Motivations to attend school:

Exploring the perspectives of primary school children

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Abstract

Children's attendance at school is a key priority due to the current high proportion of absences from England's state schools. Studies have explored the multifactorial nature of pupil attendance, however these have often focused on reasons for absence. This study presents a novel perspective by focusing on who and what motivates pupils to attend.

The study involved sixteen children in year 4 and year 6 of an English primary school, who participated in a drawing task followed by focus group discussions. Thematic analysis of the data provided an insight into the participants' individual and shared views. The emergent themes were examined using Self Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017), with a particular focus on the extent to which participants were motivated by forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as identified by the theory's motivation continuum and Organismic Integration Theory (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023).

The outcomes of this research indicate that many factors motivated the participants to attend school, with both intrinsic and extrinsic influences acting simultaneously. The power of safe and secure relationships, underpinned by trust, understanding and a sense of belonging cannot be understated. Participants highlighted the paramount importance of their connections with peers, teachers and parents, alongside the value derived from memorable learning experiences and wider school opportunities. Additionally, there was recognition that attending now could support participants to achieve their future aspirations and enable successful adult living.

The findings suggest that policy makers and educators may wish to consider how they can support pupils to develop and maintain strong and meaningful relationships, particularly with peers, that nurture a sense of belonging. Consideration may also be given to how the curriculum and wider educational opportunities can provide pupils with authentic and significant experiences that will support their learning and future ambitions, as well as influence their ongoing motivation to attend.

Acknowledgements

This project has been a truly humbling experience. The cognitive and emotional demand of researching and presenting this thesis have, at times, caused me to doubt if I would ever finish. However, I am not one to give up on something and when I said that I would complete my doctoral thesis, I meant it. That being said, I would not have made it this far without the support and encouragement of many people.

First, I would like to thank the participants of this study. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to hear the children's voices on what is such an important topic. I truly hope the project does justice to their contributions. I am also grateful to the headteacher and wider school staff who warmly welcomed me into their community to conduct the research. I must also extend my thanks to Dr Sylwia Holmes and Dr Susannah Wright, my fantastic supervisors. Their knowledge, skills, expertise and support throughout this process have enabled me to reach this point. I have valued their honest and constructive feedback throughout my doctoral journey and am grateful for the time and energy they have given to my work.

To my family and friends. I am sorry to have bored you with talk of my thesis over what has felt like a hundred years but I have appreciated your encouragement and belief in me. In particular my parents, who, with constant interest in my studies and career, have always provided me with motivation to keep going. While I think you sometimes wonder why I take these things on, I trust you know that my work brings me such joy. And David, my ever patient husband. In your own words, you have 'put up with me' for the years it has taken to produce this thesis. You have unwavering confidence in me and my abilities. Thank you for always being there.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Dana. While the process of writing this may have taken my time, please know that you will always be my number one. I am so proud of you and I hope that you will strive to do all the things you dream of, no matter how hard or out of reach they might seem.

Remember, 'It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.'

Sir Edmund Hillary

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Chapter 5

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the important topic of primary school pupils' attendance at school from a novel perspective. Involving sixteen participants from academic years four and six, in one state primary school in England, data obtained from a drawing task and subsequent focus groups were used to respond to the central research question:

Who and what motivates children to attend school?

Thomas (2016) cautions us to consider the value of the endeavour and the extent of the project's interest before embarking on a research project. Therefore, this study was underpinned by a personal, professional and academic rationale and my positionality has shaped my views and approaches throughout the project. This demonstrates the importance of the project within three contexts and aims to provide the reader with confidence that the decision to embark on the study was grounded in thoughtful consideration of its value and reach.

1.1.1 Personal Rationale

Having worked as a primary school teacher before embarking on the path to headship, I have always been passionate about the education of children and the opportunities afforded by attending school. My own school experience was a happy one, underpinned by strong friendships, a love of learning and a desire to achieve. However, even in those early stages of education, I noticed this was not the same for all my peers. Now, being a parent to a teenage child who similarly enjoys attending school, I retain a personal commitment to understanding what factors contribute towards children who are motivated to attend, in order to potentially support those who are not.

1.1.2 Professional Rationale

Many studies have examined the topic of school attendance by exploring the multifactorial nature of attendance problems. This is perhaps unsurprising considering the urgency with which we strive to address the ongoing issue of pupil non-attendance. Rather than taking the time to examine what is already working, we are quick to seek solutions to a problem, particularly against the backdrop of an education system that judges schools by their ability to address and

manage pupil absence (DfE, 2024a; Ofsted, 2022). Therefore, this study embraced the opportunity to apply a novel perspective of examining children's motivations for attending school. For if we begin to know and understand what encourages children to be there, as professionals we can consider how schools' underpinning values, principles, policies and procedures can foster these motivations and behaviours.

1.1.3 Academic Rationale

As an academic working in higher education, this study has the potential to inform and guide the thinking and future developments of those who work within the field of education, including those who educate the next generation of teachers through Initial Teacher Training (ITT). There are few studies that have examined what motivates primary school children to attend school through the eyes of the child, with Reid et al. (2010) an exception. Therefore, this alternative perspective provides the academic community with an opportunity to think differently about the topic. Examining school attendance in this way may provide opportunity for new insight into an important issue that, while frequently examined, has yet to be resolved.

1.1.4 Positionality

My personal, professional and academic positionality has framed my thinking and decision making throughout the project. From fruition to completion I have been alert to the way in which my background, beliefs and experiences may influence the research process. From a personal perspective, as a student and parent, my experiences have shaped my views and approach to the project. As a result of this, I recognise that I am not an objective observer in this research. Rather, I am an individual whose viewpoints and identities have a significant influence on the way in which I interact with the world around me. This positionality has, in turn, influenced my epistemological and ontological perspectives and my understanding that reality is a social construct (Coe et al., 2017) that changes and evolves based on these interactions. This will be explored further in chapter 3.3.

My professional perspective has further contributed towards this position. Having worked in education settings for my whole career, I am somewhat an insider researcher. My experiences as a teacher, leader and headteacher have all contributed to both my ambition to undertake this research and my approach to its design, implementation, analysis and conclusions. Although I now work in higher education rather than a school setting, I continue to train the next generation

of teachers and maintain a strong connection with primary teaching. Therefore, I remain firmly positioned within the primary education sphere.

I have been acutely aware of my insider knowledge at each stage of the research process. Reflexivity and regularly questioning my own judgement has supported rigour and reduced the potential for bias. For example, choosing to use a multi-step process of thematic analysis gave me the opportunity to view and review my data multiple times. Meanwhile, employing my positionality impacted the study and decisions I have made throughout the research process, relating to the research questions, design and interpretation of the findings. While my personal interests, academic and professional experience initially formed the foundations of this thesis, as it has evolved, they have become wrapped around the project as a whole. Among many other things, this enabled me to form relationships with school staff and pupils quickly and apply my knowledge of how primary children behave in response to tasks and activities. This supported the design of the study, its associated methodology and the implementation of these approaches.

My position as a researcher is akin to a set of scales, with each decision I make having the potential to be both advantageous and hazardous. While I cannot remove the challenges associated with attempting to conduct research within my own sphere of expertise and professional experience (Thomas, 2016), I understand that it is my responsibility to recognise and embrace advantages while mitigating against hazards as far as is reasonably possible.

1.2 Overview of the Study

The central focus of this research study was to explore children's descriptions of who and what motivates them to attend school, to ascertain the extent to which intrinsic or extrinsic factors were key drivers.

To address this question, the research was underpinned by the following objectives:
1. To identify who and what motivates children to attend school.
2. To use the data that has been collected to analyse and explore what forms of motivation may influence children to attend school.

3. To use data collected and analysed to explore whether an association can be made between key components of Self Determination Theory (SDT) and participants' motivation for attending school.

The research focused on two groups of pupils from academic years 4 and 6 (participants aged 8/9 and 10/11 years) in one primary school and involved data collected in two stages. The initial stage involved participants being asked to draw and describe a picture to represent their motivations to attend. I undertook an initial stage of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), to narrow and focus the question prompts for the second stage of research, while remaining open minded to how children's responses may change and develop at the second stage. The second stage focus groups allowed participants to develop and expand upon their initial descriptions, in addition to responding to question prompts. This provided a deeper insight into their thinking about their motivation to attend school than the drawings alone.

Analysing the children's contributions through an inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) enabled me to identify a broad range of themes that were then narrowed into two key areas: relationships and opportunities. Allowing themes to emerge from the data first, before applying a more deductive approach, meant I used the children's voices rather than my own adult perspective as a starting point. Once these themes had been established, further analysis was conducted to identify latent, underlying themes within their responses.

Finally, findings were considered in relation to key components of SDT, with a focus on the origin of the participants' motivations. Particular attention was given to whether motivators could be determined as autonomous and intrinsically generated or if extrinsic factors were more prevalent in their responses.

1.3 Overview of the Chapters

Six chapters guide the reader through the research from inception to conclusion.
Chapter One: Introduction
Chapter Two: Literature Review
Chapter Three: Methodology
Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The current chapter (Chapter One: Introduction) provides the rationale for the research, along with the questions that are examined through the course of the study. The following sections provide insight into the remaining chapters.

1.3.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review is to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of the current state of knowledge on a topic (Machi and McEvoy, 2022) and the theoretical underpinning for the study - Self Determination Theory (SDT). The chapter begins by outlining the research context. It examines how, since the Elementary Education Act of 1870 (UK Parliament, 1870), free compulsory schooling has been an integral part of our country's commitment to providing education for all children. However, there is also acknowledgement that, since the introduction of the Act, issues with attendance have been prevalent. The chapter addresses some of these challenges by explaining the difficulties of defining non-attendance (Heyne et al., 2019), helping the reader to understand why educators and policymakers may find this a difficult issue to address and, consequently, why research has predominantly focused on seeking solutions to problematic attendance. Combined with the multifactorial and debilitating reasons a child may be absent from school (Gubbels et al., 2019; Kearney and Graczyk, 2020), the reader is able to gain an understanding of why this is an important topic to be explored.

The chapter makes an important link between school attendance and the role of motivation. SDT is introduced here as the theoretical framework for the study and the chapter explains how Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000a; Vallerand, 2021), Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023) and the motivation continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a), were selected to help understand what motivates children to attend school. The literature review outlines how the creation of a needs supportive environment supports volitional functioning in children and young people (Rocchi et al., 2017) that, in turn, contributes to an increased sense of wellbeing and intrinsic motivation (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). Based on this literature, I recognise that relationships are integral to the development of a needs supportive environment and this leads me to consider the extent to which this may feature in the children's self-described motivations to attend school.

1.3.2 Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology chapter introduces the interpretivist position of the researcher, examining the ontological and epistemological principles of the project. I acknowledge how my position has changed over time and detail the underpinning values that guide my research approach. This study was committed to understanding the views of the participants, rather than seeking generalisable conclusions (Creswell, 2007). I was privileged and grateful to be given the opportunity to work with the participants so I was dedicated to ensuring they had the space, voice and audience to express their views (Lundy, 2007). There was recognition from the outset that, due to the qualitative interpretivist nature of the study, subjectivity would be a feature. By being alert to this, I aimed to ensure this was a constructive addition to the study (Taylor and Medina, 2013), rather than a limitation.

I also outline the design of the study, explaining the drawing and focus group components and how these contributed towards addressing the research question and objectives. Explanation for the mixed method approach is provided, along with an outline of how the chosen approach to data analysis - thematic analysis - enabled me to become deeply immersed in the perspectives of the participants and minimise the risk of projecting my own adult meaning onto their responses (Horner, 2000). The chapter describes how application of Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach allowed themes to emerge that were then interpreted by applying selected elements of SDT, to examine the latent meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The chapter concludes by providing the reader with reassurance that the study was conducted in an ethically sound manner, detailing how issues such as informed consent, assent, confidentiality and anonymity were thoroughly addressed, underpinned by Oxford Brookes University's ethics requirements.

1.3.3 Chapter Four: Findings

The findings chapter outlines the key themes identified through analysis of the research data; relationships and opportunities. The chapter presents these findings sequentially, drawing on specific examples from the drawings and focus group transcripts to elucidate the participants' contributions. The children's drawings and quotations provide a rich insight into the data and allow the reader to become immersed in their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

I draw attention to the way participants reflect on who and what motivates them to attend school. Their drawings, annotations and vivid descriptions provided detailed insight into how peers, teachers and parents were the people who motivated them. The role of peers was particularly prominent in the participants' contributions. The children valued relationships with like minded counterparts who care for and understand them. They also described how their friendships provide them with opportunities for play, learning and fun, which contribute towards a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment. Underpinning their relationships was a sense of belonging, characterised by feelings of safety and trust. Alongside the who, children identified what motivates them to attend, drawing on meaningful opportunities for learning and play that contribute towards their development and enjoyment in the present, as well as supporting their future endeavours.

1.3.4 Chapter Five: Discussion

The discussion continues to be structured around the themes identified in chapter four but draws upon the research objectives, selected components of SDT and the wider literature to explain the findings. Research indicates that absence from school is influenced by a range of factors. The discussion chapter explains that, for this particular data set, this applies to motivation to attend. The participants in this study articulated a number of motivating factors. Applying the continuum of motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) to these descriptions, I was able to provide insight into how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were active simultaneously, influencing participants' motivation to attend. Although these interactions differed according to the individual and their specific context, this finding provides further weight to the argument that 'the most intentional behaviours are multiply motivated' (Ryan and Deci, 2020, p.4), with integrated extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation leading to the most favourable outcomes (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

1.3.5 Chapter Six: Conclusion

The conclusion draws the research to a close, summarising the key findings within the context of the original research question and objectives, as well as outlining the study's contribution to knowledge. I conclude that the reasons children attend school, much like their reasons for absence, are numerous and varied. From the participants' contributions, it was apparent that their motivation was informed by intrinsic and extrinsic influences that acted simultaneously and motivated them in different ways and to varying degrees - an example of multiple motivations in

action (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Relationships, particularly those with peers, were especially important, underpinned by a sense of belonging that was articulated by some of the participants as being part of a family. The participants described how their school relationships were safe, secure and fulfilling; providing them with a sense of belonging to the environment and the people in it. In addition to relationships, the conclusion also summarises how meaningful and personally satisfying experiences contributed towards participants' motivation. The participants recognised how these provided both short and long term benefits, demonstrating their understanding of the value of school for now and in the future.

In addition to the strengths of the research endeavour, limitations are outlined along with how the current study may provide a starting point for further research. If the reasons children attend school are varied and many, it would be pertinent for there to be further consideration with pupils of different ages and at varied stages of education. Applying principles of SDT to these studies would support further research to understand the forms of motivation influencing participants of different ages and help to explore further the connection between relationships, belonging and school attendance.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the study, providing the reader with the background and rationale for the research, as well as outlining the content of the remaining chapters. The purpose of this research was to examine children's descriptions of who and what motivates them to attend school through a two stage study that used the methodology of participant drawings and focus groups. The study was underpinned by a rationale composed of personal, professional and academic drivers. The following chapter introduces the reader to the evidence base underpinning this research, beginning with a presentation of definitions and an examination of the historical context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter uses the pertinent literature in the field to provide the reader with context to the topics and themes that are examined in the remainder of the study. It also introduces the reader to Self Determination Theory (SDT), which provides the theoretical underpinning of the study. The literature review is from a global evidence base that was selected through a careful search strategy, predominantly using the British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts, Educational Administration Abstracts and ERIC databases. Initial search terms focused on the reasons, motivations and factors influencing attendance or absence of pupils in primary and secondary education settings in the United Kingdom (UK), although this widened to include international studies, particularly from the United States, to provide additional insight into the topic. The reasons for this were two-fold. Firstly there were limited studies in the UK context and further literature was required to obtain a deep understanding of the current state of knowledge. Secondly, despite different education systems and political and cultural contexts, there were commonalities in the literature and authoritative authors in the field that were important to consider. For example Christopher Kearney (United States) and Jeanne Gubbels (Netherlands) have particular expertise in the field of school absenteeism. While I had predominantly aimed to search literature from the last twenty years, there were earlier studies that provided pertinent insight into the topic. Internet search tools were utilised to find wider literature, including government publications from the Department for Education (DfE) and other bodies connected with educational research and policy, such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). As the study has been completed over a number of years, regular searches have enabled the inclusion of more recent literature.

At the outset, I draw the reader's attention to how much of the existing research in the field of school attendance focuses on the reasons for, and implications of, absence. This study takes a novel approach by examining children's motivation to attend school. There are few studies that examine this. It is however crucial to provide the reader with insight into the range of factors that influence attendance so we can truly understand the importance of this research. The impact of absence on children's attainment and wider outcomes is profound, this provides weight to the rationale for a study that aims to better understand what motivates children to attend.

This study focuses on pupils who are being educated in state funded English schools. Therefore, any information and discussion relating to the themes explored in this literature review and the wider study refer to pupils attending a school setting for the purpose of education. There are many ways a child or young person can be educated and there is no single or best approach to this. The 1996 Education Act reinforces this by stating that 'the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education…either by regular attendance at school or otherwise' (UK Gov., 1996, Section 7). It is recognised that historically and presently, many children are educated outside the school system, with numbers of home educated pupils increasing rapidly across England (DfE, 2024b), particularly post-pandemic. While it is acknowledged that an upward trend in home education is at odds with an emphasis on school attendance and there is overlapping territory with considerations of non-attendance, exploration of this is outside the scope of the current study.

2.1 Definitions

When examining the topic of school attendance, the plethora of associated vocabulary can be problematic. Terms such as truancy, drop-out, school refusal and authorised absence are just a small proportion of the terms used to describe pupils' school attendance behaviours and they are often used inconsistently. Therefore we cannot treat the topic of absence from school homogeneously. Heyne et al. (2019) highlight the complication for researchers by listing over forty terms that have been used since 1932, just to describe non-attendance. These range from school phobia to mother-philes, school reluctance to chronic non-attendance. It would be unmanageable, unhelpful and beyond the scope of this study for me to present every definition to the reader in this chapter; however there is a bank of key terms frequently used in the current literature. It is important to clarify these both for consistency in this study and, because the language we use has a direct influence on our perception and treatment of children and young people (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023). For clarity, I have defined the key terms that will be used throughout the literature review and, where required, the rest of the study (table 2.1). The definitions I have chosen to apply are underpinned by the Department for Education, to reflect the English context of this study. However, if this study were focused on the reasons for absence, a more careful consideration of the international context would be required because definitions for terms such as school refusal and truancy are frequently questioned and debated.

Table 2.1: Key terms and definitions	
Key term	Definition
Regular attendance	'A child must attend every day that the school is open, except in the small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school' (DfE, 2022a, p.6).
Persistent absence	As defined by the DfE (2019), persistent absence is 'when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions.'
Authorised absence	Absence from school where an acceptable reason is given (DfE, 2022b).
Unauthorised absence	Absence from school where no acceptable reason is given or no reason is provided (DfE, 2022b).
Parent	Applying the definitions of the Department for Education (DfE, 2022b, p.5) for the purpose of this research, 'parents' will be used to refer to: ● all natural parents, whether they are married or not; ● any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person; and, ● any person who has care of a child or young person (i.e., lives with and looks after the child). Going forward, parent will be the terminology used to encompass those individuals above, except when directly quoting research participants' contributions.

2.2 History and Context

There is significant literature in the field of school absenteeism that includes study of aspects such as persistent absence, truancy and school refusal, although studies focusing on factors influencing presenteeism remain limited. For the purpose of this review, referenced studies are drawn from Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to provide a broad examination of the existing literature in this field. These locations were selected due to the broad similarities in educational practices between them, including school attendance requirements and law. It is acknowledged that studies from outside the UK will be representative of the specific population being studied, however this does not mean they need be precluded, rather their findings must be considered within their context and not overstated.

2.2.1 Brief History of Compulsory Education in England

School attendance has been a matter of interest in England since mass education was proposed more than a century ago. However the progress and challenges of its introduction in England are not unique. While approaches differed by nation, the 1800s saw a significant focus on the expansion of education to reach a larger proportion of the population. In England, the National Education League (NEL) paved the way for education for all children. Founded in 1869, the League was committed to providing free education to all children in England and Wales. Prior to this, there was an absence of state education. Schooling was predominantly provided by the church and somewhat mirrored the class structure within the country. Quality of education and pupil attendance could be inconsistent and as the population grew, it became apparent that the church could not fulfil the growing demand. Further, it was recognised that a more universal and consistent approach was required, with greater governmental control. It is difficult to establish an accurate figure for school attendance during this period as many pupils attended infrequently or left suddenly to gain employment (Stephens, 1998), however it has been suggested that around one in seven of the entire population was in school during the publication of the Newcastle Report in 1861 (Gillard, 2018).

Although the NEL did not achieve all its educational ambitions, the 1870 Elementary Education Act gave local authorities the power to open free, compulsory, non-religious schools for all children (UK Parliament, 1870). This was the first Act of its kind and demonstrated a growing commitment to educate all children and young people (McCulloch, 2020). It also enabled children's attendance at school to be consistently measured for the first time. Further Acts followed, including that of 1880, that made education for children aged between 5 and 10 compulsory. This had a significant impact on the percentage of children attending school across England, with attendance increasing from 9.9% in 1851 to a 90% average by 1909 for pupils aged 5-14 (Stephens, 1998). Occasional and persistent absence was, at this time, already an issue, however some of the reasons for this were different to those experienced in 2024. Common reasons cited included girls spending time away from school for the purpose of domestic work, the prevalence of childhood illness, child labour and overall attitudes to school attendance (Auerbach, 2012; Sheldon, 2007).

The introduction of compulsory schooling resulted in resistance from some groups, including the working classes, where the response ranged from reluctance to refusal and, in some cases,

violent protest (Auerbach, 2012). For some families, a child attending school meant a loss of income for the family. Achieving high levels of school attendance was problematic for the government from the infancy of compulsory education and this pattern has continued over the intervening 130 years. Since the introduction of compulsory schooling through the Elementary Education Act of 1870, questions have been raised about the non-attendance of some pupils (Hunt, 1987). While reasons for absence may have shifted in the intervening years (Reid, 2005a), it remains the case that some pupils attend infrequently or may be absent from school altogether.

2.2.2 Political Landscape

This research does not attempt to analyse the political landscape in detail. However there is acknowledgement that, in the intervening years since compulsory schooling was introduced, successive governments have attempted to address difficulties with school attendance. The introduction of fixed penalty notices for non-attendance in 2006, followed by the tightening of these rules in 2013 to encompass further focus on unauthorised term time holidays, are just two examples of the ongoing efforts made to emphasise the value of, and reinforce, school attendance (DfE, 2024c). School attendance continues to be a feature of governmental policy (DfE, 2022b; DfE, 2024c; DfE, 2024a) and mainstream media news (Adams, 2024; Dalton, 2024; Jones, 2024). This has been particularly heightened by the impact of the pandemic, which has seen a continuing impact on school attendance rates in state funded primary, secondary and special schools (DfE, 2024c). Persistent absence figures (table 2.1 for definition) have climbed to almost double pre-pandemic figures (DfE, 2024d) and in 2024 accounted for more than 20% of the school population. Meanwhile, the overall absence rate sits at around 7%. While these figures have seen a slight decline since the academic year 2022-2023 (DfE, 2023), absence still remains significantly above pre-pandemic levels.

Absence from school is an issue not isolated to England and the rest of the UK, with other countries experiencing similar difficulties in their primary and secondary schools. In the USA, although attendance has improved since 2023, persistent absenteeism remains above 25%, on average, across the 39 states measured (Malcus, 2024). Australia's attendance figures are slightly lower, with the percentage of pupils with 90% attendance or higher at 61.6% (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2023). It is of note that these countries also have their own individual challenges, such as in Australia where remote locations and the specific needs of indigenous communities present particular obstacles for education

(Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021). Like England, these countries have seen a recent increased governmental focus on school attendance, with attempts being made to improve it, particularly after the disruption caused by the pandemic. Studies from other nations may therefore prove useful in developing a better understanding of the current picture.

2.2.3 Current Context of School Absence and Attendance

Despite the recent change to a Labour government, school attendance remains a priority. Ofsted's recent report *Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence* (Ofsted, 2022), reinforces the importance of school attendance, asserting that although school leaders should be understanding and empathetic, poor attendance must not be tolerated. This is in line with more recent guidance from the Department for Education. *Working together to improve school attendance* (DfE, 2024c) outlines the approach schools should take towards tackling absence from school. While the guidance outlines the importance of supportive measures, references to enforcement approaches remain. Despite recognising the need for action and making attempts to provide consistency in England's state schools, it remains that school attendance figures are below pre-pandemic levels (DfE, 2024d) and much more is needed to secure improvement.

In 2011, Anne Sheppard examined the challenges of improving school attendance. She explained how £885 million had been spent on secondary school attendance between 1997 and 2004 on a small number of strategies to improve the national picture (Sheppard, 2011). Despite these interventions, by 2011, school attendance rates had not improved significantly, with absence rates remaining above 5% (DfE, 2024e). Over 10 years since Sheppard's study, attendance statistics are no better, with absence rates for the 2023-2024 year 1.3% above 2011 figures (DfE, 2012; DfE 2024d). While Sunak's Conservative government pledged £15 million to see the introduction of nationwide attendance hubs (DfE, 2024f), the impact of this intervention is yet to be seen and with a recent change of government, this is likely to be readdressed.

The current statistics for school attendance in England present a challenging picture (table 2.2). Maintained primary, secondary and special schools report the highest rates of absence in the last 15 years. There is some indication that absence rates are declining from pandemic levels, with authorised absence due to illness falling. This is evident across all educational phases and settings. However, rates of unauthorised absence have increased. While these figures can

largely be attributed to secondary schools, with rates more than double that in primaries (DfE, 2024d), this remains concerning. Some of these absences may be attributed to an increase in unauthorised holidays, which has seen figures rise above pre-pandemic levels (DfE, 2024d), however due to the broad reach of this category, it is likely that the picture is much more problematic. With an increased focus on school attendance, the drive to take a more strict approach to absence may also have contributed to the rise in unauthorised marks.

Table 2.2: Attendance figures for pupils in state funded primary, secondary and special schools in England			
Academic Year	**Overall Absence**	**Authorised absence**	**Unauthorised absence**
2023-2024 (Aut/Spring data)	7.1%	4.7%	2.4%
2022-2023	7.4%	5.0%	2.4%
2021-2022	7.6%	5.5%	2.1%
2020-2021	4.6%	3.4%	1.2%
2019-2020	No standard data release due to pandemic		
2018-2019	4.7%	3.3%	1.4%
2017-2018	4.9%	3.5%	1.4%
2016-2017	4.7%	3.4%	1.3%
2015-2016	4.6%	3.5%	1.1%
2014-2015	4.6%	3.5%	1.1%
2013-2014	4.5%	3.5%	1%
2012-2013	5.2%	4.2%	1%
2011-2012	5.1%	4.1%	1%
2010-2011	5.8%	4.7%	1.1%
2009-2010	6.04%	5%	1.04%
Data sourced from the Department for Education (DfE, 2024f)			

Perhaps even more concerning is the rate of persistent absence that has seen a dramatic increase since the onset of the pandemic (table 2.3). While rates had previously peaked in the 2017-2018 academic year, before dropping slightly in the years preceding the pandemic, the statistics are now of significant concern to educators and policy makers. In addition to this, an increasing proportion of pupils are now categorised as chronically absent. Calculated based on the percentage of pupils who are absent for 50% or more of allocated sessions, this figure is now at 2%, which represents over 180,000 children and young people. This means that more pupils are missing education which has a significant impact on educational achievement, social and emotional outcomes (Gottfried, 2014).

Table 2.3: Percentage of pupils persistently absent in state funded primary, secondary and special schools in England		
2023-2024 (Aut/Spring data)	20.2%	Figures based on percentage of pupils missing 10% of sessions.
2022-2023	21.2%	
2021-2022	22.5%	
2020-2021	12.1%	
2019-2020	No standard data release due to pandemic	
2018-2019	10.9%	Figures based on percentage of pupils missing 10% of sessions.
2017-2018	11.2%	
2016-2017	10.8%	
2015-2016	10.5%	
2014-2015	3.7%	Figures based on percentage of pupils missing 15% of sessions.
2013-2014	3.6%	
2012-2013	4.6%	
2011-2012	5.2%	
2010-2011	6.1%	
2009-2010	6.8%	
*Note: The methodological approach to the calculation of persistent absence figures has changed since the introduction of the measure in the 2005-2006 academic year. Where the calculation was originally based on a standard threshold and persistent absence was defined as absence of 20% or greater, this was lowered to 15% and then again to 10% and the calculation is now based on the percentage of the child's own sessions that have been missed (DfE, 2016a). Lowering the persistent absence threshold may be seen as a positive step, as it raised the standards for good attendance but it does mean that statistics are not comparable to previous years. Data sourced from the Department for Education (DfE, 2024e)		

2.2.4 Reasons for Absence in the Current Data

Illness has remained the most common cause of absence, accounting for 52.6% of all possible sessions in the year preceding the pandemic. This has remained largely steady over this time, despite fluctuations in other reasons for absence. Although many of these absences can be attributed to occasional illnesses that fluctuate in response to seasonal variation; physical and mental health remain risk factors for school attendance, with health being both a cause and

consequence of school absence (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023). It is difficult to make generalisations regarding the impact of health on school attendance, due to the array of physical and mental health needs that have been shown to impact pupils (see Kearney, 2008a for an overview), including the influence of 'somatic and subjective health complaints' that are difficult to define and measure (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a, p.318).

There is however a growing availability of literature that focuses on the impact of mental health on school absenteeism (Finning et al., 2019a; 2019b; Finning Ford and Moore, 2022). Figures from the *National Health Service Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey in England* (National Health Service (NHS), 2023) indicate that since 2017, the proportion of children and young people (aged 8-16) with a probable mental health disorder has increased from around 12.5% in 2017 to 20.3% in 2023. Despite remaining relatively stable since 2020, this represents a significant proportion of the population. In the same study, it was also found that children and young people with a probable mental health disorder were significantly more likely to be persistently absent from school. This may provide some indication as to why persistent absence rates have climbed so steeply in recent years.

Current DfE guidelines state the small number of circumstances under which absences should be authorised, including if pupils are too ill to attend or if they have received permission in advance due to exceptional circumstances (DfE, 2024b). Despite the lack of evidence for the specific impact of holiday absences on pupil outcomes (Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022), with many studies examining broad categories for absence (Gottfried, 2009), absence for the purpose of a holiday during school time is not permitted (DfE, 2022c; DfE, 2024c). Parents can be fined if they choose to take their child on holiday during the school term without the permission of the school. Headteachers are also reluctant to authorise such absences due to the impact on the school's attendance figures and the potential detrimental effect on children's learning.

Many other factors contribute to absence from school including school differences (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023; Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a), pupil characteristics (DfE, 2020a; DfE, 2024e; Hunt, 2023) and age and stage of education. There is also evidence to suggest that pupils who have low attendance in secondary school are likely to have established this pattern in the primary phase (Attwood and Croll, 2006; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2002; Schoeneberger, 2012). Therefore, unless pupils have established motivation for attending

school in the early stages of their education, it may be difficult to achieve this in the secondary setting.

While it is outside the scope of this study to examine the reasons for absence in detail, the data provides a useful overview of the key reasons for absence and the extent of the problem. And yet, it is important for statistics not to be examined in isolation. Absence figures derive from information provided by parents, who provide reasons for their child's absence. This is not to suggest that the data is skewed or untrustworthy, rather it is difficult to determine if the absence is problematic or not when it is based on binary categories (Reid, 2014). For example, if a pupil is absent due to illness, it is impossible to know from that figure if there are other underlying reasons for that absence. Therefore the broader context and wider research into the factors influencing attendance must be considered alongside statistics.

2.3 Factors Influencing Attendance

There have been many studies examining the topic of school attendance that have varied in focus over recent decades. Early studies mainly focused on familial circumstances (Douglas, 1964; Tyerman, 1968), while two decades later, recognition of the complexity of interrelated factors became more prevalent (Reid, 1985). Since then, research has steadily shifted focus and now pays more careful attention to the multifactorial nature of attendance issues (Gubbels et al., 2019; Kearney, 2004; Reid, 2005a), examined from attendance reporting (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a) and a range of perspectives, including those of parents (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Malcolm et al., 2003), pupils (Sims and Fisher, 2024) and school staff (Reid, 2005b).

Many studies, locally and internationally, have examined the reasons for absence, attempting to classify these under broad categories such as individual, family and school characteristics (Ingul et al., 2012, Ingul, Havik and Heyne, 2019; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2008). In a meta-analysis of 75 studies examining the risk factors associated with school absence and drop out (Gubbels et al., 2019), 781 risk factors for absenteeism and 635 for dropout were initially identified. Once collated and classified, these were reduced and yet a significant number of categories remained. Gubbels et al. (2019) then organised each factor into a domain, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (2006) and Kearney's findings (2008b). They found that their

domains broadly aligned with Kearney's interdisciplinary model (2008b), which categorised reasons for absence under the following influential factors: child, parent, family, peer, school and community.

However, the influence of each of these factors has been found to be dependent on the focus of the study. Parents and pupils have been found to identify school-related factors (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023; Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b), such as poor teaching and teacher-pupil relationships, perceived unmet special educational needs, boredom and bullying. By contrast, studies focused on the views of educational professionals typically reference parental and home factors as being a key driver of absence (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005b). These differences in perspective are intriguing. One could attribute blame on the opposing party as being derived from the difficulty of identifying the reasons for non-attendance, which for teachers has been found to present difficulty and frustration (Gren-Landell et al., 2015). Similarly, parents have argued that various factors including bullying, problematic teacher-pupil relationships and issues with school work create difficult attendance situations.

Interestingly, where both parents and practitioners can agree, is that, irrespective of the reason for absence, the best outcomes for pupils arise when both parties collaborate and communicate effectively with one another (Finning et al., 2017; Malcolm et al., 2003). Although there are no studies found that explore the reasons for these opposing perspectives, there is a body of research that explores blame in educational contexts (Lozano, Laurent and Wilson, 2019). This may elucidate why there is a reluctance for parents and professionals to identify their own contribution to a child's absence, as it protects the individual from a feeling of failure or responsibility. This is just one example of the complexity surrounding school attendance issues and may be one of the reasons why problematic attendance continues despite government intervention (Attwood and Croll, 2015). With many factors influencing attendance at school, it may be the case that we need to look at things differently. This is because 'risk factors for attendance problems are unlikely to occur in isolation and successful intervention may require consideration of the interaction between risk factors within each domain' (Finning et al., 2020, p.24).

2.3.1 School Factors

School is one of the key factors associated with attendance, with the social environment of the classroom being of particular importance (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023; Ingul et al., 2012; Ingul,

Havik and Heyne, 2019). Many studies, including those in the United States and Norway, have explored the influence of the school on pupils' attendance. These studies have included an examination of the relationship between the school environment and refusal and truancy behaviours, with findings indicating how crucial a positive environment can be on a child's attendance behaviours (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a; Kearney and Beasley, 1994). Academic difficulties combined with the demands of the social environment of the school can have a significant impact on children and young people, with some choosing to miss school as a mechanism to cope with the problems faced (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a). In 2008, Reid concurred with this international perspective. He argued that UK schools needed to take responsibility for the attendance issues they were presented with, pointing out that the curriculum, structures and guidelines in school environments were often outdated and did not meet the needs of today's young people.

A problematic curriculum has been identified as a key factor influencing attendance behaviours (Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Malcolm et al., 2003), with reports that boring lessons or a lack of enjoyment or interest (Reid, 2008) can lead to increased incidences of truancy and school refusal, particularly for secondary school aged pupils (Kearney, 2008a). In various studies, children and young people have expressed their concerns, highlighting the curriculum as a factor influencing their attendance or absence at school (Davies and Lee, 2006; Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin, 1996). For example, in a study by Attwood and Croll (2015), dislike of a particular lesson and boredom were commonly cited as reasons to abscond, while in the study of Reid et al. (2010), teaching approaches that were perceived as boring by Welsh primary school pupils were identified as a disincentive, particularly for children attending a pupil referral unit. Davies and Lee (2006) found that, unlike much of the literature in this area, non-attending pupils in their study did not seem perturbed by the curriculum. However, some did feel that alternative vocational curricula would be better suited to their needs, more relevant and meaningful. Although a curriculum perceived as boring may lead to apathy or even absence from education, there is evidence to suggest that children and young people can still see the value of school. In particular, it seems there is a consistent understanding from both primary and secondary aged pupils that attending school affords future opportunity (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010). Thus, while the curriculum may lead to absence for some pupils, the understanding that learning is necessary for future endeavours may continue to motivate others to attend.

A feeling of safety and security in the school environment has also been linked with attendance, with parents (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b) and pupils (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a; Sims and Fisher, 2024) reporting that a perceived unsafe school environment contributes to attendance problems, particularly for girls (Sims and Fisher, 2024), while feelings of safety and security promote attendance and engagement (Riley, Coates and Allen, 2020; Wang and Fredericks, 2014). Absence rates for girls increase towards the end of the primary phase and then surpass boys at secondary school (DfE, 2018). These figures are even higher for girls with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) (DfE, 2024e). While there is an indication that specific factors, such as the onset of periods (PHS, 2023), may influence girls' attendance, there is evidence of other contributory factors such as decreased feelings of safety and a reduced sense of belonging (Sims and Fisher, 2024).

2.3.2 Relationships with School Staff

Relationships with school staff have been found to have a positive influence on pupils' attendance and engagement with school life (Gray, 2012; Pellegrini, 2007; Reid et al., 2010; Wilkins, 2008), with studies reporting that where pupils' relationships with these adults are strong, drop-out rates are reduced (Simsek, 2011) and attendance rates may improve (Gershenson, 2016; Ladd and Sorensen, 2017). While there is an indication that more experienced teachers may be modestly more effective in securing improvements in attendance, it is notable that teachers who secure the best academic outcomes do not always have the greatest impact on attendance (Gershenson, 2016). This may suggest that there is a difference between relationship building and the quality of instruction. Other authors, both UK and internationally based, have suggested similar (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a; Ingul et al., 2012), particularly focusing on the benefits of empathetic and supportive relationships (Reid et al., 2010). Though dated, the accounts of Pomeroy's (1999) study with 33 permanently excluded secondary school pupils elucidates this. Participants identified key differences between the pastoral and instructional role of the teacher, emphasising the importance of supportive, nurturing and encouraging relationships, alongside an acknowledgement that teachers also need to create a disciplined environment. The study provided an example of the complexity of teacher-pupil relationships. It emphasised the profound impact they can have on pupils' attitudes towards school and learning, which indicates that careful consideration needs to be given to how positive relationships are formed and maintained.

Conversely, problematic teacher relationships (Malcolm et al., 2003), inconsistent staffing (such as supply teachers) (Ervasti et al., 2012; Reid et al, 2010) and a dissatisfaction with the school environment (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), have been identified as risk factors for attendance and absenteeism, particularly truancy. This is reflected in Attwood and Croll's (2006) study which found that, in interviews with 17 secondary school aged truants, the common connection between them was their reported poor relationships with teachers. From the perspective of parents and carers, unpredictable and angry teacher behaviours contribute to poor attendance (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b), while studies involving children and young people have elicited similar results. Children have cited being shouted at (Malcolm et al., 2003) and being treated unfairly and inconsistently (Reid et al., 2010) as drivers for absence. The connection between teacher and pupils also contributed to maintaining pupils' engagement with school during the pandemic. Research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2020) indicated that methods of communicating remote learning that promoted engagement and relationships with the teacher were more effective. The study found that schools using virtual learning environments with face-to-face contact with the teacher to deliver their remote learning had an increased chance of pupils demonstrating high levels of engagement, particularly for those pupils with the greatest disadvantage. Less personalised models, such as use of the school website, emails or postal methods led to a decrease in likelihood of engagement, potentially indicative of the importance of personal connection.

