

Can PRUs work?

A search for an answer from within a lived experience

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This study draws on theories of punishment (Cavadino and Dignan 2007), leadership (West-Burnham 2013), social rules, (Burns and Machado (2014) and resilience (Fredrikson and Branigan 2005) to develop an understanding of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

PRUs came into being through statute in 1993. They were set up to provide formal educational settings for young people who had been excluded from school.

LEAs have responsibility for the education and welfare of all children in their catchment areas, irrespective of which school they attend. If an exclusion occurs, the LEA is obliged to assume responsibility, under section 19(1) of the 1996 Education Act, for the child's education by whatever means seems appropriate to its designated officers. Placement in a Pupil Referral Unit is a course of action they may pursue.

This study sets out to discover through a series of narrative interviews conducted within a Key Stage 4 PRU, whether the multiple purposes of the PRU can be achieved, given the issues that present themselves in the isolated setting of the Unit, the resources available and the complex needs of the young people concerned.

Fifteen interviews were conducted within a PRU in the academic year 2011-2012. Four were held with the Head; 11 further interviews involved 12 people; 8 members of staff and 4 pupils.

A study of the evidence they provided led to a qualified positive response to the research question; i.e. that PRUs can 'work' given a number of factors that are listed in the conclusion.

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Alternative Provision
ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
CAMHS	The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
EBD	Emotional/ Behavioural Disorder
Ed.Psych	Educational Psychologist
EOTAS	Education Other Than At School
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FTE	Fixed Term Exclusion
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
ILBP	Individual Learning and Behaviour Plan
INSET	In-Service Training Day
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research

NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PASS	Pupil's Attitude to Self and School
PE	Physical Education
PEX	Permanent Exclusion from School
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSHE	Physical, Social and Health Education
SATs	Standard Attainment Tasks
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSS	Short Stay School
TBAP	Tri-Borough Alternative Provision
URN	Unique Reference Number
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Climbing Mount Improbable...

Richard Dawkins's metaphor for evolution is usefully applicable to my own mountain of improbability: a series of life events leading to the experience of running a Pupil Referral Unit and the outcome: an evolution in my thinking...

My first chapter charts my interest in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) that developed as the result of my role as Head of a PRU from 2003 to 2006, and sets out the origins of the research project. It examines the potential of my research question, 'Can PRUs work?' that emerged from my experience in the post. It gives an outline of the history of Pupil Referral Units and a description of their various forms and purposes. It reviews the issues they face and outlines the design, execution and over-arching aims of the research project.

The designation 'Pupil Referral Unit' will be used throughout the work; some PRUs have adopted different titles, for example, Short Stay School or Children's Support Service but all have the same generic identity i.e. they exist to meet the needs of young people excluded, for whatever reason, from their mainstream schools.

1.2 The mountain encountered: an assault without oxygen

I climbed my mountain full of idealism, enthusiasm and determination but found the evolving way hard and the view from the top, or rather, from half way up, disappointing. My mountain began to feel not only improbable, but potentially Impossible.

My research question emerged from three years of experience as Head of a Pupil Referral Unit. The Headship appointment came after thirty years of a teaching career in which I had worked within mainstream schools, including Grammar and Comprehensive Schools, in adult education and briefly in a Sixth Form college. I had also worked for a short period, within a PRU. Over the years, I had developed a particular interest in supporting young people who were struggling to meet the

expectations of their schools, both socially and educationally. I had also had experience of leading and managing colleagues and had worked at Senior Management level on strategic planning, staffing, including recruitment and training. I had served as a Parent and Teacher Governor of a number of different schools.

It was with some degree of confidence therefore that I put myself forward for the Headship of a small PRU in an outer London borough. The PRU was new in its then format but had emerged from an innovative small unit run jointly by Education and Social Services departments in the borough. This unit had provided personal support and an educational framework to a number of Year 10 and Year 11 pupils who were referred to it from their schools. Places were limited, referrals were carefully screened before admission and close ties were maintained between the referring school and the young person through regular reviews and reporting structures. The curriculum provided core GCSE subjects and a variety of 'Life Skills' courses tailored to the needs of the young people. Each pupil had an allocated 'Link Worker', from the Social Services team, who checked on the wellbeing, attendance and progress of his or her student on a daily basis.

This unit enjoyed a strong reputation in the 1990s for achieving successful outcomes for its referred students and was a popular, well-supported resource of the Local Education Authority.

However, section 19(2) of the 1996 Education Act, obliged local authorities to provide an educational setting for young people permanently or temporarily excluded from their schools:

Each local authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them. Any school set up by a Local Authority to fulfil this statutory duty must be known as a pupil referral unit, under section 19(2) of the 1996 Act.

In the borough under discussion, as in others, arrangements for the education of excluded pupils had mainly consisted of small tutorial groups taking place in a variety of local settings. However, with its established off-school site unit, the solution to the borough's officers seemed clear. Expansion of the intake to include those who were excluded from school appeared to be a logical step. However, the move was resisted by the practitioners and delays eventually led to the departure of the Head of Unit who was unwilling to work with the changed character of the projected PRU. Key workers, placed by Social Services, also withdrew as confusion arose over which young people were 'joint' responsibilities and those who were 'education' referrals. No screening of the intake meant that there was no opportunity to plan groups or predict attendance. The well-respected off-site provision that had existed to support a nominated group of young people for whom school had become difficult, principally because of issues outside it, became a well-intentioned but fundamentally flawed operation where management were pressing for results from staff who were unskilled in the new environment, confused over lines of communication and demoralised by the speed of change.

As the incoming Head I believed it would be possible, with a clear strategy and an injection of confidence, to equip most of the staff to cope with managing challenging and needy young people whose education history was inevitably dislocated and, in some cases, in long term crisis. I was aware how different the new PRU would seem to the incumbent staff and that issues like short term referrals, random entry dates, mixed age groups and multiple needs would be challenging management problems. However, I discovered very quickly that most of the few qualified teachers on the staff had relied heavily on intervention and support from skilled Social Services Key Workers under the old regime and were not used to dealing with personal challenge and managing outcomes themselves. This, in addition to the strategic issues, proved a difficult transitional problem.

The pressure from the local authority to meet the needs of the referring schools by taking excluded pupils on to the Unit's roll at short notice and to achieve change in attitude, behaviour and motivation with those young people in a short period of time with few qualified staff, limited resources and inadequate space, tested my skills. Suffice to say that after three years, we achieved an Ofsted 'Satisfactory' judgement,

which, in 2006, meant that we had passed their inspection, albeit with nominated aspects to improve.

I resigned from the Headship following the inspection believing that I had achieved what had been asked of me but totally unsatisfied as to the nature of the establishment, the quality of what we had achieved, the support we received from the Local Authority and the Management Committee and the, in my view, virtually impossible expectations placed upon the Head.

I had the opportunity to take up a place at Brunel University to pursue my interest in PRUs. My research was founded on my own challenging experience and my knowledge that some PRUs had achieved 'Outstanding' judgements from Ofsted and I was keen to know how these had been achieved, what had been achieved and where the difference lay. I included the possibility that at least part of the difference was likely to be found in me.

1.3 Preparation for tackling my new mountain.

Time to check my equipment, learn from other climbers, understand my limitations and temper my ambition...

In the chapters to follow, I rehearse the progress I made on learning the language and in developing a better theoretical understanding of the issues presented in the PRU setting.

A particular event had significance for me.

I attended the National Pupil Referral Unit conference in July 2010. I had previously attended a number of this organisation's conferences and knew a number of the delegates well, including the then President. The organisation is principally aimed at supporting the needs of Heads, Teachers in Charge or Managers of PRUs and Alternative Provision of whatever type it might be.

It occurred to me that, with the President's permission and support, I could exploit the opportunity to find out what at least a number of others were experiencing on 'Mount Improbable' and present a questionnaire to the delegates. With permission secured

the questionnaire had to be written and produced for 120 delegates in a matter of hours.

I achieved an encouraging 62% return. 74 delegates of 120 filled in the questionnaires and returned them to me.

Delegates were asked to respond to a number of questions that explored their views on the issues concerning the management and leadership of PRUs.

I included questions on the gender balance of the staff, teaching and non-teaching, and on the buildings in which they worked. I was able to formulate useful impressions from the outcomes that informed my questioning when carrying out visits, making observations and conducting interviews at the data-gathering stage of the research project.

Further thought led me to the conclusion that although I had achieved some success in capturing the views and experiences of a substantial number of Heads of PRUs, I would need resources well beyond my capacity to follow up each respondent for further illumination. As outlined in the Methodology, I eventually focussed my efforts on one PRU Head and extended the questioning to those who worked with her, both adults and young people. I deal with the issues raised, principally concerning the critical limitations of a single case study in the same chapter.

