facing their pupils, the greatest sense of despondency was expressed when staff members described not knowing how to support their pupils. Two depute headteachers were quite candid in outlining their feelings of failure and inability to meet some of their pupils' needs:

> There's one wee girl, obviously in the class you're [observing] in, who suffers severe anxiety… and I'm at a stage now with her… (whispers) I don't know what else I can do for you… d'you know… and I find that hard… 'cause I feel as if I *am* failing?
>
> - Ms MacDonald (School 3, D.H.T.)

> **Ms Ahmad:** Sometimes you think, "Do I know enough?"
> **Mr Bell:** I mean, am I right in… [thinking you] sometimes feel out of your depth, and are not sure how to respond?
> **Ms Ahmad:** Yeah… it's a lot for us to have to deal with on the floor… I think that's the feeling amongst a lot of staff, I think: "*Woah*… this is a *lot*…" Like, we're education, but now education is mostly social work, and we're trying to deal with mental health as well… and I think staff… can feel that quite heavy 'cause they want the best for these children… But they feel… "Are we enough?" or… "What else can we be doing?" And that can… impact on us as well, and you think, "What else can we do to help these young people?"
> **Mr Bell:** Are there times where you feel you're not enough?
> **Ms Ahmad:** Yeah. I think sometimes, yeah. Which is rubbish… You *want* to be enough, and you want to do enough, but you think… "How could we be better? What else could we do?" Makes you reflect. A lot. Makes you worry. Ultimately. About these wee people that are in front of you.
>
> - Ms Ahmad (School 4, D.H.T.)

As Ms Ahmad states, staff members clearly do seem worried about their pupils, and whether their efforts *are* enough to cope with their pupils' needs. The interviews suggest

that school staff members have thought in depth about factors associated with their pupils' needs, factors which to a certain extent they may feel lie beyond their control. This, as well as the impression that their pupils' needs are becoming more prevalent and serious, would presumably lead those involved to feel somewhat overwhelmed.

This chapter has outlined staff members' perceptions of the ways they seek to meet their pupils' MHWB; the curricular programmes and outside agencies, the crucial role of relationships and adaptations, and the deficits which staff members consider hamper their response. These will be discussed in detail in chapter eight. As was mentioned earlier, it is in the comparison between staff members' and pupils' perspectives that the evidence for the present thesis' argument about pupil voice is to be found. The discrepancies between what staff members perceive as necessary to improving the support they can offer, and what pupils consider important, are stark and intriguing. These differences will emerge during consideration of the next chapter, in which attention turns to the views of the pupils and their thoughts about how their schools might better meet their needs. Following Antonovsky's (1979) principles of salutogenesis, pupils from all four schools were asked what positive actions their school could undertake which might promote their MHWB. Analysis of their suggestions form the next chapter in this thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN. FINDINGS PART THREE.

SCHOOL PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS OF WAYS THEIR SCHOOL COULD IMPROVE THE MHWB SUPPORT IT PROVIDES.

This chapter will outline Scottish primary school pupils' perspective on what their school could do to improve their MHWB. As such, it provides an insight rarely reflected within the literature to date (see section 3.6) and one that contrasts clearly with that of school staff members, as expressed in the previous chapter. In so doing, it offers support for one of the most important arguments of the present thesis, that pupils' MHWB could be improved significantly if school staff members valued pupils' opinions and acted upon them. The contrasts between staff members and pupils' views, and the implications of that contrast, will be set out in chapter eight.

Findings from the pupils will be set out in this chapter in three forms. Firstly, the number of pupils who referred to each subtheme will be shown in a bar graph. This number was derived from the process shown previously in section 4.10.2. Secondly, data will be displayed in the form of detail from the jigsaw pieces used in the classroom activity; finally, quotes from the conversations held with pupils during the activity will also be presented. Time constraints meant that the notes from each conversation could not be recorded verbatim; rather they tended to be brief and abridged. In some cases they are little more than bullet points. In order to mitigate the risk of misinterpretation, the notes from these conversations will be presented in this findings chapter as they were recorded at the time; in summarised form. As a result, the syntax or grammar are occasionally a little jarring. As mentioned previously (see section 4.10.2), there was insufficient time during the classroom activity to hold conversations with five participating pupils who contributed jigsaw pieces to the present study. The decision was taken to include the data from their jigsaw pieces within this chapter, on the basis that the writing or drawings on the front of these pieces referred explicitly to a topic associated with one or more of the themes outlined here. Lastly, it should be pointed out that, prior to being presented here four of the jigsaw pieces had labels placed over text or images that might identify that school.

Analysis of the data generated in each of the participating classes revealed several themes which shed light on how pupils consider their MHWB could be better supported by their school. Some themes are represented across all four classes; however, others are highly contextual and particular to only one or two classes. The pupils' views can be collated into three main themes: firstly, pupils seek changes to their school environment, curriculum or routines. Secondly, pupils wish for more outdoor learning, P.E. and organised sports. Lastly, pupils in two of the four schools expressed a clear desire for their school to keep pet animals. The first of these themes, that of adaptations to teaching, school routines and environments, might seem to have the most in common with school staff members' views.

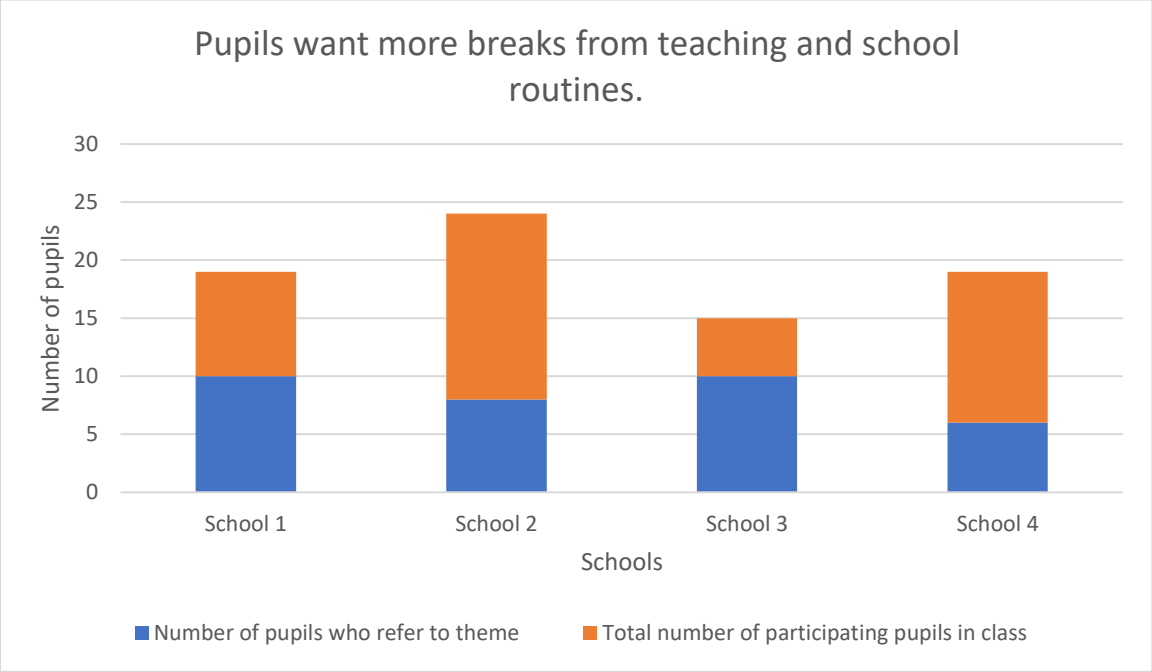
For example, many pupils as well as staff members recognise that pupils benefit from flexibility in the delivery of the curriculum as well as pedagogical approaches. However, this theme is multi-faceted and although there are some similarities with staff members' views, many of the adaptations that pupils propose for their schools are distinct from those put forward by the adults.

7.1. THEME 7: ADAPTATIONS.

This theme is the most frequently cited of the three presented here; almost half of all participating pupils expressed a desire for at least one aspect of the theme. It is also the most complex; pupils expressed a desire to make changes to their schools in four distinct ways, each of which represents a subtheme within the overall theme of adaptations. Firstly, pupils wanted more breaks from teaching and school routines. Secondly, changes to the balance of the curriculum were also sought. Thirdly, pupils wanted their schools to have better physical resources and equipment. Lastly, pupils sought improvements to the services their school offered.

7.1.1. "IF WE'RE HAVING A HARD TIME, IT CAN RESET OUR BRAINS." PUPILS WANT MORE BREAKS FROM TEACHING AND SCHOOL ROUTINES.

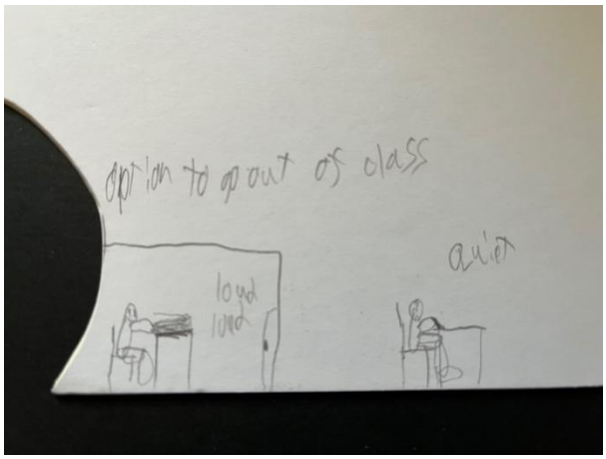
Pupils across all four school expressed a clear desire for more breaks from teaching and some school routines, as can be seen in graph 7.1.



Graph 7.1.

This subtheme can be divided into two strands: firstly, a wish for more 'time-outs' from the classroom routine. Secondly, around one fifth of all participating pupils suggested longer

break times or shorter days. The first strand was often expressed in terms of an aspiration to be able to leave the classroom for a period of time in moments of need:



"Option to go out of class. Loud. Quiet." Jigsaw 1.1; Amanda A.

> Option to go out of class if annoyed and stressed, a quiet place would calm you.
>
> - Amanda A.

In her illustration, Amanda seems to visualise a quiet working space set up outside the class. Several pupils envisaged such a quiet place in terms of a bespoke, comfortable room which could provide some respite for those who felt stressed by the classroom environment:



Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

> Quiet room. Five or ten minutes in it if you feel stressed by work.
>
> - Bethany C.

> Nice relaxing room, nobody comes near, just for quiet conversation. Just for relax. If you're having a hard time or a sore head you can go there. If you're struggling you can go.

- Declan C.



Jigsaw 3.7; Genevieve C.

Quiet room for those who are uncomfortable, space to calm down.

- Genevieve C.

Penny B. suggested a space specifically for those who felt stressed as a result of dyslexia:

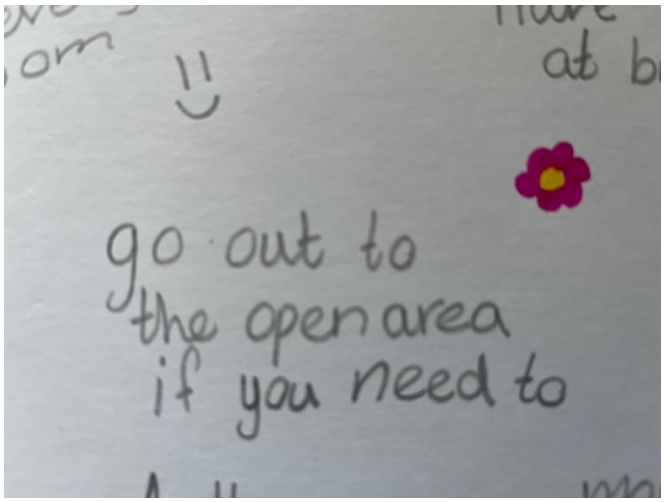


Jigsaw 2.16; Penny B.

I'd like a dyslexia room where I can go and chill out if I feel stressed. It could have fidgets [sensory toys] and other things to help us.

- Penny B.

According to Dmitri, this sort of quiet, safe space could be an already established area within the school, such as the “open area”, a communal space outside the classroom:



Jigsaw 1.4; Dmitri A.

However, Huan B. suggested locating such a space outdoors:

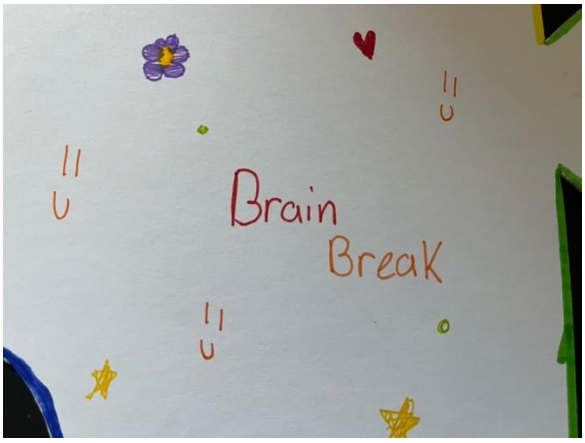
> More outdoor garden spaces and time to be used just for calming. For time-outs when you’re feeling stressed.
>
> - Huan B.

When considering where they would like to spend more time out of the classroom, some pupils specifically requested greater access to their school’s nurture room:

> More people to access the nurture room – as a reward perhaps.
>
> - Farid A.

> I’d also like more time in the nurture room. It makes me happy and takes my mind off things and it’s nice to talk and solve problems.
>
> - Eleanor B.

Finally, some pupils seemed to suggest that the break they sought from the classroom environment could still be achieved without leaving the classroom itself. Several argued for an increased number of ‘brain breaks’ (a short hiatus in teaching or activity time) throughout the day:

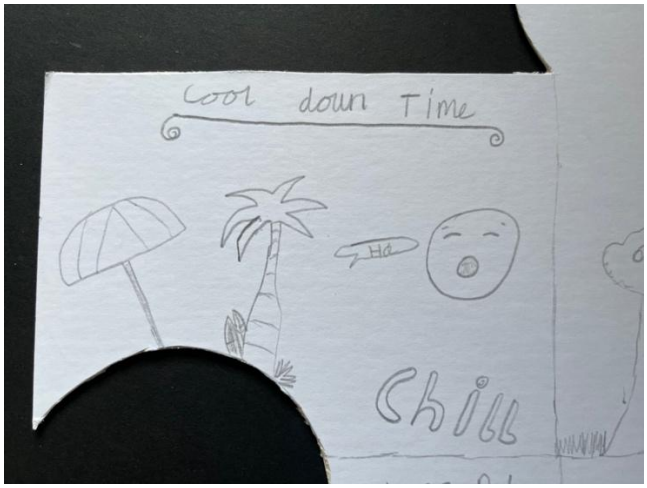


Jigsaw 1.7; Gordon A.

Brain breaks – if we're having a hard time, it can reset our brains.

- Gordon A.

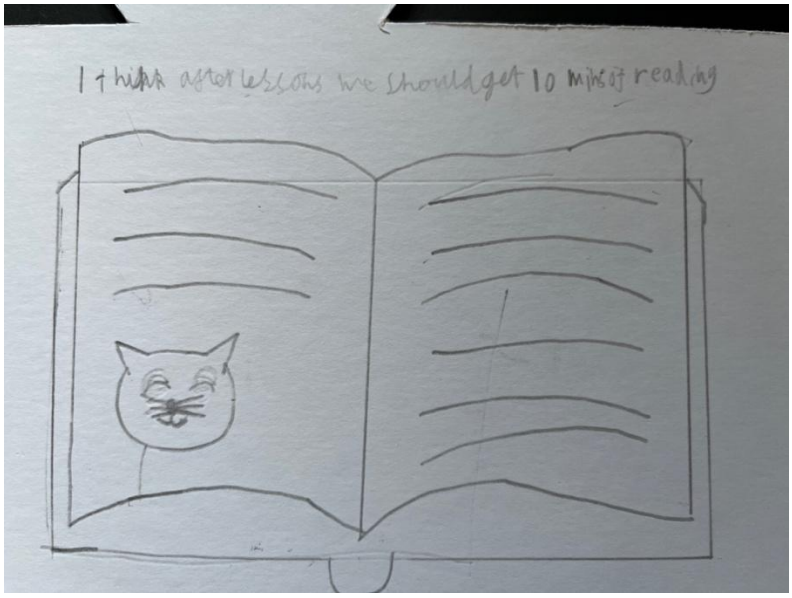
For several pupils, these breaks could be in the form of short planned intervals between each lesson, something some characterised as a 'cool down time'.



"Cool down time. Chill."
Jigsaw 2.15; Omar B.

Cool down times between lessons. Some time to listen to music.

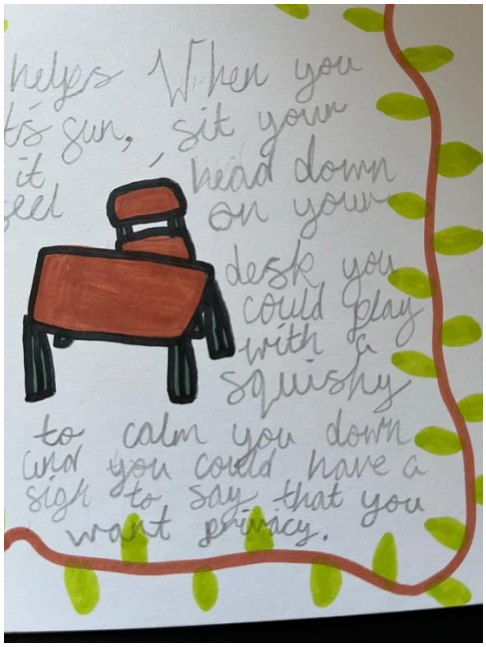
- Omar B.



"I think after lessons we should get ten minutes reading."
Jigsaw 2.14; Nancy B.

> After every lesson I'd like a cool down time for ten minutes to chill out and relax.
>
> - Nancy B.

Rory A. suggested being able to use some sort of sign in class in order to have some control over when he chose to have a break from the classroom routine:



"When you sit your head down on your desk you could play with a squishy [sensory toy] to calm you down and you could have a sign to say that you want privacy."
Jigsaw 1.18; Rory A.

> This would give privacy and allow time to think things through.
>
> - Rory A.

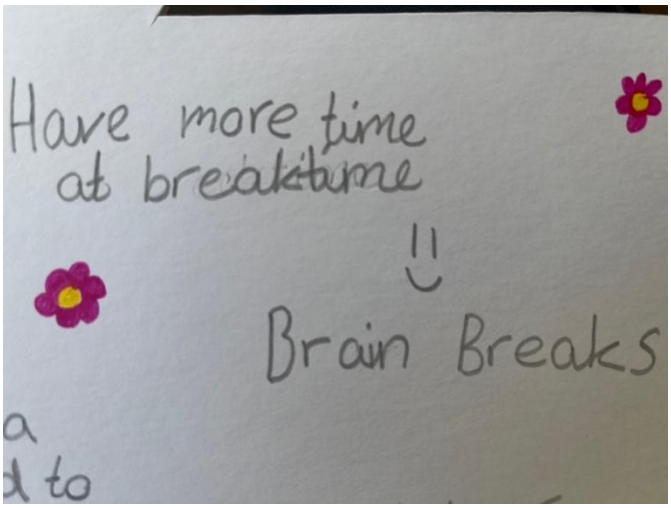
Oliver D. proposed planning some games or fun activities for the class during these breaks from teaching, and described the benefits to pupils' MHWB from so doing:

> I want to spend more time playing games. So, the teacher often says, "We'll play a game at the end of the day." But there isn't time and it doesn't happen! So- *planned* time to play games. Sometimes when you play a game it puts you in a happy mood then you pass on happy energy!
>
> - Oliver D.

The second aspect of moderation from the school day which pupils expressed a desire for was that of reducing the time spent on school activities by means of longer break times, shorter school days, or shorter assemblies. For many pupils, the time they were allocated for their morning interval, or break, was clearly not sufficient:



Jigsaw 1.7; Gordon A.



Jigsaw 1.4; Dmitri A.

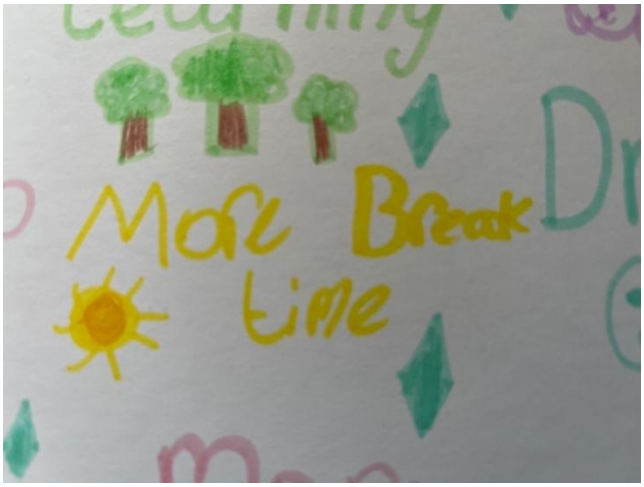
More time at break – gets us outside more, gives us more time to exercise.

- Gordon A.

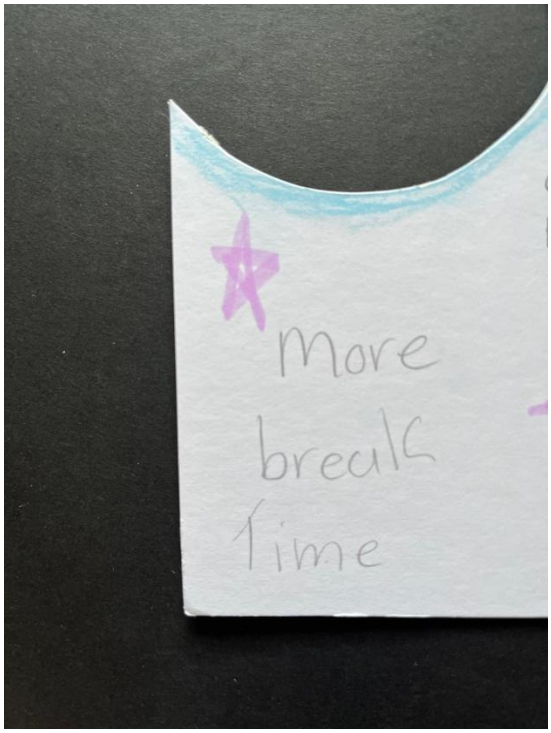
This was a relatively common theme. It was reflected in the draw and write activity of fifteen pupils across all four schools, but was particularly prevalent in school three, as can be seen here in the work of classmates Aihan, Bethany, Clara, Hamza, Logan and Nabil:



Jigsaw 3.1; Aihan C.



Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.



Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.



Jigsaw 3.8; Hamza C.

More break time – helps to get your energy out. Keeps you focused. There are plenty of games and activities outside.

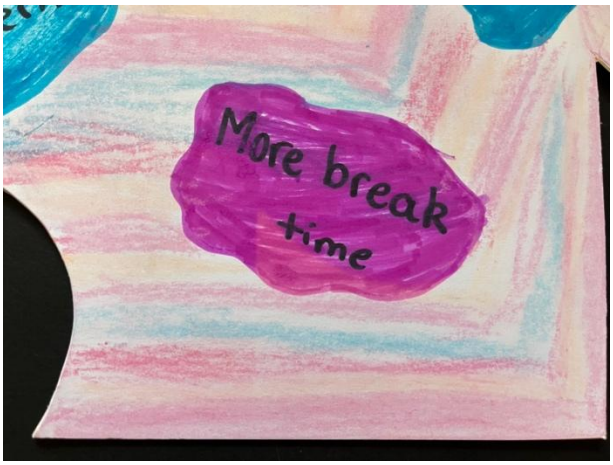
- Hamza C.



Jigsaw 3.12; Logan C.

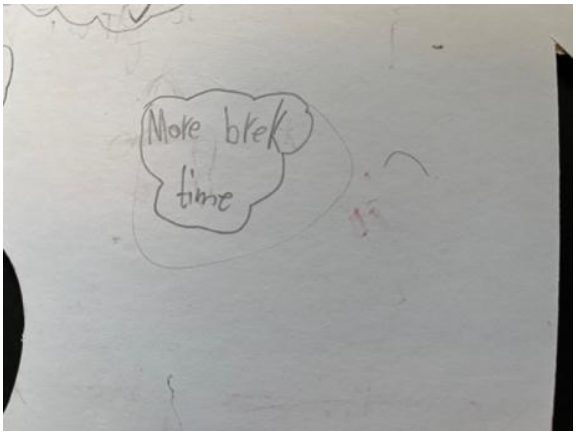
Longer playtimes – more exercise makes us more focused in class.

- Logan C.



Jigsaw 3.14; Nabil C.

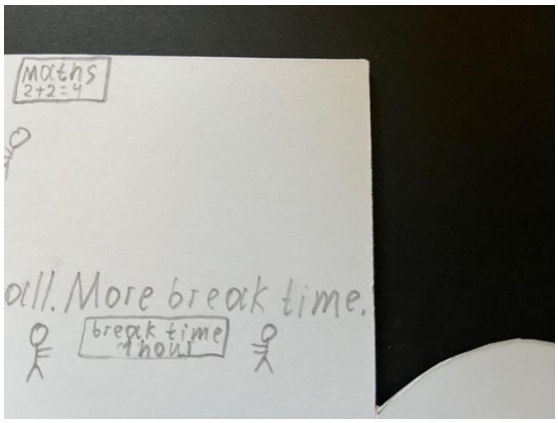
Some specific proposals were made as to the frequency and duration of extensions to break and lunch times. Kayla suggested extending each by five minutes:



"More break time."
Jigsaw 3.11; Kayla C.

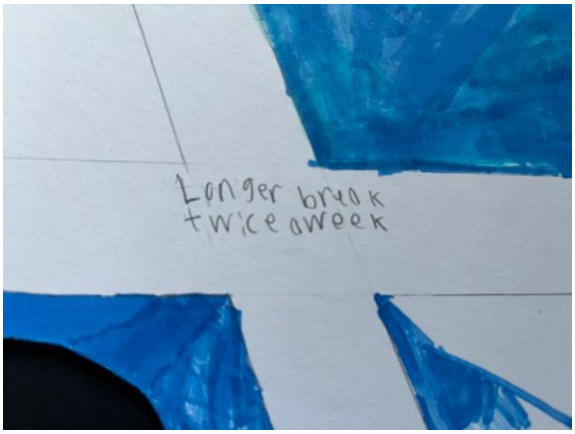
> I'd like more break and lunch time – five minutes more each. More time outside to relax.
>
> - Kayla C.

However, Ivy thought that an hour for break time was more appropriate:



Jigsaw 3.9; Ivy C.

Finally, Quinn A. suggested that a longer break time need not happen every day to be effective:

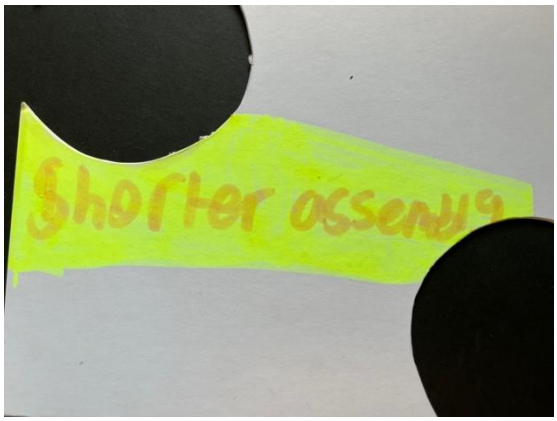


Jigsaw 1.17; Quinn A.

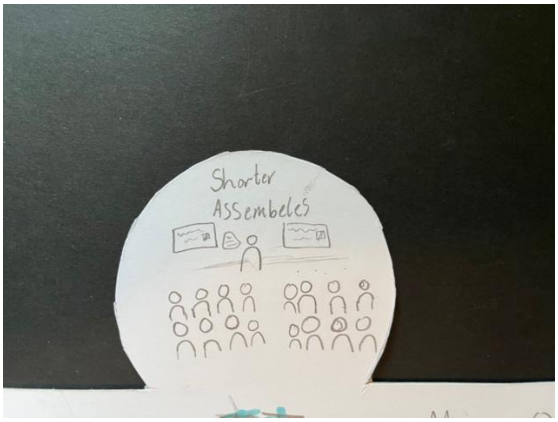
A longer break time twice a week.

- Quinn A.

In addition to this widespread desire for longer breaks and lunch times, four pupils in school four expressed dissatisfaction about the length of their school assembly:



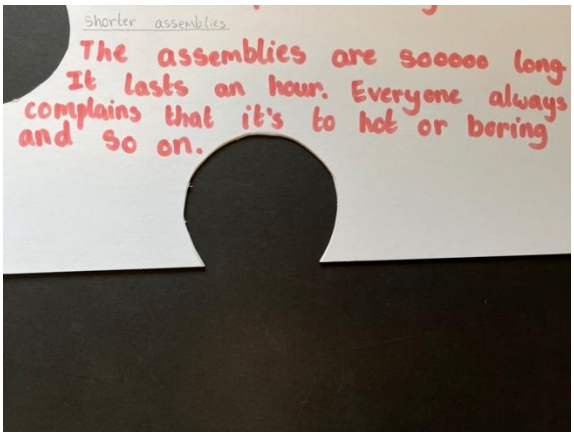
Jigsaw 4.13; Muhammad D.



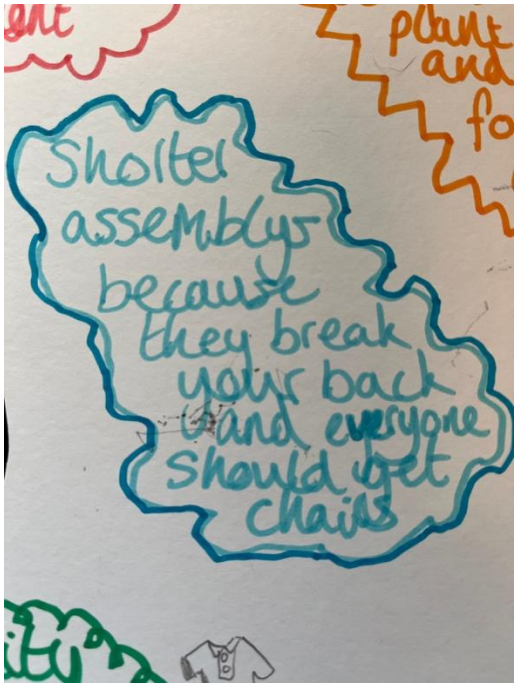
Jigsaw 4.6; Fatima D.

Shorter assemblies. They are too hot/ long/ uncomfortable.

- Fatima D.

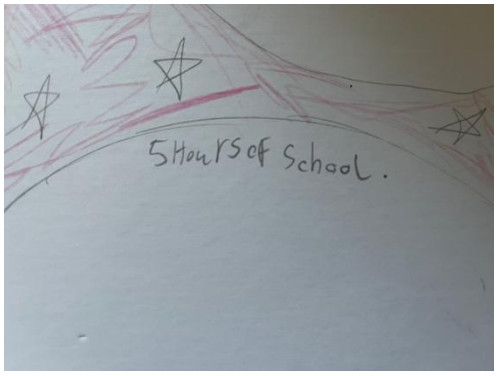


"The assemblies are *so* long. It lasts an hour. Everyone always complains that it's too hot or boring and so on."
Jigsaw 4.18; Rylee D.

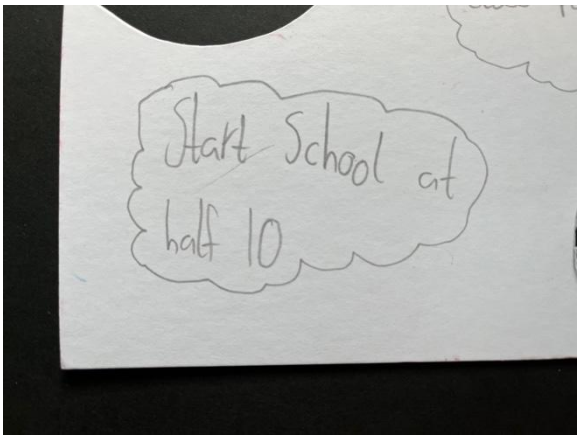


"Shorter assemblies because they break your back and everyone should get chairs."
Jigsaw 4.19; Shiv D.

Finally, in common with those who sought a shorter assembly, two pupils suggested reducing the duration of the school day itself:



Jigsaw 1.12; Li A.



Jigsaw 3.11; Kayla C.

Aleksandr D. disagreed; the front of his jigsaw included the phrase, “More school time.” When asked to elaborate about this point, he replied:

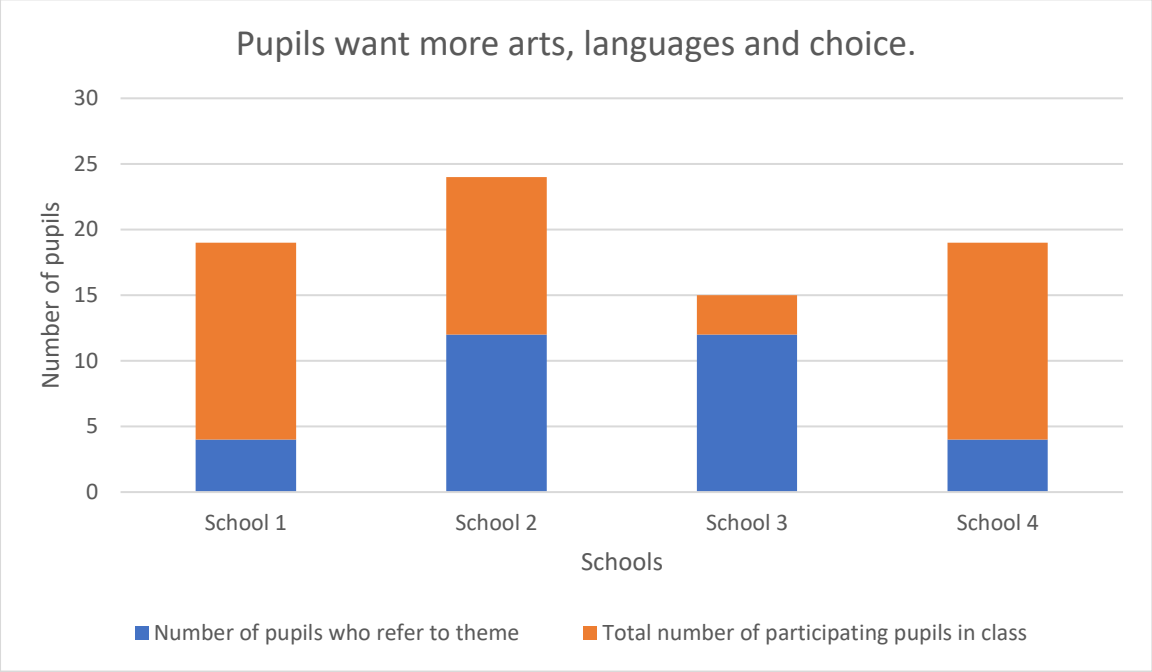
> I’d like a longer school day because I like school. School is full of everything you could imagine – it’s like Disneyland but better.
>
> - Aleksandr D.

It should be noted that Aleksandr was identified by his teacher as a pupil who faced particularly complex and serious issues relating to his home circumstances.

These views suggest that many pupils may feel that interruptions to classroom routines can be a valuable alleviation. If so, it is perhaps to be expected that some pupils also expressed a desire to exert an increased control over what happens in class. One of the obvious areas with which this might occur is by their having a greater say in the balance of the curriculum.

7.1.2 “IF YOU HAVE MORE CHOICE IT WILL MOTIVATE YOU TO COME TO SCHOOL IN THE MORNING.”
PUPILS WANT MORE ARTS, LANGUAGES AND CURRICULAR CHOICE.

Across all four schools, pupils favoured arts and languages over other subjects, as well as voicing a general sense that they would like greater choice over what lessons were taught. Schools two and particularly three felt strongly about this issue, whilst school four was the least concerned, as can be seen in graph 7.2. Notably, I formed the perception during the observation week that the class teacher in school three kept a relatively tight control over his class. In contrast, the teacher in school four routinely offered her class choices and stated that she deliberately tilted her curriculum towards the arts as that was her class' preference.

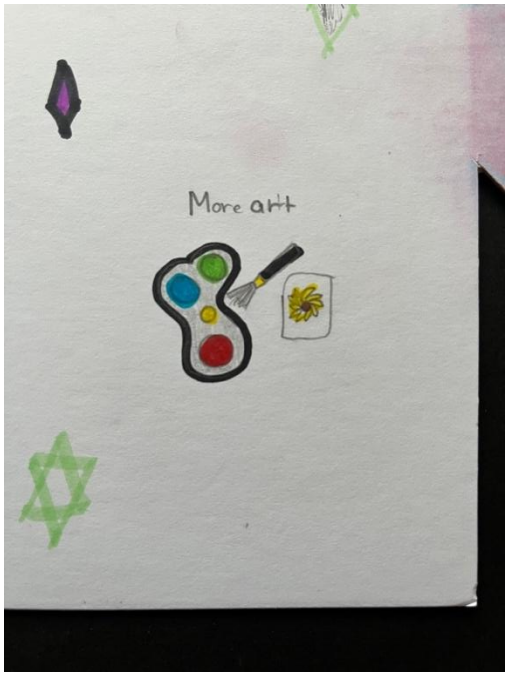


Graph 7.2.

The most commonly expressed desire for a change to the curriculum was for an increase in art:



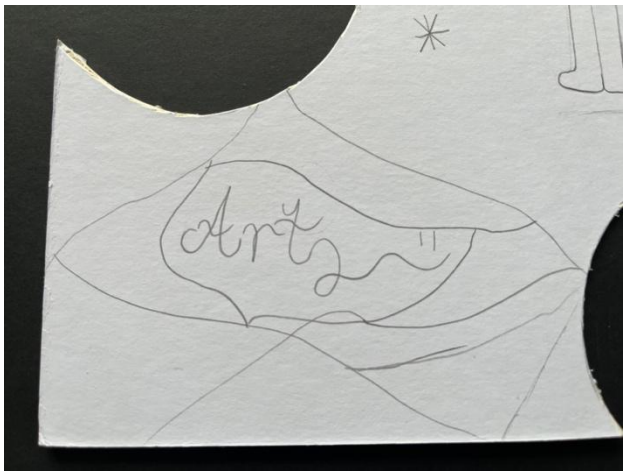
Jigsaw 3.6; Fiona C.



Jigsaw 3.1; Aihan C.



Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

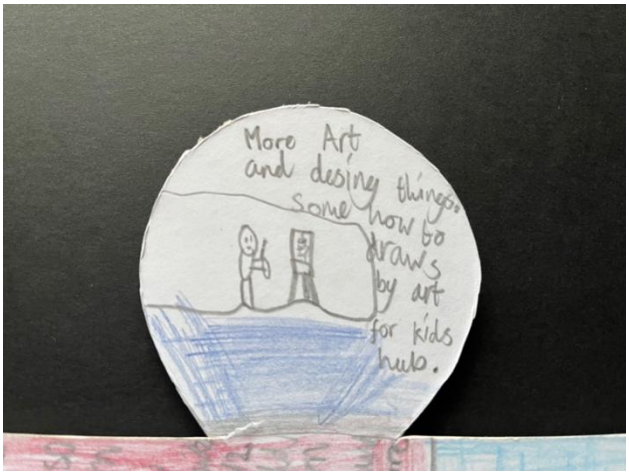


"Arts."
Jigsaw 2.3; Catarina B.



"A bit more art."
Jigsaw 4.7; Giovanni D.

Declan pointed out that art could be taught by means of tuition videos, displayed on the class' smartboard:



"More art and design things. Some 'how to draws' by art for kids hub [art tuition video website]."
Jigsaw 3.4; Declan C.

Eleanor B. explained why she liked art and wanted more of it:

> In art you can express yourself. You have control over it and can be creative.
>
> - Eleanor B.

Kayla saw value in art's ability to entertain and relax pupils:

> I like art 'cause it's fun and calming.
>
> - Kayla C.

Although in different schools, Kayla's view was strikingly similar to that of both Giovanni D. and Bianka B.:

> More art. Makes me feel calmer and it's fun.
>
> - Giovanni D.

> More art because it's more relaxing- it's a relaxing subject.
>
> - Bianka B.

Bianka was one of several pupils who referenced more than one favourite subject, in her case art and history:



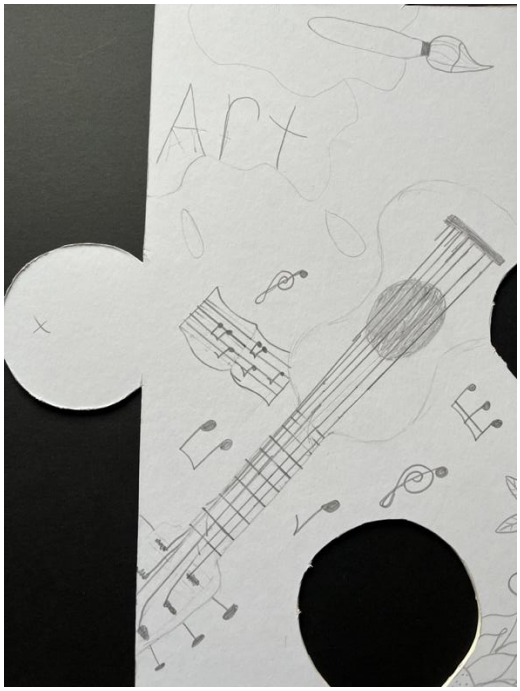
"More art! History!"
Jigsaw 2.2; Bianka B.

Clara C. was in favour of more art and drama:



"More art stuff. Different lessons – more drama."
Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.

For Huan B., more art and music were most important:



Jigsaw 2.8; Huan B.

Whilst Gurpreet B. wanted more art and writing:



“More art. More writing.”
Jigsaw 2.7; Gurpreet B.

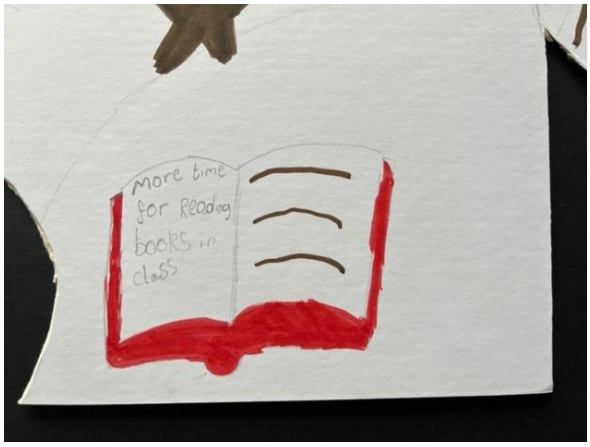
> More writing and art opportunities. In art you can express your feelings.
>
> - Gurpreet B.

As Gurpreet's views exemplify, beyond a strong expression of desire for more art, languages were also favoured by many pupils. For some, this was a wish for more time to read or write, as can be seen here in Dragana's intricate and rather beautiful work:



Jigsaw 2.4; Dragana B.

Dragana's classmate Jade felt that increased opportunities to read might better support her MHWB:



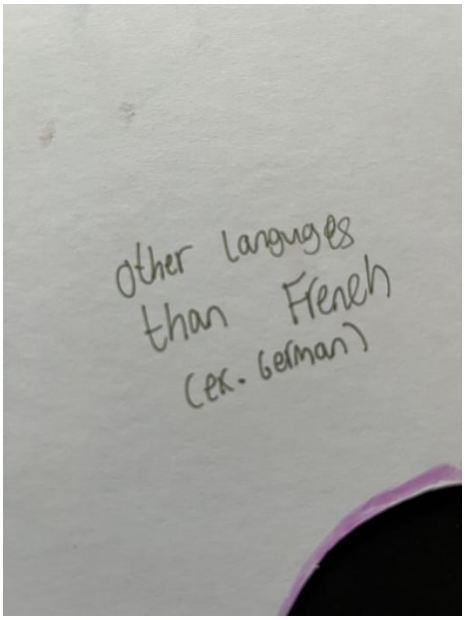
"More time for reading books in class."
Jigsaw 2.10; Jade B.

Esme A. included a wish for more discussions in class, citing health and wellbeing exchanges which she had particularly enjoyed:

> More talking and listening (H&WB discussions.)

- Esme A.

However, the most prevalent request in terms of language was for more *foreign* languages to be taught in school:



Jigsaw 3.6; Fiona C.



"Teaching different languages."
Jigsaw 4.6; Fatima D.

More languages in school – increases skill for life beyond school.

- Fatima D.

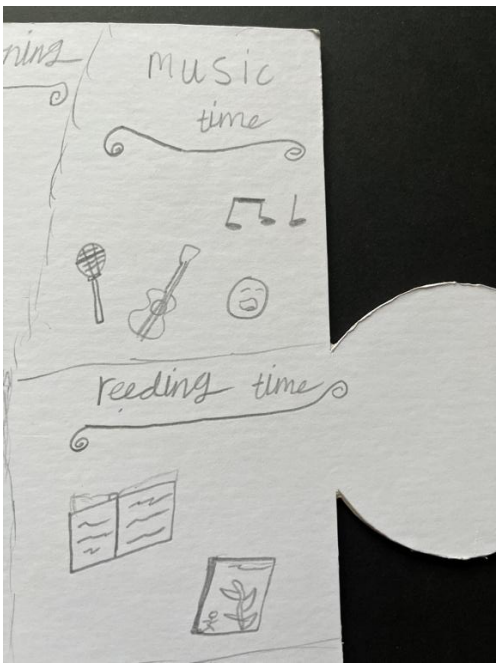
Different languages taught in school – Japanese / Chinese.

- Praise A.

Others sought to include more opportunities for language with other forms of the arts. Classmates Gurpreet B. and Omar B. both shared a desire for more reading and music:

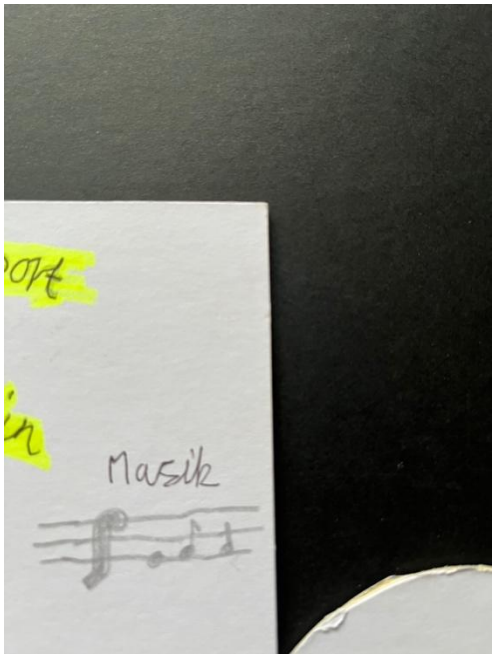


"More reading. Longer guitar."
Jigsaw 2.7; Gurpreet B.



"Music time. Reading time."
Jigsaw 2.15; Omar B.

Several other pupils were keen on more music in school:



“Music.”
Jigsaw 2.9; Isaac A.

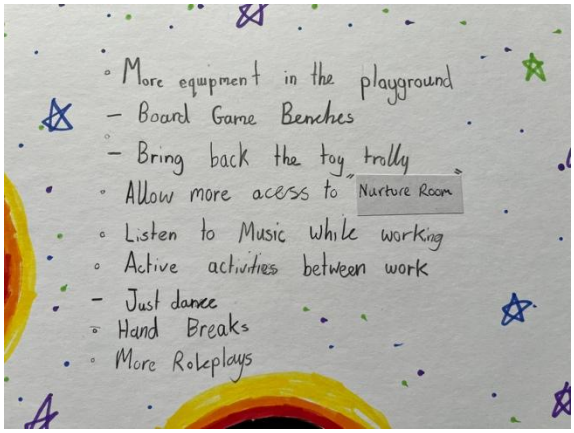


“Music.”
Jigsaw 2.16; Penny B.

Some time to listen to music.

- Omar B.

Some pupils saw background music as being beneficial in terms of creating the right atmosphere during activities:

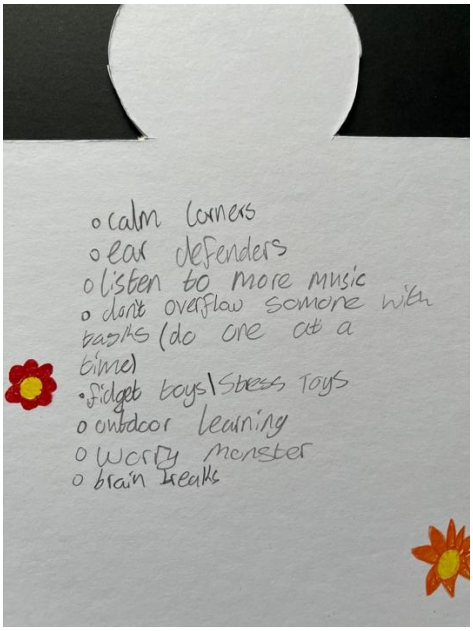


"Listen to more music while working."
Jigsaw 1.6; Farid A.

More smartboard music during lessons.

- Farid A.

-



"Listen to more music."
Jigsaw 1.9; Isha A.

Music – creates a good vibe to help you focus or change mood. Calming music for work.

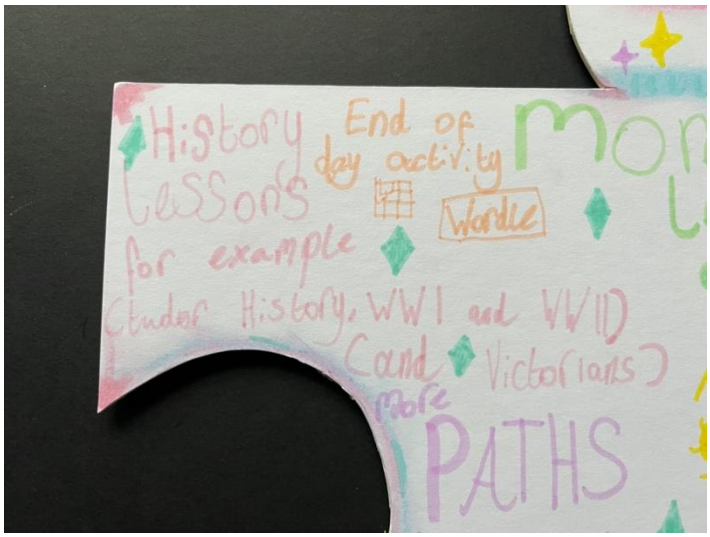
- Isha A.

Despite many of the calls for more music in school seemingly related to incidental or background music, Huan B. was alone in explicitly requesting more music lessons in school:

I'd like more guitar lessons. I'd like more music in school – different areas.

- Huan B.

Art, languages and music represent the greatest prevalence of choices for a particular subject across all four schools. Beyond these three, there were a few requests in school three for more history lessons:

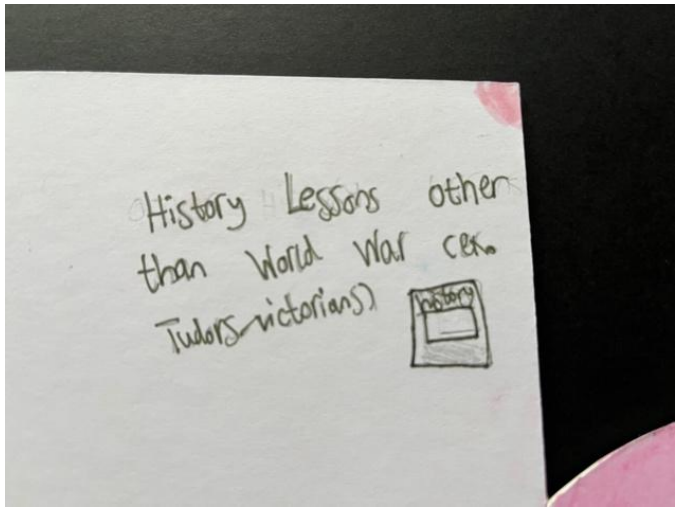


"History lessons. For example Tudor history, W.W.I and W.W.II and Victorians."
Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

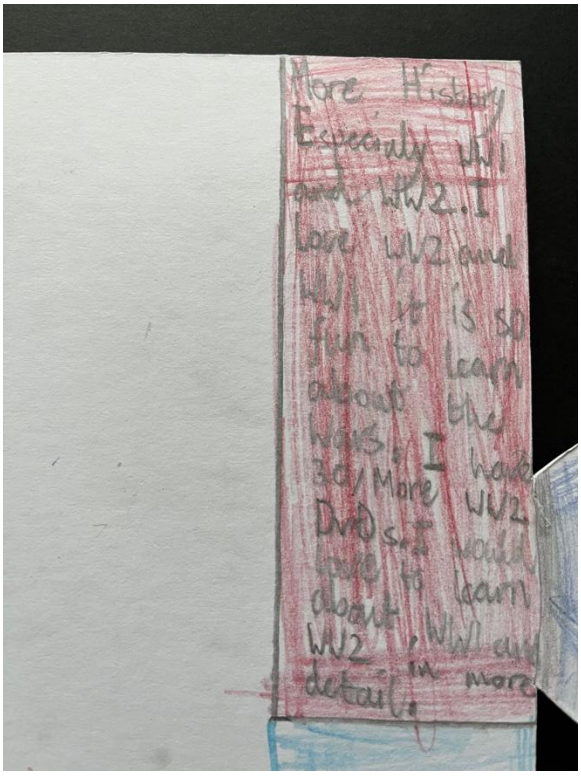
More history lessons. Don't do enough.

- Bethany C.

Bethany's classmates Fiona and Declan also wanted more history, although they disagreed about the suitability of lessons on World Wars:

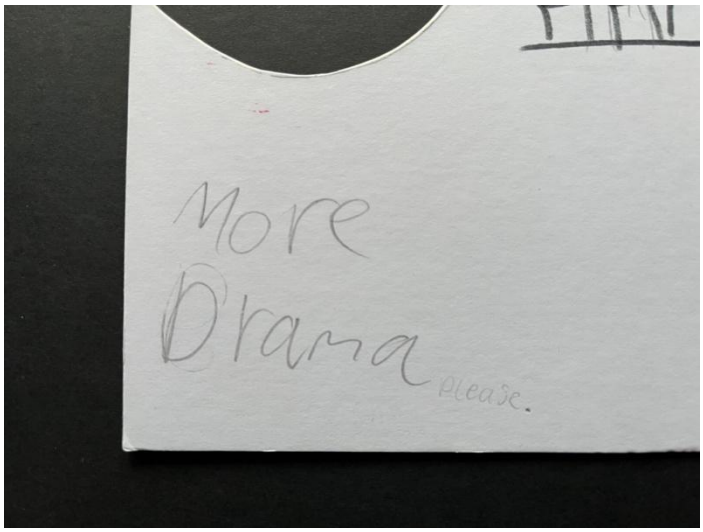


"History lessons other than World War."
Jigsaw 3.6; Fiona C.



"More history, especially W.W.I and W.W.II.
It is so fun to learn about the wars."
Jigsaw 3.4; Declan C.

More drama was also requested by a few pupils, either in the form of lessons or simply a greater use of role-play generally:



"More drama please."
Jigsaw 3.10; Jayda C.

> I would like more drama activities – it helps me to express myself and solve problems.

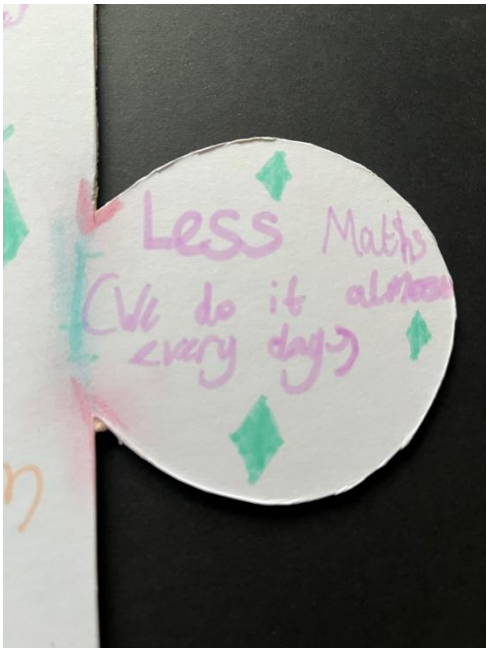
- Jayda C.

-

Role play – use of drama in lots of lessons.

- Farid A.

The only mention of maths across all 77 jigsaw pieces was not favourable:



“Less maths. (We do it almost every day.)”
Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

Ultimately, although there may be something many pupils find intrinsically calming in art, the choice of favourite subject is an entirely subjective one and therefore presumably varies across schools. Presumably (contrary to the findings of this study) there are classes which prefer maths to languages or drama. In order to resolve this situation, a flexible approach which can respond to varying contexts is therefore required. Such an approach was suggested by several pupils from school three, who argued for greater choice or control over the lessons they participated in, rather than simply advocating for more of one particular subject. The situation which suggested the need for greater choice was depicted equally bluntly by both Nabil and Genevieve C:

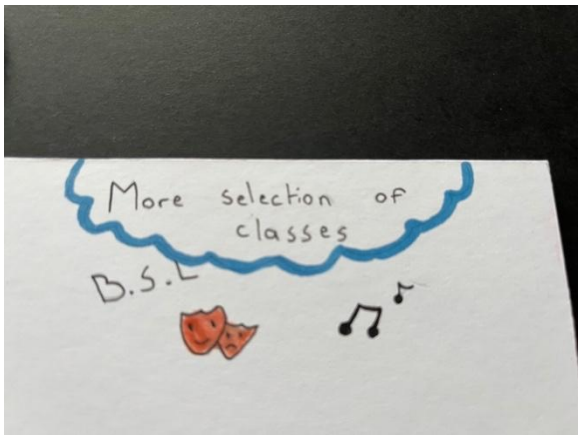


Jigsaw 3.14; Nabil C.



Jigsaw 3.7; Genevieve C.

Emilia C. seemed to hint at the solution to the issue, although she does not explicitly state who should make the selection:

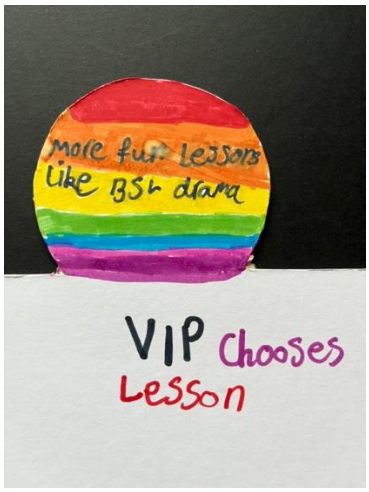


Jigsaw 3.5; Emilia C.

More selection of classes – a better range through the day.

- Emilia C.

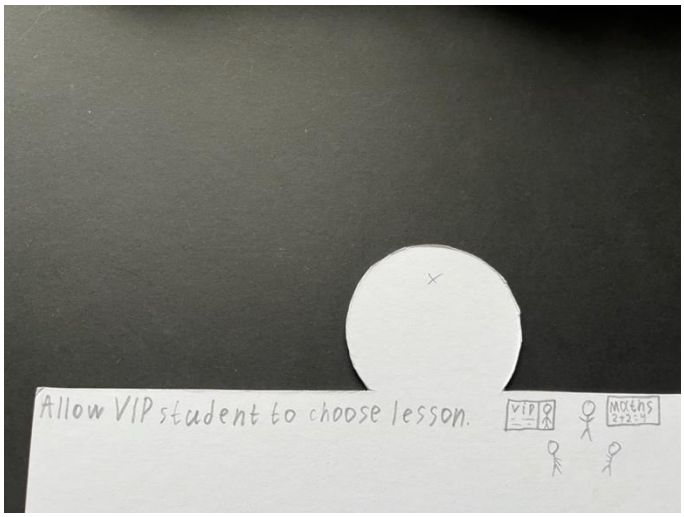
Two of her classmates suggested the choice could be made by the 'pupil of the day', a feature of the PATHS programme taught in their school, and also known as the 'V.I.P.':



Jigsaw 3.15; Olivia C.

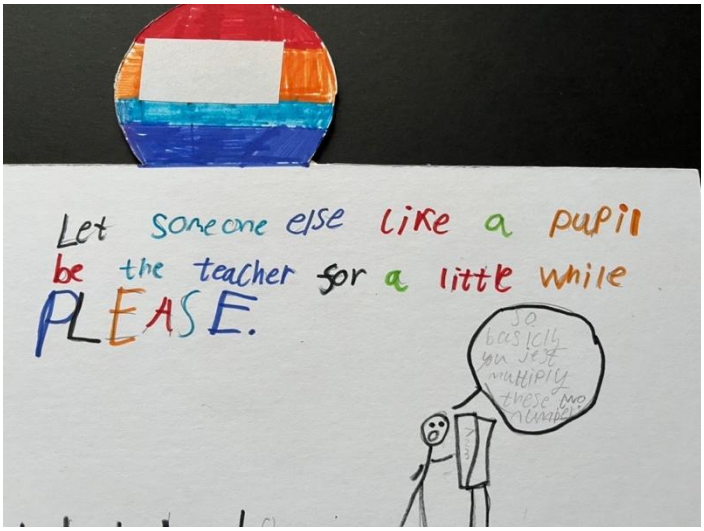
PATHS pupil chooses the lesson.

- Olivia C.



"Allow V.I.P. student to choose lesson."
Jigsaw 3.9; Ivy C.

Jayda C. recommended that not only should a pupil choose the lesson, they could take some responsibility in delivering it too:



Jigsaw 3.10; Jayda C.

> More opportunities for the class to 'be the teacher' and deliver parts of the lesson. I like this!
>
> - Jayda C.

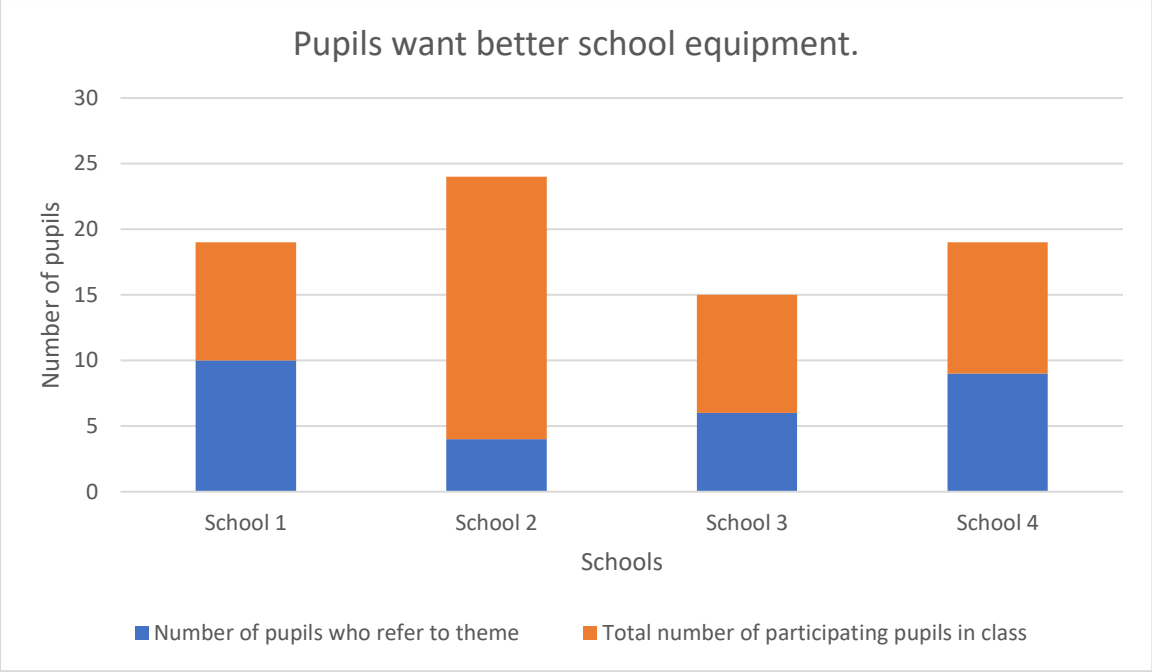
Finally, William B. outlined one potential benefit which pupils might feel from having greater control over decisions taken in the classroom:

> If you have more choice it will motivate you to come to school in the morning. More choice over what you learn.
>
> - William B.

Having described pupils' views about proposed changes to school routines and the curriculum, as well as their thoughts on how these might improve their MHWB, the focus now turns to the remaining adaptations pupils suggested. These are more material in nature, relating to schools' amenities, facilities and equipment.

7.1.3 "IF THEY WERE OCCUPIED THEY WOULDN'T BE SO SAD." PUPILS WANT BETTER SCHOOL EQUIPMENT.

This subtheme comprises pupils' desires to have better physical resources in their schools. As can be seen in graph 7.3, it was expressed by a majority of pupils in school one and a significant minority of pupils in schools 3 and 4. Few pupils mentioned points associated with this subtheme in school two; this relatively affluent school seemed noticeably better resourced than the others.



Graph 7.3.

The school equipment described by pupils can be divided into three forms; sensory toys, playground equipment, and secluded areas within classrooms. The first of these, the desire to have greater access to sensory toys (or 'fidgets' as they were usually called by the pupils) was particularly evident in school one. This can be seen in several of the jigsaw illustrations:



Jigsaw 1.14; Noah A.

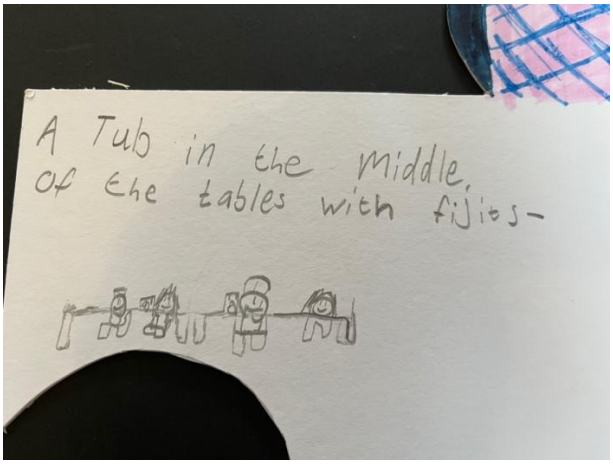
The "helping hand" box referred to by Noah A. was a box of sensory toys from which pupils could select an item. Noah evidently felt that it was insufficiently stocked. This view was shared by another pupil in Noah's class:

> A bigger range of fidget spinners.
>
> \- Maya A.

Noah also suggested a means by which this range of sensory toys might be increased:

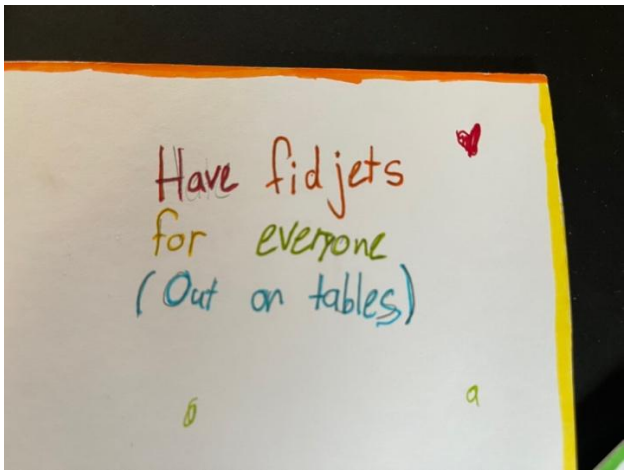
> Being able to buy fidget toys with our Dojo points.
>
> - Noah A.

The "Dojo points" to which Noah refers are a class reward system widely used in Scottish primary schools; points are typically awarded for hard work, exemplary behaviour *etc*. However, the range and number of sensory toys available was not the only issue identified by pupils; availability was also mentioned.



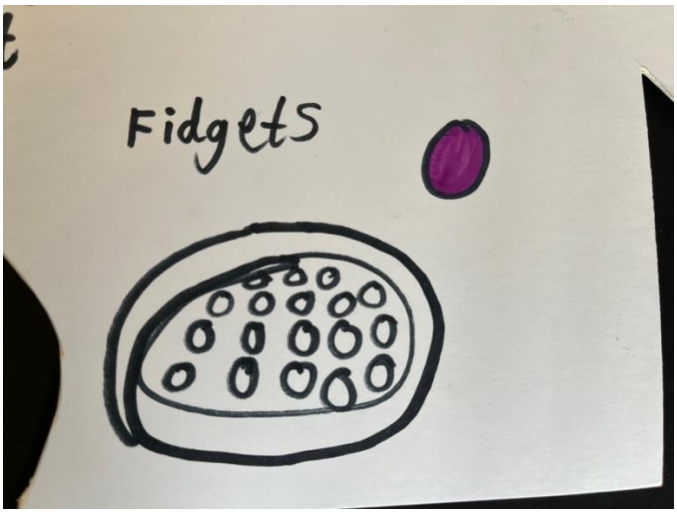
"A tub in the middle of the table with fidgets."
Jigsaw 1.13; Maya A.

The illustration featured above suggests that Maya A. would prefer easier access to sensory toys. A tub on each group table would presumably allow more discreet access than that provided by the 'helping hands' box, which would require pupils to stand up and cross the classroom to choose a toy. This preference is shared by another pupil from the same class, as can be seen in jigsaw piece 1.7:



Jigsaw 1.7; Gordon A.

Gordon A. seems to take the same view as Maya A., that sensory toys should be universally available and easily accessible. A pupil from school three, Olivia C., also felt that 'fidgets' would help support her mental wellbeing, as can be seen in her illustration:



Jigsaw 3.15; Olivia C.

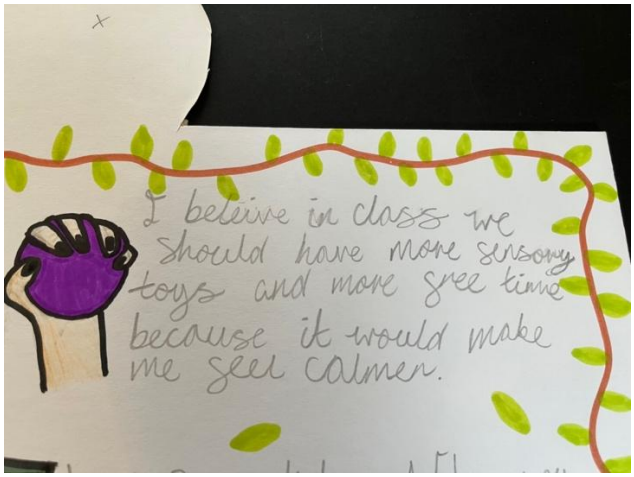
In common with Maya A. and Gordon A., Olivia also suggests that access to sensory toys was an issue in her school:

> Sensory toys – I don't where they are but we're allowed them.
>
> - Olivia C.

An insight into the benefit offered by sensory toys was provided by two pupils. Gordon A. suggested that they help pupils focus:

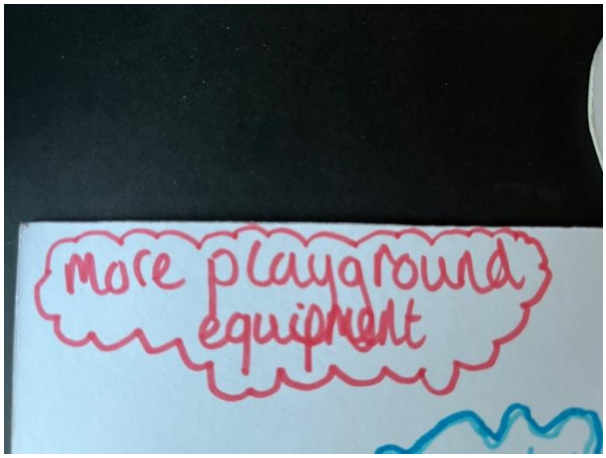
> Fidgets – help concentration, not to distract us!
>
> - Gordon A.

Rory A. clearly outlines his view that sensory toys, used in conjunction with free time, would help him feel calmer:

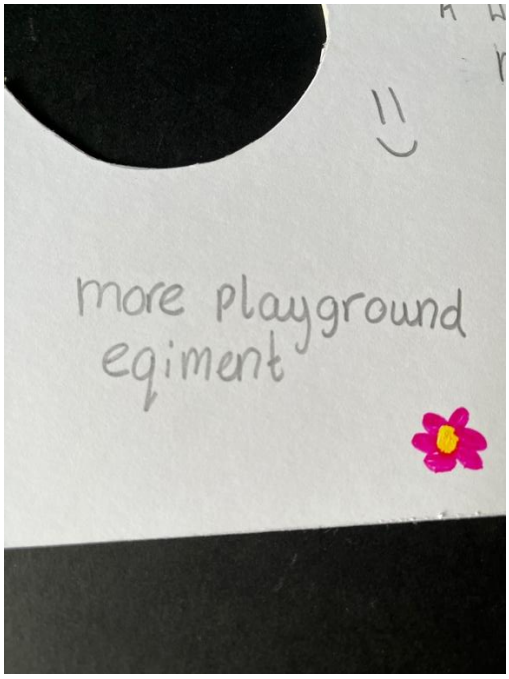


Jigsaw 1.18; Rory A.

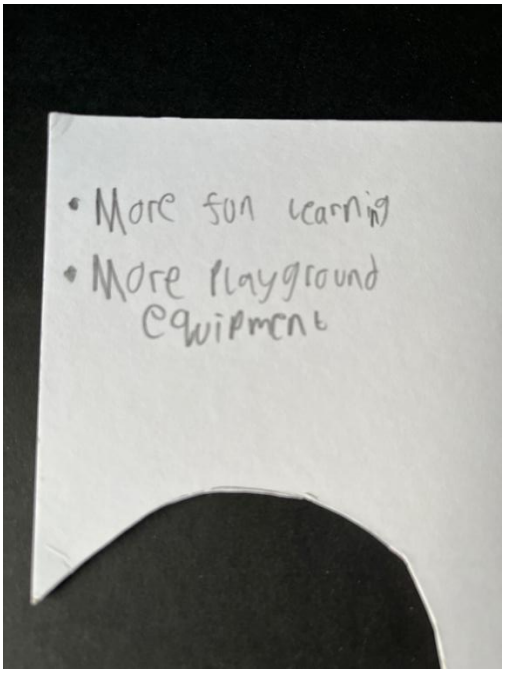
Another aspect of improving each school's physical resources was that of acquiring more playground equipment. This theme emerged particularly strongly in schools one and four and was often unambiguously stated in pupils' illustrations:



Jigsaw 4.19; Shiv D.

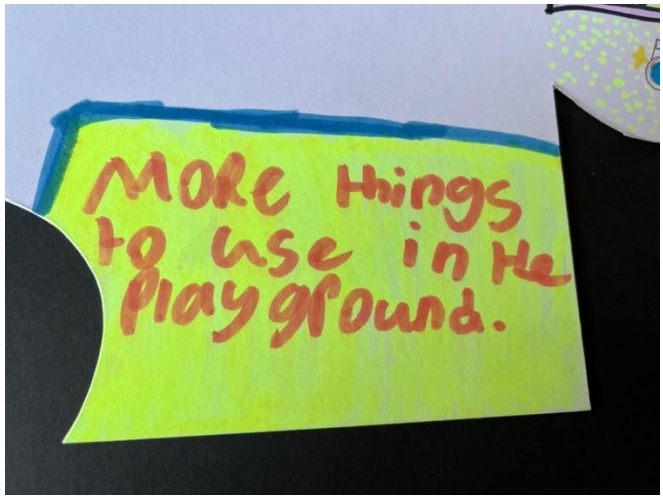


Jigsaw 1.4; Dmitri A.



Jigsaw 1.5; Esme A.

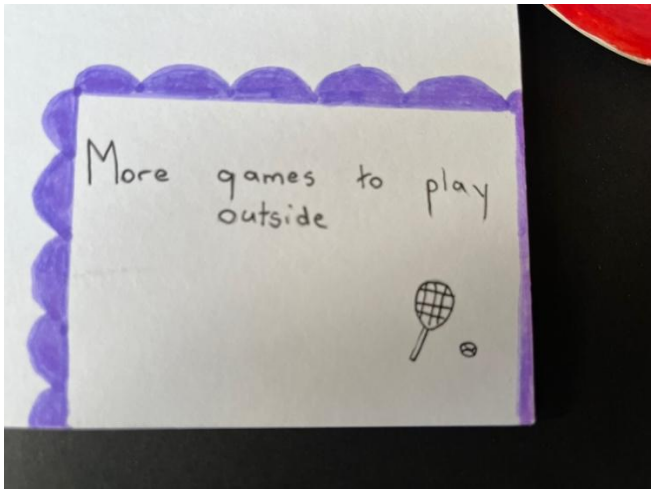
Some pupils characterised this desire simply in terms of having more things to play with during break times:



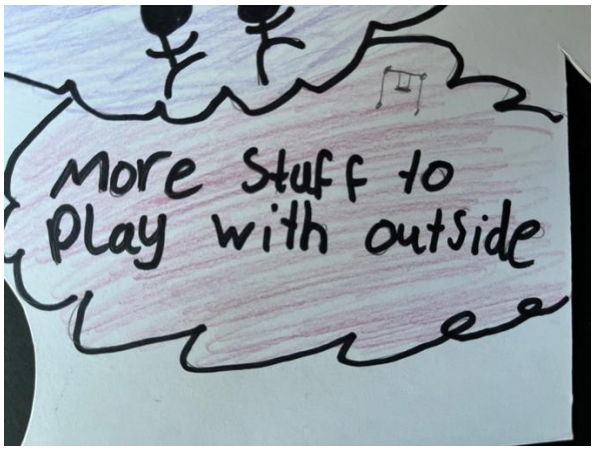
Jigsaw 4.13; Muhammad D.



Jigsaw 1.10; James A.



Jigsaw 3.5; Emilia C.



Jigsaw 4.16; Oliver D.

James A. saw a greater range and number of playground toys as important, and a way to increase the choices available to pupils:

> Our school's got a lot of great things – but maybe more toys to play outside. Choice about what you want to pick and play with.
>
> - James A.

Queenie D. saw what she perceived to be a lack of fairness in the availability of toys to pupils throughout the school:

> More playground equipment. P1s and the ASN unit children have more equipment [than us] so I want it to be fair.
>
> - Queenie D.

Some pupils had greater ambition for their playgrounds and suggested that a fully-equipped play park would help support their MHWB. Brian A. outlined what this would involve:

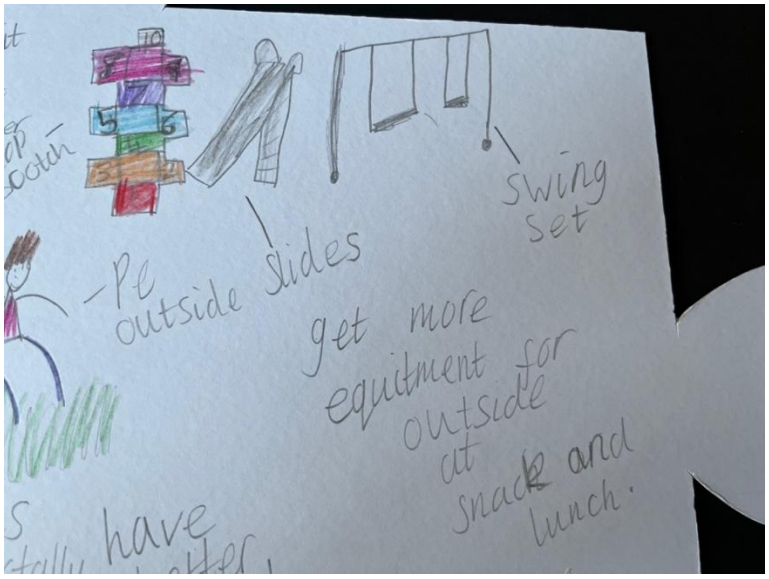
> A park in playground – swings, slide and a roundabout.
>
> - Brian A.

We can see how Brian A. imagined this in his illustration:



“A park.”
Jigsaw 1.2; Brian A.

Noor D. imagined a similar play park in her playground:



Jigsaw 4.14; Noor D.

Lily D. seemed to have a similar line of thought, imagining better playground equipment in terms of a set of swings:



Jigsaw 4.12; Lily D.

Kai D. saw having play park equipment as offering an alternative for those who preferred not to play football:

> I would like a slide. A lot of people play football but some don't like that, so they would have *options*.
>
> - Kai D.

However, Noah A. saw improvements to playground equipment as including (but not limited to) more football goals:



Jigsaw 1.14; Noah A.

Other pupils suggested imaginative alternatives to play parks or football equipment. Omar B. proposed an outdoor obstacle course:

> Obstacle courses. Play games outside.
>
> - Omar B.

Farid A. suggested setting up outdoor benches with board games set into the surfaces, such as a chequerboard for use with chess pieces or draughts.



Jigsaw 1.6; Farid A.

Farid A. also proposed more playground toys:

> Outdoor benches with board games… Outdoor toys – tennis rackets, hoops, stilts.
>
> - Farid A.

Finally, two of the pupils described how they thought that improved playground equipment might support pupils' MHWB in school:

> Bigger playground area with more equipment for breaks/ lunches. Zones for different games to give more choice. Maybe if you had more fun at break, class time would be easier/ better.
>
> - Brianna D.

> Better playground equipment – stop people sitting outside being bored. I see people lying in the playground. If they were occupied they wouldn't be so sad.

- Noor D.

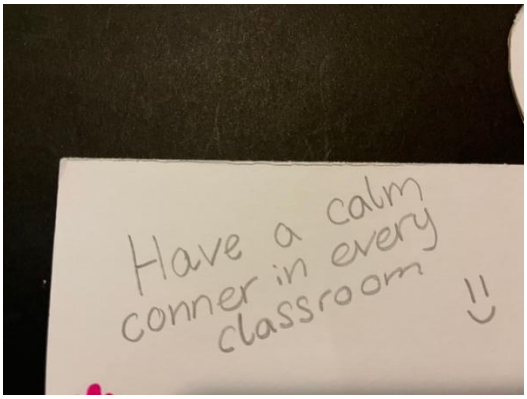
Although the theme of making adaptations to the school environment seems to be shared by both pupils and school staff in this study, the *value* of these suggestions from pupils of how better playground equipment might support their MHWB is seemingly questioned by one of their teachers. During her interview, Ms Brooke described her views on this topic, which are worth noting here:

> **Ms Brooke:** I think… for us, we're a very… deprived school, budget's low, we can see our kids are missing out on *so* much stuff. You know, the playground's a concrete jungle out there. Erm, we just… try to… to get things for the kids, and it's difficult… they're *missing* a lot in some ways.
> **Mr Bell:** What are they missing?
> **Ms Brooke:** Experiences and… just a *nice* environment. If you look around, there's litter everywhere, there's dog fouling, there's needles lying around, just… But that's the general community, that's wider, that's bigger than us… I think the head teacher will ask the kids, "What would you like for our school?" And they're like, "Skipping ropes!" They don't even know what else is really out there because this is all they know.
>
> - Ms Brooke (Class teacher, school four.)

This conversation with Ms Brooke implies that school staff may view pupils' requests for increased playground equipment as being of peripheral importance in terms of addressing the sum of their issues. As such there may be a risk that such requests are belittled. This tension between adults' and pupils' perspectives will be explored in greater detail in the discussion chapter. For now, attention will return to the final aspect of improvements to the school environment; that of quiet and comfortable spaces in classrooms.

Several pupils in school one expressed a desire for a quiet corner in their classroom. This came in various forms. For Dmitri, it was a 'calm corner', which would be helpful in moments of stress:

> Calm corner – place to relax when stressed.
>
> - Dmitri A.



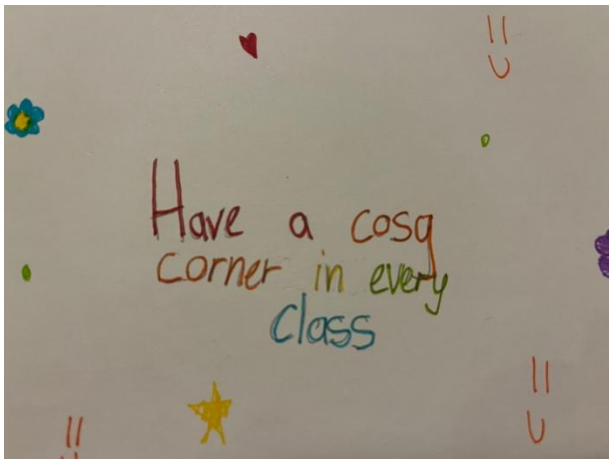
Jigsaw 1.4; Dmitri A.

Dmitri's classmate Isha expressed a similar desire:

> Calm corners- help you calm down and make you feel less overwhelmed.
>
> - Isha A.

Gordon A. also felt that having this sort of area in the class would help make pupils feel calmer. He called it a "cosy corner:"

> Cosy corner – if a break is needed, it helps you calm and not be worked up.
>
> - Gordon A.

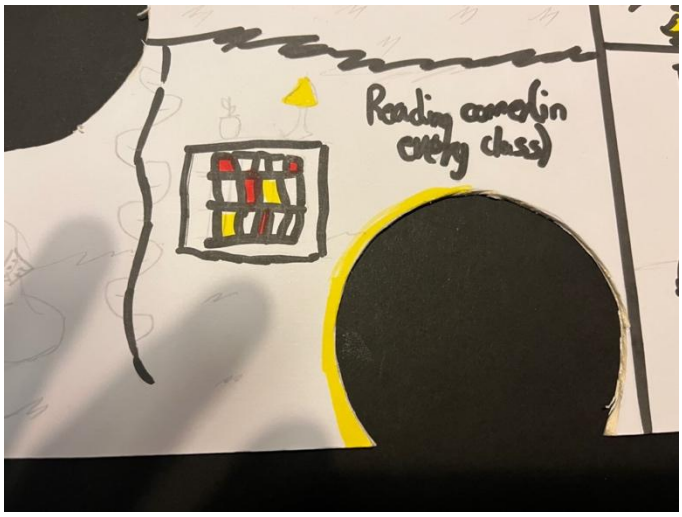


Jigsaw 1.7; Gordon A.

Their class mate Brian seemed to suggest several such areas in his class would benefit his MHWB:

> I'd like a bean bag area in the class. Also a time out zone. Reading corner in *every* class.
>
> - Brian A.

This was reflected in his illustrations:



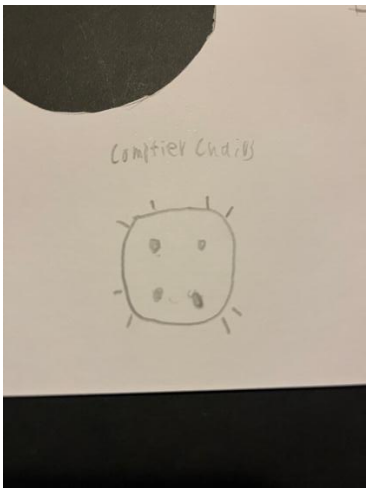
“Reading corner in every class.”
Jigsaw 1.2; Brian A.



“Bean bag area.”
Jigsaw 1.2; Brian A.

A related idea which emerged from other school was that of pupils having more comfortable seating:

-



"Comfier chairs."
Jigsaw 2.14; Nancy B.



Jigsaw 3.14; Nabil C.

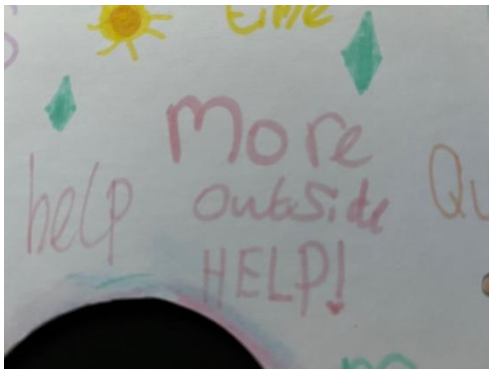


Jigsaw 3.13; Madison C.

Madison outlined her views on why "comfy seats" would be beneficial:

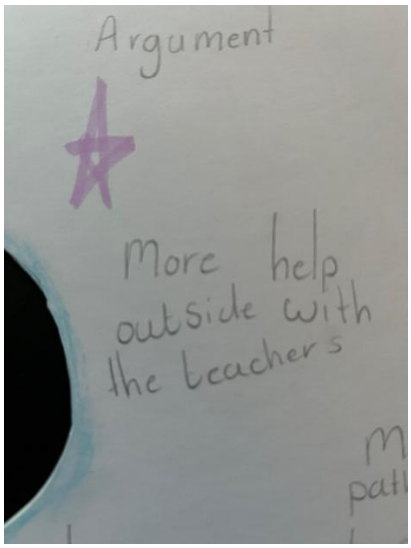
> Comfy seats – after a long week, my back can hurt, no sore muscles would make it easier to concentrate.
>
> - Madison C.

Finally, as something of a postscript to this subtheme of improved resourcing in schools, it is worth noting that there were a few pupils who called for an increased staff presence. This is of interest as it was such a prominent feature of the school staff members' views on how to improve the MHWB of their pupils. By contrast, only six pupils mentioned a desire for more help from staff; all but one of them were in school three. Here, the pupils were focused on getting more adult support in the playground:



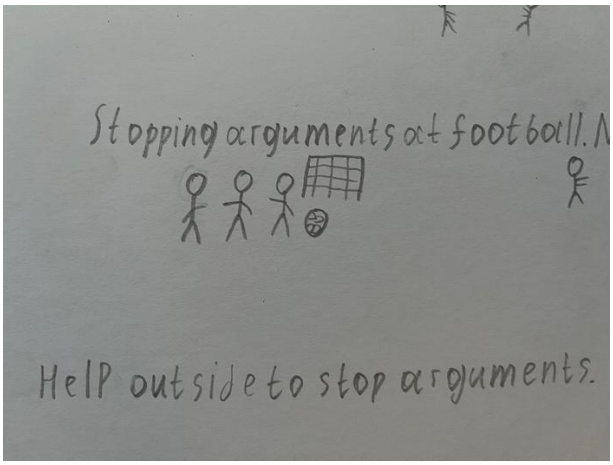
Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

Clara, Ivy and Nabil C. were quite clear that the need for more help was because of disagreements over football:

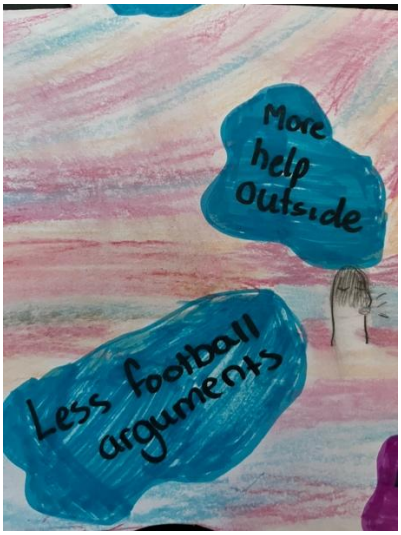


Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.

> More help in playground from classroom assistants. Help refereeing football would help fix arguments.
>
> - Clara C.



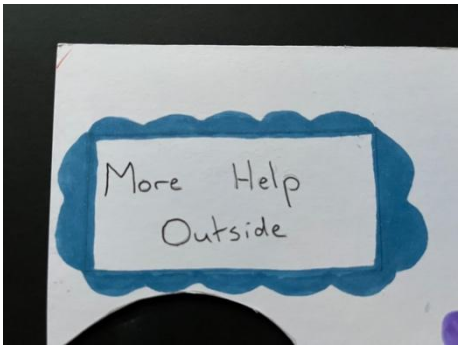
Jigsaw 3.9; Ivy C.



Jigsaw 3.14; Nabil C.

> More help outside – adults taking problems more seriously and helping to solve them.
>
> - Nabil C.

However, what is not clear from these pupils is whether they feel that an increased *number* of staff members is necessary, or simply that those present take a more proactive approach to settling disputes amongst pupils. Of all 77 participating pupils included in the study, only two explicitly called for support from a greater number of staff members. Emilia C. hoped for more adults to help pupils with games:

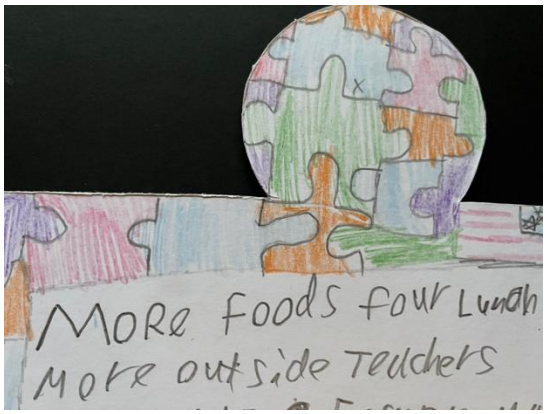


Jigsaw 3.5; Emilia C.

More help outside – more adults – more kids' games.

- Emilia C.

Aleksandr D. was clear and concise in his hope:



"More outside teachers."
Jigsaw 4.1; Aleksandr D.

More staff in playground.

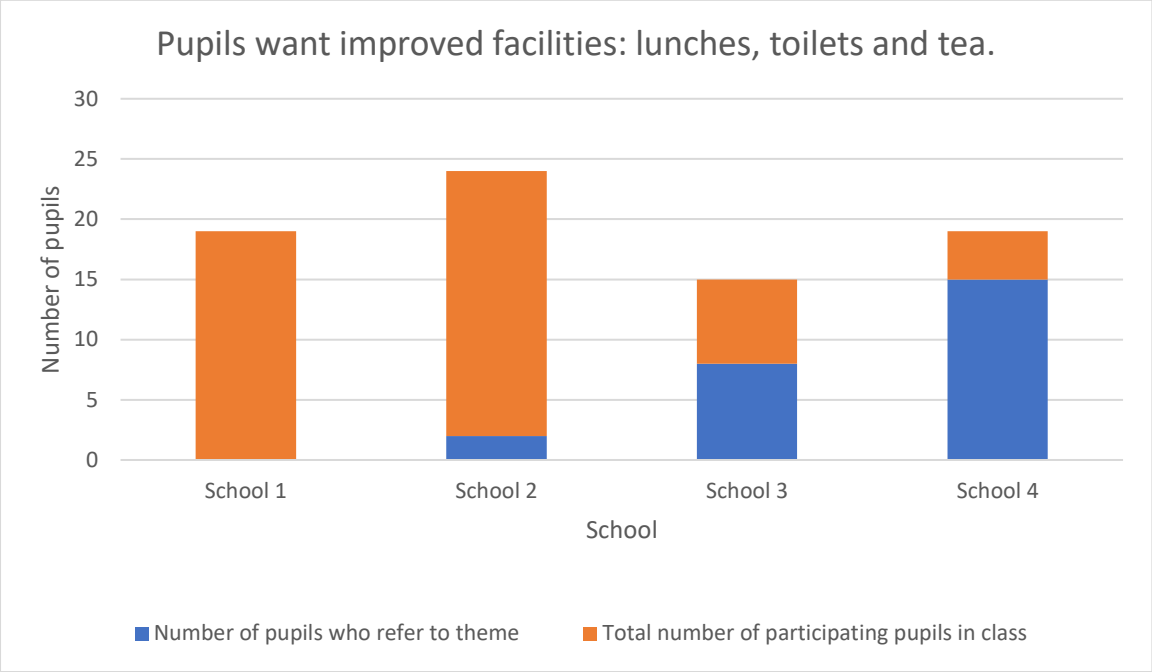
- Aleksandr D.

The disparity between the number of staff members and pupils who cite the need for increased numbers of school staff seems to highlight a divergence between their priorities, which shall be explored further in the discussion chapter. In the meantime, pupils advocated one final area of improvement; a desire for better facilities in schools. This can best be summarised in terms of three issues: lunches, toilets and tea.

7.1.4 "HONESTLY DISGUSTING."
PUPILS WANT IMPROVED FACILITIES: LUNCHES, TOILETS AND TEA.

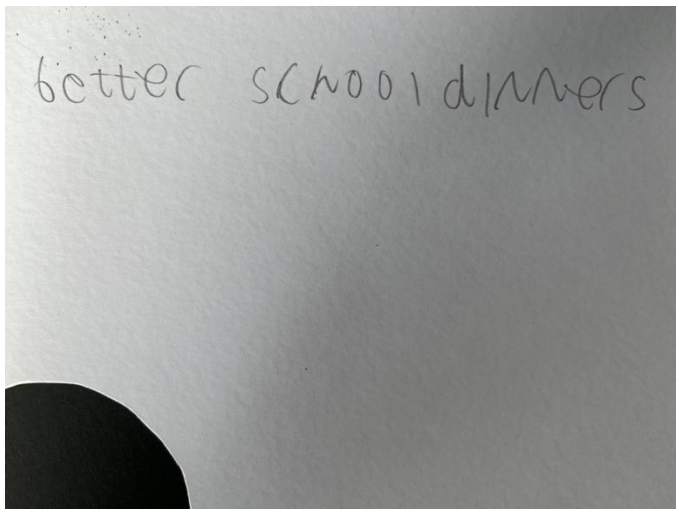
This is clearly one of the most context-specific issues which emerged from the study. As can be seen in graph 7.4, this subtheme was raised almost exclusively within schools 3 and 4,

although the frequency with which these issues were articulated was sufficient to justify its inclusion.



Graph 7.4.

Firstly, the quality of school lunches was clearly a concern in school four:

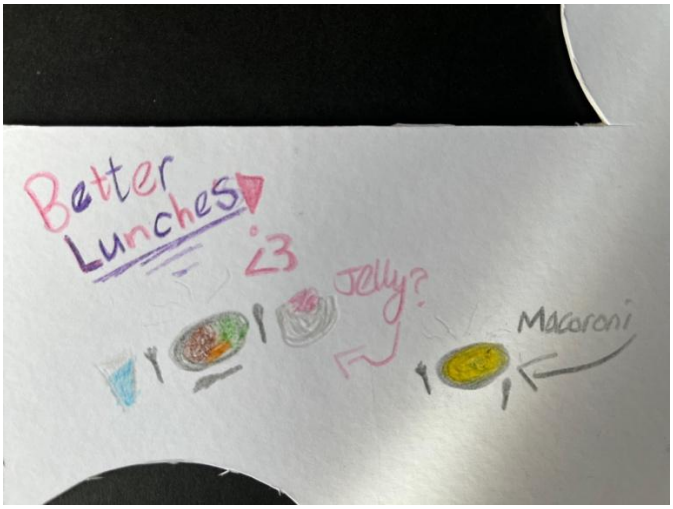


Jigsaw 4.7; Giovanni D.



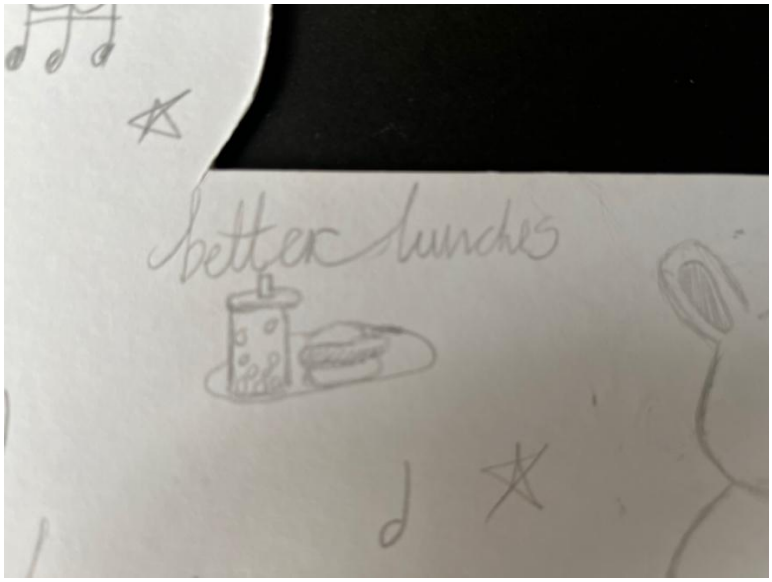
Jigsaw 4.16; Paris D.

Lily seemed to suggest that this could be achieved by the inclusion of pasta and jelly:



Jigsaw 4.12; Lily D.

Gurpreet B. was the only pupil *not* at school four who expressed views about their lunches, but she felt similarly:



Jigsaw 2.7; Gurpreet B.

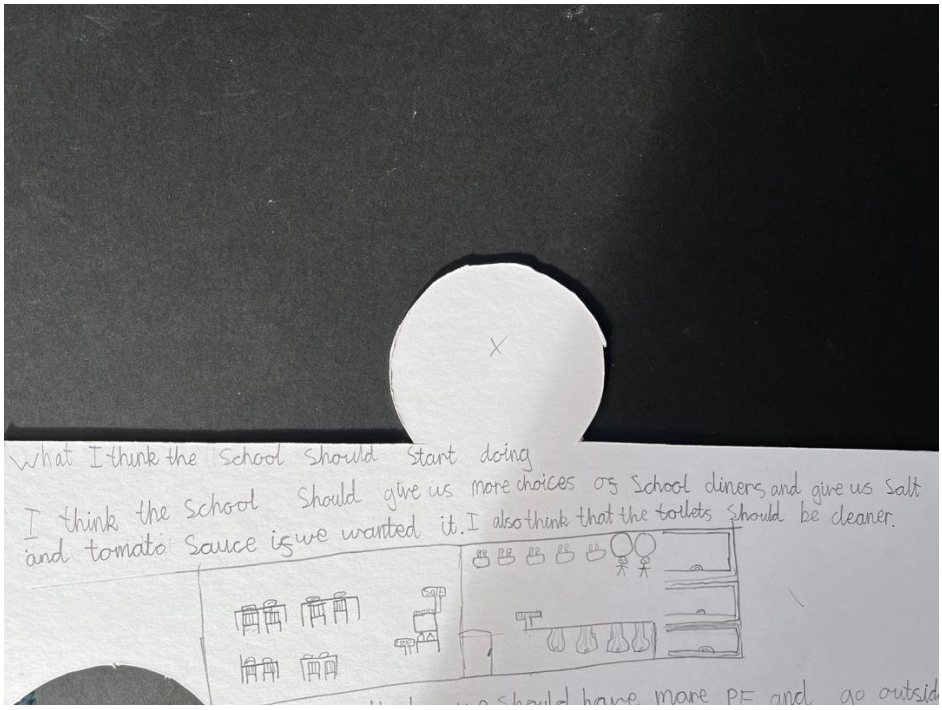
For Aleksandr, the issue seems to have been the lack of variety or choice of foods at lunchtime:

> Better choices at lunch.
>
> - Aleksandr D.



"More foods for lunch time."
Jigsaw 4.1; Aleksandr D.

His classmate Cathy D. clearly felt similarly, although she also expressed a desire for better condiments:



Jigsaw 4.3; Cathy D.

School dinners – having more variety/ condiments (salt/ sauce).

- Cathy D.

Cathy's views seemed to be shared by Muhammad:

I want tattie scones and better dinners and ketchup.

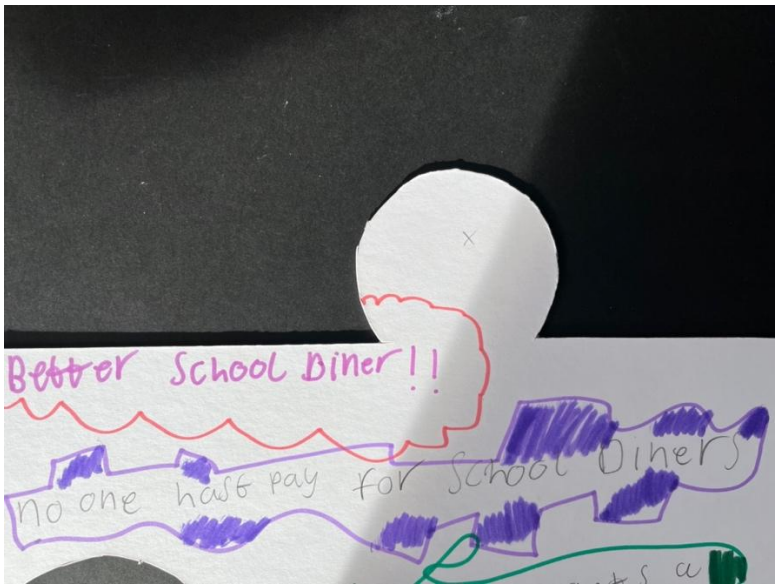
- Muhammad D.

Muhammad also made the case for school lunches to be both improved *and* free:



Jigsaw 4.13; Muhammad D.

At the time that this research was conducted, school lunches were free to all Scottish state school pupils in primaries one to five. This may explain why the pupils in school four, who were in primary six, felt this issue particularly keenly. Several of Muhammad's classmates evidently agreed with this idea that they ought not to have to pay for school lunches:



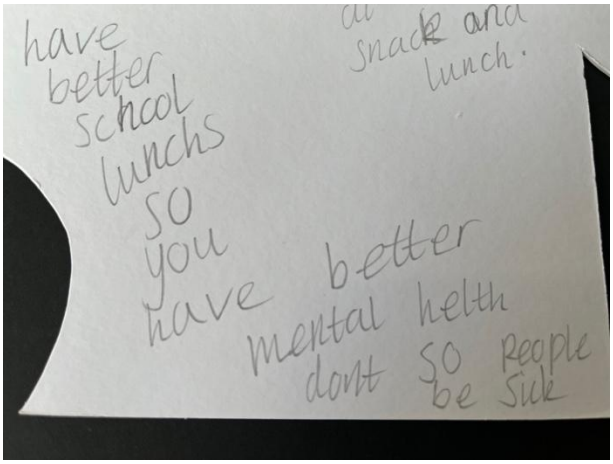
"Better school dinner! No one has to pay for school dinners."
Jigsaw 4.5; Ethan D.



"Free school dinners for all primary [classes] for people who don't have as much money."
Jigsaw 4.19; Shiv D.

> Upper school need free school dinners – like P1-3 [*sic*] – it would help people who might not afford it.
>
> \- with Shiv D.

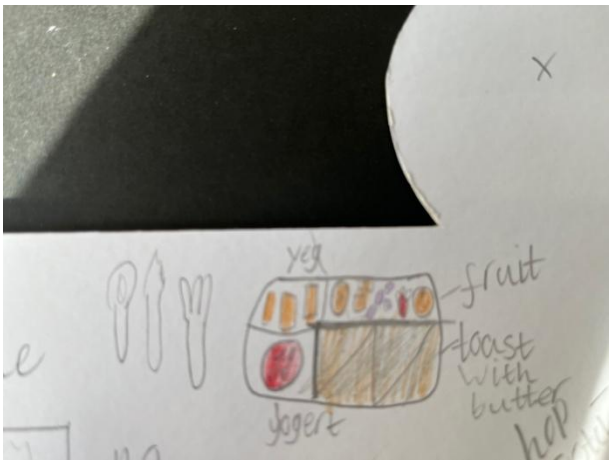
Finally, Noor tried to explain the link between better lunches and MHWB as she saw it:



"Have better school lunches so you have better mental health so people don't be sick."
Jigsaw 4.14; Noor D.

> Better food – lunches not the best. If someone doesn't like the food, they might not eat it, that will make them hungry in the afternoon.
>
> \- Noor D.
>
> \-

Noor then illustrated her idea of what that 'better food' might look like:

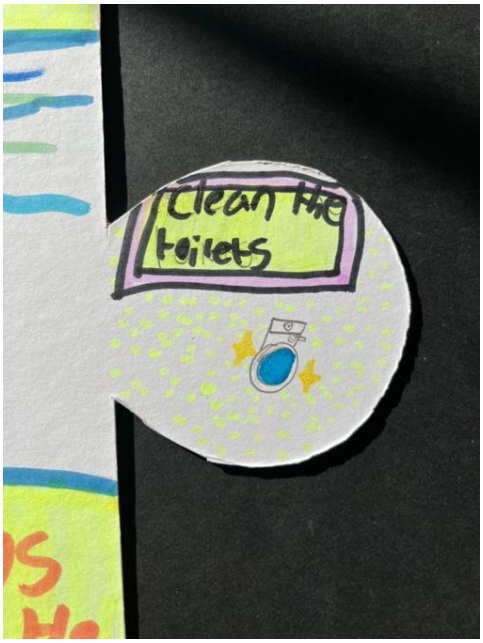


"Veg, yoghurt, fruit, toast with butter."
Jigsaw 4.14; Noor D.

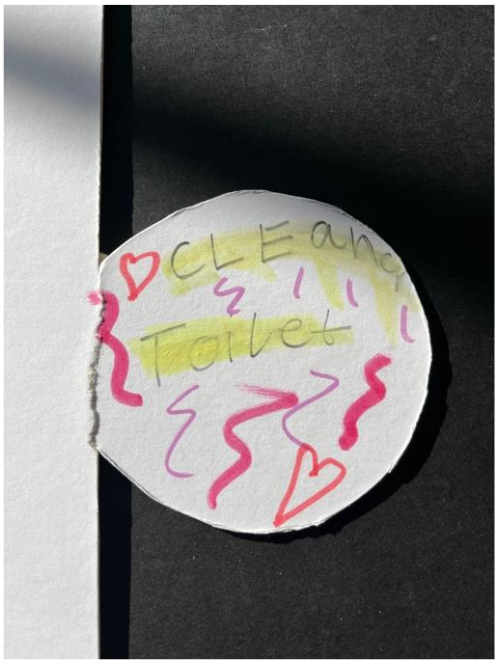
Another issue of concern which was voiced almost exclusively by pupils at school four was the unsatisfactory state of the toilets, both boys' and girls':



Jigsaw 4.12; Lily D.



Jigsaw 4.13; Muhammad D.



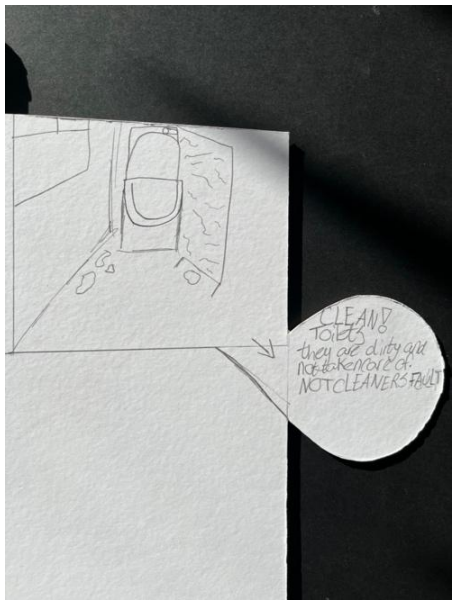
Jigsaw 4.5; Ethan D.

Oliver D.'s comment was short and to the point:

Toilets cleaned!

- Oliver D.

However, he was keen to point out that the situation could not be blamed on the school's cleaners:



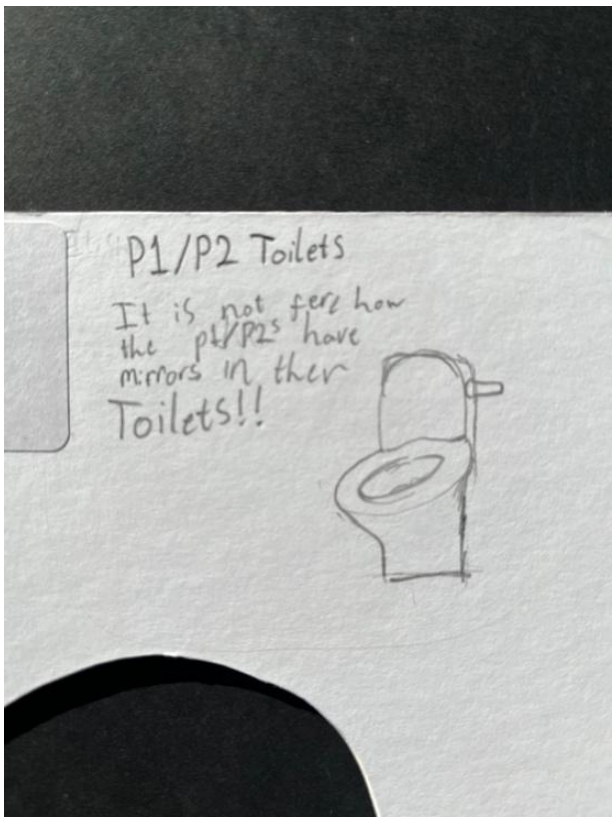
"Clean toilets! They are dirty and not taken care of.
NOT CLEANERS' FAULT."
Jigsaw 4.15; Oliver D.

-

Muhammad suggested one possible solution to the issue:

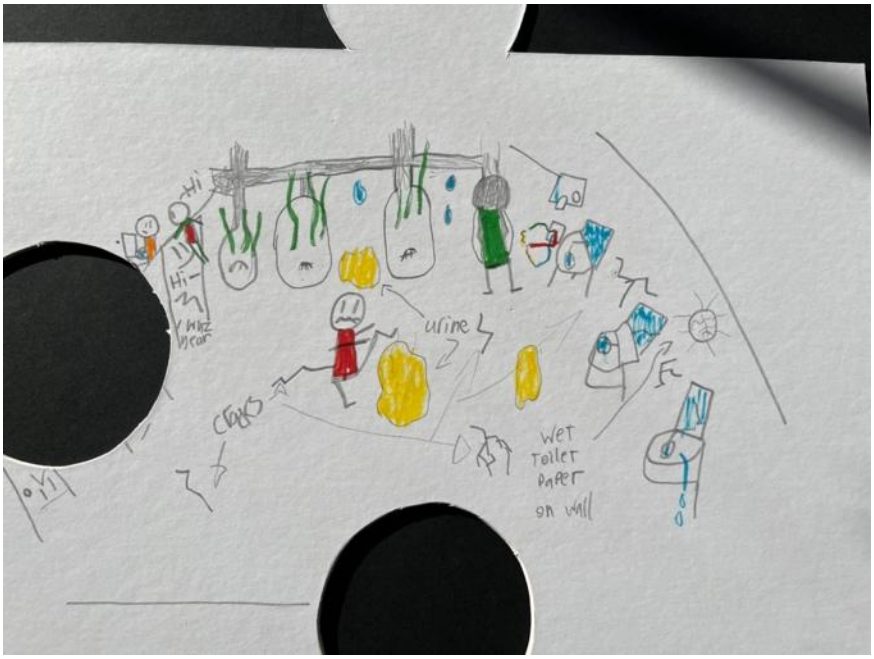
> There should be a teacher in the bathroom making sure it's okay.
>
> - Muhammad D.

Fatima felt that the lack of mirrors in the toilets was an issue:



"It is not fair how the p1s/ p2s have mirrors in their toilets!"
Jigsaw 4.6; Fatima D.

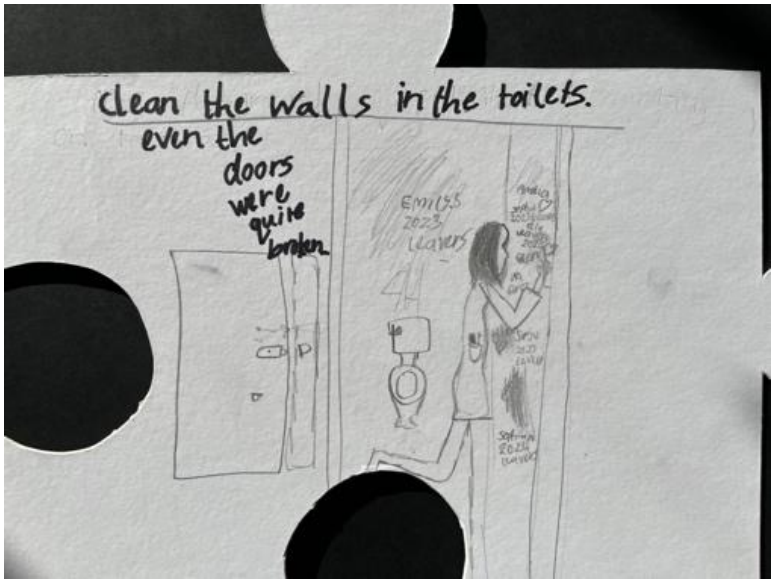
Sammy B. was the only pupil *not* at school four who expressed a similar concern about the state of his school's toilets, although he was apparently sufficiently vexed that he used his entire jigsaw piece to raise awareness of the issue:



Jigsaw 2.19; Sammy B.

> I'd like to improve the upstairs boys' bathroom. At the moment you don't want to use it because it's disgusting.
>
> - Sammy B.

Queenie D. similarly devoted her entire jigsaw piece to the issue, and complained of a lack of privacy:



"Clean the walls in the toilets. Even the doors were quite broken."

Jigsaw 4.17; Queenie D.

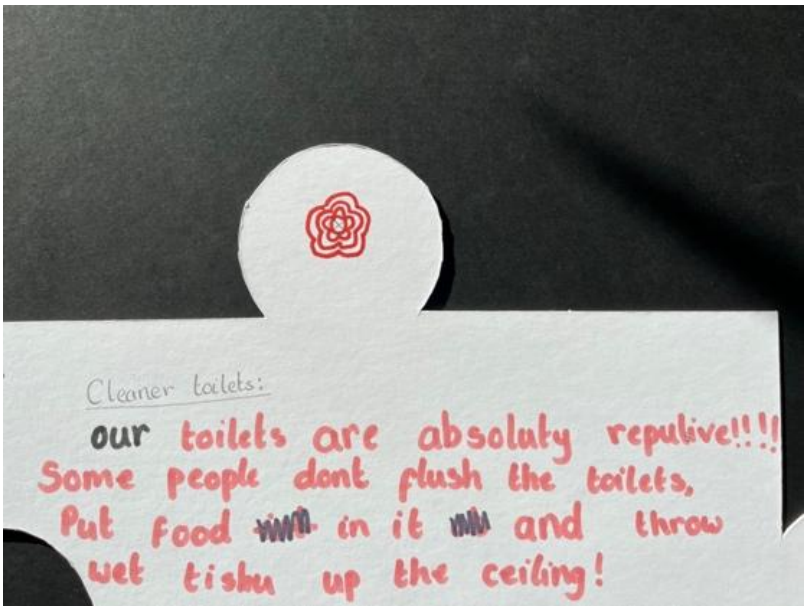
> I'd like cleaner toilets. That would help me feel better because I'd feel more comfortable. It's quite messy. Even the doors are broken so there's no privacy.

- Queenie D.

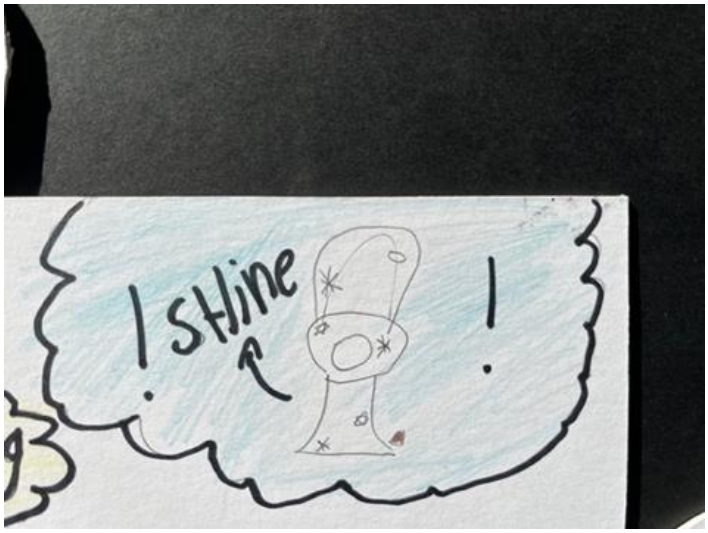
Shiv D. offered further detail about what, in her view, was wrong with the toilets:

> I'd like cleaner toilets. In the girls, there is graffiti, or flooded, or won't lock, or food or they don't flush. Soap on the floor made people slip. Bad smells make me feel sick.
>
> - Shiv D.

Rylee and Paris painted similarly "repulsive" descriptions, complaining of wet tissues stuck to the ceiling:



Jigsaw 4.18; Rylee D.

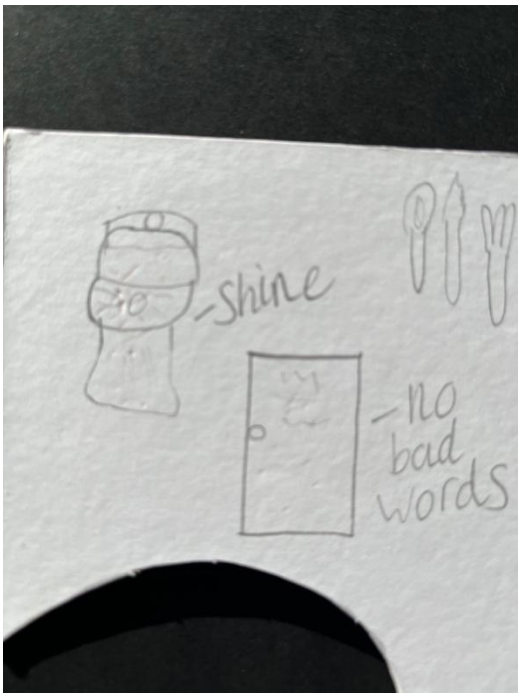


Jigsaw 4.16; Paris D.

Toilets – honestly disgusting. Wet towels on roof, rubbish.

- Paris D.

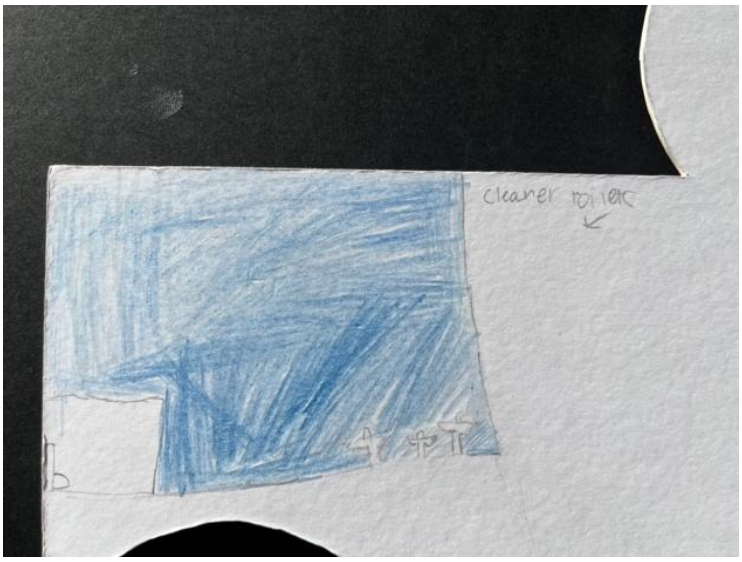
Noor D. was one of several who complained about graffiti in the toilets:



Jigsaw 4.14; Noor D.

> I'd like cleaner bathrooms because they're disgusting and graffitied – inappropriate stuff.
>
> - Noor D.

Finally, Ikechukwu made the link between cleaner toilets and improved MHWB:



"Cleaner toilets."

Jigsaw 4.9; Ikechukwu D.

Cleaner toilets. Helps wellbeing as when I walk in I feel sick and disgusted because they are dirty.

- Ikechukwu D.

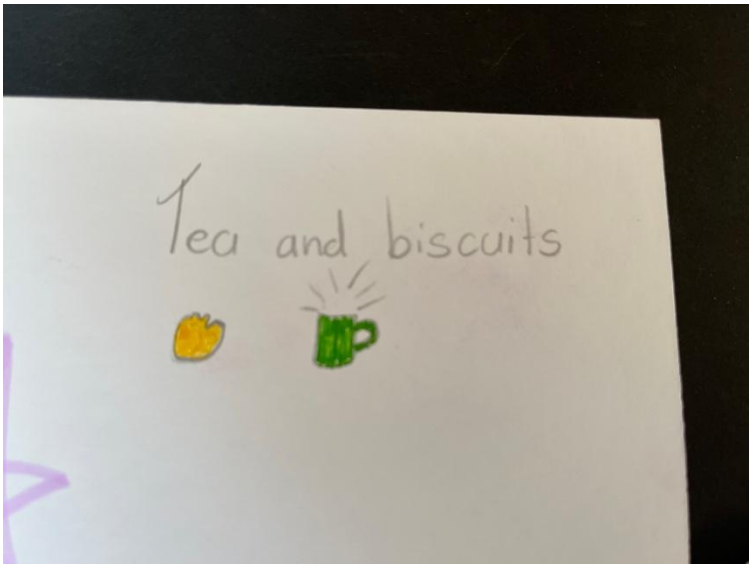
The last area of school facilities which pupils sought to improve was entirely specific to one school. Pupils in school three expressed a strong desire for tea and biscuits:

I like tea! And biscuits!

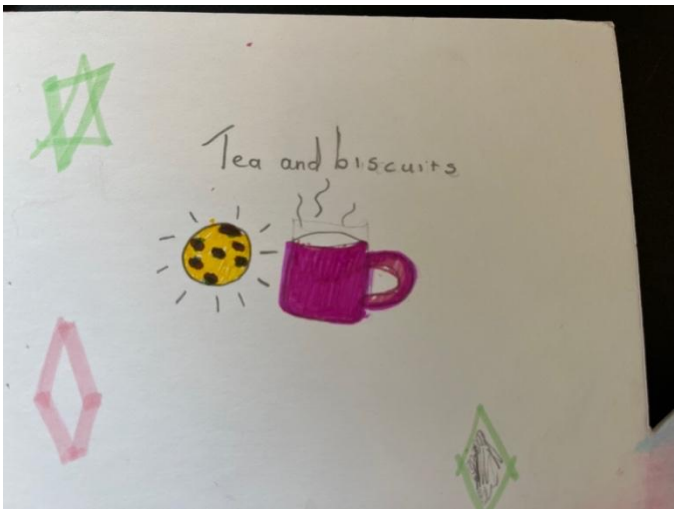
- Fiona C.



Jigsaw 3.6; Fiona C.



Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.



Jigsaw 3.1; Aihan C.

Aihan seemed to imply that one of the benefits of having tea and biscuits might be social:

> Tea and biscuits outside. Make tea for yourself and others.
>
> - Aihan C.

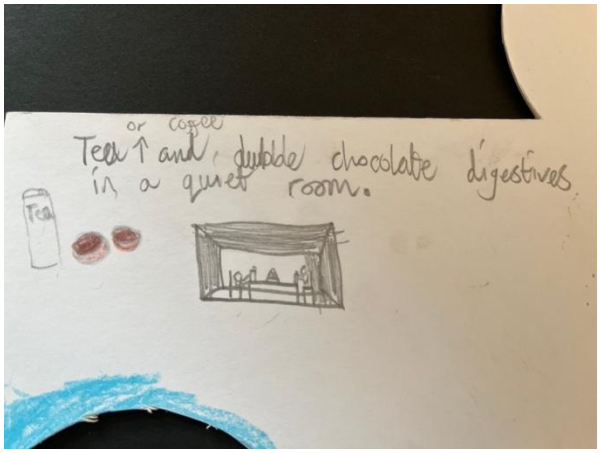


Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

Bethany suggested that they might prove helpful to support pupils who came from deprived backgrounds:

> Tea and biscuits tray for people who don't have snacks.
>
> - Bethany C.

Other pupils suggested combining tea and biscuits with a quiet space away from the classroom:



"Tea or coffee and double chocolate digestives in a quiet room."
Jigsaw 3.4; Declan C.

Or simply to help during the winter months:



Jigsaw 3.7; Genevieve C.

Tea and biscuits – to help when the weather is cold.

- Genevieve C.

Finally, two pupils thought that hot chocolate might be preferable to tea, and linked this treat with the idea of using it as a reward for pupils:

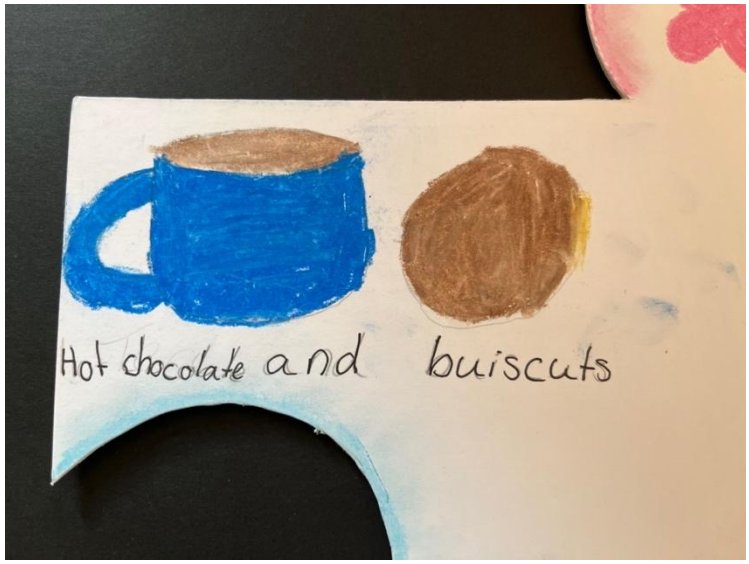


Jigsaw 3.12; Logan C.

Hot chocolate and biscuits – good reward for those working hard and following school values.

- Logan C.

-



Jigsaw 3.13; Madison C.

Hot chocolate and biscuits – to keep comfortable and warm – a treat for people to have. Could be a reward.

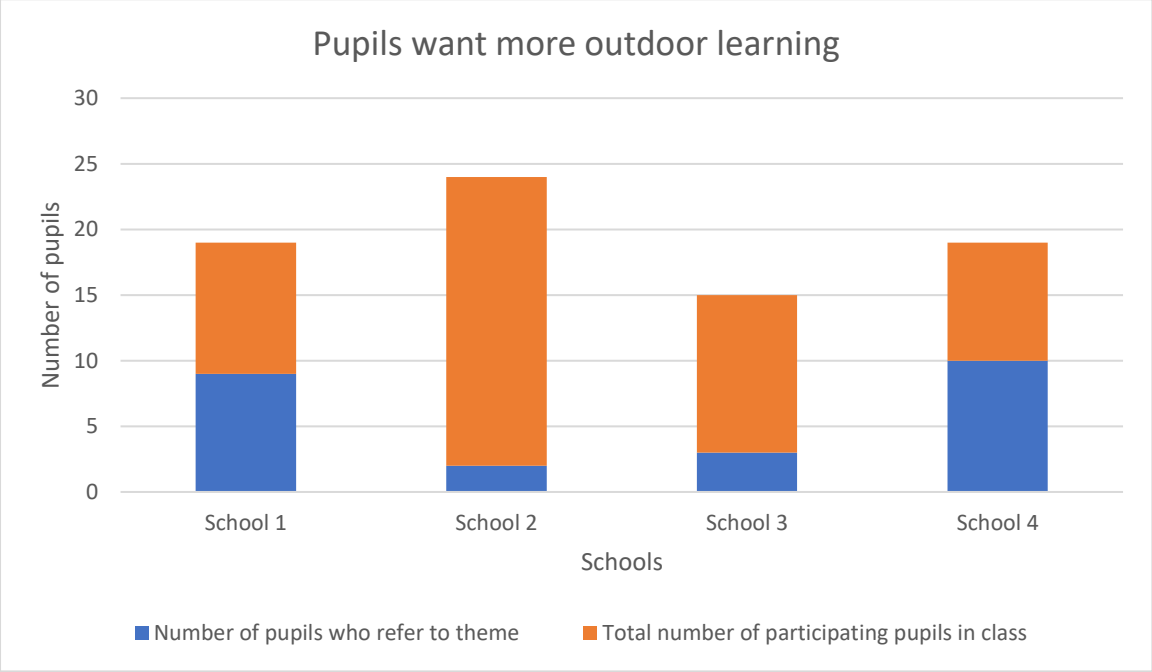
- Madison C.

In summary, pupils across all four schools requested various changes or improvements to their schools which they considered would support their MHWB. This theme was the broadest and most frequently mentioned of the three themes which emerged from analysis of pupils' data. In contrast, the next theme has but two subthemes within it; P.E. and outdoor learning.

7.2. THEME 8: OUTDOORS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

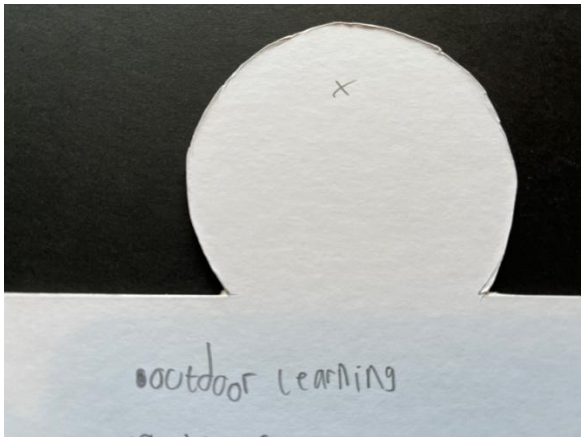
7.2.1 “MORE FRESH AIR WILL HELP MY WELLBEING.” PUPILS WANT MORE OUTDOOR LEARNING.

As shown in graph 7.5, pupils in schools one and especially four expressed a strong desire to get outdoors more. Although few pupils from the rurally located school three sought more outside learning opportunities, during the observation week the class were taken outside frequently for a variety of activities. This may have influenced the pupils’ priorities in this regard. Pupils in school two, as will be described in the next subtheme, were mostly focused on achieving greater team sports opportunities.

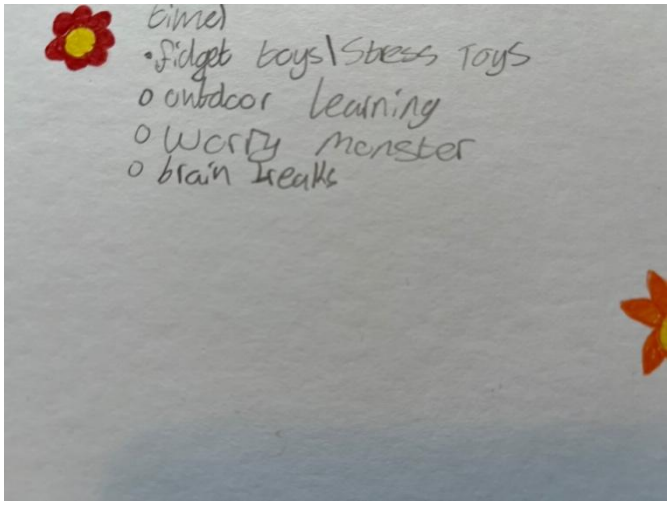


Graph 7.5.

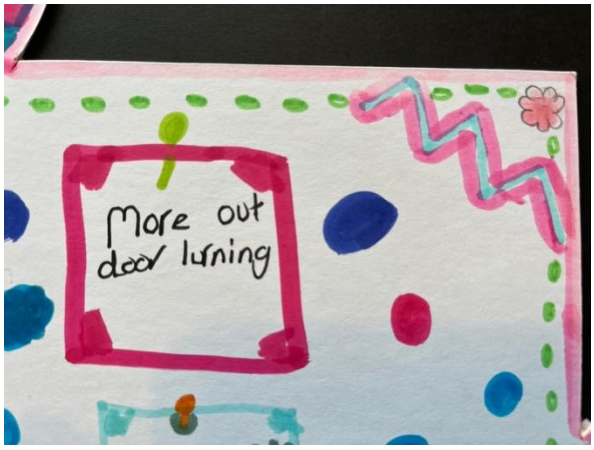
This subtheme was formed from two related areas: a call for more outdoor learning generally, as well as a specific request for more outside games and P.E. The first of these can be seen in the jigsaw pieces of pupils from school one, several of whom expressed a general desire for outdoor learning:



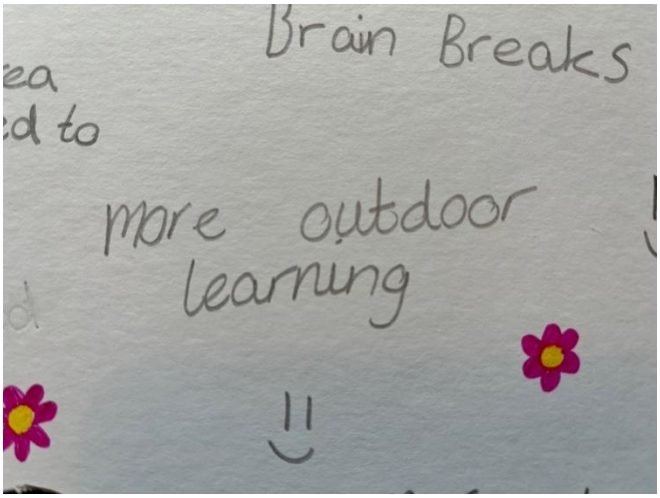
Jigsaw 1.5; Esme A.



“Outdoor learning.”
Jigsaw 1.9; Isha A.

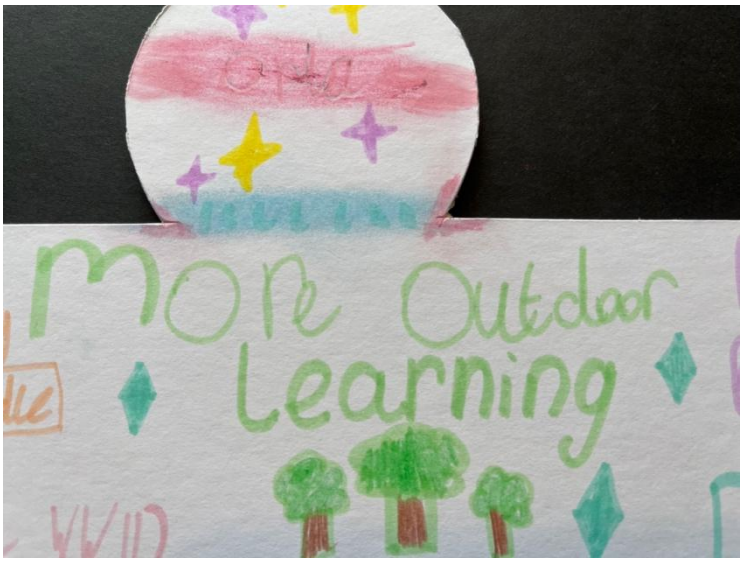


“More outdoor learning.”
Jigsaw 1.10; James A.



Jigsaw 1.4; Dmitri A.

Two pupils from schools three felt similarly:



Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.



Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.

As previously mentioned, the class in school three to which Bethany C. and Clara C. belonged were taken out several times to their surrounding area during the observation week. Notes from one such occasion, depicted below in figure 7.1, seem to support the argument that outdoor learning experiences (at least in this instance) are both fun and inclusive:

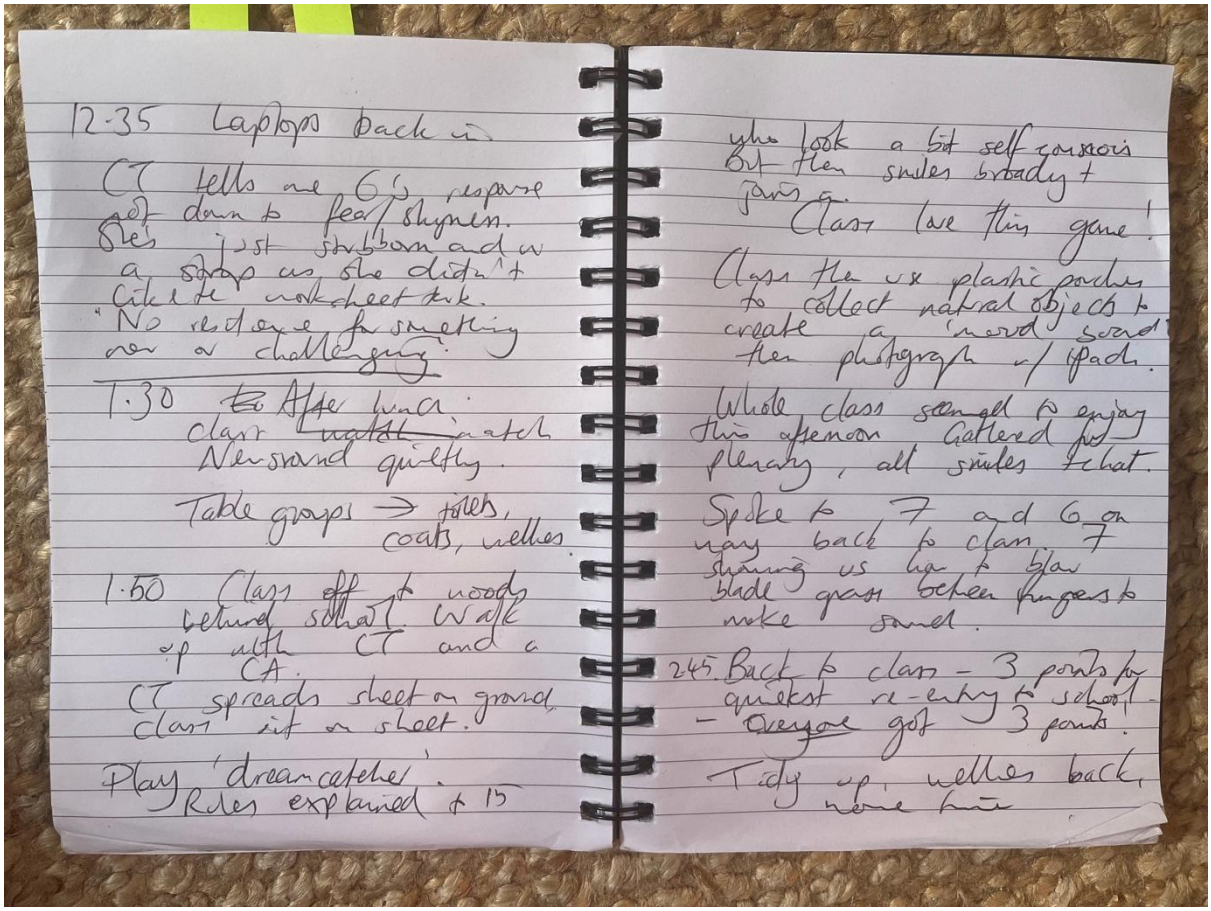
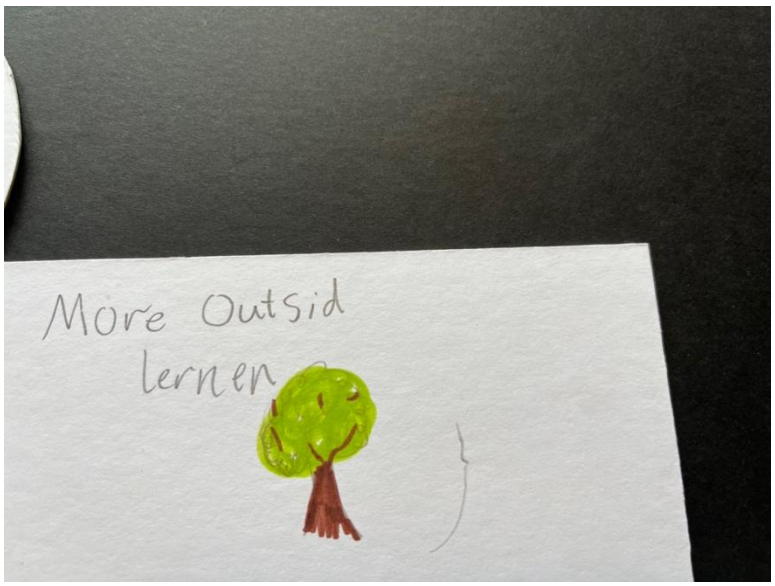


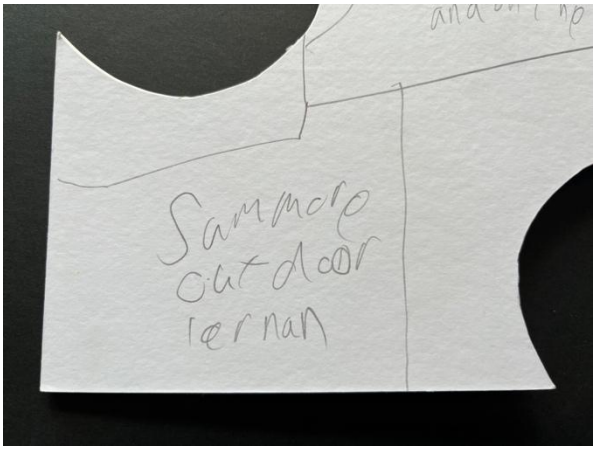
Figure 7.1; notes from observations, 06/03/24.

The notes from this particular afternoon in school three describe an afternoon trip to the woods surrounding the school. Once there, Mr Galloway spread a sheet on the ground, upon which the class then sat. He played a game with the class, the rules of which had to be explained to one child, who looked "a bit self-conscious." It should be noted that this child was particularly anxious and did not enjoy being the centre of attention, to the point that she rarely spoke in class. Nevertheless, on this occasion she was observed to smile broadly and join in. Following the subsequent main activity, I noted that the "[w]hole class seemed to enjoy this afternoon. Gathered for plenary, all smiles and chat." These notes seem to suggest that this outdoor learning activity had offered all class members an opportunity to participate in an experience in which they seemed to thrive. Furthermore, it may have lifted the mood of everybody present. On the way back to class, Mr Galloway offered the winning pupil "three points for the quietest re-entry to school," an award which was subsequently given to *all* the pupils.

Although pupils in schools one and four, which were in highly urban environments, had not experienced the same sort of opportunities with such regularity, they seemed just as keen on opportunities to learn outside the classroom:



"More outside learning."
Jigsaw 4.6; Fatima D.

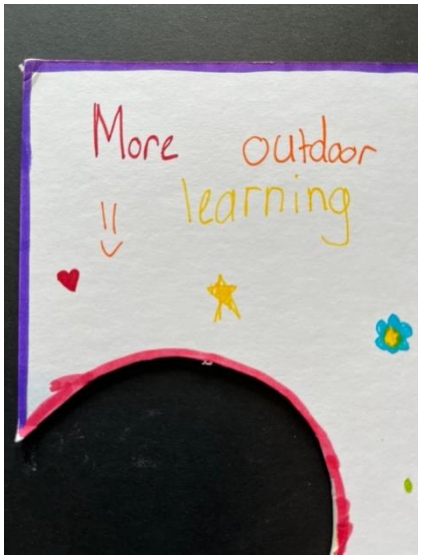


"Some more outdoor learning."
Jigsaw 4.8; Heidi D.

Dmitri explained why he was keen on more outdoor learning:

> More outdoor learning – get fresh air, more time to get outside as at lunch it's shorter.
>
> - Dmitri A.

Gordon explained that outdoor learning offered a welcome change of environment from the classroom:



Jigsaw 1.7; Gordon A.

> More outdoor learning – change from always being inside.
>
> - Gordon A.

Classmates Maya and Noah were in agreement that whilst they both wanted more outdoor learning, it was weather dependent:



"More outdoor time"
Jigsaw 1.13; Maya A.

Go outdoors more in better weather to learn.

- Maya A.



"More outdoor time."
Jigsaw 1.14; Noah A.

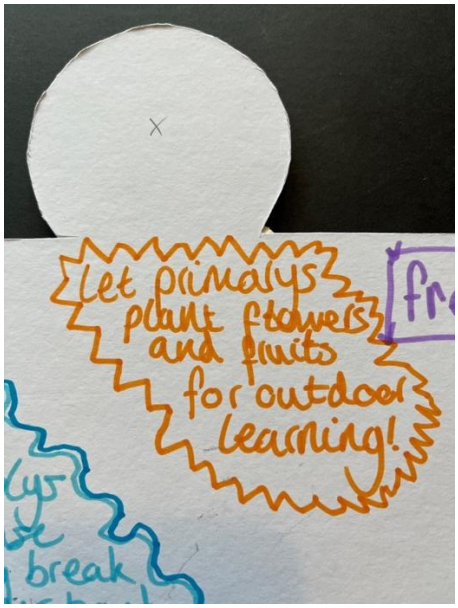
More outdoor time but only on nice days!

- Noah A.

In Noah's above request for more 'outdoor time', the focus of that time remains somewhat unclear. In fact, few of the jigsaw pieces featured in this subtheme suggest any definition of what 'outdoor learning' means to the pupils who seem so keen on it. One exception to this was Kai, who described his aspiration that the school provide lessons on botany:

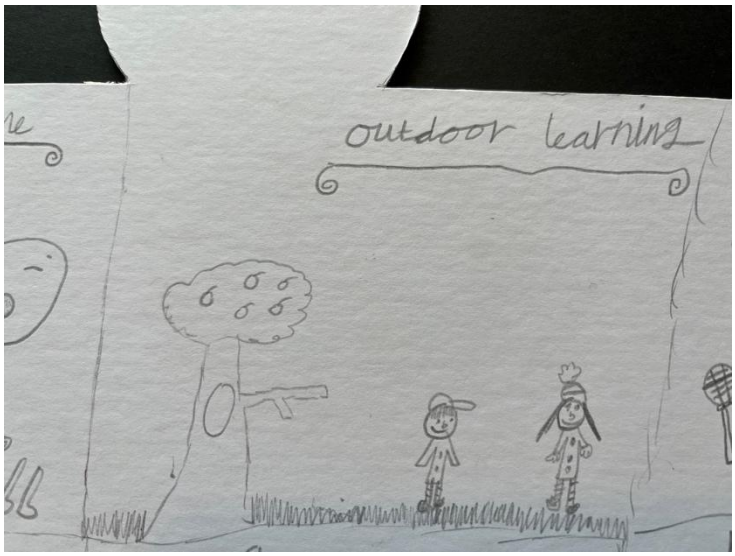
> I'd also like to learn about flowers and stuff – nature outside the schools. It wouldn't have to be too far away – just outside.
>
> - Kai D.

His classmate Shiv seemed to have a similar interest:



"Let primary [pupils] plant flowers and fruits for outdoor learning!"
Jigsaw 4.19; Shiv D.

Aside from these two pupils with specific interests in plants, the only associations pupils implied with 'outdoor learning' were those of games and physical pursuits. Omar's illustration was as general as many of his classmates, but the notes from his conversation suggest that he really hoped that the learning would come in a physically challenging manner:



Jigsaw 2.15; Omar B.

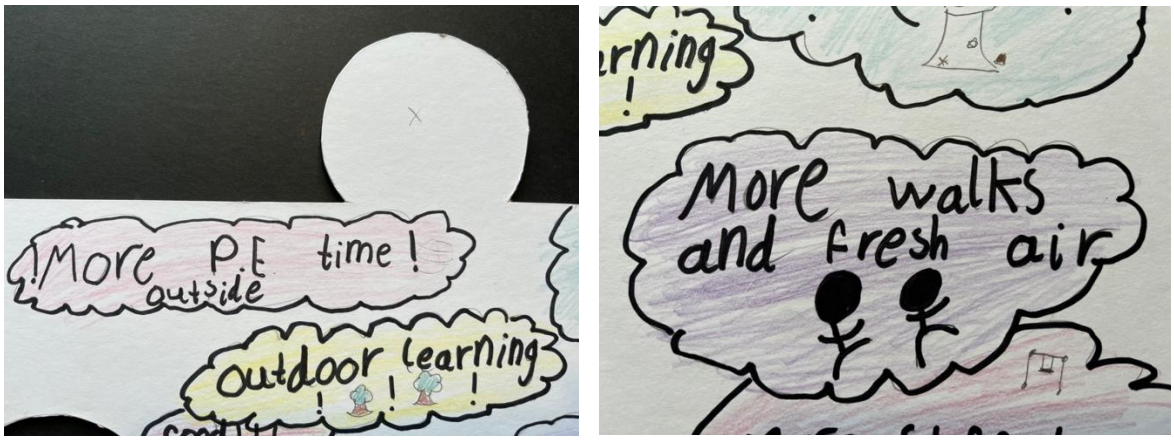
Outdoor learning. Obstacle courses. Play games outside. Set challenges.
- Omar B.

Harry A. was more explicit in his wishes:



"Play more outdoor games."
Jigsaw 1.8; Harry A.

Paris D. felt that she would benefit from a range of outdoor activities including P.E and walks:

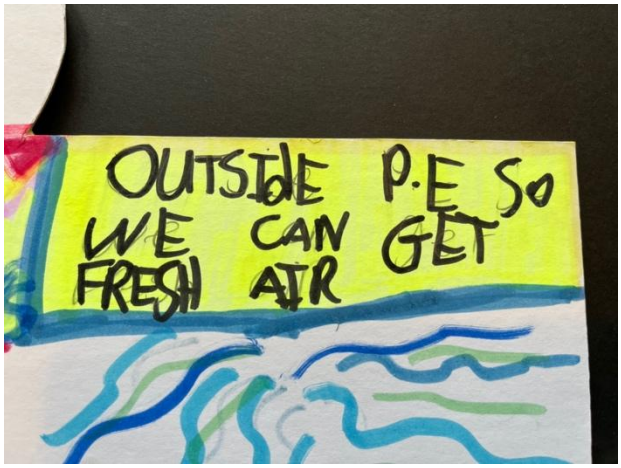


Jigsaw 4.16; Paris D.

However, Paris stressed the importance that these activities should be of a certain standard:

> More P.E. time outside – would get us more active and healthy. More outdoor learning – but interesting lessons, not just boring ones outside. Did in P4 – sometimes good but sometimes a wee bit boring – depends on the activities. More walks.
>
> - Paris D.

Paris' request for "more P.E. time outside" forms the second aspect of this subtheme. It was supported by several pupils, including Muhammad and Noor D.:



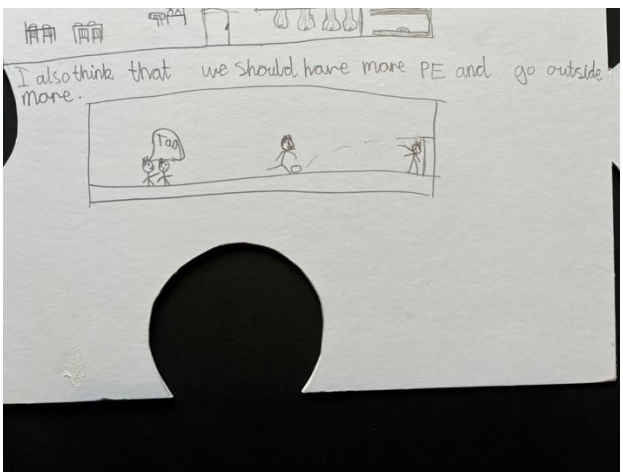
Jigsaw 4.13; Muhammad D.



Jigsaw 4.14; Noor D.

Harry A. and Cathy D. wanted more P.E. in general, but were clear that as much as possible of those lessons should be outside:

> More P.E. time. More of it outside.
>
> \- Harry A.



"I also think that we should have more P.E. and go outside more."
Jigsaw 4.3; Cathy D.

Ikechukwu also wanted more outdoors physical education and suggested that this might help improve his attention:



"More P.E. outside."
Jigsaw 4.9; Ikechukwu D.

> More P.E outside – active, more space, helps me focus.
>
> - Ikechukwu D.

Finally, in calling for more time outdoors, Jasmine also pointed out the association between improved physical and mental wellbeing:



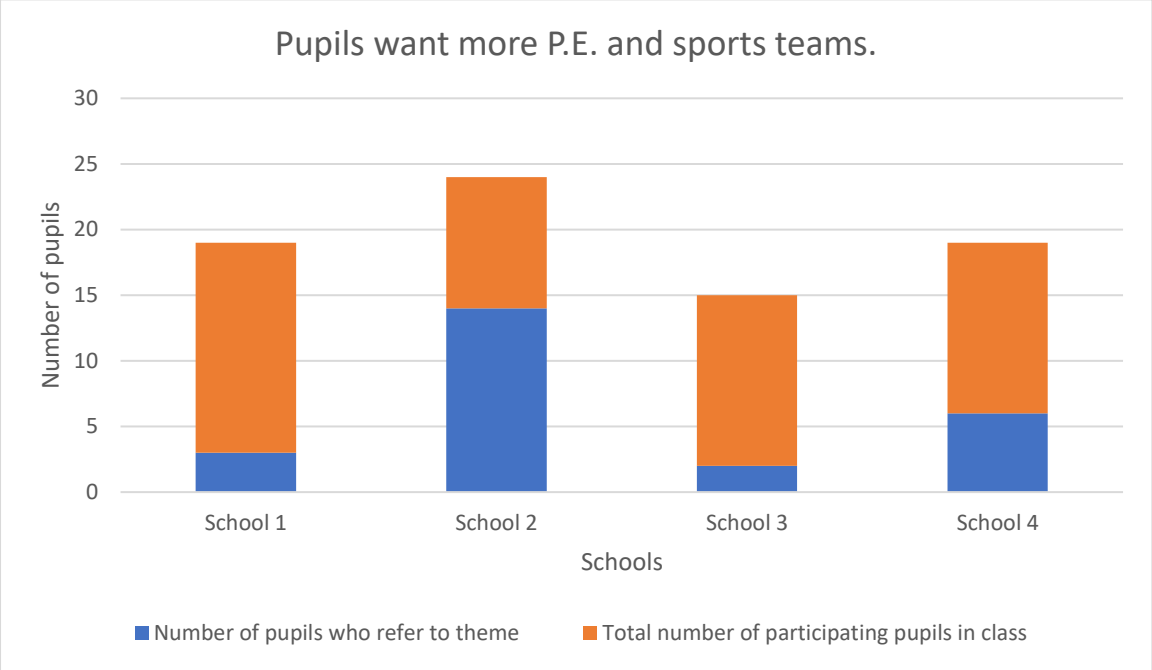
Jigsaw 4.10; Jasmine D.

> I want to go outside more. Play more sports outside. You get fresh air and would get more fit – these would help me feel better. More fresh air will help my wellbeing.
>
> - Jasmine D.

It is worth mentioning that during class discussions prior to the pupils beginning work on their individual jigsaw pieces, many pupils expressed a similar awareness to Jasmine's of the link between physical and mental health. This association was further upheld in the views of pupils who called for the second subtheme in this topic; a desire for more P.E. and opportunities for organised sports teams.

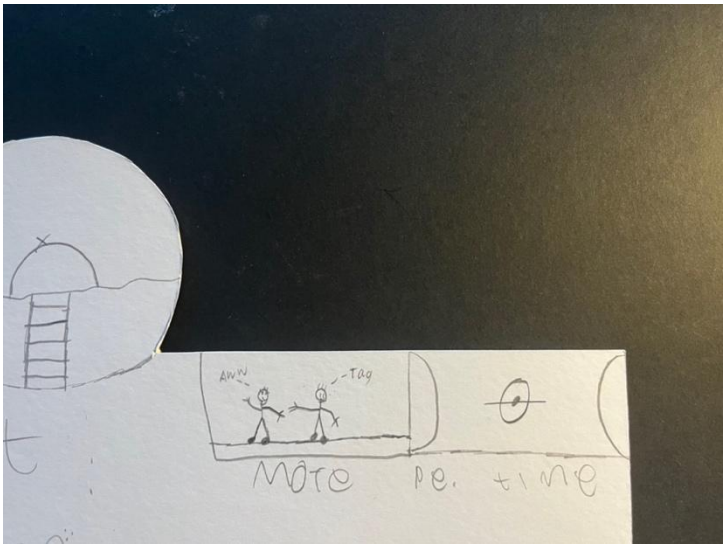
7.2.2 "IT WOULD SHOW THAT SCHOOL CARES ABOUT US!" PUPILS WANT MORE P.E. AND SPORTS TEAMS.

As can be seen in graph 7.6, pupils in school four and especially in school two wanted more P.E. in general as well as greater opportunities for sports teams and clubs in school.

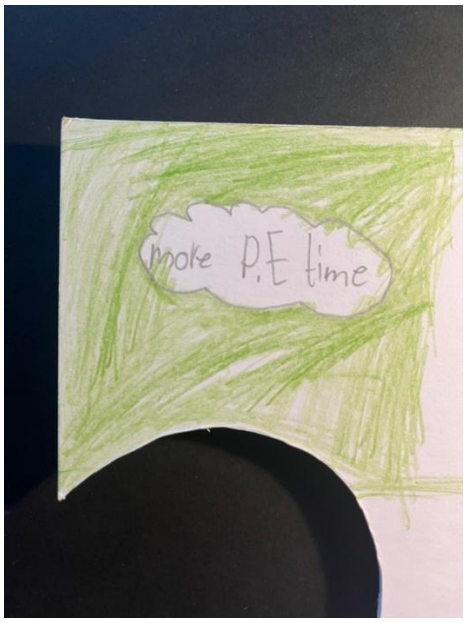


Graph 7.6.

Several pupils favoured an increase in the two hours a week Scottish primary schools are expected to allocate to P.E.:



"More P.E. time."
Jigsaw 4.7; Giovanni D.



"More P.E. time."
Jigsaw 3.11; Kayla C.

Ivy C. agreed with her classmate Kayla, identifying P.E. as one of her favourite aspects of school:

> The best thing about school at the moment is P.E. and break – I'd like more of them.
>
> - Ivy C.

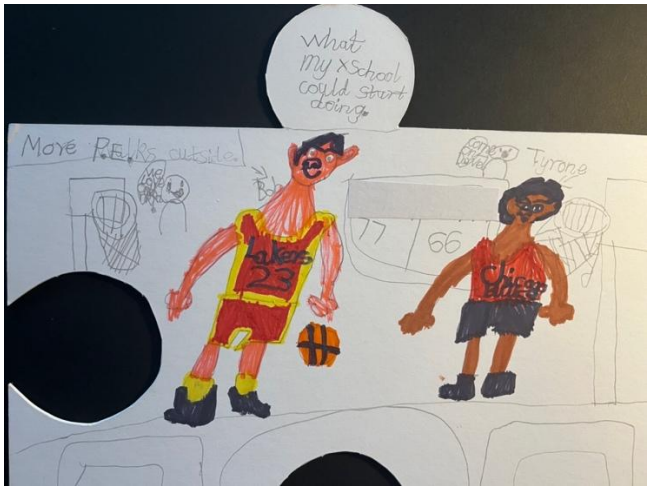
Aleksandr pointed out one of the main benefits pupils could expect from an increase in P.E.:

> More P.E. time – exercise makes you healthy.
>
> - Aleksandr D.

Whilst Heidi wanted not only an increase in P.E. time, but that it was properly resourced:

> More P.E. and more P.E. equipment.
>
> - Heidi D.

Dominik's illustration suggested a preference for more basketball in particular:



"More P.E."
Jigsaw 4.4; Dominik D.

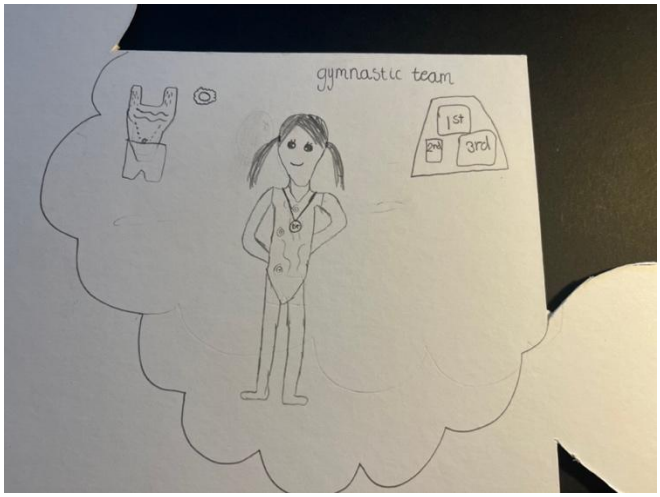
Notes from conversation with Dominik recount his vivid description of why he likes P.E.:

> More P.E. and P.E. competitions. This would help school/ wellbeing because P.E. makes you feel alive.
>
> - Dominik D.

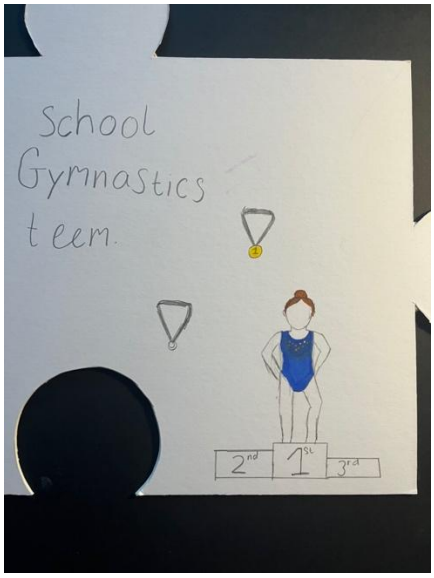
Dominik's note also touches on his desire for competition. This competitive aspect is associated with the second strand of this subtheme; pupils' desire for more opportunities to take part in organised sports teams. This issue was virtually exclusive to school two, but was one of the strongest to emerge from its pupils. The nature of the sport varied according to each pupil's preference. Catarina, Eleanor and Laylah all shared the same passion, arguing that they would benefit from their school providing a gymnastics team:



Jigsaw 2.3; Catarina B.



Jigsaw 2.5; Eleanor B.



Jigsaw 2.12; Laylah B.

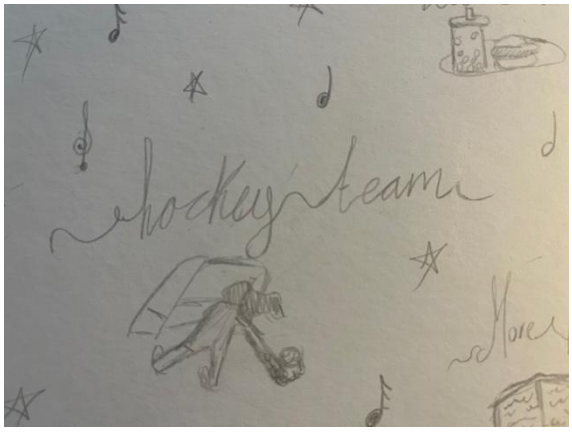
In conversation, all three girls described how being part of a gymnastics team would improve their wellbeing:

> I'd like to practice gymnastics more. If there was a team I could do it several times a week and get more practice. I could do more sports and this would help me feel better.
>
> - Laylah B.

> I'd like a gymnastics team because you can't do it in the playground. It makes me really happy!
>
> - Eleanor B.

> I'd like a school gymnastic team because it's one of my favourite sports – it's pretty popular. If we had a team it would make lots of people happy. Opportunity to do more gymnastics – I'd feel better about school. It would show that school cares about us!
>
> - Catarina B.

Catarina's last point is particularly persuasive, as it clearly suggests that the establishment of a gymnastics club would make her feel valued, and presumably increase her sense of belonging as a result. Gymnastics was not the only sport that girls in this class supported; Gurpreet and Qabita favoured establishing a school hockey team:



"Hockey team."
Jigsaw 2.7; Gurpreet B.

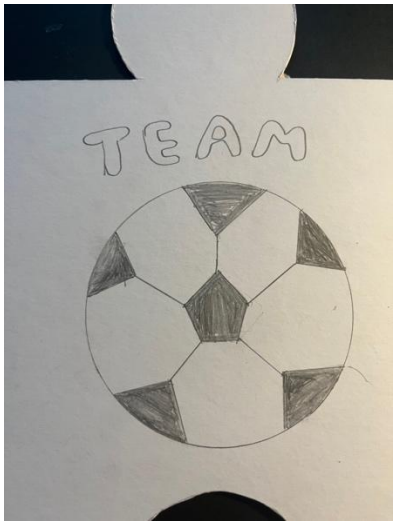


Jigsaw 2.17; Qabita B.

Qabita described the effect this would have on her MHWB in terms similar to those of her classmates who advocated for gymnastics:

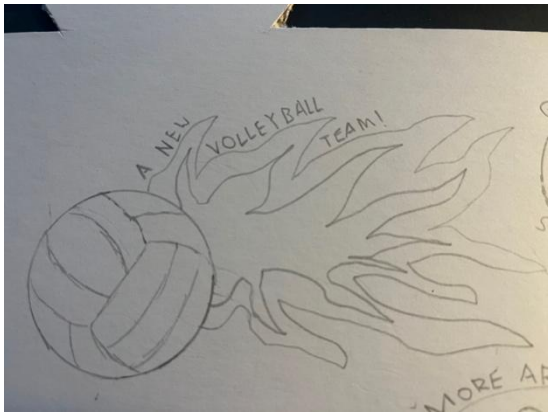
> I'd like a hockey team – make me happy at break and lunch in the playground. It's always football and it's not as fun.
>
> - Qabita B.

Despite Qabita's impression that it was "always football", Frank wished for a football team in school two:



Jigsaw 2.6; Frank B.

Other pupils from the same class preferred different sports:

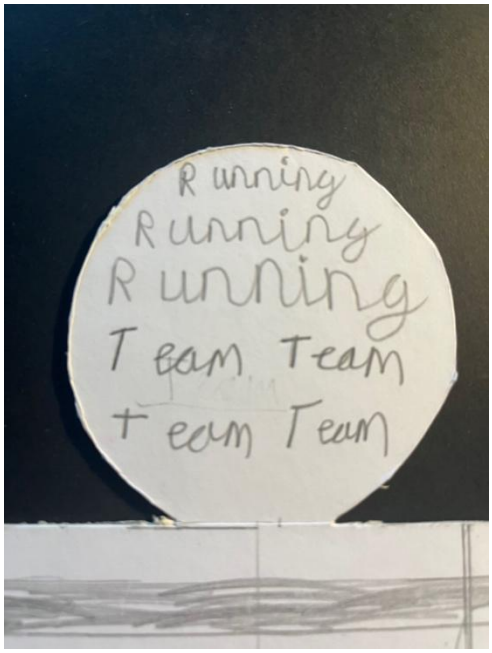


“A new volleyball team!”
Jigsaw 2.2; Bianka B.

I’d like… a netball team please!

- Jade B.

Yasmine and Mark both wanted their school to establish a running club:



Jigsaw 2.13; Mark B.



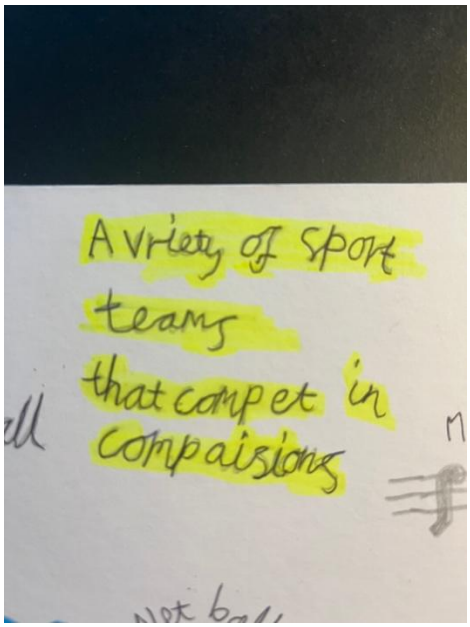
"Running team!"