2.3.3 Relationships with Peers

Friendships and familiar peer relationships have been shown to have a positive impact on children and young people's academic achievement (Blansky et al., 2013), adjustment (Chen et al., 2010; Molloy Gest and Rulison, 2011), motivation (Molloy, Gest and Rulison, 2011) and risk of school dropout (Ricard and Pelletier, 2016). The latter study indicated that, in addition to parental and teacher support, reciprocal friendships play a crucial role in motivation and persistence. The impact of friendship and other peer relationships on pupils appears to change with age, with the period of adolescence being especially important (Wang et al., 2018) as young people broaden their social groups, obtain greater freedom and become more sensitive to, and influenced by, their wider network (Dweck, 2002; Ryan, 2000). Relationships with peers in school make a significant contribution to a sense of belonging to the environment. Osterman (2000) found that acceptance among peers was of particular importance for positive adjustment in school, indicating the value of friendships between like-minded individuals who choose to engage in such relationships. And it seems these relationships can have a significant impact on

the way children and young people feel about school, with Hamm and Faircloth (2005), in their study of secondary aged pupils, concluding that friendship was a 'primary source of positive affect at school' (p.72). This finding has been supported by further research with primary aged pupils (Antonopoulou, Chaidemenou and Kouvava, 2019), which found that secure friendships had a positive impact on children's attitudes towards school and reduced a propensity for avoidance. These findings suggest that friendships may be an important motivator for attendance.

Some research from the United States (Kirksey and Elefante, 2024; Kirksey and Gottfried, 2018) has also found that, for both primary and secondary aged pupils, the presence of familiar faces within the classroom can have a positive effect on attendance. Kirksey and Gottfried (2018) found that when primary aged pupils were in classrooms with children they were familiar with from the previous year, there was a decline in the number of absences and the proportion of students who were persistently absent decreased. Kirksey and Elefante's follow-up study in 2024 examined this from a secondary school perspective, with similar outcomes. While the outcomes of both studies indicate modest rather than significant effects, it could be suggested that the findings point towards familiar, stable relationships as influential factors. Further study would be required to identify the extent to which the quality or type of relationship between familiar peers influenced their attendance.

However, peers can also be the cause of attendance problems (Corcoran and Kelly, 2023; Sims and Fisher, 2024). Although studies examining the long term effects of poor peer relationships on pupil attendance have been limited (Laith and Vaillancourt, 2022), two types of behaviour have been attributed to absence (Finning et al., 2020). These are, the negative impact of bullying (Reid et al., 2010, Steiner and Rasberry, 2015) and unhelpful peer relationships (Juvonen, Nishina and Graham, 2000, Sims and Fisher, 2024), that encourage unhealthy behaviours, including truanting (Attwood and Croll, 2015). A common factor in these studies is the impact of the negative relationship on the child or young person's sense of belonging, safety and wellbeing in the school environment (Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2022; Sims and Fisher, 2024). There is evidence to indicate that children and young people with lower rates of attendance are more likely to report a lack of connection with the school environment (Sims and Fisher, 2024), while a secure sense of belonging can contribute to improved social relationships and academic motivation (Goodenow and Grady, 1993). While this does not prove

that a sense of belonging is directly associated with school attendance, it does suggest a potential relationship between the two.

Similarly, parents have cited bullying as a reason for non-attendance (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Malcolm et al., 2003), with studies suggesting that some parents view this as a reason to stay away from school. In one study that examined the views of 2000 parents across England (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005), a quarter felt that bullying would be a legitimate reason to keep their child away from school. A further 42% would consider the circumstances carefully before allowing their child to be absent. Meanwhile, in interviews with 17 parents of children with school refusal behaviours, Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg (2014b) found that one third of parents identified bullying as a contributory factor in their child's refusal behaviours and subsequent absences from school.

An important consideration here is whether attendance at school impacts friendships, friendships impact attendance or if the influence is bidirectional. If a child is not in school for an extended period of time, this may impact their relationships with peers, if only due to their lack of presence. Studies involving teachers (Wilson et al., 2008) and pupils (Malcolm et al., 2003), have identified that absence from school leads children and young people to have difficulty forming and maintaining friendships. There is also evidence from studies of poor school attenders and comparable groups of good attenders to indicate that absence from school leads to a reduction in the number of friends a child reports to have (Carroll, 2011). In Carroll's study, 140 primary school children defined as poor attenders (80% attendance or below) were asked, alongside a group of comparably better attenders, to name their best friend plus a further four friends in their class. Through analysis of this sociometric investigation, it was shown that poor attenders named fewer friends and were less likely to be chosen as a friend by their peers. The median number of choices received by better attenders was 4.4 whereas the poor attending group received a median of 2.8 choices.

Correlating with other study findings (Malcolm et al., 2003, Wilson et al., 2008), this may indicate that those who attend school more frequently have more friends. However, it is important to note the limitations of Carroll's (2011) study, including that it was cross-sectional in design and therefore did not negate the impact of other factors on the number of friends selected by participants. Further, by asking participants to identify names of friends with no follow-up to establish the actual nature of their relationship to that person, participants might have been at

risk of merely choosing individuals with whom they would like to be friends. Despite this, there are other studies that illustrate similar findings. For example Wilson et al. (2008) examined the views of primary and secondary parents, teachers and pupils across seven local authorities in England. They found that educational professionals expressed concern about the impact that absence had on children and young people's peer relationships and the ongoing impact this had on the child's school attendance. Meanwhile, in Malcolm and colleagues' (2003) study, children themselves cited being 'reluctant' to befriend a poor attender, stating there is 'no point if you don't see them' (p.24).

2.3.4 Relationships with Parents

Parents play an important role in their child's education and can have a positive influence on school completion (Kantova, 2024), motivation (Zellman and Waterman, 1998) and educational outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2021), particularly when there is focus on the quality of involvement (Moroni et al., 2015). In relation to school attendance, parental involvement has similarly been found to have a direct influence (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005). And yet, in a range of studies, it has been found that school staff often believe parents and carers to be at the root cause of a pupils' attendance difficulties (Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Reid, 2005b; Reid 2007). One UK study (Malcolm et al., 2003) found that, when interviewing teachers and support staff in school, the negative influence of home and family in relation to school attendance was referenced frequently by participants. Similarly, in a Swedish study involving 158 teachers, although there was agreement that problematic attendance was a multi-factorial problem, the participants concluded that those involving the family had the greatest influence on attendance (Gren-Landell et al., 2015). Further studies involving staff in various roles, from headteacher to family support worker, have elicited similar results. For example Reid's (2005b) study of 192 primary school staff members cited head teachers' perspectives on the role of parents in a child's absences from school. They referenced reasons such as 'family holidays during term time, poor parenting practice and skills, alcohol and drugs' as contributory factors (Reid, 2005b, p.66). Meanwhile, in their study involving 16 secondary school staff members working across a variety of roles in three schools, Finning et al. (2020) classified four themes relating to practitioners' beliefs about risk factors for attendance difficulties. These were defined under individual, family, school and peer factors that align similarly with findings of other studies (section 2.3). In their findings, the authors concluded that family life provides a key contribution to pupil attendance. Practitioners described how parents with dismissive attitudes towards

education, or those with low aspirations, made it more difficult to achieve positive attendance from pupils (Finning et al., 2020).

However, it should not be assumed that parents of poor attenders do not understand and value education. Studies have shown that parents, including those of children with problematic attendance, understand the value that attending school has on their child's life chances (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023; Malcolm et al., 2003). The two-phase design of Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) study involved a random sample of parents in the first stage, whilst in the second stage they involved only parents of children with poor school attendance. This methodology allowed the authors to compare the views of parents of children with both average and poor attendance. The findings from both stages were consistent in terms of parental perspectives and attitudes to school attendance. In their random sample of the general population, 96% of parents surveyed believed that regular attendance at school was important for children of all ages and with their sample of parents of poor attenders, findings were comparable. Further, interviews with parents demonstrated a common consensus that attendance at school was valuable and it was a parent's responsibility to ensure their child attended regularly. A more recent study by Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) drew similar conclusions. Despite the pandemic leading to a significant shift in parental attitudes to school attendance, there remained a general consensus that attendance was important. However, much like the findings of Dalziel and Henthorne (2005), attendance issues were perceived to be a problem for other parents, while their own child's absence was justified and reasonable.

These findings indicate it is too simple to determine the parents of poor attenders as being the cause of their child's attendance problems. On the contrary, it suggests that the relationship between parent and child in relation to school attendance is complicated, with many factors influencing the parent's role. There have been attempts to categorise these influences. In their study, Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) used the outcomes of their interviews to develop four categories of parental response:
- Parents who try hard
- Powerless parents
- Overprotective parents
- Apathetic parents

These categories attempted to capture parental behaviour, particularly in response to low attendance or requests for absence. Again though, this may present a potentially oversimplified

view, as parents are unlikely to be positioned neatly within one category. Other parental factors have been shown to have an impact on attendance at school, with pupils who have the lowest rates of attendance more likely to experience family separation (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001), parental conflict (Corville-Smith et al., 1998) and inconsistent or lax parental discipline (Gubbels et al., 2019). Studies (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Sheppard, 2007) have also indicated that pupils with low attendance are more likely to cite inconsistent responses from their parents regarding school absence. In one small scale study involving 57 12-13 year olds from across the UK, it was found that low attenders were more likely to receive an inconsistent response from a parent when a request was made to be absent (Sheppard, 2007), potentially reinforcing the differences in parental response captured in Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) study.

2.3.5 Connections Between Relationships and Belonging

The importance of belonging has been noted in relation to children's school, peer and adult relationships. Studies in the earlier sections of this chapter (section 2.3) have shown that where children and young people feel a sense of connection, safety and strength of relationship with the school environment and people in it, outcomes are more favourable (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Sims and Fisher, 2024). Belonging has been a feature of research since the 1950s, with studies indicating its importance for both physical and psychological health (Allen and Kern, 2017). Authors have defined belonging in slightly different ways (Allen et al., 2021), however common to all definitions is the importance of developing strong connections with the environment and people in it. Riley (2022, p.1) defines it as 'that sense of being somewhere you can be confident that you will fit in, a feeling of being safe in your identity and at home in a place.' Of key importance is the quality of relationships within the environment. As Allen and Kern (2017) explain, a sense of belonging does not necessarily relate to an individual's physical engagement with others, rather it focuses on the perceived quality of the relationship with the environment and the people in it. This is perhaps why Goodenow and Grady's (1993) definition remains favoured within the research community, as it focuses on 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment' (p.80), emphasising the importance of the individual's perception.

Belonging also features in many motivational, relational and sociological theories, from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), to Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and Bronfenbrenner's (2006) ecological model. Similarly, belonging is central to SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2017), where the term 'relatedness' is used to refer to an individual's sense of belonging to

the environment and people in it, determining this as integral to psychosocial wellbeing and autonomous function. As the theoretical underpinning of this study, SDT will be examined more closely in section 2.4. However, the presence of belonging in a wide range of theories suggests it is of significance to the individual and their successful functioning in the environment.

Research has identified many benefits to fostering a sense of belonging at all stages of life (Allen et al., 2018; Riley, 2022), particularly focusing on its impact on an individual's mental health and psychological wellbeing (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Conversely, an absence of belonging has been found to have negative effects (Allen and Kern, 2017), with strong evidence to indicate that social connection is closely linked to physical and mental health (Holt-Lunstad, 2018). In the context of education, belonging has been found to consist of a number of key components (Allen and Kern, 2017), including pupils' connection, attachment and bond with the environment and people in it. Hewitson (2021) outlines how belonging is vital in securing engagement and motivation in the learning process, while studies have also found that belonging has an important impact on academic outcomes (Goodenow, 1993; Pittman and Richmond, 2007, Riley, Coates and Allen, 2020), mental health and wellbeing (Allen et al., 2018).

In the context of attendance, the school environment is fundamental to establishing a sense of belonging. After all, it can be argued that belonging to the school environment must be initiated by being present, as it would be difficult to establish a sense of connection without attending in some way (Bowles and Scull, 2019). Belonging has been found to contribute towards decreasing school absences (Riley, Coates and Allen, 2020), supporting engagement and reducing the risk of drop out and participation in antisocial behaviour (Wang and Fredericks, 2014). As outlined earlier in the chapter, a recent study by Sims and Fisher (2024), that utilised survey data of over 30,000 children and young people, found that pupils with the highest rates of attendance scored consistently higher for belonging than those who experienced significant attendance difficulties. This emphasises the importance of belonging in fostering positive patterns of attendance.

While the child or young person's sense of belonging in school is made up of many different components, such as their peer interactions, the environment and learning, it has been identified that the relationship between pupils and their teachers is of particular importance in the development of belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Klem and Connell, 2004; Riley, Coates and

Allen, 2020). A key focus here is on the development of supportive and encouraging relationships which has been outlined earlier in the chapter. Consequently, belonging may be an important contributor to children's attendance at school, underpinned by their interactions with the environment and the people in it.

2.3.6 Reasons Children Provide for Attending School

Little has been written about children's motivations to attend school, which is why this research presents a novel examination of a frequently studied topic. One of the few studies to focus specifically on primary school pupils' attitudes towards school attendance in the UK was conducted by Reid and colleagues in 2010. Investigating the views of Key Stage 2 pupils in Wales, as part of a larger study commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, focus groups were conducted with 78 pupils aged 8-11 to explore their views and opinions on school attendance. The pupils represented the attendance range, with some high attenders participating alongside those with notably lower rates. This was particularly the case for those participants sampled from a pupil referral unit. The children were asked to consider a range of areas which included reasons for attending and the use of rewards and sanctions to support good attendance. All participants understood the implications of non-attendance and were aware of the benefits of attending, particularly referencing the correlation between education and future life chances. Participants in the study also demonstrated understanding of the legal implications of non-attendance, with Reid et al. (2010, p.472) commenting that 'the youngest pupils particularly seemed to fear the consequences of any absences for their parents or carers.'

A second key finding of this study related to friendships. Feedback from pupils in the study overwhelmingly identified friendship as highly valued in the context of attending school. This finding correlates with Davies and Lee's (2006) interviews with pupils in secondary school. 35 attending and 13 non-attending school pupils were interviewed, finding that, for both groups, school was commonly identified as a place to come and meet your friends. Similarly, Reid et al. (2010) found that primary aged children were able to recognise the impact of poor attendance on their friendships. This included parents preventing them from playing with the child or being moved away from a friend in the classroom. This focus on friendship was polarised by the finding that bullying was the reason most commonly associated with non-attendance, which correlates with the studies outlined earlier in this chapter (section 2.3.3).

Finally, in the study of Reid et al. (2010), the broader school context was identified, with participants citing positive relationships with teachers and the use of incentives within school as drivers to encourage attendance. It was commonly cited by participants that poor relationships with teachers and particularly, the presence of supply teachers, discouraged attendance. Much like other absence-focused research (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014a; Ingul et al., 2012), the children favoured empathetic and caring relationships with consistent adults. This indicates, as suggested earlier in the chapter, that teacher-pupil relationships may be key drivers for pupils attending school and may correlate with findings of other studies that report an association between teacher absence and truancy (Ervasti et al., 2012).

Reid and colleagues (2010) emphasise how this novel, relatively small-scale research in one area of the UK provided opportunity for further study. They noted the benefits of engaging with children directly regarding their attendance at school and encouraged further use of such methods to obtain pupils' perspectives. This was a novel study as, unlike others in the field, it placed greater emphasis on pupils' motivations to attend, rather than their reasons for absence. This encouraged me to proceed with this research, as the study demonstrated that children were able to engage in conversations about school attendance and, from the age of 8, appeared to have a good understanding of the value and importance of a school education. What this study (Reid et al., 2010) did not achieve was an in-depth examination of the motivators for attending school as it focused on a broad range of areas, including both motivators and barriers.

Consequently, my study aims to build upon the findings of Reid and colleagues' work. Their study provides some evidence to indicate that pupils may be influenced to attend school by a number of factors. My study aims to explore this further by only focusing on motivations to attend. By providing a small number of children with the opportunity to provide an initial response through drawing their motivators, followed by discussion in focus groups, a more detailed understanding is expected. With research being focused on reasons for absence for so long, we have neglected examining the reasons pupils have for wanting to attend which, according to Reid and colleagues' research (Reid et al., 2010), may be wide ranging and illuminating.

2.4 Motivation

As the current study aims to examine what motivates children to attend school, in addition to examining the factors influencing attendance, this chapter must also address the concept of motivation. Motivation can be defined as the process through which someone is prompted to take action of some kind (Ryan, Bradshaw and Deci, 2019; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Its origin is in the Latin for move and can be any intrinsic or extrinsic force that leads to a behaviour or action. The topic of motivation is of significant interest in a wide range of contexts, across all areas of life, including sport (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2007), work (Gagné, 2014) and education (Theobald, 2006), where motivation and learning have been frequently studied. Across these fields and more, it is a topic of great interest to those who want to find the best ways of motivating their athletes, employees and pupils. Historically, motivation was more closely aligned to the environment than the individual, with an emphasis on the impact of external forces on behaviour. Early behaviourist principles proposed by psychologists and philosophers such as Pavlov (1941), Watson (Malone, 2014) and Skinner (1968) suggested that it was the environment rather than the individual which led to action. In particular, Skinner (1968) focused on the use of positive and negative reinforcement, arguing that if a child received positive reinforcement, they would repeat the behaviour. The emphasis on motivation through an external reinforcement structure was prominent across the literature in the field, yet neglected the inner motivations of the child. Many have criticised this approach (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Robins, 2012; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004), arguing that the overuse of extrinsic motivators and rewards can diminish the intrinsic value of the task. Individuals may be at risk of losing sight of the intrinsic benefits of completion and experience diminished intrinsic motivation once the reward has been claimed or removed (Deci, 1972; Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 2001).

Over time, a growing number of authors looked more holistically at the factors influencing motivation, questioning the idea that people were solely influenced by extrinsic factors. Harlow's experiments with rhesus monkeys (Harlow, 1950) challenged this perspective by observing that the animals appeared to be completing a task without external reward. Not only that, but they returned to the task having already completed it. He concluded that the monkeys were intrinsically motivated by their engagement in the puzzle, leading them to complete it multiple times to improve their efficiency. It did not take long for these findings to be considered by others in the field of human motivation. For example, Deci's (1972) early research into the

effects of rewards on intrinsic motivation found that those who were not being paid to participate in a task displayed more persistence towards completion. Further studies and meta-analyses have since provided weight to this perspective (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Deci and Ryan, 1985), suggesting that extrinsic motivation has an impact on an individual's longer term intrinsic motivations (Howard et al., 2021). It has however been shown that the nature of this influence can be dependent on the way in which the reward is used. Ryan, Mims and Koestner (1983) described the difference between these by identifying whether tangible extrinsic motivation, such as rewards, were contingent on the task or determined by performance. Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) took this further by distinguishing a difference between whether the reward was dependent on task completion or not, leading to the development of six ways in which a reward could be given. While this research established that rewards could be dependent on different factors, there remains evidence to indicate that all forms can have a detrimental impact on long term intrinsic motivation.

In practice, rewards are frequently used in the classroom. In the context of school attendance, primary and secondary schools in England commonly use rewards and incentives to promote and improve attendance, however there is limited evidence of their efficacy (Balu and Ehrlich, 2018; EEF, 2022; Young, Connolly Sollose and Carey, 2020), and they may even have a demotivating effect in the long term (Robinson et al., 2019). While children appear to value and enjoy rewards for attendance (Reid et al., 2010), this does not necessarily translate to improvements in actual attendance rates (EEF, 2022). As a school leader, I saw first-hand the use of rewards for school attendance and have, at times, questioned their effectiveness. My initial reading into the impact of rewards on intrinsic motivation, also prompted me to make connections with the focus of this study. Interestingly, participants in Reid and colleagues' study (Reid et al., 2010) identified a range of rewards and sanctions for attendance but the authors did not appear to explore whether this motivated pupils to attend or not. This is something this study will seek to examine further, by inviting pupils to identify and describe what motivates them to attend.

Should an interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors be influential in terms of motivation (Sansone and Harackiewicz, 2000), consideration must be given to theories that include a focus on this. Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, though initially developed around the same time as Harlow's work, considered motivation differently. Maslow proposed that an individual is motivated by a hierarchical set of factors. At first, Maslow asserted that the lower

levels of the hierarchy needed to be met before an individual would be motivated by needs further up. Over time, this view has shifted as studies have shown that the hierarchical structure is not as straightforward as initially presented. For example, Tay and Diener (2011) found that in the event of basic needs being unmet, an individual will focus on these. However it does not preclude activity in the other levels of the hierarchy at the same time. Therefore an individual may be homeless but there is still the potential for them to feel a sense of belonging in their relationships. They found this was particularly the case for participants living in environments where basic needs were unlikely to be fully met due to high levels of deprivation. In these instances, psychosocial needs emerging from relationships were more likely to be fulfilled first.

I considered the contribution of Maslow's theory to the field of education. Maslow posited that an individual's motivation is based upon the extent to which their needs are met. In the context of education, teachers strive to meet the needs of their pupils. Increasingly, this includes even the most basic needs, such as food and clothing, as levels of poverty increase across England (National Education Union, 2022). Maslow's theory proposed that if basic needs are not met, a child will struggle to focus on their education. However, could it be the case that children attend school because the environment enables the fulfilment of these needs? Earlier in the chapter, factors influencing attendance were explored. The common theme connecting these was an individual's needs. If a need is not met, this may contribute towards absence from school. Therefore a child's attendance at school may indicate that the environment meets their needs.

Drawing upon the work of Harlow (1950) and Harlow, Blazek and McClearn (1956) and early work by Deci (1971); Ryan, Deci and their colleagues began to explore the impact of different forms of motivation. This was the origin of SDT. Deci (1971; 1972) concluded that people may be influenced by extrinsic rewards but that the impact, although efficacious in the first instance, may diminish. Over time, Deci and Ryan found that participants in studies were frequently influenced by their own interest in the task rather than by the external rewards offered (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). Despite some of the controversy around the effect of intrinsic motivation (Cameron and Pierce, 1994 cited in Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 2001), cognitive evaluation theory, a mini theory of SDT, gained pace. Central to this component of the theory is the careful examination of how extrinsic factors, such as incentives, influence intrinsic motivation. This was the beginning of what has been described as a Copernican turn (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan et al., 2021), shifting the perspective towards seeing people as active influencers in their lives and motivations. These early findings have since shaped thinking around the concepts of intrinsic

and extrinsic motivation (Sansone and Tang, 2021) and is the reason I have chosen to draw upon SDT in the context of research that explores children's motivations to take action and attend school.

2.4.1 Self Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT acknowledges the work of Maslow, Harlow and behaviourist principles but gives consideration to the psychological drivers of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1991; Ryan, Bradshaw and Deci, 2019; Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). The theory is distinctive because it emphasises the way in which intrinsic and extrinsic forces interact alongside an individual's basic human needs. The theory comes from a position of organismic dialectalism which assumes that all people have agency and are active drivers of their growth and development (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This is in contrast to the behaviourist principles of Watson (Malone, 2014) and Skinner (1968), who argued that human beings are controlled by the environment and influenced by the external reinforcements they receive. SDT argues that, in order to maintain motivation and drive, people require fulfilment of basic psychological needs. While others, such as Maslow (Maslow and Frager, 1987) and Hull (1943), have considered the fulfilment of needs, they have prioritised physiological requirements. By contrast, SDT focuses on psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Supporting these needs is proposed to result in optimal functioning, increased levels of wellbeing and motivation. Conversely, where these needs are not met, individuals are at risk of poor wellbeing and suboptimal functioning.

SDT is broad in its scope, with six mini theories that define and explain each aspect of the motivational theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017). While a detailed analysis of each mini theory is outside the scope of this research, table 2.4 summarises how each theory contributes towards the central tenets of SDT. This is important because components from each of these mini theories contribute to the focus on my project. This is also summarised for reference within the table so readers can develop a better understanding of how the study relates to aspects of the theory.

Table 2.4: Summary of mini theories and their relationship to the the research study focus		
Mini Theory Name	**Summary**	**Link to this project**
Mini Theory 1: Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)	CET focuses on the influence of intrinsic motivation and the way in which this motivation can be influenced by external forces (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999). It also focuses on how forces that impact feelings of autonomy and competence influence intrinsic motivation. In this sense, it explores the relationship between the nature of the individual and the influence of the social environment; the impact of inter- and intra-personal relationships.	My project aims to identify what motivates children to want to attend school. Through children's descriptions, I also examine the participants' relationship with their environment and how this influences their motivation to attend.
Mini Theory 2: Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)	Unlike the first mini theory, OIT (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023) explores the role of different forms of extrinsic motivation and the way in which they influence volitional function. The forms of extrinsic motivation differ by the extent to which they are internally regulated. This means that an individual may be motivated by an extrinsic force but the extent to which that motivation is internally regulated by the individual will determine the extent to which the action is autonomous.	There is evidence to indicate that children's attendance at school is influenced by a wide range of factors. My study aims to examine what extrinsic factors may motivate a child to attend school and to develop an understanding of the extent to which those extrinsic factors are integrated into the child's autonomous function.
Mini Theory 3: Causality Orientation Theory (COT)	This part of the theory examines how individuals respond differently to others and their environments. It suggests that an individual may develop long-term orientations. For example, some individuals may demonstrate control oriented behaviours that respond to reward and consequence, as opposed to others who may be more autonomous in their actions (Deci and Ryan, 1985).	This study examines the descriptions of individual participants. Through these descriptions, it may be possible to identify whether some participants reflect a particular alignment with more autonomous or externally regulated forms of motivation.

Mini Theory Name	Summary	Link to this project
Mini Theory 4: Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)	A key mini-theory, BPNT identifies the three key psychological nutriments of autonomy, competence and relatedness as key contributors to volitional functioning, wellbeing and health (Ryan, 1995). This mini theory argues that we should focus on creating environments and interactions that foster and support these needs being met.	By talking to the children in this study, I aim to explore the extent to which their interactions with people and the school environment support intrinsic motivation by fostering autonomy, competence and relatedness. Do the children's descriptions of what motivates them to attend school suggest that these factors support the fulfilment of basic psychological needs as identified by BPNT?
Mini Theory 5: Goal Contents Theory (GCT)	This aspect of SDT draws together the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, by considering the importance of goals. Goals may be intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, with the theory examining how goals can impact outcomes differently depending on their origin (Ryan et al., 1996). An orientation towards intrinsic goals, such as building relationships and a sense of belonging, have been found to have a more positive impact over extrinsic goals, such as academic outcomes and financial gain (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010), as they provide greater satisfaction of basic needs.	As this study seeks to understand what motivates children to attend school, there will be exploration into what it is that drives them and why. This is an important distinction. For example - a child may be motivated to attend school by a personal goal. Conversely, they may be motivated by an extrinsic goal.

Mini Theory Name	Summary	Link to this project
Mini Theory 6: Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT)	This aspect of SDT gives particular attention to the importance of relationships. Building and maintaining strong, positive relationships fosters a sense of relatedness to individuals and the environment (Deci and Ryan, 2014), which helps to satisfy one of SDT's basic psychological needs. Relationships that support these three needs are the highest quality.	Section 2.3 of the literature review considered the valuable role of parental, school and peer relationships in children's school attendance. Positive relationships have been found to support improved attendance and outcomes for children and young people. Through this study, I explore the extent to which participants' relationships with their peers, parents and teachers influence their motivation to attend school.

There are key features of SDT that are important to highlight. Firstly, SDT focuses on the relationship between intrinsic motivation, different forms of extrinsic motivation and how these relate to and influence the fulfilment of psychological needs. There is recognition that both the type and quality of motivation will influence the individual in different ways (Vansteenkiste et al., 2009). This is in contrast to other motivational theories, such as self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggest that merely increasing the amount of motivation will have a more desirable effect on the individual. SDT considers the quality of motivation along a continuum, from the most to least autonomous forms (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). Note here that the theory separates extrinsic motivation into four forms. Thus, although an individual may be motivated by an external force, their decision to act will be more or less volitional depending on the extent to which the locus of causality is internally regulated (Ryan and Connell, 1989). What this means is that an individual may integrate an extrinsic motivator into their values system that will lead them to act volitionally. Conversely, if the perceived locus of causality is external, their decision to act will be as a result of compliance.

In an educational context, there is significant evidence to indicate that motivation driven by internal causality has positive effects on engagement (Froiland and Worrell, 2016), outcomes (Ryan and Deci, 2020) and reduced absence and drop-out from school (Vallerand and Bissonnette, 1992). This is not to suggest that extrinsic forms of motivation are inherently negative in outcome. On the contrary, there is evidence to indicate that, in very specific circumstances, identified regulation (Howard et al., 2021; Losier and Koestner, 1999) and externally regulated approaches (Koretz, 2017), have yielded positive results. It is however

suggested that this may yield fewer positive effects in the long term leading to a reduction in the effect of intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972; Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 2001). Through this model, SDT seeks to explain the way in which an individual is driven to act and the extent to which their interactions with others and their environment contributes to volitional action. The theory proposes that while some factors will support autonomous function, others will undermine it. Environments and relationships that meet an individual's needs for feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness are associated with increased volitional function (Chen et al., 2015), with an emphasis on the extent to which needs are satisfied rather than their relative strength.

Despite significant evidence (see Deci and Ryan, 2017 for a summary) to support the propositions of SDT and it becoming a prominent motivational theory (Koole et al., 2019), there remain critics. Those in support of behaviourist principles provide weight to the opposing argument, particularly in relation to the influence of extrinsic reward and control on volitional functioning and intrinsic motivation. Behaviourist principles are, by design, focused on the role extrinsic forces have on an individual, rather than giving attention to autonomous decision-making. Other critics have focused on Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) and the way in which the forms of extrinsic motivation are described (Chemolli and Gagné, 2014; Sheldon et al., 2017). Chemolli and Gagné (2014) provide multiple examples, suggesting inconsistencies in the literature. Further, they argue that the development of the continuum on which the forms of regulation are organised is unhelpful and misleading. They contend that the evidence indicates that motivation differs in kind more than the degree to which they are self-determined. Therefore, they should not be considered along a continuum. Further, they suggest use of a continuum implies that more autonomous forms of motivation lead to different levels of the same outcome, despite research indicating that the varied forms of regulatory style actually elicit different outcomes (Chemolli and Gagné, 2014). Ryan and Deci (2017) provide confident evidence to counter this perspective, providing a broad range of studies to support the continuum model, citing the work of Ryan and Connell (1989) and Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992), among others.

2.4.2 Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) and Motivation

As explored in section 2.4, intrinsic motivation is preferable as it encompasses behaviours that are self-regulated and enacted autonomously. However SDT recognises that an individual will not always be fortunate enough to act purely for the satisfaction of doing so. Organismic

Integration Theory (OIT) carefully examines the role of extrinsic motivation by defining the extent to which those extrinsic forces are internalised (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023). This means, the extent to which the extrinsic motivator becomes internally regulated and autonomously enacted by the individual.

This mini theory contributed towards the development of the autonomy-control continuum that was introduced in section 2.4.1 of this chapter. The continuum is separated into three key sections: amotivation, forms of extrinsic motivation and forms of intrinsic motivation. Alongside these three categories is a behaviour scale which reflects the extent to which the behaviour is self-determined. This is where SDT differs from other motivational theories. When an individual is intrinsically motivated, their behaviours are at their most autonomous (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2019; Ryan et al., 2021). They act out of interest, enjoyment and willing engagement, gaining a sense of satisfaction from their actions. One might assume that extrinsic motivation is the opposite but this is not the case. There are four identified forms of extrinsic motivation and although they are all characterised by action for an external response, they are not all controlled in their form. This means that although the individual may be motivated by external factors, the action may still be carried out volitionally.

OIT views extrinsic motivation differently from previous research which has concluded that extrinsic motivation cannot be autonomous. Instead, OIT uses internalisation to describe the extent to which an individual gains intrinsic value from the action (Ryan and Deci, 2019; Vansteekiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010) and integrates these into their own values and beliefs (Ryan, Connell and Deci, 1985). To illustrate the difference between external and integrated regulation, we refer to two working adults. Adult one may attend work solely for the money. This would be indicative of an *externally regulated* form of motivation with an absence of autonomy. Much like Skinner's (1968) description of operant conditioning, the person is only motivated due to the offer of a reward, in this case financial. Meanwhile, adult two knows they are making a difference and can see the value of their contribution despite not feeling a sense of inherent joy from their role. This also represents a form of extrinsic motivation but what differs here is the individual's ownership of their behaviours. There is a degree of autonomy through *integrated regulation.* It is however important to note that although extrinsically motivated behaviour can be integrated by the individual and performed volitionally, they are still responding to an external influence so this cannot be considered a form of intrinsic motivation (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010).

In addition to these two forms of extrinsic motivation, there are a further two categories: *introjected regulation and identified regulation.* Whilst introjected regulation may be observed when someone is motivated based on self-control or ego (a form of external regulation) (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan, 1982), identified regulation is indicative of someone who is somewhat internally regulated, potentially by being motivated through an awareness of their personal value to the task. Amotivation is defined as the least self-determined form. It is characterised by an absence of motivation to participate in any task (Deci and Ryan, 1985), with the individual demonstrating a lack of insight into the relationship between an action and its outcomes and value (Poulsen, Rodger and Ziviani, 2006; Ryan and Deci, 2020; Vallerand and Bissonnette, 1992). It is important to note that amotivation is not comparable to demotivation, which is characterised by a reduction in motivation. Demotivation is often caused by external factors impacting an individual's level of initial motivation, while amotivation is unrelated to this because it is characterised by an absence of motivation altogether (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

Describing the different forms of motivations positioned along the continuum may imply that, for each action taken, an individual is motivated by a single factor that is representative of one form of motivation. However, it must be noted that a person can be influenced by different forms of motivation simultaneously. Ryan and Deci (2020, p.2) describe how behaviours are often 'multiply motivated', with the most intentional behaviours being influenced by intrinsic motivation and integrated forms of extrinsic motivation concurrently. This again highlights the complexity of motivation, demonstrating that a person's actions may be influenced by a variety of motivational factors at any one point in time.

Having identified earlier in the chapter that a range of factors influence school attendance (section 2.3), I felt this drew parallels to the principles of multiple motivation and the motivation continuum. From the studies examined, it seems that intrinsic and extrinsic factors may interact simultaneously to influence attendance behaviours. Therefore, I wondered whether it could be the case that participants in my study may identify multiple motivators that were representative of the categories defined by Ryan and Deci's (2000a) continuum. To illustrate this, table 2.5 provides an example of what each type of motivation could look like in the context of school attendance. It shows how different reasons for school attendance could be categorised by the form of motivation driving the action. These reasons were derived from the literature examined

earlier in the chapter, alongside those provided by pupils in my own prior professional experience.

Table 2.5: Exemplification of motivation types in the context of motivations to attend school					
Amotivation	Forms of extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	
Pupils do not understand why they attend school and do not attribute value to it.	Pupils attend school because they know that they, or their parents, will receive a punishment if they do not/ they will receive a reward if they do.	Pupils attend school because if they do not, they will feel as though they have disappointed their parents or the school.	Pupils attend school because they want to secure a good job when they are older and perceive that attending will support them in achieving that aim.	Pupils attend school because they have a deep understanding of the benefits which are embedded in their values and life meaning.	Pupils attend school because they gain pleasure and enjoyment from being there.
Continuum derived from Ryan and Deci (2000a)					

2.4.3 Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

SDT, much like the theories of Maslow (1943; Maslow and Frager, 1987) and Rogers (1963), determines that individuals are born with an innate motivation to engage with their environment, learn and develop (Deci and Ryan 1985; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009). Maslow (1943) postulated that people were driven by a hierarchy of needs, with physiological needs being the most potent. Conversely, Rogers (1963) identified four key needs that were belonging, self esteem, freedom and safety. His theory was underpinned by the idea that a person needed to look inward to identify barriers to their development.

Demonstrating some commonality with both Maslow and Rogers' theories, SDT aligns with the idea that motivation is influenced by needs but rather than physiological, the theory's foundations are psychological, concluding that three needs are crucial to determining an individual's motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000a; Vallerand, 2021) and wellbeing (Tay and Diener, 2011). While Rogers (1959) concluded that for a person to thrive, they required environmental factors of openness, acceptance and empathy, SDT considers autonomy, competence and

relatedness as the key nutriments (or needs) for volitional functioning. The theory proposes that these needs are crucial to the healthy development and performance of individuals across age, country and culture (Chen et al., 2015; Ryan, 1995; Ryan and Deci, 2008; Vansteenkiste and Ryan, 2013).

Autonomy is defined as the capacity to make one's own decisions and act volitionally, with an absence of coercion or control (Ryan and Deci 2020). Autonomy continues to be the most controversial of the three needs, although there is argument that this is due to a misunderstanding of what autonomy is (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). As Van den Broeck and colleagues emphasise, it is not about a person acting independently of others. Rather, it concerns an individual's sense of volition and choice in their decision-making. While there is no hierarchy of needs within the SDT framework, the theory proposes that fulfilment of each of the needs is aided through autonomy support (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This means that autonomy supportive environments will also have an effect on perceived competence and feelings of relatedness (Howard, Slemp and Wang, 2024).

Defined as a sense of confidence in one's engagement with the demands and expectations of the environment, competence is associated with a feeling of being able or even feeling expert in one's actions (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Sheldon and Filak, 2010). Competence is supported in environments where the individual is provided with the right amount of challenge and feedback to support growth and development (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

The third need is relatedness, which is characterised by strong relationships with the environment and people in it (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Deep connections and trust, obtained through warm and supportive connections, are central to someone feeling related to their environment (Poulsen, Rodger and Ziviani, 2006). Many theorists have identified relatedness as a key contributor to human needs (Bowlby, 1973; Maslow, 1943), recognising the impact of social relationships in the environment on an individual's success, motivation and wellbeing. What is distinctive about relatedness in the context of SDT is that while other theories define relationships as having extrinsic value, SDT focuses on the value of relationships for their own sake (Ryan and Deci, 2017). These relationships can be both strengthened or undermined by individuals and their environments.

2.4.4 Needs Supportive Environments and Motivation

If it is the case that these needs are crucial to an individual's growth and development, how can we ensure they are met? BPNT proposes that both the structure and people within an individual's environment make a significant contribution to this (Rocchi et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2017), emphasising that environments that support these needs will lead to greater volitional functioning, higher degrees of intrinsic motivation and improved wellbeing (Ryan, 1995; Ryan and Deci, 2000b, Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). By contrast, environments where these needs are unmet or limited are described as needs thwarting and can lead to unhappiness, a reduction in feelings of wellbeing and controlled motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000b). There has been much research examining needs supportive environments and their impact on motivation (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989; Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2019), across a wide range of contexts. Much of this research has focused on the impact of autonomy support (Ryan and Deci, 2017). However, as it is the case that autonomy supportive environments have been found to have a positive impact on all three needs (Ryan and Deci, 2017), this is perhaps unsurprising.