1.4 Consulting the guide book: learning as much as possible about the mountain...

At this stage, it became necessary to ensure that I had a comprehensive understanding of the issues against which to set my enquiries.

I knew that, in England, Pupil Referral Units are educational establishments that exist to meet the needs of young people under the age of 16 who are excluded from school. The exclusion may be permanent or for a fixed term; it may be part-time or full time. It may be for health reasons, social reasons or for a range of behaviour related issues. PRUs may also be used to provide for young people without school places for a number of reasons: for example, pupils with Special Educational Needs awaiting specialist provision; asylum seekers awaiting school placements. In such

cases, and others, the placement may be neither permanent nor fixed-term but open-ended awaiting resolution.

PRUs have always had to deal with challenging issues. Through their very nature, they work with some of the most damaged and damaging young people in our society. They are, in general, challenging to manage and expensive to run. Currently (2016) a mainstream placement costs £4,000 per annum; the Pupil Premium allocates an additional £995 to support pupils with Special Educational Needs. A PRU placement costs £10,000 per pupil and may be topped up from additional funding from the referring mainstream school. In these circumstances it is inevitable that the various stakeholders, particularly the referring school, the LEA, Parliament and the taxpayers it represents, will have high expectations concerning desired outcomes from PRUs.

The recent (2012 – 2015) coalition government focused attention on their urgent concern about outcomes in terms of life chances for young people who are excluded from school, either permanently or temporarily. There was an awareness that continues to grow that large numbers of young people who find themselves in the NEET group (Not in Employment, Education or Training) at post 16, have experienced exclusion from school and have spent time in alternative provision, frequently the Local Education Authority's Pupil Referral Unit. A recent (June 2016) House of Commons briefing paper states that,

Those eligible for free school meals, those who have been excluded or suspended from school, those with their own child and those who have a disability are more likely to be NEET. (Delebarre 2016)

The riots in London and elsewhere in August 2011 gave added impetus to the concern as large numbers of those young people who went through the courts in the wake of the disturbances were found to have been previous offenders many of whom had experienced exclusion from school at some time in their education history. According to The Guardian newspaper report, '*Reading the Riots*', produced jointly with the London School of Economics, 68% of those who went through the courts following the riots 'had previously received a caution or conviction'. The foreword to the 2013 White Paper, '*Transforming Youth Custody*' presented to Parliament by the

Secretary of State for Justice, Chris Grayling and the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, gives a general description of young offenders.

Young offenders often lead chaotic lives and face complex problems, including substance abuse, unsuitable accommodation and emotional or mental health issues. Literacy levels are unacceptably low and the vast majority have in the past been excluded from school.

The nature and quality of the provision of alternative education settings is therefore at the heart of the ongoing debate about social exclusion issues. The coalition Secretary of State for Education from 2010 - 2014, Michael Gove, claimed in an interview reported in The Guardian newspaper on October 1st 2010 that:

Pupil Referral Units are the weak link in the chain without an accountable person who is responsible for making sure these children progress.

The Secretary of State proposed to turn all PRUs into privately sponsored academies; he claimed that one organisation, SkillForce, made up of ex-Army veterans had already expressed an interest in running pupil referral units. This claim was made against a backdrop of steadily improving Ofsted outcomes from PRUs.

According to the Ofsted annual report 2009-2010 in which the inspection of 136 PRUs is reported,

The proportion of Pupil Referral Units judged to be outstanding has increased each year from 2007-8 when it was 7%, to this year when it is 21%. (See Appendix 1 (c))

In comparison, in the same report, (p.35), the proportion of secondary schools reaching Outstanding was 13%. (888 secondary schools were inspected in 2009-2010.)

Currently, if a child is excluded from an English school on a permanent basis, the Local Education Authority assumes direct responsibility for that child's education. A permanently excluded pupil will normally be placed in another secondary school for a second chance at full-time mainstream education. In most LEAs this is negotiated

through a placement panel of some description, usually comprising representatives of the LEA and the Heads of the local schools. If the second placement breaks down, the PRU may be the destination of choice for the LEA as they seek to carry out their responsibilities towards the young person. The PRU may also be used as a temporary support for the young person prior to their second placement.

For fixed-term excluded pupils, placement in a PRU is also a course of action that may be pursued. The LEA is obliged under current legislation (*The School Discipline Regulations (2012) for Maintained Schools, Pupil Referral Units and Academies*) to ensure that all fixed-term excluded pupils are in receipt of formal education on the sixth day following its implementation. If the exclusion period exceeds that, the PRU may be the resource that meets this obligation.

PRUs also work with schools supporting pupils on a short-term basis before exclusion takes place. LEAs usually operate a screening panel of some description that will review cases and decide on a course of action to support the school and the young person in the manner they deem to be most appropriate to the presenting needs. The intervention may be a short full-time programme for the pupil, delivered at the PRU; it may be a part time placement with the pupil remaining at his or her mainstream school but spending allocated periods at the PRU. It may involve placement with a further 'Alternative Provider' offering a specific activity in addition to, or in place of, time spent at the Pupil Referral Unit.

In some areas the PRU is part of a wider Local Authority operation named, for example, 'Children's Services', where a number of different types of provision may be available under one centrally managed service.

As with all its educational institutions, the LEA has responsibility for the quality of education delivered to the young people in the PRU; until 2007 they normally delegated the responsibility for day-to-day delivery and quality control to a Head or Teacher in Charge. Statutory guidance introduced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009), required all PRUs to have a Management Committee with responsibility for curriculum delivery and the scrutiny of operations of the Head or Teacher in Charge and staff. There is a difference between Management Committees and Governing Bodies: unlike schools, PRUs are frequently directly

managed services of a LEA with a limited devolved budget and limitations on the executive role of the Management Committee.

All PRUs, whatever their type or setting, have a Unique Reference Number (URN) and are subject to inspection from Ofsted.

Pupil Referral Units offer provision for both primary and secondary age groups. As is already apparent in the description of the responsibilities of the LEAs, PRUs have multiple functions and as a result, there is no standard PRU.

Some provide resources for permanently excluded pupils alongside pupils on fixed-term exclusions, and those not excluded but referred out of school before exclusion takes place. Others provide for these groups in different establishments.

A number of PRUs contain pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Formerly this occurred as a rarity when the specialist school placement had broken down or the pupil was waiting for a placement in a specialist school. Increasingly, however, PRUs appear as a specific destination named by placement panels as the number of 'Special' school placements is reduced.

Some PRUs provide education for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers: they may run a crèche and offer child care courses; others accommodate young mothers alongside their excluded pupils.

Some PRUs support long-term school refusers, long-term sick and other emotionally needy young people; others accommodate such young people alongside their excluded pupils. The designation 'PRU' also includes hospital schools, specialist mental health provision and a variety of settings run by charities like Barnado's Charity for Children.

This multi-function role of the PRU is a challenging, strategic management issue. Some, usually larger, LEAs have worked to provide different types of settings for their excluded pupils, separating those who are emotionally fragile, school refusers for example, from the more challenging 'behaviour' related referrals. Setting aside the inevitable and enormous expense of such mixed, multi-site provision, an issue in itself, the difficulty often arises that such tidy definitions are aspirational, not actual.

Most referrals, whatever may be the stated reason for the exclusion, present a spectrum of complex needs. In my experience, hidden presenting needs may range from bereavement, drug abuse, undiagnosed learning needs, housing problems, unaddressed health and mental health issues, family breakdown and domestic abuse- any or all of which are frequently accompanied by a long history of dislocation from regular schooling with issues dating back to primary school. To expect PRUs to overcome such a multitude of presenting issues and enable the young person to recover quickly from the trauma of exclusion, move into a new environment, settle to patterns of behaviour and conformity that he or she had not previously been able to achieve and then move on successfully, after a short period, to the next stage of their education, is challenging indeed. Yet these are exactly the expectations of local and national education policy.

In an effort to drive up standards overall, the coalition government, elected in May 2010, moved very quickly to legislation enabling the creation of further 'Academies' and 'Free Schools'. Unlike mainstream schools, they do not lose some of their budget to the maintenance of a local authority PRU.

They are free to choose support for their excluded pupils, and for those under threat of exclusion, from whichever provider they believe meets their needs. They may prefer to select intervention from a growing field of independent Alternative Education providers and reject the local authority PRU; the dependent relationship between the Local Education Authority and its education provision is disappearing under the Academy programme. Many are running their own in-house units; others are operating in commercially organised groups and managing fixed-term and permanent exclusions between themselves through so-called 'managed moves' and other strategies, imitating procedures that have been long established in many Local Education Authorities.