Jigsaw 2.24; Yasmine B.

Yasmine seemed to imply that establishing particular sports clubs might improve motivation or possibly even attendance for those who were skilled in those areas:

> I'd like a school running team. If there are opportunities to do things you do well that will make you want to come to school more.
>
> - Yasmine B.

It seems fitting to conclude this section on pupils' desire for more sports teams with the thoughts of Isaac, whose jigsaw piece calling for greater access to sixteen individual sports featured previously (see section 4.10.2). He summarised this aspiration himself, both in writing and conversation, and also hinted at the appeal of competition:



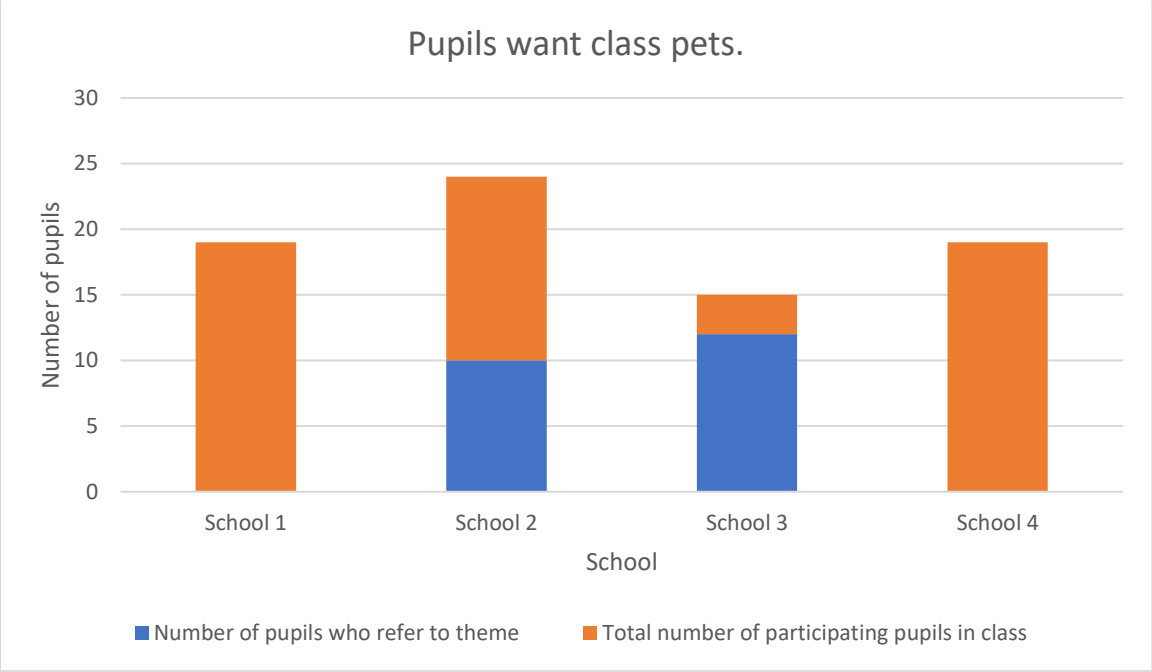
"A variety of sport teams that compete in competitions."
Jigsaw 2.9; Isaac B.

> I'd like more sports equipment and more teams so we can play against other schools. I'd feel better because we'd have a variety of different sports to try and we wouldn't have to go elsewhere, out of school.
>
> - Isaac B.

The final theme to emerge from analysis of pupils' jigsaw pieces is considerably more straightforward than the previous two, to the extent that it only has one dimension: many pupils expressed an opinion that their MHWB would be better supported if their school kept pet animals.

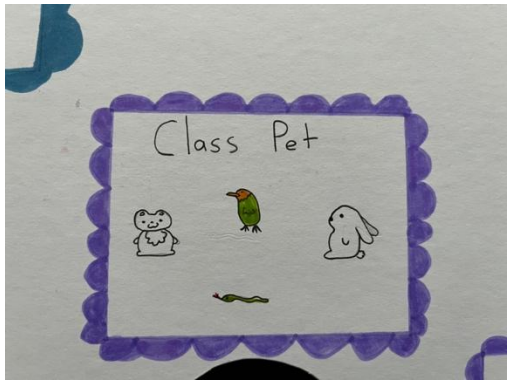
7.3. THEME 9: PETS. "BECAUSE – WHY NOT?"

As graph 7.7 shows, this theme was exclusive to two of the four schools. Despite this, 22 of the 77 participating pupils supported it. Furthermore, this theme, which initially seemed relatively innocuous, informed aspects of reasoning and lines of development within this study in unexpected ways. In fact, it came to symbolise both the need to value pupils voice, as well the way that is subtly denigrated by school staff members. These issues shall be explored in detail in the discussion chapter.

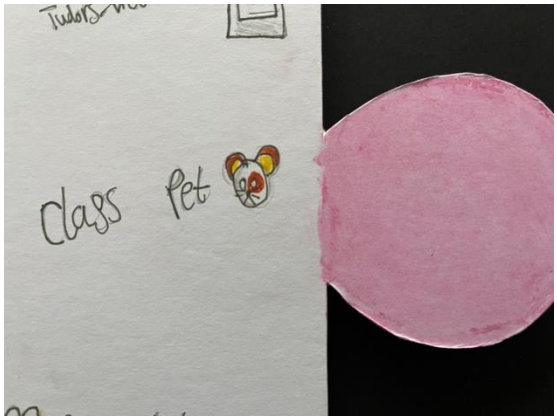


Graph 7.7.

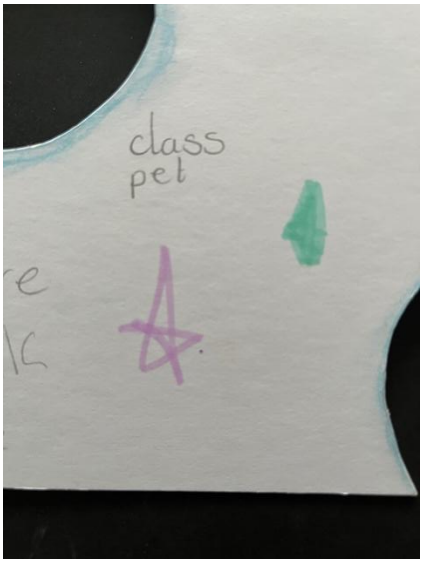
Calls for a “class pet” were common amongst the illustrations drawn by pupils in schools two and three:



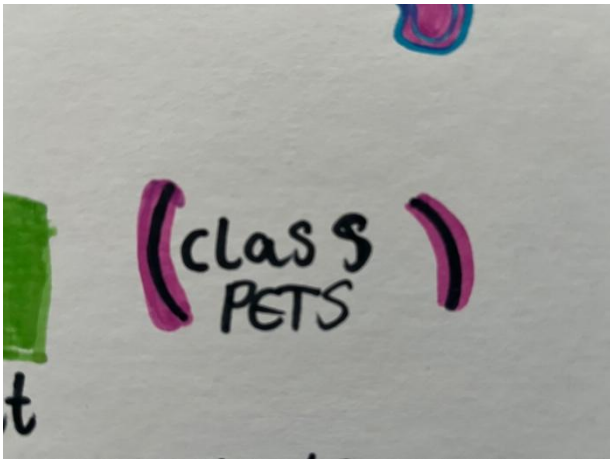
Jigsaw 3.5; Emilia C.



Jigsaw 3.6; Fiona C.

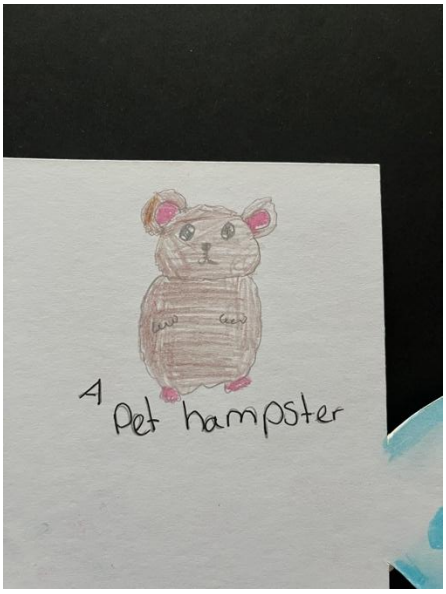


Jigsaw 3.3; Clara C.



Jigsaw 3.15; Olivia C.

A wide range of different types of pet was suggested by pupils. The most commonly cited request was for a class hamster:



Jigsaw 3.13; Madison C.

Class hamster.

- Ravindra B.

I'd like chicks or a hamster.

- Olivia C.

Mark suggested that pupils might benefit from interacting with a hamster when feeling stressed:

I'd like a hamster cage because if I was finding something difficult I could go to it. It would help us feel calmer and happier. It might make us quieter!

- Mark B.

Abdullah also liked the idea of a class hamster:



Jigsaw 2.1; Abdullah B.

> I'd like a hamster! I feel it would help. Like an emotional support animal. If you didn't want to go to school, you would think; "But the hamster's there!"
>
> - Abdullah B.

The above comments show that Abdullah shares a similar view to Mark, in that pets could act to support pupils in moments of difficulty. However, he additionally implies that classroom pets may have an effect on school attendance. This particular rationale was shared by his classmate Ulrich:



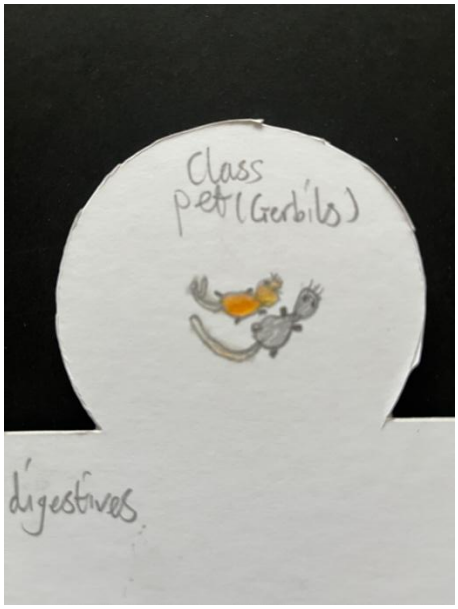
Jigsaw piece 2.21; Ulrich B.

> I want a hamster because it would make me want to go to school more.
>
> - Ulrich B.

In school three, Logan took a very similar view to Abdullah and Ulrich:

> A class pet – can help if you are feeling down, it is like a 'therapet' [emotional therapy pet]. Makes people more likely to come to school.
>
> - Logan C.

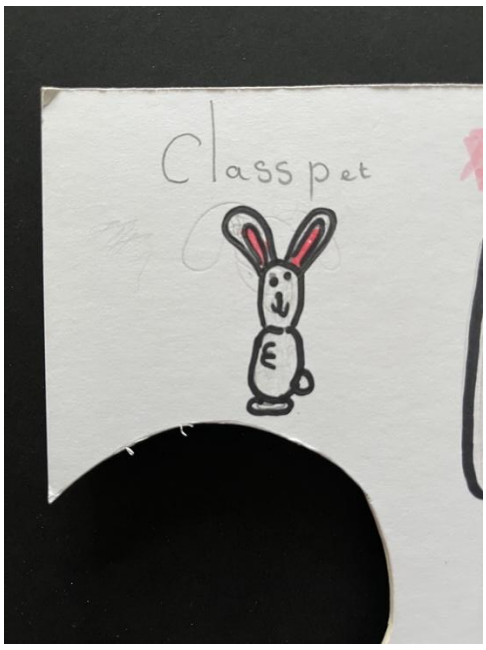
One possible attraction of hamsters is the relative ease of keeping them; in theory, they could be maintained in a cage within the classroom. Although he preferred a different type of pet, its housing arrangements was something that Declan had clearly considered:



Jigsaw piece 3,4; Declan C.

> Two gerbils. Cute and beautiful. Only come in pairs. In a cage at the back of classroom.
>
> - Declan C.

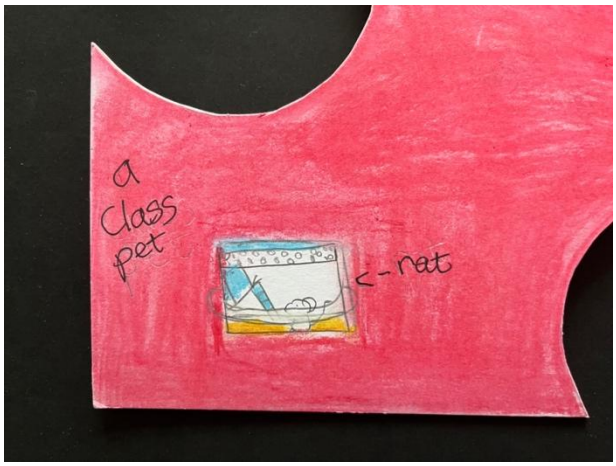
Similarly, Aihan had envisaged the accommodation as well as the pet:



Jigsaw 3.1; Aihan C.

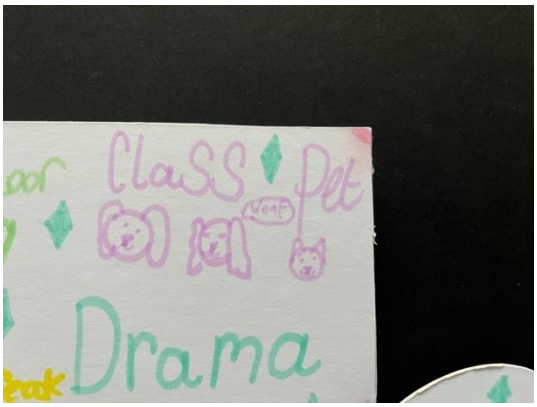
> Class pet – a rabbit in a hutch.
>
> - Aihan C.

Logan was one of two pupils who thought that their MHWB would benefit from a more unusual pet:



"A Class pet. Rat."
Jigsaw 3.12; Logan C.

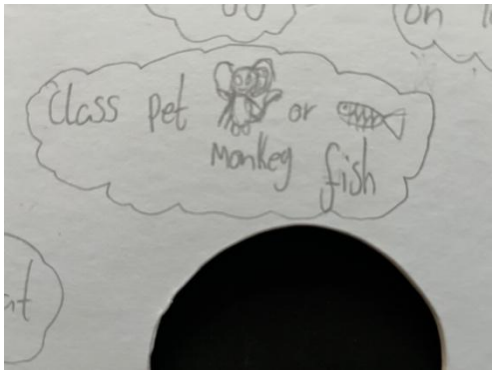
Bethany agreed:



Jigsaw 3.2; Bethany C.

> A class pet – a rat please! Everyone can feed it.
>
> \- Bethany C.

The practicalities of keeping a pet in the classroom would presumably be one of the main considerations for any school considering accommodating pupils' wishes for pets. In this regard, Kayla may find that her choice of fish is perhaps the more likely to be realised:

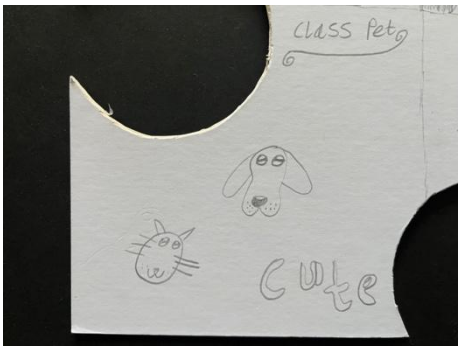


"Class pet. Monkey or fish."
Jigsaw 3.11; Kayla C.

In fact, Kayla may have already realised which of the two was more attainable by the time she explained her thoughts to me:

> Fish for a pet.
>
> \- Kayla C.

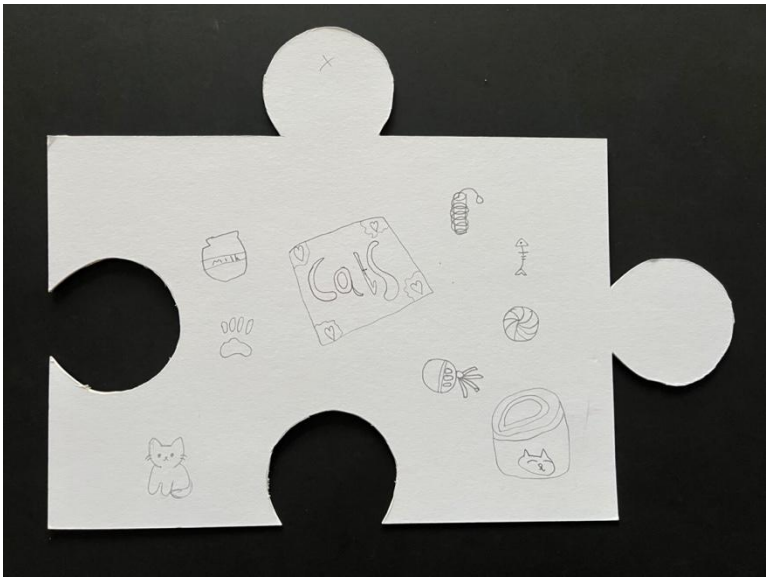
Although not as exotic as monkeys, other pupils did have designs on pets larger than hamsters, rabbits or gerbils:



Jigsaw 2.15; Omar B.

> A reasonable - sized class pet.
>
> \- Omar B.

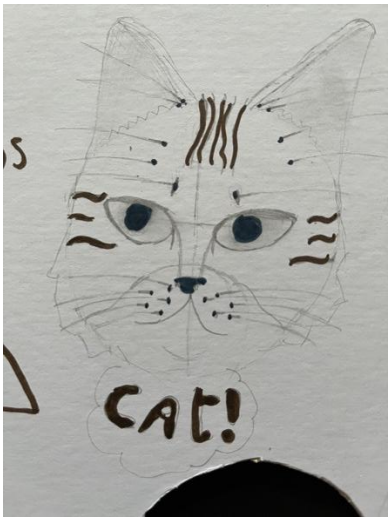
Several pupils wanted such "reasonably sized" pets in the form of a cat or a dog:



Jigsaw piece 2.22; Violet B.

I want to get an animal. Not a big one, a reasonable – sized one, like a cat.

- Violet B.



Jigsaw 2.10; Jade B.

I'd like a class cat.

- Jade B.



Jigsaw 2.7; Gurpreet B.

I'd like a class pet – a dog. Because - why not? I'd like to stroke it. It would be like an emotional support pet.

- Gurpreet B.



Jigsaw 3.7; Genevieve C.

Class pet – could help to calm someone down. Maybe a dog. It would also settle the class down.

- Genevieve C.

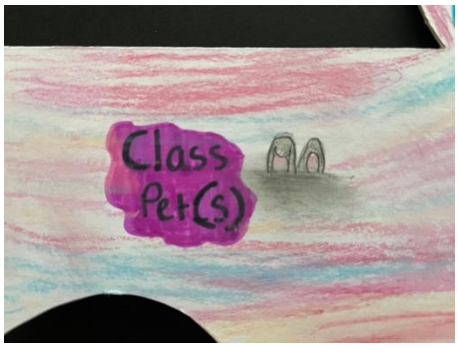
Taylor devoted her whole jigsaw piece to a plea for class pets. It is difficult to tell whether she would be happy with any one of the pets listed, or rather that she wants them all:



Jigsaw piece 2.20; Taylor B.

> I'd like a goldfish, a cat, dog, hamster. If you're feeling unhappy you can pet and feed the animal.
>
> - Taylor B.

Finally, Nabil offered an insightful comment as to why class pets might be expected to have some beneficial effect on pupils' MHWB:



Jigsaw 3.14; Nabil C.

> Class pets – pets at home help me, one in school could do the same.
>
> - Nabil C.

Presumably many of these pupils advocating for school pets already have their own pets at home; as Nabil points out, for some pupils this theme may be influenced by their conviction that their pet does have a tangible, positive impact on their MHWB. If so, from the pupils' viewpoint it may stand to reason that the same effect could be achieved in school. Evidence that it may indeed have such an impact came from Ms Lees, who asked that the type of animal she kept in her nurture room be redacted. However, their effect seems indisputable:

Ms Lees: The [type of pet], I've got to say, are probably the best resource I've got in this room… I do have a child in the upper stages, who can leave the class, if he's quite upset, or something's happened at break time and they're *really* upset and don't know how to cope with those feelings, and he often just comes into this room and sits on that chair, and he watches the [type of pet], and erm… I can actually see him calm down within.. within a minute, really, a minute or two! And then I go, "Oh, look what they're doing, oh they're chasing, and this is…." And then, turns round, he's quite… calm, and then I can say to him, "So, what happened today?"
Mr Bell: Mm-hmm.
Ms Lees: You know? And, they… (laughs) they love those [type of pet]!... But it works, they absolutely love it!
Mr Bell: Whatever works!
Ms Lees: And it works really well!

- Ms Lees (Nurture teacher, school 2.)

Having thus considered what actions schools could take to better support their MHWB, pupils across the four schools included in this study have expressed clear preferences for more control and choice over school routines and the curriculum; for improvements to their school equipment and facilities; for more outdoor learning, P.E. and opportunities for organised sports; and finally for schools to maintain pets. Having presented both pupils' and school staff members' views, the following chapter will reflect on these findings; how they relate both to each other and to the literature.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

In an effort to ground the arguments proposed within this chapter, certain aspects of the findings featured within the previous three chapters will be highlighted. In addition, this chapter will position these findings within the relevant literature. Finally, it will offer a synthesis of these findings and suggest what implications they have in terms of theory and practice. As such it will advance salient elements of the descriptive and analytical elements of the findings toward the establishment of the current thesis. It is, therefore, both analysis and discussion.

The present study sought, by means of a mixed-methods design, to examine Scottish primary school staff members' awareness of precarity, their perceptions of pupils' MHWB issues, their response to pupils' MHWB needs, as well as pupils' views on what their school could do to support their MHWB. It endeavoured to form a clear picture of these issues at the time of inquiry within four Scottish primary schools. The findings showed that the risks posed to CYP by precarity have not been considered in schools; that the concept of precarity was little known or understood; that staff members had perceived significant declines in pupils' behaviour and MHWB over recent years; that school staff members were afflicted by uncertainty as to the extent and cause of these declines; that relationships and adaptations in school were seen as key to meeting pupils' needs; and that staff members and pupils held widely different views as to how best to support pupils' MHWB needs.

Although findings from a study which involved four primary schools can clearly not claim to be generalisable, the extent to which participants' descriptions of pupils' behaviour and MHWB align with findings from broader surveys (ECYP Committee, 2023; Inchley *et al*., 2023) is significant. For example, across Scotland there has been a "notable increase" since 2016 of primary school support staff members' reports of verbal abuse, physical aggression, and physical violence towards themselves and other staff (Scottish Government, 2023a, p.120). This seems to correspond to a description offered by a support staff member that "the severity of … violent and aggressive behaviours that we are seeing is definitely something that I've noticed a *big* change in" (Ms Kaminsky, personal communication, 2024, emphasis in original). Such increases in the incidences of aggression have undoubtedly contributed to pressure on the Scottish Government to update its guidance on behaviour in schools (Scottish Government, 2025c). In addition, the MHWB findings from all four schools in the present study are not dissimilar to those of the most recent Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey, which reported that around 32% of pupils surveyed suffered from moderate or severe anxiety and 35% had low mood or risk of depression, a figure which has doubled between 1998 and 2021 (Inchley *et al*., 2023).

Irrespective of such similarities, the findings from the present study have important implications for all those involved in school communities. The nature and potential

consequences of these implications will be discussed throughout the present chapter. Please note that, for the avoidance of repetition, throughout this chapter the titles 'school staff member(s)', 'pupil(s)' and 'participant(s)' will refer to the participants *in the present study*, unless otherwise stated.

I will argue that it may be inferred that the perceived rise in scepticism around the prevalence of MHWB in children (Bell *et al*., 2025) has in part arisen from uncertainty about factors associated with MHWB, as well as staff members' scepticism about the effects of MHWB awareness in general. This inference is evidenced within the findings of the present study. Staff members' doubts seem to be exacerbated by the emergence of groups of CPY who were previously perceived to have been relatively untroubled by MHWB issues. This scepticism will likely act as a barrier to providing an appropriate level of support for such CYP. Furthermore, I will argue that pupils are being exposed to various layers and forms of uncertainty and instability; I will propose that these amount to a 'precarious childhood'. Although school staff members are aware of most of the factors associated with this proposed model of a precarious childhood, they are unaware of the risks posed by exposure to parental precarious employment, which I will position within the model. School staff members thus have a 'blind spot' in terms of known factors affecting their pupils' MHWB. This will likely exacerbate their scepticism as it may add to the perceived MHWB issues amongst pupils for which staff members feel they cannot account.

In addition, I will review the evidence of the risks posed by CYP's increased exposure to what I will term a 'digital childhood', which describes an over-exposure to online interactions rather than those in real world. I will argue that these risks are amplified by a simultaneous exposure to a precarious childhood, and that there is therefore a synergy of harm which develops between the two. Next, I will examine how these two models of harm align with the emergence of the previously mentioned 'unexpected' groups of CYP who previously seemed little troubled by MHWB issues. Finally, I will examine the nature of the schools' response to such issues. I will contend that despite many appropriate aspects of staff members' attempts to support their pupils' needs, such as adaptations to school systems and practices, and the development of strong relationships with pupils, schools attend insufficiently to both pupils' and parents' voices. A genuine acceptance by school staff of the value of pupils' voice, combined with meaningful and visible attempts to enact their suggestions, may offer an achievable means to significantly improve the MHWB of CYP.

Although staff members were generally in agreement about the scale and deteriorating nature of the behavioural and MHWB issues pupils faced in schools, they seemed far less certain as to the causes. On this topic, they seemed afflicted by doubt and confusion, to the extent that almost all participants doubted the true extent of pupils' MHWB issues.

Consequently, it seems appropriate to begin with the topic which might subsequently render all others irrelevant: is the MHWB 'crisis' afflicting schools actually genuine?

8.1 EXTRAPOLATION OF SCEPTICISM.

Significantly, almost all staff members expressed some degree of scepticism about the MHWB issues affecting their pupils. These doubts can be separated into two perspectives. Firstly, some participants voiced suspicions about whether a minority of pupils were exaggerating or inventing MHWB issues as a ploy to excuse poor behaviour. In this scenario, MHWB issues are seen as being contrived by pupils, whether wilfully or delusionally, and likely in the aftermath of offending behaviours. The second perspective was encapsulated in Ms Brooke's use of the Sports Day analogy (see section 5.3.4). In this instance, the implication was that a pupil may have inflated dislike or fear of doing something into a MHWB issue. Here, the perception is that, whilst not entirely contrived, 'negative yet normal' emotions are being exaggerated by pupils, and consequently being characterised as MHWB issues. The implication of either scenario is that pupils' MHWB issues have not in fact increased in prevalence as much as it might seem; some individuals are simply mistaken in their self-diagnosis, whilst others have fabricated conditions entirely.

This is presumably a seductive rationale for several reasons. Firstly, it has the allure of simplicity: it offers a relatively straightforward explanation to a situation for which many staff members feel they cannot otherwise account. Furthermore, as the 'crisis' would therefore have been overstated, consequently the scale of the solution could be diminished. This suggests the expenditure of less effort and fewer resources, which would presumably be welcomed by schools, authorities and governments, all likely experiencing budgetary constraints. Finally, it would involve a subtle shift of responsibility for the situation, from wider societal factors to the pupils themselves. This may have the effect of offering some justification for a reduction in support offered by school staff members.

In fact, the participants in the present study are not alone in expressing such sceptical sentiments. They have similarities with those held in general society: a recent survey conducted in England showed levels of stigma amongst the public towards people with MHWB issues to have increased sharply since 2019, the first such increase since the measure began in 2008 (MIND, 2024). Such attitudes may inform, or be influenced by, statements by politicians. For example, the current Health Secretary Wes Streeting, in his efforts to reform the Personal Independence Payment system, argued that "definitely there's an overdiagnosis" of MHWB issues (Elgot, 2025, para. 5). Such statements undoubtedly represent an increasing suspicion regarding the authenticity of MHWB issues amongst young people in general.

8.1.1 STAFF MEMBERS' BELIEF THAT MHWB AWARENESS IS INFLATING PREVALENCE.

Aside from these more general expressions of doubt, what then gives rise to such sceptical attitudes amongst the participants of the present study? Beyond a desire to account for an apparent rise in prevalence of MHWB issues, the factor common to all participants is suspicion about the effects of greater *awareness* of MHWB issues. This increased awareness is either on the part of the school staff, or the pupils themselves. In the former instance, staff members repeatedly suggested that some of the apparent increase in prevalence of MHWB issues amongst pupils could be explained by staff members' own heightened tendency to identify, understand or label pupils' issues or conditions. This was frequently referred to in terms such as, "are we simply more attuned to it now…?" (Ms Ahmad, personal communication, 2024). The other described aspect of greater awareness related to the pupils. In this instance, the perception was that both an increasingly open discourse in society, as well as MHWB education programmes in schools, had contributed to their enhanced awareness. This had the effect of increasing pupils' MHWB literacy whilst reducing their inhibitions about discussing MHWB, resulting in pupils being both more likely to self-diagnose MHWB issues as well as increasingly empowered to share those assessments with others.

School staff members' concerns about the negative effect of MHWB awareness lessons have some support from emergent theory within the literature. As previously outlined (see section 3.6 above), the prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes & Andrew, 2023) has clear parallels with the views of some staff members. Although Foulkes and Andrew acknowledge that increased MHWB awareness has led to more accurate reporting of previously under-recognised conditions, they contend that awareness efforts are also causing some forms of mild stress to be misinterpreted as MHWB problems. Furthermore, Foulkes (2024) argues that this may tend to become a self-fulfilling process in that the resulting rumination can lead to genuine problems. As yet, there is limited evidence to support this hypothesis, although Jesse and Haslam (2024) showed that increased mental health literacy and reduced levels of associated stigma (both typically products of MHWB education) are associated with greater levels of self-diagnosis (although it should be noted that their study was limited in scope to adult participants). They conclude that efforts to raise mental health awareness might lead individuals to "mistakenly identify subclinical or transient problems as mental disorders" (Jesse & Haslam, 2024, p.6).

8.1.2 RISKS POSED BY THIS PERCEPTION.

Despite such conclusions, there are several problems associated with both the perception that the prevalence of MHWB issues amongst pupils may be artificially inflated, as well as a reliance upon the prevalence inflation hypothesis to account for such a situation. Firstly, the limited empirical evidence which might relate to Foulkes and Andrew's (2023) hypothesis is

equivocal. For example, in contrast to Jesse and Haslam's (2024) study, Rutter and colleagues (2023) found that participants who self-reported that they considered themselves to suffer from depression or anxiety disorder, but had not received a diagnosis, generally had similar levels of symptom severity to those who *had* received a diagnosis. Secondly, irrespective of its validity, the prevalence inflation hypothesis (and scepticism about MHWB awareness in general) would seem to present a risk to MHWB teaching. If programmes to promote awareness and reduce stigma are seen as contributing to the increase in prevalence in MHWB issues, one potential consequence is that such programmes might simply be curtailed. Finally, there is a danger with such a hypothesis that it will gain traction beyond its value; the extent to which it can explain a phenomenon.

As previously outlined, for many it offers a convenient explanation for an apparently insurmountable issue. However, intractable issues rarely have simple explanations. It is self-evident that each individual behind the striking rise in prevalence of MHWB issues amongst young people is unique, and there will be every imaginable instance and situation represented in the sum of all affected. Clearly, MHWB issues amongst entire populations are not dichotomous, in that everyone who considers that they have MHWB issues are either quite correct or mistaken. Thus, there will undoubtedly be some who are, as Andrews and Foulkes (2023) suggest, either misinterpreting or even inventing MHWB issues. However, by the same logic, there will be those who are not. The danger for the latter group of young people is that an increase in general scepticism about the true extent of MHWB issues will result in their issues being underestimated, trivialised or dismissed entirely.

Furthermore, there is a corresponding risk that increased scepticism could stigmatise many individuals, especially those whose MHWB issues seem 'unexpected', as was the case with many of the pupils described by staff members. Indeed, evidence exists which suggests this is already the case amongst young people who self-diagnose, or believe that they have a MHWB disorder without having had a professionally assigned diagnosis (Fellowes, 2023). Such young people have been accused of doing so to facilitate a sense of belonging (Corzine & Roy, 2024), to establish their identity (Acheson & Papadima, 2023), or even to make them appear "sharper and more interesting than others around them" (Haltigan *et al*., 2023, p.3). If these were in fact genuine motivations, there is some evidence that they may be counterproductive. Dixon-Ward and Chan's (2022) analysis of online posts found that many adolescents expressed hostility towards peers who self-diagnosed depression and accused them of 'faking it' for attention. In a similar study, Underhill and Foulkes (2025, pp.786-7) found that people posting on the website Reddit discussed how:

> … the 'epidemic' of inaccurate self-diagnosis means that anyone claiming to have a mental disorder is now not being taken seriously… some people seemed to assume that because self-diagnosis *can* be inaccurate, *every* self-diagnosis is inaccurate.

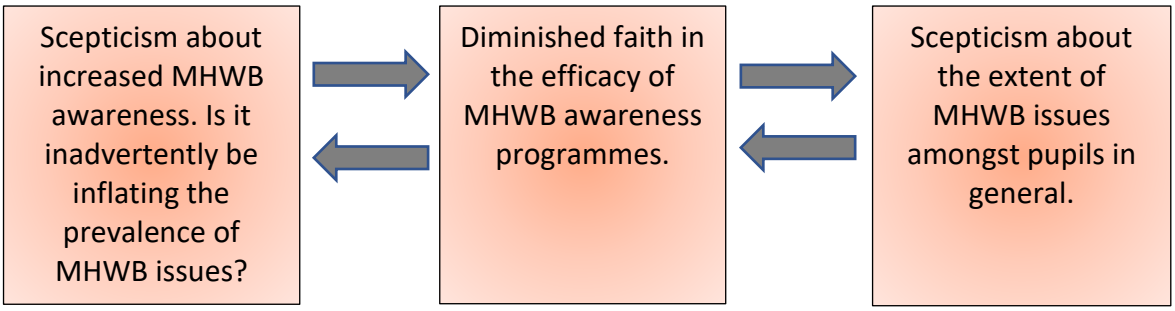
The prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes & Andrew, 2023) might seem to be a model which encapsulates the views of many school staff members. Indeed, as previously acknowledged, it likely explains the increase of MHWB issues in *some* young people. Nevertheless, the challenges and risks which are associated with an overreliance on this hypothesis suggest that it is prudent to scrutinise the findings from the present study to see if other mechanisms may be identifiable. Based upon the assumption that it will not explain every individual's situation, a range of theories is therefore likely required to explain a range of situations. In fact, it is the risks and challenges themselves which have led me to propose an extension of this hypothesis, which I will explain in the following section.

8.1.3 EXTRAPOLATION OF SCEPTICISM MODEL.

The prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes & Andrew, 2023) posits that increased mental health awareness leads to increased and often erroneous self-diagnosis, which in part accounts for an apparent rise in MHWB issues. Rather than rebutting the potential of the prevalence inflation hypothesis, one could extend or counterbalance it with a heuristic, supported by the findings of the present study, which develops as follows:

1) School staff members, unable to account for what seems to be a novel rise in the prevalence of MHWB issues amongst children, search for potential factors which may be influencing this rise.
2) MHWB awareness seems to be a possible factor. It has apparently increased concurrently with the issues; in addition, the associated perceived reduction in stigma and increase in MHWB literacy both empower and enable children to discuss issues in ways they did not do previously.
3) School staff members express scepticism about increased MHWB awareness and query if it might inadvertently be inflating the prevalence of MHWB issues. Notably, increased awareness on the part of both children (in the form of lessons, the influence of social media *etc*.) as well as staff (in the form of training *etc*.) is suspected of contributing towards increasing prevalence of issues.
4) This undermines faith in the benefit of MHWB awareness in general, and MHWB awareness programmes in school in particular.
5) Finally, scepticism around the effect of MHWB awareness is extrapolated to include a wider body of pupils who present with MHWB issues, particularly those who do not have apparent factors which the staff members can identify, and those who are perceived to have a motive to contrive MHWB issues.

One could call such a heuristic the extrapolation of scepticism model, as tabulated in figure 8.1 below:



"So it seems more pronounced… but I think it's because we're a lot more sensitive to it now…" - Mr Galloway.

"I also think that the down side of us talking much more about it now is that you have young people that will say, "I've got anger issues!" Or, "I've got anxiety, an' whatever!" - Ms Doyle.

"Is that a mental health issue? Or is that this child just really doesn't like it and they still just need to get on with it?" - Ms Brooke

Figure 8.1 Extrapolation of scepticism. The arrows denote directions of influence.

In this model, the scepticism of staff members extrapolates from doubts about the efficacy of awareness programmes, to a querying of the reality of the issues facing pupils generally. If, as the findings from the present study suggest, there is some basis for this model and accordingly school staff members were to become more sceptical about the extent of MHWB issues amongst pupils, what then would be the consequences for those involved? Firstly, staff members would presumably become progressively less tolerant of pupils' issues and therefore less inclined to offer sustained and meaningful support. It is conceivable that MHWB awareness teaching might be quietly neglected by individual teachers as suspicion grows that such programmes are causing more problems than they solve. Evidence from the present study supports the notion that teachers, exercising their pedagogical autonomy, have curtailed particular teaching programmes when they did not have sufficient faith in them. It is not beyond imagination that they might supress MHWB awareness altogether if they thought it counterproductive. Pupils would receive less support for any issues they experienced, and reduced benefit from MHWB teaching should that diminish. Crucially, pupils may feel less likely to seek help if they perceive that staff members were less trusting about the perceived gravity of their issues. This would presumably lead to increased feelings of stigma, and potentially heightened levels of harmful behaviours as pupils felt less able to cope with issues without sufficient support. Consequently, staff members would likely be faced with pupils who present with increasingly severe internalising and externalising behaviours. Ultimately, it is possible that current concerns about the viability of inclusive education in Scotland held by some parents and teachers (Scottish Government, 2023f) as well as authorities (Scottish Parliament, 2024) might escalate, should pupils with unmet MHWB needs become progressively more distressed in mainstream classrooms. This could, over time, undermine the political will to sustain the presumption to mainstream in Scotland. Finally, parents and carers of children with MHWB issues might increasingly choose to withdraw their children from school altogether and opt for home schooling, potentially as a consequence of increased school refusal on the part of the children. This would exacerbate an already deteriorating situation: over 30% of pupils in Scotland met the threshold for persistent absence in 2023/24, whereas during the decade up to 2020 it averaged around 20% (Scottish Government, 2024c).

At this point, it is important to reiterate that the staff members did not apportion *all* blame for their pupils' MHWB issues to increasing MHWB awareness. Nor did they believe that all cases were imagined or invented. Most staff members considered that the prevalence of what they considered to be 'genuine' MHWB issues amongst their pupils *had* increased. This aligns with what the literature suggests is the case in the wider population of young people (McGorry *et al*., 2024). Given that this is the case, it seems reasonable to consider what factors participants associated with such an increase in prevalence; this will be the subject of discussion in the following section.

8.2 FACTORS: PRECARIOUS CHILDHOODS.

Firstly, it seems reasonable to assume that given the increasing prevalence of MHWB issues amongst young people, either some of the factors associated with these issues have increased in prevalence or severity, or completely novel factors have arisen, or both. This aligns with the perspective voiced by several staff members that "*something's* obviously changed that children are now… feeling that way" (Ms Simpson, personal communication, 2024). The fact that staff members had failed to agree on obvious candidates for such an exacerbating or novel factor only seemed to add to the sense of bewilderment they expressed. As Ms Strand (personal communication, 2024) put it; "there's an unexplainable element there as well… that's changed the dynamics of children and their behaviours." Given what the literature tells us about the constellation of factors which influence MHWB (Pearlin, 1989), it should of course be expected that there is not one single factor which has somehow eluded the attention of researchers. However, in consideration of the findings from the present study, I shall argue that many of the issues which school staff members have identified as risk factors for their pupils' MHWB may be seen in terms of the uncertainty, instability or disruption they cause. As such, I contend that the sum of these factors represents what may be described as a *precarious childhood* which acts to harm many of their pupils.

The basis for such a contention is the strong evidence from the school staff members that they perceived various forms and levels of uncertainty and instability as acting to harm their pupils' MHWB. This is supported by evidence from the literature. Uncertainty has been defined as a state when:

> … details of a situation are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general (Brashers, 2001, p.478).

It might seem to be a truism that uncertainty is harmful to young people. Hirsh and colleagues (2012, p.304) proposed that uncertainty "poses a critical adaptive challenge" to people and is experienced subjectively as anxiety. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted in an effort to describe this process, and most of the relevant studies suffer from substantial heterogeneity in terms of study design, participants, and definitions of terms (Massazza *et al*., 2023). Despite such caveats, reviews of both quantitative studies (Massazza *et al*., 2023) as well as qualitative research (Kienzler *et al*., 2025) into the relationship between uncertainty and mental health have found significant negative correlations between uncertainty and MHWB. Furthermore, uncertainty has been associated with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and has been strongly linked with mental disorders in Chinese students (Wu *et al*., 2020). In addition, the staff members described

several forms of uncertainty as risk factors associated with their pupils' MHWB. The most distal of these are societal or systemic forms of uncertainty.

8.2.1 SOCIETAL/ SYSTEMIC UNCERTAINTY.

This broad, general level of uncertainty has been characterised as an insidious and defining feature of modern society (Lancet, 2022; Muggah & Goldin, 2019). The current generation of young people have faced uncertainties relating to the pace of societal change, climate change, armed conflict, the displacement of populations, as well as austerity and the aftermath of global recession. This broader context is cited as a factor in pupils' MHWB by several participants. Ms Brooke (personal communication, 2024) refers not only to issues within social and political domains but indeed "all sectors" in her list of factors; several other participants bemoaned the pace and direction of societal change. This is characterised by the "real shift in society" described by Ms Strand (personal communication, 2024); a perceived movement away from traditions of family and community, towards an individualistic, materialistic society. Notably, Ms Strand's account has clear echoes of certain authors' depictions of anomie arising from the weakening of social bonds (Durkheim, 1895/ 1958; Standing, 2011).

However, it is another global expression of uncertainty, the COVID-19 pandemic, to which the participants most often referred. The pandemic, and associated lockdowns, are frequently cited by staff members as a catalyst which exacerbated underlying issues by its abrupt and universal transformation of many social norms. The effect was dramatic and far-reaching, in the views of participants, and was likely due at least in part to the shock of the unexpected, the uncertainty of what was to come, and the abrupt withdrawal of the stability which school represented. As Mr Singh (present communication, 2024) said, it "knocked a lot of kids out their routine." In this respect, COVID-19 was a great leveller, in that everyone was suddenly subject to a degree of uncertainty; in other respects it was quite the opposite, as it amplified the effects of pre-existing socio-economic inequality (Patel *et al*., 2020). Notably, rather than viewing uncertainty as an expression of the pandemic, some authors have argued that these positions can be reversed. Schweizer and colleagues (2023) posited that the harmful effects of the pandemic on adolescents' MHWB should not be seen in isolation and are really symptoms of a greater, underlying threat: increased uncertainty. In their review of empirical studies in this area, the authors found that many of the COVID-19 related factors which young people identified as harmful to MHWB were based upon their inability to predict outcomes; this led them to conclude that there is "an association between real-world uncertainty and adolescent mental health" (Schweizer *et al*., 2023, p.6).

These overarching, systemic expressions of uncertainty undoubtedly affect the MHWB of pupils, according to the participants. However, they sit at the most distal position from

pupils, relative to other forms of uncertainty. Two distinct forms of uncertainty, as identified by school staff members, sit at a more proximal situation to pupils and represent clear risks to their MHWB: family socioeconomic factors and family relational factors. These family-level factors were perceived to be extremely influential by school staff members. As Ms Doyle (present communication, 2024) put it; "you've only got them for five hours and then they go back home, some of them to… what's causing the mental health problems." Each of these factors, and the relationship between them, will be addressed in turn in the following sections.

8.2.2 FAMILY RELATIONAL UNCERTAINTY.

One of the most commonly cited factors which school staff members perceived to have negatively impacted pupils' MHWB was that of instability within familial relationships. This was described in various forms: imprisonment, addiction, crime, illness, bereavement, separation, and the establishment of new relationships. Aside from the lack of control that children presumably feel when faced with such circumstances, the aspects of uncertainty (in terms of Brashers' [2001] definition) common to all these forms of change are ambiguity, complexity and insecurity of knowledge. Separation and family break-ups were commonly cited in schools one and two; bereavement was a particular issue for pupils in the class at school four. These disruptions to children's secure development have well-documented associations with long-lasting detrimental outcomes (Barnard & McKeganey, 2004; Stikkelbroek *et al*., 2016; Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Furthermore, these harms are often intertwined with multiple factors and consequences; for example, D'Onofrio and Emery (2019, p.100) characterise marital instability as presenting "not a single risk factor, but a cascade of sequelae for children."

8.2.3 FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY.

The other proximal risk factor to which many staff members referred was the range of adverse socio-economic circumstances which some families experienced. There was a high level of awareness of the association between deprivation and pupils' MHWB amongst participants; for many, it was the first issue raised when asked which factors they considered relevant. This association is well documented within the literature (Fitzsimons *et al*., 2017). Nevertheless, it is clear from the findings of the present study that there are nuances and fluctuations amongst those families living in deprivation; from the irregular need for a free school lunch amongst those children whose parents and carers are unemployed, to the changes observed in children's behaviour when their family is "going through a tough time" (Ms Fenton, personal communication, 2024). This too is supported by findings from the wider literature (Cheng *et al*., 2021). Although there was scant awareness of precarious employment amongst staff members, many *were* aware of socioeconomic instability or uncertainty as a risk factor for their pupils. This suggests a more nuanced

understanding amongst school staff, rather than a simple view that only a *constant* level of parental poverty presented a threat.

8..4 NESTED SYSTEMS OF UNCERTAINTY MODEL.

These two areas of proximal, familial uncertainty are clearly influenced by the distal forms of uncertainty. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, global recession and associated austerity measures, national and local political decisions, changing cultural and societal norms and climate change are all capable of impacting families' relationships and socioeconomic circumstances. In addition, the proximal influences of both family relationship and socioeconomic uncertainty not only adversely affect children's MHWB, but also likely interact with each other. Families which experience high levels of financial stress are more likely to undergo separation (Bridges & Disney, 2016); conversely, parents who undergo separation are more likely to experience financial hardships (Russell & Maître, 2024). Accordingly, it is possible to conceptualise these influences as situated in an interactive, nested arrangement around an individual child, as presented in figure 8.2, below.

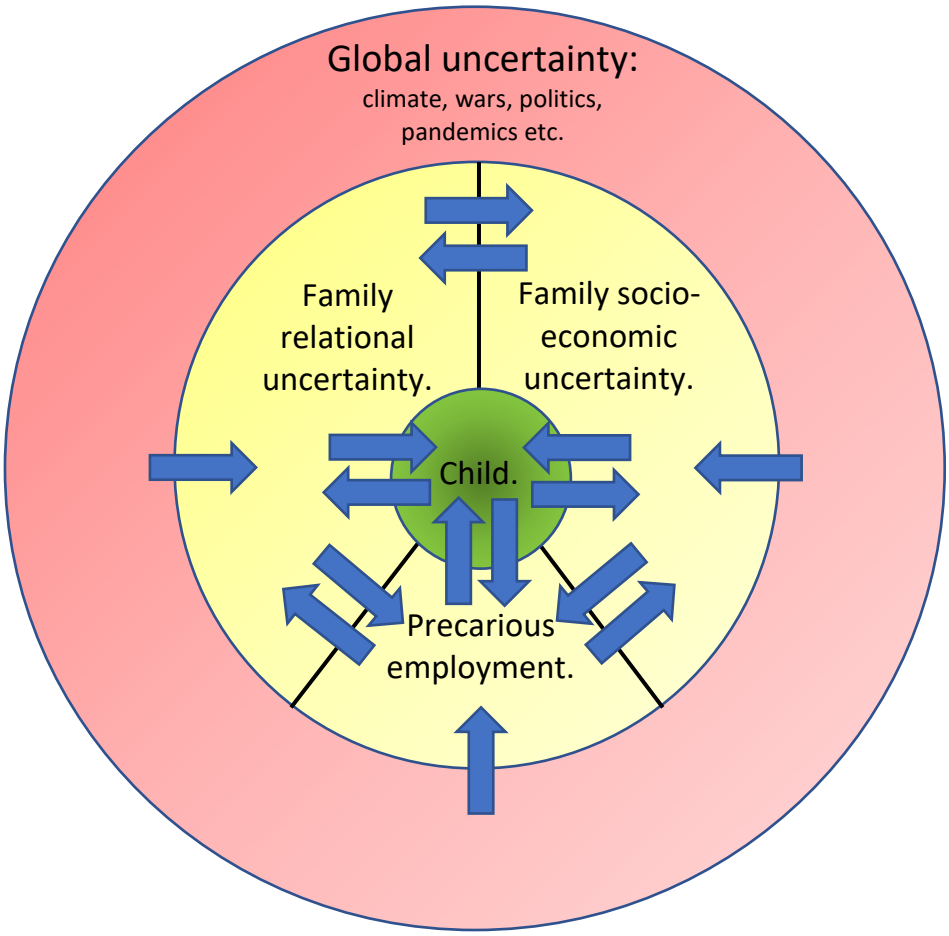


Figure 8.2. Nested systems of uncertainty: precarious influences on childhood.
The arrows denote significant directions of influence.

(*N.B*. I do not claim that this model is complete. Other forms of uncertainty undoubtedly act to harm children: school and peers are obvious omissions from this diagram, which is limited in scope to the findings of the present study.)

In this model, it is possible to characterise the interactions between the previously described domains of uncertainty, and their detrimental effect on children, in terms of a broader conceptualisation of precarity, as defined by Judith Butler (see section 2.2). In her view, precarity is a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2016, p.25). However, it is also possible to position a narrower form of precarity, that which arises as a result of exposure to precarious employment (and the definition adopted by the present study; see section 2.2), within this broader arrangement. This narrower view of precarity can be conceptualised as sitting between the family's relational uncertainty and the family's socioeconomic uncertainty, as precarious employment is located at the nexus of the two. Situated thus, it is influenced by global factors, and in turn influences both socioeconomic and relational aspects of the family, as well as the child both directly and indirectly.

There is one important difference between these domains of uncertainty. It is the literature, more so than the findings of the present study, which points to the placement of precarious employment as a risk factor within this model (Mauno *et al*., 2017). School staff members showed clear awareness of all of the other areas of uncertainty, and positioned them all as risk factors associated with detrimental MHWB outcomes amongst pupils. Although one or two staff members described an association between precarious employment and their pupils' MHWB, it seemed clear from the conversations in which these descriptions arose that the staff members had likely not considered these associations prior to being questioned about them. When taken in conjunction with the occasional confusion over the definition of precarious employment, staff members' outdated and stereotypical views of parental employment, and the lack of awareness or data about the extent of precarious employment amongst parents and carers, it seems reasonable to conclude that school staff members had little to no understanding about either precarious employment or precarity.

As such, the risk factor which precarious employment presents to pupils' MHWB can be conceptualised as sitting in a 'blind spot' for school staff members. The danger therein for all stakeholders is that whilst pupils who suffer MHWB issues associated with precarity may consequently present with increasing levels of anger, anxiety, anomie and/ or alienation, the school staff members have no cognisance of the factors associated with these symptoms. School staff members can thus be thought of as akin to the inhabitants of Plato's cave, unaware of that which is casting shadows on the wall, and mistaking those shadows for reality. They will therefore be unable to identify the source of the problem and may

consequently be left, metaphorically speaking, grasping at shadows. The findings of the present study suggest that this may already be happening, in that staff members report significant increases in the severity and prevalence of behavioural and MHWB issues amongst pupils whilst, as discussed earlier, expressing uncertainty, doubt and even scepticism about the factors behind these symptoms.

Several strategies which might mitigate this situation will be outlined throughout the forthcoming sections in the present chapter. Beyond these, staff members would certainly benefit from specific training about the risk posed by parental precarious employment. This could be addressed as part of an increase in training around MHWB during initial teacher education. Any training of this nature should aim to impart a more nuanced, contemporary understanding of employment and its associations with pupils' MHWB.

8.2.5 ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING THEORETICAL MECHANISMS.

One final aspect which lends credence to the suggested model of precarious childhoods emerged from the findings of the present study: the commonalities between the testimony of school staff members and theoretical mechanisms which relate to precarity. Specifically, several staff members spoke of tension at home stemming from various forms of uncertainty. These were usually financial or relational in nature but two staff members specifically referred to situations in which children had experienced anxiety as a result of parents' employment coming under threat. In these situations, pupils had been thought of as "feeding off parents' anxiety" (Ms Lees, personal communication, 2024); in similar terms, Mr Singh described how "sometimes that anxiety can kind of spill over" (Mr Singh, personal communication, 2024). Ms Clarke noted that the first sign of an issue was typically when a change was noted in a child's behaviour; only subsequently was it discovered that "[a]ll of the things that were *steady* in the house, are *not* any longer" (Ms Clarke, personal communication, 2024, emphasis in original). These accounts lend support to both the previously presented model of precarious childhood, but also to the somewhat more established Crossover Theory (Bolger *et al*., 1989; see section 2.3). Bolger's theory sought to describe the mechanisms by which parental precarious employment can harm workers' family members, by transmitting stress either through emotional contagion, direct sharing or by deteriorating parental behaviours. The accounts given by school staff members would suggest these pathways do indeed act to convey harm to children who are subject to precarious home circumstances, including exposure to parental precarious employment.

8.3 FACTORS: DIGITAL CHILDHOOD.

Aside from the exposure to various forms of uncertainty which I have argued can be seen as amounting to a precarious childhood, the other main strand of harm which school staff members identified as impacting their pupils was in the digital domain. This digital world is

itself characterised by novel uncertainties for the young people who navigate it (Ferguson *et al*., 2024). As others have already written extensively on this topic, not least Haidt (2024a), I am limited in terms of what the present study may contribute to this field. Furthermore, an analysis of the risks posed by exposure to digital devices was not among the original aims of the present study. However, two points required that the issue merited some consideration here. Firstly, the participants determined that it is worthy of attention. In this regard, various concerns were raised; some discussed the particular vulnerability of children to screens that are "stimulating and bright and flashy" (Mr Reavey, personal communication, 2024). Other participants referred to the addictive qualities of digital devices. This characterisation has some support from within the literature; smartphones have been called the "modern day hypodermic needle, delivering digital dopamine 24/7 for a wired generation" (Lembke, 2021, p.1). Indeed, 46% of American teenagers who were surveyed in 2022 reported using the internet 'almost constantly' (Vogels *et al*., 2022). One implied consequence of such frequent use of digital devices is the inhibition of a play-based childhood (Haidt, 2024a). This can be seen in the example of Mr Reavey's pupil who played his Xbox for twelve hours in a row.

Beyond these general concerns, there is a second, more particular reason for discussing the effects of digital devices upon CYP in the present chapter. I intend to argue that exposure to a digital childhood may be acting in *synergy* with that of a precarious childhood. This would represent an altogether novel perspective, unrepresented thus far in the literature. As has been set out in previous chapters (see sections 2.5 and 3.5), evidence exists which shows that exposure to both precarity as well as what Haidt (2024a) calls a 'phone-based childhood' act as distinct harms toward CYP. What is less clear is the relationship, if any, between these two factors. How might the two be linked, and if so, by what mechanisms? Might these two factors act to exacerbate one another, such that the total detriment is greater than the sum of the parts? As there is only limited evidence within either the literature or the present study to support such an idea the conclusions to such queries are, at least in part, tentative. However, notable evidence exists which supports a *related* argument; that children who perceive themselves to be in a relatively low socioeconomic situation are more likely to experience detrimental outcomes from the use of social media than their more affluent peers. My contention is that it is highly likely that this vulnerability extends to children who experience a precarious childhood, particularly through the mechanism of social comparison, to which this discussion will turn next.

8.3.1 SOCIAL MEDIA AND UPWARD SOCIAL COMPARISONS.

Social comparison is defined as the process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self (Wood, 1996). It is a particularly important developmental feature of childhood and adolescence and strongly linked with the formation of children's self-concept and identity (Crone *et al*., 2022). Several of the school staff

members referred to the risks associated with children making comparisons between themselves and peers. For example, Mr Galloway (personal communication, 2024) commented that "the pupils that have anxiety, especially as they're getting older… this comparison that they've got to other pupils, that comes into play..." Social media has undoubtedly opened a new domain in which such comparisons are now possible with a theoretically worldwide reference group. Furthermore, two factors coincide to make it more likely that social media users will experience *upwards* social comparison (when one compares oneself to others who are perceived to be better-off in some regard [Festinger, 1954]) than downward or lateral comparisons. Firstly, algorithmic personalisation curates the content presented to users on social media so as to be highly relevant and interesting for them, which should intensify comparisons, as users will more likely be presented with references who possess commonalities with the user (Orben *et al*., 2024). Secondly, online presentations tend to be more positive than in the offline world. Studies have shown that adolescents purposefully share content to appear interesting, well liked, and attractive (Yau & Reich, 2019); this results in a 'positivity bias' affecting online posts (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021). Thus, upward social comparisons between individuals and reference groups are more likely when occurring online than in the physical world (Park & Park, 2024). Such upward social comparisons have been shown to harm the MHWB of even passive social media users (Gomez et al., 2022; Schmuck et al., 2019; Skeggs *et al*., 2025). Indeed, social comparison has been shown to be a key mechanism explaining the relationship between the use of social media and subjective wellbeing (Verduyn *et al*., 2020).

8.3.2 PARTICULAR RISK OF UPWARD SOCIAL COMPARISON FOR CYP EXPERIENCING DEPRIVATION.

Having outlined the risks presented by online social comparisons to young people in general, in what sense might there be a *particular* risk for children experiencing precarity who use social media? As previously mentioned, the literature predominantly describes the risk for children from deprived backgrounds, rather than precarious ones. For example, Skogen and colleagues (2022) showed that the lower the subjective socioeconomic status of adolescent social media users, the greater the likelihood that they would encounter negative experiences in general whilst online. Furthermore, it seems likely that children who experience deprivation are at greater risk of making upward social media comparisons. Due to both the previously described positivity bias of online presentations, as well as the tendency of online influencers to promote expensive commodities (Dinh & Lee, 2022), social media has been characterised as "a very concentrated representation of the enviable aspects of society" (Yang *et al*., 2025, p.9). It therefore seems reasonable that the perceived gap between CYP experiencing deprivation and those whose online posts project affluence and security will seem wider than for other children. Indeed, Yang and colleagues found that not only did passive social media use significantly predict materialism, but that those who

perceived themselves to have lower subjective socioeconomic status were more likely to experience a sense of relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966), findings which replicated previous studies (Khamis *et al*., 2017; Krause *et al*., 2019). Relative deprivation has been defined as "the judgment that one is worse off compared to some standard accompanied by feelings of anger and resentment" (Smith *et al*., 2012). Kuo and colleagues (2024) associated a sense of relative deprivation with a wide range of negative health and wellbeing outcomes; furthermore, Yan *et al*. (2025) found that a sense of relative deprivation which arose from social media use was associated with increased hostility and anger towards those perceived as more affluent.

Thus, the literature clearly lends support to the argument that CYP who experience lower subjective socioeconomic status are more likely to experience greater risk of detrimental MHWB outcomes than their more affluent peers by means of upward online social comparison. This suggests that the risks posed by deprivation and social media may act in synergy. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that a similar process may apply to young users of social media who have been identified as being at risk of marginalisation in ways other than simply deprivation. Mikkelson (2024, p.1) found that the features which identified adolescents as marginalised were "both mirrored in and reinforced by their digital behavior, and vice versa." In this way, their use of social media was found to have contributed to their further marginalisation, as "their online and offline challenges appear to reinforce each other. In this sense a social divide may become exacerbated by a digital divide" (Mikkelsen, 2024, p.14). These findings are notable as they suggest that various forms of vulnerability pose additional risk factors to young people using social media, over and above the risk posed by social media use alone.

8.3.3 SYNERGY OF HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH BOTH PRECARIOUS CHILDHOOD AND DIGITAL CHILDHOOD.

Although I could find nothing within the literature which describes the relationship between *precarity* and social media in such terms, it seems likely that potential mechanisms and outcomes will be similar, as deprivation and marginalisation are closely related to precarity (Korte, 2014; Varghese & Kumar, 2022). In this regard, it seems likely that Runciman's Theory of Relative Deprivation (1966) may account for such an association. As outlined previously (see section 2.5), Treanor (2016) relied upon Runciman's theory to account for the detrimental effects of a mother's financial vulnerability upon her children's MHWB. Although Treanor's study involved assessing the indirect effect of comparisons made by mothers, rather than by the children themselves, it seems reasonable to assume that Runciman's (1966) Theory of Relative Deprivation applies to (at least older) children in a similar fashion. Indeed, Treanor noted that the "subjective concept of financial vulnerability is more salient than the objective measure of income" and that for older children, the resulting "impact of financial vulnerability is directly experienced through the comparisons

they make with their peer (reference) group" (Treanor, 2016, p.23). In the absence of robust empirical evidence which supports the concept of particular risk for children who suffer the detrimental effects of a precarious *and* digital childhood, it seems at least plausible that such risk exists.

Lastly, further support for this idea that a precarious childhood and upward social comparison on social media are acting in concert to harm children's MHWB is provided in the present study. Here, Mr Reavey presents the perspective of some of his pupils, as he understands it:

> … the social media aspect… everything seems perfect on there, and you're not, it's not real… And you see that, and you start to question, "Why do I live like this, when that's what it could look like…"And then it's the whole feeling of, "It's not fair," and that brings out a lot of emotions as well. (Mr Reavey, personal communication, 2024)

Two final points remain concerning the risks separately posed by precarious and digital childhoods. Firstly, there has been some discussion in the literature about whether the effects of the 'Great Recession' or those associated with smartphones have had the greatest impact upon young peoples' MHWB. Some authors argue for the former (e.g.; McGorry *et al.,* 2025; Odgers, 2024) whilst some contend that the latter has had the greater effect (e.g.; Haidt, 2024a, 2024b; Twenge *et al*., 2018). Given what the literature reveals about the kaleidoscope of interconnected factors which influence MHWB (Link & Phelan, 1995), it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that either socioeconomic or digital factors have supremacy to the point of exclusion over the other. It is surely more likely that both of these factors are significant and, as with so many other social determinants of MHWB, potentially intertwined. The second point relates to schools' ability to mitigate these issues. Clearly, it is beyond schools' capabilities to entirely prevent their pupils from experiencing harm from either or both of these factors. However, some mitigations are easier than others. Although most schools in the UK enforce restrictions on pupils' use of mobile phones during classes (Children's Commissioner, 2025), there are growing calls for schools to implement a total ban on phones in schools (Booth, 2025). Such a move may not eradicate the risks posed to young people by digital technologies, but it would eliminate the risks of certain harmful practices, such as filming incidents of bullying in school and then sharing the video with others. Finally, such a ban would also presumably act as a powerful message to young people about how serious the risks posed by the use of mobile phones are to their MHWB. As such, it would seem reasonable to recommend that head teachers consider the benefits of implementing such a ban in their schools independently, irrespective of whether a national ban occurs or not.

8.4 THE 'UNEXPECTED' AND THE NOVEL: GIRLS, AFFLUENCE AND ANXIETY.

Having discussed the factors associated with pupils' MHWB issues, attention now turns to groups of those pupils themselves. Many staff members expressed varying degrees of alarm and confusion around not only the increasing prevalence of MHWB issues amongst their pupils *generally*, but also amongst groups of pupils which had not previously been associated with MHWB issues to the same extent: the 'unexpected' and the novel. As Ms Strand (personal communication, 2024), put it; "in years gone by, it might have been something that was more linked with your children in deprivation, or, you know, or children from traumatic backgrounds." The perception seemed to be that MHWB issues had more recently become unusually prevalent, and in some cases severe, amongst previously less affected groups of children. The findings suggested that two groups in particular constituted much of this increase in novel cases; girls, and children from apparently affluent or secure backgrounds. Although these groups are presumably overlapping, each will be considered in turn in the following paragraphs.

8.4.1 PREVALENCE AND NATURE OF MHWB ISSUES AMONGST GIRLS.

School staff members reported several relatively novel issues that predominantly affected their female pupils. Within school four, a previously unknown phenomenon of self-harm amongst older girls was noted. This corresponds with the situation throughout the UK; over the past two decades, the prevalence of self-harming behaviour has risen significantly, and is particularly associated with teenage girls (Cybulski *et al*., 2021). In addition, schools three and four described a tendency for girls to 'mask' their MHWB issues (see section 2.4). Within the literature, 'masking' is a phenomenon that is typically described in reference to children with autism (*e.g*.; Chapman *et al*., 2022); there is scant use of this term in relation to children who suffer MHWB issues. Furthermore, it is possible that participants had conflated the issue of masking with that of internalising MHWB issues. If so, this would suggest that that girls in schools three and four were more likely than boys to internalise their MHWB issues. In fact, some participants in these schools stated that not only were girls more likely than boys to mask their issues, they were also more likely to suffer from anxiety.

This portrayal aligns with the literature, which suggests a clear gender divide in relation to MHWB issues amongst CYP (Bao & Han, 2025). Firstly, girls in the UK are significantly more likely than boys to suffer MHWB issues, particularly between the ages of 11 and 14, and these issues are significantly more likely to be more severe than those experienced by boys of the same age (Yoon *et al*., 2023). Furthermore, the gender divide also affects how these issues manifest. For example, the latest Scottish Health Survey (Scottish Government, 2024b) showed that male children were more likely than female children to report high or very high levels of conduct problems as well as hyperactivity (13% of boys compared with 8% of girls, for both outcomes). Conversely, the same survey shows that 45% of 13 year-old girls report

moderate or severe anxiety, compared with just 14% of boys (Inchley *et al*., 2023). These findings suggest that nationally, boys are more likely to suffer externalising symptoms whilst girls are much more likely to suffer internalising symptoms. This corresponds with Ms Holloway's assertion that when it came to identifying those in her class who suffered from MHWB issues, "the girls in the class… I don't think you would be able to pick them out. The boys in the class… you potentially would" (Ms Holloway, personal communication, 2024).

8.4.2 GIRLS AND DIGITAL CHILDHOODS.

Some of this gender disparity may be associated with the different ways boys and girls are making use of digital devices (Haidt, 2024a; see section 3.5). Blanchflower and colleagues (2024) found that not only was poorer mental health significantly associated with time spent in front of a screen amongst young people in Europe, but that the association was particularly strong for females. As outlined previously, the literature provides convincing evidence that adolescent girls in the UK are more likely to use social media than boys, and that this particular form of screen time is associated with many of the most significantly detrimental MHWB outcomes (Twenge & Farley, 2021; Twenge & Martin, 2020). Indeed, Twenge and colleagues (2022, p.1) found that "among girls, there is a consistent and substantial association between mental health and social media use" which the authors reported to be greater than associations between mental health and binge drinking, sexual assault, or drug use. There is also support for a particular risk for girls from social media within the present study. In Mr Galloway's view (personal communication, 2024), social media gives children "this idea of what they 'should be'… it's got a… oh, a huge, huge impact on them. Huge impact." Furthermore, Mr Galloway associated this impact with girls in particular, as they were "definitely the ones that are looking at what's out there, they are being bombarded with images… there's a constant comparison…" (Mr Galloway, personal communication, 2024). It seems likely that some of the apparently novel increase in MHWB issues amongst girls can be associated with a digital childhood (Haidt, 2024a).

8.4.3 CHILDREN FROM AFFLUENT BACKGROUNDS.

Beyond the increasing prevalence of MHWB issues amongst girls, there was another group of children whose issues school staff members often seemed quite unable to account for. This group comprised the increasing numbers of anxious pupils who came from apparently secure backgrounds. For example, Mr Reavey (personal communication, 2024) described how in his experience, "some of the children that I've put forward for the chat with… to have that counsellor speak with them about their anxiety… it's not the ones that are coming from the more deprived areas." In a separate school, Ms Simpson (personal communication, 2024) considered that she had "a lot more children in my class as well that you know, kind of present with, like anxiety… erm, you know, for no obvious reason, you know they've got an okay background…" This is certainly an issue which has little representation within the

literature, which overwhelmingly portrays the most significant socioeconomic risk to children's MHWB as deprivation. Despite this, some studies have argued that some affluent children are exposed to particular risks. These are typically described in terms of depression and anxiety which are associated with excessive pressures to achieve as well as isolation from parents (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005; Luthar & Kumar, 2018; Stiles *et al*., 2020). In their review of 83 relevant studies which sought to investigate mental health concerns amongst adolescents in high socioeconomic groups, Matar and colleagues (2024) similarly found that stress, depression and anxiety were commonly associated with perceived parental pressure or alienation (either physical or emotional) from parents. This aligns with some of the comments from the staff members. For example, staff members from the relatively affluent school two spoke of anxiety as the most prevalent issue their children faced, which Mr Singh associated with parents' intense work schedules (see section 6.3.1). In school four, Ms Holloway described one pupil (personal communication, 2024) as having an "almost nuclear family… who care and support him… I think he is SIMD eight or something like that… on paper he's not a child you would expect to have such mental health issues…" Despite his apparently privileged background, her pupil had written on his desk that his life was 'sometimes busy and too loud.'

It seems plausible that in some of these instances, children's MHWB issues are indeed influenced by a lifestyle made more busy through parental necessity. What seems unlikely is that this increase in prevalence of children from apparently affluent backgrounds who experience MHWB issues may be explained by exposure to parental precarious employment. However, other aspects of a precarious childhood, as well as exposure to a digital childhood, certainly remain potential influences. The only other relevant clue which the literature offers concerns an apparent narrowing of socioeconomic inequalities relating to children's MHWB during the COVID-19 pandemic. Miall and colleagues (2023, p.762) reported that children in the UK with "coupled, highly educated, employed parents and higher household income experienced greater mental health declines during the pandemic than less advantaged groups." Similar findings were reported amongst North American adolescents by Adise and colleagues (2024). As these studies were based on secondary analysis of quantitative datasets, the authors had little insight into why these children had experienced a greater relative decline in MHWB. However, they speculated that the deprivations associated with lockdowns "brought the experiences of traditionally advantaged groups closer to those already faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Miall *et al*., 2023, p.767). This suggests that affluent children may have suffered from the relatively novel experience of deprivation and uncertainty which less advantaged children were more familiar with. If that was the case, and accounts for some of the 'unexpected' instances of MHWB issues to which school staff members have alluded, then one might expect this group of children to reduce in number as the lockdowns fade from memory. However, insufficient data have currently been published to acquire a firm sense of socioeconomic trends in relation to children's MHWB post-COVID.

One final point on this issue seems pertinent. If children in such novel or 'unexpected' groups continue to present to school staff members with MHWB issues, and the staff members continue to be unable to account for the children's issues, it seems likely that this will further develop the scepticism previously described in section 8.1. This reinforces the need for school staff members in general to have greater insight into the factors associated with their pupils' MHWB issues, if they are to respond to those issues effectively and appropriately. It is to that *response*, and what the findings of the present study reveal about it, which the remainder of this discussion now turns. Unlike previous sections, this part of the discussion benefits from the incorporation of views from both adult *and* young participants. Indeed, the voice of the pupils, which seems less concerned about some of the initial themes in the forthcoming section, will come to prominence as the section develops.

8.5 THE RESPONSE.

Prior to discussing schools' response to their pupils' MHWB issues, another caveat; this one concerns the role of outside agencies. Firstly, it should be clear that schools cannot take sole responsibility for meeting their pupils' needs; as Ms Ahmad's testimony makes clear (see section 6.1.2), schools rely upon the services of a wide range of outside agencies. In addition, these findings highlight the enormous pressure such agencies and services are under. "The waiting lists are… beyond huge" (Mr Galloway, personal communication, 2024). Although such findings shed light upon a notable aspect of CYP's MHWB support, an analysis of the role of outside agencies was considered to lie beyond the remit of the present study. This was a difficult decision, but the present thesis simply has insufficient scope to consider MHWB support being offered outwith schools. This section, therefore, will limit itself to an analysis of the findings about the *schools' response*.

It should also be noted that the various themes outlined within this section which describe schools' response to their pupils' MHWB issues seem closely aligned with many of those advocated by the Scottish Government. In particular, the 'Whole School Approach Framework for Schools to Support Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing' (Scottish Government, 2021) calls for schools to adapt their MHWB curriculum and learning and teaching, to facilitate pupil's voices and participation, to engage parents, carers and the wider community, and to focus on school ethos, relationships and pedagogy. These points correspond with four of the following topics within this section (see sections 8.5.7, 8.5.8, 8.5.3, and 8.5.5 respectively). The framework further argues that a "school ethos and environment that best supports mental health and wellbeing is underpinned by relational approaches" (Scottish Government, 2021, p.12) and that the "importance of outdoor activities to support and maintain mental health and wellbeing should also be emphasised" (Scottish Government, 2021, p.13). In addition, as previously outlined in

section 3.6, the framework positions its call for increased pupil voice within schools in terms of a children's rights-based approach (Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989).

Notably, the whole school approach described by the Scottish Government in this policy document also aligns closely with the principles of salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979; see section 3.3). The framework "emphasises a health-promoting and preventative approach to mental health and wellbeing" (Scottish Government, 2021, p.2). It also proposes a conceptual model of mental health which bears a striking resemblance to the dual continua model (Keyes, 2014) adopted by the present study:

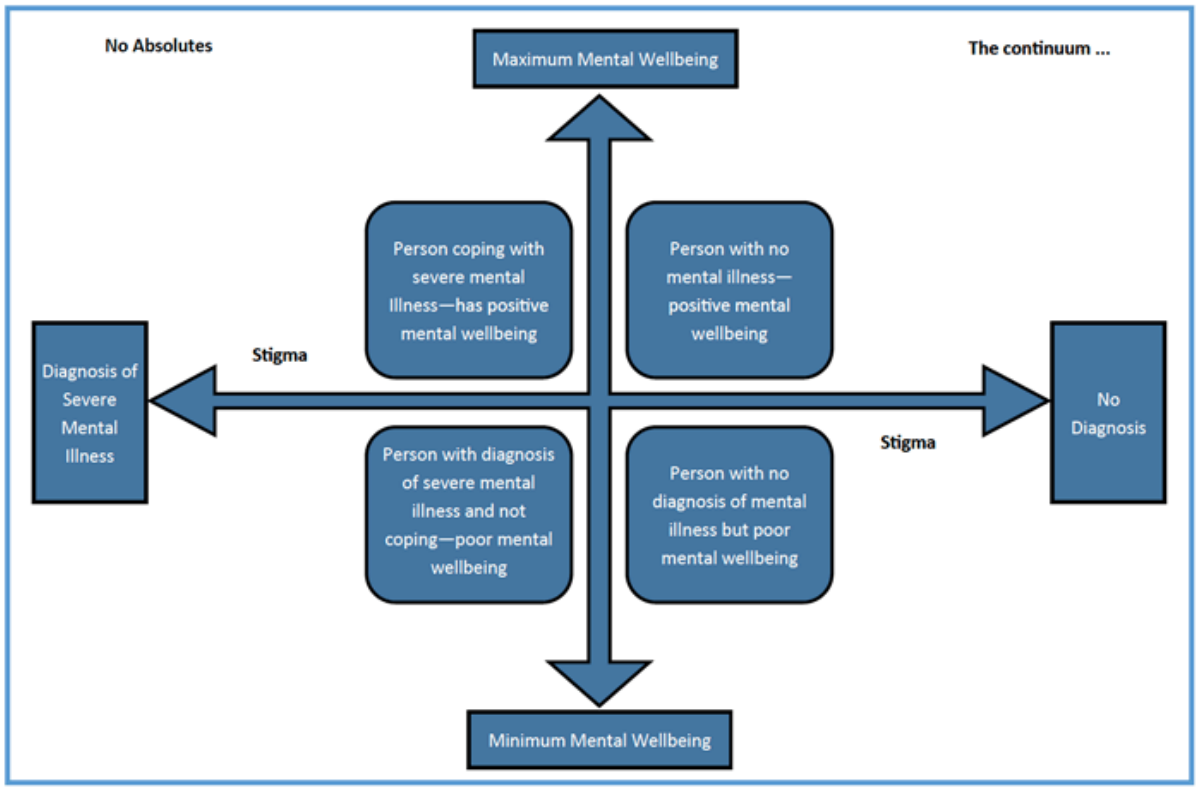


Figure 8.3; the Scottish Government's (2021, p.6) 'Continuum [*sic*] of Mental Health' model.

Consequently, it is possible to conceptualise both the Scottish Government's (2021) framework for schools to improve their MHWB support, and the findings from the present study, within the context of a salutogenic approach. Both the findings and the recommendations of the present study are described in terms that aim to bolster pupils' generalised resistance resources, and improve their sense of coherence, in line with Antonovsky's (1979) model of health promotion. This argument will be revisited and exemplified in a later section of this chapter (see section 8.5.9).

8.5.1 CHILDREN UNABLE TO COPE WITH TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM SETTING.

It is clear from the findings of the present study that increasing numbers of children found coping with the classroom environment difficult. Pupils variously described the classroom environment as a place that could make pupils feel "overwhelmed" (Isha D., personal communication, 2024); others spoke of feeling stressed, uncomfortable or annoyed. Several school staff members spoke in similar terms. As Ms Kaminski (personal communication, 2024) pointed out, "…some kids just can't cope with the traditional methods that the others can cope with… the *numbers* of kids who are now not coping… *that's* getting a bit… alarming." Notably, most of the school staff members who portrayed this situation talked about children who found the 'traditional' or 'mainstream' classroom challenging . This suggests an acknowledgment that the environment is either outdated or unsuitable for many children.

8.5.2 THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT.

Several staff members discussed the need to manage the physical setting of the classroom in such a way that it created an inclusive environment (*e.g.* comments about the Neurosequential Model in Education [Perry, 2020]; see section 6.2.1). Although the layout of a classroom is undoubtedly important (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009), it is notable that pupils mentioned the physical environment of the classroom rather less than school staff members. When pupils mentioned the classroom, it was often in terms of seeking respite from it. One point of agreement between staff members and pupils lay in the value of quiet, safe spaces to which pupils might go to either work in peace or simply to gain momentary solitude from the classroom. As Ms Fenton (personal communication, 2024) put it: "these young people sometimes *need* a space away…" Ms Ahmad's description of how one of her pupils benefited from regular short 'sensory rest' visits to the side room adjoining her classroom (see section 6.2.1) seemed to suggest that, despite the array of other measures which she had employed to meet the pupil's needs *within* the classroom, the use of this room was the measure which had given most benefit. As she pointed out, "he was just completely overwhelmed and anxious, picking, and he just had to be… out the classroom" (Ms Ahmad, personal communication, 2024).

This chimes with the expressed wishes of several pupils. As Amanda A. said (personal communication, 2024), she would like the option "to go out of class if annoyed and stressed, a quiet place would calm you." Amanda's views align with the findings of other studies, as noted in a previous chapter (see section 3.6): Brown and Dixon (2020, p.392) reported that pupils in secondary schools in England described a dedicated open access 'safe space' room which was "deeply valued by students… when feeling overwhelmed." Such safe spaces may therefore offer the prospect of meaningful benefit for pupils and ought to be a consideration in schools. They may in fact already have become more commonplace in

Scottish schools; many school staff members who participated in a national survey reported that their school had recently introduced sensory or 'break out' rooms in order to promote positive behaviour (Scottish Government, 2023a). Finally, these rooms might also help alleviate moments when children perceive that they are experiencing the 'spotlight effect' (see section 6.2.2). It seems likely that schools were also using nurture room facilities in a similar manner: "sometimes they go there [nurture room] because it's the only actual space we've got, and a door that can be shut" (Ms Doyle, personal communication, 2024). Notwithstanding the value ascribed to such physical and environmental resources, many other aspects of the response schools had enacted to support their pupils related to a different domain; that of the personal and relational. These aspects form the next sections of the discussion; the first of these concerns the links between schools and their communities.

8.5.3 PARENTS, CARERS AND COMMUNITY.

As described in a previous chapter (see section 3.6), the inclusion of parents and carers within a school community has a positive influence on children's MHWB (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, schools often find the establishment of such a relationship with parents challenging for a variety of reasons (Baker *et al*., 2016), and school staff members have been known to hold prejudicial or misinformed attitudes about some parents (Cameron *et al*., 2022). This last point seems somewhat pertinent to the present study given the deficit perspectives which some staff members held about some of the parents in their community (see section 6.3.1). As Mr Galloway (personal communication, 2024) opined, "I think, er, solid parent skills seem to be on a decline." In school four, Ms Brooke (personal communication, 2024) described parents who were "not able to make sensible choices." Nevertheless, implicit in some of these staff members' criticisms was the view that parents and carers were an essential component in schools' attempts to meet their pupils' MHWB needs: "the *bigger* influence is home" (Ms Kaminski, personal communication, 2024). Ms MacDonald (personal communication, 2024) was even clearer: "it has to be a partnership with the families."

The issue therefore becomes one of how to develop a positive parent-school relationship. The value of a home-link worker in developing such a partnership was evident from the testimony of several staff members. Nevertheless, this value really seemed to be based upon the *relationship* forged between school staff members and the family, rather than being specific to the *role*. Ms Fenton (personal communication, 2024) seemed to pursue a very similar strategy to Mr Johnson when she described inviting family members into school: "getting them to come in for a cup of tea and just offload when the child's not there… the tissues are there and they need that support as much as the child does." As Ms Fenton's description suggests, the key to developing the partnership between school and home may lie in staff members' recognition that families are struggling every bit as much as

children and school staff are. A shared approach to the issues would presumably be far more productive than a censurious one. Furthermore, a closer relationship between school and parents might better inform school staff members about parental employment circumstances and home circumstances in general. In lieu of more invasive methods of data collection relating to parental employment, a closer relationship with parents, in which information was shared more readily, might mitigate several of the issues described within this chapter.

Achieving this sort of improved relationship undoubtedly faces challenges. School staff members often seemed to know little detail about their parents and carers; they held simplistic and outdated views about their employment, were often not able to give estimates about the prevalence of unemployment in their communities and learned details about home circumstances only through what pupils told them. On the other hand, some parents clearly viewed schools as authoritarian institutions which either threatened or intimidated them. Mr Johnson (personal communication, 2024) described the attempts he made to break down such barriers between his school and the parents who had "major anxiety about coming to the school playground." This divide between school staff and the "hard to reach" families (Mr Galloway, personal communication, 2024) was most frequently described in the relatively deprived schools one, three and four. Indeed, Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) argued that the barriers which persist between the most marginalised parents and the schools their children attend are often class-based constructs which are deeply ingrained in the social structures of communities.

Overcoming such barriers will not be easy. However, the changing nature of schools and of the needs of their families offers some opportunities to do so. As Ms Ahmad (personal statement, 2024) pointed out; "we're education, but now education is mostly social work." Schools are, in effect, increasingly become multi-agency community support hubs, in which social workers, psychologists, community nurses and police are often to be found. In addition, food and clothing banks are increasingly attached to schools; all four of the schools in the present study provided forms of charitable service to their most vulnerable families. Staff members at schools one and four spoke of routinely feeding and clothing some families, and even of providing Christmas presents. As schools develop their role as community support hubs, parents and carers could be invited into school more frequently, to help with a variety of support roles or to take advantage of the help the school can offer. Informal drop-ins for parents to come and have a cup of tea and 'offload' are clearly valued in schools one and four; these could be encouraged and developed further. Parents could be invited to come and work with their children in school, or to come and volunteer their help if willing to do so (and if cleared to work with vulnerable groups by Disclosure Scotland). The aim of such engagement should be focused entirely on the need for schools to value not only parental voice but also parental presence (McKenna & Millen, 2013). It is only by inviting parents and carers to become an integral part of a school, involved in its

daily functioning, that barriers will begin to dissipate, partnerships will develop and communication will increase. Such developments would require a change in the approach of teaching staff, particularly if they had extra responsibilities or parents and carers within their classrooms as a result. Studies have found significant resistance amongst school staff members to the idea of increasing parental voice within schools (Brown *et al*., 2020). However, the potential benefits in improved behaviour and extra support may help persuade staff members of the merits of such an approach. Many staff members in the present study seemed perfectly aware of the importance of having positive and close links with families. As Ms Ahmad (personal communication, 2024) stated; "we know how quickly things can unfold if we don't have that good relationship…"

8.5.4 ADDITIONAL STAFF MEMBERS.

Aside from concerns about the parents and carers of their pupils, the single clearest message voiced by school staff members was their desire for schools to be reinforced with additional colleagues; "we just need more people" (Ms Clarke, personal communication, 2024). This was overwhelmingly presented as the single most important factor that staff members perceived would improve the MHWB support that they offered their pupils (see section 6.3.2). Despite this, most school staff members seemed resigned to not acquiring additional workers, or even to the prospect that they might lose some of their current team. As Mr Singh (personal communication, 2024) put it; "unfortunately… they're trying to cut *down* on teaching numbers, you know, the ratio of teachers to children is going up so…"

His assessment is indeed borne out by the statistics. Following a period of relative stability in the numbers of primary teachers in Scotland, there has been a significant decrease during the last two years. In 2024 there were 24,468 full-time teaching posts in Scotland; this number was 629 lower than the previous year (Scottish Government, 2024a). Recent plans by Glasgow City Council to cut a further 450 teaching posts over three years were reversed only after the threat of industrial action by teaching unions (McKay, 2025). As Mr Singh seemed to suggest, these figures are likely linked to the number of primary pupils in Scotland, which also fell over the past two years (Scottish Government, 2024a) and is nearly 11,800 lower than the 2015 figure (Scottish Government, 2015). In 2024, Scotland recorded its lowest number of births since records began in 1855 (National Records of Scotland, 2025). Consequently, it seems probable that the numbers of both primary pupils and teachers in Scotland will continue to fall.

Notwithstanding the real concerns of school staff members who undoubtedly feel under considerable pressure, the literature suggests that increasing the number of staff in a school may not represent the panacea they perceive it to be. Jakobsson and colleagues (2013) examined a closely related subject, that of the effect of class size on the prevalence of MHWB amongst Swedish adolescents. They found no significant association between the

two, to the extent that they could not "reject the hypothesis that class size has no effect on mental health and well-being at all" (Jakobsson *et al*., 2013, p.248). Furthermore, irrespective of the merit or otherwise of increasing school staff numbers, there is a clear risk that in focusing upon an outcome which is highly unlikely to occur, staff members will be both disappointed in their hopes and distracted from the consideration of more achievable strategies. *All* of the staff members who were asked what would help their school improve its response to pupils' MHWB needs cited the need for more staff. In contrast, few pupils considered that extra staff members would improve their MHWB (see section 7.1.3). Only six of the 77 pupils requested additional adult help, all of whom specifically cited the need for these extra staff members to help outside, mostly to help resolve arguments about football.

8.5.5 PEDAGOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS.

Another particularly powerful element of the findings which related to the *personal* aspect of schools' response to MHWB issues was that of pedagogy. Although all four schools nominally used whole-school or authority-wide programmes to teach MHWB outcomes to pupils, the teachers seemed to favour either adapting these to suit their class, or prioritising their own bespoke approaches. As Mr Reavey (personal communication) said about school four's PATHS lessons, "I'll be honest, I think they are a bit… tedious." Several teachers also described the value they perceived in teaching personalised lessons on equity or resilience. The impression was formed throughout the present study that teachers in the four schools not only favoured their own lessons over their school's comprehensive packages, but also tended to teach those lessons as discrete subjects. Although there was some evidence from school staff that they made connections with their pupils to issues such as equity in distinct yet related moments, there was little sense that MHWB teaching permeated the curriculum. This would seem to be contrary to the principles of a Curriculum for Excellence (LTS, 2009).

There is insufficient evidence within the findings of the present study to be certain of *wh*y teachers have adopted this approach. However, as previously mentioned (see section 8.1), given that staff members have expressed scepticism about MHWB awareness programmes, it is possible that this attitude may influence their teaching. This would certainly align with a move toward teaching MHWB-*related* lessons (such as equity and resilience) in a discrete fashion, and away from a whole-school MHWB promotion package, such as PATHS. This is potentially consequential, as beneficial outcomes for pupils' MHWB from programmes such as PATHS may dwindle to a statistically insignificant level if teachers do not invest sufficient teaching time in it (Humphrey *et al*. 2018). If teachers *are* distancing themselves from MHWB promotion programmes such as PATHS due to scepticism about their efficacy, they may in fact be depriving their pupils of an evidence-based means of MHWB support (Faria *et al*., 2013).

In contrast, school staff members seemed to have a quite different attitude towards enacting pedagogical adaptations within their classroom, and also of the importance of forging and maintaining positive relationships with their pupils. In terms of the former, Mr Galloway (personal communication, 2024) explained; "If we recognise that pupils are finding things difficult, we're quite willing to adapt our practice." There seemed to be a widespread acceptance that school had to adapt to fit certain pupils' needs, rather than the other way around: "You need to be thinking about *adjusting…"* (Ms Strand, personal communication, 2024). This acceptance of the importance of flexibility *did* seem to permeate school staff members' pedagogy in a way that the formal teaching of MHWB did not. It is possible that this attitude was influenced by the previously described ways in which some pupils were not able to cope with the classroom environment, and staff members' apparent tacit acceptance that the 'traditional' element of such environments was a factor for these pupils.

This view is certainly supported by the literature, as the strategies which are most widely acknowledged to be effective in terms of inclusive practice tend to involve the pedagogical approach of the teacher (Finkelstein *et al*., 2021; Florian & Beaton, 2018). Notably, several of the pedagogical strategies described by staff members were focused upon mitigating the 'spotlight effect', such as Mr Reavey's anecdote about the use of a red counter in maths lessons shows (see section 6.2.2). This shows an awareness as well as a sensitivity to pupils' needs that can only be of benefit to their MHWB.

Ultimately, staff members were unanimous in their assessment of the most important asset they could offer in support of their pupils: "…there is nothing like that relationship that adults can have with the pupils…it's the key thing to making a difference" (Mr Singh, personal communication, 2024). In school four, Ms Strand (personal communication, 2024) was in complete agreement: "relationships is at the heart of everything we do." The first of several aspects which emerged from the findings about relationships was that pupils must come to have trust in staff members. Trust usually requires time and investment to develop; "allow the young people to build that relationship with you where they trust you and know that you are there for them" (Mr Johnson, personal communication, 2024). This process could take longer for some pupils than others; Ms Strand's analogy of constantly pulling at a thread (see section 6.2.3) suggested that, for some pupils, building trust could be a lengthy process. There seems little doubt that pupils' trust in staff members is of crucial importance in developing their MHWB (Leighton *et al*., 2016). It has been linked to both pupils' sense of safety in school and to academic achievement (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

A second necessary feature of relationships which staff members alluded to was that they must *know* their pupils. As with trust, this can only be achieved over time, but is essential if staff members are to offer optimal support to their pupils. A clear example was offered by Ms Holloway when she described the girl in her class who worried the charm on her

bracelet when feeling upset about her gran's death: "I don't think unless you *knew* the child, you would notice that…" (Ms Holloway, personal communication, 2024, emphasis in original). This level of knowledge about a pupil's actions and emotions enables support to be offered at that moment and in the most appropriate manner. Mr Galloway (personal communication, 2024) described how in a similar situation (and equally familiar with his pupil's personality) he could catch one of his pupils "very discreetly, she's not someone that… likes it to be visible" and ask if she wanted to deliver a note, simply to give her a break from the classroom. Notably, these pupils are perhaps the most likely to engage in what staff members referred to as 'masking'. It seems likely that staff members' knowledge of their pupils may be the most effective means of discerning issues despite such barriers.

The third aspect of relationship-building which staff members discussed was the need to ensure that pupils felt *valued* by staff members. This was demonstrated in numerous ways by staff members, the most commonly described of which was the process of 'checking-in' in with pupils. Although checking-in seemed superficially to be a quick and informal means of assessing pupils' wellbeing, it also conveyed to pupils the sense that staff members cared about them. As Ms Kaminski described, her pointed greeting to children in the morning involved waiting for their response "so that they feel valued, they feel welcomed… Somebody who is looking at them, they're accepting them, they're valuing them, for who they are" (Ms Kaminski, personal communication, 2024). Furthermore, for some pupils this may be a relatively rare experience of being treated in this manner. Ms Holloway (see section 6.3.1) talked of pupils who were not cared for at home and consequently did not recognise attempts to do so by school staff members. For most pupils, however, there is benefit simply in being seen, accepted and reminded that staff members care about them: "it's about acknowledging your children… these are your people, you've got to be there for them" (Ms Ahmad, personal communication, 2024).

It is heartening to see such strong evidence from school staff members about their views on the significance of relationships with pupils. As Mr Reavey opined (personal communication, 2024), the majority of staff in his school "would be *really* good at relationship-building or just being… here for the children who need them." The literature certainly supports the need to do so; as described in a previous chapter (see section 3.6), the role of relationships between school staff members and pupils is of fundamental importance. Relationships are central to mechanisms by which pupils' MHWB may be influenced, such as improving school climate (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018) or pupils' sense of school belonging (Osterman, 2000). These are fundamentally relational approaches (Brown *et al*., 2025) which are dependent upon the nature of teacher-pupil relations (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019).

8.5.6 ATTAINMENT AND PRESSURE.

The relationships and pedagogical adjustments which staff members have described are likely to be of fundamental importance to pupils' MHWB. However, the most frequent references which the pupils themselves made to teachers' pedagogical efforts tended to be in relation to 'brain breaks' which many teachers provided during lessons (see theme 7.1). Some pupils requested more frequent use of these breaks to punctuate lessons; they were seen by pupils as being able to "reset our brains" (Gordon A., personal communication, 2024). It seems likely from such accounts that some pupils perceive that the work in class can be somewhat oppressive. Several pupils (*e.g.* Bethany B., Penny, B, Huan B., personal communications, 2024; see section 7.1.1) described feeling "stressed" by their work. Omar B. and Nancy B. (personal communications, 2024) requested a "cool down" between lessons, which implies a certain intensity.

Pupils' apparent perception that classroom work puts them under a certain level of pressure aligns with staff members' views about pressure to meet attainment targets. Several staff members described the tension they felt between meeting pupils' attainment targets and their MHWB needs. These were often portrayed as conflicting pressures. As Ms Fenton (personal communication, 2024) put it:

> You know if we haven't got the wellbeing right, the children are not going to learn. …if there was less pressure coming from *way* on high about… attainment… and we could give more time over to wellbeing, we'd be able to close the gap.

Scottish education policy has for many years portrayed wellbeing as a *prerequisite* for attainment (Scottish Executive, 2006; Spratt, 2017). However, it seems clear that school staff members not only feel considerable pressure to focus on the latter, but that they also considered there to be a conflict between the two. As Ms Brooke described, the pressure school staff members felt to focus on attainment could indirectly adversely affect pupils. She implied that her efforts toward helping a pupil meet his attainment targets were in part responsible for his poor attendance:

> You're putting pupils under pressure to *meet* a statistic to appease someone somewhere, but by trying to push the work up… you can sometimes be putting them under… undue pressure (Ms Brooke, personal communication, 2024).

It may be that pupils' MHWB might be better supported in the short term if head teachers felt they had the necessary scope to argue that, for certain children in certain situations, wellbeing targets should take precedence over academic ones. And as Ms Fenton argued (see section 6.2.1), better MHWB in the short term may help close the attainment gap over the longer term.

8.5.7 BALANCE OF THE CURRICULUM.

Another means of alleviating perceived classroom pressures which was described by both staff members and pupils was by adjusting the balance of the curriculum. Staff members did seem to enjoy sufficient autonomy that they felt able to do this to a certain extent, as exemplified by Ms Holloway's willingness to tilt her timetable in favour of the art activities that her class so enjoyed (see section 6.2.1). In fact, pupils across all four schools voiced a clear preference for art, which was described by several pupils in terms of its calming or relaxing properties. Bianka B. (personal communication, 2024) spoke in similar terms to several other pupils in her request: "More art because it's more relaxing- it's a relaxing subject." There is some support for the social and emotional benefits of art within the literature. Participating in arts activities within schools has been shown to have a positive effect on young peoples' self-confidence, self-esteem, relationship building and sense of belonging (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). Art therapy sessions involving primary-aged pupils in the UK have reported significant and beneficial MHWB outcomes such as improved self-expression, safety, empowerment, hope, and optimism for the future (Moula *et al*., 2022). Notwithstanding the diversity of pupils' preferences, it may be the case that for many pupils there is something intrinsically beneficial in art activities.

Another curricular area which proved popular amongst pupils was that of physical education. Several pupils alluded to the link between physical and mental wellbeing, suggesting that as more P.E. might improve their physical fitness, they would expect improvements to their mental wellbeing to follow. As Dominik D. (personal communication, 2024) stated so simply yet powerfully, "P.E. makes you feel alive." Catarina B. (personal communication, 2024) drew clear links between more gymnastics opportunities and a sense of belonging to school: "I'd feel better about school. It would show that school cares about us!" Calls for extra physical education were often linked by pupils to a desire for more outdoor learning (see section 7.2.1).

Notably, the desire to get outside was most frequently voiced by pupils within the most deprived and urban catchments in schools one and four. Jasmine D. (personal communication, 2024) argued, "More fresh air will help my wellbeing." Many pupils simply seemed to value the opportunity to be outside as an end in itself, as it represented a "change from always being inside" (Gordon A., personal communication, 2024). Outdoor learning has been linked with measurable socio-emotional, academic and wellbeing benefits (Mann *et al*., 2022), as has providing opportunities for children to engage with nature in a school setting (Ly & Vella-Brodrick, 2024). Access to outdoor environments is a recognised protective factor against MHWB issues for CYP (McCurdy *et al*., 2010), especially for girls (Piccininni *et al*., 2018). Conversely, a lack of opportunity to access nature is likely to harm children's development in a wide range of ways (Driessnack, 2009; Louv, 2008).

Increased physical and outdoor education may be a timely and fitting response to the developmental limitations associated with a digital childhood. As the prevalence of play-based childhoods diminish in the face of digital technologies (Haidt, 2024a), schools can redress this imbalance by restricting phones in school and taking their pupils outdoors. Furthermore, as interdisciplinary learning was considered a tenet of a Curriculum for Excellence (Humes, 2013), one might expect that primary teachers in Scotland ought to be reasonably adept at using either art, physical education or outdoor learning opportunities in order to teach experiences and outcomes from other curricular areas. This strategy might satisfy both the pupils who advocate for more of these curricular subjects *and* head teachers with one eye on attainment data.

8.5.8 PUPIL VOICE.

Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that pupils in schools beyond the present study would rather prioritise subjects other than the arts, languages and P.E. favoured by the pupils herein. One cannot expect a blanket approach to please all pupils; in fact, a wide range of subjects were favoured within the present study, with maths a notable exception.
As with many other aspects of the pupils' views, the underlying issue was not one of favouring a particular subject over another, but rather of *influence*. The pupils clearly seemed to want the right to have a say in the balance of the curriculum. As previously mentioned (see section 7.1.2), this was most frequently requested in school three, in which pupils had seemed to have least choice in this regard. Pupils from all four schools expressed a range of ideas about curricular choice, including having a certain pupil choosing a lesson, or a pupil actually having an opportunity "to 'be the teacher' and deliver parts of the lesson" (Jayda C., personal communication, 2024). This latter point would likely benefit learning and teaching; according to cognitive elaboration theory (Wittrock, 1978), the thought processes necessitated by the explanation of concepts to others deepens understanding of those concepts. But it seems most likely that it is in the exercising of pupil voice itself, rather than the prioritisation of particular subjects, that the greatest benefit lies. As William B. (personal communication, 2024) put it; "If you have more choice it will motivate you to come to school in the morning."

At this point, it is important to note that pupil voice is a concept which has been troubled by several authors. Some have expressed concern that pupil voice is too often "taken at face value, undertheorized, and reified" (Facca *et al*., 2020, p.6). Others have argued that it is a "debunking strategy" which simply reveals the disguised interests of the dominant group (Moore and Muller, 1999, p.202). James (2007) questioned the assumptions around authenticity of children's voice, pointing out that children's diverse socioeconomic and cultural experiences render a unifying concept of 'voice' problematic. Komulainen (2007) argued that children's voice in research never truly represents the view of the child as it is always relationally and socially constructed between adults and children. According to

Spyrou (2011), children's views are particularly constrained by sociocultural norms when expressed within institutions such as schools. Furthermore, studies that use art as a method of allowing children a voice have come in for criticism, although much of this relates to the tradition of psychologists seeking to 'capture' the 'subconscious' voice of the child (Eldén, 2013).

In order to mitigate these risks, Facca and colleagues (2020) recommend acknowledging that voice is a relational concept, in which meaning is always situated and open to multiple interpretations, and that children's voice in particular is almost always produced through intergenerational dialogue that is subject to an inherent power imbalance. Indeed, Urbina-Garcia and colleagues (2022), in their systematic review of the literature, found that most studies which aimed to research children's voices relied upon adult-led methods of data generation, such as interviews and focus groups.

Beyond these theoretical issues, which have in part been discussed elsewhere (see sections 4.7 and 4.9.3), there are undoubtedly certain limits to acting upon the wishes of pupils. For example, if one views pupil voice in terms of children's rights (Lundy, 2007), then clearly one ought not enact pupil voice if it is likely to infringe on the rights of the pupils themselves, or on other's rights. In other instances it may simply be impractical, for a variety of reasons. These may include unrealistic expense ('Primary 7 should be rewarded with diamonds for good behaviour') or legal restrictions ('pupils should be allowed to vote in general elections'). Others wishes may be commendable yet beyond the power of school staff to grant ('world peace').

Nevertheless, most of these instances could yet be used as a learning opportunity. Indeed, children not only have the right to be heard, and their views given 'due weight' (United Nations, 1989); they also have the right to have adults support them in forming their views (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). This may entail the occasional enactment of pupils' views that seem manifestly unwise to school staff members; we learn through our mistakes, after all. Furthermore, the more pupils feel that their suggestions have been valued and acted upon, the greater their sense of agency and ability to reflect upon the process becomes (Fielding & Bragg, 2003). Accordingly, the exercising of their voice ought to improve throughout the process. In terms of the present study's findings, issues such as the state of the toilets in school four, so keenly felt by the pupils at that school, could become ones of civic responsibility were pupils' voices to be considered. In learning that they can not only raise the issues which are of most immediate concern to them, but also mount campaigns and seek to achieve changes, pupils would develop an increasing sense of agency (Cook-Sather, 2020; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). This would encourage schools to become more democratic institutions (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006).

Another aspect of the findings from the present study further addresses the issue of pupil voice: pupils' requests for more school equipment. There were several requests for more 'fidgets' (sensory toys) in school one. The use of these by pupils in order to "help concentration, not to distract us!" (Gordon A., personal communication, 2024) was a relatively recent development in school one. Notably, it had caused Ms Brooke to reflect and to "adjust my expectations of what's acceptable in the class" (personal communication, 2024). In addition, pupils from all four schools had requested more (or improved) playground equipment. As Noor D. (personal communication, 2024) reasoned: "If they were occupied they wouldn't be so sad." However, Ms Brooke (personal communication, 2024) revealed rather disparaging views of such requests:

> … the Head Teacher will ask the kids, "What would you like for our school?" And they're like, "Skipping ropes!" They don't even know what else is really out there because this is all they know.

The implication of Ms Brooke's apparent attitude is that she feels that her pupils have insufficient knowledge to ask for things that might substantively address their MHWB needs. One might rebut this argument by considering that, were they to work, skipping ropes would be amongst the cheapest imaginable solutions to MHWB issues. In fact, evidence already exists to show that a six-week programme of skipping can improve adolescents' mood (Jufril *et al*., 2022). If, on the other hand, the ropes were provided but the children's MHWB did *not* improve as a consequence, then two associated points should arise. Firstly, the pupils would become aware that their voice had been heard and valued; this in itself should improve pupils' MHWB (PHE/ DfE, 2021). Secondly, as already mentioned, there is at least the prospect that in failure, the pupils' subsequent suggestions might improve.

8.5.9 PETS.

Few points in the present study highlighted the issue of pupil voice as clearly as pupils' request for pets in school. Although these calls were exclusive to only two of the four schools, they were significant within these two classes; twelve of the fifteen participating pupils in school three referred to this theme. Despite some calls for large (or "reasonably – sized" pets [Omar B., personal communication, 2024]), the most frequently requested pets were smaller, such as hamsters, gerbils or rats. Several pupils described the prospect of pets as directly supportive of their emotional wellbeing; Abdullah B., Gurpreet B. and Logan C. (personal communications, 2024) referred to either a "emotional support" animal or a "therapet." Pets were variously portrayed as being helping to make pupils calmer, happier, quieter, more settled, or help pupils when they felt 'down'. Others claimed that they might increase enthusiasm for attendance: "it would make me want to go to school more" (Ulrich B., personal communication, 2024).

Given the deterioration in attendance levels in Scottish primary schools since the COVID-19 pandemic (Scottish Government, 2024c), this point of view should be of interest to schools. Indeed, wider studies have shown that the use of therapy pets in educational settings has grown over recent years (Jalongo & Petro, 2018) and that such use has increased both pupils' attendance levels and motivation (Sorin *et al*., 2015) as well as reduced pupils' stress levels (Meints *et al*., 2022). Furthermore, in their systematic review of the relevant literature, Wintermantel and colleagues (2024) found that that therapy dog-assisted interventions can have a positive impact on social behaviours and reducing stress in mainstream school settings. Many of the pupils saw no reason *not* to have a pet within their classroom. Gurpreet B. (personal communication, 2024) may have spoken for many when she reasoned: "Because - why not?"

Unfortunately for Gurpreet, several adult participants in the present study felt that there were clear reasons 'why not'. Once the classroom activity in school two had finished and the pupils had gone home, Mr Singh (who had been present during the activity) seemed to be somewhat dismissive of the request for classroom pets. His first considerations were practical: who would look after such a pet at the weekends and during holidays? What about allergies? I must confess that initially, I held similar views myself. A certain groupthink seemed to develop amongst adults within the study that this was rather a sweet idea, but that it was entirely impracticable. During a meeting held to discuss the aggregated findings with the senior leadership team at school two, a similarly deprecating attitude was evident. Whilst they were keen to engage in the feedback process, and considered some of the pupils' suggestions which seemed easier to implement, the idea of pets in schools was dismissed out of hand. This was despite the fact that they already had pets within their nurture room, which in Ms Lees' view were "probably the best resource" she had (Ms Lees, personal communication, 2024). Notably, when the issue of classroom pets also arose in school three, attitudes amongst the school staff members were strikingly similar to those in school two.

This has been found to be a fairly common response amongst teachers when first confronted with the idea of classroom pets (Daly & Suggs, 2010). It is beyond dispute that practical considerations are of importance, and inextricably linked to the ethical considerations involved in keeping a school pet in humane circumstances (World Animal Protection, 2023). Nevertheless, practical difficulties are not reason enough to simply dismiss an idea. This was demonstrated in striking fashion when I began research within school four. As my week in this school ended (and after all of the interviews with staff members had been conducted) I was given a tour of the ASN unit by Ms Strand. The tour concluded in a room which had in its corner a large hutch with four guinea pigs. Given the events in the preceding two schools, I questioned Ms Strand about the animals at length. She stressed the contribution which the guinea pigs made to supporting the children in her care; other than Ms Strand's human staff members, they were described as the most

effective asset in the ASN unit. Ms Strand explained that the guinea pigs were key to developing compassion, responsibility and empathy in her pupils, attributes which have also been noted within the literature (Meadan & Jegatheesan, 2010). Furthermore, the guinea pigs also played an invaluable role in helping to regulate children's emotions, just as Ms Lees had described her pets had done (see section 7.3). Often, Ms Strand explained, children who had experienced high levels of distress would take themselves to the hutch and simply watch the guinea pigs for a while, as their emotions settled. She clearly regarded the guinea pigs as central to the support she offered her children, many of whom had significant social and emotional needs.

Beyond these clear benefits to Ms Strand's pupils, the guinea pigs took on a greater significance for the purposes of the present study. More so than the proposed skipping ropes which Ms Brooke had dismissed, they embodied the disregard which some school staff members showed for their pupils' suggestions (Robinson, 2021). In so doing, the school staff members not only appointed themselves as the arbiters of pupils' suggestions, but also demonstrated questionable judgement in this capacity. There is a certain irony in the fact that school staff members dismissed their pupils' suggestion of keeping classroom pets as impracticable, yet acknowledged that their own request for extra staff members was a solution which was unlikely to be achieved. Ms Strand's testimony had, in vouching for the efficacy of pets in schools, shown the grounds on which other staff members dismissed the idea to be somewhat spurious, or at least based upon false assumptions. Furthermore, the pupils' views about the value which classroom pets might offer aligned with both Ms Strand's and Ms Lees' assessment of their actual benefit; the pupils' views also had significant support from within the literature. Hindsight had therefore revealed this to be a particularly persuasive example of the need to value pupils' voice. Why then had this suggestion *not* been given due consideration within schools two and three? Without directly questioning the staff members involved, one can only speculate. However, as Lundy (2007) points out, pupils' agency within schools is often dependent upon adults who may hold sceptical views about children's capacity to make meaningful suggestions towards school improvement. I reflected upon my own initial doubts about the feasibility of keeping classroom pets and wondered if I too had been guilty of such scepticism.

At this point, it seems worth examining this example, and that offered by the skipping ropes in the previous section, through the lens of Lundy's (2007) four elements of pupil voice (space, voice, audience, influence; see section 3.6). In these examples, it seems that the first two elements have been satisfied, in that pupils were given the space to express their voice; a desire for skipping ropes and classroom pets. The exact details of the manner in which pupils were asked 'what they want for their school' are not clear from Ms Brooke's account, so it is not possible to determine in that instance if the space offered to pupils was safe or inclusive (Lundy, 2007). In terms of the third element, audience, the adults who had the power to make changes according to pupils' views were undoubtedly informed of them. In

each case, the pupils' views were communicated to their Head Teacher. Clearly, it is the last of the four elements, influence, in which the problem lies. As Lundy (2007) argues, the fact that this is dependent on adults' perceptions of children's age, maturity, and capacity is what makes this aspect of Article 12 so problematic. As previously outlined in section 3.6, enacting pupil voice is not an example of good practice or generous pedagogy, it is a moral and legal imperative (Lundy & Cook-Sather, 2016).

In addition, the argument for valuing pupils' voice is fundamentally a salutogenic one. As outlined in a previous chapter (see section 3.6), pupil voice is a mechanism common to several routes to improved MHWB for CYP. It has been shown to be associated with improved MHWB outcomes through various indirect pathways, such as by encouraging a positive school experience (Cosma and Soni, 2019), by developing and enhancing whole school MHWB promotion programmes (Carter, 2025), by improving relationships and pupils' sense of agency (Mulholland and Parker, 2004), by improving school climate (Ford *et al*., 2021), and by developing pupils' sense of school connectedness and belonging (Patalay *et al*., 2020). It seems that whichever of the commonly adopted MHWB promotion strategies a school might choose, pupil voice has a contribution to make. However, as both the literature (Atkinson *et al*., 2019) and the present study suggest, pupils' voices are not always valued. This therefore would seem to be one of the clearest findings from the present study.

Furthermore, I would argue that measures such as acquiring classroom pets on the basis of pupils' desire for them also represents a clear example of salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979; see section 3.3). Not only is a supportive school environment related to pupils' sense of coherence (SOC; García-Moya and colleagues, 2013), Antonovsky (1987) argued that increased influence or participation in social situations was fundamental to the development of a SOC. Krause (2011) argued that a sense of belonging, and of self-worth (both clearly outcomes of pupils' voice being meaningfully acted upon) were crucial to a SOC. As the present study has adopted Keyes dual continua model (2014; see section 3.3), the focus therefore moves to what schools can do to *promote* the mental wellbeing of CYP. There are surely few better placed to answer that question than the young people themselves. As previously mentioned (see section 3.6), it is now more than twenty years since Mulholland and Parker argued: "If we hope to transform pupils' lives for the better, we do need to find out from them what might enable this (Mulholland and Parker, 2004, p.20).

Inquiring of the pupils in this manner, as the present study did, has revealed their answers in stark relief. Those answers have been shown to have merit beyond the judgement of many of the adult participants. The present study therefore recommends that schools ought to build upon the methodology utilised herein and embed similar consultative processes within classrooms. The form of such a consultation may be chosen to suit the context of individual schools. However, the pupils' views *must be acted upon wherever possible*

(including in circumstances when the adults are sceptical of the perceived outcome; as argued previously, failure offers learning opportunities). As pupils understand that their suggestions will be valued, their sense of agency and belonging ought to develop, and accordingly they should begin to view their world as more meaningful, comprehensible, and manageable (Antonovsky, 1996). What is more, this proposed process took very little classroom time in the first instance; would presumably take less time as pupils became more used to it; and the consultation itself would cost nothing to implement. Although these latter points make it an even more attractive proposition given the current budgetary and time constraints experienced by all schools, the real beauty in this process is that at an answer to at least part of the MHWB problems that schools and children face may be found within those very children themselves. We just need to start asking them.

8.6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS.

Whilst the present study provides valuable insights into the awareness of precarity amongst Scottish primary school staff members within the case study schools which can serve to inform policy and practice in similar settings, and the MHWB of the pupils who attend those schools, it is important to acknowledge not only its strengths but also its limitations. These will be set out within the following section alongside the potential influences each may have had upon the study findings. Rather than separate strengths and limitations into two parts, this section will examine how each apply to three main areas of the thesis: the literature review, the methodology and the findings.

The literature review explored two related yet distinct topics, each supported by a considerable body of work. Through bringing together previously unrelated theoretical bases pertaining to both MHWB and precarity under the umbrella of Scottish primary education, a narrative was created leading to new insights which would not have been revealed otherwise. For example, the examination of salutogenisis in relation to the MHWB of children of precarious employees is a novel perspective, and therefore an innovative feature of the present study. This association and contextualisation of various theories gave the present study a secure foundation within the existing literature, and thereby facilitated clear study aims and research questions.

That said, one limitation of the literature review is that it included no articles which were not written in English. Two consequences arise from this. Firstly, it is unknown how many relevant articles have been written in foreign languages; this therefore represents a potential detriment to the extent of the literature review. Secondly, there is no doubt that the exclusion of foreign language articles reinforces a Global North perspective in educational research, thus perpetuating a divide which not only risks implying a secondary status for researchers in the Global South but also deprives those in the North of the valuable contributions the South can offer.

In terms of the methodological approach used within the present study, one important strength is the combination of the researcher's pragmatic paradigmatic stance with the qualitative dominant research design. The approach adopted afforded the opportunity for participants to co-construct meaning in a manner that is appropriate for research which is fundamentally exploratory in nature, and which is also age-appropriate (see section 4.4). Other approaches would not have added similar value. For example, a quantitative dominant study would have focused upon attempts to measure a phenomenon like precarity, about which participants turned out to have little awareness.

Another key strength of the present study's methodology lies within the data generation method which was selected for the classroom activity. In each of the four schools I was particularly struck by the level of enthusiasm expressed by the pupils for the activity. This was evident not only during the activity itself, but also in the anticipation pupils voiced throughout the week preceding it. This enthusiasm created a level of engagement which another method of data generation would likely not have achieved. As the activity seemed to be widely enjoyed and replicated the sort of classroom experience with which pupils were quite familiar, the conversations which arose as a result seemed quite natural. This allowed pupils to open up about their experiences and views in what seemed a relatively safe space (Lundy, 2007). Therefore, this method, in addition to being relatively innovative, almost certainly offered insights which another method may not have generated.

Nevertheless, there were certainly limitations which arose as a result of the methods adopted in the present study to gather data. The most obvious of these concerns access to schools, which was a challenging and protracted process. In all, three local authorities offered access to their schools. In one of these, I could not find a Head Teacher who would allow me to research in their school. The second authority has a generally affluent profile of catchment areas, in which it was decided little value could be gained beyond the research in school two (see section 4.5). This resulted in all three of the other participating schools being situated within the third local authority. These three schools offered a fairly wide degree of variety, in terms of the original maximum variation sampling strategy (Patton, 2015) which had been selected as most appropriate (see section 4.5). That said, I did not manage to include any schools located within one of Scotland's biggest cities. Given the presumed association between precarity and cities (Campbell & Leheij, 2021), it seems likely that the inclusion of a deprived inner-city primary school may have added extra value to the findings.

Taking account of the time pressures on staff, the approach adopted for member checking of the veracity of accounts generated in interview proved to be a successful strategy. Rather than provide lengthy transcripts of interviews (which would have been unlikely to have been read in any depth) staff members were given printed summaries of my interpretation of

their interviews (see appendix L) to which they had the opportunity to respond and draw to attention any inaccuracies, misinterpretations or missing information. Very few requests of this nature very made. However, the method by which I could check my interpretation matched pupils' intended meaning was not so straightforward. In the end I chose to create a giant jigsaw piece for each class (see appendix M). Although these could be seen as a strength, in that they represent a meaningful attempt to engage with pupils after the data generation phase, the issue lay in the fact that member checking was done in front of pupils' classmates and teacher. Although pupils were told that they could talk to their teacher later and in private if they disagreed with the themes that I was presenting to them, it is quite possible that some may not have felt comfortable doing so. Consequently, it is conceivable that the findings generated with the pupils may not be as trustworthy as they could, had I found a way to conduct member checking individually.

A key strength of the analysis and discussion chapter is recognition of multiple, and sometimes, conflicting perspectives on various issues which are often not reconciled in policy and practice nor within the literature. For example, there is a distinct tension between school staff members' scepticism about the prevalence of MHWB issues amongst pupils (mirroring wider societal perspectives on the issue) and the pupils' view that their voices are insufficiently heard by adults. Likewise, the solutions forwarded by staff and by pupils as to how mental health issues may potentially be mitigated and pupil wellbeing promoted are very different (one example being staff advocacy of smaller class sizes and the pupils' advocacy of a class pet).The strength of the analysis and discussion chapter is that it recognises these multiple and opposing perspectives and tries to reconcile them. The clearest example of this lies in the acceptance that the prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes & Andre, 2023; see section 3.6) likely explains some of the increase in prevalence of MHWB issues amongst CYP, whilst simultaneously proposing an extrapolation of scepticism model. These might be seen by some as opposing models which potentially even contradict each other; I have however accepted that both are likely to explain certain elements of a complex phenomenon. Rather than contradicting each other, my position is that one extends the other. The effect of this is to position theories in a compatible manner, which has value given how riven by divergent stances the field of MHWB is.

8.7 RECOMMENDATIONS.

This section will outline recommendations which emerge from the analysis and discussion of the main findings. They will be arranged according to the relevant stakeholder; schools, policy makers, initial teacher education providers, and researchers.

8.7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

One of the clearest findings of the present study relates to the lack of awareness of precarity within Scottish primary schools. Given the risk factor that this poses for pupil's MHWB, it is crucial to address this gap in school staff members' knowledge.
Aside from the importance of training future teachers (see section 8.7.3), this study therefore recommends that all teachers currently employed in both primary and secondary education in Scotland be informed about precarity and the risk it poses to their pupils. This could be achieved by means of an in-service day training programme delivered to all staff members by a body such as The Child Poverty Action Group or Public Health Scotland.

Another important recommendation for schools is that they should develop or strengthen systems of enabling, hearing, and enacting pupils' voices. This must be done in a meaningful fashion, in terms such as those described by Lundy (2007). This recommendation has three main benefits; firstly, it is a salutogenic factor in and of itself. Secondly, it can inform and facilitate the enactment of the recommendations for schools outlined in the following paragraphs, as well as any others which pupils deem worthy in their school's context. Finally, it offers the potential for pupils to have ongoing influence in shaping how MHWB may be promoted within their school, as the present study has demonstrated. As previously outlined, such a recommendation is entirely in line with current guidance, policy and legislation (Education Scotland, 2018; Scottish Government, 2021; UNCRC [Incorporation] [Scotland] Act 2024, 2024).

Two further recommendations also merit inclusion here. Both were supported by findings from pupils as well as staff members within the present study. The first is of the value of safe, quiet spaces within schools which may be accessed by pupils. Schools should therefore, where possible, consider establishing such a space and informing pupils as to how and under what circumstances it may be used. Currently, such spaces are only described within guidance in terms of managing dysregulated pupils (Scottish Government, 2025). It is clear from the findings of this and other studies (Brown & Dixon, 2020) that pupils feel that being able to access such spaces may have salutogenic effects and therefore can be seen as a proactive, rather than simply reactive measure.

The final recommendation for schools is to develop, where possible, more opportunities for outdoor activities. This was supported strongly by findings not only from pupils but also by several of the school staff members. As mentioned previously (see section 8.5.7), outdoor activities, games and sports have the potential to offset some of the detrimental outcomes associated with a phone-based childhood (Haidt, 2024). Outdoor activities are also linked to more positive MHWB outcomes, particularly for children from less affluent families (Caryl *et al*., 2024). Furthermore, they are in keeping with Scottish Government policy and guidelines (Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition, 2021; Scottish Government, 2023).

8.7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

The Scottish Government (or alternatively individual Local Authorities) should consider a blanket ban on mobile phones within primary schools. Such a measure would convey a clear signal about the risks posed by mobile phones without placing all the responsibility to make what would likely be an unpopular decision upon individual Head Teachers (Scottish Government, 2024). However, any such ban should be accompanied by a robust programme of education within schools aimed at informing pupils as to the risks to their MHWB which a digital childhood presents.

It seems clear that many schools are already beginning to take on new roles which increasingly position them as a multi-purpose community hub, rather than simply an establishment which is focused solely on the academic education of children (see section 8.5.3). One development which would facilitate this process and help support the MHWB of both children and their families is the deployment of greater numbers of home link workers. As described earlier (see section 6.3.1), there are very few of these workers currently employed within schools. As they tend to support the most vulnerable and deprived families within schools, they could be seen as a key asset in closing the poverty-related attainment gap (Scottish Government, 2022) as well as mitigating the association between parental and child MH issues (Marryat & Martin, 2010). Furthermore, increasing the numbers of such workers may assuage the desire for more help expressed by the school staff members in the present study. As such this thesis recommends increasing the number of employed home link workers within Scottish primary schools.

8.7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

One of Maclean and Law's (2022, p.2359) central findings in their study into primary teachers in Scotland's ability to support their pupils' MHWB was that a "lack of adequate training was identified as a primary barrier to delivering adequate supports and identification." Recent research with secondary teachers in Scotland implied similar failings (Holt *et al*., 2025). The findings of the present study suggested that school staff members not only felt unprepared to support their pupils' MHWB, but also that they tended to hold deficit perspectives about MHWB, in that it was usually framed in terms of pupils' issues. Accordingly, this thesis recommends that initial teacher education (ITE) in Scotland should focus upon a salutogenic approach, with pupil voice and a sense of school belonging being firmly linked to the promotion of pupils' MHWB. This would help to align practice with the stated aims of existing policy (Scottish Government, 2021) as well as the standards expected of registered teachers (GTC Scotland, 2021).

Furthermore, as previously mentioned (see section 8.2.4), future ITE should include training about the changing nature of employment and the risk factor posed to children by the precarious employment of a parent or carer. It may be helpful to contextualise this within

broader ITE about the risks posed by a range of uncertainties, such as the nested system model proposed within the present study (see section 8.2.4). This may help to expand an ITE in MHWB programme that may previously have had too narrow a focus upon trauma and attachment (Tonceanu & Tulloch, 2022), pupils with ASD (Scottish Government, 2020), or on the increasing medicalisation of children with diagnosable conditions such ADHD (Scotland's Data on a Map, 2026).

8.7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Firstly, it seems highly likely that both the prevalence inflation hypothesis (Foulkes & Andrew, 2023) as well as children's use of social media will be the subject of future academic scrutiny; based on this assumption, these areas will not be recommended for future research in this thesis.

As the extrapolation of scepticism model presented herein would seem to pose a risk to children's MHWB (see section 8.1.3), it would be prudent to establish if this model can be transferred to other contexts. Therefore this thesis recommends that exploratory, qualitative research be conducted with teachers in Scotland in order to gain further insights into whether their experience of teaching MHWB awareness and promotion programmes is associated with any increased scepticism they may feel as to the extent of MHWB issues amongst their pupils.

One of the most important areas which the present study has highlighted the need for future research to consider is around the nature and prevalence of precarious employment in Scotland. A lack of clarity on these issues has made an assessment of the extent of precarious employment extremely challenging (see section 4.5). In order to address this, future studies should adopt a clear multi-faceted definition of precarious employment (Kreshpaj *et al.,* 2020) and an existing, tested tool by which to measure it (*e.g*.; Vives *et al*., 2010). If policy makers are to fully understand the prevalence of, and trends within, precarious employment in Scotland, quantitative measurement of this phenomenon is essential.

Finally, further qualitative research should be undertaken with parents who are employed in precarious circumstances, in order to gain further insights into the nature of the association between parental precarious employment and children's MHWB. Such insights may inform schools to improve the timing and nature of the support they can offer both families and children.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION.

The original aims of this study guided the reviews of the relevant areas of literature; precarity and MHWB. Those reviews in turn concentrated the aims of the study into defined research questions. In addressing those questions, the present study has revealed significant points of interest. Some, such as the role of pupil voice in supporting pupils' MHWB, are already represented within the literature. Nevertheless, the present study has made novel and important contributions in a number of areas.

Firstly, the gap in awareness about precarity which this thesis highlighted was not restricted to the staff members in the present study. Scant information was found within the literature about precarity within a Scottish context, and nothing at all in relation to schools. This thesis therefore forms a valuable introduction to the literature about precarity in the context of Scottish primary education.

Secondly, this thesis presents a novel interpretation of mechanisms which may be acting to harm primary pupils in Scotland, and offers evidence to support the heuristic framework in which they are presented. Although much has already been written about the risks posed by over exposure to social media, this thesis is the first to propose that a 'digital childhood' may be acting in synergy with a 'precarious childhood'. Furthermore, the nested systems of uncertainty model presented within the previous discussion chapter is the first to situate the risks posed to children by exposure to parental precarious employment within a wider array of interacting proximal and distal harms.

Finally, the present thesis contributes to the literature by proposing a novel 'extrapolation of scepticism' heuristic device. This device sits alongside other theoretical contributions and seeks to explain the process by which staff members have expressed doubts about the true extent of MHWB issues which their pupils seem to be facing. Significant evidence from the findings of the present study supports such a process.

Beyond these contributions, what personal conclusions can be reached from the process of this study? I have learned immeasurably from the doctoral experience and it has undoubtedly been transformative. In this regard, it is tempting to refer back to the introduction, and depict this thesis as a return to rehabilitation. This is, however, inappropriate. Framing it thus, in personal terms, would marginalise those whom this thesis ought really to serve.

There are therefore only two points that seem worthy of consideration here. The first is; when I recall those pupils whom I described in the introduction, would the findings from this thesis have helped them, had I had the chance to implement them in my school? Whilst this is clearly impossible to determine, I may speculate that a greater understanding of the

factors which affected some of those children might have influenced the support which some of my colleagues and I offered them. Furthermore, I remember all too well certain children whose behaviour was linked to MHWB issues, which in turn were viewed as highly dubious by some colleagues. With hindsight, I wish that I had had a greater willingness to challenge their scepticism. Scepticism which, I am reminded by the experience of the present study, I too have shared.

I have no idea whether or not the pupils whom I taught might have wished that our school acquire pets. They were never asked. Had my colleagues and I embraced pupils' views at the time, I have no doubt that that our school, and its pupils, would have been a happier place. It is conceivable that, had we obtained such pets, they may have helped to regulate our most distressed pupils in ways that we were otherwise unable to achieve. Furthermore, in respecting their wishes, I am confident that *all* pupils would have benefited. It is entirely credible that a closer community and increased trust and belonging would result from that level of engagement.

However, I no longer have the opportunity to apply the lessons I have learned over the past four years to the benefit of those pupils, many of whom will by now have left secondary school. So, the second point that is worthy of consideration here does not concern the past, but the future. Having adopted a pragmatic stance, I must focus upon the consequences rather than the antecedents. How might my study serve those in the present and future? This raises the issue of 'impact', a term whose forceful connotations have always seemed daunting. However, the prospect of 'small wins'; "a series of concrete, complete outcomes of moderate importance" (Weick, 1984, p.40) encourages me that I might start by seeking to serve at least a few pupils in some small measure.

To this end, my hope that I could persuade those schools involved in this study to increase the consideration they give to their pupils' voice was largely frustrated. However, it occurred to me that I had rather more influence within another school: the one in which I had last taught. My next action will therefore be to visit my last DHT and share my findings with her. She may be more persuadable than the staff in the present study; although I cannot now help my former pupils, perhaps I can improve the experiences of their younger siblings and neighbours.

Lastly, as I had originally found that I might have more success in academic pursuits than at the chalk face, herein lies another avenue of potential influence. I will aim to publish as much as is possible of the present thesis, in the hope that this too will make some small difference somewhere. If further similar opportunities to conduct research present themselves, I will seek to publish what I can of those too. It may be that not only might I better *understand* pupils' needs through research, I might publicise ways of *meeting* some of them too. So; to anyone whose attention has sustained to this concluding point, and still

has the privilege of teaching children; please ask *them* how their school can be a better place.

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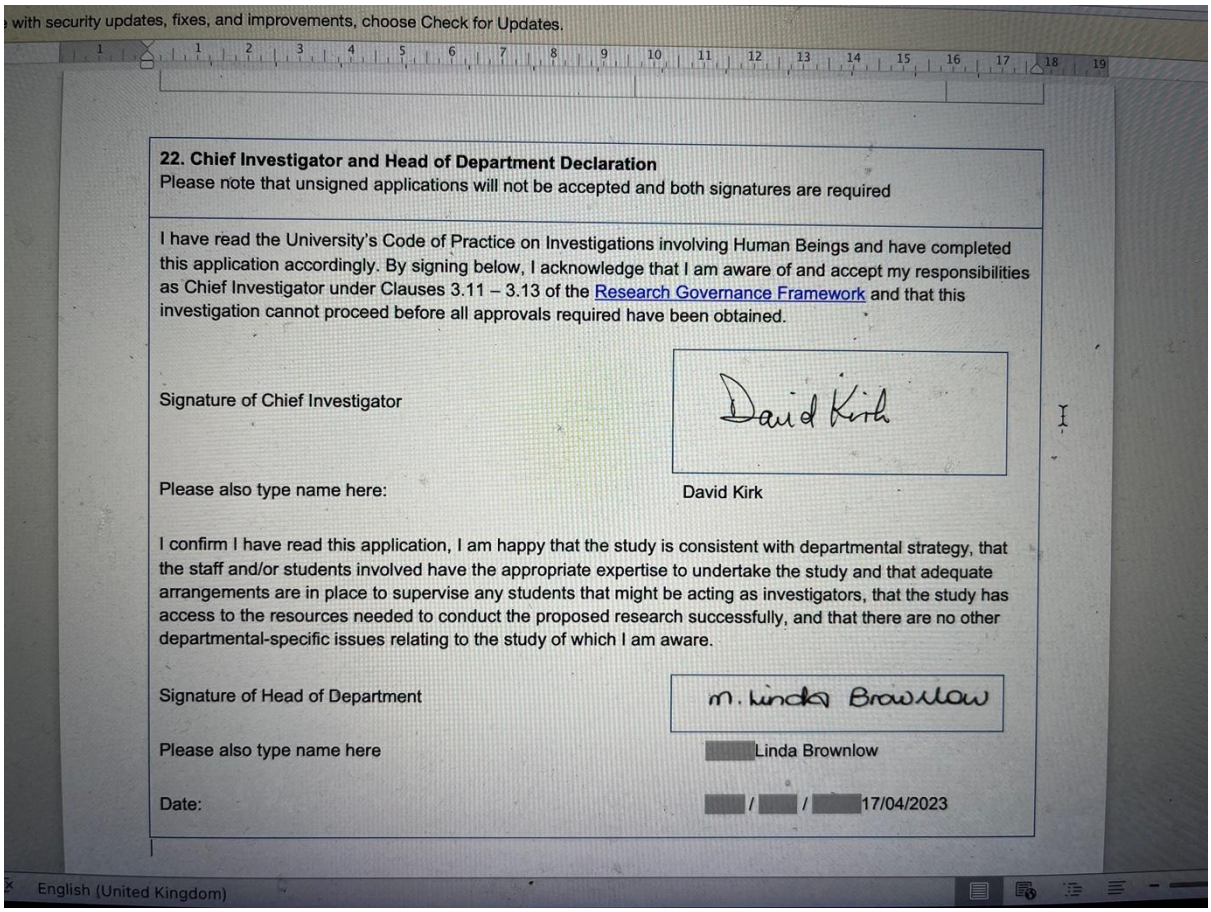
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APPENDICES.

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE ETHICAL APPROVAL.


with security updates, fixes, and improvements, choose Check for Updates.

22. Chief Investigator and Head of Department Declaration
Please note that unsigned applications will not be accepted and both signatures are required

I have read the University's Code of Practice on Investigations involving Human Beings and have completed this application accordingly. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am aware of and accept my responsibilities as Chief Investigator under Clauses 3.11 – 3.13 of the Research Governance Framework and that this investigation cannot proceed before all approvals required have been obtained.

Signature of Chief Investigator: David Kirk

Please also type name here: David Kirk

I confirm I have read this application, I am happy that the study is consistent with departmental strategy, that the staff and/or students involved have the appropriate expertise to undertake the study and that adequate arrangements are in place to supervise any students that might be acting as investigators, that the study has access to the resources needed to conduct the proposed research successfully, and that there are no other departmental-specific issues relating to the study of which I am aware.

Signature of Head of Department: M. Linda Brownlow

Please also type name here: [redacted]Linda Brownlow

Date: [redacted] / [redacted] / [redacted]17/04/2023

English (United Kingdom)

Figure C1: screenshot of signed University of Strathclyde ethical approval.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORMS.

Participant Information Sheet for School SLT member.

Title of the study: Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

Researchers: Gerard Bell, David Kirk, Joan Mowat.

Details of Project:

The aim of this project is to explore a Scottish primary school's awareness of precarity ('precarity' describes the harmful effects to peoples' wellbeing, such as stress or anxiety, caused by insecure employment or income), as well as the school's perceptions of any potential impact on the wellbeing of pupils, and lastly the school's response to meeting the wellbeing needs of its pupils.
Statistics show that increasing numbers of families in Scotland are exposed to insecure employment and financial situations. In addition, more and more young people have been experiencing wellbeing issues over the last 20 years. As such, it is of vital importance to investigate the situation within Scotland's schools, and shed light on how they might better support the needs of their pupils.

Do you have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. There are no consequences for declining to participate. If you do decide to participate, you may change your mind and withdraw from the study without the need to give any reason, at any stage, without any consequences, while the study is still ongoing.

What will you do in the project?

If you decide to participate in the study you will be asked to accommodate the researcher within one class in your school for a period of up to a few weeks. The researcher will observe the pupils, staff and normal routines within your class. In addition, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be individual so that you may speak as freely as you wish about your views, which will be treated confidentially. An audio recording of the interview will be made on a password-protected, local authority approved device. The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. There will be opportunities to have any questions you may have about this answered in school.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been asked to take part because your views on young peoples' mental health and wellbeing are important. To get an accurate impression of schools awareness and response to these issues it is necessary to ask those most closely involved.

What information is being collected in the project?

You will be asked about your views on:

- Any changes that you perceive in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils over time, and how you might account for these changes (if any).
- Your impressions of the prevalence of wellbeing issues amongst pupils, as well as how you would describe how these issues (if any) present.
- Your awareness of pupils' home circumstances, and any associations you might make between this and pupils' wellbeing.
- Any curricular programmes designed to support pupils' wellbeing.
- What other things school staff do which help support pupils' wellbeing.
- Anything in school which either undermines positive pupil wellbeing, or support it.

Who will have access to the information?

All of your views and ideas will be treated confidentially. Your views will only be reported through the use of a pseudonym, or as part of a wider sample (for example: "staff member C said that…."; "26% of staff from school X thought that…"). Nobody will be able to identify you, your pupils or your school from the final report. The only people who will have access to the information given in the study will be the research team. Confidentiality will be respected in all circumstances, unless a response raises child safeguarding concerns, in which case I would inform your Head Teacher or member of staff with responsibility for pupil safeguarding.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

Whilst not in use, the audio recording device will be stored in a locked, secure locker at Strathclyde University, until the information from it is collated and stored on password protected computers at the University. The recordings will be deleted permanently once the researcher has concluded his doctorate.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Contact details:

For further information about the research please contact:
Gerard Bell
gerard.bell@strath.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet for School Staff.

Title of the study: Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

Researchers: Gerard Bell, David Kirk, Joan Mowat.

Details of Project:

The aim of this project is to explore a Scottish primary school's awareness of precarity ('precarity' describes the harmful effects to peoples' wellbeing, such as stress or anxiety, caused by insecure employment or income), as well as the school's perceptions of any potential impact on the wellbeing of pupils, and lastly the school's response to meeting the wellbeing needs of its pupils.
Statistics show that increasing numbers of families in Scotland are exposed to insecure employment and financial situations. In addition, more and more young people have been experiencing wellbeing issues over the last 20 years. As such, it is of vital importance to investigate the situation within Scotland's schools, and shed light on how they might better support the needs of their pupils.

Do you have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. There are no consequences for declining to participate. If you do decide to participate, you may change your mind and withdraw from the study without the need to give any reason, at any stage, without any consequences, while the study is still ongoing.

What will you do in the project?

If you decide to participate in the study you will be asked to accommodate the researcher within your class for a period of up to a few weeks. The researcher will observe the pupils, staff and normal routines within your class. At the end of the observation period you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be individual so that you may speak as freely as you wish about your views, which will be treated confidentially. An audio recording of the interview will be made on a password-protected, local authority approved device. The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. There will be opportunities to have any questions you may have about this answered in school.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been asked to take part because your views on young peoples' mental health and wellbeing are important. To get an accurate impression of schools awareness and response to these issues it is necessary to ask those most closely involved.

What information is being collected in the project?

You will be asked about your views on:

- Any changes that you perceive in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils over time, and how you might account for these changes (if any).
- Your impressions of the prevalence of wellbeing issues amongst pupils, as well as how you would describe how these issues (if any) present.
- Your awareness of pupils' home circumstances, and any associations you might make between this and pupils' wellbeing.
- Any curricular programmes designed to support pupils' wellbeing.
- What other things school staff do which help support pupils' wellbeing.
- Anything in school which either undermines positive pupil wellbeing, or support it.

Who will have access to the information?

All of your views and ideas will be treated confidentially. Your views will only be reported through the use of a pseudonym, or as part of a wider sample (for example: "staff member C said that…."; "26% of staff from school X thought that…"). Nobody will be able to identify you, your pupils or your school from the final report. The only people who will have access to the information given in the study will be the research team. Confidentiality will be respected in all circumstances, unless a response raises child safeguarding concerns, in which case I would inform your Head Teacher or member of staff with responsibility for pupil safeguarding.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

Whilst not in use, the audio recording device will be stored in a locked, secure locker at Strathclyde University, until the information from it is collated and stored on password protected computers at the University. The recordings will be deleted permanently once the researcher has concluded his doctorate.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Contact details:

For further information about the research please contact:
Gerard Bell
gerard.bell@strath.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet for Parents and Carers.

Title of the study: Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

Researchers: Gerard Bell, David Kirk, Joan Mowat.

Details of Project:

The aim of this project is to explore Scottish primary schools' awareness of precarity ('precarity' describes the harmful effects to peoples' wellbeing, such as stress or anxiety, caused by insecure employment or income), as well as the school's perceptions of any potential impact on the wellbeing of pupils, and lastly the *school's response to meeting the wellbeing needs of its pupils*. It is on this last point that your child's views can help us improve how schools respond to those needs.
Statistics show that more and more young people have been experiencing wellbeing issues over the last 20 years. As such, it is of vital importance to investigate the situation within Scotland's schools, and shed light on how they might better support the needs of their pupils.

Does your child have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. There are no consequences for your child if you decide not to participate. If your child does decide to participate, they may change their mind and withdraw from the study without the need to give any reason, at any stage, without any consequences, while the study is still ongoing.

What will your child do in the project?

Your child's class will soon be taking part in an art activity, in which each pupil will be asked to create a picture. The picture will show what the pupils think their school already does (or could do better) to support the pupils' wellbeing needs. If your child decides to participate in the study, what they have drawn in their picture, as well as what they have said about it in class, will be noted down and used to get a clearer picture of what schools are doing to support their pupils' wellbeing needs.

Why has your child been invited to take part?

Your child's class has been asked to take part because it is very important to understand *young peoples*' views about how schools can support their wellbeing needs more effectively. Many studies about pupils' wellbeing only ask adults what they think young people need.

What information is being collected in the project?

Your child will be asked about their views on:

- What things can affect their wellbeing and how they feel, particularly in school.

- What their school is already doing to support their wellbeing.
- What other things their school could do which would support their wellbeing. .

Who will have access to the information?

All of your child's views and ideas will be treated confidentially. Their views will only be reported as part of a wider sample (for example: "26% of pupils from school X thought that…"). Nobody will be able to identify your child or their school from the final report. The only people who will have access to the information given in the study will be the research team. Confidentiality will be respected in all circumstances, unless a response raises child safeguarding concerns, in which case I would inform your child's Head Teacher or member of staff with responsibility for pupil safeguarding.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

Your child's drawing will be stored in a locked, secure locker at Strathclyde University, until the information from it is collated and stored on password protected computers at the University. The drawings will be returned to your child's school once the researcher has concluded his doctorate.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Contact details:

For further information about the research please contact:
Gerard Bell
gerard.bell@strath.ac.uk

Information Sheet for Pupils.

What is the project about?

I'm trying to find out what schools can do to help their pupils have positive wellbeing. Having positive wellbeing means that *most* of the time you feel good, that your life is going well, and that you're able to get on with your daily life.

Do you have to take part?

You don't have to, it will be up to you to decide. Nothing will happen to you if you decide you don't want to take part. If you decide you do want to, you can change your mind at any time while I'm still here in your school.

What will you be asked to do?

Soon your class will be given an art task. You'll be asked to draw a picture. If you have decided to take part in the project, all that means is that I'll write down some notes about what you've drawn and anything you've told me about the drawing. Those notes will help me understand what your school does to help pupils have positive wellbeing.

Why have you been asked to take part?

Your class has been asked to take part because it is very important to understand what pupils think about what happens in their school. It might be quite different from what your teachers think!

What will you be asked about?

You will be asked if you can think of anything which:

- already happens in your school and helps pupils have positive wellbeing.
- your school could start doing to help pupils have positive wellbeing.

Will anyone know what I've drawn or said?

Apart from me, and possibly another researcher at the University I'm from, nobody outside of this classroom will know what you've said or drawn. The

only time I would tell anybody else is if you tell me something that makes me think that you're not safe. If that happened I'd talk to your Head Teacher about how to keep you safe.

What will happen with my picture?

Your picture will be kept in a locked cupboard at my University. I'm the only person with a key for the cupboard. Once I'm finished looking at your pictures I'll bring them back to your school for you.

Thank you for thinking about this. If you have any questions you can speak to your teacher, your parents or carers or even me.

Gerard Bell.

Consent Form for School Staff

Please sign, date and return this form if you consent to being a participant in this research.

Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify me personally) at any time.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data which do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me, or my school, will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Consent Form for Parents and Carers.

Please sign, date and return this form if you consent to your child being a participant in this research.

Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If they exercise their right to withdraw and don't want their data to be used, any data which have been collected from them will be destroyed.
- I understand that my child can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify them personally) at any time.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data which does not identify my child personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies my child, or their school, will be made publicly available.
- I consent to my child being a participant in the project.

(Parent/ Carer's printed name:	Date:
Parent/ Carer's signature: `	
Child's name:	

Consent Form for Pupils.

Please sign, date and return this form if you agree to being included in this research project.

Precarity, Primary Schools and Pupil Wellbeing.

- I have read and understood the information sheet and any questions I had have been answered.
- I understand that it's up to me if I want to be part of this project. If I decide to be part of it, I can change my mind at any point while Mr Bell is still in this school. It is okay to change my mind and nothing will happen to me if I do, nobody will be cross with me!
- I understand that anything I say, write or draw that gets used in the project will be confidential. That means that nobody outside of my class will be able to tell that me, my class or my school were part of this project.
- I agree to being a part of the project.

Printed name:	Date:
Signature:	

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF NOTES FROM OBSERVATIONS.

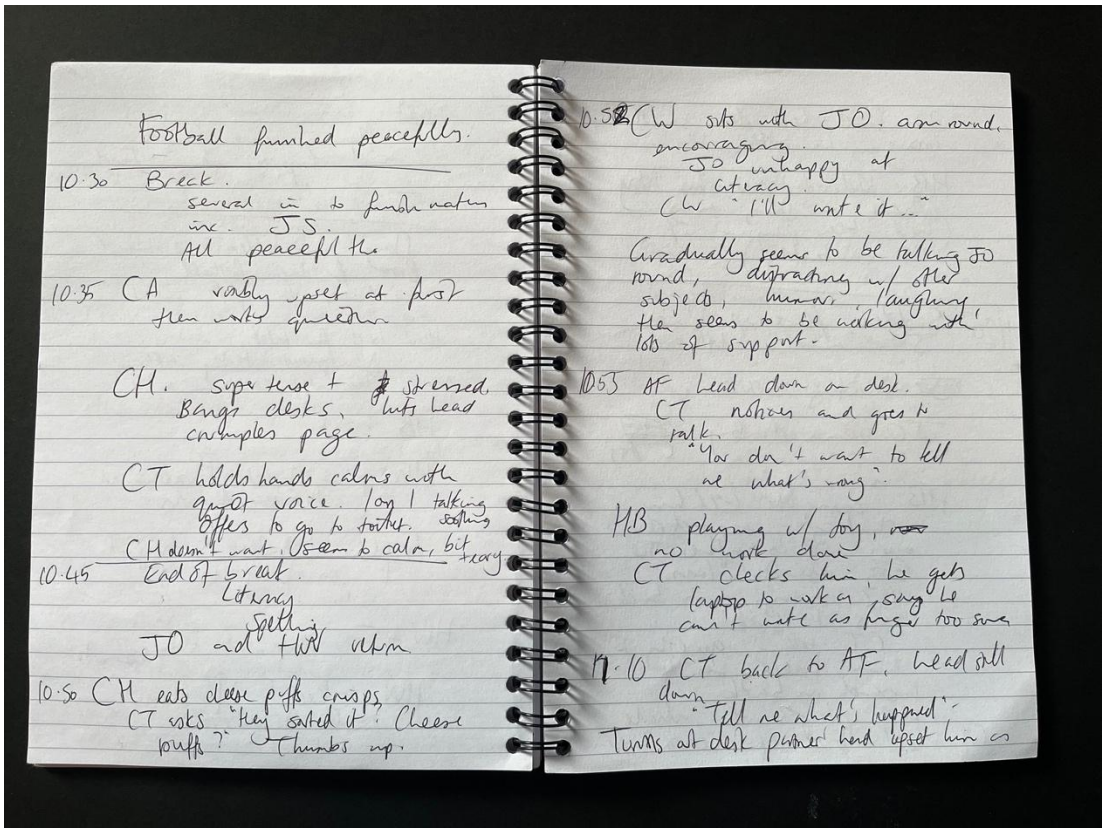


Figure F1: Observation notes from school one, 22nd May 2023.

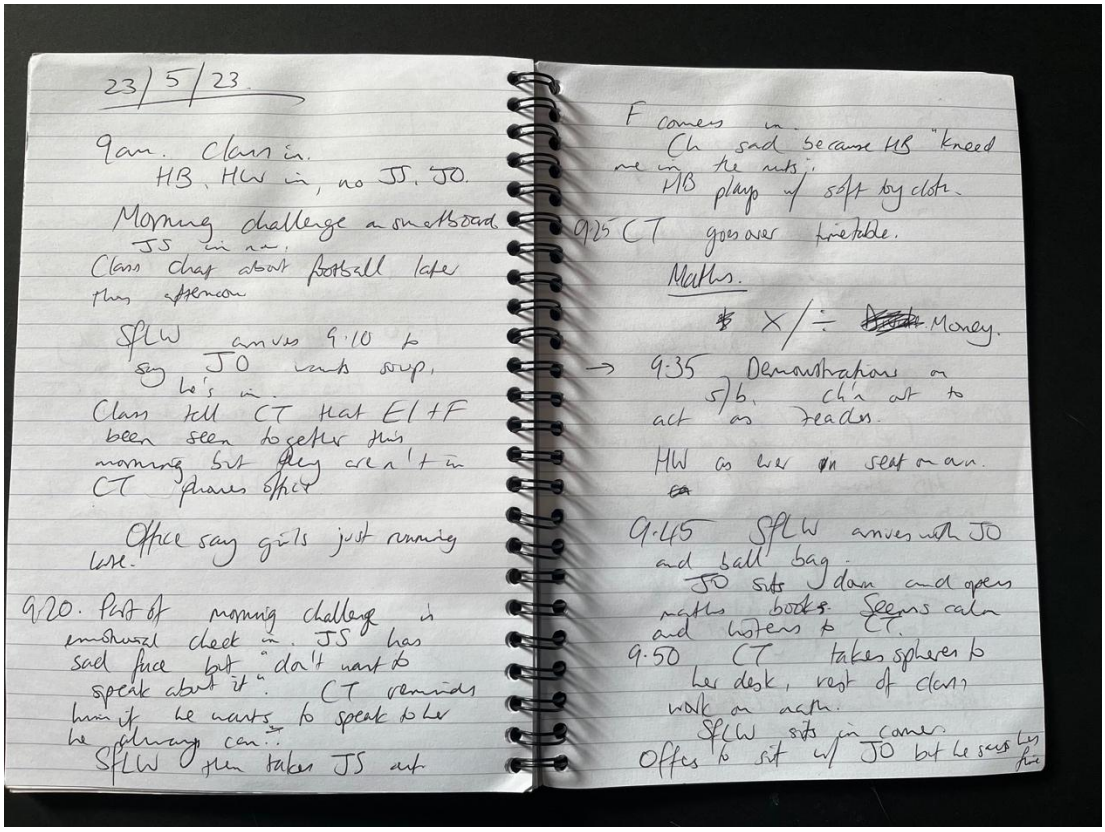


Figure F2: Observation notes from school one, 23rd May 2023.

APPENDIX D: TABLE OF CATEGORIES OF INTEREST WHICH AROSE FROM OBSERVATIONS.

THEME	CATEGORY	RELATES TO RQ:
Environmental factors	Individual support strategies; *e.g.* ear defenders, fidgets, cushions *etc.*	RQ3.
	Group support strategies; *e.g.* 'comfy corners' *etc.*	
	Seating arrangements	
Timetable adjustments	Soft starts, early finishes, brain breaks	RQ3.
	Time outs: scheduled and unscheduled.	
Agency support	Internal support e.g. Classroom assistant 'boost groups', Nurture Room support	RQ3.
	Outside agency support	
Manifestations	Anger/ frustration/ defiance	RQ2.
	Anomie	
	Anxiety/ anguish/ depression	
	Alienation	
Teacher behaviour/ pedagogical support	Ignore provocations	RQ3.
	Offer individual support	
	Positive/ inclusive ethos	
	Relationships	
	General strategies which support MHWB	
Curricular programmes	HWB lessons	RQ3.
	MHWB lessons	
	Assembly input	
Pupil triggers	Classroom work: difficulty or type	RQ4.
	Friction between peers	
	Friction with staff members	
Pedagogical support	Strategies which support MHWB	RQ3.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES.

PRIOR TO INTERVIEW:

- Thank participant.
- Assure confidentiality.
- Remind participant that they may withdraw part or all data up until point of analysis.
- Explain the intended use and impact of study's results.
- Outline the three main areas of questioning: pupil behaviour and wellbeing, home circumstances, ways the school supports pupils. If participant wants to add anything to this they will have opportunity.
- Ask for verbal consent.

SCHOOL SLT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section one: children's behaviour & MHWB. (Questions relate to RQ2).

1) If you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools? In this school?
2) Over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them? (*probe*: What about since you started working in this school?)
3) What do you think might be causing these changes? (*probes:* Do you see any connections with the lockdowns? What about other factors?)
4) In general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of the pupils in this school? (*probe*: Can you describe how any issues manifest? Are some issues more evident than others?)
5) Have you noticed any changes in pupils' MHWB, and if so, can you describe them? Over what sort of time frame?
6) Do you have any views about whether MHWB issues affect some children disproportionally and, if so, where might the explanation lie?

Section two: home circumstances. (Questions relate to RQ1).

7) Drawing from the data that you hold on SIMD status and FSME, are you able to infer from this, or from any other sources, information about the socio-economic status of individual families? What sources, other than SIMD and FSME, have you drawn on?
8) To what extent do you think that parents and carers within this school community are employed in unstable jobs (for example; 'zero hours' or temporary contracts, work in the gig economy, *etc*.)
9) Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic *stability* of your pupils' household and their MHWB outcomes? (*probes*: If so, what sort of outcomes do you think are associated with stability/ instability?)
10) Can you see any relationship between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do and their children's MHWB?

Section three: the school's response to MHWB issues. (Questions relate to RQ3 and RQ4).

11) How does your school's curricular activities support pupils' MWB needs? (*probe:* Would you describe these activities?)
12) What sort of other strategies do teachers in this school employ at a personal, or class level, which might support pupils' MHWB?
13) Can you describe any partnerships with outside agencies that help support pupil MHWB?
14) Are there any other ways you can think of that this school supports MHWB of its pupils, and if so, can you describe them?
15) Can you describe any barriers that make meeting the MHWB needs of your pupils more challenging?
16) What might help your school improve its response to the MHWB needs of your pupils?
17) Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to add on the subject of MHWB?

CLASS TEACHER AND SUPPORT STAFF INTERVIEW.

INTERVIEW:

Section one: children's behaviour & MHWB. (Questions relate to RQ2).

1) If you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools? In this school?
2) Over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them? (*probe*: What about since you started working in this school?)
3) What do you think might be causing these changes? (*probes:* Do you see any connections with the lockdowns? What about other factors?)
4) In general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of the pupils in this school?
5) Can you describe how any MHWB issues manifest? What form do they take? (*probe*: Are some issues more evident than others?)
6) Have you noticed any changes in pupils' MHWB, and if so, can you describe them? Over what sort of time frame?
7) What do you think might be causing any changes you've seen?
8) Do you have any views about whether MHWB issues affect some children disproportionally and, if so, where might the explanation lie?

Section two: home circumstances. (Questions relate to RQ1).

9) To what extent do you think that parents and carers within this school community are employed in unstable jobs (for example; 'zero hours' or temporary contracts, work in the gig economy, *etc*.)
10) Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic *stability* of your pupils' household and their MHWB outcomes? (*probes*: If so, what sort of outcomes do you think are associated with stability/ instability?)

11) Can you see any relationship between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do and their children's MHWB?

Section three: the school's response to MHWB issues. (Questions relate to RQ3 and RQ4).

12) What sort of activities or lessons are taught in this school to support pupils' MHWB needs? (*probes:* Would you describe them?)
13) Apart from lessons, what sort of other strategies do teachers or other school staff use at a personal, or class level, which might support pupils' MHWB? (*probe*: Can you think of any unusual strategies, or characteristics, that you've seen colleagues use that seem effective?)
14) Are there any other ways you can think of that this school supports MHWB of its pupils?
15) What things make meeting the MHWB needs of your pupils more challenging?
16) What might make meeting those needs easier?
17) Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to add on the subject of MHWB?

APPENDIX F: 'DRAW AND WRITE' LESSON PLAN.

Learning Intention: We are learning about wellbeing, and how schools can improve their pupils' wellbeing.

Success Criteria: Describe a change that a school could make that might improve its pupils' wellbeing.

Introduction:

Introduce the subject of wellbeing, share the learning intention and success criteria. Ask class how they would define 'wellbeing' (Think, pair, share, then quick class discussion). Offer a definition of wellbeing in pupil-friendly language: "Wellbeing is all about how you *feel*. Some young people have said that having a good sense of wellbeing means that, *most* of the time you feel:

1. … good about yourself,
2. … that your life is going well, and
3. … that you are able to get on with your daily life. (This definition from PHE & EBPU, 2016).

Display these features (in text with pictorial cues) so that they may be referred to throughout the discussion. A few brief questions may help explore this definition: "Can you think of something that might happen to you which would help you feel good about yourself?" *etc*.)

First activity: What happens in school which affects pupils' wellbeing?

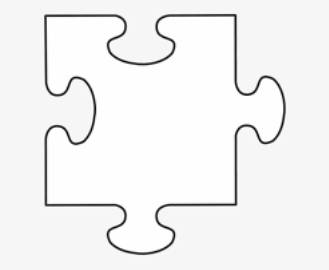
Ask the class the following two questions. For each question, children think, pair, share suggestions, then offer answers orally to teacher. Teacher makes lists of answers to each question on a class whiteboard as they are offered. These lists should be grouped under the headings suggested in brackets:

Q1: 'What does our school do already to support pupils' wellbeing?' (DOING ALREADY)

Q2: 'What other things could schools start doing that would support pupils' wellbeing?' (START DOING)

The change that the pupils will describe in the next activity will probably fall into one of these two categories: either an improvement to something in the first list, or what to start doing from the second. Having these lists displayed may help children who feel 'stuck' for ideas in the next activity.

Second activity: What can schools do which will help improve pupils' wellbeing?



Show class one blank piece of paper (approx. A4 size) cut into the shape of a jigsaw piece. Tell the pupils that they will each get one piece (some pupils may prefer to share a piece, at the teacher's discretion), and (just like a real jigsaw) each of their pieces will come together to form a big picture. But this big picture will show how schools can support pupils' wellbeing. So, on their individual jigsaw piece, each pupil should draw (and write if possible) the change that schools could make which they think would have the greatest effect in terms of supporting pupil wellbeing. It could be from the lists on the whiteboard, or their own idea, not yet discussed. Remind them that it should be achievable (*e.g.* not simply banning school). Stress that the activity is not about how well they can draw, but rather about understanding their ideas. Finally, if pupils do not want others to see their work, they can use the reverse side of their jigsaw piece, so that when the jigsaw is assembled, their work will not be visible.

Third activity:

Assemble the jigsaw on a wall or whiteboard (using blu-tac or tape). Quickly review the suggestions made on each piece. Ask the class for their views on which of the suggestions would be the most effective. A brief discussion of the learning and what the class consider the most useful suggestions can act as a plenary.

References:

Public Health England & Evidence Based Practice Unit (2016) Measuring and monitoring children and young people's mental wellbeing: A toolkit for schools and colleges. Available at: https://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF COMPLETE JIGSAW.

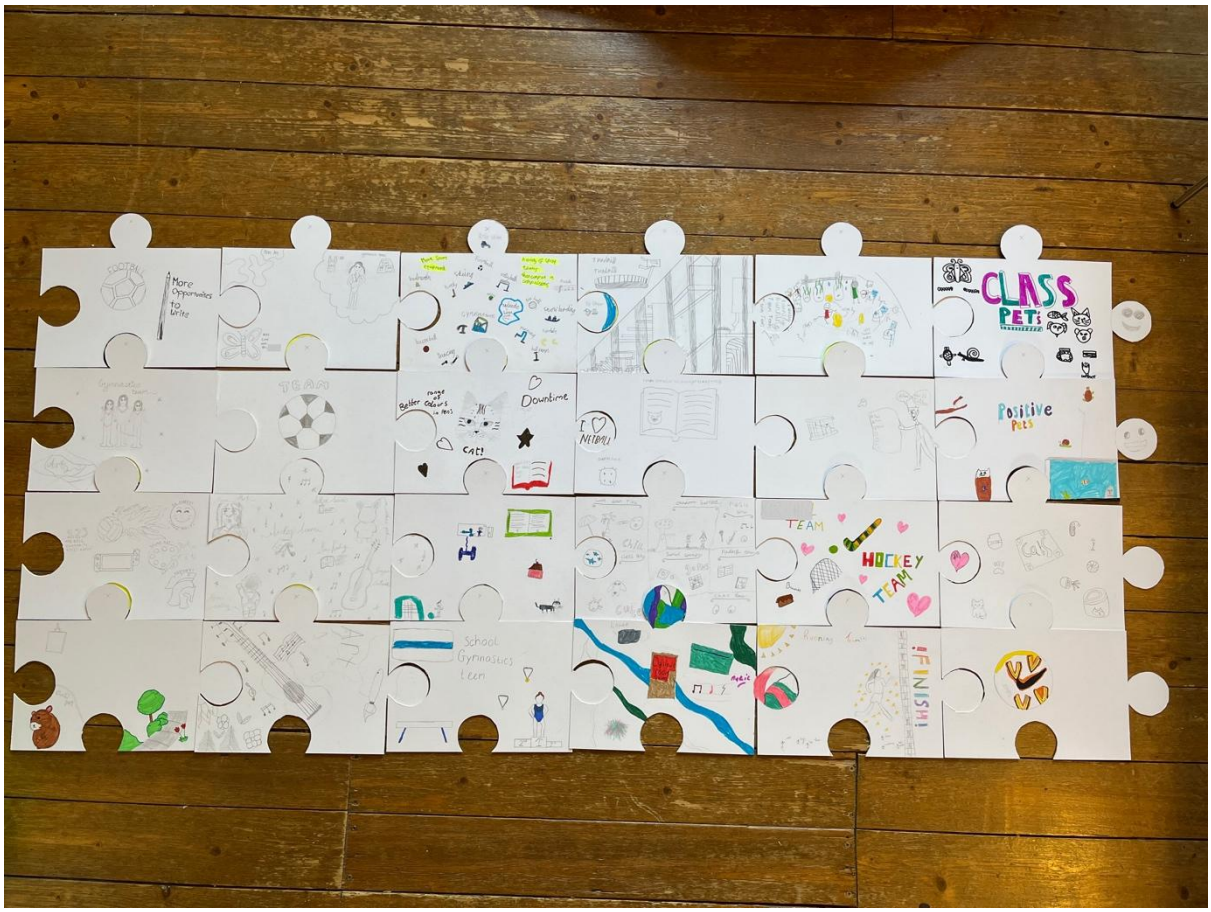
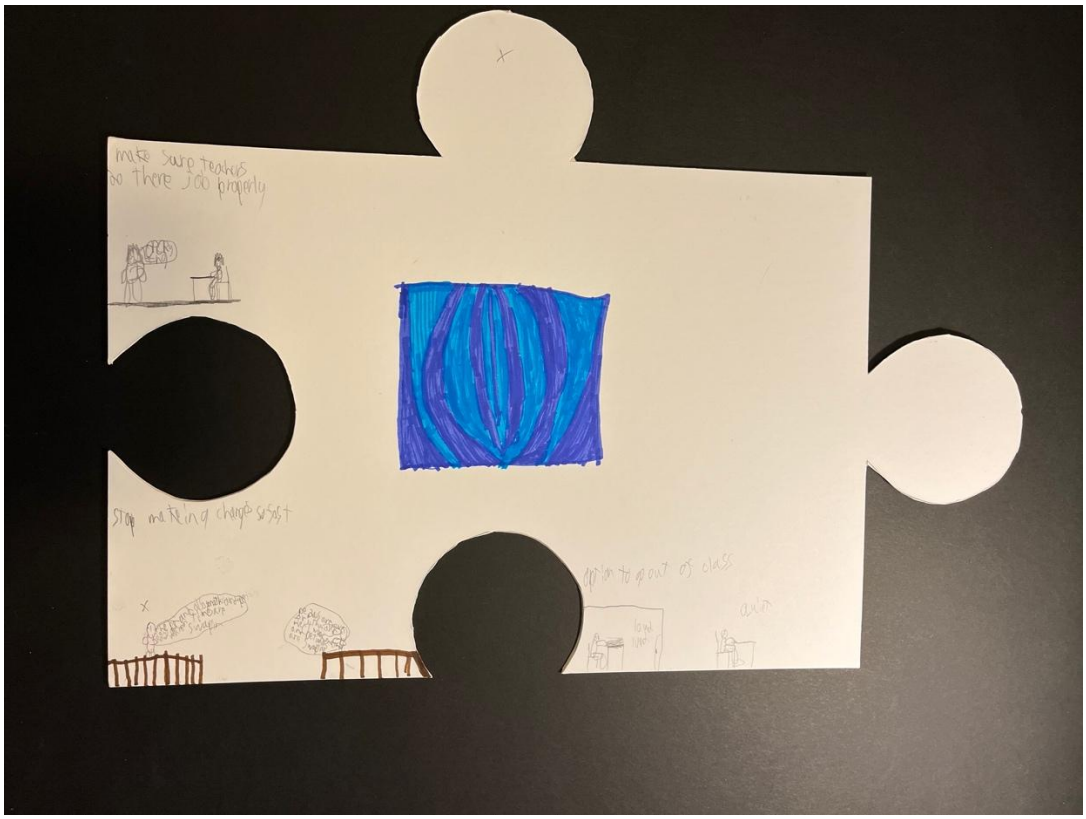


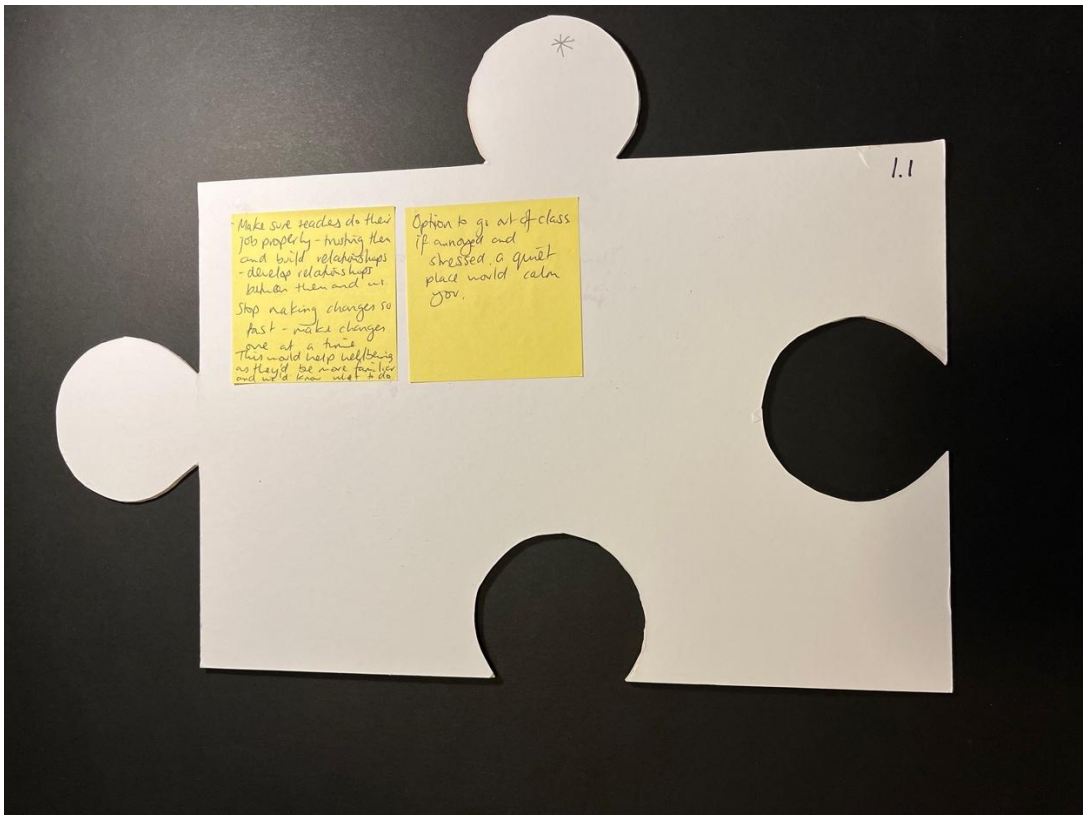
Figure J1: the complete jigsaw (*ie.,* all participating pupils) from school two.

APPENDIX H: INDIVIDUAL PUPIL'S JIGSAW PIECES.

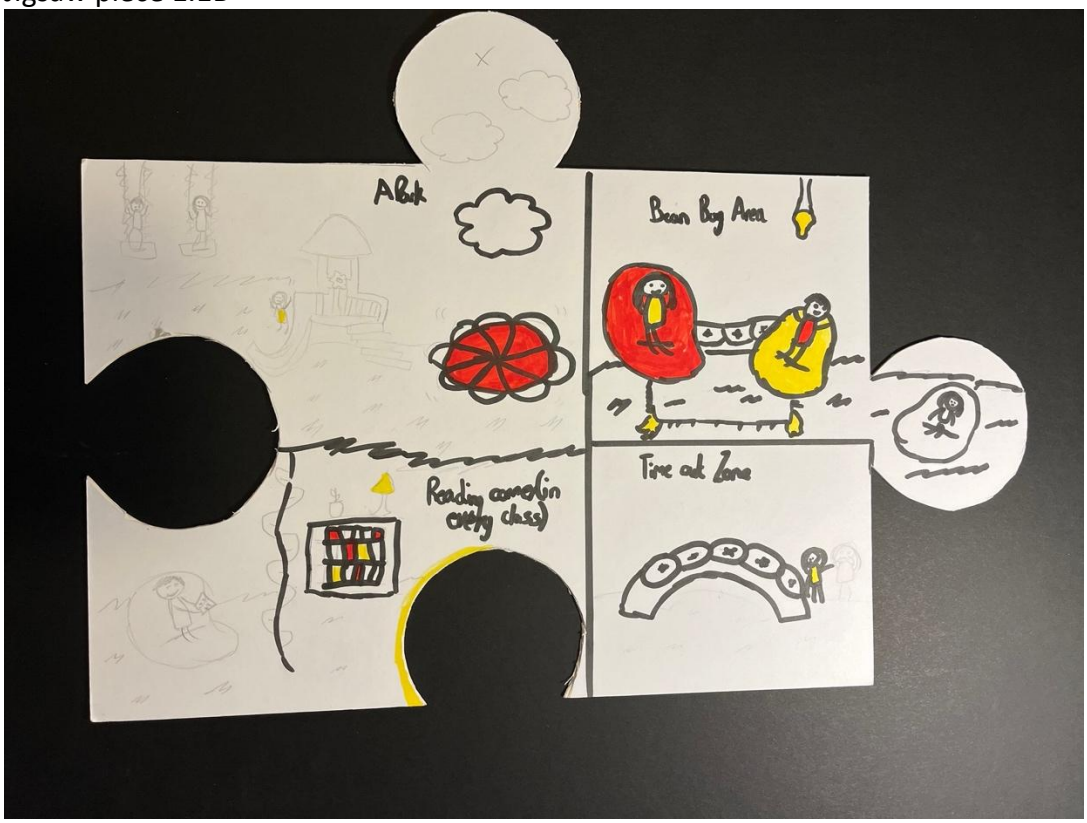
School 1.