2.4.5 SDT and the Classroom

There is a rapidly expanding evidence base that makes the connection between needs-supportive school environments and positive pupil outcomes, particularly focusing on the beneficial effects of more autonomous forms of motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2020) or a more supportive, motivating teaching style (Reeve, 2009). Central to SDT is the proposition that to foster intrinsic motivation, teachers need to ensure they are creating an environment that supports rather than thwarts pupils' needs. Just as needs thwarting parenting approaches are seen to have a negative impact on children and young people, the same can be said for teachers. Much research has been conducted on the impact of autonomy supportive teaching practices (Aelterman et al., 2019; Reeve and Cheon, 2021), with recent reviews and studies demonstrating the relationship between these approaches and positive outcomes for pupils (Gustavsson et al., 2016; Reeve, 2009; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). But what are the indicators of a needs supportive classroom? Such approaches, according to Ryan and Deci (2020), primarily involve giving pupils meaningful choices and ownership, in addition to demonstrating a responsiveness to their needs and perspectives in the teaching strategies deployed.

Other authors emphasise the importance of bringing pupil choice into the structure of the lesson, as this increases pupils' feelings of autonomous self-regulation (Reeve et al., 2014). Ryan and Grolnick (1986) explored this in a study with 140 primary aged participants from the United States, using the Origin Climate Questionnaire (deCharms, 1976). The origin climate is described as one where autonomy and acceptance is achieved within a consistent, structured environment (Ryan and Grolnick, 1986). The questionnaire was followed by a writing task that required the participants to write a story about what was happening in a given image of a generic classroom scene. Applying the two-stage design, the study found that children who perceived their classrooms to be origin promoting (autonomy supportive), were more intrinsically motivated and had a higher sense of self worth. Additionally, the writing task revealed that participants who perceived their own classrooms to be autonomy supportive were more likely to write stories that included positive, motivated characters. Conversely, participants who perceived their own classrooms as needs thwarting resulted in stories with controlling teachers and discontent protagonists.

While this study suggests the potential benefits of autonomy supportive environments for pupils, the balance between structure and control has also been identified. Controlling behaviours have been seen as unhelpful because they oppose autonomous regulation, create stress, anxiety and frustration (Reeve and Tseng, 2011; Soenens and Vansteenkiste, 2010). Structure however is a powerful tool for teachers and should not be seen as opposing autonomy support. Instead, 'they can and should exist side by side in mutually supportive ways' (Reeve, 2002, p.193). Structure may include components such as clear goals, guidance and helpful feedback (Reeve, 2006), whereas in contrast, controlling behaviours may include the placing of demands, commands and coercion. Reeve (2002) categorised 22 potential differences between autonomy supportive and controlling teacher behaviours, indicating the difficulty in identifying what autonomy supportive teachers do to secure favourable outcomes for their pupils. Reeve (2002) pointed out the obstacles in achieving this, drawing on 11 factors that may lead to a teacher displaying controlling behaviours in the classroom. These ranged from knowledge and training to personal perspectives and social expectations. Alongside an autonomy supportive environment, relatedness (one of the three psychological needs identified by SDT) has been found to have a positive effect on school attendance (Chang et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020). Studies have shown that children who have strong relationships, a sense of safety and value within the environment are more connected to it (Chang et al., 2019; Kearney, 2008a). It may therefore be the case that we need to look more closely at culture as a driver to securing positive attendance

outcomes (Jackson et al., 2020), especially with reports revealing that in schools where students feel an increased sense of connectedness to the environment and staff, absence is reduced (Apter and Whitney, 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020).

2.4.6 SDT and Rewards

As outlined earlier in the chapter, rewards are commonly used as a motivator for school attendance despite the evidence for their use being relatively weak (EEF, 2022). In the context of SDT, rewards are generally representative of a form of externally regulated motivation. The role of rewards is addressed in the first mini theory - Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) - that seeks to explain the influence of external factors on intrinsic motivation. The theory suggests that forms of extrinsic motivation which impact an individual's intrinsic motivation by diminishing feelings of autonomy and competence, will likely inhibit it in the long term (Deci, 1972; Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 2001).

This aspect of SDT has proved controversial since its inception, particularly within the context of extrinsic rewards. In 2001, Cameron, Banko and Pierce identified two meta-analytic studies of hundreds of articles which have led to conflicting views on whether rewards have a negative effect on the individual. From their analysis, they concluded that extrinsic rewards did not, over all, have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation. Twenty years later, Ryan and Deci (2017) acknowledge this complexity, clarifying that while early studies focused on the negative impacts on tangible rewards, later work has recognised the relationships between the reward and the meaning attributed to it by the individual.

Findings from one large scale study of high school students in the United States (Robinson et al., 2019) found that both retrospective and prospective rewards for attendance resulted in pupils attending school less in the month following the reward. They inferred that the reward itself may have given students the impression that high levels of attendance were exceptional. This, in turn, may have impacted the participants' intrinsic motivation, leading to a decrease in overall attendance (Robinson et al., 2019). Further studies have shown similar results, identifying the importance of intrinsic motivation and a sense of belonging for sustainable attendance and engagement in school (Tyler, 2008; Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997).

One study (Sims and Fisher, 2024), that surveyed over 30,000 secondary school aged pupils and analysed the attendance records of more than 200,000, found that belonging was a central

feature in the attendance patterns of those surveyed. They identified that pupils with the lowest rates of school attendance reported a lower score for belonging. With these patterns replicated in a number of different question areas, the study also found that female pupils' sense of belonging was likely to be weaker than that of their male peers, which may be attributed to increased friendship issues for females in key stage 4 and that female students report feeling less safe in school. In parallel with this, the study also found that pupils' understanding of the implications and consequences of non-attendance did not lead to improved attendance but understanding the relationship between the school, peers, teachers and pupils was much more important, emphasising the importance of intrinsic factors over external rewards, consequences and sanctions.

Therefore, if intrinsic forms of motivation are most effective, this may demonstrate why punitive and reward- based strategies to support regular attendance are largely ineffective. There is also an indication that high attenders may be more likely to demonstrate autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation, such as in Sheppard's (2009) study which found that high attenders, although just as likely to avoid school-work as low attenders, cited their reasons for completing work as related to the values of education and their future career opportunities.

2.4.7 SDT, Parental Support and Motivation

Parental support plays an important role in a child or young person's motivation. Self-determination theory indicates that parental support impacts the child's feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness to their environment (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) which, in turn, influences their motivation due to their psychological needs being met. Studies have shown that parents influence motivation to achieve at school (Vasquez et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2022), including during periods of lockdown when pupils were learning at home. Although it is suggested that parental involvement in school is multifactorial, debated and not always helpful (Grolnick and Pomerantz, 2022), there is evidence to indicate that parents can have a positive impact on pupils' motivation for engagement and achievement (Barger et al., 2019; Cheung and Pomerantz, 2012; Ricard and Pelletier, 2016). For example, although outcomes of the meta-analysis conducted by Bargar et al. (2019) were varied and effect sizes were small, there was evidence that support from parents can influence motivation and offer support more widely. Aligned with the tenets of SDT, these studies have however found that the support must be appropriately targeted to secure positive effects for the child.

Ryan and Deci (2017) describe this as autonomy supportive and controlling parenting behaviours, with the latter likely to have an adverse effect on a child's motivation. Autonomy supportive parenting may be indicated by positive encouragement, support and joy at being involved in supporting a child. Conversely, controlling behaviours are characterised by frustration, anxiety and negativity, that may have a direct influence on the child's confidence, motivation and perceived competence (Ryan and Deci, 2017). These parental behaviours can influence a child's long term outlook on education, negatively affecting their motivation and achievement (Wu et al., 2022). The autonomy supportive approach is a key element of positive parenting from the perspective of SDT. Grolnick et al. (2014) characterised autonomy supportive parenting as an approach that encourages independence and shared responsibility. Much research in this area acknowledges the positive influence of autonomy supportive parenting on attitudes and achievement at school (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989; Vasquez et al., 2015). Pre-pandemic, much of this involvement would have been related to homework completion. However, during extended periods of school closure due to the pandemic, many more parents were at home with their children whilst they were engaged in a broader range of school learning and activities.

2.5 Chapter Summary

Attendance at school is an important predictor of positive outcomes, both academically (DfE, 2016b) and socially (Carroll, 2010; Malcolm et al., 2003). Whereas, by contrast, absence from school increases an individual's risk of lower attainment (Attwood and Croll, 2015; DfE, 2016b; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022; Pellegrini, 2007), social difficulties (DfE and MoJ, 2022; Flaherty, Sutphen and Ely, 2012; Rocque et al., 2017) and mental health problems (Finning, Ford and Moore, 2022). This chapter has explored a range of factors identified by other studies as affecting school attendance. Problematic definitions, the current national picture of attendance in primary and secondary schools and attempts that have been made to secure improvements in attendance, all point towards a difficult situation that needs to be addressed. The chapter has concluded that while there has been much research into the reasons for non-attendance, studies into what motivates children to attend are limited and this gap should be explored.

In 2006, Davies and Lee argued that 'ignoring the reasons why such students actually attend school is a major oversight in current research' (Davies and Lee, 2006, p.204). Despite this,

there has been little research from this perspective in the intervening years. For secondary aged pupils, Davies and Lee's (2006) research demonstrated the importance of respectful adult relationships and strong bonds with peers as determinants of school attendance. The participants also demonstrated an understanding of the benefits of attending school for future life chances and what they saw as valuable curriculum experiences. Reid et al. (2010) provided similar insight into the views and experiences of primary aged pupils. Much like their contemporaries in secondary school, they identified the value of relationships. However, they were also able to see the importance of school for the future. While rewards and recognition for attendance were welcomed, they did not provide the primary reason to attend. Although both of these studies examined the reasons children and young people may be motivated to attend school, this was not their sole purpose. The current study aimed to build on these findings by focusing solely on what motivates children to attend school. The two stage design of my project offered an in-depth look at what motivates a sample of primary aged pupils to attend school.

Applying the principles of SDT, this chapter has also sought to explain the importance of motivation in the context of school attendance and, more broadly, in relation to an individual's healthy and full development (Ryan and Deci, 2008). The chapter has demonstrated a potential relationship between the key tenets of SDT and the reasons pupils may be motivated to attend or be absent from school. It may be the case that fulfilment of psychological needs, as proposed by BPNT, contribute to children's motivation to attend school, while the autonomy-control continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) may enable me to provide explanations for the varied forms of motivation that influence the participants. These connections will be used to support the analysis of the current study's findings, in order to ascertain whether an association can be made between children's self-described motivation for attending school and these aspects of SDT. In the next chapter, I outline the methodology of the project. Ethical considerations, data collection and analysis approaches are discussed, with the aim of providing clarity on the steps that were taken to obtain data pertaining to the research question and objectives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

As outlined in chapter two, studies on school attendance have frequently focused on absence, with much writing about the multitude of reasons for this. These studies have been far reaching, exploring the views of school leaders (Reid, 2005b), teachers (Davies and Lee, 2006; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005b), parents (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b) and pupils (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid et al., 2010). However, few studies have documented the reasons that individuals may be motivated to attend, which is why the current study focuses on this. Initially I had considered examining the experiences of pupils in primary and secondary schools, across four academic year groups. I anticipated this would provide me with the opportunity to examine the difference in children's perspectives based on their age and stage of education. It quickly became apparent that I would struggle to obtain gatekeeper access to the schools in my selected areas. The large secondary environments were busy and only seeking a small sample of participants made it difficult to identify a school willing to participate.

While in time I would like to examine this issue across a broad range of ages and stages in education, I therefore chose to focus on primary aged pupils. On reflection, this was a very positive decision. The reasons for this were threefold. Firstly, I wanted to be respectful to the participants, giving their contributions time and energy. I was aware of the constraints of doctoral research and recognised that I may lack capacity working with a larger number of participants. Secondly, my professional experience had all been situated within the primary setting and was ultimately where the motivation to initiate this research came from. I understand the context of the primary school environment and pupils. Qualitative researchers engage in a process of social interaction with the school environment (Korstjens and Moser, 2017), therefore I anticipated that my knowledge and confidence in this context would be of benefit to the relationship building process and research endeavour as a whole. Finally, while the data indicates that attendance difficulties peak in the secondary phase (DfE, 2022d; Sims and Fisher, 2024), studies have shown that patterns of attendance are often established at primary school (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2002; Schoeneberger, 2012). This provided a strong rationale for a primary aged focus, as outcomes of the research could be used to support work in the primary sector which may, in turn, impact pupils in the secondary phase.

In light of these decisions, this chapter outlines the methodological approach for the research, underpinned by my theoretical framework and personal approach as a researcher. It discusses my ontological and epistemological standpoints, clarifying my approach and positionality as a researcher. The aim of this study was not to prove a hypothesis through the application of a replicable quantitative study. Rather, I endeavoured to interpret the views and perspectives of the individual participants involved. This chapter demonstrates how my methodological approach aligned with an interpretative position and was situated within a social constructivist framework.

3.1 Researcher Outlook and Position

My interest in this study was driven by my work in schools over the last decade and I recognise these experiences influence my research in the field. During this time, I have experienced the challenges of school attendance from the position of class teacher, middle leader, senior leader and headteacher. As a class teacher I worked with many children for whom attendance at school presented a challenge. The reasons for these difficulties were often complex and mirrored those that have been identified in studies discussed in chapter two. I noted that those who attended school less regularly than their peers sometimes found themselves in a pattern of non-attendance that, as Reid (2005a; 2005b) and Zhang (2003) point out, was often well-established by the time they left primary school and continued into their secondary education. Conversely, children who attended regularly appeared to exhibit stronger relationships with their peers and reported increased enjoyment and motivation in school activities and learning (Chen et al., 2010; Molloy et al., 2011; Ricard and Pelletier, 2016). I realised the questions often asked when a child was having attendance difficulties centred around their reasons for absence, rather than seeking to understand what would motivate them to attend. This became the seed from which my interest in this research grew. I started to consider whether we could be looking at the topic of school attendance from an alternative perspective and whether strengthening positive motivation for attending school could be a more powerful way of achieving regular attendance.

My research approach was framed by these personal and professional experiences and aligns with the concept of teachers as researchers expressed in the early ideas of Dewey (1904). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, p.9) describe his outlook, drawing on how educators should be

both 'consumers and producers of teaching'. I see it as my professional duty to explore new ways of securing the most effective outcomes for children and young people. In my professional roles as a teacher and school leader, I have not engaged in formal research pertaining to this topic. However, education professionals can be engaged in an informal research process as they seek to improve and develop their practice. This was the case for me in the context of attendance. I carefully scrutinised attendance data and talked to pupils, parents and staff in an attempt to achieve improved outcomes in my setting. I acknowledge this was not a formal study but in order to identify actions that could lead to tangible improvements in the school context, research was integral to the process. These informal activities ultimately informed my decision to take a more scholarly, systematic approach to examining the topic.

Through my years as a teacher, I was attracted to the interpretivist paradigm, having originally aligned more comfortably with positivism. Coming from a background of scientific interest, I entered the teaching profession with this perspective; seeing facts as separate to opinion (Buchanan, 1998; Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003). There are both strengths and limitations to this approach. Underpinned by quantitative approaches, positivism focuses on an 'observable and measurable reality' (Newby, 2014, p.99). Researchers collect and analyse data that it may be possible to replicate; the basis of research that leads to generalisable outcomes and the construction of a tested theory. In some contexts, where variables can be controlled and measured, this approach has many benefits. However, within the educational context, there are limitations that have been acknowledged by authors exploring these contrasting approaches (Cohen, Manion and Morrison., 2007; Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Newby, 2014).

Humans are complicated, unpredictable and their behaviour often cannot be replicated. This is particularly the case when observing behaviours and interactions within a classroom. These highly individual and dynamic environments present difficulties for the positivist researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Applying a positivist approach in this context risks a loss of connection to the nuances of human nature and that which cannot be measured (Hammersley, 2013), instead relying on outcomes that can be replicated and generalisable (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By looking at things in this way, there is a risk that the perspectives of those who do not align with the general patterns of data may be overlooked. This undermines the principles of social research that aim to hear individual voices of participants within their specific context (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Lees, 2007). While I

do not underestimate the benefits of a positivist approach within some contexts and studies, there are many occasions where interpretivism is more appropriate.

Our understanding of phenomena is informed by the context in which it is studied. Applying interpretivist principles in this study required me to draw upon meaning from the inside to form understanding (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). As Thomas (2016, p.110) emphasises, interpretivist researchers are 'interested in people and the way they interrelate – what they think and how they form ideas about the world.' The current study was designed with this in mind. The aim was to secure a deep understanding of the perspectives of participants within their context, rather than make generalisations to the wider population (Creswell, 2007). The chosen approach allowed for a degree of subjectivity that is absent from the positivist paradigm. While I recognise some see this as a limitation of the interpretivist approach (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), suggesting that subjectivity can lead to bias and contradiction, it can make a positive contribution if actively recognised and managed. Taylor and Medina (2013) concur, viewing subjectivity as a positive development in social research, outlining how our interactions with the world and the social construction of knowledge strengthen, rather than weaken it. The methodological approach to this study supported this construction of knowledge, as both stages of data collection allowed rich description from participants that could be analysed to explore the explicit and implicit meaning.

3.2 Research Question and Objectives

Through careful review of the literature and consideration of my own experiences as a professional working in schools, I devised the central research question for the current study:

Who and what motivates children to attend school?

The question was addressed through the methodological approach outlined in this chapter, with data collected, examined through thematic analysis and interpreted with the support of the theoretical lens of Self Determination Theory (SDT). To scaffold the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, the research was underpinned by the following key objectives:

1. To identify who and what motivates children to attend school.

The literature review examined the broad range of factors that influence children's attendance at school. Personal, parental, peer, school and community factors have all been identified as contributory to school attendance (Gubbels, et al., 2019; Kearney, 2008b), however there have been few studies that have explored who and what motivates children to attend from their own perspective (Reid et al., 2010). This research aimed to do this by collecting children's individual descriptions.

2. To use the data that has been collected to analyse and explore what forms of motivation may influence children to attend school.

Drawing upon SDT, this objective sought to analyse whether the participants were motivated by internal or external forces. If extrinsic motivators were identified, this objective aimed to explore the extent to which these may be integrated forms of extrinsic motivation, as defined by the motivation continuum devised by Ryan and Deci (2000a). This may be pertinent because evidence suggests that intrinsic motivation supports engagement (Froiland and Worrell, 2016) and academic achievement (Taylor et al., 2014), while the long term effects of extrinsic motivation can be less favourable, depending on its form (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

3. To use data collected and analysed to explore whether an association can be made between key components of SDT and participants' motivations for attending school.

This objective aimed to explore whether any associations could be made between children's self-described motivators to attend school and key tenets of SDT. Using an inductive approach, the analysed data was explored by applying SDT once the key themes were identified and analysed.

3.3 Ontology and Epistemology

My ontological position has shifted as my perspective of the nature of reality has evolved, developing from that of reality being objective to reality as a social construct. This is what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.7) describe as a 'product of the individual consciousness.' This means that reality is dynamic and changing based on the experiences and

evolution of the individual in their social environment. In the current study, focus was given to the views and perspectives of the participants in the moment in which they were studied. Therefore, this study seeks not to find **the** reality but **a** reality. This aligns with the concept of nominalism – the idea that meaning is created by words and that knowledge is a social subjective construct, rather than a truth to be found (Coe et al., 2017). A rationale for the value of identifying 'a reality' relates to the way in which the Coronavirus pandemic impacted societal perspectives on school attendance. Research (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023; Ofsted 2022) demonstrates how the pandemic shifted the way children, young people and parents view the importance of school attendance, with some beginning to question the long-held societal contract between schools and families (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023). In their research, involving parents of school-aged children from across the geographical and social spectrum in England, Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023, p.14) describe a 'paradigm shift' in views. This rapid shift in perspective caused by a major world event, and the significant impact it has had on pupil school attendance, reinforces the importance of conducting research that identifies the current reality of this topic.

The study design reflected this ontological position, as the data collection strategies focused on the words of the individuals. Further, this was why I decided not to collect the participants' actual attendance figures. Attendance data would have provided me with a statistical insight into how often the participants had been present at school but the purpose of the research was to examine their personal motivations to attend, rather than a quantitative notion. There are many factors that may prevent a child from attending and these can be out of their control, particularly for young participants. They will likely still have views on what motivates them. Further, inclusion of participants' actual attendance data risked posing a distraction when the focus of the study was on children's perceptions and descriptions. Therefore, the methodology for the study focused on providing participants with the opportunity to share their motivations, without the risk of making assumptions or misinterpretations based on the number of sessions they actually attended. It is important to note that this study did not attempt to make a causal connection between reported motivators and actual rates of attendance. Rather, it aimed to obtain rich descriptions of the participants' perspectives of why they want to attend. This perspective also reflects the epistemological stance of the study, demonstrating my alignment with interpretivism. As I have outlined earlier in the chapter, this is based on my view that being immersed in the phenomena will support my interpretation of it. The selected methodology gave control to the participants, allowing them to express themselves in their own way and share their views

openly. Therefore, the study was able to maintain the integrity of the participants' perspectives with the aim of 'understanding from within' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.21).

I carefully considered my position in relation to determinism and voluntarism (Burrell and Morgan,1979). Many previous studies examining school attendance resonate with a deterministic perspective. This means that, ultimately, all events are as a result of an external force acting upon them. In the context of school attendance, this would presuppose that children and young people are influenced entirely by external forces such as parents, school and peers, rather than the individual having influence over the decisions they make. This study took an alternative approach as, utilising SDT, it considered the extent to which intrinsic factors may influence a pupil's attendance at school. Although the theory recognises the interaction of the individual with their social environment and the influence this has on their ability to be self-determined, the will of the individual is central to the theory. An individual's autonomy may be influenced by their interactions but in an optimum environment, the individual would be volitional in their motivation to act.

These assumptions were central to the design of my research. Our views of the world, the essence of knowledge and how humans acquire and communicate this knowledge are 'a skin, not a sweater' (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.21). They are at the very core of our work as social researchers and drive each element of the process from fruition to completion. This aligns with the very nature of the school environment and the children we educate. They are all different, individual in their characteristics, cultures and ethos. To understand them, we must immerse ourselves in their environments and communities in order to construct our understanding. This view may present barriers for the positivist researcher. However, the current study does not seek to identify generalisable conclusions, thus the study should not be interpreted as such. Instead it aims to provide a detailed insight into the lived experiences of the participants involved.

3.4 Recruitment: School and Child Participants

The primary school in this study was identified via convenience sampling, with the selected school receiving an initial communication to gauge interest (appendix one). This was followed by more detailed information (appendix two) and a consent form to participate in the research

(appendix three). There are some who view convenience sampling as a last resort (Newby, 2014) because it cannot lead to generalisable conclusions and is only representative of its own group. However, in this instance, the approach was deemed appropriate as the focus was on the participants from within the single school sample, rather than the specific nature of the school itself. In addition, the exploratory design of this study did not seek to achieve generalisable conclusions which also supports convenience sampling.

3.4.1 School Context

The selected school was a medium sized, co-educational, state funded primary school in the South of England. The school converted to an academy in recent years and holds a good Ofsted report post-conversion. With the capacity for two form entry from nursery to year 6, the school caters for pupils on the outskirts of a city with a mixed catchment of pupils living in both private and social housing. Pupils are drawn predominantly from the local catchment area. Statistically, the school's rates of absence and persistent absence in the 2022-2023 academic year were higher than the national average. However, as actual rates of attendance were not the focus of the study, this was not a determining factor in school or participant selection. The pupil population is mixed, drawing from a range of ethnic groups and nationalities but the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is slightly below the national average. In terms of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), these statistics are positioned slightly higher than the national average while Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility is broadly similar to that reflected nationally.

3.4.2 Recruitment of Child Participants

The study focused on children from two different primary years groups attending the identified school. Participants meeting the eligibility criteria were identified and approached. To explore the views of participants of different ages, two age groups were selected from key stage 2 - academic year 4 (aged 8-9) and year 6 (ages 10-11). Due to the small-scale interpretivist nature of this enquiry, a small sample in each age group was sought so that in-depth thematic analysis was manageable and realistic within the timescale of the project. A feasibility study was used to support the decision-making process around participant group sizes. Although the feasibility study utilised adult participants, the selected group size of eight for both stages of the research felt too large and unmanageable, particularly at the focus group stage. Participants were unable to share fully their views within a reasonable timeframe, as there were too many participants to

contribute. Therefore, when it came to selecting participants for the current study, I decided to focus on how I could reduce numbers in the focus groups. Authors (Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981; Gibson, 2007; Hennink, 2014) all discuss the benefits and limitations of group size, suggesting that smaller groups when conducting research with children are preferable, which supported my decision-making process alongside the feasibility study. Table 3.1 shows the planned recruitment structure for the study.

Table 3.1: Planned study recruitment structure		
	School A - Primary School	
Pre-study Informed consent	Year 4 (Age 8-9)	Year 6 (Age 10-11)
Stage1 Drawing	Maximum of 12 from each set of participants above (Randomly identified if over 12 consent to participate) Gender balance as close as opt-in will allow	
Stage 2 Focus groups	Same participants as above	
Summary	Max.12 participants Stage one and two	Max.12 participants Stage one and two
Total	Max. 24 participants in total for stages one and two	

Participants were children from the identified school year groups, whose parents provided informed consent for them to take part. It was acknowledged from the outset that parents with specific views or attitudes towards attendance or those who have children with attendance concerns, may not give permission for their child to participate, leading to a skewed sample. I attempted to mitigate this by providing parents with a clear outline of the study in the following documents:

- Introductory letter (appendix four)
- Participant information sheet for parents (appendix five)
- Participant information sheet for child (appendix six)
- Privacy notice (appendix seven)

These were shared in paper and electronic form. The documents outlined the nature of the study and emphasised the participants' personal perspectives. I produced an information video (appendix eight) and held an in-person information event at the school, with the aim of presenting information about the study in the most accessible way possible. I welcomed questions and dialogue throughout the process, with the aim of building relationships with the school community and presenting myself to parents as personable and accessible. These strategies also aimed to secure a range of participants in the study, including those with English

as an additional language. The video format was presented as simply as possible, was subtitled and, as it was shared through YouTube, could be captioned in different languages.

On receipt of the consent forms for the study (appendix nine), I spoke with the headteacher to identify whether there were any specific considerations or requirements for the participants involved. While there were no specific issues to be noted, the headteacher did reflect that they felt the participants represented a 'good mix' of the school community. Whilst this remark is anecdotal, my experience of primary headteachers is that they know their pupils well and I felt this comment was a positive indicator of variation within the participant group.

The aim was to recruit 24 participants to the study. While initial response rates were encouraging, the total number of consent forms received did not exceed the maximum number for each year group. Therefore all participants who provided informed consent were able to take part and random allocation was not required. Table 3.2 summarises the number of participants that took part in the study, along with their key characteristics. Initially I questioned whether a reduced number of participants would provide me with an adequate data set. However, the participants' contributions were rich and varied, providing a plentiful source of data. I wanted every child's voice to be heard and concluded that having more participants would have made this harder to achieve within the constraints of the study. There was acknowledgement that a sample of this size may make it difficult to identify patterns in the data but could still provide indicators for future study.

Table 3.2: Participant numbers and characteristics		
	Year 4	**Year 6**
Total number of participants providing informed consent	8	8
Gender distribution (M:F)	4:4	3:5
Total participants Stage 1 (drawing)	7 One female participant was absent from this stage	8
Gender distribution (M:F)	4:3	3:5
Total participants Stage 2 (focus groups)	7 One male participant was absent from this stage	5 Two female participants were absent from this stage One male participant withdrew
Gender distribution (M:F)	3:4	2:3
Pseudonyms of all participants		
Male	Hunter Jon Aaron James	Sam Oscar Carter
Female	Kate Sophie Rachel Lina	Carrie Abbie Tina Fliss Sasha

The study was open to all pupils in the eligible year groups. Other than receiving informed consent from parents (appendix nine) and assent (appendix ten) from the participant at the point of each data collection activity, there were no further exclusion criteria. If participants were unable or unwilling to assent, this would have excluded them from participating. This was not the case for any of the participants with informed consent in stage one. At stage two, one of the participants chose to withdraw from the study. This was accepted without question. At both data points, there were children who were absent due to unforeseen circumstances. As the data was determined to be rich enough with the participant numbers achieved, return visits were not arranged to follow up with these children. The reader will however note that some participants

do not feature in the findings or discussion chapters for this reason. It cannot be predicted who will provide informed consent to participate, however gender balance was broadly achieved. While studies have suggested that mixed participant groups, particularly for focus groups, can present challenges (Fielden, Sillence and Little, 2011; Hennessy and Heary, 2005), I decided that within the context of this research, it was appropriate due to the low risk of sensitive gender-specific content being discussed. I did however observe the participants closely in the first stage of the research, to identify appropriate groupings for stage two. This is discussed later in the chapter (section 3.5.6).

The selected year groups for the research were based upon careful consideration of the research question and objectives. As the data collection sought to gain insight into the motivations of different aged children, it was important to invite participants from more than one age group whilst minimising the impact of other factors on their views and perspectives. From the literature (Chedzoy and Burden, 2005; Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999), and my own experience in schools, I identified that children may be adversely affected by transitions between schools and year groups. Therefore I decided to avoid data collection at the beginning of the year where significant transition had taken place (e.g. participants in year 3 who had not long moved to key stage 2). While I was advised at the registration stage of this project to consider whether a transition year (year 6) should be avoided, I decided to continue to involve them for the following reasons:

- Year 6 pupils have almost completed their time in primary school and have likely established strong perspectives on school and their experience in the primary setting.
- As the research was being carried out in the summer term, participants had completed their statutory assessments which may or may not have an influence on their motivation to attend school.
- In England, as pupils begin their transition to secondary school at the end of year 6, this gave me the opportunity to explore whether participants perceived there to be a shift or change in motivation due to impending transition. Further, as all pupils prepare for transitions in the summer term, there was an opportunity for consideration of internal and external transitions, i.e. moving between year groups in a school or to a different school.

By contrast, year 4 pupils are established within key stage 2 but still have a significant proportion of time remaining in primary school. I hoped this would provide an alternative perspective to those pupils who were shortly due to move on.

The data collection for the study took place in the summer term, when participants were well-established in their school year group and class. It is acknowledged that responses may be influenced by personal experiences and this cannot be mitigated, especially since this research seeks to understand personal perspectives. These circumstances were considered at the analysis stage where appropriate. For example, the year 6 participants referred to a recent residential trip that was evidently fresh in their minds and a memorable experience. Had the research taken place earlier in the year, this may have featured differently, or not at all. This, in turn, influenced the analysis of the data obtained.

3.4.3 Children as Active Participants in Research

Children and young people make a rich contribution to the world in which we live. Historically, research with children and young people has frequently focused on their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, overlooking the contributions they can make and instead applying methods that do not actively involve the child participant. Over time, this perspective has shifted. Thomson (2007, p.208) stated that 'the key question is not whether we should listen to children but how best to represent this group's many voices'. While this emphasised the importance of individual agency (Giddens, 1984), in recent years, increased focus has been given to the relational nature of childhood. This focuses on agency as a social endeavour, influenced by the environment and people in it (Larkins, 2019). When conducting research with children, we must therefore pay attention to how their relationships and environments may shape research encounters.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), outlines the right of the child to express their views freely in matters that affect them. However, it has been suggested that there is a gap between what the article promises and how this is applied in practice (Lundy, 2007). Studies suggest that research with children often runs the risk of reflecting the adult researcher's perspectives on what they think childhood looks like (Horner, 2000), rather than truly hearing the voice of the child. Therefore, it is important for researchers to remain focused on actively engaging and listening to participants, to ensure they are not biassed to their own worldview. The Lundy Model of Participation (Lundy, 2007) revolutionised

the conceptualisation of Article 12, proposing that those working with children to implement it should focus on the following four principles:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view.
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views.
- Audience: The view must be listened to.
- Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

(Lundy, 2007, p.993)

By applying these four principles to the design and implementation of the current study, I aimed to provide participants with an authentic means of communicating their views to an audience, who would listen and act as appropriate. In the context of this chapter; space, voice and audience were all considered, while influence is considered later in the discussion, conclusion and implications for practice.

Giving participants agency and opportunity is crucial to obtaining their perspectives. However, it is important to consider the cognitive abilities of children and young people, acknowledging their potential limitations and adapting approaches to enable them to express themselves successfully (Lundy, 2007). A key theorist in cognitive development, Piaget (1963) argued that children progress through different developmental stages, with each enabling the child to engage with the environment in a different way (Miller, 2010). While it is recognised that there are many critiques of Piaget's rigid stages of development, the issue of being able to engage with participants across a range of ages remains. Children construct their knowledge of the world through engagement with it and their reflections of these experiences. This develops their ability to relate to the adult researcher in increasingly complex ways. Evidence indicates that between the ages of 7 and 11, children undergo significant cognitive development, which influences their ability to communicate with others (Doherty, 2014). Whilst these developmental stages are potentially not as distinct as those defined by Piaget (Flavell, Miller and Miller, 2002), this phase is crucial as it is characterised by the development of conversational skill and diminishing egocentricity. Prior to this, children may be less able to engage in this way, meaning that if children under age 7 were included, this may have required a different methodological approach.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected in two stages using two qualitative methods. The first stage of data collection involved participants creating a drawing and description, either verbally or in writing. The second stage, a focus group discussion, was informed by an initial light-touch analysis of the drawings. Data collection took place in June and July 2024, with a two week gap between stage one and stage two. The following sections discuss the two methods selected, outlining strengths and limitations, as well as reflecting on their implementation. Careful consideration was given to how the methods would be used to elicit rich descriptions from the participants and allow them to use their voice (Lundy, 2007) to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

3.5.1 Stage One: Visual Methods

The use of a visual method in the first stage of research was designed to provide a platform for further discussion in the second stage focus groups. There are many examples of drawings being used as data in research (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009; Kearney and Hyle, 2004; Leonard, 2006; Wood and Mayaba, 2015) and I was particularly drawn to this method from my background as a primary school teacher. Having used drawings to elicit information from children in various contexts, I was acutely aware of the benefits of such methods. In my profession, drawings have often provided an engaging starting point when talking to children about a wide range of topics. Sometimes they can 'say' what previously has been unsaid or allow us to see beyond (Leitch, 2008). For example, when talking to a child about potential safeguarding concerns, drawing and talking is a commonly used approach, utilising such tools as the three houses (Weld, 2008) to scaffold children's responses to questions. Drawing and talking therapy is also increasingly used to support children who have experienced trauma or may have emotional or behavioural difficulties. Again, this approach utilises the child's drawing, alongside skilful non-intrusive questioning from the practitioner, to gain an insight into the child's thoughts, feelings and experiences. Other studies involving adults have also alluded to the benefits of drawing. This has included their ability to focus the participant's response and encourage them to be more open and honest about their experiences (Nossiter and Biberman, 1990).

Although the use of visual methods has only recently become more prevalent in social sciences research, drawings have been used for many years in the field of psychology. The 'draw a man'

test was devised by Goodenough (1926) to examine children's intelligence. A scoring scale was developed based on the different body parts and detail added to the drawing. Although this particular tool has lost favour over time, drawing continues to feature in the work of psychologists. Alongside my anecdotal experiences, studies have found that drawings can support the exploration of children's thoughts and feelings. As authors suggest (Anning and Ring, 2007; Thomas and Silk, 1990), a child's drawing can provide us with an opportunity to view their understanding in a unique way. They can provide us with an insight into the way they think, feel and see themselves in the world.

Drawing as a methodology in research can also present an opportunity for a child-centred, accessible and empowering approach (Einarsdottir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). By allowing participants to make their own decisions about what they choose to include and omit, as well as how they describe their drawing and its features, can enable children and young people to express themselves more openly. As Cain (2010) suggests, drawing can be seen as an intimate activity that focuses on a strong connection between the individual and the marks they make. This participant-centred approach aligns with an increasingly common perspective in research, that it should be conducted with children as opposed to them being subjects of research (Cook and Hess, 2007; Wall, 2017). These benefits align with Lundy's (2007) principles and the requirements of Article 12 and 13 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as drawing provides the opportunity for children to convey their views freely (Article 12) and through a form of expression that is appropriate to them (Article 13).

3.5.2 Annotated Drawings: Draw and Write Approach

The participants were asked to provide a written or verbal description with their drawing. While all participants were given the choice to describe verbally, all chose to write. The 'draw and write' approach (Einarsdottir, Dockett and Perry, 2009; Wood and Mayaba, 2015; Wood, Theron and Mayaba, 2012) provides children with the opportunity to move away from the drawing merely being a 'visual reference to objects in the world' (Cox, 2005, p.115) and instead focuses on the underlying thought processes, viewpoints and perspectives. This, in turn, provides increased reliability and validity to the data obtained. Adding a verbal or written description reduces the risk of misinterpretation at the analysis stage as the participants will have described the content of their drawing (Merry and Robins, 2001). Further, adding a description supports participants by providing them with the opportunity to convey meaning that may not be articulated by the drawings themselves. This has been evident in other studies using these

methods (Kearney and Hyle, 2004; Wood and Mayaba, 2015), where participants have been asked to draw in relation to a prompt. That being said, there is also evidence to suggest that while children ascribe meaning to their drawings, the resulting labels may not reflect these. Instead, they may provide a reflection of what the child perceives the adult as wanting to see (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009).

The second stage focus groups added value to the labelled drawings, as they allowed participants to explain their thinking further, drawing on the images created during the first stage. This approach is supported by research (Angell, Alexander and Hunt, 2014; Butler, Gross and Hayne, 1995) that has found children are more able to recall events through drawing, particularly those that are routine. This approach was well-suited to the current study as attending school is a routine event that happens daily through many years of a child and young person's life. Using drawings and their descriptions, alongside the spoken word in the follow-up focus groups, also strengthened the research by 'offering a way of exploring both the multiplicity and complexity that is the base of much social research interested in human experience' (Guillemin, 2004, p.273). For example, in the first stage, a participant's drawing included a picture of a tie alongside the caption 'I like cycling and walking and lessens *[sic]* and meeting my friends and uniforms with ties.' Without follow up discussion in the focus group it would have been difficult to ascertain, from the drawing and caption alone, the participant's motivation for including this particular drawing. While an interpretation could be made through the eyes of an adult, the second stage focus groups recognised that children have their own agency with their own insights and perceptions (James and Prout, 1997). This provided an important opportunity to establish deeper meaning from the drawings produced by the participants in stage one.

The use of drawings in the current study also aligned with my approach to knowledge; this being that it is constructed based on experiences and interactions. The drawing process itself supported the participants in the construction of knowledge and the drawing, as a product of that process, was also interpreted. I recognise however that the drawing captures only a moment in time. There is no fixed view and what influences a child to attend school at the present time, may change and evolve if they were asked to complete the same task in a day, week, month or year's time.

3.5.3 Considerations When Using Visual Methods

Drawing is commonly used in classrooms all over the world for many different purposes. Children are familiar with the activity from a young age and are frequently asked to draw in a range of school contexts. Although the use of this strategy diminishes as children become older and more confident to express themselves in written forms, drawing remains a commonly used task in school. While there are many strengths to the use of drawing in research, there are considerations and limitations to reflect upon.