Local Education Authorities still retain their Section 19 responsibilities however and many PRUs remain under their control as directly managed services. Moves towards redirecting this statutory responsibility to schools are in train: a Department for Education pilot programme involving 12 Local Authorities ran from 2011-2014 in which the total budget for the management of PEXs (Permanently Excluded Pupils) and FTEs (Fixed Term Exclusions) was devolved to the schools in those authorities.

Details of this initiative are contained in the final report, the *'School Exclusion Trial Evaluation: Research report (2014)*.

The strategic picture therefore is complex and fluid. Meanwhile, those PRUs currently in operation, (there are approximately 400 establishments in the United Kingdom) continue to work with the great majority of young people excluded from school, both permanently and for a fixed term. The issues they face in the daily management of their services are challenging. However, as already mentioned, in 2010, 21% of PRUs inspected achieved an 'Outstanding' judgement from Ofsted, a 14% increase from 2008. In 2015 18% of PRUs inspected (335) achieved an 'Outstanding' judgement and 85% an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' (See Appendix 1(d)). In spite of negative perceptions therefore, and against what appear to be very difficult odds, much of what is achieved in PRUs is evidently of outstanding quality. Ofsted reports available to view on line support this claim. (See Appendix 1(c) for an Outstanding PRU Ofsted report.)

Complex management issues within PRUs arise from the nature of the provision. Exclusion from school may occur at any time in the school year and admissions to PRUs take place as the need arises. This means that PRUs are constantly adjusting to the needs of recently excluded young people alongside their established cohorts. For a primary PRU, the child can be from any year of Key Stage 2; for a secondary PRU the pupil may be from any year group in the range from Year 7 to Year 11.

PRUs manage this problem in a variety of ways but for all of them, particularly those with small numbers of members of staff, this 'open door' system, is a challenge. In my experience the new pupil will need careful support; it may be necessary to offer individual support for a period of time; it may be that the young person knows the other pupils and that problems of association occur; it may be that the young person is demonstrating a rejection of formally managed classrooms and other means of engagement have to be found. For PRUs, particularly those with limited physical resources, this may present problems. The management of the introduction of new pupils involves making an assessment of their needs, deciding on and implementing an appropriate individual learning and support programme, introducing them to the new environment, demonstrating a personal and determined interest in their welfare, and convincing them of the worth of the whole exploit. This is a complex range of

tasks demanding skilful assessment techniques, imagination, professional resources and a determined, solution-focussed approach.

One of the major driving factors in working with a young person in this situation is the focus on the short-term intervention that the PRU is meant to represent. As noted earlier, difficulties arise if there is no 'exit strategy' in place from the outset of the relationship. For Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils, the usual desired outcome is a return to a mainstream school, whether the child's original school or another. This will normally be established before entry to the PRU. However, it may arise that no destination is known for some reason; this is particularly the case when a young person has a Statement of Educational Needs and specialist placement may not be forthcoming. Some PRUs have found themselves managing Key Stage 3 statemented pupils for long periods of time; in one case known to me, for well over a year.

For Key Stage 4 pupils, referral to the PRU will, in many cases, mean that they will complete their statutory schooling in the PRU environment. Although exempt from the National Curriculum, PRUs are expected to work as far as possible to replicate the opportunities the pupil enjoyed when in mainstream, particularly when the exclusion occurs in Key Stage 4. Many PRUs operate GCSE courses in a variety of subjects with priority given to the core areas of English and Mathematics. Public examination outcomes for young people in PRUs, as noted earlier, have been notoriously low.

It was this issue in particular that led the coalition government (2010-2015) to commission a review of Alternative Provision (AP) led by Charlie Taylor, the government's Expert Adviser on Behaviour. Their justification for the commission is made clear in their Policy Paper: *'2010 to 2015 government policy: children outside mainstream education'* published in April 2013 and updated in May 2015.

Large numbers of pupils in AP do not achieve meaningful qualifications: in the year 2011 to 2012, only 1.3% of pupils in AP achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C, or equivalent, including English and mathematics.

Exclusion from school for behaviour reasons is usually the culmination of a period of stressful events for all concerned. The excluding school will, most probably, have

worked long and hard to maintain a relationship with the young person; there may be feelings of frustration, disappointment and perhaps even traces of guilt on their part.

The parents(s) or carer(s) will probably have been involved in a protracted series of meetings with school managers, outside agency professionals and local authority officers on the way to their child's entry to the PRU. For them there may be feelings of anger, disappointment and perhaps embarrassment. The family may be suffering multiple difficulties: health and housing issues are frequently complicating factors in my experience. The LEA officers involved will be anxious to place the young person, primarily, for his or her wellbeing, but also because they may feel pressurised to meet their legal obligations. In my experience the young person at the centre of this activity and the focus of everyone's attention will probably be experiencing a range of complex emotions which may or may not be apparent.

A study of the impact of exclusion by Munn, Lloyd and Cullen (2000) indicated the nature of the problem. They interviewed 11 young people who had experienced exclusion and based their evidence on previous studies (Hayden, 1997; Brodie, 1998; Kinder et al., 1997) that were produced when exclusion from schools had reached its height in the late 1990s.

They all (the young people they interviewed) experienced *exclusion* first and foremost as a strong, negative, emotional reaction. They felt:

- Rejected;
- Angry;
- Hard done by;
- Worried;
- Upset;
- Scared; and
- Shocked.

(Munn, Lloyd and Cullen 2000:2)

For the PRU manager, picking a way through the complex presenting issues towards a fruitful working partnership with the range of interested parties is a major challenge which demands skill in maintaining multiple, complex, and sometimes highly-charged, relationships.

Many of the young people referred to PRUs have experienced a very disrupted educational history, possibly with long periods of absence for a range of reasons. Schools may provide useful information but assessing a pupil's learning needs is made more difficult if the referring school is lacking hard data on achievement. Many PRUs have established effective core assessment processes and Ofsted underlines the crucial nature of initial assessment.

In their 2007 study of 16 London PRUs they reported the following:

Eight of the PRUs visited had good systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. However, almost all of them received too little information from pupils' previous schools, even though 14 LAs had clear policies about what should be provided. This hampered the PRUs in establishing pupils' attainment levels on admission. (Ofsted 2007)

However, it is frequently not an easy task to assess learning needs, particularly when they may have been well hidden behind anti-social, challenging classroom behaviour for possibly a considerable length of time. PRU staff have to work through presenting behaviour to make their assessments of needs, attempting to develop a relationship of trust with the young person as swiftly as possible.

Making trusting relationships with adults in general may be a difficult issue for the young person; PRU staff play a crucial role in working to restore their pupils' self-esteem and confidence. For many of the young people, their experience of adults may have been confrontational, judgemental and autocratic, so gaining their confidence is a challenging task.

Young people referred to a PRU for behaviour reasons may also suffer from a range of health and mental health conditions. PRU managers have to make a judgement as to the appropriate and possible treatment they may attempt to pursue on the young person's behalf. Access to support services may be excellent in some areas, for

example in one PRU known to me, the School Nurse was a weekly visitor, well-known in the local schools and frequently known to the young people prior to admission. She played a valuable role in supporting them through a variety of issues relating to their health and wellbeing including pregnancy, drug related issues and family problems.

Access is patchy however, and PRUs report difficulty in accessing support services, particularly CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service).

Many young people referred to PRUs have Special Educational Needs, both with Statements and without; access to specialist support may vary from area to area and take time to materialise. Meanwhile, PRU staff have to meet the child's needs relying on their expertise, experience and resourcefulness to support them.

It is evident from the issues outlined above that the staffing of PRUs is crucial to their success. PRUs are demanding of time, expertise and physical stamina; they also require multiple management skills at every level of the operation. In most mainstream school environments, headteachers might expect to be able to delegate, or at least share with other colleagues some aspects of financial management, some levels of decision making and organisation, and some contact with parents, outside agencies and visitors. For the Head of the PRU, especially a small PRU with limited numbers of staff, the management of all of these tasks and more may fall to him or her as the single senior member of staff.

Staff recruitment and retention can also be challenging issues for PRUs. It is evident from the people I have met and worked with in the PRU world that there are many dedicated and totally committed members of staff whose resilience and professionalism is second to none. However, it is also true to say that there are few opportunities for career progression in their generally limited settings.