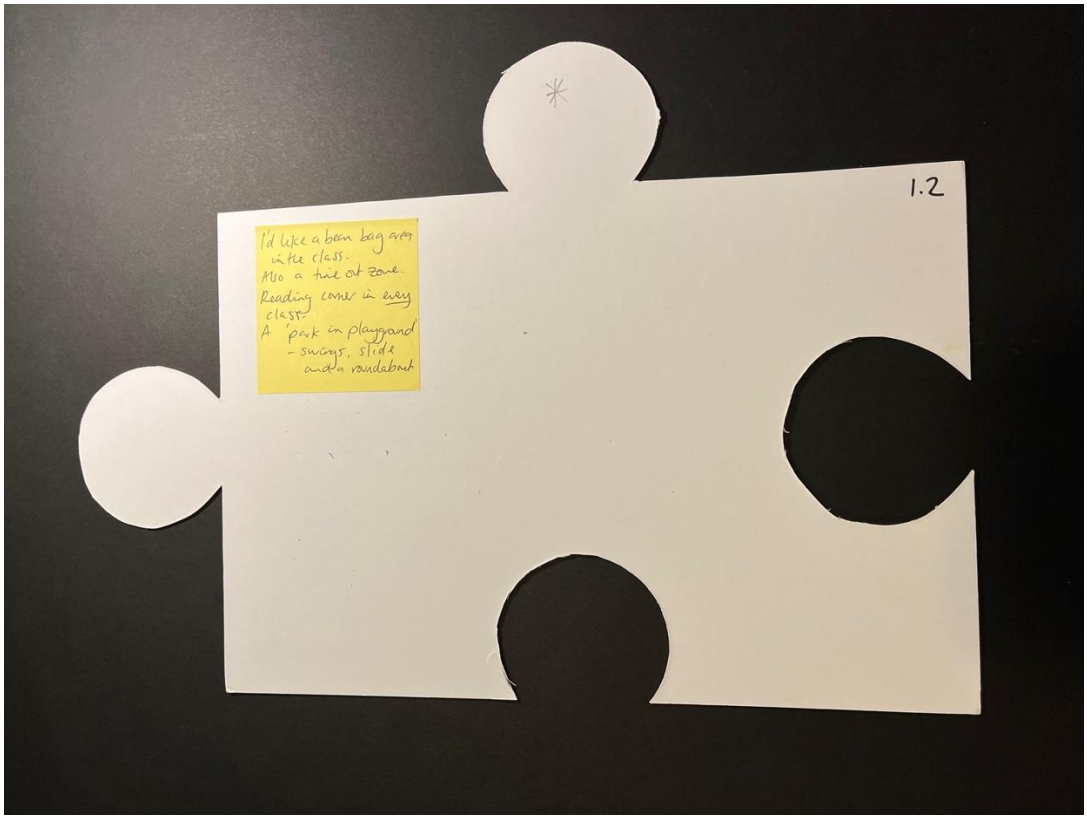
Jigsaw piece 1.1A



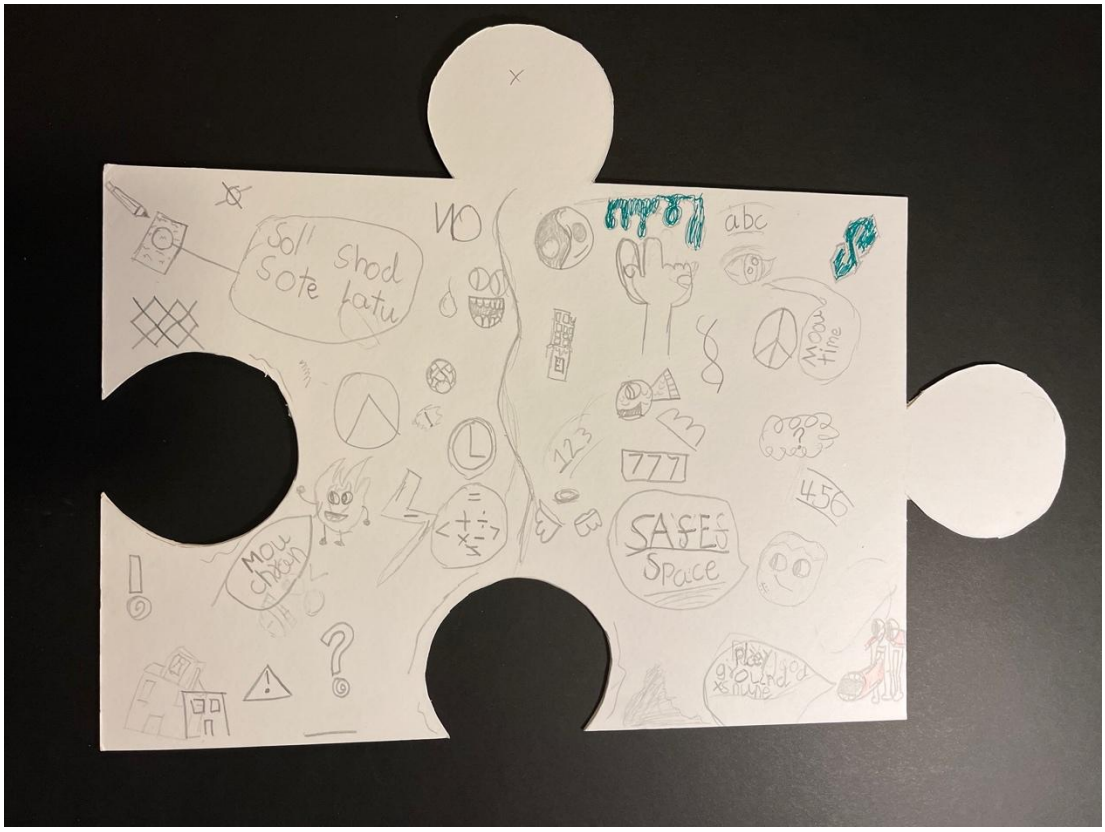
Jigsaw piece 1.1B



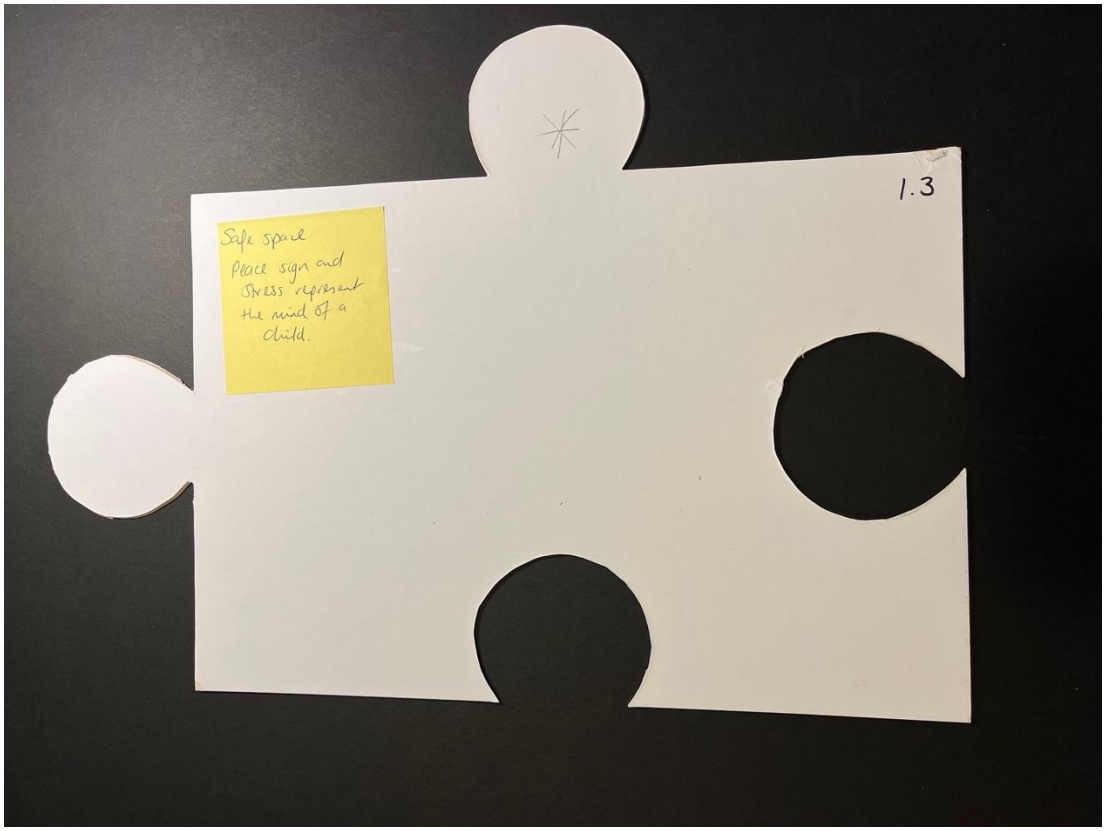
Jigsaw piece 1.2A



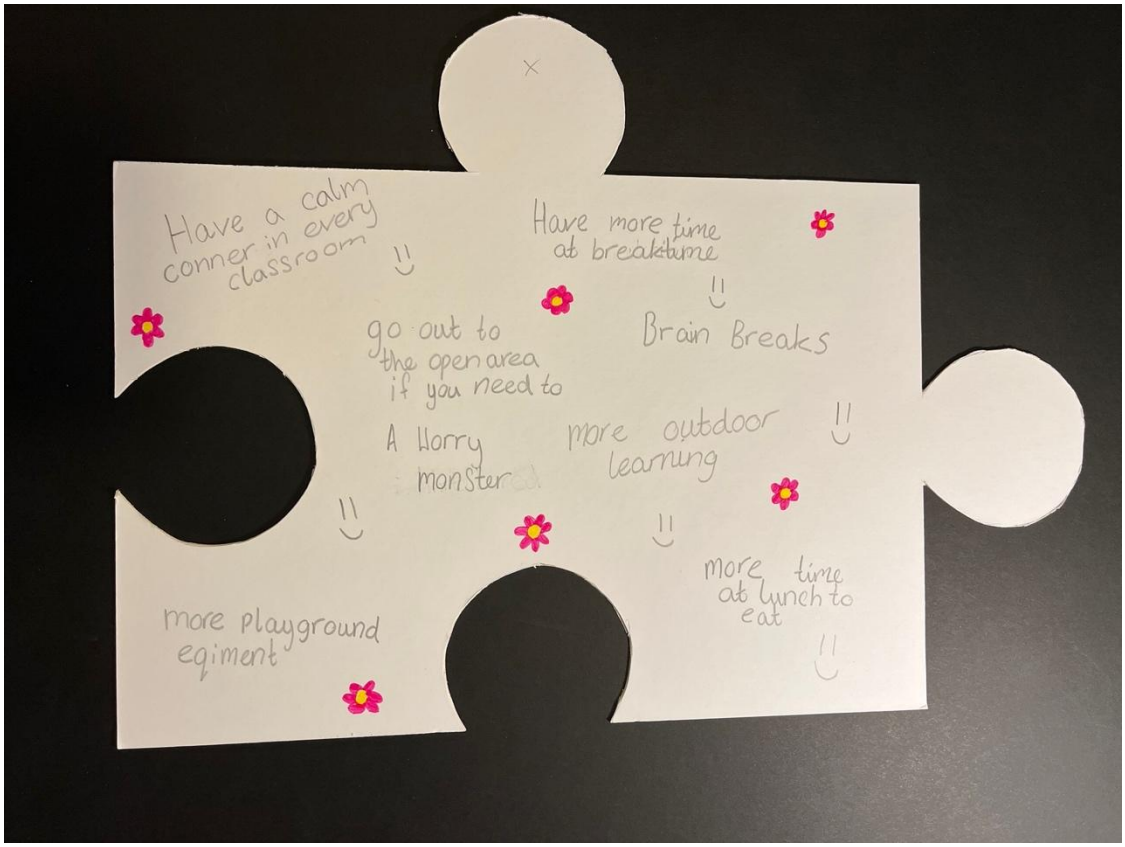
Jigsaw piece 1.2B



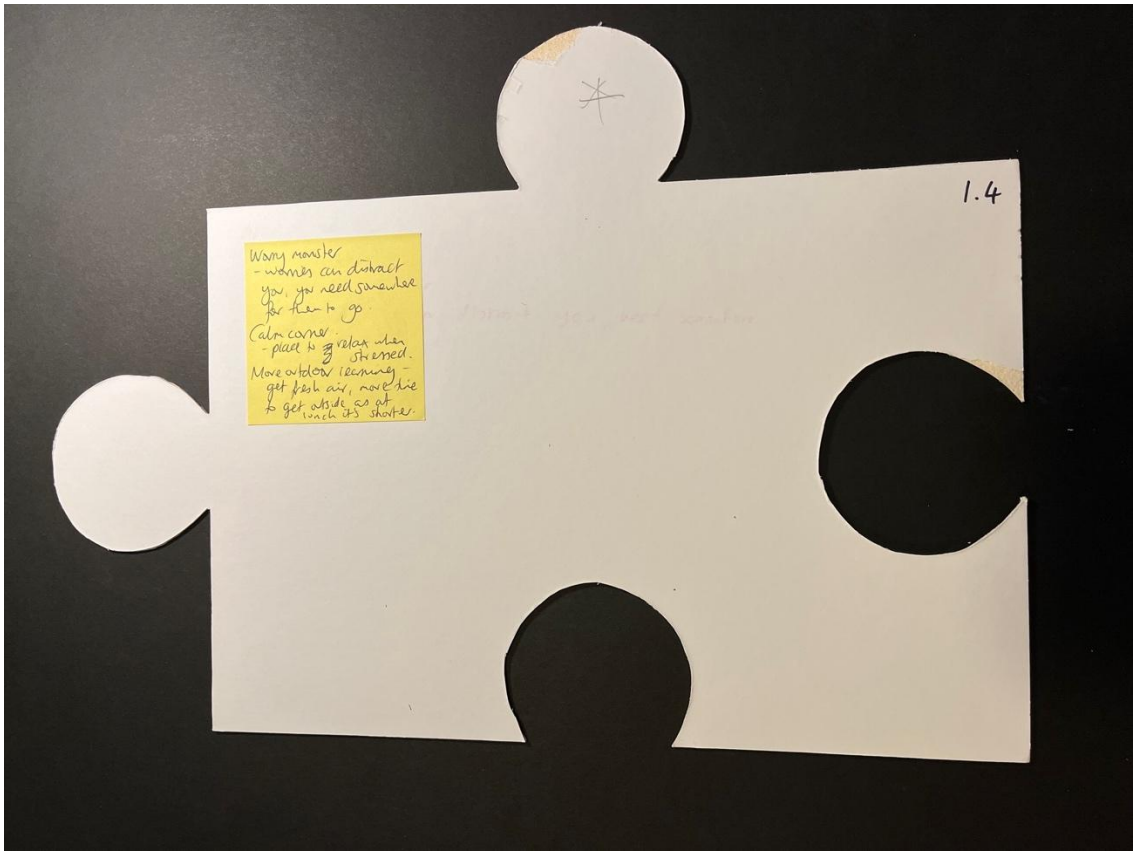
Jigsaw piece 1.3A



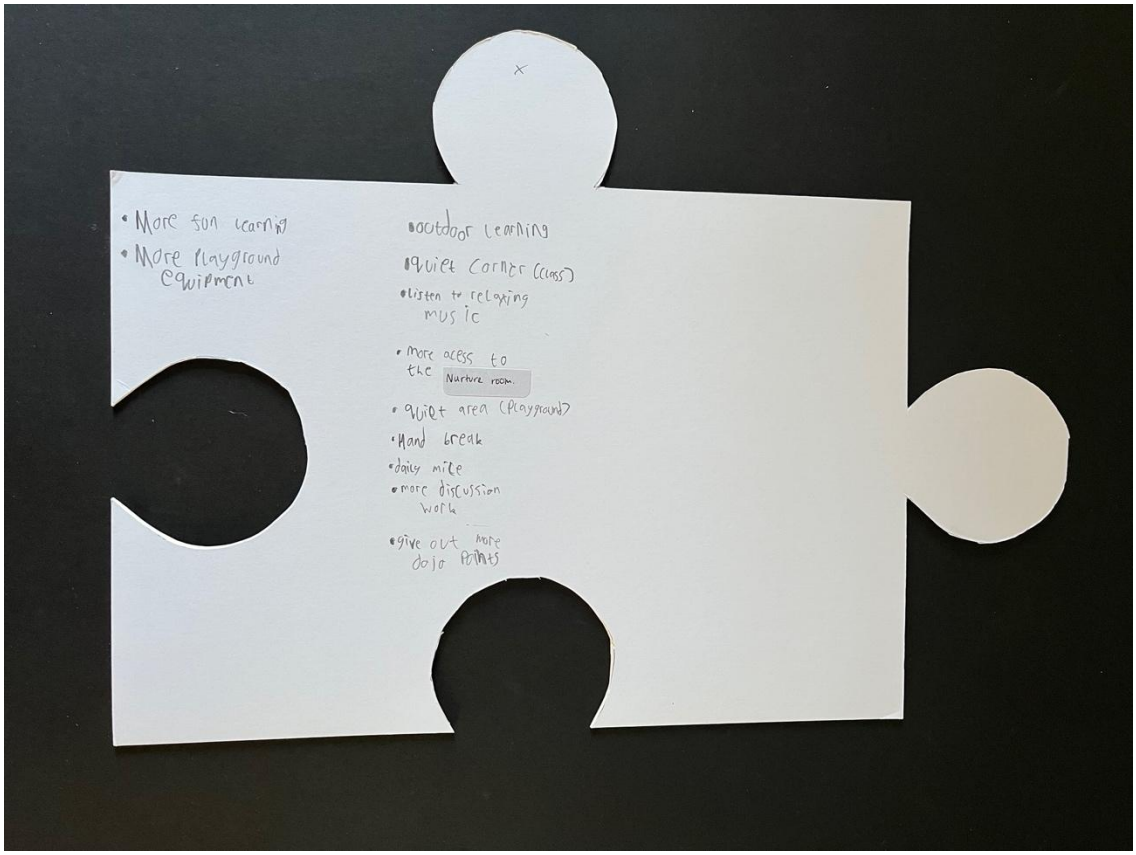
Jigsaw piece 1.3B



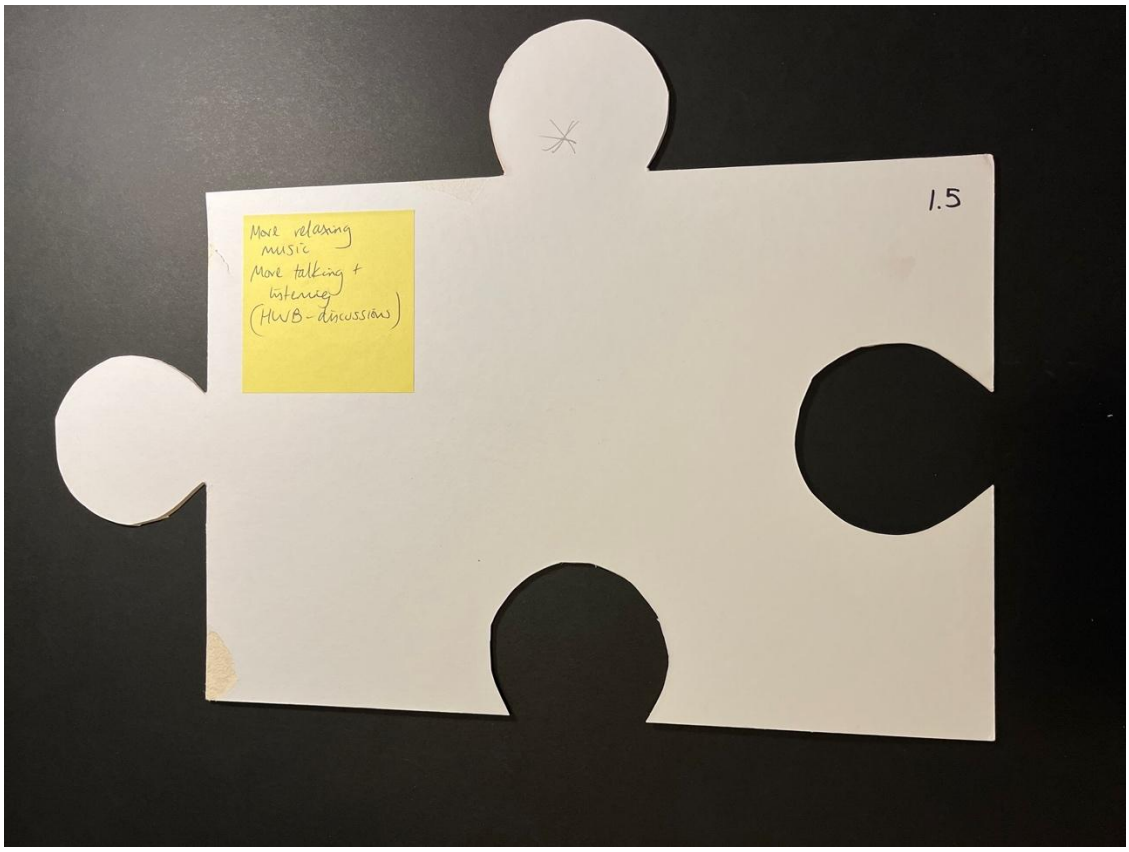
Jigsaw piece 1.4A



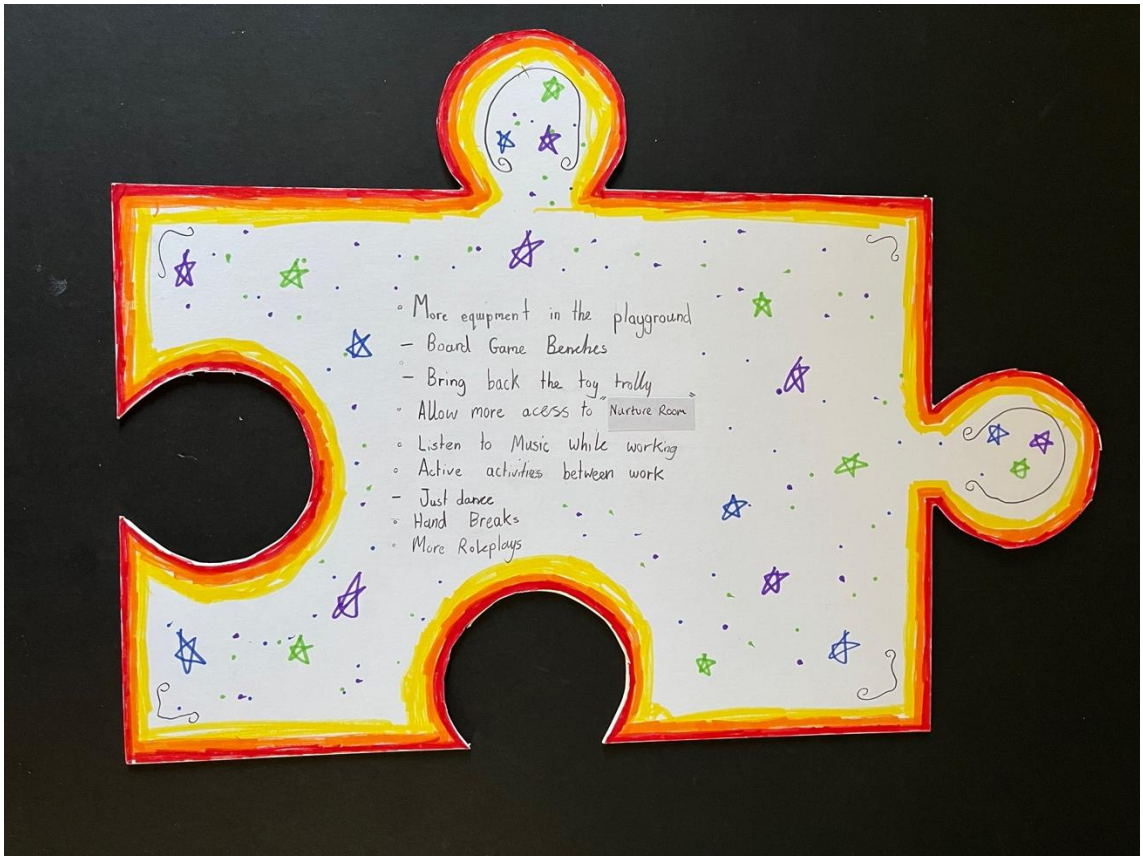
Jigsaw piece 1.4B



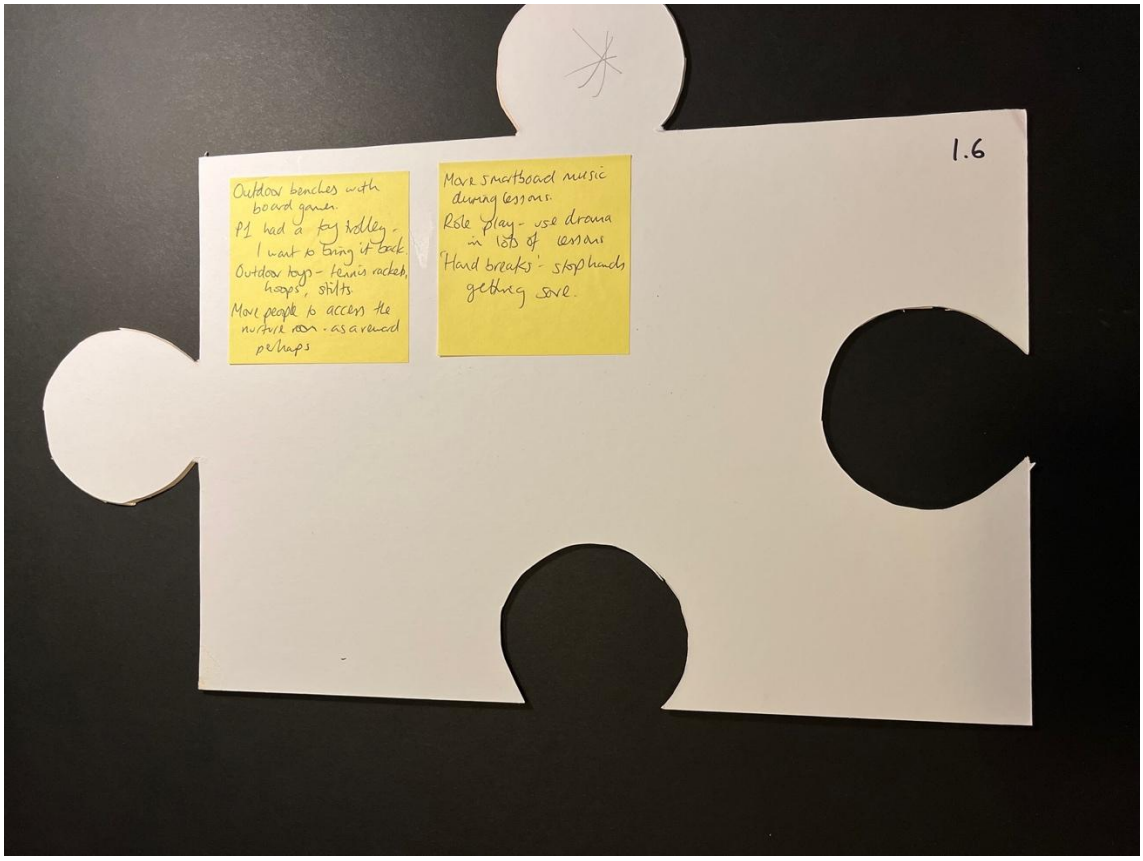
Jigsaw piece 1.5A



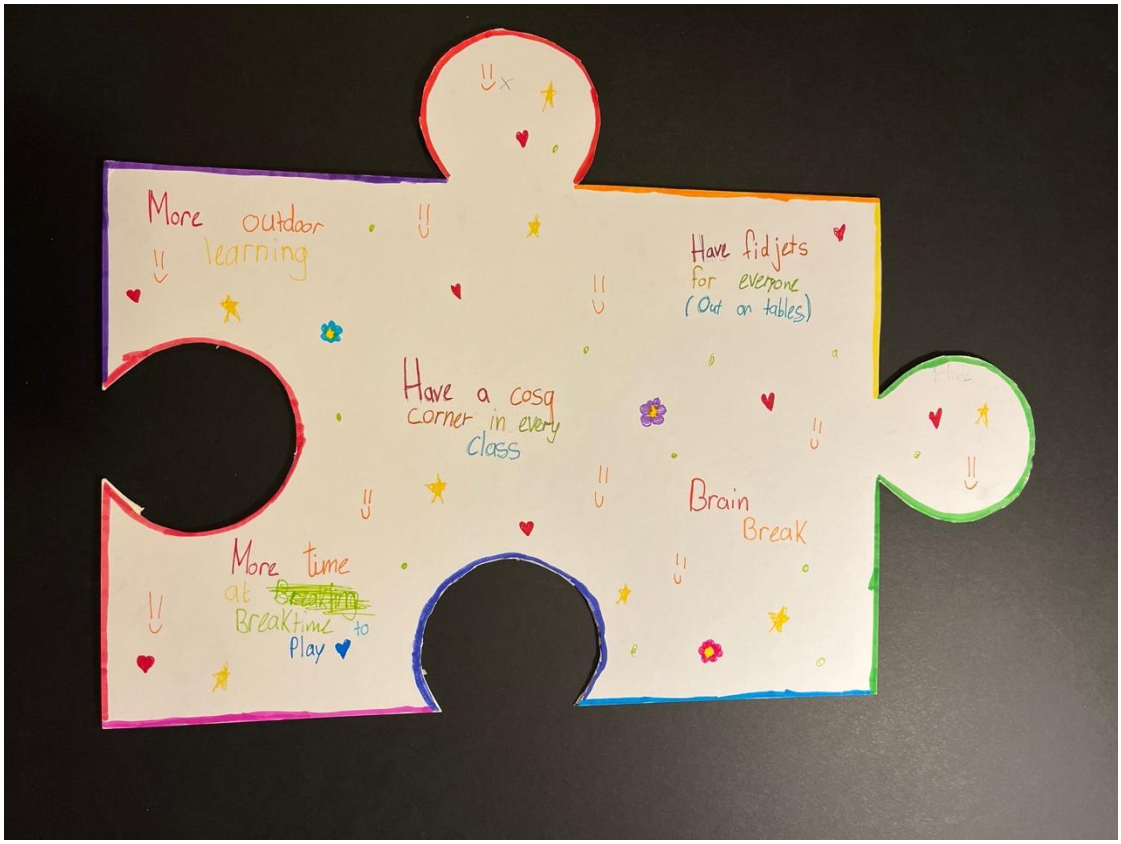
Jigsaw piece 1.5B



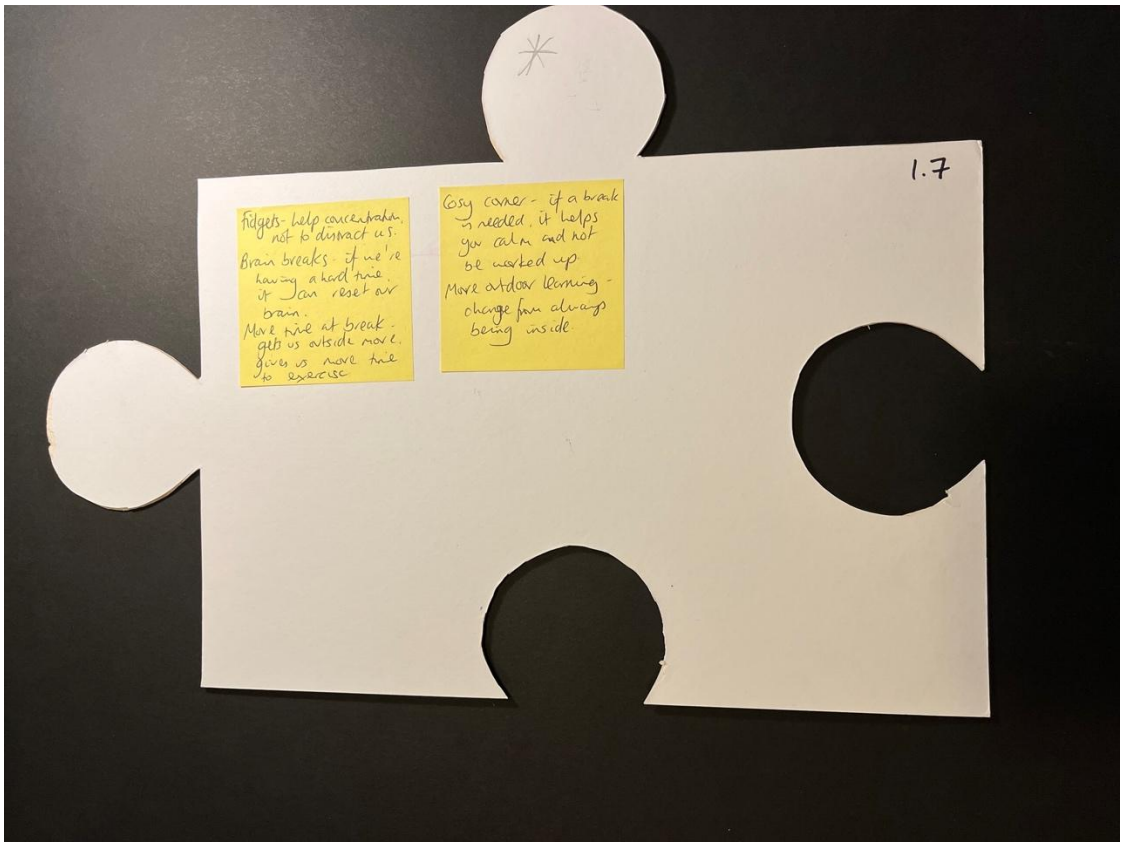
Jigsaw piece 1.6A



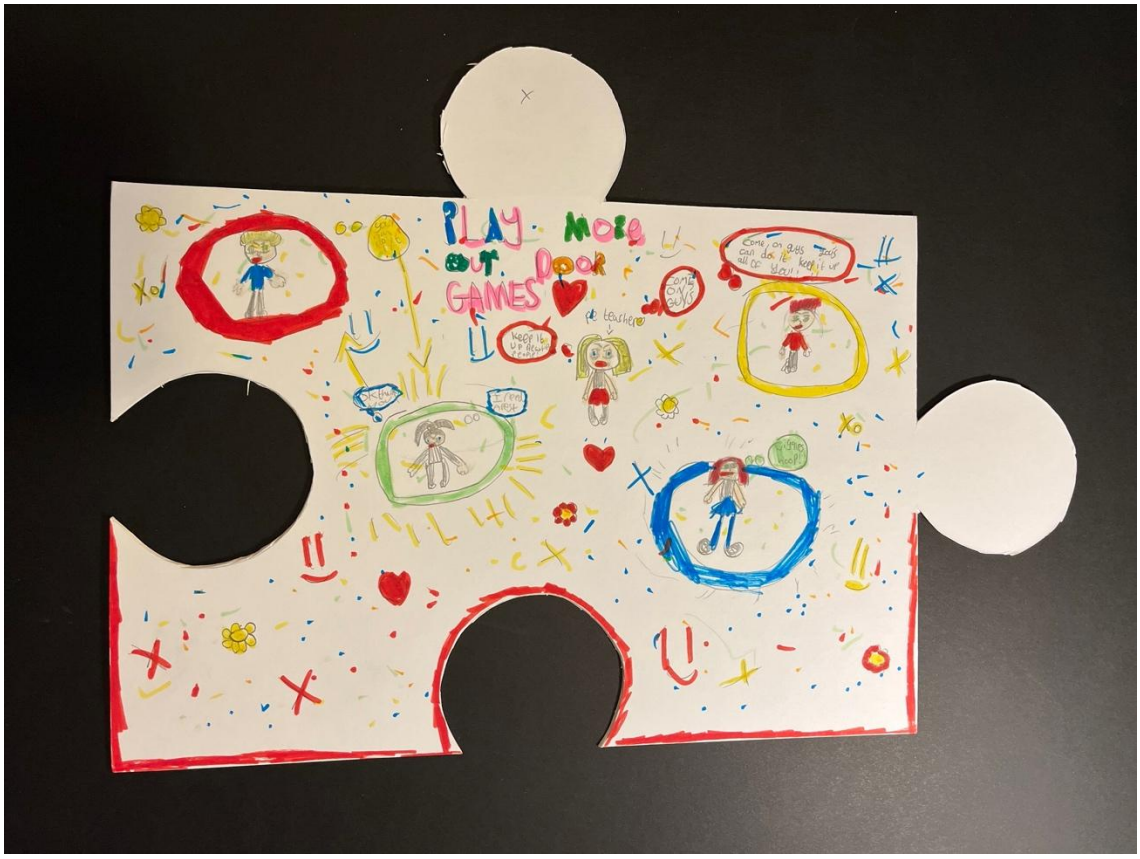
Jigsaw piece 1.6B



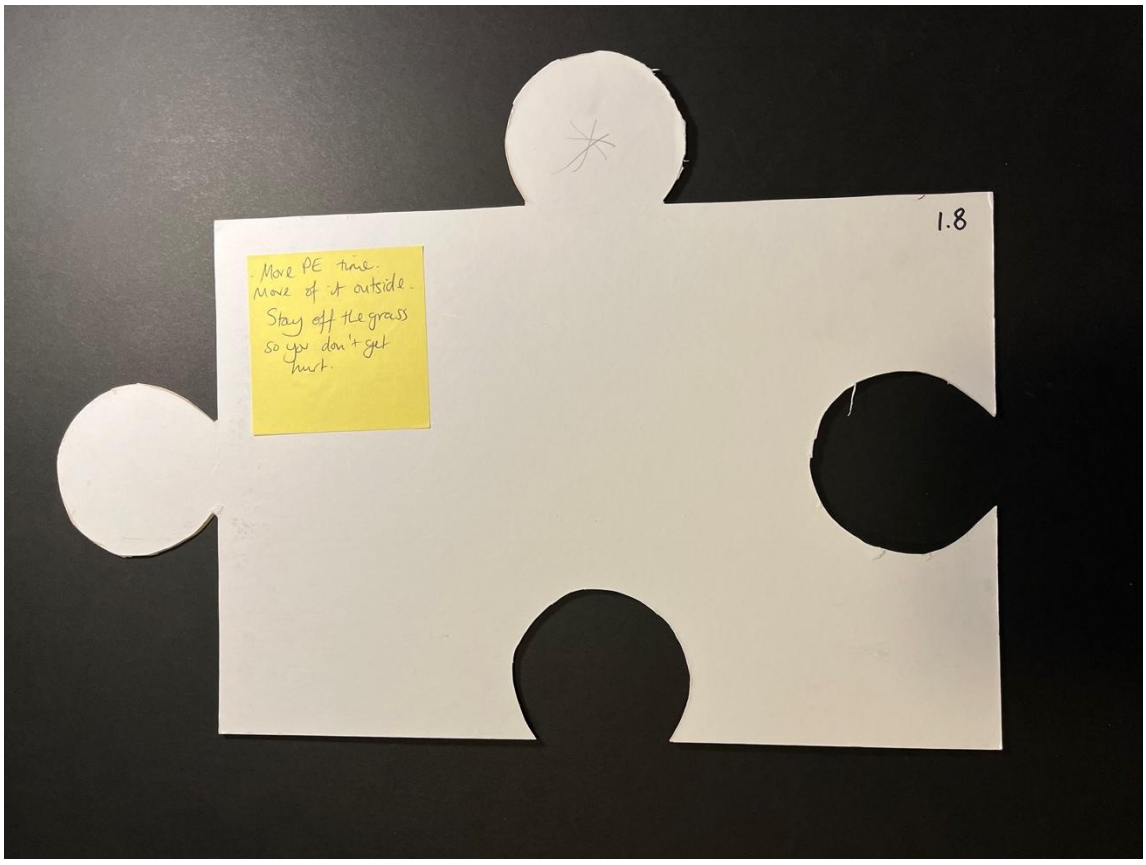
Jigsaw piece 1.7A



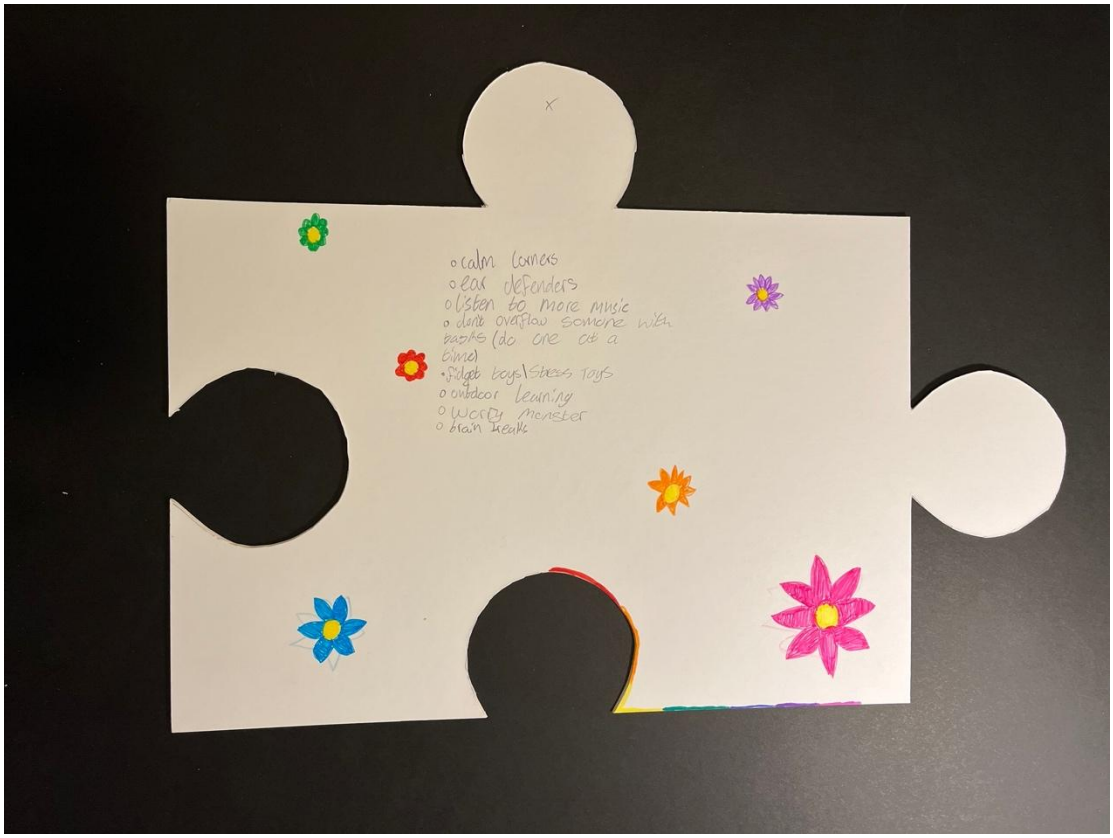
Jigsaw piece 1.7B



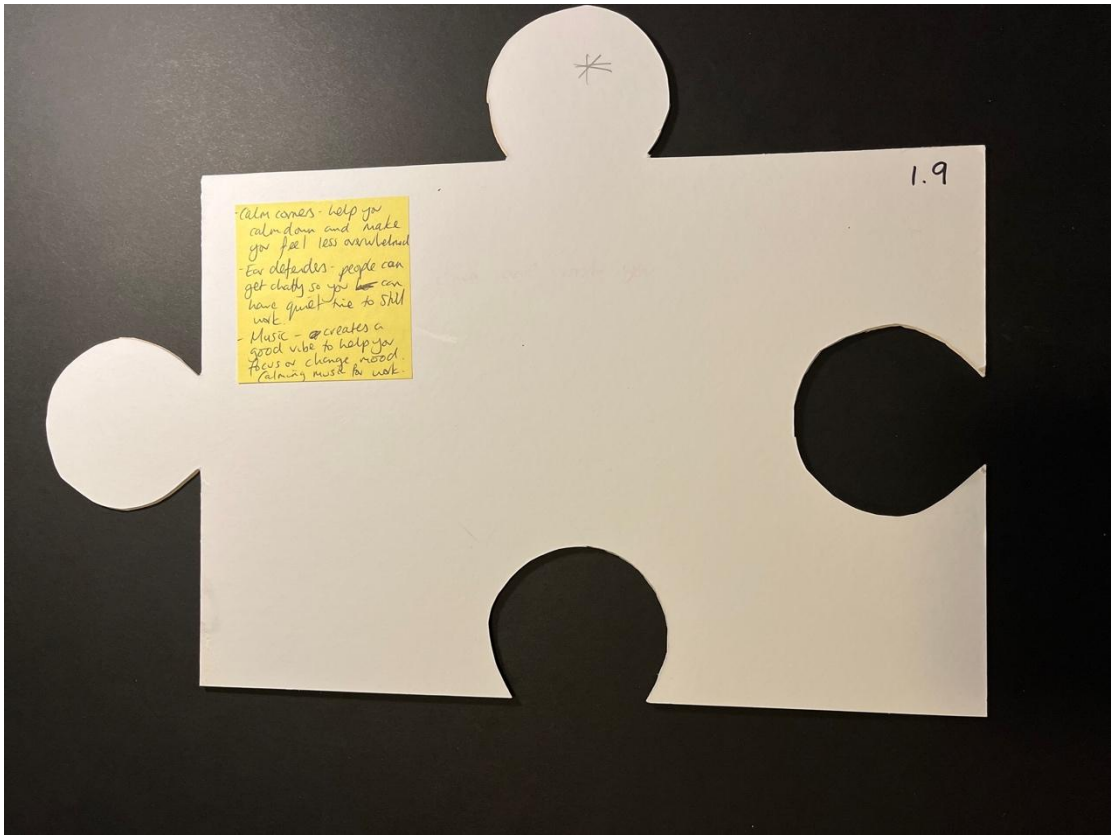
Jigsaw piece 1.8A



Jigsaw piece 1.8B



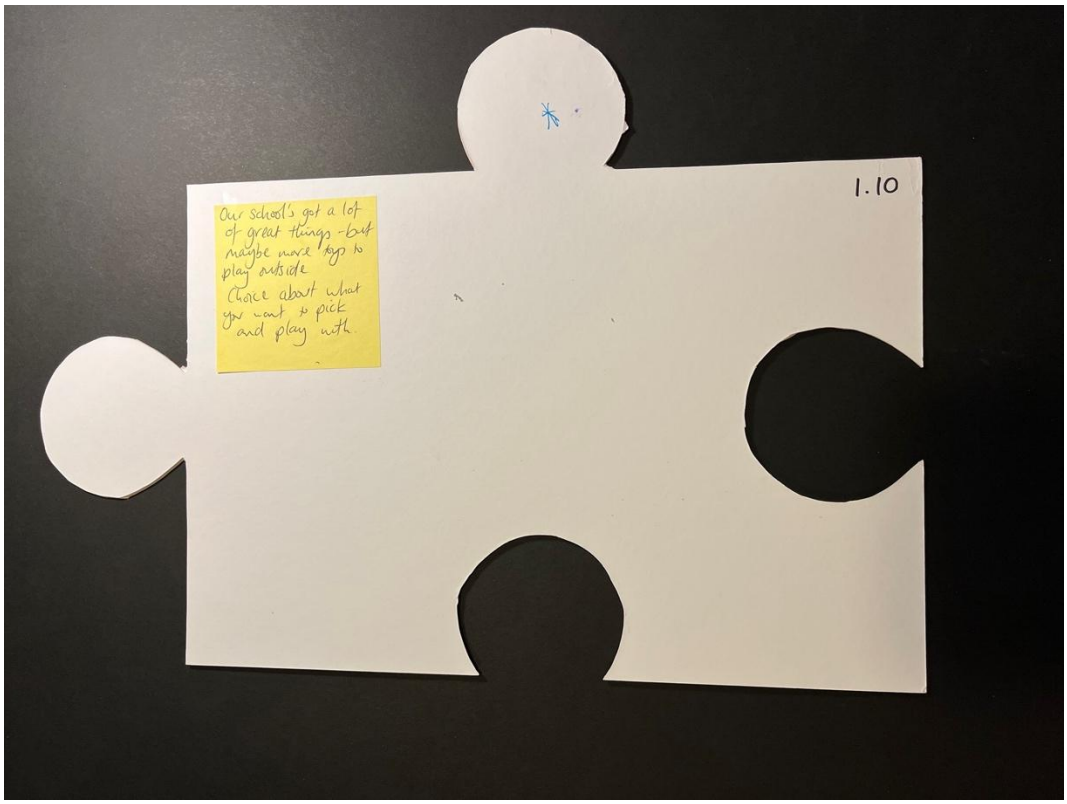
Jigsaw piece 1.9A



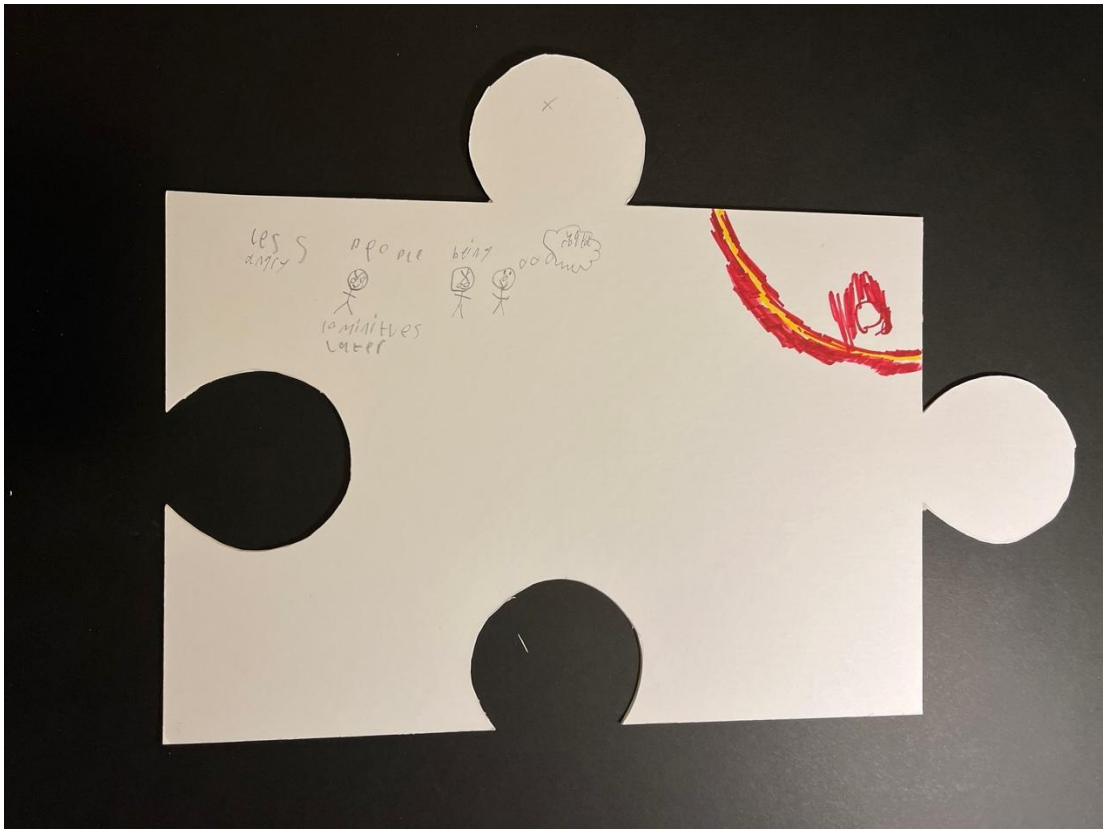
Jigsaw piece 1.9B



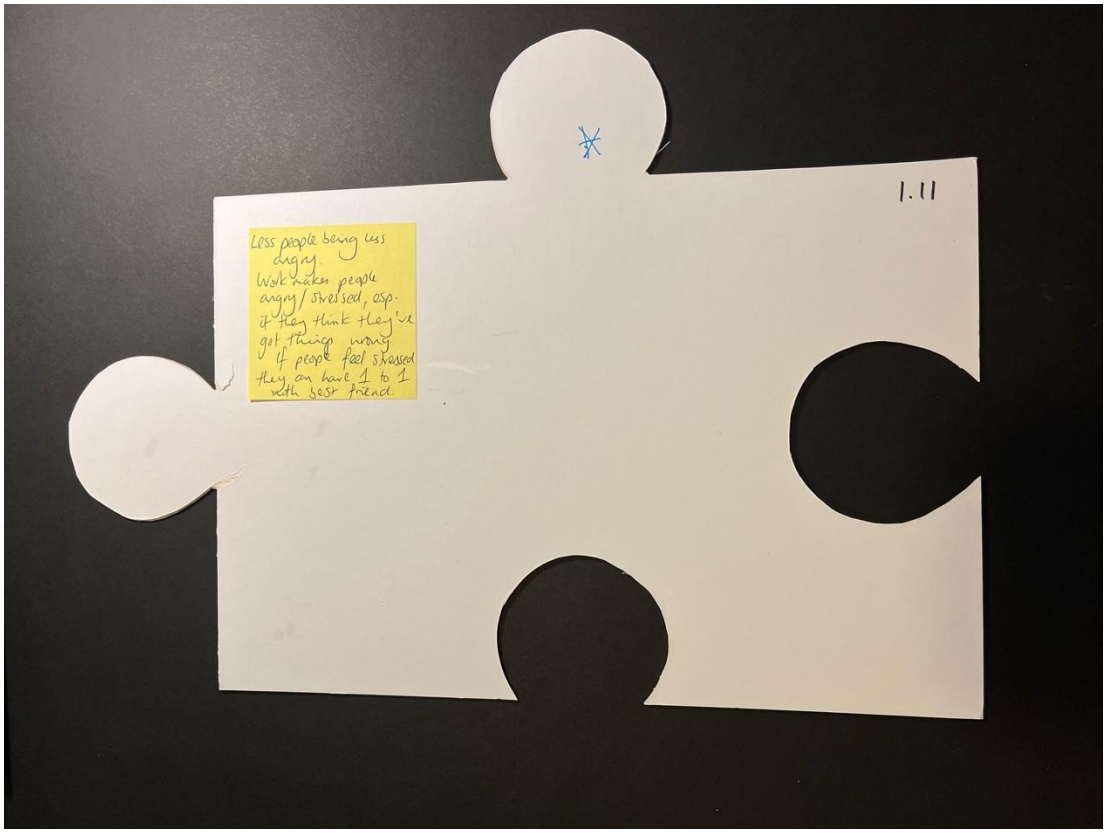
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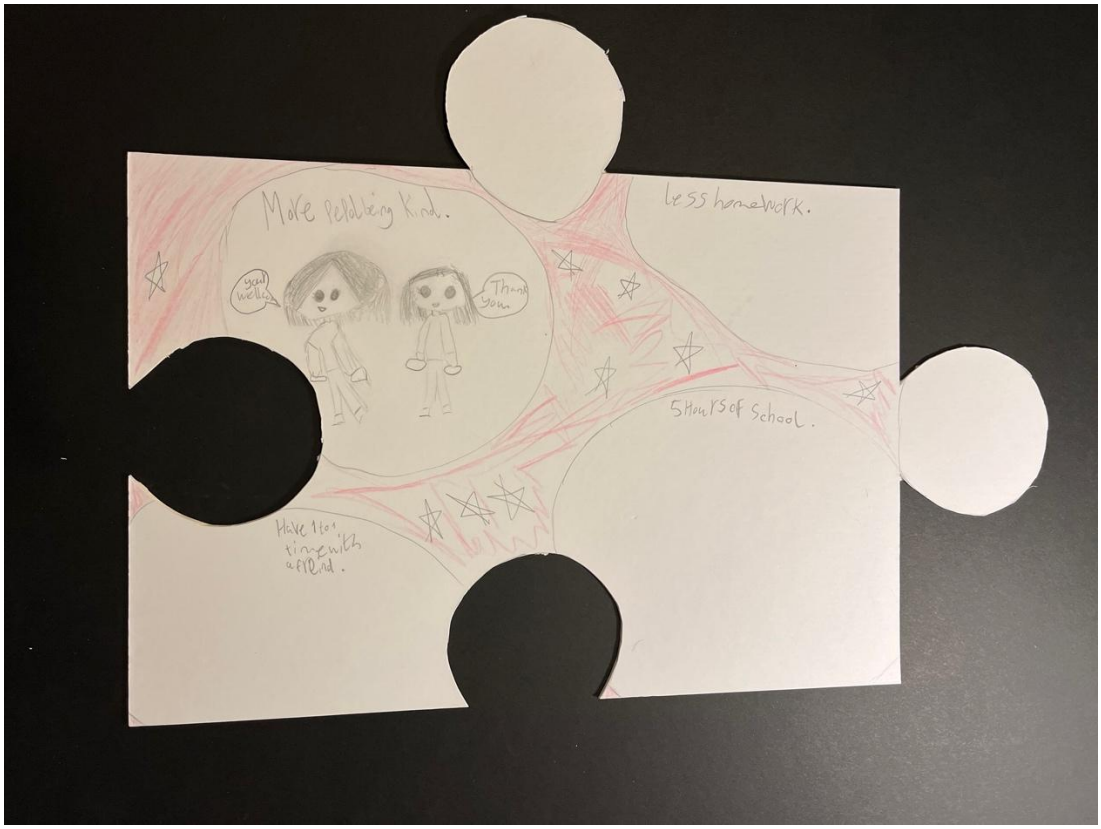
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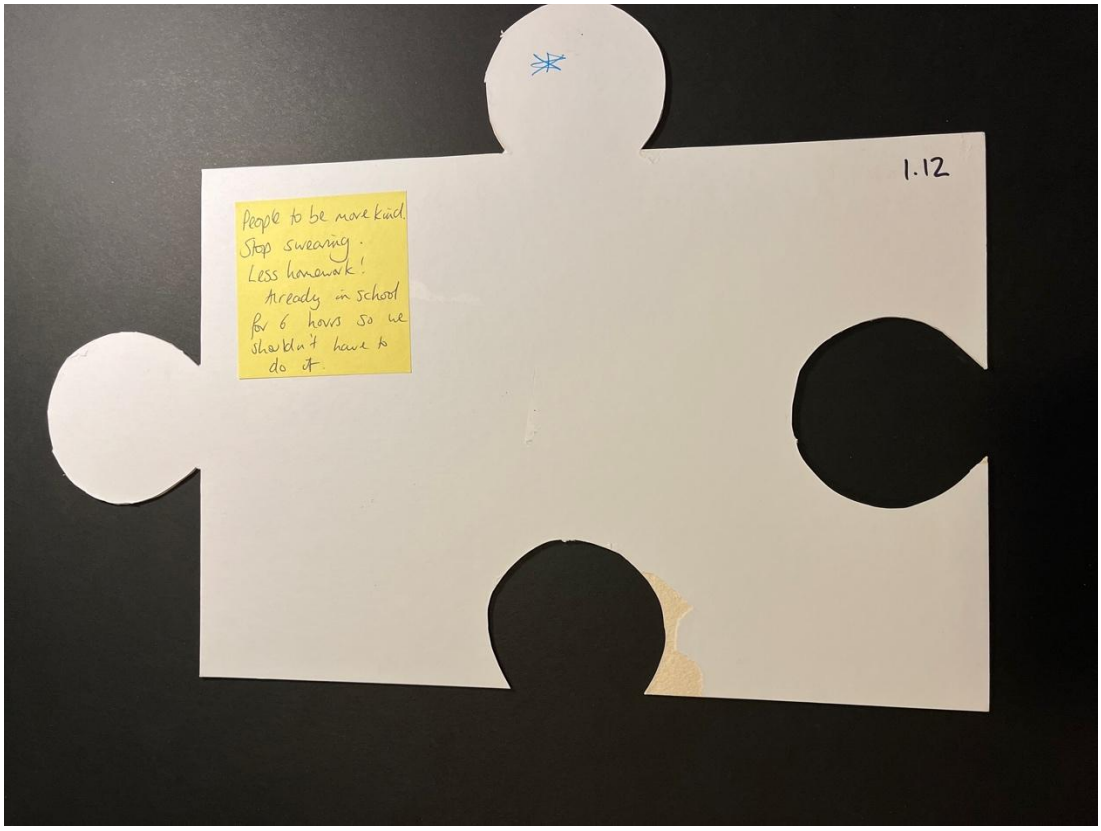
Jigsaw piece 1.11A



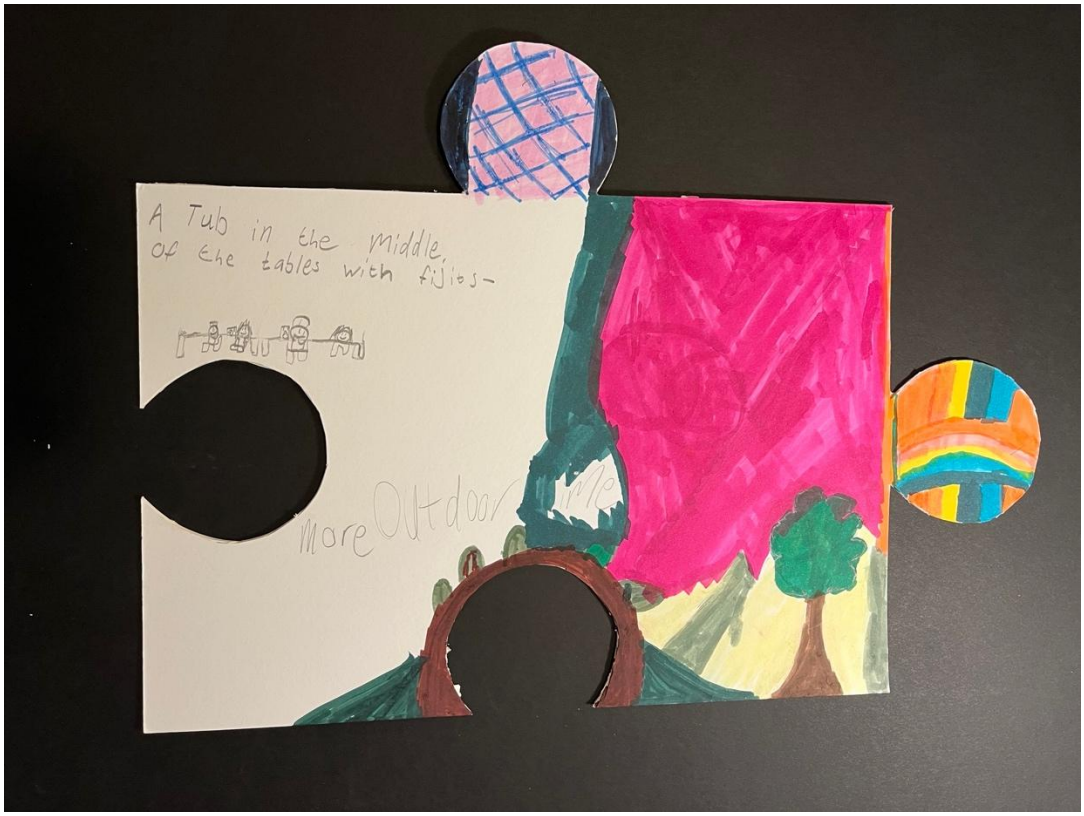
Jigsaw piece 1.11B



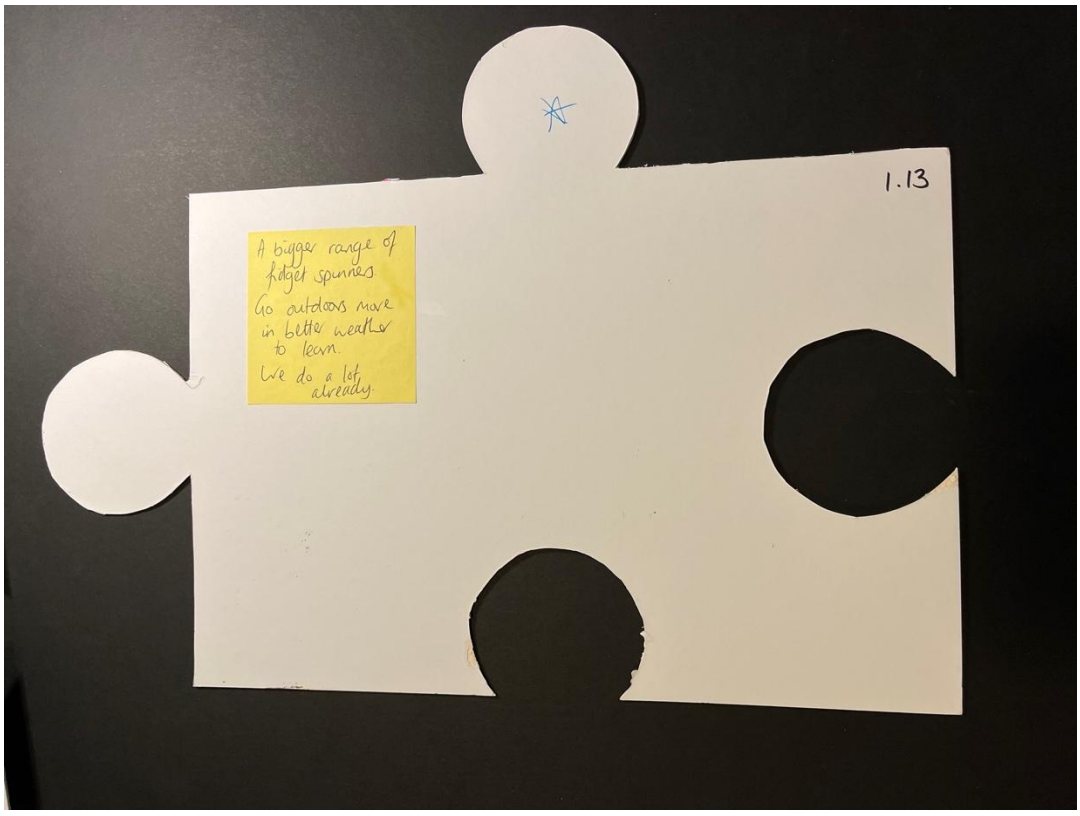
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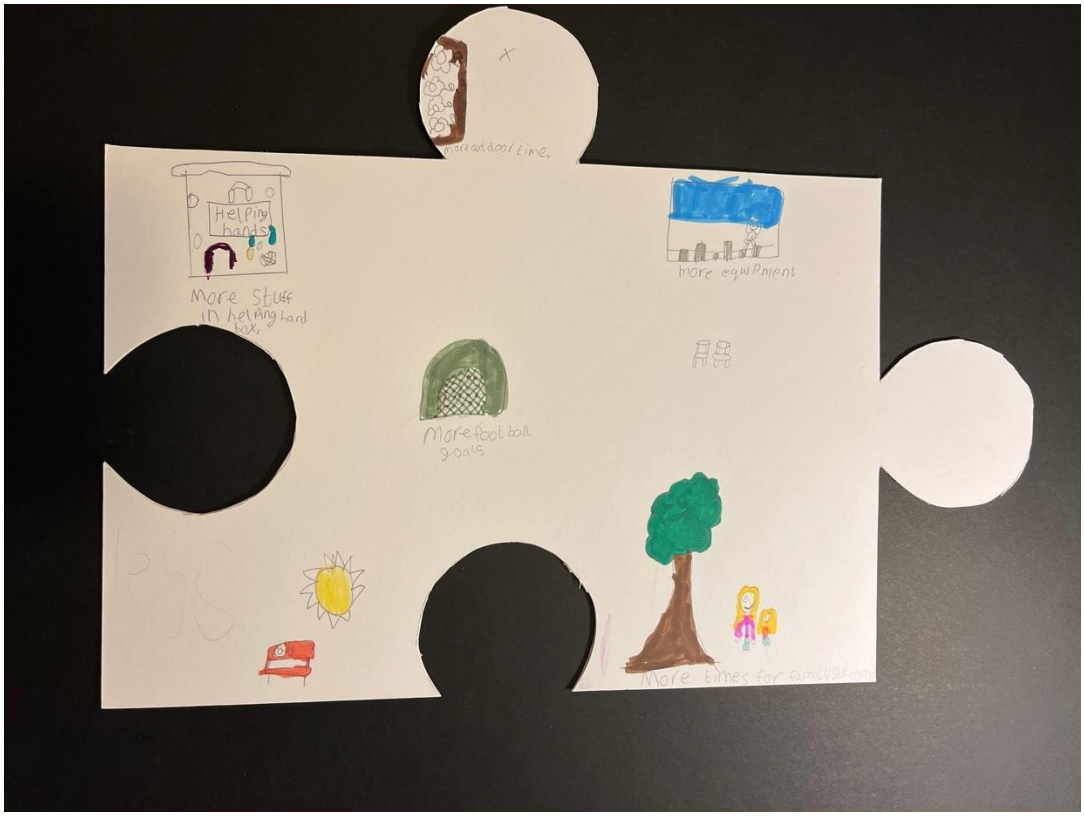
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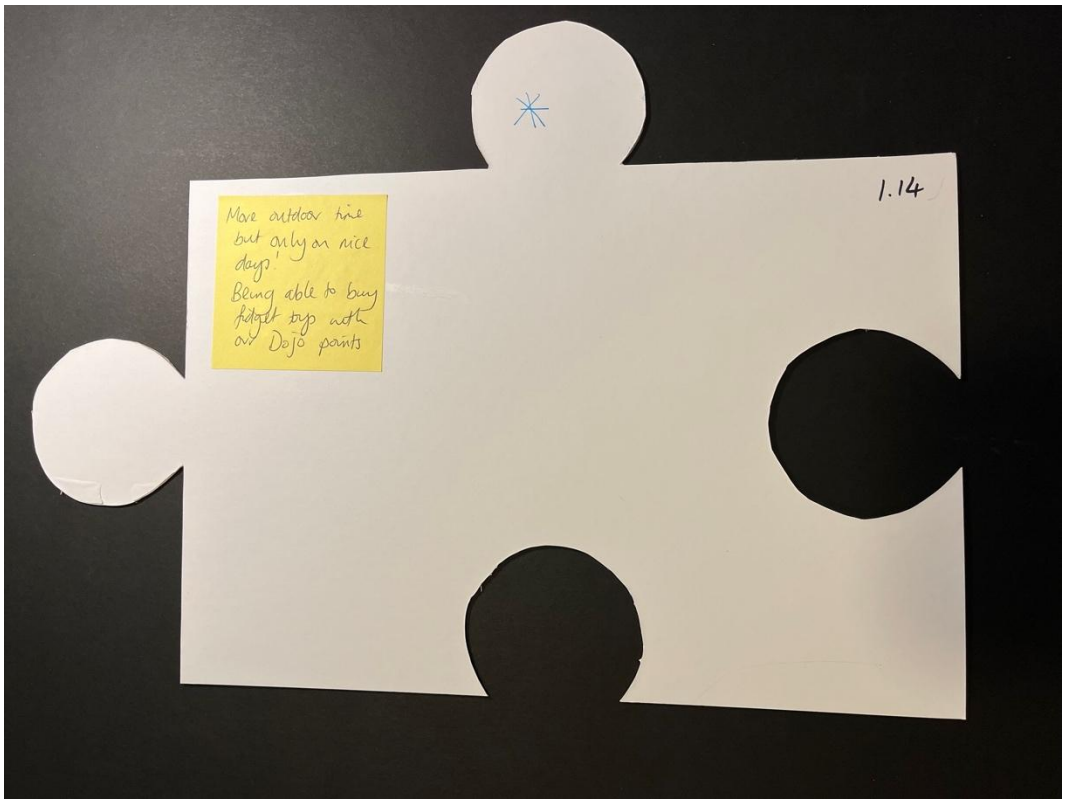
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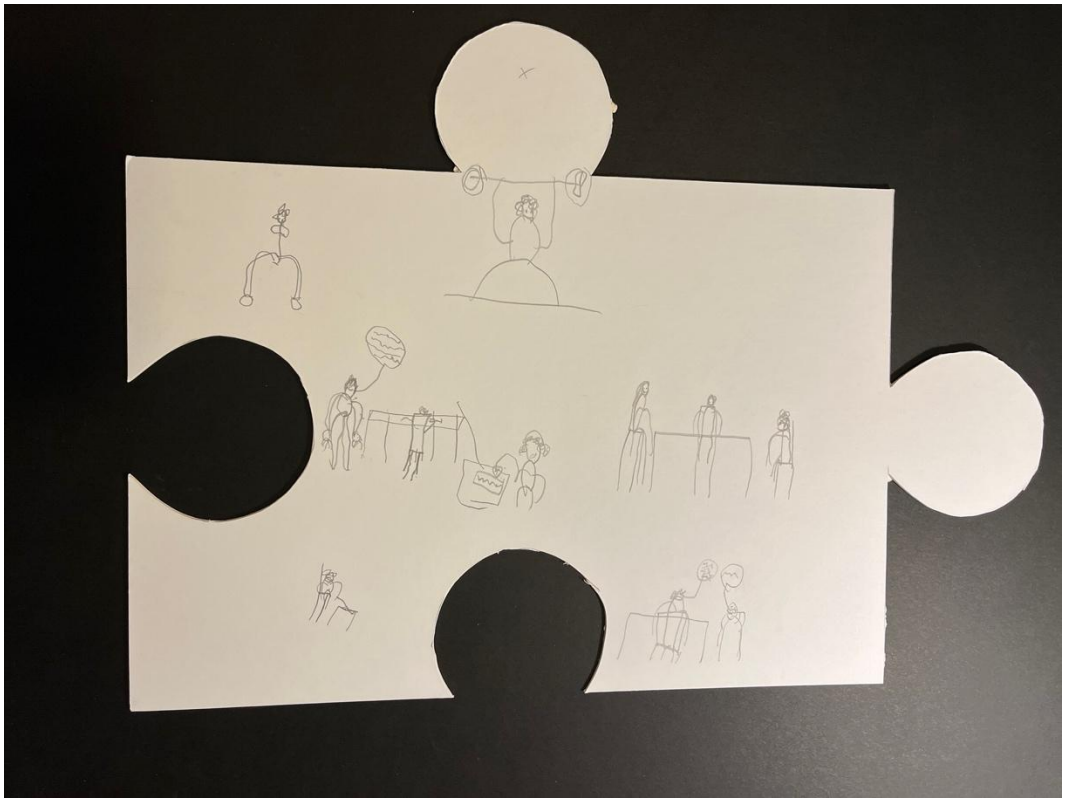
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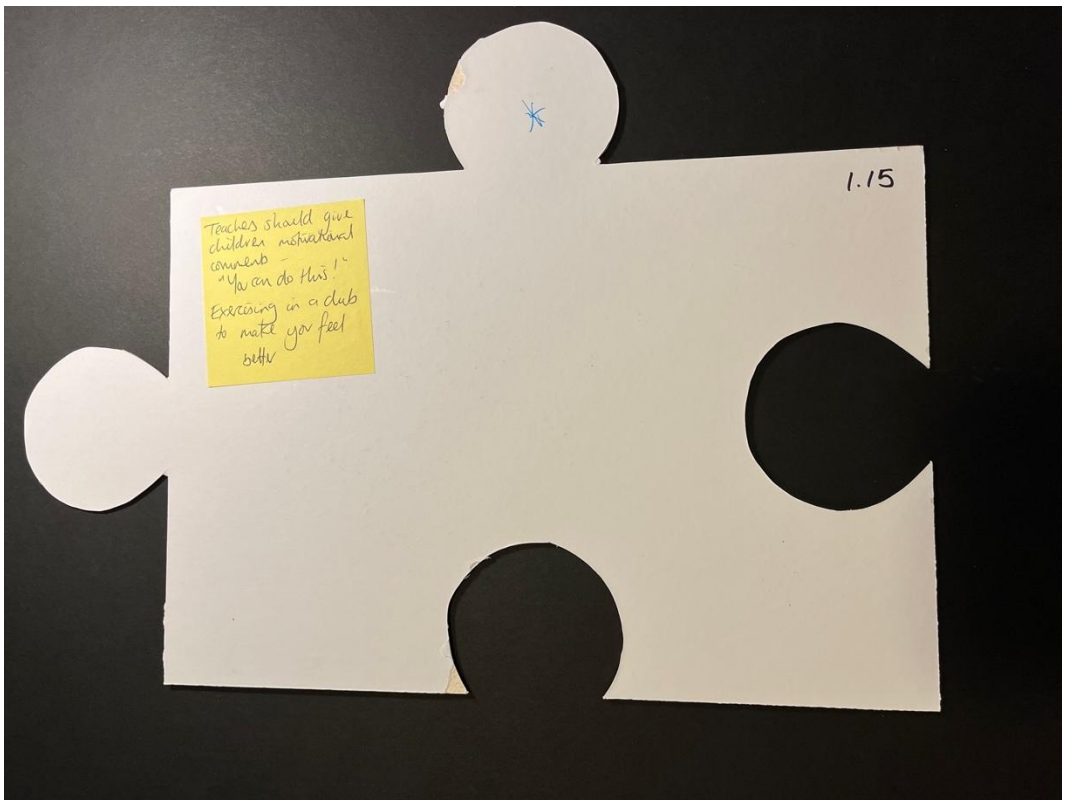
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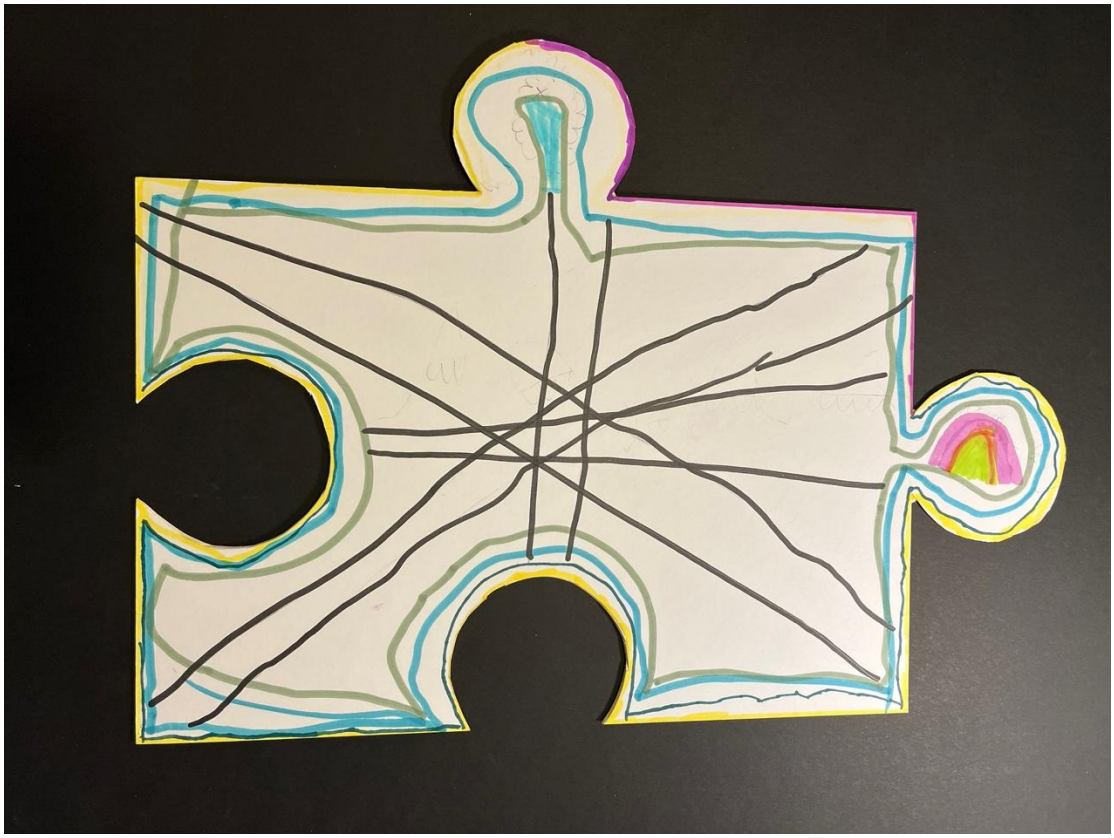
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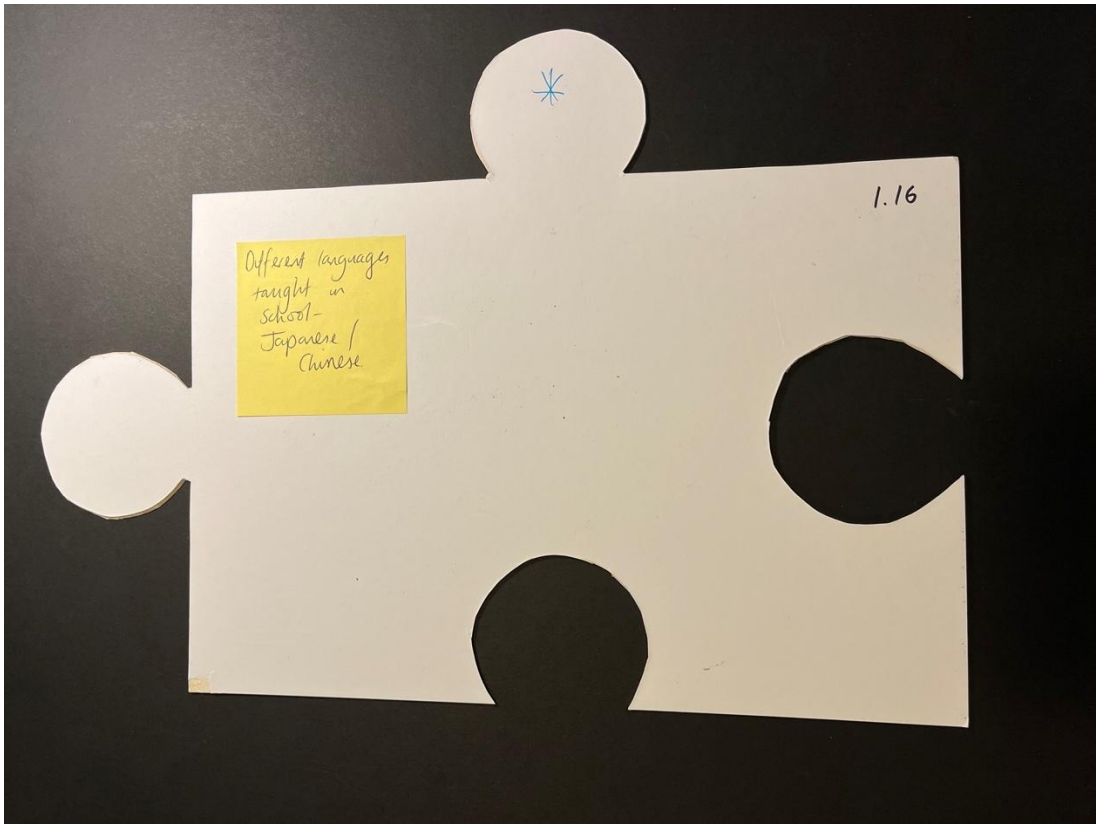
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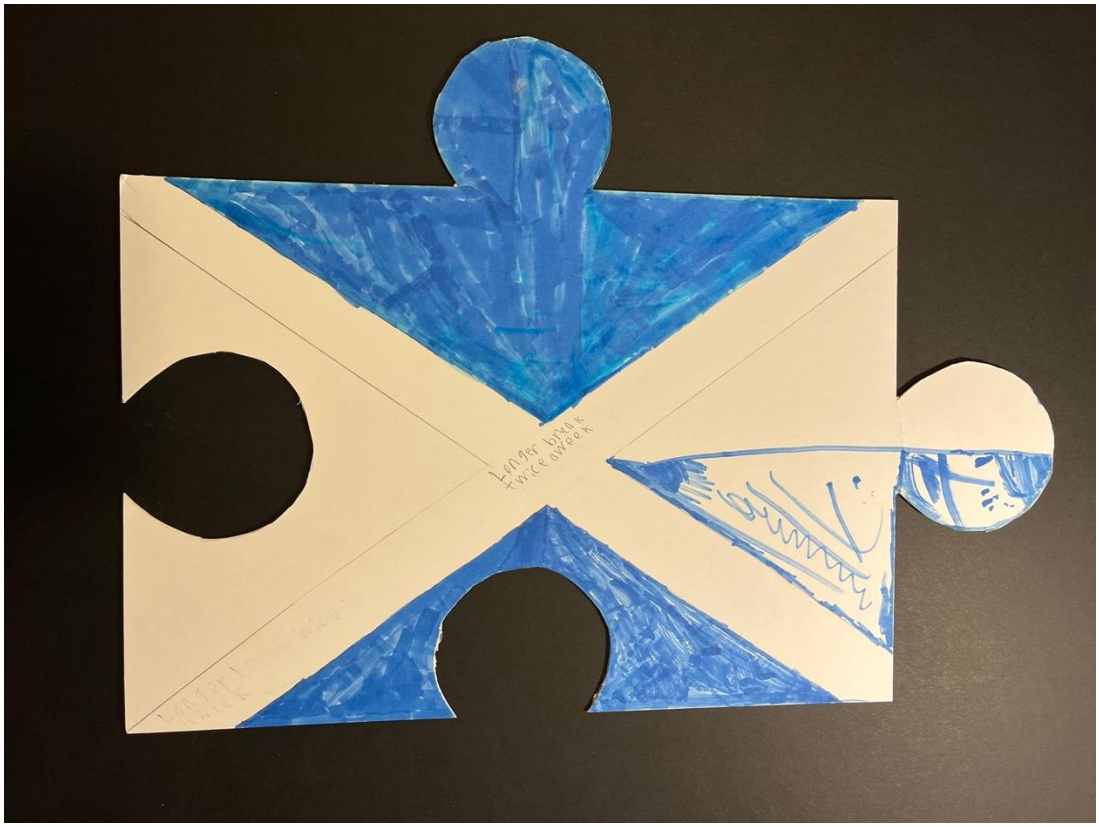
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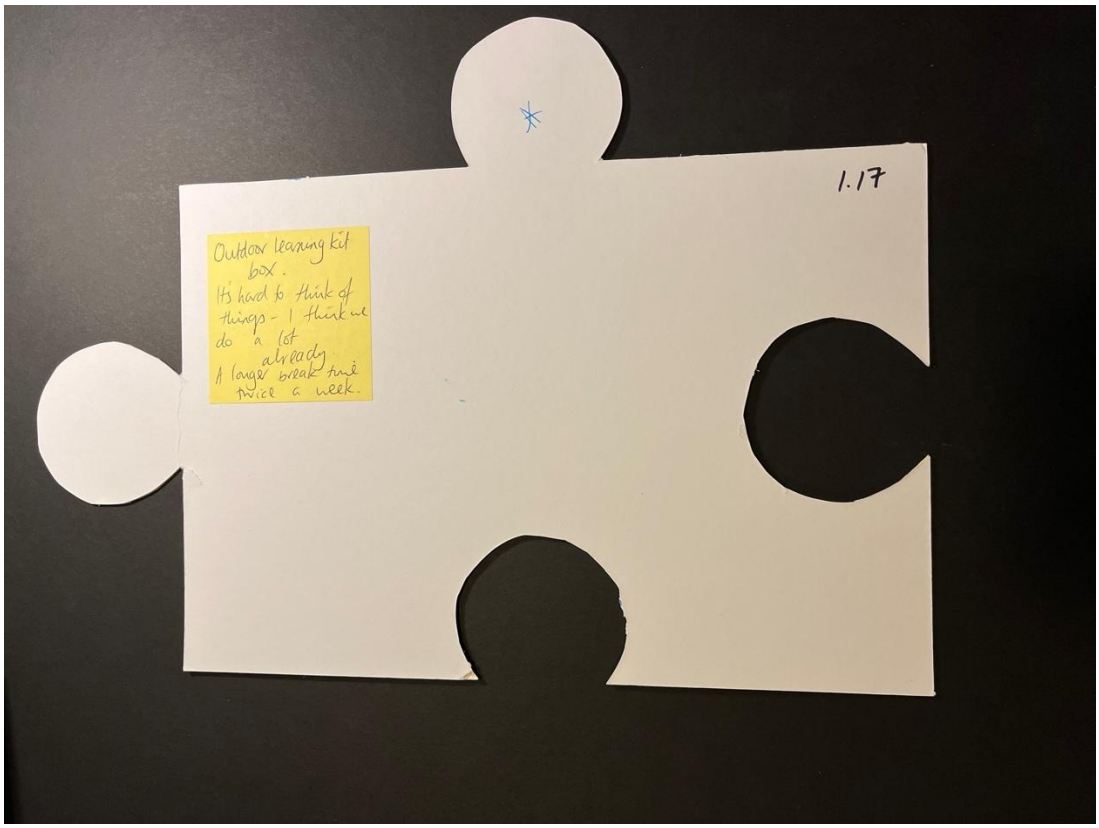
Jigsaw piece 1.16A



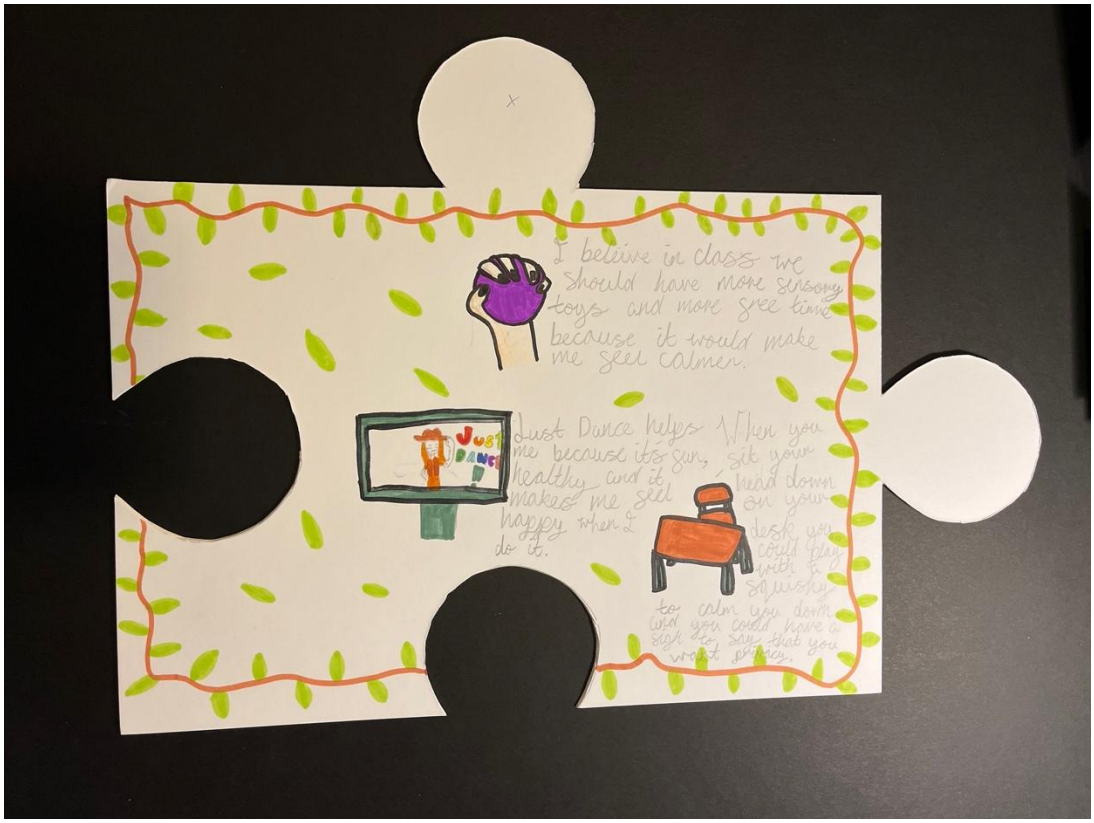
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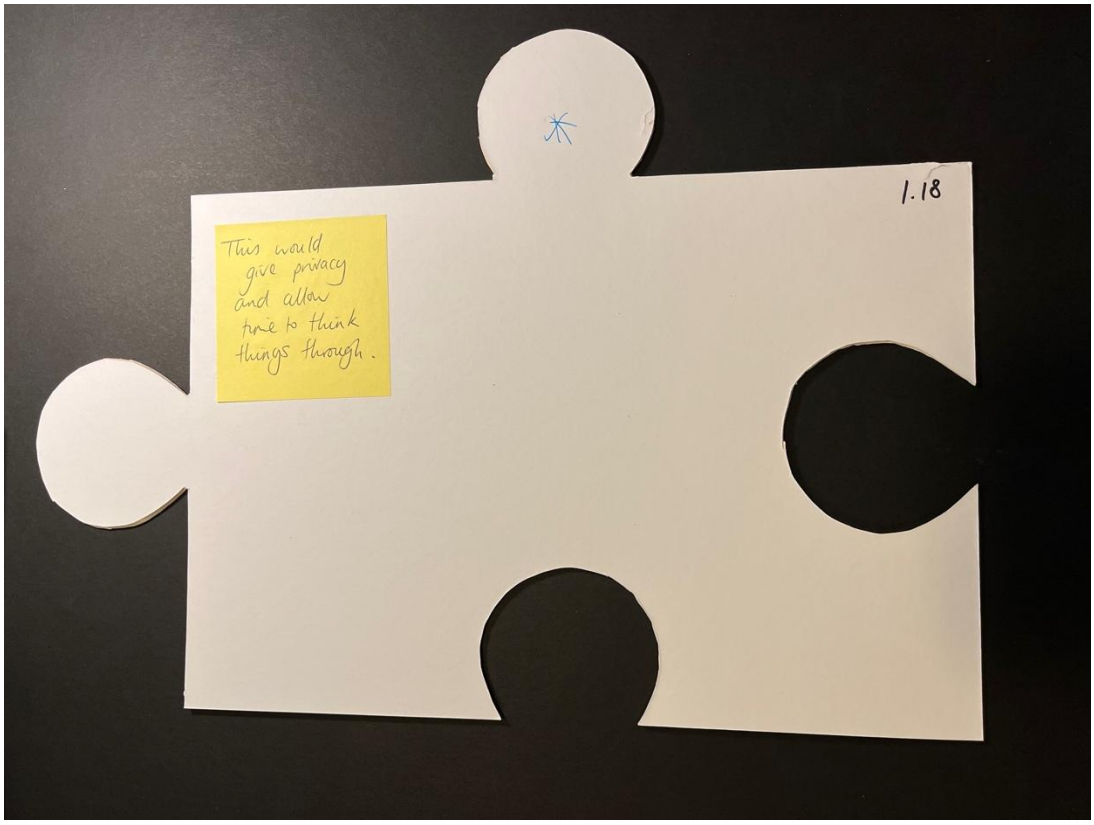
Jigsaw piece 1.17A



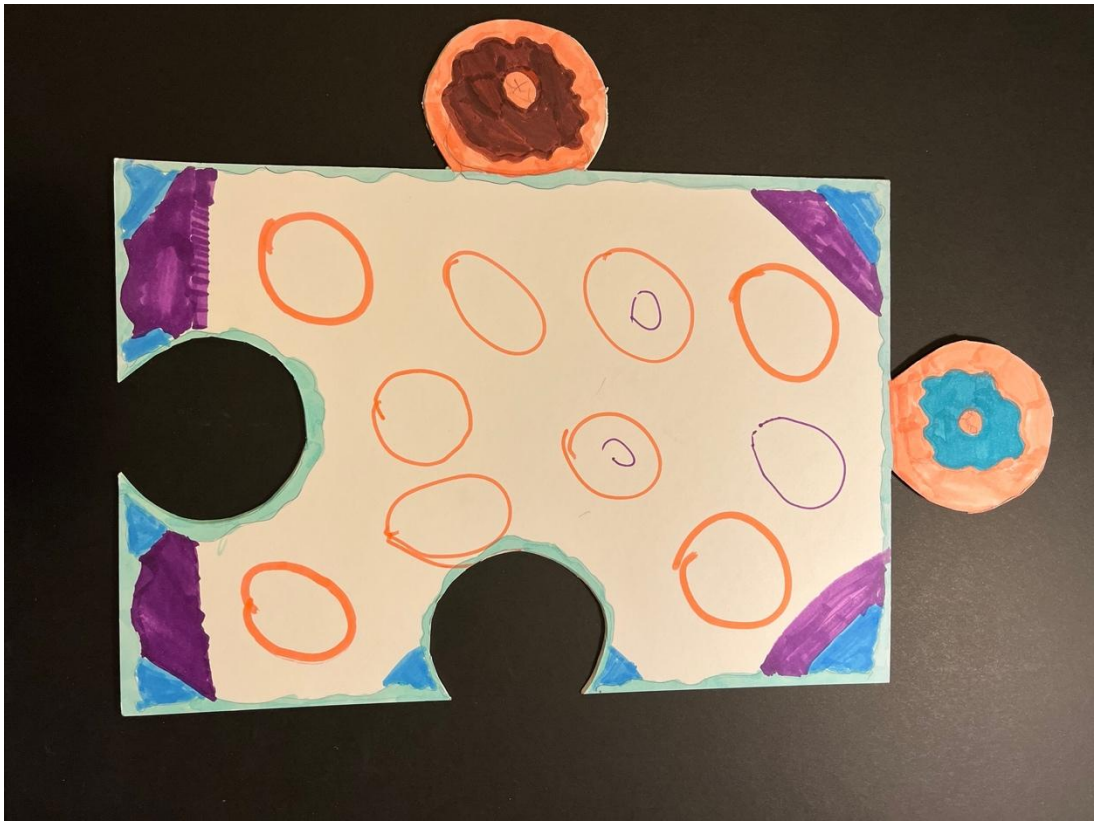
Jigsaw piece 1.17B



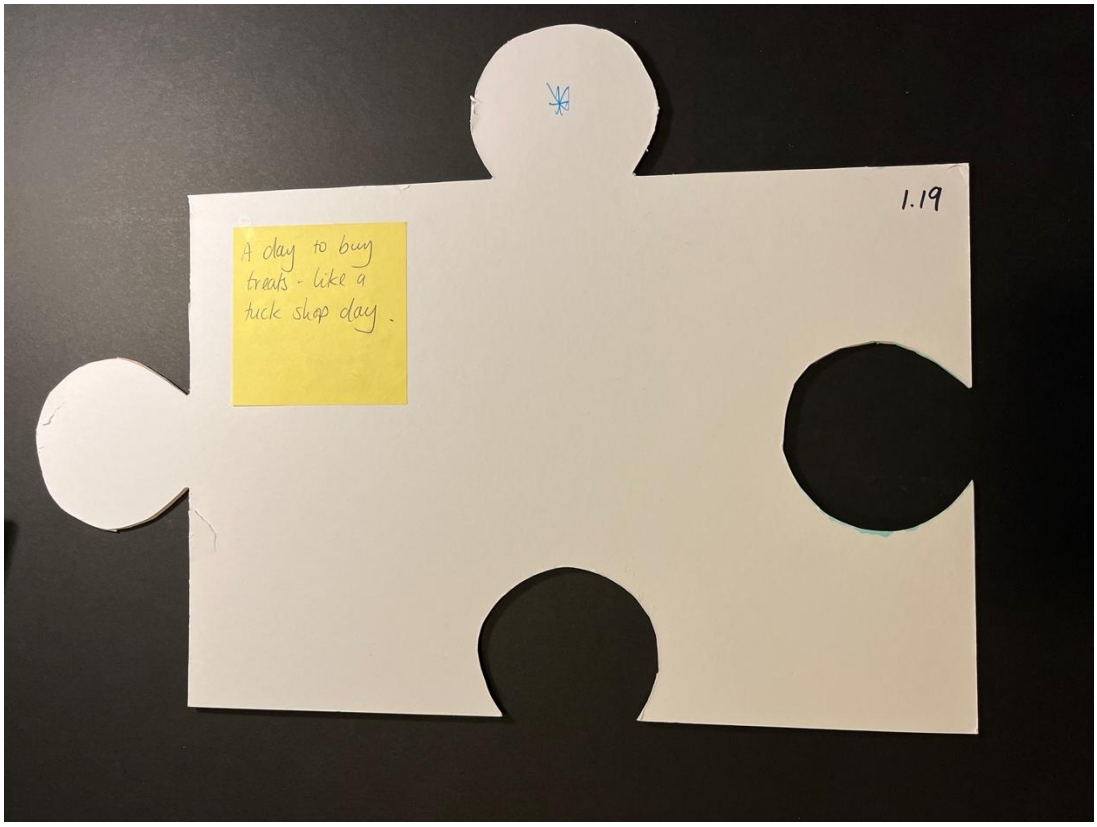
Jigsaw piece 1.18A



Jigsaw piece 1.18B

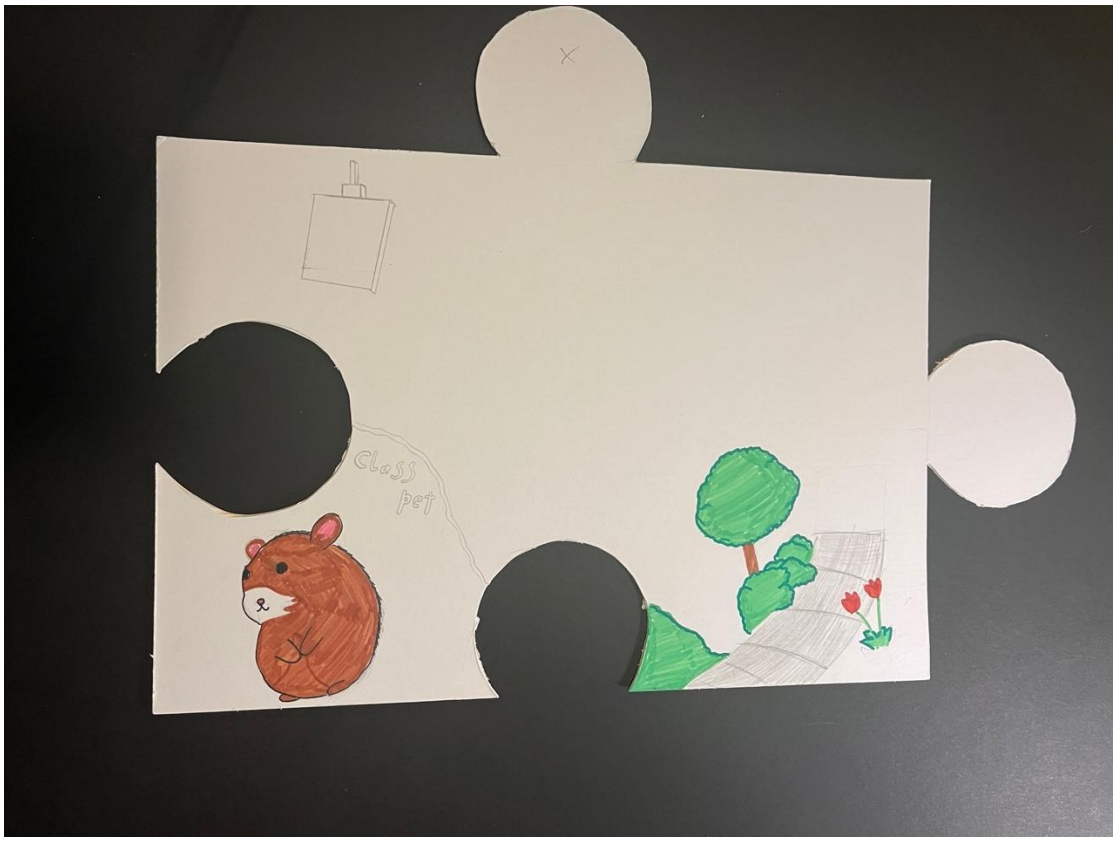


Jigsaw piece 1.19A

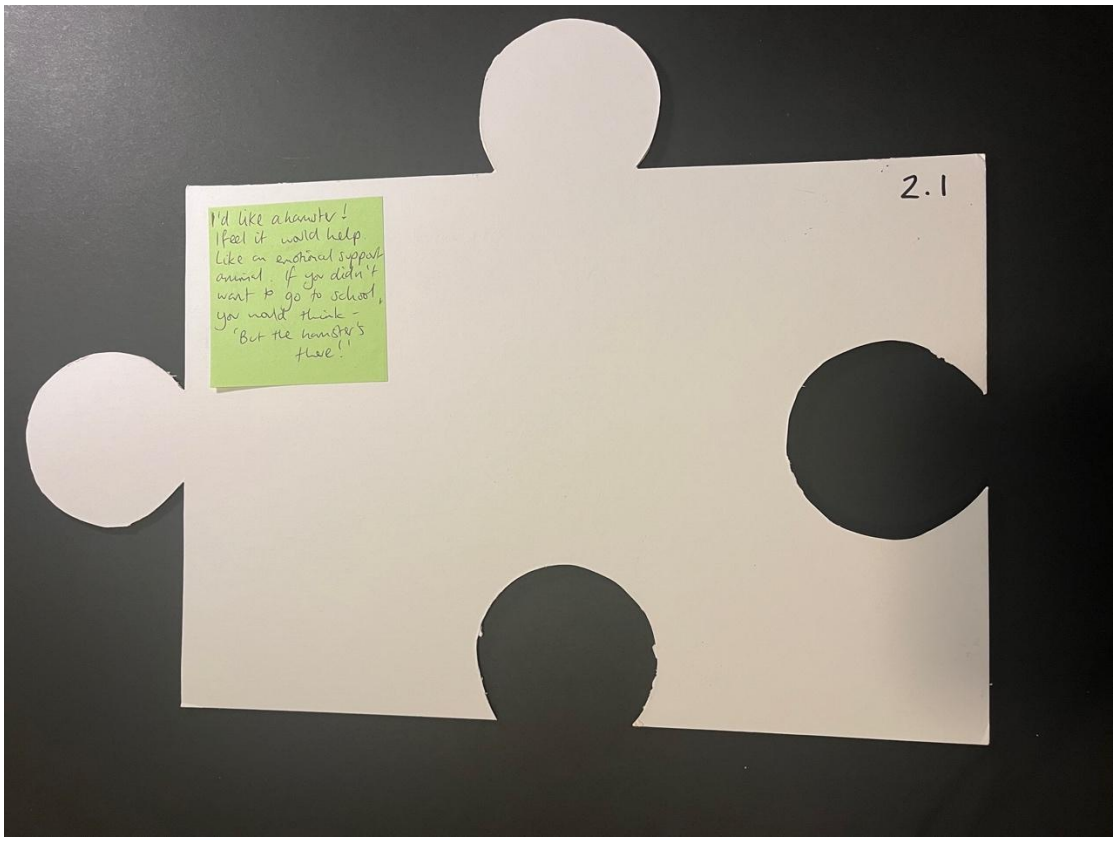


Jigsaw piece 1.19B

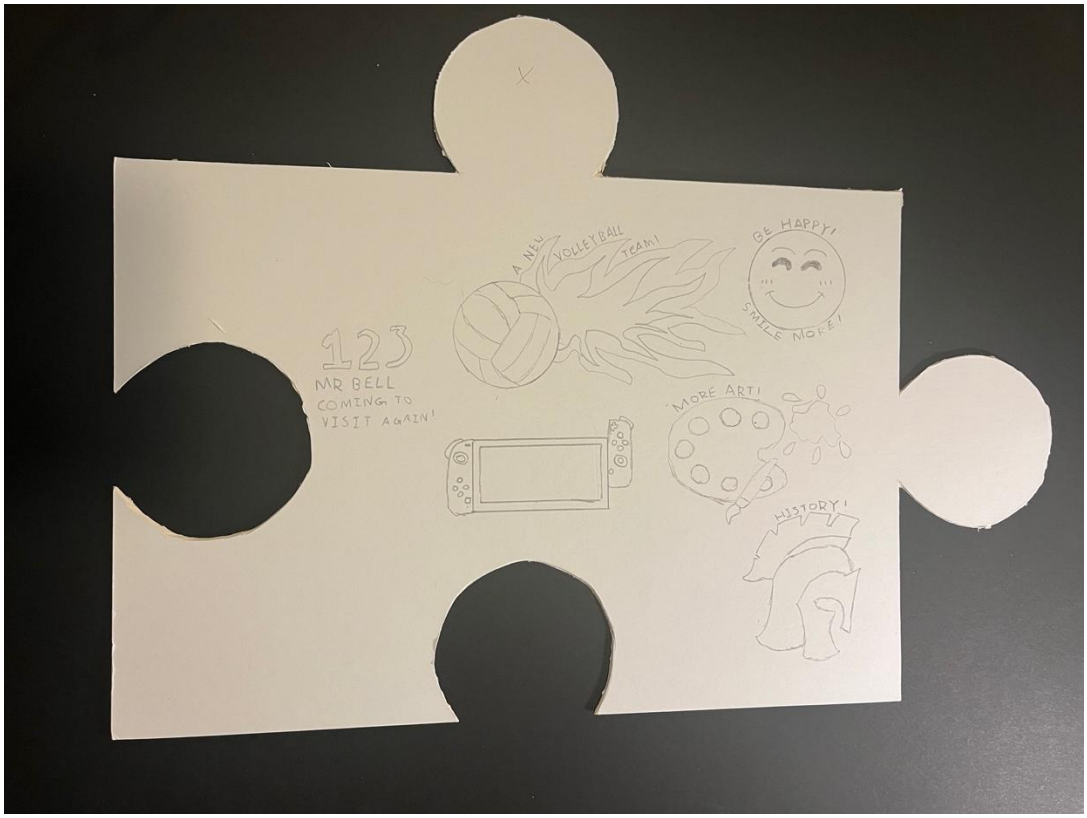
School 2.



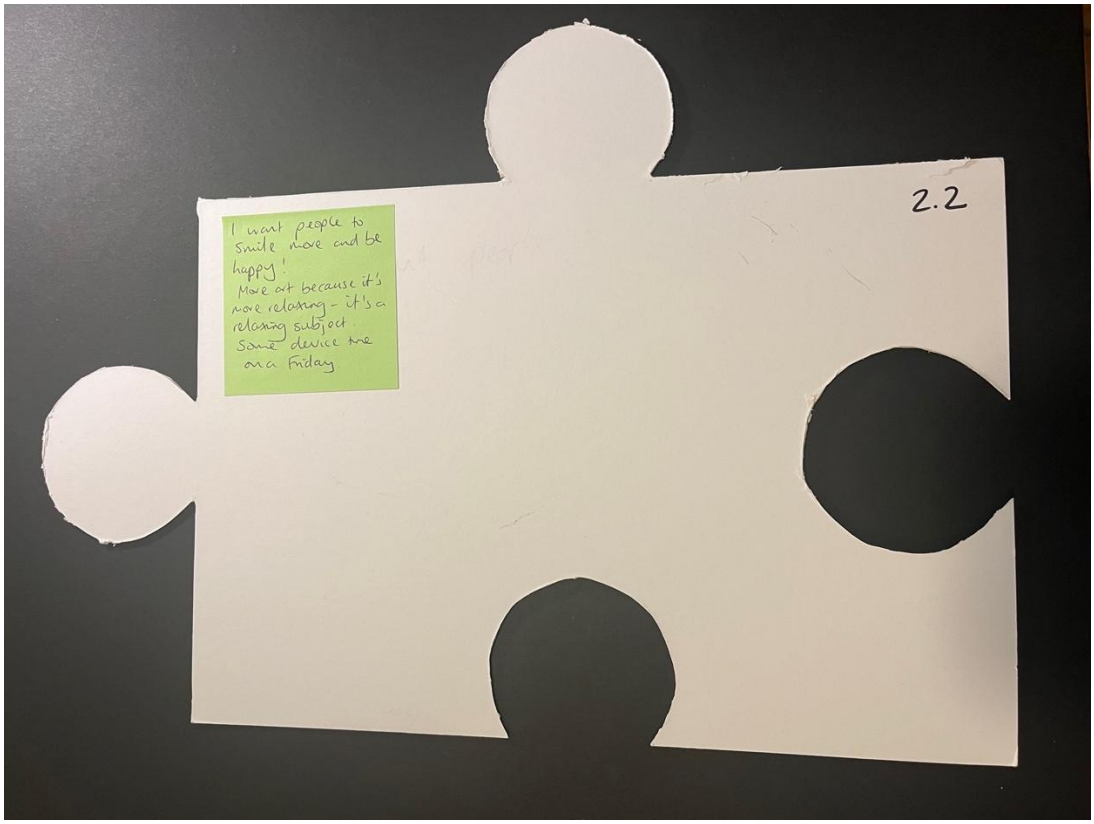
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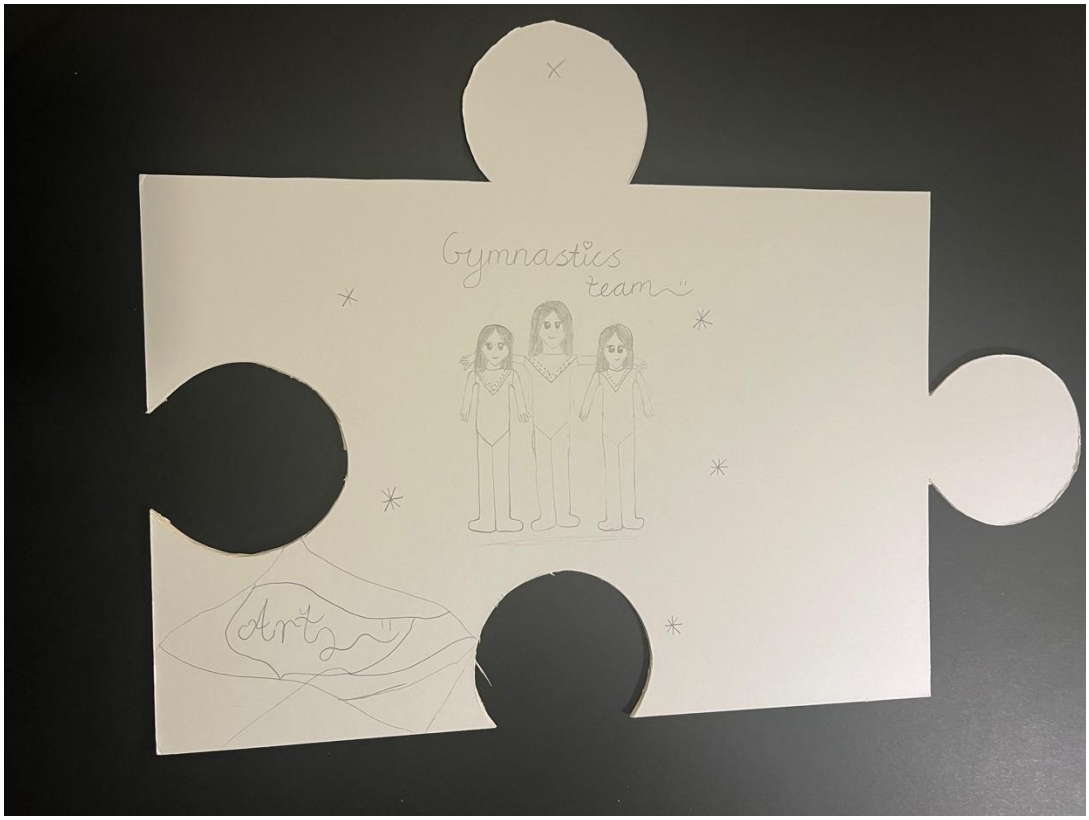
Jigsaw piece 2.1B



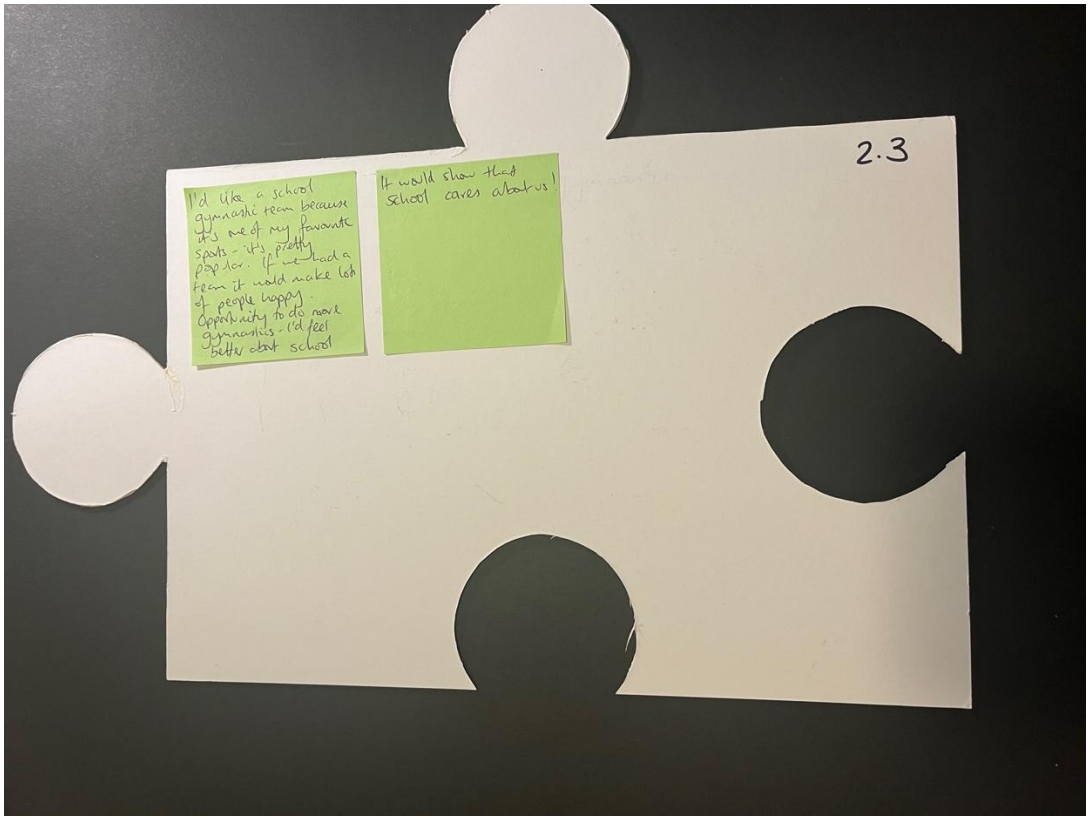
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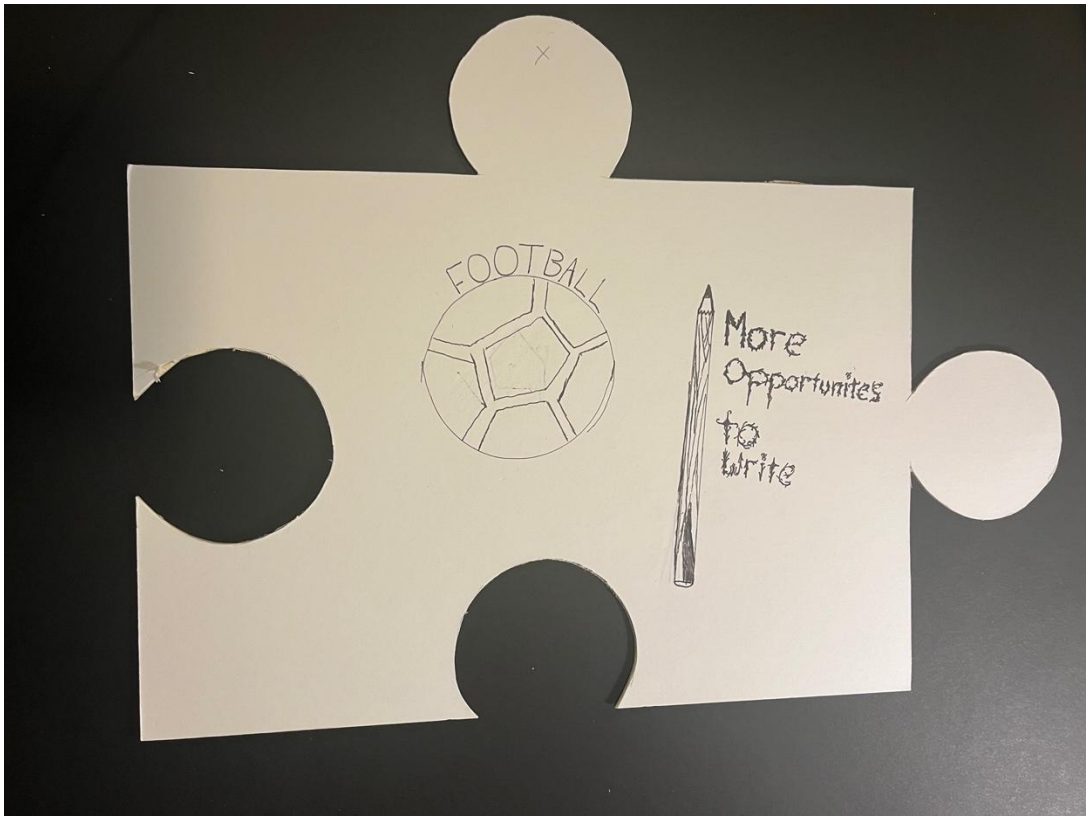
Jigsaw piece 2.2B



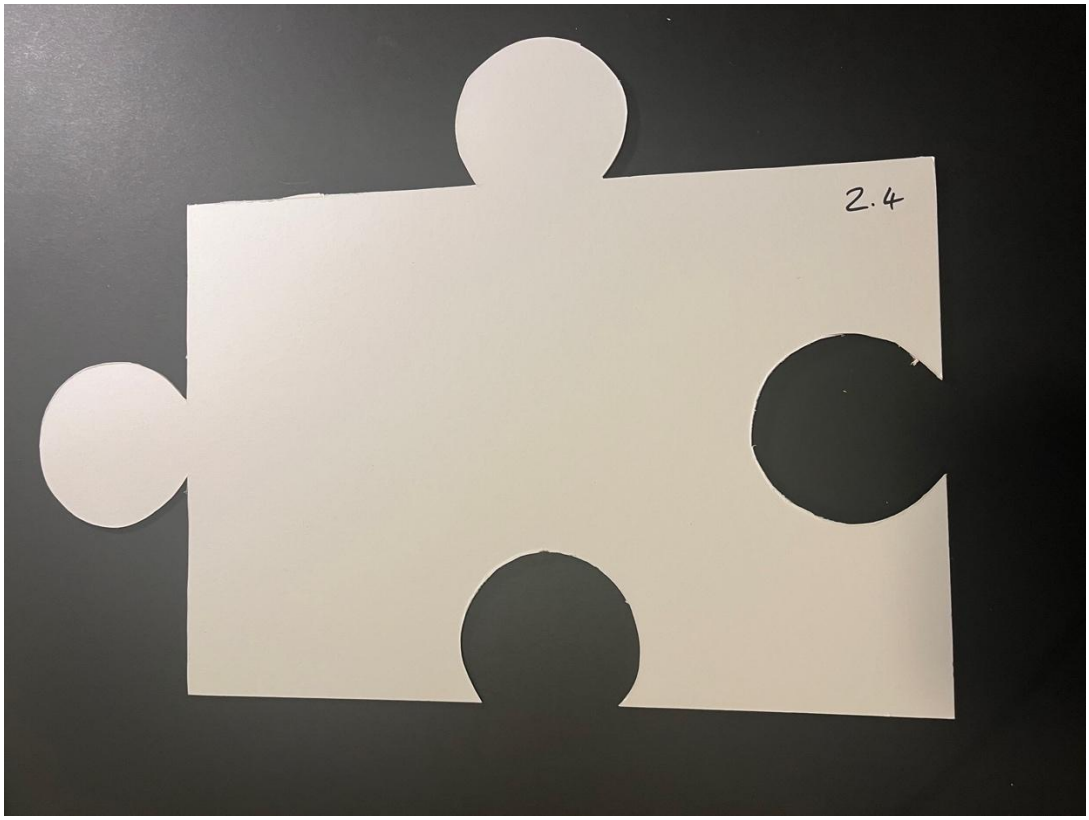
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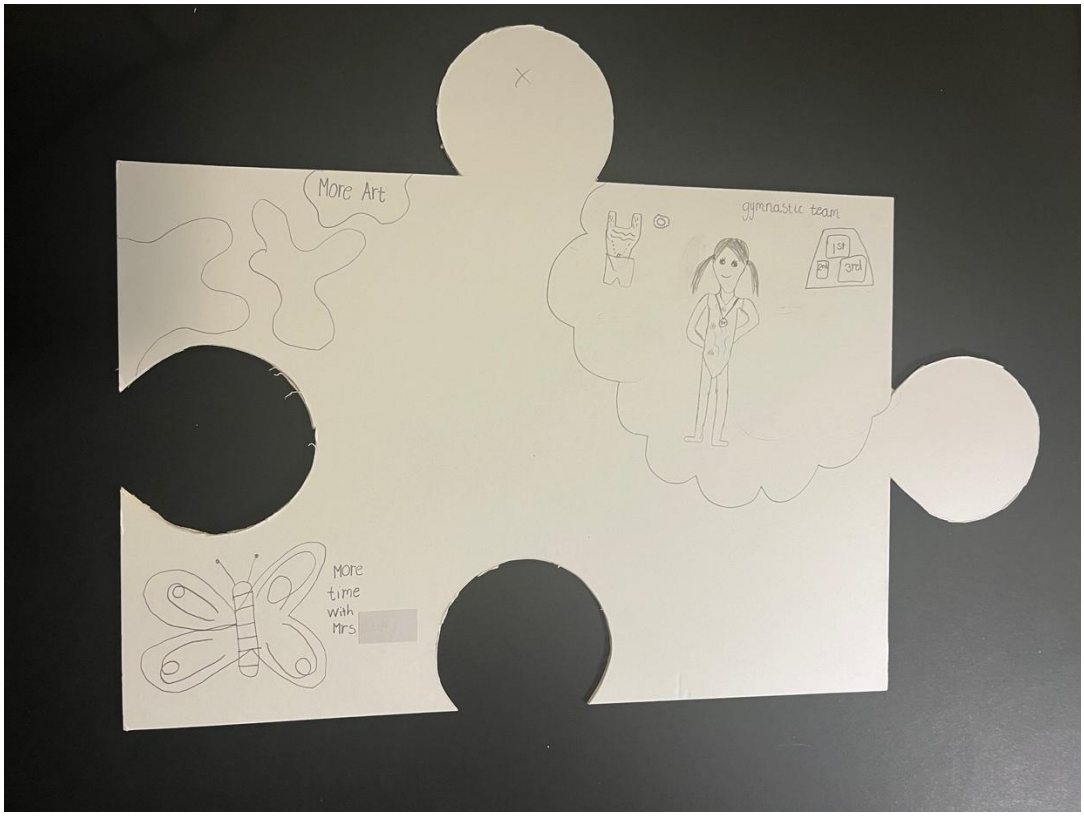
Jigsaw piece 2.3B



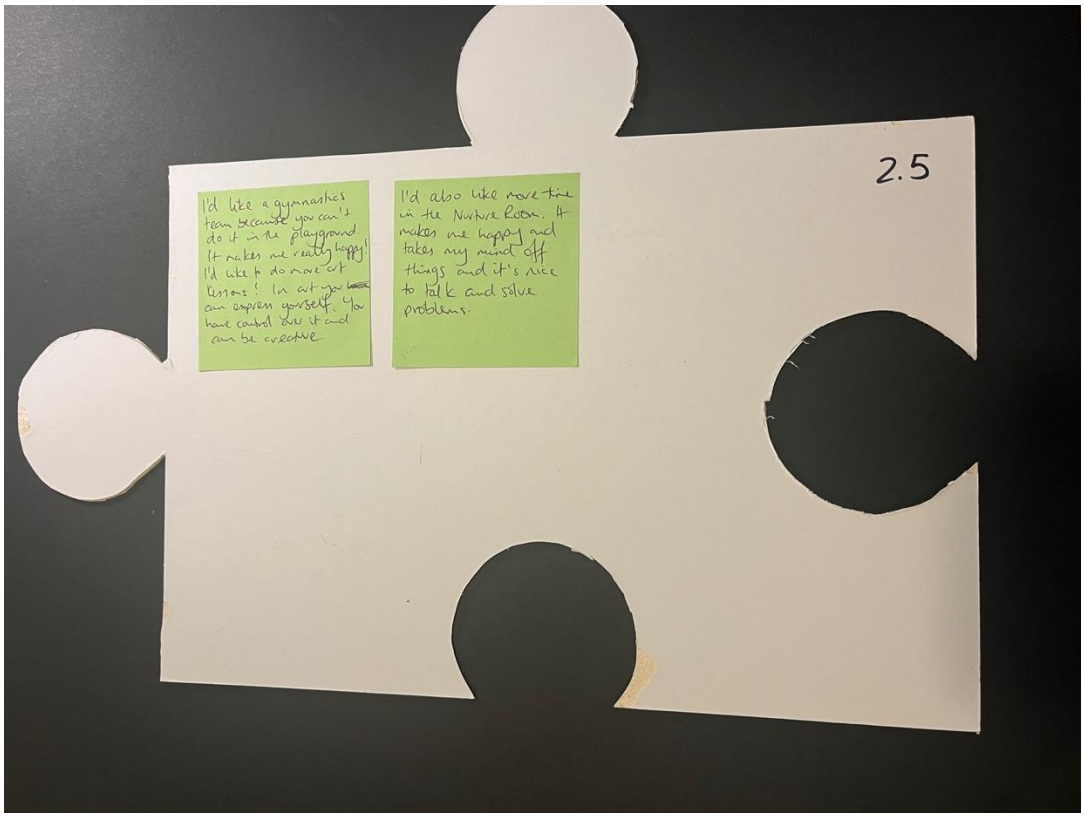
Jigsaw piece 2.4A



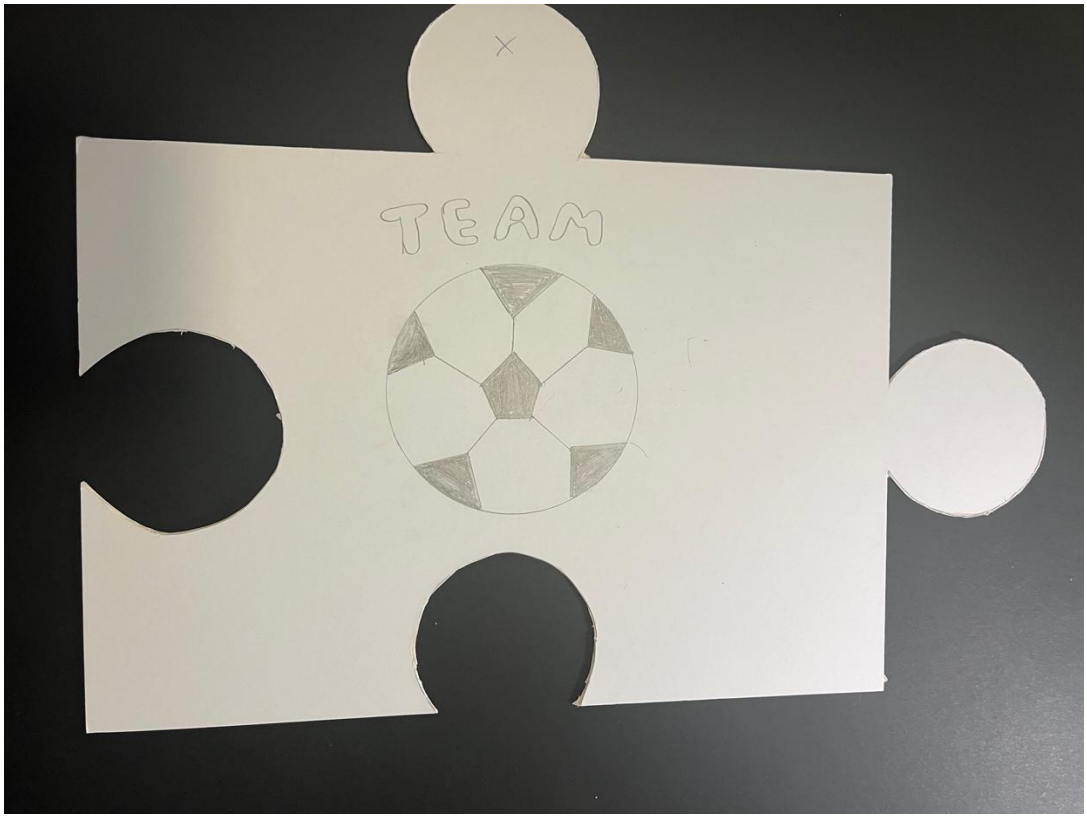
Jigsaw piece 2.4B



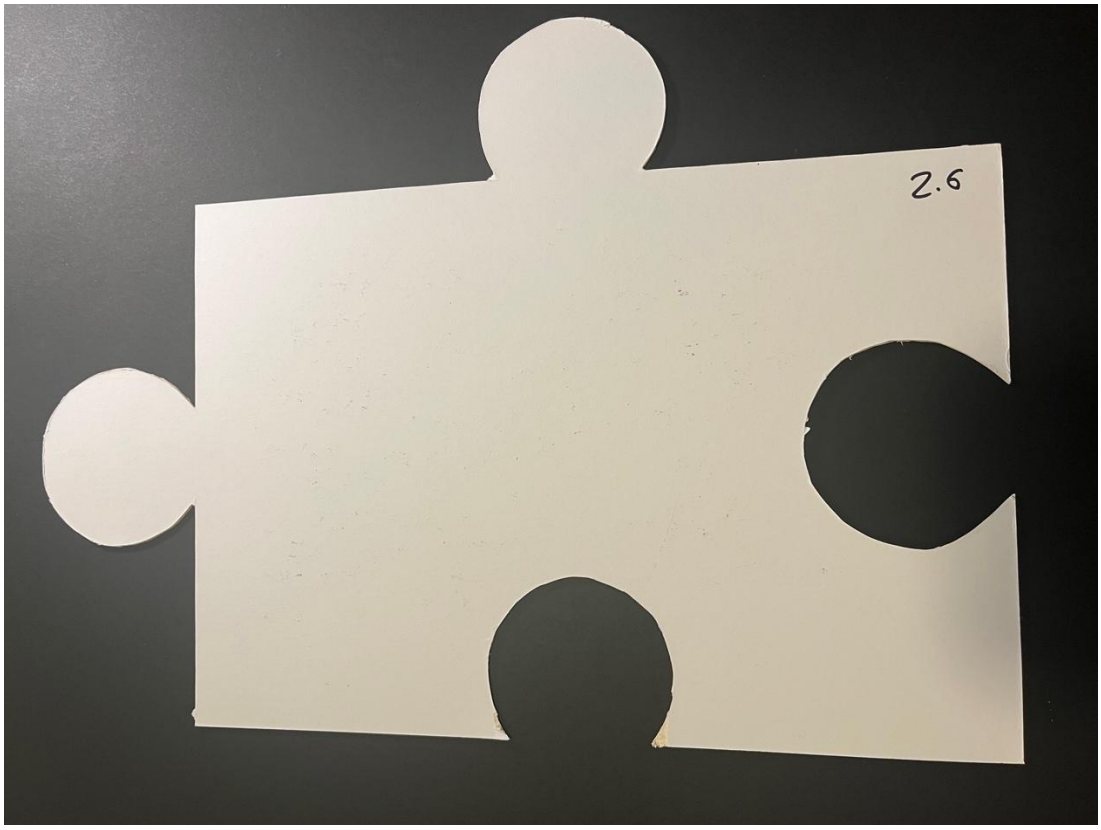
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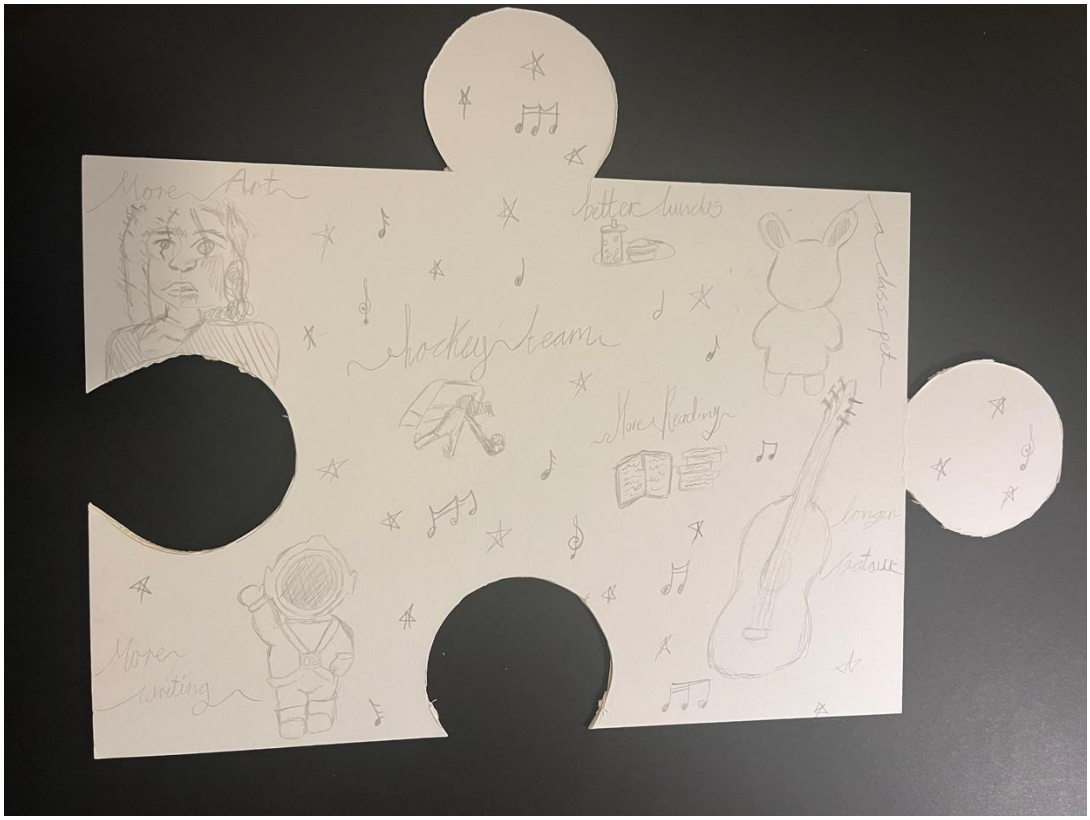
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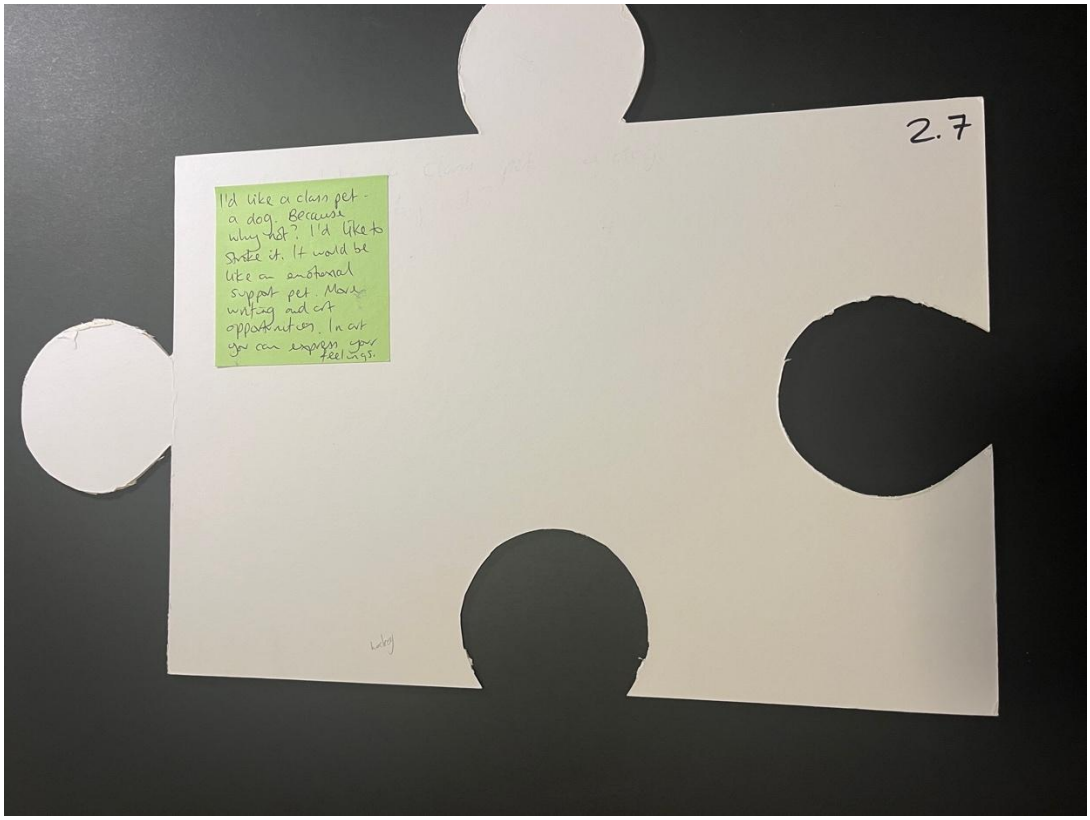
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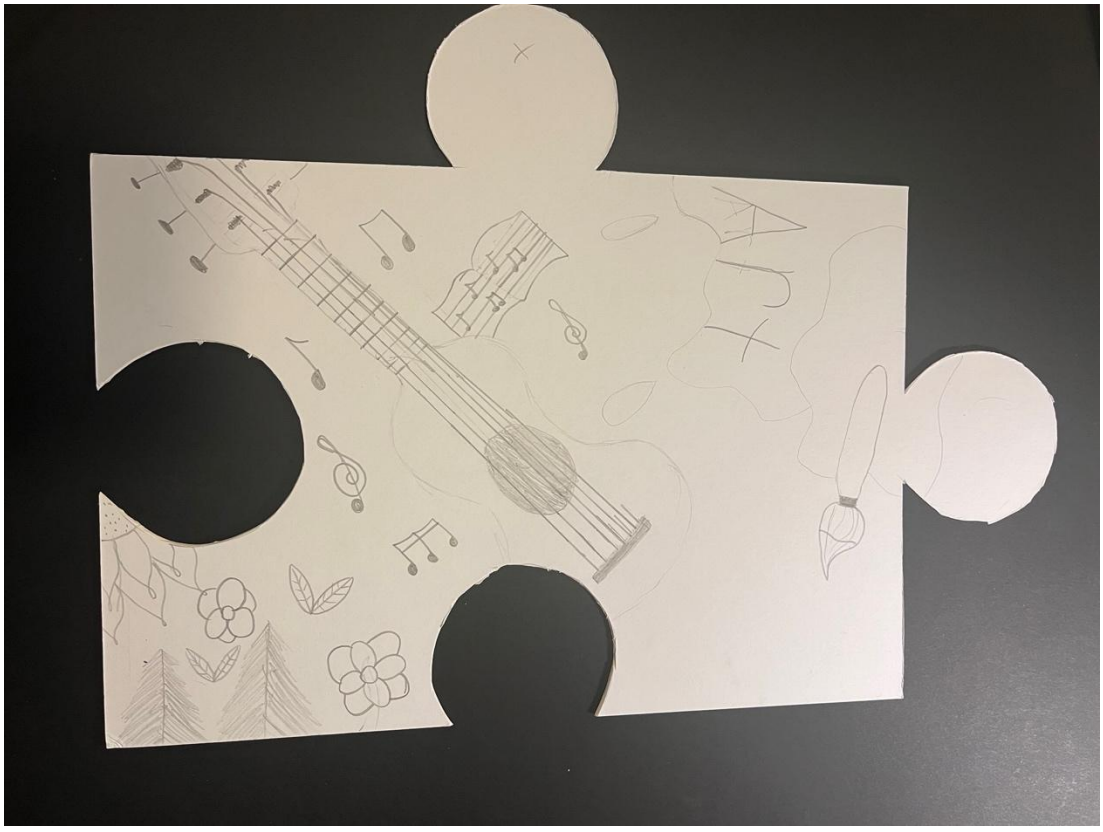
Jigsaw piece 2.6B



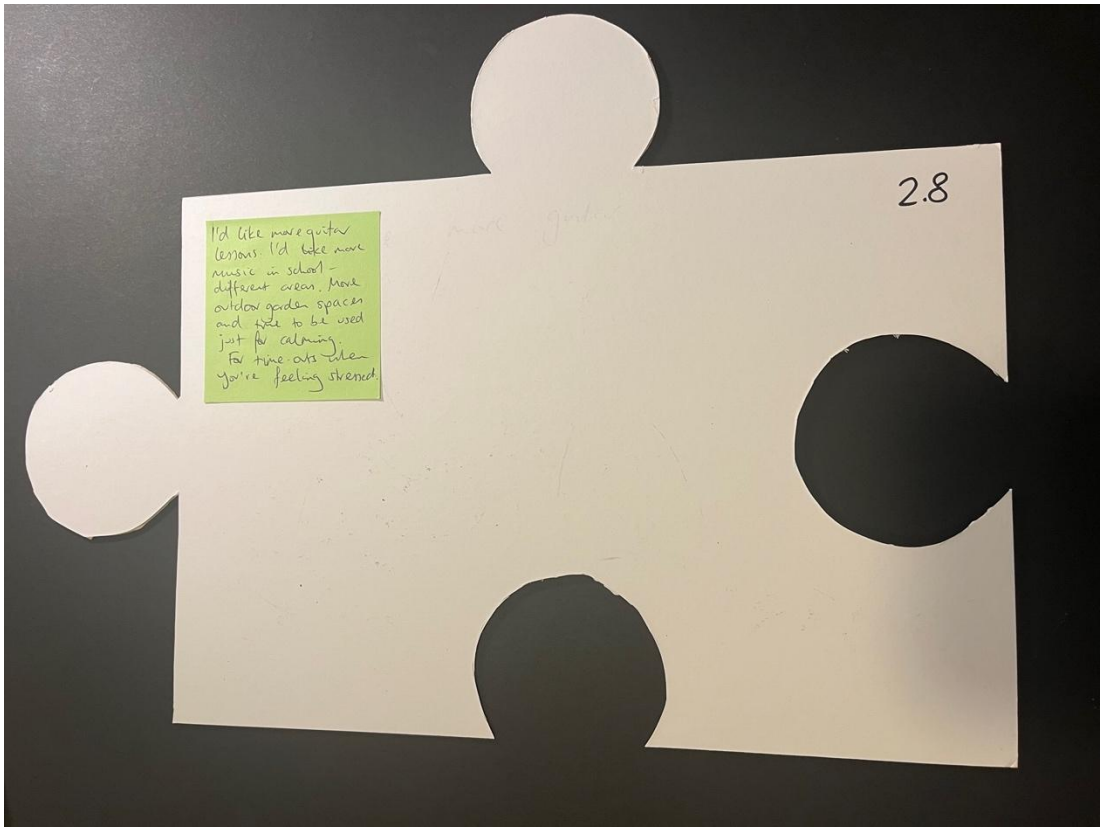
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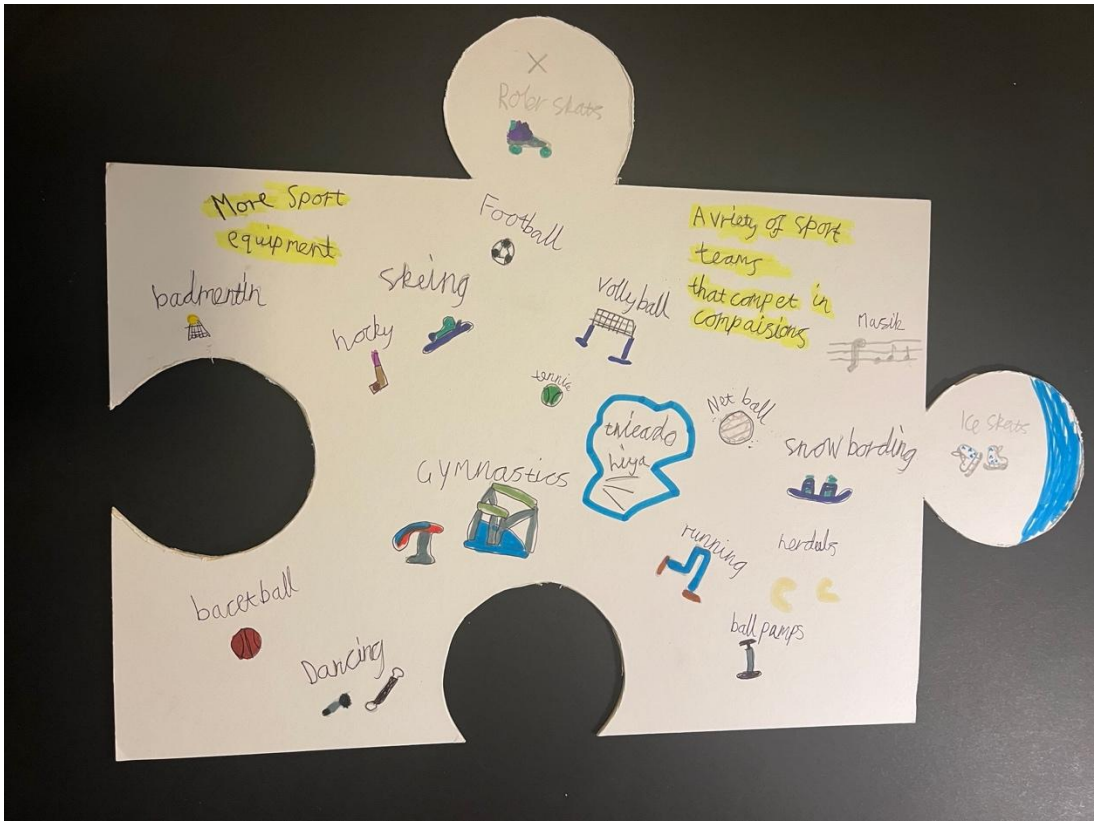
Jigsaw piece 2.7B



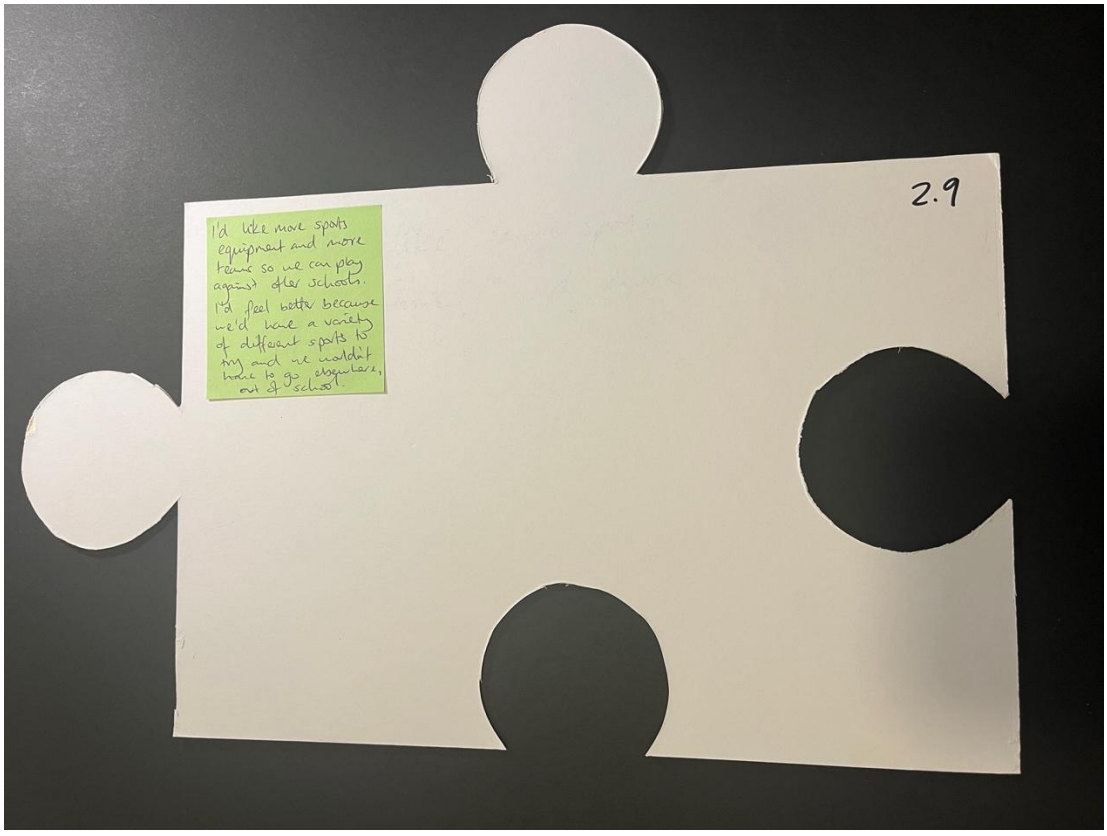
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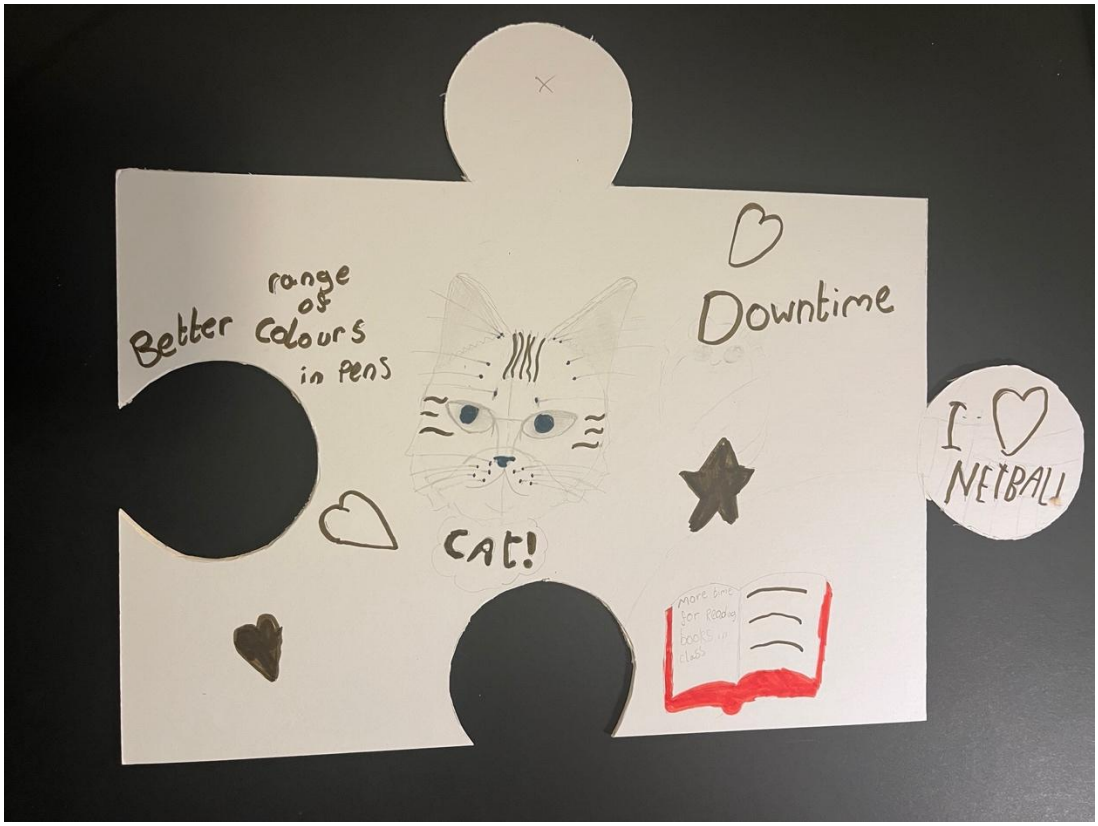
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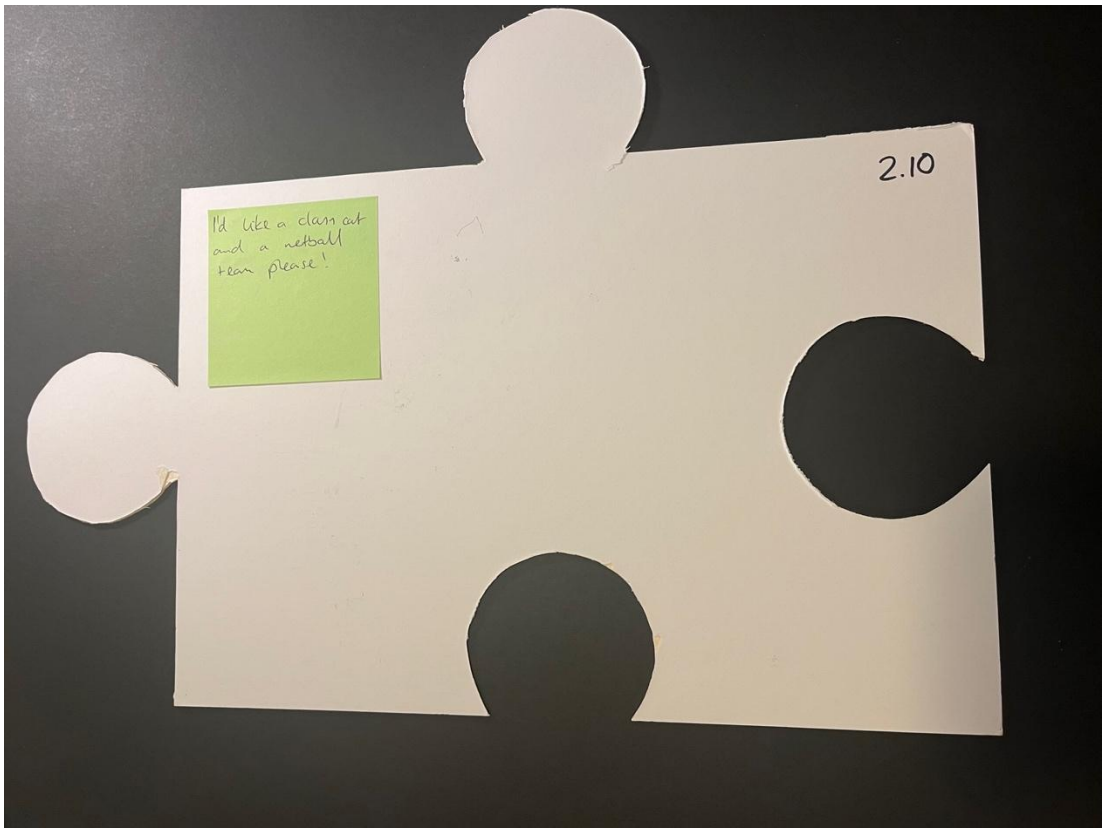
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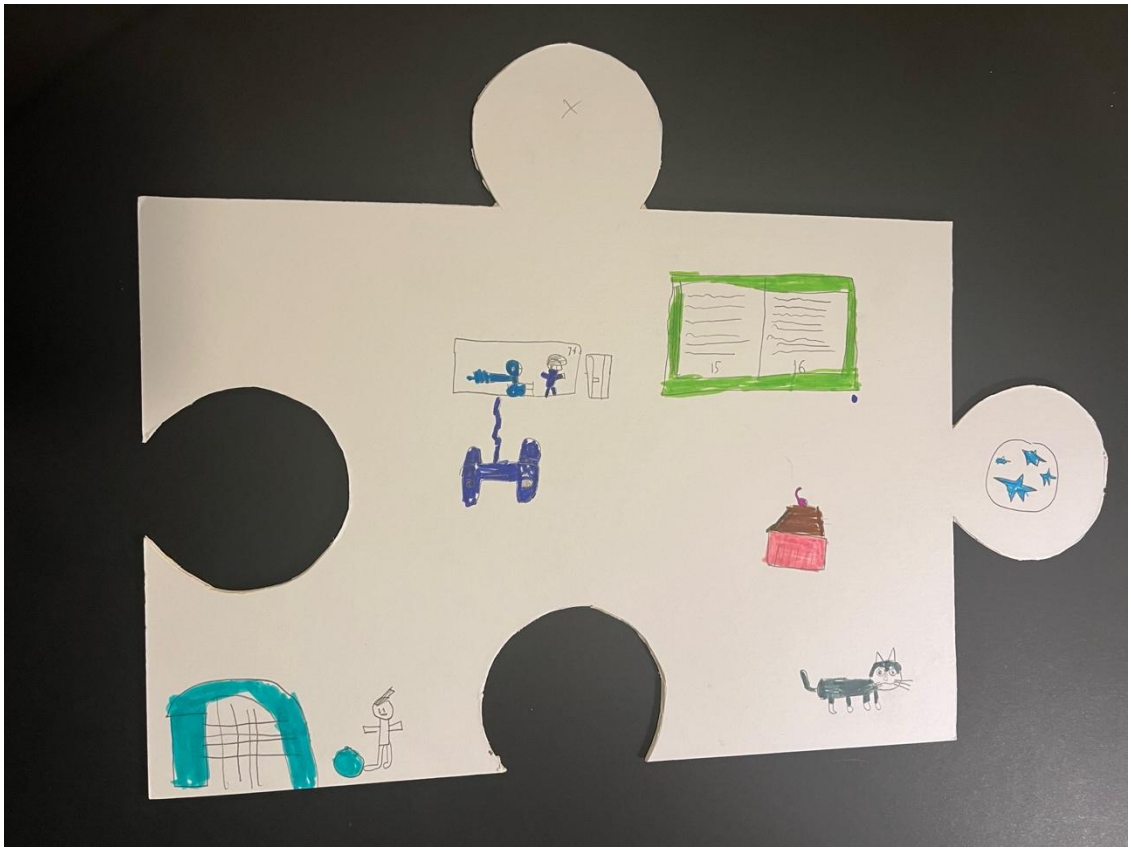
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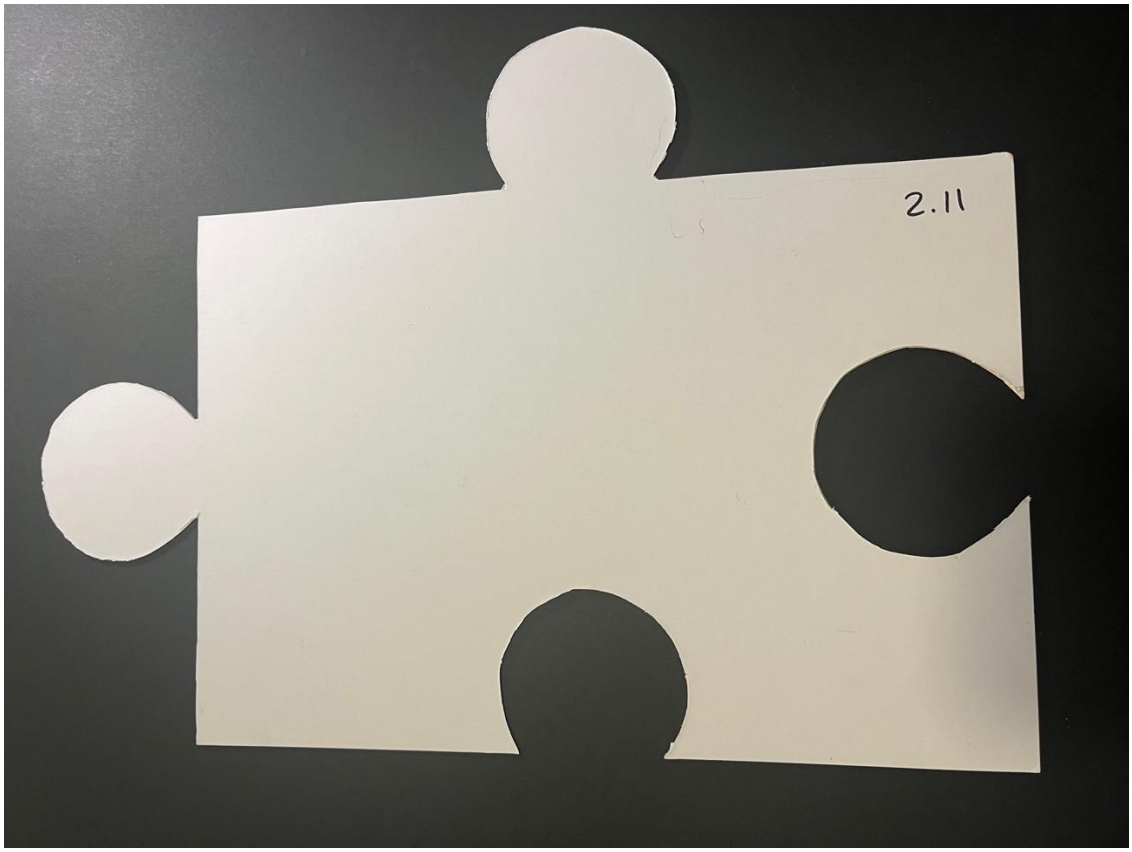
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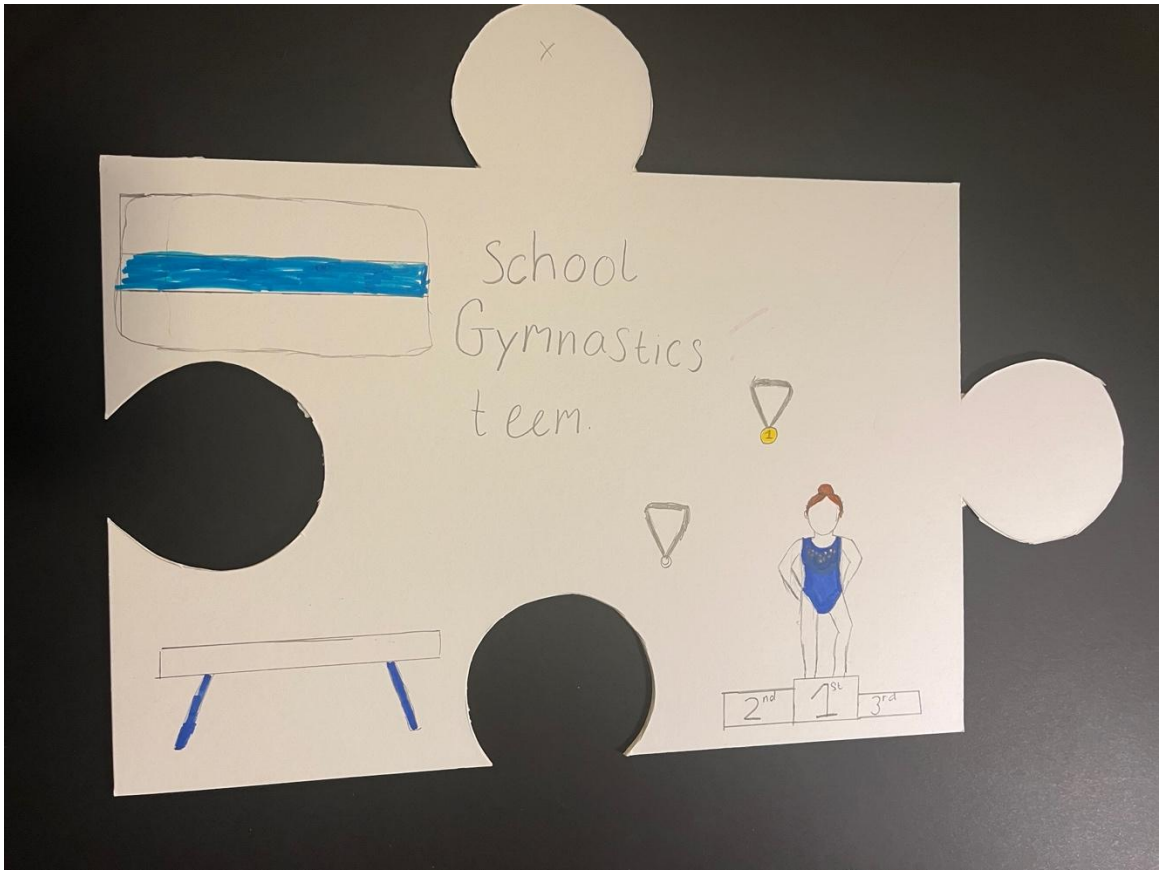
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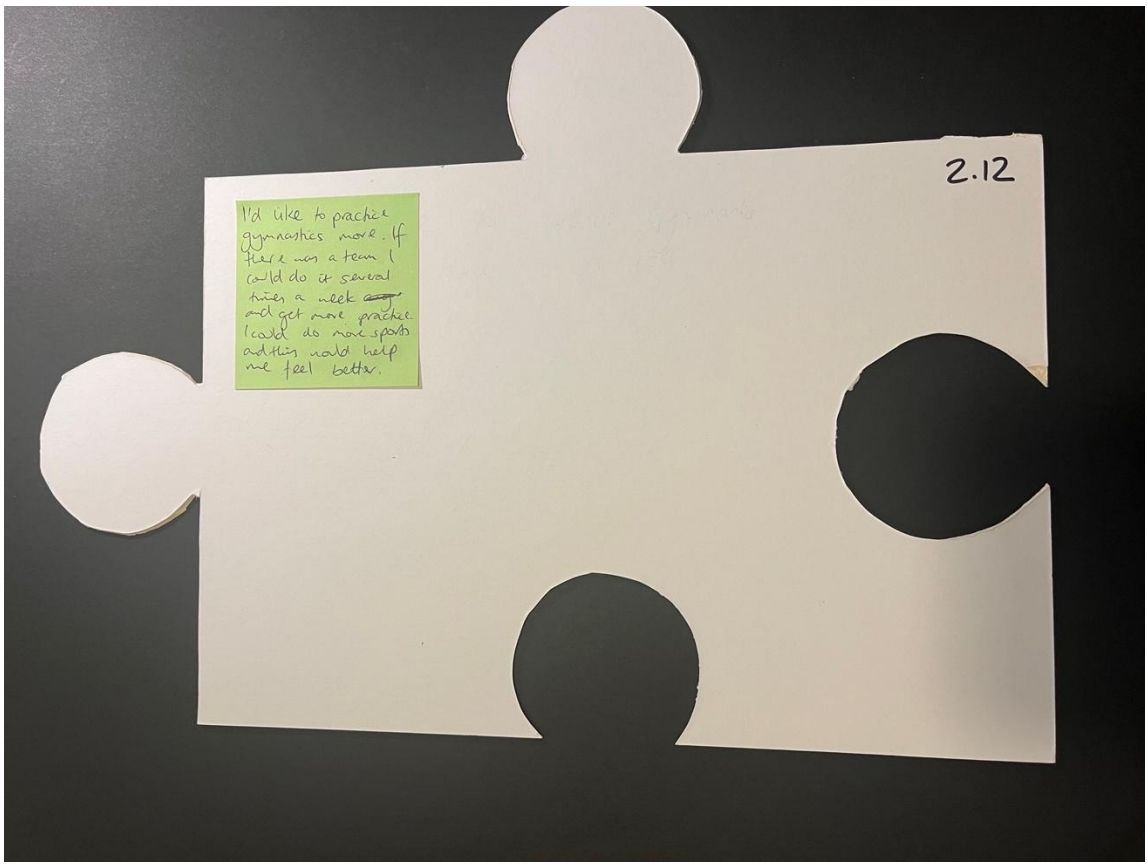
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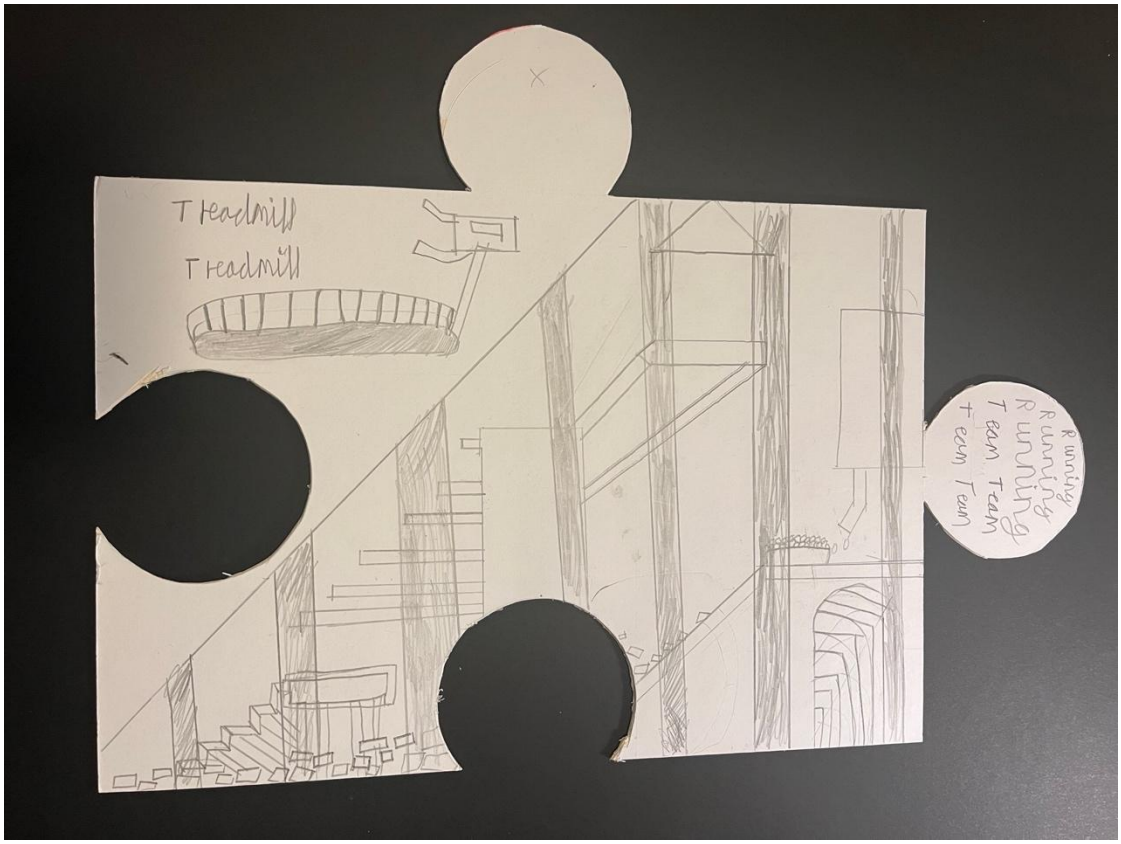
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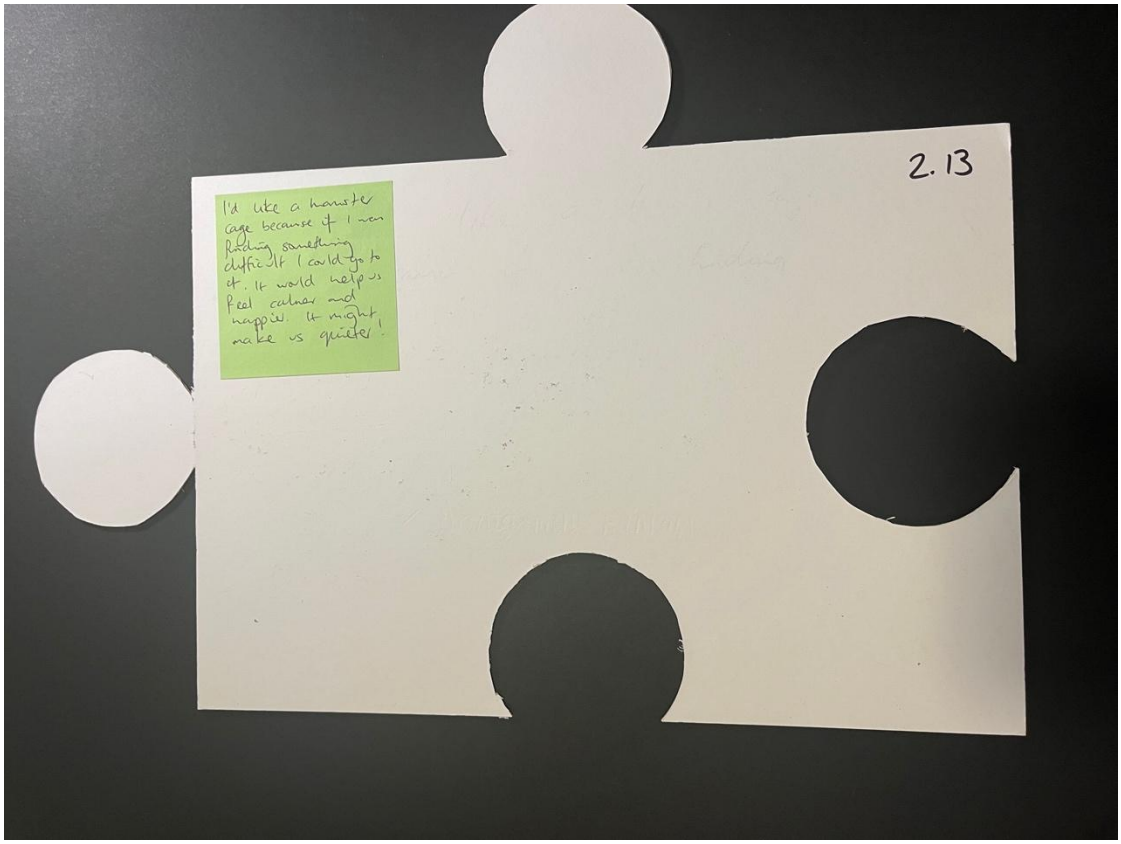
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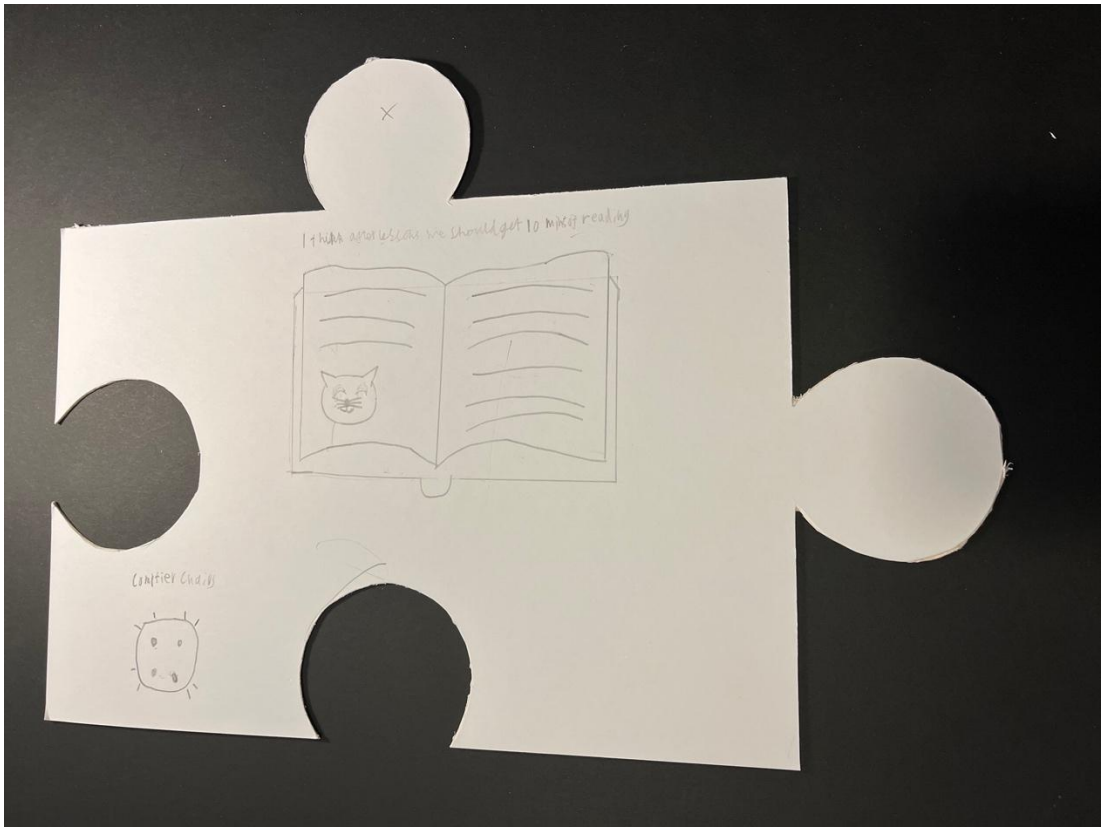
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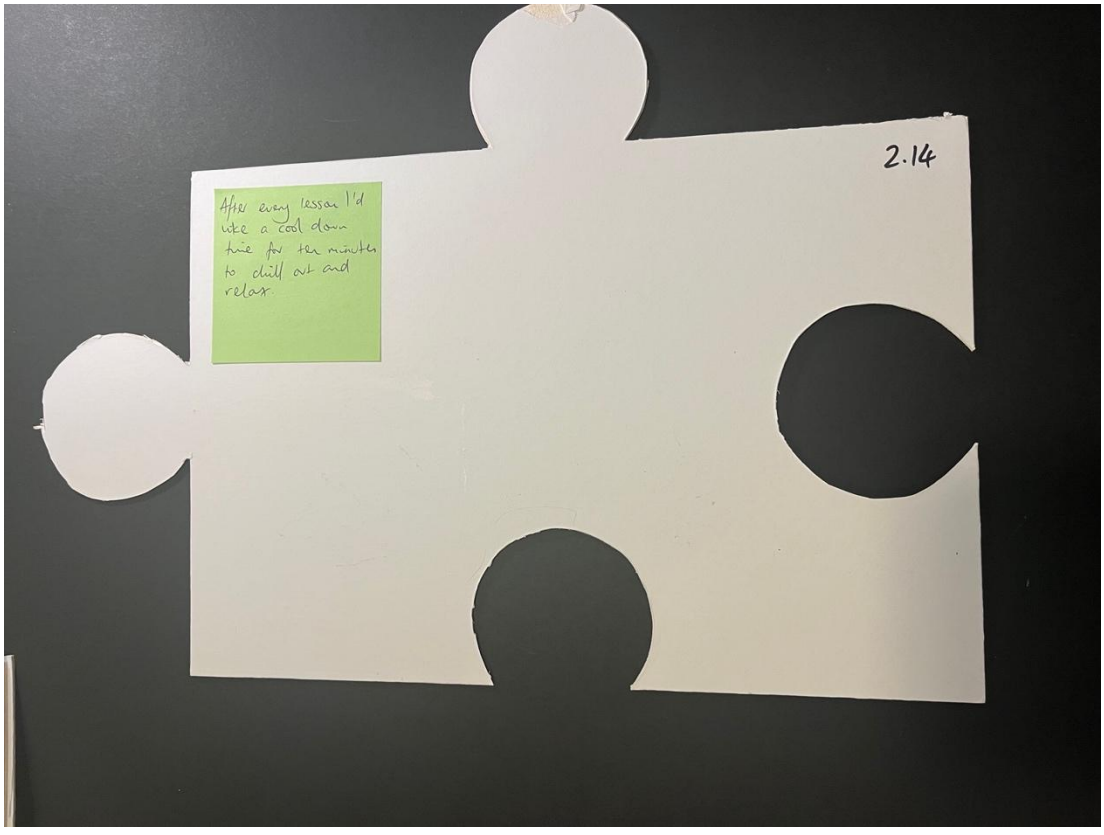
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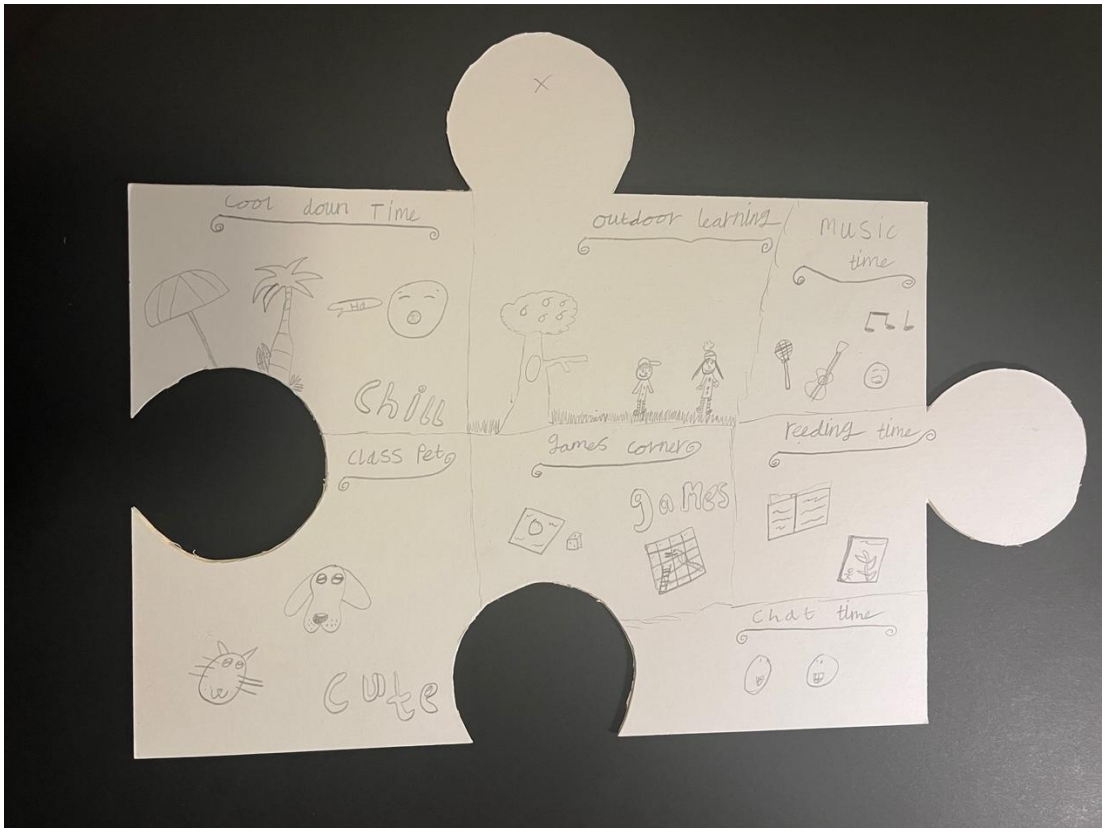
Jigsaw piece 2.13B