3.5.3.1 Fabrication

There is a danger that, due to the prevalence of drawing as a free and open activity, participants may inadvertently create fabrications rather than images created in true experience (Miles, 2000). This also affects the analysis stage of the process. Mannay (2010) urges caution when interpreting drawings, particularly as they may not always be accurate. To demonstrate this, she uses an example of a child's drawing of their house. Rather than drawing an actual representation of their own house, the child creates a drawing of a typical house and describes it as their own. To mitigate this in the current study, participants were reminded that they needed to draw what motivates them to attend school and these should be real things that influence them, rather than something they believe would be a motivator for others. In the drawing task schedule, I provided myself with a prompt to ensure this would be clarified with the participants and this was reiterated during the instructional phase.

3.5.3.2 Reluctance or Resistance to Drawing

There is evidence to show that adults (Guillemin, 2004; Kearney and Hyle, 2004), children and young people (Miles, 2000; Wood and Mayaba, 2015) can be reluctant, resistant and even refuse to engage in activities involving drawing. Specifically, in Scherer's (2016) study, she encountered numerous difficulties when asking primary aged participants to draw. She was presented with oppositional behaviour that included tearing sheets out of books, scribbling and refusal to engage in the task. Miles (2000) similarly found this to be the case and described the challenges faced using the method with older children. He reported that 'older children with immature drawings appeared to be less comfortable and perhaps embarrassed by this' (p.141). While Miles does not specify the age range of these 'older' children, it seems that as children progress into secondary school (age 11 onwards), reluctance to draw may be more prevalent. This may be due to drawing becoming a less frequent activity for older children (Wall, 2017).

Similarly, refusal behaviours have been observed in research with adults (Guillemin, 2004; Lyon, 2019), with participants going as far to suggest that they would not have participated in the study if they had known drawing was involved (Kearney and Hyle, 2004).

Drawing is a familiar task for younger children but becomes less commonplace as they grow older. Wall (2017) found that older participants were more motivated to engage in the task when given permission to annotate their drawings and when it was emphasised that drawing ability was not being assessed. It is important to recognise that if a participant is not confident to draw or feels the drawing is being judged, this may impact their willingness to participate. Therefore, in the current study I made sure to emphasise to participants that their level of drawing skill was not important and a written description would enable them to explain drawings where necessary.

3.5.3.3 Age and Ability

I anticipated drawing outcomes would likely differ depending on the age and development of the participant. This may be deemed a limitation of the method. However, an alternative view is that the drawing offers an entry-point into discussion with the participant. It is less about the drawing itself and more about the narrative accompanying the image and the perspective of the child. In the current study, this was carefully attended to. This approach provided the participants with the opportunity to draw, write and/or describe verbally and explain their motivation to attend school, making this a highly inclusive approach that facilitated obtaining all participants' perspectives (Lundy, 2007).

As language skills develop in children and young people over time, so do drawing skills and the ability to represent what you want to draw. Some studies suggest it is difficult to compare the drawings of a young child with those of an older teenager because the child may not have the technical ability to draw what they are imagining. As Leonard (2006, p.53) suggests, it is easy for us to assume that 'children find drawing technically easy'. And yet other studies describe how visual methods are well-suited to younger children, irrespective of their technical drawing abilities, as the task is familiar to them (Hill, 2006) and is commonplace in the early years and primary school (Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). In the context of older children and young adults, this however would not apply, as the use of drawing decreases as children progress through their education and make more use of the written word.

Taking a child-centred approach, it was important to consider the participant's perception of their drawing abilities and the impact this might have on their participation in the research. The studies outlined earlier in the chapter (section 3.5.3.2) found children and adults could be reluctant to engage in drawing activities. This was, in part, attributed to the participants' perceptions of their drawing ability. If participants perceive that they cannot draw, they may be reluctant to engage in the activity. Comments from participants such as 'I'm a terrible artist. I hope I can do what I'm supposed to do.' have been referenced in other studies that have used drawing as a data collection method (Kearney and Hyle, 2004, p.364). Although in Kearney and Hyle's (2004) study, the drawing element did not result in any complete refusal to participate, reluctance and resistance was evident, particularly at the initial stages. This was also found to be the case in Leonard's (2006) study, where children were incentivised to participate with the offer of a cash prize. Again, although none of the children refused to participate, the author reported that frustration was evident in some of the children while they were producing their drawings. This was something the author had not been prepared for, although she had considered that not all children would have the same drawing skills.

In recognition that participants in the current study may be deterred by the prospect of drawing, they were clearly informed of this element from the outset, both in the recruitment materials and consent forms. This transparency may have resulted in some eligible participants choosing not to volunteer; however, in light of the literature above, this decision was central in ensuring that participants felt comfortable with the expectation to engage in a drawing task. The drawing task schedule (appendix eleven) illustrates further mitigations through the pre-task briefing given to the participants. I included clear reference to there being no 'wrong' way to draw and emphasised that drawings are personal to the participant and would not be assessed for artistic skill. The addition of a description was also supportive, as those who chose to draw less were still able to express themselves in writing.

In the current study, reluctance to draw was not evident to the extent described in Scherer's (2016) work, however participants in the year 6 group made comments about their abilities and the quality of their efforts. Rather than withdrawing from the activity, the participants continued while others in the group responded to these contributions with supportive comments or, conversely, by critiquing or offering disparaging remarks on their own attempts. These behaviours mirrored those exhibited in the studies of Kearney and Hyle (2004) and Leonard (2006). Interestingly, this behaviour was not observed in the year 4 group of participants which

may correlate with Wall's (2017) perspective that drawing is a more familiar and accepted task among younger children.

3.5.4 Conducting the Drawing Task

The two groups of participants were asked to draw a picture in response to the following prompt: *Draw a picture that shows what motivates you to attend school.* Other than providing clarification and re-phrasing of the instructions to ensure the participants understood the task (using the schedule in appendix eleven), very little structure was provided. Participants were offered the choice of pens or pencils and provided with an A3 paper template, with the prompt printed and boxes to draw and write in (appendix twelve), but were not given any further prompts during the data collection. I made a conscious effort to ensure I did not offer reinforcement by using vocabulary such as 'good' or 'fantastic', that might encourage participants to respond in a particular way.

While I had planned to provide the participants with a model, using an unrelated example, this was not required for either group. A number of participants started drawing immediately after the initial instructions and all understood the task, suggesting that the intentionally general instructions were enough to focus them on the activity. Drawings lend themselves to this approach as they can be created with very limited input from the researcher (Kearney and Hyle, 2004; Meyer, 1991). However, as Meyer (1991) advises, it is important to balance loose structure with a researcher's need to obtain high quality data. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the structure and design of the approach. Leonard's (2006) study provides an example of this. He asked 193 children to create a drawing that focused on their perspectives of the eleven plus. While he reflected that the loose structure of the prompt allowed participants to interpret the instructions in their own way, he recognised that positioning the drawing task after focus groups may have influenced the children's responses. He questioned whether the negative perspectives shared by participants in the focus groups contributed to the same themes arising in their drawings, particularly as they may have been inadvertently reinforced by the research team. These findings contributed towards the design of the current study, reaffirming my choice to position the drawings before the focus groups and leading me to consider how I could minimise the risk of endorsing particular views or perspectives.

Using drawings had both strengths and limitations in the current study. Participants were observed to understand the task easily and most commenced drawing quickly and confidently.

This was certainly a strength of the input as I had very little influence over the participants' activity during the task, minimising researcher bias. Conversely, allowing the participants to talk to each other presented some challenges. While they were reminded not to talk about their drawings, most mentioned something to at least one other participant or announced it to the rest of the group. While participants did not appear to respond by copying the same image on their paper, what was heard could have influenced what was subsequently drawn (Richards, 2003) or contributed to collective rather than individual themes (Leonard, 2006). I chose to prioritise enabling participants to feel relaxed and at ease rather than intervening to stop conversation, as this felt more conducive to positive engagement. While there were similarities in ideas presented by the participants, such as capturing images of friends and learning, all drawings were unique and none appeared to show copying or intentional sharing of ideas.

I could have removed the chance of sharing ideas completely by asking the participants to draw in smaller groups or individually. However, this may have led them to feel uncomfortable or contributed to a power imbalance which could have adversely impacted their involvement. This is a much less favourable outcome. Additionally, taking the participants in a group at the first stage provided an opportunity to make observations of their interactions and behaviour before the focus groups. Noting how the children interacted with each other enabled me to make an informed decision about how to organise the focus groups. This will be discussed later in the chapter (section 3.5.6.5).

3.5.5 Stage Two: Focus Groups

Many authors have identified and described the value of focus groups (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; Barbour 2007; Krueger, 1994), emphasising how they involve the process of gaining a deep understanding of the participants' viewpoints on a particular topic or theme at a one-off meeting. Focus groups aim to give control to the participants in terms of the direction of the discussion, allowing them to establish a deep and informative dialogue (Anderson, 1996). They are ideal when the aim is to examine perceptions and feelings about a particular issue (Krueger and Casey, 2014). Additionally, they are a good way of collecting information relating to complex motivations because they provide opportunity for additional questioning and discussion (Morgan and Krueger, 1993). The method 'allows the researcher to generate more focused, richer, more complex, and more nuanced information' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013, p.40).

Sometimes focus groups are seen as unsuitable when the topic is highly personal or may be especially sensitive to the participants because of lack of confidentiality and the presence of a group. However, there is evidence of successful use of focus groups for complex and thorny topics (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; Morgan, 1997a). The themes explored in the current study were not particularly sensitive and although it was not possible to anticipate everything that could cause a child or young person to become distressed or upset, I gave careful consideration to how I would mitigate issues should they arise. Key to my approach was having clear ground rules for participants. At various points in each session, I reminded the children of the importance of conduct and confidentiality. I also observed participants closely during the drawing task, which informed how I allocated them to the subsequent focus groups.

Historically, focus groups have been used in market research because they offer a time efficient strategy to collecting a volume of data. However, over time, they have become popular in many other fields of research (Colucci, 2007; Krueger and Casey, 2014; Madriz, 2003). It has been suggested that focus groups are an easier option than other methods but this is not the case (Colucci, 2007; Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007). Focus groups require careful thought and there are many challenges to consider such as group dynamics (Morgan, 1997a), question design (Colucci, 2007) and analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In the context of conducting focus groups with children, there are additional considerations (Gibson, 2007) that will be discussed further in the remaining sections of 3.5.

3.5.6 Considerations When Using Focus Groups

The key difference between interviews and focus groups is the level of interaction between the participants (Kitzinger, 1994). Krueger and Casey (2014) describe the value of the social nature of the focus group, outlining how engagement with other participants can support individuals in building their own understanding and perspectives. This links to social constructivist learning theories that propose we build our own opinions through the interactions we have with others (Vygotsky et al., 2012). Authors have explored the interaction of people in groups (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007), identifying the diverse range of factors that influence their interactions with one another, including intra and interpersonal factors and environmental influences. This is important in the context of focus groups because participants are invited to engage in conversation with other contributors as part of their response to prompts. Therefore, researchers deploying this method would be wise to consider how to create the optimal environment for individuals to participate, by considering these varying demands.

3.5.6.1 Participant Interaction

I wanted to ensure the participants could talk to each other and interact effectively in the research environment. Bruner's (1966) social learning theory emphasises the changes that children go through during each phase of their development. He outlines how, between the age of 7 and 8, a child's language use and understanding develops rapidly and they are increasingly able to take part in more demanding conversation. This knowledge informed my choice of participants, contributing to why I focused on working with pupils aged 8 and above. DeHart, Sroufe and Cooper (2004) use this progression of children's communication development to explain why it is also important to group children according to their age. For example, the social environment is very different for a teenager compared to that of an eight-year-old. Teenagers have greatly developed cognitive abilities that enable them to consider multiple viewpoints and reflect on how others perceive their behaviours. Therefore, in the current study, participants took part in focus groups with children their own age and careful consideration was given to the group's ability to communicate within a focus group through careful discussion with the headteacher.

3.5.6.2 Gender Grouping

Evidence indicates that gender grouping can have an influence on the effectiveness of the focus group (Hennessy and Heary, 2005), particularly if the topic is sensitive or participants are unfamiliar with each other (Adler, Salantera and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; Fielden, Sillence and Little, 2011). Making a somewhat sweeping statement, Greenbaum (1988) suggests that young children are prone to dislike the opposite sex whilst teenagers are too interested in them. While Heary and Hennessy (2002) concur that the complexity of relationships in that age phase may not be conducive to positive outcomes, they suggest this may be more apparent when discussions involve gender-specific topics that are particularly sensitive to the participants. In the current research, all participants were 11 years old or younger and familiar with working together in their own classroom environment. As the topic of research was neither particularly sensitive nor gender specific, I decided to mix the groups. Having observed all participants together during the drawing activity, I determined that it was the behaviours and interactions of the individual participants, rather than their gender, which would determine the groupings for the second stage of the study. I was keen to secure mixed groups that would allow quieter participants an equal opportunity to contribute their thoughts and opinions over those who were more confident, supporting my ambition to provide all of the children involved with the space and voice to contribute (Lundy, 2007).

3.5.6.3 Power Imbalance

Focus groups can create the feeling of a safe environment for children and young people to participate in research (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; Horner, 2000), however there is the risk of power imbalance between the researcher and subjects of research. Bagnoli and Clark (2010) discuss this in the context of research with children and young people, drawing attention to the way power imbalance already exists by nature of the participant being a child and the researcher being an adult. It is important to minimise the power imbalance created when an adult is seeking information from child participants (Horner, 2000; Lundy, 2007; Shaw, Brady and Davey, 2011), to enable them to share their valuable contributions to knowledge. Children may feel vulnerable talking directly to an adult so involving more than one child can enable participants to feel more relaxed and at ease in the environment (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007).

McGarry (2016) cautions us not to underestimate the power of the researcher. She cites Foucault's (1982) theorisation, explaining that: even though action may be taken to minimise the imbalance of power, 'in any social interaction, the action of one individual affects the (re)action of others, creating an intricate web of power relations' (McGarry, 2016, p.341). Ultimately we cannot always anticipate how participants may respond in response to others' contributions and therefore we must be prepared to respond accordingly (Gallagher, 2008). In some ways, Gallagher's (2008) experience conducting focus groups mirrors that of my own, demonstrating the difficulty of establishing an environment in which participants are truly empowered and the discussion is child-centred. While this was consciously considered during the focus group, it is acknowledged that, as a less experienced moderator, this presents challenges.

The focus group environment should feel welcoming and inviting to the participant so they feel at ease (Kennedy, Kools and Krueger, 2001). Strategies to encourage children and lessen power imbalance include building rapport (Efken, 2002) to make the group non-threatening, as well as focusing on the topic without leaving participants undervalued or, in particular when working with teenagers, treated like a child (Efken, 2002). Lund, Helgeland and Kovac (2016) also suggest that nodding and smiling can be encouraging for children, however it is important to ensure that non-verbal signals are not misconstrued by the participants as an agreement with what is being said.

In the current study, an introductory activity was used at the beginning of each session where participants were invited to engage with the microphone, observe the sound bars and watch the transcription appearing on the computer screen. The participants were then invited to introduce themselves and say something about them or their interests. I participated in this too in order to support the relationship building process. While the schedule had allowed for an introductory game or activity, the participants seemed very relaxed in my presence and were animated and talkative on their way to the space used for the focus groups. A contributory factor in this may have been that I was already familiar to the participants, having visited previously to complete the drawing stage of the research. I therefore did not have concerns about their willingness to commence the discussion.

3.5.6.4 Peer Influence

When conducting focus groups with children and young people, it is important to consider the impact of peer influence on the participants, as this can also be a cause of power imbalance (McGarry, 2016). I addressed this by keeping the participants in their academic year groups, as older participants may dominate groups where young children are also present (Veale, 2005). As children get older and move into their teenage years, the importance of their peers also increases as they become more alert to the opinions and viewpoints of their friends (Richards et al., 1998). Therefore, when conducting focus groups, it is crucial to be alert to peer influence on participant response. Peer influence in focus groups can operate in different ways, offering both strengths and limitations. For example, participants may be more open in discussion among friends (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; McGarry, 2016), however they may be more inclined to agree with the majority to reduce the risk of appearing different to their peers (Hennink, 2014), or to limit the potential for conflict (McGarry, 2016).

Considering these factors, the focus group schedule provided an opportunity to establish ground rules that would emphasise the importance of giving one's own views and respecting those of others. I also ensured that, throughout the session, I gave opportunities for others to contribute their perspectives on a given point. Participants were made aware that anything shared in the focus groups must remain confidential and all contributions should be treated kindly and with respect. The aim of this was to promote the importance of positive relationships between members of the group.

3.5.6.5 Group Size

There are contradictory views on the number of participants that should be in a focus group. Some (Clark, 2009; Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003) emphasise the importance of not making the groups too small, as this can reduce the interaction between participants and be challenging if any withdraw from the process. Others suggest as few as two or three can be viable (Fielden, Sillence and Little, 2011). Small groups may have a negative impact on group dynamics if one individual in an already small group is dominant or has strong opinions. However, smaller groups can allow timid or quieter participants the opportunity to contribute their ideas in a less intimidating atmosphere (Morgan, 1992). Some authors recommend groups of around six to twelve participants (Cameron, 2005; Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook, 2007), while others suggest slightly fewer is more appropriate for novice researchers (Clark, 2009). When conducting focus groups with children and young people, many authors (Efken, 2002; Greenbaum, 1988; Kennedy, Kools and Krueger, 2001) believe smaller groups to be preferable, reducing to as few as four participants when working with the youngest children (Morgan et al., 2002).

From this short synopsis of the literature, it is evident there are varied and contradictory perspectives on what works best, with factors such as participant age, gender and need to be considered. Based on the planned participant numbers (twelve per year group), I originally allocated participants to groups of six (table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Planned focus groups allocations				
	Year 4 Participants		**Year 6 Participants**	
Planned number of participants	12		12	
Stage 1 Drawings	All participants together		All participants together	
Stage 2 Focus groups	6	6	6	6

However, actual recruitment numbers were lower than expected so this number was reduced to four (table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Revised focus group allocations				
	Year 4 Participants		**Year 6 Participants**	
Actual number of participants	8		8	
Stage 1 Drawings	All participants together		All participants together	
Stage 2 Focus groups (Proposed random allocation)	4	4	4	4

I was alert to Clark's (2009) advice that slightly smaller groups can support the less experienced moderator. As an experienced teacher, I was also aware of the challenges that can present themselves when talking to groups of children. I have generally found smaller groups more conducive to detailed responses and with a chance that one or more of the participants may have a special educational need or disability, I felt this would be a more purposeful and manageable arrangement. This aligns with literature (Kennedy, Kools and Krueger, 2001; Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996), that identifies the potential difficulty of managing a discussion of this kind with children.

This decision was reinforced having observed participants in the first stage of research. As the headteacher had indicated, this group provided a diverse mix of participants. Some were confident and boisterous while others were quiet and reserved. It was also evident from the outset who had close relationships. This was demonstrated through the participants' physical positioning in the space and their verbal interactions with their peers, which I recorded in my field notes and returned to at the focus group planning stage. This led me to allocate rather than randomly select participants for each group (table 3.5). The aim was to foster positive interactions, create supportive environments for all participants and minimise any risk of tension or intimidation (Hennessey and Heary, 2005).

Table 3.5: Actual focus group allocations				
	Year 4 Participants		**Year 6 Participants**	
Stage 2 Focus groups	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
Pseudonyms	James Sophie Aaron Kate	Lina Hunter Rachel Jon	Sam Tina Carrie Carter	Abbie Oscar Sasha Fliss

These groups were conducive to a positive and productive environment, with the participants presenting as comfortable and at ease. In the case of year 6 group 1, unforeseen circumstances led to the absence of two participants and in year 4 group 2 , the absence of one. What is special about focus groups is the interaction between participants (Anderson, 1996; Kitzinger, 1994) and it may be viewed that a very small group involving two or three participants may not facilitate that. However, the decision to continue with small groups was grounded in a commitment to position participants in a comfortable environment that would allow them to contribute their own perspectives and views. My aim was to obtain the perspectives of individuals and while the transcriptions do reflect fewer interactions between participants in the smallest group (year 6, group 1), the children were able to express their views clearly and openly in a safe environment. In terms of ethical practice, I felt this took precedence over merging the two groups to secure interactions with a larger number of participants. Further, while the year 6 participants were 10 and 11 years old, some of the behaviours exhibited during the first stage drawing task reflected that of older children. I therefore referred back to the literature on conducting focus groups with teenagers. This indicated that smaller groups can provide time and space for older participants to build a connection with the researcher and articulate their thinking and views (Clark, 2009; Efken, 2002), again reinforcing the decision to continue with smaller groups.

3.5.7 Questions and Prompts

Questions and prompts are central to the development of an effective focus group, to encourage interaction and prompt a conversational environment (Krueger and Casey, 2014). A schedule was carefully prepared (appendix thirteen), considering two key elements- firstly that questions

should progress from the general to the more specific and secondly, those of highest importance should be asked first (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007, p.61).

The themes and key questions identified in the schedule were:

1. Further exploration of the drawings created by participants in stage one of the research, using themes that have been identified from the analysis.
● What are the motivations for the participants in the group to attend school?
● Sharing their motivations – Are we all motivated by the same thing?
● What motivates you the most out of the things you identified in your drawing?
● How may the pandemic have influenced motivations to attend?

2. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
● How do participants describe their motivations to attend school? Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?

3. Parents and motivation to attend school
● What do your parents/carers think about attending school?
● How do your parents influence your motivation to attend school?

4. Motivations to attend school and age/stage
● How do you think your reasons for attending school might change as you get older, if at all?
● Have they changed from when you started school/ when you started this school?

Analysis of participants' drawings contributed to a revision of this structure to allow time for exploration of the following themes:
● What is the role, if any, of animals as motivators to attend school?
● What influence, if any, does school uniform have on motivation to attend school?
● What is the role of adults (teachers and support staff) in motivation to attend school?

3.5.8 A Flexible Approach

While I had initially planned for the questions to be worded and presented consistently and in a specific sequence for each of the focus groups, what actually transpired was a more fluid delivery characterised by fewer, broad questions (Morgan 1997a). I had considered the limited

experience of some of the participants and the differing levels of understanding among those from varied age groups (Krueger, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2014; Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007), so questions were asked as clearly and simply as possible.

However, as responses could not be predicted, it was not always possible to adhere to the prepared sequence without the risk of limiting participants or resorting to a greater emphasis on my focus, rather than that of the individuals involved (Morgan, 1997b). While I always kept the focus of the research in mind (Krueger and Casey, 2014), I allowed for flexibility and embraced unpredictability (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013). Hennessy and Heary (2005) explain the importance of this, suggesting that researchers should allow children to talk about personal interests and memorable experiences, irrespective of whether they are completely relevant to the research topic.

I also sought opportunities to encourage the development of responses (Krueger, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2014; Morgan, 1997a), using techniques that prompted further development through neutral language (Adler, Salanterä, and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019), without a suggestion of my own perspectives or leading participants towards a particular response **(**Greenbaum, 2000, Krueger and Casey, 2014). That being said, I recognise there were inconsistencies within the focus groups that would be improved with the opportunity of a further attempt. While I felt that my approach improved with each group of participants, these inconsistencies may have impacted on the findings.

3.5.9 Recording and Transcription

The focus groups were recorded on Zoom and Google Meet (sound only) using two laptops and an external microphone. Oxford Brookes University holds Google and Zoom accounts so these were securely accessed with my university login. Two devices were used in case of technical difficulties. Participants were helped to feel at ease with the recording devices by having the opportunity to speak into the microphone and watch the live transcription. Reassurance was given that the recording would not be shared and would be deleted after transcription.

I transcribed all focus groups shortly after the data was collected. I knew this would be a lengthy and arduous process but it was the most rigorous approach (Krueger, 1998). I listened to the recordings carefully first, noting the names of the participants against the Google transcript. I then re-wrote the transcription, using the Google transcript as a guide. I expected it might be

difficult to distinguish between speakers in the group so, where possible, I stated the participant's name before they started speaking. During the focus group, I also asked the participants to make a small signal to indicate their intention to speak. This enabled me to note down the initials of speakers at the recording stage. I had considered using a professional transcription service but concluded that doing it myself would provide an opportunity to process the recording and help me to become immersed in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). I then read and re-read the transcripts as the starting point of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). This is a form of reflexivity, returning to the same data multiple times to engage more deeply with it.

3.6 Timing and Environment

Timing is an important consideration when conducting any type of research, particularly when working directly with participants and seeking to ensure they are in the best place to take part. Practically, meeting the participants more than once supported the development of more trusting relationships (Efken, 2002; O'Reily and Parker, 2014) for the focus group stage of research. When I visited the school for a second time, the participants recognised me and it felt as though there was a sense of ease in the group. Participants were calmer and more responsive to instructions. This may be due to familiarity or the timing of the visit. The first data collection took place after lunch while the second visits were both directly after morning registration, which may have impacted the participants' behaviour. It is difficult to ascertain the precise impact of visiting the setting multiple times and at different points in the day, although it is likely this will have contributed to participant behaviour.

In the case of focus groups, various suggestions have been made about the best time for conducting them. Avoiding end of day tiredness (Kennedy, Kools and Krueger, 2001), particular days of the week or national and local events (Hopkins, 2007), have all been cited as potential influential factors. Kenney, Kools and Krueger (2001) suggest lunchtimes may be preferable but, based on my professional experience, children are often reluctant to participate in activities that lead them to miss playtime unless self-selected. In line with my ethical approval, I chose to liaise with the school to identify mutually convenient times. As a result, the drawing tasks were completed on a midweek afternoon and the focus groups took place on a Thursday and Friday morning to fit in with other summer term activities, such as sports day and an educational visit.

Sessions were designed by considering how long I expected the activity would take while being mindful of guidance on favourable session lengths. Thirty minutes was allocated for the drawing task, providing plenty of time for participants to draw and add their description. More time would have allowed for more detailed images. However, as the main purpose of this stage was to elicit key motivators for attending school, detailed drawing was not necessary. The images were representative of key ideas rather than detailed artistic representations. For focus groups, there is no consensus on duration for children aged 8-11 (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha, 2019), but having worked with children for many years, I deemed anything longer than 45 minutes would see attention levels decline. I was also prepared to provide children with a break during the focus group although this was not required. I paid close attention to the participants throughout but felt that stopping for a break would have disrupted the flow of their contributions.

All research activities took place in a comfortable classroom that was normally used for teaching broader curriculum subjects. The way children were seated in the room helped me to maintain eye contact (Krueger and Casey, 2014), offering reassurance to less confident participants and affording the opportunity to moderate more dominant children if required. A familiar environment that is flexible and offers options for seating is generally considered conducive to good research (Hennessey and Heary, 2005; Krueger, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2014) and all participants had used this space before for other activities. While some authors suggest that children and young people may take the activity more seriously if they are within the school environment (Kennedy, Kools and Krueger, 2001), others suggest that giving participants some flexibility in the location can be preferable (Coyne and Carter, 2018). Some propose that children's responses can be adversely affected when research activities are completed in the school setting (Kellett and Ding, 2004; Krueger and Casey, 2014). They refer to the adult-controlled nature of the environment and the risk of the focus group being interpreted as school. This, in turn, can influence responses and potentially lead to behaviours that would be perceived to satisfy a teacher (Clark, 2005; Punch, 2002). It was neither practical or ethically appropriate to conduct the research activities outside the school setting, so using a shared teaching space achieved as much neutrality as possible. A shared classroom also meant there was no sense of belonging to a particular group or participant, therefore adding to the appropriateness of the space. In addition to this, participants were reassured that the research was not a school activity, there were no 'correct' answers (Punch, 2002) and their contributions would have no influence on their school education now or in the future. However, it is acknowledged that the participants

were aware of my past experience as a teacher and headteacher. This may have influenced their behaviour or contributions, despite the participants being advised that I was present in a research capacity only.

3.7 Research Ethics

My ethical responsibilities in the context of this research extended beyond the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and Oxford Brookes ethics guidelines under which I obtained approval for the research to take place. Ethical practice must go beyond the core expectations of the organisation and therefore became an active and deliberate part of my research that was both ongoing and iterative (BERA, 2024).I carefully considered ethics at every stage (Burgess, 1989; Harcourt and Sargeant, 2012) and remained alert to risks that might arise.

Extra consideration was required for this study as it involved participants under the age of 18; a vulnerable group within the population. This is a reason why the drawing task and focus groups were selected as a form of data collection, as they gave control to the participants. There are many advantages to conducting research with children in a way that makes them feel like active participants in the process (Alderson, 2005), however this can prove problematic if they later feel misrepresented or regret taking part. To mitigate these risks, I considered them carefully using Freeman and Mathison's (2009) framework to develop a study risk assessment (appendix fourteen). This helped me to think through the potential ethical implications and steps that could be taken to support participants. While there were no concerns arising from participants during the data collection process, I did apply dynamic ethical practice when devising the focus groups. As outlined earlier in the chapter (section 3.5.6), I had to make careful decisions to ensure that participants were comfortable within their groups.

3.7.1 Safeguarding

While the research did not discuss particularly sensitive topics, this did not preclude a safeguarding disclosure. Although this did not occur during the data collection process, I was prepared to make a decision regarding a break of confidentiality if necessary. In the event of an immediate safeguarding concern or risk to the child's safety, I planned to inform the school's designated safeguarding lead immediately. The safety of the child was always at the forefront of my mind. I was transparent with participants at each stage of data collection, informing them

that I had a duty to keep children safe and, if I had concerns about anything they had drawn or said to me, I would need to share this with their headteacher. This process was also outlined in the aforementioned risk assessment (appendix fourteen).

3.7.2 Researcher Wellbeing

In considering the ethical responsibility we have for our participants, we sometimes overlook our own vulnerabilities. Although the current study did not present a high level of risk, it remained important to prioritise my own safety and wellbeing. Taking into consideration the BERA (2024) guidance and Lee-Treweek and Linkogle's (2000) conceptual framework, I developed a personal risk assessment (appendix fifteen) to consider the physical, emotional, ethical and professional risks associated with my study. During the initial stages of research, I did not think engagement with this would be necessary but, as the project progressed and emotional resilience waned, I found it helpful to revisit this to reframe my thinking and ensure I maintained balance.

3.7.3 Consent and Assent

Information sharing and consent are crucial to ethical research practices (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Check and Schutt, 2012; Gregory, 2003). Informed consent was required from the parents of all participants. Detailed information was presented to participants and their parents at the recruitment stage, to support their decision-making process. This included providing an information video (appendix eight), offering an in-person information event, detailed participant information sheets (appendix five), privacy notice (appendix seven) and formal consent forms (appendix nine). Written, visual, verbal and translatable forms of communication were distributed, with the aim of increasing accessibility and assuring that consent was fully informed. This was preceded by a similar process involving the school's headteacher. We communicated by email (appendix one) and then met in person to discuss the research. This meeting was followed by electronic copies of research information for the headteacher's consideration (appendix two) and a school consent form (appendix three). Opportunities for questions and clarification were offered throughout the process and permission was sought before each visit to the school.

As the participants were all under 16 years old, I was advised by the Oxford Brookes University ethics team to obtain assent rather than consent. In light of the project aims and focus, I

produced child-friendly participant information sheets (appendix six) and assent forms (appendix ten) that were completed by the participants before each data collection activity. This was important because children and young people have agency and should be given the opportunity to consider their own involvement. As Alderson and Morrow (2011) explain, what is perceived to be low risk by an adult may not be interpreted that way by a child. 'There is no single measure of low-risk-simple versus high-risk-complex research' (p.87). These thorough processes ensured all parties were able to make an informed choice about their participation. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw at any time without question.

3.7.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Prior to data collection, I informed the headteacher that the school and pupils would remain anonymous and pseudonyms would be used for all individuals participating in the study. Any identifiable features on drawings, in descriptions or transcriptions were removed or pseudonymised to minimise the chance of identification. A strict process of coding was used to separate and remove identifiers at the earliest opportunity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). All original drawings were destroyed once they had been anonymised and scanned. Focus group recordings were deleted once they had been fully transcribed. Data was stored securely using the Oxford Brookes University google drive platform to minimise the risk of information being accessed (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

While I worked hard to assure confidentiality and maintain anonymity, this was not always easy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Ensuring participants followed the appropriate procedures was even more difficult. While adults may not uphold the same ethical principles as me or others in a group (Newby, 2014), working with children adds another layer of difficulty due to developmental and social factors. Children may not understand the importance of confidentiality or may share their experiences with friends through excitement or interest. This can be damaging for the integrity of the research and may cause difficulties for other participants if their personal information is shared beyond the group (Newby, 2014).

Suggestions that participants could be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement (Cooper and Schindler, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) were unrealistic and inappropriate in the context of this research. Working with primary aged children, the parent would need to complete the agreement but this would not offer assurance that the child would maintain confidentiality. Further, children are unlikely to understand the significance of such an agreement and would

likely forget and share information with their peers accidentally. I did make it clear to participants that we had a responsibility to maintain confidentiality. I started by explaining what confidentiality was and, at the beginning and end of each data collection stage, we discussed the importance of maintaining it beyond the session. Participants were reminded before they left the room that what was shared in the space must remain confidential.

The children seemed to understand and accept the importance of maintaining confidentiality but they were forthcoming with views relating to anonymity. Participants in both year groups requested to be identified in the final thesis. I explained why pseudonyms were required but more than one participant asked if they could select their own. They found it difficult to understand why they would not want to be named, associating being in the research as an opportunity to be 'famous'. While it has been argued that participants have the right to identification (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012, p.129), this was not considered in this context as all participants were children. Participants were gently reminded that they would not be named and could not choose pseudonyms. In an attempt to make this more relevant for the group (Efken, 2002), I related this to social media presence and the concept that once information about you is shared, it cannot be withdrawn. We discussed how they might want to be named now but their views could change in the future and, if they had been named, it would be too late. When communicating with parents it was also made clear that, while I would do everything I could to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, this could not be guaranteed. I was transparent about this in the video and participant information sheet. Since the data collection, I have not been alerted to any adverse situations arising from children's discussions but, should this arise, it would be addressed on an individual basis.

3.7.5 Trust, Rigour and Validity

This research was small scale, with findings that do not claim to be replicable in another setting or generalisable across the wider population. Should these methods be applied to another group, it is unlikely they would elicit the same outcomes as the responses are context and participant specific. A good example of this was in the participants' reference to animals as motivators for wanting to attend school. There is recognition that this specific school has animals on site that the children are permitted to interact with. This is likely a factor in why they were referenced in the drawing task and subsequent focus groups. A further example was the year 6 participants' references to a residential trip. Had the research been conducted at another point in the academic year, the participants would have yet to attend the trip and therefore may

not have referred to it. These two examples illustrate how individual experience, context and timing are just three factors that may influence a participant's response.

While I recognise replicability and reliability cannot be guaranteed, I chose an approach that supported trustworthiness. A thorough, thoughtful and transparent approach to data collection, analysis, description and discussion supported this, drawing on considered methodological approaches and an established form of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Researchers in social sciences are advised to approach validity with caution (Thomas, 2016), due to its dichotomy with interpretivist research. In the context of qualitative research, Hammersley (1992) advises that validity is about having confidence in results rather than achieving certainty. Therefore, I gave careful consideration to the extent to which the findings were both plausible and credible (Thomas, 2016).

3.8 Analysing the Data - Thematic Analysis

The reliability of qualitative research can be questioned when the process of analysis is not robust or clearly described (Nowell et al., 2017). As Attride-Stirling (2001, p.386) cautions, 'If qualitative research is to yield meaningful and useful results, it is imperative that the material under scrutiny is analysed in a methodical manner.' The author goes on to describe the limited tools available to support the qualitative researcher, leading many in the field to avoid detailing how they analysed their data in research reports. Although over twenty years has now passed since the publication of this article, qualitative analysis remains challenging despite there being a growing body of research, particularly applying a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Some of the questions raised about the quality of thematic analysis may derive from the perception that many who use such flexible approaches to analyse qualitative data, do so without providing clarity to their readers about the steps taken to conduct the analysis (Trainor and Bundon, 2021). This leads scholars to view it as an approach that is neither robust nor reliable.

In the current study I used thematic analysis, underpinned by Braun and Clarke's approach (2006; 2022). Thematic analysis is a form of subjective enquiry that focuses carefully on the emerging data. While it is a systematic approach, it is also flexible and takes into consideration the subjective nature of the qualitative researcher. Further, it is particularly well-suited to

understanding experiences, thoughts and behaviours, as the coding process enables the researcher to capture the individual meaning and concept from each contribution (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I chose it for my study because I wanted to identify common themes from a group of participants, with the aim of carefully describing and categorising their contributions in both stages of the research.

3.8.1 Phases of Analysis

Boyatzis (1989, p.1) describes thematic analysis as 'a way of seeing', suggesting that the way one person views the data will be different from others. This resonated with me because it aligns with my outlook on the project. The current study provided insight into the lived experiences of a small sample of participants. Through thematic analysis, I was able to engage with the data in a deep way, being open and flexible (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to the themes that arose from the drawings and focus group transcriptions. While I initially planned to follow the six phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022), what actually transpired was a more fluid approach (table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Thematics Analysis Procedure	
Phase	**Description**
Drawing task completed	
1. Identifying areas to explore further Analysis of drawings prior to focus groups (appendix sixteen)	This stage involved a 'light touch' look at the drawings produced by each of the participants. The analysis was inductive and included identification of semantic codes only. As I was going to be speaking with the participants to obtain further detailed descriptions of their motivations to attend school, I did not want to apply an existing theoretical construct or start to look for implicit meaning.
Focus groups completed	
2. Coding the drawings (appendix sixteen)	I started by coding the drawings, using the key themes identified in the 'light touch' stage as a starting point. Having coded these in detail and identified themes from this data set, I took my attention to the focus groups.
3. Focus groups - Immersion	After transcribing the focus groups, I spent time listening to the recordings and making informal notes against the transcriptions. This is what Braun and Clarke (2022, p.35) describe as becoming 'deeply and intimately familiar with the content of your dataset'. At this stage, I did not refer to the drawings as I wanted to make a separate interpretation before drawing ideas together.
4. Focus groups - Coding (appendix seventeen)	This was the coding stage, working through individual drawings and transcriptions, highlighting each new unit of meaning.
5. Mind maps (appendix eighteen)	Diverting from Braun and Clarke's (2022) phases, I moved away from electronic systems and took to paper. A challenging but necessary part of the journey, I drew together findings from the drawings and focus groups on mind maps. This was the beginning of generating initial themes.
6. Establishing themes (appendix nineteen)	Spreadsheets were used to look for patterns across the drawings and focus groups.
7. Refining themes	Using the spreadsheets, themes were then refined, resulting in combination, review and, in some cases, removal of themes.

3.8.2 Development of Themes

The development of themes was central to the analysis and meaning making of the data. They were generated with the aim of developing 'stories about particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset', as opposed to 'summaries of the range of meaning in the data related to a particular topic or 'domain' of discussion' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.592). The idea of a theme being a 'pattern of shared meaning' is in contrast to the 'summaries of meaning' perspective. This is because it seeks to understand the data and use themes to give meaning to multiple aspects of the data, rather than providing a summary of all information relating to an element of the data set. Themes are not within the data to be discovered, therefore it is through the process of actively coding and mindmapping the data that I was able to develop initial themes at both a semantic (or manifest) and latent level (Boyatzis, 1998).