A further aspect of the PRU phenomenon is that very few are housed in a purpose-built environment. Most mainstream schools look like schools; they may vary in size, age and architecture but are generally recognisable as the institutions they are, even without the tell-tale evidence of numbers of young people entering and leaving the buildings at specific times. PRUs, however, are housed in a variety of settings

ranging anywhere, in my experience, from a floor in a commercial office block to a disused chapel. Most are accommodated in former schools or other Local Authority buildings and rely on the initiative and flexibility of the PRU managers and staff to make the best of them.

1.5 Consult experts on scaling Mount Improbable: who has grappled with its challenges before me?

Having reflected on the nature of Mount Improbable, it was then necessary to consult experts and others who have climbed ahead of me, learn from them and build on their experience.

The literature review in Chapter 2 will trace the background and policy history applicable to the PRU phenomenon. The justification for the setting up of PRUs by statute in 1993 and consolidated in the 1996 Education Act lay in the twofold tension between the then acknowledged and unchallenged inalienable right of schools to exclude their unwanted pupils, and the growing awareness that those who were excluded had some right to an education, however impoverished in comparison with their mainstream counterparts and however grave their misdemeanours were judged to be.

The literature review will also consider the more general history of the way English society has punished its peers and in particular the punishment that has been traditionally associated with our schools and their discipline systems, including exclusion. It makes reference to the work of Michel Foucault on power, authority and punishment and also looks in detail at the work of Carl Parsons, former Professor of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University College, now Visiting Professor of Social Inclusion Studies in the Department of Education and Community Studies at the University of Greenwich who has been writing on, and drawing attention to, the issue of exclusion from school since 1994. His relentless focus on the moral issues involved in the process of exclusion, and indeed in the whole process of the politicised English education system, helped me to untangle my thinking on the process and its legitimacy. His paper, *School Exclusion: The Will to Punish* (2005)

with its consideration of *'the balance between punitive/exclusionary and therapeutic/restorative positions'* (p.187) was particularly helpful.

The review will also consider the issues of leadership and decision making in the complex and challenging environment of the PRU.

1.6 Persuade other climbers to let me chart their progress.

I will seek permission to record their impressions and perceptions.

The data gathering exercise is outlined in detail in Chapter 3. It proved to be a challenging but rewarding process. It took me a long while to decide exactly what I wanted to learn and how best to approach the challenge. I had, after all, already attempted my own Mount Improbable so it was not immediately clear why I felt so driven to discover how others would set about the task and what they would achieve *en route*, possibly, to the summit. In the methodology chapter I examine in detail this evolutionary process and describe how I was able to persuade another 'climber' to allow me access to her successful PRU. With permission achieved and first steps agreed, suddenly the landscape changed. As the Head of an Outstanding PRU (Ofsted, 2010) my contact was approached by a different Local Authority that wanted her expertise to lead the improvement of their PRU which had been in Special Measures and needed radical intervention. Initially I was disconcerted by this change of circumstances but, with her encouragement, saw an opportunity where I had thought there had been a problem. She allowed me not only to share in her forward planning and preparations, but also to hear and record her concerns, hopes and fears at the prospect of the renewed ascent. I had the good fortune to be able to record her impressions at the beginning of her task and to be allowed to drop in to map her progress at different times as the climb continued. I was also fortunate in being able, as a result of her whole-hearted support, to meet various members of the 'climbing team' and to learn about the mountain, its difficulties and rewards from their different perspectives.

The demands of the research process meant that I needed to reflect on the kinds of conversations I would hold, the kinds of questions I would ask, the extent to which I would allow the interlocutors to dictate the form and direction of the conversations

and on further issues concerning the length, time and place of the meetings. In the Methodology chapter I record my thinking on interview strategy and, as will be seen, came to the decision that I would hold one-to-one sessions and adopt a conversational approach. Admitting to some knowledge of PRUs might be helpful in breaking down some of the potentially difficult encounters I might have in some potentially fragile settings. This led me to adopt the word 'conversations' rather than 'interviews' to describe the encounters. I was mindful, however, of being too 'present' in the data and, as acknowledged in the Methodology chapter, there may still be occasions in the data when I have crossed a line between detached 'researcher' and engaged 'former practitioner' and I spend time reflecting on the impact this may have had on the validity of the participants' responses.

1.7 Present and reflect on the evidence gathered: what have I learned about how others view their experience of Mount Improbable?

I gathered a quantity of data and was concerned that I would not easily be able to form coherent and thematic observations on them, such was the variety of subject matter, the range of emotions expressed and the lack of comparability and control over important base lines. These extended beyond differences of role and status of the participant into such detailed issues as setting, seating arrangements, length of time available, interruptions to the conversations and outside distractions.

It became clear that the questionnaire that I had presented at the PRU Conference in 2010, offered a helpful framework on which I could begin to shape the variety of data I had gathered.

In addition to the four recorded conversations I had enjoyed with the Head, I had also recorded conversations with members of staff, both teaching and non-teaching and with a number of young people, pupils of the PRU. The results of this exercise are recorded in Chapter 4 with further reflections on the emergent themes in Chapter 5.

1.8 Seize the opportunity to tell other people about the mountain!

The aim of this research project is not only to add to the sum of knowledge about the world of the PRU although this in itself seems a worthwhile objective. In my

experience, politicians, policy makers, civil servants and the great majority of those involved in the education of young people have never worked in a PRU, will possibly never have visited a PRU or know much about the issues they face and the work they do. As demonstrated earlier, this degree of ignorance has not prevented some in positions of authority from passing judgements upon the quality of the provision. If this research project enriches their understanding of PRUs in any degree I will feel rewarded.

A further aim is to bring the generally unheard voices of those who attend and work in PRUs to a greater audience and in listening to them, to attempt an answer to the question, 'Can PRUs work?'

I will make a judgement on whether the PRU I visit is indeed, as Michael Gove claimed in 2010, a *'weak link in the chain without an accountable person who is responsible for making sure these children progress'* or a dynamic, creative, therapeutic institution changing the lives of some of the most needy members of our society.

Having surveyed my new mountain, reconnoitred the terrain and prepared my equipment, it is now time to set off on my attempt to climb a second and different Mount Improbable... I look forward to the view from the summit.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Consult experts on scaling Mount Improbable: who has grappled with its challenges before me?

I compiled this Literature Review to support my study of the phenomenon of the Pupil Referral Unit and to explore the evidence for a historical and theoretical underpinning of the process involved in the most extreme form of punishment meted out in our schools, exclusion, whether temporary or permanent, and the subsequent organisation of the excluded pupil's education. The research question, 'Can PRUs work?' required from me an understanding of their current social and educational context and the philosophical and political stance adopted by their advocates and critics.

In the review I explore the emergence and development of the current political and social concept of 'social exclusion' and attempt to set exclusion from school into the wider context implied in the term. I examine the theories of punishment that underlie the policy and practice of behaviour management in English schools and focus particularly on the thinking that justifies the ultimate sanction of exclusion from the school community. I make particular reference to the work of Professor Carl Parsons, whose focus on the issue of exclusion from school in England has been intense and sustained throughout the decades before and after the turn of the 21st century.

I also explore the issue of leadership in challenging settings and how the rule making and decision-making processes operate within a hierarchical management system, particularly when complex and fragile situations arise as in a PRU. I examine the relevance of the 'Social Rule System' theory to the issue and make some reference to concepts of resilience as they relate to leadership and management in a PRU.

2.1 The 'social exclusion' phenomenon

According to de Haan (1999:1) the invention of the term 'social exclusion' is usually attributed to a French politician in the Chirac government in the 1970s: Rene Lenoir published '*Les Exclus: Un Francais sur dix*' in 1974. The socially excluded, in

Lenoir's definition, were not simply 'poor' in material terms, which had been a general perspective in the past, but were also *'handicapped, suicidal and aged people, abused children, substance abusers, etc. – about 10 per cent of the French population.'* (p1).

The broadening of the concept to include other types of social deprivation: unemployment, immigrant issues, gender issues, education and urban degradation for example, spread through Europe in the 1980s and '90s. The European Union Treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1997) even included statements of intent regarding combating 'social exclusion' within the Union. As de Haan (2001) points out, the change in terminology in the anti-poverty programmes of the European Union was significant: *'While 'poverty' was the central concern in the first programme, in the third programme this had become 'social exclusion'* (p 2).