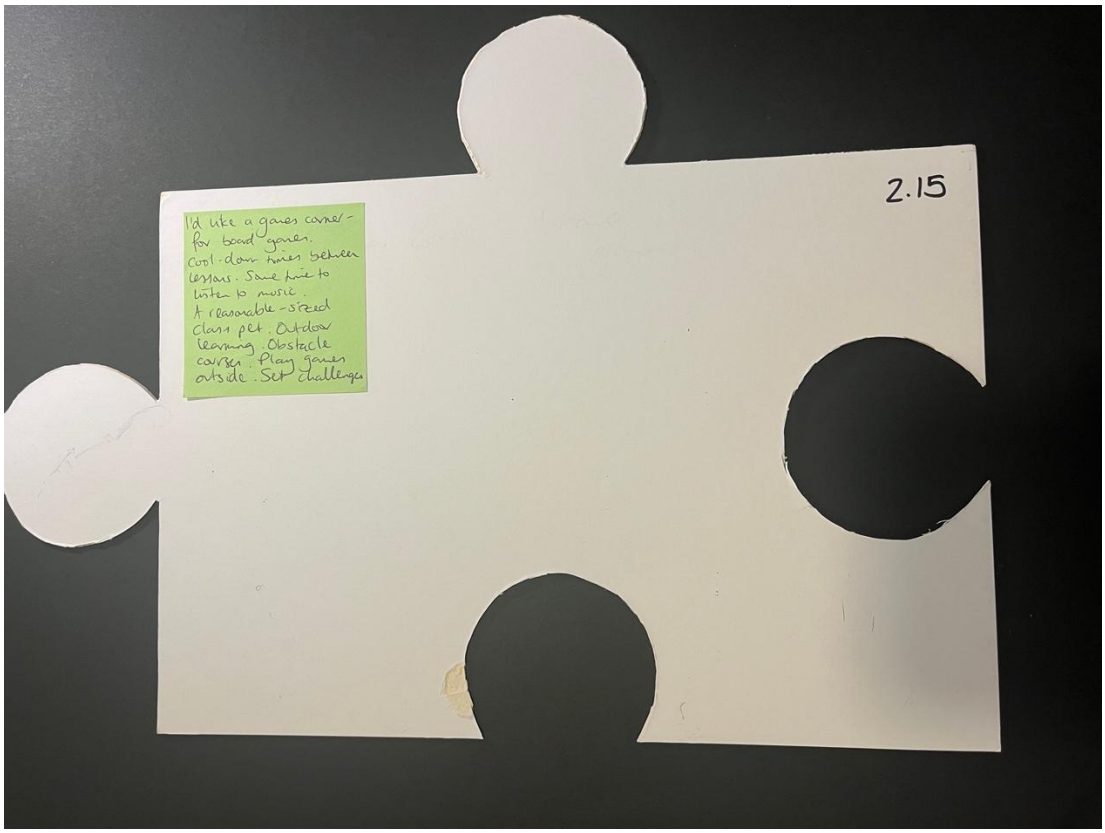
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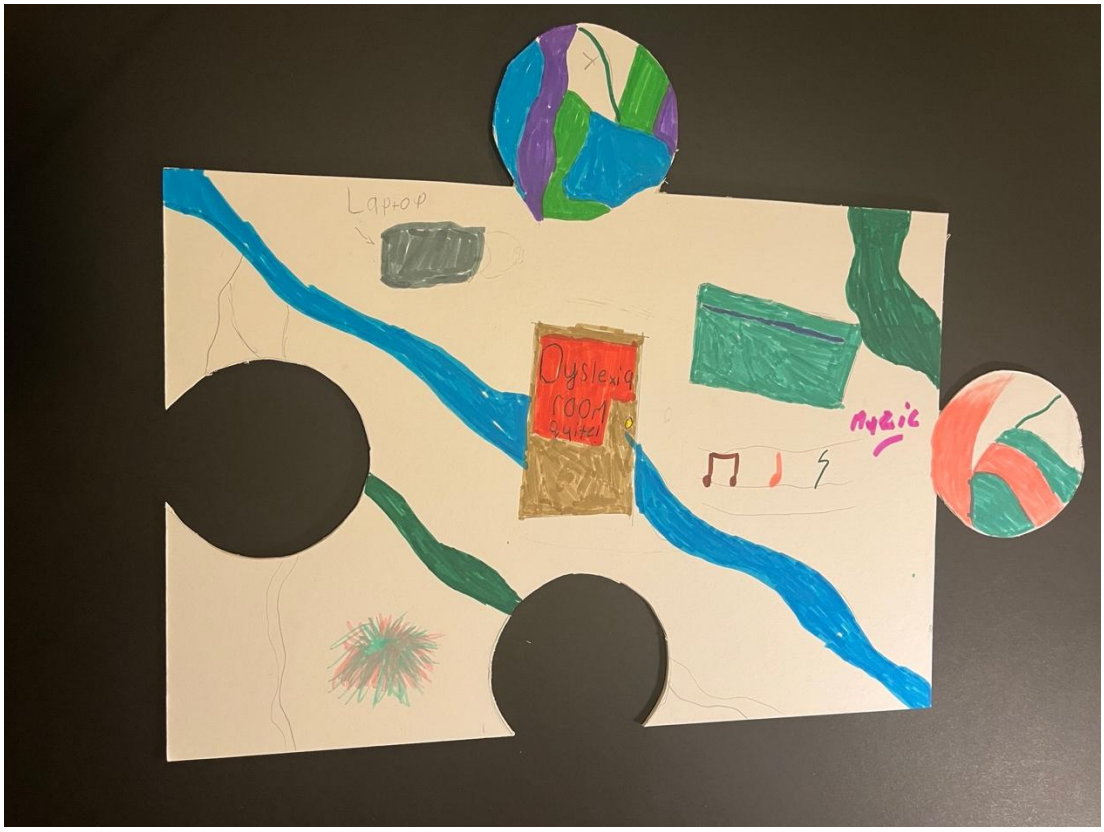
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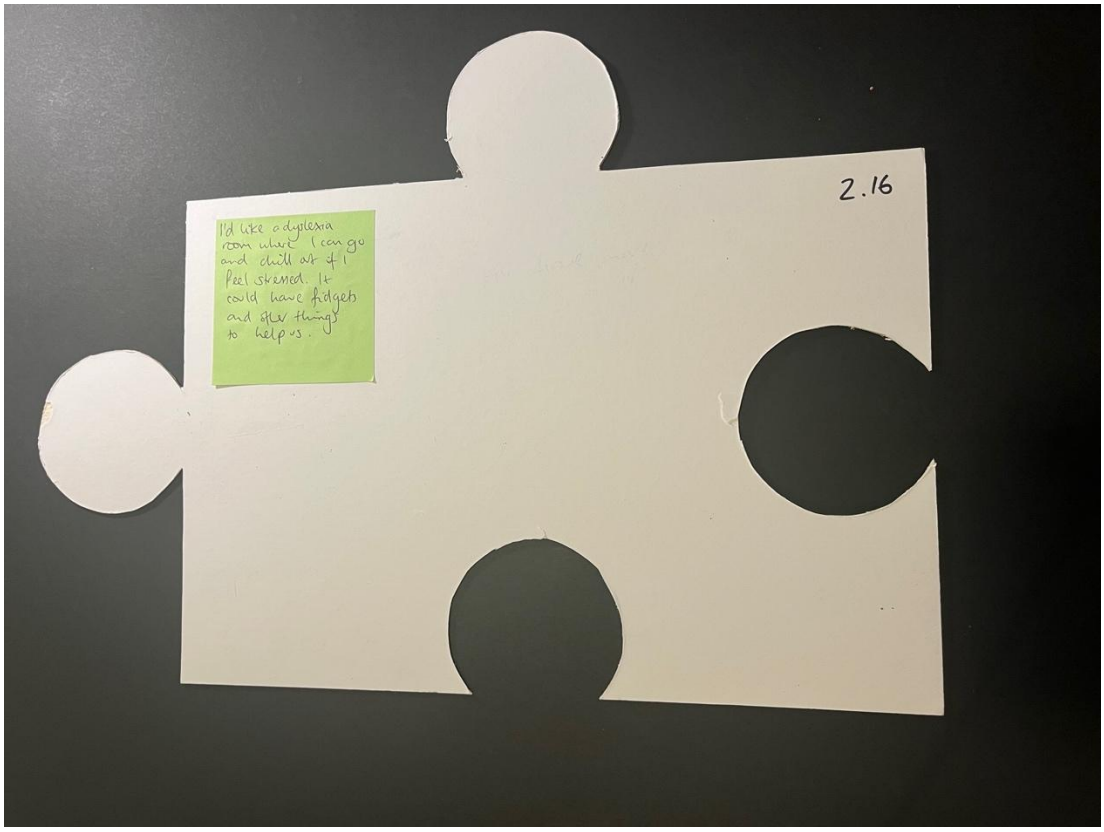
Jigsaw piece 2.15A



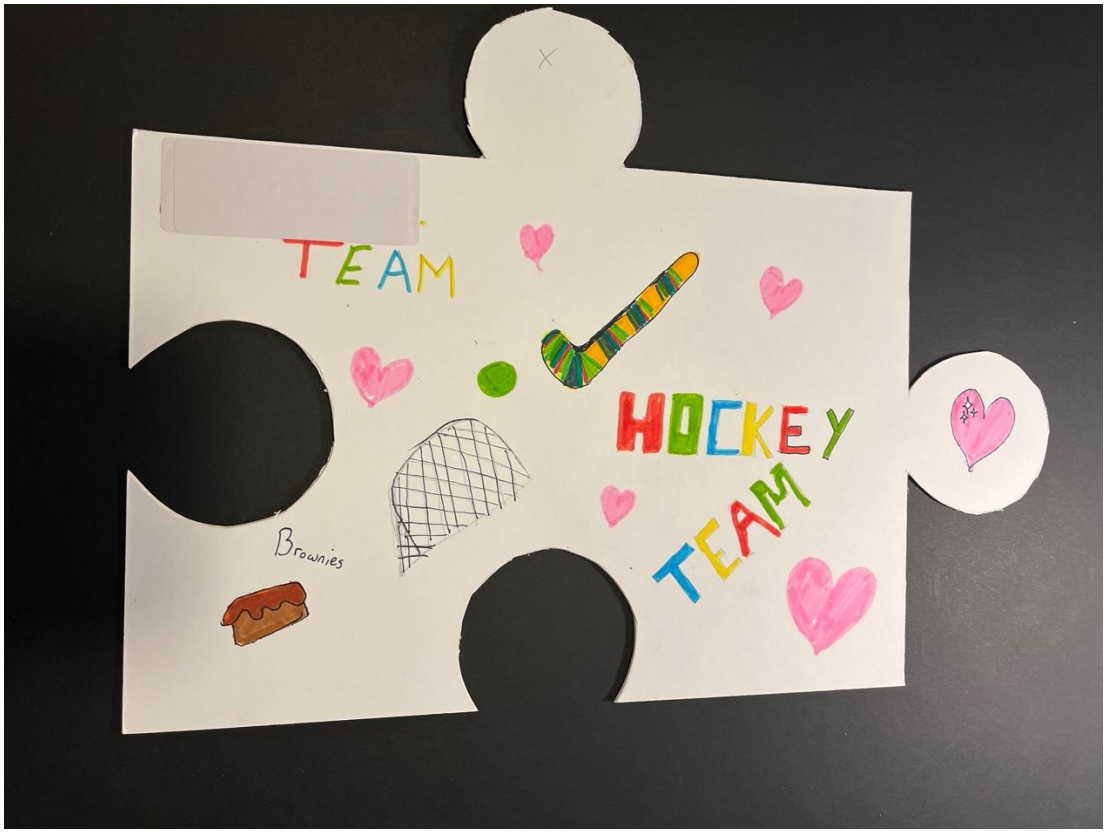
Jigsaw piece 2.15B



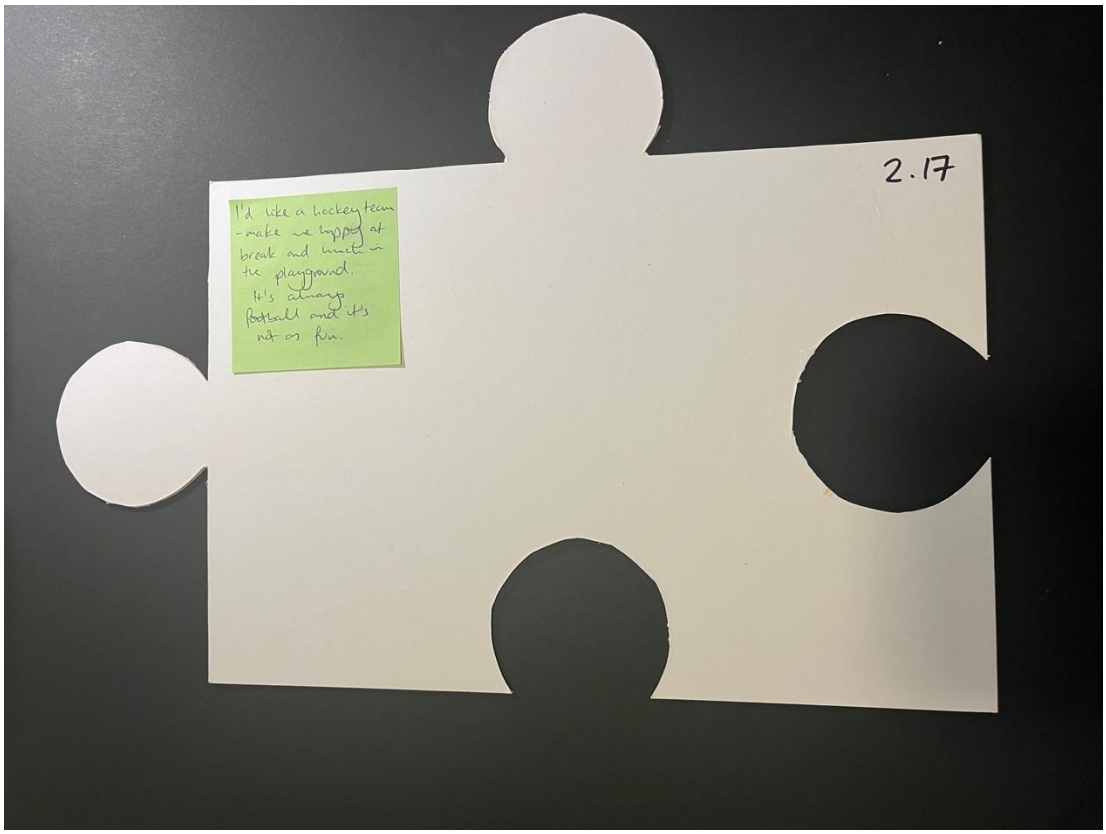
Jigsaw piece 2.16A



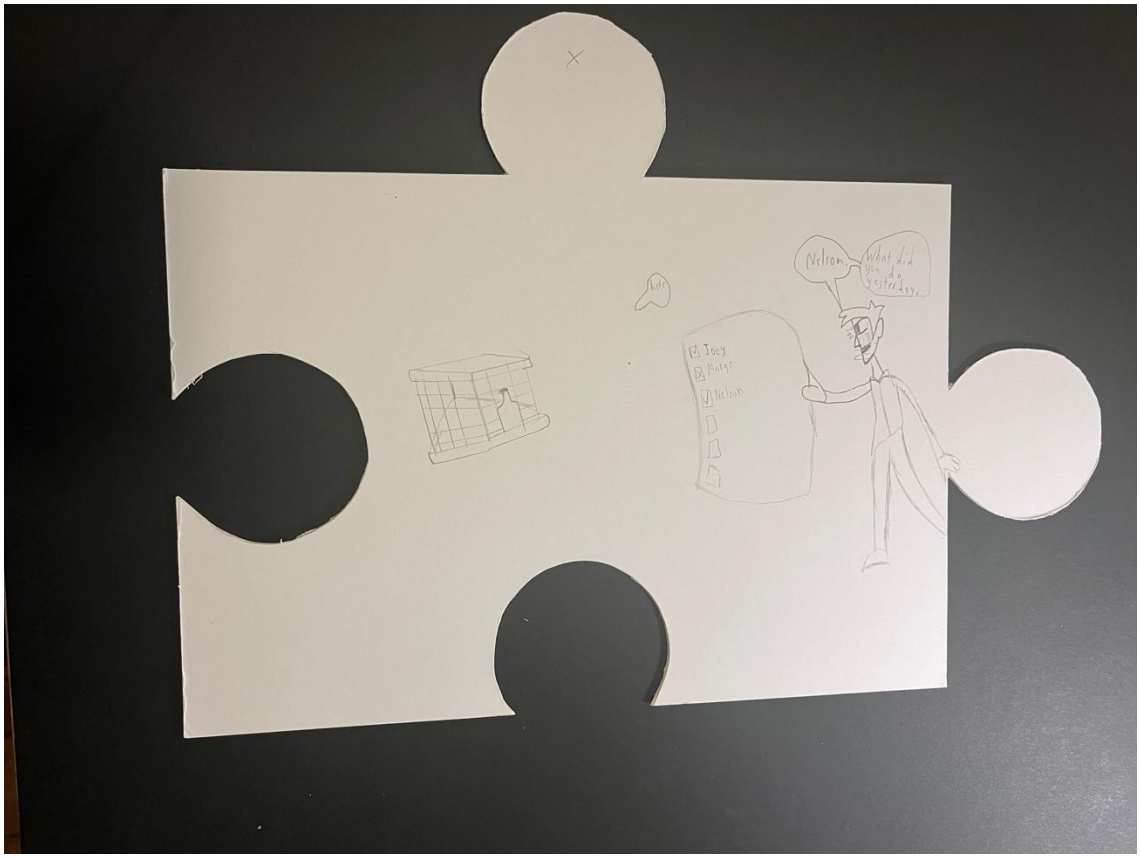
Jigsaw piece 2.16B



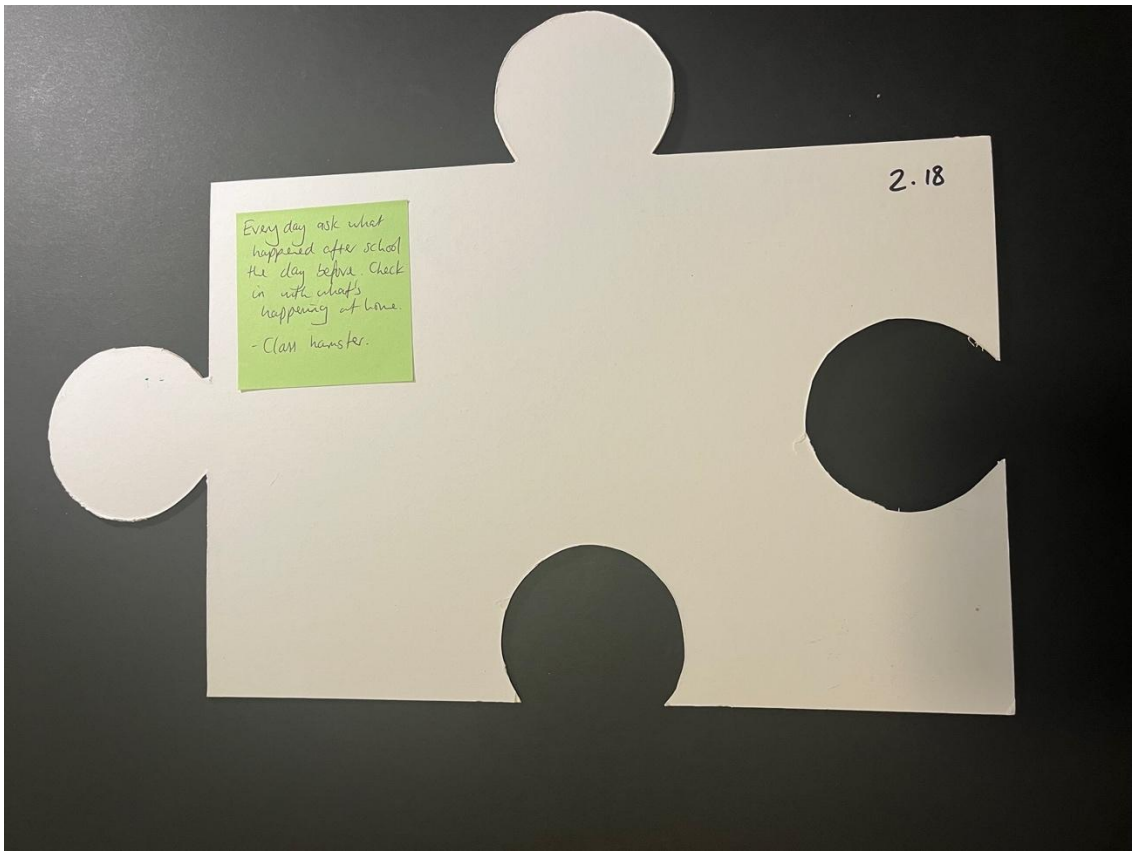
Jigsaw piece 2.17A



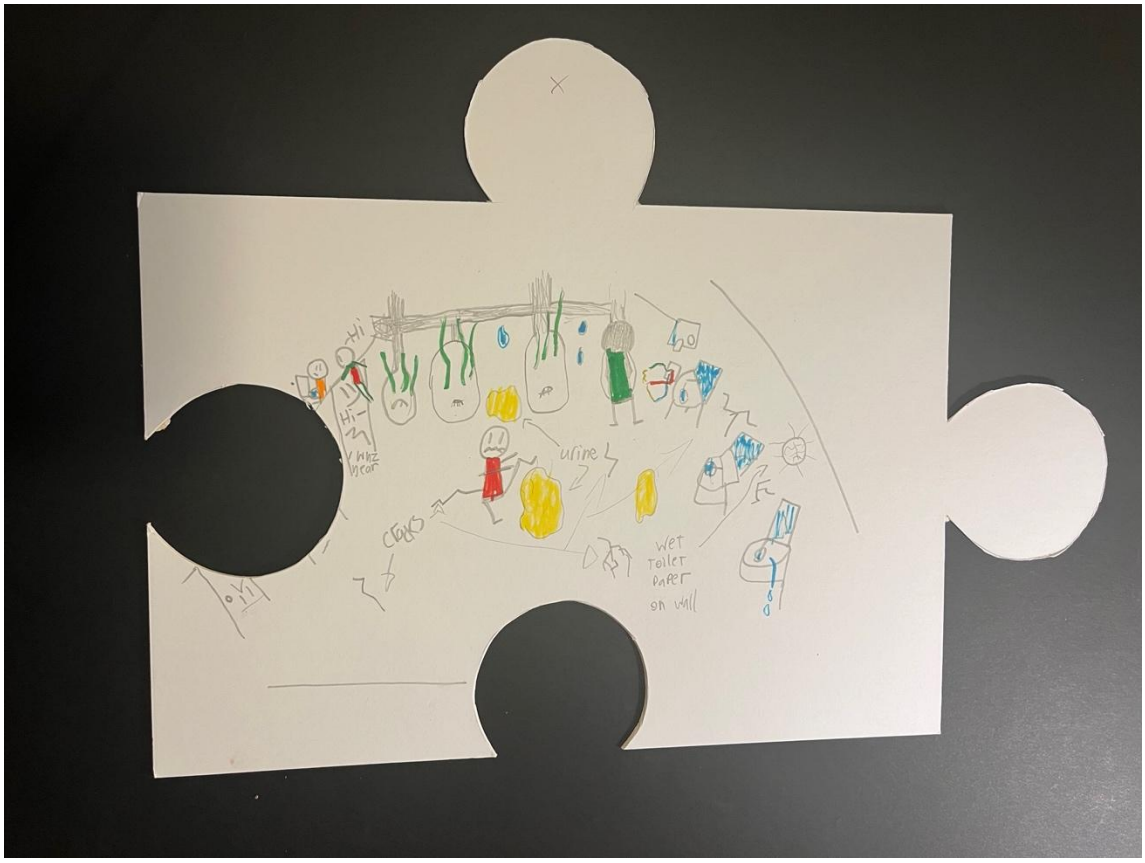
Jigsaw piece 2.17B



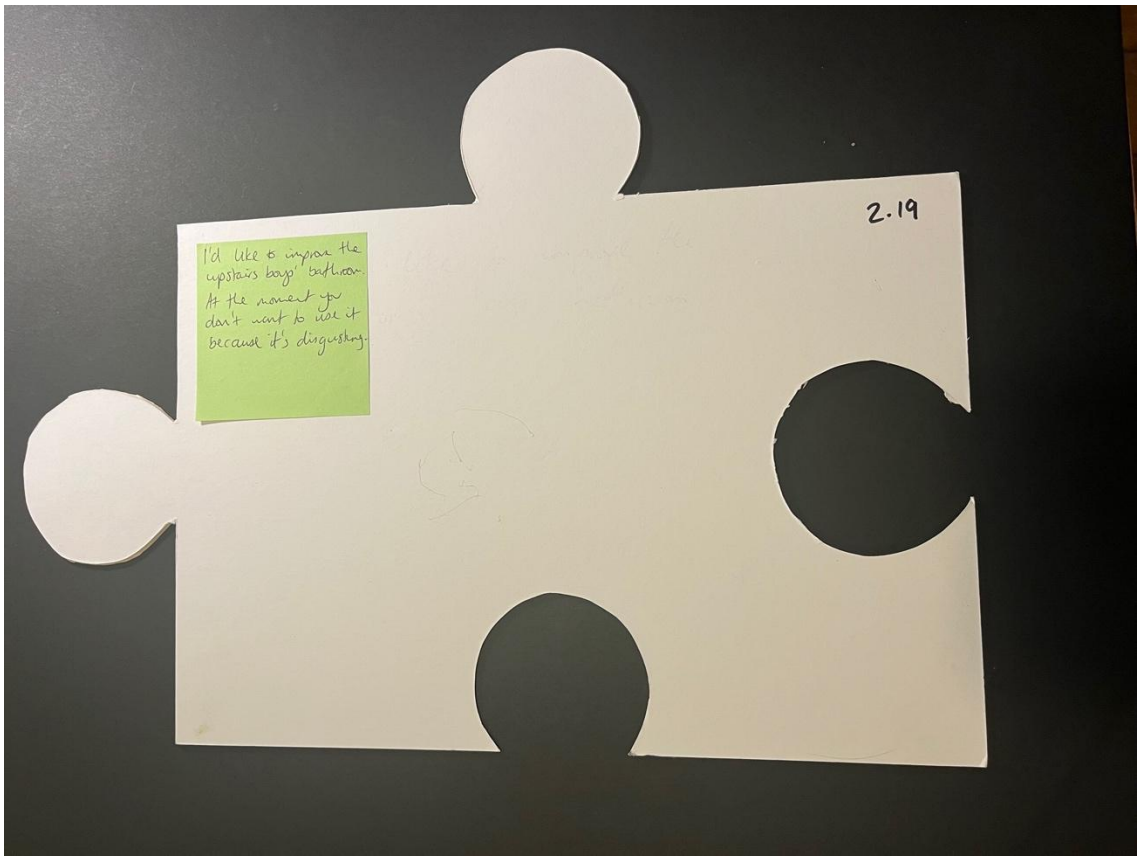
Jigsaw piece 2.18A



Jigsaw piece 2.18B



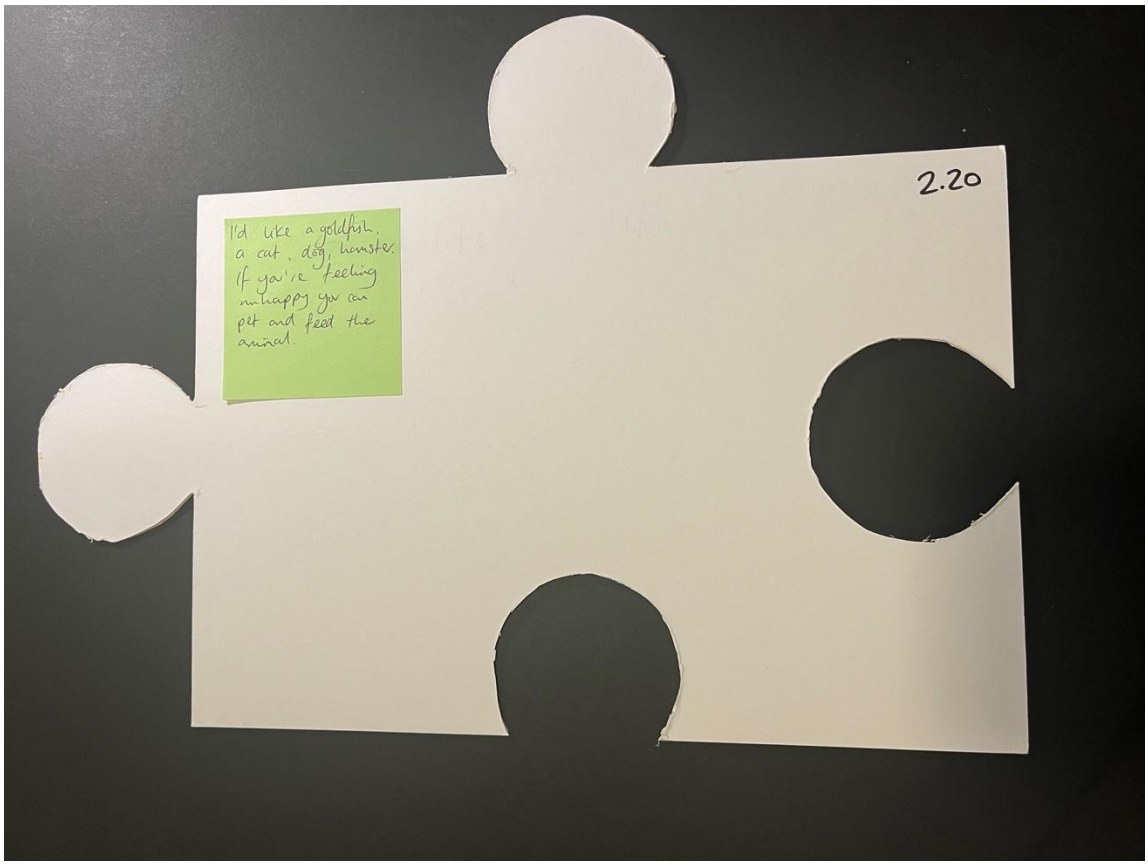
Jigsaw piece 2.19A



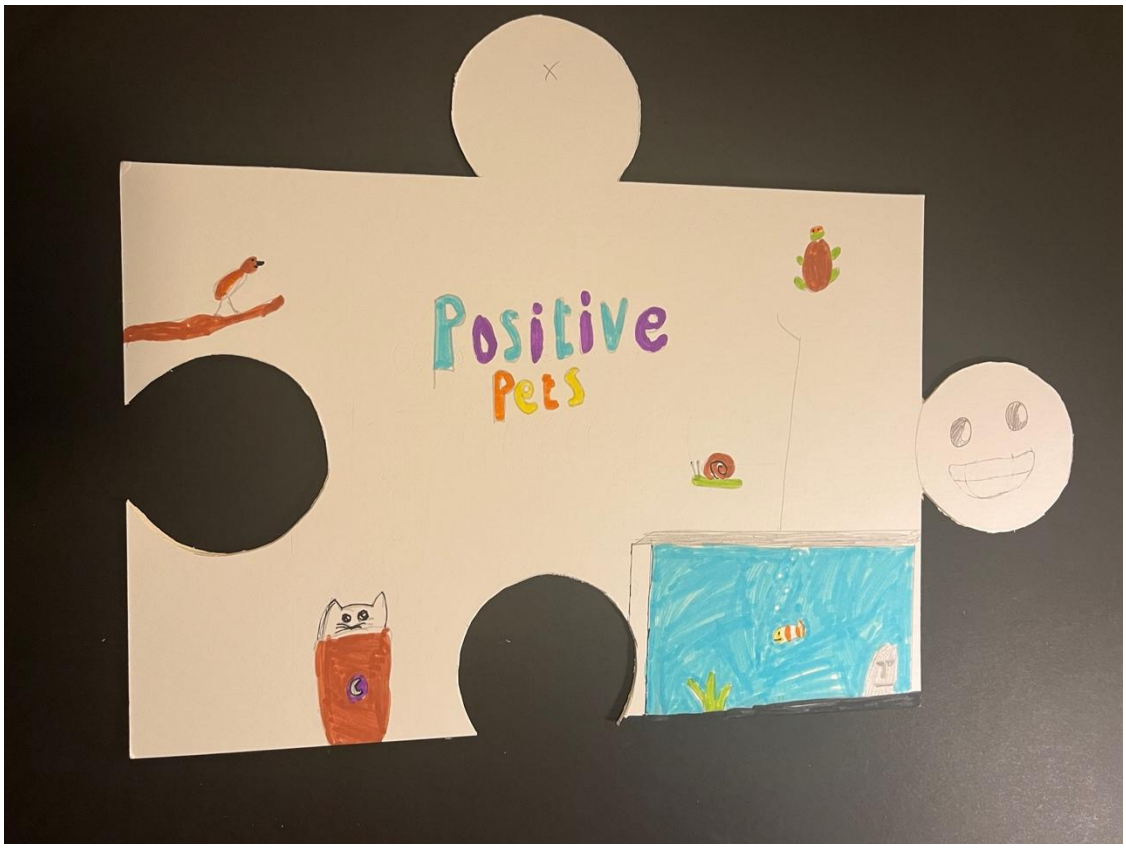
Jigsaw piece 2.19B



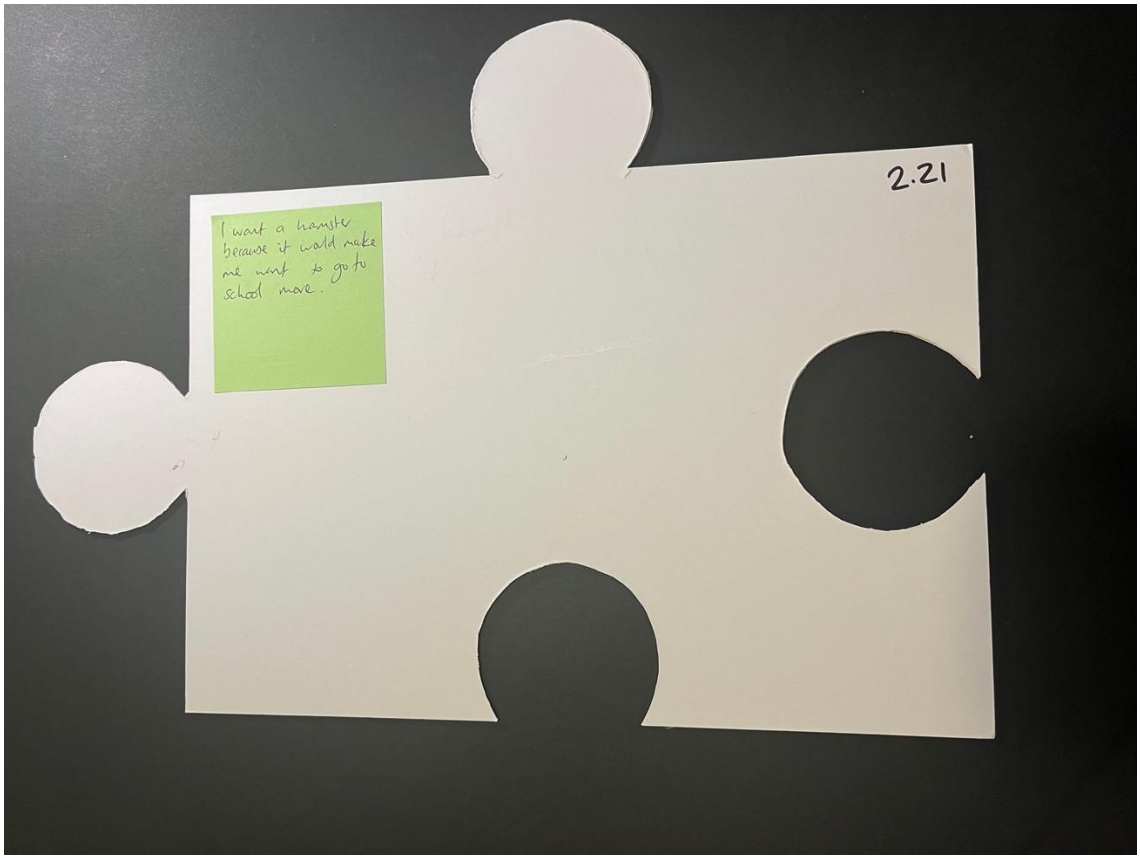
Jigsaw piece 2.20A



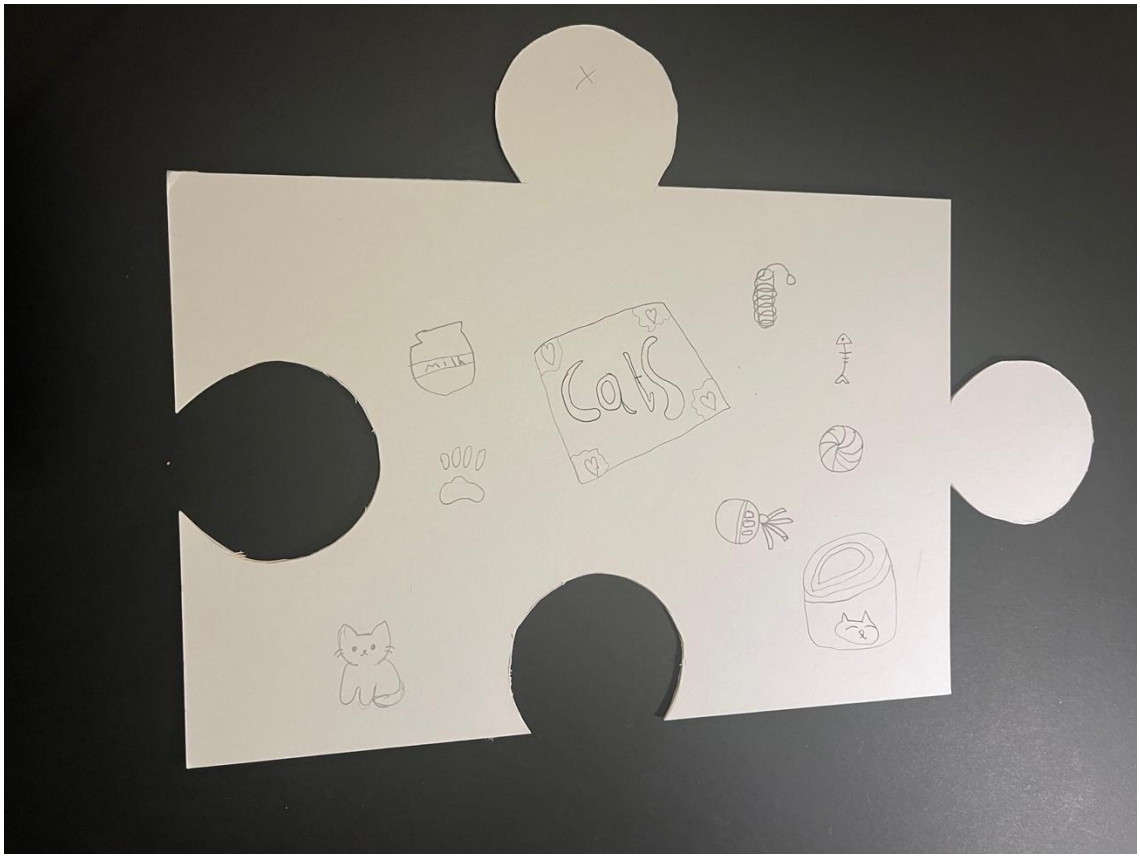
Jigsaw piece 2.20B



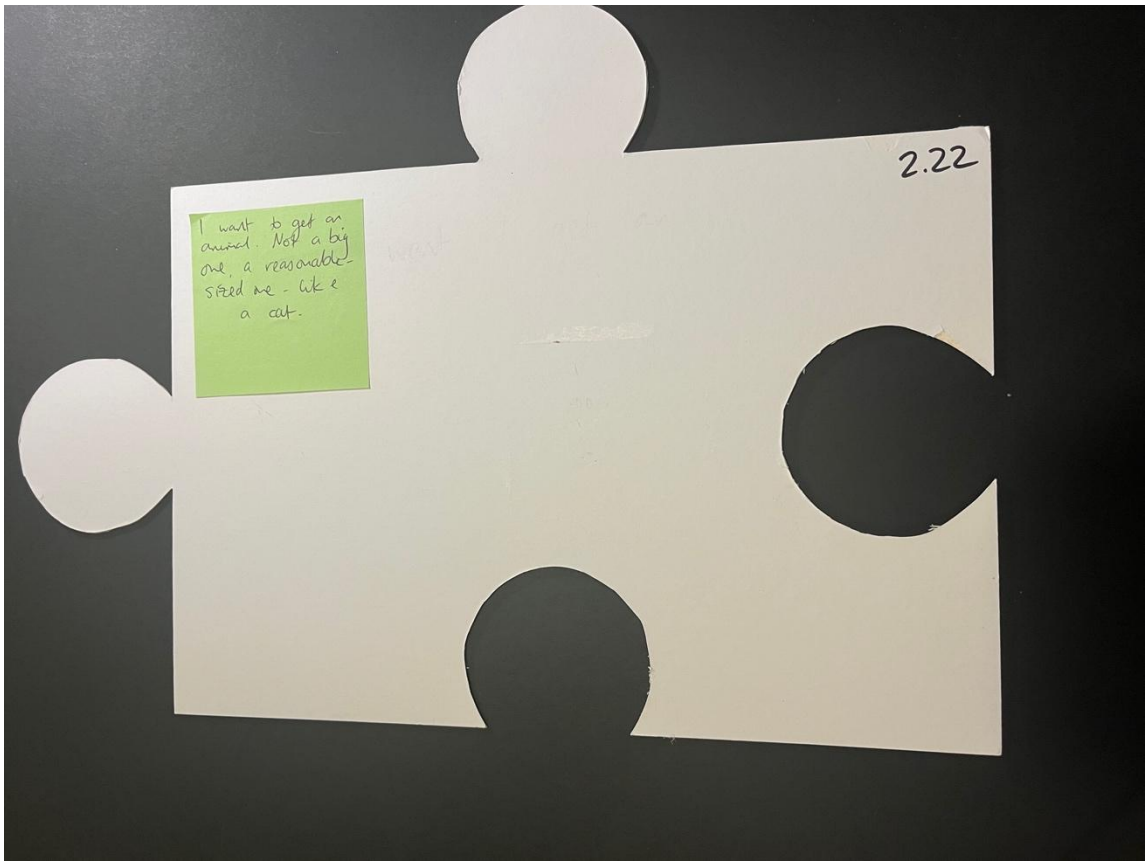
Jigsaw piece 2.21A



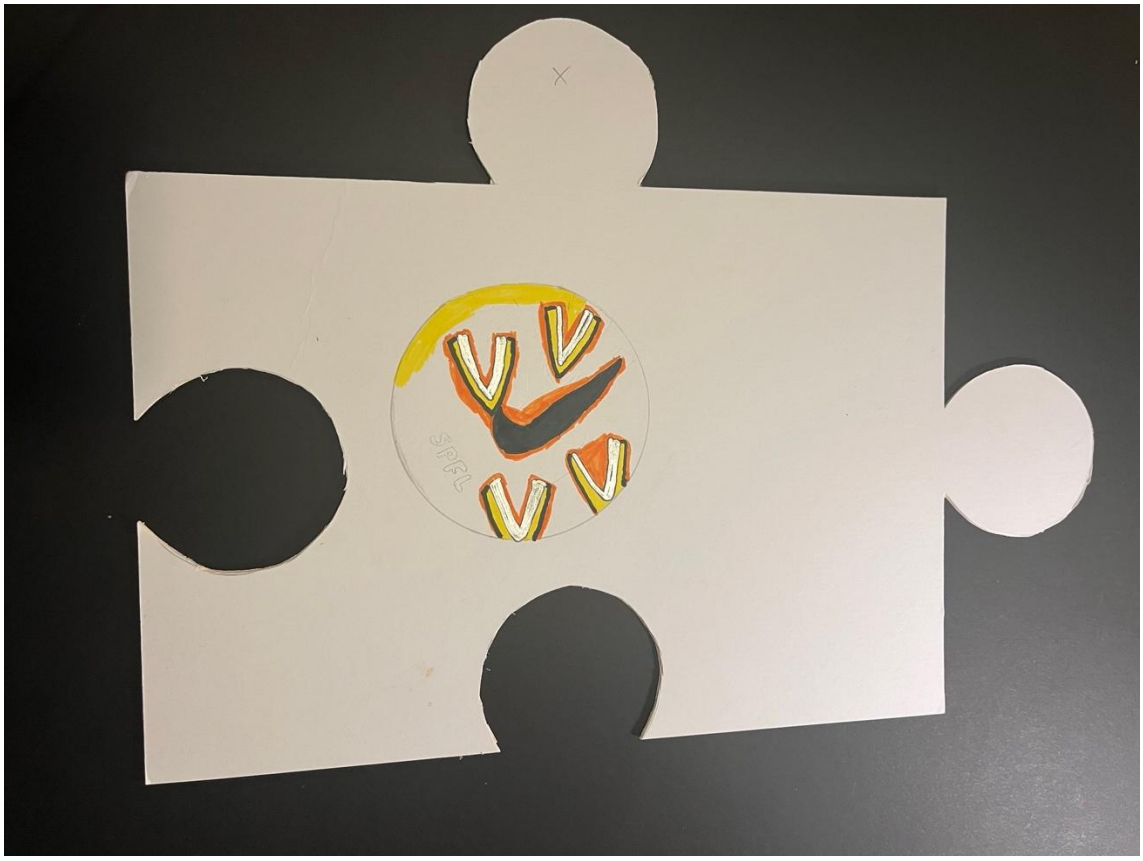
Jigsaw piece 2.21B



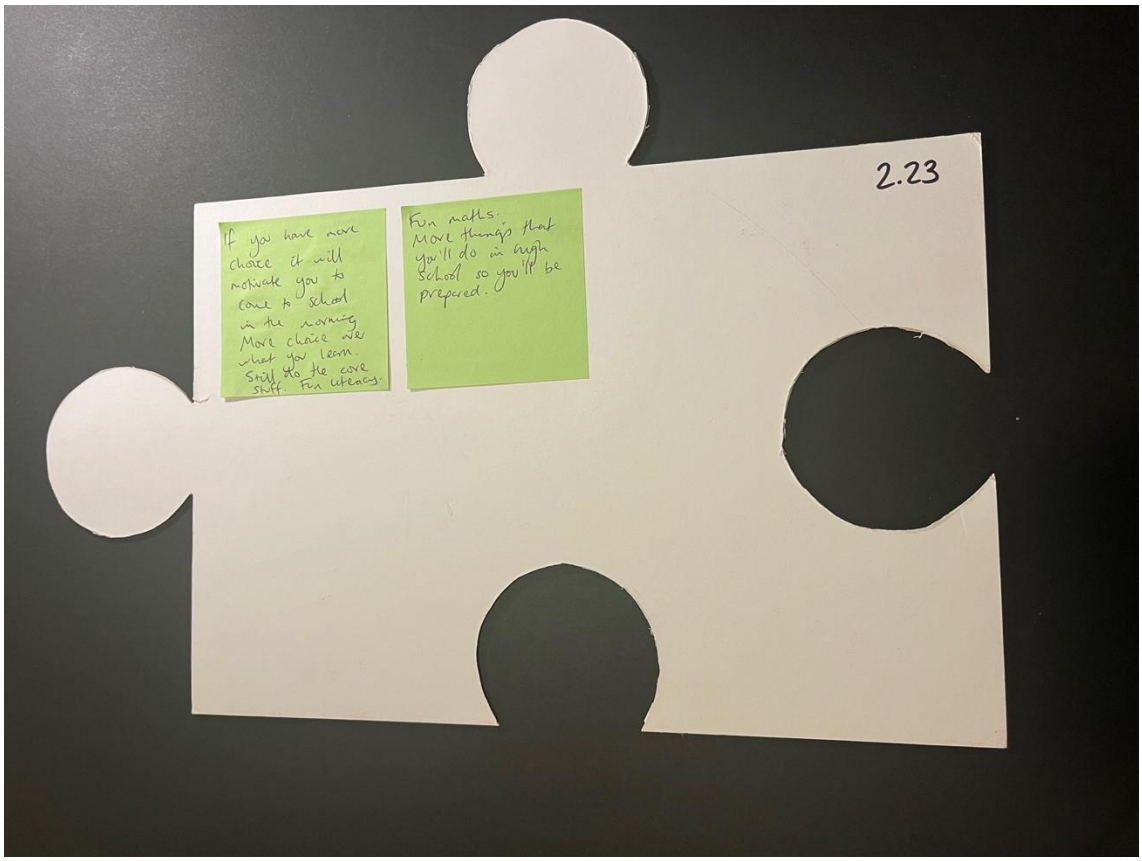
Jigsaw piece 2.22A



Jigsaw piece 2.22B



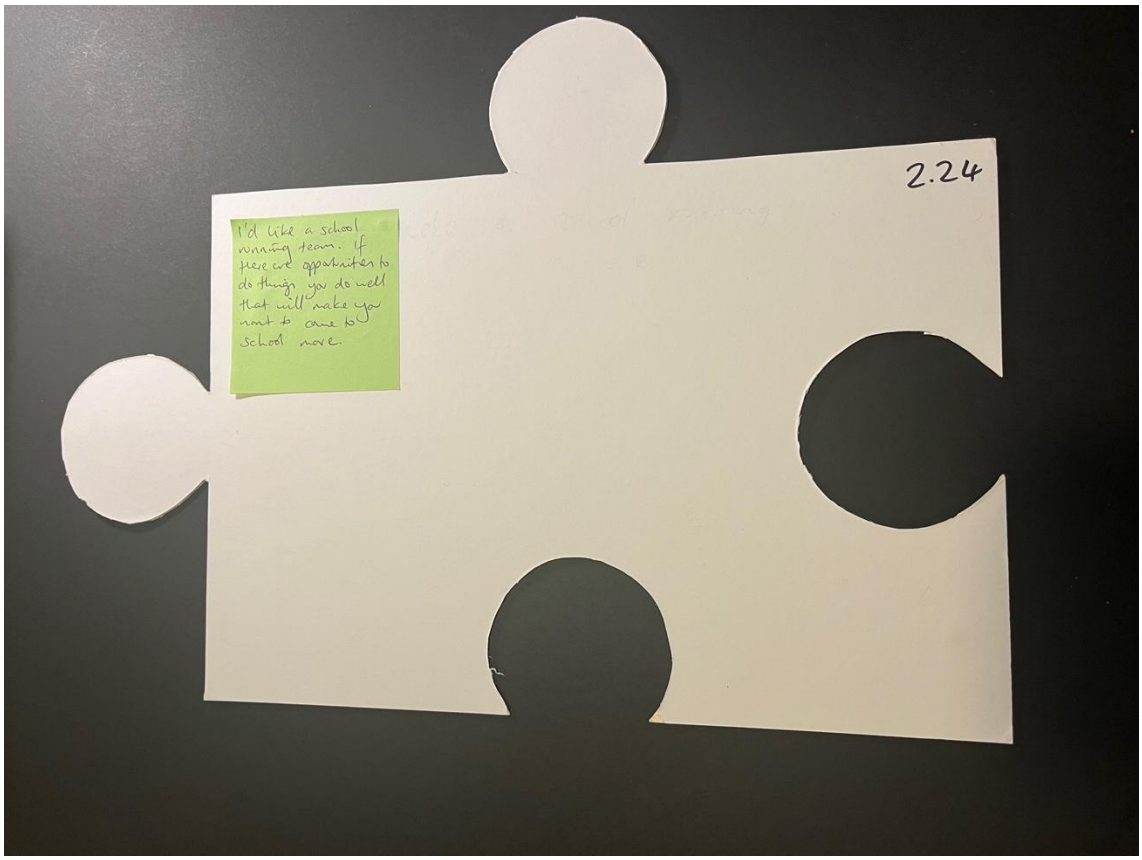
Jigsaw piece 2.23A



Jigsaw piece 2.23B



Jigsaw piece 2.24A

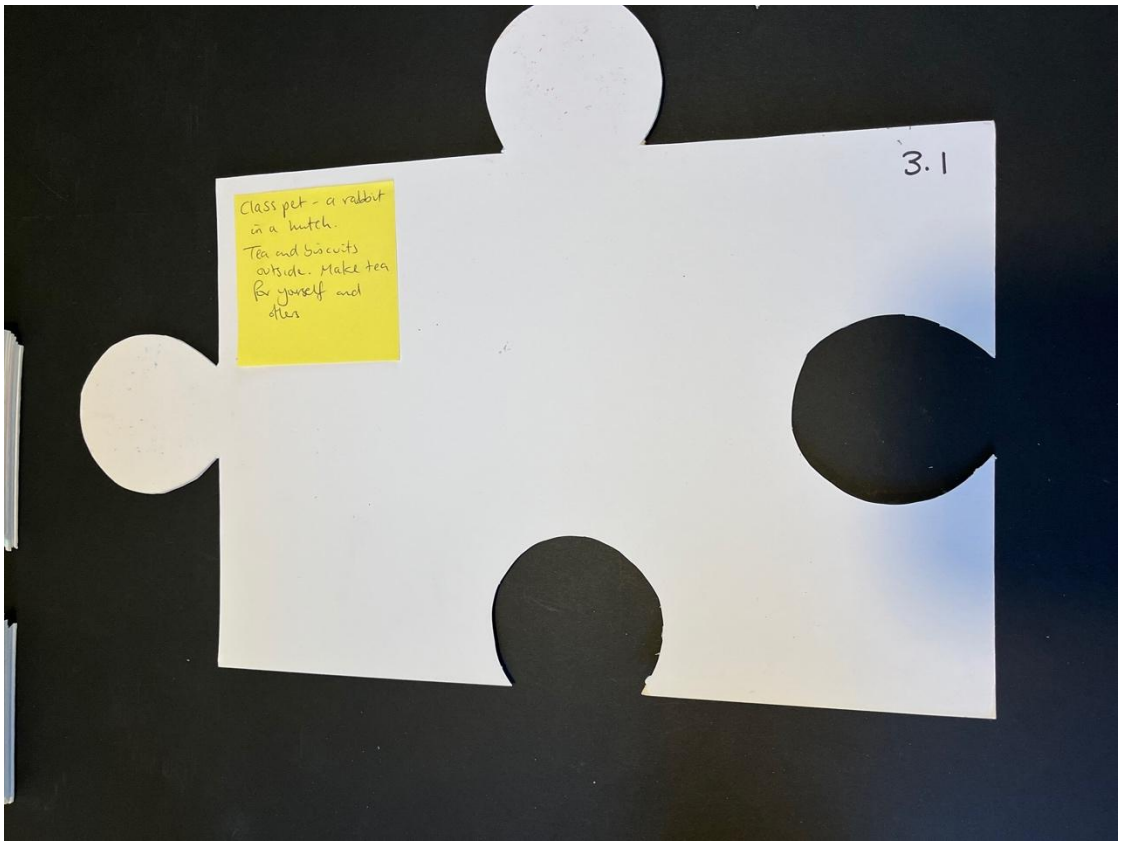


Jigsaw piece 2.24B

School 3.



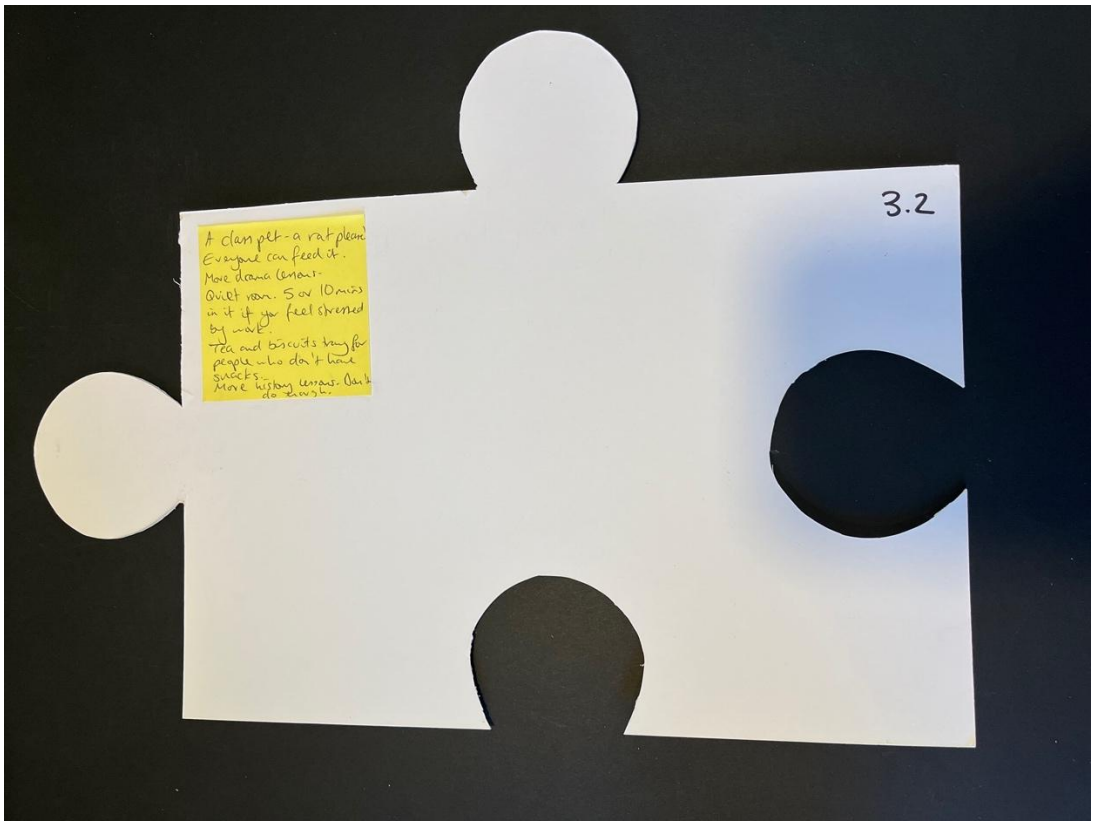
Jigsaw piece 3.1A



Jigsaw piece 3.1B



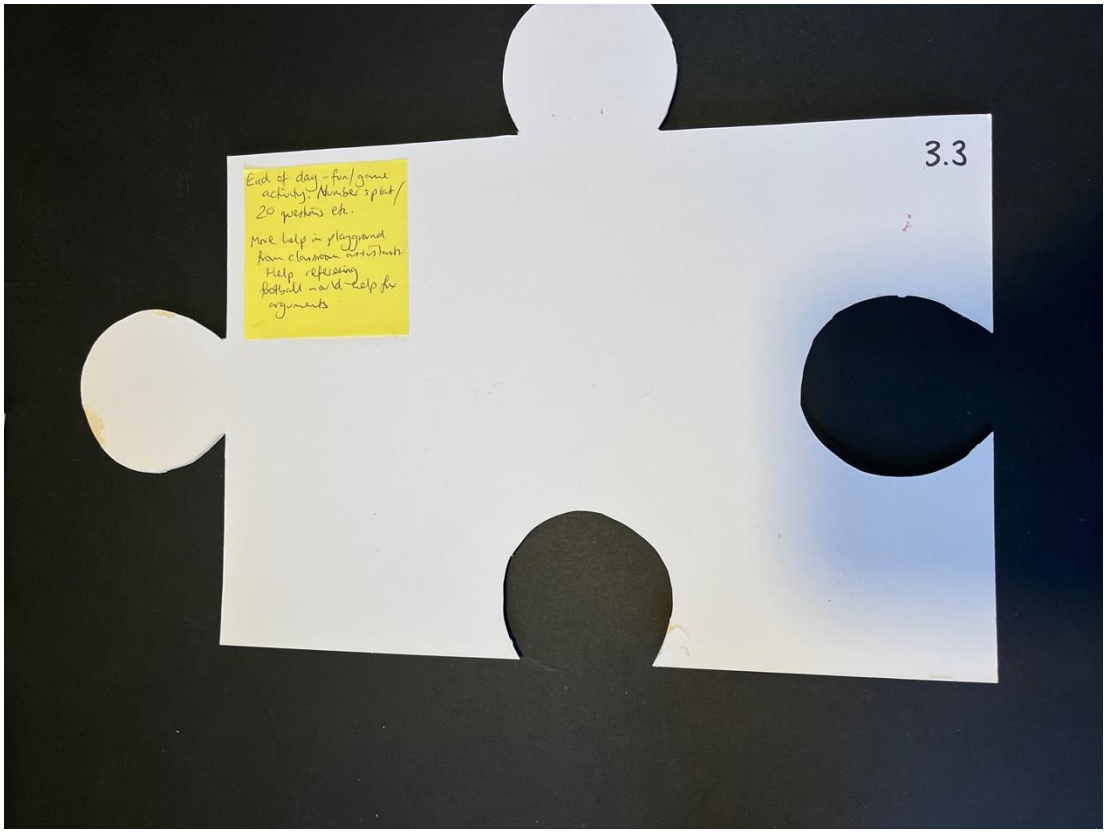
Jigsaw piece 3.2A



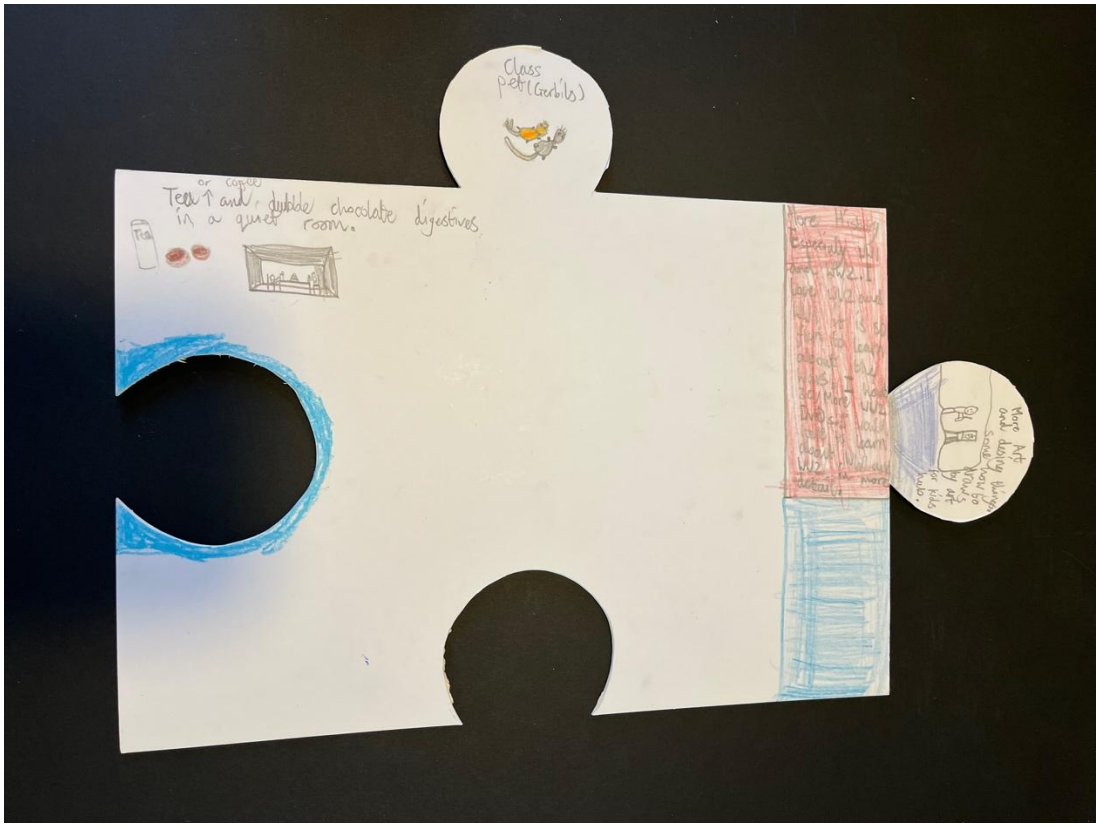
Jigsaw piece 3.2B



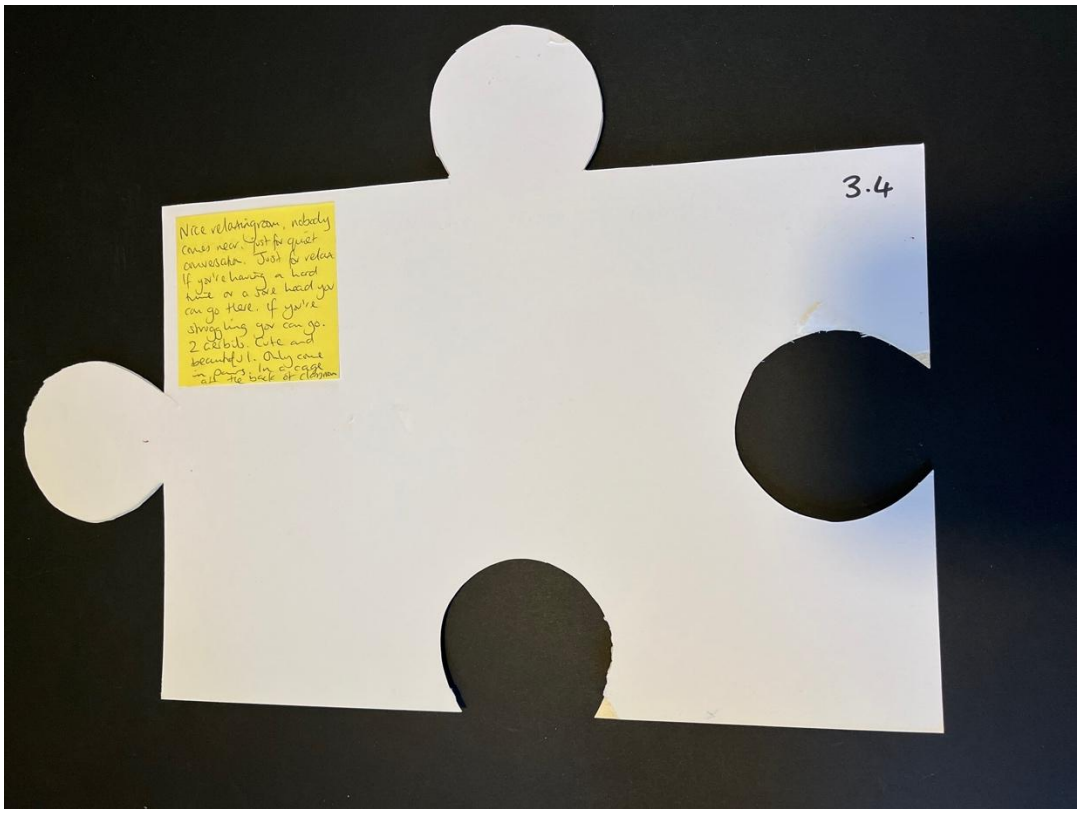
Jigsaw piece 3.3A



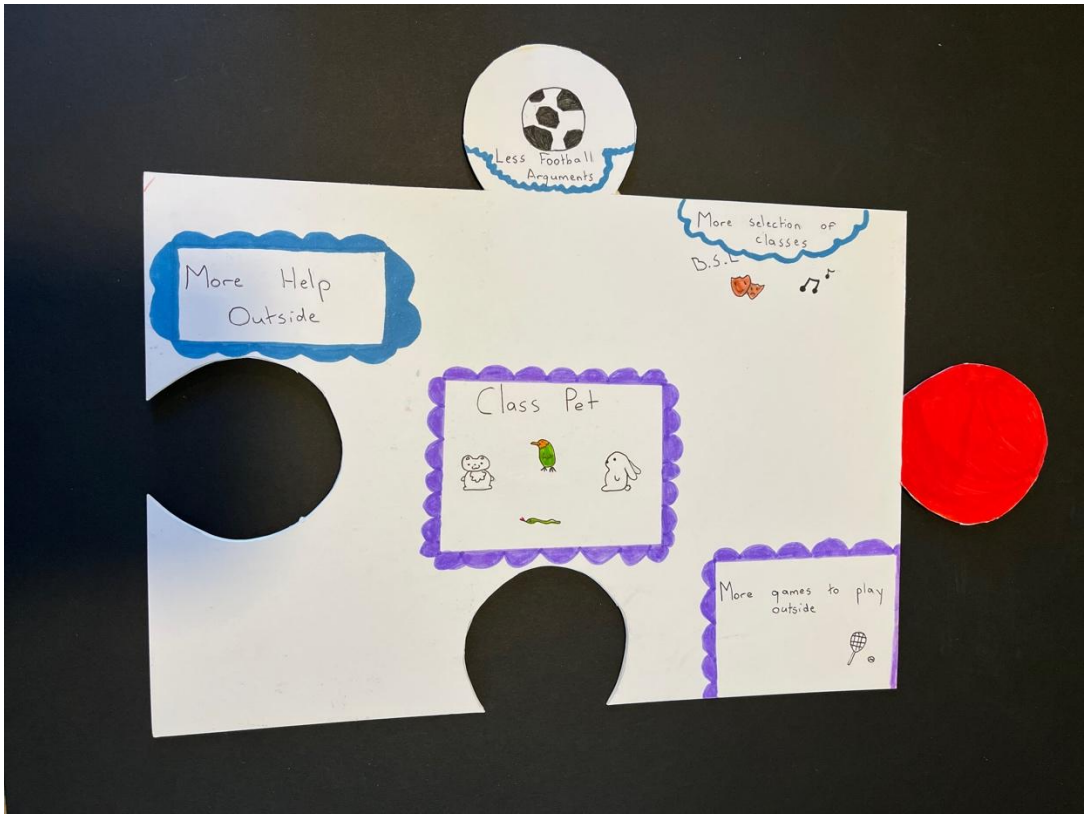
Jigsaw piece 3.3B



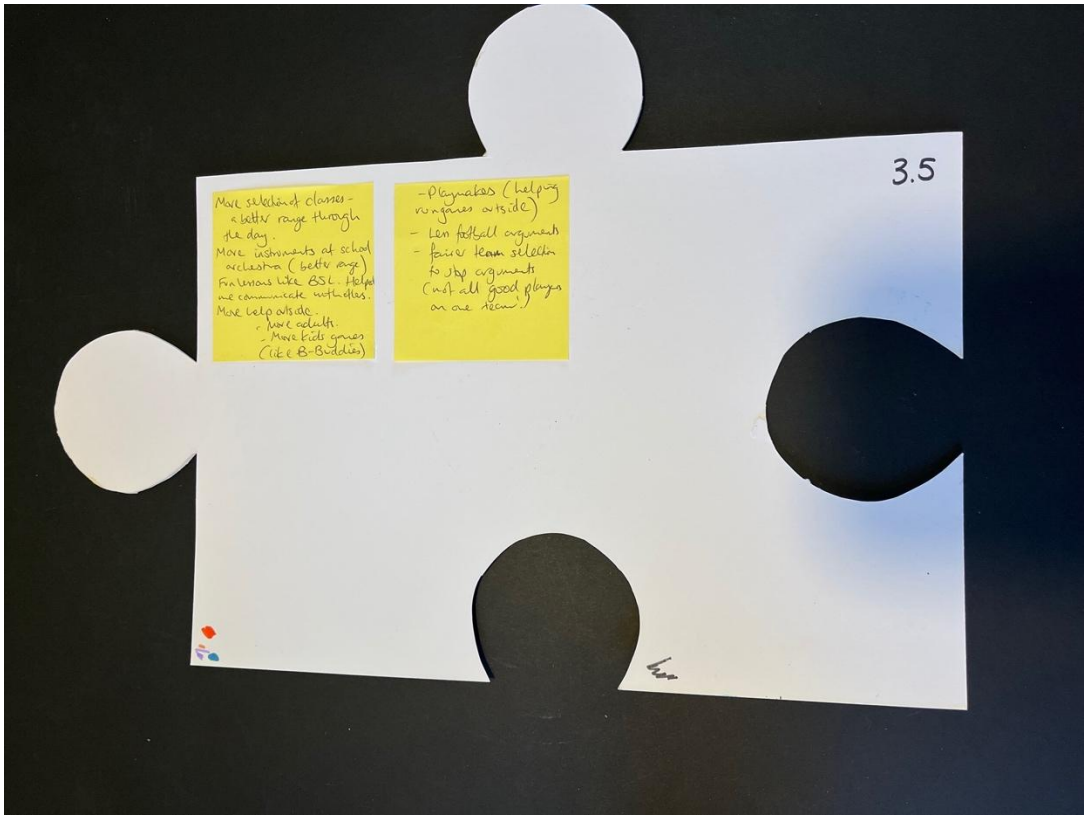
Jigsaw piece 3.4A



Jigsaw piece 3.4B



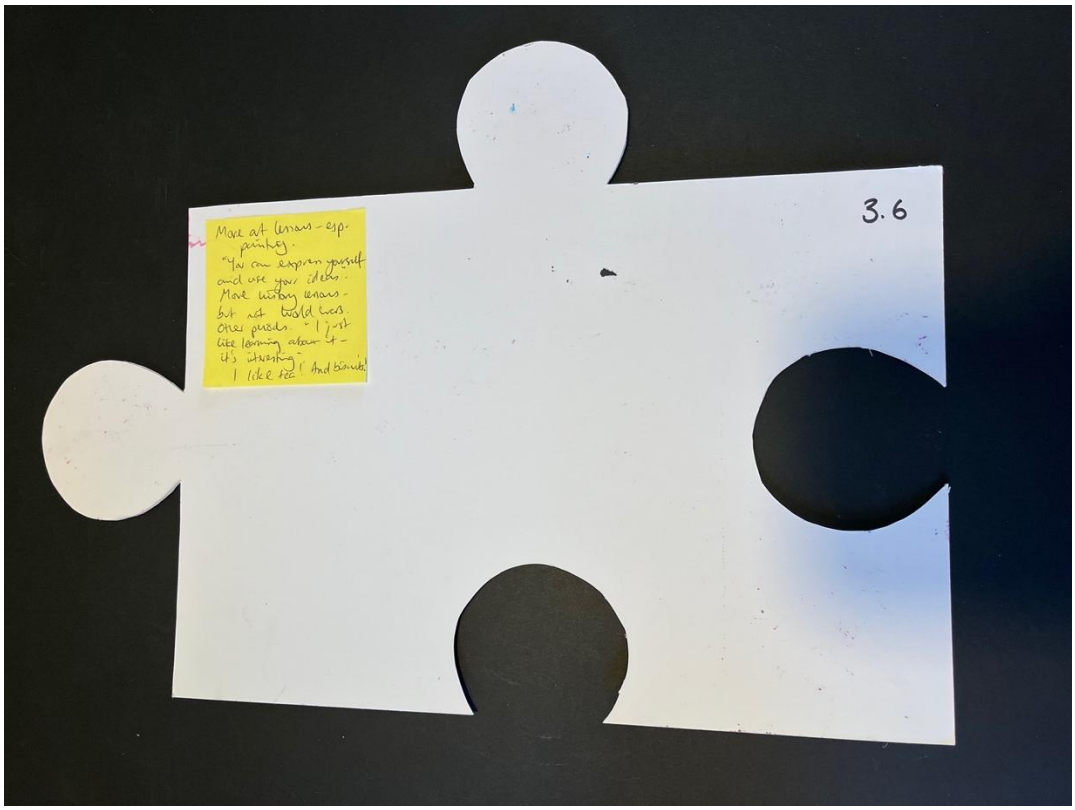
Jigsaw piece 3.5A



Jigsaw piece 3.5B



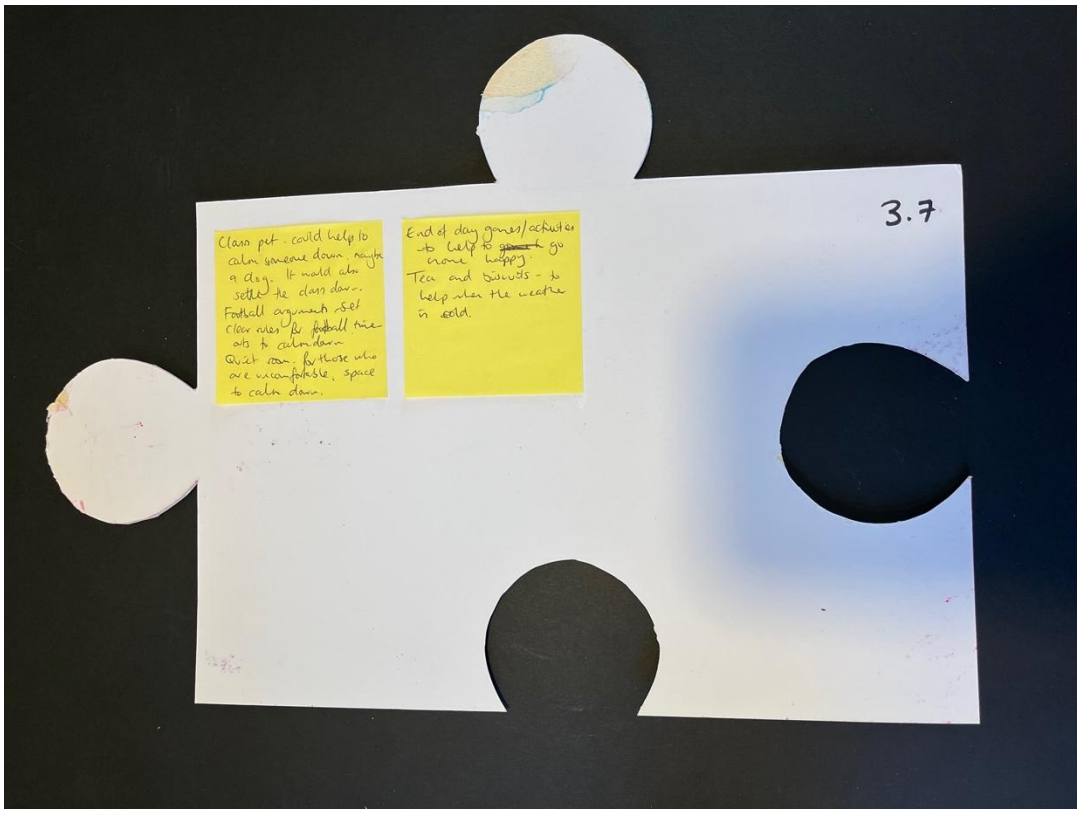
Jigsaw piece 3.6A



Jigsaw piece 3.6B



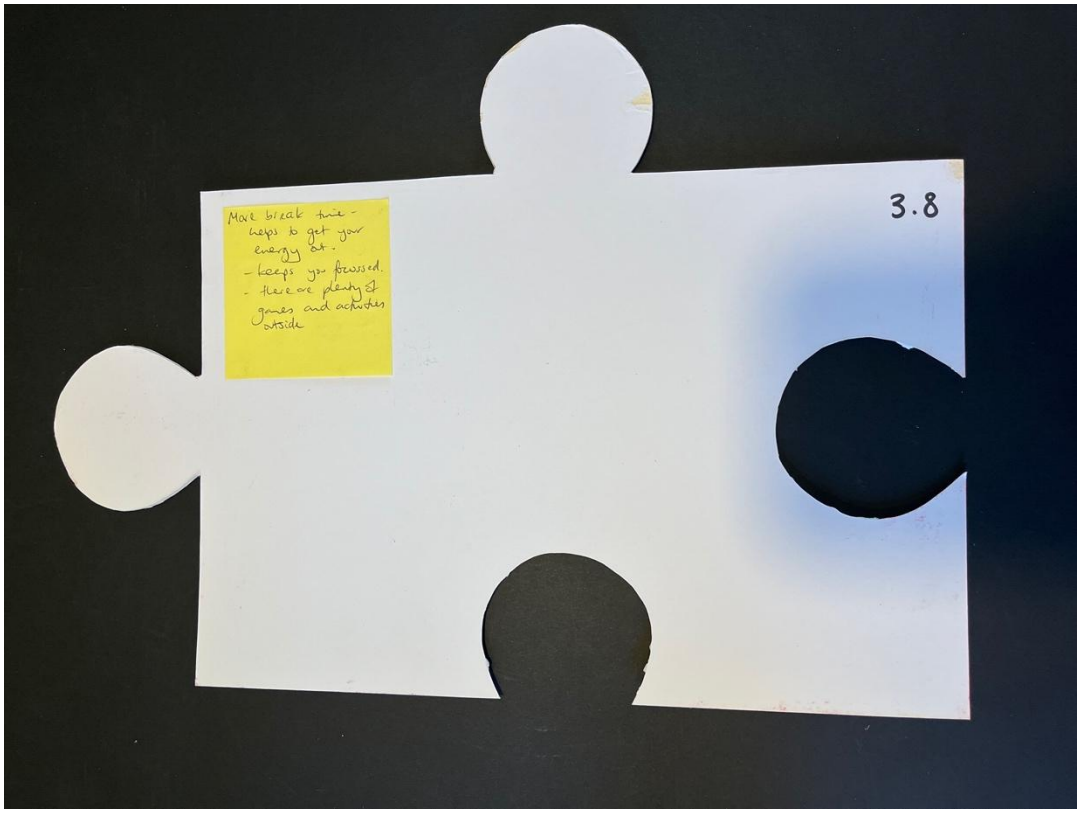
Jigsaw piece 3.7A



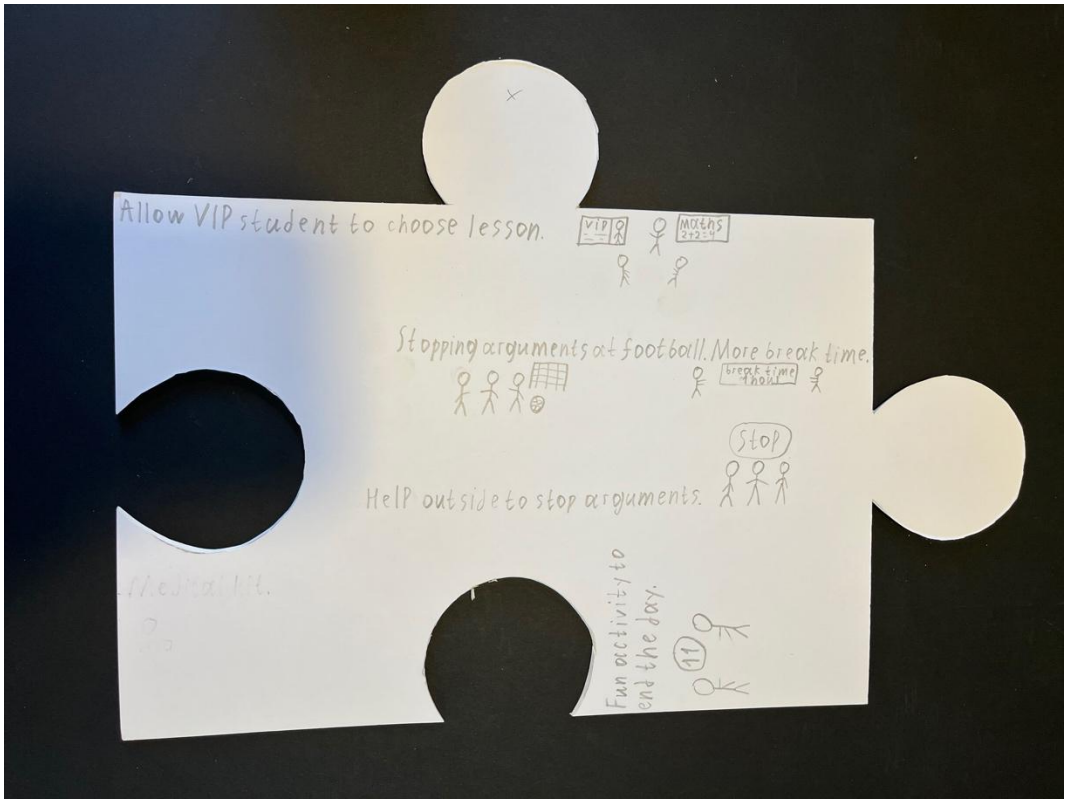
Jigsaw piece 3.7B



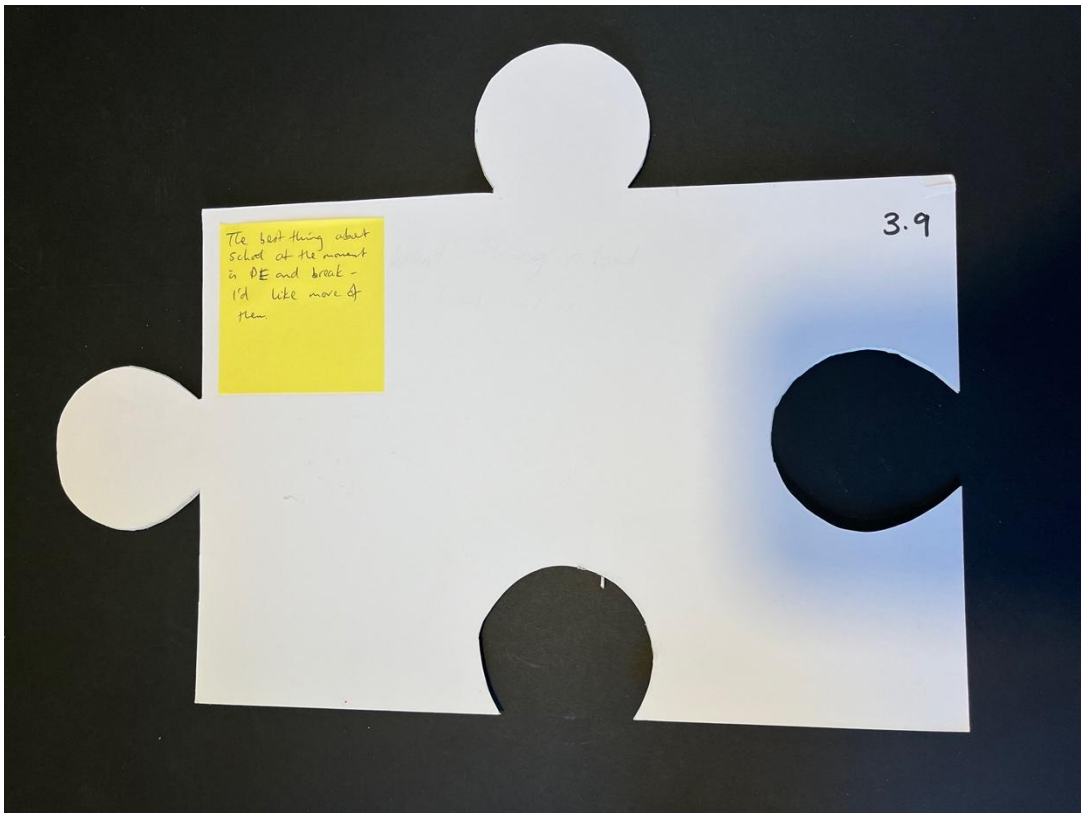
Jigsaw piece 3.8A



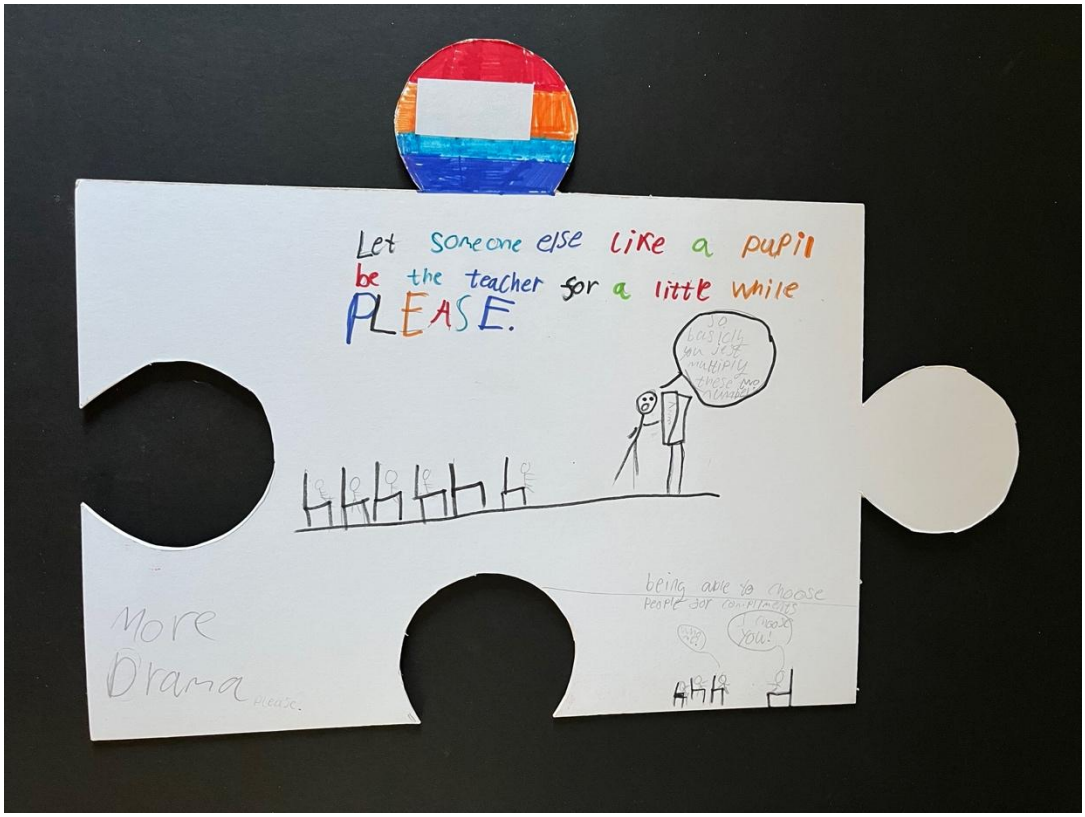
Jigsaw piece 3.8B



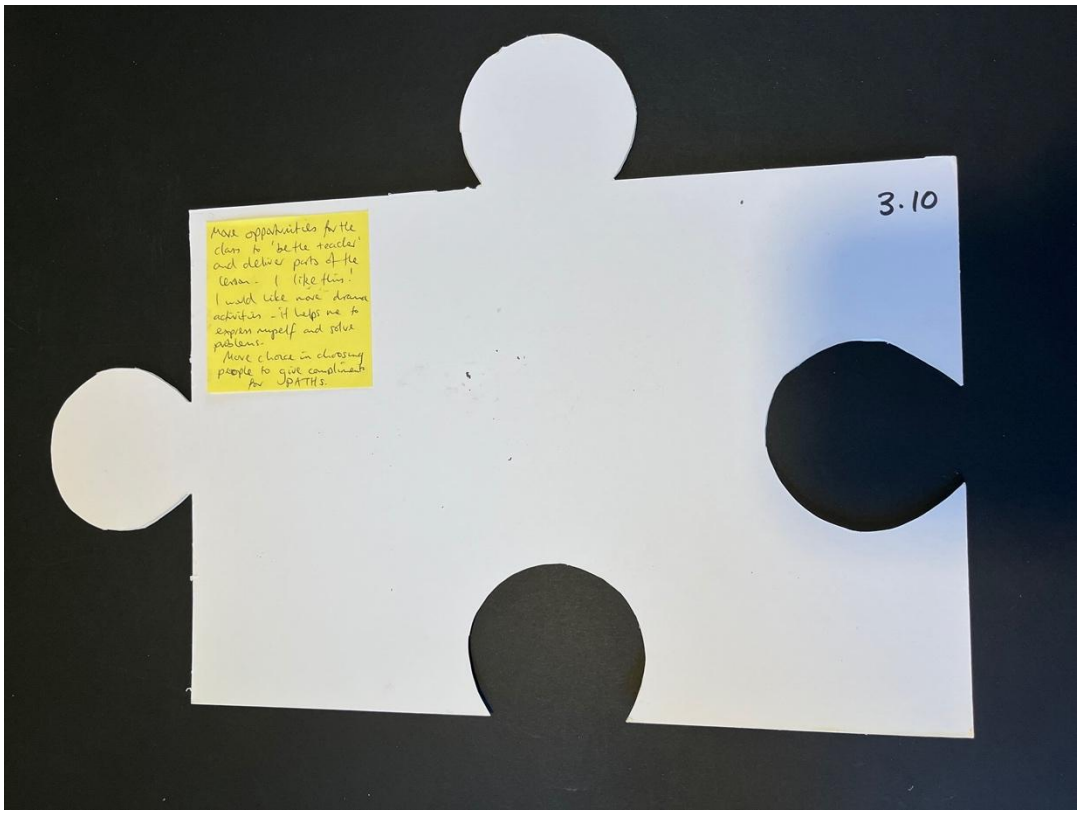
Jigsaw piece 3.9A



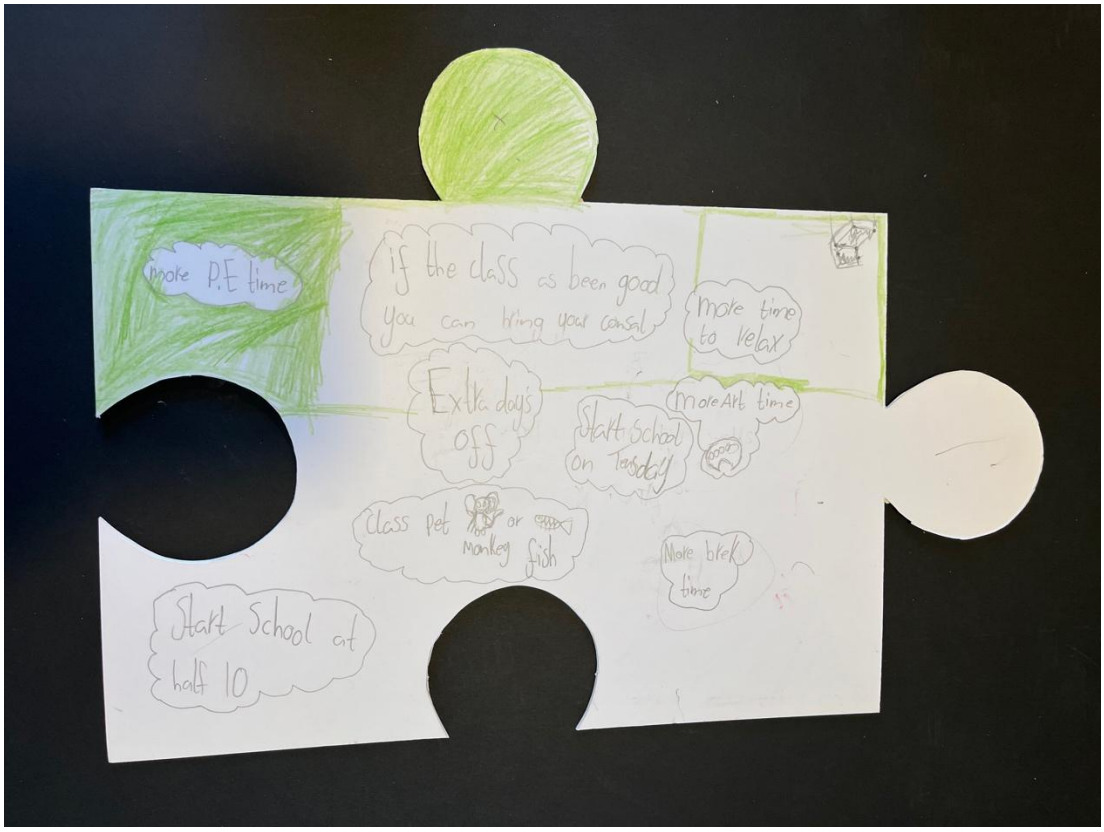
Jigsaw piece 3.9B



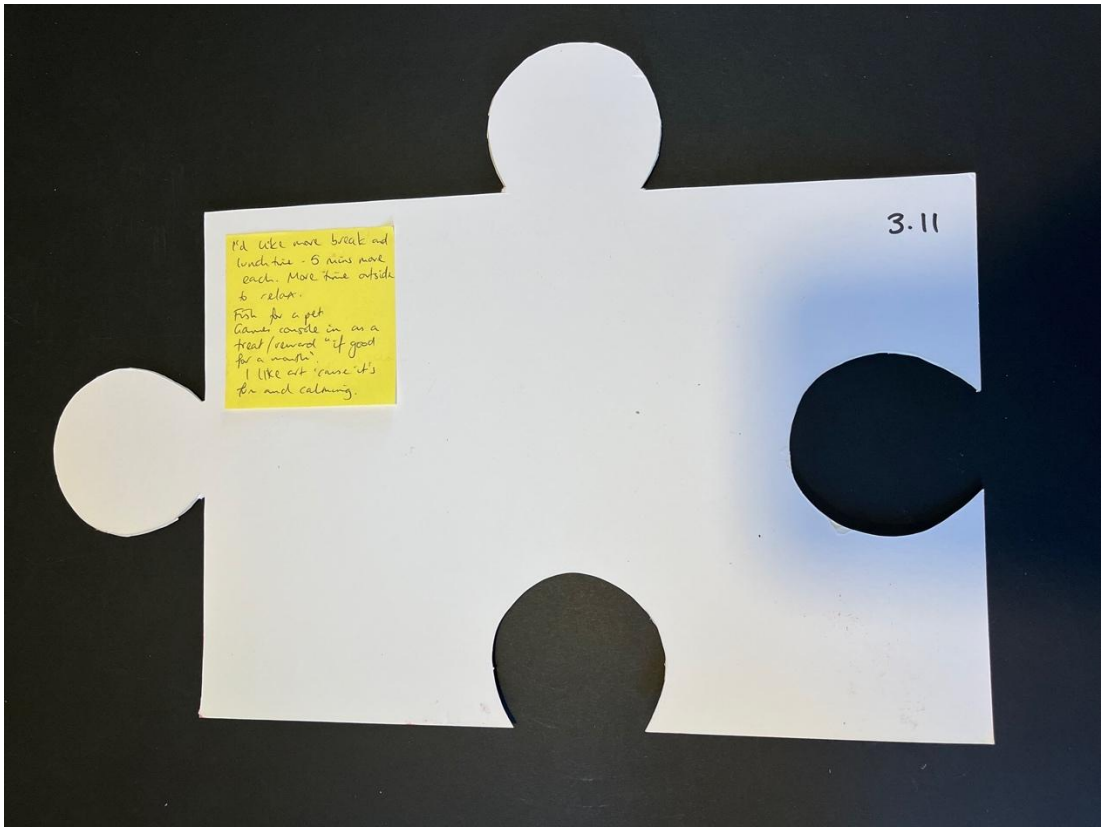
Jigsaw piece 3.10A



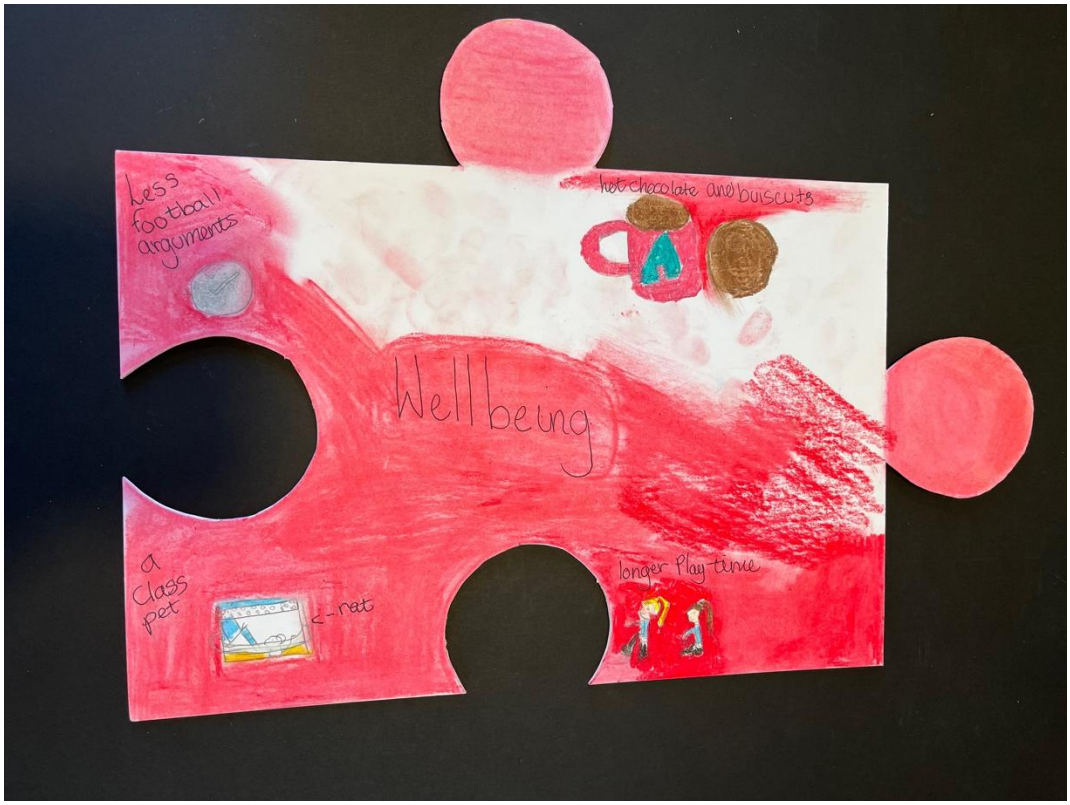
Jigsaw piece 3.10B



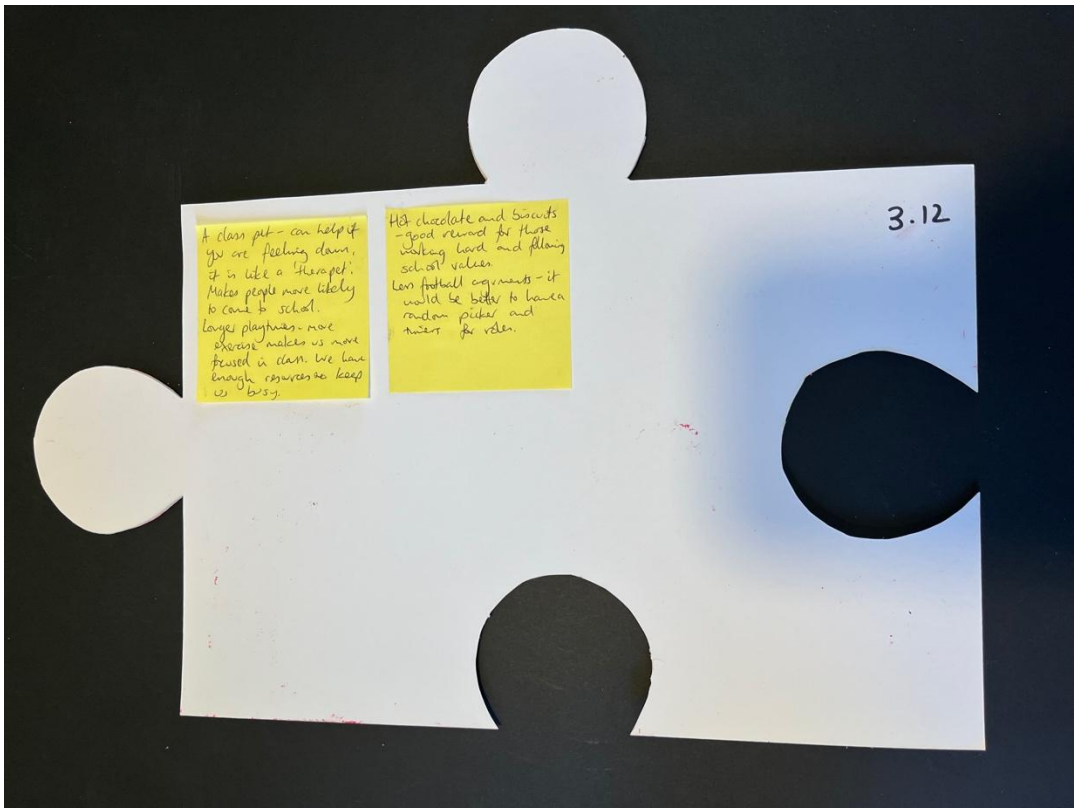
Jigsaw piece 3.11A



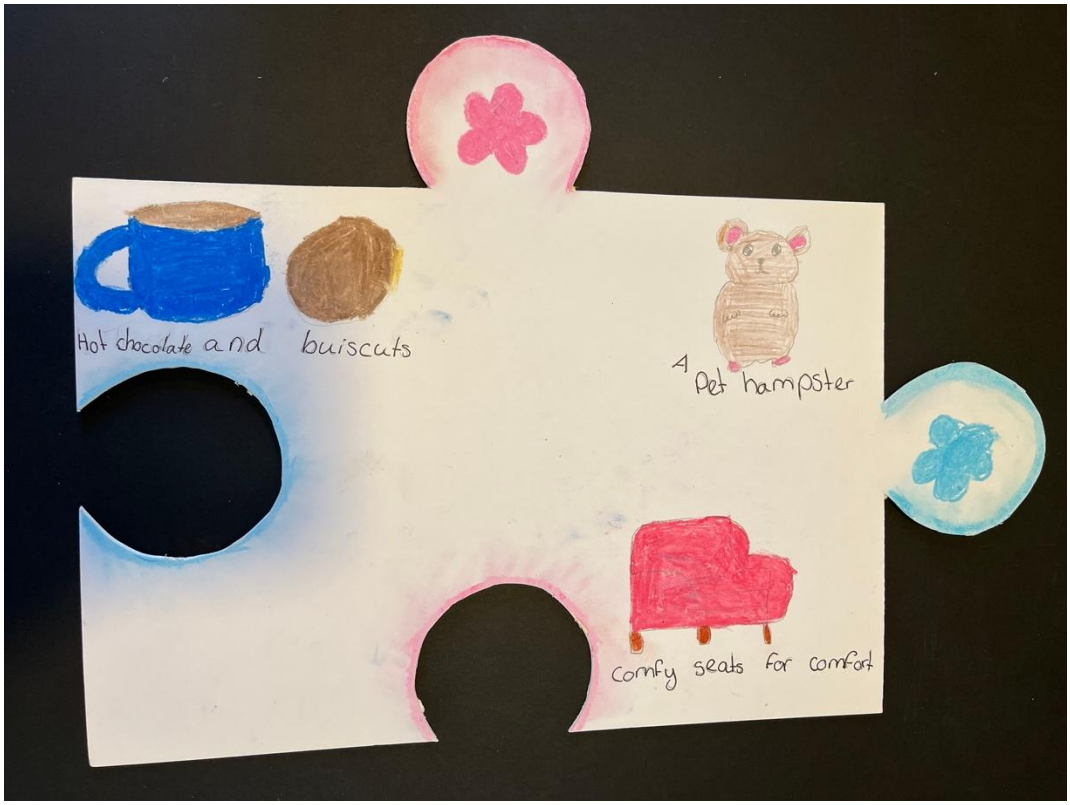
Jigsaw piece 3.11B



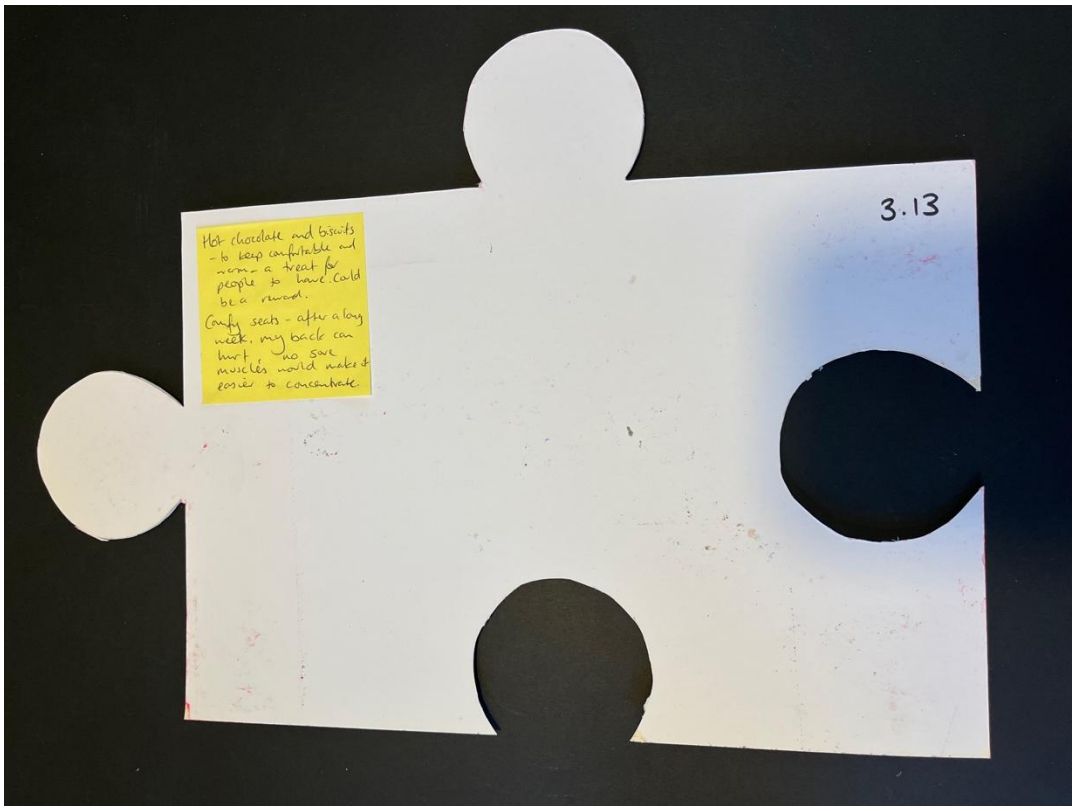
Jigsaw piece 3.12A



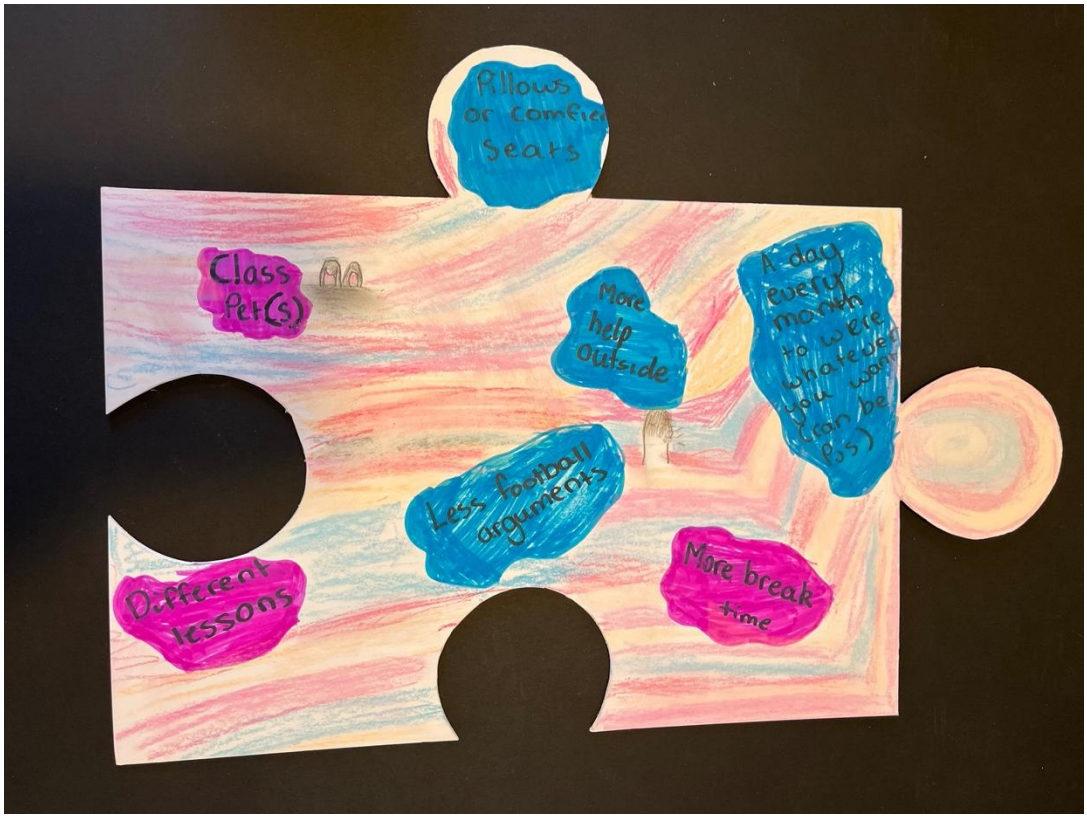
Jigsaw piece 3.12B



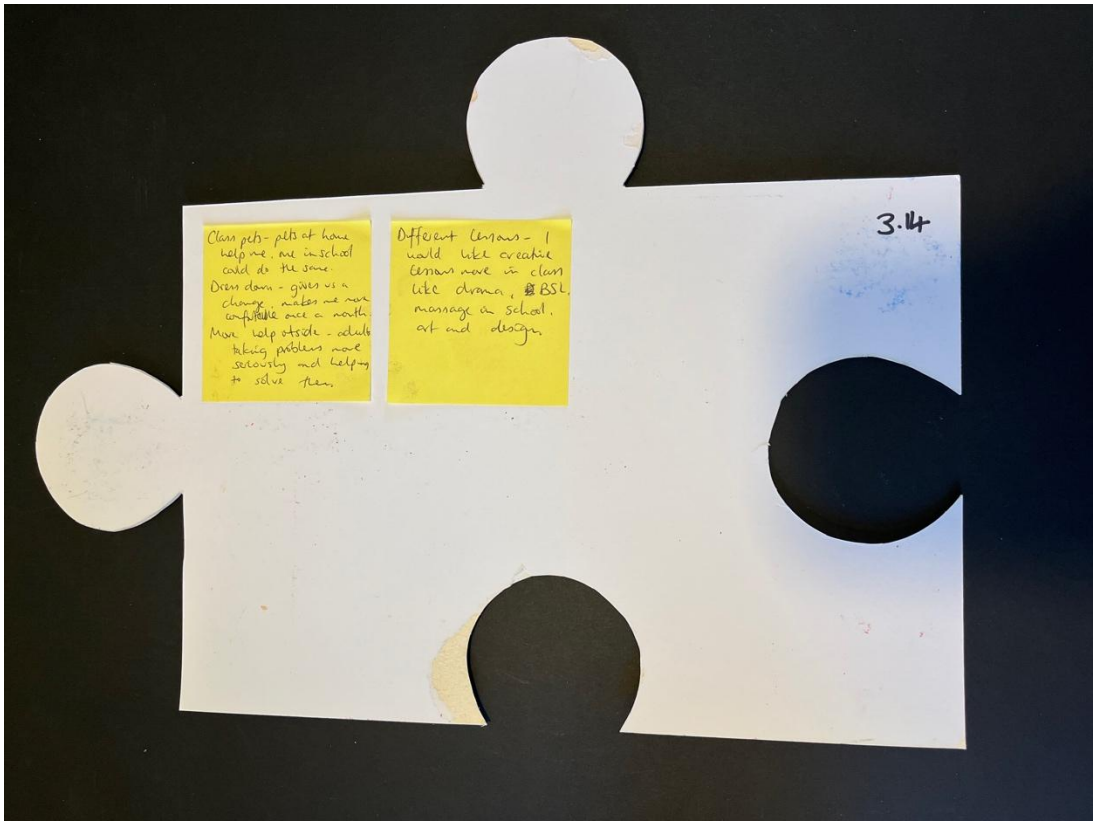
Jigsaw piece 3.13A



Jigsaw piece 3.13B



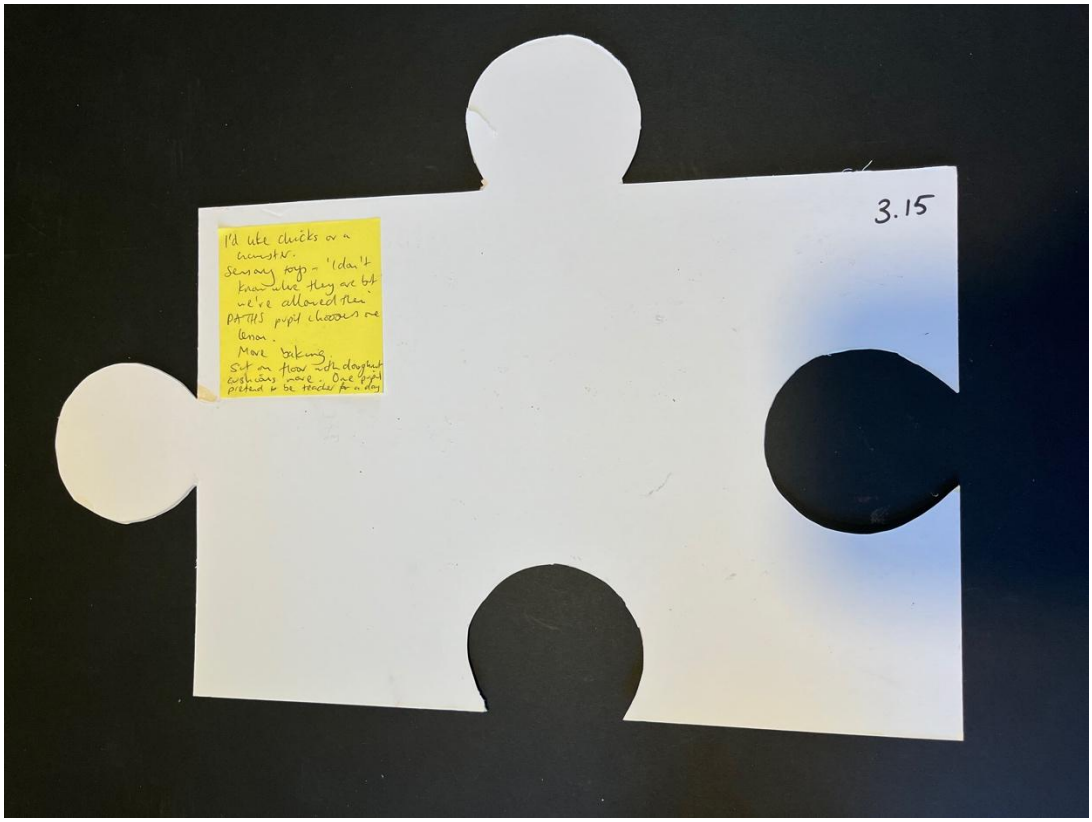
Jigsaw piece 3.14A



Jigsaw piece 3.14B

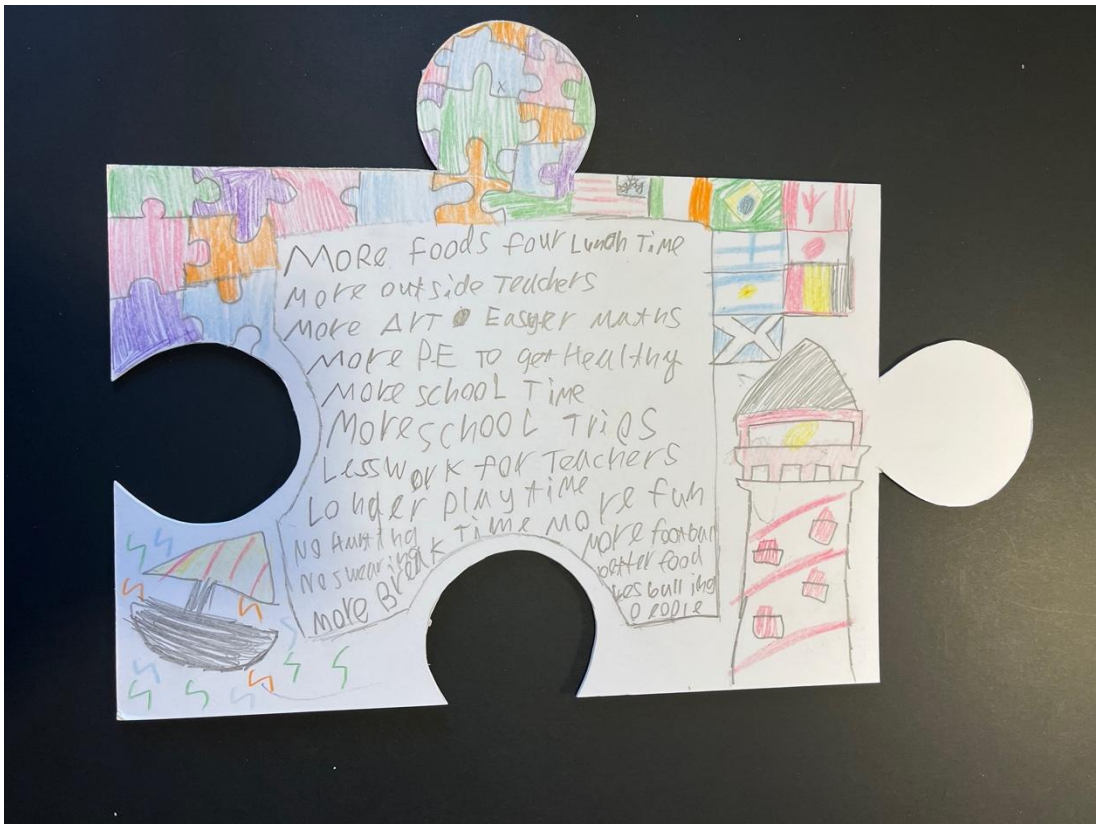


Jigsaw piece 3.15A

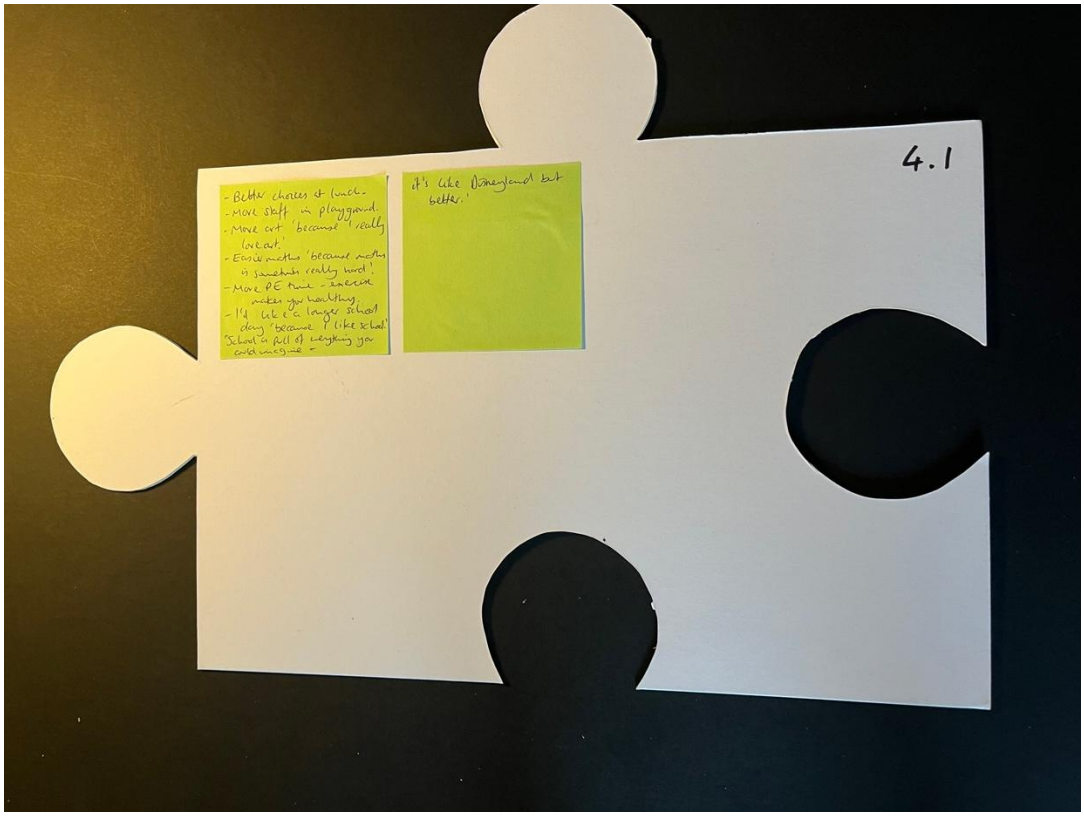


Jigsaw piece 3.15B

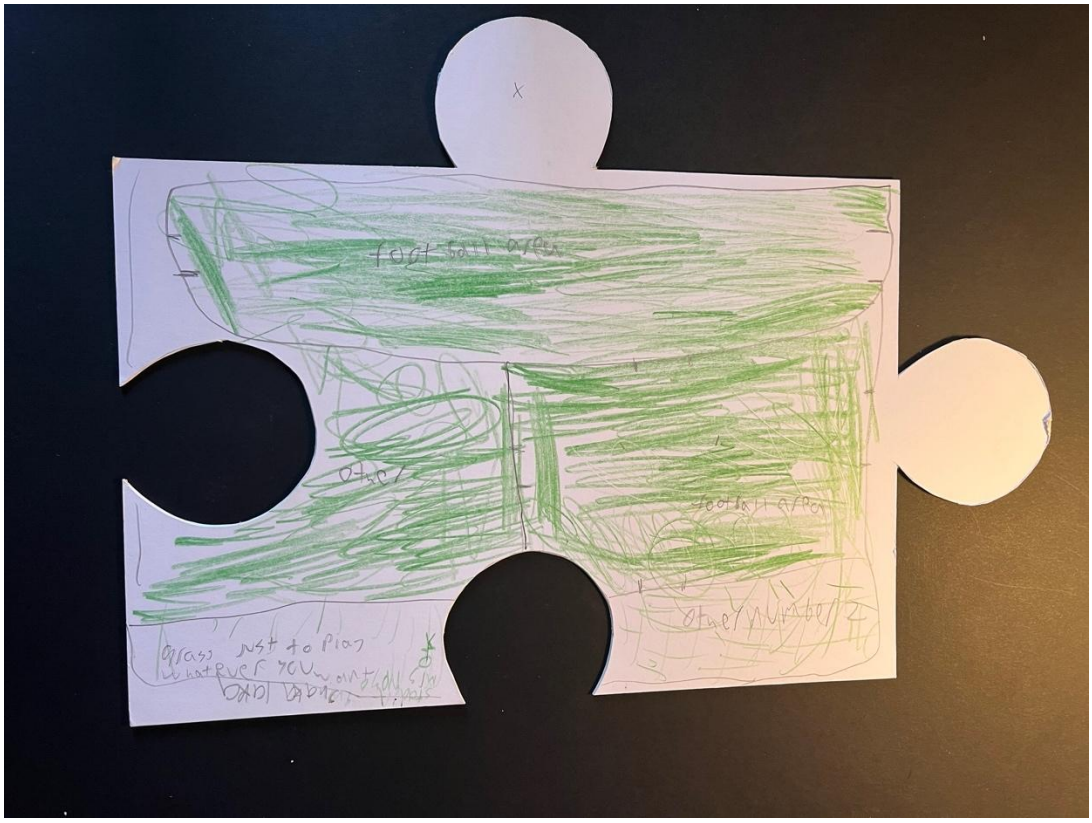
School 4.