3.8.3 Inductive, Deductive and Reflexive Analysis

Analysis was predominantly inductive as I wanted the themes emerging from the data to be driven by what the participants thought, felt and described. I did not want the application of a theoretical framework to divert this at the initial stages. After themes had been generated using an inductive approach, the principles of SDT were applied to explore latent meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). While the procedure outlined earlier in the chapter (section 3.8.1, table 3.6) may suggest a linear approach, the process was iterative. It was difficult to be 'tolerant of uncertainty' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.11) while reviewing the dataset multiple times, sometimes with significant and radical changes in one sitting, but I was alert to the need to trust the process in order to take a truly qualitative approach. I 'critically interrogated' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.13) the data, taking into consideration my own experiences and beliefs. As a qualitative researcher, who has a significant amount of experience within the field being studied, my positionality was integral to the process. These areas demonstrate how reflexive thematic analysis varies across studies and is not a 'one size fits all' recipe to analysing data. Rather, critical aspects were on a spectrum which, for this project, have been exemplified in table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Spectrum of analysis

Inductive	Deductive
Analysis was initially an inductive process with the data driving the interpretation. Once initial themes were identified, a more deductive approach was applied. The key elements of the research questions and principles of the theoretical framework were applied to identify the relationship, if any, between the initial themes and the research aims.	

Semantic	Latent
Initial analysis generated key themes at a semantic level. Further analysis at the deductive stage explored the potential underlying meaning to the participants' drawings and descriptions.	

Experiential	Critical
The study sought to identify the perspectives and views of the participants as described in their drawings and through the focus groups. I wanted to understand their individual perspectives, at an experiential rather than a critical level.	

Realist	Constructionist
Through analysis of the data, I captured the realities of the participants. The themes generated from the data were the participants' 'truth and reality' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.10), at the point at which the data was created. Meaning was constructed through analysis of the data in relation to time and context, while also taking into consideration my positionality.	

Domain areas derived from Braun and Clarke (2022, p.10)

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined my methodological approach, providing insight into the decision-making process that led to the design of the current study. I have outlined how my chosen approach aligns with my ontological and epistemological standpoint, by focusing on collecting and carefully analysing the views of the individual participants. Rather than being replicable and generalisable, the study valued the individual contributions of the participants, seeking to understand their context and experiences. Research with children and young people is an important endeavour and this chapter has articulated how the participants were given the space, voice and audience to be heard (Lundy, 2007), within considered ethical constructs. I sought to carefully collect, analyse and interpret the contributions from their perspectives, working hard to minimise the application of an adult lens to the findings (Horner, 2000).

Through a two stage data collection process - draw and write, followed by focus groups - a rich collection of data was obtained from a sample of 16 participants in year 4 and year 6 of a state primary school in the south of England. The focus groups provided the opportunity to explore their initial drawings, offering participants the chance to describe and explain what motivates them to attend school. This data was then analysed using an iterative process of thematic analysis, drawing on the processes described by Braun and Clark (2022). This led to the identification of themes that were then interpreted using SDT to look for associations between the participants' descriptions and key aspects of the theory.

Chapter four presents the findings of this study. The chapter is organised into themes and describes the research findings in the context of the first objective of the research project:

- To identify who and what motivates children to attend school.

I describe how these findings may be identified as particular forms of motivation and begin to explore whether an association can be made between the key components of SDT and participants' motivations to attend school.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of my study. Using thematic analysis to interpret the annotated drawings and focus group transcriptions, I identified the key themes in the data. These themes have been used to organise and present the findings in this chapter. As outlined in chapter three (section 3.8), an iterative process of coding and reviewing the data led to the emergence of a number of different themes. These were grouped into two key overarching themes - relationships and opportunities - under which the findings are presented. These themes have then been subdivided into six sub-themes that are presented in turn during this chapter (figure 4.1). Relationships are presented first as they featured most prominently in the children's responses followed by a focus on opportunities. The sub themes have been used to distinguish between key aspects of the central themes.

Figure 4.1: Overarching themes and sub themes
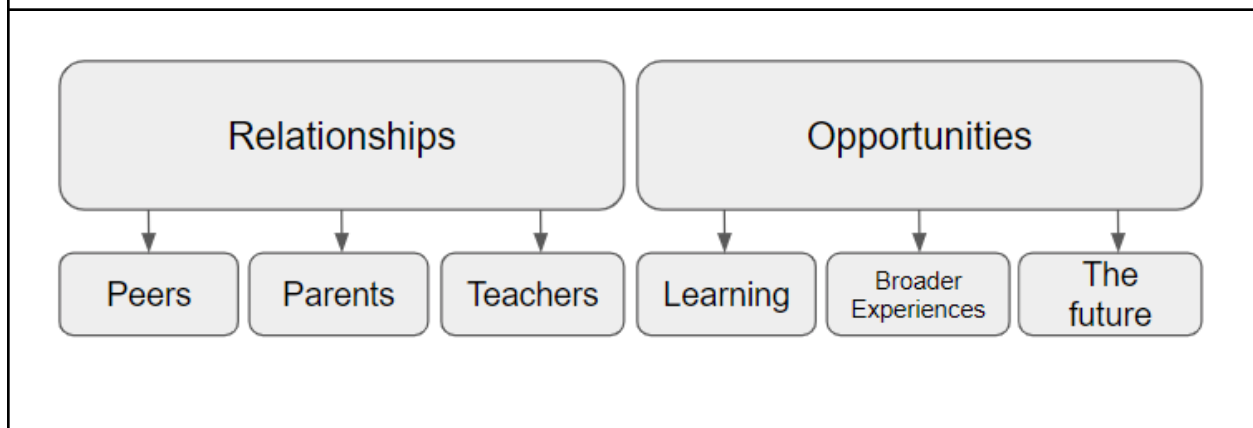
4.1 Theme One: Relationships

The importance of relationships cannot be understated in the context of this research. Exploring the public facing information that was available prior to commencing the study, it was evident that relationships were at the heart of the research school. The school website highlights the importance of the school community and working together to secure positive outcomes for all children. Equally, the school's vision and values explain how it prioritises relationships within

and beyond the immediate environment, emphasising the importance of their connection to the wider community.

I stated in chapter three (section 3.7) that, prior to conducting any research with children, I spoke with a member of school staff to ascertain whether any pupils had specific needs. I was keen to ensure that all participants were safeguarded and any needs were identified so that reasonable adjustments could be made. Despite having over 300 pupils in the school, the headteacher knew each child well and could talk about them in detail. She knew their personalities, interests, strengths and difficulties and spoke about all the children with an interest in their success and wellbeing.

While I did not spend long at the school and my interactions with other staff did not extend beyond conversations in classroom doorways, this focus on relationships was echoed in my interactions with the pupils. From the outset, the children were friendly, warm and welcoming towards me and each other. They presented as having a strong sense of community and a deep commitment to their school. They knew each other well and although some participants had been at the school for longer than others, there was a sense of camaraderie among the pupils that was grounded in their school class identities. While these anecdotal reflections are solely based on my experiences during data collection, the findings of the drawing task and focus groups provided tangible evidence for this. The prevalence of this theme was what led me to consider it first.

Children's contributions under this theme referred to three core relationships: peers, parents and teachers. This combination led to the formation of what I have come to describe as a triad of meaningful relationships. These three relationships all appeared to contribute simultaneously towards children's motivation to attend school. Figure 4.2 shows how these three types of relationship interact with the child. I have used different sized boxes to reflect the frequency with which the children mentioned these relationships. While this was a qualitative study and I did not intend to count the number of references to peers, parents and teachers, participants referenced their friends almost three times as often as teachers. They referenced parents even less frequently.

Figure 4.2: Triad of relationships
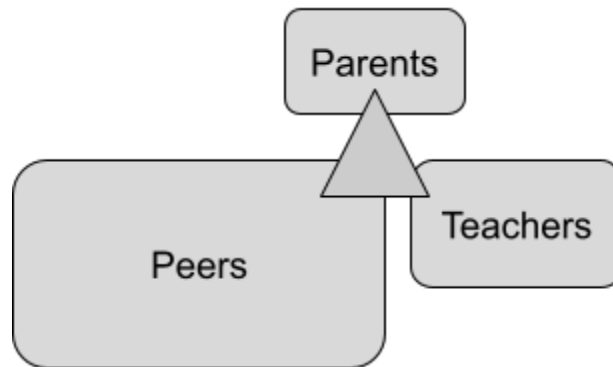
4.1.1 Relationships with Peers

It was apparent that relationships with peers were especially important to the children in this study. Participants from both age groups referred to them unprompted, at both stages of data collection, indicating that this was evident more widely than an individual or group.

4.1.1.1 Seeing Friends

Friendship was referenced frequently by all participants and was a dominant theme during incidental conversations too. Being with friends was an important component of children's responses in the drawing task. All year 4 participants made reference to friendship in some form, along with seven out of eight of the year 6 children. Meeting and seeing friends were common responses to the prompt 'Draw what motivates you to attend school.' This was illustrated by the children's drawings which featured groups of children standing together with the participants and their friends indicated.

Being in the presence of friends seemed important to the children. Seeing, meeting and hanging out, without any specific reference to exactly what they would be doing, was a feature of their responses and drawings. It was also notable that images depicting friendship were, in the majority of cases, in the plural. While only one of the participants referenced another child by name in their drawing, during informal discussions with the children, they talked animatedly about their friendships and the fun they had with individuals and groups. A sense of belonging was evident as participants referred to 'my' friends, illustrating a personal connection with those in their drawings.

Some of the drawings and associated descriptions extended beyond being with or seeing friends, to give a more specific indication of why those friendships were important. In her drawing, Rachel (year 4) captured one of the activities she likes to do with friends (playing with skipping ropes). Meanwhile, Aaron's (year 4) drawing included two friends walking together with a speech bubble over the top of one friend asking the other what they should do.

The sense of 'doing' things, 'playing with' friends and a common interest were apparent in the drawings and associated descriptions. Four of the participants directly mentioned playing with friends as a motivator for attending. The focus groups gave me the opportunity to explore this further, to understand what it was about friendships that this group valued. When asked to reflect upon their motivation to attend school, all four of the focus groups featured friendships as the first point of discussion. While Hunter (year 4) had referred to meeting friends in his drawing, during the focus group he illustrated why this was important to him. He described how meeting and playing with friends gave him the opportunity to have fun on the playground, play football, spend time on the climbing frame and engage with cricket on the field. Other participants in year 6 made further references to play, such as Tina. She explained how being at home could result in sedentary behaviour while attending school provides the opportunity to be energetic, run around and play which are not only fun but good for you too.

There was also evidence of how the opportunity for play with friends extended beyond the hours of the school day. The school was close to a local park and there was consensus among the participants that arriving early at school afforded the opportunity to play there with friends. Sophie described this during the focus groups, explaining how she aimed to arrive early each day for the opportunity to talk to her friends and play on the playground. The school playground also offered the opportunity for pupils to play in a large expanse of grass, referenced by the pupils as 'the field', Sasha spoke animatedly about her experiences. She described the enjoyment gained from playing on the big fields and surrounding mounds, while also having the opportunity to chat with friends.

When talking about their experiences of play with peers, there was a palpable sense of excitement among the participants, characterised by animated descriptions, gesticulation and smiles. There was a strong sense that the opportunity to play and build experiences with peers was an important rationale for attending school. This extended to the types of activities enjoyed

by participants. In their drawings, some children included pictures of sports equipment such as rackets, bats and balls while others included playtime equipment such as skipping ropes.

While the drawings and their associated descriptions did not specifically link sports and participants' relationships with their peers, it was notable that more than one drawing included equipment commonly associated with team sports, such as footballs, bats and balls. While these drawings could be merely illustrative of participants enjoying a range of sports at school, their choice of items may represent the value attributed to engaging in activities that involve others. Team sports provide an opportunity to collaborate with peers and work together in a large group. Therefore, the participants' decisions to include these could be because they enjoy playing together with groups of friends. Similarly, in the focus group, Sasha (year 6) referenced the pleasure she gained from playing team games with her peers. She described the fun she had playing manhunt on the school field. A variation on the game of tag, manhunt involves a large group of people working together with the aim of trying to catch those on the opposing team.

The activities described by the participants illustrate the multi-layered benefits of friendships, from practical support and engagement in fun games to the deeper social, emotional and psychological support afforded by communication and understanding during these interactions. Play and fun were universally accepted by the focus groups as a reason for attending school. However, there was also a sense of a deeper connection between the children and their friends that extended beyond individual opportunities to play and engage in activities. This is described in the following section.

4.1.1.3 Supportive Friendships

Some of the participants chose to create drawings that depicted groups of children. One could infer that, by doing this, the children might be attempting to represent supportive and trusting relationships with their friends. Groups of children standing together and smiling may indicate happiness and connection between individuals. Three of the drawings depicted groups of children with a box or circle around them. Research examining the process of children drawing has found that they configure their pictures purposefully (Cox, 2005). Therefore, the circle or square around the images of groups of friends is therefore likely intentional rather than incidental. Creating a box around the image could be interpreted as a sense of connection or belonging as the images are contained together, within the box or circle. However, it must also

be acknowledged that the participants may have 'boxed in' the images from a merely practical perspective. Organising them in this way indicates the component parts of their drawing and the different things that motivate them to attend. For example, in the case of Tina (year 6) all her drawings were organised in this way, with an outline drawn around each image.

While it is difficult to interpret a sense of trust and support from the drawings, the focus groups provided a more detailed picture of the nature of the children's relationships with peers. The interaction between participants in one of the year 6 focus groups elucidated this. Abbie initiated the conversation by explaining how she was motivated to attend school because her friends have the ability to cheer her up, even if she is not feeling great. She emphasised how they can make her smile and that school feels like a positive place. Oscar added to this by agreeing with Abbie's sentiment. His comments also focused on the benefits of having friends in school who can defend him or cheer him up if he is feeling sad. This interaction draws attention to the way in which the participants focused on how their friendships have a deeper value than opportunities for play and fun.

The participants both shared the view that their friendships influenced their mood, spreading positivity, even if they were feeling low. There was also a sense that their friends had the ability to lift their spirits and provide support. This was particularly evident in Oscar's statement when he indicated that his friends would come to his defence when needed.

The value of trusting and supportive friendships was further illustrated in one of the year 4 focus groups. Lina described how her friends help her to get through the day, suggesting that their presence makes the challenging aspects of school more manageable. She expanded on this by explaining how her friends provide support if she is finding school work difficult or if she were to hurt herself. Much like Abbie and Oscar, Lina referenced the help and support provided by her friendships. It seems that Lina's perception is that friends are there to help her, to support her with work and to come to her aid in the event of an incident.

4.1.1.4 Understanding and Safe Friendships

Abbie and Oscar's earlier interaction demonstrated the important role of support in peer relationships. Later in the exchange, Sasha gave her perspective too. She compared her friendships with her familial relationships, explaining that friends are different to siblings because you get along with them whereas, by contrast, siblings can be annoying. In the conversation,

Abbie followed this comment by explaining in more detail how friendships are based on understanding. She described how friends get along because they have things in common and understand each other.

While Abbie explicitly stated the importance of friends understanding each other, undertones of this could be felt in Sasha's response too. While she focused on brothers and sisters being annoying, there was a sense that friends, conversely, were not. This may suggest that Sasha sees her friends as individuals who are like minded, understand her and behave in ways that she finds appealing rather than irritating.

These responses indicate a level of psychological as opposed to physical, practical support gained from their friendships. While it was evident from the descriptions that friends provided support with practical tasks and activities, it seemed this support ran deeper. While this was not apparent in the year 4 discussions, it was evident in both year 6 groups. Abbie, Oscar and Sam all articulated the way their friendships made them feel, with a focus on happiness and safety. Sam explicitly linked this to his friendships, explaining how these relationships made him feel happy and safe because his peers would be in a position to offer support if he was faced with a problem.

Sam's response suggests a deep connection and sense of understanding that he has within his friendships. Sam spoke of his confidence in his friends' abilities to keep him safe and make him happy. Moreover, this depth of connection was demonstrated by his trust that his friends would be there to help him in times of need. It seemed Sam had confidence that his friends knew him well enough to help him in the moment and proactively support him too. In his focus group, Oscar communicated a similar message, outlining how he perceived his friends as people who would defend him.

This sense of consistent, reliable support seems to be underpinned by a feeling of understanding. The idea that friends understand you in a way that others might not. Abbie was the only participant to discuss this explicitly, describing how you make decisions about your friends based on your connection with them. She explained that you might talk to other children but they won't necessarily like the same things as you or understand you. Again, this shows how friendship goes beyond engaging with others in practical tasks and activities and instead focuses on a deeper connection.

While the other participants did not expand on this further, when they talked about their familial relationships, there was a sense of recognition that they differed. Sasha explained this when discussing how school friends are more likely to have similar interests compared to siblings. Sasha's contribution suggests that her school friendships offer something that her relationships at home cannot. From her description it seems that Sasha gains value from being in an environment with those who share her interests and care about the things she does. This is inherently valuable to her and is a clear benefit of attending school. The importance of communication between peers was referenced by other participants too. Children in both year groups articulated the importance of interaction, referencing how they enjoyed chatting and talking with friends. This exemplifies the value attributed to communication which further develops the importance of friendship as a vehicle for support and understanding. Having someone to talk to and share your experiences with presented as an important part of the children's relationships with each other.

While participants referenced the friendships that arose from having similar interests, there was also acknowledgement from two of the participants that friendships were not solely related to like-mindedness. Lina (year 4) described the reciprocal relationship between friends who have different interests and the benefits of being able to learn new things from one another. This view was shared by Sophie (year 4), who explained how her friends helped her to learn new things such as handsprings in gymnastics.

4.1.2 Relationships with Parents

In contrast to the impact of peers on children's motivation to attend school, parents featured far less in participants' descriptions. The literature review outlined the influence that parents and carers can have on their child's attendance, including how some children attend school out of the fear of the consequences they believe their parents may face in the event of non-attendance (Reid et al., 2010). While I had anticipated participants might refer to the role of their parents in motivating them to attend school, these were fewer than expected.

4.1.2.1 Pressure to Attend

Two participants referred to a sense of pressure from their parents to attend school. One participant (James, year 4), included reference to this in his drawing by including a label that suggested his parents made him attend school but he did not mention this again in the focus group. For the other participant, the opposite was true. James' description of his picture was in

contrast to his focus group contributions, where he provided multiple reasons for wanting to attend. It is important to reflect on why this might be. Firstly, we have to consider that the drawing may reflect how James feels about attending school and his decision to draw but not articulate this in the focus group may have been an active decision. Potentially, as other participants did not contribute such thoughts, he felt unable to say it himself. Conversely it may be the case that, on this day, James was feeling particularly unhappy about school. He could have had a disagreement with his parents, friends or teachers. It is not possible for me to know this without speaking to him directly but I felt his comment was striking and provided insight into the way children might feel about attending school. How might this parental influence be interpreted and how did this impact his motivation?

While there were no further references to parental pressure within the drawing task, another participant in James' focus group reflected on a similar theme. Sophie explained that, from her perspective, attending school was a legal requirement set by the government. Her understanding was that all children are required to attend school (if not educated elsewhere) or the parent could be arrested. Later in the focus group, she developed this further by suggesting that her parents could face consequences from the government if she did not attend.

At this point in the focus group discussion, I had asked the participants whether they were more motivated by internal or external forces (section 3.5.7). While Sophie had provided plenty of other motivating factors prior to this, my question prompted her to reflect on the legal requirements of attending school. At first, it was difficult to ascertain where this perception had developed from. However, she later revisited the topic. Having been prompted to consider how motivation may have changed over time, Sophie clarified her thinking by explaining that she had initially been motivated to attend school through fear of the consequences her parents would face if she did not. She described learning from her parents that they could face consequences if she did not attend school. From this description, it sounds as though Sophie had been directly informed by her parents of the implications of non-attendance and that she continued to attend out of compliance. However, she followed this statement by explaining how things had changed since then, with her attendance now being motivated by her friendships and wanting to attend.

These contributions demonstrate the interplay of factors influencing the participants' thoughts and feelings. While Sophie was motivated by playing with friends, feeding the animals, lessons and rewards, she could also remember a time when she was motivated through fear of a

consequence for her parents if she was absent. Both Sophie and James indicated external pressure from parents as reasons for attending school, with James' comment in particular indicating parental control as a factor.

4.1.2.2 Support, Encouragement and Role Models

The other references to parents in this study reflected different themes. Unlike references to friendships, which were somewhat consistent from all participants, comments about parents were more varied. Perhaps this was because, unlike peers, they were mentioned less frequently and participants did not keep referring back to their parents to develop their points. That being said, indications of parents as support, encouragement and role models were evident in the children's responses. Fliss (year 6), captured the essence of this first in her drawing which included a large image of her parents. They were the dominant component of the drawing, surrounded by smaller images depicting other motivators. The size of this image may have been an active choice by Fliss, so she could visually represent the relative importance of her parents in relation to her motivation to attend school. However, this was also the first image Fliss added during the session which could also be why it is positioned centrally within the frame.

Fliss' description of her drawing demonstrates how she holds her parents in high esteem, suggesting she sees them as role models. Her description also refers to her parents' job roles and qualifications which may also indicate that she aspires to their roles in academia or, as discussed earlier in the chapter, demonstrates understanding that attending school will help her to achieve employment in the future. Either way, this is in contrast to the parental pressure described by Sophie and James.

Unfortunately, Fliss was not present in the focus group, so I could not explore this further with her but other participants in year 6 did reflect on the impact of their parents. Tina, Sam, Abbie and Sasha all mentioned the importance of parental encouragement and support, although the context of this was different for them all. While Sam focused on his motivation to make his parents proud at school events, Tina reflected on her parents in terms of helping her to overcome challenges at school. Meanwhile, Abbie focused on parental support in the mornings, describing how her parents would provide verbal encouragement and help with practical tasks if she were reluctant to start the day.

The literature review explored how autonomy supportive parenting may influence a child's motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Abbie's description of her parents' role in her attendance at school seemed to be indicative of this approach. Rather than describing how her parents used controlling or coercive behaviours to secure her attendance, she instead focused on the encouragement and support they provided which, in turn, encouraged her to get out of bed and start the day. Tina provided a similar example within the context of a problem at school. Her description of parental behaviour was of reassurance and support. James and Rachel (year 4) provided further insight into this. James indicated that his parents were in favour of his attendance at school, although he did not expand on this response to indicate whether this influenced his actual motivation to attend. Rachel however explicitly linked her parents to her own motivation by explaining how they sometimes gave her the motivation to attend when she did not want to.

While this was the only occasion when a participant made an explicit reference to motivation, it was apparent from the children's responses that their parents played an important role in their lives. That being said, it is notable that these references were infrequent compared to the way they talked about their friends. The children required no encouragement to talk about their peers but in three out of the four focus groups, the influence of parents was prompted by a question from me. This may provide an indication of the relative importance of parental and peer relationships within the context of school and their motivation to attend.

4.1.3 Relationships with Teachers

Teachers were a feature of the children's responses in both stages of the project, with a particular emphasis on the kindness, help and support they offer. A number of the drawings illustrated the presence of the teacher in the classroom, such as through an image of a teacher working at the board. In these representations, the participants may be representing the instructional rather than pastoral role of the teacher. In three of the four year 6 drawings that illustrated teachers, individuals were also identified by name, which may indicate specific relationships between teacher and pupil.

Carter's contribution to the drawing task and my observations of his behaviours and comments during the session were particularly pertinent. Carter (year 6) appeared to find it difficult to settle to the task and spent time, at first, talking to me and his peers. Having shared that he did not know what to draw, he asked if he could draw his sports teacher. The drawing was labelled with

his teacher's name and although Carter did not add this to his description, he talked to me about how much he enjoyed sport with this particular teacher, how kind he (the teacher) was and how much he liked him. From this interaction, I inferred that Carter had a strong and trusting relationship with this adult that was grounded in a respect for his sporting knowledge and skills. There was something about the teacher that appeared to resonate with Carter and supported the relationship between them. Although Carter was not present for the focus groups, I was able to explore the role of teachers as motivators with the other participants. Much like Carter, for a number of the children, kindness was key to the value attributed to their teacher. This kindness could be demonstrated through actions, such as class parties, or through the help and support they provide as positive adults in the participants' life.

Participants in year 6 shared a similar perspective, emphasising the value of teacher support as well as how they made learning an enjoyable experience. For example Sam describes how the good humour of teachers helps to make learning fun, especially if the lesson is expected to be boring. Indicative of the existing research in this area (section 2.3.3), supportive and nurturing relationships, rather than controlling ones, were important motivators for the children and clearly referenced in the focus groups. Oscar (year 6) found an association with familial relationships, explaining that while teachers are not related to pupils by blood, they still provide support, much like one big family.

While there is recognition in this contribution that his relationships with teachers are different to those with his parents, referring to the school as one big family was pertinent. This may indicate the value he attributes to these relationships and the depth of feeling he has towards the adults in his school. Oscar was not the only participant who referred to the school in this way. Abbie also described how the school environment involves support all around that enables everyone to learn together as a family.

Abbie and Oscar may have prompted each other's use of the word 'family', however their contributions still indicated the strength of these relationships and how important they are. While Abbie and Oscar identified the similarities between familial and teacher relationships, there were also indications that teacher:pupil relationships had some key differences. Sasha, Oscar and Abbie agreed that the relationships they had with teachers influenced their behaviours and choices. They provided examples of being asked to do something or try something new. In the case of their parents, the children felt they would be more likely to resist or say no if it was

something they did not want to do. By contrast, if the activity was suggested by a teacher, they would be more likely to give it a try.

As well as providing kindness and support, these interactions may illustrate the role teachers play in encouraging children to try new things, in addition to offering a broad range of learning opportunities. The children seemed to find the teacher's behaviour motivating due to the specific activities offered and their belief in them that they could do something new. Conversely, their comments could have been interpreted differently. Participants suggesting they cannot say no to teachers could be inferred as controlling behaviour, with children under pressure to comply with instructions. While the participants' later comments in the focus group seemed to imply the former interpretation, it is not unreasonable to suggest that children felt compelled to follow their teacher's instructions due to them being in a position of authority.

4.1.3.1 Teachers, Autonomy and Perceived Competence

The idea of teachers promoting a sense of perceived competence in the children is important to explore. Autonomy supportive approaches (section 2.4.4), that focus on encouragement and supportive interactions with children, have been found to have more positive outcomes than controlling behaviour. The descriptions provided by the children reflected teachers who provide encouragement and support which, in turn, gives the participants confidence to try new things. In turn, these positive interactions provided children with further motivation to attend. Again, there was a suggestion from the year 6 participants that the school environment encouraged them to try new things and make their own choices. For example, Oscar described how the school environment can help pupils to identify new talents they may have been unaware of. Oscar's comment is particularly pertinent as it implies that, through the provision of opportunity, the teachers are supporting the children to be autonomous in their actions and identify new skills and aptitudes they may be unfamiliar with. Again, this aligns with the principles of autonomy supportive approaches that were outlined in the literature review (section 2.4.5).

4.1.3.2 Relationships and Rewards

In the context of this study, rewards were not a key component of the children's responses. I did not explicitly ask the children or headteacher if the school used rewards to support attendance. None of the children mentioned a school-wide or class based reward system used solely for this purpose; however, in my experience as a school leader, attendance rewards have been a common feature of school environments that I have taught in and visited.

Participants in both year groups did however reference a classroom behaviour reward system. With the exception of the children in year 6 group 1 (who did not mention rewards), participants referred to a marble system. The system involved moving marbles from one jar to another, with marbles awarded for good behaviour and a treat once all the marbles had been moved across to the other jar. The participants suggested this was a motivator for them to attend because the marble treat gave them the opportunity to shift from the usual school timetable to do something fun, different and exciting.

The children spoke with enthusiasm about their 'marble treats' with Oscar (year 6) remembering how they once earned a water fight. Exploring their responses further, the references to rewards appeared to be related to two things. Firstly, the reward was motivating for the children because it provided them with the opportunity to do something different or something they perceived as more fun than their usual classroom activities. More importantly though, the value of the reward appeared to be underpinned by the way in which it gave them the opportunity to interact with their peers.

When Lina (year 4) talked about the reward received when the marble jar was full, she focused on the importance of relationships. She used the word 'we', indicating that this was a collaborative reward and she specifically referred to eating food with her friends. Similarly, when Abbie referenced her motivation to attend school for the treat, she mentioned the importance of fun, closely followed by describing how she was excited to see her friends for the reward. Rather than the physical reward motivating them, it was the feeling of fun and the opportunity to share the experience with others that excited them.

Kate and Lina (year 4) described how the marble treats had a positive impact on relationships within their class, highlighting how it helped their class to work together and get along when this was not usually the case. These comments demonstrate the value Kate and Lina attribute to the classroom being a place where their peers collaborate and come together to achieve a positive outcome. From their responses, it appears that positive relationships with peers in their class are important to them. It also seems that offering different activities and opportunities for children to do things with peers provides motivation and encouragement for them to attend, both to work towards and engage in the activity. The year 6 participants' reflections on these activities, two years after they had taken place, may also be an indicator of the relative importance of providing children with the opportunity to engage in activities that they perceive to be fun and exciting, with their peers.

4.2 Theme Two: Opportunities

Relationships between participants and their peers, parents and teachers were a dominant theme in my interactions with the children and subsequent analysis of the drawings and focus groups. However, the participants also provided insight into the opportunities and experiences afforded by attending school.

This section of the findings chapter presents the theme of opportunities in three key areas - learning, broader opportunities and the future - that reflect the way in which the underpinning ideas were described by the participants. The children in this study focused on school as a place for learning and broader experiences, as well as identifying how their time in school might support them now and in the future.

4.2.1 Learning and Lessons

The importance of learning as a motivation to attend school was prevalent in the children's drawings and focus group contributions. 12 out of the 15 drawings included some reference to learning or lessons. In the drawing stage, some of the children focused on learning in a general sense, while others were more specific about the lessons they enjoyed, citing subjects such as PE and art. Of the topics featured in the children's drawings, learning followed closely behind friends as one of the key components. More than one participant chose to draw a picture of a classroom environment with a board, depicting a general image of learning and lessons, while other participants were more specific in both their drawings and descriptions.

Jon (year 4) attempted to capture the range of learning he enjoys through four small images in his drawing, one to represent learning in each identified subject - art, maths, PE and writing. Other participants took a similar approach, representing the subjects they enjoyed through a visual representation. In her description, Fliss (year 6) explained how she likes the occupations offered by the school. This description was paired with a drawing that represented a combination of specific lessons and more general activities. While there was no general consensus from the participants that a particular subject was favoured, there were some that appeared more frequently than others.

Six of the fifteen drawings included mathematical symbols. As the children did not necessarily mention maths explicitly in their description, it is difficult to ascertain the reasons for this. It could

be inferred that mathematical symbols are immediately recognisable as an aspect of learning and the children wanted to make clear that this was what they were representing. Secondly, it is not uncommon to see mathematical symbols on television, in books and magazines as a representation of learning. Again, these symbols are widely recognisable as such. Finally, mathematics is commonly perceived by pupils as a challenging and demanding subject. It could therefore be the case that they wanted to demonstrate how 'learning new things' was important.

Another commonly represented subject was PE, with the most frequent image depicting sporting equipment, such as bats and balls. In their descriptions, some of the participants specifically mentioned PE and sports as well. During the focus groups the participants did not expand on their interest in PE, however I have inferred why PE and sport may have featured for the children. Unlike other primary National Curriculum subjects, physical education is, by nature, a collaborative learning experience. Children may learn specific sporting skills independently but in many lessons, they work together with their peers in paired, group or game situations. PE provides children with an opportunity to connect with their peers and strengthen their relationships through games and play. This may be reflected in the children's choice of sports-related images and also mirrors the points presented earlier in the chapter (section 4.1.1.2), where participants articulated the value in playing games and sports with their friends. Footballs, rounders bats and tennis balls are all representations of team activities. Even a hurdles race (depicted in Jon's drawing), involves multiple competitors. When I reflected on this, it could be the case that the children enjoy engaging in sports and PE because it gives them the opportunity to be together. The children evidently value being with their peers, working and playing together. PE provides a good opportunity for them to do this. Again, this mirrors findings presented earlier in the chapter (section 4.1.3.2) that identified how the children valued their marble treat because it gave them the opportunity to spend more time with their friends.

4.2.1.1 Learning Something New

Comments relating to the learning taking place in school were combined with an understanding that attending was an opportunity to learn something new. Participants in both year groups recognised how they obtained new knowledge through their engagement in specific learning activities. This was illustrated in a number of the children's drawings where they added descriptions to indicate that they enjoyed learning new things. Participants made similar contributions during the focus group discussions although, in all instances, there were limits to how specific the children were about what the new learning actually entailed. Sam (year 6)

focused on learning new sports in PE, as well as the value of engaging in projects and learning something new in subjects such as DT.

Although Sam's comments were relatively broad and did not make specific reference to what the new learning was, there was recognition that school provided him with the opportunity to participate in learning experiences he had not encountered before. He demonstrated this through his reference to specific subjects such as DT and PE. This was echoed by those in year 4 who shared a similar perspective. Rachel, like Sam, focused on the importance of learning new things and having fun. Again, although Rachel is not specific about the subjects or aspects of learning, she recognises that school is a place for her to learn something new.

4.2.1.2 Pleasurable and Meaningful Learning

Alongside this, children made connections with their opportunities in school and the pleasure and enjoyment that came from their engagement in them. Participants in both year groups referred to 'fun' in their drawings and focus group contributions. While in some cases this word was attributed to their interactions with peers, they also described the learning opportunities and lessons as enjoyable. The children were more explicit in these instances, providing specific examples of learning opportunities that were fun or enjoyable. Sophie and Kate (year 4), articulated this in the focus group when they discussed some specific learning experiences which they found fun and enjoyable. Sophie recalled a recent mathematics lesson involving shapes while Kate referenced making pop up books and growing plants.

Sophie and Kate described how specific aspects of learning were fun, enjoyable and memorable. During the discussion, Kate also described how tall her plant had grown following the planting lesson. This suggests she is remembering an event that happened a while ago. She recalled what seemed to be an experience of planting a runner bean but her indication of the size of the plant suggests this did not happen recently. This indicates that the memory of this experience had stayed with her far beyond the planting of the seed. These memorable moments of learning were clearly important to the children as they recalled them quickly and were animated in their descriptions. This was similarly echoed by the year 6 participants. For example Tina reflected on her experience of the year 6 play. Although she provided a more general reference to the play as a whole, rather than a specific element, there was evidence to suggest this was both a fun and memorable experience.

4.2.1.3 Learning Isn't Always Fun - and That's Okay

There was recognition from the participants that not all learning at school was fun and enjoyable. Kate (year 4) and Sasha (year 6) both openly described this in their focus groups, articulating how lessons could be sometimes boring and sometimes fun. These reflections may provide evidence to suggest a demotivating factor for children. If learning is not fun and memorable, surely the children would not want to come to school because of this?

The children however demonstrated a more nuanced perspective of this. They appeared to acknowledge and accept that not all opportunities at school were going to be, or could be, fun. While this did cause them to experience fluctuations in their motivations, none of the participants indicated that these experiences would lead them to stay away from school. Kate and James (year 4) shared some of these feelings in their discussion with me. While there was recognition that sometimes they did not like attending school, finding test papers and some lessons boring, the fun and excitement of particular school days and activities provided them with the motivation to continue attending.

Some of the year 6 participants developed their thoughts on this further, demonstrating an understanding that future learning opportunities encouraged attendance on the less exciting days. Hunter shared his perspective by describing how the prospect of an upcoming trip would give him the motivation to get through more challenging days in order to have fun. Unlike the year 4 responses, Hunter's comment mentioned something akin to delayed gratification. He appeared to understand that, in order to participate in the educational visit, he would need to 'get through' the other days. This may suggest that his motivation to attend the educational visit was enough to maintain his motivation to attend the less enjoyable aspects of school. Abbie (year 6) demonstrated a somewhat similar perspective, exploring how the prospect of seeing friends or doing something exciting at school was a welcome change from the day to day of regular lessons.

4.2.2 Broader Experiences

In addition to what we may anticipate as common school-related learning opportunities, the children in this study also reflected on the importance of the wider opportunities offered in their specific school context.

Forest school, outdoor learning and the resident school animals were an unexpected but significant motivator for children in both year groups. At this juncture in the findings chapter, it is important to note that, prior to visiting the school for the first time, I was not aware of the role animals, forest school and outdoor learning had within this particular school community. The school website dedicates a section to their commitment to this endeavour, however I was not expecting the impact of this work to be so evident in the children's responses. My previous experiences of forest school have been in environments where a small group visited the forest on a weekly basis, often for a short intervention, making this an occasional rather than a regular experience. However, from talking to the children during my first visit, it quickly became apparent that this was not the case in the study school. The children described visiting the forest school multiple times per week, taking part in outdoor learning opportunities and caring for the animals.

The children's animated descriptions of caring for animals during the drawing phase of research introduced me to the profound importance of this experience. Five of the year 6 participants included descriptions or drawings of animals and while none of the year 4 children included them in their drawings, they were referenced in informal discussion during the drawing exercise. Abbie (year 6) and Tina (year 6) both described their enjoyment of being with the animals, looking after them and participating in forest school. Through discussion with the participants, it transpired that animal husbandry was a component of their forest school sessions and when the children talked about this, their experiences were communicated in a lively fashion. It was clear from the outset that this was something really special. Sophie and Kate (year 4) shared how they liked the animals, with Sophie describing how cute they were before moving on to explain how they were allowed to feed them too. Lina and Rachel (also year 4), were similarly dynamic in their references, excitedly talking about feeding the goats.

One can note that, in Abbie's list of things that motivate her to attend school, the school's goats and chickens do feature but the reference is sandwiched between references to interactions with peers. In contrast, both year 4 groups spoke for an extended period about the animals, with participants in the second group recalling a memorable event where the goats escaped. Hunter, Lina and Rachel (year 4) all contributed, the strength of the shared memory coming through in their rich descriptions. During this retelling, the atmosphere in the room was electric and I found

myself laughing at an anecdote that, to the children, was hilarious. Throughout, the participants looked at one another and kept bursting into laughter.

The animals in this school were important to the children in three key ways. Firstly, as part of the forest school, they provided children with an exciting and engaging learning opportunity. The environment of the forest school, the activities completed there and the animals appeared to have a positive impact on the children. This is elucidated in the drawings, descriptions and focus groups. Additionally, from the children's descriptions, it seemed that the relationships they had with the animals were important too. Caring for and feeding them provided the children with the opportunity to form bonds that were unlike those they share with their peers or other members of the school community. Spending time in the forest with the animals also provided the children with another opportunity to spend time with their peers. For example Sophie (year 4) referred to the animals and forest school space as a place for chatting with friends.

I recognise that the children's connection with animals is particular to this school and the children seemed to acknowledge this too, explaining how the opportunities afforded to them were different to those of other children. What this suggests is that the children experience great pleasure in engaging in an activity that is not explicitly linked to any aspect of the national curriculum. It is a broader opportunity where they can learn new skills, in collaboration with their peers, and engage with animals that they are unlikely to have contact with in their everyday lives.