A further definition is offered by Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne (2002, p90) who claim that *'(social) exclusion is a dynamic, social and complex process'* rather than a position. They make reference to Walker and Walker's (1997:8) definition of the 'socially excluded' experience as *'being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society.'*

An American perspective, Silver (2007) echoes and develops the thinking of Macrae et al. (2002) in describing 'social exclusion' as a 'process' rather than a condition:

Most theorists maintain that social exclusion is a process, not only the condition reflecting the outcome of that process. Yet few, if any, people ever reach the ultimate end of the imagined trajectory. There are no formal 'exclusion thresholds' to cross, as exist for poverty. Rather, at any one time, people are situated on a multidimensional continuum and may be moving towards inclusion in one or another sense, or towards a state of comprehensive, cumulative social rupture. This process has been labelled social 'disaffiliation' or 'disqualification', among other terms, and encompasses humiliation as well as social isolation. (p. 1)

The United Kingdom was, by 1973, a full member of the European Community but following the election of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979, policy language started to shift. Public attitudes moved away from the European notion of 'social exclusion' as being the experience of individuals but the responsibility of the state, to a more neo-liberal perception, that individuals were masters of their individual fates and needed the support of the state only to empower them to achieve personal goals, usually interpreted as increased wealth and prosperity for one's self and family. Margaret Thatcher is frequently quoted as saying, '*There is no such thing as society*'. A search of sources revealed the following from an interview conducted by William Keay and published in *Woman's Own*, in January 1987:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand, "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!" or, "I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!" "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.

2.2 The impact of Thatcherism

The final phrase, '*people look to themselves first*' is a crucial addition here. The impact of Thatcherism lay in its intensely personal application of political thinking and its move away from the notion of collective responsibility. Whether intentionally or not, it allowed those who had means, at whatever level, to enjoy them without any sense of guilt or necessary awareness of those without means. Further, from the same interview (1987), comes the following.

The exercise of the spirit and the inspiration is what you do with your money. There is nothing wrong in wanting more.

The general theme of the Thatcher era was, therefore, one of urging personal responsibility, of promoting private enterprise and of encouraging the operation of the

free market in all aspects of life, including the social institutions of the National Health Service, state education, transport systems and the trade unions. 'Social exclusion' as a concept did not appear in neo-liberalist Conservative policy or discourse at that time because of the implication in the expression that the condition was inflicted upon those who were excluded by outside forces beyond their control. Thatcherism as a concept lauded those who stood on their own two feet, looked after themselves and their families and 'got on their bikes' to look for work. This much repeated phrase stemmed from a speech made to the Conservative Party Conference in 1981, by Norman Tebbit, the then Secretary of State for Employment.

I grew up in the '30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot. He got on his bike and looked for work and he kept looking until he found it.

2.3 1997: a shift in focus

The incoming Labour government in 1997 took a different stance and one of their first initiatives was to set up a SEU (Social Exclusion Unit) and commission a detailed analysis of the UK's social fabric. The resulting report formed the basis for the 'National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal' (January 2001). It was the work of 18 Policy Action Teams focussing on different social issues ranging from homelessness, employment and, importantly for the purposes of this literature review, on 'Young People' (Policy Action Team 12).

In the foreword to the 'Young People' report, the then Minister of State at the Home Office and Deputy Home Secretary, Paul Boateng, wrote:

A significant minority of young people today experience a wide range of problems and acute crises in adolescence. The scale of these problems is in many cases worse than this country's past experience and worse than other apparently comparable countries. The problems are concentrated in, but not confined to, the most deprived neighbourhoods. There is an increasing body of knowledge about the risk factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing acute crises,

and the protective factors that help young people overcome the odds.

(p 1)

These problems included, in this 1997 report, '*illiteracy, homelessness, mental illness, drug addiction and serial offending*'.

Boateng continues,

Through a combination of poverty, family conflict, poor educational opportunities and poor services, too many (young people) find themselves apparently destined for a life of underachievement and social exclusion. (p 1)

The 'poor educational opportunities' included for many the experience of exclusion from school. In 1995/6, 13,500 young people were permanently excluded from school. Taken in proportion to the whole school population the number is small, about 0.2%, but as the report indicated, the life chances for those who experienced dislocation in their educational experience were seriously adversely affected, especially where combined with other deprivation factors. They were much more likely than their peers to experience '*underachievement and social exclusion*'. It was at this time that the acronym NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) first appeared in a report (1999) from the Social Exclusion Unit on the growing number of 16 – 18 year olds who fell into this category.

2.4 The issue of exclusion from school

The concept of deprivation by exclusion is not one that exists only in schools but pervades many social groupings. Children know how to exclude an unwanted child from their games, gentlemen's clubs 'blackball' offending members parents might send children to their rooms. Breaking the rules of the group, at whatever level, brings socially accepted and generally understood consequences. The issue of exclusion from school however, raises the debate on the aims and purposes of the formal education system. Is it a right or a privilege? Is it a liberating or containing mechanism? Should mainstream education be taken away from those whom others deem to be undeserving of it, as in the examples above? For Professor Parsons,

these questions lie at the heart of his enquiry. His work is central to this literature review. The issue of exclusion from school has been for him a personal, professional and political concern for many years and his challenge to its accepted role in our educational settings has been sustained and telling. In the preface to *Education, Exclusion and Citizenship* (1999), he describes his book as

an intellectual project seeking to locate school exclusions within a matrix of social forces and discourses of legitimation, which include national and local government decision making, professional teachers' concerns and public opinion. (p xi)

For Parsons, the statistics showing rates of exclusion from school in the 1990s were shocking indicators of the extent of exclusion as an accepted educational phenomenon but it was the evidence from particular case studies that led to his more emotional engagement with the issue. His motivation for writing is, he says, '*riddled with anger and anguish at the situation*' (p xiii) as his evidence acquired from a (then) six-year study of the issue had led to the view that '*the exclusion problem has some very negative short and longer term consequences and can involve great financial cost but immeasurable human misery and waste*'. (p xii)

The impact on the lives of the young people who experienced exclusion from school was evidently not a major concern of policy makers and practitioners whose confidence in the justification for the procedure, certainly in the late 80s and 90s, was apparently unshaken by the growing numbers involved. On the contrary, the view that those who appeared to reject the 'gift of education' should expect to have it removed was supported, by politicians like John Major, to the right of political thinking and given credence through the work of the American sociologist, Charles Murray. Murray was brought to London by the Sunday Times to expand on his theories on law, order and punishment. In two articles he proposed strongly that increased attention should be paid to retributive punishments for anti-social behaviour. He favoured more and longer prison sentences. Murray claimed that '*Justice does not consist of successful therapy. It consists of just desserts*'. (Sunday Times January 25th 2004)

Parsons challenges this punitive approach. particularly in relation to young people who are considered *'at risk, disaffected and socially excluded'* (2005:187). He asks, *'Is the young person associated with the adjective or adjectival phrase of 'at risk', 'disaffected' or 'socially excluded' or is it another agent that has placed them 'at risk', caused their disaffection or excluded them? Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?'* (p 187)

In Parsons' opinion, a strong influence on the rising exclusion rates in the 1990s and perhaps the major contributory factor was the 1988 Education Reform Act. This Act delivered LMS (Local Management of Schools), the National Curriculum, the publication of individual schools' National Curriculum test results and GCSE results in league tables and the introduction of a degree of choice for parents in selecting schools for their children.

Local Management of Schools meant that Governing Bodies and heads became responsible for their own budgets and moved away from Local Authority financial and management control. The National Curriculum, though not compulsory in the independent sector, was strictly imposed on maintained schools and its outcomes measured in national SATs (Standard Attainment Tasks). The Act introduced the requirement for the publication of SATs scores for individual schools. The introduction of a degree of choice for parents in selecting a local maintained school for their children was closely connected to the thinking behind LMS and the publication of SATs scores. Parents were encouraged to study the league tables and make their selections based on the evidence of the published scores. The first Parent's Charter in 1991 stated that parents should expect:

- a report on their child's progress at least once a year;
- regular reports on their child's school from independent inspectors;
- performance tables for local schools;
- a prospectus or brochure about individual schools; and
- an annual report from the school's governors. (DfE 1991)

LMS also fed into the emerging competition between local schools for pupils: the better resources were managed, the more tangible the impact on the local

community and therefore the more popular the school would become. LMS had 'formula funding' at its core: the formula was based on pupil numbers so the more popular the school became, the more financially supported it would be. This apparently logical process was the epitome of the 'market forces' approach of the then government.

It became clear that not all schools were able to compete on an equal footing. Some were within areas of social deprivation; others were in 'leafy suburbs'. Some had many children with second or third language issues; others had very few. Some had more than the average number of children with Statements of Special Educational Needs. The bald statistics of the league tables gave no indication of such diversity between the schools. Inevitably this created a growing reluctance on the part of schools to damage their public profile by including those with poorer test outcomes, or, more particularly, to persevere with those pupils who were causing disruption to the learning of others and presented convincing reasons why their school might move to exclusion as a strategy for solution of the problem.