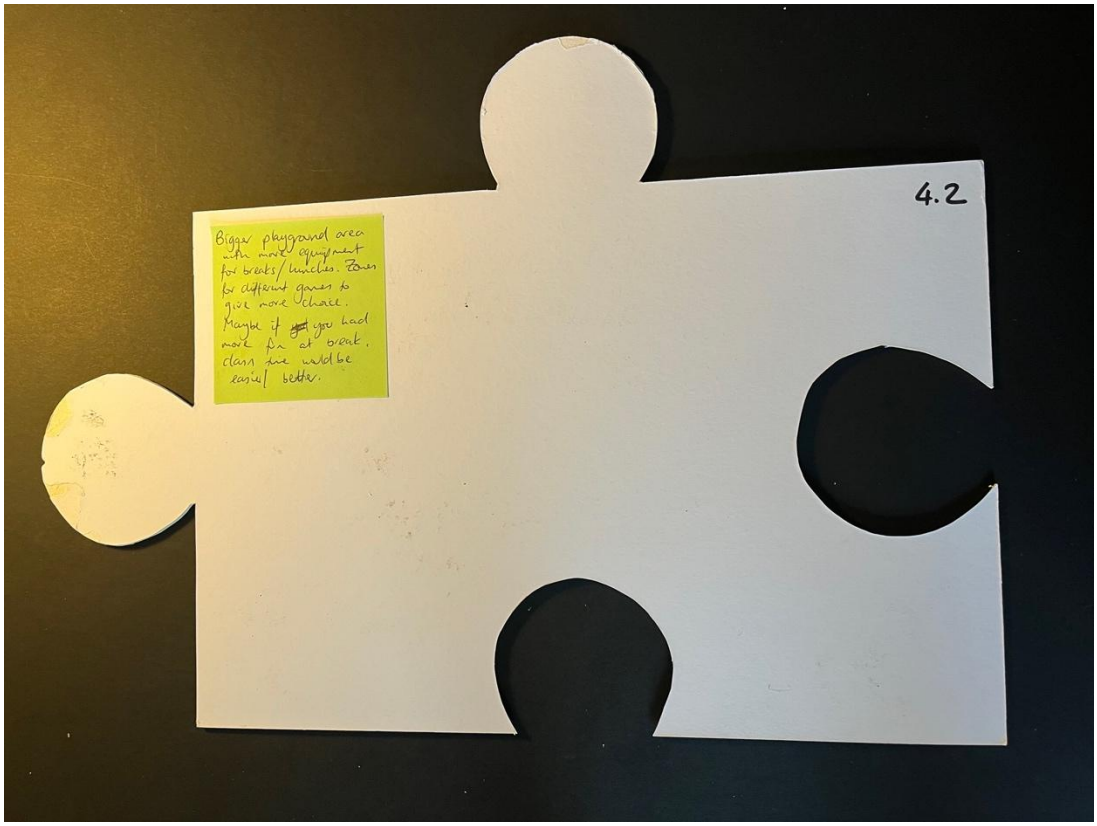
Jigsaw piece 4.1A



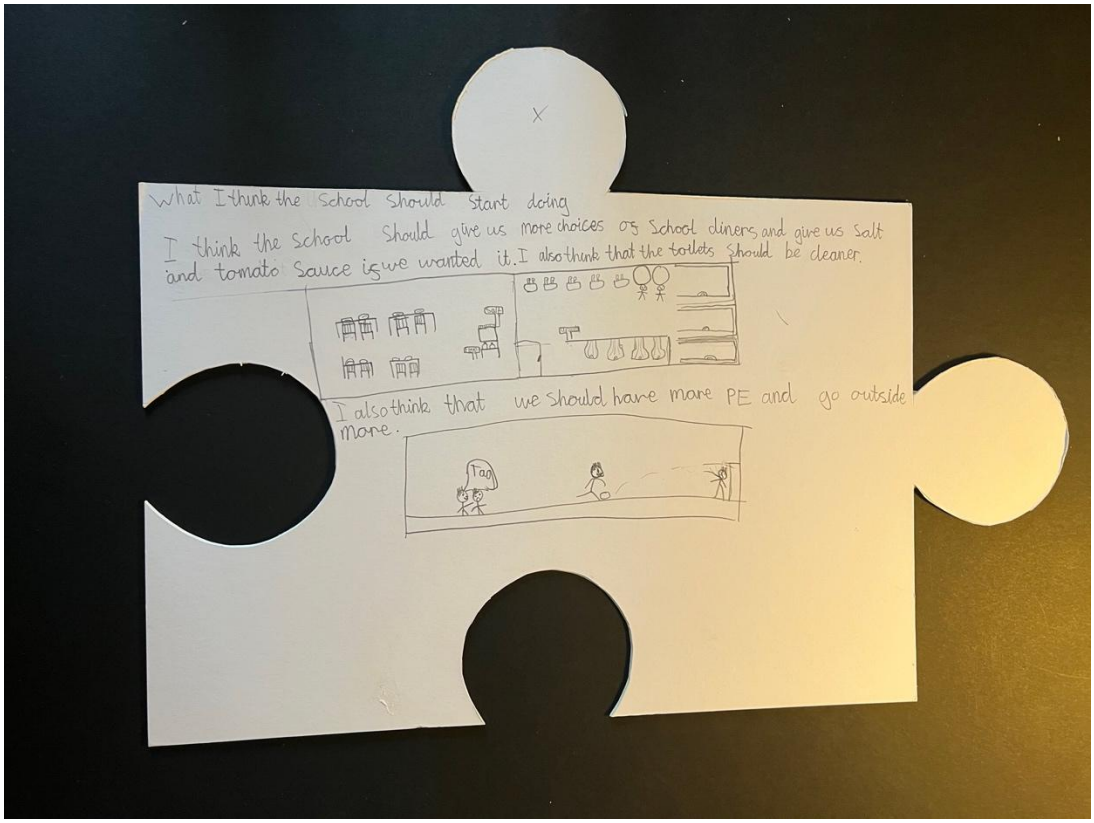
Jigsaw piece 4.1B



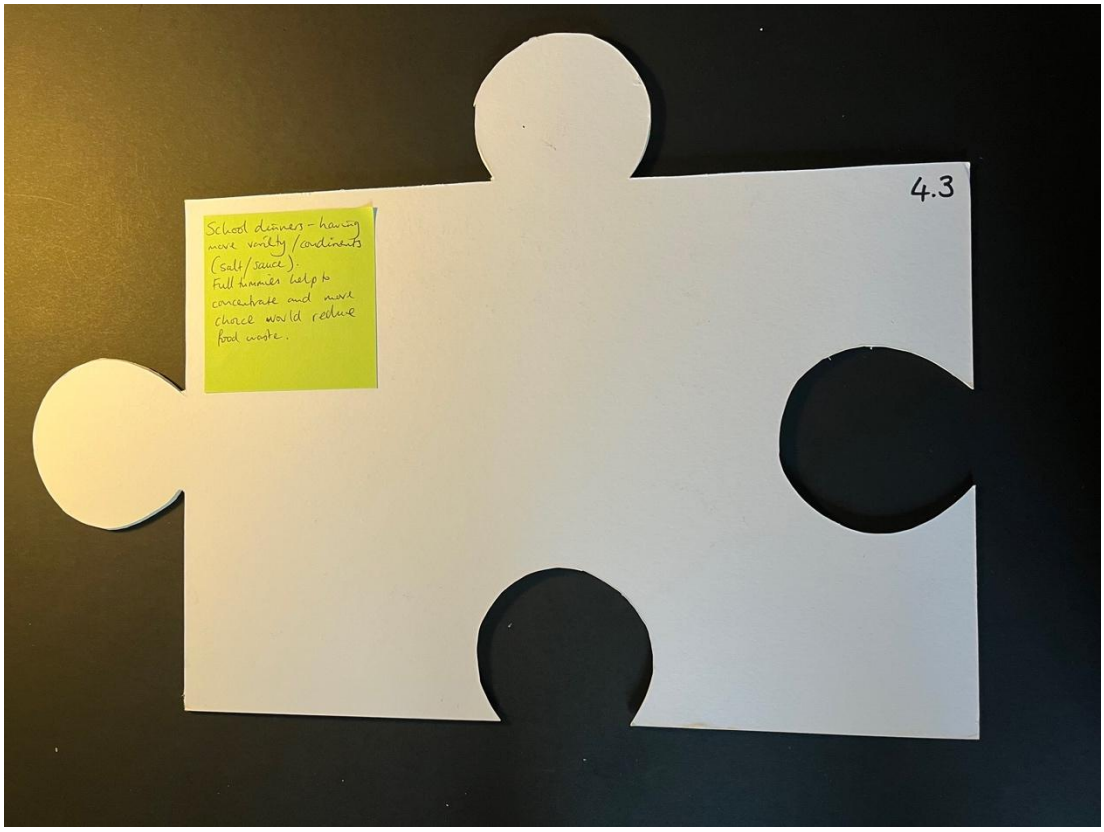
Jigsaw piece 4.2A



Jigsaw piece 4.2B



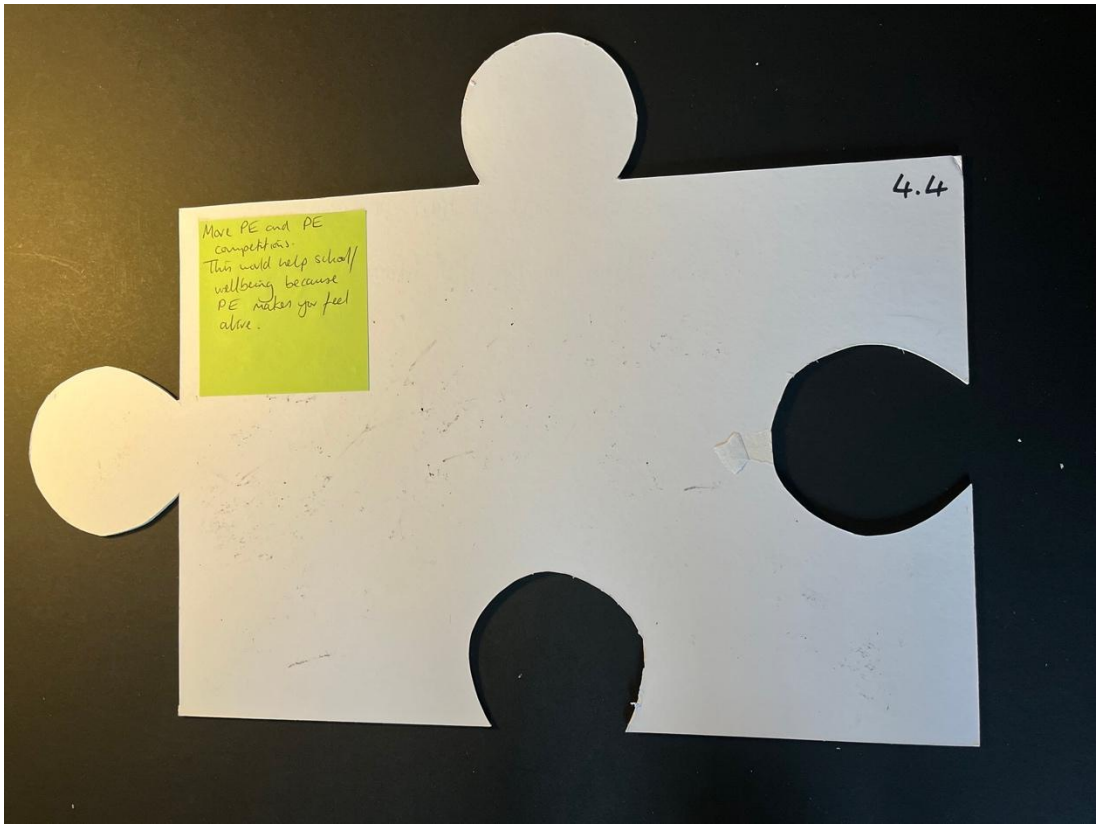
Jigsaw piece 4.3A



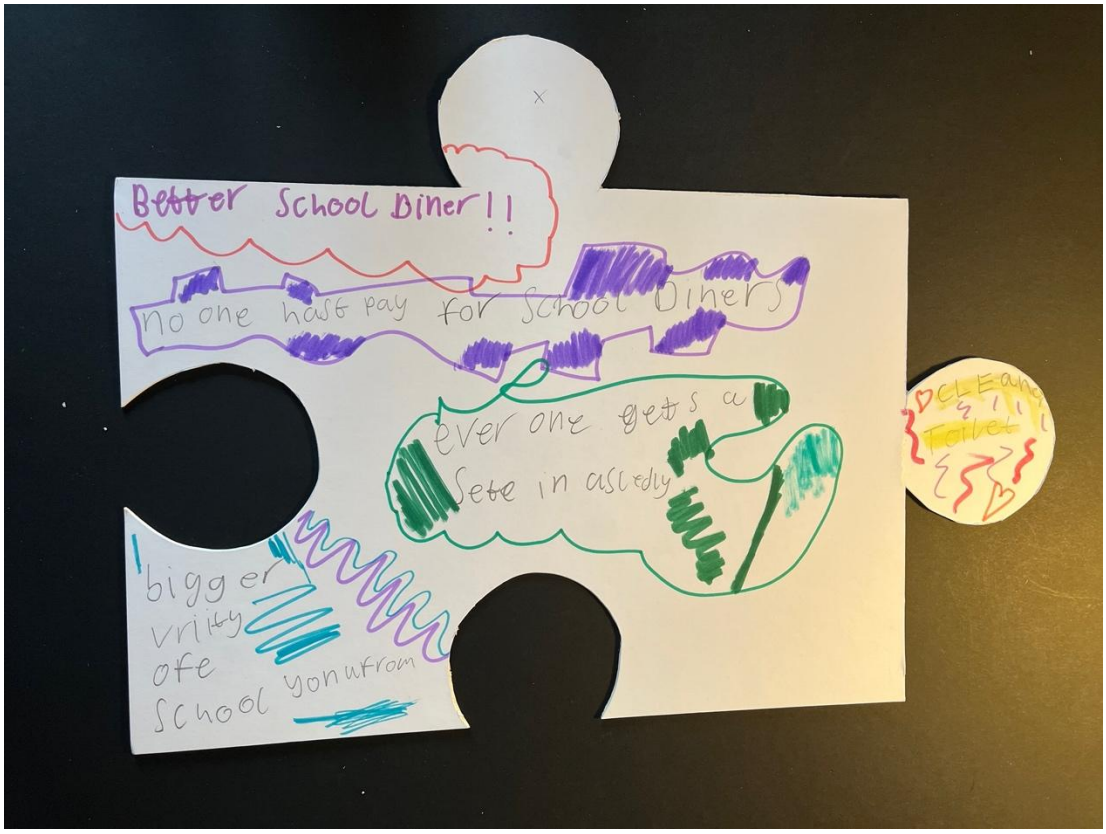
Jigsaw piece 4.3B



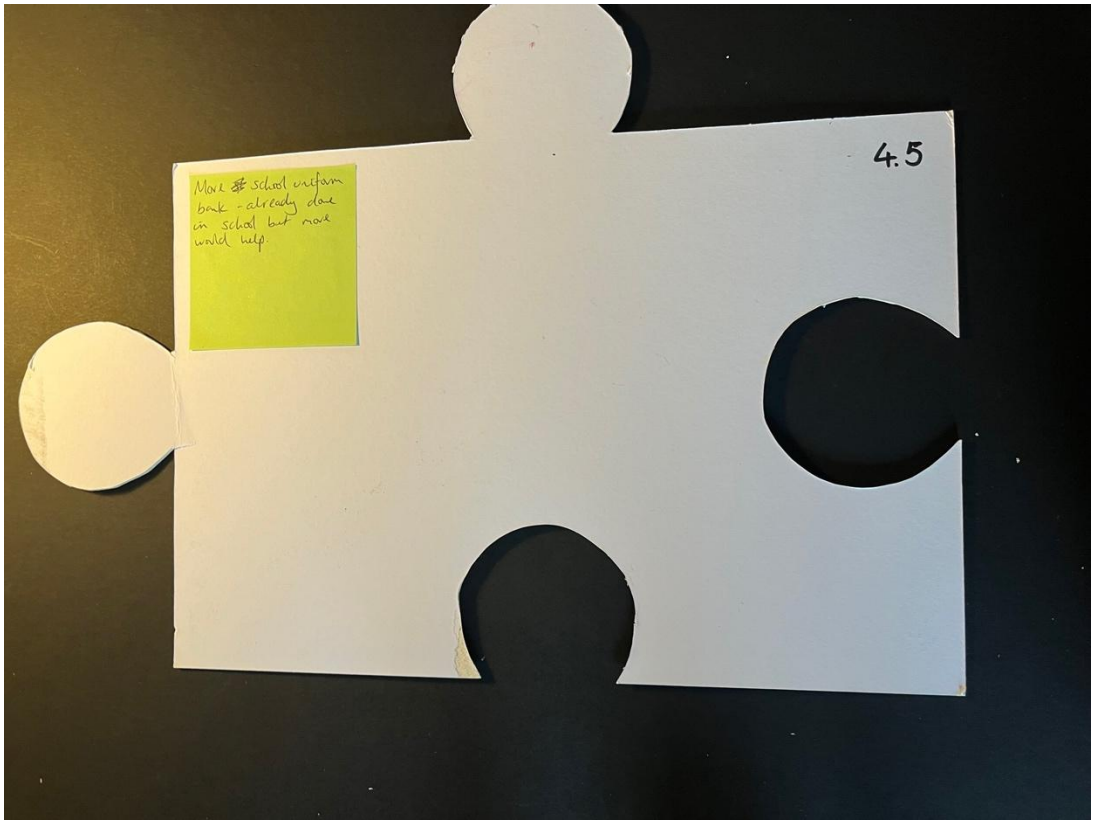
Jigsaw piece 4.4A



Jigsaw piece 4.4B



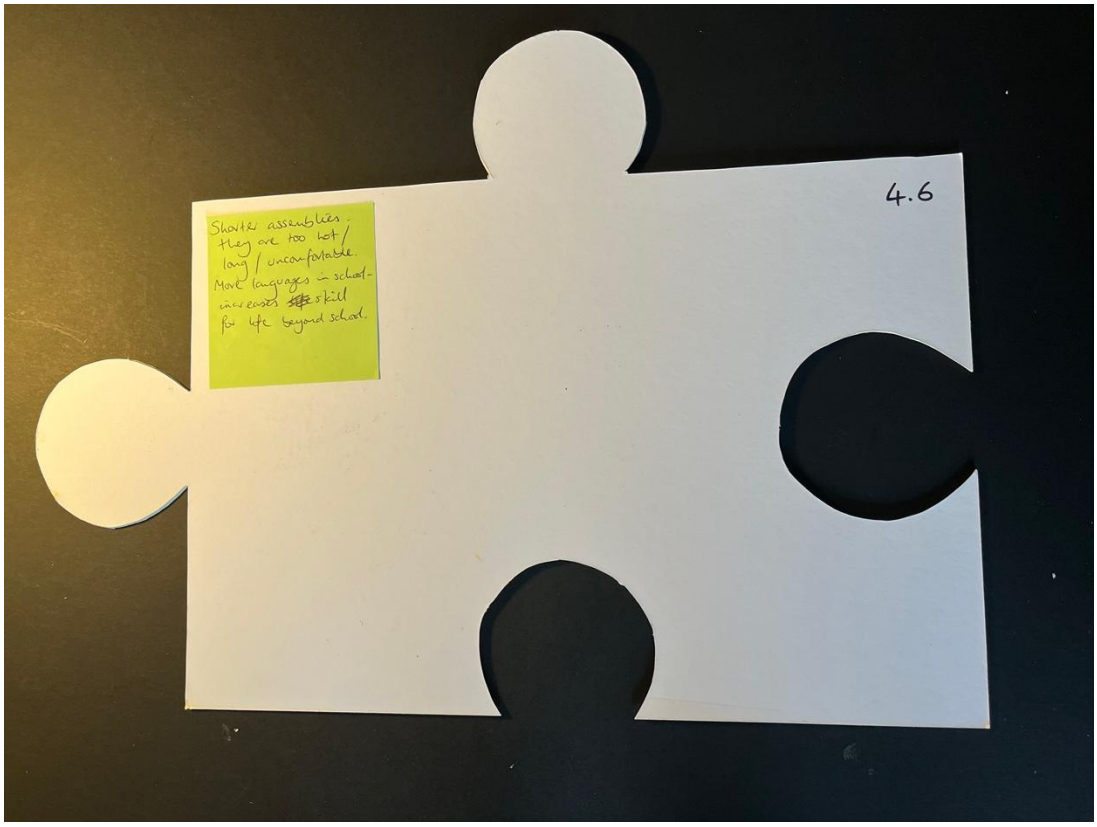
Jigsaw piece 4.5A



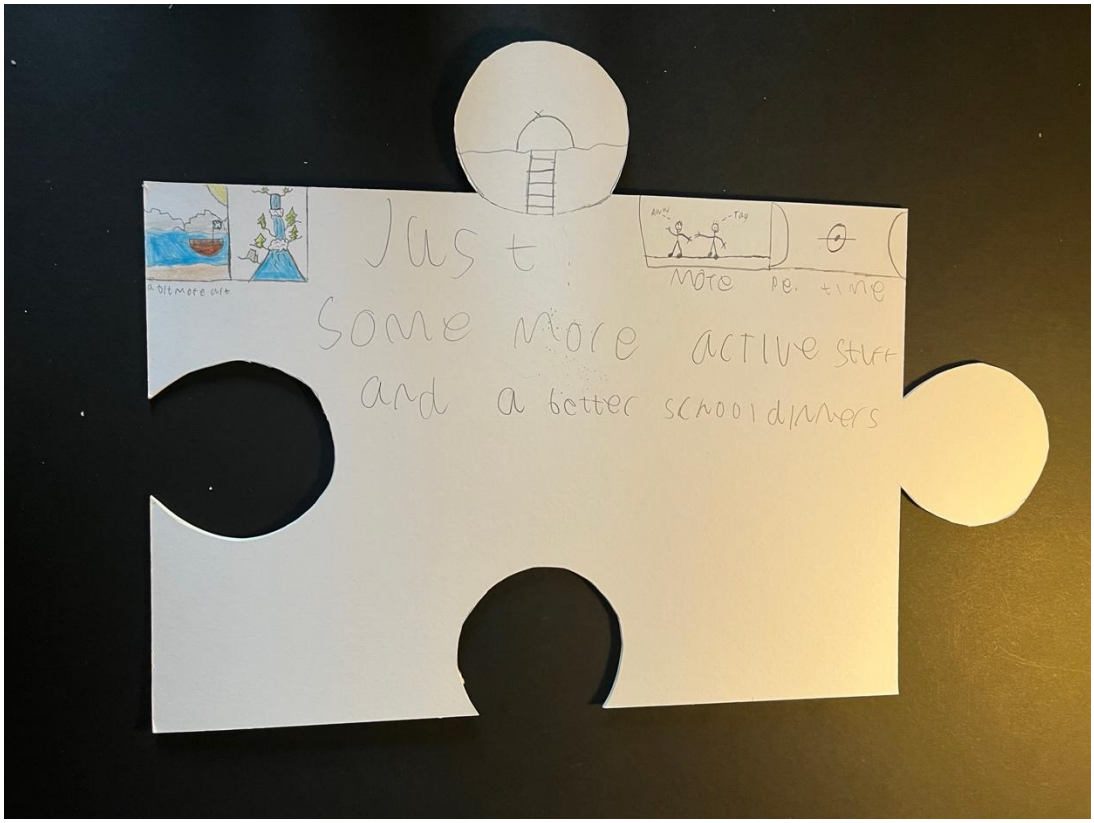
Jigsaw piece 4.5B



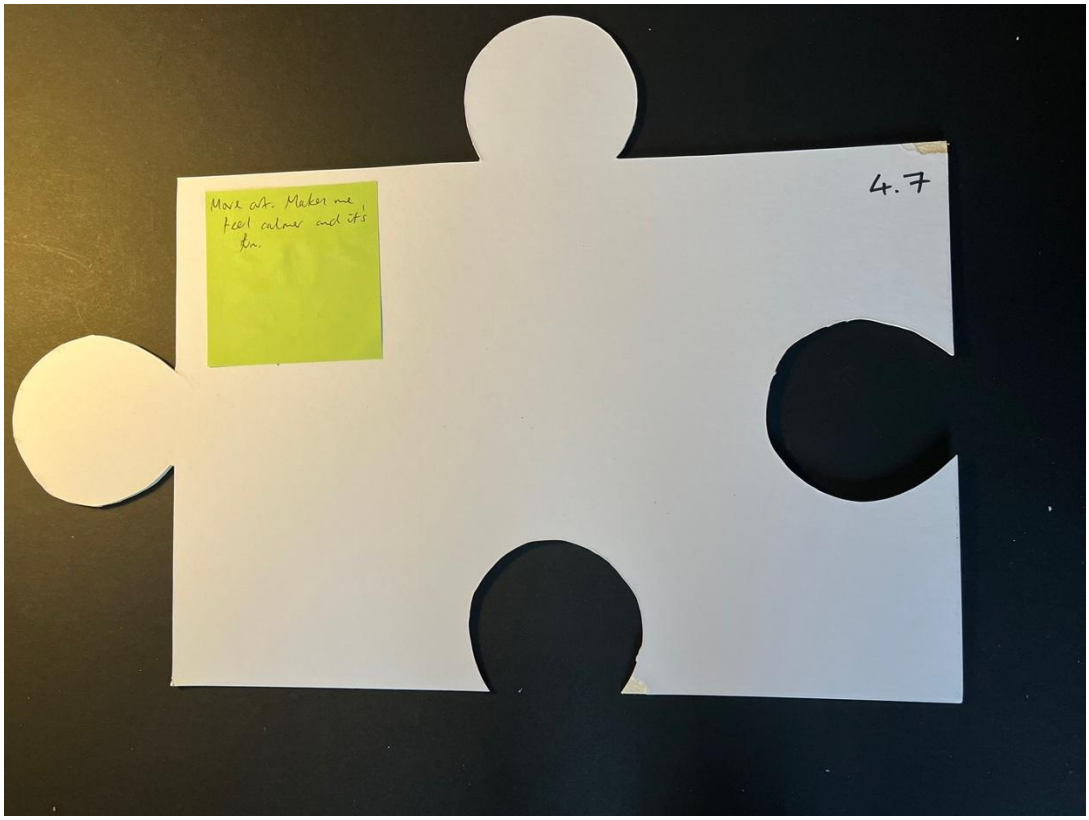
Jigsaw piece 4.6A



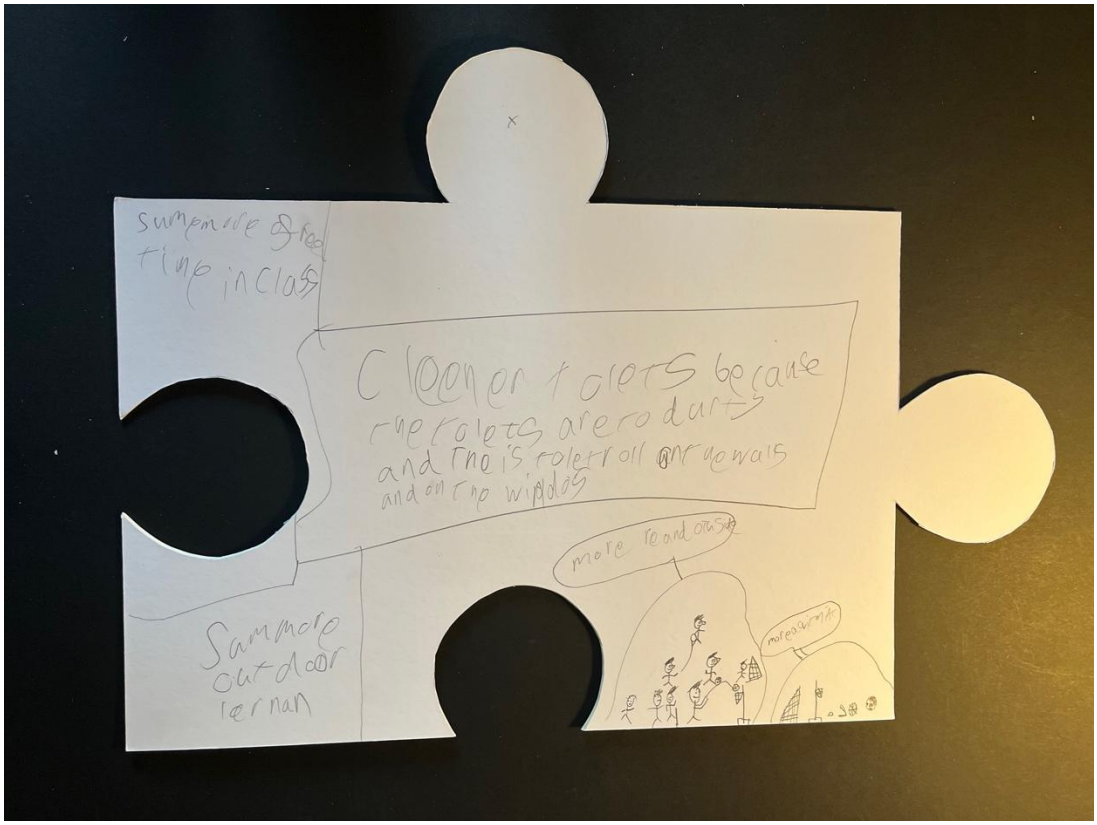
Jigsaw piece 4.6B



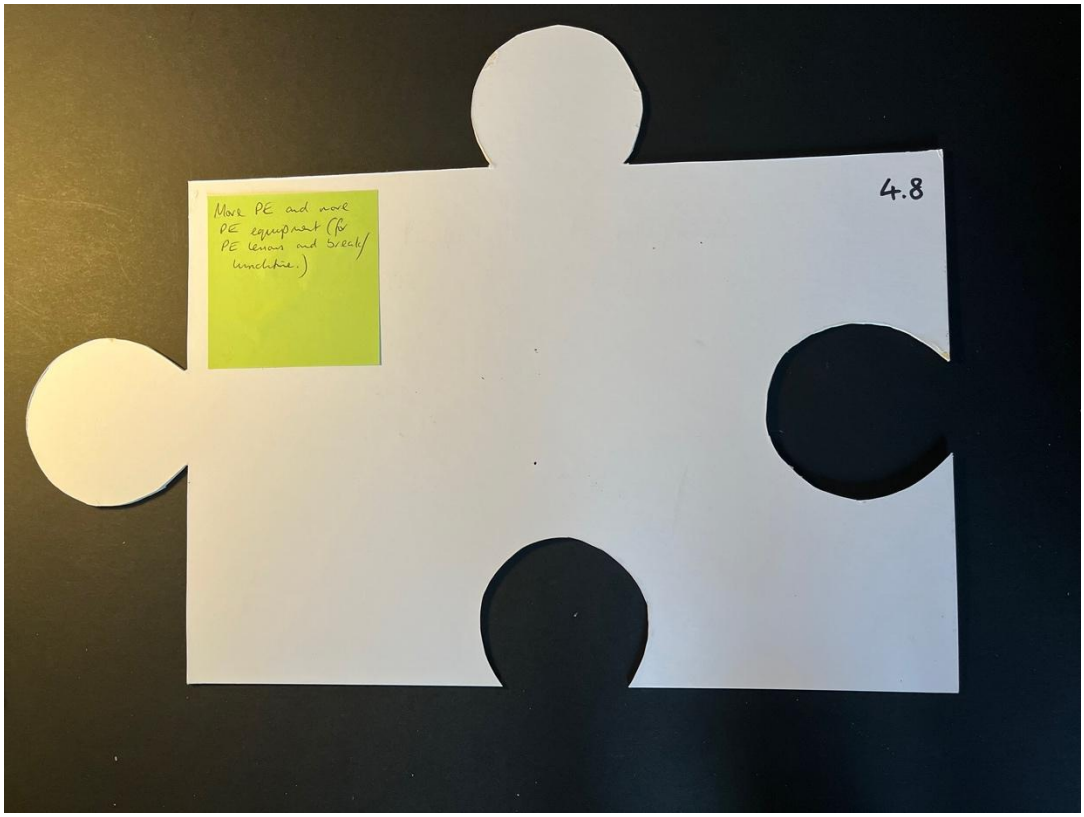
Jigsaw piece 4.7A



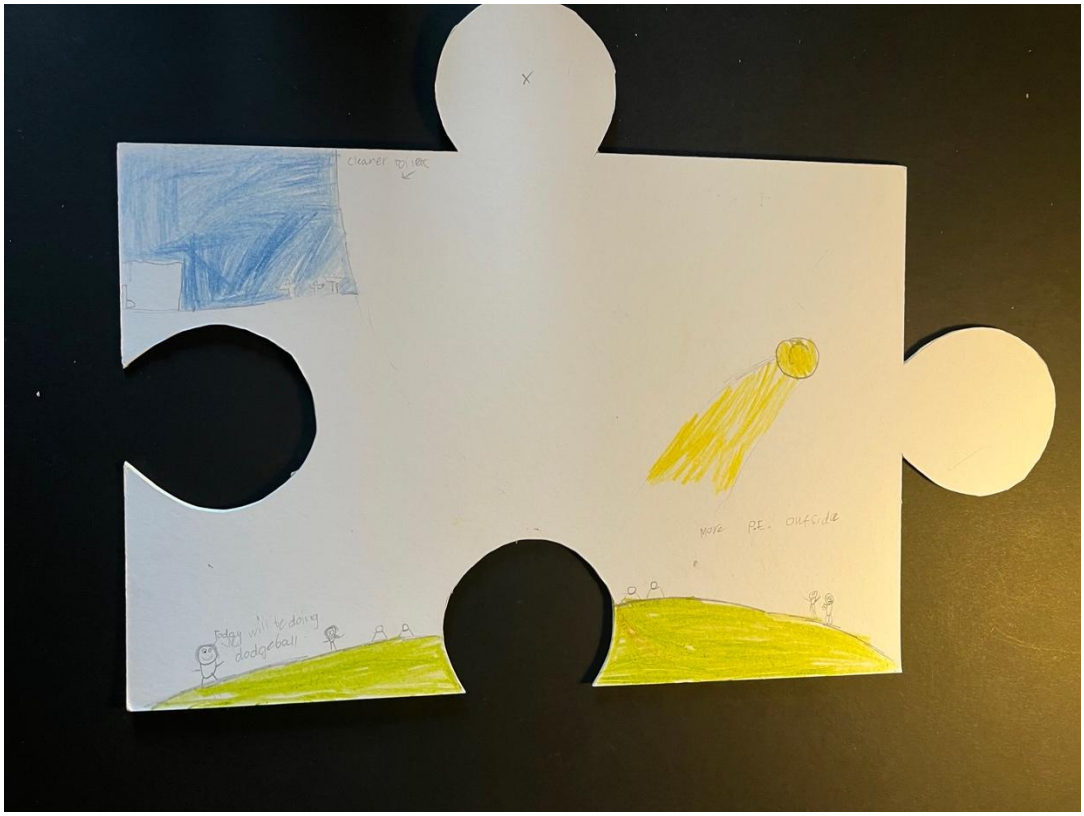
Jigsaw piece 4.7B



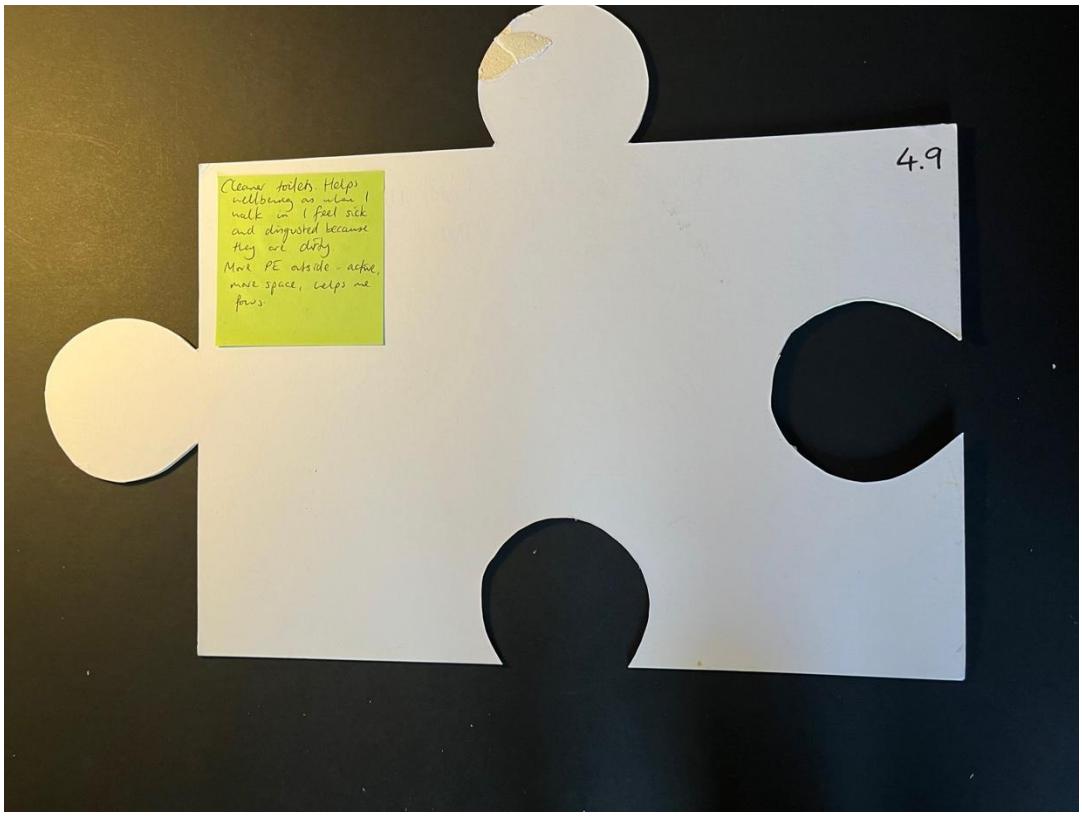
Jigsaw piece 4.8A



Jigsaw piece 4.8B



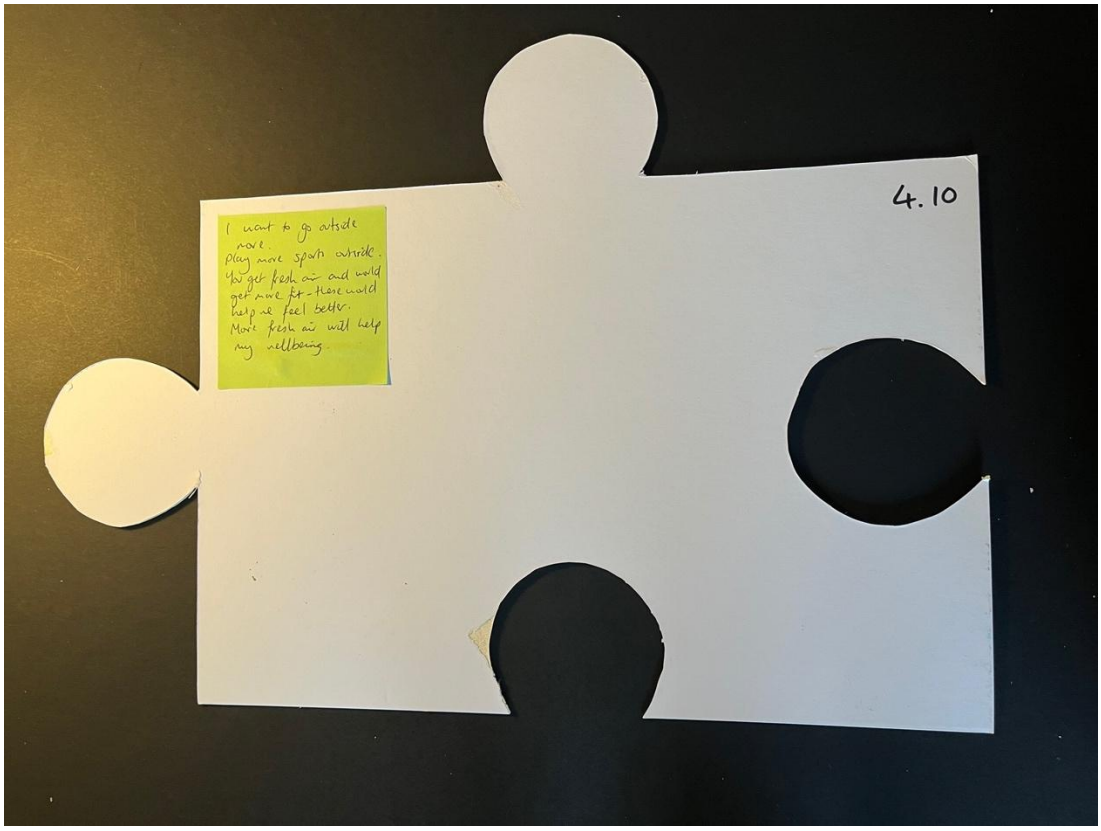
Jigsaw piece 4.9A



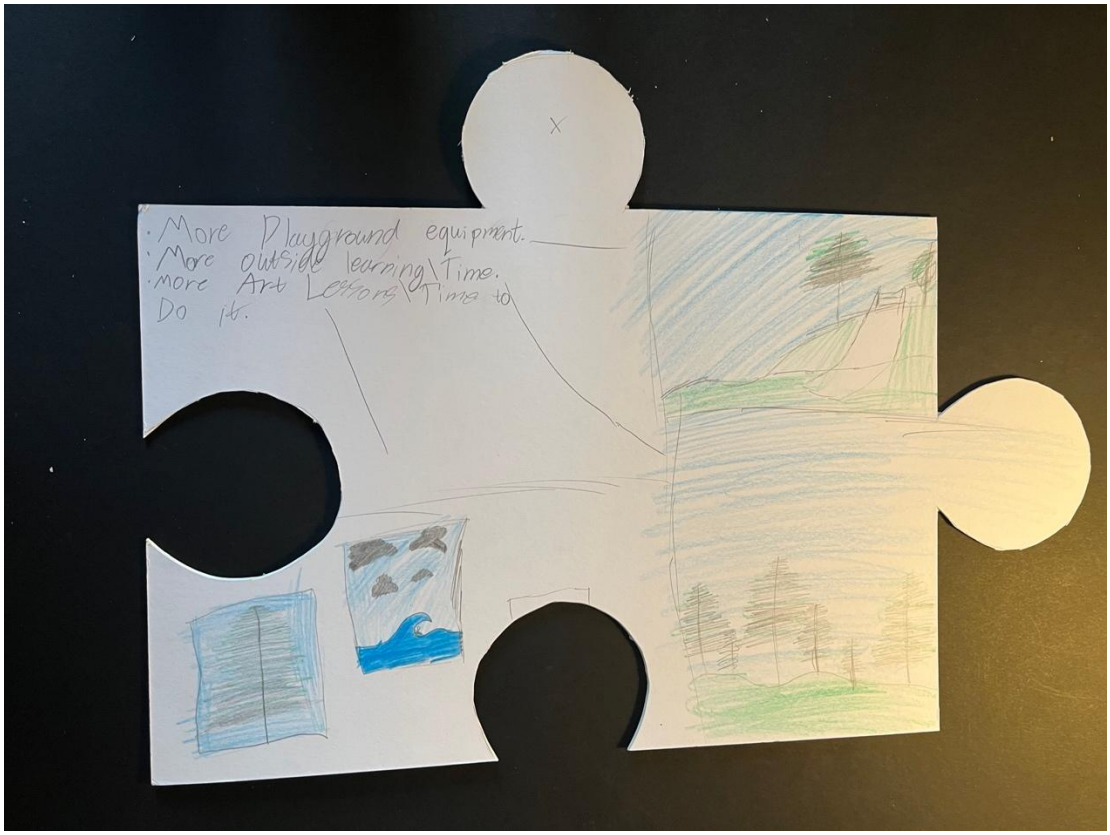
Jigsaw piece 4.9B



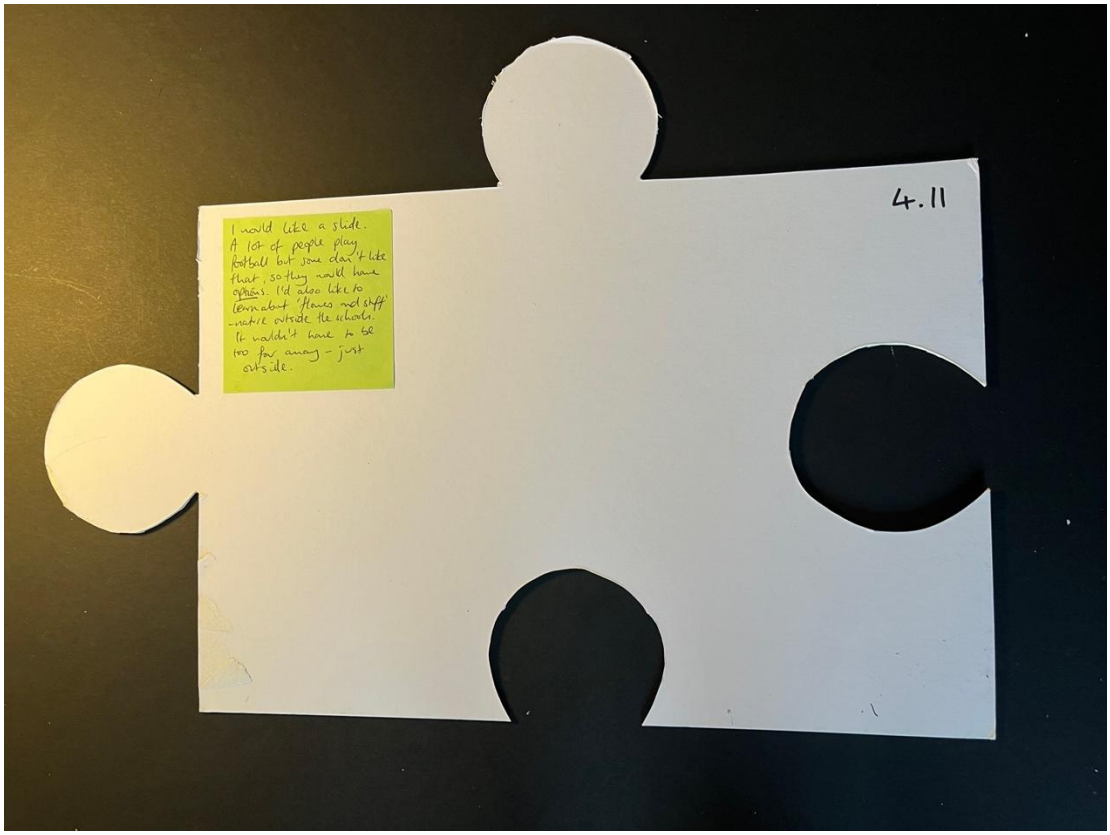
Jigsaw piece 4.10A



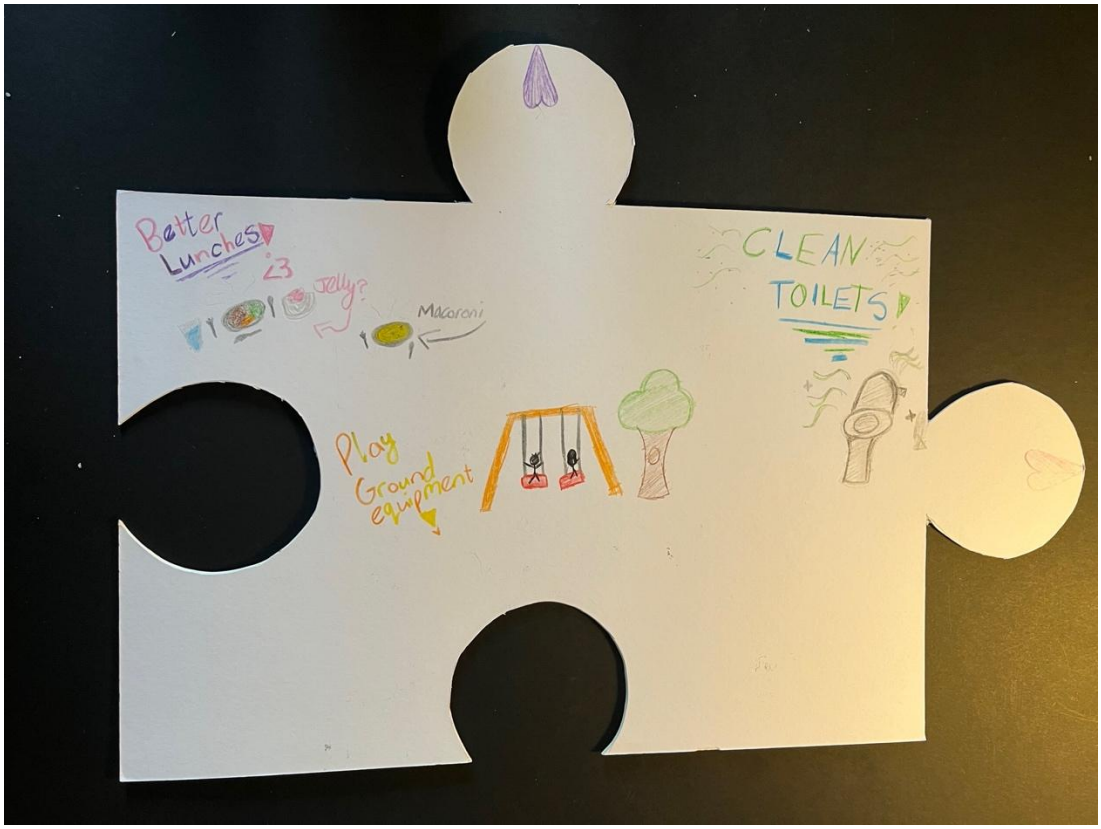
Jigsaw piece 4.10B



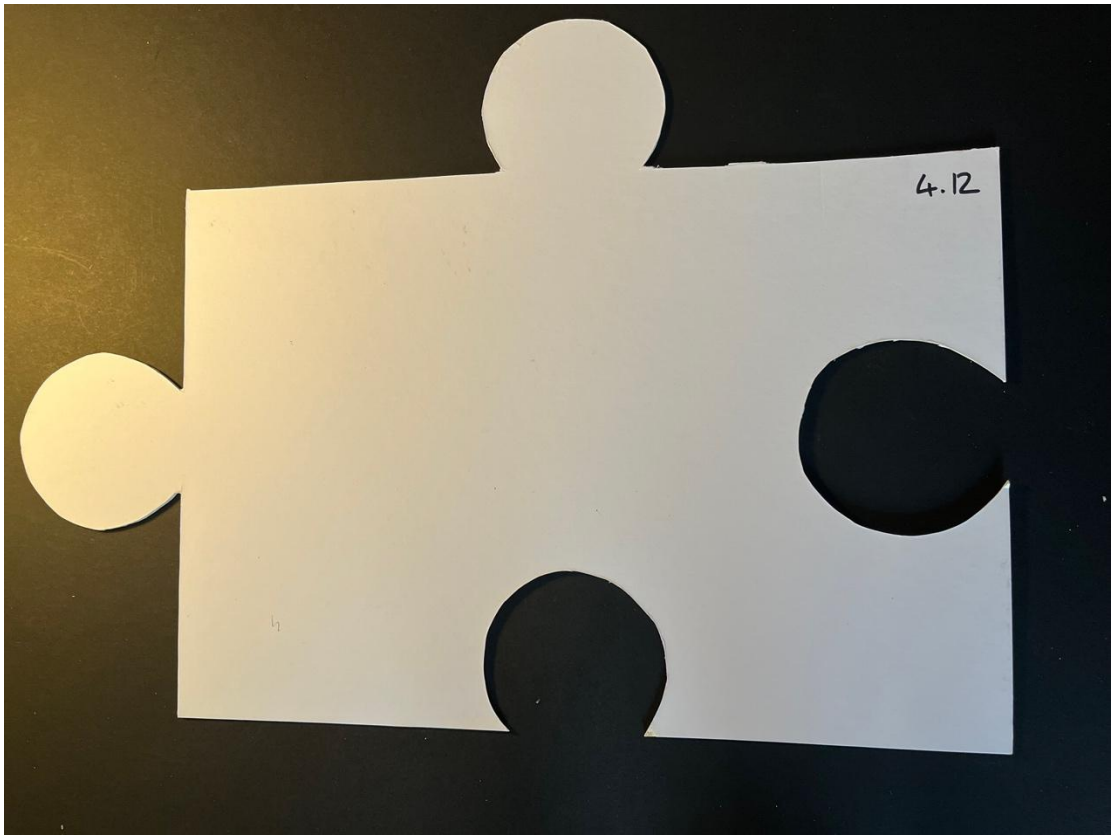
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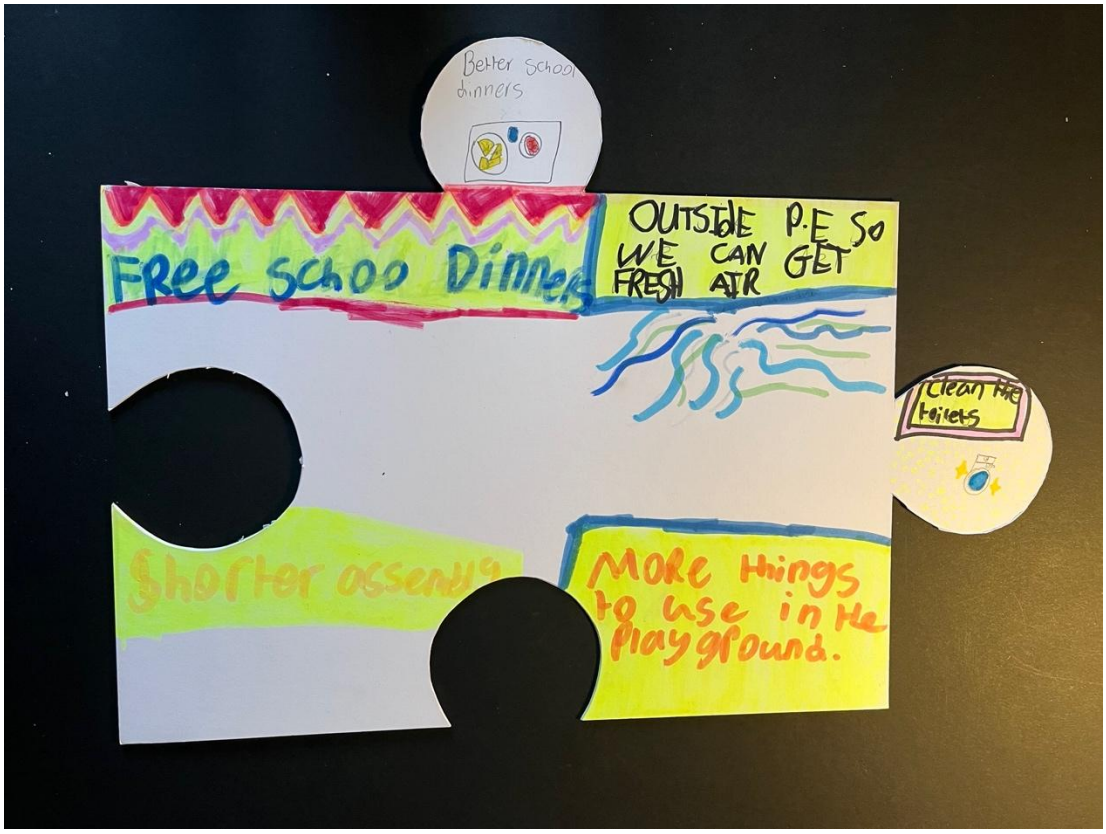
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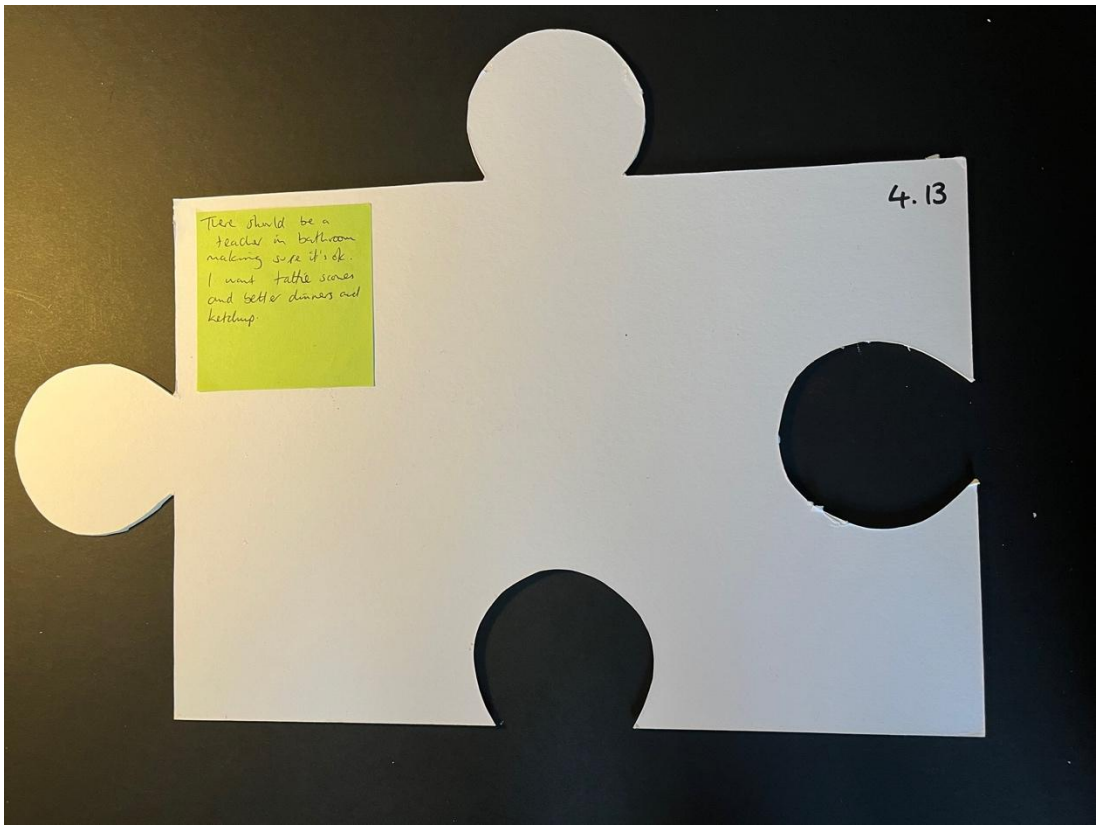
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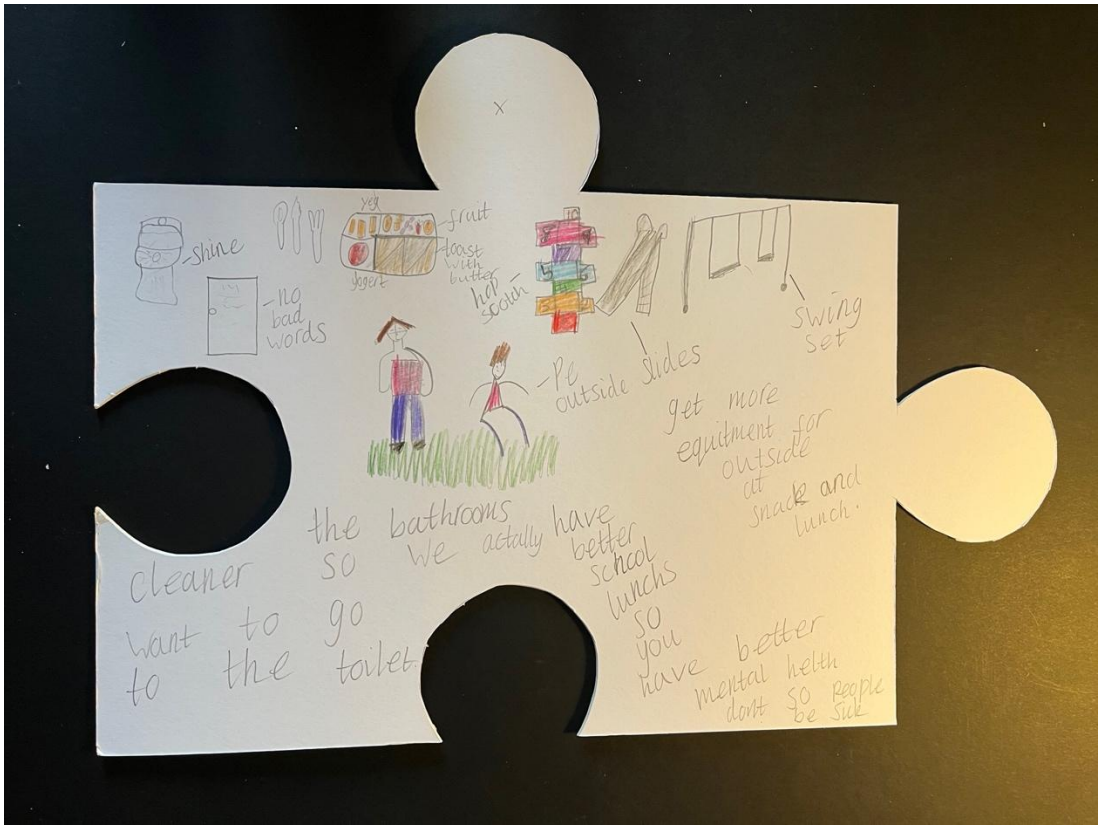
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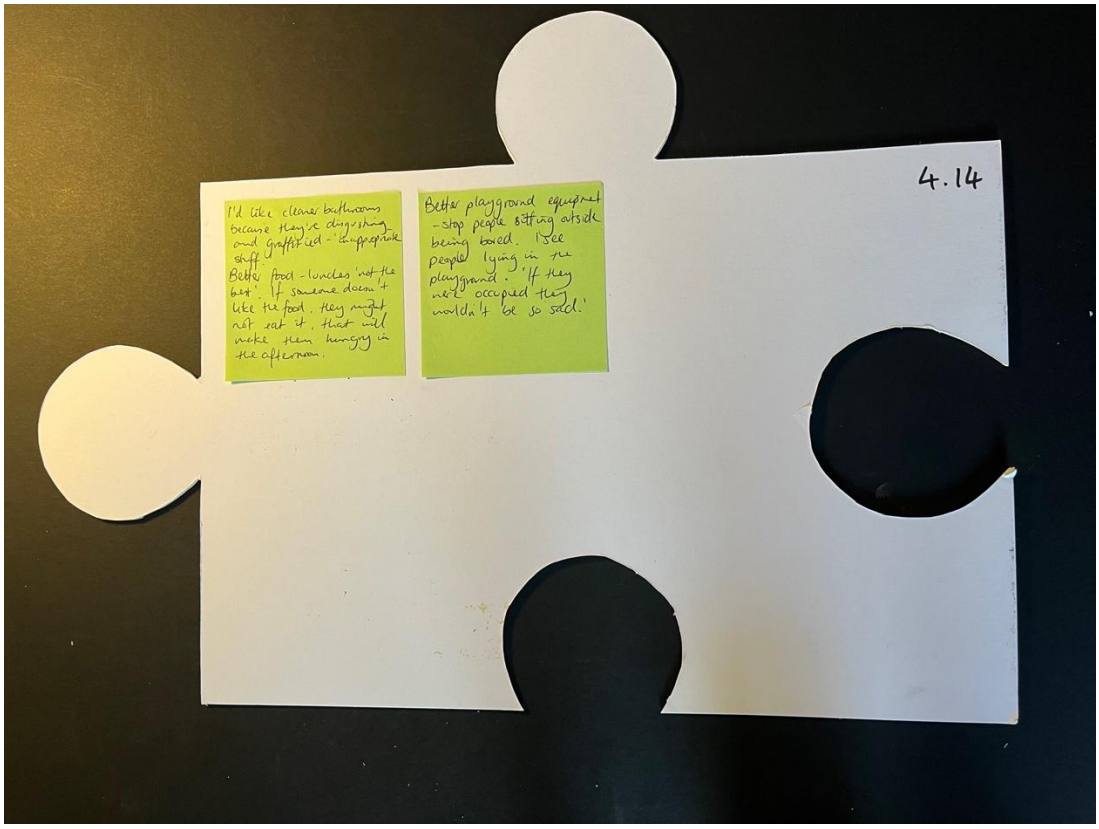
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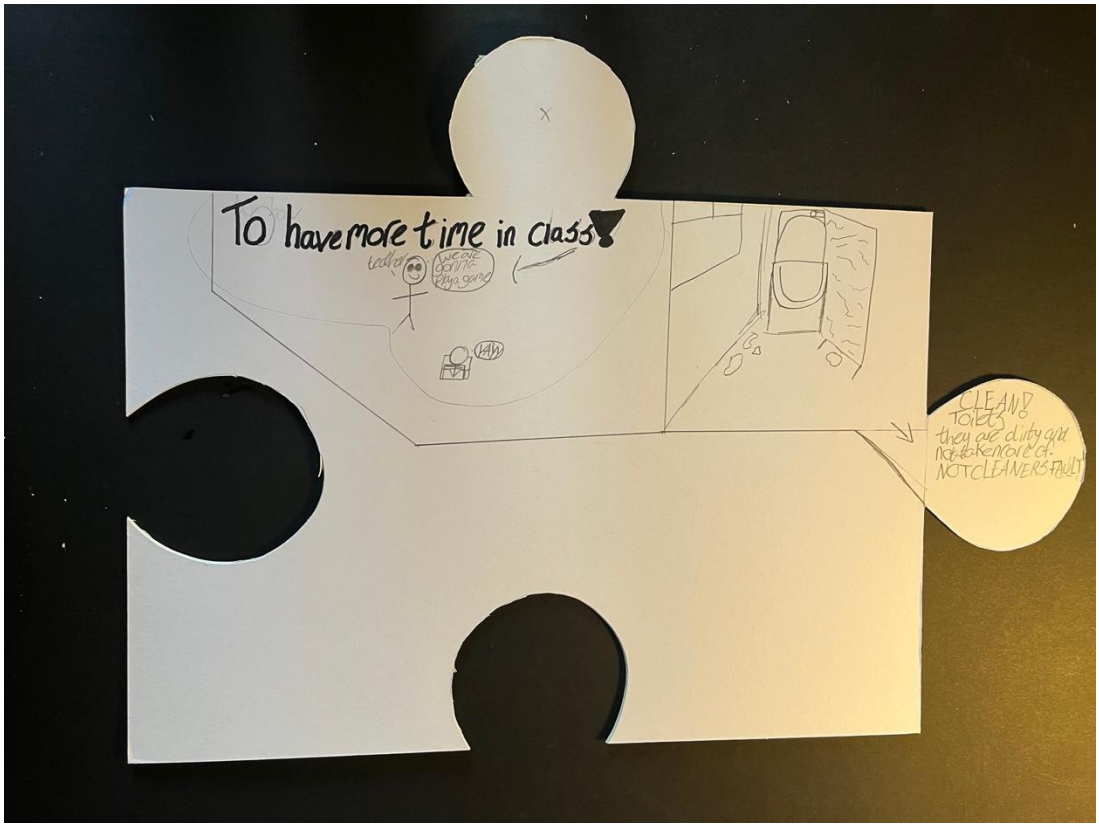
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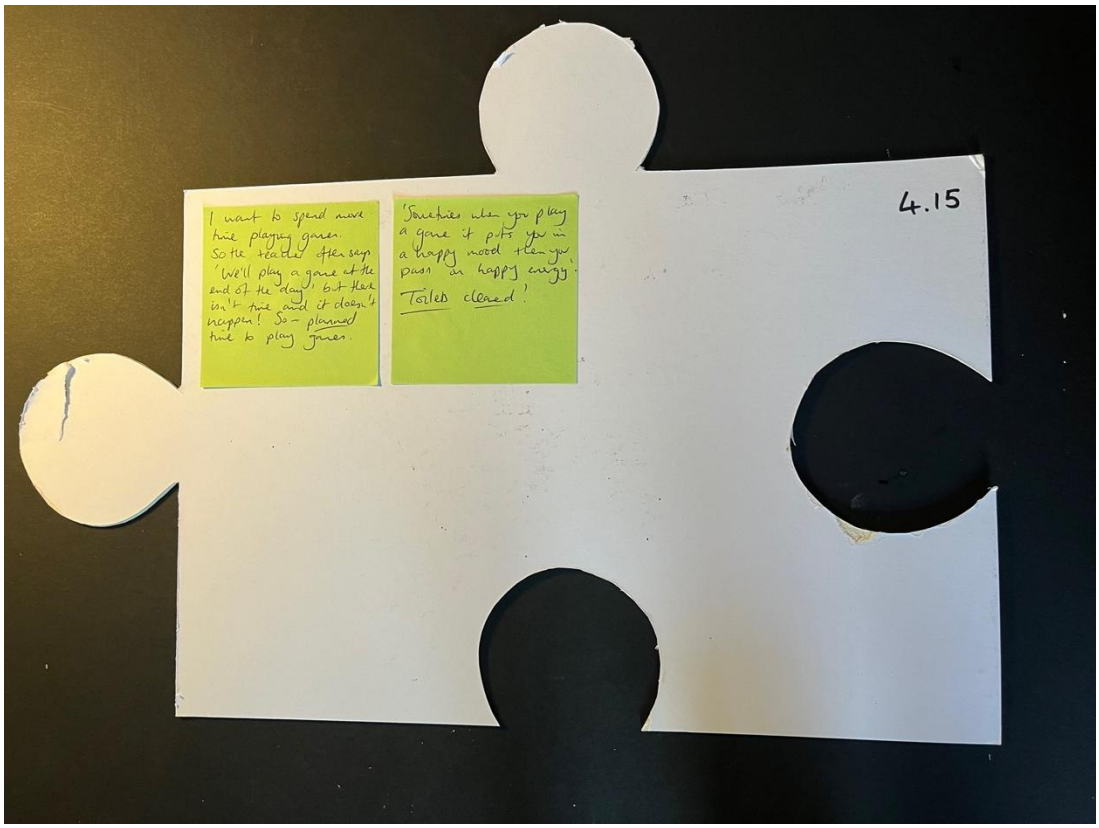
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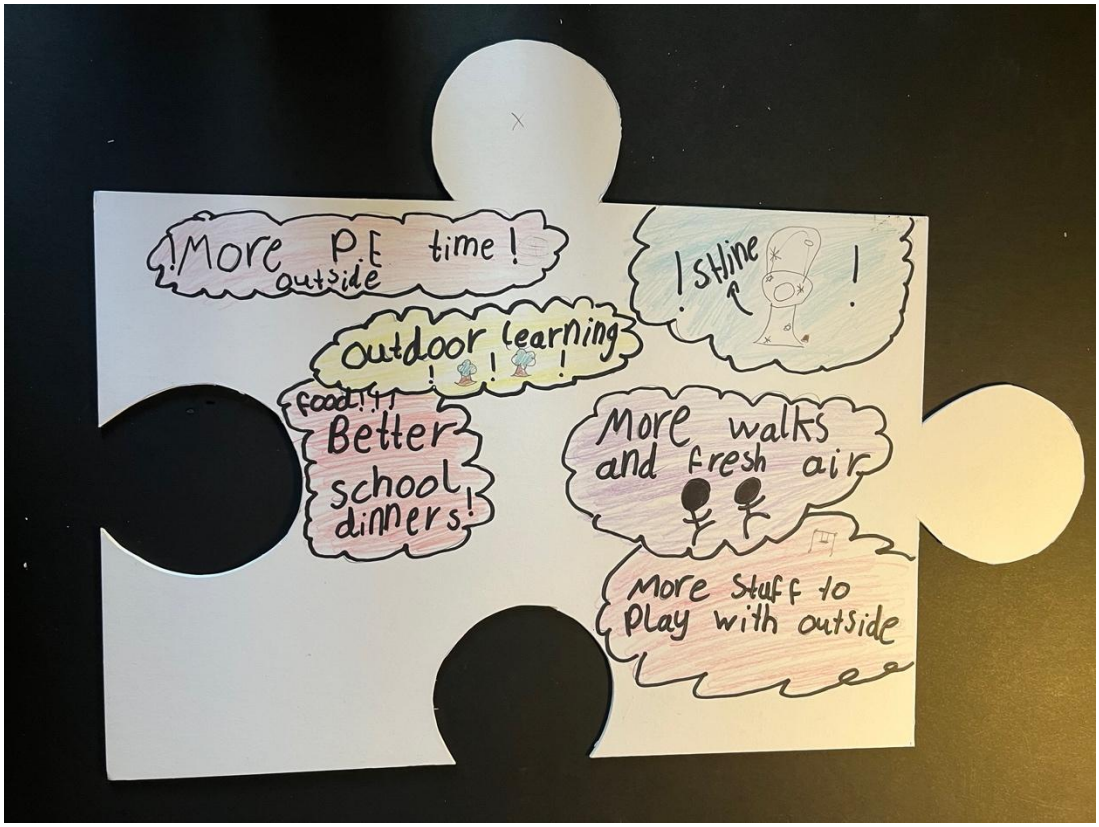
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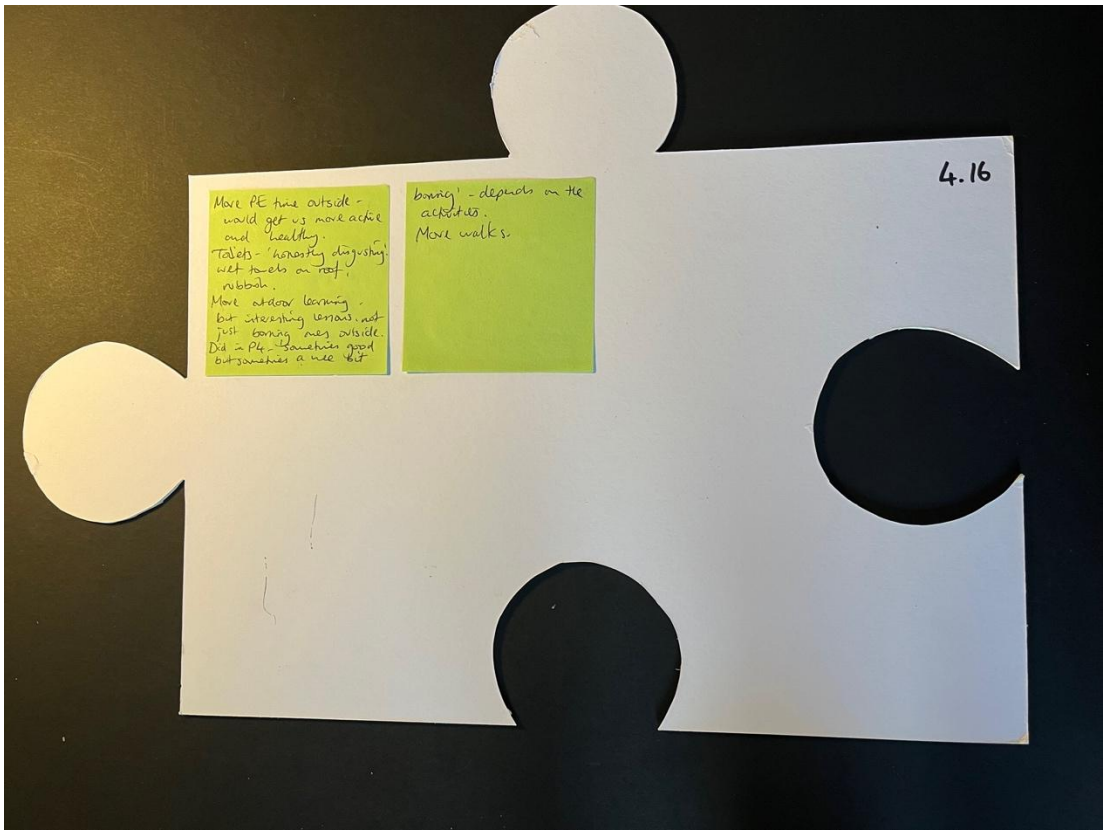
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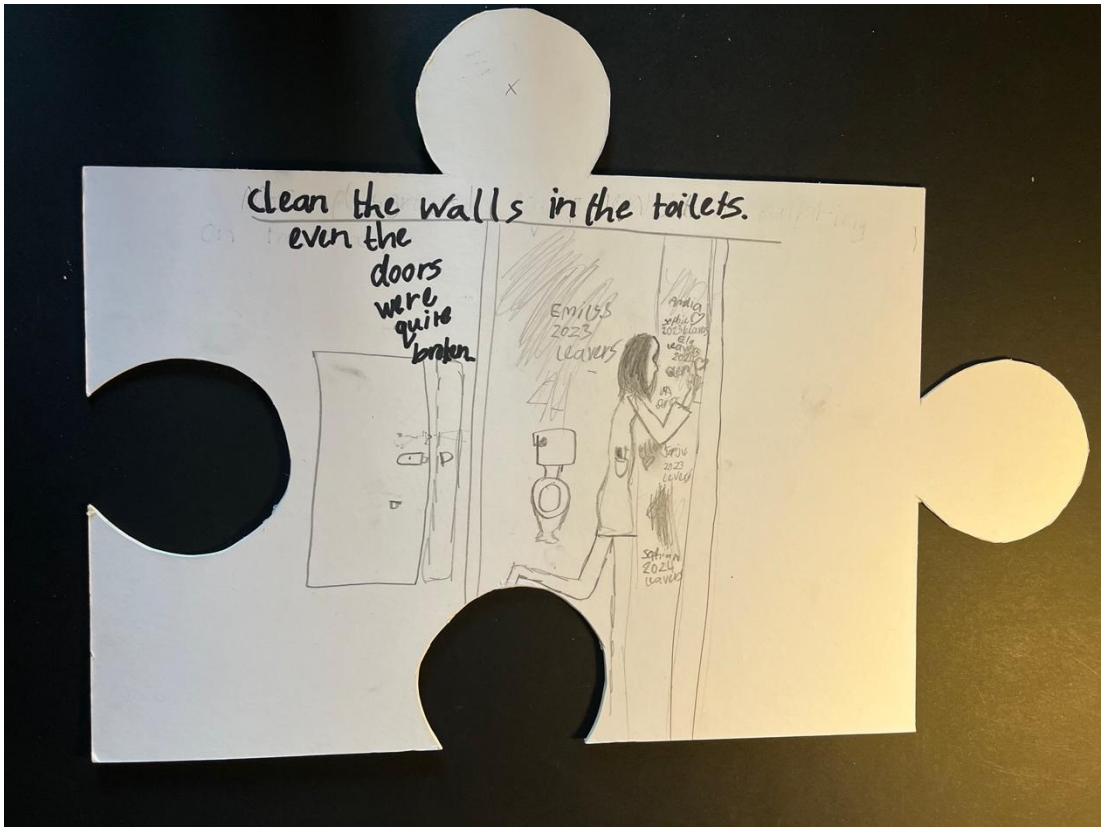
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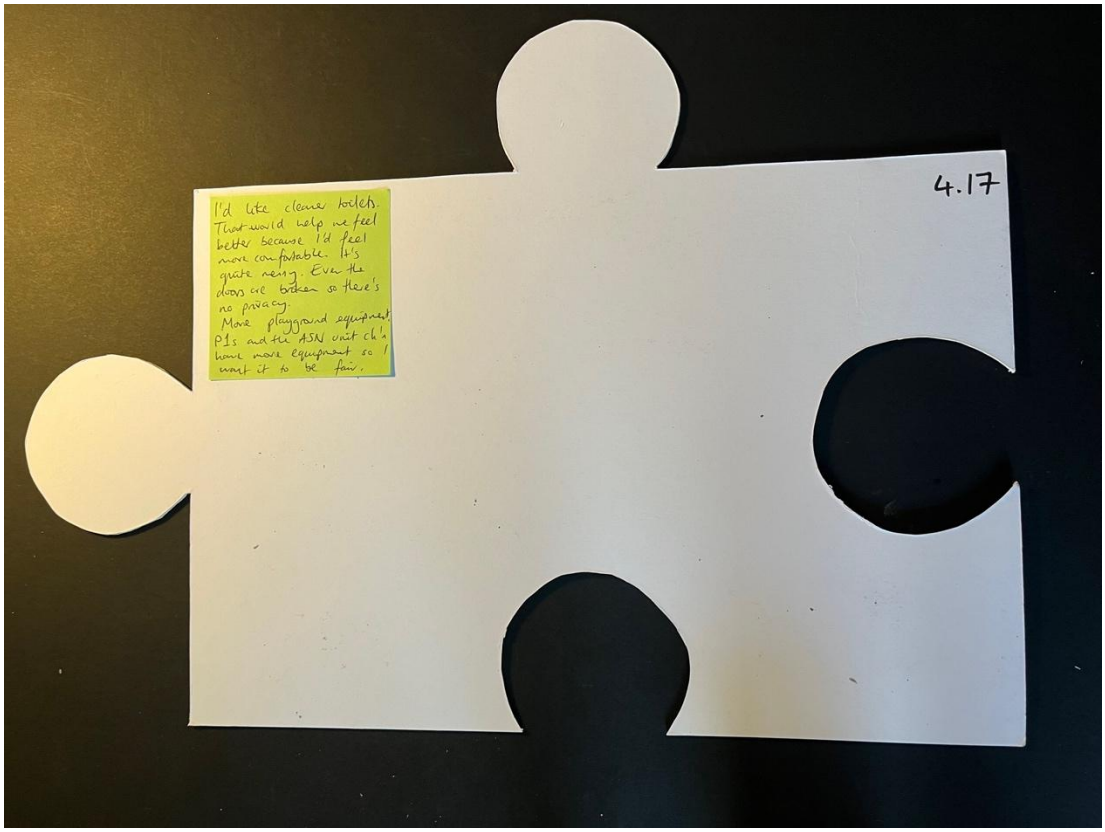
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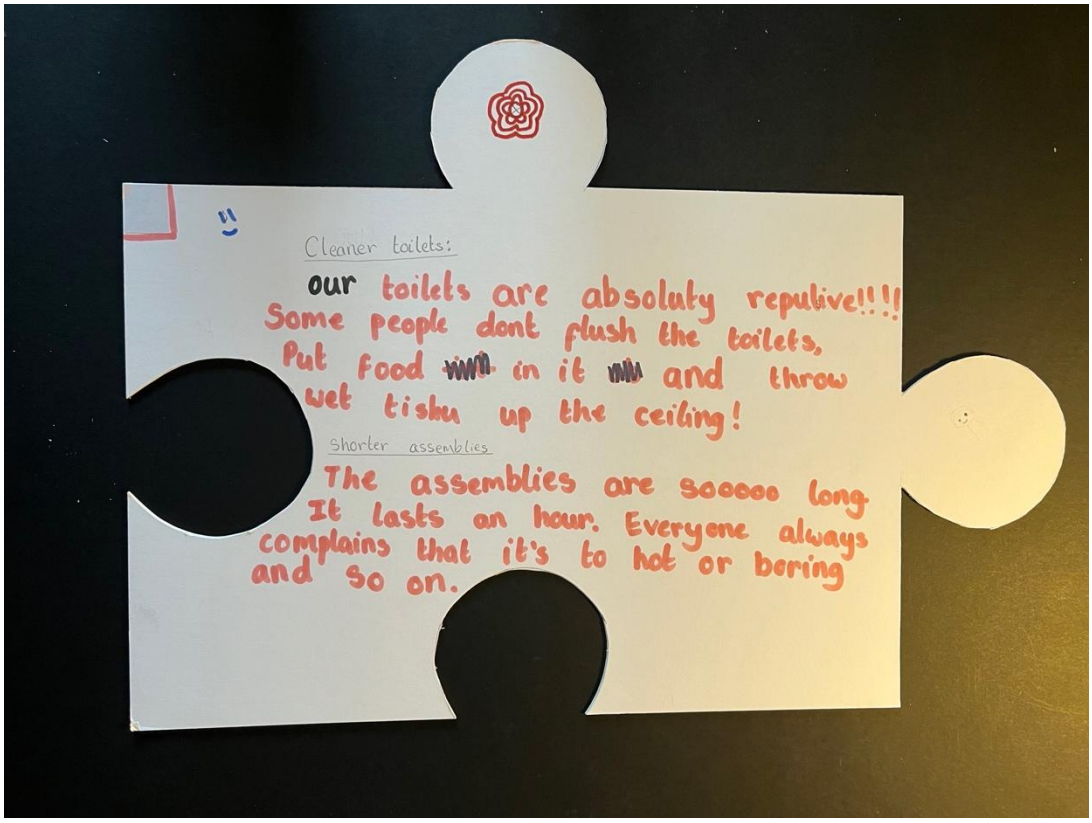
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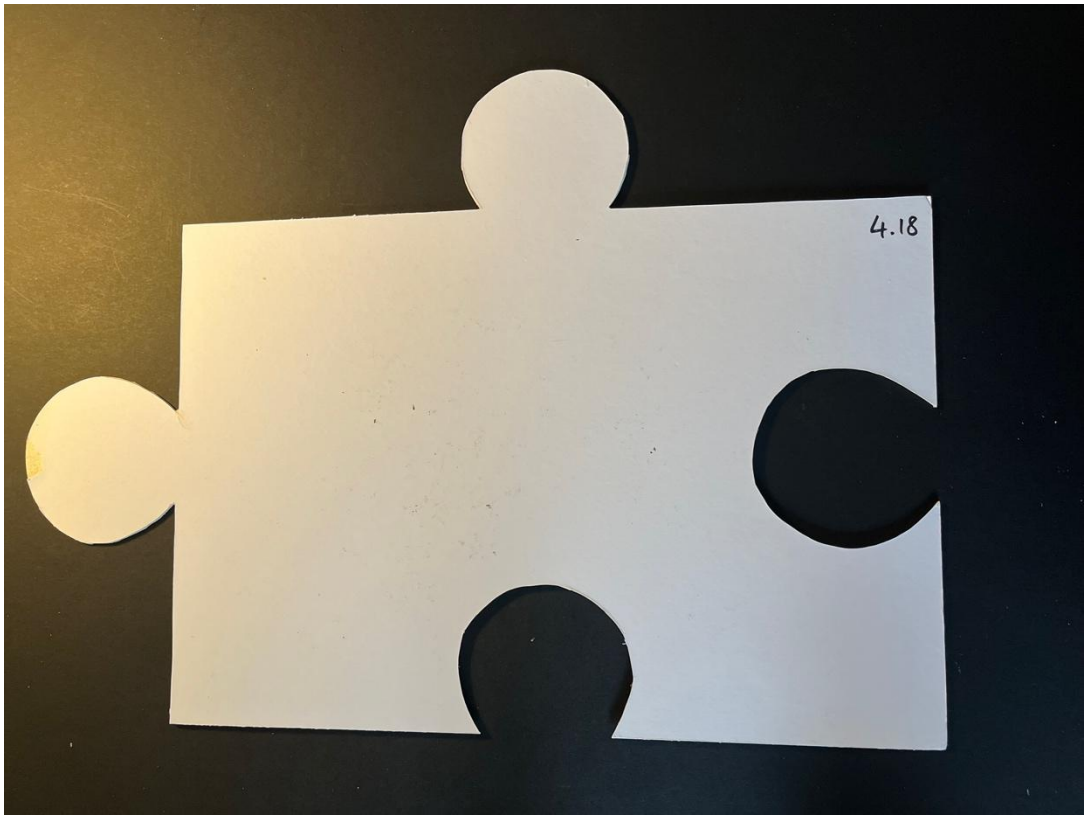
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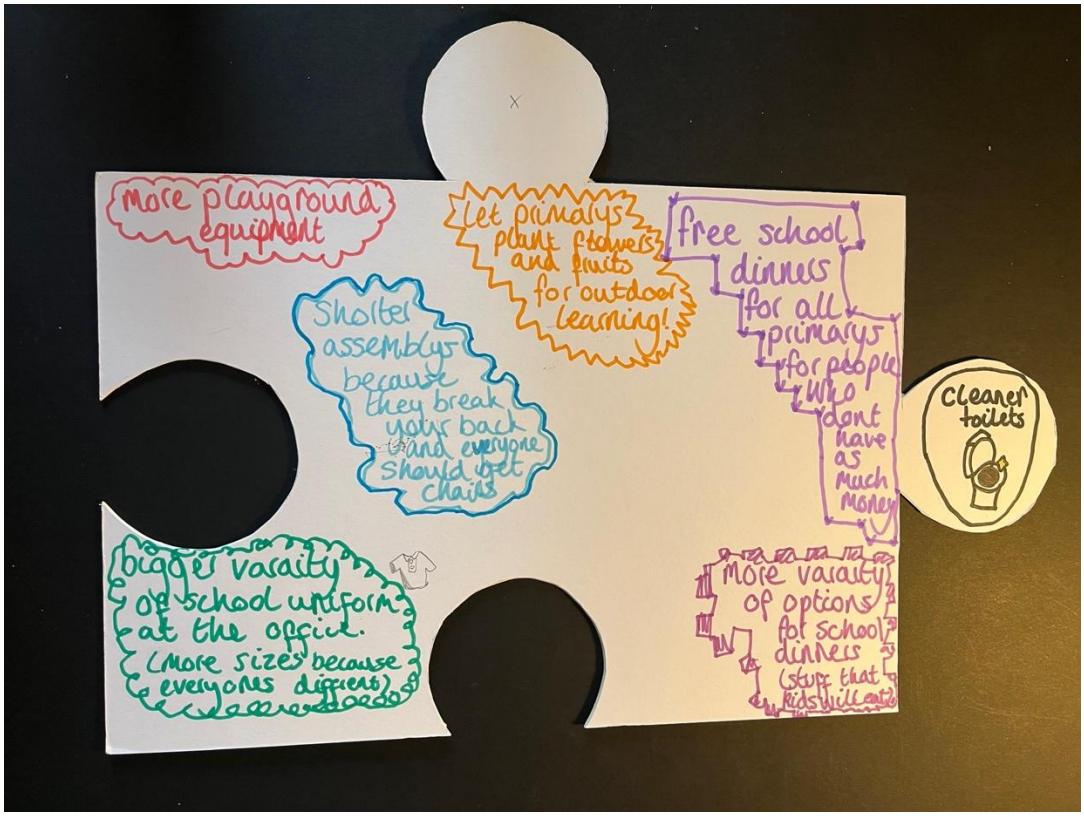
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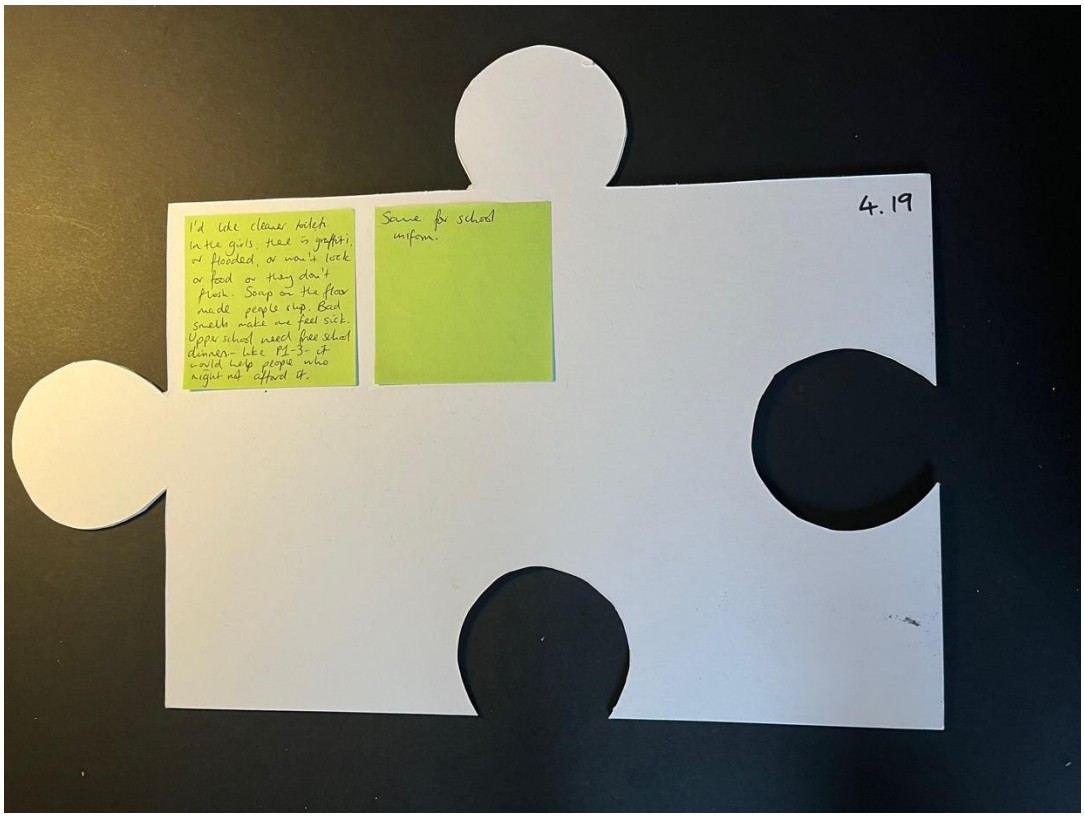
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APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS.

Interviewer …….. Interviewee.

SCHOOL ONE INTERVIEW ONE: D.H.T. (MS DOYLE; 23/05/23).

So thanks again for meeting with me, I do have your consent to record this?

Yes, you do.

That's brilliant, thank you. Well, I'm just going to ask you a few questions about, erm, pupils and their wellbeing and their home circumstances and also ways that the school helps support pupils' mental health and well-being. So I thought I'd start off with, er, just asking you how long you've taught, if you don't mind me asking?

I have been teaching since 1987 so this will be my 36th year.

That's a *lot* of experience [laughter]. So, over the time that you've taught, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour…

Yes. Huge.

… and if so, how would you characterise these changes?

(Pause) Er... I would say that pupils have become… seems a lot less respectful to adults within the school, er... and behaviours escalate to an extent that they didn't used to be. Children used to… in classes… sit and listen and not answer teacher back but now that's a very common occurrence, which interrupts the learning in the classes.

Ok… and…

A lot more… dysregulated children than previously. There seems to be a lot more needs of… er, pupils that find it very difficult to dysregulate, er, *regulate* their emotions as well as their behaviour.

Do you mean the *number* of pupils exhibiting that sort of behaviour?

Yes, that has improve… that has got a lot greater.

Right, okay. And this is over the course of your whole career then?

Yes.

What about since you… I mean this school's nearly ____ years old then, what about since you started in this school? Have you noticed any changes in pupil behaviour in a more recent term then?

Yes I would say… I think that in the last three years there's been significant differences in the behaviour of the children. I think after having the two spells of, er, where the children were not at school and… in between and after that where we had spells where children were sent home for weeks, you know because that was our guidelines at the time, I think that the knock-on effect has been *huge* for some children. Because I think some children were at home where parents were potentially juggling having trying to home school, trying to work from home, being scared and… in some homes… children maybe got to do what they want, anything for an easy life, 'cause we're all cooped up in this house. Also it got children out of the way of coming to school and… being in a school routine which I think… routines are very beneficial for them.

Especially for some children.

Yes, ah-ha, and I think some houses… would have been chaotic and… now… children have, a lot of children have found it very difficult to settle back into a routine and… the way they sometimes address adults and what they think is appropriate and not appropriate has *changed…* somewhat.

Okay, thank you. Erm, so in terms of pupil wellbeing, erm, have you noticed any changes in, er, the pupils' wellbeing overall, and how they feel?

There seems to be a lot *more* pupils that have got wellbeing needs that require, er, input around their wellbeing, whether it be… a soft start in the morning, whether it be time out of class to go and try and regulate, er, their behaviour. There seems to be a *significant* increase in the amount of pupils that parents are looking for referrals regarding… potential behaviour, possible ADHD, ASD, to CAMHS. The amount of referrals I have put in over the last couple of years probably has been *double* what went on the three or four years before then.

Have you got any insights into what sort of factors are driving these changes; behaviour, wellbeing, these things that you've noticed changing over your career?

I know we as teachers talk about social media, and computers, and screen times and things like that not always being regulated at home. So pupils are getting a chance to watch and do things that they necessarily shouldn't. Erm, phones. Mobile phones. I don't know whether, er… and this is in my old, nearly-retiring head… whether there's as much time spent in some families with their children. Are they spoken to, or are their parents in front of a phone?

Ah, *parents* on their phones? As well as just the children?

Yes, well, I mean children as well, but also I think, er, some *adults*, some parents are not spending the quality nurturing time that they have with their children… as previously years gone by before we had the internet and mobile phones and social media at your hand.

Do you think that this is causing attachment issues?

I think so. Mm-hmm.

Okay. Thank you. Erm, in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

I would say that in general, the majority of our pupils, their mental health and wellbeing is good, but we have… a percentage that are quite high tariff and I think they tend to cloud your judgement on everybody else's (inaudible- needs?) that I think when you look at statistics we, I think.. I'm trying to think.. I'm not quite sure what the statistics are, but in each class there may be a handful of children that you have concerns about or come to our attention and compared to the rest of the class that, that's a small percentage but… they're, because they're… shouting out or their needs must be met you do forget about all the ones who're actually getting on fine. And obviously the curriculum has changed *hugely* over the last few years, in that we are addressing these and obviously our lessons are all round about mental well-being and emotional well-being as well as their physical wellbeing, things that didn't used to be addressed in school that we're constantly trying to support these kids within through the curriculum as well in school so that's a *huge* change I've noticed o'er the hunners of years I've been here.

Is that something that you've noticed as a result of the Curriculum for Excellence? Because health and well-being became one of the core…

Yes it is.

Okay, thank you. Erm, so in terms of the… the issues that you do have here in the school, erm, how would you characterise how you… or what sort of impression do you have of how the mental health and wellbeing issues manifest themselves? What sort of issues do you commonly come across?

Er, dysregulated disruptive behaviour, anger, aggression. The other side of it: anxiety.

Well, that's… do you think that some issues are more evident than others? I mean, I suppose this is similar to… you were sort of saying that this small percentage, or relatively small ratio of children take up a disproportionate amount of attention, so do you think that some of the mental health and well-being issues are more evident than others?

Yes. Obviously the ones that are shouting the loudest. The ones that are dysregulated in class, disruptive to the learning; they're the ones that you notice the most. The anxiety ones probably can... unless it's severe that it's impacted them actually coming into the class in the first place… they might be sitting, we might not be noticing so much that these things are happening because the louder ones are at demanding your attention.

Shouting the loudest.

Mm-hmm.

Okay. Erm, so, a similar sort of question to the behaviour one… have you noticed any changes in mental health and well-being over time?

I suppose… it's the same as the behaviour because behaviour is… all, all behaviours are emotions so… it is a dip in mental wellbeing for the pupils, for those that are dysregulating. There has been an increased amount of that over the last few years.

All behaviours are emotions.

Mm-hmm.

Mmm. Okay. I'm interested in home circumstances as well, that's the other, sort of side of the coin my study's basically about: er, connections and associations between what's going on at home and the mental wellbeing of the pupils. So, erm, I mean, drawing on data that you might hold on SIMD or free school meal entitlement, erm, are you able to infer about socioeconomic status of individuals families, parents and carers of children? Is that something that you're aware of or not? Does it come into the mix?

It… it does come into the mix a wee bit but it's something that I actually would need to sit down with the figures in front of me to see… but I am sure that there are quite a few children who are in lower SIMD categories that are some of our children who require significant support within a school not just through their mental health but sometimes also, er, in their education as well.

I mean I've mentioned those two because they are commonly held pieces of information, data sources in school… are you aware of any other data sources like that that might, erm, reflect on socio-economic status?

What I would have said was that often, and something that has become more evident to me over the last few years is that, erm, often even family circumstances… the impact that… er, family break-ups can have on pupils is… *huge*, and different family dynamics… in that mum and dad maybe split up, so we then have got extended families and we jump between the

two houses with extended families and how they are treated in each household as other fam… as other step siblings come along… other issues in that, erm, mum… Example: mum gets a new partner, the partner has children of a similar age, we all live happily in a house, become an extended family, mum and new partner fall out, the relationships and bonds that are made with the siblings together… and the step parent are just shattered again and that… I have a few examples in the school of that where that is *huge* effect on mental health.

The impact of that insecurity at home, I see… erm, in terms of the *employment* of parents and carers, are you aware of erm, are you aware of what types of jobs that they hold? I wonder whether they will whether you've got any formal, er, information about or if you're just aware of it through talking to…

I would say that in our locality, there are a *minority* of families that have what we would probably class as *professional* jobs. I would say that the *minority* either are non-working or are in… manual or, I'm trying to think how you would describe… in non-professions? Is that the right…?

What about things like zero hours contracts and the gig economy?

I'm sure there's a lot of our parents on things like that.

You think so?

A lot of them will be struggling as well you know living week to week with pay packets and things like that. We even have staff like that because our… unfortunately, the wages of our classroom assistants are *appalling* for what they do…

It's a scandal.

… er, we have a single parent that's one of our classroom assistants and I know that it's a struggle… it's a… also when you're a temporary member of staff you know your day off or you have to be off because your children are off you don't get paid, it's not like, you know, if you have a permanent contract at least you get sick pay from the council but not if you're a temporary member of staff. So all these things are impacting on… that's why we've tried to provide a food bank at the front door, er, for… and give away the meals that we get from lunch break in the afternoon. A box comes in with meals from the kitchen and that is open to children or staff that wanted to take them away… obviously the children get first choice! (Laughs)

Do the parents make use of the foodbank or is it just the for the pupils?

The pupils will often take them for the pupils (parents?). I've got one boy in particular… or two families that we know that are regular coming to get meals and will take it away and we know that there's quite a few siblings within the family… so it's being used.

That's great. Mm-hmm. Er, it's not great it's *required* I'm afraid but… anyway… you've touched on this in an answer before: do you see any associations between social economic *stability* of parents and carers and the mental health and well-being of pupils? By stability I mean, you know, if they have secure jobs, regular income, no sort of housing worries… as opposed to those who are living hand to mouth if you like, erm, or have insecurity of housing...

I definitely think that… of the minority of families that we've got that I would say are in kind of professional jobs… and that's, I'm not being derogatory to those that have not got a profession, I don't mean that at all. Because working in a shop, being a sales consultant… I'm meaning like teachers, doctors, lawyers, you know that kind of high spec. professional… the children that we've got and within families there, are ones that do not come to our attention other than for good things.. does that make sense? Because… No. I don't know what the because is… but… there…

That's a tricky one!

We assume that life for them is what you would say a normal happy nurturing household… A lot of our… the children who don't, are very dysregulated and cause us problems in the school I would say come from different *types* of families where they may be in kinship care… er, they are in families where… there has been… break-ups, single parents… I've just dealt with a situation there that came to light that, erm, a boy within a step family at the moment… with stepdad and new baby… struggling with anger issues and is being violent towards his mum. And he knows he's doing this and… he just can't seem to control his anger. Again, that's one of the children I spoke about… and this is just my personal opinion, but for the kids that jump piggyback backwards and forwards from dad's house to mum's house, and it's different routines in each… and there's animosity between mom and dad, that can *only* be a negative impact on the mental health of children. But that's my personal opinion.

And you can see what seems to you to be like clear associations between these sorts of things?

Yes.

By kinship care do you mean being looked after by the by extended family?

Extended family, yes. [Greets another staff member who walks past] Because their own parent is not able to look after them, that is rather than the children going to care.

And that in itself will doubtless impact…

Yes. Because… often because kinship care is… less formal, er, there is still probably sometimes visitation times spent with… the real parent that wasn't in the right place to be able to look after them properly and safely… so there's still a mix of both. Or, there's… animosity in the house about why… why you're there, or you're dealing with the aftermath of what's happened previously, er, and the fallout can sometimes come a bit later, not necessarily straight away. It can be years later before there's….

Before you can see the effects of it?

Yes. Ah-ha.

Well I was just wondering… the last wee section is just about the school's response to some of these issues. Erm, how does your school's curricular studies support pupil mental well-being?

Right, well, we've got an extensive health and well-being programme, that covers hugely… er, social and emotional wellbeing and, we… er, there's experiences and outcomes they need to cover every year. As well as that, we have things like mental… this is mental health week this week, where, em, specifically (inaudible) are targeted, and we make a big thing of it. It's something that talked about hugely now. We… through assemblies, we look at.. this term, we're looking at the wellbeing indicators and looking at a different indicator each week which is then being followed up in class…

SHANARRI?

SHANARRI. Yes, the SHANARRI indicators. Which is then being followed up in class by the class teachers. We have supports that we can go to…

I remember them coming back and talking about 'nurtured' after the most recent assembly I think?

Yes... we have got the [name of nurture room] in place this year, which is for children… as well as…we're trying… It's difficult because the very dysregulated pupils… sometimes the [name of nurture room]'s… it's not necessarily to be seen as a place for the bad people? So sometimes they go there because it's the only actual space we've got, and a door that can be shut, and give them time to calm down, or whatever… but it also is a space for the likes

of the children that need a soft start in the morning, that just cannot cope with going into a class. There's a wee boy in this class with *huge* anxiety issues, he comes in in the morning and needs half an hour before he actually can be fed back into the class again. Er, our… it eludes me, her title, but our [staff member's title and name], she is *wonderful*, she's our wellbeing champion within the school and she does a huge amount to support our children that need it, both the ones that are the loud, er, misbehaving ones to the ones that are really struggling socially and emotionally. And we have an open door policy there where there are certain children that know that they can just say, "I'm going to the [name of nurture room]" and they're able to leave the class and go down there,er, and spend time there. For those who are not able to cope in the playground, or dinner hall at lunch time, that's a place that they can go and eat their lunch in a safe place, quiet place, calmer…

I was saying to [class teacher's name] that I'd really like to see that in action but it's difficult because sometimes… [interrupted by another passing teacher, short conversation between teacher and interviewee].

Also… pupil's wellbeing… [other teacher's name] has been a huge asset because he works with families and tries to make sure that our attendance is improved… those that are struggling to get into school, he very much facilitates them trying to get into school and breaking down the barriers. We also have, within the authority, we have good supports in that the last three years there's an exchange counselling service for pupil's well-being and that's been opened up to all ages within the school that if we feel that there's somebody that could do with a block of counselling regarding something… and the feedback has been very positive. We also work with [name of charitable outside agency] and they support some of our pupils.

Yes, I was going to ask you actually just about outside agencies… so… so… where is it? [trying to find question on schedule!] Can you describe any partnerships with outside agencies?

So basically, we've got a huge partnership with social work. The [name of external counselling service], [name of charitable outside agency], also… I'm trying to think… [name of another external agency], I think? Our school nursing service, also our Educational Psychologist, er, is weekly or fortnightly…

That's a wide range.

Yes, so… and obviously, we work with CAMHS.

Er, how do you find accessing CAMHS at the moment?

It… It's absolutely fine for us now. We went through a wee spell where we needed to phone and get a referral triaged, and they would say yes go ahead with it, or no we don't think a candidate's… er, this is the right candidate, here are other avenues we suggest you try first. Now, I don't know whether that was maybe too… problematic for them to have somebody available for that. Now we, if we feel like there's a need for CAMHS, we would, erm, with the par-… we'd get the information from the parents and we can actually just put a referral in now, and they make the decision whether it's somebody that's suitable or not. However, the *majority*… we're professionals now… I don't mean… at that… but we wouldn't necessarily be putting a CAMHS referral in if we didn't feel that there was a *need* and I know that they have said that they liked the referrals that come from the school because they have got lots of information. And we try to make sure that parents give us lots of information about and their concerns at home and we add that in with the concerns at schools, so that they're getting quite a big picture of the problem.

Erm, I really just ask, because you hear a lot about how overwhelmed they are…

Well, as I said, from our point of view, it's easy now to put the referrals in, but.. I know the problem then is for the parents, that you're not talking about a quick fix or anything like that. It can be *years* before things are actually… it can be… quite often we get an initial phone can and it will say, "Yes, yes, you're on the waiting list for such-and-such", and the waiting lists I think are over a year long, so there's a wee… gap there, where there's parents that are crying out for help… but… there's n….although you've *tried* and put forms and things in….

There's not the capacity there to help…

… 'cause when they're crying out for help, let's help the ones (inaudible).

Okay, right, thank you. Erm, so, other than outside agencies and whole-school approaches the school's got, I mean… knowing the staff as you do, what sort of strategies do you see individual teachers using at maybe a class or even a personal level with pupils that you think help support pupils' mental wellbeing?

I think that the approach… the way teachers *teaching* has changed hugely over the years…

Pedagogy?

… a much more nurturing approach… I mean obviously I've been here so many years that we've gone from the stage where, you know, the teacher stood in front of the class, er;

“Listen! This is what you're going to do! Now go and do it!” To the point where, we have a lot more interaction with pupils. Pupils are… there’s a lot more kind of like pupil choice, personalisation and choice, the things we’re doing that they’re see that they’re able to guide the things they're doing or there’s a wee bit of… er, leeway in what directions they go with lessons. I think, er… adapting the curriculum and differentiation of work in the different *types* of activity… we’re now aware that, you know, for certain pupils, a written task’s not the most appropriate for learning, certain people like more hands-on, different ways of learning. And I think a teacher needs to be aware of all the different styles within the class… er, and be willing to adapt to suit that. And obviously changing expectations from different pupils depending on… their background, or the needs that they’ve got in class. Our teachers are *very* much made aware and kept in the loop about, er, what's happening to some of our pupils, er, outwith school or family circumstances or wellbeing needs that they have. And we have plans for those with significant wellbeing needs, whether they be, er, the dysregulation, to the ones with anxiety and they’re made up by [name of nurture room PT] and plans that the teachers follow as well.

Support plans?

Yes.

Okay, thank you. Almost done, then. What about school makes meeting mental wellbeing needs of pupils *more* difficult? What are the barriers to helping them as effectively as you’d like?

Because you’ve only got them for five hours and then they go back home, some of them to… what’s causing the mental health problems. And you can only guide them and give them support and help and give them ideas of how things can change… but when they go home it's not always… that's not always possible.

That’s a tough one to overcome, that, isn’t it? You can’t keep them in 24/7…

I know, (laughter) and you have two extremes of parents; parents that have got bad experiences themselves of schools, so they’ll say, “Ach, ach, it doesn’t matter what the teacher says, or anything like that, it’s not important”, but you can only give them a lot of guidance and help and teach them about things, but whether or not they take it on or not, it’s a different matter.

Can you think of anything that, er, as a school isn't being done at the moment that might improve the situation? (Long pause) That might make it easier to support… I mean in a perfect world, if you could do what…

In a perfect world, if we had more staff…

More staff.

… and we were able to have, like, an inclusion unit to be able to have those that… really find it hard to dysregulate and not disrupt the learning of others… because that affects children's mental wellbeing within the class, because those that are sitting there worried, "Is he going to kick off? Am I going to get hit with something?", you forget about that…

And that's just the teachers. (Laughter)

I know! To be able to have more staff, and facilities within the school…

So it's a resource issue.

… to meet the needs of a wider selection of pupils. I think.

Okay.

I think… from an *old age* perspective, inclusion seems a good idea, but I think that there are some children that… inclusion doesn't work for?

In practise?

In practise. But everything's a money thing…

Do you have any other thoughts or anything you'd like to say that we've not really covered to do with mental health and well-being of pupils? Anything you'll like to add?

No… not really… it's something that's a worry and actually makes me realise that I must have been very fortunate that *my* two children were growing up didn't have mental health issues because it worries me how *young* some of these children… seem to… struggle… but I also think but the *down* side of us talking much more about it now is that you have young children that will say, "*I've got anger issues!*" or "*I've got anxiety, an' whatever*", you know that all these words that chil… that, for example, my children who are in their twenties now, didn't even probably know existed when they're going through primary school. So, I think we're somewhere in the middle.

So, the… the greater amount of discussion and awareness there is of it… do you suspect that that might be exacerbating the problem in some cases?

In *some* cases. Not all. (Interrupted by another teacher). I think I'm talked out!

Thank you very much. Basically, what I'm hoping to do with this, and other similar interviews as I go round other schools is try and build a picture of what *is* going on in schools and what schools are doing with the issues that they face, and what they're doing… to meet the needs of their pupils, what's working and what's not, so that we might better be able to improve things for them.

I feel that… we're, er, definitely *trying* to meet the needs but we could do more if we had more resources. I feel as if at times, we're… lip service is not the right thing, cos it's definitely not, considering where schools were a few years ago we have got *so* much more now in place but we just need more and more of it to make it… to make it, er, more positive.

Thank you very much.

Okay, over to you [name of staff member], he asks a lot of hard questions! [laughter]

Well, I'm just going to turn this off..

[End of recording]

SCHOOL ONE INTERVIEW TWO: NURTURE TEACHER (MS FENTON; 25/05/23).

Okay, so, just to repeat that last question, I have got your verbal consent to record this?

You do, yes.

Thank you very much. Thank you again for your time. So, I'm just going to ask you a few questions, erm, I have some questions here that are designed for a class teacher, so some of them will be about class teaching and things like that but I'm sure you can still offer your valuable opinions…

For sure…

… and insights. Erm, it's not a completely set interview schedule, so if there's things you want to talk about that vary, deviate from this, then that's great, I'll welcome anything that you want to add. So, er, just start with an easy one, may I ask how long you've been teaching?

I have been teaching since 2001, so 22 years… (laughs) in with the bricks, as they say.

That's a lot of experience.

Yes. I would say so.

Erm, and how long have you been teaching in this school?

Er, most of that time actually, so 2005 I came to what was [name of school] primary, which you'll know, there was two schools came together, erm, so 2005, and then we moved into this building in 2018.

So, over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour?

Undoubtedly. Yes.

How would you characterise those changes?

I would say that we're seeing much higher… significant dysregulated… levels of behaviour, an increase in… violence and aggression, towards pupils and towards staff, erm, more extreme, more regular, bigger number of pupils that are experiencing that level of dysregulation, erm, and I would say that there's been a *rapid* increase since COVID… as well, that, when we came back from that, and trying to recover from COVID, that has put more strain on families, which has then reflected in pupils' abilities to cope within their educational setting.

You've kind of touched on one of my follow-up questions there…

Sure…

… which was, erm, when you say that there's been a stark increase, do you mean in the numbers of children this affects, or the severity of the issues within the children?

Both.

Both…

I would say. Erm, you've got significant numbers of children who are, I would say, are suffering from mental health issues, so leading to lots of anxiety, lots of, sort of, inability to kind of, use the norms of regulation to cope with situations that they might normally have been able to cope with, so fall out with friendships, or, something in the classroom's a bit difficult, then that… a lot of children are now struggling to cope with that at all, in any way, and are becoming *very* dysregulated as a result of that… *and* the severity of the types of violent and aggressive behaviours that we are seeing is definitely something that I've noticed a *big* change in. Erm, whereas before in primary it would be very *rare* for, adults in particular to get violent incidents… you know, of aggression towards them, now I would say that's a regular occurrence for us to deal with that on a daily, weekly basis.

You're making that comparison… when is 'before'?

I would say…

At what time was it rare?

I would say it's been a *gradual* increase…

Mm-hmm.

So we can't… I wouldn't say it's *just* been since COVID, because I have worked, specifically before COVID with… young people who were very violent, and who were not able to cope within the classroom setting so I wouldn't say it's just been since COVID but I would say it's accelerated, greatly, since COVID, since we've come back.

Okay. Thank you. You mentioned the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils, how would you characterise, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils in this school, in general terms?

(Pause) I would say, in general, we have… significant numbers of pupils who suffer from anxiety, erm, that is… so there's an increase of numbers of pupils who struggle to get into school in the morning, and require support with getting settled and coming into a routine… a number of pupils who are… it's sort of things like, self-harm, or eating disorder type things, number of children who are struggling with… a sort of lack of structure sometimes at home and things, as well as a number of families I would say that are in crisis and that obviously impacts quite significantly on the pupils when they come into school, because they are carrying that in with them on a daily basis. So we are definitely, and in my role, I am supporting an increasing number of children, erm… this year I started with 80 plus children on my log, as requiring *some* form of wellbeing support, and that was before we took the primary ones into account.

And this is a school role of 320?

Yeah. So that's a significant number, and I have added children to that list, since, as the year has gone on.

So, where would you say you're at now?

I would say I'm probably hitting about 90 children that have been identified, by staff, as requiring some sort of wellbeing input. Some, it's maybe like a sort of daily, weekly, check-in, for some it's maybe they just need a focus on a particular aspect of their wellbeing, some need ongoing support, some need support at a specific time of day or with a specific subject, so the needs are quite varied, I would say, but the numbers are… *big*.

When you say the needs are varied, I was struck… because I was just about to ask you how you see these issues manifest in the young people…

Mm-hmm.

You raised, for example, the issue of anxiety, many children suffer anxiety, is that maybe the most *prevalent* issue that you deal with?

Er, yes… and, also trauma, the fallout from trauma, the children who have experienced trauma at some point in their lives, or are currently experiencing trauma, then… that would be a big category as well, of pupils that I would be required to support… and they tend to be the pupils with the biggest behaviours, the biggest emotional challenges, are the children who have been impacted by trauma, in one way or another, and are carrying that with them.

Okay. You mentioned self-harm and eating disorders, I mean these are quite serious…

Yeah.

Erm…

They would still be in the minority, but we have over the years seen a sort of… increase in… where you would never have had it before, you're now aware that there are one or two children who are going down that path because their mental health… they're really struggling, and so… also I would sort of say that there's a, sort of social media influence on these kind of behaviours as well…

Okay…

… there's a sort of….

The next thing I was going to ask, actually, is… well, you've touched on a few things, er, to do with this… what do you think is causing all these changes, this increase in prevalence and severity of issues that you've described…?

I don't think there's any *one* thing that I'd hold responsible for it… er, I would say that trauma is undoubtedly one, so, the breakup of families, people just coming and going, relationships being quite transient, so you've got a partner comes with other children, that relationship breaks down, there's a lot of coming and going so children are not necessarily always secure in who their kind of safe people are… so that is a big factor, I would say that, what children *eat* as well, can also impact on their behaviour, their mental wellbeing… erm… I would say the increase in social media, the amount of time children are spending on screens and things, erm, is certainly reducing their concentration span, and their ability to concentrate and cope for long periods of time…

Mm-hmm…

…so that presents a challenge when you're trying to, in a classroom environment, teach, and educate, and put information across, because they're used to that… *quick*… *fix*…erm… I think society is different, and there's a lot of families struggling… so, we've got, food poverty, we've got hygiene poverty, all different… you know, you've got people who are struggling to make ends meet, people who can't, can't afford to put their heating on and things, *that* is undoubtedly having an impact on our pupils as well, we live in an area with quite high deprivation, erm… there are, you know a number of children who would fall into the SIMD 1 and 2 category, and that undoubtedly has an impact… we've got people who are living hand-to-mouth and who are struggling, erm… so I think that really does impact the young people as well…

Do you see any correlation between, er, low SIMD… er, pupils from those areas, those backgrounds, and prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues?

Yes, there can be, but I wouldn't say it's exclusive to that? But yes, I think undoubtedly, that presents extra challenges for the young people who are living in those kind of circumstances… erm, but sometimes what we can see is the reverse of that, so you can have children who are from higher SIMD numbers, who, perhaps, parents are out working, children are at lots and lots of clubs, and different things, so they've got lots of opportunities but actually sometimes they're exhausted by the number of things that they're doing? Erm… and so, in actual fact, they are not necessarily getting what we call 'down time' and time to regulate, time just to spend with their parents, 'cause their parents are busy juggling work-life, all these different things, making ends meet, erm, and are perhaps doing okay, but haven't always got the time to invest in spending time with the child and sometimes that's what a child is craving… is that relationship, if they feel it's missing… So, yes, I would say there's a definite… you know, poverty of *any* kind definitely impacts behaviour, but it isn't *always* the case that that's *exclusive.*

Do you think that, erm… do you see any other… do you think that mental health and wellbeing issues affect *some* groups of children disproportionately?

Yes… I mean I would say that… definitely, erm, children living in poverty, because also their parents are often struggling with their mental health as well, and wellbeing, and so they're not necessarily able to support their child in the way they could because they themselves are struggling. And so we're finding actually, in my role, I support a lot of parents, as much as I do the pupils, with their own wellbeing… and I'm sort of an outlet for them to come, and

share, and (inaudible), so they're then maybe in a better place to support their child at home… because sometimes they're full up too…

Would you… describe how that works then? When you support the pu… the parents and carers?

Yeah, so, if… if I'm working on a sort of very regular basis, and there are some pupils who I would work with every day, erm… for some, parents, that can be quite traumatic, having a child that they're struggling to cope with, so part of… as much as it's important to build a relationship with the child, it's also really important to build that relationship with the families… so, having them in, keeping in contact on the phone, getting them to come in for a cup of tea and just offload when the child's not there, those kinds of supports are also really… important I feel, it's not just the child who needs the help, it's often the family as well. And so, building that trust, as well, with the parent, better helps us in school to be able to support the child, because if they've got a safe person, the parent, that they know they can go to, and that they know understands what's going on at home, and quite often they're looking for somebody, a 'one-person' contact, so although… although the child could be in a class and… and… what-have-you, quite often I'm the link, as well, because I'm the person… the person that's there all the time, that maybe builds the relationship *deeper* than a class teacher would, and can provide that bit of extra support, and I can, you know if they're struggling, say, "Just come in, we'll have a coffee, we'll sit," you know, they can offload, the tissues are there and they need that support as much as the child does. And sometimes I'll support the two together, I'll say, "Come and spend some time with your child *here*," sometimes it'll just be the parent on their own… I have parent workshops as well, that we've kind of dipped our toe in the water, where parents can come and work alongside their chid with other parents there as well, because I feel like sometimes families can feel isolated, and feel… a bit like you were saying about schools earlier, they feel it's only them?

Hm-mmm.

Whereas if they can see other people are in the same boat, other people have difficulties, nobody's got the perfect child that… you know… that people hold up in their head that, 'my child should be this', 'my child should be that', so that in itself is a wee support sometimes as well…

That's really interesting, that sounds great. Erm… drawing on your knowledge, then of the parents and carers of some of these pupils, erm, to what extent do you find parents and carers within the wider school community are employed in unstable jobs, like zero hours contracts, gig economy, and things like that?

I'm… I'm not sure 'cause that's not… doesn't *tend* to be something that I would sort of go into in great detail with parents unless they would, sort of share it particularly. So, I wouldn't *really* be able to help you (laughs) answer that one particularly well… Er…but I do know there's a lot of parents who don't work, or that would be working just part time and things… but as for… I couldn't really go into details about that, sorry…

That's okay! That's fine. Erm… Do you see any… I've sort of asked you something similar to this already, do you see any associations between the socioeconomic *stability* of the pupils' household, and their mental health and wellbeing?

Yeah. I would say there is, definitely. Erm, and you can see that, you can see that when there's a family going through a tough time, sometimes there's a change in the child… so the child may *not* have needed support before… all of a sudden, there's a crisis, and so they are needing support, and sometimes when you unpick what's going on, yes, there is some sort of financial crisis, or poverty, or some event that has happened that they are then… the fallout from that. And that child might only need, the family might only need support for a short period of time to get over that, sometimes they need longer-term, just depends on… so yeah, there's definitely a correlation…

Okay. Erm, right, the last set of questions are really to do with the school's response then, which you've sort of touched on here and there as well… but I suppose this is why I was really interested in interviewing you, because obviously, you're focused on that…

Yeah…

Erm, what sorts of activities or lessons are *taught* in the school to support mental health and wellbeing?

So, this is something that… we are looking to change, so that… this is the first year that I've run this facility, [name of nurture room]. Erm, so I have responsibility for wellbeing across the school, erm, and we're kind of trying to implement… so the [name of authority] Council have got a new model of inclusion, inclusion redesign, whereby, they're looking for… rather than continual extraction of pupils away from class, that the support is becoming more and more integrated into the class setting. So this year what I've worked on is staff training,

erm… to look at… erm… sort of, erm… implementing discreet areas within their health and wellbeing curriculum to support wellbeing, so things like equity…

Mm-hmm…

… looking at resilience, looking at restorative practice, and how you can sort of build that in every day to, the way we work, ethos within the classroom, ethos within the school. Erm, we have a health and wellbeing working party, so across the working party different aspects of health and wellbeing that we've looked at, so for example, one of the big projects, again this is an [name of authority] initiative, was the period poverty and looking at providing free products for everybody in the school community, that's been sort of set up and established, erm, now that COVID is finished and we can *have* families back into school then definitely increasing the number of times that families are able to come into school. So that they do have those relationships built with, numbers, you know, multiple people because there can be… although it's good to have one central person, you don't want just one person on the team, because if that person's not there, then there's nobody, so we're trying to kind of build up those relationships as well across the board so that there's a team of people that they can go to and trust, erm…

Sounds like quite a long-term operation…

Very much…

Is this part of the current SIP?

Yes. And will be… invested in, more… as… obviously, it's dependent on funding as well, because my role, has to be funded, to be out of class, and based around this, erm, we got point-five of a teacher funded…

Is this from PEF?

Well no, this was from the authority, the rest has been made up from the PEF funding…

Okay…

Initially, in the year, I wasn't out full time, I was covering a day in class, I was only doing this point-five of the week, but there was no way you could possibly cover (laughs) what we need to cover in point-five of a week…

I was quite struck when [HT's name] said that you were available in here full-time for pupils who need it… that's unheard of in my experience…

Yeah, in this school it's really important because of the level of need… you know, if there's a child in crisis, it's good to have someone who can deal with them, rather than just…

shuttling them off to class, because if they're in crisis, they're not in a place to learn. They need that fixed, as you know, before *any* learning can take place.

Absolutely.

Erm, we are… so basically, the sort of over-arching plan is we'll have a focus for pupils, a focus for staff and a focus for parents, and the idea is that, in the *long*-term, we're all working together for the same aim, in partnership, and we're all supporting each other, as and when… Staff wellbeing has been a big part of my remit as well, so I've been providing support for staff because *everybody's* struggling, you know, in different ways, it's not just our young peoples and their families… you know, we've got staff who've been using food banks, we've got staff who have got, you know, relationship crisis, we've got staff who are dealing with the challenging behaviours day-in and day-out, who then get, you know, full up and worn out, and need support there as well, so…

I know. It can take its toll…

It can *really* take its toll, if you're doing that in the long term, so thinking about what, you know, [class teacher's name]'s dealing with, on a day-to-day basis, that you've observed, as some of those young people… erm… so, that kind of, living with that kind of thing takes its toll on staff mental wellbeing .. we're trying to kind of… touch *all* bases because it all links together… I feel…

That's fascinating. Er… okay, apart from the lessons, the curricular programmes, are there any other strategies that teachers or school staff use, at a personal level, or a class level, erm, that, you know, might support pupil mental wellbeing? What sort of strategies have you seen individual teachers employ that are really effective?

Er… so.. you see a lot of teachers using things like mindfulness, erm, having regulation breaks, up-regulation, down-regulation so if the children are getting a bit restless, antsy, sometimes they need something to settle, or if they're quite lethargic, sometimes they need something to give them a bit of a boost, er… people would have sort of, quiet corners or sensory corners, fidgets, things like that, erm, some of the teachers are using music as a way of therapy, some pupils with… we've got some individual CD players, retro style! (laughs) That they can, you know, put their headphones on, and then listen to their music, 'cause that keeps them.. sort of, busy, erm… we're developing our own, erm, sort of, we've just changed, like, developed a whole new set of school values, I did a lot of work with that, so then… erm, we're trying to kind of build those things into the classroom, and like our

respectful relationships policy so that… there's lots of time for children to get some down-time and relaxation… If there's a child in crisis then sometimes they would come here, sometimes they would get a chance to sit somewhere quiet and do something, we've got a lot of children who have got soft starts, so if they're feeling anxious in the morning, they come in, they've got…

[Interrupted by child appearing]

There's a girl here, [indicating child] actually, she's got a… she's chosen some colouring and drawing, that just settles her… there's other kids come in, they just like to talk to you for a wee 10, 15 minutes to get over the hurdle, erm, really we're focusing on relationships with the pupils, erm… so that we can read what the pupil needs, and understand what the pupil needs, and give them it, where possible, er… so… building up a picture of the kids we've got, reacting if there's sort of unusual… something unusual, and knowing the kids that need that support, and working with the child and the parent, to sort of agree on a plan for them, really, you know, so that everybody knows this is what happens, this is how we're going to support this child, so that there's a sort of consistency there as well. And that information then would get passed on to other staff members… erm, so yeah, as I say a lot of mindfulness, a lot of physical things, music, therapeutic activities really, erm… things like even, sort of, for the younger ones, like manipulation, fine motor skills, all that kind of thing, erm, as well…

So you mentioned, erm, kids coming down here when they're in crisis, obviously every... every… I don't know, I *imagine* that they'll all be unique, and different circumstances and…

Yep.

… behaviours, erm, if you can typically describe a sort of, you know, a typical… erm, what happens when a child in crisis comes to you…

What happens when a child in crisis comes to you? So, usually, I would give them an opportunity to regulate a bit more, first.

And how do you do that?

So, it depends on the child, but, so for some children I might play a game with them or something, something that's going to distract them really, from the immediate crisis, so lots of kids respond well to something like *Uno*, or draughts, or something like that, they can sit, because there's something else to talk about, and you're engaging in that… *some* children, they just want a seat on the sofa, and they want a wee squishy toy, they want to sit and hug

something, and they want, you know, they want that kind of comfort. Some of them like to sit on the rocking chair, because that rocking motion, soothes them, erm… when they are beginning, and you can *see* it in them, you can see when they're beginning to regulate, then I'll ask them if they're ready to talk about what's… what's wrong. Erm… and when they're ready then we'll try and get into a wee bit of a discussion about it, we'll try… use kind of gentle questioning, to try and unpick, what was the issue? What caused you to react the way you reacted? Or what's making you upset? Or that kind of thing and we'll have a chat about it and then once they've got it off their chest then we'll try and look to see, is there anything we can do that will fix the issue?

Mm-hmm.

Or is it something that, we can't fix but we're going to manage it, so that, you know, going forward, then we've got some strategies and things. For some children, just having talked to somebody and had that wee bit of nurturing, somebody listening… sometimes they just want a wee hug, you know, it can be something as simple as that? Or a wee pat on the back, sometimes just that time away is enough for them, and they're regulated and they can go back and cope again, but always making them feel like, whatever their issue is, is valid, their feelings are valid, erm… No matter whether you think, that seems a bit unusual, or whatever, letting them know that whatever they're feeling is okay, and looking at how… how can we *manage* that feeling. So that it's not taking over everything. That kind of thing. So that would be the approach that I would take, regulation…

These remind me of PATHS principles.

Ah-huh. Regulate, talk about it, come up with a solution if we… [phone rings] if possible, it's not always, you know, there isn't always a fix, so we.. excuse me, I'm just going to take this… "Hallo… I am," [Answers phone, brief pause in recording]

… snacks, so some kids will come needing some breakfast, and sometimes that's enough to settle them, sometimes they just need like a wee drink of juice or a hot dr… sometimes, if they're really upset a wee hot chocolate or, a cup of tea if they're an older child, do you know what I mean, is *enough*, just to kind of settle them, they just need… they just need somebody to kind of… be like their mum, basically… do you know what I mean? Sometimes that's all they need. Sometimes they need distracting.

Er… are there any other ways that you can think of that the school supports mental health and wellbeing? That we've not already discussed…

Well, I think generally, there's like a wide programme of things like after school clubs, so there's a choice of different activities that the kids can get involved in, which is always good, a good boost for mental health. It's not always necessarily like physical sports, although there are lots of sports, there's things like coding, there's things like, erm, performing arts and diff… there's a *range* of things, erm… at assemblies as well, that can often be a time in which they can focus on a specific topic, erm… to do with mental health… erm… things like fundraising, and charity work and things like that as well, when there's things like Comic Relief, Children In Need, things like that, then there's a lot of raising awareness of issues and things, through that, erm… Assembly times actually are also active, there's an active part to that…

I saw a little bit of one today, uh-huh…

So. That, as much as it helps kids' physical health, also helps their mental health… has a definite impact. Breakfast club, as well, erm… there's that option for parents, erm, who are *working* to put children in to, or feel that they need them to come and get their breakfast, erm, obviously there's free school meals, erm, we have, er, when the children who take home, some of the left over erm, school lunches and things, so, the kitchen bring through bits and pieces and little bits of left over and we have families that will take that. Again, we're looking after the *physical* side, but that actually has a knock-on effect to their mental health and wellbeing as well. Erm…

I was thinking, just when you were saying, I was thinking this morning about all the kids out playing football, and how that completely… changed the atmosphere from, "Uhhh... Monday morning," to… "Ahhhh…." [This relates to a 'soft start' practice, a small group of boys observed playing football around 9:30am on Monday morning with a staff member]

Yeah.

It's such a… I always found this a very difficult balance because you, you know, there's a tension between, work and achievement, and mental wellbeing…

There is. There is.

… but they're also inextricably linked, because…

Totally.

… and I've seen examples of that this week, with, you know, children… suddenly getting very upset because they feel that they didn't understand something…

Yep.

So, if you, push the sort of… the fun aspect of school to the detriment of hard work and learning *too* much then that can also…

Of course it can, it's a balance.

It's a really difficult balance to strike.

It is very much so, and that's the same with the children who come to visit *me*, like, they need that time away, but… also, that time has to come to an end and they have to go back to class and they have to and that's part of what we're trying to do, support being in class as much as possible. Sometimes I will go and work with children in their own class… so I have someone who's *really* really anxious when it comes to certain parts of the curriculum so I will go and work with that young person in class so that they're *there*, doing the learning in class… but, they're getting a wee bit extra support, erm, so it is, a very fine balance to strike.

It will vary with each child as well…

Varies with each child, [sighs] varies sometimes to with the time of year, as well, we find that in the approach to a holiday, the build-up to a holiday, we find there's an escalation…

Do you?

… in behaviour, and that is often because children are communicating, through their behaviour, that they are getting anxious about the fact that the support of school is no longer going to be there for that week, 2weeks, 6 weeks, 7 weeks in the summer. Erm, so we find that the build-up to a holiday for… our.. what we would… the *highest* tariff children would be that they escalate their behaviour because suddenly that routine structure of, they *know* where they stand at school, things are the same, there is a flow, a pattern, the people are the same… that's going to be away from them, and…

Particularly the primary 7s, at this time of year…

Sure. Yep. From what they know. So the build-up to holidays are tricky for a lot of young people.

Fascinating.

Erm…

Erm… what makes *meeting* the mental health and wellbeing of your pu.. your pupils' needs, more challenging? What are the things…

Erm… Lack of people? Lack of staffing?

Resources.

Resources, yep. Erm, that lack of funding, lack of space, sometimes as well, these young people sometimes *need* a space away. Our school is very open, we have no doors, there are no… you know it's very hard to get peace and quiet, some of… some of the classes would not be as dysregulated if they couldn't see in to what's ha… you know, sometimes dysregulation *breeds* dysregulation in others, so if somebody's having an episode in the corridor, and is… careering about, and you know, is being rounded up and helped, that can have a knock-on effect to people in other classes, because they can see and hear what's going on. That can, you know, so… the physical building can present its own challenges.

I see, mm-hmm.

Erm.. but as I say, the number of staff, the number of children in a class, which again comes down to the number of staff, erm… which means that the teaching staff, the support staff are stretched, which, kind of lim… you know, chips away at their capacity to be able to provide for everybody's needs in their class, all the time… And it tends to be that the bigger… the bigger behaviours, the bigger more *obvious* ones, *have* to… be dealt with, but there are others who then slip under the radar, more because maybe they're not as loud and upfront about how they're feeling.

The anxious ones.

Yeah. The quiet…ly.. anxious, as opposed to your big behaviours, who are…

Internalising and externalising behaviours…

Ab… absolutely, yep.

Erm… so… connected to that, then, what would make it easier? In an ideal world…

Mm-hmm…

… what would help fix some of your issues?

In an ideal world, I would have a team of people that work with me… erm, because *I'm* it, and I have one classroom assistant who actually, we ended up having to put full time into primary 1 because there were 3 young people in there that required, a *lot* of support, which means that some of the… the lower d… not lower 'less important', but the lower *under the radar* kids, are not necessarily getting the amount of input they deserve, because time is taking up dealing with the crises as they happen, which *has* to be done, but… For example, I was running wellbeing 'boost groups' were we would focus in… so there would be a group of young people maybe that had been identified in a year group as having a particular area that they needed support with, be it managing social disagreements, or a lot of children

who seem to erupt when they're angry or whatever, and I would do a sort of focus over maybe 6 weeks, 8 week block, on looking at supporting that specific need. Those are the things that end up… *going* when there's a crisis, because you've not got the staffing to continue that going and… that is frustrating because you *know* there's kids who's needs you're not meeting… not that the other child is not important, but you know *everybody's* important and you can't do it for everybody when you don't have enough people.

Anything other than staff?

Erm… for me, that would make the biggest difference, to be honest…

Okay…

… the amount of staffing. Quite fortunate to have a lot of different resources and things, erm… there's other things we'd like to develop, we'd like to develop an outdoor space, more, like this is my outdoor space here [indicates quadrangle space beyond window] and I'd love to have it as a, you know, bit of a sensory garden, therapeutic activities, things like that so… I guess a bit of funding? Erm, but predominantly people on the ground would I think make the most significant difference, and not just for me and my team but across… more support staff.

More hands on deck.

More hands on deck. Yep. To deal with what happens on a day-to-day basis.

So… that's more or less it. Is there anything that you would like to add… to… the various things I've asked you about, is there any, anything else you'd like to… to… add as final thoughts or comments, something that you feel is important, that we've not covered, or…

Erm… I suppose, we touched on it, but just the importance of wellbeing… *first*… *before* anything else, you know if we haven't got the wellbeing right, the children are not going to learn. So, if there was less pressure coming from *way* on high about… attainment, having to be at this specific part at this specific time, and we could give more time over to wellbeing, we'd be able to close the gap. But it might not be… in *their* timeframe, but in the *long* run, I think that would improve things overall.

So… instead of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing being *core* strands of the curriculum, health and wellbeing should have primacy over everything?

Yeah. Because without that, we won't have… the children are not in a place to learn. You know yourself. And it goes back to Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'…

Wow! Yes… (laughter)

And if we don't have that, we've got nothing, do you know what I mean? We need children who are safe, fed, you know, secure, well, mentally well, physically well, *then* we'll have children who are in a place to progress, and progress quickly. But we need time to embed all the different things that these children need.

Okay. Well, thank you *very* much, I *really* appreciate your time…

You're welcome…

… and your insights, and your experience, and your opinions… very useful.

(Laughter) I hope it *was* useful, in one way or another!

[End of recording]

SCHOOL ONE INTERVIEW THREE: CLASS TEACHER (MS SIMPSON; 26/05/23).

Right, okay… so, thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed, I do have your verbal consent to record this?

Yes, you do.

Good, thank you very much. Okay, erm, I'll start off with an easier one then… do you mind if I ask how long you've been teaching?

Erm… so I've been teaching since… 2012?

2012.

2012, so….

Ten or eleven years?

Ten or eleven years, yeah.

That's a good while.

Yes.

Enough to get your feet under… under the desk (laughter). So… over the course of that time, have you noticed any changes in pupil behaviour?

Yeah, I have. Erm… I think, when I first got into teaching, erm, you were able to actually do your job, which was, predominately… teach! Erm… whereas now… I feel, you're having to wear a lot more hats. Erm, you know, like… erm, you've got kids coming in, maybe haven't been fed in the morning, you're having to make sure they've got something to eat. You're having to be their, kind of support for them, if they need someone to talk to, because they've maybe not got a kind of stable home life, erm… So I feel as a teacher, now, you're…

not just teaching, you're having to take on a lot more roles, erm, which can make the teaching side of things quite difficult.

So you've covered quite a few of the, well, some of the things that I'm going to touch on again in a minute about, er, what you think might be *behind* some of these changes, but… maybe, could you, er, *describe* some of the changes in behaviour that you've seen, how would you characterise them?

Yeah, erm… I think you're seeing a lot more children with additional support needs, ranging from like, dyslexia, you know right the way through to autism, erm… you're seeing a lot more children with like social and emotional, behavioural needs, erm, you know, it used to be quite kind of low-level behaviours that you're seeing in your class on a day-to-day basis, with maybe like *one* child that… maybe *occasionally* would display kind of… extreme behaviours but now you could be getting a group of 4 or 5 children in quite a small class, erm… which is quite tricky to deal with in amongst… all the children that have additional support needs… erm… so it's, yeah I would say it's changed *drastically*.

Do you think most classes in the school are like that now?

Absolutely, yep, I could not pick *one* class in this whole school that doesn't have some sort of… issue, yep.

Okay, okay, thanks. Er, so you've touched on some of these things, erm, what do you think might be causing these changes?

Erm… I think it's *got* to come from… like, society and how society's changed, erm, I think parents nowadays want to be friends with their children…

Mmm.

… and that there's… a kind of shift from… you know, you know parents have been setting boundaries, they would rather have an easy life 'cause a lot of parents, erm… work, so to make things easier for them, at home, you know they're maybe like, "Here's an iPad," or, "Here, go and do whatever you want and just give me peace," and then you've got obviously the other extremes where you've got, erm… you know, parents that *don't* work, erm… and come from, a background that has been… a bit chaotic growing up and it's almost as if it's like a cycle, kind of repeating itself, erm, so I think it's… quite kind of… it's definite… I think it's a society problem…

Mm-hmm.

… it's been worse since COVID, as well.

Mmm. I was going to ask if you see any changes, any connections with the lockdowns…

Yeah. I would say there's been big changes just over the past, erm, well three years… huge changes. Erm, especially with regards to respect, in school.

When I asked you, initially if you'd seen, erm, changes over the course of your career, erm, given that you're saying that the changes have got drastically worse since the lockdowns…

Mm-hmm.

… did you notice any deterioration *before*?

Yeah, but it was kind of slightly, it wasn't anything… you know you were maybe getting a few more kids in your class that… you know… that were presenting with like, your additional support needs, erm, but I would say behavioural needs, and emotional needs, that's been a lot worse since COVID.

It's accelerated rapidly since then?

Yes.

Okay. Erm, so in general terms, er, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school, and maybe in your class specifically?

Erm, you know I've got quite a small class and I would say it's quite varied, erm, although I've got a small class there's *quite a lot* in my class that I would say… are struggling, emotionally, erm, just due to things going on at home, erm, and their circumstances, erm, you've got a lot more children in my class as well that you know, kind of present with, like anxiety…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, you know, for no obvious reason, you know they've got an okay background, erm…

Mm-hmm, so how would you describe these mental health and wellbeing needs that you've said quite a few of the kids in your class have got… I mean, you've mentioned anxiety, erm… what are the ways in which these issues manifest?

Erm… you, erm, just them becoming quite *disengaged*, erm, don't want to enter into a conversation with you, they might sit and *cry*, erm, and don't want to… tell you why, erm, you know, refusing to do certain things in class as well, erm, yeah… just be quite withdrawn, and obviously, erm, then you've got the other extreme… I can think of obviously one or two in my class that present big behaviours…

Mm-hmm.

… you know, can be… quite *violent*, erm, kick furniture… kick, punch staff, erm, yeah… so it can present in… a few different ways.

I've certainly seen, er, examples of both of those in the time I've been here.

Yep.

Erm, are some of these issues more evident than others?

(Pause) Erm…

Do you notice them more? Are they more on the radar?

Yeah, ah-ha, I think obviously with the big behaviours… you're definitely aware of that, erm, and when you know that you've got a child in your class that can present with these big behaviours… but it's not *predictable*, that can be quite hard, erm, 'cause you're kind of constantly on, a kind of knife-edge, you don't know when it's gonna happen, you used to have certain triggers, now it can be anything…

So these are the things at the front of your mind?

Yeah. Ah-ha.

What do you mean by big behaviours?

Erm…

I mean I think I know what you mean, but..

Yeah, the big behaviours are like, you know, getting up, erm, out of their seats, going and kicking furniture, erm, tipping furniture, lifting chairs, throwing chairs, erm… lifting their hands, you know, to myself, erm, kicking with their feet, erm, you know, *refusing* to leave the classroom, you know, endangering myself and the other pupils in the class.

Erm, er… just on that note, very quickly, I was quite struck when you told me initially just about this… I've forgotten what you called it, but essentially the restraint training…

Yeah.

… you'd been on…

Yes.

… how to hold a pupil safely, basically, can you tell me a little bit about that?

Erm, so, because of one of the pupils I do have in my class, and the fact that his… behaviour can be quite extreme, erm, myself and my classroom assistants along with members of management went on CPI training, which [name of authority] council allow, erm, and it's [name of authority]'s support team that run that, so it was a two-day course were we went and looked at the theory behind erm, obviously using these procedures, erm and, well

looking at the model and how a teacher has to act in a certain role, depending on the behaviours that they're seeing. Which I found really really useful… because I felt that sometimes [background noise] when I was going through this course that you know actually, sometimes I remain in a supportive role for too long when actually I should be being more directive, or you know I'm letting things escalate too much so it's now allowed me to see when to step in, erm, and use these holds safely…

Okay.

Erm, and I definitely think there's a place for them, because actually it's helping the child…

That's interesting because I just assumed that most of the course content would be on the physical aspect of how to do it safely…

Absolutely not… a huge amount of theory.

Right, I see, that's interesting. So, just… I mean roughly, typically, how often would you say that you've had to do that?

Erm… I would say I need to use these holds *at least* twice a week…

Twice a week…

… yep, and on bad days it could be… twice a day.

Mm-hmm. And… and just on one particular child or occasionally on…

Erm, yeah, it's just on one particular child because that's in his safety plan.

I see, right, okay. Thank you very much, erm, right, so, I just wanted to ask you particularly about that because it had interested me but just getting back to the pupil mental health and wellbeing in general, erm, you told me about how some of these issues manifest in class and you told me about changes in behaviour that you noticed, have you noticed any changes in pupils' mental health and wellbeing over time, and if so, can you describe any changes that you've noticed?

Yeah, I would say I have, erm… I feel like… children nowadays are starting to be quite hard on themselves, quite down on themselves, erm, you know saying that they're not capable of doing things, and kind of perceive themselves quite negatively, erm, which is unusual to what I would have saw in my class, you know, ten years ago.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, it's just really interesting to see that, you know, *something's* obviously changed that children are now… feeling that way 'cause you know…

That's interesting…

… a child's like, well obviously I was a child, you know you're just like… out playing, and you nothing, you didn't have the weight of the world on your shoulders whereas nowadays, you tend to see kids coming in and… they're just… got *a lot* of worry… and view themselves quite negatively, and you just wonder where that's come from.

Mm-hmm. Yeah, so do I.

Ah-ha.

Interesting, okay, do you have any thoughts about, er, what's causing these changes? The mental health and wellbeing changes?

Erm, again, I think just down to background, family background, you know, if there's maybe hard times going on at home…

Mm-hmm…

… erm, and they're maybe witnessing things that children shouldn't be witnessing at home, that, you know they're bringing that worry into school, erm, you know, kids maybe going through losses, parents separating, erm, I also think social media has got a huge role to play in it as well.

Mm-hmm.

And the fact that kids have access to tablets and phones, erm, so easily.

Do you think that most of the kids in your class… who are aged, nine or ten?

Mm-hmm.

Uh-huh, think most of the kids in your class have got internet-able…

Yes.

… devices?

Absolutely, yeah. Even if it's through their Xbox or through their Playstation, they are all definitely using it.

Okay. Okay, erm, can you see any associations between the SIMD status of your pupils and their mental health and wellbeing?

Erm, I think there is… yeah, I would say, obviously depending on where they're… obviously this area has got a low SIMD and I think there is some sort of correlation between that and… obviously, the children's experiences at home, their parents are maybe out of work, parents are maybe reliant on, you know, alcohol, these sorts of things, and then obviously coming in to school, and that having an impact on them, then obviously you've got kids in the class that are coming from the same area and they're okay…

Mm-hmm..

So it's a kind of… *funny*… one… I think we did…. have a chat….

Well, I was going to say, we've already had a chat about how… SIMD is a very blunt tool, it's not always clearly representative of a particular pupil's home circumstances…

Yeah…

… but at the moment, it's about the only…

Yeah.

… information we've got on that…

Yeah.

… which is frustrating, I know, so… We've got a couple more on home background and then we'll just have a wee chat, just to finish with, about the strategies that the school uses to help support… so… to what extent do you think that the parents and carers in this school community, or your class, are employed in unstable jobs, you know for example gig economy, zero hours, part time, things like that?

I think, probably, a huge portion of them… proportion…

A huge proportion?

Probably in… maybe, not very stable jobs….

I see… in your class too?

Erm…. yeah, I think… (pause) I don't know if it would be as much as… half… half and half? I don't know. I'm not too sure.

Okay. So I'm not including benefit recipients… I mean, when I say benefit recipients, I mean people who are *unemployed* and receive benefits…

Yeah.

… within that, so if you were still to group them in the half that *aren't* in unstable, you still think it's maybe about 50-50?

Erm, I don't actually, you know I'm not too sure whether it would be as much as that 'cause I know that some… *do* have stable jobs, you know, like erm… nurses and things like that… er, college lecturers and then you've got ones that are maybe kind of self-employed, working in shops, which are generally… zero hours these days… isn't… aren't they, most of them… erm… not too sure what the split would be.

Okay. Okay, erm, can you see any associations between the pupils whose parents and carers fall into that unstable work category and… and pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Erm… (sighs) the one… the kids that kind of stand out in the class to me, yeah I can see… a link… I would say, erm… whether it's because maybe parents are working kind of unsociable hours as well, might have a, erm, a kind of role to play in that, or if they're single parent backgrounds and maybe not like seeing them as much due to obviously having to work, and they're relying on maybe grandparents, but yeah, I would say it's… presents more in those kids.

Okay.

Just when I'm thinking about the ones that kind of stand out more in my class.

You're thinking about specific individuals?

Yeah, specific children, yeah.

Erm, okay, in terms of the… you know, we've talked quite a bit about the issues you're facing, erm, the.. response that the school's put in place… I mean, you know I've certainly seen examples while I've been here so, erm… what sort of activities or lessons are taught in the school at a class level? What sorts of actual curricular teaching goes on to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Well we follow our, erm framework, our [name of authority] council health and wellbeing framework, erm, and obviously part of that is looking at emotional wellbeing, erm… At the beginning of the year, obviously 'cause I knew some of the problems that my class in particular would be presenting with, we spent quite a lot of time looking at emotions, and what these emotions could look like, how they present, how we deal with them, we spent quite a lot of time going over that, erm… We did, after COVID we used something called [name of H&WB package] as well, that was a whole-school…

Whole-school, okay…

… initiative, and it was just obviously trying to help everybody get into being back in school, you know obviously being away from everybody for so long and [background noise] being isolated, erm, and then obviously with all the issues that COVID brought along, you know, maybe people passing away, etc., erm so it was to help them recognise, you know that what they feel is normal and how… to deal with it…

Okay.

… and be kind of resilient. So we do… look at lessons in class. Erm, focusing in on how to deal with your, kind of mental wellbeing, we do take part in things like mental health awareness week, and days like that when these come up as well.

The [name of H&WB package] programme that you mentioned, that was a whole-school…

That was a whole-school thing, that we all did.

The… the authority framework, erm…

That's across [name of authority], we'll all use that.

I see, are there, sort of central resources to be…

Yeah, that usually… kind of, it's got hyperlinks and erm, (indistinct: pinpoint? PowerPoint?) staff resources to use, erm… I've also spent a bit of time looking up people to, erm… that are quite good at it, I use Instagram… so there's somebody that I follow on Instagram and it's really really good…

Okay…

… and kind of gives you good ideas. Erm, and she's actually got her own resources which I used quite a lot last year.

That's what I was going to ask: so the other lessons you mentioned, when you first took on your class, these are activities and resources that you're cherrypicking yourself?

Yeah, that I picked out that I thought were really good, and appropriate to the stage, erm, 'cause it was just, it was quite simple and it was using books, as well, like stories... Erm, it was kind of using like a… body map, and you were trying to pinpoint where you were *feeling* things on your body and how that might present as well, just, you know, to make them really aware of… erm… and also I liked the way the resources said, you know, like these emotions are like they're like visitors, they're not there…

Oh, that's interesting…

… for long.

Uh-huh.

You know and you had like the emotions in a wee suitcase and stuff like that…

Oh that sounds lovely! (Laughter)

Yeah, so that was quite good.

Oh, that does sound nice.

Yeah, it was something I'd use again.

Erm, I've noticed quite a few of your pupils being taken out for what seems to me like quite a wide range of…

Yeah. There's a lot of stuff going on.

… support, outside agencies, teachers from within the school… so can you list a few of these groups, or reasons why kids are getting taken out…

So, I have, erm… some individuals in my class that go to counselling…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, for various different things, just to do with their family background… so I've got some that are experiencing loss, parent separating, erm.. and then just, obviously, maybe a kind of unstable, unsettled kind of family home life, erm so they are speaking to counsellors from [name of counselling service], and from [name of charitable outside agency]…

Okay, are those two separate organisations?

Yeah, two separate organisations. Erm, so they come in, and the children take part in a block of counselling, erm... and then at the end, it's decided whether, you know, they maybe need, erm, a wee bit more support, 'cause I know one of them, in particular, their [name of charitable outside agency] sessions were supposed to stop but we've decided to keep it going…

Extend them…

Obviously, off the back of social work…

I see…

So, (sighs) we've got that, what else have we got… we've got the… there's a wellbeing group, that one of my pupils goes to once a week, that's run by [background noise] one of the classroom assistants…

So that's an internal support…

Yeah, that's an internal support. Erm, so they go to that, it's kind of like a boost group, erm, that we would have for like, literacy or numeracy, we've got one for wellbeing so it's like children that maybe just aren't… you know, being able to kind of, maybe verbalise how they're feeling, or deal with their feelings and it's just to kind of… help… them… process what they're feeling, giving them, erm, kind of ways to … support themselves, you know, when obviously, if there's nobody around and they're dealing with situations… and then we've got the [name of nurture room], as well, which is a nurture room, and we've got a principal teacher based in there along with a classroom assistant, and she's there to support pupils as and when required.

Okay.

And that's used… quite heavily, across the school.

So, tell me a little bit about how *you* make use of the [name of nurture room] then, and your pupils…

Erm, so I make use of the [name of nurture room], erm, you know if like my kids are coming in and maybe they're saying they're hungry, they go down to the [name of nurture room] and they'll get something to eat, they've forgotten a snack, they'll go down to the [name of nurture room] and get something, there's always something available down there, although we do now do school… we do toast in the morning…

Hm-mm.

… outside in the playground, erm, so that's kind of reducing the number of kids that are coming in hungry.

I've seen a few of your kids coming in with…

… toast in the morning. Yeah, although I know my, my son's school do the same, and he has his breakfast in the morning but he'll still take toast on the way in! (Laughter)

Well, fair enough!

So, I think you do get ones that just take some just because it's free, free food, but, erm.. I also use it if I feel that maybe there's someone in my class that's needing just that bit of time out, of class…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, you know, as a bit of respite, maybe just five minutes, you know just to go away, calm down, get their thoughts together, and to come back upstairs…

So these are unscheduled trips…

Ah-ha.

… just as and when you think…

Yeah, just as a wee break. Erm, I would also use it if there was maybe an issue.. erm, that I am maybe not able to resolve, there and then, erm, you know if there's maybe a restorative chat that needs to take place, I can call down to the [name of nurture room], to see if [names of nurture room staff] can help out.

I've seen quite a few of the… kids going out for restorative chats since I've been here, is that something that is quite widely used through the school?

It is, we are all trained, the classroom assistants are trained, we just had a refresher on our last in-service day as well, from our [member of staff], so it's widely used, I think it's a big thing across the authority, to be using…

Find it useful?

Yeah, ah-ha, it is useful, erm, but I think it's very much the children need to be ready for the chats, 'cause other than that it doesn't work. Erm… I do think there's occasions where, it might not work, depending on the child… as well, sometimes they know just what to say just to get the conversation over with. Erm, and kind of, get out of the situation then, you know, five minutes later they could be presenting with the same behaviours that… started the restorative chat in the first place… So I think, erm, there's definitely a place for it, but… I don't know if it always works. Erm, the [name of nurture room] can also be used at break and lunch as well… if we've got children that, erm, aren't coping outside in the playground, so they can go down and have a kind of quieter lunch, so it's sometimes used for that as well…

Erm, what sort of other strategies do teachers, or school staff use, at a personal level, or a class level, that you might have seen that you think support pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Erm, we can use… brain breaks, erm, like calm corners, fidget toys, putty, a lot of kids in my class use putty, erm… I think also it's… a huge thing is just having a relationship with the child, that they know they can come and talk to you, erm, and know that they can trust in you and can speak to you, erm, I think that's really key.

Mm-hmm. Isn't it. Okay, erm, so… are there any characteristics that you think… you know, that might undermine pupils' mental health and wellbeing? Are there any ways that you've observed people dealing with children that you think, "Mmm, I don't know if that's helpful"?

Erm, (sighs)… I think… I mean it's probably something that like, that *I* didn't probably think on until I went to that… that CPI training. I think the way you word things to children..

Mm-hmm.

You know like being up and going, "What's wrong with you?"

Mm-hmm.

I don't think, *that* helps. Because you're… it's almost as if there's something wrong with, like with the child. Erm, so I think that the way you're wording things needs to be really…

That's interesting.

… erm, you need to be quite careful, you know, "What's happened?" would be better, you know, "How can I help you?"

So is that about… positive… er, the way that you frame things positively…

Ah-ha…

… or negatively? Or is it a… confrontational, stylistic sort of thing?

I think it's erm, the way you're phrasing it, I think you need to phrase things positively, 'cause I don't think anybody would go up here and be (adopts cross, aggressive tone) "What's wrong wi' you?" I think, yeah, I think it's just about… it's having to be more positive the way we're speaking to them, you know, to make them… to validate their feelings, you know, 'cause obviously they're feeling a certain way because something's happened, and they don't know how to deal with it, so you're going up and going, "What's wrong wi' you?" That's not actually helping them, they're maybe not wanting to engage in a conversation…

Yeah, I can see that. Erm, so, getting to the end, so just sort of very general questions, just in case I've missed things that you want to talk about… Are there *any* other ways you can think of that we've not already touched on that the school supports mental health and wellbeing… of pupils… I mean, what makes… what is it about school that *helps?*

I think it's got to be, like a whole-school ethos, I think we all need to be… you know, singing from the same hymn sheet, I think we need to all need to have the same approach. Got to kind of be embedded, erm, across the school. It would make no difference, like one teacher, or a couple of teachers, having a certain approach to help with, obviously children's mental wellbeing. I think it's got to be across the board and coming from the top, but I think that happens in our school, like, our head teacher and our deputes have always, you know got like an open door policy. They're happy to speak to the kids and help them and give them a cuddly toy to bring upstairs, and erm, yeah, I think… I think it's got to be a shared approach, I think that's a… big… thing, erm, to be helping them.

What is it about school that risks undermining pupils' mental health and wellbeing? What's the negative impact that school might have?

Erm… (sighs) I suppose it would maybe be… (coughs) just focusing on… achieve …like, you know, achievement of things like literacy and numeracy, and putting that above… you know, wellbeing. And I think mental wellbeing needs to be okay before everything else is okay.

Do you think there's a tension between… wellbeing and achievement?

Absolutely. Yes. And you feel that at the end of the year when you're doing your tracking. 'Cause I know it's coming from the top, like, obviously it's coming from outwith the school, you know, it's like, you will get, "Why are your children not at…?" Whatever level they need

to be at, and then don't actually know what's going on in that child's background, they've got no idea what they've been through, so it's, like that child's not achieving this because, you know, they've lost a parent this year, or they're… you know, they've been taken away from parents and put into foster care. You don't know what's going on in that child's background and yet, they're still wanting them to be, where they need to be, on second level or on first level.

Do you think that, I mean, when you talk about doing the tracking at the end of the year, I guess… I mean, am I correctly reading that your implication is that some kids aren't on target, aren't on track, for say, literacy or numeracy because… things that have been required to support their wellbeing throughout the year have impacted that achievement?

Ah-ha, or it's just the way the child's been feeling and they've opted out of a lot of lessons 'cause they can't cope in class.

Okay, okay, that's interesting. Erm… are there any other things you'd like to add on the subject of…

[Door opens, someone enters room]

I don't think so…

[Staff whisper inaudibly to each other]

Anything else you'd like to add? That we've not already covered?

Erm, I don't… think… so, I think we're kind of covered…

Just in case there's something… you know, I'm making a list of questions, it's not always what you want to say! (Laughter)

I think that's kind of covered… everything…

Okay.

… and I feel like I've… put my point across about things!

Well, er, I'm really glad to hear you say that, 'cause I think that's been really, *really* useful. Thank you very much. Okay.

No problem.

I'll just turn that off, er……

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL ONE INTERVIEW FOUR: HOME LINK WORKER (MR JOHNSON; 23/05/23).

Bingo. Right, I do have your consent to record this interview?

Absolutely, with pleasure.

Thank you again for your time. Erm, okay, I know that you're short of time so I'll make it as quickly… as quick as I can. Erm, how long have you been working in schools?

Woah. I've been home link worker across two schools for five years, coming up six years, but before that I worked with a charity organisation that used the arts as the kind of catalyst or conduit for transferable life skills, pupil development, personal wellbeing, confidence, for secondary schools since I was…. [years old], now I'm [years old].

Okay, so you've got experience…

So I've been working (inaudible) for ten, fifteen years?

Okay.

Both here and abroad.

Okay. Over the course of that time, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise those changes?

Woah. (Long pause). I think in education and the world we… we are in a period of change, I think life circumstances for families and communities, whether that be financial, personal barriers, their own education, limits that they put on themselves, their own physical and mental health and wellbeing, have really impacted this generation. I think off the back of COVID 19, that's been an additional challenge and I think only now we're actually… two years back? We're now actually seeing not only educationally the gaps that we have to do and to fill for young people but more *socially*. And with how young people interact. I'd say *that's* a change that I have seen most recently. I can say most recently in the past two, three years, coming out the end of COVID, I think the isolation that posed for us didn't allow young people to create positive relationships with each other, didn't allow them to have the skills and learn the skills about positive communication, friendly communication, how to speak with kindness to each other, how to form relationships, how to tackle or approach conflict or uncertainty in a positive healthy way. And I think on top of them, other personal support needs they may have, whether that be any SEBN need, I think that's added an extra layer onto some of these young people, er… where I think, regardless of all comm.. all behaviour being communication, I think that what the people are trying to communicate through… escalated behaviours is the piece that we have to maybe try and investigate and work on more with multi-agencies… I do support young people that are very verbally and

physically aggressive at times, again I think that comes from a place of… uncertainty and not knowing themselves. I think there's a *lot* of pressure put on young people and families as a whole unit… linked to multi-generational cycles of what families may be stuck in or used to and… I think only now schools are being able to offer hope again. I think we maybe lost hope for quite a while…

That's interesting. I remember one of my university tutors, going back years, used to say that, er, his first head teacher had told him that they had to be 'dealers in hope.'

Absolutely. And I think… now… now that's… the wider staff community at a school *can* wrap around supports for a family, I think positivity, and positive approaches to wellbeing and the future is how we should be tackling challenges for escalated behaviour. And… trying to provide families the reassurance that there can be a different tomorrow, the journey might not be smooth, it will be bumpy, there will be upsetting times, but… that the school are people that are actually just like them.

Hmmm.

There's no hierarchy, we are exactly the same and we're here to look out for each other. I think that may be something positive from the pandemic that we experienced that people really did come together and now we value more in an educational, family, personal setting with people, the opportunities and experiences that we have… but I think from what that took away and the ability to form positive healthy relationships and be able to learn the skills of self-regulation or being able to speak actually for young people about what they really do feel inside is the next chapter in the journey and the next stop that I think… the two schools that I work in I think we're on the road to that… I hear that in the council from other colleagues, other home link workers, er… and that does fill me with hope.

Good. That's interesting. Erm, thank you. Er, you've actually touched on a few other questions that I was going to ask. I'm interested that quite a bit of that answer was already addressing what may be some of the underlying causes or factors behind some of these issues. Which is actually where I was going, shortly. Erm, how would you… in very general terms, just thinking of this school, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

(Pause). I'd say… there are *less* young people requiring check-ins, one-to-ones, emotional wellbeing and support… than those… that… there are less that need it in this school, I think it's a small minority of young people with specific identified needs, again whether that be

SEBN, or whether it comes from family circumstances or background or poverty-related attainment gap, er… social (inaudible) in the community… for their wellbeing, I think what I'm proud of at this school is the level of one-to-one support, I think staff are very attuned, just by simple things, and I think that's the bit that's related again to COVID in my last… my last piece. I think we have to start again. And by starting again it's simply by speaking to people and allowing young people the time to build and form the relationships and to form trust with us again as adults, as home link worker, as teacher as head teacher. And it's simple things, like mindfulness colouring, a game of Uno, bringing people together that may have had conflict in the playground and sharing in a game, turn-taking, accepting failure or loss in a game, and trying to relate that back to school, practice, home life, is something that the staff here do very well. The staff are always there to check in, they're always there to come and then seek, er, professional development for themselves, there's a lot of work done here around restorative practice, er, I've led that, I've led training in that for classroom assistants *and* for the staff actually, and looking at how we can positively restore broken relationships or relationships that become fractured during the school day, whether it be from an accidental point of view in the playground, or if it has been harsh words that have been said, and how we relate that back to the young people to allow them to fully understand, and not just say sorry. What's behind that? Where's it coming from? And I think that there's also a place in that where health and wellbeing *has* to come first because if you're not happy healthy and here, and staff have not allowed you to feel regulated and calm in a classroom, you're not going to, you're not in an ability to learn, your brain capacity, you're not in that part of your brain where you can actually soak up the teaching and learning. And again I then, can't imagine what that must be like for a young person who then may be living with autism or ADHD or there's another diagnosed living condition that… to then make the classroom accessible and the activities differentiated and to ensure our pupils still achieve, I think that's been a key priority here since, (coughs) 'scuse me, since I've been at this school, but certainly the other school that I've been for five years and that's come from placing health and wellbeing first.

Mm-hmm.

Ensure the relationship, allow the young people to build that relationship with you where they trust you and you know that you are there for them, in a.. in a safe environment, it's a safe adult, someone they can speak to.

Mm-hmm.

And, I think if we get the health and wellbeing part right, not just for the young people but for the families…

Then you get the achievement.

I think that's the bit where we would then see an increase and a rise in attainment because we've ensured that everyone is…(inaudible) wellbeing in their mind, their mind is positive.

Yep. That's… gen… that is.. all the research agrees with that, that diagnosis. Erm, thank you. Erm… sorry, just one quick question that I had just right at the start of that you said that, you know I was asking if, er, how you would describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils generally in the school and you used a phrase, "It's less," and I was wondering if you were comparing that with, erm, how it *used* to be here, or with another school, what do you mean when you say "It's less now?"

The way young people present, I think that's young people I think overall in both schools, there are general health and wellbeing lessons that I go in to do with regard to anti-bullying, for example, and respectful relationships, as a broad… to a full class or a full stage, or full school. However, there would be more *identified* families if they were on, say for example, working with social work or multi-agencies, or had been *identified* as presenting with escalated trauma or escalated behaviour. Their wellbeing checks would be more.. I would increase more, so potentially that would be three times a week, or twice a week when I'm here, for specific emotional, social, wellbeing welfare check-ins, with that young person and the family… when I say 'less', in a school roll here of…

[Number over 300]?

I think we're up to about [number nearer 400] when you add in the [other sections of school], and I think I check in with only about 20%, or lower, of young people and families that I'd say are on your radar for really requiring heightened support. The other 75, 80-plus % I believe can contribute and are at that level where the wider health and wellbeing curriculum fully supports them to attain and develop at that level, as opposed to a comparison.

Okay.

But I would say that that's… I would say that that figure's about the same for both schools I'm in…

Mm-hmm

The other school that I'm I has a higher roll, er, but again, it's a small pocket so I think (coughs), 'scuse me, I think that's testament to the wellbeing work that education *and* wider partners have done to support this journey back to full time education over the past two years, but for adults too, there's that small pocket of young people that require that extra bit of support, not only to integrate back in to school, but in their family and wider community.

Which we're coming to in a minute, erm, so, am I right in thinking… you're describing a picture where currently maybe about a fifth of pupils are requiring *some* form of actual targeted support…

Intervention.

… intervention, and the remaining children, erm, you know they may or may not to varying extents require a bit of support but, just the general, whole-school, classroom support is sufficient.

Mm. Yeah.

Okay, that's very clear, thank you.

Think that's also reflects (inaudible) and two parents nights, report cards, check-ins, you're seeing that young people through their tracking… are on track and (coughs), excuse me, the introduction of PATHS at one school that I'm in, they've now been on a two-year journey and they're actually doing the application right now to become a [name of level] accredited three-year PATHS model school, er, in [name of local authority], I'd like to see this introduced more in this school as a focus, I promote it and celebrate it to other schools in the authority, a PATHS lesson two, three times a week, regardless of how long the lesson, but as part of the curriculum linked to numeracy or linked to writing is allowing that forum where you can ensure all the young people around you are talking about; "Is this a comfortable feeling? Uncomfortable?" What these emotions look like, and I think *that's* then how you know, some of the young people that require that extra targeted intervention, because they can't participate in that whole-class forum. *That* is the bit that's the challenge, because actually is their emotions and their mind and where they are from their life experiences, that can allow them to have the capacity to participate in that whole environment, so then you're actually able to differentiate very quickly with the young people that are happy and able from that learning to speak openly about their emotions, and those that don't, and that's the way you can see the pocket that… how can we

encourage that, what more work do we have to do with you, smaller group setting perhaps? One to one? (Coughs) 'scuse me.

I… I… you know I've used PATHS before myself, and I… rate it, particularly in the early years, I think..

Absolutely.

… it costs money, it's a resource, you know, its, 'What are you going to do with your PEF?' basically… Right, okay, thank you… Do you have any views about whether… particularly some of these, these young people that are requiring a greater level of support, a greater need, do you have any views about whether these mental wealth and hellbeing [sic]… Urgh! Mental wealth! Health. Should be mental wealth, shouldn't it? Mental health and wellbeing issues are affecting some… some *types* of children disproportionately? Are there… you know, a certain type of child who you are more frequently seeing within these groups? Or is it just, is it, are they *completely* varied and all entirely individual, impossible to categorise? (Pause). I think the hardest part about that question is looking at it without forming any kind of stereotype or stigma against a young person and a family, and putting them in a box. However, to allow… I think natural assessment does that anyway, natural differentiation in a class does that anyway, and if we try to look at it as a support method rather than a label, I think would be really good moving forward. Er…

I think that is very good advice and I shall reflect on how I shall rephrase that question….

No, no, no, but I think that's how we think! I think that's how we think, I think we look … and it is linked to the answer. At one school I'm at, is fifty-fifty, and the school sits in the middle, with one half of the grass… very wealthy, large four, five bedroom houses, two cars in the drive, lawyers, doctors, accountants. The other half, the other half of the grass is classed as SIMD 1,2, within the top 5% of multiple deprivation of [name of local authority]. And that's just separated by a school in the middle. And… half and half come to each… so, naturally, from generational cycles that I spoke about earlier and family circumstances that… I think the hardest part is that young people are born into a family and born into a community and… very highly linked to poverty and hope, or lack thereof, of hope, within families of what they can achieve and what they can be, or the means that they have, coming from what they learn and what they know. And how their mental health has been affected throughout their life I think has put a great deal of *family* feelings- adult, mother,

father, parent, carer, auntie, gran… feelings onto our children, straight away, because (coughs), 'scuse me….

Not at all.

… they're coming and they're seeing… I think we have to give cre… children, *more* credit than we do for *fully* understanding what they are *seeing*… if you can talk about the turtle, and your emotions and PATHS in primary one, you'll know if you're coming, and… someone's in full school uniform with their full pack lunch box and if your shoes have holes in them and you have nothing, you can *see* that, and you can see that the children see it…

Mm-hmm.

So, unfortunately yes, to answer your question, I do think there… I think there are pockets within communities because of what that community is living with and the deprivation within that community, I think puts a great barrier on children and families as a whole to fully integrate and release their potential in all aspects of their life. But I think… that sometimes… it may be easier to stay… in that cycle because it's all you know… It's very, it takes a very brave person to break away from that mould and try something new and sometimes try to invest in the interventions from education, social work (coughs), because that's fear of change, and change comes to us all as… we immediately go to the negative, uncertainty, fear, so if you're already living with a barrier that you know because also as an adult, that's just what I've spoken about, how the child feels, as an adult, I deal with parents that have major anxiety about coming to the school playground, coming to the community events, because of the fear of being… the fear of being judged from the families that are on the other side of the grass. So, I am an advocate for trying to gently push that boundary by bringing people together and just seeing people for people, because I think… on both sides… the half on SIMD 1 and 2 need to feel acceptance from their SIMD 9 and 10 families that they can come in but equally the SIMD 9 and 10 families must be open to allow the SIMD 1 and 2 families to come in; there's growth from both sides, so it doesn't mean just 'cause you're SIMD 1 and 2 that that means the stigma is there, the stigma is there for all of us because we all judge all the time.

(Laughs in confirmation).

The top must allow the bottom in, and the bottom must be ready to… hopefully allow to be accepted into the community fold. And that goes back to what I said at the start about relationships, and if they can bring people together and form positive relationships. You

don't have to like each other, love each other, so long as there's mutual respect within a community for everyone being together, for the next generation of children to grow up stigma-free, as they weren't, I think that's what we have to do.

Fascinating. That… just, just before we go any further, your work here comes before, erm…

[Pupil arrives at the door.]

Would you like to pause for one moment?

Would *you* like to pause for one minute, because I understand that…

May I just open the door to see…

… in your position, er, things happen!

… just open the door to see…

[Tape paused.]

Okay, thank you for resuming after a short break, erm, I will get to the point as quickly as I can, my main interest in your experience is these insights into pupils' families and carers' backgrounds. Erm, now you've spoken quite a lot about the, the association, the difficulties that you… the challenges that present from families who are, who… as *I* take it, from your descriptions, you see entrenched in generational dependence on the security of benefits, is that a fair characterisation?

Er, yes, absolutely, that was linked to the piece about breaking away from the mould, and what you're used to…

Mm-hmm.

I know, because of the level of support, for some of the top families that are on my… radar, that… because of working with them and financial inclusion, they're, (coughs), 'scuse me…

I'm fine, don't worry!

The benefits they receive can sometimes mirror or greatly exceed the monthly wage of a classroom assistant, be very close to my personal wage…

Mm-hmm.

… if you're looking at a single mum with three children, then I think that dependency on that benefit can also have become, possibly… an incorrect safety blanket because unfortunately, because of potentially their background and their education, that may limit them, to go into a job that would reflect the same monthly wage that they're actually receiving in their benefit. By no means am I saying the benefit should not be there, however, I think it has, maybe unintentionally, formed that safety net where, 'why would I then take the risk to

empower myself and go and get a job, maybe at Tesco, or… a community food bank, or a school, or volunteer somewhere?' To see progression in a career, when…

[Phone rings.]

… right now, I'm already getting that money.

Looking beyond this group of parents that you've described that are… are, erm… unemployed, or dependant entirely on benefits, erm, to what extent do you, are you aware of parents and carers in the school community who work in what you might call unstable jobs: zero hours contracts, gig economy, you know, paid on completion of a particular job rather than a fixed income every week independent of what work they're doing? Have you any insight into parents and carers on these sorts of…

Specific data or numbers to be able to reflect, I'd say no.

And general perception?

I would be able to say, from some of the families that I support, from supporting their children within school, I know that because of the need, and this links back to your first question about behaviour, I know because families understand the need or behaviour of their young person, that they've withdrawn from employment, or reduced employment, to be available, to have to come to the school to support their young people.

Mm-hmm.

So we're now looking at a model were families are trying to provide for their children, but due to the need, and whatever that need may look like, they're having to reduce the hours of their employment to be available, *to be available* to come to school to support. So, I mean look there are families that are sitting on, potentially two days, three days…

Mm-hmm..

.. they *were* in full time employment, but that… they made the choice to reduce that to support their family. I know there's…. hmm, there's quite a high percentage of the families here that I do support that… have never worked…

Hm-mmm.

… have… and… (pause) I believe it would take a great deal of change for them to work, er, 'cause I think that has again become unintentionally a safety net…

Yes.

… but… I don't know much about with regard to the zero-hours contract piece, or the full work piece, but I do know that, again, they're half-and-half, it's actually the same in this

school that I'm in just now, half are… again, as we were saying, we're immediately going to phrases like 'high-achievers', 'successful', everyone's a high achiever, everyone's successful, that's how we try and look at it, but the families that have identified or requested support for themselves, because of their young people, because of their background, their family, their circumstances, they've chosen not to- either chosen not to work, or not been able to get employment.

You've spoken, eloquently, about, erm, the.. the impact that you have seen on… pupil wellbeing based on the security of relying on, or the generational dependency on benefits. Are you, do you have any awareness of any association between financial *insecurity* and impact on pupil wellbeing? (Pause.) Is that something you come across much, or is it on your radar?

Er, yes, there… frequently there's young people that come to me and say, "I need to be a school lunch today." "Why?" "Oh, mum and dad… there's last week… my mum and day don't get paid 'til next Thursday."

Mm. Mm-hmm.

You invest and then finding out, *oh*, 'x', and you're trying to be… fine line… also that we have to be careful in education, you do a prompt question that you believe is a positive healthy question out of interest to young person, "Oh great, where does your mum and dad work?" Mum and dad don't work, it's the benefit man."

Mm-hmm.

So we are seeing in primary which is what, twelve years and below, are able to articulate…. "Mum and dad don't work, it's the benefit man. It's the money man." And… you've then entered in, and opened that… You've not put that stigma on them, you've not given a… not given your opinion, but that young person's had to share that bit of information with you so that then poses for me, the dignity piece.

Mm-hmm.

So, but yes, I…I would say family… the insecurities for young people, and then how… how they are in school. Some young people when it comes to snack time and lunch time because they know we have stations for fruit, or food, will come, will always come down, will always say, "I haven't had breakfast this morning," or..

Okay…

… or we were late today, my mum didn't have anything, I don't have anything because my mum doesn't have any money. And that then… in one way, does open a door to allow you to then… I then share that with families, and I find that… a slight saving grace for me, because when I can relay to families that their young person is feeling this, and their young person has voiced it, and I'm concerned about everyone that I want to help, I find that adults can then be more responsive to me, if it's something their young person has voiced, rather than me potentially knowing or offering that support… blank.

Okay, I'm only going to give you, like, ten words max to answer this last question, 'cause I know…

Hit me!

(Coughs.) If you had to choose ten words to describe the most valuable thing that this school does, to support young people's mental health and wellbeing….

Ten words… this school does… the most valuable part to support mental wellbeing…

What's the top thing, the most important thing that you do, as a school?

(Long pause.)

(Laughs) Sorry to put you on the spot!

No, I love it! These things are good! (Long pause. Interviewee writes notes.) I've written down; I believe this school builds relationships, I believe this school provides smiles to everybody and moments of happiness to make them feel included. I believe there is care. People here ask about families, not just young people, everybody, they want to know because they want to help solve the problem, and the school is always there, the schools that I work in put out communication to say, "We are here, we… we want to work with you, we want to help you," and the school positively and healthily challenges barriers to families that may not feel confident enough to come forward, we go and work with those families an open the door by saying, "Come in and have a cup of tea with us."

Mm-hmm.

And simply by having a cup of tea, and breaking down a barrier of stereotypes and stigma and hierarchy, we get to know people for people, and I believe, makes some of our most vulnerable families feel that they are accepted, that they belong, and that they are valued within our community.

Fabulous. Thank you *so* much for your time. I'm going to let you get to the more important…

Absolute pleasure. Thank you so…

[End of recording]

SCHOOL TWO INTERVIEW ONE: NURTURE TEACHER (MS LEES; 25/10/23).

Testing. So, thank you very much for giving me your time, and agreeing to… to an interview at *such* short notice.

(Laughs.)

So, just for the tape, I do have your consent for this interview?

You do.

Thank you very much. Okay, we'll start with a relatively easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

I have been a teacher for 23 years now…

23 years, wow…

Primary school teacher.

In this school?

In this school? Twenty years.

Twenty years?

And the past three years as a nurture teacher.

Mm-hmm. Okay, well that's really my interest in speaking to you, in that capacity… Erm, so in general terms, over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them?

Yes, I have noticed a change. Children appear to be a lot more anxious… erm, than when I first started out teaching. Sometimes I do think about that and I wonder though, was I just younger and not realising, er, but certainly as I've got older and had, you know, children of my own, I can kind of see things, erm… lockdown brought a lot of anxiety in children, being at home, and… almost kind of feeding off parents' anxiety. They spent so much time together and the parents were anxious about money, or bereavement, erm, children were there to witness all of that. So I have… I have, over thirty children I see, in a week, in this room.

Wow. Okay.

I have groups from primary two to primary seven, and I also so Seasons for Growth for children experiencing change. So, I have seen changes in childrens' self-esteem, anxiety, lots of worries.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Yeah.

Okay. Interesting. Erm, thank you, erm, so, you've touched on this already, have you got any insight into what you think might be causing some of these changes? Some of this increase in anxiety? You've mentioned the lockdown, er, the lockdowns, and the impact they've had. Do you think that that is the major cause of change, or do you see any other changes as well, what do you think?

Oh, I think children have…

Sorry, I beg your pardon…

Yeah, no, no, I know what you're saying, erm, definitely social media.

Mm. Okay.

Definitely in the sense of all these different WhatsApp groups, even though, you know, our children are young in primary, the older ones, p6 and 7s, talk about problems on WhatsApp groups, people, you know, saying unkind things, erm… and… erm… Just children not coping with, you know, parental separation, divorce…

Ah-hah.

Yeah, there's been... er, a number of children in the school who are, erm, upset? At what's going on at home so they come here to work through their feelings.

Right, so, quite a lot of what you're describing there is really to do with home life?

Yeah, some of it is home life…

Okay.

Some of it though, there may be children in the school who, erm… have, you know, need support with work, they've got additional support needs, maybe they're dyslexic, erm, and their self-esteem is quite low, because they've become aware that children around them are able, to, you know, read and complete work better than they can that's what they say, you know, that people can do things better than me, and they find that quite hard.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Mm. Okay, thank you, erm…

Friendships, that's another one.

Friendships, of course.

That's a big one. (Laughs).

Erm, in general terms then, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

(Pause). There are a minority of children who are struggling with their feelings… but, in general? The ethos in the school is very good, it's a very nurturing school, you know the staff are fantastic, the leadership team are really big on, erm, helping children with their mental health through different projects we do throughout the school. So I would say in general, it's actually very… it's positive in the school.

Mm-hmm.

But you know there are that minority of children who are struggling. It's such a big school as it is, there's over 600 children, so erm, in the most part I think it's quite good.

Okay. That's good. It's a huge school…

Yeah, exactly, there's high schools the size of this primary!

(Both laugh).

Ah-hah, er… so certainly you touched on a few things there that the… the leadership team… some of the programmes and things that they do to support... and I'll come back to that…

Okay! That's fine!

Erm, er.. can you… you've mentioned anxiety, can you describe how, er, this minority of pupils who you say are struggling with mental health and wellbeing…

Yeah…

Can you describe how issues manifest? How do you see, erm…

Erm…

What sorts of problems do you see?

Right, so what kind of… so, I have children who, erm, have… get very panicky, and have described what they're having as panic attacks, erm, I have children who, erm, struggle with friendships and don't understand, erm… don't understand, you know when children don't want to play with them, they think it's something on them, it's something about them, not necessarily the game that they're playing. Erm, so they're struggling with that… I've kind of forgotten your question to be honest! (Laughs.)

I'm interested in how... the sorts of issues that you see children... you see children having, how do they manifest? What sorts of behaviours, or how do you experience these children who are struggling…

Okay, children who feel very worthless…

Okay…

Yeah, erm… children who talk about, erm… how in-depth can I get… go with this?

As far as you want. Absolutely.

Yeah? Yeah? Erm, children who may have spoken at some point about [redacted at participant's request]. Erm, children who are angry with how life is and may be upset and talking to, erm you know, upset at home and… being angry with parents. Yeah.

Erm, this is entirely confidential…

Uh-huh.

… and, you know, I can guarantee you that the interviews that… that I conduct with all sorts of staff members… the data will all get aggregated, so nobody will be able to identify you or the school or the pupils…

Yeah, okay. Yep.

… so you can go as in-depth as you want, obviously I'd ask you not to mention any names.

Okay, no, no.

[One comment has been redacted here at participant's request.]

Er, okay, that's very detailed, thank you. Erm, so, you know I asked you earlier in general terms about changes in the way pupils behave, you know, you've maybe perceived over your career… specifically about mental wellbeing: have you noticed any change in *that* over the course of your career?

Erm…

The prev… the frequency of it, or the severity of it, any changes happening?

I don't really know to be honest, I think it's always there, I think back to my earlier career and children that I had in different schools I taught in a school in [name of deprived inner-city area], I taught in [other deprived urban area], and actually a lot of these things were going on then. Yeah. But I was younger, and there were other people who would look out for these children, and… I didn't have the experience really.

Yeah.

But I do believe that they were being helped by other members of staff, members of the leadership team, so I think a lot of these problems have always been there. Yeah.

Okay. Thank you. Er… we're rattling through this, so… I'll slow down a bit.. Yeah.

(Laughs)

Do you have any views about whether mental health and wellbeing issues affect some children disproportionately, are there certain types of child or certain categories of children who are more affected than others?

Some of the autistic children that I work with…

I see…

Yeah, they have difficulty understanding friendships and feelings, and er, just what's going on around them, erm, I see it with those children that I'm working with at the moment.

Do you think they form the majority of the children that you're helping?

(Pause.) No, I don't actually, no. I'm helping a lot of children who, erm, through Seasons for Growth, I'm helping children with separation, that they're struggling with parents splitting up and parents moving on and you know, having new girlfriends and boyfriends and just that wider family community. I've got a number of children that are, struggling with that right through the school…

Mm-hmm.

… and we've had, erm, parents who have… died recently, we've got children who've lost, erm, more recently a dad, just before that a mum died, and there's someone I'm supporting just now who's parent's very very ill as well. So that… that takes up quite a lot of my time because they need so much support, or just sort of time out of class and doing nice things as well. You know, have someone to talk to. And I spend a lot of my week with these children as well.

That's… that chimes with what several other people have told me…

Yeah.

So obviously they'll be overlaps between these categories, they're not clear-cut but, erm… children with ASD, erm, bereavement and family health issues…

Yep.

… and family separation and break-up and changes in relations… Do you think those broad categories cover *most* of the pupils you're supporting?

(Long pause.) Erm, mostly… I do have other children though, who come because they.. just aren't very confident, erm, they… they're just general worriers, and parents have contacted the school and said they're worried about them, and, erm… It's been suggested that they come for nurture and we can sort of revisit that term by term and they would come to me and they'd get leadership opportunities, they would organise charity things, or even older children getting put into groups with younger children…

Mm-hmm.

… and it gives them that role of looking after someone and erm, helping out. I give them tasks to do with the children so that they feel as if they've got this sense of worth and erm, they do come back and say they enjoy it 'cause they see these children in the playground and they're running up, it's almost like they're hero status as well? So I do get a lot of children for those reasons too, but just, you know, on a short-term thing.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

I'm sure that's very helpful.

They enjoy it. They get to help with baking and, you know, just lots of nice things.

Er, okay, erm… well, that's really helpful, that's mostly all of my questions to do with mental wellbeing…

Okay.

… I'm also interested in, er, the family circumstances and the parental background, as I said… erm, to what extent do you think that parents and carers in this school community have employment in what you might call unstable jobs: zero hours, temporary contracts, gig economy, that sort….

I'm not really aware of that here.

Is that because you *are* aware of parental background and you don't know of many children that in that category, or because you don't get to know too much about the child's family's background?

Well I *do* get to know the children's family background, you know, of the children that see…

Ah-hah…

… and then we have access to, you know, looking at the, you know, it's like the PEF funding, and just seeing family circumstances, erm, I'm aware of the provision of school meals and things like that, but… it doesn't seem to be something that sort of jumps out at me…

Okay. It's not strongly associated with the children you're seeing.

No.

Okay. Are there any family circumstances, in terms of employment, that *are* associated with the children you're seeing? Or is it a wide range of…

No, I… I don't really know the answer to that to be honest with you.

Okay. That's fine. Okay. Erm, and… can you see any associations between socio-economic stability of your pupils' households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes? Do you see patterns between children whose home lives just tend to be a little bit more erm… er, parents who are perhaps unemployed, or parents who are living in deprivation, or parents whose, erm… pupils whose parents have professional jobs…

Mm-hmm…

Do you see any connections between pupils you're… you're looking at, you're supporting and what their parents do for a living? No?

No. I'm not.

Okay, right. That's fine, thank you.

Sorry! (Laughs.)

No, no, you're absolutely… you know…

I don't have more to say on that!

I really just want to know how it seems to you, and your views and perceptions.

Yeah.

Erm, right, the last few questions are, er… as I said I'd come back to about the sorts of programmes and activities and things that the school does to support…

Yep, sure.

… pupils' wellbeing.

Yep.

Er, what sorts of activities or lessons are *taught* in the school to support mental health and wellbeing needs?

So within the classrooms themselves they use the 'Bounce Back!' scheme. I don't know if that's been mentioned to you already?

Yes, ah-hah, [class teacher] mentioned that. Mm-hmm.

And a lot of growth mindset.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah. They have their assemblies as well, and that's where children who have got an achievement, a [name of school values] certificate, or [name of school values] phone call, they're called to the front, and they get their photo taken…

Mm-hmm.

Erm…

[Name of school values] is the school's values?

Yeah! So it's… [begins to list school values but seems to forget some].

[Continues list of values] (Both laugh).

And… [Suggests last value but is unsure}

I can't remember I'm afraid!

(Both laugh)

Erm, so, yeah, we, erm… the head teacher does [treat with the head teacher]. Has that been mentioned?

I saw that today!

That's fantastic, children *absolutely* love that…

That's nice.

I think the children… I believe the children feel very cared for in this school. And er, our management team, they always… have time for the children, erm, [name of SLT member] has always got children at break time and lunch time, erm, maybe someone might be struggling outside and she's just very open to having them in and doing little jobs for her as well, erm… and obviously a lot of children are referred to the [name of nurture room] as well.

Mm-hmm.

I don't know if you want to speak about the kind of things that go on in here?

Definitely.

You do?

Yes.

Okay, I didn't know if that was answering that particular question. So, different groups for lots of different reasons, er, we use the resilience alphabet, I've got that up on the door over there, we're on… letter 'C' at the moment, letter 'C's over here, er, working on that…. So basically the [name of nurture room] runs the same for every person that comes in here, children come in, and they show in the mirror just how they're feeling..

Mm-hmm…

… facially, or, you know, say a word. And that just helps me to, you know, see how things are.

Mm-hmm.

And every child, doesn't matter what age they are, they like to do that though, erm, or… and I'll tell you about that in a wee minute, sorry, erm…. and they come to the table, and we all have a, an emotional check-in.

Mm-hmm.

We talk about how things are going, erm, now that can be, some days children just come in and talk about what they're doing at the weekend, or their swimming lesson, or something like that. Other days, because they're so used to it being a safe space, and they know the children that they're with, they might say, "Oh, this happened in the playground," or, "This is happening in my life and I'm quite upset," and because the children are all used to it they're actually good at saying, you know, "Well why don't you try this?" And give each other suggestions. Erm, the older ones are particularly good at that, erm… and from there, we'll go on to, like, the main focus of our lesson, whether it's… for some groups it's the resilience alphabet, for some groups it'll be Seasons for Growth, at the moment I'm doing, erm, primary four and five for Seasons for Growth, er, for that…. Erm, also younger ones, theres a younger group for life skills…

Mm-hmm…

… and it's basically just good listening. And we use this resource called Time To Talk with [name of soft toy], so he's our prop. And, erm, yeah and it's very much, "Looking at my eyes when I'm speaking to you," and….Yeah, so we have Time To Talk for them… erm, I have a group that just needs that wee break from class, erm… and it's just to do something kind of fun. They just get really really tired as the day goes on. Erm, they'll come here, we've got a toaster, we've got a baking area, so we might make some toast, have some jam, or butter. Erm, other days I'll organise with the kitchen for them to have their ovens on first thing in the morning and we can bake healthy cakes, you know? With very little sugar and things like that, but the fact it's happening at school's quite exciting for the children, to make something like that! (Laughs.) Erm, we have… what else? Cool in School, there's a wee bit of that up there… and, I don't know if you've ever heard of Cool in School?

No, I don't know Cool in School…

It's a really really good programme, it works through the story of Tom, and he's got friends, and he starts a new school. Tom might angry at different things that's happening, so there might be one lesson that Tom got angry because he couldn't do his maths work, and he threw it… and, er, you know we look at, "What was the cool choice to make? What could he have done?"

Mm-hmm.

Erm… and you know they come with the ideas, "Well, he could have said to the teacher, or tried, or spoke to the person sitting beside him, er, 'cause some of our children, the group that do that, might just have something that's not working right away, they get angry, they might just leave the room. So we talk about choices, and using the hand shield if someone's bugging you in the playground, instead of, actually, hitting! (Laughs.)

Mm-hmm.

Say, "I don't like that." They're moving away from using the hand shield 'cause that was just… as they get older, they don't really want to do that. (Laughs.) Er, we say, "I don't like that," and talking about… sorry, I'm biting my stitches… erm… Oh! We also use the 'Volcano in my Tummy', that's another group…

Yes, ah-ha…

That's certainly good for children that are feeling quite angry.

Mm-hmm.

Erm… I'm trying to think! There's just so many different groups. I have children who…. Get leadership tasks. So, we've done like various charity work, we've dis, erm… looking back at the door there, we did [name of charity appeal]…

Oh yes..

… So we collected in coppers, 'cause it was at a time where schools didn't really want to ask parents for money, 'cause there was so much going on, but if there were any sort of coppers lying about the house, and there were children coming into the school with like three pence and things like that. And [name of charity] kindly gave us cups, erm, for all the donations, so every class had a cup. So one group was in charge of going round, and then counting the money, and that was good for their… counting as well. Erm, and we did, erm… the [name of homelessness charity] in town, food collection for them… but then, on a smaller scale, we've done things like, we're organising.. there's a gardening group, we call them the [name of group]…

Mm-hmm…

… and they're in charge of the pond outside, I don't know if you've been out in the playground? There's a pond area…

I have, but I didn't notice the pond…

… there's a big grill over it, just for safety… but they're in charge of that. We're getting some solar powered, like fountain things and plants to grow and flowers round it. And they're in charge of going round the classes and reminding children that that's not the bin during break and lunch! (Laughs.) Because they keep going out with litter-pickers to get crisp packets out! But that's to build their self-esteem and just make them feel really proud that they're carrying something forward in the school.

I'm struck… I mean all of these… this sounds like an amazing array of things that you're doing, erm… they all sound very structured and… are these all timetabled occasions?

Yeah they are.

Is the room used at all for, you know, just to receive people?

Yes.

You know, sometimes when pupils just… you know, something happens in class and they need intervention there and then, or they need a time out or whatever.

Yes it is. So… what I'd… over the past couple of years, I was very tight for groups, but I was new to it…

Mm-hmm..

… and what I realised was children needed that check-in time. So that's part of my timetable, so I start off the first period of every day and I do check-ins. So I have children that are timetabled for check-ins, but I also have that time to… you know, if there's something not quite right happening, there's someone quite upset, or a teacher's come to see me and said, "Can you check-in such-and-such?" I'll use that time to see them. Erm, but… on the other side of the door I've got a wee poly-pocket with paper and a pencil, so the children who all come here know that they can… if they need to see me at any point that day, that something's going on, they just leave their initials in class, stick it on my table. (Coughs). And they know at some point that day I will come to see them and have a chat with them. So yeah, I do have time to do that.

Okay.

I've also been… given a radio this year! So I'm always available! (Laughs.) No, but if something's happening, and I know someone's left a class, which was what happened before you came today: someone left a class and just came up here 'cause they weren't qutite... happy about something that was going on, erm, that I know they're on their way or I can radio that someone's appeared.

Does… does that sort of thing happen.. frequently?

Yes.

Yeah? Mm-hmm..

Yeah. It happens a lot. The [type of pet], I've got to say, are probably the best resource I've got in this room.

Mm-hmm.

And it only started off with [boy's name], for a wee class pet. We've got a PSA, who has a great knowledge of [type of pet], [inaudible] a [type of pet], three years old, 'cause the three's around the wrong way, as you can see! (Laughs.) We're celebrating the oldest one's birthday this week!

(Laughter) Is that what the balloon's for? I did wonder!

So every group that's here this week, is celebrating [type of pet's name] birthday in some way, so the p2s yesterday made cards… that's why the popcorn machine's out as well, everyone's getting to do something nice for the birthday, but… I do have a child in the upper stages, who can leave the class, if he's quite upset, or something's happened at break time and they're *really* upset and don't know how to cope with those feelings, and he often just comes into this room and sits on that chair, and he watches the [type of pet], and erm… I can actually see him calm down within.. within a minute, really, a minute or two! And then I go, "Oh, look what they're doing, oh they're chasing, and this is…." And then, turns round, he's quite… calm, and then I can say to him, "So, what happened today?"

Mm-hmm.

You know? And, they… (laughs) they love those [type of pet]! And I think, oh gosh, people in this school must think, "What is she doing with those [type of pet], having a third party?"

Oh not at all, no!

But it works, they absolutely love it! So that's what's going on in here this week! (Laughs.)

Whatever works!

And it works really well!

Ah-hah, erm, so you've given me a really detailed account of what happens in here…

In here!

… this sounds like some excellent work, you know… you know, knowing the other staff throughout the school, as you do…

Yeah…

… erm, do you see any of your colleagues using particular strategies, or techniques that you think are quite effective at supporting, erm, mental wellbeing? The wee things that teachers do….

I do…. I see teachers with… 'cause obviously I'm moving around the school a lot, I see teachers speaking to children just outside their classroom, it all seems very calm, you never hear anyone shout or anything like that, you know, it is a calm environment, and children do seem to be… *listened to*…

Mm-hmm…

Erm, I see teachers dealing with a lot of things, we've got an NQT… [Interrupted by knock at door] Sorry? That's [inaudible] again… I see her outside the class just helping children… erm, some of the children that I've been supporting, erm, I see, you know the class teachers actually spending time with them… erm, and asking management as well if there's a chance that they can have some time out of class…

Mm-hmm…

… erm, and a support teacher'll go in instead, just so they can find an area in the school… sometimes here, if I'm not using this room, just to have that check-in, and have that discussion, so that it's actually not just me?

Mm-hmm..