4.2.2.2 Valued Resources and Opportunities

Opportunities and resources were important to the children, being mentioned in different ways in both their drawings and the focus group discussions. Combined with the different lessons referenced by the children, they identified the value given to the opportunities provided by the school, as well as the contribution the teachers made to enabling these to take place. The year 6 participants had recently been on a residential trip so this was fresh in their minds. Two children chose to draw the residential visit logo during the first task and it was a topic of informal discussion while they were drawing. The children talked about the fun they had on the trip, recalling memories and humorous anecdotes from their travels. Alongside this was evidence of a camaraderie, the children appeared to have worked together as a team during their experiences.

Swimming also featured in two of the year 6 drawings and was followed by some discussion in the focus group. One of the participants had aspirations to become a swimmer in the future and Abbie drew upon this to illustrate how the school provides children with new and important experiences. She used the focus group discussion to highlight how the school had actively sought opportunities for the children to go swimming when previously this had not been possible. She followed this with other examples of school activities that she felt were unique to the school. Not only do these comments illustrate the range of opportunities offered by the school, Abbie recognised the teachers' role in securing these for the children. Again, this indicates a connection between the relationships built within the school environment and the opportunities afforded by attending.

The children recognised that their school was providing them with opportunities and experiences that may be different to those experienced by other children. As well as identifying the importance of residential trips, swimming, water fights and visits to the park, they also recognised the school environment itself as a resource. Despite being positioned on the outskirts of a city, the study school benefited from large buildings, specialist teaching spaces and a vast outdoor area. The children not only recognised the value and benefits of this but they were grateful for them too.

4.2.2.3 A Sense of Gratitude

Through my two visits to the school and the discussions I had with the children, it steadily became apparent that the children were grateful for the opportunities and experiences offered by the school, recognising their value both now and in the future. Although not always explicitly stated, there appeared to be an acknowledgement that the school was able to provide them with opportunities not all children were able to access. On a basic level, this included reference to special spaces within the school environment such as the art and science room that were dedicated teaching spaces.

There was also acknowledgement that access to a large outdoor space and a forest school within the school grounds were unlikely to be available in all school environments. However, the children's gratitude for opportunity extended beyond the physical spaces. They demonstrated a deeper understanding of the value of education, being able to compare their experiences to those they perceived as less fortunate than themselves. This was reflected in the participants' contributions in both the drawing and focus group stage, where the year 6 children demonstrated an insightful understanding of the educational opportunities offered in England

now compared with other countries and periods in history. Abbie and Oscar engaged in a lengthy discussion where they explained how they had opportunities to attend school, while other children may be prevented from doing so due to conflict and politics. They described their gratitude for having the opportunity to receive an education, demonstrating an understanding that this was not the same for all children worldwide.

Abbie and Oscar's exchange may indicate that they have integrated this extrinsic motivator into their values system. They appear to demonstrate a conscious understanding of the value of school and this has become part of their rationale for attending. I was struck by their thoughtful and considered responses. The conversation continued for an extended period with very few prompts from me, demonstrating the intensity and enthusiasm for this part of the conversation. Sasha, Oscar and Abbie were all able to provide further examples of how school contributed to them feeling grateful. Sasha provided a particularly pertinent example by explaining how some girls are not permitted to attend school in other nations.

These comments demonstrated a depth of understanding that, from my prior experience working with primary aged children, I would not have necessarily expected. Through this short conversation, the group moved beyond the intrinsic value afforded by seeing, talking to and playing with friends, to considering their understanding of extrinsic factors and how this had influenced their values system. This outward looking perspective may reflect the developmental stage of these participants. Egocentricity diminishes as children develop an ability to consider the views and experiences of others (Doherty, 2014). However, their contributions also provide clues about their educational experiences so far. The children have developed these views and perspectives as a result of their interactions with their environment. Whether that be through discussions with parents, learning in school or engagement with the media, the children are learning about the value of education and the privileged context in which their experiences are situated. Being motivated by these attitudes and values is indicative of what Self Determination Theory (SDT) describes as integrated regulation (Ryan and Deci, 2000b), an extrinsic motivator that has become embedded in a person's values system. It seems, from the children's contributions, that at least some of these perspectives have developed as a result of the education and opportunities they are offered at school. This provides evidence of the school's powerful contribution to the children's values systems, attitudes and outlook.

The other groups did not explore these ideas to the extent of Sasha, Oscar and Abbie; however, being grateful for school was echoed by one of the year 4 participants in her drawing and

subsequent contributions during the focus group. Much like Sasha, Kate made these comments unprompted. In her drawing, Kate expressed these thoughts by including a self portrait with a thought bubble describing how she was lucky to be able to attend school. Combined with an additional label to indicate the drawing represented her thinking, Kate appears to be emphasising the value given to these thoughts. While she likely knows the bubble indicates thought, she may have wanted to be sure that the reader understood this represented her thoughts specifically. Despite the focus groups taking place two weeks after the drawing activity, it is somewhat significant that Kate took the opportunity to repeat this, once again acknowledging that some children do not have the opportunity to come to school and that she was lucky to have the opportunity to do so. Despite the difference in age between the two groups of participants, Kate's drawing and further contribution in the focus group demonstrated a similar values structure, attributing value to education by recognising the opportunities she has, that others do not.

4.2.3 Considering the Future

Most of the participants' contributions focused on their current school experiences. However, there were indications that the participants gave thought to the importance of educational opportunities for their future endeavours. Studies have shown that children begin to make the connection between attending school and future opportunities from an early age (Reid et al., 2010; Sheppard, 2009). The participants in the current study were consistent with this, with contributions demonstrating a longer term perspective. Fliss' description of her drawing demonstrated an understanding that attending school would provide her with the knowledge and skills needed to secure employment in the future. She articulated the importance of obtaining employment as an adult, demonstrating a secure understanding of the benefits an education would offer her as well as relating this to her parents' careers.

None of the other participants referred to the future in their drawings and, as Fliss was not present for the focus group, I did not have the opportunity to gain further insight into her views. However, this theme did feature in three out of the four focus groups, with contributions from five of the participants. While Fliss' drawing focused on how her learning at school would help her to get a job and fulfil her career aspirations to follow in the footsteps of her parents, James (year 4) saw things from a slightly different perspective. He acknowledged that attending school would enable him to source employment, however he also articulated that school would provide him

with skills he would need to survive as an adult, such as being able to manage interactions in a shop.

Participants in the year 6 group demonstrated similar feelings. While Sam associated the additional subject opportunities in secondary school with helping him to access a career, Abbie focused on how an education would allow her to achieve success, have a positive life and be the best version of herself with money, food and a home. In this group, the children were also able to make an association between these opportunities and their relationships with school staff. In their discussion, Oscar, Abbie and Sasha acknowledged the role that teachers have in motivating them to do their best and work towards future goals. Oscar captured this perspective, acknowledging how despite teachers sometimes being frustrating, their intentions were ultimately good. There was an acceptance from Oscar that sometimes the value of school might not be immediately evident but he understood that, in the long term, he would be able to reap the benefits.

4.2.3.1 Anticipating Change Over Time

The children in this study were relatively close in age, with two academic years between them. I had initially planned to study participants in the secondary and primary phase, to explore whether motivations to attend school were different based on age and stage of education. While this did not come to fruition and the resulting study only explored children in the primary phase, I was still keen to explore whether the participants felt their motivations would change as they progressed through school. While the drawings focused on participants' current motivations to attend, the focus groups provided the opportunity to ask the children how they felt their motivations may evolve and change.

There was a perception from the year 4 participants that motivation to attend school would likely change as they got older. They felt that some of this change could be attributed to the different opportunities offered from a transition to the secondary school learning environment. While the children were able to identify how secondary school might provide new and exciting opportunities, the common perspective was that getting older meant a growing reluctance to attend school, mainly caused by an increased desire to stay in bed. It is difficult to determine where these ideas originated from. For some of the participants, relatives appeared to be the source, whereas for other children this was less clear. There was however some indication that

this was a commonly held perception, with teenagers being generally more grumpy and negative than younger children.

By contrast, the year 6 participants were able to see how the transition to secondary school might increase their motivation to attend. Children in both groups referenced the wider opportunities on offer at secondary school, including access to different subject areas, subject specific resources and a wider friendship network. Tina and Sam provided insight into these perspectives, explaining how the range of subjects on offer and the general differences between the primary and secondary school environments looked like a fun and enjoyable opportunity that they were looking forward to engaging with.

While there was acknowledgement that the transition to secondary school would bring about change, the year 6 participants were broadly positive about this. I questioned why the year 6 participants provided more developed responses when asked to reflect on how things might change as they get older. The data collection for this study was completed in the summer term of the year 6 pupils' final year at primary school. All the participants had visited their new secondary schools and talked about this informally during the drawing task and after the focus groups. They had seen the classrooms and resources available in these new environments and been given the opportunity to compare them with their current educational provision. It was evident that the children were in the process of preparing for this transition, which may explain why they were able to give more thought to the prospect of change. Conversely, transition to secondary school may feel a long way off for year 4 participants. This may have contributed to their focus on perceived changes experienced by teenagers, rather than on the new opportunities on offer at a new secondary school that they have yet to see and experience.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the core findings of this study, using the children's drawing, descriptions and focus group contributions to elucidate the points made. The findings were presented under the two key themes of relationships and opportunities.

Relationships play a crucial role in the participants' motivation to attend school, with peers being particularly influential. The participants reported how trusting and supportive relationships that were grounded in common understanding, shared interests and a sense of belonging were

valuable to them. They explained how they were motivated to attend school so they could spend time with their peers, enjoying play, sports and fun.

While friendship was a frequently referenced motivation to attend school, the participants also recognised the important contribution made by parents and school staff. They valued the supportive relationships with these adults and although a small number of participants eluded to an external pressure from parents, the majority focused on the way in which adult relationships encouraged them to attend. Teachers were particularly valued for their kind, helpful and supportive approach. The participants reflected on how the adults in school worked hard to build positive relationships and provide learning experiences and wider opportunities that were both educational and enjoyable.

The second theme explored the influence of opportunity on the children's motivation to attend school. The participants acknowledged that school was a place for learning. This was something they valued, drawing attention to the wide range of subjects and activities they could engage with. The children recognised the value of broader experiences and, for this particular group, the influence of animals, outdoor learning and forest school were something they especially enjoyed. There was an understanding that many of the opportunities offered at their school were distinctive and special, providing learners with experiences beyond that of pupils in other schools, locally and globally. There was a deep sense of gratitude for school and the children made pertinent comments that demonstrated their understanding of how they were fortunate to be able to attend.

While the children mainly focused on their present experiences, they did take the opportunity to reflect on how their attendance at school may impact their future. There was a recognition that, beyond the benefits of relationships and their immediate experiences, attending school would help them in the future. And while the children were mainly focused on the present moment, there was an understanding that their motivation to attend school would likely change and evolve over time, particularly as they progressed into the secondary phase of their education.

Chapter five will discuss the findings presented in this chapter, drawing on the research objectives, selected components of SDT and the wider literature to explain them further.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

Chapter four presented the findings of this study, focusing on the children's drawings, descriptions and focus group contributions to elucidate the key themes identified. In this chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to the research objectives, the underpinning theoretical framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT) and the wider literature. The three key objectives of my research were:

1. To identify who and what motivates children to attend school.
2. To use the data that has been collected to analyse and explore what forms of motivation may influence children to attend school.
3. To use the data collected and analysed to explore whether an association can be made between key components of SDT and participants' motivations to attend school.

In chapter three (section 3.8) I outlined my approach to the analysis of data, drawing on the structure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). This involved carefully identifying key themes through an iterative process of viewing and reviewing the data. The findings chapter presented these themes as they emerged from the data, remaining faithful to the children's contributions. In this chapter, I expand on this by discussing the themes in more detail and interpreting them through aspects of SDT and the broader literature. Table 5.1 shows how the themes identified in chapter four are mapped into chapter five, along with the objectives that are addressed.

Table 5.1: Theme mapping: Findings chapter to discussion chapter		
Chapter Four	**Chapter Five**	**Objectives Addressed**
4.1 Theme One: Relationships	5.2 Who Motivates Children to Attend School	Objectives 1,2,3
4.2 Theme Two: Opportunities	5.3 What Motivates Children to Attend School	Objectives 1,2,3

5.1 A Variety of Motivational Factors

A core reason for embarking on this project was that there have been few studies that have explored children's motivations to attend school (section 2.3.7). While there are a wide range of studies that explore reasons for absence (section 2.3), only a small number of authors have asked who and what motivates children to attend. In such studies (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), this has also not been the sole focus of the research. A variety of reasons interact and contribute to children not attending. I was therefore interested to examine whether the same would be true for children's motivation to attend.

For the participants in the current study, a variety of motivational factors were identified. All the participants identified multiple reasons for attending school and it seemed these appeared to act simultaneously on each child, with some featuring to a lesser or greater extent. There were however common themes that became apparent in the participants' responses, which led to the development of the two overarching themes and six associated sub-themes. These are presented again in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Overarching themes and sub themes
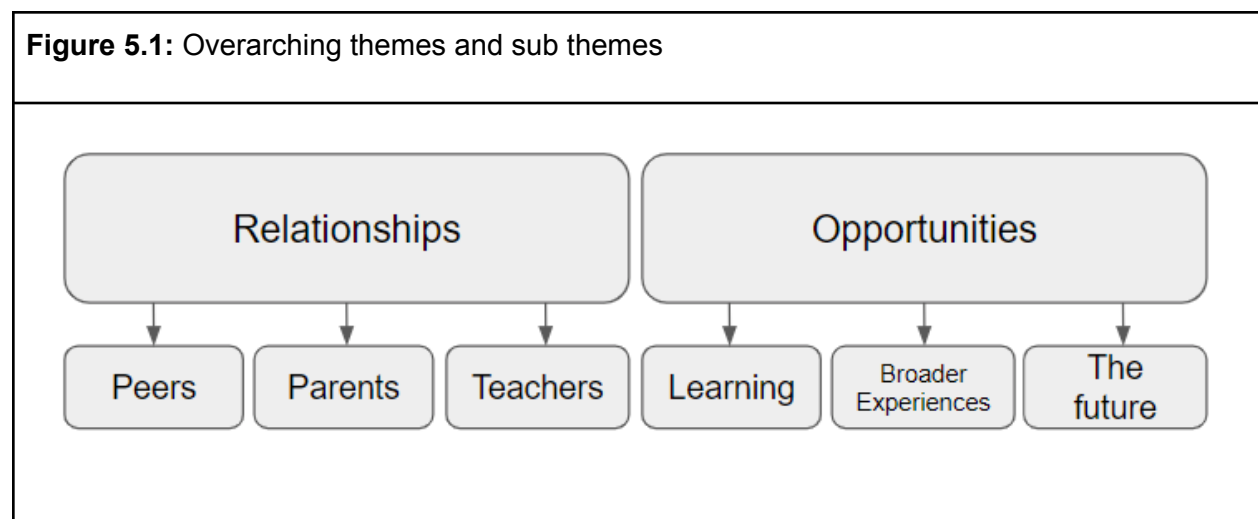
While the children in this study identified a range of different factors that influenced their motivation to attend school, the similarities in the themes identified suggest the core reasons for attendance may be more homogenous than the reasons for absence. As noted in the literature chapter (section 2.3), Gubbels et al. (2019) attempted to organise the risk factors for non-attendance into domains. Although the authors synthesised the risk factors identified in the 75 studies down to categories that mirrored those identified by Kearney (2008b), they had

initially identified 781 risk factors for absenteeism. While it is acknowledged that I am comparing a small scale study with a large scale meta-analysis and there may be other motivating factors to consider, it is still pertinent to note that the participants in the current study focused on fewer motivations for attending school.

Additionally, although Gubbels et al. (2019) and Kearney's (2008b) categories were designed to identify the risk factors of non-attendance, there were correlations between these and the themes identified in the current study. Much like the risk factors for non-attendance (section 2.3), the importance of relationships was a central theme in the current study, underpinned by children's interactions with their peers, parents and teachers. These accounted for three of the six categories identified by Kearney (2008b) as risk factors for absence. While opportunity (the second key theme of this study) was not specifically categorised by the aforementioned authors, school-related factors were identified as risk factors for absenteeism and dropout, which included reference to school quality. This may, to some extent, mirror the findings of the current study which found that learning and opportunities offered by the school influenced motivation to attend.

The literature review also highlighted how parents (section 2.3.5), school professionals (section 2.3.3) and pupils (section 2.3.4), had differing perspectives on which factors had the greatest influence on school attendance. I sought only the views of children so the current research does not claim to identify the reasons children attend school from a multi-faceted perspective. Rather, it aimed to explore the perspectives of a small sample of children across two year groups in a single primary school. While this means I cannot claim these themes are indicative of the whole population or would be the views of parents and education professionals too, they do indicate the children's self-reported reasons for attending school, for which there were similarities with the existing literature.

It is relevant to note the similarities between the themes identified in chapter four and the categories identified in studies of absence (section 2.3), as this may indicate that the reasons for absence and attendance are interrelated although not necessarily causal. Further, while I have identified key themes from the data, much like studies examining absence, reasons for attending school do not occur in isolation (Finning et al., 2020). Therefore, while I will discuss the themes individually, it is important to recognise that within the data collection these were interconnected. This was why it was helpful to examine the data through mind maps as they

highlighted the connections within and between themes. Mind mapping was a diversion from the core structure of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) (section 3.8.1), however it helped me to understand how the themes identified by the children may be related.

5.2 Who Motivates Children to Attend School?

Participants in the current study identified who and what motivates them to attend school, enabling me to address the first objective of the study. As exemplified in figure 5.1, the children made distinct references to their relationships (the who) and opportunities (the what) as influential factors. This section of the chapter explores the influence of the 'who' factors in the context of the broader literature and theoretical lens of SDT.

5.2.1 The Influence of Relationships with Peers

Studies exploring reasons for absence, and the small number of studies that have specifically explored motivations to attend, have identified the importance of relationships (section 2.3). In the current study, this also became a dominant theme. Across the two stages of data collection, relationships between the participants and their peers, parents and teachers were evident and often interconnected with discussions about learning and activities at school. From the outset, it became apparent that participants especially valued their relationships with peers. The uneven distribution of references to each influential relationship was represented in the triad of relationships (figure 5.2) and emphasised the significance of the children's relationships with peers. While other studies have identified the importance of peers, parents and teachers to school attendance behaviours, the triad of relationships is novel. This is because it attempts to illustrate how the influence of each relationship is unequally distributed. Other studies have explained the influence of different relationships separately but have not used a diagrammatic form to represent the potential uneven distribution between them.

Figure 5.2: Triad of relationships
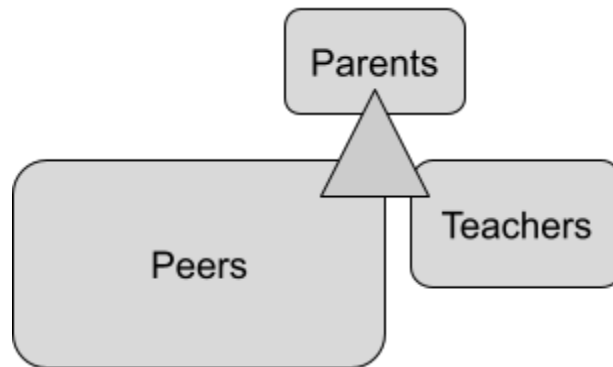
Unlike their relationships with teachers and parents, no prompting was required for participants to reference their peers. The drawing stage was particularly indicative of this. Fourteen out of the fifteen participants included reference to friends in their drawings or corresponding description, while only two children mentioned their parents. Only four participants referred to their teachers, although it could be argued that references to learning in school may also include implicit references to them. Furthermore, in the follow-up focus groups, although each discussed the influence of all three relationships on their motivation to attend school, it was only their relationships with peers that were mentioned unprompted. It is important to note that, throughout the session, comments relating to parents and teachers were generally contained within the section where they had been prompted. Friendships however emerged throughout, with the children making connections to their peer relationships when discussing other motivators.

The participants' focus on peer relationships over that of teachers was an interesting finding because it appeared to contradict some of the existing literature in the field (Allen et al., 2021; Klem and Connell, 2004; Riley, Coates and Allen, 2020), that has suggested teacher-pupil relationships are of principal importance in supporting attendance and engagement in school. That being said, it does correlate with other studies that have explored primary and secondary pupils' motivations for attending school, finding that the social environment was of primary importance to the participants involved (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010).

5.2.1.1 Relationships with Peers, Basic Psychological Needs and Belonging

There were a range of ways in which children's peer relationships were apparent in their discussions (section 4.1.1). Firstly, merely the presence of peers within the environment was important. School as a place to meet and be with friends was central to their rationale to attend (section 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.2). Like other studies (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), children saw that school gave them the opportunity to meet and play in a social environment. Reid et al. (2010) found that making and seeing friends were key benefits identified by children for attending school and this was also the case in the current study (section 4.1.1.1). Trusting and supportive relationships were also of paramount importance. Children identified the value of relationships with friends who understood them and shared their interests and values. This is mirrored in studies examining academic motivation (Antonopoulou, Chaidemenou and Kouvava, 2019; Molloy, Gest and Rulison, 2011; Ricard and Pelletier, 2016), where findings have indicated that reciprocal peer relationships have a positive effect on academic motivation, engagement and attitudes, beyond that of parents and teachers.

Aligning with the principles of Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), the children also identified the psychological benefits of their friendships, particularly the importance of relatedness. Some participants described their friends' abilities to keep them safe, while others focused on the way their relationships with peers helped them when they were feeling down or facing challenges. Across all participants there was a sense that the children had trust in their school relationships, that they were secure, supportive and ultimately reliable. This correlates with the principles of BPNT that emphasises how supportive and safe relationships provide a secure base for engaging in tasks and activities (Poulsen, Rodger and Ziviani, 2006). It also concurs with the wider attendance literature, with absence studies indicating that a lack of secure relationships, social exclusion and bullying can all contribute towards school refusal and truancy (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b), while strong friendships are associated with attendance, engagement and feelings of wellbeing and connectedness (Antonopoulou, Chaidemenou and Kouvava, 2019; Hamm and Faircloth, 2005).

A feeling of safety and security is particularly important in the context of attendance. Studies have linked perceptions of safety with attendance, with children and young people who report feeling unsafe at school more likely to be absent (Sims and Fisher, 2024). This, in turn, has a direct impact on a pupil's sense of belonging. A secure sense of belonging contributes to strong relationships with peers and can support attendance and achievement at school (Cunningham,

Harvey and Waite, 2022; Goodenow and Grady, 1993; Schoeneberger, 2012). Sims and Fisher's (2024) large scale study found in particular that those with the weakest attendance also had a lower score for belonging.

From the participants' contributions, it became apparent that their warm and supportive relationships created a sense of belonging with the school environment and people in it (section 4.1.1.3 and 4.1.1.4). This is in line with existing studies that have explored the importance of belonging in establishing positive relationships (Antonopoulou, Chaidemenou and Kouvava, 2019; Osterman, 2000). Belonging is a key component of BPNT, with the term relatedness being used to identify the trusting and supportive relationships that support someone to feel connected to their environment. The theory proposes that basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are crucial to an individual's motivation, wellbeing and volitional function (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, section 2.4.3). As a component of these psychological needs, relatedness is characterised by strong and meaningful relationships. It was evident from talking to the participants that their relationships with peers were an example of this. In the drawing tasks and follow-up focus groups, the participants regularly made reference to 'my' friends along with the specific games and activities they valued engaging in alongside them. They spoke confidently about things they did together. For example, the animated account of animals escaping from their pen demonstrated a sense of shared experience among the group. The participants could all relate to this, reflecting how they felt part of their peer group and the experience. Three of the children's drawings also included groups of friends with a circle or box around them. As suggested in chapter four (section 4.1.2.3), depicting the children in this way could also be an indicator of togetherness or belonging to a group.

A sense of belonging is important within the context of SDT and motivation. The children in the current study illustrated this through their descriptions of strong connections with their peers and the school environment more broadly. Oscar and Abbie (year 6) provided a particularly pertinent example of this as they both described their school as a family who would always be there for them. Using the terminology of family suggested a deep connection to the school and the people in it. This, in turn, related to the children's motivation. The participants in the current study were explicit about the way these secure peer relationships motivated them to attend school which aligns with existing studies that have found that children and young people who

articulate a sense of belonging to the school environment are more likely to have higher rates of attendance (section 2.3.6).

As well as supporting the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, the motivation exhibited by the participants, in respect to their relationships with peers, appeared to be volitional (table 2.5 in section 2.4.2). The children were attending school because they gained pleasure and enjoyment from being with their peers. Language such as 'my friend' and 'I enjoy' suggest autonomous functioning and that they wanted to attend in order to gain the perceived benefits of these relationships. There was no indication from the participants' responses that they were under pressure to attend. Quite the contrary, they could articulate the personal satisfaction of these relationships with confidence. These were discussed in terms of concrete, physical aspects as well as psychological benefits. For example, Tina and Sam (year 6) agreed that friends encouraged them to be physically active, while Aaron and Rachel (year 4) identified specific activities they would do with friends. The children were able to describe learning opportunities and events they had engaged in with their peers, from attending residential visits to engaging in forest school. It was evident that the children enjoyed experiencing the day to day elements of school life with other children and these experiences were personally satisfying.

5.2.1.2 Relationships with Peers and Motivation

Studies have indicated that absence from school may make it more difficult for children to form and sustain friendships (Carroll, 2011; Wilson et al., 2008) and this can impact their attendance. Therefore, supporting pupils to sustain positive relationships that foster a sense of belonging may contribute to more favourable attendance that, in turn, has the potential to support their ongoing relationships and motivation to attend (section 2.3.4).

It may be the case that children with weak friendships are less motivated to attend, contributing to higher rates of absence that, in turn, limit their ongoing ability to form and maintain relationships with their peers. Conversely, children who have strong and meaningful relationships with their peers may exhibit higher levels of motivation that directly influence their attendance rates. This would be consistent with the literature (Molloy, Gest and Rulison, 2011; Ryan and Deci, 2017), that has identified the importance of relationships in establishing more volitional forms of motivation. It would also concur with existing studies (Carroll, 2011) that have explored the relationship between school attendance and the number of friends a child reports to have. While the current study did not examine the participants' actual attendance rates, it was

evident from the children's responses that their friendships were secure and meaningful relationships that contributed towards a sense of belonging to their school environment. In turn, this influenced their motivation to attend. This further aligns with the principles of SDT that suggest the fulfilment of basic psychological needs will contribute to, and foster, an individual's autonomous motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Organismic integration theory (OIT), the second mini theory of SDT, examines how different forms of extrinsic motivation influence a person's volitional function (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023). These different forms of motivation are presented in the self determination continuum (section 2.4.2). The theory proposes that the greater the extent to which extrinsic motivation is integrated into the individual's own values system and locus of causality, the more autonomous and self determined the motivation will be.

As outlined earlier in the chapter, the participants' relationships with peers appeared to be volitional. They actively cited them as being a core reason for attending school, suggesting alignment with the association proposed earlier in this section. The joy and satisfaction gained from spending time with their peers suggests that while the peer is an extrinsic influence in their life, the feelings created by spending time with them were internally regulated which is indicative of integrated regulation, the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). The children wanted to be in school so they could spend time with friends they value and enjoy engaging with in learning and play. However, from the participants' contributions, it could also be argued that they were intrinsically motivated by these relationships. Poulsen, Rodger and Ziviani (2006, p.83) describe intrinsic motivation as 'engaging in authentic, self-authored and personally endorsed activities' and there was plenty of evidence of this in the children's contributions. The participants drew images depicting their engagement with friends and this was supported by the comments in the focus groups that indicated a sense of authenticity in their relationships. Although their peer relationships may have been initiated through being at the same school, it was evident they had grown and become a deeply integrated part of them and their motivation to attend.

5.2.2 The Influence of Relationships with Parents

In chapter two (section 2.3.5) the role of parents in supporting children's attendance at school was identified as having the potential to be supportive (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005) and a risk factor (Finning et al., 2020). There have been few studies that have examined the specific role

of parents as motivators for children's attendance, however research has shown that parental support plays a key role in children's academic achievement, motivation and persistence (EEF, 2021; Ricard and Pelletier, 2016). In studies of attendance, multiple authors have identified how the value attributed to school attendance by parents (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023; Malcolm et al., 2003) can influence a child's attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that parents will also have an influence on their child's motivation to attend school to begin with.

While participants made fewer references to parents than teachers and peers, where they did discuss them, these were generally within a context of support and encouragement. This is interesting to note considering significant research has found that parenting difficulties, such a lack of parental support, were significant risk factors for non-attendance and school drop out (Gubbels et al., 2019). It may therefore be the case that there is an association between levels of parental support and children's motivation to attend school. Despite this, studies have shown that even in cases where there are attendance difficulties, the majority of parents value education and the role it has in supporting their child's future (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Davies and Lee, 2006; Malcolm et al., 2003). Despite the impact of the pandemic and identified societal shift in attitudes towards school, this remains the case (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023).

In the current study, the participants' contributions reflected positive and encouraging parental attitudes. The participants identified supportive behaviours such as preparing breakfast, providing encouraging comments and offering support in the event of problems such as instances of bullying. This mirrored the findings of other studies (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Finning et al., 2020), that identified supportive, consistent and autonomy supportive parental behaviours as conducive to supporting positive school attendance. However, in contrast to their comments about peers and teachers, the participants indicated that while support and encouragement was welcome, it was not explicitly linked to their motivation to attend. This led me to question whether the participants would have referenced their parents more frequently had they been less enthusiastic and supportive. However, previous studies have found that the parents of poor attenders still shared a positive outlook on education (section 2.3.5), suggesting that this may not have impacted the participants' responses.

Support and encouragement was not, however, the only way in which the participants described their parents' influence on their motivation to attend school. From a small number of participants, there was also the suggestion that they wanted to make their parents proud or

emulate their lives and behaviours. Fliss's drawing provided a vivid example of this, depicting her parents in the centre of the page. Fliss was the only participant to reference her parents in this way but her decision to focus on them in her drawing and caption demonstrated their relative importance for her. Sam's comment came from a slightly different perspective, focusing on making his parents proud at school events; however both could be interpreted as participants seeing their parents as role models. This is an interesting finding as although existing studies have examined the potential for parental relationships to be both supportive and damaging (section 2.3.5), they have not fully explored the influence of parents as role models. Studies (Dalziel and Henthorn, 2005; Malcolm et al., 2003) have identified the importance of parents setting expectations for their children and this may be interpreted as a form of role modelling. However, they have not examined how the relationship between the parent and child may promote attendance behaviours, in order for the child to emulate the adult or make them proud.

In contrast to these positive affirmations, two participants made reference to an external pressure from parents to attend school. James' apparent reference to parental pressure provided a different insight to the supportive and encouraging behaviours described by participants like Abbie and Tina. That being said, while one of James' drawings suggested potential pressure to attend, his other drawings and contributions during the focus group were inconsistent with this. This correlates with existing literature that has explored children's reasons for attending school. In the study of Reid et al. (2010), while the participants referenced many positive reasons for attending, there was also a clear understanding that non-attendance could have consequences. In the current study, this was further demonstrated by Sophie. Like James, she was aware of the potential consequences of non-attendance which it seemed may have been shared with her by her parents. This awareness now acted as a motivator for her to attend. Similarly, this was not the only motivating factor identified by Sophie but it did indicate an aspect of compliance in her attending behaviours. Sophie understood that, if she did not attend school, there would be unfavourable implications for her parents.

5.2.2.1 Relationships with Parents and Motivation

The varied references to parents in the current study (as outlined in section 5.2.2) suggested a complex relationship between parents and participants' motivation to attend school. In this small sample of children, four key influences on motivation were referenced. These were:
- Pressure from parents

- Threat of consequences
- Support and encouragement
- Parents as role models

Participants' descriptions of their peer influences were broadly homogenous. The picture for parents was quite different, with participants referencing parental influence that appeared to represent different forms of motivation. The complexity in the parent-child relationship mirrors that of studies exploring reasons for absence from school. Chapter two (section 2.3.5) outlined how Dalziel and Henthorne (2005) attempted to categorise parental responses to a child's attendance problems. These categories were identified as: parents who try hard, powerless parents, overprotective parents and those who were apathetic. In the current study, while the participants generally reflected positive parental relationships, there was evidence to indicate they motivated their children in a variety of different ways which correlated with Dalziel and Henthorne's (2005) findings.

Considering these findings in relation to SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2017), some interesting observations can be made. Similar to the children's relationships with teachers, the positive support and encouragement provided by parents was valued and appreciated by the participants in the current study. They recognised the value of their parents as nurturing protectors in their life. While this may be indicative of a more internally regulated form of extrinsic motivation, some of their other contributions presented a different picture. References to pressure from parents and threat of consequence due to non-attendance reflected more controlled forms of motivation (section 2.4.2). Further, although the children seemed to refer to their parents as role models and making them proud in a positive sense, this could also be viewed from an alternative perspective. One could argue that, rather than promoting volitional functioning, the participants may have been driven to attend due to the perceived shame or guilt if they did not meet their parents' expectations (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

This interplay of parental influences on the participants may provide evidence for the existence of the four variants of extrinsic motivation, as defined by organismic integration theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000a), the second mini-theory of SDT (table 5.2).

Table 5.2: The four variants of extrinsic motivation reflected in the participants' contributions relating to parental influence on motivation to attend

Amotivation	Forms of extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	
	Participants attend school as they or their parents may receive a consequence if they do not/ they feel under pressure.	Participants attend school because they want to make their parents proud/ do not want to let them down.	Participants attend school because they know school will help them achieve their future aims (e.g. to emulate their parents).	The support and encouragement from their parents supports the integration of school attendance into their values system.	

It also supports the proposition that while the forms of motivation are organised along an autonomy to control continuum, an individual may be motivated simultaneously by intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2020; section 2.4.2). For example, while attending school due to the threat of consequence may be representative of a more externally regulated form of extrinsic motivation, support and encouragement from parents, in addition to their perception of parents as role models, are indicative of more internally regulated forms. This suggests that parents may influence their child's motivation and adjustment in a variety of different ways, through their explicit and implicit interactions with them. This is in line with the literature (Barger et al., 2019; Cheung and Pomerantz, 2012) that outlines the influence of parent-oriented motivation. Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) argued that while parents can support a child's autonomous motivation through encouragement and support, they can also promote feelings of guilt and anxiety as children aim to gain approval from their parents. To some extent, this was demonstrated by the participants' contributions as they described a combination of both supportive and potentially controlling behaviours.

5.2.3 The Influence of Relationships with Teachers

While friendships featured most prominently in the children's drawings and descriptions, the value of secure relationships with adults in school was referenced. Much like the research in this area, which has emphasised the importance of supportive adult relationships over instructional quality (Reid et al., 2010, section 2.4.5), the children in the current study focused on the

kindness and support offered by their teachers over teaching skill. As outlined earlier in the chapter (section 5.2.1.1), two year 6 participants referred to the school as a family and teachers were included in this description. The participants described how the teachers would always be there for them and help them through anything. These comments indicated a deep sense of trust in the adults within the school, again emphasising the importance of nurturing and caring relationships in establishing a sense of belonging and relatedness with the school environment. This finding concurred with the evidence base that has found positive relationships with teachers can have a powerful influence on attendance, engagement and adjustment at school (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Ingul et al., 2012).

In the data, there was also an indication that autonomy supportive teaching practices acted as a motivator for children to attend school. Autonomy supportive approaches, as defined by BPNT, are characterised by providing children with meaningful choices, support and encouragement (Ryan and Deci, 2020). SDT proposes that, by creating an autonomy supportive environment, individuals can be more volitional in their decision making, promoting wellbeing and intrinsic motivation (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). Abbie (year 6) provided an example of this when she described how her teacher encouraged her to embrace opportunities.

Her description, along with those of other participants, suggested the teachers provided support and encouragement, prompting the children to make their own choices and engage in new and exciting activities. This is indicative of an autonomy supportive approach and has been found to foster positive outcomes for pupils, including increased motivation and engagement (Gustavsson et al., 2016; Reeve, 2009; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). In turn, Abbie referred to this as a motivating factor for school attendance which indicates the potential value of this approach in securing pupil attendance and engagement. Similar associations can be made in reference to other participants, such as Tina, who explained how her teachers helped her to learn, were nice and did not raise their voices to pupils if a mistake was made.

Other participants' contributions can be interpreted to illustrate the balance between autonomy supportive and controlling behaviours. A reference to teachers being helpful is indicative of an autonomy supportive approach, while comments suggesting that teachers did not shout or respond dismissively may be the participant's way of indicating that the environment is supportive and motivating, rather than controlling and demotivating (Haerens et al., 2015). However, the participants also recognised how their teachers provided instruction, giving clear

guidance and setting boundaries. There was recognition from the participants that the relationships they had with their teachers were different from those with the other adults in their lives. Tina, along with some of the other year 6 participants, described the presence of boundaries, with Oscar's comments suggesting that while he might say no to his parents, this would not be the case with his teachers. Much like the literature (Pomeroy, 1999), this indicates that participants understood the difference between the pastoral and instructional role of the teacher. They did not report their teachers to be controlling but understood that teachers were in a position of authority. It may also be inferred that the children understood and valued the structure created by the teachers. There is evidence to suggest that structure is a powerful tool that can promote autonomy (Reeve, 2002) and support pupils in feeling safe and secure (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b), while controlling behaviours by the teacher can be demotivating and cause anxiety and stress (Reeve and Tseng, 2011; Soenens and Vansteenkiste, 2010). This may, in turn, influence attendance behaviours.

5.2.3.1 Relationships with Teachers and Motivation

In the context of SDT, the participants' relationships with teachers appeared to contribute towards the fulfilment of their basic psychological needs. As Ryan (1995) proposed, fulfilment of these needs has a positive impact on an individual's attitudes towards growth and development. While a person may not be alert to requiring the fulfilment of these needs, nonetheless, the positive impact of them is evident in their behaviours and performance. Therefore, it may be the case that through positive and supportive relationships with their teachers, in the structured environment of the classroom, the participants' psychological needs were met (section 2.3.3).

This can also be related to the type of motivation exhibited when the participants described how their teachers motivate them to attend school. Some of the participants drew images of their teachers standing at the front of the classroom; however, unlike their relationships with peers, there were few specific references. Although a small number of participants made reference to teachers by name, in the majority of cases, references were indirect and related to the learning taking place rather than the individual facilitating that learning. Conversely, other children featured in almost all the drawings and were explicitly referenced in annotations too. Further, while the participants actively referenced their peer relationships throughout the focus group discussions, in a range of different contexts and in response to varied prompts, their references to teachers were more confined in response to one question. All this suggests that while the

participants' relationships with their teachers were motivating and supporting the fulfilment of their basic psychological needs, they were not in the forefront of their minds.