Where a pupil persistently engages in disruptive behaviour, a school is more likely to exercise the right to exclude that pupil in order, as the head teacher sees it, to secure the well-being of the teacher and the education of the other pupils. (Parsons 1999:51-52)

As Ofsted grew in strength and influence, the rate of exclusions increased still further. The penalties of a poor Ofsted outcome for a school, in the market place that local education provision had become, were severe. Its local reputation, and therefore, its number of applications were crucial to its per capita income.

With open enrolment, money following pupil numbers and parents supposedly informed by league tables, schools are encouraged to sell themselves and are tempted to remove anything which might diminish their reputation – such as problem children. (Parsons 1999:49)

For Parsons, this situation was political and, more specifically, Conservative. '*...key messages about what education is for and whether it is to be seen as a personal, competitive good or a community building necessity*' (p 49) are delivered by central

government and from his perspective of eighteen years of Conservative government it is clear where he thinks the balance has tipped.

The neo-liberal philosophical underpinning of the Thatcher years, the development of the market economy and the movement away from the notion of shared responsibility and engagement within a community, embodied in the public institutions of the Welfare State, towards the justification of a personal pursuit of whatever the best or desired object might be, inevitably led to the marginalisation of particular depressed groups. Parents were encouraged to pursue 'choice' and to insist on 'standards'. The impact on how schools managed their challenging pupils was, at least according to Parsons (1999), a clear and inevitable outcome.

The Conservative government legitimised definitions of the ill-disciplined in school and set the increasingly authoritarian exclusion legislation and regulations in place. (p 18)

Parsons highlights the tension that exists in formal educational settings between the implicit but powerful intention to educate for conformity within a social setting and, on the other hand, the explicit but equally powerful intention to liberate minds and create independent thinkers and operators.

Is education to empower individuals or prepare people for roles in society? Does it fulfil a generalist parenting role for pupils or concentrate on inputting particular skills, roles and dispositions? (p 4)

He quotes MacIntyre's (1987) 'essential and impossible' compromise for teachers between the requirement...

...to shape the young person so that he or she may fit into some social role and function that requires recruits (and) teaching young people to think for themselves, how to acquire independence of mind, how to be 'enlightened'. (p 16)

If the purpose of education is necessarily paradoxical, it is clear that treading the path between acceptance and challenge, between conformity and expressions of

individuality, is likely to produce points of conflict for those who find such subtleties of self-management and self-fulfilment difficult to appreciate.

Parsons (1999) examines the purpose of education as he sees it. He discounts more philosophical approaches claiming that:

schooling is an institution designed, evolved, compromised and seriously contested over more than a century, to achieve a mixed bag of ends. The ends are relative to the social context and usually the national economic context... Political, economic and cultural elites contest about the ends which schooling should seek to attain, the form it should take and who it should serve. (p 5)

He outlines what he sees as the *'six functions of education'*, namely, the *'custodial'*, the *'civilising'*, the *'creating a national identity'*, the *'skilling'*, the *'credentialing'* and the *'selecting, organising and transmitting of public knowledge'*.

The first, the custodial function, is crucial to this debate. The notion that *'all children belong in school from the time when they move away from babyhood and easy containment in the family until they reach maturity and employment'* (p 7) has underpinned our state education system since its foundation in the 1870s. Resistance to compulsory education came then from a number of quarters, from working-class families fearing the loss of earning power of their children (children might be employed in mines and mills, for example, from the age of 8) to employers fearing a loss of employees in unskilled tasks. However, it became generally accepted that school was for everyone; it was seen, as it is today, to be a moral good and a process that society wishes all children to undergo. It has since been enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. (UNESCO)

However, in England the business of 'going to school' is an enforced 'moral good' and therefore has a strong degree of compunction attached to it. Parents will be prosecuted if they do not send their children to school; they may challenge the quality

of the educational experience of their children but they may not refuse to have their children educated. The home-schooling option remains but is for many an unlikely route particularly in homes where income levels are low. For many children, schooling will be an obligation comfortably assumed; for others it may not be comfortable but it is an accepted necessity; for some it may be an experience that must be endured and then consigned to painful memory; for a few it will be an unacceptable and unendurable environment.

Throughout the 1990s, Professor Parsons and his department at Canterbury monitored the numbers of pupils excluded from maintained schools. From his perspective in 1999, when he published *'Education, Exclusion and Citizenship'*, the situation concerning the rate of exclusions from school was unacceptable. He claimed that those schools who *'had tried everything'* (p1) before exclusion and who, at the same time, had unspent resources in their budgets were taking advantage of the educational status quo that allowed them to do so.

In my experience, the educational status quo to which Dr Parsons refers is firmly established.

Every school in England and Wales is obliged to have a behaviour policy that sets out the expectations of the school regarding the behaviour of its pupils, its processes for the management of non-conforming behaviour and the stages and forms of sanctions and punishments that are used. There is legislation (2006) in place to ensure the annual production and distribution of the required behaviour policy and much government guidance available in, for example, *'Behaviour and discipline in schools'* (2012), *'Ensuring good behaviour in schools'* (2012) and in *'Getting the Simple Things Right'* (Taylor 2011). Exclusion from school is the final sanction. Although hedged about with strict statutory procedures (*The School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations 2012* and *'Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England'* (DfE 2012)), the acceptance of the right of the school to punish and ultimately to exclude is unchallenged. How children are punished may have changed over time but why they are punished is embedded in the cultural practice of associating the transactional activity of teaching with the imposition of the power relationship that has the master

and the pupil, the squire and the tenant, the master and the apprentice series of hierarchical historical relationships at its core.

To ask what justifies inflicting punishment on children (a question infrequently posed in fact) is to ask a fundamental question not just about the English education system today but also about our social behaviour and power relationships over time.

2.5 The history of school punishment

It is interesting to look at the history of punishment in schools. It is a history that mirrors the development of these power relationships in our society. In David William Sylvester's 1970 work *'Educational Documents 800 – 1816'*, he describes how, throughout the Middle Ages, school masters *'employed beating as the main incentive to learning'* and moreover, that *'when a man became a Master of Grammar at the University, he was given a birch as a symbol of his office and his profession'*.

Ruthin Grammar School was founded in 1574. Its comprehensive set of statutes of governance, compiled by the founder, include the following directives for the offices of Master and Usher (Sylvester, 1970),

The Master, if he is in School, shall correct and punish those whom he shall find guilty of a Fault or Negligence by Complaint of the Monitor; in the Masters Absence the Undermaster or Usher shall in this as well as in every other instance supply the place of the Master. And that Boys may show greater esteem for his Office I will and ordain that Monday at 9 'o'clock in the morning every week...an account to be taken in order to examine into Boys faults unless the Master should see occasion to omit or overlook it. But I think it expedient that some crimes be immediately punished according to the discretion of the master and not delayed until Monday. I ordain that when Complaints or Accusations are heard... the Master shall make a speech to the Scholars upon the Occasion and shall earnestly exhort them to virtuous Actions or by sharp Reproof endeavour to dissuade and recall them from disgraceful ones and roughly reprehend them of Sloth or eloquently and smoothly persuade them to Diligence and Industry. (p 112)

And further,

The walls of the school or of any other contiguous building and glass windows shall not be damaged or defaced by the scholars by playing at ball or any like Diversion'. (p 116)

And as to Indulgence and Severity my Will is that Moderation be observed. Boys shall not be struck on the Ears, Noses, Eyes or Faces.'
(p 112)

A 21st century behaviour policy might not include the directive to avoid 'Ears, Noses, Eyes or Faces' but in other respects would be remarkably similar to this 16th century example. In my experience, most schools believe in the efficacy of swift responses to misdemeanours and would also operate a system of referral to a higher authority if the severity of the offence demanded it. They would surely include rules and sanctions related to damage to the fabric of their buildings in their behaviour management strategy; they would also exhort their pupils to good behaviour, 'dissuade and recall them' from undesirable actions, warn them of the dangers of 'sloth' and persuade them of the value of hard work.

2.6 The challenge of anti-social behaviour

This glimpse into history helps us to see that punishment systems in schools related to behaviour management policies are not recent developments designed to tackle a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour among the nation's young in the post-World War II era, but entrenched historical and culturally accepted procedures. Indeed, Steven Pinker in his book 'The Better Angels of our Nature' (2011) makes a compelling case for recognising a reduction in overall levels of violence and aggression in societies across the world. He ascribes the general distaste for his view to the strength and frequency of media coverage of catastrophic violent events, the so-called 'if it bleeds, it leads' approach to news.