You know, 'cause children can become very attached… I'm just telling… this is… *me*… (laughs) erm, you know, and so… there's a bit of a partnership there as well. And any planning I do, as well, you know I'll show the… the class teachers, and the same… as well, erm, just so we're kind of doing the same thing, and saying the same thing to the child..

It's important…

… that works well. We've got wellbeing plans and… you know everybody's got their, I've got my part in the wellbeing plan as well, yep.

Okay, thank you. It's almost done then…

Yeah, that's fine…

… are there other ways you can think of that you've not already mentioned, anything else you'd like to add, about the ways the school supports mental wellbeing? Do you think you've covered everything?

I think…. *Personally*, I think we're doing a lot.

Mm-hmm.

Erm… having, you know, got together with colleagues, on different courses in the authority, em, *so* many of them are saying they don't have a nurture room, the y don't have… you know it's just normal day-to-day running. I'm quite sure these schools do their own programmes and things but… personally, I know you've just come into this school and might have different ideas, (laughs), I think we try and support children as best we can…

Mm-hmm.

… and you know we call parents regularly as well, in fact, this morning, erm, I called… two parents… just to talk to them about how things are going with their children in the [name of nurture room], they're quite new to the [name of nurture room], just checking in and seeing, you know, how things are. At home as well…

Okay, that's great. Erm… er, what makes… what things make meeting the needs of your pupils more challenging? What are the barriers, the things that make your life difficult?

Erm… things like… (pause). I have to get to know the children..

Mm-hmm.

So… I've been lucky in a sense that I've *taught* a number of the children, erm, and that's made… that makes things a wee bit easier 'cause they already know me… certainly, erm I have to, you know, if a child doesn't know me and there's something significant going on, well they're not going to just… some children do, 'cause some children are like that, but there's other children that will just sort of, "Oh, I don't want to say to you, I don't really know her yet…" so, I will do things like having a few settling in weeks and let them come in and play, different games and things, play with them, let them bring a friend along…erm… and get to know them, and then they become that wee bit more trusting and they kind of *like* coming to this room, you know, because there's nice things that happen in it… Did I answer that question there?

Yeah!

(Laughs.) I started talking and then I forgot the question!

(Both laugh.) The question… well, you have answered it, or at least you've given me *an* answer to it, er.. the question was, what makes your job more challenging?

Yeah, so…

Building relations with… yeah, you absolutely have…

I mean, I don't have any, erm, you know there aren't any difficulties with parents. Parents are generally very… on the whole actually, happy that their children are getting extra support, and they're very *honest*…. erm, on the phone as well, they'll talk about exactly why they're worried about their child. So, I don't have any… there aren't any difficulties with parents…

Okay..

… erm, which is good.

The other side of that question is: is there anything you can think of which would make your job easier? What would make supporting *all* of the wellbeing needs of the pupils in this school, easier?

(Pause.) Well… sometimes I feel as if I need to be in… more than one place. At the same time! (Laughs.)

You're too stretched.

So I'm quite stretched.

Mm-hmm.

But, on the other hand, I'm quite well supported as well…

Mm-hmm.

There was one point last year, and I was taking too much upon myself…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and I found it really really tricky and… I was keeping it to myself, I was thinking, "Gosh, this person's upset, and that's happened with this… Right, I need to do it, I need to do it all kind of thing…" So that's, maybe more personal about me, erm, but I did speak to… the leadership team and… it was good…

So if you had a magic wand, and you could change anything, then what would that mean, like, an extra member of staff, or… or… how would you have alleviated that situation?

Erm, yeah, just a wee bit of support, in the sense that some things were coming my way, and I was thinking, "How am I fitting this all in?" And I'm now full-time this year, I wasn't full-time doing that last year…

Oh I see…

So I'm doing extra days of it this year, so that's helping. I'm not class-committed at all this year, either, erm, although I do quite like a wee bit of… being in the class… but this year I'm not, erm, so that's given me more time as well, so I do feel as if I am sort of meeting the children's needs… a wee bit better… Like, if I wasn't working a day last year, and then it was all sort of happening.. children were why waiting, why is she not in today? And it wasn't a working day. So that kind of helps. But at that point, you know, there were… oooof. One of the teachers that you're in class with just now, erm, they were in charge of… that particular year group.

Ah-hah.

And that particular person took on some of the check-ins as well. So, that really helped.

Sharing some of the…

Some of the… some of the responsibility. Because actually the people were there to help...

Yeah.

… with it. It was just I was getting myself caught up.

Last question.

(Laughs.)

You know, just on the subjects we've been discussing…

Yep.

… principally mental wellbeing, and the school's response, is there anything you'd like to add, that we've not already discussed, is there any other points you'd like to make, or…?

Erm… well we have a number of after-school clubs, but…. You know, involving parents too. Parents… parents are really big, they do a lot in the school. They're doing all the gardening in the front of the school… so there's a number of things that we've got, you know, we're so much in contact with parents too, and they get so many opportunities to come into the school through meet the teacher, and… assemblies and things like that so, I do think that there's quite a good partnership there as well.

Good!

Er, the [name of nurture room] is available for parent's night as well.

Is it?

Yeah, parents get appointments for, erm, children's health and wellbeing… If the child comes here, they get a ten minute appointment too…

Okay. That's nice. So they get to see how it works. Just like in a normal classroom.

Yeah, just a normal progress report.

Erm, thank you *very* much for your time.

I hope you got enough there! (Laughs.)

Well, I absolutely did, I've got loads of [inaudible], I'm just going to stop this first, er…

[End of recording]

N.B. Certain details in this transcript were redacted at the participant's request: the type of pet used in the Nurture Room, the name of the special treat with the head teacher, the name of the soft toy, the name of the gardening group and the name of the charity which funds were raised for.

SCHOOL TWO INTERVIEW TWO: D.H.T. (MS CLARKE; 24/10/23).

Okay… testing.. yes, seems to be working. Okay, thank you very much again, just to reiterate for the tape that I do have your verbal consent to record this?

Yes, you do.

Thank you very much. Well, erm, we'll start with a hopefully relatively easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you been teaching?

I have been teaching for... this is my… (pause), twenty-ninth?

Twenty-nine…

Twenty nine years, yes…

A lot of experience.

Yes. Yes, and in lots of different schools. I've been here for, erm, eighteen and a half years.

Mm-hmm.

But prior to that I had been in a variety of different schools, er, different local authorities, short-term supply, long-term supply, erm, different contracts, then moved into… [name of local authority] in a, in another school in [name of local authority], erm, and was there… temporary contracts for a couple of years, erm, and then got the permanent job there, so was in that school for about five and a half years and then moved to another one, erm… And then… came here.

And how long have you been here?

Eighteen and a half years. I came to take up a principle teacher post, erm, and after about two years, erm, took on the acting depute post and then.. got the job through that as well.

The rest is history.

Yes! (Laughs.)

Over the course of that career, erm, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them?

(Pause.) I think that's actually quite difficult to answer for me, because at the earlier part of my career, when I was a class teacher… a lot of times I was in schools where the behaviour was more challenging, anyway. Erm, I think now… it seems to be a trend with so many things, and maybe it's just the way that we look into things and, within education and within other areas… but there are *many* more children now who have been identified and have diagnoses of dyslexia, autism, ADHD, erm, dyspraxia seems to be… raising it's head again, er, more and more as well… er, and I don't know, I don't know why that is. I don't whether it's because we're better at spotting it?

Mm-hmm.

Or, because all of these things are becoming more prevalent, and if so, why?

Mm-hmm.

So all I've got really is questions round those things… but… when learning… when there are barriers to your learning, as a child, very often the way that you… the way that they are dealing with that, or masking that, or trying to not seem like it is a problem and something that's worrying them, then there are behaviours that come from that.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Erm…

So you've talked about an increasing prevalence of *diagnosis* there, does that mean… I appreciate that it's difficult to compare school for school, when you've worked in more challenging contexts… say over your time *here*, would you have consider that you've noticed a change in pupil *behaviour*?

Erm… *yes*, I think I have, and I think it… I think sometimes it's that old… (laughing)… you know, 'when I was at school, if I came home and said the teacher had given me into trouble for something, then, oh… yeah I had obviously done something that I shouldn't have done, and that was the end of the story.'

Mm-hmm.

End of the conversation. Erm… parents are… I understand absolutely that we have their most precious… belonging, for… for six hours every day, and we have to look after them, and we have to make sure that they are all right… but… the time is spent, you know, if there's a bigger incident or something that happens, we spend the time to look into that…

Mm-hmm..

Erm, and… and yet, there are parents who are not… they're defaulting to what their child is telling them.

Mm-hmm.

Rather than listening to the adult who investigated and spoke to everybody.

Familiar with that!

(Laughs.)

Erm, do you have any insight into what might be causing any of these changes that you've perceived?

Er, yeah, I think for us here… we were talking earlier and I was saying what [name of school] looks like, round and about and from the outside and the preconceptions people have because you're in a school in [name of affluent district]… is, is not what's happening here on the inside. About… er, I'm not exactly sure, maybe about fourteen years ago maybe, when the last kind of recession that hit a little bit, and things were challenging for people, we… the school at the time wasn't… we weren't quite three streams, we didn't have three classes at every stage… most of them did. Erm, but not fully… and not all of our classes were, you know, up to the 33 where, where they should be. But when people were, sort of hitting financial difficulties…

Mm-hmm…

… there was an awful lot of children who do live in our catchment area, but had been going to private school… and there was waves and waves, on a termly basis, of them coming here, because as the next set of fees were due, people were realise… they couldn't sustain and they couldn't maintain that. That's one aspect of that, and there's, you know, private.. you can have your opinions of private school and state school and what you would rather have, and of course every parent has the choice to do what they want there… but that was a relatively… there wasn't any, there wasn't a devastating situation, in my opinion, to move from a private school to a state school here. But there are people who are… who have stretched themselves to move in to this area…

Mm-hmm…

… to come to this school. And when there have been other issues that have happened, round COVID… *and* other things, 'cause it's not… I wouldn't put all the blame on COVID for everything to do with people's financial situations, they've been happening over years, because different things happen – people separate, they divorce… but they're wanting their children, understandably, to have as much continuity in their life so they don't want to move them school…

Mm-hmm…

… if they can really help it… Erm, so they're then trying to find somewhere that's still within the catchment area, that they can afford to do that, and the pressures and the pressures and the pressures…

Mm-hmm.

You know, we have parents who… have, erm… who have struggles with alcohol. Caused by those kind of challenges…

I see, ah-hah…

… financially, and of course, that then impacts on the children. Erm. and, for us… what usually happens is, we see the change in the child, before we know what it is that has been the catalyst, because first of all, you first, you first… your go-to question is, "Are you having a problem with your friends? Have you fallen out, is there something wrong there?" Erm, and if that's not the problem that's fine, but you're not getting to what it is, 'cause of course they're children and maybe not exactly sure exactly what it is that's happening at home, but… there's an increase in arguments, and tension, and you know… All of the things that were *steady* in the house, are *not* any longer.

Mm-hmm.

Erm…

I was.. I was very interested, actually, in what you were saying before we came to this room, and I actually deliberately didn't ask you further about that, because I wanted to get it on the record… thank you. Erm, so, moving beyond behaviour, it's not really the focus of my inquiry, it's a useful starting point…

Mm-hmm..

… but in terms of mental health and wellbeing, in *very* general terms, how would you characterise pupil wealth and hell…uurgh! Mental health and wellbeing… (laughs) in this school?

Erm… I think you can't make a generalisation because it is just really specific to individual children and… you know, the lives that they are living. You were at assembly yesterday when I was talking, so I had done a similar… the content of assemblies is pretty similar between the primary one to four, and five six and seven.

(Knock at door. Record paused.)

Yeah, the content is pretty similar so I had… we had that sort of conversation round, erm, mental health awareness and mindfulness, walking… I always think it's interesting because you can gauge with things like that when you're talking about those things that maybe are a bit more personal? And even when you're… when you're in a room with that many children, you can see the ones who are tuning in to what you're talking about, and not just a case of giving you an answer, you know, putting their hand up and giving you an answer about what do they do, if they want to change from feeling sad to happy, what would they do? Erm, there's… there's… there is an awareness, particularly with the older ones, of what mental health is about.

Mm-hmm.

And I think that's good, because it's in the press, because it is now becoming something that we talk about quite… ordinarily. Then you can talk about it at assembly and not be concerned that… (pause.) Sometimes when you're talking about some things with children in assemblies… their interpretation of it and how they then talk about it at home can inadvertently ring alarm bells sometimes.

Mm-hmm.

Whereas… and mental health… could easily have been something like that in the past, because it wasn't talked about, but it has been, and *way* more…

Mm-hmm…

Erm, since COVID as well. It became, you know, everybody kind of switched on to that. And I think that was good, because there was so many things that had… you know, so many people were struggling with their mental health, that had *absolutely* nothing to do with COVID, but it really kind of… it broke the door down in terms of actually being able to talk about it, because *so* many more people were in situations, or pressure.. or… you know, just

not… the not being able to go out your house, erm, or the worry… There was a lot of children… I did a lot of, erm, I spoke to quite a number of children on the telephone when we were in lockdowns, erm…

Yes…

… predominantly children with additional support needs, erm… who were in the stage… stages that I was responsible for… but I'd also had a longstanding relationship with them because when they started school I was the additional support needs coordinator so I was the person that they… that went out to visit them in their nurseries, erm, and also was their kind of contact person right from an early point…

Mm-hmm..

… erm, and so there was quite a lot of conversations… some children, particularly children with autism, were finding it really difficult… to.. be, be *taught*, for want of a better word, at home by their parents, 'cause their parents weren't their teachers…

Mm-hmm…

… and your teacher teaches you, and your parent parents you.

Mm-hmm.

And being at home blurred those lines. And.. and.. but then there was a knock-on, so they were struggling with that, but their parents were struggling with it as well because there was, you know, there was a lot more tension around things that there hadn't been before, you know, maybe sometimes homework and things like that can.. can cause a bit of aggravation, erm, and be a bit of a challenge, but this was day-in, day-out, Monday to Friday.

Those were difficult days.

Mm-hmm.

I remember phoning my class in the garden… erm, and you know, sometimes.. sometimes a bit upsetting.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so… you've discussed, you've talked about, er, this sense that there's a more open awareness of mental health and wellbeing now, it's an issue that's spoken about, erm, have you… I don't know whether this goes hand in hand with this, but have you noticed any changes in pupil mental health and wellbeing in the school over the time you've taught here? Is there a change in prevalence, or…

Yes.

… or issues, or…

Yes, no, definitely. I think a *lot* more children… are becoming a *lot* more anxious…

Mm-hmm.

… and *worry…* about, about things that… you know, you would maybe have small pockets of children perhaps, and it would probably be caused by, you know, something significant…

Mm-hmm.

… that had happened, within their life, or their family or something, but now there *does* seem to be just a… a greater number of children which then causes… yes. This then causes a lot more phone calls, pastoral phone calls from parents. I was saying to somebody a couple of weeks ago…I…I.. the number of phone calls that I was getting from parents within… simply into the second full week of term, this year… Normally it's very quiet.

Mm-hmm.

Children start school, they're settling in, they've know from, you know, June who their teacher is going to be, we do a Sway that gets sent out to all the families so if they want to remind them and see a photograph of their teacher and where their classroom is and things like that… they've got all that. And then they come in August and they're settling in to the new routine, getting, you know, re-establishing their friendships, 'cause they don't all see each other through the summer… and then by about mid-September, September weekend, that's when little fizzy things start to happen again. Or worries start about things. And this year it just seems to have been more or less from the minute we've been in the door.

Okay. And… and that change in the stage that things are happening, this is mostly to do with anxiety of pupils…?

Yes, mostly. I think also because I'm responsible… this year I've got primary six and seven, direct stage lead, primary five to seven, sort of overall responsibility, so you quite often, again going back to children predominantly with dyslexia actually, and also if they are the first child in their family…

Transition. Going to….

Yep, absolutely. Erm, and so you get that, from the primary seven parents. Just, you know, wanting to make sure that everything's in place, wanting to make sure that their teacher knows everything that they need to know about them, erm…. and we've got really robust systems in place so that teachers *do* know everything that they need to know, and the

wellbeing plans that we have and the additional support needs profiles, and they're updated and they're passed, you know, they're reviewed termly, and they're passed on, erm, to the next teacher so that any strategies that the children have in class for their learning, or for their emotional support, their behaviour, you know whatever it is, it is all passed on but parents seem to be increasingly… anxious and… *them* needing reassurance…

Mm-hmm…

… that that has happened. Erm…

Mm-hmm, erm, last question in this area, I'm just conscious of time… er…

Yes, so…

[Interview interrupted: recording paused and resumed].

Er... there we go. Also remember that you seemed… I meant to ask you actually, because you seemed to be suggesting that some… well, you were saying that parents were expressing anxiety and I wondered whether or not… whether or not this was coming from the parents or the parents were expressing the anxiety that they saw in their children?

Yes, and I think there's probably times where it's one, and times where it's the other. Yes. I think also… parents, obviously when we were in lockdown, parents saw their children's learning up close and personal.

Mm-hmm.

In a way that they don't normally do. But, equally, they saw their own child's learning in isolation from everything else, erm, and, you know, unless obviously the parents were teachers, it was a foreign task to them. Thankfully, because we're trained, and that's what we do, it's not something that anybody can walk in off the street and do. But parents were put in that position of having to do something, erm, they were maybe juggling their own work, or sometimes they weren't, and there was a lot of guilt attached from some parents to it because they were having to work. And you can't work and, and… you know, imagine coming to work and having your child with you, and being responsible for them doing something to do with their learning…

Mm-hmm…

… you know, throughout the day. Even if you narrow down what we, erm… you know, what the tasks were that their teachers had assigned to them, and they weren't as onerous as a day in school would be, but, you know, so many parents were anxious about, 'I don't want them to fall behind', and duh-duh-duh.. And obviously, we were balancing all of that

because we were aware that, you know, within a class of thirty-odd children, the children were not all getting the same experience at home…

Mm-hmm..

So, you know, there was a lot of assessment and discovery when the children were coming back to school to establish… but you couldn't be moving children around groups based on what their parents had or hadn't been able to do for them at home.

Mm-hmm.

So… so there was so much. It's so complicated and complex, erm… and so, you know, parents saw their own child's learning in a different way, but they didn't see it through the eyes of a teacher, and so, you know, their takeaway from what they were seeing was, you know, was different… and, and, you know, wasn't based on necessarily knowing what you should be expecting.

Mm-hmm.

But that just… guilt, anxiety, worry, is my child doing well enough, where are they with everybody else, have I spent too much time on my own work this week, I'll need to give them more time, might need to be at night, duh-duh-duh-duh…

Yeah.

So I get it. And there's a whole lot of that still has rolled on. As it has, you know, as it has for all of us, because I think everybody, you know, nobody's… well certainly in school because we are seeing, still, the impact in different ways. You know, we're still talking about COVID, and the impact that's it had. I don't know, obviously, what.. what those sorts of conversations are like in, in other, erm… you know, in other places, in banks, in solicitor's offices…

Mm-hmm..

… you know, in those sorts of things, I don't know whether there's a roll-on impact, erm, but what we do here is so much about… individual little people, and the associated adults that go along with them…

Ah-hah..

… that there's just… it's like a huge spider's web. That's all intertwined, so, you know, we still talk about COVID. We've mentioned it several times this week, just, you know, to do with particular situations.

Yeah. I recognise that, definitely. Erm, the children who experience mental health and wellbeing issues in this school, do you have any views about whether, erm, certain groups are affected disproportionately? Erm, are certain types of children more susceptible, more prone to these issues? Do you see any, er… when you look at the children who are requiring that bit of extra support, do you see any groups within that that you associate with, erm…

I think.. I think that, erm… I'm thinking about the tracking database, I'm thinking about the different characteristics that can be the barriers to learning. I don't think that, erm, I don't think that there's anything to do with what your ethnic… background is from… I don't, cant… there's no child springing to mind particularly, around that, for that to be something. I think, erm… children with free school meals. Children who… so, our catchment area is predominantly SIMD nine and ten.

Nine and ten, mm-hmm.

But we do have some children, I think the lowest, I'll obviously get this for you, I think the lowest that we go is four.

Okay.

But it's.. but those are children who are placing requests.

Mm-hmm.

So it's… you know, they're not our catchment.

There's no SIMD lower than eight or nine in your catchment?

I don't think so.

Right, okay.

No.

It is by postcode…

Yes.

… so it's, I don't imagine there will be many…

No.

… different categories within a catchment, I hadn't thought of that before.

No. Because I don't think that there's any local authority housing. There is rented houses, as we were talking about, er, the flats behind the school, erm, but I don't think there's any actual local authority housing within our catchment.

It's quite a blunt tool…

Yeah…

… I think…

Er, but, so yeah, so children who might be more prone to mental health… yeah, I think we could probably look and see that free school meals, there is something that we could… that might be a factor, or might be a barrier for them and also connecting there… SIMD… split families. Depending on the split and depending how the parents have been able to cope and manage that, and kind of, what the reason behind that was. Erm, because, unsurprisingly if… if there's a lot of animosity, then that's really difficult for children. Really difficult for children. And that's something that I've seen throughout my career…

Mm-hmm…

… erm, but that's certainly… it just makes life so much more complicated for a child when they are in the middle of that push-pull between their parents.

I've had several interviews… flagged that up as a major factor.

Right.

Erm… so thank you, you've actually touched on my next question… these next three are to do with parental circumstances, family background. So, drawing from data that you hold on SIMD status and free school meal entitlement, erm, are you able to infer from these or any other sources you might use, information about the socio-economic status of individual families?

Yes, so we would know… we obviously would know that the… the income of parents of children who are on free school meals is obviously below a certain threshold, I don't actually know what that threshold is, I don't know what the sort of monetary boundary is on that… erm… Sometimes it's curious because you… you.. you know, there are children on that list that you see, and again there's not that many…

Mm-hmm.

… within the school either, and because that's the main measure for the pupil equity funding money…

Of course, yeah…

… then, compared to some other schools, and quite rightly so, erm, we're not receiving as much money as other schools are, where that is.. it can be almost every child in the school, in some areas, even in [name of local authority] as well, you know, schools that are not that far away from here…

Okay…

…erm… (long pause). Yeah, you don't know the ins and out necessarily…

Mm-hmm.

… of the situation, unless something.. unless something comes into conversation from a child… or… we have had occasions where other parents have contacted us to confidentially let us know about circumstances, erm, that have changed within families, you know, that they are aware of.

Within their own or others' families?

No, others' families.

Others' families, okay…

Erm, and obviously completely confidentially, erm, and obviously we're careful…cautious and careful about how we… use that information, you know, there are ways to… you know, we.. you'll have seen we have a lost property at the front door, it's actually embarrassing because I don't know how… even people who… don't particularly, don't have any money concerns… cannot be bothered to put their child's name on an item so it finds their way back to them. So that we have that embarrassing pile of jumpers and jackets and this that and the next thing. It's awful… it's absolutely awful, and it's a mystery to me. It is an absolute mystery to me why people cannot just take the time to put a simple name on the things. And the thing is they don't… it used to be worse, before COVID when, when… it was… when children had PE, their kit was all in school so they got changed in school. You know, the boys would stay in the classroom, the girls would go to the toilet, or vice versa, you'll know this… erm, and there was always, you know… so there was extra clothes that were very easily lost, 'cause there was the uniform they'd taken off, or there was the PE kit that hadn't made it all the way back into the PE bag, etcetera, etcetera… So it should be minimised because they come in in their kit now, but that pile just gets bigger and bigger. Erm…

Not particular to this school.

No? No…

(Laughs.) Not only this school! Promise you that.

Right. Oh that's good to know! Erm… but erm, yeah , so we kind of managed to slip it… "Oh! Oh! Your jacket's got (inaudible). Here we go, we've got this in our uniform bank," or whatever, whatever and… I've never known of any parent who has then sent that item back.

I see. Ah-hah.

We do it very subtly and quietly. It was really interesting, a few years ago, erm, I went to a meeting. It was with… erm, one of the QIOs who was responsible for erm… it was to do with… to do with parents I think.. but it was about the cost of the school day. It was when that kind of document was coming out, er, in the first place and talking about it. And I had gone along with a couple of members from… parents from our parent council. And these things came out in the conversation. I was talking about the things that we're doing, 'cause we were sitting together, we had like another school, er, sitting beside as well and we were talking. And those two parents were astounded at the things that we do, that they had no idea about.. because, because the circumstances had never, sort of, you know, fallen into their life.

Yeah. Ah-hah.

Erm…they didn't know but then that was good.

Mm-hmm. So I'm sort of reading, correct me if I've, tell me if I've got this right or wrong. I'm reading from what you say that free school meal entitlement, isn't always sufficient enough information just to know precise, er, precisely where a child, where their socioeconomic place is…

Yes. Yeah, yeah.

… but that you… well, because we're teachers, you intuitively begin to pick up certain other bits of pointers…

Yep.

… signs…

Yep.

… and you tailor a response to those individual stories.

Yes. And… I was thinking.. the kind of examples there that I thought of are things that have probably been actioned by members of the leadership team, but our class teachers are very very good at flagging things up to us, you know… that's.. we're able to do the quiet subtle stuff because we don't have thirty other children with us all the time, when we're doing things, in the way that a class teacher has. Erm, but they let us know. Just as they do about other things, if they, erm, notice a bruise on a child, and.. you know, as any of us would do, you say, "Oh! What did, what happened there?" And if they're not comfortable with the answer, or something just sounds a bit off, you know, they let us know.

Mm-hmm. Okay, right, thank you, erm… to what extent do you think that parents and carers in this school community are employed in what you might call unstable jobs? Things like zero-hours contracts, gig economy, erm, part-time work, that maybe there's not always that security of knowing when you're going to be working, or when you're going to have lots of work, or not…

Mmmmmmm. (Pause). I don't know. I would.. (laughs)… I would incline to default to the, erm, the stereotypical opinion of this area, but actually I have absolutely no idea.

Okay.

No idea.

Okay.

Because it's not… we wouldn't know… funnily enough, quite a number of years ago, about ten years ago or so, we've added in.. we were trying to, we were trying to find other ways to be able to connect to parents, to get them to come in…

Mm-hmm.

… to talk about their careers, and jobs and things like that, and just… for different reasons. And in one, er, document that we used when children enrolled with us, we put on a wee bit for them to put what their occupation was.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so that we were getting that information nice and easily and then it would be easier for us to maybe phone people up directly…

Yeah..

… to say, "Would you be able to, would you like to come and talk about your job, blah blah blah…" But it's not something… I think that fell away, and doesn't… doesn't get done any longer, erm… but there really isn't… there's no… reason for us to find that out, or to be shared… to have that information shared with us.

Mm-hmm. Er, I think that, you know, often that's maybe something that class teachers might know about the pupils in their…

Yes, they may do, they may do.

Erm, do you see any… last question about the home circumstances… it looks like you're a wanted woman…

It is! (Laughter.)

[Recording paused due to child's arrival, then resumed.]

Pushing on. Last question on this, connected to the last one, so I don't know if you'll have an insight into this or not… Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic stability of your pupils' households and their mental health and wellbeing?

(Long pause.) I can probably only… can I think about that… more in terms of… single parent families? They're ones where… because quite a lot of our families, both parents work.

Mm-hmm.

And they're… they have to do that to be able to maintain here. And it's, that's a choice that they made for what they wanted for their family and their children, to come… to be able to come to [name of primary school]. Erm, so I would say that yes, possibly another group that you could see, other than it just being split families, where the children's mental health can be suffering slightly, also single parent families as well. Where, you know, where there perhaps just isn't contact any longer with…

With the other parent.

Yeah.

Ah-hah. Okay, thank you. Right, the last ones are really just about the schools' response to these pupils' needs. Erm, so, er.. How does your school's curricular activities support pupils' mental wellbeing needs?

Obviously post-COVID when we came back to school the priority was literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for a period of time, although there may have been other bits and pieces that were included within the curriculum. Health and wellbeing, which has the same weight and… and… in terms of curriculum time, as literacy and numeracy. That was, you know, front and centre, for us. I think… I think… it can take up quite a lot of time… for class teachers, and I think in terms of perhaps other things, that maybe appear to be behaviour, things, but actually rooted in something…

Mm-hmm..

… something else… that might be a sort of mental health issue…

All communication.

Yes. Exactly, exactly, and… in the leadership team, we're the people that have got more time to be… more time at our disposal to be able to talk to children on a one-to-one basis so, and I think that comes in to play a lot more as well. Erm, I think there's definitely, from when I was a class teacher… definitely a much much bigger shift to... we were talking about it at assembly…

Mm-hmm.

… you know, and as I said to you, it was, it wasn't a kind of, "Oh! Talking about mental health?"

Uh-huh…

And, and the negative connotations that may have come along with that in the past, that's not there, and that tells *me* that the children are used to hearing and talking about that, and are, you know, made aware of, it's okay sometimes to not feel good, and it's about, how do we, you know, how do we… help ourselves, erm, to come out of that, what can we do? So *clearly* there's a lot going on in classrooms around that.

Okay. And the teachers have got freedom to, to… or autonomy to teach that sort of thing in whatever way they see fit?

Yeah, I mean we've got resources…

Set resources?

Yep, we've got resources and we've got planners, but… as with everything else, it ultimately is coming back to the experiences and outcomes, and that… you know, as long as those are being covered, erm, I don't mind how that's being done..

Ah-hah.

You know, we provide things so that people have got a starter if they're not quite sure, or they don't have but, erm, or they're looking for something particular, they're not sure where to look for it, or whether they're finding something good, there's plenty there.

Mm-hmm.

In terms of things that we have around the school but there's no, you know, '*it has to be* like this', absolutely not.

So, a couple of the staff have mentioned Bounce Back to me...

Yep.

So is that, would you say, that's something that is whole-school, or simply encouraged, or simply available?

I would say it's… I would say we encourage it…

Mm-hmm.

(Pause) … because we know it's covering things and it's, it's quite comprehensive in terms of the kind of units that it has in there. That doesn't mean to say that you have to do every element of, of…

I understand.

… of any unit that is there…

Of course, of course.

… it's a starter for ten, and it's a solid starter for ten, if… you know, I think from that perspective. Erm, and I think it's… I don't know how old it is now, I don't… but, it is still pretty fresh.

Mm-hmm.

As a resource, as well, which is helpful too because it's not… it's, it's dealing with the kinds of things that we're wanting to be able to talk about now.

Yeah, ah-hah. Okay, thank you, erm… er, so, beyond sort of curricular and planned things, erm… what… do you notice any strategies or techniques that, that maybe have impressed you or caught your attention that class teachers use, just at a personal level? Just the wee things that they do that you think might be quite effective at supporting the wellbeing needs their pupils…

Yeah. And I think it can depend very, very much on the class that's in front of you, as well, and what their needs are…

Of course, ah-hah…

Erm, a few years ago we had a class, so they're in, they're in S1 now, but when they were in primary six, they… really, post-COVID, post-lockdowns, the big lockdown had been when… the first one had been when they were in primary five.

Mm-hmm.

Erm… is that right? No, it was when they in primary four, but they lost some time, obviously, as well in primary five. In primary six they, they were just much more immature…

Mm-hmm.

… than you would expect a primary six class to be. And the teacher that they had at the time was new to the school, she was just on a temporary contract. So she didn't have any… past knowledge of them, you know, just from being around the school, which, you know, class teachers do… you pick up bits and pieces when you see classes around. And… absolutely legitimately she was… teaching them and interacting with them and treating them like primary sixes, but they were still needing *news* time, and, erm… that kind of time to just talk about, *talk*…

Yes, 'cause they hadn't really had those experiences before, really…

Yes. And it was different from the other classes in their year group…

Oh I see…

… they weren't the same, so, you know, the three teachers were working together, planning what they were doing.. but it.. there was just one of the classes, erm… and we had, we had several parents on the phone in relation to that, and we had to, you know, talk about, this class clearly are not emotionally where you would expect a primary six class to be, so you kind of need to… revert back and think about, what would I be doing for *those* things, in terms of health and wellbeing and, you know, those sorts of things, where would I be with a primary four? A kind of mid-year, primary four class? 'Cause they're needing it. So she, she put in check-ins in the morning, set up a nice wee table when they come in the door, they put their name under where.. how they were feeling, all that kind of stuff… Their teacher the year before had had that, and it just… she had happened to do it, she hadn't done it because of any information that had been shared with her about that class, it was something that she had set up anyway, erm… but clearly that… it, it just made it smooth for them in primary five…

Continuity.

… and they still were needing it in primary six.

Do you think it's because of the nature of the support, or because of the continuity from pre-COVID practice?

Er… I'm not quite sure actually.

Okay.

Not quite sure.

And when you think of effective practitioners around the school, erm… and you see sort of wee tricks or strategies or things that they do with their class, they just help support these pupils, are there any… do you see any themes, or even just individual instances that sort of jump to mind?

Do you know, it's funny, that's actually strangely a difficult question to answer. Because I'm not in the classroom.

I see, okay.

So I don't. I don't see the teachers actually doing the things that they will be doing. Erm, I know what *I'm* doing, and I… out in the playground, and I… I don't for a minute think I'm doing strange and wonderful things that nobody else is doing, so I…

What… what do you do that you consider helpful?

Stopping and listening. And that can be really difficult out in a playground with two hundred children in it! But trying really hard to do that, because sometimes out in the playground, *that's* where they want to talk to you because it can *look* a lot more anonymous.

Yeah. I see, of course, ah-hah.

Yeah. Because there's so, you know, there's noise round about, children, other people and children won't necessarily hear what we're talking about…

You're not asking to leave the room to go and have a chat.

That's right. So it doesn't… by having that conversation with me, or any other adult in the playground, it's not… you know, they won't feel that there's a spotlight on them. Erm… and, (laughs) the only difficulty there is getting the other children that are coming at you for fifteen other reasons as well! (mimics 'teacher voice') "We're talking." Erm, it's that kind of thing, it's little, it's little subtle check-ins, it's the children that you know.. and this will no doubt happen within classes, 'cause, you know, I do it sometimes with children, where you're just doing that kind of thumbs up when you see them just in the corridor, nobody else will notice, but… you know that you've got that going on… (whispers) "Everything alright? Everything okay?" And, you know, do whatever, and I, you know, *know* those things will be happening inside the classes as well, it's just that I *don't see* it…

Of course… Okay, thank you. Erm, nearly done… Er… can you describe any partnerships with outside agencies that help support pupil mental wellbeing?

Erm…

Sorry, any partnerships with outside agencies…

Yes, no… so... [name of programme]. Erm, which is a [name of authority] initiative… erm, a sort of partnership group of people, we've got Children 1st, Family 1st, lots of different people there, that are able to support children and families, which is fantastic, erm… and more and more and more… I don't when this was established, I think it this… I think it was established maybe 2018? 2019 maybe, round about then, and… of course it was just absolutely perfect timing…

Mm-hmm…

… for, for what was about to happen, erm… we've got… so, this year, so far, we've made two referrals that have been picked up by them, so children that we've referred to [name of authority programme] for their team to help support…

Okay.

One for a child with, erm, er, who had a bereavement. And another child who has a diagnosis of autism, erm, and… (pause) we're, we're just needing… at home, they're needing more support as well, erm, and we're needing some more guidance and more support in terms of…

What do we do.

What do we do. Yes. Erm…

CAMHS?

Yes… (sighs.) Such a long waiting list. Erm, such a long waiting list. And… and that's really difficult, erm, and you kind of have to get *on* the waiting list… What… what we're finding, is that… some parents… who are able to, are going privately.

Okay.

For assessments.

Ah-hah.

Erm…

And is that frequent? Common?

Erm… yeah, I would say… there could easily be… it's difficult 'cause I've been out of the ASN loop a little bit, but just from… I'd say.. maybe three… two, three a year?

Okay. Okay. Thank you. Erm… Any other ways we've not already discussed you think the school supports mental wellbeing? You think we've touched on everything, or is there…

I think so.

Okay. Erm, last two really quick ones then. Can you describe any barriers that make meeting their needs more difficult? What are the challenges?

Class size. Because the more that you have, the more… the more children in your class, the more needs you are going to have.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and you know, we've got some year groups weirdly, who… where all three classes have got a number of significant additional needs…

Mm-hmm…

… and that's really difficult.

It's always the way, they come in waves!

Yeah. Erm, additional support, in terms of pupil support assistants, educational psychologists, these are all things that have had their funding cut, therefore there are not as many as there used to be… erm, and that reduces the amount of time… it reduces the amount of time obviously in terms of PSAs that children can have… support…

Mm-hmm…

Erm, or are supported perhaps in ways that they ideally need to be, also so that they can be in the class sometimes, you know, erm, and… you can never have enough educational psychologist time. When I first became the additional support needs coordinator… we had a half day a week. So every, I think it was every Tuesday morning, from just after nine until…

The ed psych would be in half a day a week?

Yep. Yep.

Goodness me. Wow. I've never heard of that.

But not any longer.

So the… the other side of that coin then, is… if you had a magic wand, what would make meeting their needs easier?

(Long pause.) I think it is about… people. I… I think that… because that's very much.. when we first met, in here, I… I can't remember what we were talking about exactly, but I… I know that I spoke about our reduced leadership team…

Mm-hmm. Oh yes, I remember.

… this year.

Ah-hah.

Erm, and the im… I mean, that is *such* a *significant* thing… But it's not really… on some levels it is, specific to be, the fact that we have less members of the leadership team…

Mm-hmm.

… but in other ways… we just need more people. And it, you know, it doesn't matter… it doesn't matter in terms of the support… what, what category, job title, whatever, however you want to describe it, these… these people would come in.

Need more hands on deck.

Yeah.

Okay.

Yep.

Erm, thank you, well the last one is entirely open: is there any other, anything else you'd like to add, on these themes, that we've not already mentioned?

Oh I don't know, I don't think so! (Laughs.)

Well, you've certainly given detailed…

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL TWO INTERVIEW THREE: CLASS TEACHER (MR SINGH; 27/10/23).

Okay, thank you very much for, er, allowing me to record you, I have got your consent to do that?

Yes, absolutely.

Thank you very much for letting me, er, come to your school and be in your class… put up with me.

It's been good, it's been very (indistinct- helpful?).

Right, so I'm going to ask you about 16 questions, mostly in sort of three broad categories, about erm… eh... pupil behaviour and wellbeing, and then home circumstances and then school's response to, er, wellbeing issues. So, we'll start with an easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Er, 13 years I've been a teacher here… I've been here since I've been an NQT, still here now, doing the same stuff! (laughs).

So, always here, 13 years?

Yep, 13 years, apart form my first year, doing… like… erm.. at university… but, yeah 13 years as a teacher.

Erm… have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour over that time?

(Pause) Erm… (pause) kids are kids, you know… erm, I think as society changes, behaviours sometimes change… but generally, erm, you kind of deal with roughly the same things. You know, erm... you know sometimes things change around uses of phones, or mobile phones or technology and you know, the different behaviours that happen around there, but I think *here* mostly behaviours have been pretty consistent. A lot of people talk about, in the staff will talk about… kind of *respect*, and kids not having as much respect, and you know, is different.. but you look at, through history, erm, (laughs) there's lots of people talk about the next generation was worse than the next one and actually I think, on the whole we've

got really well-behaved kids that… are kids, and push boundaries, but actually, you know, are pretty well-behaved and are nice to work with.

I mean, you say that you hear things in the staff room... do you think that's a widely-held view in the school, or are you… er… unusual in that respect?

(Pause) I think… (pause) we had… so, in my time here there's been a change of head teacher about 5 or 6 years ago who obviously… deals with things differently. Teachers used to… when I was here, we had the traffic light system where people were, you know… all the kids were on green, they went to amber, and then they went to red, if they had done something wrong, and teachers… *liked* that system 'cause you could put someone on amber (indistinct- they knew they were on?) a warning… I think teachers still, well a lot of staff feel that we don't have consequences for things, er, like that, you know the consequence was the amber light but actually now… so therefore, they think the behaviour's worse, erm, because…

They haven't got sanctions?

Yeah. But the sanctions are just different. Do you know, if you just work with them differently…. Erm… But I do think people feel like, you know, we need something to go to… but the go-to is, "Well, if you don't stop doing that I'll phone your parents," or, "If you don't stop doing that, you know, you're going to have to finish the work at break time," or, whatever, you know, but it's not the kind of, public shaming as it were, but people just don't feel like they've got that visual… you know, you're doing this and I think people want that. And then they think, "Well, there's no respect." That's talked about in the staff room, you know, kids are cheekier, they don't respect staff. *I don't* see it being massively different… erm… but… some people might.

Okay, thank you. Erm… In *general terms*, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils in this school?

(Pause) I think, generally, we've got good mental health, erm, of the pupils in the school. I think most of our kids are…. erm... have good mental wellbeing. There are some that… that don't, or have some challenges, erm, but I think generally, yeah, everyone's… I would say the majority of children have good health and wellbeing. I think we've got a lot of supportive staff and a lot supportive families here. Erm… so, and if there are things going on with children you tend to hear about it quite quickly and then you can try and… help them.

So…. the… the cases that you do suggest there… although you're saying that there are relatively few…

Yep.

… the cases that you do see in the school, I mean how would you characterise… how do you see these issues manifest, what sorts of issues are you dealing with?

I would say mostly it comes through as anxiety, or worrying about things… erm… a lot of kids are anxious and I think that we've seen a bigger upturn in that since COVID, you know, and the anxiety levels of children… erm, you know, that's… that's… I'd say they're worried about, and you know that can then manifest in them not wanting to come to school, or… in the previous years when I worked as kind of principal teacher, children, you know, trying to get them into class or being in the class, and that anxiety is something, you know, anxious about feeling different or looking different… or.. or things like that, do you know? Erm… that obviously comes from… not wanting to take part in classes or… or feeling unsure about having self confidence in their own learning but.. but I'd say that's probably the *most* significant thing that we've noticed here, certainly over the last few years.

Do you think there's been an increase in the number, or the severity of these anxiety cases?

(Pause) Erm… I would say yeah, I would say there's probably… well, in my experience, more kids that are more anxious now… I think COVID did have a big impact on that… erm, certainly kids came back and were, you know, more worried about illnesses and you know, having been told to wash your hands every, three times a day or four times a day and, you know, you've got this thing you don't want to catch and then… I think… also, that knocked a lot of kids out their routine, you know, of coming to school every day and then they have that… I don't *need* to come to school every day… so yeah, I would say so, but not in a *significant* level but it's something that, you know, is, maybe noticeable to a slight degree… but, I mean, you've seen my class this week, you know, there's not anyone that's really… significantly anxious that you have to do a lot of work with, obviously there's one or two kids that need a bit more support but then, I think you always have kids that needed support anyway…

I'm not sure I would have noticed any… visible signs of mental… wellbeing issues in your class after a week. Couple of kids, maybe… present as being quite quiet… but not to the point where you'd think, you know, maybe there's an issue there.

Just, obviously, [child's name]'s the one, that maybe he comes up for a bit of reassurance or wants to speak to you about different things, erm, but yeah, the others…. Obviously I know the backstory and where they've been and why they're working with [nurture teacher's

name] and why… you know, but… erm… yeah, it's just, trying to pinpoint the ones that do feel a bit sometimes and then… trying to make sure, I mean we have worked this year obviously right from the start to try and build that kind of nurturing ethos and hopefully if the kids *are* worried about something they'll come and speak to you or… you know… I *know* most of the kids as well, so… they are hopefully a bit comfortable with me before that… they can share things…

It seems so.

We'll see! (laughs).

Er… so, you've mentioned… you know, I'm certainly not trying to… to over exaggerate this, because you've made it clear that… that there are relatively few issues… erm… and there… there *may* have been *some* impact as a result of the lockdowns and COVID?

Yep.

Do you see… can you see any other… what other issues cause some of these anxieties you see?

I think here, sometimes, pressures from home, erm… especially as… as they get older. Erm, you know, some of the kids, erm, have a…

[RECORDING WAS PAUSED BRIEFLY HERE AS SOMEONE WALKED INTO THE INTERVIEW]

Exactly.

I think sometimes parental pressure is I think what causes the anxiety. Erm, I had a child here before that, erm, the parents were… "Primary 7, should we get him a tutor? Should we do this, should we do that, you know, he needs to be the best, he needs to be able to… you know, what do you think he's going to be when he grows up?" (pause, shrugs)… I don't know! You know, he's 11!

They don't know either… (laughter)

Yeah, and the thing is, you know, so I think there is that, I think sometimes that comes from the family as well, that some of the anxieties here are… where parents feel that… maybe they don't give enough time for their kids, you know, a lot of the parents here are…erm, school, are both professionals that work long hours, you know and… some of the kids go to after-school care before school, they're in after-school care until 5 or 6 o'clock, they often then go from after-school care to home to quickly eat something to go to Guides or whatever and I think some of the parents feel that they don't spend an awful lot of time… I think sometimes that anxiety can kind of spill over… and occasionally obviously, you know if

you are here, there's a lot of financial pressure sometimes as well. Erm, certainly previously when there's been like a downturn in the economy, people have lost their jobs, you see that sometimes manifesting in the children, because obviously the pressure at home is… they're picking up on it.

I see… uh-huh…

Particularly the… just after when I started working here when it was the, kind of, 2010 [indistinct, chair squeaking] banker's crash… you know, people had bought a big house and then, they've lost their job and they can't afford the house, but they can't sell the house because the house is devalued and… you know, all that kind of thing. Erm, so I think there's a bit of anxiety about that and sometimes that then… boils over into... you know, especially at a school like this, those that have and those who don't… you know, because, a lot of the kids come in with their designer gear on the dress-as-you-please days, and you know who's got money and who's not got money and… some of the kids worry about that, you know, and… then… not being included because they're not in the same social circles or, things like that… so, yeah, I think that's maybe the… kind of… erm, some of the kids obviously have learning anxieties, it depends, you know, if they have things like dyslexia, you know, they worry about that and, erm, how they're going to cope with that, but hopefully you try and alleviate that by chatting to them about their learning and being able to help with that… erm... but, you know, I would say a lot of it… one of the boys I worked with last year, erm, it was like home…him… his mum and dad had split up and the anxiety was manifesting in school, but… he didn't want to come to school on a Friday 'cause dad picked him up and he didn't want to go to dad's. So, if he didn't go to school, then, he had to be at mum's cause he wasn't well and, you know, things like that… (indistinct)

I see… well… er… do you have any views about whether the mental health and wellbeing issues, specifically the anxiety you see, does it affect certain groups of children disproportionately?

(Pause) Erm… (long pause) I would say those, you know… those who have, sometimes an identified learning need, erm, particularly dyslexia, autism, things like that… you know, they have a lot of anxiety about different things and that… sometimes can be *because* of that learning need, so I would say, erm… children who have an identified learning support need… but other than that, groups of children…(pause) No, erm… not really other than the obvious ones who have, maybe a bereavement in the family or someone that's unwell or, you know,

things like that… erm, but I wouldn't say, in my experience, there's a certain demographic, you know we don't have a lot of, erm free school meal pupils here at our school, erm… and those that have… don't seem to necessarily have you know more, in my experience, more of a… a support need at that point. Erm… but you know, those that have, kind of autism or… dyslexia or... to a different extent, children who have been through, maybe a social work situation, you know that are looked after I would say maybe actually *do*, they… you know I'm just actually thinking about the children who… again, there's so few of them, but they often have maybe more… anxieties or more things in the backstory that they worry about in school… but, other than that, erm... that's the only demographic or group that I can think of…

Great, thank you, erm, so… next couple of questions, just about home circumstances and family background. Erm, to what extent do you think parents and carers in the school community are employed in what you might call unstable jobs; zero hours contracts, temporary contracts, work in the gig economy, things like that?

Very few.

Very few?

Very few. Erm, in my experience most of our pupil- er, most of our, erm, parents have, I'd say, professional jobs? You know, erm, the majority that I've spoken to, you know they have, you know jobs that they… you know, doctors, lawyers, erm, teachers, pharmacists, teachers, people that have kind of mostly fulltime jobs or, they've *chosen* to be part time. You know, to support their family because… but also, because the… they're financially secure enough to *allow* them to be part time…

I see…

…rather than it being a ….

Yes, I see…

You know, they can pay for…

It's a choice.

Yeah, it's a choice to be part time, rather than it being, erm, it's the only kind of work they can get, you know, erm… Again, there are obviously some exceptions to that rule, and there are obviously some children who have different, kind of… backgrounds and family make ups, but I would say the vast majority of them are kind of full time professional people.

Uh-huh. Certainly when you went round the class on the first day I was here, outlining parents and carers' jobs, that seemed certainly to be the flavour that I was getting.

A lot of them have their own businesses as well, successful own business, or are directors in businesses and you know, erm, or are professional people, so… yeah, erm…

Erm, do you see any associations between socioeconomic *stability* of pupils' households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes, or are there simply insufficient numbers for you to really… draw upon…

I'd say, there's probably… it's hard, because most of our children, you know, don't have that financial situation, but I would say, you know, from like when the financial crisis and things hit, at that point, it definitely did cause some children, you know, more anxiety… I had a wee girl, I think in about 2012 or so, that… she… they had a big house, up here… dad was, dad had a building company, the building company obviously collapsed… when that happened, they didn't have the same, erm, income coming into the house, they then had to sell the house, to… 'cause they couldn't afford the house, which caused… I think, reading in between the lines from what she said, it caused, obviously, strain in the household between the relationships between mum and dad, and moving house is stressful as it is, and she became a bit more unsettled around all of that. So yeah, I think sometimes things like that can happen but, you know, in the grand scheme of things, you know, we…you know, I would say there's not many that have… that kind of… demographic… I think if you look at the numbers in terms of our pupil equity kids, our PEF kids, there's very few in this school.

Because there's few free-school-meal entitled children?

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Erm, thank you. Right, the rest are really just about the response to… wellbeing needs. What sorts of activities or lessons are taught in the school to support pupils' wellbeing?

So we do teach, erm, health and wellbeing lessons and a lot of the kind of relationships type, erm, you know the social and emotional lessons are covered in PSE-type lessons… At the start of the year I always do a bit about teamwork and fairness and equity and you know, so we go through those kinds of lessons because obviously what works for, you know, one child, doesn't work for the rest and then it combats that "Well, that's not fair, why do they get to do that and, you know, why do I not?" So we kind of touch on that and a lot of the relationship stuff we do is, you know, about everyone having, being autonomous and

being different, and you know that everyone can like different things, and it's okay to support each other, and things like that, so, whereas the health and wellbeing programme, we have the Bounce Back programme, as well…

Yes, uh-huh…

… we focus on that, and a couple of lessons a term, about being resilient and bouncing back from, erm, different things as well. I suppose (inaudible comment due to chair scraping) extra-curricular clubs, we target certain children that maybe don't have, erm... as… fulfilling experiences, or have as many successes, and they can join the clubs and they can be part of that, and try to allow them to have that, and then you can reflect on that when you're giving, you know, things like the [name of whole-school achievement award] achievements, you can give them the achievement award, so that they've got something to kind of base that on, build trust…

And that was mentioned today by one of the pupils [in the classroom research draw-and-write activity], I've forgotten who, as one of the things that the school does, that was one of the first suggestions…

Yeah, yeah.

Erm…

It was [pupil's name] I think? Was it? Because she got a certificate last week I think?

Maybe it was, yeah. Uh-huh. Erm… And you've certainly spoken to me, erm… quite movingly, about the pupils that you've been able to take out in the past and support, with the tailored initiatives like the bike programme you talked about…

Yeah, yeah, yeah..

And taking the boy fishing…

Yeah.

And things like that…

Yeah, so, trying to find an alternative curriculum where… appropriate, so the wee boy with the bike, obviously, erm, he didn't have a bike, he couldn't cycle his bike, but he was finding it really tricky because, erm, his mum and dad had separated, mum was unfortunately terminally ill and he wasn't able to cope with the class environment at the time, so we took him out and you know, taught him real-life skills and he was doing some work with [nurture teacher's name] and, you know he was baking and he was doing things like that but then we were also every day having him out on his bike and teaching him how to… look after his

bike, ride his bike… and you know, that was really fulfilling because you were able to then make a difference to that wee boy who could then cycle a bike and go out with his friends on their bikes and things like that so…

Yes.

And just to see him having that, 'I've got it!' moment, you know, from not having to be held on the bike, to be able to, "I can cycle round, I can go up hills and I can brake, and I can, you know and I can actually…" like when you're riding, when you ride a bike you fall off, but actually for him, we were worried about the first time he fell off, because… what would happen? D'you know? What would the resilience be… but actually, he was really good and we just kind of dusted him off and got him back on, and he got on with that, and hopefully, that will be a skill that he'll have for the rest of his life, and he'll remember…

Beyond the simple achievement, well, not simple… beyond the *big* achievement of learning to ride a bike, and as you say, the social possibilities that that opens up, I think it's clearly about that time that you've spent with him as well…

And you know, the relationship that you build with him at that point, and he knew that… he never used to want to talk about home, because, home was, for him, *upsetting*, you know? So you would just ask him, you know, "How you getting on, okay?" "Fine." But, very very occasionally he would bring in something about home, well you know; "What are you doing today after school?" "Oh, my mum's coming home from hospital." "Oh aye, that's good, and how's she doing?" "Oh she's doing okay." But, erm, in his reality, I've not spoken to him this year but his reality last year was that mum was always going to get better even though that mum… had had the conversation with him about *not* getting better, you know? Erm, and I think it was, kind of one of those, he didn't want to talk about it because if he didn't say it then it wasn't going to happen, you know? So, if I don't talk about it, about mum not well, then… it'll be fine and it'll all work out so… erm… yeah, but he's a lovely wee boy, I believe his doing very well this year and he's… you know, he's, erm… doing okay, so that's good, he's doing things with [nurture teacher's name] like raising money for charity and selling raffle tickets, so…

She's obviously doing a great deal of… I mean, fascinating work with… I spoke to her about the targeted interventions with specific children…

Yeah.

Erm.. so, you've talked about the planned curricular lessons and programmes, and I'm just thinking now on a very *personal* level..

Yep.

'Cause I was always struck when I was teaching, that you would see certain teachers, just doing… just.. the little things that they do, and very individual to that teacher, or that classroom environment… but, what sorts of little techniques and strategies do you see your colleagues using, that you think, you know, that… that is really, that's working, that's worthwhile or helpful…

I think, you know, well… I say this to all the kids in here, we have that as… you know… erm, first… come and talk to me whenever, but that could be let me know and we can sit and chat at break time or lunch time because obviously… you know, just let me know, and you know, pop a note on my desk or whatever and they can… say, "Can I speak to you at lunch, can I speak to you at break" and you can make an appoint… you know, you can make time that… that's… a bit more private than, in front of the class…

Yeah, yeah.

… if you want to talk about something, we can do that. Erm, often, you know, borrowing children when you think there's something going on or you want to speak to them about it when you're out of class, or…

Hmmm, yes…

"Can I borrow you to help me with a wee job?" Or just… that kind of wee check-in… I think also when you do know there's something going on that a regular check-in's really important, particularly from, you know, if you're that person… you're the trusted adult… we, in the school, get the children to identify trusted adults, erm, that they know they can come and speak to about anything, you know, that they want to, and… you know… last year, when I was supporting some of the children who, you know, were bereaved or had been unwell, or whatever, you can just pop your head in and, "Let me see you for a minute?" Or, if there had been a bullying incident, or something, or if they were unhappy about things that had happened, just checking in with them regularly. Even if that was just… a wee thumbs up, you know, you're walking past in the corridor, a wee thumbs up and a wee nod, or a wee smile and a wee… you know, and if *not*, if there was just a wee head shake, cos, you know, then… or just a wee eye-contact head shake, you could say, no… They also have

things like (indistinguishable)… a wee smiley-face card that [DHT's name] uses quite a lot… I don't know if she talked about them?

No, she didn't, no..

So, she has an [inaudible] of smiley-face cards and it's basically a card that some of the children can keep in their tray or their bag, and it just means, if they can't find her, they put it on her desk and it's got, like their initials on the back and then she knows that she can come and find them to be able to support, you know… and I used that last year as well when I was out of class, but… it just means that…it's just a wee face.. she's got a wee box in her room, that you just pop it on the box and then you can come and… er..

So if she's out of her room and a child comes looking for her…

Uh-huh.

… they can leave the…

If she's in a meeting or…

I see.

Or, if she's on the phone, they can pop it on the wee box on her door and then she can come back and fill them in and just give them that opportunity to speak about something because… erm, you know, you need to be able to do that… I think, you know, last year we had, like the calming room and things like that, that was good for children to be able to de-escalate when they needed to, erm, you know the calming room downstairs, like…

Yeah, the one that you showed me…

With the ball pit..

Yeah…

… and the carpet that didn't work… (laughter) but the lights that light up, for some kids it was good for them just to get in there, out of the… it's not got any windows, nobody's looking at them and if they're distressed at that point, being able to just regulate and calm down… and then, you can , you know, kind of do a bit of co-regulation in there, and be able to try and step that back down…

Is that room used less frequently this year?

I'm not sure, 'cause I'm up here! (laughs) You know, it was next door to me… em… I'd imagine it'd still be used, erm, but… yeah, I'm not sure, do you know…

I mean, in the week that I've been here, I… I think I've only seen one or two instances of children… presenting as very distressed.

Yeah.

You know, screaming, erm, out of class, I've seen very few instances of that.

Yeah. It's not… it's not common. Erm… and the ones that we have that are in that situation, obviously, we try really hard to not get them to that situation, we try to, you know, we've got strategies, we've got our wellbeing plans that are in the additional support needs profiles, that our kids that don't have a wellbeing plan but have got a profile about what that might be. You know, at the start of the year we have time to look at that as a staff, you get time on the in-service days to make sure you know what's on those wellbeing plans and think about the strategies that… that would help support, or, you know those children so that you try and minimise those instances happening, you try to minimise that distressed behaviour and… you know, that's obviously sometimes further down the school, I mean, it's harder to… you don't know as much about the children, so you don't know as much about that profile, but up, certainly by upper school, you've… you've kind of got… most of the… you know mostly what a trigger is, or mostly what might be, and you can try to prepare for that or, you know, try and avoid doing something that… is difficult…

Okay, Thank you. Er… Well, you've talked at length about all sorts of things, I mean are there any other ways that you can think of that the school supports pupils' wellbeing, or have we covered them all?

Just the wellbeing profiles that I showed you on the Monday [a self-assessement SHANNARRI measurement for pupils], you know, we… we have that, erm… that's part of the, kind of, wellbeing curriculum that we use, but the profile just allows you to pick out, you know if someone's low on the SHANNARRI indicators, what that is, and then dig a wee bit deeper into that..

Ah, the self-assessed ones you were showing me?

Yes, yes, ah-hah. The matrix, they can rate themselves one to ten, you know, on healthy, or safe or whatever… and obviously sometimes that can… it's interesting, 'cause in the past, you think, "Oh right, you're a 3, come and talk to me about why you're a 3," and like, it can be something that's happened on the day, that they don't feel safe because somebody had barged past them on the stairs or whatever…

Yeah.

… but then so they'd filled it in a 3… but actually, when you talk to them about it, they say "Oh no, I'm not that low…" you know, but other times, it can be, you know, things that are obviously going on that's more significant to them… em…

I was going to ask, I mean, how… you know, obviously it's difficult to generalise but… how… er... how fair do you think children's self-assessment is, of their situation?

I would say, you know… pretty fair, certainly… since we've been using them, I've mostly used them up the school, you know, primary 5, 6, 7, I've seen them… I think a lot… it tends to be the included and the nurtured ones that they score lowly on, and that tends to be because they've fallen out with their friends or their not included in the playground and things like that, you know, included is the big one, "Nobody includes me," they feel generally safe and they feel generally healthy, etc., but it's more the, you know, the included and the nurtured that… if their friends aren't nurturing, you know, they have nurturing relationships… if they're not included in the games or they feel is someone is being unkind to them, those are the ones that, em, they tend to score lowly on… and … and often, when you dig into that, you know they *are* maybe the kids that don't seem to have as many friends, or aren't included in the same way, you know, in the same groups and things like that, so I think they're quite… honest.

I was *fascinated* by how little talk, or mention, was made of friendships and social relations today in the activity, you know, erm… given that that is quite a big source of friction, in *my* experience.

I think that I was saying to you the other day that I think a lot of that maybe comes down to at the moment because we've split them from…

Yeah…

… people that really… we've tried to give them, at least, because of the new class setup, a friend that they're with, also trying to keep them away from people that we don't really want them to be with, you know…

Or they just shouldn't be with, for their own good..

Yeah… for… because they've had instances in the past, that's just not went well, you know.

Erm… okay, almost done… erm, is there anything that you find makes… like, *barriers*, is there anything that that makes meeting the needs of your pupils more difficult?

(Pause) Not... not really, the only thing is time, you know you'd love to have more time… More time to have the kind of nurturing conversations that you wouldn't want to have in a

classroom… you know, and obviously you've got to think about your non class contact time and that's when I tend to use, or at break time, or at lunch, but, do you know, other than that in our school, I think you know… to be fair, I think if we asked for it, and said, "Listen, I really need time to go and have a conversation with, you know, so-and-so, can you…" I think the school would try and, you know, try and give you that time, and you know, try and say, "Well, I'll take your kids in from break and get them sorted out, whilst you have a chat with…" I think that would happen if you asked for it, em, but, other than that, I'm not sure there's, em, too many barriers, em, sometimes… there can be a kind of parental barrier if it's a tricky issue that they don't want, you know, or… some parents are… can be… they don't want you to tell off a child, or you have those conversations with them, or that… but that's very very few and far between. Here, we work in a really… per… I'm biased, but I think I work in a really well supportive school, that everyone wants to help the children, you know, and I think in the most part everyone is pretty confident about doing that.

There's that loyalty, shining through again…

Well… (laughter) Yeah, d'you know, I've only ever worked here, for 13 years, since my NQT year, but I do think, you know, genuinely, genuinely that people care about the kids in the most part, you know and that people don't just see it on the most part as a job, erm…

It seems that way to me.

People do want to support and help and make a difference. And hopefully that comes through, erm... and hopefully kids feel that. They won't feel that now but when they leave, you know, I said to you earlier, I had the most amazing experience when I look back at my school career, you know, I was very very lucky to go to a school that I think got to know me, got to know the family circumstances, and then supported and nurtured me as a primary school pupil and did what I needed at that point in my life, and then that obviously passed into secondary, and we were really lucky to have a really good secondary experience as well, so… erm, for me, that's really kind of just what *I* hope to bring to the party here, d'you know, and someone did it for me, so I you want to give that kind of experience back, particularly for the kids that you know have… things that they find things difficult, if you can help them with that then that's kind of what we're here for.

It is, absolutely. So the other side of that last question, erm, if you had a magic wand, you know… what would make it easier? I mean, I know you've mentioned time… what would…

Well, smaller classes would make it a bit easier….

Smaller classes…

… because… if you've got 33 in your class, you know, the time is then…

Sure…

… shortened down… and, you know I found last year, when I was out of class, I could then go and say to someone, right, and you can spend half an hour and you can do… you get to know the kids, obviously the less kids you've got, the more you get to know them, you know, you can develop that relationship even more… erm… I think, you know, there's a lot of pressure sometimes though as well, in, you know, 'getting through the curriculum…'

Hmm-mm.

So, getting through and getting, making sure you cover all the Es and Os you need to cover in a term, and actually sometimes for wellbeing, it might… just… be…

Yes…

… spending *time* with… you know, not necessarily because you need to get something done, or achieve something but… having… d'you remember, we talked about this earlier, the residential week…

Uh-huh…

… you know, see that residential week, where you get to know those kids really really well, and you get to see them as people, and there's not a… yes, there's the outdoor learning aspect of it, and there's… but a lot of that's about *wellbeing*, that week, where they work in teams, they work together, you get to know them, you work, you know, they problem solve, there's not a particular assessment at the end…

Mm-hmm.

… you know, but you see all those skills naturally developing, I think things like that, I think that's really really important. I think that's really worthwhile, and I think maybe give them *more* time, because the only time they get to do that in school is… p7. You know, without a, you know, "Yeah, I'm ticking my outdoor learning box, I'm making… I'm ticking an E and O off, I'm assessing here, I'm looking at the benchmarks and assess them against that," but, you know, just that *holistic* view of people working together, I think, you know, and I know there you've got the staff there that are trained, you know, to work on activities and make them work together, but d'you know, they are so supportive of them, you know, of kids that, whereas here you sometimes get, "Phhh, you can't do that, and I can," and you know

they've got different challenges in a way, and I think things like that would be… em, a really good opportunity for kids, em, just wish we could do it more often.

I think the other thing about… the other thing that I think about that idea of the holistic view of the child is that it's inevitably… the needs are going to be different for each child, so instead of just going down the columns, ticking off your Es and Os, actually, you're going to be… one boy needs fishing, the other boy needs a bicycle, but the other girl needs maths and language, you know, and…

Yep. Yep, you're absolutely right, and that's the other challenge, there's one of you and 33 of them, you know… you can't do that. You know, I… this year, I wouldn't be able to take the boy out on his bike every day, you know this year I wouldn't be able to do the fishing stuff at Lochgoilhead if it wasn't for the bigger staff team that I could then say, right, you all go there and I'll take him and a couple of people that way, you know, erm, and as a class teacher, you've got to teach to everybody at the same time and try and differentiate to support but… not that focused support… and I mean, we've got [number stated- many hundreds] pupils in the school, but we've got *one* nurture teacher, d'you know, who has got (inaudible) her time as best she can amongst the children who we feel need it most… but actually, in her room… you've been in her room, presumably…?

Yes, uh-huh.

… it used to be a cupboard, you know, that's been made into a lovely little room, but you can maybe fit 6 or 8 kids in it at the most, in a little group… and actually maybe having more space, you know, which we don't have, erm… so, more space that we don't have, or having, erm, more staff in that sense would help, I think…

More space, more staff, more time…

… the kids… the kids get *so* much out of, erm… the kids get so much out of the time they spend with [nurture teacher's name], you know, they love going… you know they… it benefits them greatly, erm…

The girls who I was speaking to today were mentioning her again, erm, er…

[Girls names]?

Yes, very… very fond of her…

Yeah… yeah… [girls names] …

Very fond of [nurture teacher's name]

Yeah… and d'you know, they are… erm, but they get a lot out of it, d'you know, and [nurture teacher's name] is an amazing person as well, she's very nurturing, very caring, and they *like* that aspect, because she is… obviously, there is only one of her, d'you know, and if she's off sick, you know, thankfully, touch wood, she's not really been, you know, she's not really been, since she's been doing that role, you know, on long-term, she's not been off for a long time.

Mm-hmm.

But, see the days that she's maybe off for a day or two with the cold, or she's not feeling well, the kids that she's meant to support, *really miss that time*. You know? And, there's not… you know, her skill set is if she's doing… she's been away at nurture training, she's done a lot of things, her skill set's not something that someone else can just step in to do.

Mm-hmm.

Because obviously a lot of what she does is about relationships…

Exactly, yeah.

… and you know, for *me* to go in and say, "Okay, I'm going to talk to you about…" You know, "Who are you? And why are you here?" So, erm… it doesn't *work* in that sense, so, erm, I do think having like a wee team of people would be… amazing, but you know, unfortunately… they're trying to cut *down* on teaching numbers, you know, the ratio of teachers to children is going up so… kids and nurture and things…

Well, I did say if you had a magic wand, you know, just…

If I had a magic wand, but… that's probably where we are…

Okay, erm… is there… I mean, we're done, is there anything that you would like to add on the themes we've been talking about? Anything you want to say?

No. Think we've…

No?

… covered it all.

Erm… thank you very much.

Not at all.

Thanks *so* much, for everything, [teacher's name].

No, not at all, Thanks for coming in, I appreciate you…

[End of recording]

SCHOOL THREE INTERVIEW ONE: NURTURE TEACHER (MS CHAN; 07/03/24).

Okay, so, once again, thank you very much for giving up your valuable time, I appreciate it especially as this is your non class contact time, so as I said, just to check again that I've got your verbal consent to record the interview?

Yes, that's fine.

Thank you very much. Okay, well, nice easy one to begin with, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you been teaching?

I've been teaching for twenty years.

Twenty years.

Twenty years, and, er, thirteen and a half years here.

Thirteen… well, that was going to be my next question, thirteen and a half years here. So, that's a good long time, that's longer than I taught. A lot of experience. Erm, so, I should have said, roughly three groups of questions: I'm going to ask you about children's behaviour and mental health and wellbeing…

Okay.

Erm, and then any associations you see with home circumstances…

Mm-hmm.

… and then finally the last group of questions are just about, er , the school's response to meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, so, er, I think you'll have some particularly important insights… I mean, certainly from what I've observed this morning… erm, so twenty years' experience. Over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them?

Yes, I think… pupil behaviour *has* changed, I think society has changed a lot over twenty years, and that's reflected in pupil behaviour. Erm, probably… concentration? Spans are shorter, I'd say…

Mm-hmm…

Erm, and I think that's linked to sort of society and… instant… everything's sort of instant, and instant gratification and, and… ordering things and they're delivered the next day, or watching the shorts on YouTube, everything's very short, and *now*, so sticking at things, and persevering, and having a concentration to do that I think is more difficult for children and

that needs worked on a lot in school, and activities to develop that in school. Erm, so I think that's one thing, erm…

That's been a common complaint, I have to say…

(Laughs.)

… heard that a lot.

Probably communication, erm, speech and language, erm… particularly with the younger years, erm, during and after, er, the COVID lockdowns there's definitely a regression in the sort of speech and language abilities we have in school and… I don't know if it's like… having the longer periods at school and not having the sort of school interactions may have had the impact on that, and everybody's home circumstances are different, so some children would be spoken to a lot at home and some children wouldn't have been spoken to very much at home during those times, erm… So speaking in sentences and even just forming the words and erm… a sort of knowledge of rhymes and familiar stories, the sort of basics, erm… are not there for some children and that's an important building block that has been missed out that is quite difficult to catch up with, that, erm, that schools are having to work on now.

Mm-hmm.

So, the sort of key years, with the early years and primary one and primary two, the children that were in, particularly in those age groups during lockdown I think… have had the biggest impact on their literacy…

I see, ah-hah…

… moving forward. Erm, also… probably sort of, emotional wellbeing and self-confidence and self-belief, I think children are not so confident, erm…

Ah-hah.

… now, I think maybe they had a bit more confidence before….

Mmm.

… not sure what, erm… what would drive that… there is a rise in like… I'm going back to sort of computer games and things like that, there is a rise in that and there's more living in a sort of, erm… the computer game world rather than real life, and there's not the same conversation and doing things actively…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, for yourself. Erm, I think that possibly has an impact, but a lot of children, particularly in our school, erm… are not very confident within themselves, and need

reassurance and their self-esteem… boosted and erm, so they know that they can, they can work on their own and they can achieve things and they are good at things.

Okay.

Erm, so I think…

Thank you. Well you've actually touched on a couple of things that I was going to ask subsequently, erm… the first being: some of these changes that you've described, I'm interested in what you think might be driving these changes, what are the causes behind them? You've mentioned computer games quite a bit…

Mm-hmm.

… and you've touched on the lockdowns as well…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, do you see any other, er, causal factors behind some of these changes?

I think family units, as well, I don't kn… I'm not sure if it's always been the cases been the change, but I know that in our perspective here, there's a lot of children, or there's quite a few children that may have been staying with one parent, say in England, and then they have moved to live with the other parent in [name of catchment]. And erm, so it's big changes for them, erm… and family, like relationships breaking down, and new partners, and different family units I think can affect the… sort of attachment that children have with people and the trust they have for people…

Mm-hmm.

… and, erm, that can impact on their self-esteem and how they behave in school.

That's interesting that you mention that, because again that's another thing that's come up very commonly, very common answer. Erm, in general terms, I mean obviously it's difficult to generalise, but in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

(Long pause.) It is a tricky question.

Yeah.

(Pause.) I… in general terms I'd probably say sort of middle to low, if I'm being honest…

[This participant later asked for this assessment to be corrected to 'average' as she had misunderstood the question to be only about the pupils in her nurture group.]

Okay.

… erm… It's a lovely place to work and to be and for pupils to come, but as I said they don't have the self-esteem… they lack sort of resilience to deal with things because of that…

Mmm.

… and they're hard on themselves.

Ohhh…

They don't think they're good at things, and… or they don't believe they can achieve sometimes, and we work very hard here to try and make them realise they *can*, and they can do a lot of things, erm, but I think they don't initially believe that in general.

I think you do. I would agree with that. And I think, from what I've seen, you do a very effective job. I'm absolutely not making any judgements about the school, or the staff…

Of course…

… my interest is in, trying to basically *describe* the situation that, that schools and pupils are facing these days…

Mm-hmm.

… so, erm… er, and the… you've mentioned one or two but I mean this idea that erm, that in general terms you've described it as middling to low, I mean the *sorts* of mental health and wellbeing issues that you can think of across the school, how would you describe, er, what sort of form do they take? How do these issues manifest in the children?

(Pause.) So how do they show, or do you want the…

Yes, ah-hah, yeah.

Erm…

Exactly. That's a much simpler way of putting it!

(Laughter.) It's… it's… the… a sort of… nervousness, with tasks, erm… if it's something new, they can be quite nervous or anxious about it, and maybe don't want to try it, because they're not sure about, about what… like if, what it's about, what to do, erm… I had a conversation with a child today who didn't want to try something and was… sort of refusing to try it, and…

Mm-hmm…

… I asked them how he felt, and he said he was nervous, erm… it was something new to him, and… that is a child with, erm… on the autistic spectrum, ASD. Erm, and, I tried to explain to him that… well, it's okay to feel nervous, but why don't you give it a try, because you've never done it before, you might try it and you might enjoy it, or you might try and

you might not like it and think, “I don’t really want to do that again.” (Laughs.) But if you give it a try, erm, then, you’ll *know*. But it’s trying to cross that border of trying things, and giving it a go, when… they do feel nervous. Erm, and I’m going back, thinking what was the question? How does it show, how does it manifest?

Yes! Ah-hah, yeah…

Er, right, how does it manifest, so that’s one thing, sort of holding back, and, erm, the nervous… being nervous about trying things…

Ah-hah.

Erm, also sometime, attention-seeking, so if… particularly if.. if they maybe don’t get so much attention at home, then they can want a lot of attention, maybe sort of shouting out, or always having their hand up, or going, “Uh! Uh! Uh! Me, me, me!” Kind of, (laughs), wanting to, erm… to share what they want to say, and it’s important to give them time, but, at the right time…

(Laughs.)

Erm…

Mm-hmm.

What other ways does it show? Erm… sometimes… if they’re not feeling so good about themselves and are a bit anxious or nervous or something it can come across more in an *anger* way, erm… but it’s a kind of stand-offish, I’m not feeling comfortable and it can sometimes come across… as, as that, or… just a refusal…

Mm-hmm.

… to do something. Erm…

That’s interesting that you say that, actually, because although I’ve only been here two days, so certainly not enough to get a *really* good impression of the nature of a school, but I haven’t seen many examples of that…

No, no, it’s… it would be low-level and… occasional…

Right. I see.

Occasional children. Erm… and not really… not in aggressive, loud angry way…

Mmm.

… here, but more, er, your… your… that they’re being pushed to do something that they’re not wanting to, kind of thing, that it’s out of their comfort zone.

Ah-hah.

Erm, and the facial features can… you can see that they're, they're uncomfortable and the signs are coming, s… you would try and…

Not push it.

… get round it and not push it too far, that way.

So there's anxiety, a lack of confidence, and also this idea of being, like, you know, not wanting to tackle new things, leaving the comfort zone.

Mm-hmm. Yep.

Do you think that's a fair characterisation?

(Long pause.)

You look like you want to say something else!

Can you repeat them again? No, no, I'm trying to think!

Anxiety, and.. and nervousness…

Mm-hmm.

Lack of confidence…

Mm-hmm.

… and a general, erm, desire to avoid trying new things. Or reluctance…

For some. That's only…

Yes, obviously, for some.

For some, yes. Erm, and I think a lot of the children need a lot of reassurance, so that's going back to the sort of anxiety side, or the not wanting to try new things, they need that reassurance of what to do.

And also you mentioned, erm, children who are deprived of attention wanting to over compensate in school.

Yes, I do think that happens.

Okay, thank you, that's great. Erm, so the general, the generalisation you've made of children's… well, I *asked* you to make, of children's mental health and wellbeing… have you noticed any change in *that* over the twenty years, as opposed to sort of strictly behaviour I suppose, have you noticed any changes in what you would characterise as mental health and wellbeing of pupils over your career?

I think there has been an increase in anxiety levels, erm, I'm not sure what causes that, erm, but I do think children are more anxious…

Mm-hmm.

Erm… and… health and wellbeing. There's a lot more… children are, I'd say because of the, the inputs from schools, they're a lot more able to describe feelings and use vocabulary to… emotional vocabulary to describe how they feel, and… that helps them link to, to really connect with that, and then think, right, what behaviour should we be using for it, so I… because of the focus on health and wellbeing, lessons and learning, I think, they're more equipped to discuss and talk and… and consider things…

I think PATHS is very good at that.

Yes, definitely.

Mm-hmm. Erm, so the… the awareness and literacy has improved, er…

I think so, yes.

… as… as their mental health, or certainly their anxiety, you mentioned, has deteriorated?

I think so.

Is that fair?

I think so.

Yeah, okay, thank you. Erm… er… and now the difficult one, none of us are sure: what do you think might be causing any changes that you've seen in mental health and wellbeing, and anxiety? I mean you've already said you're not sure, none of us are…

I don't know. Erm, with that…

Any hunches? Guesses?

(Pause.) There are some aspects, like when we're saying if maybe… changes at home and family members, then that can be unsettling for children, that can have an effect. Erm… I do think the rise of sort of computer games and that, and less time playing outside with friends in real life, face-to-face, I think that has an impact, erm… and also having, the lockdown years, also I think has an impact, too, because you had to learn to live in that way during lockdown, and then you had to learn to live back in society afterwards. So it was, erm, changing and as I said earlier, particularly for younger children. If that's all they really knew, then it was an even bigger change for them, when society became normal again.

I'm thinking of that girl who was… who's in your group this morning, and you mentioned that there was a sort of, er, I've forgotten what the phrase was you used, like a fear of detachment from… detachment anxiety.. what was the phrase you used? Anyway… separation anxiety! That was it.

Yes.

Didn't want to be separated from mum.

Yes.

And that was causing her a lot of anxiety.

Yes, erm, so Mondays are particularly difficult for her because she has the weekends with mum, and she knows that mum's at home on a Monday, she's off work on a Monday, so, erm.. she finds it very hard to come in to school.

Mm-hmm.

And she can be very tearful, erm, for the time that she's in on a Monday, erm… Then on a Tuesday, erm, she came in, no tears today!

Well there was almost tears I thought, yeah, she's almost there… ah-hah…

Ah-hah. But she does still find things difficult, due to her anxiety, in school… erm… but it's not the constant tears that she has on a Monday. So on a Monday, she will complete her tasks, erm, but she's upset while she's doing it. But she is able to complete activities and tasks, erm, and then she seems to sort of settle in to the routine through the week.

I think you're doing very well for her.

Thank you.

Erm, do you have any thoughts about whether mental health and wellbeing issues affect certain children disproportionately? Are there certain groups of children who are more likely to suffer these issues, do you think?

I think anybody can suffer from…

Anybody.

… mental health issues. Any child, any background, any age, erm… Yeah. I think anybody.

Undoubtedly, they can, it's true. Okay, erm, the next group are… just a few questions really, on your thoughts about associations with home circumstances. What's going on at home. Erm, so, er… to what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community are, in general, are employed in what you might call unstable jobs: erm, zero hours contracts, temporary contracts, part time work, work in the gig economy, things like that. Is that prevalent amongst the parents and carers in this school?

There's… there's definitely a big mix within this school, there are parents that are employed full-time…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, and there are some part-time and there are parents that… that don't work at all…

Mm-hmm.

… as well, so there's definitely a spread within the school.

Erm…

I think probably… I don't know for sure, but I think… the full-time working would be the minority.

The minority.

Mm-hmm.

Right, okay. Okay! Erm, do you see any associations between, er, the socioeconomic stability of pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

(Pause.) I'm thinking of specific pupils.

Sure, mm-hmm.

Erm, and… some pupils who have parents who work and, erm, they're very well supported at home, they go to lots of different activities and places and they… can still have mental wellbeing issues… erm… I think the sort… No, I was going to say that I felt possibly that the lower self-esteem… No, I think that could be anybody as well.

Okay.

So, no, I think…

Okay.

When I'm thinking of specific pupils there's not one… category that they would go into, it is a spread.

Okay, erm… so, no real relationship between what sorts of jobs… you're not aware of any real relationship between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do, and erm, children who's… children's mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Do… I mean, the sorts of children that you deal with in particular, who suffer mental health and wellbeing issues, when you think of their parents and carers, there's just a broad spread of everything, all types of employment, occupation, circumstances…

There is a spread, there's… possibly… if there is… more of a struggle at home, with money, then… that can sometimes show with children, erm, in relation to food, erm, they might be the first to take the food, or wanting more food, or… erm… in relation to like having, sort of, the clean clothes and things, and how that makes children feel if their clothes aren't getting washed frequently enough…

And you mean that might have a knock-on effect on mental wellbeing?

… an effect, mm-hmm, and how the children *feel* about themselves.

Ah-hah.

Erm…

I see that, yeah…

… because they can't… the parents can't always afford or have the time to… to wash the clothes as soon as they're dirty, they might go once a week or whatever to the laundrette or the erm, petrol station to the machines there, to wash their clothes or whatever, so it's sometimes.. some children may have clothes that are… that are dirty. That haven't been washed for a few days. Erm, and I think that can affect self-esteem.

Mm-hmm…

Erm…

Understandably.

(Pause.) Any other examples, erm… (Pause.) I can't think at the moment.

Okay. That's great. Thank you. Er, last section then, erm, and the school's response. What you do, as a staff. To help.

Okay.

Erm, er, as I say, I've seen some good examples of that this morning. Erm…

Thank you.

What sorts of activities or lessons are taught in the school to support pupil's mental wellbeing?

Er, well, as you'd mentioned earlier, the PATHS programme…

Which is a whole-school programme…

It's a whole-school programme, with every member of staff. It's not just teaching staff, so it's support staff, kitchen staff, erm…

Kitchen staff are trained?

Kitchen staff as well, yes.

I've never experienced that before.

Janitor, office staff…

… oh, that's amazing.

… every member of staff, erm, so everybody's aware of PATHS, and, the language that's used, and how to help, erm, deal with children appropriately, erm, to support them. Erm, so, the PATHS lessons are taught in class, erm, twice a week, and also because all the staff

are trained, if there's anything that happens in the playground, then it's dealt with at the time…

Mm-hmm.

… with a restorative conversation and talking about how the children feel and… what we would do differently and all the different parts of the restorative conversation. Erm, also there's procedures where children can... if there's something on their mind, they can… erm, maybe like put it on a post-it note and leave it on the teacher's desk or whatever, there's different procedures in different classes for how, erm, things that are on their mind can be dealt with… so that it *can* be dealt with and it's not left… Erm, so the PATHS problem, programme, is a very big part of our school now, erm… also we have the nurture class now, for… nurture class and, sort of nurturing health and wellbeing groups…

Mm-hmm..

… so the nurture class… we do emotional check-ins at every transition…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, to see how children are feeling, if there's anything that needs, erm, discussed… and the children are very good at listening to each other and offering advice, or, erm, tips or things to try to help, erm, with whatever the child's talking about… erm, there's understanding that feelings don't last forever, they pass, so if a child has an uncomfortable feeling, it's okay to feel that, and it will pass…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, and every class has feeling charts that children can move their name at any time to how, to how they're feeling, and in every class there's the check-ins. Erm… also in here we do do the class work as well, but it's smaller numbers so it's… they get one-to one or one-to-two teacher time, so that… helps with their confidence, because they can get the reassurance…

Yeah…

… at the time, and, er, more support with their tasks, so that they can see their achievements and feel the pleasure of achieving, completing things. Erm…

I think one of your two, this morning, I can imagine that would be an uphill struggle in a class setting…

Yes.

… to produce…

Definitely.

… that sort of writing.

Erm, to focus, and… (laughter) to… to have the ideas that fit in with the task, erm, because of the ASD…

[Bell rings.]

… erm, the snack… having snack together's also very important in nurture, because they, it's encouraging speaking to each other, and having the eye contact, and, erm, asking and answering questions and sometimes, some of the children, particularly one boy who you've mentioned earlier… finds it difficult to speak in a sentence, and to say words, so… but he was doing very well when he was, erm, offering the breakfast this morning, and that's a *really* big improvement for him to repeat a sentence, to ask the question and to remember it and ask another person, erm… and having the manners and, erm, and the remembering, because the boy at the end remembered to ask, "Would anybody like to share the last piece of toast?"

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so all of these social skills are built through that, but also the confidence to speak to people, and the concentration to listen for the answer and respond appropriately. Erm, we do focus on the school values, that's obviously across the school, but the school values with our [acronym of values] superhero, the posters are everywhere…

Yes. I have seen them.

… they're referred to all the time, erm, and they're explicitly taught, so that children understand what's expected of them, and that security and that… erm, the boundaries and knowing what's expected is comforting and reassuring for children. Erm… (pause.) So, we also have [name of local authority] support team…

Mm-hmm…

… that come in, and work with children…

Er, an authority agency that come in, like an external agency?

Yes…

And they come in, what sort of work do they do with the kids?

They do a mixture, so it can be academic or it can be, erm, emotional or behavioural as well. Have you any children in the school who go there expressly for emotional support?

I… can't think at the moment, previously… there has been, and.. they've sort of sone outdoor activities and things with the teacher, erm… to help with sort of emotional side of that, erm… I don't think there is at the moment, but there was at the start of the year.

Okay, that was going to be one of my next questions actually, about the outside agencies… Erm, apart from the lessons and the curricular planned things, I'm also interested in what sorts of strategies you see teachers or fellow staff using at a personal or a class level which might support pupil's wellbeing. I mean, just the sort of little individual things you see teachers doing, what do you think you've noticed that you think, "That's really… that helps, that's a good one"?

Erm, saying, "Good morning," with the person's name in the morning, is important, to show that they're valued…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, giving time to talk, erm, knowing when somebody's on their… whatever belt at Taekwondo or…

(Both laugh.)

… asking about their boxing or their dancing competition, erm, having the personal relationship as well as a professional relationship I think is important to children. Erm…

Knowing about their parrot.

(Laughs.) Yes! The parrot this morning, yes… it might be a parrotlet, I need to look that up!

(Both laugh.)

Erm, so, having that personal link…

Yeah.

… erm…

And taking the time.

Yes! Taking the time with them, also if there's something upsetting them, or they have an uncomfortable feeling, er, taking the time to talk it through with them, and, er, work out what to do next, erm, to take that load off of their minds, that they've shared it and it's been dealt with, and…

Yeah.

… they know that it's been dealt with… erm, opportunities for children to work together…

Mm-hmm…

… I think is important, and erm, problem solving, so challenges and group tasks, er, so they're having to communicate, and… work things out, and practice their social skills, like compromise and erm… perseverance, I suppose, and keeping at things…

Which is, as you mentioned, difficult…

Yes.

… at the moment.

I think so…

Perseverance. Okay. Erm, I'm just conscious of time, do you need to be anywhere? I know the bell's just gone a few minutes ago…

No, it's fine…

Shouldn't… We've only got a couple few questions left… erm, well are there any other ways that you can think of that the school supports pupil's mental wellbeing that you've not mentioned?

Erm, counselling services, come in. Children 1st charity…

Okay.

… so there's outside agencies that we have links with.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, also… we've had family workers, health visitors and family workers actually going to people's houses to, to work with, erm…

Home visits…

… families.

Right, okay, working with the whole family? I see, yeah…

It can be family, yes. And Children 1st works with the family, as well…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so that's… positive for children because it's, er, supporting at home as well as the support in school.

And supporting the parents.

Yes, supporting the parents, mm-hmm. Erm, what other supports? There's so many things that we do here… erm, I think the family service, lunch, is nice… all staff are in the dinner hall at lunchtime, and the… [they serve the pupils their lunch], so it's again it's the social skills, the asking, "Would you like vegetables? Would you like…" And it's served onto the

plates and, and everybody's there, so it feels like it's a real school community, erm, together…

I see, okay.

And doing things together, 'cause we have whole-school events, like a whole-school picnic in the summer, and special events, and… feeling part of something has that security for children.

Doesn't it. Yeah. Sense of belonging, absolutely. Erm, okay, er… final ones then: what makes meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils more challenging? What are the barriers to… to helping them?

(Pause.) Sometimes when you (they?) can't articulate what is the issue and if you don't know either, it can be very challenging.

I see, of course! Yes, ah-hah.

I'm thinking of a girl in particular, that's in here, erm… so you try different things, and you can research, and you can try different approaches, and sometimes they'll work for a short time, sometimes they won't work at all, sometimes they will work, but… the not knowing how to help is… tricky.

Yeah.

Sometimes, erm…

Because she won't or she can't say?

… can't say, if the child can't say, articulate *how* they're feeling or *why* they're feeling like that, or *what* will help… then its kind of… in the dark…

It's interesting 'cause I immediately thought… I imagined you were talking about the wee ones, but…

No, I'm talking about the girl…

Yes, P6, mmm…

Yes, so…

Okay.

So she's the one at the moment… I'm trying different things and, I'm not sure… what's helping her and what's not at the moment, so that makes it very difficult.

Okay…

Because she's not able to share. At the moment, she doesn't have the confidence at the moment to share.

Anything else that presents problems for you, in your daily work?

Can you repeat the start of the question again?

Yeah, well basically what I'm driving at is, I'm trying to identify the things that make meeting the needs of children in your care more difficult, what are the things that make your life hard?

Ah-hah. Erm, okay so… The range of needs, sometimes…

Ahh..ah-hah.

… and the… even within this room, for nurture, there's two adults but there's six children and if… they all need help in different ways and even juggling six can be quite tricky!

Seen that this morning, yes, ah-hah. Even three adults in the room, and still…

(Both laugh.)

…still, yeah, ah-hah…

And that was an easy morning!

(Both laugh again.)

Hats off to you!

And in, obviously in the bigger classes, there's a wide range of mental health needs within the class, and giving enough time to each child is the big… is a big struggle, I think, and you want to give enough time to each child, erm, but that can be very challenging… Erm, classroom assistant time, er… like having another adult in the room, can help, erm… but there's not always… classroom assistant time provided, er, due to budgets and things, erm… and… sometimes there's just *different* expectations at home, from school, that can be difficult for children to cope with, erm… I think I mentioned the other day that it's… younger children can find it a little bit harder to differentiate between home and school…

Mm-hmm… yes, you did…

… whereas older children who… who have been here a longer time know what's expected and are in the routine, and, erm, find it a bit more straightforward I think…

So even when there are different expectations, they've learned what the ones are in school.

Yes, definitely.

Yeah.

Definitely.

So the other side of that question is, erm, what would make your life easier? If you had a magic wand!

An educational psychologist. I mean the educational psychologist does visit the school, but obviously more… expertise, quicker, the sort of CAMHS service and, erm, expert…

How do you find CAMHS?

There's a… there are quite a few children on the waiting list…

Mm-hmm.

… for CAMHS, erm, so…

Which is, a year? Two years?

It's a long time, yes.

So…

So, more access, quicker, to specialist support, might help…

Ah right, okay. Okay. So a lot of that seems to be down to resourcing, staff, time…

Mm-hmm.

… external support, er, the range of needs…

Mm-hmm.

… and the ability to communicate those needs.

Yes.

Is that fair?

Yes.

Okay, thank you, er, last one: I mean, you've answered all my questions, is there anything else that you'd like to add, maybe that we've not talked about, that you want to express about mental health and wellbeing, or your job, or… anything?

(Long pause.) I think, particularly working in *this* school, there's a *lot* of … I won't have covered everything! That goes on, erm, but there's a lot… of… erm, ah, I can't think of the word, a lot of er, *approaches* administered to try to help with children's mental, erm, wellbeing…

Mm-hmm.

… and I think the children are benefitting from it, I think it's helping, and definitely being able to… to talk about it, and articulate… is beneficial for the children, also for the staff to be able to support, erm… I think that's all.

Okay. I mean, I certainly… although as I said, I've only been here two days, erm, it's clear to me that you're doing a great job. As a staff, I mean…

Yes.

… yourself included.

I didn't take it… (Both laugh.) Just me!

Well yes, you are! Erm, this seems like a very happy, comfortable place, where you're doing the best by them.

Thank you.

Thank *you,* thank you again for your time, and I'll just turn this off.

[End of recording.]

Following the process of member checking, this participant asked for the following points to be added:

All teachers participated in a book study of 'The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog', collegiately, with discussions led by a local authority Educational Psychologist, to help us understand and develop our trauma informed practice, in order to better support our pupils.
We now have a greater emphasis on data to support MHWB. [Name of authority] Motivation and Wellbeing Profile, completed by pupils, is used to track wellbeing over time. Class targets are created from the 1st set of data, relating to identified common themes, then, after working on these class targets, the end of year data is collected and examined.
This year we also piloted using [Name of authority and type of] assessments within the Nurture Class and HWB Groups. The [name] Assessments were completed by pupils before and after interventions. Personal pupil targets were created from the data.
In addition to these, Boxall Assessments were completed for children before and after Nurture Class support. These were completed by class teachers and used as a forward planning tool within the Nurture Class, then as a measure of progress afterwards.

SCHOOL THREE INTERVIEW TWO: D.H.T. (MS MacDONALD; 06/03/24).

Okay. So, here we go. Er, first of all, thank you, again, for your time. I'm sure you're busier than you seem! Erm, you seem (laughs) incredibly relaxed since I've been here, so I'm sure you're not! Erm, I do have your consent to record the interview?

Yes.

Thank you very much. Okay, erm, start off with an easy one: if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Oh, right, so, I graduated in 2005…

Mm-hmm…

… so that'll be coming up in… that's nineteen years!

Wow. That was the year before me.

Really?

Yeah, mm-hmm. So, it was an interesting time, because… well I found it so, just because the Curriculum for Excellence was coming out…

It had just come out, in 2006, wasn't it?

Erm, so, over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so how would you characterise them?

(Pause.) Yes, I think… I would say probably the behaviours have… probably always been there, however, I think now, as educators we tend now to label them more…

Mm-hmm, okay.

Whereas before I don't think there was maybe just as much *emphasis*… on behaviours?

So is that a change in perception rather than a change in behaviour, then?

I would say so.

Okay.

I would say so, and I think maybe we change more, whereas it was… the perception of… the bad child, but now it's very much, where it's, "Right well let's look at the child's picture and try to work out what's going on?"

Okay.

So I think…

Mm-hmm.

… I think that's changed, and there's probably more awareness now.

Mm-hmm.

I think maybe the behaviours have always been there.

Okay, erm, so… er, in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school? And I know it's difficult to generalise, but, in general terms how would you, er, where would you put the pupils in this school?

(Pause.) That's a tricky one, erm, because you look at them *individually*. I would say… now, comparing, I was a depute head in a large school in [name of Scottish town] before I came here, and I would say that there's a huge difference between those two schools, whereas I'd say the mental health and wellbeing of the children here, I would say… is quite good.

Quite good, okay. Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

Okay, erm, relative to that other school?

Yes.

Erm, so, erm… such issues that you *are* facing in this school, such issues that the *children* are facing, erm, how would you describe what sort of mental wellbeing issues you're dealing with here?

I would say we don't deal with the big behaviours, we don't see a lot of that, d'you know, where it's *physical*…

Mm-hmm.

Er, I would say here, we tend to have… it tends to be more anxieties, do you know, attachment, we have trauma, I would say it's more *that* type of behaviours we tend to deal with here…

I've only been here two days but that certainly chimes with what I've seen.

Mm-hmm, yep.

Okay, erm, so, I mean, I've asked you about changes in general in pupil's behaviour, have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental wellbeing over the course of your career?

(Long pause.) Yeah. (Pause.) Yes.

You have?

Yeah, and I'm probably saying this… as a mum, as well.

Mm-hmm.

Where… I think… children are a bit more clued-on now, because they're obviously… *learning* about it more, within their schools, so I think children are able to label their behaviours more…

So the awareness and literacy has…

Yes…

… increased.

Yes, I would say so.

Now, I'm interested in… that's interesting, because… the *first* thing you said was, "Yes." So… now I'm not totally clear… do you mean that… as with behaviour I suppose, what I'm driving at is, do you see a change in the perception and awareness, or do you see a change in the actual levels of issue… of mental wellbeing issues?

Yes, I would say, definitely see a different level… of issues…

So the level of issue has deteriorated and the awareness has increased?

Mm-hmm. Yes.

Is that a fair representation?

Yes, I would say that… that's exactly what I was trying to say! (Laughs.)

Okay! (Laughs.) I don't want to put words in your mouth, I'm just trying to… to…

No…

…because obviously, those are two separate things, and they might be independent of each other, but they might not.

No, I would say that the issues are definitely becoming… more, and I think there's *more* issues…

Oh right, I see!

… do you know, as well…

So the number of children experiencing issues has increased, the range of issues has increased…

Yes. Ah-hah.

… *and* the awareness…

Ah-hah.

So everything's just…

Increased. (Laughter.)

Okay, right, okay. That's very clear. I understand that. Erm… so, er… do you have any views about whether, er, certain groups of children are affected disproportionately with mental wellbeing issues? Erm, do they tend to manifest more in particular groups of children, or is it across the board?

(Long pause.) I would say it's across the board.

Okay.

Yeah, ah-hah.

Any insight into what's driving any of these changes?

Within this area, I would say probably… the levels of deprivation, and the effects that can have… have a huge impact.

Mm-hmm.

D'you know, we have a lot of families here where… d'you know, the children *are* facing a lot of struggles at home… and I think that has… quite a bit to do with it.

Mm-hmm. Okay. Erm, as a matter of interest, your catchment… what sort of SIMD..?

We're SIMD one and two.

Entirely?

Entirely.

I see.

A hundred percent.

Right, okay. That's interesting, because I thought I remembered either yourself or [name of head teacher] saying something similar when I first came here, and I had a drive round the village and it doesn't *seem* as deprived as that, like… just at first glance, you know…

Ah-hah. When you come here, it's not… I think when you compare it with areas of Glasgow you might think that, d'you know, but.. yes, if you go… up into the schemes and things…

Right, okay.

Yeah, you will notice…

That's interesting, okay, thank you. Well that leads me neatly onto the next section, which is about home circumstances.

Right, okay.

Erm, so, drawing on data that you hold on SIMD, or free school meal entitlement, erm, are you able to make any inferences about socioeconomic status of individual families?

What do you mean, sorry…

Well, erm.. do you, do you… what do I mean? That's a good question.

Do you make a difference?

No, do you make any, er, *assessments* of pupil's socioeconomic status?

Well, I think… we don't… entirely do that because we are… our PEF is supposed to be allocated to only SIMD one and two, which we are, so we don't really… obviously things like the breakfast club, we make sure children who are free school meals, they don't have to pay…

Mm-hmm…

… erm, we run clubs, like we had the… [name of local children's charity], it's a company in [name of nearby town], a charity, erm, where they were going to teach children to ride

bikes, as well as give them a bike for free… so again we made sure it was children who were entitled to free school meals…

Mm-hmm.

… children who we knew… poverty-wise, wasn't great, and we knew that they probably wouldn't get that experience to… learn to go on a bike…

Mmmm.

… so, in those circumstances, we'd definitely look into that.

Do you, I mean, I suppose you've got an advantage in that you're quite a small school, with a small school community here…

Yes.

… maybe, I'm guessing, maybe more likely to know a bit more about individual children's…

We do.

… do you use any, are there any other sources of data that you can draw upon, apart from SIMD and free school meal entitlement, to gauge where… where parents and carers are at financially, or are you more likely to just sort of know, instinctively?

We do kind of *know*, we know like, the parents who are employed, who are unemployed…

Right.

… d'you know, obviously the children who, erm, have to access like social services…

Mm-hmm.

… so we probably take in all those kind of things as well.

Right. Okay.

Yeah.

And often the kids tell you themselves…

And that's it, but I think the thing with it being a small community school, we do know the families very, very well…

Mm-hmm. Okay, erm, to what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community are employed in unstable jobs? Er, zero hours contracts, gig economy, temporary work, things like that?

I couldn't tell you off… by heart… we do have probably a high level of unemployment… I would probably say about… thirty percent are probably unemployed…

And of the remaining seventy percent, what sort of employment…

I would say, I wouldn't… there's not many… I would say, are in professional…

Mm-hmm.

… capacity jobs, I would say mostly are factory workers, d'you know, shops, working in the supermarkets, erm, d'you know maybe like… manual, joiners, plumbers… I wouldn't say there'd be many that I can think of that's zero….

Zero hours contract…

… hours contract… but I think that's probably because of this area.

Mm-hmm.

D'you know? I don't think there would be much employment with that kind of thing here…

Things like gig economy, like, you know, when I say gig economy I mean people who are only paid on… they are paid on completion of individual tasks, like taxi drivers, delivery drivers…

Yes, ah-hah. I think we'd have quite a few of them, as well…

Quite a few of them, okay…

Mm-hmm.

Okay, erm, do you see any associations between the socioeconomic *stability* of pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

Yes, I definitely see that. Absolutely.

Can you describe that at all?

Erm, so I can, *I* can tell by their clothes, just their whole manner, their demeanour, I know when things are maybe… tough?

Mm-hmm.

Erm, 'cause I can see a change in their behaviour, I just know by looking at their appearance…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, I know when things… and they tend to.. and again, I think maybe it's because we have that trusting relationship… a lot of the children will disclose, and tell us…

Yeah.

… as well, and a lot of the parents do, because a lot of times we will phone up and say, "We've just noticed, you know…"

Mm-hmm.

"… he's no' been his wee self," and they do tend to disclose to us.

Right. So this is.. I mean, you know obviously you're noticing that maybe the, the physical changes first, like dirty uniforms, or things like that, but do you actually see a knock-on effect…

Yes.

… onto their wellbeing as well?

Mm-hmm. I mean we've got a wee boy just now, who… the family are facing eviction just now, and… he's always been quite happy coming into school, but lately he keeps coming to me, talking about a sore tummy…

Mmmm.

… d'you know, erm, needs a blanket, a comforter with him…

Mmmm.

… erm, I mean, that's just one example. Er, I've got another wee boy who I know, erm, ther was attachment issues there with mum, and now that's him just back with mum, erm… But he tends to seek… er, like, *adult* attention, d'you know, whenever he wants to walk in with me, I always bring the lines in, d'you know, and he always wants to hold my hind, d'you know, and it's… and he'll keep holding my hand until we get to that point where we need to go into class.

Mmmm.

And I can tell when there's things worse because he'll get even more clingy.

Yeah. I see.

Mm-hmm.

That's interesting. Do you think he's deprived of that at home?

Yes. Ah-hah.

Okay, erm, so… can you see any relationship then between the sort… I mean, you've described when things are… going badly at home, or when there's been a *change*, or eviction, things like that, obviously these are serious things… can you see any relationship that you notice between the *types* of jobs parents and carers do, and the wellbeing outcomes of pupils?

Probably those parents who don't work.

Mm-hmm. So it's more likely to be affecting the children of parents who are *un*employed?

Mm-hmm.

I see.

Er, no, no!

No?

Because the ones I'm talking about *are* unemployed, and it tends to be more those children… I will see… there's something going on in the background…

I see…

Ah-hah.

Okay. So there's something else, other than… obviously if they're unemployed, it's not to do with their employment…

Yeah…

Because that's a fairly constant…

And it tends to be mostly financial issues, erm, and again, we're probably… I probably see our role changing *more*, where… we are supporting the parents more with that…

Mmmm.

… and their… to support their mental health…

Again, that brings me onto the next section, the last section…

(Laughter.)

… which is the school's response…

Am I jumping the gun?

No! Not at all! You know, we're going quite fluidly! Erm, it seems to me that this school has… is working an excellent response to pupil's wellbeing needs, mental wellbeing needs in particular, erm… so, a few questions on how you do this, so starting with what sort of curricular activities are taught in the school to support mental wellbeing needs, what lessons and planned curricular activities are going on?

Well… we just got awarded last week a PATHS [name of award]!

Congratulations.

So we've embedded that, so we're [position withheld to avoid identification] in [name of local authority]!

Is that right? Oh wow!

So I was dead chuffed at that!

Ah-hah.

So it's a shame you weren't here last Friday, because we had a big ceremony! Erm, so we've embedded PATHS, for the past three years, so, erm, at least we should… in every class, they should be doing at least one social and emotional lesson every week…

Mm-hmm…

… erm, and that, is also throughout the school as well, d'you know, it's in the [name of nursery attached to school], so it's coming all the way through..

[Name of nursery]?

Oh, the nursery…

The nursery, yeah, ah-hah, okay. I mean I've heard even the dinner ladies are trained in PATHS.

We are, so… the teaching staff were trained, we then rolled it out and it was our classroom assistants and support staff, and then we rolled it out and our janitorial, our secretarial, erm, received training as well, just so we're all using the same language, same vocabulary, same strategies…

Do you find PATHS useful?

I do.

Mm-hmm.

I do, erm, when we first started it I thought there was a huge need for it, because we had just returned from COVID, etcetera, erm… I don't think we have as *big* a need, and I don't know if it's because now it's well embedded…

Mm-hmm.

… d'you know? We don't need to have that big a focus, but I think it's certainly helped with consistency through the school.

Yeah, you were saying earlier on about how you think that literacy and awareness of mental wellbeing issues has increased, and I think that's one of the main strengths of PATHS, it's very good at…

It is, labelling…

… giving the children the ability to articulate their emotions.

Absolutely. When you're trying to have that restorative conversation they can tell you, "This is what I was feeling."

Mm-hmm.

And *why* I was feeling it, d'you know…

So is… does PATHS form the main sort of curricular approach to mental wellbeing in the school?

It does. Yes.

Yeah. Erm, so, beyond the sort of planned curricular activities, I'm also interested in what sorts of… and this is harder to document, what sorts of individual strategies you see your colleagues using, just the wee things that teachers do…

Mm-hmm.

… that you think have an impact, a positive impact, on mental wellbeing. What sorts of things do you notice colleagues doing that you think, "That's really good.."?

Ahhh… that's hard because I think everybody has their own wee individual…

Everybody does! Yes, so obviously I don't need all of them, but if you can think of like just a few things that you think of that like, ahh… that's a nice wee touch, that's obviously helping that child, or that class, or…

Well we have like, erm… one of the wee ones in primary four-five who… he really struggles, it's constant low-level behaviour…

Mm-hmm.

… but we have a communication chart, d'you know, he has goals, right like… let's try to get to… he can get five stars in a day. If he manages to get at least three then he knows that this has been a successful day, so I think… and then the communication's going home, so it's that one… that, just making sure that we're always on the same page.

Yeah.

Erm, I think everybody's quite good at having their own slant on our class VIP…

Ah yeah, ah-hah…

… do you know, everybody's different, they all do it their own different ways, I like in primary two-three they've got a big book, erm, and instead of just getting a compliment slip, erm, when it's their turn they get their own page in the big book and they can always go back and look at it and see all the compliments, and it's building throughout the full year.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, I think that's a nice… nice thing.

I was watching the teacher I've been working with, erm, he lined (laughs) the class up to go out to lunch, and he had a minute spare… so he does this thing where he stares right in their face, to see if they can not laugh! If they laugh or they move then they go to the end of the

line! And the kids love it, you know, it's hilarious. And I just think, just wee things like that, it just lifts spirits.

I think there's probably a lot goes on here, and I probably take it for granted now.

Yep. Mm-hmm.

Erm, like [name of teacher], erm, my primary five-six teacher, he is very outdoors.

Mm-hmm.

And the *kids just love it*!

Mm-hmm.

D'you know, and he took primary two-three out and they were absolutely just lapping everything up, d'you know, just getting out and getting that… fresh air and… d'you know, the outdoors, erm, he's very skilled at that.

That's exactly the sort of thing I was thinking of, and I suppose you're blessed in a school like this to be able to do things like that. Erm… er, can you describe any partnerships with outside agencies that help support pupil mental wellbeing?

Mm-hmm. So we've got quite a strong relationship… with PATHS, although we're finished it, we've still got a very strong relationship there.

With Barnardos?

Er, yeah, mm-hmm. So the person who is the kind of lead in this area, she's worked with us, not just with PATHS but also supporting with staff mental wellbeing as well…

Is this [name of PATHS coordinator]?

It is! I love [name of PATHS coordinator]! I just love the way her brain works! So, erm..

Yeah, she's very good…

So, [name of PATHS coordinator]'s a really strong partner, erm, we have a strong relationship with Children 1st…

Okay, mm-hmm.

… we have quite a lot of children who access them, and I have to say they're a saving grace, because social work are so… overwhelmed…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, Children 1st have been great, and I think they've been good [inaudible] building relationships and getting into the family homes…

Mm-hmm.

… and then it gives us an insight as well, d'you know, about what's going on…

I see, yeah, ah-hah.

Mm-hmm. And then just forming that… partnership with them, building that link. Erm, also, erm… I was going to say something there and it's just gone out of my head!

(Laughter.) You know, it's the same, you don't have to remember everything, 'cause it [inaudible] suddenly loads of things came back, you don't have to remember everything.

Mm-hmm. Going to annoy me now! A lot of… we are a very community school, with a lot of links.

Mm-hmm. Educational psychologist?

Educational psychologist, yep, erm…

CAMHS?

CAMHS. Mmm. CAMHS, again… I find it frustrating with CAMHS, because now, I don't know if you know, but they have now… not accepting new referrals, unless there is a *huge* wellbeing need…

Mmmm.

So… a lot of our children who I'm assuming may have ASD, but they're maybe not displaying huge behaviours or significant needs, PATHS are… not PATHS, CAMHS are refusing…

Ah-hah. I see…

… to accept, so I find I'm a bit frustrated there, because… I don't know where to go, d'you know…

To get a diagnosis?

And… not just a diagnosis, but what *support*, because d'you know we… there's one wee girl, obviously in the class you're in, who suffers severe anxiety…

Yes.

… and I'm at a stage now with her… (whispers) I don't know what else I can do for you… d'you know… and I find that hard, d'you know…

She… she certainly is finding… finding… she seems to be finding it very difficult to cope, and I worry about how transition's going to work, and things, you know…

Yes…

… all the things that I'm sure that you…

It is, and it's these things, just trying to make sure we're doing the best… for her, and getting the service at the time. We do have another service that I use regularly, it's really good, it is the Exchange counselling service.

Oh yes. Ah-hah.

Erm, so I tend to use them now…

Mm-hmm.

… instead of CAMHS, because they're… I tend to get them in quicker, d'you know, it's roughly a six week waiting list, erm…

So they come into the school…

… into the school…

… and offer counselling for the kids.

Mm-hmm. Yep. And they'll also offer group services as well, d'you know, transition support, so… yeah… I tend to rely on them quite a bit.

Great, thank you. Erm… any other ways that you can think of that the school supports pupil's mental wellbeing? I mean, we've been through most of the ones I can think of but maybe there's…

Well obviously we have the targeted support as well, erm, we have nurture.

Yes, of course.

D'you know, so… yeah, we certainly went down the whole-school nurturing ethos, but we still felt there were some children who we thought was lost. Erm…

I think those kids definitely benefit from that sort of setting, the ones that I saw this morning…

Aye. Absolutely. And I know… we have tried to make it… traditional nurture, where it's not children who have an ASD diagnosis etcetera, we have tried to make it children where there's maybe trauma, there's attachment issues, erm, there is… a social need there, and tried to make it traditional, so they get that… just that nurture.

Okay. Erm, so, last questions then, er… can you describe any barriers that make meeting the needs, the mental wellbeing needs, of your children more difficult?

I've probably already said about it, and it's the CAMHS, the CAMHS waiting list, and… not knowing where else to go. D'you know, I find that, d'you know, 'cause I feel as if I *am* failing? Like, that wee one that I was talking about, in primary six-seven, and it's, d'you know, and I know it's because that service is so overwhelmed, but… I know I need to get that pupil the help *now,* not sat on a three-year waiting list. And that… that's what I find the barrier is, it's getting the service at the time that's needed.

Which is.. this is what's inspired me to do this, you know, I think… these sorts of situations need to be documented.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Erm, so, the other side of that question is, if you had a magic wand, what would make your life easier, in terms of meeting the mental wellbeing needs of these children?

Ohhh… if I had a magic wand… it'd be lovely to have, like, a home link worker…

A home link worker. Okay.

Oh, absolutely, because I think a lot of our… issues that we face, it has to be a partnership with the families because as I say a lot of them, it's linked to that… area of deprivation, and trying to get out of that cycle…

Mm-hmm.

So, home link worker would be… lovely.

Okay.

It'd be great. And as I said, being able to access the services when… we need it.

Mm-hmm.

There and then, not getting to the stage where I have a wee one who's thinking about home schooling because she cannot cope any more.

Ohh. So, erm, we're… I'm done with my questions, except to say, is there anything else you'd like to add, about mental wellbeing, or anything, anything you want to add that we've not already discussed, that you think, 'I think that'?

Erm… (long pause.) I think we are very much a school that tries… to put mental wellbeing… at the forefront, I would say we genuinely try to. Erm… and I hope it comes across that we do try to… know our families very very well, and our children very very well. And I think that's key, the relationships, is the big thing for me.

Absolutely. It is the key thing, yes. And I think you do it very well.

Oh, thank you.

Okay.

(Laughs.)

Thank you very much…

No, you're welcome…

… that's us done, I hope it wasn't too difficult!

No, it was not!

I'm going to stop this now…

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL THREE INTERVIEW THREE: CLASS TEACHER (MR GALLOWAY; 08/03/24).

Okay. Thank you very much for your time, and thank you for having me all week, it's been a great week, like I said. So I do have your consent to record this?

That's fine, yeah.

Okay, thank you. Well, I'm going to ask you a few questions, roughly in three groups: erm, first group are about children's behaviour and mental health and wellbeing, the second group of questions are just about your… what you know about home circumstances, and the third group is about how the school's responding to meet their needs. Their mental health and wellbeing needs. So, start off with an easy one: how long have you worked in schools?

Er, this is my eleventh year of being a teacher now, and I've been in [name of local authority] for eight of those.

Eight of those.

And six years at this school.

Mm-hmm. That's a good long time. I always think ten years is a bit of a turning point…

Ah-hah. (Laughs).

…. In terms of experience. Erm, okay. So, over the course of that career, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so how would you characterise them?

I think in terms of behaviour, not… not so much in terms of what pupils do in class, but in terms of maybe expectations in terms of, erm, how long a pupil can focus for, I've seen a real change in that. Between maybe being able to teach lessons for twenty minutes or ten minutes and being able to address the full class, erm, it needs to be a lot more sort of short, sharp bursts for them. I find the attention's very much dipped and we're having to adapt to that, whether it's the technology that pupils are using now, with their sort of bitesize ten second videos, erm… it can affect, erm, just how long a task can go for as well…

Yes…

… and you can sense that in class when they're maybe becoming, you know, a bit rumbly, whether it's a case of, sort of positive reinforcement like we do in here with their table points, or whether it's maybe, okay, we need to stop that and maybe come back to it and do

something else… but in terms of relationships with pupils, erm, relationships between each other, relationships between staff, apart from maybe a pupil that's coming through that's got an identified need or we know about coming through school, I've not seen any drastic changes in pupil behaviour in terms of relationships.

Okay. Certainly that one about attention span is a common complaint…

Yeah.

… I've heard that a *lot*. Erm, okay, thank you. Erm, do you have any… what do you think might be causing, well the changes you've described I suppose are really to do with attention span and you've touched on some of the reasons for that. Erm, er, what do you think.. I've forgotten what you exactly said about that! Was it… erm, what do you think is causing that change?

I think it's just the rapid change in technology, how quickly things are accessible, I mean if I think of my own life, your Amazon next-day delivery, or your streaming whole series and you don't have to wait a week, everything's a sort of here-and-now… and I think, erm, for a lot of pupils who are now grown up in that world, the… the aspect of hard work, or making mistakes and going through the sort of muddle that is learning to get to the end process, is something that… previously I would say pupils could follow you through that journey but a lot of pupils want it here and now…

Mm-hmm.

… and maybe in terms of resilience at times is maybe not what it was before 'cause I feel that, erm, not so much in our school, but certainly in other schools, the 'down tools' comes a lot earlier in the process when they're facing difficulties, then the sort of resilience isn't there…

Yes.

… erm, it's quite easy to say, "Oh I can't do this," or "I'm stuck," or the… maybe getting the sort of behaviours that way, erm… but certainly I can only speak for what I've seen here.

Yes, of course.

And, er, ah-hah. The attention, the focus and the resilience has certainly dipped a little bit, erm… but on the plus side of that, and I know people might sort of gripe or complain in terms of, erm, pupils using language to describe their feelings, "Oh, I've got anger management issues," or "I can't do this because of that," I think the flip side where pupils are talking about these things, is actually a bit of a bonus, where they're opening up

conversations to talk about things, erm, and there's certainly a lot more open conversations in school now. Whereas I think before if a child was maybe finding things a difficult and it showed in their behaviour, there maybe wasn't open conversations about it or it wasn't explained to the child as explicitly as things are now.

Mm-hmm.

So I think there's a lot more of, erm, discussion around what might be going through heads or why that might be the case and trying to problem-solve *with* pupils rather than trying to force things upon them. I mean, when I think of child's plans, and ILPs that we're doing… pupil voice is very strong throughout it, erm, I mean I'm thinking… can I mention pupils' names?

Yes. Ah-hah.

I mean I'm thinking, likes of [first girl's name] before, and I think getting her diagnosis, and thinking about the conversations we've had with her coming through school, where, you know she's maybe been, erm, a tough nut to crack when she's been further down, but as she's got older and she's matured she's realised she's got a difficulty it's now got a label, she's open and honest about it, I think it opens that conversation you can have with pupils rather than a label, her being this sort of bad pupil…

Mm-hmm.

… you know, there's something there, erm…

The conversation in the staff room this afternoon was a real eye-opener in terms of how much progress you've made with her.

Oh, hugely so, hugely so, and I think it might just be a part of maturity, it could be as I said the probationary teacher we had during lockdown that *really* supported the family through it, but I think [first girl's name]'s now got more belief in relationships because perhaps her home relationships… not the best model for it. But I think there's a lot more *trust* in adults now, that we're genuinely here…

To help…

… to do the best that we can for her.

Okay, that's great, thank you. Erm so… erm, you mentioned the work the probationer did during the lockdowns, now I appreciate the fact that you haven't seen much of a discernible difference in behaviour but you have characterised a few other changes… would you have

said that you detected any changes that you associate with the lockdown in *anything* to do with the pupils?

Yeah absolutely. I think, erm, certainly, er, I'm still seeing it here, but I think it's more pronounced further down the school where there is an expectation of almost one-to-one support for everything, because a lot of pupils had experienced that through lockdown, there's… less of a sort of independence in there than… I'm really lucky with the class that I've got that it's engrained back in them, but I think certainly for a lot of pupils, and perhaps those that find learning the most difficult, because they did have that support at home, then when they came back to school the expectation was still there which then made it a really difficult task for the teacher to provide the level of support that they had then become accustomed to, to go through their activities, erm… in terms of academics I think the… the impact of lockdown's going to be felt for a long time, but in terms of expectations in an adult relationship, in terms of, erm, *how* children relate to teachers as well.. there was an awful lot more of, erm, like wanting them to be your mate 'cause that's what they were used to with their parents at home going through activities, erm, so there was almost a kind of… different level of respect that you got, and coming back through lockdown… But I'm still seeing it in the other classes that we've got that that expectation of immediate help, and somebody's going to help them through this, and that the expectation that they've spent two minutes and they're not getting it to somebody's going to be there straight away… I'm still seeing that being a part of lockdown…

You're still seeing it?

Yeah, ah-hah, absolutely.

So you're sort of suggesting… you're describing there a change in the nature of the way that they view relationships between, er, in schools…

Yeah.

Right, okay, that's interesting. Erm, in general terms, I know it's difficult to generalise…

[Interrupted by adult entering the classroom. Laughter.]

It's okay, it's okay. In general terms, er, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

In school, again, I think we are incredibly fortunate where we are… whether it's the small school that we've got, or whether it's the community makeup that we've got, that I think… erm, the health and wellbeing on the whole for our pupils is very good, and I think then it

means that, because it's a small school and we understand the families and we understand the pupils, if there is a change, even if it's a slight change, we have got… a bigger sense of that and can start addressing things or putting things in place. Erm, as I say, the good thing from lockdown has been this idea, especially when we've got PATHS on board, this idea that talking about feelings isn't a bad thing, and when you're feeling a certain way, that's perfectly okay, even when if it's not the same as somebody else, that's giving you the sort of, the communication message…

Yeah.

… erm, and then relating it back into behaviour as well, that… well, you've done this because of how this is your… how you were feeling, but thinking about that sort of… that bridge between how you're feeling and your actions, erm… I think we're over the big hurdle coming back, we had lots of problems, as I'm sure other schools did, with the resocialisation of pupils and the, erm… *selfish* behaviour, I would say, erm, in terms of not having to share or not having to work with other people, erm.. as I say, I think we've got over that hurdle. Mental health-wise, I would say we're in a very fortunate position in our school, but obviously as we've discussed over the week there's… there's a few pupils that are still finding the challenge… and because, as a whole, we've got good mental health in the school, it can make those issues seem more pronounced- not for us as class teachers, but I think the pupils might feel the effect more…

Mm-hmm.

… and notice themselves more as being… perhaps slightly different to their peers, because there's not as many that are experiencing struggles to the same level as them…

Okay.

Erm…

That's interesting. Good, thank you. Er, so… the mental health and wellbeing issues that there are, amongst your pupils, I mean obviously you've several in your class alone…

Yeah.

… er, can you describe how those… what forms those mental health and wellbeing issues take? How do you perceive them in children?

Yeah, so… I think if we take, erm, [second girl's name] for example, it's anxiousness, there's a lot of question, there's a lot of uncertainty, which is why I try and get a nice clear routine and structure down, erm, [second girl's name]'s had a lot of support from counselling, from

Exchange services, from educational psychologist, and there is a… almost irrational fear of… bad things are going to happen…

I see…

… and it's trying to unpick where those might come from which is why our educational psychologist is working for her… but certainly for [second girl's name], it's this fear, it's this anxiety, it's this unknown, it's this idea of being put on the spot, it's this fear of not knowing the answer…

Mmmm.

… erm, and feeling that… we're a very supportive class, but for [second girl's name], not knowing something, it really brings on the sort of anxiety which can be sort of skin-picking, it could be overwhelming feelings where she maybe starts to cry, erm… for other pupils that we've got, likes of [third girl's name], erm, again there's a… there's this element of wanting to come to school and be almost *perfect,* I think that might come from culture of home and setting a really high standard, but for [third girl's name], it can, erm, transpire in terms of getting really clearly visibly upset, but then being stubborn and not wanting help, because feeling that she has to work through things on her own, so you have to be really careful about how you approach, between giving enough support that she's going to open up to you…

Yeah…

… but not… making it out as a big thing where people are going to see that you're giving her support, because again that would be... the barriers would just shut down. Erm, [first girl's name], in terms of, erm, her sort of mental wellbeing and any issues that might present, can be up or down because of her ADHD…

Mm-hmm…

… [first girl's name]'s very good at regulating and she won't outwardly tell you that she's feeling boisterous but it's very clear in her behaviour and it's just putting… small words again, doing it very discreetly, she's not someone that… that likes it to be visible… having a wee chat with her, catching her outside when the rest of the class aren't there, and just, erm, just asking her, you know, "Are you finding things a little bit difficult? Is there anything we can sort of put in place?"

Mm-hmm.

"Do you need a wee five minute walk? Can you go and deliver this note to such-and-such a class?" Just to give her that wee break away from being in the class and feeling the eyes are on her, erm, and then we've got [fourth girl's name] as well, that had sort of general anxiety about coming to school, finding transitions very difficult as well, erm… for [fourth girl's name] it manifests itself in a…. uh, I suppose immaturity at times, in terms of bringing her teddy bears into class, all that sort of comfort that she's got, but then you've kind of got the dichotomy between academically she's a very bright girl…

Okay…

… the conversations she'll have are very mature as well, so, for [fourth girl's name] it's being aware that although she's a very… bright, intelligent girl, there is still that element of trauma that came from her sort of past life and… yes, treating her academically as a mature student, but at the same time remembering that where she maybe is maturity level within the different things that she's come through, erm…. I don't feel maybe with the exception of [second girl's name] the issues that we've got in class are… insurmountable in terms of what the class could do or what *I* could do, but certainly the one that is the most difficult and I wish I had an answer or a magic wand for, but it manifests itself different in different days would be [second girl's name] and just that general anxiety that she's got.

Yes, we all wish we would have an answer to help… I mean she definitely… the little that I've seen of her she presents as someone with a really high degree of anxiety…

Oh, absolutely, yeah.

Erm, you know, that is impacting her life significantly.

Yeah.

Anxiety seems to be something of a theme across the people in your class who do exhibit mental wellbeing issues…

Yeah.

… to me, but I'm interested, the other theme that emerges from what you've just said is, erm, something to do with the perceived public awareness…

Ah-hah…

… of whatever thing that they're uncomfortable with…

Yeah.

… and so you have to be quite private in the way that you're helping and supporting these pupils…

Yeah.

… is that a fair assessment?

Absolutely. It's about that relationship, getting to know the pupils really well, I remember the very first time [third girl's name], erm, found herself really anxious during a lesson, and I could see that she was upset and crying, but the way that she put her head down she very clearly didn't want anyone else to see, and at that moment as a teacher I went round, oh, can… spoke to {third girl's name], wasn't getting anything from her, "Does anyone else want to go and help [third girl's name]?" Which of course made… made things worse…

(Laughs) Oh dear…

… because that was me building up the relationship and what was acceptable for her… erm, but yeah, I think… the anxiety… me being me, I'm quite an anxious person at times, and I know how routine and expectation, making things clear, works for me and I wouldn't like something… you know, overt, that people would see things, so I can understand a lot of where pupils are coming from but I think that the pupils that have anxiety, especially as they're getting older, they've got, as they're going through their hormones, this… this comparison that they've got to other pupils that comes into play as well, so there's always conversations about, "Oh, I'm the brightest at this", "I'm better than you at this," again as a school we're really good at that, I think we do a lot of sort of fluid groupings and yes we want to build pupil confidence up, but we don't want to build it in such a way that likes of [third girl's name], in a top group for maths but then it comes to shape and she finds it difficult because then that would build that extra pressure and extra sort of sense of what she should be able to do…

Mm-hmm..

… erm, so I think there's… there's sort of different ways around that, that's been a change in teaching from when I started where you did have your very discreet groups and there wasn't very much movement between them… I think we're having to do adaptive teaching and… let the pupils lead, certainly to a point, but also being very adaptive to the emotional wellbeing that comes through…

Mm-hmm.

… because if pupils aren't comfortable, you're not going to get the best out of them, and even if you know, oh, I thought they would be here, if they're not comfortable enough to get there then that's something that needs to be addressed first…

Absolutely…

… before you can then move on.

Yeah. The two are linked, but they come in order…

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Okay, thank you. Erm, so, you've touched… you've talked expansively about a lot of issues, so you've maybe touched on these things before, but just to ask you directly…I'd already asked you about changes in *behaviour* over the course of your career, over the course of your career have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing?

I would say yes for that one, and again I don't know if it was part of culture before where, because we're Scottish, and we tend to keep things to our self, but in particular boys, the idea of mental health, the opening-up about things… I mean when *I* think of going through school, it wasn't really something that was ever spoken about, if you were having a tough time you tended to keep it to yourself…

Definitely.

So there is a change in the… it's definitely more pronounced because a lot of these things that the kids have come through, whether it be lockdown, whether it be things that are happening in their home lives… but I'm glad now that we're open to conversations about these things and opening up the conversations to pupils... I mean likes of [fifth girl's name], when we were doing our puzzle pieces (classroom research activity), when she was talking about [second girl's name], she handled it in a very sort of sensible, responsible way…

Yes.

… saying, not that [second girl's name]'s struggling, the way that she worded it, I can't quite remember what she said, but again, this is good for the pupils to see, that… 'cause they are all going to go through it, even if they're one of these lucky ones that mental health is on the whole good through life, they're going to experience difficult times, and I think it's important for them to see, oh that's... that's quite a normal thing to go through, it is quite normal to be talking about these things. So it *seems* more pronounced, and I think there's a lot more pupils that are on, erm, our ASN log, for, sort of emotional wellbeing concerns, but I think that's because we're a lot more sensitive to it now, we realise that things need to be put in place if we're really wanting to progress learning forward for these pupils.

So, I'm interested in that because you've actually mentioned, or touched on that topic, it seems three times to me, about this idea of what I'd call emotional literacy, the sort of self-

awareness of issues that you're feeling, emotions that you're feeling, and the literacy to be able to express that…

Yeah.

… more clearly, more acutely, and the confidence too, I suppose… erm, and you specifically stated that you thought that that was a good thing in general, earlier on.. is that, is that… have I remembered that correctly?

I would say so, as well, erm, definitely a good thing because as I say, your… erm…

[Interviewee walks away from recording device, closes classroom door and returns.]

Thank you. That's okay, thanks.

Erm, it gives the power back to pupils, again, thinking about [first girl's name], I think [first girl's name] coming through school, would have seen herself as a bad kid, and that was the label she got, 'cause all [first girl's name] ever knew was getting into trouble at home, never, never being good enough at home, and then she'd come into school and be a nuisance, and get into trouble for that, and that was… became her sense of self, erm, but I thnk through talking about these feelings and actually, "Well you've maybe done this [first girl's name] because, this is how you were feeling," it was allowing that sort of connection for her that, "I'm not a bad person, I might do naughty things, but there's… there's a reason for it, it's because of the thing that comes before it."

You could see how damaging that.. that previous view, or the limits of that previous view would have been.

Oh yeah. Yeah.

So, I suppose my question was going to be, it's often quite difficult trying to unpick… I mean, getting back to this idea of changes in mental health and wellbeing over your career, it's difficult to unpick whether or not this is as a result of people simply being more aware…

Yeah.

… and more able to verbalise this, or whether there has actually been a change in the levels or the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues as well?

Ah-hah. Erm…

What do you think on that?

Oh, I think it's probably a sort of dichotomy between them both, because I think… everyone got to sort of take stock during lockdown and you had to spend a lot of time on your own, whereas if pupils were at school all day they were busy, they were going home, but I think

during lockdown there was an awful lot of not engaging with other people, not growing up and realising, "Oh, but they're going through the same as me," or "They're also having a difficult time," everything was done in sort of isolation…

Mmm.

… and then all of a sudden they were shoved back in with other people who were then maybe finding it difficult to come back to school, and issues just became.. became a lot bigger for people, erm, which is why we wanted the PATHS to come in… I'm not quite sure, I think it's… it's… it's probably an even keel of both of them, I think… the anxieties have come, erm… from… from the lockdown, it's there, but I think it's probably presented an accurate picture of what's came there before, I think it's just, erm, we feel maybe more open to be talking about these things, or expressing our feelings, particularly for girls, because I know girls, particularly at this age… can mask a lot of difficulties that they have going through… whereas I think… girls now… are more, open maybe about their feelings, certainly if not verbally, I think you can certainly see it more in their behaviour, erm, whereas before I think there would have been a lot more masking and exhaustion by the time they go back home, which I think is [second girl's name] quite a lot.

Mm-hmm.

There's an awful lot of masking and then it's home, and it's a sense of being overwhelmed again.

So, I'm just trying to make sure that I have absolutely understood your point, as you would see it, am I right in thinking that you're suggesting that you think that there may be an increase in prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues but that has been, erm… that the appearance of that has been increased exponentially by the ability to talk about it?

I would say so, yes.

Right. Do you think that that… I mean, I'm also interested, very briefly, because… just interested in your answers I'm afraid! Erm, you instantly mentioned the… well, you *quickly* mentioned the lockdown there, when you were describing that answer. Did you notice any increase in prevalence in mental health and wellbeing issues *prior* to the lockdowns?

(Pause.) Not… prior, in terms of a whole-school… certainly there was maybe an increasing number of pupils coming through…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, and thinking about the pupils that were coming through, we can relate it to the sort of home environment, that they were coming through. I think there was certainly… not a huge increase, but there was maybe, there definitely was an increasing number of pupils coming through that had mental wellbeing concerns.

Okay.

But we could always… sort of track where… where they were coming from, they had been identified from nursery, coming through into primary, so there was an increase, nothing… overly substantial, I would say, but certainly after lockdown, then coming back to school, there was a huge focus on it.

So we're seeing a gradual steady increase in prevalence…

Yes.

… prior to lockdown, that seemed to accelerate rapidly…

Absolutely.

… right, okay. Thank you. Erm, right, er… almost at the end of this section. And the other sections are shorter! (Laughs.)

No problem.

Erm, you've just mentioned home life there. I wonder… what are the big factors that you see driving this increase in prevalence in mental health and wellbeing issues?

I think, oh… it's almost a… a lack of… and this is going to make me sound really bad, but a lack of, for want of a better word, parenting skills, or, young children coming through and the idea that…

[Interview interrupted by Head Teacher entering the room, recording is paused.]

Right, er, tape back on, so you were just describing what you… you mentioned parenting…

Ah-hah.

… about what you think might be driving some of these changes in mental health and wellbeing…

Yeah… even just thinking generally, me going about doing my shopping, I'm seeing an awful lot of young children who aren't being spoken to, communication skills aren't there because they're going about with their tablet, there's a lot less engagement I would say with… with some parents at that really crucial stage, which ultimately impacts kids coming in to school, where, erm, academically they're behind…

Mmm.

… they're starting to compare themselves with their peers, and then that can open up all sorts of, er, wellbeing concerns where they compare it to that, erm, I think all parents have got the best intentions for their children… but, I feel there's a… a… a lack of what used to come before with an engagement with the school, an engagement with the homework, an interest in pupil learning... this might be just me going from the community that we've got, but when I think of open day's we've got, our parents coming in, there's a real lacklustre feeling about who would come in and the… we've done loads of things, the school, through our poverty-proofing, the key families that we're trying to target are the ones who typically wouldn't turn up to things…

Mm-hmm..

… erm… and…

Well, sorry, that's actually, erm, well, I'm going to come back to that in the next couple of questions, so, erm, but basically you seem to be describing… parenting issues that are liable to cause attachment problems?

Yes.

Is what it sounds like to me. But I'm also interested that you mentioned there that, erm, growing self-awareness amongst pupils and a comparison between them and others in terms of academic ability…

Yep.

… is a causal factor? In terms of mental wellbeing issues?

I would say so. I think even at the young age, and again we try and be very discreet as teachers…

Ah-hah.

… but kids have this sort of in-built comparison to other people, but I'm thinking even as far back as a P1/2 that's heavily play-based learning, erm, when some kids are doing their writing and some kids are maybe still at the sort of foundation stage of their letter formation, even then there might be a frustration or a comparison to other people as well, and again, I think some of that stems from, erm, the fact that there's maybe been less input at home, when I'm talking to our nursery colleagues as well, and thinking about some of the environments that children are brought up in, a lot more home link input, a lot more social work involvement… I think, er, solid parent skills seem to be on a decline, that could be because of parents' own mental health issues, but I'm seeing more and more that the

school is having to put things in place and having to be more involved as a whole family, erm, and it's not just the pupil concerned…

Ah-hah…

… because you've got the big circle that's round about it, that ultimately we are also involved in and trying to help as well, erm…

I mean a lot of schools are having to take these sorts of measures now.

Yeah. Yeah.

Erm, do you have any views about whether or not mental health and wellbeing issues affect certain groups of children disproportionately? Is it more likely to affect a certain group of children?

Er… (Long pause.) I would say, based on what I've seen, I think there's probably been a higher number of boys that have been in a log coming through for health and wellbeing concerns. But I think certainly being in the upper stages, I would say, girls more so. I think through the social media, I think girls are definitely ones that are looking at what's out there, that are being bombarded with images… there's a constant comparison, when they're having their chat with their friends, there's a comparison between each other, I think it probably impacts girls more, in particular this sort of transition stage when they're going through their hormones and getting ready for the [name of secondary school], I think… there's a more pronounced impact on them particularly because I think girls have a better ability to mask behaviours and mask how they're feeling…

Mmm.

… whereas some boys might act outwardly…

Yeah.

… and then you can sort of interpret that, but I think girls…

Internalise.

Oh absolutely, yeah.

First mention of social media.

Yeah.

Do you think it has a part to play?

Hugely so, erm, even in this class that we've got, and you would never know because they're very good at tending to leave things, erm, that happen outside, outside the classroom, in terms of not impacting on their work, or arguments or things in class, but

there's, there's been… especially at the start of the year, a load of social media things in here that people make in, probably got the wrong terminology, whether it's TikTok, or whatever it might be, but erm, nasty comments being put in videos that other people have been putting up, or…

Oh…

… or, about people's appearance, or what they're wearing, erm, I think social media… 'cause they spend hours on it, social media has a *huge* impact, and I don't think it's ever had a positive impact on people… I don't do social media because I know how warped it can be, and these kids are still developing their brain, they're still developing their sense of self, and I think it becomes really warped, with their reality T.V., their social media, this idea of what they 'should be', having all this money, how they should look…

Mmm.

… when their brains are still developing, it's got a… oh, a huge, huge impact on them. Huge impact.

Reality T.V.'s a bit of a strange name for what it actually is, it doesn't seem very real!

(Both laugh.)

Okay, brilliant, thank you. A few questions on home circumstances, then. Erm, just thinking about the types of parents and carers that you've got within *this* class, to what extent… oh, sorry! The first question is about the school community, and then we'll think about this class. To what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community, in general, are employed in what you might call unstable jobs? Like zero hours contracts, or work in the gig economy, like taxi driving, delivery driving, or, er part-time uncertain work, things like that. Now, I'm thinking of this group of parents and carers as opposed to, say, er, long-term unemployed, or…

Okay.

… so, do you see that as being a group of parents and… a type of employment you're aware of, in the community?

Yeah, it's a type of employment I'm aware of, and there are a few, erm, pupils whose parents, erm, were on, erm… furl, furlough? Because the place where they worked had set.. had set on fire, erm, and then that had to quickly come to an end just over Christmas time, so we're aware of, particularly when it gets to Christmas time, or any sort of big transitions

or coming to school for uniforms, erm, we're aware of parents that… possibly need help, but would never…

Ask…

… ask for it, yeah, yeah.

Okay, erm… is this a, would you say it's a large group within the school community, or…

Within the school community I would say… erm, if we take our long-term unemployed out, they would be the next biggest group after that.

And what sort of proportion are long-term unemployed would you say?

Oh, in here, I would say as a school community, I think we would be at *least* a third if not more in the village…

Okay. And then, so the remaining two-thirds that *are* in employment, you're characterising… of that two-thirds, this may be the biggest group?

I would say so, yeah.

Right, okay.

I would say so.

Erm, so, do you see any… I mean, thinking now of the parents and carers that you've put within this group, do you see any associations between the… this group and their children who have mental health and wellbeing issues? Are there any associations between that type of employment and children who are experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues?

If I just think of my class, I would say no, I actually find the opposite in that, because they're having to work hard, there is a… that sort of sense that's also developed in the pupils as well, they're very grateful for what the school does for them. If there's any meetings about anything, they always turn up to talk about their children.

Mm-hmm.

So I think that group, for me, are probably the parents that, although they don't want help in terms of things being given at Christmas time, when it comes to their child and wanting the best for their child, they're in and wanting to work. I wouldn't say that I can say there's any, erm, that their children suffer more health and wellbeing, I wouldn't say that at all, erm, I think it's consistent between our groups of unemployed people and the contracts you're speaking to and the sort of permanent employed people, I'm not seeing any sort of big correlation between them, but I think that… that sort of middle group that we're talking about are the ones that I feel are probably the most supportive of their children…

Okay…

… and the suggestions that we've got for their mental health.

Thank you. Erm, er… so, well, you've answered my next one really, which is can you see any relationship between… well, you… you have answered it. Can you see any relationship between the sorts of jobs parents and carers do and children's health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes? So you've answered that in the sense that you see no association between children suffering mental health and wellbeing and the parents and carers who are in unstable jobs, but that you do between long-term unemployed, and also, like, full-time professional workers?

Yep. Ah-hah.

Is that fair? Is that a fair assessment?

Erm, which sounds really odd, and I appreciate that (slight laugh) but when I'm thinking of our full-term unemployed [*I assume he means full-time employed here*], they work incredibly long hours, a lot of our parents, and so their children tend to perhaps be more attached than the children in here, I'm thinking of [second girl's name], I'm thinking of [sixth gril's name], erm, who… family make-up, mum and dad being different, and being passed between different people, erm, working long hours… they tend to have more of a kind of… not over-reliance but a bigger relationship I'd say with the people in school because they're the ones that they see the most, erm…

Okay.

And again, I can see, in terms of the people that are on these sort of contracts… you *can* see a link when… things are tough at home…

Mm-hmm.

… and the general sort of appearance for their children coming into school, so I'm not saying that they don't experience mental health issues the same as the other groups, for them I think we're maybe… not quicker at catching it, but because we're aware of the things that come at home, we're… we're sort of very quick to… very proactive, we kind of see what's maybe happening with their business, or we kind of know about contracts, so we can maybe put things in place… sorry, I don't know if I'm contradicting myself, and it's because we are proactive that… we're *not* seeing as many issues from that group…

Mmm… Okay…

… but if we weren't proactive… there *could* be more issues, especially around sort of Christmas time, and…

Yes… so that suggests to me… what it *seems* to me that you're describing there is that there *might* be an association there, but that it comes and goes with the.. with the financial security…

Yeah. Yeah.

… of the family, and because you have an awareness of that, you're… you're able to cope with that more readily, is that fair?

I… Ah-hah, I would say so, and again because we know the sort of school community, the kids are very open, erm, or most of them are very open about, erm, when mum and dad are maybe not in work anymore or when things have happened, I mean I'm thinking of likes of [seventh girl's name] whose mum works, erm, in a big factory, that was set on fire, and had to be furloughed, and she was sort of… giving updates: "Oh mum got paid this time, oh, she's not sure if she's going to get paid again," so it… it opened up that sort of conversation…

Right, that's very interesting.

Erm, aye… the kids are… ah, they call… most of our kids call a spade a spade, you know, so, (laughs), we get that information quite a lot from them, but because it is quite a small village and because most of us are from this area, we… we know the things that are out there, and we know the families, or we've grown up with the families before, you know we know most of the kind of ins and outs and where the wee sticky… sticky points might be.

So the key to that one is community… erm, community knowledge, and I suppose the relationship with the kids.

Yeah. I would say so, oh definitely… it makes a huge difference. And I think that's why… although clearly we have mental health, wellbeing concerns in the school, I think the reason that we maybe don't have as many pronounced ones is because the relationship that we've got…

Mm-hmm…

… and even though we've got some families that are hard to reach it doesn't stop us as a school from… trying to engage, or putting things in place, or going and… and chapping a door…

Okay.

… you know we still try and break those barriers down because if we don't, we've realised that it will impact the child, which will then, potentially impact the.. the rest of the class…

(Laughs) Yes… yes…

… which you know, is… aye…

Okay, thank you. Last set of questions. We're picking up speed now! Okay, this is just about the school's response to some of these issues that you're facing. Er, starting with the planned curricular ones, what sort of activities and lessons are *taught* in the school to support pupil's mental health and wellbeing?

Yeah, so we've got sort of two, two strands in terms of health and wellbeing, we've got our, erm, PATHS approach…

PATHS, yeah, ah-hah…

… promoting alternative thinking strategies lessons, and then we've got our sort of, not prescribed, but a [name of local authority] virtually prescribed lessons, that give.. your drugs and alcohol, that kind of go hand-in-hand with that…

So these are authority-wide health and wellbeing lessons?

Ah-hah.

And just for the record you are a [prize-winning] PATHS school?

We are, as of [date prize was won], yeah.

Yeah, congratulations.

Thank you very much.

Erm, you can certainly, I mean.. as I said to the class today, when they were giving me ideas, I mean I *wasn't* joking, I'm not used to that level of, er, that level of awareness from the pupils…

Yeah.

… even the terminology and things…

Yeah.

… it's impressive. So, sorry, I cut you off there..

No, you're fine!

… authority and PATHS.

And then we've got the wellbeing champions, which is why they had designed their sort of little presentations, er, we do a lot of… anything out there's… health and wellbeing or any sort of trial projects, we, we jump on it 'cause it is something as a staff we all really believe

in. Erm, [number of] years ago I did a project that got recognised by Education Scotland, called [name of project], which was all about this idea of speak about your feelings, and the kids were out in the community, they were making posters, they were putting videos online about different scenarios that people might face. So we've got our two strands of health and wellbeing but for us, although there's the, the lessons, it is something that bleeds over everything and we try and make the sort of natural links and connections with everything that we do…

Mm-hmm.

… because we realise… (laughs) just how important it is, for our pupils.

Amazing.

Thank you.

Erm, right, now this one I'm interested in because I have seen… I would say a *lot* of examples of this myself, but I'm interested in what *you* think. Apart from the lessons, the taught activities, the planned activities, I'm thinking now down to a more personal, er, personal or class level. What sorts of strategies do you see, or maybe you use yourself, do you see teachers or school staff throughout the school using on a *personal* level…

Yeah.

… a class level, that supports mental health and wellbeing? Just the wee things that teachers do, that you think, "That's effective."

Yeah. I think as a school we're very good at finding the time for those little conversations with pupils, but doing it at the, at the right time. I mean I can give examples from all the classes that we've got, and it's not just the conversations they're having with pupils, and the sort of positivity and the pushing them on through the different things, it's always done… at either a discreet level, as some pupils might like it, or it's done overtly if some pupils really like that, that sort of praise and being made an example of. We've all got different forms of rewards, but it's not always just simply for good work, or being academic, we like it when people share things from home that they've done, or we like saying, "You were such a good friend because of this," it's recognising them as a whole holistic person, and it's not just always the academic side that we focus in on for that, erm… I think we're very good as well at a school level, sharing information, so if I… erm, likes of, for [second girl's name], strategies that might work, 'cause we're a chatty bunch in the school and if people had saw [second girl's name] going along the corridor, of course they'd want to stop and talk to her

because that's how they do it, but making sure that that if we've got… a child that maybe needs a consistency in approach…

Mm-hmm…

… that we're making sure that we're all on sort of the same page from it. And I think we're, we're very good at relationships with our pupils, and again, might be because we're a small school, but even though it'll be a while before I get them, I feel like I know all the primary one-twos, and I know their wee issues, I know their little quirks, and they know me, because they see me, so I feel that by the time they come up to me, it's not like starting with a blank slate, I already know, "Right, I need to speak to such-and-such this way, this person might need to sit closer to the back 'cause it's a bit quieter there," erm…

You'll maybe get [primary one boy's name] next year…

(Laughter) Aye! That's it! Erm, I had his sister [name] actually, last year, erm, er… we've all got our different emotional check-ins that we do, erm, we have our sort of brain breaks, which again, depends on the different classes, you've got… obviously further down the school there's a lot more of those sort of breaks for pupils, erm, if we recognise that pupils are finding things difficult, we're quite willing to adapt a practice, whether it be a tent up at the back if you've got luxury of room, or whether it might be letting them go for a wee walk, we're very good at a personal level… trying to find a strategy that works, and not giving up, and being willing to adapt our own practice to suit that pupil, because we know if we get things right to suit that pupil, that could have a huge impact on the rest of the class because it just settles the, settles the environment down.

And again, all of those things come back to the relationship and the understanding of the child…

Yep.

… because you can't do them, or certainly make them effective, unless you know that child.

That's it. And I mean, there'll probably be loads that I can't think of, likes of [first girl's name] today, for her, her… erm, PATHS, instead of picking pegs, it was letting [first girl's name] choose. So for her, it was that wee bit more personable.

Mm-hmm. I've *many* notes in my observation book of… little fudges that you've done to tailor it for individual children. Particularly, you know, things like your lining up… erm, you know, trying to get them to be statues, but you know, trying to make them laugh…

Ah-hah.

… one at a time. The overall effect of that is that those children leave the school at lunchtime, or whenever it is, in a… in a good mood.

Ah-hah. I was always a believer… I can't remember who told me, but it doesn't matter how rubbish a day you've had, if it's been really rumbly, you need to let the kids go home happy and just let them debrief from anything that's came before. Erm, yeah, and I'm glad that they were all picking up on their little puzzles [the classroom research activity] the… that they like that as well…

Mm-hmm.

… and they wanted more of it at the end of the day 'cause it just ends it on that *nice note*.

Erm, okay, brilliant. Only a few left. Right, well you've talked about so many, are there any other ways you can think of that, you know, that maybe I've not asked about or you've not already discussed, any other ways that the school supports mental health and wellbeing that come to mind?

Yeah, erm, I think we're really good at keeping up to date with our child's plans and ILPs and thinking of other services that we could get in to support us, because although we are face-to-face with these children, sometimes it might be something we've not got an expertise in, so as a school we're very good at working with SLT to look at what services are out there for pupils, we're very good at amending and adapting our CP, so it's not something that's done at the start of the year, and then that's it, it's reviewed at the end of the year, if things aren't working, we're very good at taking notes and adapting, we're good at involving the parents and children in it as well, so it is actually a *child's plan*…

Mm-hmm…

… because they've had a say and an input into it, erm… But, whilst we're doing all that, I think we're also very good at… eh, how do I word this, er, again, Friday brain… getting kids prepared for the reality that is life. I mean, when I think of [first boy's name], er, I keep thinking through the week that you must think I'm horrible to him, because like, "[First boy's name]! Shhh!" This, that, the other thing to him…. But for me, he's going to the [name of secondary school] and yes, he's got his own issues, he absolutely does, and we've got the soft approach for him, but… we need to prepare him for going to the [name of secondary school], for the sort of wider world, and it's… it's… it's speaking to him about, "Well, this is what you might encounter, these are the wee strategies we'll put in place, this is why we're

doing it," so that it's not just about correcting behaviour, it's sort of, opening up to maybe why we're trying to put those little strategies in place for him.

Okay. That's interesting.

Which I think is important as well because we are a lovely bubble here and I don't want that bubble to get burst when he goes to the [name of secondary school] and pupils that have been doing really well, whether it's academically or emotionally, it takes a downward slope because… I've not done my job of… preparing them for that, erm, so there's an element of, erm, making it that wee cosy bubble but also the, the kind of pushing the…

Yeah.

… I suppose the harsh reality of life, sort of inbuilt to that if that makes sense?

Yes, yes. It makes perfect sense, yeah. Okay, erm, er… what makes meeting the mental health and wellbeing of your pupils more challenging? What are the barriers to supporting them as much as you would want?

It's… for me, the barriers are when… you are trying your different strategies and you're finding it really difficult to find something that works… as I say, we're very good at adapting, but I'm thinking of likes of [second girl's name] and *knowing* that she's finding things difficult and we've got various bits and pieces in place… no one likes to see a child coming in who's visibly upset into a classroom, erm, and the challenge could be that it's… it can be, erm, ah, I don't want to use the word 'frustrating' in that we're frustrated at [second girl's name], but trying to find something that works, looking through the good practices out there, but then remembering that *all* children are unique, and as we've had this conversation before, what might work one day, might need to be changed to the other day, it's having that consistency as well, when, erm… other people are in the class, or other people are doing lessons that… those little things are kind of put in place 'cause it's… it's hard to explain what you do as a teacher when you've got a relationship, for children, then if I was ever off sick and somebody else was in…

(Laughs.) Yes.

… I'd be stressing out about, "Oh, have you done this? And have you done that?" Erm…

And just highlights how…

Yeah.

… how difficult it is for another person to fill your shoes.

Ah-hah. So it's… it's putting the right things in place, at the right time that make a difference for that child…

Mm-hmm…

… but it's also putting things in place that aren't just for the now, or aren't just to make life easier for them at primary school, it's thinking about strategies that we can give these pupils that will ultimately help them through the rest of their life.

Yeah.

So that it's not, erm, they've done well through primary school and they've coped and we've got this… these strategies in place and then, it sort of fizzles down…

Mm-hmm.

I'm going to find that a challenge this year, with transition for some of our p7s, they've got their enhanced transition, but because that school is huge, all the kind of softer things that we do which will be suggested to the guidance that's down there…

Yes…

… for manpower, might not be followed, and I'm thinking likes of [first girl's name], that will make a huge difference to that wee girl whether she gets that check-in every day, as I'm going to suggest to [first boy's name], that somebody speaks to him at the end of the day, and maybe finds what classes he's found difficult, so they can maybe say to his teacher, "Look he is going to call out a lot, that is [first boy's name], but try this, try not to get frustrated, try these wee things with him," erm…

I always thought… I always felt when I was in p7, you do all this transition work with the staff, you hand over all these notes, (laughs), but, with the best will in the world, it's difficult for them because you're… you're taking the sum of *your* experience and what's worked for you, and trying to disseminate it to twelve different teachers. *None* of them will have that same relationship with him, as you have, you know. It's going to be a bumpy ride for some of them.

I think so… I think so. But I'm hoping we've prepared them… *enough*, that… they'll maybe… not all the time, because I remember from PATHS, always, when we got our PATHS visitor in, used to get, "Well, we've taught them this, and they're not applying it," and she said, "But you're not getting them to apply it just now, you're getting them to apply it as an adult, you know, this is what you're preparing them for…"

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so I always remember that, clearly, but… likes of the kids that I do have a sort of concern for, likes of [first girl's name] going through life, likes of my… the ones that are really quiet, academically brilliant but could be a wallpaper child, you know, it's… it's… they're the.. thinking about the… 'cause I wouldn't say, likes of [eighth girl's name], has any sort of wellbeing concerns, that is just her personality that she's quiet, but… that could then become an issue when she goes to the [name of secondary school], if she's maybe got a wee issue, and things aren't put in place…

Like I say, you need to take them up into the hills and get them screaming and shouting!

That's it, do you know I might do that, I might do that!

(Laughter.)

That would be a good one. It would be the quietest shouting…

But, you know, just like you said, I can just see some of them just going… (makes a tiny murmuring noise.)

Ah-hah, ah-hah.

Okay, erm, last real question then is the flip of the one that I've just asked you: what would make your life easier? What would make meeting their needs more achievable? Again, the 'magic wand' question…

(Answers immediately.) It would be staff.

Staff?

It would be… not necessarily smaller classes, because I like the class size that we've got, and being able to build up that relationship, and I think kids *should* be having falling-outs with each other, 'cause it's a natural part of life…

Yes, absolutely…

… it's the dealing with that, I don't feel that it's class sizes that are smaller, but it's that extra pair of hands, because if [first girl's name]'s having a bad day, [fourth girl's name]'s come in upset, [second girl's name]'s come in, and is visibly crying, [third girl's name]'s having a wee tantrum because she's finding her work difficult, and I'm working with [second boy's name], it's the balancing the plates 'cause you know what you want to do for these children, it's… it's… it's staffing…

Okay.

It's more money being invested in that. In terms of programmes, there's all these great programmes that can come through, but there is nothing like that relationship that adults can have with the pupils…

Mmm.

… it's the key thing to making a difference 'cause you can give them all the sheets and all the information, but unless they're seeing it applied or modelled from the relationship that adults have got, that then becomes really hard for them to have in their head to then apply. For me, it's… a huge amount of staffing in school. If I had… two classroom assistants, and it wouldn't really be for any academic needs as such in here that I couldn't deal with on my own, but… the difference that that could make if pupils are finding a hard time, because although I feel I've got a good relationship with my class…

Sometimes you're stretched too thin.

Ah-hah, and not even just that, but likes of, erm, having another adult in, maybe I wouldn't be their first stop to come to if they've got an issue, although they know me, it could be something that they'd prefer to speak to somebody else about…

Oh I see, yes, ah-hah… I understand.

… and they don't really get that… option so much in the class, erm…

That's interesting. I hadn't thought of that. Er, you… I'm struck by how *immediately* you responded to that! (Laughs.) Erm, so… that's an easy one to interpret.

Yeah.

Is there anything other than staff that you would need? On the radar?

Erm, I think in terms of services that we access, the waiting lists are… beyond huge, and a child can get put on a waiting list, the parents kind of breathe a sigh of relief… but then they don't hear back for a year, they don't hear back for two years, and it gets to the point where a kid is at the end of primary school and still doesn't have any input from CAMHS… or, erm, CAMHS have come out, done their initial assessment, done a wee bit of input, but then that child needs to access CAMHS again, goes right back to the bottom of the waiting list…

Ohhhh…

… there's services out there, but we *cannot* get them in…

Okay.

… quick enough to help, help our pupils.

Well, that just leaves me to say you've been *incredibly* generous with your time… erm, today in this interview, but all week, so I'm beyond appreciative, thank you so much. Erm, is there anything that we've not covered about mental health and wellbeing, or, or just about anything that you would like to add?

Erm, not that I can think of off the top of my head but if I do think of things, next time I see you, when I'm hopefully a lot more fresh (laughter), erm, I'll bring it up.

You have given me an *incredibly* expansive interview, and I'm *very* grateful.

Good, that makes it better!

(Laughter.)

Okay, I'll stop this now then…

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW ONE: D.H.T. (MS AHMAD; 12/03/24).

Okay. Thank you very much for meeting me, and giving up your very valuable time. I do have your consent to record the interview?

Yep.

Thank you very much. Okay, we'll start with an easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Erm… I have worked here since 2006, so… eighteen years.

And always in this school?

And I've always been in this school.

Oh, I see!

I did probation, and never left! (Laughs.) Here we are!

Oh, that's fantastic! Your staff speak very highly of you.

Oh! That's positive! Thank you.

The ones I've spoken to.

Mmm.

Er, over the course of that career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them?

(Pause.) Yeah… (sighs.) I mean, when you think back, I think the whole job's changed, it's kind of thinking relating specifically to pupil behaviour… I think there was a significant

transition point… post-COVID probably, that was a… very turbulent time. But coming back, I did notice that children seemed to have less resilience and less accepting of boundaries, and… because they're out of routine and structure, the staff had to kind of be… were almost head-on against a lot of these children..

Mm-hmm.

… coming back from obviously home circumstances, during that COVID time, and definitely since then, there's been ripples in the water since children have returned to school. And now it's almost like trying to back-pedal a bit, and trying to get on top of the aftermath of COVID I feel, but also… like within this school, there's a lot of challenging behaviour, but then you've also had addition of [name of ASN unit], which has changed dynamics in this school as well, erm… being mindful it's not supposed to be a social emotional behavioural unit, a lot of the… issues with the [ASN unit] is dysregulation. And even across the mainstream now there, I would say there is an escalation in dysregulation…

Mm-hmm.

… with the children. Definitely.

Okay. Erm, that's quite a common… common themes that you've raised there, in terms of what I'm hearing from other interviewees. Erm, so the next question was going to be: what do you think might be causing some of these changes? I mean you've touched on a couple of things there.

I think a lot of socioeconomic factors though, isn't it?

Right, ah-hah.

Like, we… our school, our catchment's quite kind of varied. Half of it is SIMD one and two…

Mm-hmm.

… I mean, the other half, are kind of eight and nine.

Oh, I didn't know that.

So it's almost a kind of fifty-fifty split, almost… there's a few in the middle but most of it's… so I think it's forty-six per cent SIMD one and two, so we've got a high level of deprivation in our school.

That's a very interesting catchment.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

I don't think I've ever heard that before.

No, it's… we've got kind of this area here but the [name of area] ward is kind of eight and nine so it's a really… unique split, which can cause difficulty in itself… social factors, erm, but I do think… coming from an area of deprivation… and there's a lot of families who've got social work intervention, some that *don't* have it that perhaps should have…

Mmm.

… levels of attendance, children that are not in the routine and structure of a school day… speaking to parents you know there's not the routine and structure at home…

Mm-hmm.

You know, there's not the boundaries, and also trying to get that parental engagement. You can be met with resistance, but also you can get the parents that just… don't really know…

Mm-hmm.

… so I think a lot of really is… parenting, but it's how you're addressing that.. and not offending the people, and trying to keep parents on board with you, and being that *team* with the family, 'cause sometimes if that team approach is not there, then sometimes it can be very much you're trying to do the job of a lot of a lot of different…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, agencies, because obviously education's struggling with staffing, but I know working with other agencies, there's also a lack of staffing there to support these families… erm, 'cause unfortunately it is that… deprivation, the one and twos where you are seeing the most dysregulation from, so..

Mm-hmm. So, you've raised deprivation and parenting there…

Mm-hmm.

… do you see an association between deprivation and parenting issues?

Obviously there's exceptions to everything, and…

Mm-hmm, yes, of course...

… obviously you meet all walks of life and sometimes it's, erm… your more affluent families they're *time poor*, and they don't have the time for their children…

Mm-hmm.

… they do the extra things and they can be quite, "Oh we don't have time for doing that, we're doing this, we're doing that, but we've got money and…" they think they're not the issue, so I think there's also… when you're talking about your nurturing principles, it's not always the ones and twos, because the more affluent families, they are busy, they're

working long hours, they don't have the social interaction that the children had… there's a *lot more* going on online, particularly with our upper school children, and that's significantly impacting behaviour in school. It's significant issues *outside* of school, they're *exposed* to a lot more now I feel…

Mm-hmm.

… than what they were before. The language, what children are aware of, even our younger pupils, some things they're saying they're watching, it's just completely inappropriate…

Mm-hmm.

So you… you're battling a lot in school, with things that you can't actually control, once they're going home and what they're being exposed to. I think exposure to things is… really… *over*-exposure things and [inaudible] children in this school is really obvious, and trying to address that with parents can be tricky, 'cause they say they're not doing that… but it's trying to find… where are they, where are they being exposed to this from. And that's often a battle that's not easy to win. (Laughs.)

So you've mentioned lockdowns, deprivation, parenting, erm, the time-poor, I suppose this is, erm, attachment?

Yeah! Yeah.

Ah-hah, and social media.

Mm-hmm.

Okay. Erm, any other factors worth mentioning, or do you think that's… those are the main drivers?

I think as well there's a lot more… coming out about neurodiversity as well…

Mm-hmm.

… and addressing the needs of *those* children, and sometimes it's about how we're managing to support these children. Parents are very cross with health services, and also trying to get children access to these services as well, 'cause we can see children that… really struggle with anxiety, children that have got undiagnosed neurodiverse things…erm, also children that are coping with family circumstances where there is high levels of needs in the siblings, and these things come into play as well, we've got children with families who attend specialised schools, and that can be a problem with not sleeping, they're tired…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, and they're dealing with that at home, they can be young carers as well, I mean… there's actually just… it's a *massive* web of things.

Isn't it.

When you start to unpick it, oh, there's something else, there's something else…

(Laughs.) Yeah. Ah-hah. Which is…

But also parent's mental health can be an issue, as well. Like I know one just now that we're struggling to get to school, and it's the adult's mental health that's preventing the child from coming to school. So… the more you look, the more you'll find, I'm beginning to (laughs) realise.

There's a lot in that. That's true. Okay, thank you. Erm, so in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in your school?

(Pause.) Erm… I wonder if it's something we talk about more… now… so you see more, and the more you look the more you definitely find. When we started off doing the [name of authority counselling service] school counselling service, that was kind of about lockdown time-ish…

Mm-hmm.

… there wasn't really much uptake on that, there wasn't really many parents coming forward saying, "I think my child would benefit from this," or staff coming to say, "Oh, I'm really worried about this wee one," but… more recently, there's now a massive waiting list for the [name of authority counselling service], and that was always just something, if somebody came to you, there was a place, there was a counsellor that could come, whereas now it's, "No, you're on a waiting list," they kind of get triaged on that list now, so that's something we could offer but now even that's backing up, so you know there's definitely an issue here because we can't… get to all the children we need to get to. I know, speaking to the school nurse a lot, she works with some pupils, but even that she's overwhelmed with the numbers, we can do CAMHS, it's just… you're meeting a dead end there…

Mm-hmm..

… waiting lists are just… so, so long, but also the parents that are contacting us, saying, "We're seeing this at home," whereas sometimes in school, we're not seeing it, but a lot of pupils are masking in school, and then, I'm hearing about… I've got a list of children where parents are saying, "We don't know what to do at home, it's awful, it's this, it's that…"

because there's so much masking from their child in school, they're just going home and… exploding.

Mmm. They're always different….

And really *worried* parents. Think, thinking, "What is going on with my child just now?"

Now I'm interested that you started off that answer with, er, sort of increasing emotional literacy and awareness…

Mm-hmm.

Erm… but you ended up *apparently* describing an increase in prevalence? Do you think it's both? Or, is it just the former?

(Pause.) Oh, I don't know, that's hard isn't it? (Pause.)

It is hard! Yeah.

Ah-hah. Has it always been there but society's talking about it more now, though?

Ah-hah, that's really what I mean.

Is it okay to say it now, and ask for help, whereas before people hadn't really asked for help?

I think, undoubtedly it is, but... does that account for the apparent increase in prevalence…

Mmm.

… or is there an increase in prevalence too?

Mental health?

Yes, ah-hah.

(Pause.) I feel there's a lot more children struggling now than what there used to be. Personally.

Right, okay…

I just… through working with families… yeah.

Okay.

It is a bit of both.

It is difficult to unpick…

It's trying to unpick it, and thinking, and what is a factor there…

So, we've really sort of bled into the answer to this question, but I'll ask you anyway: have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career, and if so, how would you characterise them?

(Pause.) Yeah… thinking of classes recently, there's definitely been children with noticeable anxiety…

Okay.

… in school, and that can be for different reasons. One can be, like… this one I'm thinking of is definitely undiagnosed neurodiversity, they've really struggled with that.

Mm-hmm.

Other ones have been really horrific family circumstances, very, very anxious children. Erm… self-harm, in primary six and seven girls has been a factor recently as well, things that never used to come up, erm, to the extent it is where they're actually harming… children bringing things into school that are not okay, and hurting themselves but also going into the toilets and bringing other girls involved, er, there's been issues where the girls have been involved in that, but are saying, "I just feel pressured to do it because they're doing it, and it's a thing that they're doing," but then obviously their mental health has been affected by their peer group, and they've been influenced by what's round about them and what they're seeing. Erm… and it can be… this wee girl who's from a *really* turbulent background… has influenced a lot of children round about her, and there's a lot of *fear* there as well though, and worry… about what's going on around about them, which then makes their own anxiety… come out…

Mm-hmm.

… you can see some really withdrawn children as well, which worries me, ones that you maybe wouldn't notice…

Mm-hmm.

Or is it because we're now more aware of it, we're noticing… children you maybe wouldn't have noticed before, like your wallpaper ones that would just avoid… any sort of attachment with you, they would rather just stay hidden. I suppose, as a staff, we've had a lot of training about kind of trauma-informed practice, and attachment theories, are we more attuned to it now and we're noticing it more as well? So I suppose it's a lot of factors putting together I think.

Seems to me you're describing some quite serious symptoms of mental wellbeing there…

Oh, there's some children really worry me right now. Mmm.

And in terms of prevalence of issues, that seemed to increase as well?

Yeah, have to think… we hadn't really experienced that until… this past…

Mmm. Severity and prevalence.

Severity I would say is increasing.

Okay. Right. Thank you. (Sighs.) Okay. Do you have any views about whether these mental health and wellbeing issues you're describing affect certain groups of children disproportionately?

(Pause.) Erm… (pause.)

Are there certain types of children who often seem to be experiencing these issues, or is it just… across the board?

(Pause.) Erm, I'm trying to think, there are probably kind of certain groups. I know there's groups of children who are neurodiverse… one particularly… and I was on a course recently about Tourette's, 'cause we've got some children in the school with Tourette's, just to increase the knowledge of that, that often goes along with ASD, ADHD, but also they were saying like people with Tourette's have got a higher chance of having suicidal thoughts, and having low self-esteem… so definitely we've got a group of children who have these things that *do* suffer from mental health issues, and you can see they, they worry… the ones that don't want to come to school, because they're worried about coming to school, and it kind of almost spirals into other things and other things and the more… there's this other wee girl I'm thinking about, there's more coming out the woodwork the more you look at her, mum's in contact a lot and seeing things at home… so definitely I think a group of children who are neuro diverse… and other… things, and they struggle, they struggle with the routine of school and that can be a factor in their anxiety, they just struggle with a school day. And that can be a contributing factor, the [inaudible] school, erm, because of their needs and how their needs are met in a mainstream school can be tricky…

Okay.

Although we do put things in place. Then we do have a group of children who… have… they're on child protection before, they've got really… difficult circumstances at home… and they'll maybe show their anxiety, their mental health in different ways, it can be quite big behaviours you'll see…

Externalising.

Yeah. So... I think we've got groups we see it in different ways. You get ones where you *see* the big behaviours, about their attachment, their trauma they've got in their life, and it's trying to support them and regulate them. Often, you've got the ones that mask, mask,

mask, erm… then equally you've got other ones from… what would seem quite good homes, but is there pressures on them from other things that makes them worry. Like someone's a high-achieving gymnast at one point, who'd given all that up, is it other things that are contributing? Society pressures as well…

So… there is no, there is no particular…

You couldn't say it's just one, no.

But you do mention neurodiversity, erm, deprived or turbulent backgrounds…

Mm-hmm.

… and possibly…

Childhood trauma.

Trauma, yes, and pressure as well.

Yeah.

Home pressures. Okay. Thank you, well…

I would say as well, the peer group thing as well. The social bit as well, is influencing, particularly in our p7 children. As they're getting older, the external pressures of society, the social media issues and being out and about… things you see like that as well.

Girls? Boys?

Mmm. A lot of issues with p7 girls… at the moment.

Okay, now, the next section is shorter, you'll be glad to hear, is just about home circumstances.

Mm-hmm.

Now you've already raised, erm, parental pressure at home, also the issues associated with deprivation, turbulence.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so, drawing from data that you hold on SIMD status and free school meal entitlement, are you able to infer from these, or any other sources, information about socioeconomic status of individual families? How do you *know* about the socioeconomic status of a family?

Erm… so, obviously we've got our information on SEEMiS, you know, that kind of background information, erm… we tend to try and get families *in*, to try and kind of build that relationship, right from the start, we have regular meetings with the family, meetings with identified children, erm… obviously we work with other agencies as well, so we've got

that kind of network that kind of build around a family, and obviously if we're noticing things, worried about things, you would start to kind of build that…

Mmm.