This may indicate that, while the participants' relationships with peers had become an integrated part of their values system, their relationship with teachers was more externally regulated (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens, 2010). The participants could see the personal value of their teachers and were consciously grateful for them but this had not become fully integrated. This may therefore be indicative of identified regulation (section 2.4.2). Ryan and Deci (2000a) (section 2.4.5) suggest that autonomy supportive approaches, such as encouragement and positive and specific feedback, support children's internal regulation, while controlling behaviours can lead to stress, anxiety and frustration (Reeve and Tseng, 2011; Soenens and Vansteenkiste, 2010). The participants in the current study primarily described the former, autonomy supportive, approaches in their contributions. Although the children did not specifically mention feedback, they alluded to the value of support and encouragement from the teachers. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the motivation provided by their teachers was integrated into their belief system, however there were indicators to suggest that their input was highly valued. In particular, the children referenced help and support which were indicative of encouragement and guidance (section 4.1.3.1) and they also emphasised the importance of teachers providing them with new opportunities and experiences which they were grateful for (section 4.2.2.3).

5.2.4 Relationships Influencing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

The triad of peer, teacher and parent relationships were all identified by participants as motivators for attending school but, applying principles of SDT, it became apparent that the form this motivation takes may vary. Referring back to the self determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, section 2.4.2), the children's self-described motivators were representative of intrinsic and different forms of extrinsic motivation.

The first objective of the current study was to identify who and what motivates children to attend school. The second and third objective required me to analyse and explore the data to identify what forms of motivation these factors may be representative of, drawing on the wider literature and SDT. So far, the findings have indicated that peers, parents and teachers motivated the participants in different and powerful ways. Using the self determination continuum (section 2.4.2), I have summarised the forms of motivation identified by the children, based on their

drawings, descriptions and focus group contributions. Table 5.3 shows how the different forms of motivation may be exhibited in relation to who motivates the children to attend.

Amotivation	Forms of extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	
There is no evidence of this in the data collected	Participants attend school as they or their parents may receive a consequence if they do not/ they feel under pressure from parents to attend.	Participants attend school because they want to make their parents proud/ do not want to let them/ their teachers down.	Participants attend school because they know school will help them achieve their future aims (e.g. to emulate their parents).	Participants attend school because their relationships have helped them to understand the benefits of attending. Participants value their engagement with teachers and peers.	Participants gain inherent joy, satisfaction and pleasure from attending school to spend time with their friends and play.

Table 5.3: The self determination continuum and forms of motivation identified by participants in relation to who motivates them to attend school

What is apparent from table 5.3 is that multiple motivations may be acting simultaneously on the child (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Much like the research that has explored reasons for absence (section 2.3), what this suggests is that the relationships between participants and their peers, teachers and parents interact to motivate them in different ways - both intrinsically and extrinsically. It is also important to acknowledge here that this discussion draws together the individual contributions of all participants. The extent to which these factors may influence one or more of these participants will be unique to them. Gubbels et al. (2019) explained that the reasons for non attendance are multi-faceted and specific to the individual, their environment, social constructs and needs. This study has shown similar to be true for motivations to attend, with motivations along the continuum represented.

5.3 What Motivates Children to Attend School?

As well as exploring who motivates children to attend school, the current study also sought to identify what motivates them. In the previous section of this chapter (section 5.2), I discussed how peers, teachers and parents formed a triad of relationships that influenced the participants. Applying principles of SDT, it seemed that peers, teachers and parents contributed towards the fulfilment of the participants' psychological need for relatedness (belonging), as well as motivating them in a variety of ways, as represented by the self-determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). The next section of this chapter separately explores the 'what'; however it is important to note that these factors do not occur in isolation and are often associated with the relationships explored earlier in the chapter.

5.3.1 The Influence of Learning

The participants in the current study confidently described who motivates them to attend school, with peers, parents and teachers all influencing their decision-making. However their drawings, descriptions and focus group contributions provided evidence to suggest they were motivated by their experiences and opportunities too. Learning, fun, play and the opportunities afforded to them by attending school featured, in some way, in all the children's responses. In the drawing task and focus groups, children captured the learning and activities of school through their illustrations and descriptions and this was primarily grounded in the pleasure and enjoyment gained from those particular lessons and activities.

5.3.1.1 Enjoyable and Memorable Learning

When the children talked about lessons and learning, their key focus was on enjoying participating in those activities, which is perhaps unsurprising considering that boring lessons have been reported to demotivate (Reid et al., 2010) and potentially influence absenteeism (Attwood and Croll, 2015) (section 2.3.1). Although some of the participants indicated that they went to school to learn, the events recalled by the participants largely reflected memorable experiences, rather than the specific learning gained. Animated descriptions highlighted these, such as Kate's recollection of growing a plant. Kate did not talk about what she learned from growing the plant, she was focused on the experience and how much she enjoyed it. A further example of this was in the children's vivid descriptions of forest school and their interactions with the school animals. While these experiences provided the children with clear opportunities for learning, their descriptions focused on the pleasure gained from interacting with the animals,

feeding and caring for them, as well as building dens in the forest. This suggests that, for these participants, the instructional quality of lessons seemed less important than the way the experience made them feel. Research has indicated that engagement is an important factor in pupils' learning and enjoyment in school and is closely associated with their motivation (Aelterman et al., 2012; Aelterman et al., 2019). The children's references to fun lessons were indicators of this.

5.3.1.2 Learning Experiences and Motivation

In the literature review (section 2.3.1), it was identified that a problematic curriculum (Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Malcolm et al., 2003) or learning perceived as boring (Reid, 2008), can reduce motivation to attend and potentially lead to truanting behaviours. Conversely, this suggests that learning perceived as enjoyable may be motivating for pupils. This seemed to be the case in the current study, with participants indicating that their motivation to attend was grounded in enjoyable and meaningful experiences. Much research has also found that children and young people are more likely to persist with learning activities and achieve better outcomes if they are engaged in learning experiences that are personally meaningful and autonomy supportive (Aelterman et al., 2019; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000a). If children are intrinsically motivated by the learning and opportunities offered by school, they will be participating volitionally as a result of interest and the appeal of the task (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). In the current study, the children's descriptions did reflect this. The children were able to give specific examples of lessons that they found fun and exciting and identified how these were meaningful to them.

Applying elements of SDT, this finding suggests that the participants were, at least to some extent, intrinsically motivated by the learning and opportunities offered (section 2.4.2). However, this does not mean that extrinsic motivation was not present concurrently. This is because we cannot necessarily determine from the children's responses whether their motivation was determined by enjoyment and interest alone (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). While enjoyment and interest are characteristic of intrinsic motivation (section 2.4.2), the participants' comments may also be indicative of integrated extrinsic motivation which is characterised by an understanding that activities are meaningful and relevant.

Applying this proposition to the current study, there were examples where both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may have been operating concurrently. Sam (year 6) provided an example

of this when he described how he enjoyed learning new sports in PE as well as making projects in DT. Sam's comments could be interpreted in two different ways. He could be indicating that he is intrinsically motivated through interest and enjoyment. Conversely, commenting that he likes learning new things may suggest that he sees the activities as meaningful and relevant. Alternatively, it may be that Sam's motivation to engage in learning and activities at school is autonomous but influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Both of these forms of motivation have been found to have a positive effect on outcomes (Ryan and Connell, 1989). To illustrate the interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, I have drawn upon the self determination continuum that was used earlier in this chapter (section 5.2.4) to show how motivations derived from the participants' relationships were positioned along the continuum. Table 5.4 shows how the forms of motivation related to their learning and experiences at school (in italics) have been added to those derived from the participants' relationships. This is to elucidate how the who and what factors that motivated the children may be representative of the different forms of motivation, as identified by the self determination continuum.

Amotivation	Forms of extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	
There is no evidence of this in the data collected	Participants attend school as they or their parents may receive a consequence if they do not/ they feel under pressure.	Participants attend school because they want to make their parents proud/ do not want to let them/ their teachers down.	Participants attend school because they know school will help them achieve their future aims (e.g. to emulate their parents). *Pupils attend school because their learning will help them in the future.*	Participants attend school because their relationships have helped them to understand the benefits of attending. Participants value their engagement with teachers and peers. *The value of education and learning has been embedded into the participants' value system.*	Participants gain inherent joy, satisfaction and pleasure from attending school to spend time with their friends and play *and their learning / wider school experiences.*

Table 5.4: The self determination continuum and forms of motivation identified by participants in relation to who and what motivates them to attend school

What this shows is that, similar to the participants' relationships, learning and experiences at school may influence the children's motivation in different ways, with varying forms of motivation influencing them at any one time. This is indicative of what Ryan and Deci (2020) describe as multiple motivation. They highlight the benefits of this, suggesting that different forms of motivation influencing the individual concurrently can lead to the most positive outcomes. This may suggest that the learning environment, lessons and opportunities provided by the school promote volitional motivation as opposed to externally regulated forms, where children are participating through compliance or external reward or punishment.

5.3.2 The Influence of Broader School Experiences

Participants in the study gave attention to the role that school animals played in their motivation to attend. This finding was context specific - there is recognition after all that not all schools have goats and chickens on site. However, for the participants in this study, there was value attributed to interactions with the animals, alongside the opportunity their presence gave the children to spend more time with their peers, which is an example of the connection between relationships and experiences. Much like their interest in lessons, their forest school and animal husbandry experiences were grounded in the pleasure they gained from interacting with the animals and their peers, rather than specific learning gained. However, this may also be indicative of a special relationship between children and animals.

Previous studies have found that children's relationships with animals are different from those of adults (Fonseca et al., 2011; Nelder and Wilks, 2022; Prokop and Tunnicliffe, 2008). Children are more likely to demonstrate a strong attachment to animals, displaying a sense of moral concern. Hawkins and Williams (2016) provide a helpful definition of what this means, suggesting that feeding, protecting and showing an animal care can all be indicators of prosocial behaviour. While the year 4 children provided detailed and developed descriptions of their experiences with the animals, the year 6 children did not - even when prompted. This was despite the participants including animals in their drawings. There is evidence to indicate that a child's level of interest in animals may decline between the ages of 7 and 11 (Borgi and Cirulli, 2015) as they develop stronger relationships with people. It could therefore be the case that the year 6 participants placed emphasis on their relationships with their peers. An example of this can be found in one of the year 6 focus groups. Abbie provided a list of things that motivated her to attend school, including trying new things, sports, forest school and the animals; however she largely remained focused on her interactions with peers. By contrast, the younger participants provided more animated descriptions of their interactions with the animals and were notably more excited by their presence in the school. Again, this may be an example of multiple motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2020) in action, as the children's descriptions of their engagement with the animals could be interpreted as intrinsic or extrinsic in origin.

5.3.3 Gratitude for Opportunity and Experiences and Motivation

Although the participants were predominantly motivated by relationships and their learning experiences in school, they also attributed value to the wider opportunities associated with

attending. Children in both year groups articulated feeling grateful for teachers organising specific activities such as swimming and residential trips. However, on a deeper level, they also demonstrated gratitude for education as a whole and were able to articulate in detail why they felt this way. Their responses focused on an understanding that other children, both locally and globally, may not have the same opportunities as them.

Considering this in relation to SDT and the motivation continuum (section 2.4.2), it has already been identified that the participants may be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated concurrently by multiple motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Applying the self determination continuum to the children's gratitude for education, it seemed that this motivator could equally be positioned at different points along the continuum (table 5.5).

Table 5.5: The self determination continuum and gratitude for school					
Amotivation	Forms of extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	
		Participants attend to avoid feelings of guilt and shame.	Participants attend due to gratitude for opportunities they have that others do not.	Participants attend as gratitude has been integrated into their values system.	

Firstly, it could be argued that there was an element of guilt associated with participants' comments. The children may have felt that they should be grateful for an opportunity that others do not have. This would be an example of introjected regulation (Ryan and Deci, 2000a), as the children would be attending in order to avoid these feelings. Conversely, their gratitude for education may be indicative of a more internally regulated form of extrinsic motivation. Given the nature of the children's comments and the language used, I propose this was more likely. The children did not suggest that they 'should' be grateful. In fact, they were quite clear that their understanding of the opportunities they had made them 'feel' grateful and lucky. Likewise, Kate's thought bubble in her drawing demonstrated a deeper personal connection as she made use of the word 'I'. This comment may indicate a shift from identified regulation - seeing the

relative importance of attending (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) - to integrated regulation. Integrated regulation is characterised by motivation that has been embedded into the individual's own values and beliefs (Ryan, Connell and Deci, 1985). In the current study, the participants' comments appeared to reflect this because they were able to communicate in detail how their gratitude for education had become embedded into their values system.

5.3.4 Motivated by the Future

Thus far, the focus of this chapter has been on who and what motivates children to attend school now. This is what the participants were asked to draw and reflect upon for much of their focus group. However, I found the children had considered how their attendance at school now might influence their future. Similar to findings of other studies in this area, that have focused on both primary and secondary aged pupils' reasons for attending school (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), the children talked about how their learning would help them to obtain a job, pay bills and provide them with the chance to have similar opportunities to that of their parents. For example James (year 4) was able to make the connection that in order to stay alive, he would need to make money. Attending school would provide him with the skills he needed to do this.

These descriptions were pertinent because they demonstrated an outward, long-term, perspective held by the participants. I was aware that, in other studies, children and young people had shared similar perspectives (section 2.3.7), so I was expecting that a participant may refer to this. Their contributions suggest that as well as considering the immediate benefits of attending school, such as meeting and playing with friends, learning new things and engaging in fun activities, they were able to look beyond this into secondary school and adulthood.

The participants understood that school could afford them future opportunities that would enable them to be happy and successful. While the origin of these perspectives was not examined in detail, there was an indication that their school and parental relationships may have contributed to this. Again, this correlates with existing studies that have examined the perspectives of parents of good and poor attenders (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023; Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005). These studies found that, among parents, there was a shared understanding of the importance of school and this was an outlook they shared with their children.

The participants were also able to recognise that, while school was not always fun, attending now would enable them to reap the benefits in the future. Much like their motivation to try something new, this may also be underpinned by the quality of their relationships with teachers and peers. Studies have shown that the teacher-pupil relationship can support resilience and task persistence (Havik, Bru, and Ertesvåg, 2014b; Ingul et al., 2012), which suggests that the positive relationships described by children in the current study may contribute towards their motivation to persist in attending school, despite some tasks being less enjoyable than others.

5.3.5 Motivation May Change Over Time

Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2020) propose that while the self determination continuum is not developmental, behaviours can become more internalised over time and in line with development stages. They suggest that more internally regulated (autonomous) forms of motivation lead to more positive outcomes and are more likely to be sustained. In the current study, participants seemed to be motivated by a combination of factors that included more internally regulated forms of motivation. The findings also indicated that participants were intrinsically motivated, particularly by their peers who they gained inherent joy and pleasure from spending time with. While this may indicate the presence of multiple motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2020), it was unclear whether their motivation to attend school had become more internalised over time, as the participants in year 4 and year 6 were motivated in similar ways. However, questioned about whether their motivation to attend school might change in the future, the participants almost universally agreed that it would. The participants concurred that as they aged, they would be more reluctant to attend school, driven by not wanting to get up in the morning. While there was acknowledgement from the year 6 pupils that school may be more exciting due to the increased range of opportunities, they perceived that teenagers had different attitudes to school and life.

And yet, it was difficult to ascertain the origins of these perspectives. While there was agreement that teenagers are grumpy, it was unclear where this had been learned from. However, when Kate talked about teenagers wanting to stay in bed, she indicated this was something shared with her by family members. This suggests that although the participants did not know exactly how their motivation might change, they recognised that it likely would, as their school environment and friends changed around them. Despite these comments, it remains unclear whether the participants' motivation will become more internalised over time. Rather, it seems the factors influencing the participants may change and evolve. To examine the extent to

which motivation may become more internalised, further research across a variety of age phases would be required.

5.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter five has offered the reader further insight into the findings of the research, making connections between the research questions, theoretical principles of SDT and the wider research literature. It has been found that, much like the reasons for absence (Gubbels et al., 2019), participants were motivated to attend school due to a range of individual factors that influenced them in different ways. In line with the self determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a), participants seemed to be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation, with some forms of motivation being fully integrated into their values system. The participants' relationships with their peers were particularly indicative of this. Much like other studies in this field (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), peer relationships were examples of volitional motivators, as they attended school for the pleasure and satisfaction gained from being with like minded individuals. These relationships, along with those involving teachers and parents, supported a sense of belonging which, in turn, contributed towards their volitional functioning.

In addition to powerful relationships, participants were influenced by the memorable and enjoyable experiences afforded by their attendance at school. This is similar to other studies in the field (Reid et al., 2010). Much like the influence of relationships, multiple motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2020) acted concurrently to motivate the children to attend, this included an underpinning understanding of the importance and value of education. The participants' confident articulation of their gratitude for education provided powerful evidence of how their motivation for school had become integrated into their values system (Ryan, Connell and Deci, 1985), indicative of the most volitional form of extrinsic motivation. While the current study focused on what motivates children to attend school now, there was also evidence that the children were able to look to the future. Concurring with existing literature in the field (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), the participants acknowledged that education was important for their future success and, despite it not always being fun and enjoyable, it was a necessary part of their lives.

Throughout the chapter, I have made connections between the findings of the current study and existing literature in the field. While participants referenced a number of factors that motivated them to attend school, which was inline with existing studies that have explored reasons for absence, peer relationships were dominant in their contributions. This is in contrast with some of the existing literature that has given greater focus to the role of the school, particularly teachers and the curriculum, in determining attendance behaviours (section 2.3.1). Underpinning the themes presented in this chapter was the importance of belonging. Other studies have identified a connection between relationships and belonging (section 2.3.6), including some that have identified a link to school attendance (Sims and Fisher, 2024). The current study reinforced these findings, identifying a correlation between the participants' motivation to attend school and feelings of belonging to the school environment, peers and teachers.

While studies examining reasons for absence (section 2.3.1-2.3.6) and motivations to attend (section 2.3.7) have identified a multitude of factors that influence attendance, the current study has used elements of SDT to identify how multiple motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2020) may act concurrently to influence children to attend school. Applying the self determination continuum to the findings (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) has allowed me to identify that children may be influenced by a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that occur simultaneously to motivate them to attend school. The connections between SDT and motivations for attending provide a unique contribution to the knowledge in this field and are presented in the final chapter of this study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This study aimed to address a gap in the literature, exploring what motivates children to attend school by listening to the perspectives of primary aged pupils. Using a combination of drawings and focus groups, I was able to gain rich and detailed descriptions from the 16 participants who were in year 4 and year 6 of an English primary school. Through careful thematic analysis of their drawings and focus group contributions (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and application of elements of Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023; Ryan and Deci, 2000a), I identified that there were a number of factors that acted simultaneously to motivate the participants to attend school. There were however key motivators that stood out in the children's responses, in particular the emphasis on the importance of supportive and understanding relationships, especially with peers, and the value of learning and opportunities at school. The application of SDT and, in particular, the self determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023), provided an insight into how extrinsic and intrinsic factors acted concurrently as multiple motivators (Ryan and Deci, 2020) to influence the participants, while the participants' sense of belonging reinforced the value of the basic psychological needs of relatedness for volitional function and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2008). The conclusion of this study summarises the contribution to knowledge through reference to the key findings of the study. It also addresses the strengths, limitations and opportunities for further research.

6.1 Research Question and Objectives

The overarching research question for this study was:

Who and what motivates children to attend school?

To address this question, the research was underpinned by the following objectives:
1. To identify who and what motivates children to attend school.
2. To use the data that has been collected to analyse and explore what forms of motivation may influence children to attend school.

3. To use data collected and analysed to explore whether an association can be made between key components of Self Determination Theory (SDT) and participants' motivation for attending school.

The following sections of this chapter summarise the contribution to knowledge, discussing this in relation to the overarching research question and objectives of the study.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge: Findings

The literature review (section 2.3) provided the reader with insight into the factors influencing children and young people's attendance at school. A number of influential reasons were identified and explored, particularly those contributing to pupil absence, concluding that children's attendance patterns were impacted by a combination of factors. The current study took a different approach to many others in the field by examining the reasons pupils were motivated to attend school, as opposed to their reasons for absence. Data was collected through a drawing task and focus groups and was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I concluded that, similar to studies examining the reasons for absence, participants in the current study provided multiple reasons for attending school, which allowed me to respond to the first objective of the study that was to identify who and what motivated participants to attend.

In line with the small number of studies that have specifically addressed the topic of what motivates children to attend school (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), the participants in the current study predominantly focused on the importance of their relationships. It is worth noting the consistency in these findings, despite it being eighteen years since Davies and Lee's (2006) study. In contrast with some of the existing literature on this topic (section 2.3.1), participants gave particular attention to the role of their peer relationships, over those of teachers and parents, in relation to their attending behaviours. Although teachers and parents were the subject of drawings and focus group discussions, it quickly became apparent that peers were the main motivation for attending school. Participants' relationships were underpinned by the importance of belonging. Existing research has explored the association between relationships and belonging (section 2.3.6), with some examining the connection with school attendance behaviours (Sims and Fisher, 2024). The current study reaffirmed the

importance of belonging for children at school, principally established through their relationships with peers. As well as identifying who motivated them to attend school, the participants identified other factors. There was evidence that they valued the enjoyable and meaningful opportunities afforded to them by attending. There was recognition and gratitude for what school had to offer them both now and in the future.

These findings were interpreted using SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2017), initially identifying that the participants' relationships were underpinned by a feeling of belonging. This is characterised in SDT within Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (section 2.4.3) as relatedness. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023) was also used to determine that participants in the current study were influenced by a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that acted simultaneously on the participants (Ryan and Deci, 2020). The following sections (6.2.1 to 6.2.4) elucidate how each key finding contributes to knowledge.

6.2.1 Finding One

- Motivation to attend school is determined by a number of different factors.

Through analysis of the data, I determined that participants in the current study were motivated by a variety of different factors. While the children predominantly focused on the importance of peer relationships, they also referenced parents and teachers as people who motivated them to attend. Alongside this, the children focused on the importance of meaningful and enjoyable learning and activities. The children recognised the value of their school experiences now and in the future and were able to identify how this may contribute towards their ongoing success. The participants demonstrated their respect for education through gratitude for opportunities afforded to them. It was evident that the children understood how their experiences were different from others locally and globally and, for this, they were grateful.

This finding provided insight into the wide array of factors that may motivate children to attend school. Just as there are many reasons that pupils are absent, it seems the same may be true for the reasons children attend. Similar to reasons for absence, it appears that these factors also interact in different ways for each child. While there were commonalities in the participants' responses that allowed the identification of key themes, this study does not address the relative strength of each of these motivators on the individual child. Therefore, while one participant may be more motivated to attend school due to a particular reason over another, this is not

addressed in this study. What the findings do illustrate is that the participants were simultaneously motivated by a number of who and what factors. These may however be present to a lesser or greater extent for the individual.

6.2.2 Finding Two

- Relationships, particularly those with peers, were a key motivator for the participants, underpinned by sense of belonging.

Relationships were a key determinant of the participants' motivation to attend school and included connections with peers, parents and teachers, although the influence of them appeared to be unevenly distributed (as illustrated in the triad of relationships - section 5.2.1). Relationships with peers were a dominant feature of both stages of data collection, with parents and teachers featuring less frequently. This was a key finding considering some previous studies have emphasised the importance of the teacher-child relationship over that with peers (section 2.3.1). The children were motivated to attend so they could engage with their peers, play and have fun but they also valued other aspects of their friendships, such as the support and understanding offered in times of challenge.

While references to teacher and parental relationships were less frequent and more likely to be prompted, the children did mention them in both stages of the research. Similar to their peer relationships, the children valued and trusted the help and support provided by their teachers. They were able to describe how they were provided with encouragement and kindness to try new things and be themselves. The participants demonstrated understanding of the value of their teachers, recognising their role in facilitating fun learning experiences and wider school opportunities, which aligns with existing studies in the field (section 2.3.3). Although there were more varied references to parents, this mirrors the complexity of parental involvement described by studies that have explored their influence on pupil absence (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005). Most participants referenced their parents as providers of support and encouragement, however there was occasional reference to parental pressure and the consequence of non-attendance.

The valuable relationships identified by the participants were underpinned by the importance of belonging. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (section 2.4.3) identifies belonging as relatedness and concludes that it is crucial to an individual's wellbeing and motivation. This aspect of SDT proposes that deep connections and trust obtained through warm and supportive

connections enable a person to thrive (Poulsen, Rodger and Ziviani, 2006). The findings of the current study supported this proposition, as the participants focused on the enjoyment and pleasure they gained from being part of a supportive 'family', both at school and home.

6.2.3 Finding Three

- The joy, satisfaction and meaning attributed to participating in school learning and opportunities provided both short and longer term motivation for participants.

The participants in the current study reflected on the value of the opportunities offered at school. While the children referenced attending school because they enjoyed learning, what transpired was actually focused on the influence of experience. The children spoke animatedly about their experiences in school, drawing on forest school, interactions with animals, growing plants and attending educational visits. They gained joy and satisfaction from engaging in activities they perceived were fun or personally significant to them, rather than because they allowed them to achieve a specific outcome. This is in concurrence with existing literature which concludes that experiences children find meaningful foster intrinsic motivation, establishing engagement and perseverance (section 2.3.1). Although the children preferred these experiences over those they determined as more boring, there was recognition that not everything in school was fun. They acknowledged that, in order to engage in the fun and meaningful activities, sometimes they would need to complete the more mundane task too. As well as being motivated by their experiences and opportunities in the present, the participants demonstrated an understanding of how their attendance at school now could positively impact their future. In agreement with other literature in the field (Davies and Lee, 2006; Reid et al., 2010), the children were able to articulate how they were motivated to attend school in order to have the knowledge and skills required to support their future endeavours.

6.2.4 Finding Four

- The drive to attend school is determined by intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation occurring simultaneously.

Responding to the first objective of the current study - Who and what motivates children to attend school? - finding one (section 6.2.1) concluded that participants were motivated by a range of different factors. These were separated into two themes - relationships and

opportunities - before being divided into six sub-themes. Finding four builds on this by applying aspects of SDT to these themes. Using the self determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a) and OIT (Pelletier and Rocchi, 2023), I was able to determine that participants were motivated by a range of factors that were characteristic of different forms of motivation, including both intrinsic and extrinsic forms that appeared to influence the participants simultaneously. This finding supports the existing evidence base that indicates how 'the most intentional behaviours are multiply motivated' (Ryan and Deci, 2020, p.4), and influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation concurrently.

Research indicates that more volitional forms of motivation, such as intrinsic motivation, or more integrated forms of extrinsic motivation, can lead to improved outcomes for pupils (Froiland and Worrell, 2016; Ryan and Deci, 2020). Therefore, it was encouraging to see that while participants in the current study identified motivational factors that appeared to be representative of various points along the self determination continuum (Ryan and Deci, 2000a), more volitional forms of motivation were prominent in their contributions. In particular, the participants' relationships with peers appeared to be intrinsically motivated, due to the inherent joy and satisfaction gained from their friendship.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge: Methodology

This study sought to obtain the views of children; to gain a better understanding of their thoughts and feelings. The methodological approach was designed with Lundy's model of participation (2007) in mind, in order to provide the children with the space and voice to share their perspectives (section 3.4.3). The use of drawing as a method was carefully considered and, despite the potential limitations of this approach, its use in the study facilitated the participants in sharing their views. This presents opportunities for the wider research community in their future research with children. Drawings are used frequently in the classroom by teachers and the current research has demonstrated how skills currently utilised by professionals could be applied to support classroom based research. I found that inviting children to describe their drawings limited the risk of attributing my own meaning to them and placed emphasis on the child's underlying thoughts, feelings and meanings, making this a valuable research strategy. Combining this with a secondary form of data collection gave participants the opportunity to develop their responses, adding further insight into their motivation to attend school. The

combination of these methods supported participants in articulating the complexity of their experiences. This could be utilised in other research contexts, to gain a deeper insight into the views of children and young people.

Using SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2017) to interpret the themes was also a valuable methodological decision in the current study. Applying the self determination continuum and organismic integration theory (OIT) (section 2.4.1 and 2.4.2) to the data enabled me to consider the origin and relative strength of children's motivations, providing insight into the varied ways in which the children were moved to act. It allowed me to understand better how extrinsic and intrinsic motivation influenced the participants, including how multiple motivators acted simultaneously. Understanding how children are motivated and the extent to which that motivation is volitional is valuable knowledge to acquire, especially given the long term positive impacts of more autonomous forms of motivation on performance and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). Furthermore, the principles of BPNT (section 2.4.3) allowed further insight into how people and environments can support the fulfilment of fundamental needs, particularly underlining the value of relatedness (belonging) for volitional functioning. Other research questions that seek to examine the influence of motivation would benefit from applying these theoretical principles because they may help the researcher to understand the forms of motivation acting upon the individual, along with the extent to which they are volitional.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

This study provided a novel insight into a topic that has frequently been examined from an alternative perspective. Utilising a two stage approach, I obtained rich descriptions from participants to understand better the reasons they were motivated to attend school. The current study did not aim to provide a generalisable conclusion on children's motivations, rather I sought to develop a deep understanding of the views of a small group of children that could, in turn, be used to inform further study in this area. Therefore, I recognise that the chosen approach has influenced both generalisability and validity.

6.4.1 Participant Selection and Sample Size

Using a single school in the research limited the participant sample that could be obtained. While all pupils in the eligible year groups were invited to participate, only a small number came

forward and not all were present for both stages of the study which may have limited the findings in two key ways. Firstly, the study may have attracted parents and carers with particular views, potentially precluding those with children who had problematic attendance. Similarly, the study may also have attracted participants with certain characteristics. As the study was promoted as a positive look at school attendance, focusing on what motivates children to attend, the sample may have been skewed towards those who attended regularly and enjoyed being there.

It must therefore be acknowledged that the findings of the current study represent this group of children only and any consideration for how this might apply within the broader context must be considered with caution. Seeking the participants' actual attendance figures may have allowed me to draw comparisons between self-identified motivators and actual attendance rates; however this would have changed the focus of the study and potentially detracted from the children's descriptions.

6.4.2 Methodological Limitations

A two stage design allowed me to conduct initial analysis of key themes from the drawings, before conducting the focus groups. While this was a strength because it allowed me to adapt questioning prompts for the second stage, it could also be considered a limitation. Using the drawings to inform the questioning prompts may have influenced the children's direction of thinking and limited their ability to refer to new areas or discuss wider topics. While I attempted to make the discussion as open as possible, there is recognition that, as a less experienced researcher, further consideration of question structure and design may have allowed more open discussion.

Alongside this, the interaction between participants must be acknowledged as a potential limiting factor. During the drawing task and focus groups, children were encouraged to give their own views and not be influenced by the contributions of their peers. However it was difficult to remove all discussion, particularly in stage one, where the children talked to one another while drawing. Further, a focus group involves discussion so it is impossible to remove the possibility that participants will be influenced by others' responses. While it is acknowledged that participants may have been influenced by group-think, the decision to allow the children to talk to one another was a conscious one, which focused on promoting a safe environment for the children to share their thoughts and feelings. Consequently, though I must acknowledge the

potential influence of participants' responses on one another and the subsequent findings of the research, I would not change this decision in the future. An ethical researcher should always balance the fidelity to the research endeavour with the comfort and safety of participants.

Focus groups place demands on inexperienced researchers. Distinctly different from interviews, they require facilitation that allows participants to speak freely with one another, creating a dialogue that focuses on their interactions, rather than the influence of the facilitator (Krueger and Casey, 2014). While I am very comfortable interacting with children in a school setting, further opportunities to apply a focus group methodology may support improved facilitation and foster increased discussion between participants. At times, the focus groups resembled group interviews because there was less dialogue between participants and they responded individually to me and the questions I posed, rather than talking to each other. While there are benefits and limitations to both approaches, whichever is chosen may influence participant engagement and response.

6.4.3 Group Dynamics

Observing participants carefully, as well as using the information gathered to inform organisational decisions at the focus group stage, helped to create an environment that was conducive to children sharing their own views. On the whole, participants presented as relaxed and confident. However it cannot be ruled out that children may have refrained from sharing particular thoughts or views in front of others, especially if they did not align with the general consensus of the group. Interviewing children separately or changing the configuration of the groups may have influenced participant responses; however the participants' comfort and safety was prioritised throughout to foster a positive research environment.

6.4.4 Researcher Subjectivity

From the outset, it has been acknowledged that researcher subjectivity contributes to qualitative study and my lived experience as a student, educator and researcher will have informed the way I conducted and analysed this research. While there are strengths to embracing researcher subjectivity (Thomas, 2016), it is acknowledged that there may be other interpretations of the data than those that have been presented here.

6.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Despite the limitations discussed, the key findings identified in the research are both pertinent and relevant. There is potential for these findings to be explored in further research, to better understand the motivations that children have to attend school.

6.5.1 Association Between Belonging and Attendance

In the current study it was inferred from the children's responses that their relationships were underpinned by a sense of belonging, however this would benefit from further exploration. Previous studies have identified a relationship between pupils' sense of belonging and actual rates of attendance. Sims and Fisher (2024) identified that secondary aged pupils with a stronger sense of belonging, had higher rates of attendance. However, these findings were obtained predominantly through survey data that elicited quantitative outcomes. It would therefore be helpful to combine this methodology with qualitative data collection (such as focus groups), to examine further the relationship between reported feelings of belonging and pupils' actual rates of attendance. This may help us to gain a deeper understanding of the connection between feelings of belonging and pupils' attendance patterns and motivations.

6.5.2 Motivations to Attend and Age/ Stage of Education

Exploring the views of primary school pupils, the participants proposed that their motivation would likely change as they transitioned into secondary school. As attendance concerns are more prevalent in the secondary phase (DfE, 2024d), with rates of absence peaking at year 10, it would be pertinent to examine the motivators of secondary school participants, to understand if and how they change. A longitudinal study, examining the views of children over time, may support an improved understanding of how children's motivations evolve and potentially shed light on key transition points within the educational journey. Further, applying principles of SDT to a longitudinal study may enable further exploration of the different forms of motivation influencing children and young people at different ages and stages of education. Using the self determination continuum and principles of OIT, to interpret the self-described motivations of these participants, would support understanding of whether forms of motivation at each stage of education are different and whether motivation can become more integrated over time. This was something that could not be examined in the current study, as participants identified similar motivators and were close in age.

6.5.3 Fostering Relationships with Peers

Relationships were a powerful motivator for participants in the current study. Those with peers were of particular importance to the children involved and provided a strong motivation for them to attend, as they were underpinned by a sense of value and belonging. This prompted me to consider the value of further research into how educators support children to establish and maintain friendships that, in-turn, foster a sense of belonging. Studies have indicated the potential benefits of children working with peers who are familiar to them on a year on year basis (Kirksey and Gottfried, 2018; Kirksey and Elefante, 2024), as it has been shown to support their sense of security and belonging. Therefore, the common practices of mixing pupils' classes each year may be unfavourable to maintaining peer relationships.

Talking to teachers and school leaders about the strategies they use to support pupils in building and maintaining peer relationships, may therefore provide insight into where practice could be further developed. Additionally, pupil interviews may indicate where current practices support or thwart their ability to form and maintain positive relationships with their peers. Applying Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Ryan and Deci, 2008) to a study with this focus may also enable researchers to examine further the relationship between the need for relatedness (or belonging) and its influence on motivation, attitudes and behaviours.

6.6 Implications for Practice

The current study does not claim generalisability, however the range of motivations identified by participants for attending school indicate that this is a complex topic that would benefit from further exploration. Attendance continues to present obstacles for policymakers and school leaders to overcome. Despite a plethora of research into the potential reasons for absence, the outcomes of such studies are yet to have a lasting impact on children's attendance at school. Therefore, focusing more closely on how we can enhance children's existing motivations to attend, may provide an opportunity for a more innovative approach to tackling problematic attendance.

This study has highlighted the importance of the relationships between children and their peers, teachers and parents, alongside the value they attribute to them as drivers of their behaviour. Focusing on how schools can support children to establish and maintain strong relationships

may help them to develop a stronger sense of belonging that will, in turn, have positive academic, social and emotional outcomes. To support recovery in the post-pandemic world, we may also wish to consider how we can support pupils to re-establish relationships that may have been lost or damaged during this period, rebuilding a sense of safety and belonging impacted by an extended time away from school. For policy makers and educators, this suggests that a focus on how we can establish belonging in our schools and emphasise the importance of a safe and secure learning environment should be a priority over academic catch-up sessions. This is particularly important given that evidence suggests children make better progress and are able to learn more effectively in an environment that is underpinned by belonging.

Memorable, meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences were also a key theme within the data, however participants recognised the value of learning generally, for now and in their future lives. This suggests we should pay careful attention to the way in which we design and deliver our curriculum, to ensure it is both meaningful and purposeful. The participants enjoyed engaging in broader school opportunities such as forest school, sports and educational visits; however they also recognised the importance of other aspects of learning that were not necessarily inherently enjoyable. Teachers might usefully consider how their curriculum is designed to provide children with a broad and balanced experience that focuses on teaching, as well as wider learning opportunities. Providing children with an understanding of how their learning may contribute towards their development now and in the future may also support their understanding that learning is a tool for the future. Policy makers, including those in the process of reviewing the National Curriculum, may wish to consider the extent to which the current curriculum has space for teachers to enhance and enrich their teaching, in addition to fulfilling statutory requirements.

Finally, this study reminds us of the importance of listening to the views and perspectives of children. It has demonstrated how children can be supported to communicate their thoughts and feelings on a topic of importance and how they have the skills to do this with confidence and understanding. My careful methodological decision-making and experience as a professional in education enabled me to achieve this. Children and young people are directly affected by the decisions adults make. Therefore they have a fundamental right to contribute their views and perspectives on educational topics. The findings of the current study have reminded me that we would be wise to pay attention to their contributions. They are meaningful, valuable and may

help us to better understand the issues faced by children and young people in our schools, supporting more informed decision making (Reid et al., 2010).

6.7 Reflection

This research originated from my professional experiences as a primary school teacher and leader, alongside the deep personal value I assign to education. School was a happy place for me. Having collected and analysed the data for this research, I wonder to what extent this happiness was related to the relationships I formed there and the memorable learning experiences I engaged in. I continue to have strong friendships with people I attended school with and we often reminisce about the fun we had together at school. I also have vivid memories of school learning experiences which I now share with my teenage daughter. Perhaps it is these positive associations that have kept me in education for so long.

And yet, as a professional, I came across children and families whose experiences of school did not reflect my own. Attendance difficulties were common in my workplace communities and part of my role was to identify the potential causes of these issues and seek solutions. On reflection, I spent a lot of time finding out why a small proportion of children were absent, rather than exploring the motivations behind the many who attended regularly. This led me to consider motivations for attendance as a topic for research and I am very grateful to have now had the opportunity to conduct the current study.

Although this research has only allowed me to obtain the views of a small sample of children, the findings have been rich, insightful and offered opportunity for further study. Applying methods that I had not used before, I was struck by the depth of information obtained from the participants. Using the drawings and focus groups together allowed me to identify a number of factors that may influence children's motivation to attend school. Applying aspects of SDT to the data, in particular the self determination continuum, enabled me to gain a better understanding of how multiple motivations influenced the participants simultaneously. Self determined forms of motivation were prominent in the participants' descriptions, particularly when discussing the influence of relationships with peers.

Principally, I have learned that, just as there are many factors influencing absence from school, there are equally many reasons children want to attend. As professionals, it is our role to identify what these are and find ways to nurture them in our pupils. In the context of the data from this study, relationships appeared to be key. How can parents, educators and policy makers, support children to build and maintain strong relationships that will provide them with the motivation to overcome the challenges, changes and demands they face throughout their school journey?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Initial communication to school

Dear —

My name is Anneka Fisher and I am a doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University. I would like to ask your permission to conduct research in your school setting towards my thesis titled: Push or pull? Exploring children and young people's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.