However, there remains a strong perception that whether anti-social behaviour among the young is new or not, or increasing in frequency or levels of intensity, it is certainly a deep-seated and challenging issue today. As Parsons says,

The problems of pupil indiscipline and disaffection facing schools are shared by all the societies of late modern western democracy. (1999:2)

And further,

Britain's disaffected youth are not unique and have not sprung uniquely from some dynamic Anglo-Saxon social fray; cultural influences, family structures, ethnic mixes and welfare provisions are among the background factors held with some commonality across western Europe and North America. (1999: xiii)

This evidence has led me to reflect further on the phenomenon of punishment in general in English society and the philosophical theories that underpin processes that are evidently so widely applied and yet so relatively unchallenged.

2.7 The justifications for punishment

Punishment is commonly justified in contemporary society in two ways: firstly, by its aspirational deterrent effect and secondly, by its reformatory intention. Both justifications lie in the intention to reduce the possibility of the repetition of the offence. Cavadino and Dignan in 'The Penal System' (2007) claim,

'Reductivism' is a 'forward-looking' or 'consequentialist' theory: it seeks to justify punishment by its alleged future consequences. (2007:37)

The punishment would remove the recipient's desire to commit crime, because it had led to the punishment and so bring him or her into line with the established system of moral behaviour that governs his or her group, whatever the nature of it might be: family, school, neighbourhood, country. This would be of benefit to the individual (because he would no longer experience the punishment) and, by extension, to the whole community, because he would no longer commit the crime.

This approach recalls the moral theory of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism, where punishment, however painful, is justified in the pursuit of a greater good, '*the greatest happiness of the greatest number*'.

As an approach to reducing crime and criminal behaviour, this has attraction. It seems very straightforward as an idea to expect reduction in crime if the punishment is painful, as seen throughout the history of our penal system, schools behaviour management systems and within our families. Though the 20th century saw a gradual move away from corporal punishment, the 'smacking debate' still lingers.

The second type of 'reductivist' punishment described by Cavadino & Dignan, (2007) is that designed to 'incapacitate' the offender.

As a strategy to reduce offending this must work as, in its application, the offender is removed from his or her setting, whether at home, at school or within the community and placed somewhere which will limit the individual's freedom to make decisions about the offending behaviour. This might involve being sent to another room: a bedroom, another classroom or to a specially designated 'removed' space in a school or outside it. Alternately, as a result of court action, a person might be sentenced to time in a detention centre or prison where he or she will be completely removed from his or her community and the offender's freedom to make decisions be severely curtailed.

The desire to 'incapacitate' was at the root of strategies like banishment and deportation from earlier times and is certainly at the root of school behaviour management strategies involving the use of excluded settings within a school and even more isolated settings outside it, in a PRU for example.

The reformatory intention of punishment is the third strand of the reductivist analysis. (Cavadino & Dignan 2007)

The reformatory intention seeks to work on the character. Reform is at the core of much of the explicit aims of a school's behaviour management policy; the objective of conforming behaviours, those that meet the institution's expectations, would certainly be justified in this way. An opportunity for rehabilitation came to be seen in the

middle years of the 20th century, as the main justification for imprisonment particularly for young offenders.

Reform as the central aim of the penal system was a highly popular notion in the 1950s and 1960s when penological thought was dominated by the 'rehabilitation ideal'. (Cavadino & Dignan 2007:42)

In subsequent years, in the Conservative administration, this therapeutic approach became politically less and less popular. It came under severe pressure following the Jamie Bulger murder in 1993 when, as previously mentioned, the then Prime Minister John Major famously commented that '*society needs to condemn a little more and understand a little less*'.

However, for supporters of the approach, including New Labour at the turn of the century (embodied in their 'social inclusion' agenda), its attraction is its therapeutic core; it sets out to 'cure' the offender and reduce the possibility of re-offending offering 'treatment' in order to reappraise behaviour and achieve conformity. With or without the co-operation of the offender this strategy certainly finds its place in behaviour management systems in schools today where Anger Management programmes, Solution Focussed Therapy and Restorative Justice processes, among other strategies, would most probably be implemented.

A further element that sits within concepts of punishment cannot be ignored however. As Cavadino and Dignan (2007) describe it, it is not reductivist in character.

Retribution does not look forward; it is a response to the offending act and is intended to demonstrate the strength of the feelings of outrage the group experiences as a result of it.

And further,

It is the fact that the offender has committed a wrongful act which deserves punishment, not the future consequences of the punishment that is important to the retributivist. (p 44)

For Parsons (2009), it is the retributive element within behaviour management policies in our schools that is unjustifiable. Condemning the action followed by

rejecting the individual and, if the point of exclusion is reached, declaring an end to an interest in a pupil is tantamount, in his view, to a denial of the person's human rights.

Exclusion from school, either permanently or for a fixed period, is a quiet mockery of Every Child Matters. (p.7)

2.8 The difference between punishment and discipline

R. S. Peters' 'Ethics and Education' (1966), a standard text for the trainee teacher at the time, makes a careful distinction between discipline and punishment. According to Peters, all punishment is retributive; it is a transactional process. If a misdemeanour is committed then a sanction will follow: this is the clearly understood consequence for all concerned. It is embedded within the power relationships of the school hierarchy; to be punishment it must be inflicted by a figure of authority otherwise, he asserts, it would be defined as 'revenge'(1966: 268). He highlights the confusion he sees between discipline and punishment.

Discipline is described as the essential activity required to produce an effective working environment - this might involve the teacher requiring silence in a classroom for example. Conforming to these expectations would require reinforcement but he is convinced that 'moral exhortation' coupled with school traditions and the authority of teachers would obviate the need for punishment. He concedes, however, that '*there usually has to be a system of punishments in the background to act as deterrents*' (p 274).

Thus he moves to a consideration of the latter; punishment. For Peters it is important to understand that the justification for a punishment does not lie in the probability that it will benefit 'the individual punished'. Its purpose is the maintenance of the established system of order within the institution. According to Peters, '*[p]unishment is one of the most potent devices for bringing about estrangement*' and is '*at best a necessary nuisance*' (p 279). Reading his work one is brought up short by his consideration of the value of the cane as 'the ultimate deterrent' but this is the only value he attaches to it. He sees little chance of reform attached to its use and that

only of the 'short sharp shock' variety; a justification that achieved some short-lived popularity in the later Thatcher era.

2.9 Foucault and the history of the treatment of difference

Michel Foucault's explorations of culturally embedded practices, particularly in relation to the treatment of difference, are relevant to this study of the extreme punishment of exclusion.

My first reading of this influential 20th century French philosopher helped me understand better the nature of punishment and transgression. In 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) Foucault traces the development of the theories of punishment through the 18th to 20th centuries in western society. His research investigates the movement from punishment for transgression that was intended to alter behaviour through the memory of inflicted pain upon the body, to punishment that was intended to bring about an alteration of behaviour through therapeutic treatment. In this model, the treatment of prisoners becomes more humane in that physical pain is no longer inflicted on the body and the emphasis turns to efforts to alter ways of thinking, to modify and 'normalise' behaviours, deflect and redirect anti-societal motivations and appeal to 'conscience'.

According to Foucault it is not power that is everywhere but '*power relations*'. Power relations are explicit and implicit and pervade all human situations and relationships. They are not limited to explicit or designated expressions of supremacy as in the administration of punishment, for example. Foucault was asked in a question and answer session at the University of Berkeley in 1983,

'You say power is everywhere...?'

He replied, '*No, power relations are everywhere.*'

(Foucault, cited in Ball 2013:154)

In '*Madness and Civilisation*' (2001) Foucault traces the history of '*difference*', of the attitudes of the '*normal*' towards the '*abnormal*' and of the treatment the '*abnormal*' receive. He believes that the '*leper*' outcast syndrome remains within our society and

that, although the boundaries of the definitions of the *'outcasts'* may change, the process remains the same. (Foucault, cited in Ball, 2013: 112)

Echoes of this categorisation and the treatment of difference are present in British society and within the English education system today. Ball (2013) argues that the neo-liberal tenet of *'choice'* that has been a driving principle of government policy in recent times *'offers to resourceful and well-resourced parents a form of micro-social defence'* allowing them to avoid contamination from *'untoward social mixes'* and keeping a distance from perceived untrustworthy and disliked difference. (Ball, 2013:112)

'Discipline and Punish' (1991), Foucault's study of the penal system from the 18th century onwards, begins with a truly shocking description of the public execution in 1758, of Robert-Francois Damiens, who had made an attempt on the life of Louis XV. For four hours he was subjected to horrifying torture that culminated in six horses being used to tear his limbs from his body. The eyewitness account quoted by Foucault, spares no detail of the dreadful spectacle.