… keep that kind of on their [inaudible: past notes?], you'd start to build that chronology of events that we're noticing, do we have to build in extra agents to work with them, erm… we've got a home link worker…

I was just going to say…

… who ties in with these… erm… we've actually got one who's been off, we've got one who's here three days, we're going to have another one here three days as well, and he's very good at literally going out to the houses, and phoning, engaging… I think families, sometimes because he's not a teacher, he can be a kind of 'way in', he's not…

Mmm.. that's interesting…

… that kind of authority figure! I know quite often if a phone call's got to be made, it's better *he* makes it, 'cause of that relationship he's got with them… erm, because sometimes they can be quite reluctant to engage, erm, and we know how quickly things can unfold if we don't have that good relationship.. so it's about all staff kind of working round the person. All staff are really good at noticing things, they'll come and say to us. Staff are quite good at… particularly infant staff, at catching parents…

At the school gate.

… families at the school gate. So it's about communication and trying to build that trust from the kind of get-go with the children starting school.

Do you find that more useful then, than.. data from SIMD, you know, the actual…

Yeah, it's.. you don't want to stigmatise everybody in SIMD one and two 'cause we've got lovely families in SIMD one and two and it's circumstantial where they are, you're trying not to tarnish everyone with that same brush, so… although, yeah it gives you a heads up it's not always…

It's a very broad brush.

Yeah.

Yeah. I understand. Okay, thank you. Erm, to what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community are employed in… are *employed* in what I would characterise as unstable jobs: gig economy, zero hours contracts…

Ah-hah.

… uncertain work? Taxi drivers, delivery drivers… paid on the completion of a specific job, or… who don't have the *certainty* of an income, is what I mean.

I don't know if I could give specifics of that. I don't know exactly. I know, from some families I work with I know, they don't work.

Mm-hmm.

And I know they… *can* some to school and they'd be available on the phone throughout the day. Erm, but I know, obviously because I do the ASN stuff, I can phone quite a lot of parents and they're *at* work and they'll say, "Oh, email me, I'm at work, I can't do it." I don't know if I could give rough numbers… Children will say things about their families and who works, who doesn't work, and this is what they do, but… I don't know. I know, I know there is a lot of parents in this catchment don't… are not employed?

Mm-hmm. What sort of, roughly what sort of proportion of parents do you think are long-term unemployed?

Phhhh. (Long pause.) I don't know. I don't know the answer to that one.

Okay. And the, the division that you see, that you seem to characterise there, is… is basically… employed or unemployed?

Mm-hmm.

Is that fair to say?

Yeah.

Yeah? Okay.

That's, all… I don't know, I don't know the specifics of it, I'm just doing the… like I know some had Christmas temp jobs, some families in that kind of situation, worked at Christmas, but I don't know… the whole… image of the school with that.

Okay, thank you. Do you see any associations between the socioeconomic *stability* of pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes? The child's mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Mm-hmm. Er, it's funny, 'cause I was talking to some pupils about… like, obviously, why we're asking you to be the best you can be, "I don't need to, my mum doesn't work." Erm, and you do see that cycle with some. Got one wee boy just now who's *very* difficult, whose dad has… he's a well-known character for the wrong reasons… and I think he just decided, "Well everybody expects me to just be like him, so… what's the point?" And then he very

much identifies himself with, this is who I'm going to be… and so you do see that cycle with some families, not *all*, but you do see...

That's very difficult to break that generational cycle…

It's trying to break it and to break that, erm… the children's mindset.

Mm-hmm.

But then you could be so much more, not the [inaudible], "What's the point, I don't need to that, nah, 'cause this is what my, my lifestyle's like, this is what…"

Mm-hmm.

"… my whole life's like. My mum does that, so, I don't need to do that." So it's trying to say, there's more to it, and trying to be that positive role model for these children and instil the best in them… that motivation. So that can be tricky, when, what they're living in, well… "That's just what I'm going to do."

In a way there, what you're describing is actually stability…

Mm-hmm.

… even if that stability is long-term unemployment and poverty. There's a sort of security in.. what has gone before.

"It's what I know."

Er, yeah, ah-hah, that's what I mean.

Change is scary.

[Interview interrupted by other staff members coming into room.]

Er…

Happy to pause this if you want to?

[Interviewee speaks to other staff briefly, recording paused.]

Not at all, well I've just resumed the recording, so…

Yep.

Just to remind you, I'd just asked you if you could see any associations between the socioeconomic stability of your pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes…

Ah-hah.

Can you see any relationships between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do… I mean obviously now I'm thinking of your… the constituency that have employed parents…

Mm-hmm.

Do you see any associations between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do and the children's mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

(Pause.) Emmm… I'm just trying to run through my, kind of children that…

Sure, of course, yeah… thinking of examples…

… I'm struggling with just now… There is a range.. Like, one I know, one I know is… mum works on and off, like we were talking about earlier…

Ah-hah…

… that's why I know about that… (sighs.) The other one, they don't have… kind of full-time jobs, I wouldn't say, these ones, kind of work part-time, I mean, I'm not so… the ones I know are not professional careers…

Mm-hmm.

… they are… probably lower-paid jobs, some of them, well we've got some that… the mum works part-time but the dad will work full-time…

Mm-hmm.

So, there is a kind of *mix*.

Mm-hmm.

One's a hairdresser that I'm thinking of, just now, she's actually stopped working just now because of the… issues with her child, so I do have some that… their children and circumstances have impacted their *ability* to work, so we've got it impacting the home as well…

That's interesting.

And that's a few families where mum's on reduced hours… or not working at all at the moment to support the child.

Do you see any that consciously seem the other way round? Where the parent's job is impacting on the child?

Ah-hah, because they're working so many hours, and they're… (pause.) Emm… (long pause.) I mean I know I have in the past, there's one wee girl who's mum and dad had *really* high-flying careers, and she was really struggling…

I see.

It was always like attachment…

Ah-hah…

… looking for that…

Yes, you've touched on that before…

Erm, so I have seen that… I've seen a mix, I would say just now, the ones that I'm dealing with a lot… the parents don't have full time… work.

Mm-hmm.

They might have… part-time work, or not at all.

Okay, thank you. Last section, then…

I just know that some of these parents have mental health concerns, as well.

Mm-hmm. Yeah, you mentioned that as well.

Yeah.

The last section then, is the school's response, erm… How does your school's curricular activities support pupil's mental health and wellbeing?

So, we're, erm, over the past few years, we've introduced PATHS, curriculum, so we're like a [level of prize-winning award] school, we've done it over a period of so many years, and that's changed out health and wellbeing curriculum…

Ah-hah.

… to erm, explicitly teaching emotions, and feelings, and as you move through school it's dealing with conflict and with peer pressure, so it's about explicit teaching of things. Erm, it's funny, like, you teach them, but then in the playground you deal with things, it's like, "Well, did we do our stop and calm down?" So it's actual on-the-go coaching modelling of what we're teaching in the class but again, not using it…

Mm-hmm.

It's… they *hear* it, but they don't always see it, so it's trying to, on-the-go, this is what we should do for PATHS, and for the wee ones it's 'doing turtle', for the bigger ones you've got stop and calm down, that kind of… system to it? So it's trying to embed it in everything we're doing.

And just as with spelling and maths, they don't all get it right the first time you teach it…

No. No. So it is… overlearning of it!

Yes, exactly.

Very much overlearning of the emotions, erm… in school as well, right what… we talked about use of wider agencies before, like, we communicate well with our partner agencies to try and support children, we think, "Oh, this is more than just a school level." Erm, at school we very much think about relationships, and staff have got really good relationships with

our children and would recognise when things are, maybe not staying on track, things are going a wee bit… off. Erm, like support staff as well, they're really important in that 'cause they're out in the playground where things kick off…

Yeah.

Erm, so it's about that communication between staff as well and linking in. Erm, we try to celebrate the children in school, and kind of boost their self-esteem, 'cause we know sometimes this is the only place it's happening. We try and make the environment a safe space for the children as well, all classrooms have a checklist to try and keep classrooms calm, and a nice environment for children. We try to make the whole school environment a nice place to be, and… nurturing and warm and… [inaudible.]

Okay, thank you. Erm, so, getting down… I mean, as you say, relationships… well, *I* think relationships are key…

They are key.

… absolutely. So, what sort of strategies do teachers in the school use at a *personal* or a class level that you see, that you think is effective?

Mm-hmm.

I mean, just the little things that staff do.

Erm, I think it's, er… how aware they are with the children? Like, the staff at the doors welcome the children in, they've got classroom assistants with toast at the doors welcoming them in…

[Background noise.]

Erm, I wonder if we should go next door? Pause just now…

[Recording paused and re-started.]

That's it.

So we were talking about the staff and relationships. So I think it's about… not just the relationship with the child, but I think it's about the child seeing the teacher's got a good relationship with the parents, and you see that in the infant playground more so than the upper, where they're out in the morning, they're greeting parents, welcoming children, "Can I just catch you about this? Can I…?" That welcoming, "Come and speak to me, I'm very much open," staff will phone and check-in with parents about certain things, they'll come and speak to me, sometimes I'll say, "Well it's probably better if you phone rather than me," 'cause I think sometimes it's like, "Why is the next level phoning me?" It could be that… kind

of assumed that it's something negative, but also they're on the front line with the children, and they know them best, erm, things like, we do our pupil of the day through our PATHS programme, so we're giving the children compliments and, erm, recognising nice things about them.

Mm-hmm.

Going along the corridor, it's about acknowledging your children, like I'm… I'm not teaching this year, but… I know a lot more children…

Mm-hmm.

… than what I did before, so it's that positive relationship with children, (mimics child's voice), "Hi [name of interviewee]!" They want to talk to us, it's about making time in what is a very full day… but, these are your people and that's… you've got to be there for them, so…"

I'm watching, erm, the class teacher that I'm in with at the moment, and there are things that she implements in the classroom that, I don't know whether they're whole-school or not, but the things like, erm… she had a name for it, some 'neuro start', with the calming music and the soft lights…

Yes. So, that's a whole-school thing, that's a, erm, neurosequential… NME…

That's it!

Neurosequential Model in Education, yeah, we've done a lot of work, we did book studies, it was 'The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog', and that was like attachment, and, er, childhood trauma, and so from that we generated like all the school was neutral in colour, some have got [inaudible, could refer to fairy lights seen in classrooms?] lights, the dimmer lighting in the classroom, erm, we have the soft start in the morning, we've got the sixty beats per minute music on, we regulate the tempo of music, staff know children should have a structured day, there's a routine no matter what class you're in, should have a morning starter, a visual timetable should be up, so it's that feeling of safety and security for children, they know it's predictable, 'boring is best' as they say…

(Laughs.)

… you *know* what's going to happen, you don't want to alarm them, they've got that fear and terror state, we want to keep them down and calm and in a ready to learn state… And so… we talked about having regulation breaks throughout our day to keep our children from getting stressed out and highly anxious, so… not just like, "Let's go out and do the daily

mile," it could be that our *teaching* is regulating, so our lesson would have children moving, and having active so it's not just sitting listening, and then becoming more anxious, it's about incorporating things in your day that keep your child in a safe and steady, ready-to-learn state. Erm, we do the check-ins as well, as part all staff do the daily check-ins with children. Some children I know, like a member of staff will check in more often, some staff I know welcome children at lunchtime, and do things with them at lunchtime, erm, we've got… erm, [inaudible] come and do after-school clubs with the children, they also do a lunchtime club with some p7s, who find lunchtime quite tricky, erm… trying to think what else we've got…

Goodness. That's a lot.

We've got a Barnardo's worker coming in just now for that wee one…

Just about to ask about outside agencies. See when you were teaching, I mean, it's difficult to answer this question, because what works for one child will not work for another…

Absolutely.

… and they are each individuals, but… was there something that you implemented yourself, or saw someone else implement that you thought, "That is… that's *really* made a difference."

Erm..

Because a lot of these things, you know, we have a huge range of things that we are… I don't want to sound cynical, because I'm not… but we're told… "Try this, try this, try this…"

Ah-hah. Ah-hah.

You know, a 'here and now board', or a visual timetable, or… and sometimes they'll work wonders, and sometimes you'll think, "Well, that was a box-ticking thing," you know…

Mm-hmm.

So, can you remember anything that you thought, "That's really effective…"?

So, I have had tricky classes, where there's been a *lot* going on…

(Laughs) I'm sure!

… and a lot of… individuals… erm, and I had a wee one last year who… who definitely [inaudible] and found a mainstream class *really* difficult, erm, so he had.. almost like a privacy board, he really struggled with… the classroom environment…

Physically isolate him from… like a sensory block?

Yeah. Ah-hah. Like a sensory block. We had that.

I see.

Erm, I was lucky last year, I had a kind of side room, and so we would just… he would… he needed, "This is what's happening now," *very, very* scripted, to the tee.

Hmm. Very literal.

Very visual, what was happening.

I see.

And he would have to have that time out from a class, and he had to have that dosage of the classroom, and then that sensory rest.

Yeah.

And that was the way to keep him regulated throughout the day, that he had sensory rest. In the class he had ear defender, his board, timetable, he would have… he was *very* into his laptop, and that's something that made him feel comfortable. So it was about… structuring his day to the 'Nth degree' to make sure he would feel safe, but also providing that sensory rest time, 'cause he just needed that, and if he… You could see him, [inaudible, trembling?], you're like, "Here's your time out card," and he would go and have that, and it's just about… the mainstream classroom *is* overwhelming, to a lot of these children, and there's a lot going on in it, erm… but I was so glad for that room because I had a few that I had the time to go, "I can see you're struggling right now, I wonder if you'd find it better to go and work next door just now," and there was a few that actually… hadn't really flagged up before, and you started to notice… Like what you're saying, you notice one thing, then you notice another, and that wee boy, really… this other boy really benefited from sensory rest because he was just completely overwhelmed and anxious, picking, and he just had to be… out the classroom. You think, *so* many needs, so we're trying to… we're trying to work with educational psychologists, we can just devise this environmental checklist and this structured day to try and support *all*, but then there's obviously the exceptions where you just need that little bit more, and… It's a *lot*, though, it is a lot.

(Laughs.) Isn't it?

Ah-hah!

Well, I'm sure you made a huge difference for that boy, so well done… Erm, okay, outside agencies. Can you describe any partnerships with outside agencies that help support pupil mental health and wellbeing?

So… erm, we've got a really good relationship with the educational psychology team, which have been good, she also works with child [inaudible] got caseloads, erm, we've also, some years we didn't have many caseloads so we more, had a kind of high… a whole-school level, and she would do training with staff, this year she's been doing training with classroom assistants to try and upskill them in dysregulation and how to regulate a pupil, and what's their behaviour telling us, we're not labelling the 'bad kids', that kind of work with the classroom assistants, coaching the modelling of coregulating pupils, erm… she's really good, if you're stuck with something you can phone and so we've got really good relationships where… although you've got your hours for educational psychology, I know if I phone [name of educational psychologist] she will answer and say, "What about doing this? What about doing that?" School nurse, school nurse is actually a parent at the school…

Really, okay.

… but she's great, [name of school nurse], again, I know I can phone her and say, "I'm wondering about this one, have you got any information on this one?" And she would be working really well with that one, erm… Again, part of my job, I put the referrals in, for social work, Children 1st, erm, Barnardo's, erm… [name of local authority community support group], we've worked…

You mentioned the Exchange…

Exchange, yeah, our home link team… gosh who else is there? I feel like I call them all the time! (Laughs.) I think it is about that relationship with your outside agencies and trying to make sure you're approachable and getting on with everybody so you can get the best for the children. 'Cause you really need this team, now, like, it's more than the school level, it seems like…

Mm-hmm.

Quite a lot of the day is… [indistinct: police?], got them in as well, yeah…

Okay, that's a lot, thank you. Erm, okay, last couple. What are the barriers… can you describe any barriers that make meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils more difficult?

People.

People?

We don't have enough people. (Laughs.)

Ahh… okay, staff, yeah.

Like, staff, and you just want to have… more people to help these children, like, to have more opportunities to work in small groups away from the mainstream classroom, to give that one-to-one time…

Mm-hmm.

Staff that are LIAMs trained, like, the anxiety management strategies, sometimes they're class-committed so you can't have as much of that going on as what you would really like to do, erm… trying to put intervention in place to try and support children, we've got our [name of ASN unit] which obviously has smaller class sizes, but even with that, you feel like there's just… not enough on the floor to keep everything… running in a smooth…

Not enough staff?

Yeah.

… on the floor. I see. Not enough hands on deck.

And obviously we're bound by… what we get given. We do use PEF money to get extra classroom assistants and things, which is good…

How much longer is PEF going to be there?

Mm-hmm. And this is it, like, a lot of our classroom assistants this year are not permanent, so you think, what's next year going to look like? If we've got less staff in. So that's kind of… it is a major barrier, you feel like, you want to do more but… time, and the constraints of what you can do in a day.

Okay. If you had, say, if you were gifted another three bodies, what would you do with them? Where would you put them?

Mmm. I think we'd think about the nurture type provision, and maybe… thinking about how we'd run it, it would probably be certain groups of children, to support…

Is the [name of ASN unit] not… fulfilling some sort of nurture role as well?

Yeah. Yeah, for the kids that are in it.

So you'd just expand that, really?

Yeah.

Ah-hah.

Yeah. I think as well… big classes are hard for these kids, and that's… that's out our hands really, given staffing, that does make it tricky…

Okay, well is.. we're moving into the next one really, the last one, if you had a magic wand, the other side of the coin, what are the things that would make your life *much* easier, to meet the needs of your pupil's mental health and wellbeing issues?

Mmm. So I think, sometimes you think, "Do I know enough?" Is it training for staff, or is it more availability of mental health nurses, availability of CAMHS, that… because we've got a few children with CAMHS, and only one has a regular meeting with a nurse, there's not that availability, so it's support from health agencies, where we need them.

Extra support from outside agencies?

Yeah.

The first thing you mentioned there was… I mean, am I right in… sometimes feel out of your depth, and not sure how to respond?

Yeah. I think with all.. all the train… obviously we've had training in certain things, but… you think, it's a lot for us to have to deal with on the floor… I think that's the feeling amongst a lot of staff, I think: "*Woah*… this is a *lot*…" Like, we're education, but now education is mostly social work, and we're trying to deal with mental health as well…

You were saying, crisis care…

Yeah, and I think staff… can feel that quite heavy 'cause they want the best for these children…

Yeah.

Absolutely. But they feel… "Are we enough?" or… "What else can we be doing?" And that can take… impact on us as well, and you think, "What else can we do to help these young people?"

Are there times where you feel you're not enough?

Yeah. I think sometimes, yeah. Which is rubbish.

Well, I think that's… very *honest* of you, but I think that's very common as well.

You *want* to be enough, and you want to do enough, but you think…

Okay. Thank you. Erm, is there anything else you would like to add, on… that we've not already touched on, something you feel is important to say, on these issues, or *anything* else?

Mmm. No. Very thought-provoking, though. Makes you think a lot more about it, and think, "How could we be better? What else could we do?" Makes you reflect. A lot. Makes you

worry. Ultimately. About these wee people that are in front of you. You just try to make their day as… day work as best you can.

That's why I'm here and I'm sure it drives a lot of what you do too.

Mmm. Yeah.

Okay, thank you very much for your time.

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW TWO: NURTURE TEACHER (MS STRAND; 13/03/24).

There we… go! Right. First of all, thank you for your time. I've seen how busy you are today. Erm, and I… you've just explained to me that you've got lots of other things going on so I'm really appreciative. I do have your consent to record the interview?

Yes.

Right, thank you. Okay. Easy one: if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Erm, I've worked in schools for about sixteen years.

Have you? Really, okay.

Mm-hmm.

That's about the same length of career that I had.

Yeah.

So, a good… a good dollop of experience!

Yes.

Okay. Over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so, how would you characterise them?

I would say yes. Over the years, quite a bit of change in behaviour. Erm, I think, though, what I've noticed *most* of all is an increase of us being aware of children with the likes of autism, ADHD, these additional support needs…

Mm-hmm.

… so I would say I feel like there's been a much larger increase in *that* within our schools? Erm, there's also… directly probably related to COVID, we've seen a lot more of dysregulation for children, not only just children with additional support needs, but children in the mainstream who, who normally wouldn't have.

Mm-hmm.

But there, certainly we're seeing other things mainly anxiety, and stress.

Mm-hmm.

They're the big two that are coming through quite a lot…

Okay.

… erm, from a variety of pupils.

Okay. So, the… I've forgotten the word that you used, when you describe this change that you've noticed over the course of your career, is this an increasing *number* of children, or an increase in severity of behaviours, or both?

I think definitely an increase in numbers *and* an increase in severity, yeah.

Ah-hah.

I would agree.

And the other thing that I meant to... sorry, I meant to include in that summary, erm, you talked about the increasing *awareness* of these… diagnosable conditions…

Yes.

… that you mentioned, erm, is that something that's separate from an increase in prevalence, or does that account for the increase in prevalence, in terms of how it seems?

Yeah, I think… these are questions that we think about quite a lot…

Aye.

… and we talk about quite a lot, as colleagues…

Yeah.

… and, erm, people working within education, and definitely there must… there's an awareness, there's a greater awareness of… these additional conditions and additional support needs, erm, there's a bit more of kind of people… picking out of the kind of types, but there's also, there's an unexplainable element there as well, because for me it just can't be, "Oh, we're just better at assessing," or "We're doing more early intervention…"

Ah-hah.

Or there's almost an unexplainable… and whether that's health-related or food-related, or… there definitely feels to me, just personally, like there's an additional element…

Okay…

… that's changed the dynamics of children and their behaviours, and… our kind of way of picking up on things, like autism and ADHD.

So, I'm just about to come to… what you think might be behind these, but basically what you seem to me to be describing there is: an increasing awareness, an increasing ability to diagnose and label…

Mm-hmm.

… but also… just an unexplained increase… in the deterioration of behaviours, wellbeing…

Yeah.

Is that a fair assessment?

That's a fair assessment.

Okay, erm, so as I said, what's behind these changes? Apart from the increasing awareness on the *professionals* side, what do you think is driving this deterioration in…

I think definitely we had a deterioration kind of *prior* to COVID…

Mmmm.

… it was already there, I feel, anyway. Erm, and then COVID kind of exacerbated it and made it more intense and that time spent… the children spent at home and… sometimes not the most ideal circumstances, have definitely made an increase in the behaviour in the children transitioning back into schools and that structure and routine and boundaries and everything being there when weren't used to it for so long, has been really hard for some children. Erm, but, like I think there's *something else* there, and I've looked at it quite a lot, about you know, food and diet…

Mmmm.

… and the gut health and things like that as well, and I feel that when we've got these conditions that we are diagnosing, like autism and ADHD and other things, I definitely think there is something else health-related there.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, potentially kind of food-related, diet-related, not getting outdoors as much, there's… there's a definite element of that. I also think, as well, just as I mentioned outdoors, I think there's been a real shift in society as well…

Mm-hmm.

… because when I was younger, it was… I was outdoors all the time, you could not get me in, I was running, I was jumping, I was climbing, you know, I wasn't… but nowadays, a lot of children are so stuck to devices…

Mm-hmm.

… and computer screens that they spend all their time in the house.

Mm-hmm.

And I feel as though there's almost a reluctance in adults to let their children out, and let them out their sight, so there feels to me like there's been some sort of fear of, "I don't want to let them out, I don't know what's going to happen, society's not great." Whereas, years ago perhaps when I was a child… not that they didn't care, but they just didn't think… the same way…

Mm-hmm.

It was just like, "Right! Out you go! Come back… whenever, and there's a poke of chips, and away you go!" And you know, you climbed trees and you had fun and you explored… and that's another side of it as well, another part of this jigsaw puzzle too.

It's interesting you describe it like that, because it's undeniable… there is no one cause, or we would have found it by now, there's a whole range, myriad things acting here, erm, so you mentioned: diet, and physical health, which is definitely associated with these things, so it seems to me, erm, changing society and erm, what's the word I'm looking for? That sort of… overprotectiveness of parents, because if… is that the why you've tried to describe it?

The fear of…

Yeah. There's not the same…. because there's not the same community spirit as there used to be, years ago.

Ah, okay. Ah-hah.

I feel like… (sighs.) Here's me getting really deep and philosophical, but… there seems to be a whole shift, that family's not the centre, and it's not all about family, and your family's the most important… it's… we… idolise material things.

Mmm.

And I feel there's a lot of that in it as well, and we're too busy with, "I need the phone, the latest phone," and "I'm on my phone," and I get instant access to everything in life, and then it's like, "I need to have the best T.V., and my kids need to wear the best clothes," and there's such a focus on that…

Mm-hmm.

… that I think just the core beliefs of family unit and the family values have sort of been lost a wee bit.

So materialism is undermining this?

Yeah.

Right, I see. That's very interesting. Thank you. Erm, so I started off asking you about *behaviour*, which.. obviously there's associations with mental wellbeing, but they are not quite the same things, so… in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils within this school?

(Pause. Sighs.) It's hard to quantify that and think about it as a percentage or a number, or what that looks like, I think there are real pockets of children struggling…

Mm-hmm.

… and we've got the different elements of that, you've got those children who introvert and become quite quiet and reserved and there are wallflower children who maybe really struggling and they don't always get noticed, and then you've got the children who are acting out, and the behaviours coming out as a form of communication, to try and let us know that something's going wrong.

Yep.

So, there's definite pockets… probably pocket in primary seven, and there's probably a pocket kind of five, six, certainly as they get to the upper school, I think that's when we kind of notice the biggest change and the biggest *dip*.

Okay.

When they become less ego-centrical and worried about their whole wee world and they start to become aware of the world around them, and they start to realise that there's differences between them and other people, erm, I think that's when it becomes quite apparent.

So, like a greater awareness and the comparisons that are drawn as a result of that?

Yeah.

Right. I see. That's interesting. Okay, thank you. Erm, so you've sort of touched on this already then: such mental health and wellbeing issues as you are aware of in the school, what forms do they take? How do you see them manifesting? I mean you describe these sort of internalising…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, symptoms, the wallflower as you put it, and the externalising…

Mm-hmm.

… but how would you describe the symptoms of these mental health and wellbeing issues?

I think we see children refusing to go into class, because they don't like when they walk in, all the other children look at them, and they're too anxious to go into class. We see children with quite blank expressions on their face, quite… like, expressionless. So there's no smiling, no matter how what you're talking to them about, and you're trying to be joking and things, they just have that kind of blank expression on their face. They might look pale, tired, they're some of the kind of physical things that we might see.

I see, ah-hah.

And children who are, kind of struggling with their mental health, erm, the externalisation, the kind of behaviours I suppose, you can get anything from children dealing with stress and anxiety, they could become angry, they could lash out, they could… run, they're in that fight or flight, that kind of lower brain… and they're kind of wanting to run or they're wanting to fight.

Mm-hmm.

And that doesn't matter whether it's kind of… not always *physical* fighting but almost… sometimes it's that *dialogue* they want to… fight with you, and that argument and that… you know… But I think sometimes it's the more introverted ones that's a wee bit more worrying 'cause it's harder to pull that out, erm…

I see. Ah-hah.

It's so easy, 'cause when you see the bigger behaviours, you can name it, and you can say, "I can see this, I think you're feeling…" And then that gives… kind of breaks down the barriers and allows them that space to say, "Yeah, that is what I'm feeling," or… and get to the bottom of it, but, erm, sometimes the kind of introverted child's really hard to kind of get into, erm… Especially if they're feeling, kind of, really low, low confidence, low self-esteem, low mood. You see a bit of that, especially just now, maybe in some of the girls. In p7.

I particularly… I mean, I recognise all of those things, you've described, obviously… erm, I'm particularly interested in this description of children that you described as '*blank*'.

Mm-hmm.

Can you tell me a little bit about what that's like, and… how to deal with them, and… what… 'cause that one I'm less used to.

Yeah. So, relationships is at the heart of everything we do, and we believe really strongly in relationships, so you have to build a relationship with the young people first and foremost. Erm, and we would do that, you know, through just being… some of our staff have done

DDP training, erm, and that involves, like being 'PACEful'. So that involves you and your attitude, and your ability: you are playful, you're accepting, you're curious and you're empathy.

Okay.

So that is the kind of structure of how we would then… interact with that young person.

I see, okay.

So you start by being playful: "Oh! I see you're having a tough day today, come on and we'll go and do this," or "Let's do this!" And it can… it doesn't mean that you're carrying on, or having a joke, 'cause that's not always appropriate…

It's just an entry?

It's the tone of voice you use…

I see, ah-hah…

… it's the way you might manage that, and… sometimes it's just a *lot* of that, and a lot of that over time, as that young person starts to get to know that you're a safe person, and that you… *do* care. And you need to show you care all the time, you need to be thinking about *adjusting*… The child struggling to go into the classroom, you need to adjust that for them, you need to say, "Right. I see you're struggling to come into the classroom right now, let's come down with me, come to the [ASN unit] perhaps and we'll sit down, we'll have a chat." You know, they'll come down, and they'll sit and they'll have a wee chat, sometimes they won't talk, sometimes they will, but it's just slowly, always picking away at that and pulling at that thread until they know…

Yeah.

… that they can trust you, and like…

Oh, that's a good analogy. I like that.

"I'm okay to talk to this person, this person isn't going to shout at me, this person isn't just going to give me a row, they're actually seeing me for me."

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so, that's how we kind of try and address some of that.

Okay.

And, I was just thinking of one child in particular, who I sat down with yesterday, and… and she smiled and chatted to me for the first time, and that's one of the children I was taking about: had the very blank, kind of emotionless… *face* a lot of the time, and was really

struggling and feeling really miserable about herself, and I was able to just kind of see that… other side, that more joyful side of her when she was in an environment that she felt a bit more safe and secure in and knew that people kind of understood her and, kind of saw her.

That… that *must* be rewarding.

It is, yeah.

You must feel like you've made some sort of small breakthrough.

Yeah, it definitely was good, it was nice to see.

Yeah. Yeah. I'm just going to… double check that… [checks recording device]. Yes. I have the fear that..

It stops recording! 'Cause you'll never get this again! (Laughs.)

I know! And particularly when your answers are so interesting. Erm, thank you. Ah, where have I got to? Right, so I'd originally asked you about… have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour over the course of your career… Have you noticed any changes in pupils' mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career?

Yeah. I think that… can sometimes go hand in hand?

Of course.

Erm, but not always… and I definitely think it feels as if it's more visible nowadays. Erm, but then… I don't know if that's partly to do with my *own* journey, and the job that I do, and… Am I spotting things more? Or am I more aware now, than possibly I was in my earlier career? Erm, but yeah, I think there's… there's a definite… there's so many factors to that as well, isn't there?

Of course, mm-hmm.

So I think that… families, and the family unit, like I said earlier… and people being on their phone, and detached… that attachment isn't there with a lot, because parents are so attached, and carers are so attached to their phones…

Mm-hmm.

… that I feel as if when the kids are, children are younger, that they've missed a lot of that attachment, a lot of that communication, that verbal, that emotional, that physical communication with their children, so I feel like *that's* impacted, attachment is *huge* in a lot of what we do, and we see a *lot* of symptoms behaviourally and health, like mental and emotional health…

Mm-hmm.

… difficulties because of that, and because of the lack of attachment and the attachment to kind of social devices and things like that. So I think there's been a definite increase in that.

Mm-hmm.

Because I've definitely seen an increase in people's *addictions* to their phones, basically. And that's what it is, there's a real addiction to these devices.

Certainly I've taught children who… attachment can be the only thing that I can account for, some of the way that they are, actually.

Mm-hmm.

And consequences can be… devastating.

Mm-hmm.

Okay, thank you. Do you have any views about whether mental health and wellbeing issues affect some children disproportionately? Some *groups* of children disproportionately? And if so, which ones?

(Pause. Sighs.) I don't think it discriminates anymore?

Mm-hmm.

I don't think that in our society *now,* that… I think previously, in years gone by, it might have been something that was more linked with your children in deprivation, or, you know, or children from traumatic backgrounds, or difficulties, but I notice… a real shift, or spread…

Mm-hmm.

… of it? From children who are coming from families who you would think, you know… you don't know what goes on behind closed doors, of course you don't but you would imagine that…. It doesn't really discriminate class or race now…

I see…

… I definitely don't think so, I think…

So do you think that in the past you might have been *more* likely to be dealing with children, er, experiencing mental wellbeing issues, who were from deprived backgrounds?

Yes.

And now you are encountering more and more children from, perhaps affluent backgrounds?

Yes.

Are there any associations between what *sorts* of wellbeing issues those pupils experience, and their backgrounds?

I think, again, I might have said this already but.. the stress, anxiety…

Mm-hmm.

… worry… I think that as a society and a generation, they are… people are more apt to *talk* about *everything* in front of their young people. Whereas when I… again, I'm going back to when I was younger! (Laughs.) Okay, so… nothing was spoken about in front of us, you wouldn't have spoken about mum and dad's finances, you wouldn't have heard them talk about that, you wouldn't have heard about their work struggles, or what's going on with dad's job, or you know, he might be made redundant, or whatever's going on, we would never had heard any of that.

Mm-hmm.

Because, again, that was always kept behind closed doors, but nowadays, people just speak so freely.

Do you have instances you can think of with children… I mean, this idea that you're describing that, erm, families are discussing openly these sorts of issues in front of children, and that's having a detrimental impact on the child?

Yes.

You do?

I do. So, within the [ASN unit] we have multiple children who come in to us and say, and tell us stuff that's going on at home. I had one child tell me in depth about his mum's… *troubles*, and the operation she was going for…

I see.

… to… to… you know, in-depth detail about that… operation, and what will happen to mum and what *could* happen to mum, you know, so that… that was all talked about, and there's other children who'll come in and tell you about their, kind of, things that are going on in their life, or… "We're poor," or "We've got no money," or you know, that these conversations come up quite a lot, when we're dealing with young people.

Goodness. Okay. Okay, well that leads me on to the next section about home circumstances. Quite nicely, actually. Erm, to what extent do you think that parents and carers within the school community are employed, as opposed to unemployed, erm, are employed in what I might characterise as unstable jobs? So, zero hours contracts, working in the gig economy, where they're paid on completion of a job, like taxi drivers, delivery drivers, people who

have got uncertain hours and pay, things like that. Is that something that you're aware of as being prevalent in the school?

I think within this school you're probably… a mixed bag…

Ah-hah. Okay.

… and it's probably about fifty-fifty?

Mm-hmm.

Because of the area we're in just now, you've got an area which is quite affluent and quite well-to-do, probably got quite secure jobs, and then you've got an area which is probably the opposite, there's a lot of unemployment, a lot of not wor… not working, or choosing not to work. Erm, a lot of, kind of like you're saying, those contracted, zero contracted jobs and things like that, so it's quite probably well-balanced in this…

Okay.

… school community.

So, I mean, are you alluding to the fact that the section that comes from the highest SIMD status, they're more likely to have secure, professional jobs?

Yes.

Yeah? Full-time, secure jobs?

Yes.

The other constituent group are a mixture of unemployed and less secure jobs?

Yes.

Is that fair?

Yes.

Okay, what sort of proportion of the… the families from the lower SIMD status would you say are long-term unemployed?

(Pause. Sighs.) That's hard to quantify, without actual physical data.

Ah-hah.

Erm, I would only be guessing at best..

Ah-hah.

… er, and it would be a rough guess. Erm, but perhaps… I'm thinking about where we are, and who we work with, and… probably about half.

Right. I'm interested in that answer… you know, I can understand that answer, obviously… do you get to see any data or are you judging your awareness and understanding of home circumstances more from just chatting to the pupils?

Probably just the children I know, and I work with most closely, that… I'm judging it on that… I do obviously get to see the SIMD details and things like that, but as to what the children... sorry, what the parents do, or carers do, as a profession, then no, we wouldn't really be privy to that.

Okay, right, thank you. Erm, right, last question in this section: can you see any relationship at all between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do, and the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of your pupils?

(Long pause.) Yes. I had to think about… took some time to think about that one there, because I… I'm again, back to thinking about… our children who are from the more affluent area, and.. who have parents who are work… both working full-time…

Mm-hmm.

… and almost can be unavailable?

I see.

For a good bit of their time, and the children that then struggle with mental health because they don't have those secure attachments. Or aren't getting what they need then, because their parents are always busy, or always working, erm… and then I'm thinking of the other aspect of the children, who… erm, don't have those parents available because… their devices, and choose to have that device in front of them.

I suppose the common link that you're describing there is that… is again, back to attachment.

Mm-hmm.

And, erm, spending time with your children?

Yeah, quality time.

Mmm. Okay. Thank you. Right, erm, school's response. Particularly interested in speaking to you about this, because I know that you are running the [name of ASN unit]… which… seems to me to be supporting, and maybe I've got this wrong, seems to *me* to be supporting pupils for a variety of reasons. Some perhaps almost purely behavioural, some more sort of nurture, like acting as a nurture group, supporting children with mental health and wellbeing needs, or perhaps who just need the social learning?

Yes. So you're absolutely right…

Is that correct?

Yes, that's absolutely right, so, erm... within the school… I came in the school as part of another team, erm, to support with some challenging behaviours, and when I first came into the school, you know we had a lot of externalisation of behaviours…

Mmm.

A lot of running, a lot of climbing, running away, jumping… and I came in to work with some students, erm, and once I was in here, I was like, "Why don't we develop something that's more… not reactive? But something more proactive?"

Yes. Ah-hah.

So that were putting in a proper intervention. So that's when I started, we started looking at the… what we can provide and where we can provide it and how we can make best use of that, with the limited resources we had at that time. Erm, and then… a job came up here and I went for the class teacher job at the time, and… I was in the school, and that… was what I wanted, 'cause I wanted to be in the school, I believed in inclusion within a school, I believed in having areas like this, like a [name of ASN unit] within a mainstream school, so you're connected, you're inclusive, but you're also targeting the needs of the child and they're at the centre, within this environment. So when we were doing that, it was very important not to have just all behavioural, because you would *never* make any changes if you just had behavioural children within that…

I see… That's interesting.

… that [ASN unit], you don't… you need positive role models, you need children from a variety of backgrounds, children with a variety of needs…

Just like in any class, I suppose.

Yeah, so some children came down to us because they had a literacy difficulty, some children came to us because they had a numeracy difficulty, it wasn't specifically for… you know, they didn't have any behavioural difficulties, so they would come down and we would create your classes around that… some children were displaying tendencies of, kind of… not undiagnosed, but autism and social communication difficulties and ADHD and trauma and attachment…

Mmm…

… *all* of that, so there was a real, like you were describing there, we have a real mixed bag of children we support and we support about forty children in the school at this point in time.

Okay.

Erm, so… yeah…

And many, or most of them are in your unit full-time, and some are joining classes for particular times or subjects, is that correct?

Yeah. Yes, so I think what part of our kind of vision was that we would work with children, help them through their most difficult times, build resilience there, build coping skills, co-regulate with them, erm, give them those opportunities to really build their self-esteem and confidence around their learning, or who they are, or what life's like for them, and then they would be able to go back slowly to mainstream…

Yeah.

…. And some children, that's just not an option for, and it never will be, and their destination and their educational path will be completely different, and that's fine. And some children will be able to go back for pockets of time to mainstream, some will be able to go back full-time to mainstream, it's just… but it's got to be done at the right time for them.

Yeah.

And we've got to be very careful on that 'cause there have been instances where people have wanted it to happen really quickly, and it's broke down…

I see.

And like, you have to really know the children, and you have to really have a relationship with them, and you really have to understand them before you start putting those plans in place. To make that work.

Relationships are key.

Yeah.

Okay. Thank you. Erm, so what sorts of activities, or like planned curricular activities or lessons are taught within the school or the unit that support pupil's mental health and wellbeing?

So, erm, we've got our PATHS programme first and foremost. So that is part of our health and wellbeing programme, to understand our feelings and emotions and get coping

strategies and things that can help us through that, erm, so that's taught as well. We also have been on an NME journey, the neurosequential model of education…

This was new to me…

Yeah.

… but I've been watching it in [teacher's name]'s class. Very interesting.

Yeah, so it's really really good, that's how we've structured all our classrooms, how they're all kind of green, and we've got the fairy lights, and the lamps on…

Mmm.

… making the environment right for the child as well, so that they feel safe and secure…

It does feel calmer!

I know, calmer, yep. So we ensured *that* was happening, we have regular kind of check-ins, and a kind of group check-ins, one-to-one check-ins about their feelings, how they're feeling across the day, erm… we are really structured on our transitions, so that children know when their transitions are coming up… Erm, we have developed within the [ASN unit], erm, a real visual communication style… to teaching and learning…

Mm-hmm..

Erm, so the kind of flipcharts that are up on the boards that come up have the visual icons…

Mm-hmm…

… linked to say maths and numeracy, then the children's individual ILP targets will have that same symbol and then if they're doing work they'll see those same symbols around so they'll be able to know…

Okay…

… that they're doing that part…

What's an IOP target?

Er… an individual learning plan.

Oh! I*L*P! Right! I see, sorry!

(Laughter.)

So, just basically we did a big bit of work on them, and making them pupil-friendly…

Okay.

Erm, so they have little keyrings with all their targets on…

Ohhh…

… they take them off, and they use them while they're doing their lesson.

Mm-hmm.

So they can say, “I’m working on that target right now, as I’m doing this lesson.”

Okay.

So we’ve got that, we’ve got a lot of sensory activities and experiences as well, we offer multiple regulation breaks, when children are dysregulated, or they’re feeling full up or overwhelmed, they get to go, and they can go out on the scooters, or they can go to the garden, or they can go a walk or whatever. As [inaudible] sometimes it’s football to the gym hall, if it’s free, and things like that as well, so a lot of regulation and co-regulation there as well…

Okay.

Erm, just again, also adapting your teaching and learning to have that PACEful nurturing approach, so just being playful, and accepting of the behaviour and the feelings, and being curious and empathic as well, so that is all part of what they kind of do as well, erm, when they’re doing teaching and learning.

Okay. Great. Thank you. Erm, this one’s a wee bit harder to describe I suppose, erm, because aside from the curricular planned activities, the lessons… I’m also interested in just the little personal strategies that you see, that maybe you employ, or you see other colleagues employing, just the little things that teachers do that you think, “That’s going to make a difference to someone,” again, to mental health and wellbeing.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, what sorts of things, strategies, tricks, do you see colleagues using at an individual or a class level that you think, “Mmm… that’s good..”?

Yeah. (Pause.) I think I’ve always believed this: it’s in you. Like, when you’re working with children with additional support needs, or children with trauma, backgrounds, there’s just something in you that *gets it*… and I think patience is huge.

(Laughs.) Yeah…

Because… (laughs) some days are really *hard* and really *long*, and no matter how that child’s trying to break you down ‘cause they don’t trust that you’re going to stay, ‘cause dad didn’t stay, or mum didn’t stay, so they’re trying to break you down to see if *you’ll* stay, erm, so having that patience and that resilience are two wee tips I think, even though you’re dying inside and you want to roar inside perhaps, it’s about having that kind of… perseverance and, erm… keeping cool and calm in every situation, breathing through it, going to the toilet

later and having a scream if you want, but… (laughs)… in front of the children, erm, it's making sure that… Getting down to their level, as well, is another one, erm, within reason, children you obviously trust because it can be in a situation if they're dysregulated…

Oh you mean.. *physically* getting down…

Physically getting down to their level, yeah..

Yeah, it's a problem for me!

Sometimes if you get down to their level and it's not the right time, you really need to know your children, you can get a wee bop on the nose, erm, so… you need to make sure that that's the right time… again, as I said earlier, that PACEful approach. Erm, honesty as well, like, seeing through… even if it's a hard thing, or, that you're having to do, like I always believe in being firm, fair and consistent. They've always been my three words that I always repeat to any teacher, whether they're in ASN or they're in mainstream or whatever it is, erm, because you stay firm, you stay fair and consistent, they trust you, and trust… is… *huge*.

I was going to say that. Trust is everything. That's how you build it.

Whether you put a sanction in place, or an actual consequence to something, or whether you're telling them you're going to… cook tomorrow, or we're going to go on a regulation beak tomorrow, or whatever it may be, you have to stick to your word and you have to be… true to your word and follow things through.

Mmm. And even more so for the children you work with I'm sure.

Yes. Yes.

Okay, thank you. Erm… (sighs.) Where are we? Erm, almost done. Are there any other ways you can think of that the school supports mental health and wellbeing of its pupils?

Yes, so, I suppose thinking of things like… mental health and awareness, they have mental health and awareness weeks, where there's a real focus on that type of thing, and we're talking about it. I'm a great believer in talking about things like that, you know, and… explaining things, and explaining that not only the children feel that way, like, make connections…

Mm-hmm.

We feel that way sometimes too, you know, we get like that, but also it doesn't last forever they pass, those feelings, so those types of things, the assemblies, they're always… thigs like that are addressed at assemblies and talked about at assemblies. I'm also LIAMs trained, so

it's 'Let's Introduce Anxiety management.' So it's… it's offering that kind of… erm, one-to-one or group work with, er, talking about anxiety and coping strategies, and it was delivered by the NHS, erm, for people in schools to be able to deliver that…

Okay.

… to children, erm, and help their self-esteem there. We do Seasons for Growth as well, erm, that helps with change and loss, and change and loss can be anything from… divorce, or death, or any of that. There's a whole… arrangement of different ways that change or loss can affect children's lives. Erm, as a [name of ASN unit], we're very open, it's not like we have children coming in, but we are also open to helping and supporting other young people in the school who're maybe be going through a period of time that's really challenging and really difficult, so you know we'll help and support maybe or use some of our expertise to help and support the young people through that as well. Erm… (pause.) I'm trying to think of any more, kind of…

Oh, it's a lot!

(Laughter) … concrete things as well!

No, that's good, thank you…

Restorative conversations I suppose, is another one, erm, and I'm a great believer in… them being very effective. Not everyone believes the same, but, you know, I've used them in mainstream classes where, you know, children have then had the dialogue and have been able to go away and have their *own* conversations with the young people, so you're having the person that was… maybe someone was hit, and someone did the hitting, so they're able to sit down and have conversations about what happened and what went wrong… I always remember one time I spoke to… I had two, a boy and a girl, and the boy kept calling the girl names, all the time, and he used to just have wee sly digs at her and stuff like that, and I says, "Right, we're going to have a restorative conversation." And we sat down and the girl explained how that made her feel, and the boy turned round and went, "I never ever knew that."

Mmm.

He says, "I didn't get that at all," he says, "I was just having a banter, I was just having a laugh. It was just a joke to me." So… and then she was like, "Well, no…" And she understood his point, he understood her point, and it was just like a revelation for them both and their

relationship was much better after that. So, yeah… restorative conversations and being a restorative school's really important as well. For… as part of that… support.

Okay. Thank you. Yeah, I'd agree too. Erm… er… okay, last couple. What things make meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils more challenging? What are the barriers to helping everyone as much as you would like?

(Pause.) Ahhh… I'm going to have to say parental and carer barriers, I think that is a big one, erm…

How does that work?

When they're not on the same page as you…

I see. Right, okay.

So we've had situations before where they've maybe not agreed with what we're seeing…

Ah, right…

… or how a child's presenting, and they're like, "No, don't agree with that, that's not how it is, it's fine at home," or whatever. And sometimes they don't tell us all the truth of what is actually happening at home, so it makes our job really hard, if people at home are saying, "No! Everything's fine! No, he's going to bed at seven o'clock and he's getting up and he's having a full breakfast." When actually the child isn't going to bed until four in the morning and isn't having anything to eat, and they're coming into school grumpy and annoyed, and… So, that type of thing, that… not telling us the truth and…

Do you think for some parents you're just another authority?

Yeah.

That is therefore a threat?

Absolutely. And there's always that… a great believer in the fact that *they've* had really traumatic experiences of school, or really tough experiences of school, so then they just believe that and have that… that stuck mindset of, that fixed mindset of, "Nah, school's just telling us what to do and stuff."

Ah-hah.

You know, that's really hard. Erm… you've probably heard these answers a million times: money, resources, erm, not having the right resources, not having the right access to resources… training as well, not having accessibility to training, and being able to… you know, send your staff, or get your staff to go out and get more training and more, erm, knowledge and awareness on certain aspects… can be hard too.

When you say resources, I mean you mentioned money, erm, is money the resource you're referring to or are there other resources?

No, I think that… like, person resources are really hard, I think them cutting…

Staff.

Classroom assistants and…

I see, yeah.

Yeah, staffing, so, erm, not having as many classroom assistants maybe as there once was, as well… I think classroom assistants' role's changed as well, erm, it's not stapling and putting things up on the wall so much anymore! (Laughs.) They're dealing with a lot, so maybe more training for *them* as well, more… support and ability for them to have *time*… 'cause maybe it's nine to three, is their contract, and I've always said like it really should be half eight to half four or something, and be paid for that obviously, but…

I was going to say, the pay's..

There's… there's… they need to be also reading… ILPs, or knowing targets, or staying on for a staff meeting that we're having that we're talking about strategies and interventions and things, because they're so important and quite pivotal…

Mmm. They're on the front line.

And society… like nowadays, they're on the forefront a lot of the time, dealing with, and I'm not specifically talking about our [ASN unit], I'm talking about a mainstream environment now, and they're the ones running to, or going to support, the challenging behaviour…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, within the mainstream, so that can be really hard too.

Or sometimes the ones that… the anxious ones are confiding in.

Yeah.

You know, first port of call. So the other side of that question is: if you had the magic wand, erm, in order to meet all of the mental health and wellbeing needs that you face, er, what would make life easier?

Ah… for us, and I'm just thinking about I suppose in our bubble at the moment, erm, I think… proper outdoor areas… like really well thought-out and well planned…

Okay…

… areas that are outdoors that are sensory that the children can get outdoors more.

Mmm.

I have noticed… hugely more so last year, the impact of having… we had a… er, outdoors lady who came in, and she took our classes out for outdoors, and the difference in what those children were able to achieve in the outdoors…

Mmm.

… rather than being in a classroom, so we have children who have got all these kind of difficulties, like running out of class, "I don't want to do my maths! I don't want to write! I don't want to do that!" But will go out to a garden and they'll, you know, write things and look for bugs and write up what they see and hear and feel and things like that, so… the outdoors, I… like, I believe hugely for mental health, being outdoors is…

Okay…

… huge, so having those outdoor areas, having outdoor areas that are maybe undercover a bit as well, so you can get out…

I was going to say, on a day like today…

… in all weather, so that even if they wanted to go out and play football there was an undercover area that they could do that if they wanted to go out on their scooters, you know… but I'm very much… it was raining today and I still sent the children out, I said, "We'll give them the option."

Did you? Good.

I said, "Go outside. You can go outside if you want, if not you can stay in the class… in one of the classrooms, supervised." So some children still chose to go out, put their jackets on and were happy to be outdoors, erm, and some children chose to stay in, and just giving that pupil choice there as well. Erm, more, erm, for us because there's only one P.E. hall in this school, it's hard, 'cause our children specifically need a lot of P.E. and physical activity, so… that's used quite a lot by the mainstream so we don't always get a chance to be out there and there are some times we could be doing P.E. every single day of the week, erm, for our children…

I see, ah-hah.

… 'cause on one side of things, the fine and gross motor skills still need developed and then on the other side of things we've just got children who need to climb and run and jump… erm, because they have got that need to do it…

Mm-hmm.

… because of a variety of reasons. Erm, so another area like that, erm… I think a school counselling team almost as well, within the school. I'm a bit of a believer in we're needing to move towards that and having a dedicated person or couple of people who offer a real concrete provision of… counselling and… like… just…

I think that'd be an excellent idea.

… regulation… yeah. Just… what that'll look like I don't know, but… yeah, I do think that that needs to be an element to schools now moving forward as well.

The external agencies that provide that sort of thing can't cope.

Yeah, I know.

And the other advantage is that your counsellors will know the kids, know the contexts, you know…

Yeah, I think as well, funds is another thing. To be able to buy in people that are maybe… specialists or… when I'm thinking about just offering that alternative curriculum I… I'm going to say it: I think our curriculum's dated. Erm… I think it needs to change, and change… quite a bit.

Mmmm.

Erm… for the children that are in society now. Erm, you know, you've got children with, like PDA and ADHD and things who just cannot be in a school building 'cause it's just really difficult and really challenging, so I think there needs to be a bit of a overhaul on that as well.

It's just… remarkable to me because we both started at a time when a Curriculum for Excellence had just been introduced…

Yeah.

… and it just seemed like this new dazzling thing, you know, and all of my colleagues were moaning about not having National Testing and what have you, and here we are, twenty years later and it… isn't fit for purpose.

No.

In some regards.

Yeah.

Because… I suppose because of the rate of change in society, really.

Yes.

Mmm.

It has.

Very interesting. Thank you *so* much. Is there anything else you'd like to add, erm, that we've not discussed, on this subject or anything else?

(Pause.) No, I think we've covered quite a lot!

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think we have.

Yeah. I feel like I've just been like… (laughs) all my internalisation of all my feelings regarding the education system and additional support needs and children that are dealing with, kind of mental health issues and emotional issues… I feel as if I've just went, "Here's all the reasons *I think*…!" (Laughs.)

Perfect! That's what I was hoping for!

Erm, so… yeah. Think you've got everything…

Okay. Well, I'll turn the recording off.

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW THREE: CLASS TEACHER 1 (MS HOLLOWAY; 14/03/24).

Okay. Right, thank you, once again, huge thanks for *so* unexpectedly having me in your class for a week.

(Laughs.) It's a pleasure.

It's always a privilege to see under the bonnet of a school, but, erm… I… don't know how much choice you were given…

No, do you know what, like.. it's all a learning opportunity, and it's been great to have you, you can see from… the kids have loved having you in the class.

Well I've loved being here.

Erm..

I forgot to ask you: I do have your consent to record this?

Absolutely, you do.

Okay. Thank you. Okay, erm, your time's valuable, so I'll press on. Erm, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Erm, two years. Well, a year and a half, I suppose it'll be, so last year was my probation year and this is my NQT year.

But as we discussed it's almost like a second probation because you're in a very different stage this year.

Yes! (Laughs.) So, last year it was in primary two, for my probation year, which was wonderful, erm, and then moving to primary six. Also wonderful but a different, er…

Kind of wonderful.

Yeah, er, different kind of learning curve as well.

Mm-hmm. Very different. Different jobs, I think.

Ah-hah. A lot of the time. And I mean, there's been… a large part of it is transferable and being in the same school as well has helped, because you kind of know the routine of the school…

Mmm. Yeah, that's true.

And you know the staff, so there's a bit of comfort in that, but, erm, jumping from first to second… at times third level, has been, er…

Of course, yeah… ah-hah.

Has been, has been challenging.

How's your Pythagorus?

(Laughter.) Sketchy!

Okay, over the course of this career then, erm, I appreciate it's difficult to say, only being in your second year, but have you noticed… Well, I could ask you, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so how would you characterise them? But also, I'd maybe invite you to… you know, if you think that maybe your peers, who have longer terms of service, might say that *they* have noticed a change in behaviour, what do you think the general consensus is?

I would say that there *has* been a change in behaviour, not necessarily for the better…

Right.

Erm… that children are at times a bit more dysregulated, erm, in the classroom, than they would have perhaps been previously, erm…

Are you basing that on your own experiences or a mixture of that and your peers'?

A mixture, so.. a mixture. So I see a lot of, and have seen a lot of dysregulated behaviour from primary two and in primary six, coupled with, erm, discussing with my colleagues that behaviour, that they've seen as well.

Okay, right, thank you. Erm, what do you think might be causing these changes?

(Pause.) Oh goodness. Erm, I don't think there can be just one reason…

No.

I think there's going to be a lot, erm… taking into account the area that the school is in, I imagine has an impact as well, so.. the school's demographic is made up of children who are in like SIMD one and two, and then.. there's actually a SIMD ten student... (laughs.) There's a mixture of eight and nine as well, so there's quite a melting pot of, like, cultures and family values and backgrounds that come in to the school, erm, which can impact… the experience that the child's had before they even get to school.

Definitely.

Erm, you know, so I'm talking to children who, erm, haven't slept in a bed at night, who haven't had, erm, breakfast, who are hungry, who are unclean… erm, so it's difficult to expect them to be focused and attentive during lessons, when they're feeling like that themselves, when they're feeling a bit uncomfortable.

Obviously. Undoubtedly. Erm, okay. Thank you. Erm, do you see any connection with the lockdowns?

(Pause.) Erm… from my own experience… I can't really comment 'cause I've only… I've only taught in schools post-lockdown.

Mm-hmm. Anecdotally? From your colleagues?

From my colleagues, they have noticed part of a change, in terms of, like, their social skills.

Mm-hmm.

And I've commented myself on, like sometimes the lack of social skills or basic sharing, taking turns, erm… generally how they win or lose at games, we've got a couple of children who…

Yes, you've talked about that…

… in the class who are either super-competitive, which is a great thing, but not so great when there's tantrums if they don't get their own way at the end of the game. Erm, and when speaking with my colleagues, they've at times attributed that to a lack of, erm, interaction with children of their own age through lockdown.

Okay, erm, in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school?

(Pause.) Erm, I think it really, really varies from child to child and also from moment to moment!

(Laughter.)

Yeah.

D'you know, I'm thinking of a pupil in my class who… at times can be really dysregulated, erm, at the start of the year would run out of the class, could be quite, erm, confrontational, could be disruptive, throwing things, erm, just generally dysregulated. And now.. I don't know that his mental health has necessarily improved 'cause he still has times where he feels uncomfortable in class..

Mm-hmm.

… but our relationship has improved to a point where his behaviour doesn't *show* like that, so, you know, we've developed ways of communicating with each other, like a tap on the head, or talking through a puppet, or, like…

And I was going to ask you *in detail* about all those methods later!

(Laughs.) Erm, so, you know I think… his mental health has… it has it's peaks and troughs but the behaviour associated with the mental health has improved.

Sure. Testament to you that until you mentioned the tap on the head, it wasn't entirely clear to me which pupil you were talking about. So… that's enormous progress.

Thank you.

Erm… so, maybe within your class then, or within the wider school, such metal health and wellbeing issues that you do experience, can you describe how they manifest? What sort of forms do they take?

Oh, erm, in quite a few ways, so unfortunately my class has suffered… out of the twenty four pupils, we've had five bereavements in the past six months…

Mmm. You mentioned…

… erm, so students… I've either seen in the class, erm, the behaviour really escalates, to a point where they're pacing and they're trying to hurt themselves, or maybe punching or scratching themselves in class, erm, and having to… erm, trying to run away, trying to leave… threats of hurting themselves, erm… so it can either go to that extreme…

Mm-hmm.

… or, I see children sort of retreat into themselves, where, erm, they struggle to engage in conversation, they struggle to engage in things they previously would have enjoyed.

Mm-hmm.

Some students… have been remarkably resilient, to the change that's gone on in their lives, erm, I'm thinking of a student who had quite a turbulent home life anyway…

Mm-hmm.

… and grandparents were a real sense of stability.

Okay.

So when the grandfather passed away… unless you knew the child, you wouldn't have known that there was anything going on, there was quite a lot of masking of that behaviour. When you delved into it, when you had a conversation with her, she was able to give more detail and really articulate how she was feeling, but… there was a bit of a front put on, and I see that more in the girls in the class. So the girls in the class who have suffered bereavement, I don't think you would be able to pick them out.

Mm-hmm.

The boys in the class… you potentially would be able to.

Do you think that masking that you talk about, is that simply that they are strong and resilient, or are they bottling things up in a way that might, might be detrimental to them?

I would agree with the latter.

Right. Ah-hah.

And trying to find a strategy to support them through that…

And to let it out.

Yep. Is, erm, quite a challenge..

That's interesting. So you've got, basically, you've got internalising *and* externalising behaviours going on: distress, self-harm, but also… the internalising, that *suppression* that you described… Difficult to see how that manifests then?

It.. it *can* be… it can just be a sort of… for want of a better word, *vacancy*… at times, like, so, you know, I'll be talking and I can see that they are listening, they're listening but not *hearing,* if you know what I mean? They're not able to take in what I'm saying, so…

Okay. That's an interesting way of describing it. Vacancy. Right. I think I understand what you mean, sorry, I interrupted you…

No, no, not at all! Er, so you can kind of see that and you can see aspects of it, so there's a student who has a… a charm bracelet and they've got a little charm…

Mm-hmm.

… for… to represent their grandmother, and you can see them just, like… holding it, so I don't think unless you… *knew* the child…

Of course.

… you would notice that, but, like, knowing them… probably like… more aware of their little sides.

Okay. Poor girl.

I know. From that aspect, there's a sort of… bereavement, mental health, but then we've also got the social mental health, so there's children who really struggle to make friends, erm, and struggle to make connections and therefore feel really lonely, erm, in class. So you… I find that with *this* student (pointing to empty desk)…

It's fine to mention names for the purpose of the tape, 'cause when I transcribe the interviews, the names will just be blanked out.

Okay.

So.

So, [first girl's name], erm, really is… a really naturally quiet student…

She seems so, yeah.

Erm, she's really, really shy, erm, and she really struggles to make friends, erm, has done throughout school, so I really try and have her sitting with people who I think will try and bring her out…

Mmm.

… a bit more and include her, but… you know, there's that kind of anxiety within her, she'll come and say, "Oh I'm feeling really anxious because nobody wants to play with me at break time, and I'm feeling really lonely," and, you know, it's trying to support her to feel confident enough to ask, trying to encourage the other students to be kind, to recognise these things *in* other people, erm, to help… So, there's the *big* mental health issues, of bereavement, or children who are, erm, looked after, who are having to deal with child protection services, erm, there's the big [inaudible] but then there's still the smaller mental health battles that they're having to deal with.

Now you're, you're into… causal factors, like the things *behind* them there, and as you said at the start, it's *so* myriad and erm, there's just so many that it's very difficult to define at times, but, yeah... I can see that there are all sorts impacting your class. But at least she feels able to come and talk to you.

Yeah, d'you know, it's taken a while to get to the point where she would really open up and articulate exactly how she's feeling, but…

But you got there.

I'm glad we got there! (Laughs.)

Erm, okay, so, have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing, I mean I've previously asked you about behaviour, have you noticed any changes in mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career? And again, anecdotally from your colleagues if you want…

Erm… (pause.) I think children are more aware of what mental health *is* and being able to talk about how they're feeling, so, erm, definitely in this school as opposed to schools I was in for, like, my placements, erm, they do the PATHS model, erm, which talks about feelings and categorises feelings into comfortable and uncomfortable and that's taught from primary one…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so it's given children that vocabulary to be able to say, to explain how their bodies are feeling, you know… In primary two I would have children who would be, like, "I'm just feeling…" and they would sort of shake their hands and maybe point to their chest if they were feeling really worked up…

Mm-hmm.

And then, you know their peers would be like, "Uncomfortable?"

(Both laugh.)

"Angry?" And able to fill that in because we're associating the feelings in the body with the labels or the names, so…

It definitely puts rocket boosters on that emotional literacy and gives them the vocabulary, just as you've said…

Yeah.

.. to express… that…

So I feel like there *has* been a shift and they've been able to vocalise what they're… what they're feeling and how they're, why they're maybe feeling like that, erm…

Now, is that the only thing that's going on, is there… does that account for greater expression of issue?

Erm, I think it plays a part in it.

Mm-hmm.

I think it plays a part in it. Erm, (pause) I think that… they maybe feel a bit more empowered to talk about their mental health than before, like I'm thinking of when I was at school, mental health was not mentioned at all! (Laughs.) Erm, it was not on the curriculum, whereas now, erm, I think we try and create safe spaces for children where they can do that, like you've got, in the classroom there's… in every classroom there's always a wee comfy seat and there's like a sort of calm area…

Mm-hmm.

There's like the, erm… the zen den… they're calling it…

The zen den! That's brilliant! I've not heard that before!

(Laughs.) … in the [name of ASN unit] there's a sensory room so that students can have these spaces to feel safe and to be able to talk about their mental health so I think there's… it's not the only thing that's contributed to their change in mental health and wellbeing but.. it's given them a space and language to be able to recognise it.

Sure.

Like, I think of my own experiences, I definitely felt anxious at points at school, but I wouldn't have known what that emotion was…

Or what to do with it or how to…

Yeah, exactly, whereas we're trying to, like, embed strategies…

Okay. So… just to really put you on the spot, do you think that *that* is… that is the biggest single factor driving the change in what you see, the fact that you've created this environment where they are empowered and able to express themselves now?

Do you mean like it's the biggest factor in…

In creating what you might see as an increase in the level of issue, of severity of issue…

I think there's also just an increase… in *need* as well, you know the amount of children who don't have, like… who are coming from a more turbulent background… seems to be on the increase…

So is it fair to characterise that as a bit of both then?

Yeah. (Laughs.)

Okay. Okay. Thank you. Sorry to drill down into that!

No, no, not at all!

Erm, ahh, same question as behaviour, you've actually touched on a few things already… what do you think might be driving some of these changes in the... the amount of need, as you put it, the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues?

Erm, loads of things, so I think that the… digital technology, and how often children are exposed to it… erm, you see, like even in primary two last year but definitely in primary six, you can see the dependency on screens…

Mmm.

… and children talking about being on computers all night, children talking about, erm, being on gaming consoles 'til two in the morning, and then I'm expecting them to be at school at nine, ready to learn! Erm, also, they talk about social media, as well…

Mm-hmm.

And online bullying, and, erm… generally comparison, from their lives to lives that they see online.

Ah, okay, I was just going to ask that. So… sorry…

Yeah, so when we ask about what jobs they want to do, a good fifty percent of the class will say, "I want to be an influencer, I want to be a YouTube star," er, "Because they get things."

I know. I mean, when I started it was footballers or dancers.

Oh, I know! Like, doesn't someone want to be a plumber? Or like a joiner? (Laughs.) Or a doctor? Erm, so, but they compare their own lives to the lives they see online and then they want… the material things, and then that, maybe being a position where they can't…

Comparisons usually unobtainable or unfavourable.

Oh, absolutely. Erm, so that, I would say plays a part financially as well like, you know, you have some children from a more affluent area who are always well presented, or have… maybe different brands of clothes that they wear…

Ah-hah.

And then you have children who are… living in poverty and can't… are on a bit of an uneven kilter so then they're comparing not only to people online but to people within the class, erm…

[Sound of door opening, child enters classroom. Recording pauses and then restarts.]

Right, sorry, just paused the tape briefly as a pupil entered the room there. Erm, so social media, online comparison, but also comparison within the class…

Yeah.

… directly between pupils. Anything else driving the mental health and wellbeing needs?

Parents? And families, erm….

Can you describe how that works?

Yes, so, erm… in the area there are families who… you would think potentially have links (pause) … to crime or to drugs…

Okay.

… and the children can then talk about that, and you think it's just…

Yeah, I'm thinking of next door…

Yeah ah-hah, that's the child, the family I'm thinking of, and it's just… really hard for them, like, their wellbeing, it's… not being cared for at home…

Right. Mm-hmm.

… so then they come to school where people are trying to care, and they don't know what that looks like…

Oh, I see… that's interesting. So they don't… or they can't respond to that? I see… oh…

That might not be the case, that's just…

… but how it seems to you?

Ah-hah.

That's… what I'm interested in is how things seem to you.

Yeah. They're just maybe not able to… I mean, if you've never been looked after in your life, it's… maybe hard to accept and then… if you're not looked after *at home*, that attachment with their family, if that's not… if their one good adult, or their one person, if that's not there, then there's maybe perhaps a sense of distrust…

Yeah.

… with other adults, which then makes it harder to make that connection to help the child. Erm, gender, having a bias on that, as well, like I'm thinking of that student in my colleague's class, erm… the relationship with his mum… was really toxic and turbulent, erm, therefore he has a real distrust of women?

I see.

Erm, so….

Mmm. Fascinating.

… and really, had a real thing about… for being ten, had a really… he had a perception about *class*…

Mm-hmm…

… like, *social* class, and really didn't trust people who he considered to be of a different social class…

I see.

… or who, who… were women. So he worked well with my colleague…

Mm-hmm. Who's a man.

… partly because he's a fantastic teacher and is really great, but also… because he's a man, he can be that role model he didn't have… in quite the same…

Mmm. Do you think he was given to, assigned to that class or that teacher on that basis?

No.

No, right. Okay, right, thank you. Er, right, well… you're talking quite a bit about home life there, which… my next few questions are on that. So, to what extent do you think that parents and carers within this school community are employed, as opposed to unemployed, are employed in what I would describe as unstable jobs? So, zero hours contracts, work in the gig economy, where you're paid on completion of a job, like taxi drivers, delivery drivers, temporary contracts, you know, uncertain hours and income, basically.

I'm trying to think… based on *my* class…

Mm-hmm.

Based on my class, I would think that… quite a majority of them have a stable income…

A stable income? I see, ah-hah.

But I don't think that that's a trend throughout the school.

Ah, right, okay.

So, like, thinking of my class… last year, there's quite a few parents who were unemployed… thinking of some of my colleagues classes, they had parents… the kids in their class whose parents worked part time…

Mm-hmm…

… or worked as delivery drivers and things like that, so there maybe wasn't as… as steady or regular income, perhaps, but there is such a mix because you've got as I say, like the two different areas, catchment areas…

It's a very interesting catchment, I hadn't quite picked up on that until I came here.

Yeah, it's a bit of a melting pot! (Laughs.)

So, when you say the parents and carers' employment in *this* class is quite stable, I mean how would you… roughly what sorts of jobs are you looking at the majority of your parents and carers having?

So we have, erm, nurses, health care professionals, erm, post people, people who run their own businesses, like joiners and roofers and things like that, erm… on the flip side you've got children who *don't*… whose parents don't have a job, or whose parents maybe work in like a, erm, a shop, part-time…

Okay. Mm-hmm.

But the weight, I would say, is more towards…

The secure jobs.

Yeah.

I see. Okay, thank you. Erm, do you see any associations between what I could call the socioeconomic stability of a household, of the parents or carers, and the pupil's mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

(Pause.) Erm… yes and no. It really depends on… on the child.

Mm-hmm.

So, erm, using wee [first girl's name] as an example, so her parents, erm, I… mum doesn't work at the moment, erm, I'm not entirely sure *what* dad's job is, but they pointed out… she's pointed out her house on the way by before… on the way, we were walking to the college and it's all… boarded-up windows and things. Erm, there's not a lot of income, like, and erm… but she one of the more able pupils in the class, like her writing is excellent and, you know, she really tries really hard in class, but then she has this social anxiety as well, so like… aspects of her mental health are really strong, you know, she'll say to me, you know, I'm really proud of my writing…

Mm-hmm.

You'll see on Friday, when we leave we talk about what we're proud of in the week, and she always has something to comment on, like she has that resilience and she has that pride in her work, however lacks…

Social confidence, and ease…

Yeah, yeah, so…

Currency, ah-hah.

… it's hard to say, and then… [second girl's name], erm, in the class, so [second girl's name] lives part of the week at home with her mum, and part of the week with her sister…

Mm-hmm.

So she had a family bereavement when she was a child, her sister passed away.

Oh dear.

It's a really, really tragic story and erm, so her mental health, her anxiety can be quite *high*.

Mm-hmm.

Erm… but….

Significant trauma.

Oh, absolutely. Erm, and you know, obviously living with her sister… she lives with her sister because times when she lives with mum, she doesn't come to school. Erm, she lives with her sister to try and improve attendance.

Right…

Erm, but then socially she is, like… she has a solid group of friends, you know she is exceptionally bright, like… she struggles with numeracy but in literacy she really thrives. She's got a… bizarre yet wonderful imagination! (Laughs.) When you read her stories! Erm, so, again it's so hard, because there are aspects of her which are really confident and resilient…

Mm-hmm. And it does come in different forms, and affects people in different ways…

Ah-hah. So, these are some of the children I'm thinking of… or… [first boy's name]. [First boy's name] has had a lot of trauma in his life, erm, he only joined our class at the start of the year, erm, previously was in school in [name of different local authority]…

Mm-hmm.

Before that, was in England, but, you know, has been on child protection registers and things and there's been a lot going on for him…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and he really… again, family background, mum doesn't work that I know of?

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and step-dad, erm, works occasionally as a roofer. And you can see… his mental health isn't… always… very resilient, he can be quite, erm, dysregulated at times. At things that you would expect a child to maybe be able to manage, like… playing a game.

Saw him crying in P.E. when he got put out in dodgeball yesterday.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So…

So he has, what you could… what you seem to me to have described as being multiple factors impacting him there. Trauma, circumstances…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, okay.

But then that trauma and that social aspect of family life then makes it really hard for him to connect with other children, because his social skills are so different.

Mm-hmm.

Which then, maybe ostracises him even more because he doesn't know how to communicate with this class.

Mm-hmm.

Like… out of the three primary sixes… I'm speaking for my colleagues as well but I know that they agree that my class are probably the most sheltered… at times…

Mm-hmm.

… and definitely the most emotional! (Laughs.) Er, or the most… *teary*.

Mm-hmm.

Or… immature's not the word, but younger.

Yeah.

Than the other two.

Some of them do seem really charmingly young. I think, you know, I'm thinking of [second boy's name]…

Ah-hah! (Laughs.) I know!

And you don't want to take that away from them but they… they need… Anyway.

Ah-hah. It's really difficult.

Yeah. Erm, can… can you see… just to finish this, er, this… second section then… can you see any relationship, *any* relationships between the *sorts* of jobs parents and carers do and the child's mental health and wellbeing? Is there anything that comes to mind, or not?

(Long pause.) Not, not *particularly*, erm… (sighs.) Perhaps like the… lack of a steady… income? Can impact, erm, but… they all have… their own mental health or wellbeing, erm,

issue for lack of a better word. Erm, and I think there are some comparisons you could draw in there that are because of the parents and the parent's lifestyle and income?

Mm-hmm.

But there's so many other factors as well, it would be hard to say, "Yeah, it's definitively because they have this… job…"

Mm-hmm.

"…they act like this." Like, you can see it in some ways because of like, I mean like, so [first boy's name], earlier… talked about his family life… their family working life can be quite unstable…

Mm-hmm.

They do stand out as children whose mental health… is also a bit unstable. But then you've also got likes of… [third boy's name]…

Mm-hmm.

… whose mum and dad both… like, his mum's a nursery teacher, his dad's a farmer…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and his mental health is… he really struggles with it. I don't know if you noticed the sentence he wrote out, on his desk, I'll show…

No, I haven't.

Like, so, they were practicing spelling words this morning, and… hold on [crosses classroom to pupil's desk and reads sentence pupil wrote on his desk.] "My life is sometimes busy and too loud."

Ahhh.

Erm, but, on paper… looking at his family life, he's got a mum and dad… and a sister, he's got the sort of… almost nuclear family…

Mm-hmm.

… who care and support him…

Got a bike for Christmas. For his birthday, rather.

Yeah, d'you know, like, they are, I think is he SIMD eight or something like that…

Dad ate all the cake though! (Both laugh.)

So funny! What's he like? (Laughs.) But, erm… on paper he's not a child you would expect to have such mental health issues…

Mmm.

… yet he does, he's one of our pupils who are, erm, on the waiting list for the Exchange.

Oh really? Okay.

The counselling service.

I see.

Erm…

I wouldn't have guessed that.

So he is a child who was punching himself… and calling himself… erm…

Okay.

[Third girl's name]… is a darling, she's the nicest student, erm, works so hard, she's so kind, so empathetic, her dad is a police officer, her mum… her mum works in health care I'm sure, but it's not like a nurse job, it's something else…

[Looks at recording device] No, just checking it's still going! (Both laugh.) You get paranoid! Sorry! Dad's a police officer, mum's in health care.

Erm, again, lovely family, she's got an older brother, she's got a younger brother who I taught last year, mum and dad are *really* great, so supportive of her…

Mm-hmm.

… but she has awful mental health, and again, she's on the referral list for the Exchange.

How does it manifest in her? Anxiety?

Negative self-talk.

Oh, really? Right.

Has a really low opinion of herself.

Right, okay.

Really low self-esteem. Doesn't… like, struggles… You'll see tomorrow when we talk about what we're proud of, erm… never thinks of something for herself, can't comment… if I tell her she's an exceptional artist, she does really well, she's so creative, if I say to her, "That's amazing! I'm so proud of you!" She… can't… take that, she has to [inaudible.]

Ohhh. Okay, right, so to roughly paraphrase what I *think* you're telling me there, just to check if I've got this right... There *are* associations that you can think of, but they are *not* uniform, they're not always the same…

Ah-hah.

… and they're just a bit lost in such a… plethora of different factors and different symptoms. Is that fair?

Yep.

Great, thank you. Last group, nearly there.

No, not at all! Absolutely fine.

You're doing a great…. Erm, This is just about the school's response. What you do as a staff, to help support these pupils. What sort of activities or lessons are taught in the school to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Erm, the big one that comes to mind is our PATHS programme, which is from primary one right through the school. Erm, reinforces that language at every stage so they're getting the same vocabulary taught, erm, the same strategies taught, although… in a slightly more mature way as they come up the school. So, erm, in primary two… they 'do turtle', erm, where they hold themselves and they self-regulate that way. In primary six we talk about the control signals, the traffic lights, so to stop, to make a plan and think, and then to try that out. But, erm, it's a similar method… it's the same message, just delivered in a different context. Erm, so there's that… erm, activities-wise, personally I think it comes down to the class, like… I know that my class last year loved to perform. At any opportunity! (Laughs.) So they loved to sing or to dance or to have, like… to do a show and that really built their self-esteem and their confidence…

Mm-hmm.

… loved to do show and tell, to bring something to talk about…

Eye control.

Eye control, yes! (Laughs.) That wasn't even the weirdest one, I can tell you! (Laughs again.)

Okay, you can maybe me the weirdest one later! (Laughter.)

All sorts… all sorts of talents! (Coughs.) 'Scuse me. Whereas, this class, erm, they love art activities, erm, so I try and have, like, you know, we would do art as part of the curriculum anyway but I try and weight it quite heavily towards that, so… they have opportunities to paint, to sculpt, to, erm, to draw, to sketch, erm, to… like, from the design aspect, you know, we're making our Anderson shelters just now, but we've made cars before, and we were testing them on friction surfaces…

Brilliant.

… and then we delivered them to the primary ones and twos, so that they could use them and play with them. Erm, so like, they *love* a kind of arty design challenge, so whilst I would do that anyway..

Mm-hmm.

… I try and make more opportunities for that 'cause I know that that's where they get their joy.

So you're tailoring the curriculum to suit the individual mental health and wellbeing needs of a particular class.

Yeah. And trying to have, erm, the brain breaks and trying to give them the opportunity to choose what we do for that because what *I* would want to do is not necessarily what…

Yeah.

… *they* would like.

I was going to come to brain breaks, because the next question is: apart from the lessons, the planned curricular stuff, what sorts of other strategies do you… do *you*, or you see other teachers… or school staff, I mean your classroom assistants as well, er, use at a personal or class level that you consider supports mental health and wellbeing?

Erm, so we try to have brain breaks, especially through the middle slot, where it can be quite a long stretch of time, erm and try ot get the students to vote on what they would like to do for that, so if they want to go outside, if they want to play a game in class... We used to go for a walk round the school, erm but [third boy's name], erm… when we were at the college, erm, for part of our P.E. block… and from his home life… he threatens to run away a lot.

I see.

Erm, and if we're going a walk, it's just the path that goes round the school so I could take them myself…

But you are beyond the fence.

… but I feel… a bit hypervigilant when I'm doing it, I don't like it, it's not the most relaxing. Perhaps for the children, but it's not really for me, because I'm worried that the… that he…

Ran. And what would you do?

Yeah.

Yeah. The risk might be low, but the danger is.. unthinkable.

Er, so I try and do it where it's contained, so in the class we've got loads of different.. games, like a number game, a detective game, stop the bus, head sown thumbs up, erm, loads of different ones, but I try and give them the choice of what they want to do. *Or*, erm, one of our other things is… I don't know if you've seen Zenimation?

No.

On Disney Plus, so it's, erm, a series of wee short videos, they're maybe like five to seven minutes long…

Mm-hmm.

They've got different themes, so, like, for example one could be water…

Mm-hmm.

And it's like clips from Disney films that have got… that feature water. But there's no music or talking, it's just the sounds of the water, as it would be if you were in the film. Erm, I'll put one on so you can see! (Laughs.) But, we'll sometimes just watch that and do some drawing or do some sketching…

Okay, that sounds very calming, yeah.

Yeah.

And the neuro- something thing that you do in the morning…

The neurosequential model…

That's it!

… or NME, so it's just trying to make sure that the children are coming in to a calm environment, so there's not loads of clutter… although at this moment in time… with the Anderson shelter project going on, it's maybe not the best… (laughs.) Erm, so there's not loads of clutter about, erm, everything's tidied away, the lights are… there's ambient lighting, so there's fairly lights or, erm, lamps…

Mm-hmm. It's not supermarket…

Sorry?

It's not supermarket lighting!

Yeah! Exactly! (Laughs.) Erm, the backgrounds are sort of like the wood, or… wooden slats or natural colours…

Oh, for your millskin? Your boards? I see.

Yep.

I hadn't noticed that before.

Erm, instead of it being, like the bright primary colours, and things, it's all trying to… It's difficult when you've got… your topic's about a lighthouse! (Laughs.) But trying as much as possible to have greenery in the class, erm, I try and have flowers or wee plants…

I was going to ask you about them. Yeah, they've been very popular with the kids, you see, you know, [fourth girl's name] sits there and strokes the tulip heads and things…

(Laughs.) You know, it started off, erm, as… I've got some [inaudible] plants, over at the window sill, that they like to take care of and to water, erm, and then it was for an art project, we were going to use the daffodils as our inspiration…

Oh I see! Ah-hah.

… and then they could choose how they wanted to…

The clay ones!

Yes! So we've got clay ones, or some of them chose watercolour, some of them did it in a like… [second boy's name]'s actually was great, he did it in a pen…

Ah-hah.

… like a black, biro pen, and he did it as if you were looking down on the vase. Erm, and then… they had the choice of what media they were going to use, and how they were going to express… their interpretation of the flowers. Erm, the tulips are here this week because, erm, my aunt had brought me some at the weekend, and I don't have a lot of vases in the house, and I thought, "Well, d'you know, these will cheer me and the class up, I'll bring them in!"

Well they have!

And d'you know, it's been great, 'cause we then used the daffodils to dissect them…

Mm-hmm.

They had like, put the parts at the table, and wrote on the table and labelled them and things. It was really good.

I'm also interested in the, erm, the (ASN) unit that you've got within the school. Now you've mentioned that you've got three children who are transitioning from the unit, of whom I saw one yesterday, er, because he joined us for P.E.. Erm, how… can you describe your experience of that, then?

Erm… it can at times be challenging, because when they're not in your class for the full time…

Yeah.

… it's not as easy to build up that strong relationship. Which the children in the [name of ASN unit], *really* need that.. (laughs)… that's the whole foundation of them being able to be successful in the class, is that they have that trust and respect for each other. Erm…

So, difficult for them to build that relationship with you, but also with their peers.

Yeah, erm, so for the children that come up to… well, to start with, [fourth boy's name], erm, you'll have seen him once, this week, in the afternoon, his attendance is… really… concerning.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so..

So, he's not in school *at all*, or…

No.

Right. I see, ah-hah.

Erm, so he… doesn't come in generally before break time.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, if he comes in at all, erm, really turbulent home life, erm… and where we were talking about jobs, you would see the link there because his family don't work, and mental health was…

So, long-term unemployed?

Yeah. He was living with his aunt for a while, he's now back living with his mum but his siblings still live with the aunt, it's really…

It's turbulent in terms of relations and care and security…

Very much so, very much so. Erm, and then obviously if he's not coming to school, when he does, there's that anxiety… He's… not *completely* illiterate, but can't… read or write… probably I would say at primary one or two level?

I see. That's going to be a barrier to coming, as well then.

Exactly. So he comes to me in the afternoon for topic, which theoretically is less…

Intimidating?

Yeah, than coming for literacy or numeracy, *however*, with topic there's so much reading and so much writing as well, 'cause when we're talking about World War Two, we're looking at different sources…

Mm-hmm.

… of information, we're looking at videos,, which he can access, but we're also online sources that he can't… he can't read the information. Erm, so it's then like a self-esteem, you know, it's trying to make sure that there's a task for him to do within that. So he comes… he is a naturally friendly child, and tends to make… surface level relationships really

easily, like he's… typically he's always well-behaved in class, erm, although I don't always know how much he… gets out of it.

Okay.

Er, [fifth boy's name] comes only for P.E…

Interesting boy. From what I saw yesterday.

Do you know, I… have a real soft spot for [fifth boy's name].

Ah-hah.

Erm, he has had the hardest start to his life, erm… he has ADHD…

Mm-hmm.

… but he also has a heart condition, erm, so they're struggling to try and find out if he can or cannot be on medication to help his ADHD…

Oh, I see…

… because of that.

So, unmedicated yesterday?

Ah-hah. So, he loves being active, he is a natural leader, erm, he loves working with other children…

I saw him directing other pupils in the class, with the dodgeball…

Yeah, so he's great with his peers, but he's also really… see when you see him working with the primary ones and twos, he's exceptionally… he's so *kind*.

Ohhh.

He's got a real kind heart. Erm, it's just at times, his behaviour can be quite impulsive. So he's also a child who I've had to stop roller skating down the corridors and things! (Laughs.) So, erm, he comes to us only for P.E., but we have a good relationship. At times, when his behaviour has escalated… even within a P.E. session, erm, there's been moments, there's been times when I've been able to bring him back, and we've been able to have a conversation and been able to resolve the conflict. But there's also times where… there's no reaching him.

Yeah.

Erm, [sixth boy's name], is a new… one to the class… well not new to the class, he started with the class in primary one, and has been in the…

The unit ever since.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Erm, he is a bright child, really clever, erm… has a lot of issue with his own self-esteem.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, so for example, he went to his primary five class once last year, and was drawing a lollipop, erm, and when the teacher said, "Oh, do you think you could add… shading to it, or would you try and do this?" erm, he then internalised that as the teacher not liking him and wouldn't go back.

Wow. That is sensitive isn't it? But you would have thought you'd start with a positive. Or… *only* a positive! (Laughter.)

I know! I think she did, I think she said, "Oh, that's good, have you thought about maybe..?" Something like this, and… erm.. yeah, so I've been trying really hard to build that relationship with him, and… he's been getting there? Like he has been doing well, he's been off this week so I've not…

Okay.

… I've not seen him. He didn't join us on Monday…

Mm-hmm.

… but… they're trying to let *him* dictate the pace of how often he comes. Mum is really keen for him to be in class full-time, but we're acknowledging that that transition is not going to be…

Yeah.

Easy.

Okay, right, thank you… I'm just anxious… I'm concerned about your time?

Yeah, I've got to get them… from assembly!

Okay.

Do you want… have you got many…

No, I don't have many more, and…

Could we do it at break time?

Of course you can, yes, absolutely.

Is that okay?

Yes, absolutely no problem, I'll pause it…

[Pause in recording.]

Okay, recording back on, erm, I do have your consent for this?

Yep, you do.

Thank you. Just the last two questions then, 'cause we were interrupted with the kids coming back from assembly. So, you'd been talking about the way the school responds to the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils. Erm, told me all sorts of fascinating things. Just a couple of very general questions at the end…

Mm-hmm.

What makes meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your children more challenging? What makes life hard?

Erm, the range of needs.

Mm-hmm.

It's not one solution fits all.

Mm-hmm.

So, you know, you can have, like, fidgets and things in the class, we can do brain breaks, but that's not going to… solve all the problems, erm, also just the general lack of… resource or time, even, you know, I think of the kids in the class I know, that… they're all fighting their own wee battles, and there'll be days where I think I didn't get a chance to actually fully check in with that child and… I know that that's *kind* of the nature of the beast but… I don't think it should be. Especially when their mental health is impacting so many other areas.

Mm-hmm.

They're not going to be able to do fractions of a quantity if they're really worried about what people have done to them in the playground, or if they are starving 'cause they've not had anything to eat. Erm…

Yeah. So, time, and the range and complexity of the things you face? *They* face? Anything else? Makes it hard?

Erm, at times, just… generally being full yourself.

Being… what?

Er, full yourself! So, like, I'm sorry, I should explain that better! I mean like… there can be *so* many different things going on…

Ah-hah…

… with them…

Oh, *full*! *Yourself*! Ahh, right… I *think* I understand.

Yeah! (Laughs.) So, there can be so many different things going on… (coughs) that… at times it can be hard to give full attention.

Mm-hmm.

So I'm thinking of a time when… at the start of the year when there was a… police investigation, a child protection case, and my mind was so… busy with that…

Yeah.

… that at times, like I found that was where my focus was. And it was then hard to put that to the side to help the other students that needed it? Erm, because of the… intensity, the severity, like…

Yeah.

But then that's not to lessen the other experiences, because they're just as valid.

Mm-hmm.

But, it's sometimes hard to…

I can…

… have space to… help…

I can understand that because, er, it seems to me that some of the issues you face on a daily basis *are* quite severe here, I mean we had a staff member attacked on Tuesday morning that visibly shook you.

Yeah.

And you were… upset by that.

Yeah, erm, that's, I mean… that… I think at times…. Almost… (pause.) PTSD is not the right term, but the previous week, my colleague, who was covering, erm, the class next to me, had also been attacked. And then the following week…

I was struck by something you said after that…

[Interrupted by child entering room.]

You wanted to…you recognised that she might be feeling a sense of helplessness, and you wanted to take that away. You wished you could take that away.

Yeah. (Laughs.)

[Interrupted by staff member entering room.]

Okay. Another subject.

Erm, no, it's okay. Erm… yeah. There is a sense of helplessness because I don't want any of them, my colleagues, to deal with what they have to at times.

Mmm.

And… But there's not an awful lot… you can do about it, if you're not… *there*.

Mm-hmm.

And even if you *are* there…

Sometimes, yeah…

… there's not an awful lot you can do about it.

So the other side of that question is, what would make your life easier? In terms of meeting the needs of your, the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils, what would make life easier? If you had the magic wand?

If I had a magic wand would love more… adults in the room.

More adults in the room.

Er, or more support for mental health, or more specialised support, so I put in the referral forms for the Exchange for the pupils that we've mentioned, in, erm… September time? And they've still not seen anybody.

I see. Right, okay.

Erm, so…

That's nearly the full year now. Isn't it? Coming up for it.

So, you know, you can do so much, but you can't… almost see it through?

Mm-hmm.

The things that you're trying to put in place, so there's… you know, the things you try and do in class… but that's not the same as them getting the dedicated time with a qualified therapist.

And there is only so much you can do to meet their needs.

Yeah, erm… yeah.

I'm afraid. Okay, thank you, thank you again for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to add, on the subjects we've talked about, or, or *not*? Just anything you feel it's important to say, or do you think you've covered everything?

Erm, almost certain that I'll be pestering you at lunchtime! (Laughs.) Something that I've remembered! But at this moment in time, I can't think of anything, but if I do, would it be okay to…

Oh, of course! And you'll have a… you know, nothing you've said is written in stone, I come back and check with you again later…

Ah, okay.

… just to make sure that I've got the right end of the stick, and you have the opportunity to…

Add.

Add… or adjust, or retract anything that you've thought twice about.

(Pause.) It's just, it… I would love their mental… to be able to support their mental health and wellbeing… *more* than I'm able to just now.

You feel a sense of frustration?

Yep.

Mmm.

Erm… yeah! (Laughs.)

And at times like that you have to remember what you *are* doing, and sometimes you're not even *aware* of things that you are doing.

Yeah… d'you know, that's what the Wee Breathers session is... supposed to help with. Erm, so that's the sessions with… [name of person taking sessions].

Which you mentioned to me, you've given me this documentation.

[Interrupted by child].

Okay. Thank you again.

No, it's a pleasure.

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW FOUR: CLASS TEACHER 2 (MR REAVEY; 08/05/24).

Brilliant. Okay, thank you very much for giving up your time, erm, I especially appreciate it as you're missing a valuable meeting.

Absolutely!

So, just for the tape, I do have your consent to record the interview?

Yes.

Brilliant, thank you, well, er, I know you're anxious to get back to that meeting so I'll press on. Erm, start with an easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Er…. So I've… when did I qualify? Erm…. I qualified in… June 2015, so I started placements in schools at the… properly, not just kind of helping out at the University-wise, er, August, September 2014, qualified 2015, so that's nine years in full employment in schools and a year of University-based… placements.

And how long have you been in this school?

Er, the full nine years.

Oh, the full nine years? You've always been here?

So this was my probationary year, in here, and then was offered a job at the end of it. Which was good.

Okay, brilliant, thank you. So over the course of that career, have you noticed any changes in pupils' behaviour, and if so how would you characterise them?

Er… massively, actually. Erm, I would say the biggest change in pupils is a move of… ah, lack of respect. Is a big one. I feel that the… ah, you've always had challenging pupils.

Mm-hmm.

Whether it's, erm… to do with neuro-divergent or whether it's to do with home life, anything at all, erm, but there seems to be now that… I think beforehand you could use a wee bit of authority?

Mm-hmm.

I don't mean that in a shouting way, as in a way of… the way you could speak and come across and they see you as a level of, like, do you know, "I've done wrong," that kind of idea. Whereas now the relationship is a wee bit different, where there's a *lot* more abuse…

Mmm…

… sent back at you. Erm, unless you've built up a really, really strong relationship beforehand. Whereas beforehand it didn't… not that you didn't want to have a relationship with them, but there's people in the school that you might not know as well…

Mm-hmm.

And if you're a teacher coming along the corridor, they would be very much, "I need to be respectful." Now it's… you get verbally abused as you walk past.

So… a diminishing sense of respect for authority amongst pupils and you're more reliant on the relationship?

Ah-hah. You have to put in… a wild amount of work to get that relationship there and it doesn't always work. You try your hardest, it might not work. But I would say, definitely behaviour-wise, is that there's been a *change* there.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, massively.

Okay.

And the second one, I've forgotten the question actually, it was more to do with the resilience of children as well…

Okay.

In terms of how they handle, erm, things not going their way or not *getting* their way. And that's… across… all children, not just the ones that maybe did have a behavioural issue before… is a very strong, er, lack of resilience to be able to cope. That didn't go that well, what can I do next? It's… they seem to fall apart, collapse, I don't know… I would put that, possibly down to the COVID time.

Okay.

In which, erm, their education was fragmented as well as their social interactions and maybe understandably parents having to just kind of give children their way to be able to continue themselves if they had to work during that time and teach them and things like that there…

Okay.

So they're the two main things I've noticed.

So, erm, deteriorating respect and resilience amongst pupils, erm, both increased noticeably since COVID?

I would say so, yeah.

Erm, and what about prior to that? Were these things deteriorating before that? Before the lockdowns?

Possibly. Erm… (pause.) I would say it was a big change *after*, 'cause I really go back to the class I had when the lockdown kicked in in the March, and they were considered a… challenging class.

Mm-hmm.

There was thirty, I think there was thirty-two of them, and there was a lot of… quite loud, brash, aggressive behaviour.

Mm-hmm.

But, erm, they took… consequence more. So, built relationships with them, and when something wasn't done the way it was supposed to be and you pointed that out in a way, "This isn't acceptable, 'cause this is unfair," or… you seemed to be able to get away with that, you didn't really get a massive kick back off of that. Whereas you will get that more now.

So the step change was the lockdowns.

Mm-hmm. I do think that was… yeah, there must be… must be something within the… I do think society… in society there is a bit of a lack of respect for… the profession. And I think children probably overhear parents talk *negatively* at times maybe about teachers. I've had pupils say that, "My mum called you this!" Or, "My dad said you're a…." And you're like, "Oh that's lovely!" But I think that… that all comes from the blame culture. Of when something goes wrong, our… inherent… ah, like, our need to find someone else to blame, rather than go, "Well what have I done wrong?" I think a lot of people can't, kind of look at themselves? And will go, "What's going on?" And the blame goes, well where do they go most of the time? In school. Education seems to be… probably take a bit of a hit on that one. Again, I don't know if maybe COVID accelerated that one, on the basis that when the schools were closed, instead of looking at the government they probably looked at teachers and went, "Oh, it's them being lazy." I don't know if that maybe came into it as well and it's that when parents started to get that… 'cause I think it went both ways, you used to get the parents who'd come up to you and say, "Oh, thanks so much for what you've done, because I cannae hack…" (laughs) "Twenty minutes teaching my children, never mind six hours a day…" So, erm…

[Cleaner comes into room, apologises for interruption and leaves.]

It's interesting isn't it, because I do remember there was a… seemed like a short honeymoon period where… (laughing) parents did seem to appreciate teachers!

Yeah, I mean, what I would say, is one of my classes that I had coming out of lockdown was one of my favourite classes…

Mm-hmm.

… and that's the class that… previously, the previous year the teacher had gone off with stress because of.

I see.

So, maybe there was a wee bit of that kick back into respect for teachers there… erm, and strangely enough, I was at the high school today, and I met about… fifteen of that class came over to me, 'cause they saw me, they heard that I was there, and all came to see me, and you have that… that was a really good relationship with that class. So they were, there was challenges there but… so maybe, I suppose… I think it really has… a big deterioration since that point, it's just got tougher and tougher.

Okay. So, obviously, you know we've discussed the lockdowns quite a lot, I mean my next question was going to be; what do you think might be causing these changes in behaviour? And, well… you've cited the deteriorating sense of respect and authority and resilience. Erm, and you attributed a lot of this, or associated it with the timing of the lockdowns certainly. Do you see any other causal factors?

Yeah, I would say, poverty is… a massive, massive point. Erm… (pause.) Ah, I think you've got to take yourself into realising how difficult it is for a child… when they come from a house that, I mean some of the houses in the area that you're looking at, they've not got… they've got boarded-up windows, or… their access to *basic* needs aren't there.

Mm-hmm.

And there's a shame element there for them as well. Um, they're… they've got to almost kind of suppress that, and then come in to this educational environment and be around children who can talk about experiences that they could never have because of that. And that divide's huge, and it's huge in this area…

I gather that the catchment is completely divided between SIMD one and two and eight and nine.

We've got a few zeros, which I didn't think was a thing, er, but they came through as a zero, and our zero, one and two makes up a big large chunk. But then it *jumps* to eights and nines.

Yes.

For that maybe, final thirty-odd percent. And that's… that makes it very difficult, 'cause that's also, the pressures for us as well is that… that's not that you're having to deal with maybe the… the circumstances of certain people in one aspect of life but then you've got the pressures of others who are saying, "Well, my expectation is that my child is excelling."

Mm-hmm.

But you're also having to spend a lot of your day trying to help children… in… 'cause education, obviously it's really important but so… a relationship with them in terms of them

feeling comfortable in the classroom, that's a lot of your day spent on that but, maybe you're not getting the education aspect, see that, that juggling… that balancing act that you've got to do to make sure you get both, I think it does make it quite difficult, erm…

I'm sure.

As poverty, I mean you can *see* it, it's worse and worse and worse, it's obviously going to have a detrimental effect on the children.

So, poverty, and, erm… possibly catalysed by the lockdowns, do you see any other… do any other causal factors jump out at you?

Er… I think children are a product of their environment.

Mm-hmm.

And if you are… I would say that, the environment obviously, the home life environment will have an effect on the school life environment.

Mm-hmm.

But as the school environment deteriorates in terms of certain things, as res… as lack of respect increases, other children *see* that and they look and kind of go, "Well actually, is that the way that I *can* act in here?"

I see, ah-hah.

And it depends on how you'd handle that situation… children who… you have to und… you have to *really* teach children… eh… (pause.) Equality and equity.

Mm-hmm.

So understanding that when sometimes you… some children will do something but the consequence… they might not see that as big, but you have to try and get them to understand that it *has* to be slightly different sometimes. You either don't let them see that…

Mm-hmm.

… Or you make them understand. Which is a challenge! (Laughs.)

I think you're absolutely right and it's a very difficult lesson, erm, for some to grasp. That one. Yeah, I recognise that completely from (laughs) my experiences. Okay. Er, so, we've spoken mostly about behaviour which is associated with mental wellbeing but I'm just going to focus on *that* now, mental health and wellbeing. In general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school?

Erm… (pause.) It's a hard thing to *generalise*…

Of course. And particularly with a big school.

Ah-hah. Er… I do think more children suffer from anxiety now than they did before, whether that's because we're more aware…

Mm-hmm.

… or whether that's because the pressures and challenges on children now… are … excessive.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and I would put a lot of that down to… er, the use of screens.

Social media?

Ah-hah. And even more than that, and it's… erm.. I would say the problem is a lot of children are pacified by screens from a very, very young age.

Attachment?

Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

And then they can't… 'cause… if you really think about it, a child at a young age, when they get something and it's that stimulating and bright and flashy and it brings you in… and it has all these endorphins… when you take that away, they really can't handle it, so when they're at a young age, I think that plays quite a lot… and you notice what the children now… I've seen, not so much now, previous years, teachers using that to pacify children sometimes when they're in those moments. But actually I think what it really does… it might give you a bit of a break in that moment…

Mmm.

… but it actually escalates the problem more. Erm…

Now, those are very interesting points you've made there, or certainly interesting to me, they actually touch on several questions I'm just about to ask.

Okay!

So, I'm just going to focus in on the point you made about anxiety…

Mm-hmm.

… and also the point you made about… you're not sure whether this is an increased awareness, or you seemed to be suggesting to me: is it an increase in awareness, or is it an increase in prevalence? Erm, what's your hunch?

What do mean, sorry, as in…

Well, do you think there is more anxiety amongst pupils, or are we simply more aware of it?

I think it's a mix of the two.

A mix of the two?

I don't think we've really *looked* at children with anxieties before, I think no one really would have… oh, not no one, that's really harsh, but you wouldn't have been probably as aware of it, I think we've become, I think as a society on, er… everyone now I think we're aware of it, loads of people go through things and they *mask* it, in different ways. And I think we're realising that more now, erm, one of the things I'd say, after… I've just done my Masters, and I looked at the understanding of ADHD in children and one of the biggest things for me was the fact that loads of children, especially girls, are masking *massive* amounts of anxiety that come from things like ADHD because all you're doing, your brain is constantly quizzing every decision you make, and everything around you, and you're always worrying that… er… what if something you've done, you've said… is the effect or the cause of someone else's unhappiness, or something that's going to happen, or… and I don't think that we really realise how bad that is, 'cause for years we've gone, "Oh, I've got one wee boy, it's always a boy, that runs about too much, he's got ADHD." And it's that, now realising, no I don't think it is.. and it's… I think there's loads more to it.

Mm-hmm.

I think we are, our brains are more overactive. I don't know if that's a…. erm, and again, I think that's us being more aware of it but I also wonder if there's a problem in the western world with… something that we're doing, because it is a more… it's more prevalent in the western world than it is in other places, if you're looking at studies. Are we doing something that's different, that's actually causing these anxieties? Are we not spending enough time outside, are we spending too much time blocked in and… again, with that television, iPad, phone. And then that… before you even touch on the aspect of… when they get in schools now, social media, which is now starting from primary three, primary four we're talking about now, which is….

One of the difficulties in analysing health and wellbeing in general, even the physical as well as the mental and emotional, is the difficulty in unpicking all these causal factors and they are myriad, so… yeah. Okay, so the same question I asked you about your perceptions of behaviour, over the course of your career, erm, have you noticed any change in pupils' mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career?

(Pause.) Er… (pause.) I would say… one thing that I've noticed is they're more willing to, there's more children willing to *talk* about it.

Mm-hmm.

About that they are… probably maybe more to their parents, and then their parents picking up on it and coming to you. So obviously they've got more awareness that maybe they want to speak to, which is a good thing.

Mm-hmm.

I think obviously, previous generations probably didn't speak to parents about problems. I know I didn't! (Laughs.) You just kind of got on with them, and that's probably a good thing that you can come out and do that, erm… I think that there's… and that's probably linked to the social media thing, there's a lot of, erm, children coming about their… about how they're feeling about when… 'cause it's another area… another area to be *left out of*.

Mmm.

So they come… I think there's this obsession with kids, call it 'FOMO', fear of missing out…

Mm-hmm.

So they have this thing where if they're not the one who's allowed to use something then they, or they're not invited to the group, or that they are… and that builds the anxiety… and I have noticed the children now talk about things, and they do talk about it, it seems to always come back to… you know, "It all started from this WhatsApp group…" Or, "I'm not allowed on Snapchat but they are." And then they talk about how that makes them feel and I think they are… I think that is having a wee bit of an effect and it has increased more, in terms of mental health.

Okay. Thank you. Erm, so you've mentioned anxiety within the school. I was going to ask you next about how you perceive mental health and wellbeing issues as manifesting amongst the children, erm… Is anxiety the biggest issue that you see and if there are others how would you describe them?

Erm…. (Sighs. Pause.) Anxiety is a big one. Erm, I mean, we've now got a wee group that children can go to…

Mm-hmm.

Where they go, and speak to a counsellor… and they make referrals for that and they all revolve around anxiety.

They all seem to, do they?

That's what seems to be the kind of driving factor. Anxiety and struggling socially. Erm, and the worries that will come… again, it will come to parents asking for it, 'cause they're bringing their worries home.

Mmm.

Erm, so I would anxiety is kind of the… (pause.) The main one.

The other internalising one that often is associated with anxiety I suppose is depression.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, er, and then contrasting those are the sort of externalising ones, the aggression and the angers, the ones that are much more visible I suppose!

Yeah.

Erm… do you see many of those in your class? In your classes, thinking back? Are most… I mean, obviously the easiest way to really assess that is just to think of your past classes and your own experiences.

Ah-hah.

Erm, anxiety takes up the bulk of your experiences?

It does, I think about three… at least three [inaudible] in the last year, I put forward to getting somebody to speak about anxiety.

I see. Mm-hmm.

I've already put referral through for two this year.

Mm-hmm.

And it's anxiety-based.

I see.

Erm… I think they could talk about, I also mentioned the *shame*… I think I've got one who has struggled this year, and I think a lot of this comes from the shame of what they were living in. And I think sometimes…

Poverty related?

Yeah, and to the extremes. Erm, and that's made… for them, that's gone off on the route of… aggression and… just complete and utter… lost control.

Mm-hmm.

But I think, that's got to come down to mental health and how they feel about themselves, I think a *lot* of children are very *negative* about themselves. Erm, I suppose that comes under

aspects of anxiety, certainly I suppose, or they all interlink in some way, but I think the children do have, quite a lot of them have got a low, a low view of themselves.

Self-esteem?

Ah-hah. Self-esteem is an issue, erm, they don't think massively highly of themselves, erm… which is a shame, 'cause at that age you should really just be doing… I think they over-analyse everything. But then you can link that back *again* to the social media aspect of… the perfect, everything seems perfect on there, and you're not, it's not real…

Mm-hmm.

… aspect of what's ha… it's not real.

So, that I suppose… that's something to do with the comparison that they are making between themselves and a fictional other really isn't it?

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Do you.. is that a fair assessment?

Yeah! Ah-hah. And that's the thing, you don't really see it, and that'll go from children all the way through to adulthood. When people post up their perfect holidays with their families, and you look on and you go, "My family.. my holiday was awful!" (Laughs.) Or "My kids do this," or… But they're exactly the same. But it's just what you want to portray on… This is hat children do now, because they get access to stuff that they *shouldn't* have access to, erm, you've got kids talking about make-up tutorials at p4, and things like that there, or just everything seems too perfect. Or they follow people with money.

Mmm.

And you see that, and you start to question, "Why do I live like this, when that's what it could look like," and then you feel… And then it's the whole feeling of, "It's not fair," and that brings out a lot of emotions as well.

Mm-hmm. Okay, thank you. Erm… *well*, (slight laugh), what do you think might be causing any changes you've seen? We've discussed quite a few things so far.

Yeah.

Social media seems to be cropping up a lot.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, poverty.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, some sort of association with the lockdowns, even if it's just as a catalyst.

I think it's…

A cause?

I think it was always going that way. But the trajectory changed.

Ah-hah.

Because…

Ah, I see, when you say it was always going that way… sorry, *what* was always going that way?

Poverty. I mean, poverty's been getting worse for years and years. And I think that these wee factors, everything was going in that direction of… like, poorer behaviours, and self-esteem and anxiety, all these things we've talked about, they were all probably going to get worse and worse unless we did something about it, but I think that, er, lockdown was a catalyst for it. That being said there are obviously people who found that lockdown was really good for them, in terms of… I think as adults maybe some people were lucky enough to be in a situation where they went on furlough, and they were allowed to spend, they took that time to enjoy… some family time. Erm, I feel, myself like… my wife was like that, so out two boys were young, so we just… all you could do was go out walks, so we just spent all day outdoors… That's great saying that, because I've got a garden…

Yeah.

… and I've got… erm, we're in a nice area that you can go and do that in. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the person that's got three kids in a two bedroom flat had that same experience, and I think that there was stress on the parents, and there was ones that had to work. So I know people said to me, "My child sat on an iPad for eight hours today, because I've got a job to do, and if I don't do that job, I cannae pay for the mortgage, and we're out." So it's… all these things, and I think that was the catalyst for a lot of problems. And as I said, I think children are a product of the environment they're in, so in those… (sighs.) When children start to show more negative behaviours, other children start to follow suit, or… and I think that can be an issue for us.

It's just flashed back into my memory, there, I'm trying carefully not to… you know, I'm trying to interpret what you're saying…

Mm-hmm.

… as faithfully as I can to your own meaning, and erm, I keep referring to social media but you've actually mentioned that there's more to it than that, you've mentioned… well, you

seem to be alluding toward attachment issues but also you mentioned what seemed to me to be a sort of physiological thing about the over-stimulation that devices can give children…

Ah-hah. Erm, massively. I think… and that's maybe my own thing, I've just always felt that one of the biggest issues that we face is the obsession with technology…

Ah-hah.

And technology can be used in such an effective way but it's used… *far* too young an age. Children watching things that are not appropriate on there because you don't have the… that way when you used to, the television's not as bad, because the television has probably got some sort of… programme, twenty minutes, half an hour, an hour, and generally speaking you're going to want to watch something that's in the house, everyone can see, parents are like, "That's appropriate for the children, that age…" But you've got children that sit and *scroll* on TikTok, on YouTube, I know that's a kind of social media, they are… I think that's *terrible* for the brain, it's… you're talking children at the age of three and four having their own YouTube channels and things like that. And…

(Interviewer shows silent expression of surprise.)

Ah-hah. Erm, and… (laughs.) Yeah. Like, and then putting on American accents because that's what they've heard, and, I think that it's an almost [inaudible] as well, if the algorithms for… So YouTube was one of the biggest streaming… like… things you can go on the internet anyway, and they realised they were starting to lose their figures because their videos were too long. So then they brought in, is it a YouTube short or something like that? So you can now click on a bit that has shorter videos because it's keeping the attention span of people… more. So they're actually built for you to become attached to and spend more time on.

Mm-hmm.

And you give that to a three, four, five, even up to, like older age, and you're going to become *really* attached to what you see there. And you want to see the next one, and the next one, it's only a few seconds and it becomes this obsession.

Do you think this has got, is associated with your, erm… observations about resilience?

Erm... possibly? Erm…

The lack of being able to tolerate anything that is sustained or lasting?

(Pause.) Yeah. I mean, I think everything can work into even that… because resilience probably comes a lot from how much you handle social interactions with other children.

Mmm… Ah, right, of course.

So gone are the days of you go home and… like, my *own* kids, I don't… I'm a sad old man, but I don't give them tech Monday to Thursday. They're not allowed to go on computers or anything at all. So, Monday to Thursday, they come home from school , they get their homework done, and they go round the corner for their mates. And they go and play football out the back. And I think that's really important, 'cause they'll lose a game, they'll win a game, they'll get a tackle that they don't like but they'll have to get on with it sometimes, or vice versa. And these wee things, and you realise that…

Someone'll call them an idiot!

Ah-hah. And they'll come to me and go like, "They called me that!" And I'll be like, "Well, give me the context of it, and…" They've got to deal with it. And do you know what? My eldest, he struggles sometimes with the football, he's quite a soft wee guy at times, and he doesn't like the fact that the football banter comes in, but… to an extent it's probably good that he gets a bit of that because… that teaches you that sometimes someone will call you that, but d'you know what? You let it brush off your shoulders! But… if you don't have these experiences, and you spend… Like I have children in my class who say, "What did you get up to at the weekend?"

"I played my Xbox all weekend."

Like, "Did you do anything else?"

"No. I was like, I went twelve hours in a row." And you're just like, phhh. If you're not having that experience and you're put into the school environment, and then something happens in the playground, you don't know how to handle that because you've never been… you don't get enough experience to it. And then those emotions come out in the playground. Whereas if you'd maybe had more of them from an early age rather than on these computer games all the time, you might have actually been able to handle it better.

I understand that point perfectly. Okay, thank you, that's so interesting. Last question on, erm, mental health and wellbeing before we switch over to home circumstances. Do you have any views about whether mental health and wellbeing issues that you perceive amongst children you teach affect certain groups disproportionately?

(Long pause.) Er, yeah. I would worry more, maybe it's wrong, for *girls*. Because… I still think we live in a time that there's an expectation that they have to *look* a certain way. I actually

think it's coming through more with boys as well, in a negative way, erm… But I think that the whole… I think self-esteem amongst girls is *worse*… than it is boys.

Mm-hmm.

Because of the expectation on them. And I think again, the use of social media is that… this is how I should look. This is how I should act. And as much as it's… as much as I'd probably say we're *better* at it than we were when we were in the nineties for example, there wasn't the… the access to it.

Mm-hmm.

You didn't have that constant reminder, all the time, on that phone that you have in your hand all day long. That tells you who you should be. You tend to find, as much as I think boys are bad with screens, but they probably talk about, "I was playing on my Xbox, I was playing Roblox, I was playing, erm, FIFA, I was playing Fortnite." Which is seems to be what they do. Whereas the girls will talk more about, "I was watching some YouTuber, someone on TikTok, makeup tutorials…" All these things, and you see the change, especially from p6 to p7 some of them, girls in primary seven, and the way that they dress, sort of… I just… You feel bad for them, because you thinking, "Is that because you've… you're doing that because of how *low* you think about yourself and how you think you should have to look like that, clearly…" (Laughs.) I may be wrong! I'm not a young girl! But I do worry that that's how they think more, sometimes.

Can I make an association between the… the prevalence of anxiety that you see amongst your pupils… and girls?

Erm…

Are you saying that girls are more likely to suffer anxiety? Amongst the pupils you've taught, in your experience.

I think so. Erm, But I also think they're better at masking it as well. And that's my bigger worry.

Some are flying under the radar.

Massively.

Mmm.

And I think we're calling it other things sometimes and not realising that that's… what it is. We do fall very much into the, er… autism seems to be the thing they come out with and go, but anxiety could be a load of different things and I think sometimes you actually deal with

the anxiety first to see if you could help that before you start looking at… other things there and girls *mask* these things *so*, so well. And you tend to find that you'll find out a lot more by speaking to a parent about what happens when they go home.

Do you think there are children in the school who are being given neurological diagnoses when they are actually just experiencing mental wellbeing issues?

(Pause.) Possibly. Or, the wrong neuro…

Ah, right, okay.

So, I think we're maybe going, 'cause… they're all intertwined. In some way. There's like wee things here and there but a big one is [inaudible] image, because I studied ADHD…

Well I was just thinking, you know a lot more about this than I do…

I would say that that's the big one is, I've got a parent last year who talked about how anxious they were and how they needed things in a certain way and they were just so pent up with worrying about all these things all the time, and then they were wanting to go down the route of autism.

Mmm.

But I was looking at the girl and going, "I don't know if that's what that is." Because… autism's become quite a difficult thing to try and pinpoint because I think we've also got that wrong. I think we're looking at… I think we've got, erm, home life issues that bring out aggression, and I think we go down the route of the autism's there, but actually… I don't know.

Okay.

Because… (Laughs.) I could go down a rabbit hole with that one! But I've got a *lot* of things that I'm looking into that worries me for…

You know, it just flashed into my head because… I found that a fascinating answer.

Well, just… the U.K. has the highest number of diagnosed children with autism in the world. So either we… over-diagnose or we're doing something wrong! (Laughs.) To the point where you're talking… I think it's at seven hundred and something children…

That's fascinating, I didn't know that…

Yeah. So look at the Taiwan model. It's fantastic. About a third less. More than a third less I think it is, actually. Children diagnosed.

So difficult to tie that down to exactly what is going on though.

Yeah, so that's the thing, is it over-diagnosis or is it something that we are doing? Is it… are other countries under-diagnosing? So you do, you could go down that route, but I think… Or is it environmental factors such that children with, erm, some sort of neuro-divergent issue can just fit into the system more easily? You know, as in it doesn't cause any issues for anybody?

Ah-hah. So I would look back at my own issues of being at school and you can remember the children that you probably would have just said that they're a bit quirky, or a bit odd. Probably were autistic, but the… Probably didn't have a lot of factors that made things more challenging for them? Erm, so… it kind of went on and I know a boy I went to school with, all the way through primary, all the way through secondary, and I see him now, he works in a local supermarket near me, and he works away. He's a happy lad, getting on with things. A hundred percent, would have been definitely on the spectrum, but that's… now, to hear him grow up with, erm, probably some of the more horrendous diets that we have now, with again with the overstimulating of a screen constantly, even down to the fact that every classroom's got a massive huge big screen in it. Or the fact that when you get to primary six you've got a laptop in front of you which you use for a lot of stuff as well… these screens, it's that constant… [Exhales loudly.]

I'm going to pursue this conversation with you…

[Laughter] Sorry!

No, no, not at all, 'cause I'm fascinated by that… erm, so I was just going to ask you about your perceptions of home circumstances, which you've actually touched on several times already. Erm, so, to what extent do you think that parents and carers within this school community are employed in unstable jobs? Erm, I'm sort of grouping together things like zero hours contracts, or temporary contracts, or work in the gig economy which I suppose would be defined by being paid on the completion of a task.

Ah-hah.

Like a taxi driver, a delivery driver, so these… the sort of people who have that sort of job which you might characterise as unstable, erm, what sort of proportion of the school community, parents and carers do you think fall into that category?

I would say a decent amount of unemployed to… to low, to more… to work that you would be more concerned about job loss…

Ah-hah.

Would be quite a reasonable… reasonably *high* number, erm… really hard to pin… when you speak to children, a lot of them do work in things like… the local supermarket, which might be... I know they still do a lot of, "You're twenty hours this week, you're thirty the next." Erm, like cafes, erm, things like that… and there's quite of lot of unemployment, if a child sees that you're… I've spoken to a bit, dad loses… dad lost his job. So I would say that… a reasonably high proportion…

A reasonably high proportion. Now if I pushed you towards a rough fraction?

[Slow audible exhale.]

You'd find that difficult?

Very difficult. I don't, I would be really… do you know I don't the area… I know I've been working here for nine years (laughs) but it's not where I… live, or stay, or knew *at all* before I came.

Okay.

Erm, so my understanding of that would be…

If I was to ask you about… other categories that are often discussed amongst, er, colleagues… erm, unemployment? What sort of.., is that prevalent here too? Long term unemployment?

I would say it would have to be. Erm…

Mm-hmm. And, erm, career professionals?

(Pause.) Yeah… in comparison to… if I was to base it on my own children's school, erm, *much*… eh… (long pause.)

A smaller group.

Yeah, I mean if you've got your majority of children living in… SIMD zero, one and two, it's very unlikely that they're in high professional jobs. I now that sometimes doesn't always work, those things don't… but I mean. I would say that they're not going to be, erm, at the higher end of pay scales or…

Right, thank you, erm, so thinking of the children who you have taught, erm, in your experience, who you have thought that they have been experiencing mental wellbeing issues…

Mm-hmm.

… in the past, and current class, do you see any associations between the children who are experiencing these mental health and wellbeing issues and the socioeconomic stability of their background? Or not?

Erm… [Sighs. Pause.] I'm not… sure. If there's a massive correlation there.

Mm-hmm.

I mean, that's hard, again, to… to really think into.

Mm-hmm.

What… [Sighs. Pause.] What I would say is… the children that are… have a more challenging… home life…

Mm-hmm.

Definitely show… some of the larger behaviours, in terms of… inability to control anger, or… respect towards… that kind of thing. But that obviously could stem from…

Mm-hmm.

… anxiety. In other ways. But it's… on the flip side of that there, some of the children that I've put forward for the chat with… to have that counsellor speak with them about their anxiety… off the top of my head, it's not the ones that are coming from the more deprived areas.

Mm-hmm.

Erm…

Interesting.

But I'm wondering, and again this could be *very* generalised, does their anxiety come from the fact that they don't fit in with… the… some of the children in the school, 'cause some of those children are more… brash and loud and will use language that maybe they're not… used to at home and *that* brings on the anxiety. So…

So in a way we're almost back to social comparison again. In the real world rather than the virtual.

Yeah, I think this is one of… Ah-hah, I think one of the things this school's extremely difficult with is does have the two… ends of that there, and does, it does bring round… issues.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, that being said I'm a *very* strong believer in the fact that it's not money that drives a child to be… intelligent or well-behaved, or these things here, erm… and I'd look at myself in that situation, I grew up with very, very little.

Mm-hmm.

And my parents were really unlucky with the business that they had, and jobs and things. And we moved.. I think I went and told the children the other day, I think I've lived in thirteen different houses.

Mm-hmm.

And ten of them were before the age of twelve! (Laughs.)

I see.

But… I did feel different, given that, from my own poverty, I remember feeling different. But it never brought out a lot of things because what I did have was I had a really, really strong family unit...

Mm-hmm.

… of care, things were there, to make sure you're okay. And I think the problem is… maybe sometimes we associate it with the money side of things but actually I think it's… it's not just… it's probably… *consistent* poverty which has brought around the anxiety for parents which has brought around poor parenting which is what then that child with the parents and that child… that brings a lot, I think a lot more… 'cause I don't think I can pin-point… er, just children from a deprived area in terms of anxieties… and mental health.

Okay, that's fine. There are myriad risk factors and myriad protective factors too you know… Er, okay, so last questions, just to dive right into that, can you see *any* relationship at all between the sorts of jobs parents and carers do and their children's mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

(Long pause.) Y... (exhales.) Yes.

You can?

In terms… I would say, the only thing I would say, I'm maybe being nice here, is *aspiration*.

Mmm.

So you talk about… if you get a child in the class and you can see that they've got a parent from two quite good professions…

Ah-hah.

They talk about their plan, and you tend to find you can talk about what they want to do, they *know* what that plan is, and they're quite confident about what they can do to get that plan. But you do sometimes see from children that maybe don't… they won't know what

they want to do, as much. And I wonder if that does maybe bring round a little bit of the… that self-esteem…

That's a very interesting point.

… of what they're going to be. 'Cause you do, you have that kind of… kids will know what's well-paid and what's not well-paid.

Ah-hah.

And what's a fancy job and what's not a fancy job, you know, that kind of way. So you do, I suppose, you get that there with children. Their answer is, they don't know. 'Cause a lot of them say, "I want to be like my… my mum or my dad." And that obviously can be… in here you're talking from… high end, like I've had children who talked about, [inaudible] and his dad was a neurosurgeon! He was here for a wee bit, and I'm guessing that's quite high paid!

I also remember you talking about the boy who, erm, albeit in a drama session, said that he was going to, what was it? Stab a guy for a gram of coke, or something?

Er, he said, "Hold on a minute while I do a line of coke…" er, "… finish this line of coke, I'm going to go and stab that…" The word 'guy' wasn't used, I think it was probably worse! (Laughs.) But you get the gist of it! So, yeah, so you're talking about that was their role play, to calm down a room, that's what they would talk about.

But you suggested that that's linked to their home life.

Yeah. So that's what they hear at home. That's what they hear… that particular boy, that boy…

Would you guess that that's their aspiration?

Ah-hah. Aspiration is… that… if dad is a drug dealer, is that where you're going to be ending up as well? As in, I suppose as they do get… I think probably getting that p7 into secondary is… that self-worth there, at that point?

Mm-hmm.

"Well, I may as well do that 'cause that's what's going to become of me." Erm, so as much as I can't pin-point and say that child is… If you really, really think about it, it's going to have an effect. A massive effect.

What an interesting answer. Thank you very much. Erm, okay, well, last few questions are just about what the school does, er, to support the mental health and wellbeing of its pupils. Er, so, just starting with; what sort of activities or lessons are taught in the school to

support their mental health and wellbeing needs? What sort of planned curricular things do you do?

So you've got your health and wellbeing lessons which will cover a variety of things, erm, I do a *lot* of work on… er, resilience, I love doing that! (Laughs.) But, social interactions, understanding others' emotions, we do PATHS lessons as well, and I'll be honest, I think they are a bit… tedious. But if you're clever about it you look at what the lesson is about, and you've got their own flipchart that you go through, you change it up and you make it relevant to them. And you may even take a situation… so I'll quite often say to the children, we've got a PATHS lesson on this, I want to think about what happened in the play room last week between x, y and z. I want you to come out and play out this part here… what could be done better? What could be… that person's feeling at that point? And then that's… the thing that you *have* to do…

I would *absolutely* agree with that. Particularly in the upper school, I think, in the lower school you can just read them out the book and they love them. In my experience. But in its defence, I would say that's true of just about any lesson really, that it's always going to be more powerful, more potent, if you take the actual outcome and tailor how you're delivering that to suit your class.

Yeah. And you can…

Rather than just reading it out of a book.

I talk to my class about my children quite a lot. Erm, my eldest is only in the year below where they are, so I'll talk about things that he goes through. So I'll say this happened at school last week. This is what he said happened, how would you deal with this situation? What do you think he should do? And they give me scenarios, and we find out who would go where, then we work out what would be the consequence of that scenario. If I ask you to *slow* that situation down, what would you do if you were just to kind of stop for a second and think, what was the best option? And they start to follow the same one 'cause they realise, if you think about it, and actually what's the consequence of each one of these actions and how that follows in? And using that real-life example makes such a big difference.

It's so… so powerful.

Ah-hah. If you just talk about these ra… it's not going to engage them. So you have to go in there... we are good with things like that there. We put…

Sorry.

I was going to say we've also got the [name of counselling service], which is the counselling service, which is…

I was going to come to the external agencies in a second. Erm, I was just going to ask you, before you mentioned PATHS, you were talking about the health and wellbeing lessons the school delivers and you mentioned resilience, and things like that. Can I ask, are these prescribed whole-school or whole-authority lessons? Or do you just… do you just pick and choose your own?

Somewhat. We used to be brilliant, I'll be honest we used to have, erm… our NCT was health and wellbeing and PE, and it was fantastically done. Er, obviously can't do that anymore, it's not as easy, erm… We do have what you should be teaching. And there are opportunities to go on, I will take… for example, we've got to do the RHSP, you know relationships and sexual health plan…

Oh yes.

I will take them off of the website they've told me to go to word for word.

Safer.

(Laughs.) For safety! For my own safety! And as much as the wording's *absolutely horrendous*, in terms of, "I can't believe I've got to say this to the children," at the end of the day that's for my own safety. And… to cover my own back. "I was told to say this and that's just what we said and that's it."

Particularly in primary six where some of the lessons are…

Quite…

Quite graphic.

Ah-hah. So what I do with those, I do have a good discussion with them about things and I can, I offer them opportunities to write down their, er, any questions they would not want to ask in front of the class. On a post-it note, no name on it, and we come back to them and if they're appropriate I will answer.

Mm-hmm.

And then that person gets the answer but then everyone gets the answer at the one time. And they don't, they know that I don't know who it was.

Yeah.

So that helps them a lot there. Erm, but other than that I would change them up from what I think is relevant to them. So, a lot of them is just about, again, linking… a lot of the social ones are linked into things that have happened in the playground, or I've had a previous class, I'd say, "Well this happened, and how would you deal with it, or how should we handle it?" And it does help because if you then have a situation in the class I can go, "Remember we spoke about this? What do you think you should have done better?" And then you tend to find you can build bridges and, er, mend, like wee spats and things that they've had much quicker 'cause they go, "Oh yeah, we did talk about that, I probably should have done this. Maybe have done it like that."

So you do have autonomy though to tailor what you're teaching and how you're delivering it…

Yes, ah-hah.

… to your class? And are there any sort of central resource banks or anything in the school that you can use if you want, or…

There's a link to, erm, this specific website that's got everything you can take from there…

Right, okay…

So you can take bits and pieces from it. Erm, I tend to find that… you do lessons like health and wellbeing, you need to maybe start with a base and then let it go in the direction that benefits the children most, in terms of what they're going to get from it.

Just as with every subject.

Yeah.

True. Okay, thank you. Erm, right, okay, now apart from all the planned curricular stuff, the lessons and the activities and things, now I'm interested in… this is a harder question to answer. I'm interested in the wee things that teachers do that make a difference to pupil's mental health and wellbeing. So, apart from the *lessons*, I'm thinking, things either *you* do or you observe your colleagues do, what sorts of other wee strategies do you see or you use yourself that might support mental health and wellbeing?

So, I've got a child in my class last year and this year who have quite a big anxiety with maths. And they hate asking for questions, for clarification 'cause they feel as if that is the focus on them.

Mmm.

And that makes them feel even more anxious. So I've given them a wee red counter. And that red counter is, when we've finished that lesson, they may have asked a question or two, but they don't want to ask loads, if they feel that they need more support but they don't want to look like they're asking for it, then they go past my desk and they put the red counter beside my laptop.

Lovely.

And then, we go back..

Do they use it?

Yeah! Yeah. And if I go back, and I see the red counter there, all I do is I'll pick the red counter up and I'll go over and I'll say something like, to the person beside them, and then I'll say to them if they want some help, and I'd start chatting to them and I'll put the red counter back on their desk again so they know that it's there again if they want to use it again. Wee simple things like that sometimes just…

But they make a difference.

They do…

And that's why I'm interested in them.

Reading clubs as well, reading clubs is a… again, a… almost like a cover for children that are really struggling with like maybe some friendship issues out in the playground, or if it's getting too much for them… and a wee Friday I go, "Last twenty five minutes of lunch, come up, you can sit in the corner with your book." While I have my lunch in class anyway. And they'll do that. So, erm, no one's actually seemed that bothered about it this year! (Laughs.) But last year I did have a good five, six pupils that quite often on a Friday would come up and just sit with their books,. And that was a more calming time for them than some of the kind of chaotic behaviours that would be…

I'm sure.

… seen in the playgrounds.

That's a nice idea.

Yeah. And I work through my breaks, at break and lunch, in my class and I will say to the children, "Just come up and see me. If you want to chat about anything." Erm, the wee things like that that you do. You know what I mean, there's probably hundreds of things that you've done over the years…

Well, this is the thing, there's countless thousands of wee things and many of them you're not even that conscious of. Obviously I'm not expecting anyone to list many, just the first that flash into your mind. They're often the ones that I'm most interested in. Erm, are there any other ways you can think of that we've not already mentioned that the school supports the mental health and wellbeing of its pupils?

So the outside agencies…

Next question!

That the next question? (Laughter.) Erm, do you know, there is a really big open door policy and it is… the teachers are really good at… trying to help the children. They really are. And I don't think you could say that about a lot of places. It's one thing that I think we are *strong* with… is that… the majority, I'm not going to say every single teacher 'cause that would be a lie, but I'd say the *very*, the high majority wold be *really* good at relationship-building or just being… here for the children who need them. And that's from someone at the top, to listen to them, whether it's wee phone calls home to make sure they're okay, and other ways… and all the way to, I mean, bringing in clothes… for children and putting them in their bags for them to go home with without anyone else knowing. And lunches, quite often, as well. Knowing that a child's going home to no dinner. You'll just… very, very quietly, put in the excess lunches that we've got that day, you'll put them in a bag for them, and they go home. And we also, erm, we buy presents for children at Christmas. That go under their tree. But they never know. And actually, one of the boys I saw today, you know he's not done as well as I'd like him to have done at high school, but I remember him feeling nervous about Christmas 'cause his pal was talking about how he was getting five hundred pounds and a Playstation Five at the time. And I thought, "He's not going to get anything." So I bought him a drone. And er, got him this drone, and it got under his tree, and I remember coming back in the January and he came into the class and he's like, "*I got an amazing drone for Christmas!*" And I was like, "*That is amazing!*" (Laughter.) And honestly, I could have cried. 'Cause I was sitting gong, "He's so happy about a drone." Cause I just thought, that looks like a really, really amazing gift for him. He needs something to talk about. When his pal talked about all the stuff that he got… and that's again, that….

How do you manage to get the drone from your hands to under his tree without him knowing?

We speak to the parents.

I see.

We do have parents that understand about these things, so we just… we make sure, erm, that… there are certain children that are put forward… you can specifically buy for children, or you can just buy something that can go in and we'll make sure that parents that don't have, get something for their tree. But I specifically wrote a note on this and handed it in. I said, "That's got to go to such-and-such." Because he needs to be waking up to that present in the morning.

I'm filling up now. Okay, well that certainly answered that question well. Thank you. Erm, last couple then. What makes meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils more difficult? What are the barriers to helping them?

The time that you actually get with them. The time when you are spinning a million different plates that… in terms of your marking and your curriculum that you have to deliver and cramming all that in and then the pressure of making sure that they're on track…

Mmm.

… academically, when sometimes there's not a hope in hell that that's going to be the case. And I think that actually I would turn around and say, "Does it *really* matter if that child can be a *comprehensive* reader?" I would actually turn around and say, "See if I can get him to read, and be a *functional* reader…" I would rather they were a functional reader with, erm, a strong bit of self-belief and aspiration within themselves. But I feel sometimes that you're like well I've got to give up on the wee but there because I need to make sure that they can use their metalinguistic skills to work out this word that they're never going to probably use in their life.

The tension between academic and…

Ah-hah.

… emotional…

'Cause children won't learn a *thing* unless they walk in your classroom and feel happy there. And this is the problem, you've got this… it's the expectation that we have to be at the same level of… if you walk [distance withheld] up the road from here, you walk into a local authority which will have children coming from affluent backgrounds, and their scores and things like that, are… you're expected to have the scores they have, and you're never going to get that. Nd I'm not saying that money brings around good parenting or anything that

way, but what it does bring is, erm, resources for the school and more teachers and these things.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, whereas… and classroom assistants to *every* class, to deal with… take that group and work with that group, will you go and take that child and speak to them, make sure they're okay.

Mmm. You'd be surprised about the levels of mental wellbeing issue that they're facing too.

Er, well that worries me, 'cause of my own children, they're obsessed with the whole idea that they have to be, erm, going to university. Like, you have to go and get a job, and erm…

Well, you know, you can't have that kind of environment without driving that sort of result. In my opinion.

It is… that is a *big* worry. Erm…

So, sorry, er, the other side of that coin then, you're saying that time is a real, time is the resource you would have more of…

Mm-hmm.

So, the other side of that question is; what would make meeting the needs of pupils easier?

(Pause.) Availability of… loads of things. Availability of classroom assistants, more teachers so that you're not missing out on time that you need to take to plan, or take that child out to help them. Erm… and also to bring your… 'cause… As a teacher, I don't think a lot of people… (sighs) understand this if they're not in the situation which is, when you walk through that door into your classroom, every bit of your own mental health, every anxiety that you have, every bit of stress, strain that you have, you have to *sit* at the door in a bag. (Laughs.) Go in that class and perform for six hours to make sure that you don't come across in that way, that they don't take that from you. 'Cause you're always worried that that's where a lot of their problems come from. 'Cause if they have at home, if you have a parent that's like that, it rubs off on them. Even if you don't think it does, it *massively* does. So you've got to go in there, you perform for six hours and you make out that everything in your life is absolutely fine, so that you can be there for them. And then when they leave at three o'clock, you get a ton more anxiety 'cause of all the stuff that's happened that day. You shove it in that bag. (Laughs.) And you put it back on again and you take that home to your own home and you deal with your own things. And I think that if you were to put more into education and more into the social… care for children…

Mm-hmm.

… then everyone has less of a problem with their own mental health. And then that… that relief from the teacher allows them to be that person, to… that sound board, rather than being the sound board that doesn't know if it *really* can take any more. Hence why you're seeing so many teachers off with stress at the moment. It's not necessarily stress of just the job, it's stress of life but not being able to *actually* deal with that stress because you are *constantly* under pressure.

I can so recognise that description. I remember it well.

Mm-hmm.

Okay, is there anything else you'd like to add on the subjects we've been talking about, or not, just anything else you want to add?

Er, no, I think I've probably talked to you too much, sorry! (Laughs.)

No, no, I am absolutely delighted with… you know, you've just given me so much fascinating stuff, and I really appreciate all the time you've given me, so… thank you very much, I'll turn this off…

Yep. Thank you.

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW FIVE: CLASS TEACHER 3 (MS BROOKE; 05/06/24).

Right, okay. Okay, so thank you *very* much for agreeing to be interviewed, I have got your consent to record it?

You do indeed, yes.

Brilliant, thank you. So, er, easy one to begin with; if you don't mind me asking, how long have you taught?

I have taught for, just finishing my nineteenth year.

Nineteen years.

Yeah.

Nineteen years, and all in this school?

All in this school.

All in this school. Did you do your probation in this school?

I did indeed! (Laughs.)

Did you?

All I know… is this school! (Laughs.)

Well, that must be an interesting perspective.

Sure!

Erm, so, over the course of your career, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour, and if so how would you characterise them?

Okay… overall, yes, I would say there has been a change.

Okay.

Erm… (pause.) In terms of characterisation, that's… (exhales loudly.) I've taught across different stages, in my time here, so I started in primary two…

Oh, did you?

Erm, moved to primary four, then to… or primary five, primary four, primary six, erm, most laterally spent most of the time in primary six and I think even just looking across the time with… teaching in primary six for the last maybe eight years or so…

Mm-hmm.

Erm… again, COVID's going to be a huge part of that as well, erm, you can just see the young people, erm, struggling with things. There are some things they've always struggled with, just general friendships, frustrations, erm… We were talking, like as a staff, you'd reflect back to the 'notorious' pupils of back in the 'good old days' and you know, these kids would be quite high tariff kids. They'd be kicking, they'd be punching, they'd be swearing, they'd be yelling. But that, what we're reflecting on, that was probably more the anger and frustration towards another *pupil* that had upset them, or…

Oh, I see. Ah-hah.

(Sighs.) Something had gone on in school, it wasn't necessarily the anger, the swearing… The violence wasn't directed at staff at the time. So, where… whilst that child would be quite high tariff, there was still a level of respect towards the staff within that.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, the would never really have sworn at the staff members or anything like that…

Okay.

Whereas *now* it feels there is this rage, this anger, this frustration… which can come within the situation that's happening, however it feels like it's totally out spilling now more towards staff, where this a much more…

Okay.

… this phrase, '*there is a lack of respect*'. That when boundaries are put in, did our pupils of twenty-odd years ago, fifteen years ago struggle with them? Yeah absolutely they would have, but there still would have been a bit more element of respect of, "Okay, I'll take this consequence," or the parents would maybe have been also supportive of us at times. That's not to say all parents of modern-day don't support us… but there feels a wee shift.

So the *focus* of children's anger has changed?

(Slowly) Yeah.

From in between pupils to on staff?

To staff, at times. Again, not all times and not all pupils. But, erm, there is certainly, it feels… or when you speak to other staff, other colleagues and things, they… You know, one teacher reported she was slapped full pelt in the face by a primary one pupil.

Primary one? Okay. (Sighs.)

Erm, you know, just… again, a school development for us probably as well has been the addition or the expansion of the [name of ASN unit] within our school. Erm, that certainly… that wasn't here when I first arrived, it was actually [different aspect of mainstream curriculum] classes that were down there…

Okay…

So over time, they were moved up to a different primary school in [name of area].

Mm-hmm.

And this then opened up new classrooms in our school and this is when the [name of ASN unit] had been created.

And has that brought changes for you within the mainstream classes?

Yeah, I suppose so, erm. (Sighs.) I guess it was for pupils who were sort of struggling behaviour-wise but it wasn't just always on behaviour, though…

No, no.

So within your class you had some kids in mainstream who were just *really* struggling academically, so… and also nurture was being brought in all at once, so it was probably this multi-layered, erm, sort of area of the school that was trying to support kids who were maybe just struggling on basic needs of… needing a breakfast in the morning. Some kids were just not… coping for whatever reason in mainstream class, maybe just the family circumstances and things. Then you've also got on top of that kids in your class who are just

really struggling academically, and you could really feel that in the class, all these children were maybe not behaving so well, or their self-esteem was *so* low because the work was just too high for them. So the centre there would be created to try and draw some of these children out of your class…

Yes…

… which would really help us. However, some of these children were then being taken to a part of the school where there were *very* fiery behaviours going off as well and it was exposing them… so there was this conflict as teachers of going, "Well, what's best for them?" Is it better to keep them in a safer, more settled classroom environment, where they're maybe not thriving as much because the work's… it's differentiated, but it still maybe isn't *sufficiently* differentiated for them. Or do we remove these pupils out of mainstream to take them down to the [name of ASN unit] but they're being… we're quite unsettling them by exposing them to really quite hard behaviours?

I can see how that would be difficult.

These children then return back to mainstream classes and *this* sort of high energy level starts to ripple its way through the class and it can sometimes unsettle…

Okay. You've experienced that happening in previous years I take it?

Yeah, ah-hah, I've had, erm, some… a lot of the time, these higher tariff pupils… would start in my class at the start of the year, and I think management would go, "Right, let's see how this year goes." We'd work really hard to build up a good relationship, a rapport with them to try and meets their needs as much as possible, you could normally get so far through the year… but then there have been really high trigger flash points where… it started to struggle and then that child would maybe need to be extracted or moved 'cause mainstream classes just were not quite… the right place for them. We'd have to evacuate the classroom, or things like that and that's just very unsettling for *everyone* involved.

(Sighs.) It certainly is, isn't it? Okay, right, thank you. So, you know, you've suggested some changes that you have noticed over the course of that career, course of your career, I beg your pardon. Erm, have you any insights into what's causing any of these changes?

(Sighs.) Oh, erm…

The changes in behaviour you were talking about.

Yeah…

I mean, I think you mentioned… parents? And you suggested they had maybe less, well I don't know, I don't want to put words into your mouth.

Yeah, no, I know what you mean, I definitely feel, erm… probably more historically coming to our school, if you put a sanction on a pupil the parents would more… they might not always agree with it, but they would accept it and they would sort of discipline their child or have a conversation with them. Erm… more so now, not all the time, not necessarily with my class but you can just get this underlying sense and current through social media… is a massive part where parental voice is coming through *very* strong and very negative…

Okay.

Erm, at times against the school, or against staff, and I think social media has a huge part of some of these behaviour changes that we're seeing. Not just within our pupils, 'cause that's a whole… other can of worms! Where our children's mental health is *definitely* being impacted by exposure to mobile phones, social media platforms…

Okay.

A pupil last year would come… a few pupils last year would come in on a Monday morning in an *absolutely foul* mood before we'd even started the working week, because of something that was posted online…

Over the weekend…

… or sent to them and they just descended into this negative… and then they had to meet them face to face to sort of deal with it so we were at 'red alert' from the very start of the week because of something that's… So there's this more… issues from home tend to creep into school life a wee bit more?

I see, yeah. Ah-hah, the leaking in… Okay.

Erm, and then with regards to parents as well I think, like… there just seems to be this culture nowadays where… anyone can voice their opinion. Which, again, is completely *right* and, you know, people are entitled to their opinions but it's just that level of respect has maybe been lost a wee bit from the parents to the school…

Mm-hmm.

I think, just like, even our recent meeting about class sizes being merged… parent voice was very vocal. Very negatively vocal.

Okay… right.

Erm, towards it, so… children sometimes hear this… dialogue from home.

I see.

You know, "I'll just go and say X, Y or Z. I'll just go and say… *this* to them, they can't do that!" There's a sort of more… everyone does have an opinion, absolutely correct, it's not to state that, but there's a way of… how to go about it?

Yeah.

Or to trust the professionals that… they wouldn't be making these changes… just for the sake of it?

Yeah, I understand.

There are massive big issues but that maybe gets lost at times.

Right, okay, that is very difficult to, to deal with. Erm, do you see any connections to… what you're... I mean you mentioned this briefly, right at the start. Do you see any connections to some of these changes and the lockdowns?

(Inhales.) Yes! (Laughs.) So, I'm sure lockdown… I'm not a parent myself, but I can fully imagine, or sometimes, what our parents will speak to us and parent-teacher conferences and things when we're meeting them is just the strain that they were under during that time…

Ah-hah.

Of how they just couldn't get the child to work and that really made… put pressure on the parent-child relationship. Erm, a lot of time on devices, on tablets and pacifying, maybe, the kids 'cause the parents themselves are having to work and they don't have that time to spend with them. You know, just that reliance on technology, erm, and just that… I don't know, instant screen time. Maybe the social interaction was removed from these children.

Mm-hmm. Yes, completely.

Teamwork, listening, being patient, waiting your turn, coping when it doesn't go your way, as we're then bringing the children back together, a *massive* primary school returning together, but maybe all quite insular and quite selfish and quite isolated. To retrain some of these very basic skills…

What did it feel like, when you all came back, I mean, erm, how different was it, teaching the kids?

Yeah, it was *odd*. They were there, but they were distant, 'cause you had to keep this two-metre…

(Laughter.)

… distance around you, your desk, so you could see them but you were still sort of very much keeping them at arm's length…

Did you find that worked? 'Cause…

No! (Laughter.) It's hard. Erm, and you kind of want to be able to be interactive and still approachable to them and not the sort of stand-offish… It was just a very confusing time.

Mm-hmm.

What naturally felt correct as a human to do but what guidance and science and everything was trying to say…

Yes, I remember that well. (Laughter.) I'm glad that's over! Mmm. Okay, well, I know it's difficult to generalise but, in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in this school?

(Pause.) Very mixed.

Very mixed? Okay.

Very… varied. Erm… I think more *extreme*, I suppose? Like were there issues pre-COVID Where we had children really struggling? Absolutely, there definitely would have been mental health issues that we were dealing with, with children. Erm, but it just feels it's more intense, it's magnified, there's *maybe* more children in your class… that percentage just feels larger.

Since COVID?

Since COVID, yeah, I'd say. Erm, whether again we talk about mental health so much more now, it's a term that we use. We teach quite regularly, we talk about that when we struggle with things, how do we cope, so the children themselves are much more…

Mm-hmm.

… articulate. The PATHS programme that we use very much encourages to… *all* feelings are okay…

Yes, ah-hah.

… and to try your hardest to *name* our feelings and… "Oh, I'm feeling ashamed, erm, *because*… you, erm, didn't do your homework and you spoke in front of the whole class," and that, but some children still find that exceptionally difficult to articulate…

Mm-hmm.

Erm…

Do you think that increased, erm, awareness and ability to express and identify feelings that PATHS is particularly good at… is that something that's separate from the increase in mental health and wellbeing issues that you're… I think you used the word 'extreme'. Is that separate from, or does it account for all of that increase?

Hmm.

What do you think?

Erm… I'm not sure. Erm… (pause.) Say that one again for me?

You're describing there that pupils and staff are all much more aware of mental health and wellbeing.

Yep.

And the pupils are much better able to express how they feel and identify their feelings. Do you think that that accounts for the increase in mental health and wellbeing issues that you see? Is it more of a perception thing? Or do you think that mental health and wellbeing issues *have* increased?

Have increased…

Yes.

(Sighs.) Yeah, it's difficult, it could probably come through in both I suppose, you know, erm… (exhales.) Some children are very good at articulating, others still… (laughs) very much struggle to sort of put that across. I also just look back to… almost when I was a child that you're saying… (sighs.) Did I have bad days? Yes.

Mm-hmm.

Did I cope? Well yeah. Did I just feel rubbish some days? Yes. Erm, it's just trying to build up that resilience and coping strategies as well. Is there a bit of pandering to in our modern-day society that… oh bless, right, you're… Sports Day. There's an example. A child's really quite upset and anxious about it, and you kind of go well, what do you do there? As a teacher do you put them under the stress of going, "No. You're doing it. Like, get on with it." But this child may… have quite strong, big feelings.

Yeah.

Is that a mental health issue? Or is that this child just really doesn't like it and they still just need to get on with it? And you're trying to sort of teach them… I would probably *more* likely take the option of, "No, just do it." And put it down to experience and yeah, by the

end of it you might go, "I still didn't like that." Okay, that's fine. But that's experience, that's what life is, instead of always shying away from it.

Mm-hmm.

(Laughs.) I'm not really answering your question in terms of is it…

No, no! Well, it's interesting…

… is it perceived? Like you're saying, is it perceived? Does that child have mental health issues? No, but do I think he might be on the autistic spectrum? Somewhere there? Yes.

Mm-hmm.

Does that then combine with mental health issues, I'm sure there's going to be an element of that there too. But I think we're all on the spectrum somewhere in some capacity.

Yep. Definitely. I know I am. (Laughter.)

Absolutely! Erm, it's just, it's really hard to know. But I think you now do look at your children and go, "Well you're probably autistic, and you're autistic, and you're on the spectrum here and I can see that triggers you…" Then I guess it's trying to help the children… to… *cope*? I think we need to build them that resilience.

Yeah, okay.

We *can't* always just put it down to "Oh, I'm depressed, or I'm not feeling right." We all will feel these things, it's just trying to instil a sort of toolbox of…

Coping strategies…

… strategies how to cope, so as they go through life my worry for some of our pupils is… if we keep pandering to them and letting them, you know, maybe… not do things just because they don't like them…

Mm-hmm…

What are we, how are we setting them up for skills for life, for the future…

Yes.

Erm, but equally to counter that you don't want to *belittle*… it, and… and cause them mental harm, or scarring, and…

I think as teachers those are just… countless… occasions every day where you just take these individual decisions based on what you know about the child, and what your assessment of the situation, what's going to be right.

And that's a really… that's an interesting point as well, 'cause I know across my years of teaching where I've dealt with a situation in a certain way and maybe there's been a bit of backlash coming off of it…

Mm-hmm.

And when it's explained to you, the bigger picture… for whatever reason, confidentiality, some key pieces of information weren't passed over…

Oh… okay…

Having known those key pieces of information, you would have responded in an entirely different to that situation, so then you get frustrated 'cause you think, "Oh, I maybe have upset that pupil," or said something that was maybe not the best thing to say. I wouldn't… I assessed it, and with the information that I knew, and this is how I deemed, I though best to deal with it. And sometimes retrospectively you go, "Well of course I would have dealt with that differently!"

Even if you do have all the information you're never going to get it right all the time!

Exactly, and what can sometimes maybe be the right call one way for one child, you try to replicate that and…

Oh, totally… (laughter.)

… show the same compassion, or the same tough sort of love, as it were, to someone else, and that's… incorrect, as well, it's like a *minefield* at times, to try to get it right.

Isn't it? Yeah. Erm, another thing I was interested in that you mentioned there was you said, getting back to the first question I asked on this topic, about changes in mental health and wellbeing, you mentioned that things had become more extreme. Or mental health and wellbeing issues had become more extreme for some children. And you said that that had, erm, accelerated since COVID, become more rapid, more noticeable. Did… so you think that there was any change *prior* to COVID? Have things deteriorated, or maybe *improved*…

Mmm.

… before COVID? Thinking back to, er, those years that you taught here before that.

Yeah. I certainly would say… ah, we have more parents pressing us, say to…. "I think my child's ADHD," or "I think my child might be autistic," or "I think my child is, er, got different things." I feel when I'm saying sort of '*extreme*', sometimes it can be individual… erm, pupil there, in primary five there who clearly has strong, strong mental health issues. Just… she exists, I suppose, in the class. Like the teacher there's saying "I cannot teach her, she's not in

that capacity of which to teach." So that's quite a strong, strong one. Er, at the time of COVID, however, I did have a pupil who… who was very emotionally unstable in and around the classroom, who required an awful lot of, erm, supports in place for transition points and this and that. So it's not to say these things didn't happen…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, but possibly another reason why it feels more extreme or there's more children with… labels as such or parents coming through is… (laughs.) Just the under-resourcing of the school and under-staffed as well. When I think back I felt as if we maybe had more classroom assistants to support us, there was different interventions around the school that could support us…

I see, yeah, mm-hmm.

That's not to say we don't have any just now, but everything just feels stretched.

Mm-hmm.

And that level of intervention too, some of our families who are struggling, the threshold is set *so* high… we *know* they need help. And we ask for the help but the other parties maybe aren't able to intervene yet because they haven't… it's not gone extreme enough yet?

Mm-hmm.

So then… the extreme behaviour, it just continues to spiral and spiral and spiral and we can see it happening before our eyes but we… there's no way to sort of slow it down or… you're trying your hardest to but… it can then just hit such a high level where the family is… is at that breaking point…

Crisis.

… the crisis point for the parent, for the pupils as well.

Mmm. Okay, erm, so such mental health and wellbeing issues that you do see in your class, in the school, what sort of forms do they take? Typically, what sort of mental health and wellbeing needs are you dealing with? How do they manifest?

Erm, in terms of how they present with the pupils…

Yeah.

… they can be reluctant to come into class, may even refuse to come into class, attendance can be quite poor, and that can be I guess mental health and low self-esteem, they probably run hand in hand. And it's that horrible spiral of… "Oh, I didn't feel good in class today, 'cause I didn't know something, so I'm off the next day…"

Yeah, it's harder to come back…

And when you come back in the gap's now magnified again, we're back in that same situation, so they're off for another period of time so that sort of low attendance, erm, low level of work, I guess… My class this year, generally haven't been too bad but you can see them quite emotional when things are just getting a bit too much for them. Maybe wee outbursts of shouting, swearing, storming out of the classroom…

Okay.

Erm, again maybe not so much this year but last year, it was *much* more explosive, the classroom atmosphere could turn on a knife edge very, very quickly, erm…

So more sort of…

Pupil last year was self-harming.

Right.

You know, had unscrewed the blade of the sharpener and was sort of threatening to harm himself that way…

Mm-hmm.

Self-*loathing* dialogue, commentary about himself, you know, just, "I'm not good enough, I'm this, and that." Like, scrawling notes, ripping stuff up, erm… Harm to himself. Harm to other people. Erm, climbing up on the roof of the school, climbing over the fence, very unsafe when out and about so very much needed the support of… mum, you know… He would run away from home and things like this so… For that particular pupil, those were some of the beha... more extreme… and they just magnified and intensified as the year continued to go on.

I see, ah-hah.

He required then to go onto medication, erm, and help like that. And I think, like for CAMHS, again they're operating on such a high threshold. So again, *way* back in the start of my career it would have been school psychologist referred to CAMHS, there would have been a wait but *nothing* to the extent of what we are waiting now. We're pretty much being told if parents say, "I'd like to start the process for ADHD, I'd like CAMHS to be involved," it's pretty much… it's a no-go at the moment, it's saturated, it's full up.

Yeah. Certainly not going to happen before they reach secondary school, is it…

Right! Erm…

Okay. Oh, that's distressing. Erm, okay… ah… I think I actually asked you something very similar to this before (laughs), just following up various other questions… erm, have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing? I have asked you this, haven't I, because you discussed more extreme behaviours since COVID. And I forgot what you said before COVID, did you notice any changes before COVID?

Changes before, erm… (pause.) There definitely, I mean a hundred percent there would have been children who would have struggled when you look back…

Oh, always, ah-ha, but… has it improved or deteriorated, or…

(Sighs.)

… just stayed the same?

(Pause.) I would probably say deteriorated in some ways. Erm, but probably more through that sort of resilience of coping, and not… I don't know, there was just something about children from pre-COVID, like when things didn't quite go their way of *course* they got upset, of course they naturally got their… it just feels there's more… children you'd look at and go, "Yeah, you should be okay with this, you should be able to cope," but they're… they're maybe *less* so. And that's maybe wrong of me, that's maybe judgemental on my part, kind of thing, to…

You find them a bit more *fragile*? Is that…

Yeah! (Laughs.) Fragile's a *really* good word to use. Yeah. Just more sort of fragile or a wee bit 'egg-shelly', of how they'll cope, or you've got to work *really* hard to build up that, erm, encouragement and things and… erm, again, like encouragement for school stuff, academically, like homework and things like that, you know? Changed days, when I had my homework, my homework was a priority and by jings, did I have to do that. Education, school was seen as a very important part of childhood, you know? When I went to my gran's, homework had to be done before anything else, and clubs… Kids lives are so busy nowadays as well, and that's brilliant, that's great and you want them to do those things too but… Just sometimes, erm, at parents' night and things if you're trying to say, "Listen, your pupil's maybe not on track," they're like… you leave there and maybe get… the parents will say, "Well, what are you doing about it?" And you go, "Fine. Doing everything you can…" But there is this element of… Or they'll say, "Well, what do we need to do?" And some parents, credit to them, will go, "Okay. I'll work on that." So I was told my times tables weren't very good in primary five and oh, goodness me, did my mum make me know my

times tables! (Laughter.) And I was way more sharper, confident, the teachers could see a change in me, my confidence was up. But I had that sort of supportive family network who prioritised that and who took time out of their life to work with me on that. Whereas I don't know… I couldn't say that for all the pupils in my class, that they've got that supportive home that values education. Who sees the need, that as part of their parental role…

Mm-hmm.

… is to give a bit of their time to their child, is to sit and read with them or help them with their homework or… a lot of the parents… or when you speak to the kids, one wee girl was just like, "My mum does *nothing* with me, she just sits on her phone all the time. I can't do it." So you're constantly having to… be careful with how you phrase homework and… for so many you want to say, "Get your homework in!" And da-da-da-da. And that works for such a percentage of your class but… you know then there's another percentage of your class who that's just not a fair expectation on *at all*, so you have to alter your expectation for them. So this year, or not just this year but a few years… I've done a lesson 'equity versus equality'.

Mmm. Mm-hmm.

And showing the children, and…

It's very important.

You sort of lead them, "Oh, is treating everyone the same, correct?"

They're like, "Yeah! That's Fair!"

And you're like, "Great." And you do a wee activity and they quickly realise, hang on this isn't fair that we're all treated the same.

Ah-hah.

Then that leads into equity. And then I try and… I apply that across into real-life situations in a classroom, of going, "Well see when I say *this* to *that* person of the class, but yet I change the instruction and say this to this person, is that fair?" And they're… it helps them to go, "Right, okay, yeah that is fair. I can under…" So, it's just trying to teach them this maturity of… you can't treat everyone the same. And as a teacher you've got to hold…

Yeah, of course!

… you've got to learn that as well.

Do they get that?

Er… su… per… ficially, yes.

Wow. Good for you!

And I think if they don't, and they get that sense of injustice; "But that's not…"

"Remember the equity versus equality lesson?"

"Oh yeah, aye…"

"Think about this situation for me. Right… so I know you might be a wee bit frustrated but do you see?"

(Laughter.)

So it's… it's sometimes needing to connect the dots for them a wee bit.

Ah-hah.

To point it out.

I'm impressed. You know, I found that one of the most difficult tasks in my career. Mmm. Er… changes in pupil mental health and wellbeing. Any ideas what's causing any of these changes?

Ooft!

I mean you've mentioned a few… areas…

I know. Social media?

Social media.

Like, parenting… parenting styles?

Parenting style.

Of how it once was to where we are now. Just general consumerism. Erm… the politics? Politics, budgeting, money, where we are politically, erm, just all sectors, no matter who I speak to… friends, no matter what profession they're in, everything just feels… stretched. Across not just education but I think… I mean I think… ah-hah, everywhere. Since returning from COVID, everyone's like, "Oh they're off unwell, or they're this or that…" It's not just even children, it feels like the mental health of *adults* as well, of how adults cope…

Yeah.

… with things has come, is just *changing*.

Mm-hmm.

Erm… but yeah, the sort of parenting side, the social media I think's a big thing for our young people, they're exposed to things… emotions, videos, that are way beyond their years of maturity.

Now I'm interested in that because… this is a very common complaint. Erm, in my experience anyway. Er, and when I asked you if things were deteriorating before COVID,

obviously if social media's such a big factor then this is something relatively new, you know within the past, I don't know, ten years is it?

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Im trying to think of our p6s, if they had phones before COVID, and they would have. But again… we're *way* more advanced down the line now, of where technology was versus there, so you probably were seeing, I guess the start of the deterioration, or obsessiveness over phones and screens, how to instant message folk outside of school…

Everyone in your class got a phone?

No. Not everyone.

Okay.

So there are some… and, you know, even parents' nights, they were like, "Oh we don't want to get a phone for so and so, really avoid it," and it's almost like encouraging the parents, I know that must be really, really hard, the pressure that they must be under and they're like, "It's really difficult but we're really trying to stand firm on this," and erm… but again, other parents are just like, "Och well, you know, I couldn't have them not having it, so, erm, I'll just let them on it," kind of thing, so…

Okay, ah, last one on this section, and this was the longest section! (Laughter.) Do you have any views about mental health and wellbeing issues affect certain groups of children disproportionately? Are there some groups of children who are more likely to suffer poor mental health and wellbeing?

Mmm. Interesting. (Pause. Sighs.) I'm looking particularly at probably a pupil this year who's from, erm, a broken home…

Okay.

… low pov… or poor poverty, erm, just that stable network, whether it's family, friends, home life…

Mmm.

… erm, mental health, it can affect all pupils but again it's in my experience, more *recently*, it has been my lower decile pupils maybe who would struggle.

Okay, SIMD. Mm-hmm.

In saying that however the one before COVID, she actually has been sitting as a higher decile… actually two pupils who were quite high tariff were from a higher decile so… (sighs.)

It can affect…

It can… It can affect all, but just more of my first-hand experience this year, it has been my lower decile…

Okay.

Equally… again, to counter that though, some of my lower decile kids are really switched-on, really well-balanced kids because, erm, they kind of know life is tough at times and they just kind of accept that, whereas other pupils from more affluent maybe backgrounds or areas, they are the ones that can sometimes struggle, that things aren't going their way…

Okay, yeah. Mm-hmm.

"But I… should just be good at that because I'm kind of good at everything, and…" Erm, so I know it's not a straight answer, it's.. I find it quite hard to go, "It's this! *This* particular group."

It's always so. There are no straight answers.

Erm, but I think for both of those you've got so many different contributory factors that can be part of that mental health side. More affluent area, parents are away travelling or they're away from home…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, a lot of the time to work, er, but there's almost a neglect there which can impact into mental health issues…

Okay.

Other spectrum it's, parents are there but they're maybe not parenting…

Yeah.

They're maybe unable to parent for various reasons. But one of my mums this year, she's a brilliant mum. And she's from a, you know a lower, erm, decile and life is hard for them.

Mm-hmm.

But when I listen to her speak to her daughter and give her advice.. you sort of go, your really sound with her advice, very balanced, you know. Will encourage her daughter to stand up for herself but equally… "No, that's unacceptable and here's why…" You know there's some really good morals and grounded in teaching, erm, being given to that pupil and you can then see it rub off on the way she holds herself in the class and things like that as well. Erm, it's so hard to try and pinpoint a specific…

It certainly is, yeah, ah-hah. I'm just interested in your views and perceptions and experiences, and as you say, there is no one.. I mean, if there was, then we would have sorted all this out ages ago!

Absolutely!

Okay…

The only thing, sorry to interject…

No! Go for it!

… was there's a pupil who was autistic and his… he did start to display self-harm issues, erm… but he was absolutely brilliant, I had a really good relationship with him, but his mum and dad, you know where from a good area, erm, or a good part of, near the school. But what was amazing to see in that family, he was so well supported…

Mm-hmm.

… within it, and you could see him flourish and grow. I mean it was *so* hard for them at times, I mean like he would be physically punching his mum and being really violent towards her at times, like… But the mum and the dad were just such a strong unit together, and it'll put them under so much pressure but you could just see the togetherness of them…

Mm-hmm.

Really, really helped him progress... And then you see families like that, sort of similar set up, but the mum herself, she's like, "My heart breaks for… another pupil who's like this because she's like, I'm not being big-headed but I know they're not going to get the same support we've given… given our son.

So, you've suggested deprivation, erm, but also there's a strong factor about parental support there. Er, as a protective factor.

Mmm. Yeah.

Okay, well that leads me quite neatly onto the home circumstances.

Okay! (Laughter.)

Erm, so, to what extent do you think that parents and carers in your class or in the school community in general are employed in unstable jobs? By unstable I mean where pay and hours are uncertain, so work in the gig economy, taxi drivers, delivery drivers, or zero hours contracts or temporary contracts, things like that.

Yeah. Erm… Hmm. Could you repeat the first part of the question again?

Okay, to what extent do you think that parents and carers in the school community, or in your class as a microcosm of that…

Yeah. No, I think certainly that would… to what extent, I'm trying to think probably don't know all of my sort of families' professions and things, but erm… do kids talk about like shift work at times and things like that and how, erm, they might not have seen their mum and dad for a few days 'cause they're away and then things are maybe left unsaid or not able to be spoke about or resolved… erm… (Pause.) Other… (makes clicking noise with tongue. Long pause.) Other families then, I've got a pupil whose mum's like a teacher and again, you can just see again through our parents' night conversation it's quite a different dialogue than, erm, a parent who maybe doesn't really have a job in my class came in, you can see them, they… the parents themselves are quite nervous to come into school…

Oh yes, of course, yeah.

… and actually brought in another adult, or her dad, in with her…

For support, yeah, ah-hah.

… because she felt vulnerable or unsafe and erm, and that… (sigh) yeah, that must be quite… it's very hard to see.

It's intimidating I think, for a lot of parents.

Abso… and I think that's the thing, 'cause they're like, "Oh, I hated school," or they themselves remember their experience of school and sometimes that can be projected onto it, erm, but again I guess in terms of the job side of things… erm, yeah I guess a more stable, some of the kids speak of how their parent travels around the world and is an engineer and that, er, that pupil actually gets quite upset at that transition point when dad leaves. So, we've got to a point where, erm, that child is now comfortable enough, we've built up our relationship enough, that she's able to say, "Oh, I might be feeling a bit, or I am feeling a bit upset at the moment, but it's just because my dad's leaving, or has left, and I'm just…"

So he's away for long periods, is that…

He's away for long periods of time, so you can see her wobbling, or just even during a parents' night evening conversation to have those chats, "This is why they might be a wee bit more emotionally unstable, or some aspects of work or homework might not be done." But again you can see that mental health *lift* on the return of and the excitement of, erm, of their return as well, erm…

You mentioned… something struck me, you mentioned you weren't aware of *everyone's* families' employment across your class, erm, I mean thinking across your class to the extent that you do know what people do, how would you characterise careers, jobs, things in your class?

Er, a few professional ones, sort of teachers say, erm, nurses have been spoken about, police have been mentioned, so again shift work, so they've got some stories to share! Erm, some are more sort of practical, hands-on, like bus drivers or lorry drivers and things like that, for Morton's bakers or things like this, so it's nice and we've been doing 'The World of Work' [name of classroom topic] the past fortnight, and it's interesting just hearing…

Oh, that's right, yes. You've had speakers come in…

Yeah! So it's been quite interesting hearing about different jobs and again how the kids are like, "Oh my dad does this," or, "My mum does this!" And a lot of the kids are like, "Oh I *don't* want to be such-and-such because that's what my dad does."

Oh really! (Laughter.)

And that's totally sort of put off some professions and they're like, "I'm going to make sure I'm *not* that!" Or equally, you sort of hear them going, "No, no, I think I would quite, quite enjoy to do that," erm… but yeah.

Unemployment?

Unemployment? None of them have really spoken about that, actually. But whether that's a sort of taboo subject, they won't really draw much attention, erm… There is one family in my class who I know for a fact she is unemployed and life is… just…

Hard.

… chaotic for them, we're really hitting… erm, tough for the pupils concerned and the mum's mental health is just… we're hitting that threshold where at the start of the year, the threshold wasn't high enough but we *knew* they were on the trajectory of sadly where we are now, and it's just really broken-hearted in that… ah, unemployed… claiming for… no money, claiming benefits… taking, or, someone kindly gave the mum money 'cause she was, "I don't have money to feed the boys," and… but then ten minutes later the person who gave her the money saw the mum coming out with fags and a bottle of vodka.

Oh.

And just not able to make sensible choices as a parent themselves.

Mm-hmm.

But… and again, it's easy to sit and judge, and you just say, "Oh, you just need to fix this, that and the next thing," but there'll be so many factors interlinking into that there that erm, if the parent themselves… who doesn't have a job, that income, their own routine and stability… that can then knock into the children as well and their lives are fractured and unstable and, erm…

Absolutely.

… chaotic… so then school becomes… a really odd place for them, where there is structures and boundaries and routines and you have to think of other people. So when those pupils come into school it can, it can be really, erm… 'cause the boundaries are ideally meant to be there but there comes that equity and equality. So you've got to change the landscape of your classroom quite quickly…

Change the environment, yeah, ah-hah. To fit the child. Do you see any associations at all between the socio-economic stability of a household and the pupil's mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

(Pause. Exhales.)

In terms of the sort of financial and social stability, I mean you talk about these ones that are in chaos…

Mm-hmm.

Can you see any associations between either stability or chaos and…

Yeah, I mean absolutely.

You can?

Their house is… they had to be taken out their home because it was under such… erm, squalor, it just was not fit for purpose.

And that's affecting the mental health and wellbeing of the pupil?

That is affecting… massively.

Okay.

And then the wider learning spirals out from there, oh absolutely. Erm, just the trauma that they will face, erm, so again coming into school this… the brothers are twins and the one brother only comes into school for a short period of time because that's a bespoke timetable that meets his needs.

Ah-hah.

The other twin brother though should be in all day because he's *different* and his needs are different t the other boy's. But the other boy's perception is, "Well that's unfair, well I just need to kick off, so I too will also only come in for a period of time." And it's this sort of, (sighs) I don't know, learned behaviour, or perceived behaviour? "If I do this, this and this, then that's happened for him, so I need to do that, that and that too. And that then should allow me to…" So that was where it's really hard to reason with him, so he could just not… You're trying to say, "Well actually it's really good that you're in school, you can stay all the way to the end of the school day!" Meanwhile he's going, "No it is *not*!" So he, you know, you've got him up here and it takes quite a while to regulate him…

Yeah.

… to bring him back down, so.. that pupil we haven't seen for a few weeks now.

I see.

I know if he *does* return, it will literally be trying to give him a positive experience in school…

Yeah, just anything…

And not… expecting too much and that was similar to pupil last year as well who was… all the while you've got management breathing down your neck looking for on-track pupils and percentages…

Mm-hmm.

And the pupil *last* year could have been an on-track pupil but his mental health was that that he missed so much, his confidence was low, he *was* making mistakes… but with stability and teaching the potential is there. But it still just went so unstable, spiralled, erm… Tracking's becoming a real issue, I think. In my experience, you know, because… hmm. You're putting pupils under pressure to *meet* a statistic to appease someone somewhere, but by trying to push the work up, and make it to the level you should be at, you can sometimes be putting them under… undue pressure.

Mm-hmm.