The study aims to find out more about what motivates children and young people to want to attend school. The objectives of the study reflect the researcher's interest in the potential potential influence of:
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations
- Age/stage of education
- Parental factors
- The pandemic

on what motivates children and young people to want to attend school.

The study would involve two groups of pupils from your school (Year 4 and Year 6) being involved in two data collection activities:
1. A drawing exercise where participants draw what motivates them to want to attend school, along with a written or verbal narration (12 participants from each year group)
2. A focus group discussion where the drawings will be explored in more depth alongside additional questions pertinent to the research objectives. (12 participants from each year group)

Although a maximum of 12 participants from each identified year group will take part, all eligible pupils will be given the opportunity to consent to participate. Should more than 12 participants come forward, participants will be identified randomly.

Participation would be entirely voluntary. All information collected would remain confidential and school and participants would remain anonymous in the written report.

After the data has been analysed you would automatically be provided with an executive summary of the findings. You would also be offered a copy of the full written thesis provided to you in electronic form. This can be requested by email using my direct contact address.

For further information, please find attached a participant information sheet which details what your school's participation in the study would involve.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

If, having read the attached information, you agree to your school participating in the study, please kindly respond by email, completing and returning the attached consent form. I will then be in touch with further information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Schools

Participant Information Sheet for Schools

Study title
Push or pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.

Invitation paragraph
This research invites children in an identified primary school to take part in a doctoral research study. The research study involves children in the following year groups: Year 4 and 6.

Before you decide whether you would like your school to be involved, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?
The study aims to find out more about what motivates children to want to attend school. The objectives of the study reflect the researcher's interest in the potential influence of:
● Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations
● Age/stage of education
● Parental factors
● The pandemic
on what motivates children to want to attend school.

How is the study organised?
The study will take place between June and July 2024, although participants will only need to be involved on two occasions within this period. All participant involvement will take place during school time and participants will not be required to take part in research activities outside of school hours, on evenings or weekends. The dates and times for the data collection activities will be negotiated with the schools involved to minimise disruption to individuals and their learning/break times along with the running and organisation of the school.

The study is made up of two parts. The first part involves a **narrated drawing activity** where participants will be asked to draw a picture relating to what motivates them to want to attend school. This will be followed by a request to annotate or narrate their drawing (in writing or verbally).

The second stage, which will take place approximately two weeks after the first, will involve a **focus group discussion.** In this stage, participants will come together with a small number of other participants in their age group to discuss their drawing and respond to questions relating to the research study.

How many participants will be involved?
A maximum of 12 participants from each eligible year group can participate in the research. If more than 12 participants from each eligible year group consent to participate, participants will be randomly identified.

Why has my school/ pupils been identified?
Your pupils have been invited to take part because they are in one of the year groups selected for this study. This study examines the experiences and viewpoints of children in Year 4 and 6 of primary school. If the research study is permitted, the invitation will be given to all children in these year groups at your school. If more than the target number of participants consent to take part, participants will be randomly identified.

Do we have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not your school should take part in this research study. Before you make a decision about whether to take part in this research study, you will be given the opportunity to attend a briefing meeting with the researcher to find out more about the study and to ask any questions you might have.

If you would like to take part, your eligible pupils will be provided with the following information in order to inform their decision to take part:

- Information slides (to be presented by the researcher to parents/carers at a mutually agreeable time to the researcher and the school – either virtually or at an in-person event)
- Participant information sheet for parents/carers
- Participant information sheet for potential participants
- Privacy notice for participants explaining how their data will be used.

If you decide to take part, participants and their parents/carers will be given a form to provide informed consent to participate. Parents/carers and participants will be free to withdraw participation at any time and without giving a reason. Any data collected from the participant can be withdrawn, up to the point of analysis. It will be made clear to participants that taking part in this study has no influence on the participant's school teaching and learning experience, grades or assessments now or in the future.

What will my pupils be asked to do if I consent to my school's involvement in the research study?

If you consent for your school to be involved in this study and parents/carers subsequently consent for their child to participate, they will be asked to engage in the following data collection activities:

Part 1: Narrated drawing session

- This session will last for approximately 30 minutes with a short break in the middle and will involve 12 participants. There will be two sessions per year group (6 participants in each group).
- During the session, participants will be asked to draw one or more pictures in response to a verbal prompt. At the end of the session, they will be asked to annotate (in writing) or verbally describe their picture to the researcher.
- Drawings from this part of the study may be used in the final research although the participant who drew the image and any identifiable elements will be anonymised.
- All pictures will be scanned then destroyed and the digital images stored securely and retained confidentially.

Part 2: Focus group interview

- This session will last for approximately 40 minutes with a short break in the middle.
- The focus group will be made up of the same participants. A focus group will be held with each set of pupil year groups (6 participants in each group).
- During the focus group, the researcher will ask a series of questions/ prompts relating to the research focus. Participants will be invited to respond to these and discuss as a group.
- With the participants' permission, the focus group interviews will be audio recorded.

What data from our pupils will be collected?

The only data collected about your pupils will be:

- Child's full name and age
- Participant's school year
- Participant's school
- Gender

No information or data regarding participants' actual school attendance will be sought.

This data is collected for the purpose of participant identification at the data collection and analysis stage of the research only and will not be used in the final thesis. All data will be stored by the researcher using Oxford Brookes University Google Drive services and no other individuals, other than supervisory academic staff, will view the data.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of my pupils taking part?
To take part in this study, participants will be invited to attend up to two sessions which will take place during the school day, at times negotiated with you as the school leader. The aim will be to minimise any disruption to learning and recreation time at school. During both stages of the research, participants will be working alongside other participants who are from the same year group in your school. This may or may not influence your decision for pupils to take part as other participants will be able to see and hear their responses however participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality. Although the research is positively framed, seeking motivations to want to attend, there is the potential for either parts of the research to elicit unanticipated emotive responses from participants. In the event of this occurring, data collection will be halted and advice sought from the school regarding appropriate next steps to support the participants.

What are the possible benefits of my school taking part?
It is anticipated that this study will help us to better understand the reasons children want to attend school. This may be of interest to you and the work you are doing in school to support pupil attendance, especially considering the attention paid to school attendance after the disruption of the pandemic. If you choose for pupils in your school to be invited to participate in the study, this will also give them the opportunity to participate in something they may have never done before and provide them with an insight into the process of educational research.

Will what my participants say in this study be kept confidential?
All information collected about participants will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured through the researcher deploying the following methods:
- All research data collected from participants will be stored securely on Google Drive, for which the University has a security agreement. Laptops and other devices that may be used during the data collection, analysis and publication process will be password protected and data files will be encrypted.
- The school and participants will not be referred to by name in the publication.
- All research data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity.
- The data generated during the research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

It is however important to note that total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because although participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality, their adherence to this after the data collection process cannot be guaranteed.

What should I do if I would like my school to be involved?
If you would like your school to be involved in the research study, please send reply by email to Anneka Fisher – 19038972@brookes.ac.uk

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of this study will be used in the researcher's doctoral thesis for the award for Doctor of Education. A short summary of the headline findings will be provided to all. A copy of the full thesis can be provided on request. Participants will receive a short presentation of the findings tailored to their age.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is being conducted and funded by Anneka Fisher as a student in the Department of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Oxford Brookes University.

Who has reviewed the study?
The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information
For further information about this study, please contact: Anneka Fisher via email
19038972@brookes.ac.uk
If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the
Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this participant information sheet.   **(Version Number 3)**

Appendix 3: Consent Form - School

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Consent Form - School

Research study title: *Push or pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.*

Name, position and contact details of Researcher:
Anneka Fisher, 19038972@brookes.ac.uk

	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my school's participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	
I agree to pupils in this school being invited to take part in the above study.	
I understand that the school and participants will not be identified by name.	
I agree that data collection activities can take place in the school, at a mutually agreed time, with participating pupils.	
I understand that no data collection will take place outside of school time, evenings or weekends.	
An appropriate space will be provided (e.g. a classroom) for the research to take place.	

Name of Headteacher   Date   Signature

School Name: _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix 4: Introductory Letter for Parents

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

3rd June 2024

Dear parents/carers,

My name is Anneka Fisher and I am a doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University. I have been given permission to conduct research at your child's school towards my doctoral thesis titled: **Push or pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.**

I am seeking participants for this study. The objectives of the study reflect my interest in the potential influence of; intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, age/stage of education, parental factors and the pandemic on what motivates children to want to attend school.

The study involves groups of pupils from your child's school who are in specific year groups. Your child has been selected for an invitation based on their school year group. If your child takes part in this study, they will be involved in to two data collection activities:
1. A drawing exercise where participants draw what motivates them to want to attend school, along with a written or verbal narration (12 participants from each year group)
2. A focus group discussion where the drawings will be explored in more depth alongside additional questions pertinent to the research objectives. (Same 12 participants)

Participation is entirely voluntary. All information collected will remain confidential and the school and participants will remain anonymous in the written report.

After the data has been analysed you would automatically be provided with an executive summary of the findings. You would also be offered a copy of the full written thesis provided to you in electronic form. This can be requested by email using my direct contact address.

For further information, please find attached a participant information sheet which details what your child's participation in the study would involve. You can also find out more about this study by attending an information session at **— School on Friday 7th June at 9am** or by watching the video here.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

If, having read the attached information, you agree to your child participating in the study, please kindly respond by completing and returning the paper consent form by **Wednesday 12th June.**

Kind regards

Anneka Fisher
19038972@brookes.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet - Parent

Participant Information Sheet

Study title
Push or pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.

Invitation paragraph
Your child is being invited to take part in a doctoral research study. Before you decide whether you would like your child to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?
The study aims to find out more about what motivates children to want to attend school. The study will take place in June and July 2024, although participants will only need to be involved on two occasions within this period. All participant involvement will take place during school time and participants will not be required to take part in research activities outside of school hours, on evenings or weekends. You will be notified in advance of the dates of involvement, so you know when your child is going to take part. Sessions will be determined in negotiation with the participant's school to minimise disruption to learning and participants' free time.

The study is made up of two parts. The first part involves a **participant drawing activity** where your child will be asked to draw a picture relating to what motivates them to want to attend school. This will be followed by a request to annotate or narrate their drawing (in writing or verbally). The second stage, which will take place a short time after the first, will involve a **focus group discussion.** In this stage, your child will come together with a small number of other participants in their age group to discuss their drawing and respond to questions relating to the research study.

Why has my child been invited to participate?
Your child has been invited to take part because they attend —— Primary School and are in one of the year groups selected for this study. This study is examining the experiences and viewpoints of children in Year 4 and Year 6. This invitation has been given to all other children in these year groups at your child's school. Participants will be randomly identified from those who provide informed consent to take part.

Does my child have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not your child should take part in this research study. If you would like them to take part, you will be given this information sheet along with a privacy notice that will explain how your data will be collected and used, and you will be asked to give your consent. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw your child's participation at any time and without giving a reason. Any data collected from your child can be withdrawn, up to the point of analysis.
Participation in this study has no influence on your child's school teaching and learning experience, grades or assessments now or in the future.

What will happen to my child if I consent for them to take part?
If you consent for your child to take part in this study and they are subsequently identified as a participant, your child will be invited to participate in the following:
Part 1: Participant visual method session
● This session will last for approximately 30 minutes with a short break in the middle and will involve 12 participants from your child's school year group (2 groups of 6 participants)
● During the session your child will be asked to draw one or more pictures in response to a verbal prompt. At the end of the session, they will be asked to annotate (in writing) or verbally describe their picture to the researcher.
● Drawings from this part of the study may be used in the final research although the participant who drew the image and any identifiable elements will be anonymised.

- All pictures will be scanned then destroyed and the digital images stored securely and retained confidentially.

Part 2: Focus group interview
- This session will last for approximately 40 minutes with a short break in the middle.
- The focus group will be made up of 12 participants from your child's school who are in the same year group (2 groups of 6 participants will be completed)
- During the focus group, the researcher will ask a series of questions/ prompts relating to the research focus. Your child will be invited to respond to these and discuss them as a group.
- With the participants' permission, the focus group interviews will be audio recorded.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of my child taking part?
To take part in this study, your child will be required to attend the two sessions which will take place during the school day, at times identified by school staff. This is to minimise any disruption to learning and recreation time at school. During both stages of the research, your child will be working alongside other participants who are from the same school. This may or may not influence your decision to take part as other participants will be able to see and hear your child's responses however participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality.

What are the possible benefits of my child taking part?
It is anticipated that this study will help us to better understand the reasons children want to attend school. This may be of interest to you and will be of interest to the wider educational community, especially considering the attention paid to school attendance after the disruption of the pandemic. If you choose for your child to participate in the study, this will also give them the opportunity to participate in something they may have never done before and provide them with an insight into the process of educational research.

Will what my child says in this study be kept confidential?
All information collected about participants will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured through the researcher deploying the following methods:
- All research data collected from participants will be stored securely on Google Drive, for which the University has a security agreement. Laptops and other devices that may be used during the data collection, analysis and publication process will be password protected and data files will be encrypted.
- The school and participants will not be referred to by name in the publication.
- All research data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity.
- The data generated during the research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.
It is however important to note that total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because although participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality, their adherence to this after the data collection process cannot be guaranteed.

What should I do if I want my child to take part?
If you would like your child to take part in the study, please complete the attached consent form and return to your child's school.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of this study will be used in the researcher's doctoral thesis for the award for Doctor of Education. A short summer of the headline findings will be provided to all participants. A copy of the full thesis can be provided on request. Participants will receive a short presentation of the findings tailored to their age.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is being conducted by Anneka Fisher as a student in the Department of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Oxford Brookes University.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been reviewed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Sub-Committee –
UREC Registration number: 221658.

Contact for Further Information
For further information about this study, please contact: Anneka Fisher via email
19038972@brookes.ac.uk
If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the
Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this participant information sheet.

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet - Child

Participant Information Sheet – Child

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Information for children
To be read and discussed with a parent/carer

Hello, my name is Anneka Fisher and I would like to ask for your help with my research project.

What is the study called?	**Why me?**
How do children describe what motivates them to attend school?	You are in Year 4 or Year 6 in your school.

What is this all about?	**What will happen if I take part?**
I want to learn about the reasons children have for going to school.	**You will be asked to:** · Draw a picture and talk/write about it. · You will talk in a group with some other children from your class.

How do I tell you if I want to take part?	**What will happen to what I draw or talk about?**
If you would like to take part, your parent/carer can tell me by filling in a form. If you change your mind, you can tell me or your parent/carer and you can stop. I won't ask for a reason.	Anything you draw or talk about will not have your name on it. This means that if someone reads it, they won't know that it is you.

What if I have questions?
If you have questions, you can talk to your parents/carers.
They can contact me by sending an email to 19038972@brookes.ac.uk
If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee via: ethics@brookes.ac.uk

This study has been reviewed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Sub-Committee – UREC Registration number: 221658.

Appendix 7: Privacy Notice

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Privacy Notice for Research Participants

This Privacy Notice provides information on how Oxford Brookes University (Oxford Brookes) collects and uses participant's personal information when you take part in one of our research projects. Please refer to the research Participant Information Sheet for further details about the study and what information will be collected about you and how it will be used.

Data Controller:
Oxford Brookes University is the Data Controller of any data that you supply for this research. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it lawfully. We will make the decisions on how your data is used and for what reasons.

Purpose for Data Collecting
The legal basis for processing personal data or information is as set out in Article 6 UK GDPR. Participant consent is required for the processing of their personal data for one or more specific purposes.

The basis for processing data in this study is as a:

- **Public task:** your Personal Data will be used in academic research. Oxford Brookes University is a public body and staff and students carry out research in line with the University's legal powers and constitution.

Your consent is an ethical requirement. Oxford Brookes University's legal basis for processing your Personal Data (or information) is as set out in Art 6 UK GDPR.

Data to be collected:
The following personal information will be collected during this research:
- Child's full name and age
- Child's school year
- Child's gender
- Child's school

This data is collected for the purpose of participant identification at the data collection and analysis stage of the research only and will not be used in the final thesis. All data will be stored by the researcher using Oxford Brookes University Google Drive services and no other individuals, other than supervisory academic staff, will view the data.

Data movement:
Data for this study will be stored on the Oxford Brookes University Google Drive and will not be shared externally. The organisation's Privacy Notice provides further information on how data is stored by Google but data stored on Google drive may be stored outside of the UK.

Data Source:
The source of the data will be the participants themselves through the gatekeeper organisation (schools).

What rights do I have regarding my data that Oxford Brookes holds?
- You have the right to be informed about what data will be collected and how this will be used
- You have the right of access to your data
- You have the right to correct data if it is wrong
- You have the right to ask for your data to be deleted
- You have the right to restrict use of the data we hold about you
- You have the right to data portability
- You have the right to object to Oxford Brookes using your data
- You have rights in relation to using your data in automated decision making and profiling.

Your rights will depend on the legal ground used to process your data

Are there any consequences of not providing the requested data?

There are no consequences of not providing data for this research. It is purely voluntary. If you like to withdraw part way through the research, the Participant Information Sheet includes this information. It may be that some of the data that you have provided has already been used in the research. If you would like more information about this, you should feel free to contact the research team.

Will there be any automated decision making using my data?

There will be no use of automated decision making in scope of UK Data Protection and Privacy legislation.

How long will Oxford Brookes keep your data?
In line with Oxford Brookes policies data generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years in accordance with the research funder or University policy.

Who can I contact if I have concerns?

In the event of any questions about the research study, please contact the research team in the first instance. Their contact details are listed on the Participant Information Sheet. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at ethics@brookes.ac.uk. For further details about information use contact the Information Security Management team on info.sec@brookes.ac.uk or the Data Protection Officer at brookesdpo@brookes.ac.uk. You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office via their website ico.org.uk.

Appendix 8: Information Video for Parents

Link to information video for parents: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GVHuw2HOq8

Appendix 9: Consent Form - Parent

Consent Form – Parent/Carer

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Research study title: *Push or Pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to attend school.*

Name, position and contact details of Researcher:
Anneka Fisher, 19038972@brookes.ac.uk

	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw them at any time, without giving reason, noting that any data can be withdrawn up to the point of analysis.	
I agree for my child to take part in the above study.	

	Please initial box	
	Yes	Not
I agree to my child's description of their drawing to be audio-recorded if required		
I understand the focus group will be audio-recorded.		

Male/ Female*

_____   _____   _____
Child's Name   Age and School Year   *Delete as applicable

_____   _____   _____
Name of Parent/Carer   Date   Signature

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee via: ethics@brookes.ac.uk

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Appendix 10: Assent Form - Child

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Assent Form – Participant (<12 Years)
To be completed before commencement of each stage

Research study title: *Push or Pull? Exploring children's unique descriptions of what motivates them to attend school.*

Name, position and contact details of Researcher:
Anneka Fisher, 19038972@brookes.ac.uk

	Circle
Has someone explained this study to you?	🙂 ☹️
Do you understand what this study is about?	🙂 ☹️
Have you asked all the questions you want?	🙂 ☹️
Have your questions been answered in a way you understand?	🙂 ☹️
Do you understand that you can stop taking part at any time?	🙂 ☹️
Are you happy to take part?	🙂 ☹️
If all your answers are 'yes' and you want to take part, put your name below and today's date.	

Your name	Date:
If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee via: ethics@brookes.ac.uk	

Appendix 11: Stage One Drawing Schedule

<u>Research Instrument 1: Narrated Drawings Schedule</u>

<u>Research Title</u>
Push or pull? Exploring children and young people's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.

The aim of this first stage of data collection is to provide participants with the opportunity to express their motivations to attend school through a drawing and independently written/verbalised narration.

To support the participants in their involvement at this stage, I will follow the schedule below:

1. *Pre-task preparation:*

- I will read aloud the participant-friendly information sheet that will have been provided to the participants prior to them agreeing to be part of the research. I will make sure all participants understand their role in the research and **obtain assent**. All participants will be given the **opportunity to withdraw** at this point without question.
- I will remind participants about **keeping them safe.** Therefore, if they say anything that might lead me to believe that they are at risk or not safe, I might need to share that with someone else.
- I will make clear to participants that anything shared in the session must remain **confidential** and should not be shared outside of the session. I will also make clear that **all of their responses will be anonymised and data will be stored confidentially**.
- I will explain to the participants that this session will last approximately 30 minutes with a short break in the middle if they require it. They can take a break for water or to go to the toilet if required at any time.
- We will agree to other ground rules for the session - e.g. not saying anything unkind about someone's drawing, being respectful towards each other etc. These will be identified through collaboration with the study participants.
- I will explain the purpose of the session: for participants to express their motivations (reasons) for wanting to attend school through the medium of drawing.
- Participants can use pencil on its own or they can choose to add colour to their drawings using colouring pencils or felt tips.
- They do not need to draw in a particular way. I will emphasise that this is not an art lesson and none of their drawings will be shared with their teachers or other members of the school community. The drawings will not be used by teachers to inform their marks or learning now or in the future. **The drawing skill demonstrated will not be assessed in any way and this is not relevant to the purpose of the research.**
- The participants will be provided with an A3 template sheet of paper (but they will be reminded that more paper is available should it be required)
- I will explain to the participants that there is **no right or wrong** in this activity and that I just want to know their thoughts and feelings.
- I will remind the participants that they should be working independently as I want to see what they think and feel.
- Before moving on to the prompt, I will provide the participants with a further opportunity to **ask questions/ withdraw** from the research should they wish.

2. *Providing participants with the prompt*

- Once the participants have received all of the instructions above and have confirmed they are willing to participate, I will provide them with the prompt for the session:

Draw what motivates you to attend school.

- It is recognised that some participants may not understand the language used in the prompt. Therefore, I will provide participants with further explanations that will help them to understand the task without prompting a particular response. An example of this might include: 'draw the things that encourage you to want to come to school'.
- Participants will then be given time to draw their pictures.

- I will move around the group and provide encouragement to the participants (e.g. keep going, thank you for working so hard on this) but feedback will not be provided that could lead a participant to misconstrue my response as a positive affirmation of what they have drawn.
- After approximately 20 minutes, I will ask the participants to write a sentence to describe what they have included in their picture.
- To support this process, I will provide a modelled example so that participants understand what they need to do. The model will be unrelated to the study:
  *Put up a picture of a sheep. 'This is a picture of a sheep. I have drawn a sheep because sheep make me think of wool and I like being cosy.' I want to understand what you have drawn from **your** point of view. Therefore, it is very important for me that you have explained **what** you have drawn and **why** you have drawn it.*
- I will then provide participants with a sentence starter: *I have drawn … because*
- I will remind participants that they can write in full sentences or use bullet points or labels.
- At this point, I will also offer to record narrations verbally for participants. If a participant would like to record their narration, I will record this in the room.
- Once the participants have completed their drawing and narration, a post-session briefing will conclude the first stage of data collection.

3. *Post-session debrief*

At the end of the session I will remind participants of what will happen to their contribution during this session:
- I will thank the children and young people for participating and state how privileged I feel that they have chosen to take part in my study.
- I will remind participants that their drawings will be kept and anything they have written or said will remain confidential. Their drawings/writing may feature in the final report but this will be anonymised so that no-one knows who they are.
- Again, I will remind participants that if they change their mind about taking part in the research, they can withdraw at any time.
- I will explain that I will spend lots of time looking at the drawings and the things they have written about them.
- I will explain how their drawings will help me to identify the questions we will discuss when I return next time.
- I will then briefly explain the arrangements for the second visit - highlighting how we will talk about the themes identified from the drawings as a group and I will ask some other questions about their reasons for wanting to attend school.
- Participants will then be escorted back to their class.

Appendix 12: Drawing Template

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Name: _____   Age: _____

Draw what motivates you to attend school:

Describe what you have drawn:

Appendix 13: Stage Two Focus Group Schedule

Research Instrument 2: Focus Groups Schedule

Research Title
Push or pull? Exploring children and young people's unique descriptions of what motivates them to want to attend school.

The aim of the second stage of this data collection process is to gain a more detailed understanding of participants' motivations to attend school, with questions constructed to obtain qualitative data that contribute towards the objectives of the research as outlined above.

Prior to the focus group, participant drawings and narrations from the first stage will be light touch analysed using thematic analysis. The key themes identified through this process will be used to support the development of question prompts for this stage in the research. Therefore, prior to the commencement of research, only a small proportion of the key question prompts will have been identified. The focus group schedule will be updated accordingly once thematic analysis of the drawings and their narrations has been completed. Participants will also be given the opportunity to review their own drawing as a reminder before the session but these will not be shared with the whole group.

To support the participants in their involvement during the second stage of the data collection process, I will follow the protocol as outlined below:

1. *Pre-task preparation*

- As with the first stage, I will read through the child-friendly information sheet that will have been provided to the participants prior to them agreeing to be part of the research. I will make sure all participants understand their role in this stage of the study and will ask for their **assent**. Participants will also be given the opportunity to opt-out without question at this stage in the research.
- Participants will be reminded about my duty to **keep them safe.** Therefore, if they say anything that might lead me to believe that they are at risk or not safe, I might need to share that with someone else.
- I will explain to the participants that this session will last **approximately 40 minutes.** We will work hard to not extend over that time frame as this is what has been planned and is expected by participants. I will remind participants that they can have a break if required (e.g. for a drink or to go to the toilet)
- I will explain to the participants that they are taking part in a focus group discussion. This is where a group of people talk about something and are asked some questions to prompt their thinking and discussion. I will explain that in a focus group, we do not ask each person to respond individually and participants can choose whether or not they wish to respond to a particular question or prompt.
- I will explain that discussion is encouraged during the focus group. Participants are invited to speak to other members of the group and talk about their thoughts and feelings in response to the question/prompt.
- I will emphasise there is no right or wrong answer and each participant may have different thoughts or opinions in relation to a question or prompt. This is

absolutely fine. We are talking about our own motivations; therefore it is likely that people will think differently.

2. _Agreeing ground rules_
- Ground rules for the focus group will be established, in collaboration with the participants. These rules might include - speaking if you want to, being able to say pass, no unkind laughter, giving everyone a chance to speak.
- Respect will be emphasised - respect for individuals, other participants, themselves
- Participants will also be reminded of confidentiality - keeping everything that is said in the focus group confidential when the session ends. An example will be given to illustrate this to the participants.
- What is said in the focus group will be treated in confidence and the recording will be kept securely and confidentially. Any quotations from the focus group that will be shared in the final report will be anonymised.
- Participants will be given the opportunity to ask questions.
- Ensure that all participants understand that the session is being **audio recorded** and they agree to this.

3. _Focus group question/prompts:_

Start with an introduction/ ice breaker
- Warm up - introducing ourselves with a fact that others may not know about us. _My name is Anneka Fisher and I like guinea pigs. I have four at home!_
- Depending on the age of the participants, the warm up may be adjusted to suit their age and stage of development.
- Once the group has settled in, the main focus group will begin.

The questions for the main group discussion will be focused around the study objectives organised under the four headings below however these are only indicative and may be subject to change depending on the thematic analysis of the drawings and narrations in stage 1 of the research. Language used in the questioning may be adjusted or explained in order to meet the needs of participants however this will be carefully considered to ensure that meaning is not compromised.

1. _Further exploration of the images created by participants in phase 1 of the research using themes that have been identified from the analysis_
   - _What are the motivations for the participants in the group to attend school?_
   - _Sharing their motivations – are we all motivated by the same thing?_
   - _What motivates you the most out of the things you identified in your drawing?_
   - _Potentially consider potential impact of covid on motivations to want to attend_

2. _Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation_
   - _How do participants describe their motivations to attend school? Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?_

3. _Parents and motivation to attend school_
   - _What do your parents/carers think about attending school?_
   - _Do you think your parents think it's important to go to school?_

4. Motivations to attend school and age/stage
   - *How do you think your reasons for attending school might change as you get older, if at all?*
   - *Have they changed from when you started school/ when you started this school?*

4. Post-session debrief
   - At the end of the session, participants will be reminded of what will happen to their contributions during the session.
   - They will be thanked for participating along with their contribution to the research.
   - They will be reminded of how the information from the study will be stored and presented in the final study - *Remember, I have made a recording of our focus group discussion from today and this will be transcribed. However, it will be kept safely and securely and confidential to myself and my research team (supervisor). Anything you have shared today which is featured in my thesis will be anonymised so the school and individuals cannot be identified.*
   - Participants will again be reminded that if they wish to withdraw from the study, they can do so at any time. After this session, their parents can contact me if required because they have the relevant contact details.

Appendix 14: Study Risk Assessment

Ethical Risks and Proposed Mitigations

Risk	Risk Level	Mitigation factors/strategies	Remaining Risk Level
Planning the research			Low
• The research question may be ethically unsound	Low	• Complete all ethical approval forms and seek support from university ethics officer and supervisor to ensure plan is appropriate and ethically sound	
• Approval may not be given by the ethics committee or the schools may choose not to participate	Low	• Ensure all permissions are sought in good time, once ethical approval has been granted	
• The process for identifying participants may not be seen as ethically sound	Low	• Ensure there is a clear procedure in place for identifying potential participants – make this clear at all points	
• Participants may be vulnerable	Medium	• Provide full participant information sheets to schools, parents/carers of potential participants and provide a child-friendly/young-person friendly version to the potential participants themselves	
• Participants may not fully understand the nature of the research	Medium		
• Participants may not want to participate in the research	Medium	• Hold an information event for potential participants and their parents/carers to find out more about the research. This will also give the opportunity for questions to be asked	
• Participants may feel as though they have been coerced into the research/ pressured to participate, especially if I am known to them	Medium	• Provide a clear communication channel for participants/ parents and carers to make contact with me	
• The research approach (methods) may not be ethically sound	Low	• Ensure all potential participants understand that participation is optional and does not have any impact on the participant's education now or in the future	
		• All participants to give informed consent (parents/carers and the participants)	
		• Discuss all research methods with supervisor and ethics officer to ensure they are appropriate for the study and the participants involved	
		• Feasibility study used to inform research methods	
		• Be clear with participants at all stages regarding anonymity and confidentiality	
		• Allow participants the opportunity to withdraw at any point without question, with data able to be withdrawn up to the point of analysis.	

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Risk	Rating	Mitigation	Overall
Collecting the data • Participants may feel uncomfortable during the data collection	Medium	• Identify any potential vulnerabilities before data collection – seek guidance and advice from the school/ class teacher • Seek consent before starting each stage of data collection • Have procedures in place in the event of a safeguarding disclosure during either stage of the data collection • Follow-up after the data collection process to confirm all is well with participants/ address any questions or concerns • Have a plan in place for if participants become upset or distressed during the data collection session – stop the session and seek support from a member of school staff • Identify external support that can be offered to participants if required • Processes in place to keep data secure (Oxford Brookes data processing requirements) • Be clear about complying with GDPR legislation as required • Be transparent with participants about how data is stored and shared (privacy notice) • Delete audio recordings once uploaded to google drive • Do not leave any data or devices unattended/unlocked • If any data is lost or stolen, inform University immediately and seek guidance on next steps • No pressure on participants – able to opt out at any time with no reason required • Ensure that school staff are aware of which young people are participating so they can adapt teaching and learning accordingly • Liaise with schools and, wherever possible, schedule data collection at best time for the participants' learning needs	Low
• There could be a behaviour issue or a participant may refuse to participate	Medium		
• A safeguarding situation could arise during either part of the data collection	Medium		
• Participants may withdraw at the data collection stage	Medium		
• Participants may become upset or distressed during the data collection	Medium		
• Participants may form a bond with me as the researcher	Medium		
• Data may be lost and confidentiality not maintained	Low		
• Participants may miss learning time while participating which could impact their education	Low		
Analysing and publishing • The data obtained may not be appropriate/contribute towards answering the research question	Medium	• Only present data that has been collected as part of the study • Ensure participants are aware of how the report will be published and disseminated • Make sure to pay attention to ethical practice throughout	Low

• Participants may be unhappy with the final report	Low	• Ensure all references to schools and individuals are removed from the report to maximise anonymity • Remove identifiable features from drawings through blurring	
• School/participants may be identifiable in the research	Medium		
• Information from the study may be shared beyond the agreed publishing audience	Low		
• The write-up may not meet ethical guidelines	Low		

Any stage
 • Potential risks to me as the researcher
   - Physical
   - Emotional
   - Ethical
   - Professional
	Medium/ Low	• See separate personal risk assessment	Low

Appendix 15: Personal Risk Assessment

Personal Risk Assessment

Risk Type	Descriptions	Level of Risk	Mitigating factors/strategies
Physical	Travel to and from schools to conduct research activities.	Low	Ensure that someone is always aware of my location during the day.
	Being in the school environment.	Low	Have a means of communicating (mobile phone). Follow all school policies relating to health and safety and safeguarding.
	Physical aggression from participants during the data collection stage of the research.	Low	Ensure that all participants understand the nature of the study and have given informed consent before participating. Seek information from gatekeeper/ class teacher prior to data collection to identify any participants who may have particular needs/ SEN that need to be taken into consideration/ use strategies advised by the schools to support participants.
Emotional	It may be stressful carrying out the drawing activities/ focus groups with the participants.	Medium	Identify strategies to support emotional/mental health – building in breaks, time to eat/drink.
	Participants may draw or say something that is upsetting or a safeguarding concern.	Medium	Identify a source of support to speak to regarding research (supervisor). Speak to gatekeepers/ class teachers to identify strategies that work well with individual participants.
	It might be stressful managing any difficulties in the session – e.g., disagreements between the participants, sharing of challenging information that may require follow-up/ further discussion.	Medium	Have clear ground rules in place for the drawing activity and focus group. Share these expectations and agree with the participants. Plan what will happen if a participant withdraws before, during or after a session. Have a plan in place for what to do if there is a safeguarding situation or a concern about something a participant has said during data collection. This will include establishing school policies and processes prior to visiting.
	The whole project will likely create emotional pressures due to the intensity and workload associated with it.	Medium	Seek guidance from my supervisor regarding managing workload/ the GAANT chart for the project. Ensure structure is manageable before commencing.

Ethical	Ethical practice not maintained	Low	Position ethical practice at the forefront of my research. Make sure to refer to ethical guidance throughout and apply situated ethics at each stage. Make sure to have plans in place for any ethical issues that may arise during the research study and seek the support of my supervisor for guidance if required.
Professional	If the research findings are not accepted by the research community or are contentious in any way, this could influence my professional position. Research ethics questioned	Low	Careful consideration at each stage of the research process. Regular opportunities to liaise with the supervisor to discuss emerging findings. Consideration of ethical principles throughout. Be proactive in terms of ethics as this could present a challenge at any point.
		Low	Read widely and analyse data carefully to ensure any research findings are justified. Ensure all research activities are carried out in line with accepted university procedures and protocols.

Appendix 16: Thematic Analysis - Drawings (Phase One and Two)

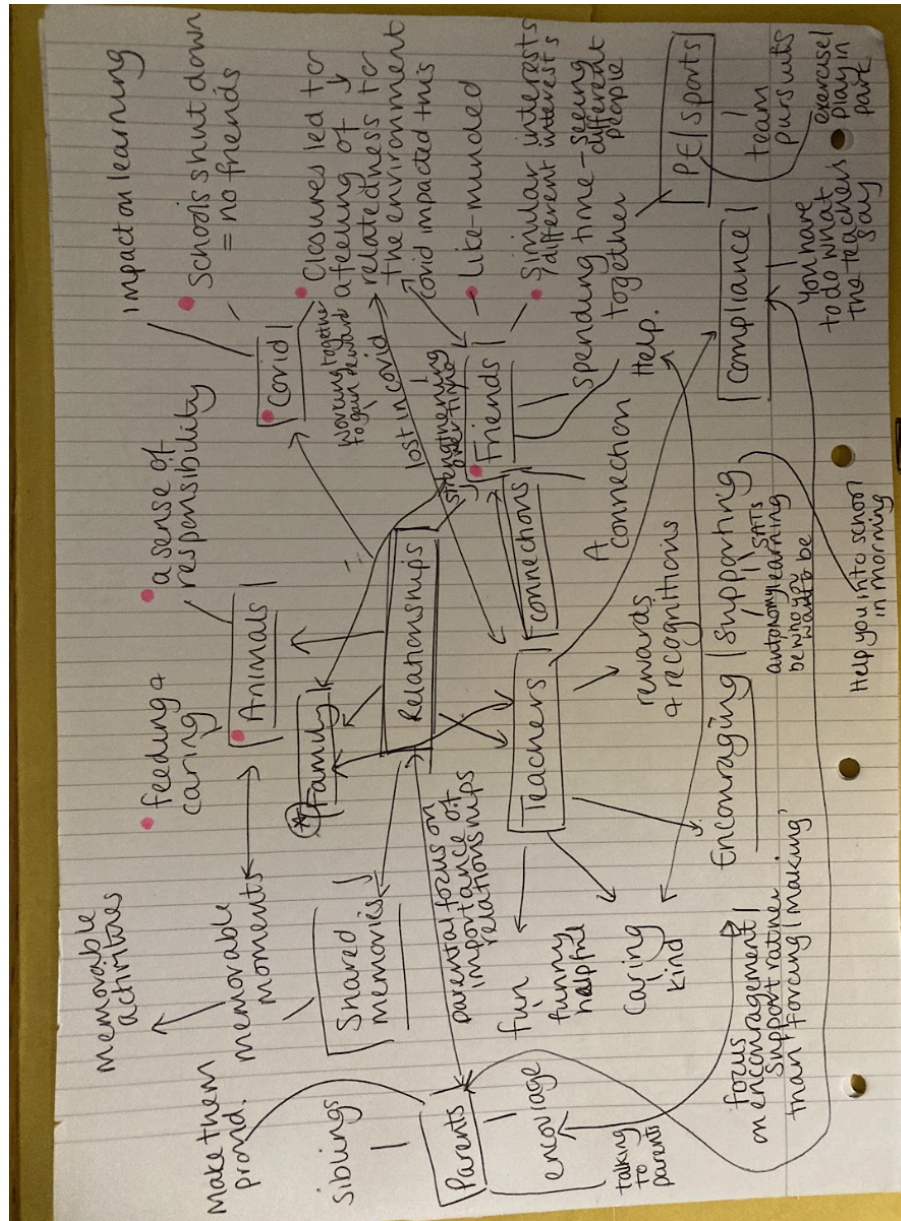Redacted due to data sharing permissions

This appendix provides an example of phase one and two thematic analysis of the drawings, with colour coding used to identify themes in the drawings and notes included to identify key ideas from the children's contributions.

Appendix 17: Thematic Analysis - Focus Group Coding (Phase Four)

Redacted due to data sharing permissions

This appendix provides an example of phase one and two thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts, with colour coding used to identify themes in the transcript and annotations included to identify key ideas from the children's contributions.

Appendix 18: Thematic Analysis - Mind Maps (Phase Five)

An example of a phase five mind map for relationships.

Appendix 19: Thematic Analysis - Establishing and Refining Themes (Phase Six)

Redacted due to data sharing permissions

This appendix provides an example of a phase six spreadsheet that focuses on the theme of relationships. The spreadsheet shows how the thematic analysis process was completed, using the data from the drawing and focus group transcriptions.