Where we're working them higher… it's not to say that they can't get there, of course they can attain that, but we're maybe trying to push them through a wee bit faster, or where there's not the same parental support from home and we could be adding to that mental stress and anxiety.

And for yourself too, 'cause as you say you've got people breathing down your neck.

Yeah, and I think trying to… this phrase of trying to 'Get It Right For Every Child' is *such* a difficult phrase. We're never going to be able to get it right for every child, and I think that's where you feel you're dividing yourself up in so many things… the classroom's too noisy so this child needs ear defenders but actually that's not right for this child, because, no, they quite like it when it's chatty, and this and that, so… Some child needs flexible seating they need to stand up, but that doesn't work for this pupil so you're trying to constantly tie yourself in knots to meet everyone's needs…

Mm-hmm.

But you know that you still will be sort of failing in some way…

Thirty three different needs, you can't…

Yep.

In a class.

Should be more… I wish we could rephrase it to 'Doing Your Best For Every Child'? That really is.. you're trying your hardest to get it…

I'm trying to think what the acronym for that is and if you can…

(Laughter.)

Anyway! So, can you see any… can you see any relationship between… I mean I've asked you if you can see an association between the stability of a house and the mental health and wellbeing outcomes, which you thought you could…

Mm-hmm.

Can you see any association, or a relationship between the *types of jobs* that parents and carers are doing and mental health and wellbeing?

(Pause.) Interesting… Erm… (Exhales.) 'Cause obviously the more professional families that I'm thinking of in my class, the kids generally are… you know, stable, you can normally… they have issues, I have had, erm, one of the professional mums emailing me earlier this year about an issue with her daughter, erm… So they certainly do still have issues and there's emotions there and they'll discuss them. But I guess where that parental support or engagement or involvement they will then contact me, I can then have that dialogue and discussion with that parent to address the issue that was highlighted. So that issue there was actually mentioned at the time, dealt with and then there was no further contact because hopefully it was dealt with and contained within that sort of time I suppose?

So professional parents and carers… more likely to… sorry, *less* likely to have mental health and wellbeing issues and more likely to address them, when they do arise?

In my experience of this class that I'm thinking of, yes…

And what about…

… when it's…

Oh, sorry!

No, no, when it's… (exhales.) Again it totally depends on family though because the family I'm thinking of who are maybe more hands-on or less well-paid job, they're great though, like the parenting's, you know… again, their interaction, they can raise any issues… Again, this mum who… I'm not sure if she is employed but she's got a wee boy, she's excellent at bringing up her issues and her daughter does really struggle with emotions and feelings the… the fists get clenched… But mum… like, their home life was awful, the girl would talk about having rats in her home and having to contact… But mum was really good at Christmas time, she came up and said, "Listen, just to give you a heads up, my daughter might be *really* upset tomorrow because she spent… almost… just under a grand on my husband's credit card for his work and he is gone ballistic at her so I just don't know how she's going to behave tomorrow in school. But I just want you to know, this is how we're dealing with it, so you can just keep an eye…" So she articulated very well what was going on. And again we were able to support them through that, so that was at a total opposite spectrum of a mum who… from a very deprived area and lifestyle and existence, erm, but still articulating well. I feel it almost depends on a person's *parents* because someone from a lower decile, the mum will come up raging, just shouting, just unable to cope themselves, just not… probably because their mental health is…

Mmm.

… is struggling so they don't have the filter of maybe just that reasoning?

Okay. Mm-hmm.

Again, to balance it out from the other side though, from professional family parents though, they can be coming in very hard or tight and very opinionated…

Sharper elbows?

… and, "Nope. I'll be getting this and I'll be just be saying…" And that can sometimes come off on the children as well, erm, so I think it's so hard to generalise it and I think across all

sectors of society you're going to get some balanced people, some not so balanced… And mental health impacts…

Yes, it…

… affluent people, you know, and it can maybe be a different type of, er, trauma that they've incurred or it can come off in very different ways.

Okay. Erm, last set of questions then, just on what you're doing. What you're doing to support or to 'Do Your Best For Every Child,' as you… (Laughter.) I'm so going to remember that! That's so brilliant! (More laughter.) It's just… sorry, I'm laughing, but I recognise that.

Yeah.

Erm, I think it's been a good many years since we've been able to Get It Right For Every Child.

Yeah.

What sorts of activities or lessons are taught in the school to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Erm, our health and wellbeing programme is PATHS, that's a whole school approach, erm, again so, sort of… Bi-weekly lessons, talking through, naming different emotions. So it's a whole-school approach so our primary ones will then graduate all the way through so by the time they're primary six we're… *should* be able to articulate our emotions and explain through and…

The wee ones generally love it, I find.

Ah-hah.

It's a wee bit staler in the upper school, is that fair?

Yes! (Laughs.) Yes, it is. Erm, quite script-based, or, erm… You know they'll talk about conflict, or there's a story… and that's *fine*, and there definitely is a moral or a lesson they can take, but it's very much, erm, trying to apply it to real situations, that conflict resolution within their lives, because the kids know if they say something hurtful that's going to impact someone else's emotions. They know that, they get it, they've experienced it, but yet it doesn't seem to filter it through. It doesn't necessarily stop them, it's the same as the internet safety; they know all the right answers, they know to block, they know to, erm, unfriend people, they know not to post things. But they still… work, use things irresponsibly and things. So they've got the head knowledge, just maybe that maturity…

Mmm.

… to do it. But yeah, the PATHS lessons are there, erm… We didn't do it this year but last year there was a health and wellbeing champions for primary six, so there was a sort of three-week block of the children learning a wee bit more about mental health and how to, erm… be a champion and support people who were maybe struggling…

Okay.

Erm, and they'd go to the playground and think of wee activities to do to encourage positivity, or to work through those sort of more uncomfortable emotions.

Mmm.

And I think, erm, for myself.. so within… there's the PATHS lessons there, but within myself as a practitioner… pupils [inaudible] or some of my pupils who *did* struggle with mental health, I offered them a notebook, a sort of wee journal. Most of them did respond really well to that little journal. I said, "That's yours, this is… you can draw in here, you can doodle, you can write messages, you can tear them out, you can leave them on my desk so…" Sometimes I found with children who… have really struggled with mental health, they maybe struggled to verbalise with how they're feeling, they can write it in words or through a picture, to communicate, erm…

That's a lovely idea, I've never heard that before.

Just… like, and each child probably used it just a wee bit differently?

Mm-hmm.

But you just found a system that worked for them?

For that child.

Erm, and for my pupil last year who used it, it worked *really* well for a period and then it… that was one of those sort of… it worked for so long, and then…

Yeah.

… it sort of faded away, sadly. As things deteriorated further. Erm, but yeah, just that, writing that, trying to have that line of communication with the pupil…

Mm-hmm.

You're trying to have that openness with them, that you're approachable. Erm, and that, while she can't fix everything for them there's just that… even just to be heard, or to be listened to, erm…

Well that's right into my next question actually! So, apart from the taught lessons and the curricular planned activities, what sorts of strategies do you see… do you use yourself, as

you've said, those journals, that's a perfect example of what I'm thinking of, you either use yourself or you see your colleagues using, that you think is effective in supporting pupil's mental health and wellbeing?

Erm…

Just the wee things teachers do.

Yeah, and sometimes it's the wee things that you don't always think about. I think as a school, we've adopted NME, erm, so… calming classrooms, more muted colours, foliage, nice lights, just trying to change the atmosphere of the classroom so it's more, er, maybe less frenetic and colourful, and things like that…

Do you find it effective?

Erm, yeah, it can be. It can be. If we set it up right in the morning and there's sixty-beat-per minute music on and things, or instrumental… After a while, it can maybe wear off, or it gets a bit grating, even as a teacher, so maybe just change things up a bit and then bring it back in another time. Erm, we have sort of fidget boxes and just been much more… aware that kids might need to sit and fidget and they're totally still switched-in and engaging, or… I'm quite a stickler for this, probably old-school teacher, I quite like eye contact when I'm teaching! Whereas I've had to adjust my thing of going, "No. That's alright, just let him sit and fiddle with that…"

Mm-hmm.

I know, I can tell, actually they are still listening to me, so I'm almost having to adjust my expectations of what's acceptable in the class, but what's quite nice is when you do see a pupil who's maybe just a bit more nervy or just… quietly, they'll just go and get something from the fidget box and then you can almost just see them putting it back one they've gone, "Right, that's enough," or "That's worked, that's helped, I feel better now." Erm…

The fidget box is something that they can just go and take something from whenever they want, yeah?

Yeah, ah-hah. And it's trying to sort of instil that from the outset. Again, (laughs) that's just me, it takes me a while to adjust of going, "Where are you off to?"

(Laughter.)

"Right, okay, that's fine." Erm, so it's… it's *me* as a practitioner, having to change as well, of going, "No, that's okay…" And for some children it is, other kids do just get generally

distracted by it though, and it's a negative thing for *some*. Erm, but for, when it's used correctly, it's very, very helpful.

Okay.

Er, we've got a wee break-out space beside our classroom as well…

Yes, that…

… that breakout space is *wildly*…

Useful, yeah.

… helpful.

Ah-hah. I can see that.

In six, the hormones are kicking in, they're embarrassed, they're ashamed, they don't want people to look at them, they want a private conversation with you, they *need* just that time… away. So, a break-out space… nearby but separate, door's open, come in whenever you need to.

One of the best things I *ever* had in my latter years was a walk-in cupboard…

Yeah!

… and, you know, other teachers used to have box files and everything, I just stripped everything out and put a couple of bean bags in there… and I don't know if I would have coped, and certainly a boy in my class, I don't know if *he* would have coped if we hadn't had that space.

Yeah. Yeah. So each classroom's meant to have sort of that soft furnishing, carpets down, that sort of calm corner, that quiet area, that space were you *just* maybe need… And I have utilised that, that was one even before, before COVID I remember using that one on a pupils. And I panicked that I couldn't find a pupil in my class; "Where has he gone to?" And then that way that he's like, "I'm here!" But he was a ball of rage coming in, and he himself had just taken himself to the calm corner where he'd laid himself down he was almost under the table. Which is why I couldn't see him, kind of thing, but I was just like, "Oh… that worked. You're using that space for what it's for, you're not quite ready…" And he just came back into the class, sat at this desk, once he'd had that chance just to regulate again, or, erm… I find sometimes with the kids in my class particularly this year as well, they're upset, they're annoyed, emotions are high, and… but they're not quite ready to speak about it. So they just need that time just to… to chill out.

So what do you do in those situations?

I'll sometimes just keep teaching! (Laughs.) And I literally will just say to them, "Are you wanting to talk about this?" And they're like, "No." Or I might even say, "Listen, I can see at the moment you're not quite ready to speak about this just yet, we one hundred percent will, but for now… if you can sit, I'm just going to keep teaching my lessons, I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing, and then we'll come back together and we'll have a wee chat. And you can have a wee think and let me know what it is that's frustrated you so." I sometimes will just continue as normal… if I feel that people will kick off because I'm continuing to teach and that's not going to really, sort of appease them then it might be, "Go and draw, or take a book, or take a sand-timer or take a fidget toy or…" If they need something more tactile or something to distract them then that would be an option so again…

That's interesting.

… it would be very child dependant!

Yeah, absolutely.

But sometimes just a distraction takes their mind off of it. And then they're *so* much more chilled and ready to sort of go, "Yeah. I did that." Or they're almost more open to own up to what they did.

(Laughter.)

And they can speak more, more sort of rationally about it? Maybe? Sometimes?

I'm always fascinated to hear what other teachers do, you know, we all have different strategies. Erm, right, okay, nearly done. Are there any other ways that you can think of that you've not mentioned that the school supports pupil's mental…

Yes, the one that's come in is, erm, 'Seasons for Growth'.

Oh yeah, ah-hah.

So just that sort of, that external provider group we can refer, er, kids onto that sort of…

Particularly for bereavement, loss and change, is that right?

Yes, yeah, change, trauma…

How do you… how many children in your class do you typically refer to these sorts of programmes?

So this year actually, I actually haven't referred *any*, but what happened this year was… *I* was notified that two referrals had been put in for two pupils in my class but not directed through me…

I see, ah-hah.

… but more through parents. So I'm not entirely sure of how parents became aware of the possibility for Seasons for Growth but obviously the parents had read it and gone, "Yep, this is something that my child would benefit from." But those two pupils, whilst they've been referred in primary six haven't received any Seasons for Growth training. Again, just because of the timescale.

There's a long waiting list for that too?

I would imagine so, I haven't… yeah, so hopefully that referral is in place, and *in situ*, my hope for them is that they will receive that input in primary seven.

Okay, right, I see.

Erm, is what my hope is, hope for them that that would continue through…

You're always one question ahead of me (laughter) because the next question was going to be, are there any outside agencies you can think of? (Laughter.) So, *other* than Seasons for Growth, is there… and you've talked about CAMHS already, is it fair to say you've more or less given up on CAMHS?

(Sighs.) I mean… I'm sort of directed by management, that was one of our questions at the start of this year; "What do we say if…" 'Cause we think of what we *used* to say to parents when they asked us, we would start a ref, a referral process, we would start gathering evidence on certain behaviours and things, erm, but now we kind of need to know, what is our official line here, if asked?

Yeah.

And the line is… so I had a pupil who's… she's looked after by her grandparents, and they were like, "We think she's got, erm, ADHD, we know no…" They themselves said, "We know not much is going to happen, but we would like you to start the process." And I did have to reiterate, "Can I just remind you that there won't… probably nothing's going to move on this quickly." I said, "I can start the request for assistance form," which I completed, I submitted, I passed on. But as to *any* progress with where that sits within the system…

Yeah. Okay.

… erm, it's been passed on… The only other I can think of would be [name of external charitable organisation]?

Oh yeah, ah-hah.

I had a pupil that was involved last year, we had [name of external charitable organisation]coming in to support, erm, working along that family, and he did… you know, he met him in school, he met him at home, so there was this sort of hybrid sort of style of working…

Okay.

… sort of just trying to… the [name of external charitable organisation] worker was just trying to get a relationship and a rapport with this pupil, who at that point was *really* struggling mental health-wise, self harm-wise, erm… But what was so hard was, erm, the [name of external charitable organisation] worker had to stop, had to terminate it because of caseload issues and things like this, and the support had to be pulled.

Oh dear…

So it's so hard, where these… sometimes…

What does that teach the child, you know?

… to get a little bit of external help, and then it's pulled, it's gone…

Just as you build that relationship, it's gone. Disaster.

And you're here almost… these are the most fragile children that you're trying to help… (Sighs.)

… and they're the ones then, the support comes and then you take it away.

Does it seem like everyone's overwhelmed?

Yeah. I… I… my fiancé's a social worker, he's sort of been explaining it from social work's perspective of just how high the threshold is.

Oh I see. Right.

Of how… of where they can support. And I was almost challenging him, going, "But was it always like this? Was the threshold always set so high? Or has it had to be lifted because of just where society is?" And I think… he's newly into it, but from what he can gather, the bar has changed.

Raised? Okay.

Just because there's so many issues.

So, last couple then, erm, in terms of… (laughs) 'Doing Your Best For Every Child,' (laughter), erm, what makes making pupil's mental health and wellbeing needs more challenging? What makes your… what are the barriers to 'Getting It Right For Every Child'?

(Sighs.) Erm… I think… just this what… you feel like, every child is individual and unique, so what works for one child and… that notebook thing for instance, that worked an *absolute dream* with a pupil and I was like, "Great! I've cracked it! I'm always just going to have my trusty notepad!" And it worked for so well, but then it just doesn't work for everyone, so you're constantly…

Or it doesn't work for the one child *all the time*, as you said, also…

Yeah, absolutely, and that is the thing, you think, "Right, I've got, I've got a solution, or I've got a strategy that's working…"

Mm-hmm.

And again, I think with my pupil last year, that was the cycle I was in. We hit crisis point, I did something… "Oh. That worked, great." And that worked for so long and then we hit a new crisis point, and then, "Oh. This thing to settle isn't working…" Erm…

So it's the variety of needs and the variety of effective responses to meet those needs?

Yeah, definitely. And I think even just… you put one thing into one place for one pupil but that can trigger something else in someone else, where you're not meaning to do that but you're going, "Right, I've got you set, I've helped you out but I've now unsettled you by doing something."

I see.

As well, so there's just maybe… so many different mental health, ASN needs within the class that it is, you're back into this plate-spinning…

Whack-a-mole!

… of, it's really hard… to get it right. Erm…

I see. Okay, erm, well the flip side of that question then is; what would make life easier?

(Sighs.) Oh, what would make life easier? (Pause. Laughs.) Erm, without being too… we have had an absolute *godsend* of a classroom assistant sort of staff about this year, and… clone her! And…

(Laughter.)

… we would be in a much happier state!

Oh, that's…

She's so, like… high quality… emotionally stable, support staff. To support our kids.

She seems very positive.

Very positive. Very, erm… (sighs.) Just gets down to the kids level, but… very understanding, very caring. But yet will teach the kids right and wrong. Er, and there's that moral standard, there's that, "Well that's not okay, and here's why…" But very protective over the kids, and just a real desire to want to… better the *whole* child, academically, physically, emotionally, looking out for their, those ones; "He's not had his breakfast this morning, that might impact how he's going to be in class, but the child's reluctant to go and get it." So she's giving you all this soft information…

Yeah. That you need.

That *really* helps, in class. "Cause you're like, "Oh, you're hungry! Of course! I didn't… I just would have thought…" The classroom is just so fast-paced, but if you've just got that soft detail coming in, you can be like, "Cool. Right, okay, I can…" Or, the kids talk to her, as well, so she'll be like, "Just to give you a heads up, mum and dad had a big argument last night, so… they're a bit off-kilter already this morning." So, I know that's *very* personal to us, but… that sort of high-quality… and an adult who themselves is very… balanced. And emotionally stable and…

And a strong relationship with the children.

… can *offer* them that support, they will *go* to her. Like the response you see them give, like I know this school year, we could have had had *way* more behavioural, academic, mental health issues than what we have had this year, just because she'll have kept the kids ticking over and she was off for two or three weeks… and you could *tell* she was off. The whole year group… even us as staff probably were a bit like, "Oh, where is she?" It's amazing, just that support. But that high-level, qualified, trained, you know, all of these things, it's just so… so, so helpful. So staffing, just more manpower, people about…

But not just numbers, you're talking about.. and not… that's a tricky one, because that's not a training issue, that's a personal quality…

It's personal traits.

Yes.

That's like, yeah, you'd like that to be a, how do they do it, not a desirable… an absolute required… Here are the personal traits that we are looking for in our staff. That is what's difficult, it's not just, ah-hah, making up the numbers and it can be anyone. You're still wanting to sort of have that…

Okay, so what would help is having more classroom assistants, more pupil support assistants, who have that level of emotional intelligence and relationship with the children?

Yeah. And again, class sizes, when I think of last year to this year as well. Last year I had a class of thirty two. Erm, this year a class of twenty four. And you do feel that you can get to know the kids better.

Mm-hmm.

You get to understand how they tick a wee bit more, that extra eight pupils…

Two tables.

You're trying your hardest, it's… But again, there's just more need, there's more of them, there's more friction, bouncing off against each other, erm… Whereas that smaller class size, you can just support them better and get to know them better, and erm… Or you can be faster to respond to any, maybe behavioural, mental issues that are maybe coming, you can get that support in faster and I definitely would say [name of classroom assistant] has helped us to do that.

Mm-hmm.

You can nip things in the bud just a wee bit quicker before they turn into something… bigger.

She speaks very highly of you too.

(Laughs.)

She does.

Well that's… very kind.

Okay, right. So… cloning [name of classroom assistant].

(Laughter.)

With petri dishes. Well I will go and speak to her! "If we could just have a few cells from your cheek?"

That's it!

Is there anything else you'd like to add, on the subjects we've been talking about, or not, anything at all that you would like to… put on the record?

I think… for us, we're a very… deprived school, budget's low, we can see out kids are missing out on *so* much stuff. You know, the playground's a concrete jungle out there. Erm, we just… try to… to get things for the kids, and it's difficult, you look at other schools in [name

of other local authority] or even elsewhere in [name of surrounding area] and things, and you just, erm… Yeah, there's just, there's just… they're *missing* a lot in some ways.

Mmm.

Erm…

What are they missing?

Experiences and… just a *nice* environment. If you look around, there's litter everywhere, there's dog fouling, there's needles lying around, just… But that's the general community, that's wider, that's bigger than us, that's…

Cocaine at the lollipop crossing. [Refers to the lollipop man finding a bag of cocaine on the street as kids crossed to come to school.]

Yeah. Exactly. (Laughs.) So, that is a bigger issue, but again it's just… I think the head teacher will ask the kids, "What would you like for our school?" And they're like, "Skipping ropes!" They don't even know what else is really out there because this is all they know.

Mmm.

Whereas the head teacher herself was almost like, "I think maybe we need to take our kids to other schools, to see what other schools have got, 'cause they don't necessarily realise…"

That's interesting. Would that teach them aspiration, or… depress them?

It could go one of two ways. It could go one of two ways.

The schools in affluent catchments are experiencing similar, well it seems to them, although I will not try and pretend what they are facing is similar to what we have faced in our careers…

Yeah.

Erm, they are certainly experiencing a mental health and wellbeing crisis.

Mm-hmm.

Amongst their pupils. It's… as you say, it does affect, it *can* affect everyone.

Yeah.

So… Okay, well thank you *so* much…

No! Thank you! Very good of you.

And, I… er, just going to stop this… oops.

[End of recording.]

SCHOOL FOUR INTERVIEW SIX: CLASSROOM ASSISTANT(MS KAMINSKI; 14/03/24).

Okay, so thank you again for your really valuable time, I know how busy you are 'cause I've seen that this week. Erm, I do have your consent to record this?

You do.

Thank you. Okay, I'll start with an easy one, if you don't mind me asking, how long have you worked in schools?

Er, in schools, in general? Erm, so I was working in schools from the year 2000 'til 2003, in [name of other local authority], erm, in a different, in a much different role from what I'm in now…

In a health role, I think you mentioned, is that right?

Yes, so it was, erm, I was a play… initially… I was a part-time play and sports coordinator…

Oh, okay…

[Inaudible] a sports degree, and then that job then merged into… a colleague left her job, and her job was health…

I see…

… promotion, which there's quite a close overlap.

Ah-hah.

And I was covering a lot of her, you know, role, and then I applied, and they merged the two jobs. So that was across nursery, primary and secondary.

Wow. That's a range.

It was initially like one… one nursery, one primary and one secondary…

Ah-hah.

… and then they stretched it out…

Okay.

… to the cluster, to the other feeder primaries, erm…

So you were all round the… all around the houses?

Yes, yeah, so… sometimes doing things in the classroom, erm…

[Interrupted by children coming through interview room.]

Sorry, I'll just shut that door, keep the noise out…

That's fine. Er, quite a lot of involvement with parents in that role, we'd do like, erm, programmes, like family programmes. We had a family learning coordinator, on… part of the

team, we had a social worker, two social workers actually, erm, and we all worked…. Sort of similar to an agency team, erm, so we would run like family programmes during the holidays, and get children coming in with parents, running activities together, give the parents things on their own, erm... A lot of that was round about health promotion, healthy eating, physical activity, erm…

Mm-hmm…

We would run parent workshops, and things like talking to your children about sort of sensitive subjects, sexual health, alcohol, drugs…

Right.

Er, and… those areas I'd also do a bit of teaching, input into the curriculum, erm, and some involvement in teacher training, in-service days, erm, whether that be a sort of input or one time we actually organised, our team organised the whole one, mainly myself, erm, it was about a book called 'Confidence to Learn.'

Okay.

Remember it?

No, I don't.

It was all about Circle Time…

Oh yeah.

… talking, all that kind of stuff, so… yeah, that was quite varied.

I was just going to say, you've a long and varied experience in schools.

Yeah, I was there as a professional, if you know what I mean? This role, I don't view myself as a professional if you know what I mean, erm… because I'm a classroom assistant so I don't even need any degrees, you know... for that. But I have to say, in this school, you are very much treated… as an equal.

That's good to hear.

Which is lovely.

It's not the case in every school.

No it's not.

Just not paid as an equal I'm afraid.

You're not! (Laughs.) Yeah. So, erm…

So how…

So I took a long break because I was having *own* family and, erm, our philosophy was, they wanted them to be raised, erm, at home and not, you know, kept by anyone else so that was a good experience as well. Erm, then I worked for a church for about six years..

I see…

… as a community worker… so again, working with lots of different ages, doing some input on assemblies, doing some teaching in schools, involved in holiday programmes…

A crossover between the church work and schools?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

And how long have you worked as a classroom assistant in this school?

Erm, in this school, only since August.

Oh I see…

Yep. Erm, it feels longer! (Laughs.) No, I don't mean that in a bad way, you just, you kind of feel like you're part of…

I see…

… things and you feel like, you know I think the kids think I've been here longer, so they'll say, "When did you start here?"

"Just August!"

"Woah!" You know they sort of feel like they've *known* you…

I think it's fair to say, from what *I've* spoken to the kids in *this* class, you've made your presence felt within that time.

(Laughs.) I don't know how!

In a positive way! No, in a positive way. They speak very highly of you.

Yes.

Er, over the course of this career, then, erm, have you noticed any changes in pupil's behaviour…

Oh!

… and if so, how would you characterise them?

Massively.

Massively?

Massively.

Okay.

Erm…

In what sense? Can you describe that?

Deterioration is the word…

I see.

… I would use, and erm…. Yeah, I often reflect on that, myself, and even back to my own childhood, and I keep thinking, "How have we got to this point?" Erm, is it that we have got more awareness… about things? And that's why we have more labels and stuff now, and we're able to say, okay, *this* child has *this*…

Mmm…

… therefore that explains why they behave like that. Or is it that we have more of the issues?

Mm-hmm.

Because I don't really remember… you know, even if you take things like neurodiversity, for example… I don't remember that volume of people that presented with different behaviours…

When you were at school yourself?

When I was at school, primary or secondary.

I think when we were at school, or (laughs), sorry I can't speak for you! When *I* was at school, many neuro diverse children simply wouldn't be in mainstream education…

So there's that, so probably that did change with inclusion, erm, and you're right and I do think about that as well, because when I was working in [name of other local authority], I remember *one* pupil with Asperger's at that time, in a big secondary school, and it was a big deal.

Oh I *see*, there was only one, one…

One that I knew of, that… that it was obvious, there could have been other kids undiagnosed that you know, had… erm, but I was also thinking about the primary school, I remember one pupil..

Ah-hah.

… that we all heard about, all the time, because they talked about how challenging he was, he had ADHD, he was on Ritalin…

Mm-hmm.

… and I remember them talking about how his behaviour was different if he wasn't on it… And he was, like this '*big challenge'*, this *one child*…

Yeah.

Erm…

And now I think it's fair to say that most classes have multiple cases of… children with a diagnosis, possible medication, is that fair to say?

Yeah, I… personally I don't know so much about medication, here, who's on medication and who's not, erm…

It's not your job to administer any of these medications?

It hasn't been, no.

No, okay…

I was aware when I worked last year in a, in a centre for children with, erm, autism, ADHD, communication difficulties… not all were diagnosed actually, but… some could be there because of behaviour, suggested, erm, and they couldn't be in a mainstream environment. Erm, I was aware that some of them were on medication, they would go at certain times of day…

Okay.

... you know, to receive that, but I've never had to administer it myself.

Okay.

But I think… you know, one of the big differences I see is just general… behaviour, I think there's a lot of pressures on children nowadays that weren't there twenty years ago which *I* believe is probably to do with exposure to stuff on the internet, and a lot… we're having a lot of issues to with bullying and stuff on social media…

Mm-hmm.

… and I think that's just made it that kids can never get a break.

I see.

If you're only at school, and interacting at school, you know, things like bullying in any format, whether it's physical or name-calling, even things like peer pressure, it can only happen in that physical environment if there's no technology…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, but nowadays, they go out of school.. and you know we're having these issues in school now, that such-and-such has called this person this, and then that's spread across a group, and that all spills over into the classroom, into behaviour…

So, so the verbal, the name-calling and the bullying is happening online…

Yes.

… but the consequences happen in school?

Yes. Yeah.

Okay. Well, you… you… my next question was, erm, what do you think might be driving some of these… well, you describe it as a deterioration in behaviour…

Yeah.

So, social media is a big player, then?

Yeah, I think social media, and I also think that the internet, children accessing… a lot more things that they wouldn't had access to before…

Mm-hmm.

… in terms of inappropriate content, and even, you know it's things like language? Erm, so the 'n word'…

Mmm.

… you can understand for me, I'm married to a black person, and my children are classed as black, and they're viewed as black, a lot of kids in their school thought their mum and dad are both black, 'cause they have colour, that word in particular upsets me on a personal level.

And do you hear it being used here?

I hear it used here all the time.

All the time?

All the time. I've heard it in the corridors, a child shouting that word at another child who's white. It's now… I was with a child… a few weeks ago, who was calling his teacher, erm, the shortened version of the word 'Pakistani'…

Mm-hmm..

… and then a 'b…', the 'b-word'. Erm, the teacher's white. So they're using racial…

So they've just adopted it as a general sort of…

It's a.. it's an insult.

Insult. I see.

Erm, and, you know, so members of staff, other children, are being called a… I mean, I heard the 'n-word' was used yesterday like, erm, from a child to another child, "You're nothing but a…" So that word is… I think it's the internet, you know, 'cause I don't think kids in an area

like this… before that would have heard things like that as much, but probably with their music, I suppose you don't even need internet for music, it's in a lot of rap music now…

Mm-hmm.

… but I think children at a young age are being exposed to adult culture.

I see, yeah.

You see what I mean?

Yes, very much so.

And I think the other big thing for me is… broken families.

Okay, can you describe that at all?

Er, I just think that's… as the years have gone on, that's become far more common.

Mm-hmm.

And I think that just has an impact on children, whether you want to admit it or not, it's…

Mmm.

And I'm not blaming people for having a broken family, but I'm just saying the reality of having a broken family… is it has… psychological effects on children.

Well I'll be returning to that in just a second. So, that's interesting, thank you. Erm, in general terms, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school? I know it's hard to generalise, but…

I would say… we've got every part of the spectrum.

Mm-hmm.

Represented in this school.

And are these issues prevalent?

Yes. Very much.

And severe?

Yes.

Okay.

Yes. Yep. I was saying I worked in a secondary school last year, erm… and I saw more aggression in the playground, and violence, in my first week here… and the *language*, in my first week here… than I did in my whole term in my secondary school.

Okay.

I wouldn't have expected that. I would have thought your teenagers… they'd have been the ones, erm, you know, in the school environment… but no. So there's not a week goes past in

this school where I'm not breaking up at least one fight in the playground. Yesterday I had three.

And I know you…

And I'm in the middle of those 'cause it's the only way that I can… I can stop one child hurting another child.

And if you don't mind me referring to it, I know that you were… attacked, physically, on Tuesday.

Yes.

And I wondered how… is that an unusual occurrence, or is routine… how would you describe that?

It's not… it hasn't been routine for me, erm… that was a child I had been working with… really quite closely actually…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, in mainstream, but who should technically have been in the [name of ASN unit], but didn't want to go there.

I see.

Erm, but his behaviour, over the past months, has deteriorated so much that now… that's the only place they feel can have him but he had assaulted a younger child, well.. the younger child was bigger than him but, erm… he'd punched a child in the stomach…

Right.

… already by quarter to nine in the morning in the playground, completely unprovoked…

Mm-hmm.

And then he does this where he runs from the playground into the school along the corridors… and they're looking for a chase and they think it's funny… erm, and I had asked him to come to speak to me, you know, this has been reported, this child was hurt and crying, just running away…

Mmm.

And another member of staff managed to sort of catch him as he ran... towards them. And we were trying to walk him, sort of supported walking, you know, one of us on either side, to take him, 'cause I said, "He needs to get inside the [ASN unit]," 'cause when he's in that frame of mind, he can hurt someone else, he just kicks the doors, slams the doors, you're always scared someone gets their fingers…

Yeah, absolutely.

Erm, so he was just kicking my leg all the way down the corridor because he wanted to be let go… erm, so, you know it wasn't like a personal sort of 'I'm going to come up and attack you.'

He's just struggling to break free.

He's just struggling, but he does that with everyone, but the staff who I see working in the [ASN unit], those kind of kicks in the legs, if.. you know, it's very much a 'hands-off children' approach, but you would only ever move them like that when they're a danger to someone else…

Mm-hmm.

… or to themselves. Erm, and sadly that… that can be a regular occurrence that they are…

It did cross my mind… you know, you're describing this supported walking into the unit, now if things *had* gone according to plan, I'm just trying to imagine, you know a child that's that distressed and angry that needs to be physically escorted into the unit, doesn't want to go, what on earth happens to them when he's in there and you've shut the doors behind him?

I know. Yeah.

How do they manage that?

Yeah. They… they have a room in there called the sensory room, which is just a safe space…

For them?

… no glass, a quiet room, no windows, and it's all softly… some kids will actually ask to go in there, just to calm down, to go in there with a friend, or to go in there on their own. They've got weighted blankets in there which I've seen being used. I had a day in there…

I like them! They're lovely, aren't they? (Laughs.)

They are! And I saw that working quite well with a wee boy who wasn't being aggressive, but was really distressed… erm, but yeah, once they're in there.. they… it's not easy for them just to start running around and causing chaos, so they tend to… it's a small environment, they tend to just gradually calm down in that environment… But sometimes the parents are phoned and they're actually taken home.

Okay. Erm, right well, er… sorry, I got side-tracked there…

That's okay.

… because I was interested in those issues. You were describing the… the state of mental health and wellbeing issues as prevalent and severe. Well, those were my words, sorry…

Yes, no I would say so, in some cases and I think probably because we do have the [ASN unit] attached to the school…

Mm-hmm..

… erm, I guess your awareness of that is heightened, because a lot of the children are in there, erm, it's actually more to do with trauma…

Mm-hmm…

… or it could be a case of trauma *and* ADHD, or *and* autism, or *and* global learning… erm, but a lot of trauma.

You're anticipating my questions perfectly, I was about to ask you: what do you think's driving these changes? So you've mentioned, and I'm just checking that I have this right in my head, social media, but you were referring to that in terms of behaviour, do you think that's had an impact on mental health and wellbeing? And you've mentioned trauma, family circumstances…

Yes. Yeah.

Do you think these are the main drivers? Can you think of any others?

It could be… I mean poverty in this area is… probably a part of that.

Yeah.

Well, it *will* be a part of that.

Yeah. There's strong associations…

Yes. Erm, and I think what you see is that you've got… it's cyclical as well… you've got generations of… erm, and it's quite interesting often that you'll hear a lot of the kids that have extra learning needs, or behavioural, quite often it's… their cousin does, or their other cousin… so you can see there are family… issues that are… you know, it's never getting remedied.

Yeah. That's very dispiriting, isn't it?

It is.

It's so difficult to break.

It is. Erm…

Okay.

… and drugs and alcohol I suppose, and I am aware that quite a number of our children… have, erm, lost their parents to those things… we've got quite of kids being raised by grandparents…

Extended family care.

… and, erm, a parent, usually dad, are in jail or in and out of jail, those kind of things, so they're all going to have an impact…

Multiple factors. Erm, the… severe, erm, mental health and wellbeing issues that you've, er, alluded to… what sorts of forms do you see them taking in children? How do you see…

For me the biggest one's aggression.

Aggression?

That's what I can't… it's just astounding me. You know, there's some kids… I'll often feedback, you know, to the teachers, "Okay, this is what the playground's been like," 'Cause it's very different when they're sitting in the classroom, it's all structured and focused, and then they're all together outside… and *everything* changes.

Mm-hmm.

So I'll quite often feedback to the teachers, and I'll describe… there's one child I can think of, and I describe to his teacher… it's almost, with him, that moment between… being normal, and being *extremely* angry and aggressive. There's no build-up. It's like…

Like a light switch…

… you've flicked a switch. And I keep saying to… there's a few children I can think of, that I try and say to them, you know, "Why are you shouting? Can we… why are you so angry? Can we not just talk about this?" They don't seem to know how to…

They probably won't know. Consciously.

And the language. Oh my goodness. (Clicks fingers.) They literally go straight into, you know, all the facial expressions, showing anger, there's the redness, the necks come out, the swearing, erm, and there's the physical.

So anger and aggression is the biggest…

Yeah, anger and aggression is the biggest one that I see.

Do you see any other manifestations of mental health and wellbeing?

Erm… (long pause.) I mean, we've got other kids as well, who… they don't have those issues and they're quite, erm, shy and introverted at times and they're the ones that… I feel bad if I've missed. You know, the other kids who are actually quiet and not saying. I try and keep my eyes all the time and I see them on their own, or if I see that there might be something wrong, you know, to actually ask them but there are quite a lot of kids who look… sad.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, and isolated at times as well…

Okay.

But I do have children that come to me quite a lot that don't have anyone to play with, they're being left out on purpose… They're normal… childhood experiences to have, I guess.

Do you… when I asked you what forms you see them taking, you were… almost instant in your response about the aggression…

Mm-hmm.

Do you think that that is the biggest constituent of mental health and wellbeing needs or are they just the more obvious and in your face? Demanding of attention?

(Pause.) Yeah. I suppose you just notice it more, don't you?

Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

Or *are* they the biggest group?

It probably is, yeah, I would say.

Okay.

I would say here, it is.

So a bit of both, really.

Yeah.

Okay, thank you. Erm, er… So I asked you about your perception of changes in behaviour over your career, and you were again quick to answer that. Have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career, and if so how would you characterise them?

You mean, people in general? Rather than…

No, sorry, the pupils that you work with. Have you noticed any changes in pupil's mental health and wellbeing over the course of your career?

Hmm. (Pause.) That's a hard one. (Long pause.) I don't know, would be the answer.

Okay.

And it might be quite difficult for me to say as well, because my job in [name of other local authority], I wouldn't say I had a chance to get to know children in the way that I know them here…

I understand, yeah, of course…

… in this role, erm…

The role you've currently got, there are few people that get to know the children as well.

It's… I feel… I don't know whether the kids sense that I'm a mum, and I'm quite maternal anyway, so… that's the way that they're… it wasn't intentional, that's just the way my job has evolved here, is that a lot of people seem to… you know, just look at you, almost in that way…

Or you're just good at your job. (Laughs.)

And that's… er… so I think I probably find out a lot more, 'cause that's the relationship that I have…

Ah-hah. So harder to say then because you've only really got the one year that you've been here to…

Yes. Yes.

Okay. I understand.

Erm…

Anecdotally? From your colleagues? What do… do they… have you had any…anecdotal evidence to suggest changes in mental health and wellbeing?

I think generally, as the years have gone on, teachers are just finding the job more and more difficult and a lot of that is to do with children's behaviour and children's behaviour is to do with children's mental health.

There are huge overlaps there.

Erm, mm-hmm.

Okay, right, thank you.

But I certainly… see things deteriorating. Absolutely. And even for us, 'cause I've lived cross-culturally as well, you know, comparisons with how children present themselves in [names of two foreign countries], to what we see here as well, the contrasts are *huge*. Absolutley huge.

That's interesting because many of the issues you've describes as being factors driving change here, I'm sure they'll be there in bucket-loads in [name of continent] too: poverty…

Mm-hmm.

… erm, crime, family instability… is that fair?

It depends. Crime… [name of country] has a bigger issue with crime than likes of [name of other country], where my husband comes from, the crime rates are much lower, erm… it's

interesting, this is probably a total aside, but I don't know… I watched this movie recently, a true story about a little girl called Ruby Bridges, I don't know if you've ever seen it?

No.

If you're interested in child mental health, I would recommend it.

Okay. I will seek it out!

Erm, she's one of the kind of… first black children to start going to… what was a white school in America, when they changed the legislation…

In the fifties?

… and they had to integrate. Erm, I don't actually know what date it was, to be honest, erm… and this child, erm, was escorted to this school. She was chosen because she was exceptionally gifted….

[Background noise from adjoining room. Inaudible comment, interviewee moves to close door.]

Erm, and there was a doctor that got interested in the case and he's been doing research into how children coped with trauma…

Mm-hmm.

… and stressful situations.

That must have been a stressful situation!

So she was picked up, erm, and escorted to school in a car, with other cars behind her, and arrived at this school to a queue of people on either side… all the other parents removed their children from the school, or from her class, no other children would come to the class because she was black. Erm, and she was shouted at, she was threatened as she walked up these stairs..

Mm-hmm.

… er, each day, and this was waiting for her to crumble. And he worked with her and worked with the family for a long period of time and he was baffled… and by the end of it, what he concluded was that children can cope with stressful situations *if*… and he identified the factors that had… basically protected her…

Mm-hmm.

… and one of them was that it was a stable family… mum and dad there who had her back, who encouraged her, who told her… mum would tell her all the time that she was worthy,

and erm… told her about other people… They taught her… they were Christians, so they were telling her about forgiveness, and they were telling her that sometimes other people don't know what they're doing and so she didn't develop that bitterness, erm…

How interesting!

It was fascinating!

Yes… that does sound interesting.

And this woman then went on to help with education, er, later on in her life, but… how did I get onto that? I can't actually remember, but I think it was to do with…

(Laughter.)

… what I was saying earlier on about… this is what I'm saying, for a lot of kids, it's the difference with [name of other country], is you've got that… usually, strong family and extended family unit round about children, and even a bigger sense of community than we have here…

My next set of questions is about family circumstances.

Right!

So, once again, you're anticipating my questions…

I'm ahead!

(Laughter.) You're ahead of the curve so far! Erm… er, to what extent are… to what extent do you think parents and carers within this school community are employed… are *employed*, as opposed to unemployed… are employed in what you might characterise as unstable jobs, so I'm thinking of zero-hours contracts, gig economy, you know, jobs like taxi drivers, delivery drivers, where you're paid on completion of a job but there's no certainty of when you'll get work, or how often. To what extent are parents and carers in the school employed in jobs like that?

Like that…

Yeah, mm-hmm.

I wouldn't know numbers, but I would actually add to that a lot of them would be unemployed.

So…

I would assume. In this area.

A fairly big ratio of… proportion of… parents and carers? Long-term unemployed?

I would think in this area… I know that that class there, erm, out of the three p6 classes, I think they have the highest number in the categories, is it SIM one and SIM two?

SIMD one and two, yeah, ah-hah.

Ah-hah, I think, it's bigger than a quarter? In that class. We've got quite a variety here…

So I heard, yeah, I was surprised by that, because I thought that most of the catchment was in SIMD one and two, but I've been told that it's a sort of half-and-half split between the bottom bands and the top bands, which is an unusual catchment.

It is very unusual. It is very, very unusual. But I would think, from the lower income ones, it'll be between either unemployed, erm, some of the parents will have mental health or addiction issues, and then there will be a good number, I would think a good number who are in non-professional jobs and who are in unstable… yeah…

Right, okay, thank you. So, do you see any associations between the socio-economic stability of, er, pupil's home life, between stability of the parents' income and circumstances and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

I mean, I would assume so. Erm, I'm thinking about one, there's a pupil that I work with a lot because they're on the ASN log, and the teacher's really trying to bring their reading and spelling level way up.

Mm-hmm.

They're way behind, you know, where they should be. And this is a child who actually wants to do well, and is panicking, about being primary six and about going to secondary school soon, at the level that they're at. So it's not someone who doesn't want to… erm, and they actually emailed the teacher and asked for extra time for me, because they wanted to get better and they were struggling. And I think of a comment that was made one day, erm, and that child said to me, erm; "[Name of CA], my mum's got five weans, er, *and* she works, she's no got time to do homework wi' me." And it's that wee comment that stuck with me…

Yeah.

Whereas I've got another child, in the class that *you're* in, erm, who has dyslexia, and it's pretty challenging for them. And we were doing our spelling together as we do twice a week, and he said, "Yeah I've already been doing those ones with my mum the other night." And his mum does his spelling with him every night. And the *difference*… erm, in him, and that other child… and that's not a judgement on that mum…

It's just a…

That's me saying, wow, I've got three kids, my goodness I know what it's like. She's got five…

Ah-hah…

… and she's working to try and provide, and dad's working, and they're trying to provide…

Mmm…

… for the family. But they don't… they don't have the time, or probably the energy…

Yeah…

… to help the child, so *that's* where I think you see it, in terms of achievement, erm…

And those little comments can give you a real insight into…

Yeah!

… home life, just a wee burst of…

Yeah.

… understanding.

And that's not a traumatic home life, or anything like that, it's not a child that's not loved, and it's not a child that doesn't have… that sort of family stability, but that's just *reality*.

Okay, thank you. Erm… can you see any relationship between the sorts of jobs that parents and carers do and pupil's mental health and wellbeing outcomes? Are there any patterns that you see emerging amongst the children who you have to give a bit of extra support to, for mental health and wellbeing? Are there any patterns between their outcomes and parents and carers occupation or lack of it?

Yeah…

Or not?

So I'm trying to think of… the ones that I work with, so from this class… [name of teacher], she's the one that identifies, "These are the pupils I want you to, twice a week, do some extra spelling support," so I'm trying to think out of those…

Ah, but, as aside from learning support…

Aside from learning support, so the ones we're having all the issues with…

I'm thinking of the children who are suffering mental health and wellbeing issues…

Ah! No, they're… (laughs).

Ah-hah.

Okay…

So do you see any… I mean, thinking of the children who suffer mental health and wellbeing issues.

Mm-hmm.

Can you see any patterns between them and parent and carer's occupations?

Generally what you could say is they come from poorer… they come from poorer families.

From poorer families?

Yes.

In general?

Yes. And I would say there a big number of these in primary sixes, who I don't even, hardly have anything to do with, in the playground at lunchtime, because everything is… well. You know, in their lives at home.

Oh I see, and their background's… more affluent?

Yes.

More stable?

Yeah. Yeah. And any issues with those kids that I'm involved in are petty… petty, you know, normal childhood disagreements and things like that, not the violence…

Mmm.

Not the aggression, not the language..

Mm-hmm.

No.

Okay, thank you, that's very interesting. Okay, last set of questions. Nearly there! These are ones about the school's response to meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of these pupils. Erm, of which I know you play a big part, even if your bread and butter may be spelling and maths, you know, out there in the playground, you're doing this every day.

Mm-hmm.

What sorts of activities or lessons are *taught* in the school to support mental health and wellbeing? (Pause.) Do you get an insight into that?

Erm, so, they've got this 'PATHS pals'?

Yes, ah-hah.

They always talk about that, there's quite a big focus on that. But, what I notice with the school as well, is there is a… there's quite a focus on… they're trying to create a calm environment. You know, when you go in first thing in the morning, there's the soft music

playing, and you didn't have that when… when *I* was at school, or even when mine started, but that, I think the calm and the lighting, they're trying to put the *physical* things in place that would promote that…

And that's a whole-school thing, is it?

Erm, I don't *know* about the other classes? I mean, that's all I see and hear in the morning…

Are you just across the p6s?

I'm just the p6s, erm, I mean, what… Another thing I've noticed, I just think the staff in this school are fantastic. Anyone that I've been in the classroom with, I've come out impressed. Erm, and… really, yep. I've not been in every class obviously, but I have been put into p5s at times to cover, and up in p7, that's not a regular thing but the exposure that I've had, you know, I walk away and I just think, "Wow."

Either they're an exceptional staff or you're an incredibly positive person! (Laughs.)

No, I think… I think they are….

'Cause most schools… maybe couldn't say that.

I think genuinely that it is a really good staff, even if you're amongst staff, people seem to enjoy working here, as part of the team.

That's great to hear.

It's not a shouty place. So I think that's… intentional. You know, and I think, the example's set… from the top. You know, the senior management, you see them speaking to kids, you see senior management around, in the lunch hall, in the playground. The head teacher quite often comes in and sits with the primary sixes. You know, they're there, they're interacting, when there's an issue, children are always listened to. You know, you can see there is that, "What's happened here?"

"There's been a fight."

"Okay, we're going to sit down, can you tell us what happened?" Not just, you know, old school, from when I was younger, you just got into trouble, erm, I'm sure that's all intentional.

And it makes a difference?

It *does* make a difference. It does. And I'd like to think more children would feel that they could go and speak to someone. I have children come and approach me *a lot* with… every, every sort of issue…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, you know, “I’m feeling sad”, or “I’m upset”, or you know, whatever… erm… I think… those are the things… and I do think they do a fair bit in class. They try and raise awareness of things at assembly…

Mm-hmm.

Erm, yeah, definitely think they’re aware of it and pro-actively trying to promote mental health and wellbeing.

Okay. So, well, aside from the things that are going on in classes, what sorts of other strategies and techniques and tricks do you see other staff members using that you consider makes a difference? To pupils’ mental health and wellbeing. I’m just talking about the things that you see colleagues do at a personal level…

Mm-hmm.

… that you think, that’s supportive, that’s positive, that’s helpful…

Mm-hmm. Erm, I think a big thing for me is modelling that calmness, that I was saying to you.

Mmm.

Erm, these teachers are all really great at it, erm, and I think that’s a big thing, ‘cause when the children are… I’m saying to you… for *some* of them, the default setting is anger and aggression, for them to see adults that are being *consistently* calm, you know… Yes, you may have done something wrong but I’m… I’m speaking to you in *this* tone, I’m speaking to you using *this* language.

This is how adults should behave.

Yeah. And, I think that’s really important, and that there’s that consistency, and erm… I’m sure we were told that… yeah, it was the Educational Psychologist actually, in an input that they had with us, for us as classroom assistants as well, they were saying especially for kids that have gone through trauma, they were emphasising that to us, you must be consistent. For some of these kids, they come in, they’re not used to somebody that goes, “Oh hi!” That’s what I try and do in the morning, with every kid I see, “Hi!” Like I’m really pleased to see them, so that they feel valued, they feel welcomed, “How are you today?” And you know, you wait for the answer. And some of them don’t have that, at home. Erm, and for some of them, we were told by the Educational Psychologist, that’s… they don’t even know how to cope with that. Erm…

But… but maybe they can start to learn if you apply it consistently…

Exactly. Exactly. And, you know there are… I've got *loads* of kids… I mean, I didn't expect that you would be giving hugs in school, you know…

(Laughs).

We've been through so many safeguarding things and everything I do when you work with children, it's like: "Don't touch them!"

I know!

Don't touch them! It's like… I would be cruel if I was actually… putting my hands out here, because…

I always found that difficult, as a male, as well…

I can imagine!

But… ultimately, just as you say, the point comes where you think, actually what this child needs is a hug.

Ah-hah! And I never go up and grab them. You know, "Oh, come here!" They just come up to you and they give you a hug! Erm, and I do actually think that, my colleague and I were talking about that on the way to work today, and it's so funny, and it really sounds uite cheesy but her words to me were, "I just think what a lot of them just need is love." And I was like, "I a hundred percent agree with you," you know? Somebody who is looking at them, they're accepting them, they're valuing them, for who they are, they're expressing their… It's so true! It's so true.

It *is* true. That's my experience too.

Ah-hah. I was thinking, there's a wee boy in primary six was in the [ASN unit]. And at times he's just… he can be *really* challenging. Really, really difficult, erm… and hes been through loads of trauma, I didn't even know the details, I've never asked, but I've been told it was the most horrendous… erm…

Mm-hmm.

… answer, when he's… and when I came back from being two weeks off… Now I'm not even in the [ASN unit], but I do come across him quite a lot, and I've always made an effort to try and build a relationship with him. As soon as he saw me he was straight over and the arms are right… round about you. Erm, and that's a child that's not with their parents, for very obvious reasons, erm, because it was so horrendous. And, you know… the problems are big, but… it's… they're looking for that contact, erm… And then even kids who don't, you'll see

me coming in here every morning to someone, who quite often looks… unhappy and that's not a home situation… there are other… sort of, probably neurodiversity things there…

I saw you… I've no idea what was going on but it seems to me that you turned round a, sort of slight situation… with [boy's name] this morning…

Oh right? Yeah…

He just seemed…

He gradually softens!

He sometimes, you know, [teacher's name] said to me that he… and it seems this way to me too, that sometimes he just withdraws…

He does.

And he just seemed to be… *into* himself, and not looking particularly happy, and then at that point you came over and, you know, within about a minute or two he was smiling.

Yeah… you try just not to take it personally when he's in that because you know it's not you…

Yeah, of course, of course.

And it's hard when a kid who's normally… I mean he'll tell me, "You're my best friend. You're my best friend, [name of interviewee]." Which is not… a normal thing for a p6 boy to say, really, is it?

No, but he's neurodiverse.

Exactly. Erm, and he's got this thing, he pats me on the head. And I actually hate my head getting touched but I allow it!

(Laughs.)

For him, because that's him showing… he has walked up to me, and he's not a tactile child…

Mm-hmm.

But he has walked up to me and… even in the lunch hall one day I remember him going up, and he just stood in front of me, "Can I get a hug please?" "Of course you can!" Erm, yeah… (laughs.) How did we get on that one?

Erm… I can't remember, but I'm glad you went there!

(Laughs.)

Erm, yeah, we were talking about the strategies…

That's what it was!

We were talking about things, *not* the taught lessons, what are the wee things…

Yeah.

Okay, erm, are there any other ways that you can think of that we've not already discussed that the school supports pupils' mental health and wellbeing? Anything you'd like to mention?

(Pause.) That the school does… (Long pause.) I mean I think… they seem to be very aware… that some kids just can't cope with the traditional methods that the others can cope with and I find that they are very accommodating, but the *numbers* of kids who are now not coping, the numbers of kids who are just wandering out of class, or can't be in class, *that's* getting a bit… alarming. And then… I honestly don't know what else they *can do*. It gets to the point where you're saying… is this just not working?

The model doesn't fit any more.

Yes. Yes.

And you can't change the model to fit everyone who needs it because they all need a *different* fit.

Yes. Yes.

It's difficult.

So that boy that I told you in primary seven, that I usually check in on, which has been a newer sort of development, sort of in the past couple of months, erm, he comes in in the morning and goes home at quarter past twelve every day…

Mmm.

He doesn't come in on a Thursday morning because he can't cope with assembly, at all, so he's only in for a very short time… and when he's in, erm, he's… disrupting the whole class…

Mmm.

… and breaking things, throwing things, shouting, swearing… the language is *awful*. Like, I would be upset as a parent, if my children were being exposed to that on a daily basis. I would really be upset, erm…

I've worked with kids like that before, and it's… *very* difficult to… find a way to deal with it.

Ah-hah. Erm, and I just sometimes think their needs are actually too great, for the school, you can't blame… the school. Erm, you know, and they're trying with him and they're putting, that's why they asked me, there had been a classroom assistant for primary seven, erm, but she left and went back to her old school, she was off and refused to go back, so she hasn't been here since Christmas. Erm, so she did spend a lot of time with him previous to

that… but they are trying, and they *do* try and work really closely with the families, I see that… erm, trying to agree, to put things in place together… "Right, this is what we're going to do," and for some of them like him it's just a completely different timetable. I think it's on his plan, if he can actually just sit, in the class. And I was going up initially and trying to sit with him and trying to do a wee bit of work. And he got so bad, not when I was there, at the rest of the time, that I was then told when I go at half past eleven, actually the plan is that he's taken out.

Mm-hmm.

And so they go and kick a ball or run around… do something, or talk… just to actually keep him down and calm, and not… causing utter chaos.

Or in school in some form.

Erm, so… they're really, really trying. I think they're so great, and I also think… my colleague and I were talking about this, that there's only so much we can do *in* school about some of these issues. Like, we're only one wee part of it, but a lot of them I think need… I don't know if why this is home-link school workers were created or not, but I don't think that's the answer either, 'cause I've looked at the job description, I've looked at the requirements, and I'm saying that's actually unfair, to ask people… without the training and , sort of qualifications, to go and fix all those problems that you're asking them to fix.

Oh, I see, it's too big an ask?

Oh, phh… I looked at the job description last week 'cause [name of local authority] are advertising for one, and I looked and I thought, "Oh my *goodness*…" You know, the level of knowledge, skills, expertise, you know, they were looking for, for that grade of a job…

Mmm.

Really. But what they need is people that can work with the whole family, as a unit.

Mm-hmm.

If I've got two children from the same family, and their language is foul, they're fighting constantly with other people, they're aggressive, they don't know how to communicate in any other way apart from shouting, swearing, being aggressive… that tells me, it's highly likely…

That's what the environment is at home.

Ah-hah. So what's the point in me, you know… now, you have that consistency, yes, this is how… We're not speaking like that…

Mm-hmm.

But the *bigger* influence is home. So that family… needs support.

Mmm.

Erm, and they are, that family, social work are involved and everything, but… to what extent? Like, can that fix it? Like, they need, to me, their needs are through the generations there, it's…

Okay, well, once again, the next question has been partly answered there…

(Laughter.)

… so, erm, what are the barriers to meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of your pupils? What makes life more difficult? And you know, home life, home circumstances, inability to fix that…

Yes.

So are there any other things that make your life more difficult? Meeting mental health and wellbeing needs?

Yeah, I think just staffing now.

Staffing.

Yes.

Okay.

I think, you know…

So…. not enough staff?

Not enough because of the needs! You know, because if you're getting pulled left, right and centre then people are spread too thinly and…

Mm-hmm.

You know, the needs are greater.

More hands on deck.

You need more… ah-hah! You do. And what often happens is kids who are the most disruptive, who the help then gets pulled for, and then there are other kids who could probably be doing with that…. Support, but because their behaviours are not quite so… serious, then the help gets channelled…

Back to what we were discussing earlier about, erm, some needs maybe shouting louder than others, or being more immediately urgent.

Yes.

The other side of that question then, just to finish with, is: if you had a magic wand, what would make your like more easy? What would make meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of those pupils more, er, achievable?

(Long pause.) I think for me… the ones that give me most grief (nervous laugh), if you want put it that way, it would be more the home situation, to be honest, it's not so much trying to fix the school…

Now you've just described the difficulty of fixing that home situation…

Ah-hah! That is…

So, how would you… if you were… prime minister!

(Laughter.)

I don't know. I don't have all the answers. I can just observe.

Mm-hmm. You know, none of us have all the answers. And I'm here to get your observations and your perceptions.

(Long pause.) That's a hard one! Er, I often go back to… cross-cultural things in my head. Erm, and how our culture is so different from the likes of my husband's culture.

I'm sure there's lessons we can both learn from that.

Yes!

Through the comparison.

In terms of family support, I think, that's where there's a difference, so… to make it very personal, so when as a family you have a child, the normal practice is any female relative who's available will come and stay with you for maybe about three months, initially, and they'll cook and clean wash the clothes and help with other kids, to let the mum… recover.

Mmm.

And feed the baby and get on their feet and then after those three months things start to settle down a wee bit.

Mm-hmm. Those first few months are torrid! In my own experience! (Laughter.)

They are!

Not much sleep!

Yes! Absolutely.

I think this sounds like a very good idea!

So when I was having our first child, I never heard of anything so insane in all my life, and my husband didn't explain it to me that way, he just said, "Do you want me to get my sister to come over from [name of foreign country]?"

Mm-hmm.

And my thought was, "Are you absolutely crazy? I'm just about to have a baby and you want me to have a guest."

(Laughs.) Ah right, I see…

And I'm thinking, "What would I cook for her?" You know, I don't what she'd like and I thought, "I want to enjoy having my baby." In my Western, individualic [sic] thinking, I was thinking "I can't cope with both of those things." And he couldn't understand why he'd offered something so horrendous. Erm, and then when I was having my third child, (laughs), when I'd had my second child we happened to be staying with my parents anyway…

Right…

… because we were preparing to go to [name of foreign country]. So we had gone in with my parents, so I had some help… When I was having my third child I was in [name of foreign country]…

Right, okay…

… with no family support round about me and my husband said, "Would you like me to ask my sister?"

"Yes please!" And she came, for three months, and she did all those things. But more than that, she was company, when he was out at work. And I had somebody to talk to when I was feeling a bit anxious about the wee one, and I had another adult present, I had support. And then…

That's so interesting.

… we were talking about it, and he said, "That's why we don't have so much post-natal depression in [name of foreign country]." And I'm like, "You're absolutely right!" And then you look at our model of doing things, and we are very individual, we cope with a lot of things on our own. Erm, I think this is… it's all the kind of same thing? See what I'm saying?

Very much so.

Erm, Yeah. I don't know if I made that very clear, but…

So, really, you're painting a picture of wider socio-cultural and family….

Mm-hmm.

… issues that re impacting…

Yes.

… these children.

Basically. And Scotland, probably was more similar to that, what I'm explaining about [name of foreign country]… Scotland might have been more similar to that sixty years ago.

Oh, yeah, or even longer… yes I see what you mean.

I don't mean the necessarily living with someone or helping them, but just that more… erm…

I wonder how the clans did it?

… the wider family support, erm…

Fascinating.

Yeah, I know, it is.

It's fascinating to me, erm, just to end then, with… I've written the questions, but maybe there's something we've not talked about that you'd like to add? Is there anything else you'd like to say, or to add, on the subjects we've talked about? Or maybe something totally different, that we've not already discussed.

No, I don't think so… erm, I don't think so. Again, I just want to make sure though… that there are a lot of positive things as well, coming from families and from children, that there are some children who… you look at them, you look at their behaviour, you look at their demeanour…

Mm-hmm..

… and you almost wish you could clone them, you'd have a perfect school. But you can see that everything in their life is calm, and, erm, stable. And then that then transfers over to how they behave in school, how they behave even towards other children. Er, they've got that consistency that we're asked to have as adults, so it's not every child that's like… what I was highlighting, the things I've been highlighting to you today, but there are actually a good number…

Mm-hmm.

… where life is good. And, you know, their mental health is well because everything is well.

Mm-hmm.

Erm, for them. But it's just that the ones that scream out…

That suggests to me, in painting the positive picture, and remembering these pupils who perhaps get forgotten in the really… erm.. it still seems to reinforce the idea that although you've spoken about, erm, the multitude of factors and things like social media, is it fair to say that you still see the central driving factor for good or for ill, as being family circumstances? Upbringing? Home situations?

Probably. Yeah. I would say, yeah, upbringing… and even things like when you hear about when something big happens in school, in terms of a child's behaviour, when we hear about the phone calls that go home, and the attitudes of some of the parents towards school, and how they speak to school staff, it's just reflective of their way of thinking and how they conduct themselves, their aggression. I've seen a parent punching the walls outside the office one day, so aggressive, erm, so no wonder the child's behaving like that. And when I had an issue with a child in [teacher's name]'s class one day, who was really rude to me in the playground, and when I spoke to [name of teacher], she phoned his mum and his mum was *horrified*… and his mum dealt with it, and spoke to him, and he seemed like a different child ever since, and the mum wanted reports from [name of teacher] about how his behaviour, and she was, "Absolutely not! Who does he think he is, speaking to a member of staff like that?" And… the *difference*! You see…

If you have that support.

Ah-hah. Ah-hah. Erm, it's not all just the financial either, like the child I was saying from the big family, you know her mental health seems fine, erm, and it's… you know… the family are trying, it's not… but, I think…

So the financial can be separate…

It can be…

… from the care and the love and the nurture…

It can be, it adds its own pressures in terms of erm, I guess time, and I guess sometimes its reflective of their own education. And their ability to help, as well…

Mm-hmm.. okay… Okay, right well, I'm going to pause this now, just… goodness me! That's…

Too long? I told you I can talk!

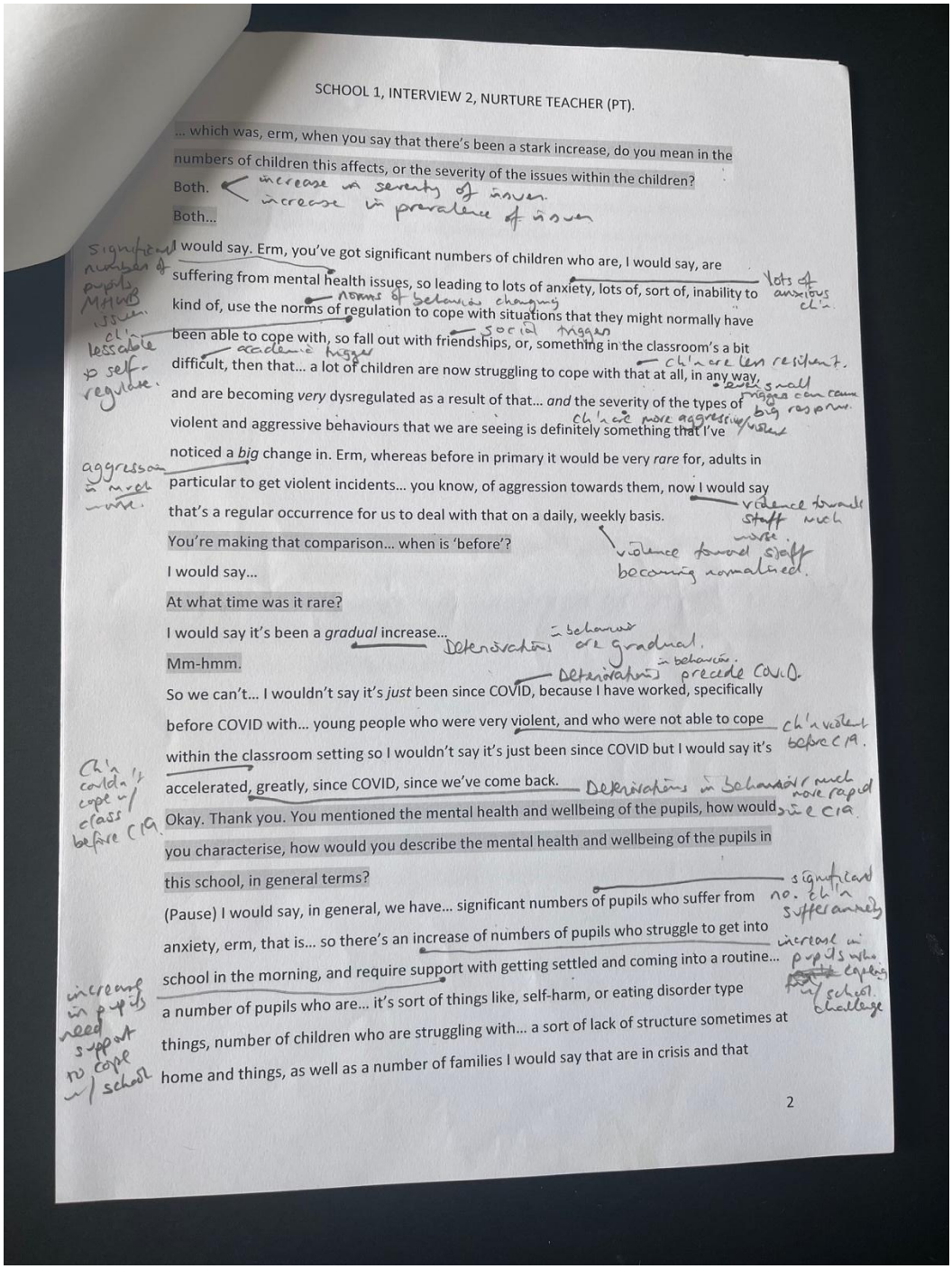
Never too long! Thank you so much for all your valuable thoughts.

That's okay!

[End of recording.]

APPENDIX J: PROCESS OF CODING AND ANALYSIS.

This appendix is designed to give a visual insight into the steps used in the process of analysis, as described in section 5.10 of the thesis.



SCHOOL 1, INTERVIEW 2, NURTURE TEACHER (PT).

... which was, erm, when you say that there's been a stark increase, do you mean in the numbers of children this affects, or the severity of the issues within the children?

Both.

Both...

I would say. Erm, you've got significant numbers of children who are, I would say, are suffering from mental health issues, so leading to lots of anxiety, lots of, sort of, inability to kind of, use the norms of regulation to cope with situations that they might normally have been able to cope with, so fall out with friendships, or, something in the classroom's a bit difficult, then that... a lot of children are now struggling to cope with that at all, in any way, and are becoming *very* dysregulated as a result of that... *and* the severity of the types of violent and aggressive behaviours that we are seeing is definitely something that I've noticed a *big* change in. Erm, whereas before in primary it would be very *rare* for, adults in particular to get violent incidents... you know, of aggression towards them, now I would say that's a regular occurrence for us to deal with that on a daily, weekly basis.

You're making that comparison... when is 'before'?

I would say...

At what time was it rare?

I would say it's been a *gradual* increase...

Mm-hmm.

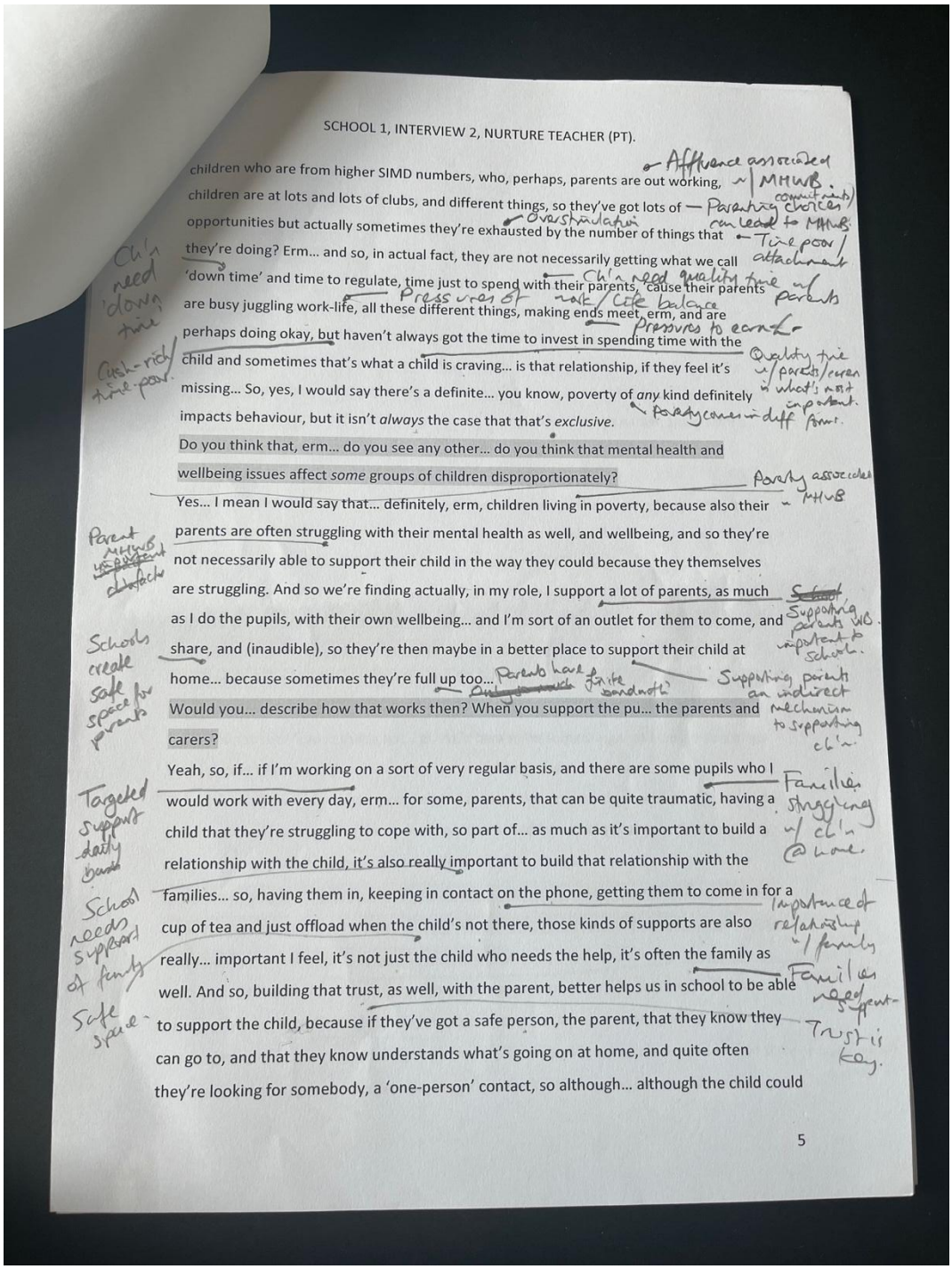
So we can't... I wouldn't say it's *just* been since COVID, because I have worked, specifically before COVID with... young people who were very violent, and who were not able to cope within the classroom setting so I wouldn't say it's just been since COVID but I would say it's accelerated, greatly, since COVID, since we've come back.

Okay. Thank you. You mentioned the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils, how would you characterise, how would you describe the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils in this school, in general terms?

(Pause) I would say, in general, we have... significant numbers of pupils who suffer from anxiety, erm, that is... so there's an increase of numbers of pupils who struggle to get into school in the morning, and require support with getting settled and coming into a routine... a number of pupils who are... it's sort of things like, self-harm, or eating disorder type things, number of children who are struggling with... a sort of lack of structure sometimes at home and things, as well as a number of families I would say that are in crisis and that

2

Figure M1: examples of initial summarising and code development.



SCHOOL 1, INTERVIEW 2, NURTURE TEACHER (PT).

children who are from higher SIMD numbers, who, perhaps, parents are out working, children are at lots and lots of clubs, and different things, so they've got lots of opportunities but actually sometimes they're exhausted by the number of things that they're doing? Erm... and so, in actual fact, they are not necessarily getting what we call 'down time' and time to regulate, time just to spend with their parents, cause their parents are busy juggling work-life, all these different things, making ends meet, erm, and are perhaps doing okay, but haven't always got the time to invest in spending time with the child and sometimes that's what a child is craving... is that relationship, if they feel it's missing... So, yes, I would say there's a definite... you know, poverty of *any* kind definitely impacts behaviour, but it isn't *always* the case that that's *exclusive.*

Do you think that, erm... do you see any other... do you think that mental health and wellbeing issues affect *some* groups of children disproportionately?

Yes... I mean I would say that... definitely, erm, children living in poverty, because also their parents are often struggling with their mental health as well, and wellbeing, and so they're not necessarily able to support their child in the way they could because they themselves are struggling. And so we're finding actually, in my role, I support a lot of parents, as much as I do the pupils, with their own wellbeing... and I'm sort of an outlet for them to come, and share, and (inaudible), so they're then maybe in a better place to support their child at home... because sometimes they're full up too...

Would you... describe how that works then? When you support the pu... the parents and carers?

Yeah, so, if... if I'm working on a sort of very regular basis, and there are some pupils who I would work with every day, erm... for some, parents, that can be quite traumatic, having a child that they're struggling to cope with, so part of... as much as it's important to build a relationship with the child, it's also really important to build that relationship with the families... so, having them in, keeping in contact on the phone, getting them to come in for a cup of tea and just offload when the child's not there, those kinds of supports are also really... important I feel, it's not just the child who needs the help, it's often the family as well. And so, building that trust, as well, with the parent, better helps us in school to be able to support the child, because if they've got a safe person, the parent, that they know they can go to, and that they know understands what's going on at home, and quite often they're looking for somebody, a 'one-person' contact, so although... although the child could

5

Figure M2: further examples of initial summarising and code development. From these first steps, an initial 'long list' of codes was drawn up.

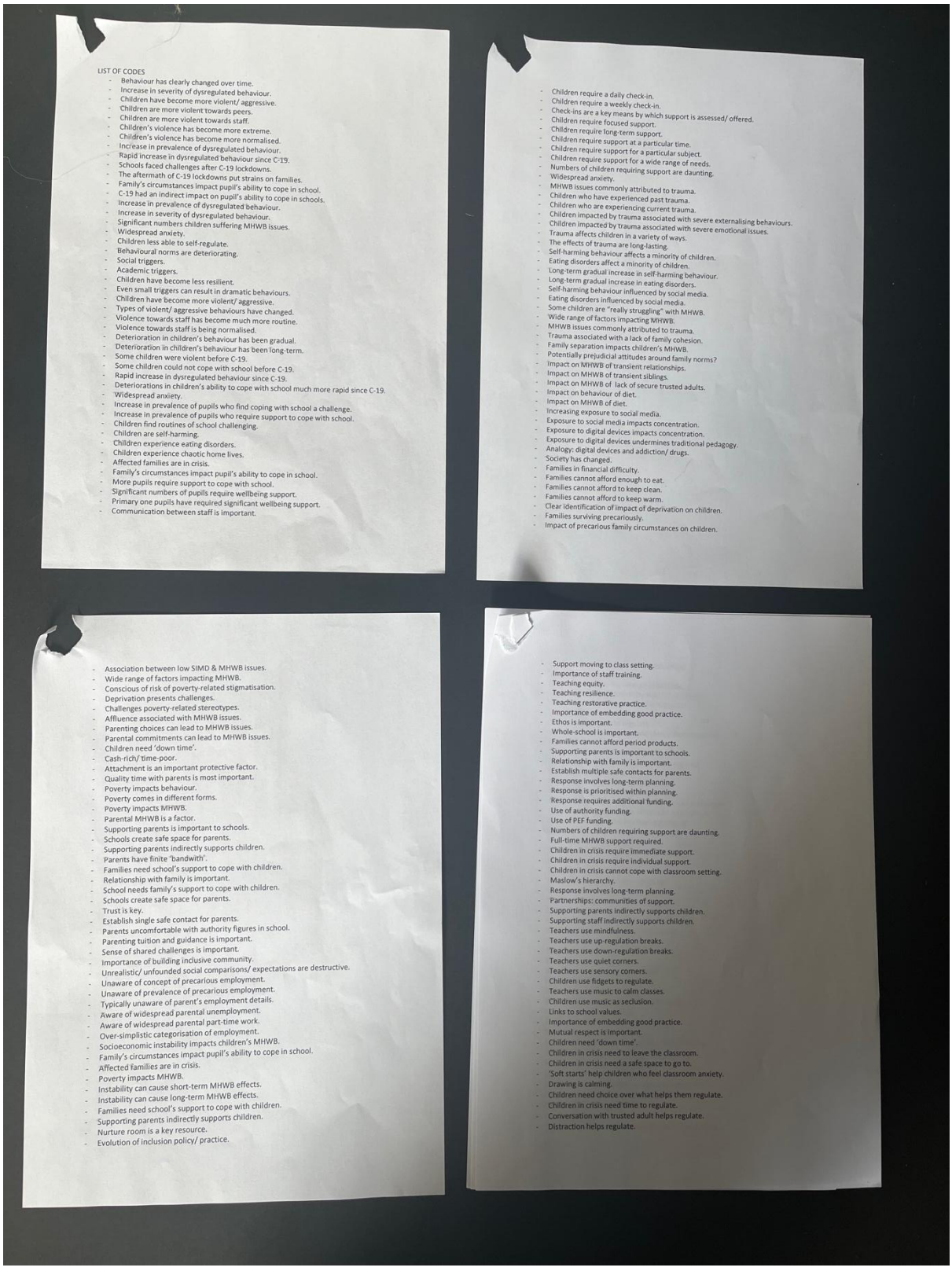


Figure M3: the initial 'long list' of codes ran to around six pages. These codes were then collapsed into a shorter list of groups of codes.

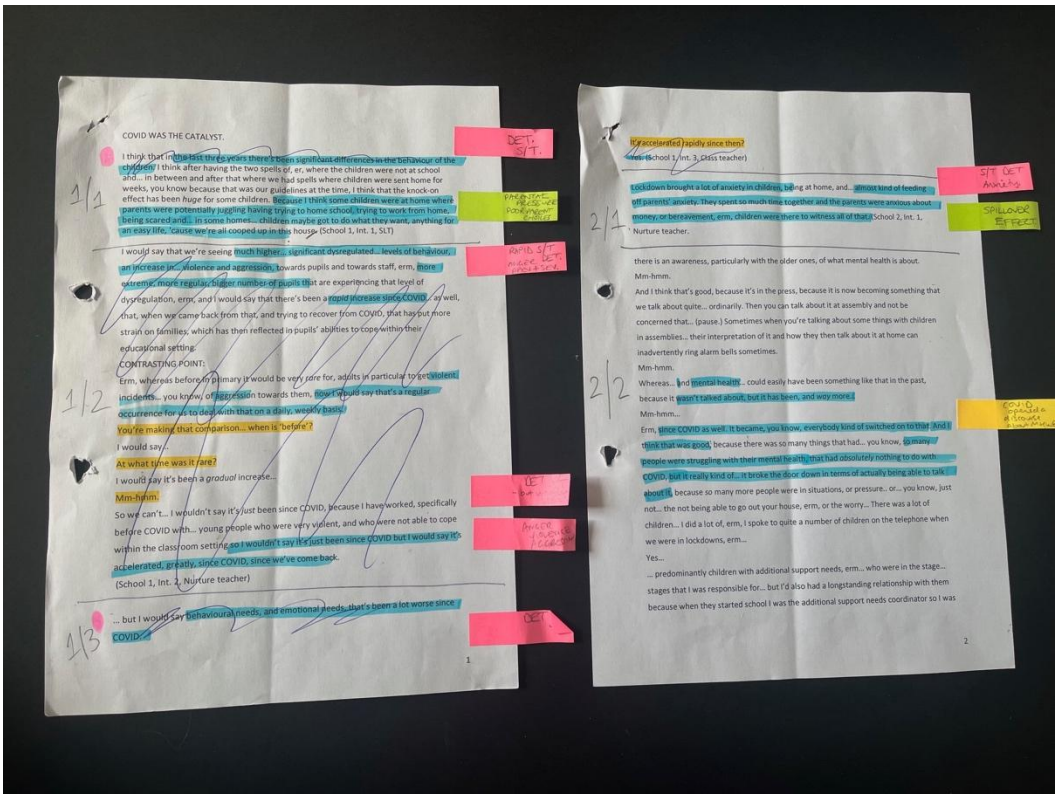


Figure M4: sections from interview transcripts which related to the most prominent groups of codes were then amalgamated. These developed into sub-themes. The example given here is of data from all interviews which related to COVID-19. The school and interviewee numbers can be seen in the left hand margin.

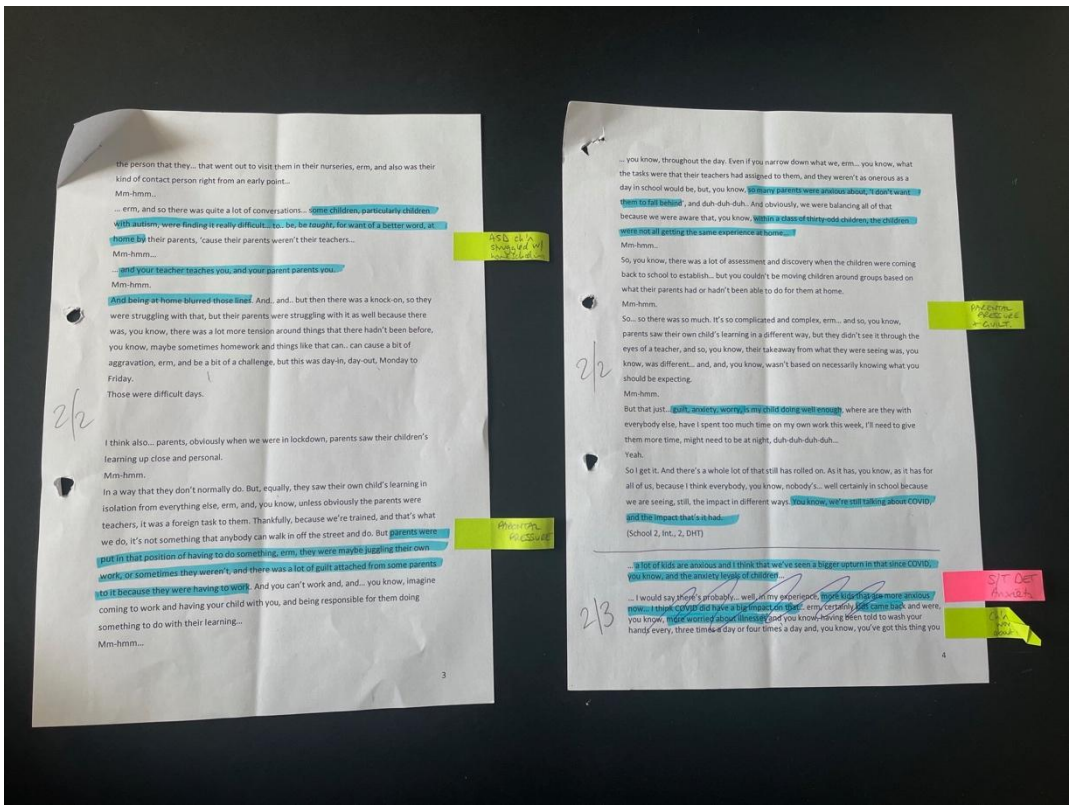


Figure M5: further data relating to the COVID-19 theme.

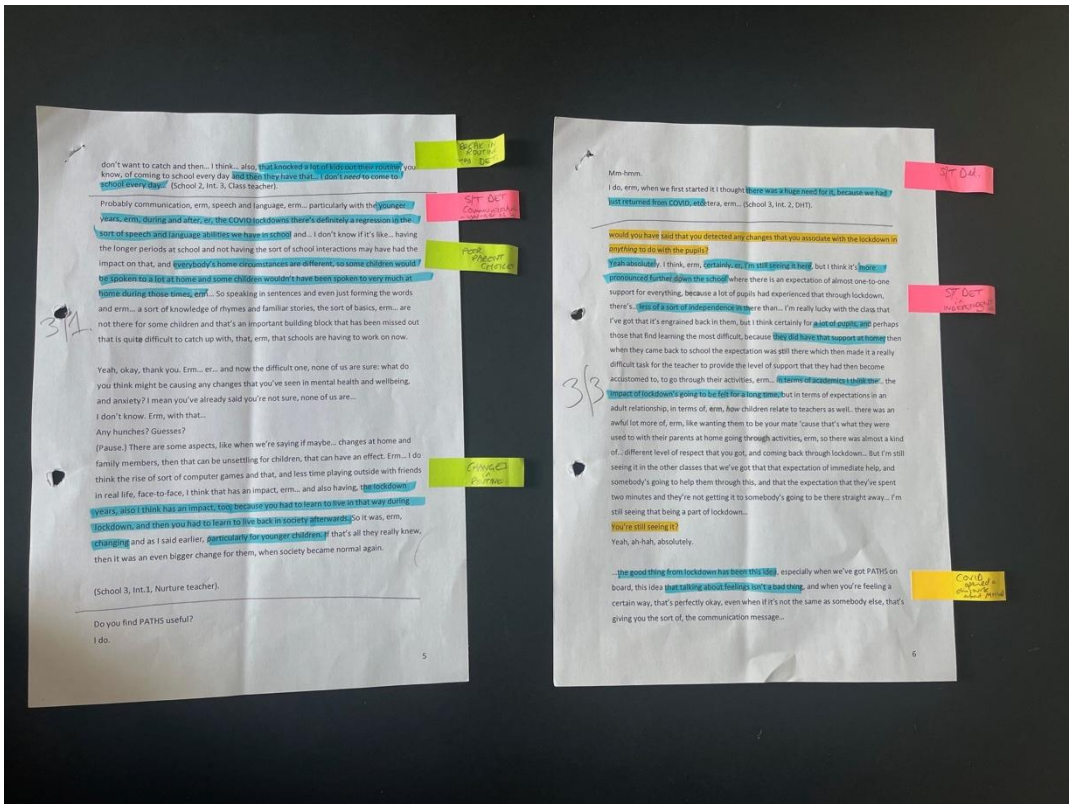


Figure M6: further data re COVID-19 theme.

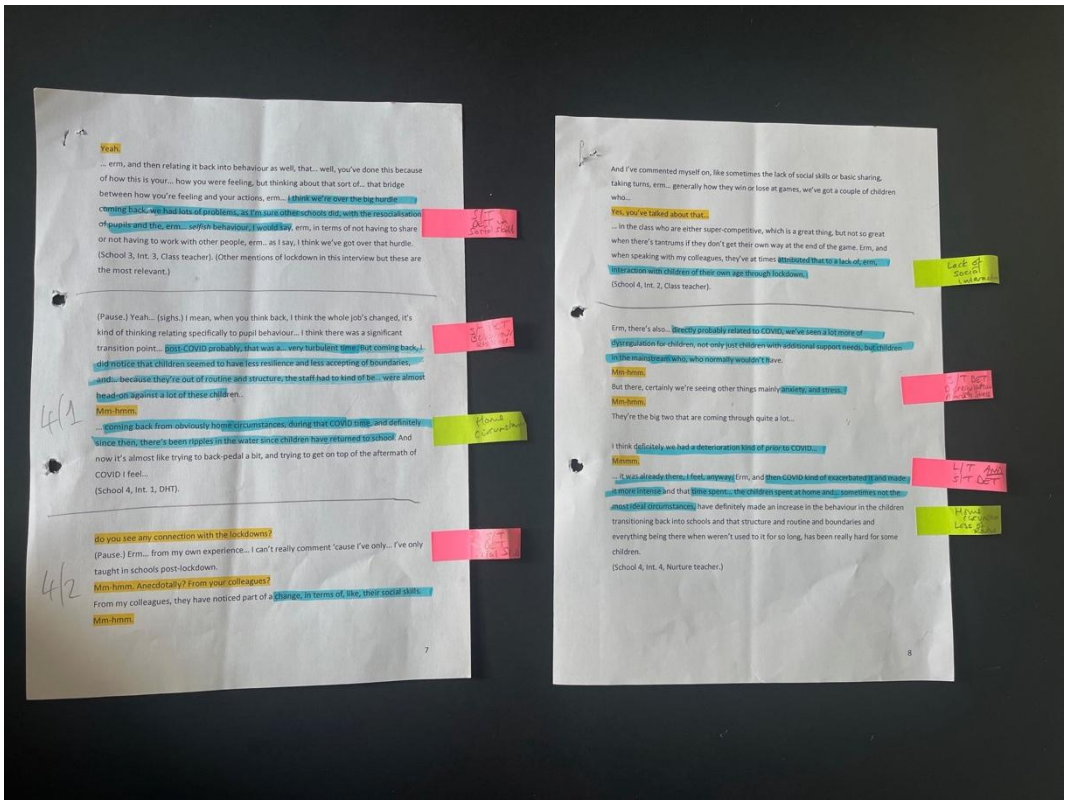


Figure M7: further data re COVID-19 theme.

APPENDIX K: MEMBER CHECKING: COVER LETTER

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT.

Thank you, once again, for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research study. I am so grateful for your valuable thoughts, opinions and experiences; they will be used to help inform schools and universities how to improve the mental health and wellbeing support we offer to primary pupils in Scotland.

Please read through the following summary in order to check that my interpretation of your interview matches what you intended to mean.

You may change, remove *or* add to anything in this document. If you would like to do so, please email me at the address below. You may also decide to withdraw your consent altogether, in which case nothing that you said in the interview will be used in my final report.

I can assure that your contribution is completely confidential. No individual, school or local authority will be identifiable in the report. If these have been included in the following summary it is only in *this* version of the transcription, and will be redacted in all other versions.

Please note that if I do not hear from you within two weeks I will assume that I may include all of your interview points, as presented here, in my final report. Once this deadline has passed I cannot then alter your points.

Please don't hesitate to email if you have any questions.

gerard.bell@strath.ac.uk

APPENDIX L: MEMBER CHECKING: SUMMARIES OF INTERVIEWS.

SCHOOL ONE, INTERVIEW ONE, D.H.T. (MS DOYLE).

- You have been teaching for 36 years.
- Over the course of your career you described seeing “huge” changes in pupil’s behaviour. You characterised these as a drop in respect for adults, greater tendency to answer back in class and behaviours which tended to escalate to greater extents. You also described a greater prevalence of dysregulated pupils.
- You also described a huge impact on behaviour from the COVID-19 lockdowns, which you connected to a loss of school routine and the chaos some children would have experienced at home.
- You talked about a greater prevalence of pupils who require mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) support from the school, as well as a significant increase in pupils who require referrals for various reasons.
- You attributed some of these changes to the effects of social media, too much time spent on digital devices (both parents and children) and not enough quality family time spent together, which may be causing attachment issues.
- You characterised the majority of your pupils as having positive MHWB, but that there are “a handful” of children about whom you have concerns.
- You attributed a greater focus on MHWB lessons over recent years to changes brought in by a CfE.
- You described seeing MHWB issues amongst your pupils as manifesting as dysregulated disruptive behaviour, anger, aggression and anxiety, and that the former types of MHWB issues are the most apparent in school.
- Although you stated that you would need to consult the figures to be sure, you felt confident that there was some association between pupils who lived in lower SIMD bands and pupils who required additional support.
- You described family separation as having a “huge” impact on pupil’s MHWB, particularly when it is complicated and involves wider family members.
- You described a minority of parents/ carers as having professional jobs, as well as another minority (although it is possible that you meant *majority* here?) who are either non-working or in manual jobs. You also thought a lot of your parents/ carers would work in precarious employment.
- You described setting up a school food bank which is used by several families in your community.
- You described an association between the minority of professional parents/ carers in your community and pupils who do *not* require support from the school. You also perceived a clear relationship between children who are very dysregulated and parents/ carers who have separated, especially if there is animosity or chaotic arrangements between parents, or those who are in “kinship care”.

- You described how your school celebrates mental health week and uses assemblies to cover wellbeing indicators; this is then followed up by class work. You also described how your nurture room supports pupils with a variety of needs. You spoke highly of the staff member who runs the nurture room and described how it had an "open door" policy for pupils who required to visit it.
- You described how your home-link worker worked to break down barriers between parents/ carers and the school. You also discussed links to various outside agencies, the social work department, your school nursing service, educational psychologist, and CAMHS.
- You described how making referrals to CAMHS had improved recently, but that parents/ carers were still facing long waiting lists.
- You described how teaching had changed hugely over the years, becoming far more nurturing in approach. Pupil personalisation and choice had also expanded, as teachers have become more adept at adapting the curriculum to fit individual children's needs.
- You described home circumstances as one of the barriers to supporting your pupils' MHWB needs, in that they often return home every day to the cause of some of their MHWB issues.
- In order to improve the support you could offer pupils, you thought that greater staff numbers would help, as well as having an 'inclusion unit' to support those pupils who find it the hardest to regulate. You suggested that although inclusion was a good policy, there are some children for whom it is not working, and that if you had more resources you could offer pupils better support.
- Finally, you expressed concern about pupils' MHWB in general, and how young some of those affected are. You also considered that a possible 'down side' of talking about MHWB more frequently was that this might exacerbate the problem for some children.

SCHOOL ONE, INTERVIEW TWO, NURTURE TEACHER (MS FENTON).

- You have been teaching for 22 years, most of which you have spent in your current school (although this time has been split across the old and new buildings).
- Over the course of your career, you have "undoubtedly" seen a change in pupils' behaviour. You characterised this change as involving higher prevalence and severity of dysregulation, as well as violence and aggression (towards pupils and staff). You also noted a rapid deterioration of pupils' behaviours since the COVID-19 lockdowns.
- You also described significant numbers of children suffering from mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) issues, leading to anxiety, inability to cope with previously manageable situations, as well as a "big change" in frequency and severity of violent behaviour, which you now see on a daily or weekly basis.

- You described a gradual deterioration in pupils' MHWB which predates the lockdowns but has accelerated rapidly since.
- You described a significant and growing number of pupils who suffer from anxiety, as well as a smaller number of pupils affected by self-harming behaviours or eating disorders, some of which you associated with chaotic home circumstances.
- You estimated that you are supporting about 90 pupils with various forms of wellbeing issues. The most prevalent issues are around anxiety and trauma. Self-harm and eating disorders are a minority but the prevalence of these serious issues has increased over years. You speculated that these issues may be related to social media.
- Other factors you identified as driving MHWB issues amongst pupils are trauma, family separation and transient parental relationships, diet, screen time, poverty and families who are "living hand-to-mouth."
- You described a correlation between pupils who come from low SIMD areas and poorer MHWB outcomes, but also those from high SIMD areas who are not receiving sufficient quality family time.
- The group of children whom you felt are disproportionately likely to suffer poor MHWB are those living in poverty, whose parents also often suffer poor MHWB. You described supporting some of these parents, as well as their children, and your efforts to build relationships and trust between them and the school.
- You were unsure as to the extent of parents and carers in the school community who were dependant on precarious employment, although you felt that "a lot" of the parents you dealt with would be either not working or in part-time work.
- You felt that there was definitely a link between the socioeconomic stability of a household and their child's MHWB outcomes.
- You described having responsibility for H&WB across the school, and having implemented staff training on areas such as equity, resilience, restorative practice, staff wellbeing and period poverty.
- You described your role as being funded by a combination of PEF and authority funds, which allow you to work full-time in the nurture room.
- You described teachers using a range of strategies to support their pupils MHWB: mindfulness, regulation breaks, quiet corners, sensory corners, fidget toys, music and individual CD players, soft starts.
- You also described a range of strategies used to help pupils who come to the nurture room to "get over the hurdle": colouring and drawing, having a chat, playing with toys or games. You describe the relationship with the pupil as being key, as well as the use of an initial distraction to defuse the immediate crisis. However, some children prefer to sit alone, on the rocking chair or sofa. Once you have seen them begin to regulate you can then try to "unpick" what the issue is. You stressed the importance of ensuring that the children feel that their issues are valid and that they have been listened to.

- You discussed the use of snacks and drinks in the nurture room.
- You described a range of after-school clubs that the school provides, as well as charity work and fundraising, and active elements to assemblies. You mentioned the kitchen's work in providing breakfasts, school meals, and left over food donations to children whose families need it.
- We both discussed the tension between wellbeing and achievement, and the difficulty in striking a balance between the two. You mentioned going into classes to support certain pupils who were anxious about work.
- You described how pupil's needs vary throughout the year, and can rise as holidays approach. You attributed this to anxiety that the support offered by school would disappear throughout the holidays.
- You cited a lack of staffing as one of the main barriers to offering the level of support you would ideally like. This predominantly affects quiet, anxious pupils as the pupils with the "biggest behaviours" *have* to be attended to. You also mentioned a lack of funding and physical space within the school. You described how the open planning of the school's interior can present problems when dealing with dysregulated pupils.
- In an ideal world, you described having a team of people to work with you. This would allow you to offer the support you would like to *all* children who needed it, as well as providing initiatives like wellbeing "boost groups." You also stated a desire to have a sensory garden area.
- Finally, you pointed out the supreme importance of getting wellbeing right for children first, as if that is not sorted out, then attainment will not follow. You implied that wellbeing should be given primacy over other areas of the curriculum, particularly in relation to pressure from higher authorities, and cited Maslow's hierarchy of needs in support of this view.

SCHOOL ONE, INTERVIEW THREE, CLASS TEACHER (MS SIMPSON).

- You have been teaching for eleven years.
- You described noticing a change in pupils' behaviour over that time, and that you have had to take on more roles now than simply teaching.
- You described seeing an increasing number of children with additional support needs and social, emotional and behavioural needs. You described a 'drastic' change in this over your career; whereas you would have had one child with extreme behaviour in a class when you started, it was now typically four or five. You felt that all the classes in your school were in a similar situation.
- You thought that changes in society were driving these changes. You described how parents were less likely to set boundaries at home now, and more likely to let children do what they please.
- You described how these changes had been gradual before the COVID-19 lockdowns, and then become much more rapid afterwards.

- You characterised your class as having quite varied mental health and wellbeing (MHWB), with quite a lot that were “struggling” emotionally, often in relation to home circumstances. You also highlighted a lot of children in your class who presented as quite anxious, despite having apparently quite stable backgrounds. You also reported some pupils who seemed to become quite disengaged or withdrawn, or cried and wouldn’t tell you why, or refused to do certain things in class. In addition, you said that there were one or two in your class who could become quite violent.
- You describe feeling on a “knife-edge” in class due to the unpredictability of these violent incidents, and that the triggers are not always identifiable. These incidents can involve children being out of their seats, throwing or tipping furniture, hitting and kicking staff or other pupils, or refusing to leave the class.
- You described the CPI training that you, your classroom assistant and members of the SLT underwent in order to safely restrain one of your pupils, which you thought you had to do at least twice a week, and sometimes twice a day.
- Changes in pupils’ MHWB which you had noticed over the course of your career include children being more “down on themselves” and having lower self-esteem, as well as seeming more anxious.
- You thought that home circumstances were behind some of these changes, especially deprivation, family loss, separation. You also mentioned social media and access to tablets and phones. You thought that all of the pupils in your class would be able to access the internet through some device.
- You thought that there was a correlation between families who live in low SIMD status areas and poorer MHWB outcomes for their children, however you pointed out that not all pupils from deprived backgrounds had poor MHWB.
- You thought that a “huge proportion” of your school’s parents/ carers were employed in precarious jobs, although you weren’t sure of the percentage. Some of your pupils had parents/ carers who were employed in ‘stable’ jobs.
- You could see a link between parents/ carers who were in precarious employment and pupils with poor MHWB in some specific individuals in your class. You also speculated about links with parents/ carers who worked unsociable hours or single parents who had to work rather than spend time with their children.
- You described using your local authority H&WB framework to teach emotional wellbeing, as well as time spent at the start of the year looking at emotions, and also some class work around mental health awareness week. You also talked about Instagram accounts which you followed that gave you good ideas and resources to use in class.
- You described pupils being offered counselling from the [external counselling service], as well as a wellbeing ‘boost group’ run within the school.
- You described how your pupils could go to the [name of nurture room] to get something to eat or just to get some respite from class or from the playground. They

could also go there for restorative conversations, which you describe as useful as long as the children are ready to talk and are sincere.

- You listed the following strategies which class teachers use to support their pupil's MHWB: brain breaks, calm corners, fidget toys, and putty. However, you considered the relationship between child and teacher to be the most important thing. You also described the importance of framing questions to children in positive terms (*e.g.,* "What happened?" Rather than, "What's wrong with you?")
- You described the importance of an SLT-led, whole-school, embedded approach to support pupils' MHWB.
- Finally, you described the tension between wellbeing and achievement, and how you that can become apparent at the end of the year when you complete your pupils' tracking details: some pupils may not be on track for very specific wellbeing reasons.

SCHOOL ONE, INTERVIEW FOUR, HOME LINK WORKER (MR JOHNSON).

- You told me that you'd worked as a home link worker across two schools for about six years.
- You thought that we were living through a period of change, which has impacted this generation, and that the effects of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns had had detrimental effects, both educationally and especially socially. Young people had not had sufficient opportunity during this time to experience positive relationships and communicate with each other.
- You told me that you do support young people who can be verbally and physically aggressive at times, which you thought was associated both with a sense of uncertainty and the pressures their families experienced.
- You thought that schools should tackle the challenges of escalated behaviour by supporting the family, offering hope and positivity.
- You thought that there was a small minority of pupils within your school that required check-ins and support due to specific identified needs. You associated these needs with family circumstances, deprivation or social issues. You later estimated that you conducted 'targeted interventions' with around 20% of the total school roll, and thought that this figure was roughly the same for the other school in which you worked.
- You praised staff in your school for being very "attuned" to these needs, for their use of simple but effective strategies which supported pupil's mental health and wellbeing (MHWB), and for their willingness to embrace new training opportunities.
- You told me about having led training into restorative practice in the school for both teaching staff and classroom assistants.
- You described the school's efforts to adapt its environments to better support all pupils, but especially those who were neurodivergent. This was part of a broader

strategy that recognised learning and teaching could not happen unless wellbeing was addressed first.

- You described the use of the PATHS programme in the other school in which you worked, and expressed a desire that it be introduced in both schools. You felt that for some children the level of social and emotional learning that PATHS offers would help them access other areas of the curriculum. We agreed that PATHS could be a highly effective H&WB intervention.
- You were reluctant to consider if MHWB issues affected any particular groups of children disproportionately due to the risk of stigmatisation. However, you acknowledged the additional barriers which could be faced by those living in deprived communities. You spoke about trying to bring people together and encourage acceptance of others as a means to challenge stigma.
- You described how the other school in which you worked sat in a catchment that was split evenly between affluent and deprived areas. You talked about the challenge of breaking generational cycles faced by families which seemed inherent to this situation. You characterised families' efforts to 'break this mould' as involving courage, as there is often a "fear of change."
- You described the "dependency" on benefits which families could experience, benefits which you said could exceed the wages of a classroom assistant. You described this as an "incorrect safety blanket" which could limit their aspirations.
- You said that you had no specific data which could give you insights into whether or not parents/ carers were employed in precarious or insecure jobs. You didn't know how many would be employed in such jobs.
- You said that some of the families which you supported had "withdrawn from employment, or reduced employment" in order to be able to support their children, and to come to the school if and when necessary. You also said that there was "quite a high percentage" of the families whom you supported that had never worked.
- You thought that there was an association between families' financial insecurity and the group of children you supported. You illustrated this by describing how "frequently" pupils will say to you that they need to be a school lunch that day as "mum and dad don't get paid 'til next Thursday," and that this 'pay day' could often turn out in fact to be the day benefits were paid.
- You described how entering such conversations with pupils could leave you concerned about the need to preserve their dignity.
- You described how some pupils will come to see you for fruit or snacks and tell you that they have had no breakfast, or that their parent/ carer has no money.
- You thought that the most valuable thing your school did to support the MHWB of its pupils was building positive relationships and offering "moments of happiness to make them feel included."

SCHOOL TWO, INTERVIEW ONE, NURTURE TEACHER (MS LEES).

- You have taught for 23 years; 20 in this school, and the last 3 in nurture.
- You support over thirty children a week in the [name of nurture room].
- You described noticing a deterioration in pupils' anxiety and self-esteem over your career, which accelerated during and after the COVID 19 lockdowns.
- In terms of what might be causing these changes, you described social media, WhatsApp groups, parental separation, having additional support needs, and social difficulties as factors affecting pupil's mental health and wellbeing (MHWB).
- You characterised the majority of pupils in the school as having positive MHWB, with a minority who are "struggling with their feelings." You mentioned school ethos, staff and the SLT as all being positive factors in creating a nurturing environment.
- You described some of the MHWB issues pupils face as; difficulties with friendships, or feelings of panic, anger or worthlessness.
- You thought that MHWB issues have always affected pupils and were uncertain if they have become more prevalent or serious over your career.
- You thought that pupils with ASD, or those experiencing family separation or bereavement are more likely to experience MHWB issues than other children. In addition you described supporting a group of children who suffered from low self-confidence.
- Although you described getting to know the family background of the pupils you support, you were not aware of significant numbers of parents and carers in the school community who worked in jobs that could be described as precarious. You couldn't see any particular associations between the children you support and their family members' jobs.
- You described the use of the 'Bounce Back' scheme in the school to support pupil's MHWB, as well as teaching growth mindset, and the recognition of achievement through school values certificates or phone calls. You also mentioned 'hot chocolate with the head…' and described the SLT as being very supportive of pupil's needs.
- In the [name of nurture room], you described having different groups of children for different reasons. You talked about the use of the resilience alphabet, the use of a mirror to facilitate emotional check-ins, having discussions with pupils, peer support suggestions, using the Seasons for Growth programme, life skills tuition for younger pupils, as well as offering a break from class for some pupils, who are offered toast or baking sessions. You also described the Cool in School and Volcano in my Tummy programmes which helped children deal with anger and make positive choices. Lastly you outlined leadership tasks such as [name of charity] fundraising and the [name of support group].
- These opportunities are all timetabled, however if required, pupils can come down and book a check-in slot by using post-it notes. In emergency situations you are alerted by radio if a pupil needs immediate support or has left a class.

- You describe the [type of animals kept in the nurture room] as “probably the best resource I’ve got in this room.” For some pupils they are uniquely calming.
- In terms of strategies that you consider helpful to the support of pupils’ MHWB needs, you describe seeing teachers listening and talking calmly to their pupils outside classrooms, as well as SLT members enabling extra time out for teachers to talk to pupils who require support. You also describe sharing wellbeing support plans with pupil’s class teachers.
- You consider that your school is doing a lot to support its pupils’ MHWB needs, particularly when you compare it to what other colleagues tell you about their schools. You also mention that parents are generally very honest and supportive of your efforts.
- The main barriers to meeting the MHWB needs of your pupils more effectively that you describe is the time it takes to build a trusting relationship with each child before you can fully support them.
- The main facilitator which would allow you to meet needs more effectively is having more support from colleagues when it is required and more time to spend with the pupils, which would stop you feeling stretched.
- Finally, you described the support that the school gets from parents, in terms of helping with after-school clubs and gardening. You considered partnership with parents to be a strength and described parents’ night appointments in the [name of nurture room].

SCHOOL TWO, INTERVIEW TWO, D.H.T. (MS CLARKE).

- You have been teaching for 29 years, 19 in your current school.
- During that time, you noted an apparent increase in the prevalence of children with diagnosable conditions (*e.g*. ASD), or at least in the *diagnosis* of such conditions.
- You described a change in pupil behaviour over the time you have worked in your current school, and an increasing tendency for parents/ carers to accept their children’s version of events over the school’s.
- You described a sharp and sustained increase in previously privately educated pupils from the catchment applying to join the school around the time of the financial crisis of 2008/9. You implied that families in your catchment had been experiencing similar pressures during the COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as prior to these, sometimes due to family breakups. These sorts of pressures on families were a significant factor which affected pupils’ behaviour.
- You felt that it was impossible to make a general assessment of pupils’ mental health and wellbeing as this was specific to individuals. You described an increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing amongst the pupils, especially the older children. You felt that this was a positive development as it allowed you to speak more freely to assemblies on the subject, without it being misinterpreted at home.

It also helped with phone conversations with children with during lockdowns, particularly children with ASN who were finding it difficult to accept their parents in a 'teacher' role.

- You felt that there had definitely been a change in pupils' MHWB over your career, and described an increase in prevalence and severity of anxiety amongst pupils. This could be measured to some extent by the increased number of phone calls you have received from anxious parents/ carers.
- You mentioned dyslexia and transition as provoking anxiety, which you hinted that in some cases could be felt by parents more acutely than the pupils. You described anxiety felt by some parents during lockdowns about their child's learning. You hinted that you felt that something of an heightened anxiety had persisted in quite general ways since the lockdowns, and that there was a sense that in schools everybody was still 'talking about COVID.'
- You highlighted children in receipt of FSM, and those who had experienced acrimonious family breakups, to be at greater risk of experiencing MHWB issues.
- Due to the school's relative lack of children with FSM entitlement, you described not necessarily having an accurate knowledge about the socioeconomic status of individual families unless your pupils, or sometimes even other families, disclosed information that gave you insights. You also explained that your class teachers were adept at picking up any worrying signs and kept SLT informed.
- You described some embarrassment about the extent of unclaimed uniform in the school, and how you were able to discreetly supply the least financially secure pupils with items of surplus clothing.
- You didn't know to what extent parents and carers in your community were employed in precarious employment, although you thought that class teachers would be much more likely to know the detail of pupil's carers' employment.
- You saw pupil's openness to talking about MHWB as a positive sign that it was being discussed and taught within your classes.
- Your school has planners and resources for teaching MHWB but teachers have autonomy to choose how lessons are delivered as long as the CfE Es & Os are being covered. Bounce Back is encouraged as a whole-school programme. Classes required varied approaches dependent on the individual needs of the class, particularly immediately following the COVID 19 lockdowns.
- You found it difficult to describe class teacher's individual strategies and approaches to supporting pupil's MHWB as you are no longer in class yourself, but personally you found one of the most important strategies to be ensuring that you give children the time to be heard when they want to talk. You described the importance of being able to do this in the playground, when children would draw less attention to themselves in talking to you. This process of 'checking in' is key to supporting children's MHWB.

- You described working with the following outside agencies: [names of three external agencies].
- You thought that CAMHS now had such a long waiting list that two or three families every year were turning to private support.
- The main barriers you described to supporting children's MHWB were large class sizes and cuts to PSA and educational psychologist numbers.
- The main facilitator you described which would improve the MHWB support you could offer was more staff.

SCHOOL TWO, INTERVIEW THREE, CLASS TEACHER (MR. SINGH).

- You have been a teacher for 13 years, all of which you have worked in your current school.
- You have not noticed any significant changes in pupils' behaviour over that time, although you describe changes in society, such as mobile phones, as having some impact. You noted that some of your colleagues report a drop in respect from pupils and a lack of consequences for pupils' actions, but you do not subscribe to that view.
- You characterised the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of pupils in your school as being generally positive.
- You described the majority of MHWB issues you do see in pupils as being related to anxiety, a situation that you said has worsened since the COVID 19 lockdowns. This anxiety has affected some pupils' attendance or ability to take part in lessons.
- You considered that the prevalence of pupils experiencing anxiety has increased slightly over time, particularly since the lockdowns.
- You described making efforts in your own class to build a nurturing ethos and quickly identify pupils who need extra MHWB support.
- When asked about what the causes of these MHWB issues were, you cited pressures from home (particularly academic pressures on upper stages pupils). You implied that some of these pressures may come from professional parents/ carers who worry that they are not spending enough time with their children at home. You also suggested that this situation may be exacerbated by the financial pressures of living within such an affluent and expensive catchment. You described being aware of pupils "picking up" on pressures felt at home when parents/ carers had lost their jobs following the financial crash around 2010.
- You described pupils whose families were experiencing financial insecurity as feeling anxious and self-conscious when they were unable to afford expensive clothes for dress-as-you-please days.
- Other causes of anxiety for pupils which you described were having an ASN such as dyslexia, and experiencing parental separation.

- You considered that pupils with an ASN or with ASD, or who had experienced a family bereavement, or who had social work involvement were more likely to experience MHWB issues than their peers.
- You thought that very few parents and carers in your school community were employed in precarious employment. You thought that the vast majority of your pupils' parents/ carers worked in jobs which you characterised as professional or in business.
- You noticed an association between families experiencing financial difficulties following the economic crash around 2010, and pupils of those families experiencing MHWB issues.
- You described teaching lessons about "teamwork and fairness and equity" as well as relationships at the start of the school year. You talked about using the Bounce Back programme throughout the year. You also described how you target certain pupils for inclusion in extra-curricular clubs, so that they can experience success in those clubs and be recognised through the whole-school achievement awards.
- You described devising an alternative curriculum for a boy who was coping with parental separation and a terminally ill mum. This was based around providing him with a bike and teaching him to ride it, but also the relationship which was forged between teacher and pupil. This developed social skills, resilience and trust within the pupil.
- When asked about personal, class-level methods of supporting pupils' MHWB needs, you described the importance of pupils feeling able to come and talk to you, particularly the need to be able to arrange discreet check-ins. This could be arranged by post-it notes or engineered by asking pupils to 'help with a job' during your NCCT. You described how pupils in the school are asked to identify a 'trusted adult' to confide in, as well as a 'smiley-face' card system used by pupils who want to speak to the DHT. You also mentioned a private 'calming room' where pupils could go to regulate or co-regulate.
- You describe instances of highly distressed pupils exhibiting extreme externalising behaviour as "not common." Pupils who are at risk of such outcomes have wellbeing plans and attempts are made to avoid them getting to that situation. Wellbeing plans are reviewed as part of 'hand-over' during the first two in-service days. You characterise pupils in the lower years as being more prone to these distressed moments as by the upper years you have learned what the their triggers are.
- You described how each pupil completes a self-assessment SHANNARRI measurement as part of their wellbeing profile. You also described how although pupils generally assessed themselves fairly, some pupils could give themselves a relatively low score for 'included' or 'nurtured' due to fleeting relationship fall-outs. However, some of these low scores for 'included' did represent pupils who were more likely to experience social exclusion.

- You described how arranging classes according to pupil relationships had eased a lot of the class friction felt in the past.
- The only significant barrier you described to being better able to support the MHWB needs of your pupils is not having enough time, particularly for nurturing conversations. However, you said that you thought that the SLT would arrange for time for this if you asked for it. You also mentioned occasional instances in which parents/ carers object to courses of action teachers would like to take.
- You described your school as being "really supportive" towards your pupils, and that all staff genuinely care about their pupils.
- You described your own positive experiences of support when you were at school as being an inspiration to you, and driving how you now seek to support your pupils.
- When asked what would make supporting your pupils' MHWB needs easier, you stated that smaller class sizes would allow you to spend more time with pupils who need it. You also highlighted curricular pressure, pointing out that for some pupils they needed time spent with them and relationships forged, rather than ticking off particular CfE Es and Os. You illustrated this point by referring to the beneficial holistic effect a residential week could have on pupils, and wished that such opportunities could happen more often.
- Finally, you discussed the difficulty of addressing 33 different wellbeing needs in a class when you are only one class teacher and one nurture teacher. This led you to describe a need for more space (a bigger nurture room) and more staff. You pointed out that due to how fond the pupils were of the nurture teacher and what a great job she did, if she was absent the pupils she supported were very affected by that; you thought that having a team of nurture teachers might be a better approach.

SCHOOL THREE, INTERVIEW ONE, NURTURE TEACHER (MS CHAN).

- You told me that you had been teaching for twenty years, of which the last thirteen and a half years have been in your current school.
- You thought that you had seen changes in pupils' behaviour over that time, which you seemed to link to wider changes in society. You highlighted an apparent drop in children's attention span as well as a regression in communication skills, particularly in young children, which you linked to the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns. You also thought that children seemed to have lower levels of self-confidence and self-esteem than they had previously had.
- Other than the effects of lockdown, you attributed some of these changes to the effects of computer games and the 'instant gratification' of modern life. You also highlighted family separation and upheaval as having a negative effect on pupil's mental health and wellbeing (MHWB).
- You described the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in the school as being "sort of middle to low", *although you later clarified this as only referring to the pupils who*

attend the nurture group, and that pupils in the wider school community had rather better MHWB than this group.

- You cited a lack of self-esteem and resilience as issues that affected pupils in your nurture group, and that you had to work hard to develop in them the self-belief to think that they could achieve things. You also described an anxiety or nervousness amongst some pupils to try anything new, and attention-seeking behaviours evident in other pupils, particularly those whom you suspected did not receive enough attention at home. Lastly, you described some pupils as occasionally displaying low-level anger or a refusal to cooperate.
- You thought that you had noticed an increase in children's anxiety levels over the course of your career. You also thought that children were now more able to articulate their feelings.
- You thought that family circumstances, computer games, less time playing outdoors, and the effects of the lockdowns had negatively impacted children's MHWB.
- You described how one girl in your group seemed to exhibit clear signs of separation anxiety when she was brought to school by her mum on a Monday morning.
- You thought that MHWB issues can affect anyone.
- You described various types of employment among the parents and carers at your school: some full-time employed, some part-time employed, some unemployed. You weren't sure but you thought that those in full-time employment would be in a minority.
- Amongst the pupils you taught, you thought at first that you couldn't see any particular link between socio-economic instability at home and pupil's MHWB outcomes.
- You thought that if there was a "struggle at home with money" then sometimes some signs of that were evident in the children, such as wanting more food, or not always having clean clothes, and that these things could have a knock-on effect on children's self-esteem.
- You described the use of the PATHS programme in the school, and that all staff in the school had been trained in its use, including the SLT, teaching staff, support staff, kitchen staff, office staff and janitorial staff. You also described the use of restorative conversations, class feelings charts and emotional check-ins, and children using post-it notes to communicate issues discreetly to their teacher. You also talked about health and wellbeing support groups and your nurture class.
- In describing your nurture class, you mentioned the use of emotional check-ins at every transition and that children were very good at listening to each other and offering advice. You also cited the smaller class sizes in your nurture classes as being helpful as pupils received more teacher attention and reassurance and this was beneficial to their self-esteem. You described the importance of snack time as helping develop social and communication skills, as well as communication.

- You described how the school places great emphasis on the school's values, which are constantly reinforced by all staff. You thought that this helped children by giving them the security of clearly understood boundaries.
- You described how a local authority support team came in to work with some children, offering academic, emotional and behavioural support. You also talked about the counselling offered by [name of service]· and the home visits provided by family workers.
- In terms of supporting pupils' MHWB, you described the value of teachers greeting each pupil individually and by name, of giving pupils time to talk and of showing interest in and knowing details about their personal lives, as well as planning problem solving activities which develop perseverance and communication.
- You described how whole-school events like the summer picnic, as well as staff regularly eating lunch with pupils in the dinner hall helped build a sense of community in the school.
- In terms of barriers to providing the ideal level of MHWB support you would like to offer all pupils, you talked about difficulties arising from pupils not being able to articulate what issue they are experiencing. This made it difficult to know how to respond and offer help. You also described the range of needs your pupils have as a challenge, as well as how thinly spread your classroom assistants' time could be. Finally, you described how younger children in particular struggle with different expectations and boundaries at home from those in school, and how that can present challenges.
- You cited having more access to an educational psychologist as one of the things that would make supporting your pupils' MHWB needs easier.
- You talked about how several of your pupils are on the CAMHS waiting list, and that this could take a long time.
- Finally, you described how your school takes many approaches to supporting pupils' MHWB needs, and that you would inevitably not have discussed them all. You considered that your children were benefiting from these approaches as well as an increased ability to talk about their issues.

SCHOOL THREE, INTERVIEW TWO, D.H.T. (MS MacDONALD).

- You told me that you have worked in schools for nearly nineteen years.
- You thought that apparent changes in behaviour over the course of your career were probably mostly down to an increased awareness and tendency to label certain types of behaviour, as well as a greater emphasis on behaviour in general. You also seemed to suggest we are now more likely to look beyond behaviour and try to identify underlying causes.

- You thought that although it was difficult to generalise, the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of pupils in your school was quite good. This assessment was in part based upon a comparison with a school you had previously worked in.
- You described such MHWB issues that pupils in your school do face as being predominantly to do with anxiety, attachment and trauma. You did not think that aggressive and violent behaviours were prevalent in your school.
- You thought that you had detected changes in pupils' MHWB over the course of your career. You thought that this was associated with a greater awareness amongst pupils of MHWB and an increased ability to talk about it. However, you also thought that the prevalence and severity of MHWB issues that children were experiencing had also increased.
- You felt that no particular group of children experienced these issues disproportionately, and that children were being affected "across the board."
- When asked what you thought might be driving these changes in MHWB, you mentioned the levels of deprivation experienced by families, and that your catchment was entirely located in SIMD one and two areas.
- When asked how you make inferences about individual families' socioeconomic circumstances, you described prioritising children who are FSM entitled for your free breakfast club as well as extra-curricular bicycle clubs. However, you also described how, as a small community school, you are simply more likely to know instinctively if a family is struggling through a variety of informal mechanisms, such as information offered by pupils themselves.
- You were unsure of the proportion of your parents and carers who worked in precarious or insecure employment. You thought about thirty percent of parents/ carers might be unemployed, and not many of those in employment were working in professional careers. You described many parents/ carers as having jobs in factories, shops and supermarkets, or skilled manual jobs such as plumbing.
- You didn't think there would be many parents/ carers on zero-hours contracts but that quite a few may work in the gig economy (taxi drivers, delivery drivers etc.)
- You thought that you could definitely see links between the stability of pupil's households and their mental health and wellbeing outcomes. You described being able to tell by children's manner, demeanour and clothes if things were tough at home, and could associate these signs with changes in children's behaviour. You illustrated this by referring to one pupil whose family were facing eviction, and that he had started complained of having a sore tummy and needing a comfort blanket. You also mentioned another pupil who became more 'clingy' to you as difficulties at home increased.
- *You seemed to describe seeing an association between parents/ carers who were unemployed and poorer MHWB outcomes among their children.*
- You described how your school had just achieved PATHS 'model school' status, and that PATHS was now embedded throughout the school and nursery, including all

members of staff. You thought that PATHS was an effective programme, and helped the school during the difficult period immediately after the COVID-19 lockdowns. You thought that PATHS had helped the children recognise and label feelings, which made restorative conversations easier.

- You described how a communication chart helped support a pupil in primary four-five, and that this was shared with the pupil's parents/ carers. You also described primary two-three's 'big book' of compliments, and how primary five-six's teacher was very outdoors, and that the pupils responded well to this approach.
- In terms of links with outside agencies, you listed [names of two external agencies], your educational psychologist, and CAMHS. You found dealing with CAMHS could be frustrating due to the increased difficulty of securing referrals, and therefore tended to use The Exchange's services instead, which you found to be much more useful.
- You described your concerns for a primary six pupil who displayed extremely high levels of anxiety.
- You also described your school's nurture class, which you said aims to support children who have suffered trauma and attachment issues as well as children with ASD.
- You thought that the main barrier to supporting all of your pupils' MHWB needs as effectively as you would want was the length of CAMHS waiting list, and what this meant for the pupil in primary six in particular. You felt frustrated that you could not offer her the service she needs immediately.
- You felt that having a home-link worker for the school would help support your pupils' MHWB needs, and might get some families out of a cycle of deprivation.
- Lastly, you thought that your school puts MHWB at the forefront of its thinking, and that it knows its families and children very well. You thought that getting those relationships right is the key to your school's effective response.

SCHOOL THREE, INTERVIEW THREE, CLASS TEACHER (MR GALLOWAY).

- You told me that you have taught for eleven years, the past eight of which you have been in your current local authority, and the past six at your current school.
- You thought that there had not been much change in pupil's behaviour in class or relationships over that time, but that you *had* seen a real reduction in their attention span. You also noted a reduction in levels of resilience, although you felt that this was more of an issue in other schools.
- You thought that these latter issues may be accounted for by rapid changes in technology and society.
- You also thought that children had an increased ability to talk about their feelings, and that this was a positive development. It had "opened up conversation" and allowed for pupil voice in planning.

- You thought that the COVID-19 lockdowns had had a noticeable impact on pupils further down the school, where children seemed less able to work independently now. You also thought pupils had had slightly different expectations of relationships with teachers following the lockdowns.
- You described the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of pupils in the school as being very good in general. You considered that the small size of your school and its strong links to the community may help in this regard, as you are better able to identify and respond to any changes in your pupils. However, you thought that there were a few children in your school who still experienced challenges in their MHWB. You wondered if these pupils might feel their difficulties to be more pronounced because they attend a school with pupils who have generally good MHWB.
- You described the anxiety felt by one girl in your class, and how she had been supported by Exchange counsellors and the educational psychologist. You also described how her fear of 'being put on the spot' could result in her picking her skin or crying.
- You described how another girl felt pressure to be 'perfect' in class, and this could result in her becoming visibly upset but also stubbornly refusing any help. In these situations she did not like being supported in a way that was visible to the rest of the class.
- A third girl, whose excellent progress throughout the school you had described, was very good at self-regulating her ADHD and also did not like 'visible' support. You described using supportive strategies such as sending her on a message out of class.
- You talked about a fourth girl who felt anxiety around coming to school as well as transitions. She benefited from bringing cuddly toys to school.
- With the exception of this first girl, who experienced severe anxiety, you felt that the strategies the school had enacted were in general sufficient to support these students' MHWB.
- We agreed that common themes among pupils in your class who suffered MHWB issues were a degree of anxiety and a dislike of being in the centre of the class' attention during the moments in which they most needed support. You felt that the best way of addressing this latter issue was through knowing your pupils well, so that you could recognise these moments and act accordingly.
- You described how some pupils' anxiety seemed to be exacerbated by comparisons they made between themselves and other pupils. You felt that teaching styles had adapted somewhat to mitigate this situation, and gave the example of fluid ability groups.
- You felt that you had detected a change in pupils' MHWB over your career. You linked this to a greater awareness of, and ability to talk openly about, MHWB issues. You also described a reduction in 'masking' of emotions, particularly amongst girls, that might have previously given the impression that there were fewer MHWB issues in classes. However, when questioned about whether pupils' MHWB issues had

increased *as well as* their openness in talking about it, you thought that both were the case.

- Although these MHWB issues seemed to increase in prevalence most markedly after the COVID-19 lockdowns, you thought that there was also a slight increase prior to this. You described these cases of pupils suffering MHWB issues as being related to their home environment.
- You attributed this deterioration in pupils' MHWB to poor parenting skills, such as a tendency by some parents to give young children a digital device. You felt that this can lead to attachment issues and poorer development and communication skills, which have a knock-on effect for children's MHWB when they then compare themselves to others at school. You also cited a diminishing parental engagement with the routines of the school, such as homework and open days.
- You thought that in general, boys were more likely to suffer MHWB issues in the school, although in the upper years, it was more likely to be girls. You linked this to social media and the comparisons which this encouraged girls to make with others.
- You described social media as having a "huge" impact on MHWB, and how it presented a warped version of reality. You also outlined how there had been some negative comments made about others within your class on social media.
- You said that you were aware of parents who worked in precarious or insecure employment, and that this was probably the most common type of employment situation amongst your school community other than the long-term unemployed. You thought that long-term unemployed parents/ carers probably formed at least a third of your community.
- You thought that in your own class, the children of parents / carers who worked in precarious employment were less likely to suffer MHWB issues than other children. You attributed this to a hard-working and supportive attitude amongst their parents/ carers. However, you also said that when things were "tough at home" you *could* see an impact on the children, but that the school was very aware of these changes and quick to respond to them. This was possible due to the community knowledge and strength of relationships within the school.
- You seemed to suggest that you could see an association between pupils who suffered poor MHWB and parents/ carers who were both unemployed and in professional careers. You seemed to suggest that the latter group were affected by the 'long hours' these professionals worked.
- You described the school's use of the PATHS programme as well as [name of authority]'s H&WB lessons. We agreed that the pupils in your school seemed to have an impressive awareness of H&WB concepts and terminology.
- You also described the school's use of wellbeing champions and your own H&WB project that was recognised by Education Scotland.
- When asked about other strategies which supported pupil's MHWB, you talked about teachers always finding time for conversations with pupils, for the use of

discreet or overt support depending on pupil's preference, and for rewards and recognition for a wide range of achievements. You also described how the staff were good at sharing information with each other and adopting consistent approaches and strong relationships with pupils across the whole school. You also described brain breaks and emotional check-ins as well as adaptive practices such as tents in classes or allowing pupils to go for short walks.

- We agreed on the effectiveness of simple fun activities just prior to transition moments. These could end a day on a positive note for pupils.
- You talked about how your school was good at planning, which often involved the pupils themselves, as well as obtaining outside services to support children were possible.
- You also talked about the importance of preparing pupils for 'the real world', and balancing this with maintaining the 'cosy bubble' of your school.
- The main barrier you described to supporting your pupil's MHWB was the difficulty in finding a constantly effective response to support your pupil with high levels of anxiety. You also mentioned the difficulty of choosing responses which were focused on the long-term, rather than simply immediate solutions.
- You also discussed the difficulty of transferring responses that you had found to be effective over the transition to secondary school, as well as potential concerns around transition for the quietest and least confident pupils in your class.
- You were quite clear that having additional staff would make the biggest positive difference to supporting your pupils' MHWB needs. You described the overriding importance of relationships with pupils, and that additional staff would provide these relationships. You suggested that having two classroom assistants in your class would make a huge difference and allow pupils to build trusting relationships with adults other than their teacher.
- Finally, you described your frustrations over the waiting lists for external support agencies such as CAMHS.

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW ONE, D.H.T. (MS AHMAD).

- You told me you have worked in schools for eighteen years, all of which you have spent at your current school.
- You thought that "the whole job's" changed over that time, and that children's behaviour had changed noticeably post-COVID. You thought that children seemed less resilient and accepting of boundaries, and that there was a lot of challenging behaviour in your school. You thought that there was an escalation in dysregulated behaviours across both the [name of ASN unit] and mainstream.
- You attributed these changes to socioeconomic factors and described how your catchment is split equally between SIMD 1 and 2, and 8 and 9. You told me that you saw the greatest level of dysregulation amongst pupils who lived in the most

deprived half of the catchment. You also described social work interventions in some families, instances of poor attendance, a lack of routine and boundaries in some households. You seemed to link some of the behavioural problems amongst pupils to poor parenting, and discussed the difficulty of keeping parents "on board" whilst addressing this.

- You described how some of the most affluent families are sometimes 'time poor' and don't provide sufficient nurture for their children.
- You described how upper school children had a "lot more going on online" and that this could impact behaviour in school. Younger pupils were also exposed to inappropriate material on the internet and this was reflected in some of the language they used. You also talked about how this could be a tricky subject to address with parents.
- You described the challenges of addressing the needs of pupils with neurodiversity, especially those who are undiagnosed and struggling with anxiety. You also mentioned the difficulties faced by some pupils whose siblings had complex care needs, or whose parents faced mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) problems, and described the needs you were trying to meet in the school as a "massive web."
- You wondered if an increased openness in talking about MHWB, as well as staff training around trauma and attachment, had contributed to an apparent rise in prevalence of issues. You described how there was a long waiting list for counselling and support services and how that situation had not seemed so severe prior to the COVID-19 lockdowns. You also mentioned that some parents were describing children behaving at home in ways that they did not in school and wondered if this was due to masking of behaviours.
- When asked if the increasing tendency to talk about MHWB could account for *all* of the apparent rise in prevalence of MHWB issues, you said that you did think that were a lot more children struggling now than there had been in the past, and that it was likely "a bit of both."
- You seemed to suggest that there was an increasing number of pupils in the school who suffered from anxiety. You also described instances of self-harm amongst p6 and 7 girls, which you said "never used to come up." You linked this in some cases to peer pressure, as well as turbulent or negative home circumstances. You also talked about some children who seemed "really withdrawn" which was a particular concern as they may be less likely to be noticed. You felt that the severity of these issues was increasing.
- You felt that neurodiverse pupils were more likely to suffer MHWB issues than other children, and mentioned pupils in the school with Tourette's. You also thought that pupils on the child protection register were more likely to exhibit "big behaviours." You also thought that children who had experienced trauma, home pressures, and those experiencing social and peer problems (especially amongst p7 girls) were more prone to MHWB issues.

- You described holding some data about families' socioeconomic status on SEEMIS, but implied that regular and early engagement with parents/ carers, as well as using your home-link worker's services, were more effective approaches to knowing 'where a family was'. You talked about how your home-link worker could sometimes be more effective at breaking barriers as they were less likely to be seen as an authority figure. You praised your teaching staff for their tendency to notice and report issues as well as engage directly with parents.
- You didn't know how many parents/ carers in the school community might work in precarious or insecure jobs, although you did know of some who had worked in temporary jobs over Christmas. You described how a lot of parents/ carers in your catchment were unemployed, whilst others whom you phoned during the day told you they were at work. You weren't sure how many parents/ carers were long-term unemployed, and agreed that parents/ carers tended to be viewed by the school as either employed or not.
- You described the difficulty of trying to break the link between generational cycles of deprivation and a lack of aspiration amongst some pupils.
- When you thought about the pupils whom you supported for MHWB reasons, you thought that their parents/ carers had a mix of different jobs and no particular pattern seemed obvious other than a tendency to have lower-paid or part-time jobs, or to be unemployed. You also described one mum who had stopped working because of the issues she faced with her child, as well as a girl whose parents had 'high-flying' careers that had caused attachment issues for their daughter.
- You talked about the school's award-winning implementation of the PATHS programme, as well as the importance of the staff's excellent relationships with pupils and parents. You also outlined the use of pupil celebrations in the school and the efforts you've made to create a safe, calm and nurturing environment.
- You also thought that staff welcoming pupils at the doors and offering toast in the morning helped support pupils' MHWB. You described the importance of making time to talk (and listen) to pupils, and of valuing them. You detailed the school's use of the NME programme, of regulation breaks throughout the day, of daily check-ins with pupils, and of lunchtime clubs for some pupils.
- You recounted your experiences with a pupil you had taught last year who had found mainstream education extremely challenging. You told me about one strategy that had supported him particularly well: the use of a side room to isolate him from the sensory overstimulation he experienced in class, and to offer him structured time-outs. Whilst in class he used ear defenders, a privacy board, a visual timetable and a laptop. You talked about managing time-outs for him throughout the day as and when you saw him begin to struggle.
- In terms of links with outside agencies, you described a "really good" relationship with the educational psychology team, who also came in to train staff. You also

mentioned your school nurse, social work, [names of three external agencies] and the police.

- The main barrier to providing the level of MHWB support you'd like to which you mentioned is not having enough staff. Ideally, you said you would like some LIAM-trained staff to take children to work in small groups or to work in a nurturing capacity. You worried about the security of future funding for the classroom assistants whom you currently worked with.
- Another issue that you thought would help provide better levels of MHWB support is to have extra support from outside agencies.
- You described how staff in general felt occasionally overwhelmed by the level and range of needs amongst pupils which you had to address. You said that sometimes there is a collective feeling of, "Are we enough? What else can we be doing?" Sometimes, you said, there are times when you feel you're *not* enough, and you described how upsetting that can be.
- Finally, you described the process of reflection which seems fixed upon how to improve the support and care you provide for the young people in front of you.

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW TWO, NURTURE TEACHER (MS STRAND).

- You told me that you have worked in schools for about sixteen years.
- You thought that over this career you have noticed a change in pupil's behaviour, although what you've noticed the most is an increasing awareness of diagnosable conditions such as ASD and ADHD. You also described a lot more dysregulated children which you linked to COVID-19, and an increase in children suffering from anxiety and stress. You thought these increases were both in terms of prevalence and severity.
- You said that you and your colleagues often wondered if an increasing *awareness* made it seem as if these conditions were becoming more common, or if they were actually becoming more common as well. You thought that it was likely both, and that although the deterioration in children's mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) had been happening prior to COVID-19, it had accelerated rapidly since then.
- You wondered whether children's diet played a part in this deterioration. You suspected there may be some sort of health link with ASD and ADHD, whether it be food-related or lack of outdoors play. You described an apparent shift in society, contrasting the amount of time you spent playing outside as a child with how today's children spend their time on screens and devices. You felt that today's parents are more reluctant, or afraid, to let their children go outside.
- You described contemporary society's diminishing community spirit and desire to prioritise the family, in favour of a materialistic tendency, and suggested that this was damaging to children's MHWB.

- You found it difficult to portray the MHWB of pupils in your school in terms of numbers, but you did think that there were "real pockets of children struggling." You characterised some of these children as introverted and reserved and others who 'acted out'. You noticed the biggest deterioration in MHWB in the upper school, which you attributed in part to children's growing awareness of, and comparisons with, others around them.
- You described some children who suffered from MHWB issues as refusing to go into class due to anxiety, some who had blank, pale expressions and were difficult to engage, as well as some who exhibited externalising behaviours and who could become angry and lash out or run away.
- You thought that sometimes the introverted children were more concerning as it was harder to identify the causes of their difficulties, and told me some p7 girls in particular seemed to be struggling with low confidence and self-esteem.
- You thought that building strong relationships with your children was the key to supporting them. You described the DDP training and PACEful approaches used by staff, and how this could over time reassure your pupils that staff are safe, trustworthy and care about them. You used an analogy about pulling at a thread to illustrate how long this process could take for some children, particularly the withdrawn ones, but that if you persisted it could open up relationships.
- You thought that one factor influencing deteriorating MHWB was that parents/ carers seemed to be so 'addicted' to their phones that it was causing attachment issues for their children. You described attachment as "huge in a lot of what we do."
- You thought that MHWB issues could now affect any child in any situation: whereas previously you thought that there might have been links with deprivation or trauma you now saw a shift, or a spread, such that it now "doesn't really discriminate class or race."
- You mentioned that you were now more likely to be supporting children from affluent backgrounds than previously, and told me that this group were more likely to be suffering from stress or anxiety. You linked this to an increasing tendency for parents/ carers to discuss everything in front of their children, such as financial, employment or health worries, and described how your pupils would tell you of their worries about their parents/ carer's issues.
- You thought that parents/ carers in your school were probably "a mixed bag" in terms of their types of employment, and that they would be split "fifty-fifty" according to which SIMD area they lived within the catchment. In the affluent areas you thought that many will have full-time, secure jobs, whilst in the other areas you thought that many will be unemployed or in insecure jobs. Without being able to see any data, you gave what you said would be at best a rough guess that about half of those living in the most deprived areas of your catchment would be unemployed.
- Although you said that you did get to see SIMD data for parents/ carers, the school had no specific data about what employment parents/ carers did, and you felt that

you were more likely to be informed about a family's situation by what your young people told you directly.

- You saw an association between more affluent parents/ carers who worked long hours and children who suffered MHWB issues, in that this situation can lead to attachment issues. For similar reasons, you saw another association between parents/ carers who were 'addicted' to digital devices, and children with poor MHWB.
- You described how your unit adopted a strategy of supporting pupils with a wide variety of additional support needs. It had originally been set up as a proactive intervention to meet the needs of a high number of pupils within the school who displayed challenging behaviour, however you felt that it was important that it did not simply become a 'behavioural unit' and should cater for a broad spectrum of needs. You told me you currently support around forty children.
- You described how your unit's vision was to support young people "through their most difficult times" and help them develop the skills they needed until they could go back slowly into mainstream classes. For some children, mainstream will not be an option, for the others, "it has to be done at the right time for them."
- You described the use of the PATHS programme to support pupils' MHWB, as well as adopting the NME model for the school environment. You also described different types of check-ins with pupils, ensuring transitions are well structured and predicable, the use of visual icons during teaching and learning, the use of pupil-friendly ILPs, a range of sensory activities and experiences and multiple regulation breaks involving the use of scooters, garden area or the gym hall.
- You thought that there was something innate in effective practitioners: "it's in you… there's just something in you that *gets it.*" You also valued patience and resilience as essential characteristics, especially in showing children that you care. You said that "getting down to their level" was important although unless you really knew your children you might "get a wee bop on the nose!" Finally, you valued the PACEful approach as well as honesty, and said that "being firm, fair and consistent" were the keys to securing children's trust.
- You told me about the school's focus on mental health and awareness week, how the NHS offered LIAMs training to staff, the use of the Seasons for Growth programme, as well as how restorative conversations were used in the school.
- The main barrier you described which made supporting the MHWB of your young people more difficult was when parents/ carers were oppositional, obstructive, dishonest or in denial. For some parents, you thought that school represented a threat or an authority that was not to be trusted, a view that may be a product of their own negative experience of school as a child.
- You also cited a lack of resources as a problem, specifically money and classroom assistants. In addition you wished that you were more able to access better training for staff.

- You described how classroom assistants' role had changed drastically over the years ("It's not stapling and putting things up on the wall so much anymore!"). You thought that this situation should be recognised through increasing their pay, involvement in planning, training and hours.
- When asked what change would have most effect in supporting young people's MHWB, you described wishing for a well-planned, all-weather, sensory outdoors area. You told me about having benefited from a woman who had taken your pupils outdoors last year, and the difference you had seen in their achievement as a result.
- You also wished for a school counselling team, and for changes to be made to the "dated" curriculum, in order to adapt to the needs of children who find mainstream school too challenging. We agreed that a CfE was no longer fit for purpose in some regards, due to the rate of change in schools and society in general.

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW THREE, CLASS TEACHER (MS HOLLOWAY).

- You told me you have worked in schools for two years, both in your current school.
- You thought that children's behaviour has deteriorated and that they are more dysregulated than previously. You based this assessment on your own experiences as well as your colleagues'.
- You linked these changes to the level of deprivation experienced by pupils, and talked about a "melting pot" of cultures, family values and backgrounds amongst your pupils. You described talking to children who hadn't slept in a bed or had breakfast before coming to school, or some who were not clean.
- You found it difficult to make any links with the COVID-19 lockdowns as these occurred prior to your teaching career. However, you said that your colleagues reported seeing changes in pupil's social skills since then, such as greater difficulty sharing or taking turns.
- You thought that the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of pupils in your school varied "from child to child and also from moment to moment." You illustrated this by referring to a pupil in your class whose behaviour had improved throughout the year, but who could still feel uncomfortable at times. You described the efforts you'd made to develop improved methods of communication with this pupil, such as taps on the head or the use of a puppet.
- You told me that out of your twenty-four pupils, five had suffered bereavements in the previous six months, and that this had undoubtedly impacted their MHWB. You described some pupils as pacing, or threatening to or actually hurting themselves, or trying to run out of class. Others seemed to retreat into themselves and struggled to engage in previously enjoyed activities, or seemed 'vacant' at times.
- You also described the resilience shown by one pupil who had already experienced a turbulent home life prior to losing her grandfather. You thought that she was masking a lot in class, but that you were able to get her to articulate her feelings

somewhat during conversations. In general, you thought that the girls were rather better at masking than the boys in your class, however you were concerned that this was more likely to simply 'bottle up' emotions in a damaging way.

- You suggested that knowing your students well was vital to supporting them effectively. You illustrated this by describing a girl who held a bracelet that represented a grandmother she had lost, during moments when she was upset. If you did not know what the bracelet signified, there would be no outward sign that the girl was distressed.
- Another factor influencing MHWB which you mentioned was social relationships. You told me about one girl in your class who struggled to make friends and felt lonely as a result, and how you tried to engineer situations which might support her. You also briefly mentioned pupils who were looked after or the subject of child protection as being at risk of MHWB issues.
- You thought that children were generally more aware of MHWB issues and felt more empowered to talk about them than previously. You attributed this in part to the PATHS programme taught in your school, as well as strategies such as the 'zen dens' in every classroom. However, you also felt that there was an increase in the needs of pupils.
- You attributed this increase in needs to lots of factors, including digital technology and a 'dependency' on screens. You talked about pupils being on gaming consoles until two a.m. on school nights, online bullying, and the tendency for pupils to make unrealistic comparisons on social media. You also said that around half of your class aspire to be a YouTuber or a social media influencer and were motived by materialistic concerns.
- You also talked about the detrimental impact on MHWB of comparisons made between more and less affluent children in the class.
- You implied that some families in the area may have links to crime or are affected by drugs, and that their children's MHWB can suffer directly as a result of this upbringing. You described some children who, deprived of care and nurture at home, found it difficult to trust either all adults or those of a specific gender or social class.
- You thought that the majority of pupils in your current class came from families which had a stable income, although you thought that was not the situation in the wider school, which you thought of as "such a mix" due to the range of deprivation levels within the catchment. Within your class, you identified a range of employment including full-time secure jobs, self-employed businesses, part-time retail and unemployed.
- You weren't sure if you could see any associations between the socioeconomic stability of a household and pupil's MHWB outcomes, saying that it "depends on the child." You described several pupils in your class: one girl who seemed to come from a deprived area and although very able, suffered from social anxiety. A second girl,

who had suffered bereavement and lived between her sister and mother's homes, also suffered from anxiety at times despite having a more secure friendship group. A boy, who had been exposed to childhood trauma and been on the child protection register, was prone to a lack of resilience and dysregulated behaviour.

- Despite cases such as these, you thought that your class was the most "sheltered" of the three classes at your stage.
- You were not sure if you could see any associations between the types of jobs parents/ carers did and the MHWB of their children. You wondered if there might be a link with a "lack of steady income" but felt that there were so many factors affecting children's MHWB that it was difficult to identify if there was a link here. To illustrate this, you described two boys in your class who suffered from MHWB issues: one whose parents had unstable employment, the other whose parents were both in full-time employment. You drew my attention to the sentence, "My life is sometimes busy and too loud" which the latter boy had written on his desk that day. You pointed out that although this boy lived in a SIMD eight area and had just received a bicycle for his birthday, he was on the waiting list for the Exchange's counselling service and had been punching himself and calling himself names. Furthermore, you highlighted another girl in your class, whose mum and dad worked full-time in secure professional jobs and were very supportive of her, who also struggled with MHWB and was on the [name of external agency]'s waiting list.
- You described how the PATHS programme was taught throughout the school to support pupil's MHWB. You also talked about how you tailored your teaching style and content to the needs of your class. You illustrated this by pointing out that last year's class had loved to perform whilst this year's class loved art, and so you had planned more of each of these activities to support each class' MHWB.
- You also described a wide range of classroom games which you used as well as giving the class a choice over what brain breaks they would like. You said that you used to go for walks around the school but had grown wary of this as you were worried one of your pupils might try to run away. You also used a video called 'Zenimation' as a calming strategy. Lastly you described the NME model used in the school and what this meant for how you set up the classroom environment. This included the use of plants and flowers in your class, which the children seemed to appreciate. These flowers had also inspired some science and art lessons.
- You found that having pupils from the [name of ASN unit] join you for some lessons could be challenging, as it was more difficult to forge a strong relationship when they weren't with you full-time. You described one such pupil whose attendance was "concerning" and who had a very turbulent home life. His literacy was poor and this could undermine his self-esteem.
- You found that the main barrier to offering an ideal level of MHWB support was the range of needs the children had. You also described feeling like you did not always have enough time to check in with pupils as much as you'd like, and also of being

"full" yourself: of having so much on that your attention can be distracted. You gave the example of experiencing a police investigation within a child protection case in your class and sometimes feeling like this had absorbed all of your focus.

- You described two cases of colleagues being attacked by pupils in the past two weeks and how these events could leave you with a sense of helplessness at times.
- You felt that the biggest changes which might enable you to offer better support for your pupils is having "more adults in the room" and having better access to specialist support, such as the [name of external agency].
- Finally, you expressed a wish to be able to support your pupils' MHWB even more than you currently are, and that this could lead to feelings of frustration.

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW FOUR, CLASS TEACHER 2 (MR REAVEY).

- You told me that you have worked as a teacher for the past nine years, all of which you have spent in your current school.
- You have noticed a 'massive' change in pupil's behaviour over that time. The biggest change you noted was a reduction in levels of respect from pupils. Although you thought that there has always been challenging behaviour in schools, you felt that there is less recognition of teachers as authority figures than previously was the case. You also described an increase in levels of verbal abuse from pupils. Although this could still be mitigated by building positive relationships with pupils, you felt that you had to "put in a wild amount of work" to build those relationships, and that even this did not always work. In addition, you described a reduction in children's resilience.
- You thought that both of these issues had worsened noticeably after the COVID-19 lockdowns, although it was possible that this deterioration had been happening prior to that point too. You gave the example of a challenging class that you had had in 2020, and that they "took consequence more" prior to the lockdowns than classes in general did after that point. However, you also mentioned a class which you'd had immediately after lockdown, which you characterised as one of your favourite classes.
- You wondered if pupils' lack of respect for teachers was influenced by parents/ carers' opinions, and was a facet of a wider "blame culture" which also worsened around the time of COVID-19.
- Other than the effect of the lockdowns, you strongly associated these deteriorations in behaviour with poverty. You pointed out that some of your pupils did not have access to some "basic needs" and also highlighted the shame these pupils were at risk of feeling. You said that these pupils had to suppress feelings when exposed to other more affluent pupils who talked about "experiences that they could never have."

- You described the difficulties of teaching pupils from such a SIMD-polarised catchment, and the “balancing act” of supporting the most deprived pupils as well as teaching those from the most affluent areas, whose parents/ carers often had the highest of expectations around achievement.
- You described children as being “a product of their environment” and were therefore influenced by their home lives, but also by their school. As respect deteriorated in school, you thought that this could fuel even more disrespectful behaviour. One tactic you thought important in mitigating this was the teaching of equity.
- You thought it difficult to offer a general assessment of pupils’ mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) in your school. However, you thought that more children now suffered from anxiety. You wondered if this was because of heightened awareness or an actual increase in prevalence, and thought it was probably “a mix of the two.” You associated this situation with attachment issues caused by the use of screens to ‘pacify’ children from a young age.
- You described your studies into ADHD in pupils, and how some pupils have effectively ‘masked’ their issues in the past.
- You thought that children are now more likely to talk about MHWB issues than at the start of your career. You also seemed to link children’s anxieties to a feeling of being excluded, or of making unfavourable comparisons between themselves and others, particularly in relation to social media.
- Anxiety, and the worries caused by social difficulties, seems to be the biggest factor behind referrals to counsellors that you were aware of. You told me that have already made two such referrals within your class this year. You also described poverty-related shame as likely driving a case of aggression within your current class, and that self-esteem was another issue that you saw within the children you taught. You linked this last issue to social media comparisons.
- You described poverty as having got worse “for years and years” and that behaviour, self-esteem and anxiety was deteriorating over this period too, but that lockdown was a “catalyst for it.” You also pointed out that for some, lockdown was a positive experience, although this was influenced by how fortunate your situation was prior to lockdown.
- You worried about the physiological effects on young minds of over-stimulation or exposure to inappropriate material caused by scrolling for hours on digital devices. You thought that this could lead to an ‘obsession’ with such devices, and that this behaviour deprived children of the social experiences necessary for development.
- You thought that girls are more likely to suffer MHWB issues, especially in terms of self-esteem, as a result of unrealistic expectations about how they should look derived from social media. You also thought girls might be more likely to suffer from anxiety, but that they are also better at masking this. You thought that this was a big concern and may account for misunderstanding what the issues were in some girls.

- You thought that neurological issues were all 'intertwined' and that some diagnoses may have identified the wrong issue. You pointed out that the UK has the highest diagnosis of ASD in the world.
- You thought that "a decent amount" of parents and carers in the school community might have precarious or insecure employment, although it was hard to be sure. There was also "quite a lot of unemployment" and relatively few professional full-time employed parents/ carers, compared to other schools.
- You weren't sure if you could see much of a correlation between parents/ carers' socioeconomic stability and the MHWB outcomes of their children. You did feel that the children who had the 'hardest home lives' definitely showed some of the 'larger behaviours' such as anger and aggression, but that the children who you were referring for counselling due to anxiety were *not* coming from the most deprived areas. You wondered if anxiety amongst affluent pupils may stem from a sense that they do not 'fit in' amongst those peers who are more brash and use offensive language.
- You described a certain level of deprivation in your own upbringing, and of having to move house many times, but felt that what protected you from MHWB issues was the support and care of your parents.
- You drew an association between a family's level of aspiration and the MHWB of their children. You thought that children whose parents and carers were employed in highly paid jobs which were purposeful and motivational may have higher self-esteem than children whose parents were long-term unemployed. You illustrated this by describing a pupil in your class who had acted out taking drugs before stabbing someone in drama, and how this had probably been informed by their home circumstances.
- You described H&WB lessons taught throughout the school, and how you did a lot of work on resilience and social interactions. You also described PATHS lessons as being "a bit tedious" although the content could be modified to make them more relevant to your class. This could best be done by basing them in real-life situations your class have faced. We agreed that this was an issue for the prescribed lessons in the upper-school PATHS planners.
- You described adapting your H&WB lessons from planners on websites with the exception of RHSP lessons which you taught verbatim for your "own safety."
- You told me about how you had given a child who felt anxious about maths a red counter; if they feel they need more support at the end of a lesson they can leave the counter on your desk. You also described providing 'reading clubs' for children at lunchtime; this was really to offer children who struggle in the playground environment a safe haven.
- You praised your colleagues for their 'open-door policy' and the strengths of their relationships with the children, and that they really cared about their pupil's MHWB.

- You described staff bringing in clothes and food and discreetly giving these to pupils who they knew did not have enough at home. You also described staff buying presents for deprived pupils at Christmas, and how they go under their trees and "they never know." You told me that you bought one pupil a drone, and "could have cried" when he came in excitedly telling you what he had got.
- The main barrier you described which prevented you from offering the ideal level of support you'd like was time. You felt you had not enough time to support every child, particularly given the pressures imposed by delivering the curriculum. You described the tension between supporting MHWB and keeping academic achievements on track and how unrealistic some of the latter targets were for some of your children.
- You felt that you could meet your pupils' MHWB needs more effectively if you had more staff; specifically more classrooms assistants and teachers. As a teacher, you also spoke about the need to leave your own worries and issues at the door and "perform for six hours."

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW FIVE, CLASS TEACHER 3 (MS BROOKE).

- You told me that you have taught for nineteen years, all of which you have spent in your current school.
- You told me that you have noticed a change in pupils' behaviour over this time. You thought that pupils had always displayed anger and aggression, but that those used to be more likely to be directed at other pupils, and that more recently the anger would be directed at staff too. You talked about diminished levels of respect from pupils and parents. You gave an example of a colleague who had been slapped in the face by a primary one pupil.
- You thought that the establishment of the [name of ASN unit] has brought some changes to the school, and that although it has taken children from mainstream classes for a wide variety of additional support needs, it has exposed them to some "very fiery behaviours." This could leave you feeling conflicted about what setting was best for your pupils.
- You thought that parents were now less likely to accept teachers sanctioning their children, and that this could be seen in negative social media posts. You thought that social media was associated with deteriorating pupil and parental behaviour. You described that social media issues which had occurred at the weekend could spill over into the school environment on Monday morning.
- You also thought that pupils were being exposed to negative 'parental voice' on social media about the school, and that this could influence the pupils' thoughts and behaviour.
- You thought that the COVID-19 lockdowns had affected changes in pupils' behaviour due to reduced social interaction and increased screen time.

- You told me that the mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of pupils in the school was “very mixed.” You thought that since the lockdowns, MHWB issues had become “more magnified.” You felt that there were more children in your class who were facing more extreme issues.
- You described how children were now more able to articulate MHWB issues, in part due to the PATHS programme. You weren’t sure if this accounted for the apparent increase in prevalence of MHWB issues. You wondered if pupils were more ‘pandered to’ in modern society than had been the case, and gave the example of sports day to illustrate your point. Should children who expressed stress over this event be allowed to opt out, or should they be made to participate? You thought that in general children needed to be taught more resilience and coping strategies.
- You described how in the past you had dealt with certain situations in certain ways, only to be later given background information about a child which would have affected your decision. This was deeply frustrating!
- You told me that since COVID-19, more parents were more vocal about their anxieties about their children, especially in terms of diagnosable conditions. You also felt that “everything just feels stretched” since the lockdowns, in terms of accessing outside agencies, getting help from classroom assistants, etc.
- You described teaching children who are reluctant or refuse to come into class, who have poor attendance, who are emotional, or prone to outbursts such as shouting or storming out of classroom. Last year, you described an “explosive” atmosphere in your class which often felt on a “knife-edge.” You also told me of a pupil who was self-harming and engaged in “self-loathing dialogue.” This pupil was also prone to harming others and could climb over the school fences and roof. This ultimately resulted in the pupil requiring medication.
- You described how CAMHS was almost a “no-go” due to the high threshold of need and waiting times involved.
- You thought that pupil’s MHWB had probably deteriorated prior to COVID-19, but that they were definitely more fragile since. You thought they needed more encouragement since the lockdowns.
- You highlighted a reduction in parental support for pupils by illustrating the change in expectations around homework. You said that one pupil told you that her mum “does nothing, she just sits on her phone all the time.” This situation has led to you teaching your class about the difference between equity and equality.
- You associated changes in pupils’ MHWB with social media, parenting style, general consumerism, politics and stretched budgets in all areas. You felt that the MHWB of adults too has declined. You felt that social media was one of the biggest drivers, although not every child in your class has a phone.
- You felt that children from families who had separated or who were from lower SIMD areas may be more likely to experience MHWB issues, although they could affect anyone. You gave the example of several pupils you had taught from higher

SIMD areas who had struggled with their MHWB, as well as one pupil from a less affluent area whose mum was "brilliant."

- You also described an autistic boy whose MHWB had deteriorated but who had been strongly supported by his parents, which you thought was an important protective factor.
- You said that some pupils in your class spoke about how their parents/ carers worked shifts. Another pupil's parent was a teacher, and that resulted in a different dialogue with the school compared with other parents/ carers who were so intimidated about coming into school that they sometimes brought other adults in to support them. You felt that this was often a result of their own negative experiences of school as a child.
- You told me about a child whose dad's job took him abroad for long periods, and how this upset the child when he was due to travel.
- You weren't aware of all of your pupils' parents/ carers jobs. You knew of a few in professional careers, some police, teachers, nurses, as well as some bus or lorry drivers. You were aware of one pupil whose mum was unemployed, and struggled with her own MHWB.
- You described being aware of an association between families "in chaos" and poor MHWB of their children. You gave the example of two pupils from one such family. One had a bespoke limited timetable, which meant that the other pupil (who attended school full-time) had begun to 'kick off' in the hope that they could also get such a timetable.
- We discussed the tension between attainment and MHWB. You talked about how children's MHWB could impact whether or not they were 'on track', and sometimes how the pressure to get them 'on track' could impact their MHWB. You pointed out how impossible it was to 'get it right for every child' given the sheer range of (often conflicting) needs in a class. We agreed that GIRFEC should be re-named 'Trying Your Best for Every Child'!
- You thought that children of professional parents were more likely to be stable than other pupils. Although they could certainly experience MHWB issues, you wondered if their parents were more likely to contact you and try to identify and address such issues. However, you could also think of individual families who came from more deprived situations who were also quick to contact you and very supportive of their children. Ultimately, you found it hard to make generalisations about this point.
- You described the whole-school use of the PATHS programme. You agreed with me that the lessons could become a little more stale in the upper school, and this could be mitigated by framing the lessons in real-life situations for your class.
- You described how last year, your stage had promoted H&WB champions over a three week teaching-block.

- You told me about offering your class a notebook as a journal which they could use in whatever way they wanted to support their own MHWB or communicate with you. Each child tended to use this in a different way.
- You spoke about how the school had adopted the NME approach and how this could be effective in calming classroom environments, although it could become a bit stale over time and required some changes to keep it fresh.
- You told me about the fidget boxes in each class and how you have adapted your expectations to accommodate this practice.
- You described how useful the "breakout space" next to your class was, and how "wildly helpful" it was in supporting pupils who were feeling a variety of emotions. You also said that each class had a 'calm corner', and remembered how useful it had been in regulating a past pupil who had been "a ball of rage."
- You mentioned Seasons for Growth and how two of your current pupils have been referred for this programme. However, there is a long waiting list for this and you hoped that they would be receiving support by next year. You also mentioned Children 1st and how they had supported pupils in the past, but how they had pulled support from a pupil due to their caseload. You felt that everyone was overwhelmed and that the threshold for offering support had risen dramatically.
- You talked about discussions within the school about what to say to parents who asked for a CAMHS referral, due to the difficulty in getting any support from this agency.
- You felt that one of the main barriers to offering an ideal level of MHWB support was the range and shifting nature of needs. This meant that one method of support which proved effective for one child might simultaneously unsettle another child, or might only work for so long.
- In order to better support your pupils, you wished that you could clone your current classroom assistant! This was due to her emotional intelligence, the strength of her relationships with pupils, and the "soft detail" which she provided you with about the pupils. So you thought that more staff who had these personal traits would be helpful. You also thought that smaller class sizes made a difference to the level of support you could offer.
- You felt that your pupils were missing out on some things when you looked at other schools, due to the local environment and levels of deprivation.

SCHOOL FOUR, INTERVIEW SIX, CLASSROOM ASSISTANT (MS KAMINSKI).

- You told me that you had worked in schools from 2000 until 2003, in a different role and authority, and then again in your current school for the past year.
- You thought that children's behaviour had deteriorated "massively" in this time. You wondered if this was in part due to greater awareness and diagnosis of neurodiversity. You also linked this deterioration to the internet and social media.

- You described how upset you felt at hearing pupils use racist terminology on a regular basis at your current school, and how they seemed to have adopted racial slurs as a general insult.
- You linked some of the deterioration in behaviour that you described to increased levels of family separation, and the effects this had on children.
- You felt that "every part of the spectrum" of mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) issues were represented amongst pupils in your school, and that these issues were both prevalent and severe. You illustrated this by describing the aggression and language you experienced in the playground.
- You talked about a recent assault you had suffered at the hands of a child with whom you had worked and supported in the school. He had assaulted a younger child before school had started and you were trying to guide him into the [name of ASN unit].
- You described the sensory room in the [name of ASN unit] and how it was a safe space which usually worked to calm children down.
- You thought that many of the pupils who attended the [name of ASN unit] had suffered trauma, or trauma in addition to a separate diagnosable condition.
- In addition to social media, family separation and trauma, you felt that poverty also impacted children's MHWB negatively. You described generational cycles of MHWB issues associated with deprivation. You also cited links with drug and alcohol dependency and how some pupils were being looked after by extended families due to parents being unable to cope or in prison.
- The biggest manifestation of MHWB issues that you experienced was aggression. You described how some children changed immediately once they transitioned from the classroom to the playground. You also described some pupils who were introverted, anxious, sad or isolated. However, the most common MHWB issues you faced amongst pupils were anger and aggression.
- You found it difficult to gauge whether children's MHWB had changed over your career as you had only had the opportunity to forge strong relationships with children over the past year. You felt that teachers in your school thought that their jobs had become more difficult over the years, and that this was in part due to pupil's MHWB and behaviour.
- You drew striking contrasts between children's behaviour in your own school and that of those living in Southern African countries.
- You discussed a film about Ruby Bridges' experiences attending one of the first desegregated schools in the U.S.A. in order to illustrate your views that strong, supportive families and communities (and Christian principles) can act as protective factors against MHWB issues.
- You weren't sure how many parents/ carers in your school community would be employed in precarious or unstable jobs, but that it might be "a good number." You

thought that many parents/ carers would probably be long-term unemployed, but that that could vary between classes.

- You assumed that there was a link between the socio-economic stability of a household and their children's MHWB outcomes. You gave the example of two pupils whose academic outcomes differed due to the level of support their mums were able to give them at home.
- You thought that the pupils who needed most MHWB support from you tended to come from poorer families. There were also many primary 6s who you said that you hardly ever had to offer MHWB support to, and these pupils tended to come from more affluent backgrounds.
- You described an emphasis on H&WB in the school, and specifically the use of 'PATHS pals'. You had also noticed that the school was making a big effort to create a calm environment, with the use of soft music and lights in classes. You felt that the standard of staff in the school was impressive, and that the SLT had set a good example "from the top." This was reflected in the way that you observed adults talking and listening to pupils. You felt that the staff consistently modelled a calm demeanour for pupils.
- You talked about making a point of greeting children and valuing them, and the need to offer them love. We agreed that on occasion, despite having reservations about physically touching children, children can simply need a hug.
- You felt that the school was very aware that many children simply could not cope with a typical mainstream environment, and that these children were accommodated. However, you expressed concern at the sheer number of pupils who now seemed unable to cope with a standardised mainstream model of schooling, and that for some children, their needs were simply "too great" to cope in this setting at all. You described one p7 pupil whose extremely challenging behaviour had resulted in him attending school only in the mornings, and that his plan included a target of just sitting in his seat.
- You described how home-link workers seemed to have a near-impossible job and that unrealistic expectations were being made of what they can achieve.
- You thought that the difficulty of being able to affect home circumstances, and the level of staffing in general, were major barriers to supporting the MHWB of your pupils as effectively as you'd like to. You felt that not having enough staff meant that the pupils who were not displaying anger or aggression were less likely to be supported.
- You thought that the main improvement that would better support pupil's MHWB needs would be to address their home circumstances, although you weren't sure how this could be done in practice. You again drew on cross-cultural comparisons here, describing how in [name of country] extended family members gather round to support mums in the first few months of a baby's life. You felt that this practice

reduced the risk of post-natal depression, and that Western cultures could learn from these sort of practices.

- You finished by drawing attention to the large numbers of pupils you worked with who had stable home lives and positive MHWB. You agreed that home circumstances was probably the main factor in influencing children's behaviour and MHWB, although the financial aspect could be separated from the nurture and love.

APPENDIX M. MEMBER CHECKING: GIANT JIGSAW PIECES.



Figure P1: visual cue of aggregated themes from school one.



Figure P2: visual cue of aggregated themes from school two.

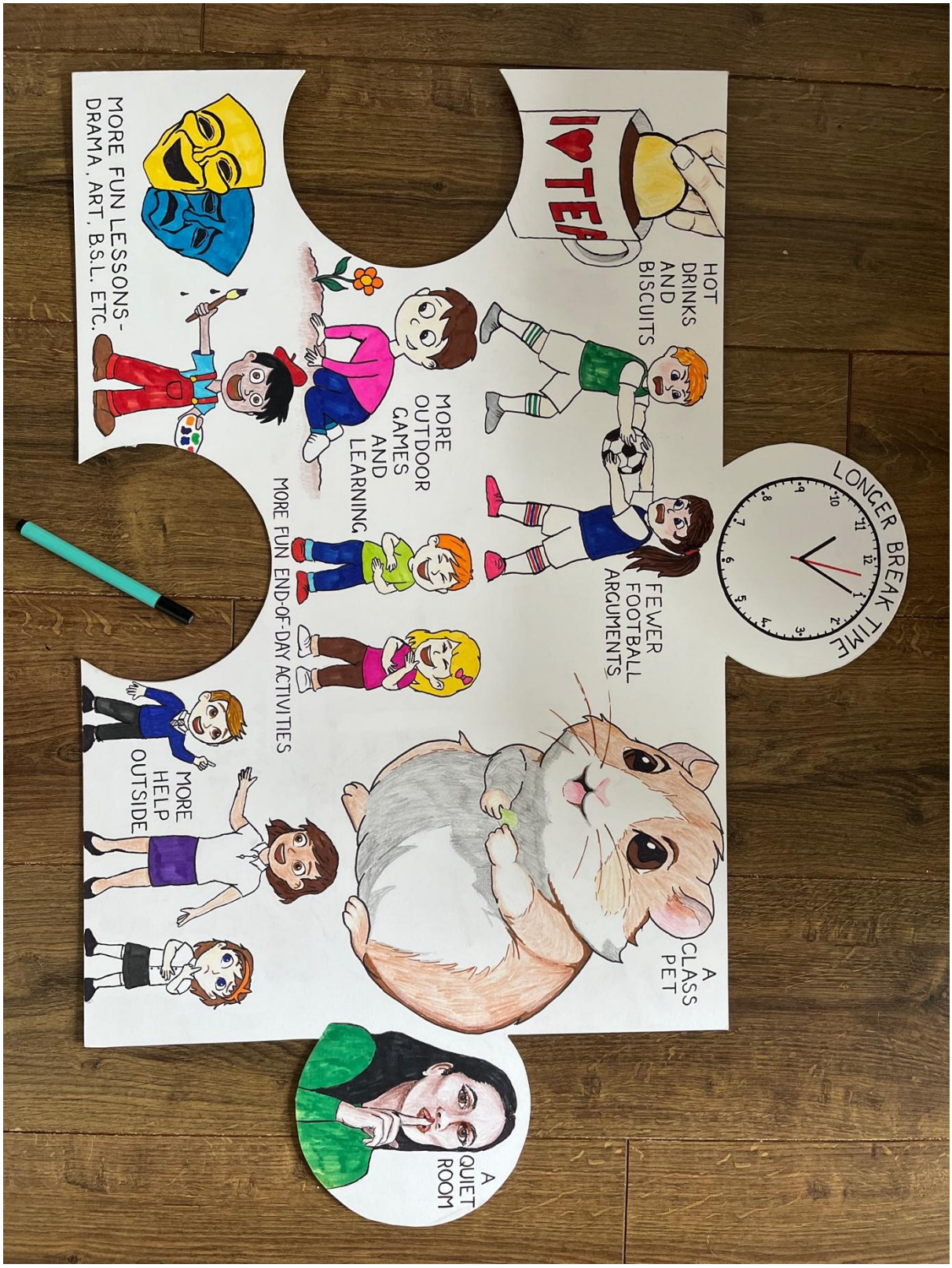


Figure P3: visual cue of aggregated themes from school three.



Figure P4: visual cue of aggregated themes from school four.