Foucault then lists the rules governing a day's activities in a house for young prisoners in Paris, 80 years later (1838). The day is fearsome in its organisation but reformatory in character and intent.

The prisoners' day will begin at six in the morning in winter and at five in summer. They will work for nine hours a day throughout the year. Two hours a day will be devoted to instruction. Work and the day will end at nine o'clock in winter and at eight in summer. (p.6)

Included in their day are chapel prayers and a moral or religious reading. They are drilled into washing and eating, move about in silence and dress and undress to the timing of a drumroll.

Foucault's general point is, that although the crimes committed in the examples were very different and the criminals too, there was, through those 80 years, a powerful movement away from physical punishments of beating and branding, that left marks on the body and was carried out in public, towards a punishment that restricted freedom, imposed work, limited social contact and made strenuous efforts to improve

the prisoners moral and religious understanding, all of which, importantly, was conducted behind closed doors. The spectacle of public executions had led to revulsion on the part of the onlookers to the extent that the actual punishment itself was beginning to be seen as a parallel crime.

It was as if the punishment was thought to equal if not to exceed in savagery the crime itself... to make the executioner resemble a criminal, judges murderers, to reverse roles at the last moment to make the tortured criminal an object of pity or admiration. (p 9)

There followed an enormously active period of reform in the process of punishment across Europe. Branding was abolished in England in 1834; the pillory in 1837. Although flogging remained a judicial punishment in England until 1948, the general movement as Foucault describes was that 'punitive practices had become more reticent'. If actually touching the body became less and less acceptable, the indirect physical effects of the punishment of the person were, as they still are, very powerful.

It might be objected that imprisonment, confinement, forced labour, penal servitude, prohibition from entering certain areas, deportation ...are physical penalties. (p 11)

But, he argues, the attitude to the body itself changed. No longer a victim and symbol of the physical power relationship between the offender and the judiciary, it became a focus of the imposition of a removal of rights and individual freedoms.

The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it or to make it work, it is in order to deprive that individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property.

From being an art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. (p 11)

The relevance of these observations to a consideration of the nature and purpose of the punishments administered in English schools is clear. It has taken a further period of time for the 'not touching the body' cultural change to affect practice.

Corporal punishment was abolished as a judicial punishment in 1948 but continued to be administered within schools and prisons. In 1967 it was abolished in prisons; it was twenty years later before it was abolished in state schools and even later within the private, so-called 'public' and independent school community.

2.10 Leadership and decision making

My Literature Review thus far has focussed mainly on the historical and ethical issues surrounding punishment and exclusion from school. However, as indicated in the introduction, further thinking on the institution of the PRU, its social structures, organisation and interactional relationships led me to a particular focus on the issues that arise concerning leadership and decision making in its challenging environment.

There is much to draw on in the field of educational research concerning leadership. Indeed, according to John West-Burnham, Professor of Educational Leadership at St. Mary's University College, Twickenham, 26,000 books on leadership were published in the 20th century.

For him, as he illustrated in a keynote lecture at the National PRU Conference in 2013, the business of leadership can be reduced to three core elements, namely, 'Principle, Purpose and People'.

- Principle – the values informing the organisation's culture and priorities
- Purpose – the dominant view as to the *raison d'être* of the school
- People – the engagement, motivation and performance of people in securing the principles and purpose. (West-Burnham, 2013)

He supports his claim with '*Seven Propositions about Educational Leadership*', (2014) as follows.

1. Leadership: Strategic not Operational
2. Leadership: Moral Activity
3. Leadership: Transformation not Improvement
4. Leadership: Core Purpose
5. Leadership: Collective Capacity

6. Leadership: Working Through Relationships

7. Leadership: Personal Authenticity

His first proposition is that the leader is the embodiment of the vision and not the executor of the practice. For him, the Head of any organisation must be possessed by a powerful vision of a potential outcome, of a desirable linear destination. The issue is clearly exactly how to generate the same visionary approach from the executive in such a way that it becomes embodied in the operational life of the institution. Some of them will share a determined optimism and commitment to the task; others will be less enthusiastic, less convinced that visionary principles can overcome apparently intractable problems.

For West-Burnham, the effective leader must set the vision and then work to convince and empower the followers to achieve it, must set others tasks and stand aside to let them complete them. (2013 Lecture)

However, the small world of the PRU dictates that the Head is involved in the day-to-day management and delivery of many of the activities and necessity requires participation and sharing roles with the executive, particularly in the management of unpredicted events.

In spite of this he is clear that the difference between leadership and management lies in the visionary role of the leader and the operational role of the followers.

The operational... is concerned with the routines, systems, structures and procedures that translate principles and aspirations into actual practice. Leadership and management work in a symbiotic relationship but always with leadership driving management. (West-Burnham, 2014)

His second claim is that leadership is a moral activity, that the fact of leadership involves making choices and that underpinning all effective leadership is '*an explicit moral framework*' and '*consistent personal values*' that guide and support decision making (West-Burnham, 2014).

There is no leadership decision-making process that does not have moral implications. Leadership can never be ‘morally neutral’...leadership has to be rooted in an explicit ethical framework, consistent personal values that inform personal and professional behaviour (West-Burnham, 2014).

School leaders face difficult moral dilemmas on a daily basis: he suggests the following examples:

- The evidence that banding, streaming and setting are only of benefit to those students placed in higher groups – for the others the impact can be highly negative. (Hallam and Parsons 2013)
- The need to deploy the most effective teachers with the most vulnerable learners. (Sutton Trust 2011:5)

For the Head of a PRU, the second dilemma posed here might evince a rueful response. However strongly held, the principle that his or her students should be treated as needy learners rather than defective people underpins the whole approach of the dedicated PRU Head, but convincing others, including his or her line managers, to share this principle and to base their moral judgements and decision making upon it can be an uphill task. Recruiting the most effective teachers is also a challenge.

His third proposition is that leadership is about Transformation, not Improvement. He dismisses what I would call the Boxer approach. Boxer, the plodding carthorse in Orwell’s ‘Animal Farm’ (1945) whose motto, ‘*I will work harder*’ drives him on to the point of exhaustion and failure, never learns from experience. West-Burnham believes that simply demanding that people ‘*work harder*’ is not productive of change. The whole thrust of Government policy, DFE implementation and Ofsted inspection is about expectations of outcomes, delivery of curriculum and achieving status on league tables, about measurement of tangibles. He argues that without transformation, the school improvement agenda so deeply embedded in educational discourse in the 21st century, is an arid exercise and must end, like Boxer, in failure to bring about change.

Unfortunately in education we sometimes become so focused on developing the caterpillar that we forget that its primary purpose is to become a butterfly, not a better caterpillar. Transformation is about the moral courage to question and challenge the status quo and to develop alternative ways forward often going against a culture that can be self-referential and self-legitimizing. (West-Burnham, 2014)

His fourth proposition is that the leader must hold, and hold others, to the core purpose of the institution. The paradoxical nature of a PRU, whether it is a 'punishment' by definition, as the last resort in the sanctions cycle available to schools, or whether it is a 'reform' school designed to restore the referred pupil to conformity and acquiescence through new opportunities and focussed support, gives rise to much confusion over the management of the institution. This paradox reflects the ebb and flow of the punish or reform debate outlined earlier and lies at the heart of discussions about how much money should be spent on PRUs, how much attention should be paid to the quality of their environments, how much effort should go into training and equipping specialist staff to work in them as the general public, the Local Authority, the Management Committee and even some members of staff are not clear about the core purpose of a PRU. For the Head, therefore, holding to a core purpose which may be clear to him or her but not to others is a challenging but ultimately crucial aspect of leadership.

His fifth proposition is the '*collective capacity*' principle.

This he describes as an expansion of the 'two heads are better than one' maxim writ large within an institution where teams achieve more than individuals, where shared good practice and experience enrich the whole enterprise and where mutual support and respect are embedded behaviours. In a PRU, where an effective, committed team is in place, convinced of the 'core purpose' and determined to overcome presenting issues success can be achieved. In the most recent round of Ofsted inspections, (2014-2015) 24% of PRUs achieved an 'Outstanding' rating compared with only 11% of mainstream schools. This marks an enormous change over time from the early rounds of Ofsted inspections of PRUs where mainstream comparisons were used (GCSE results for example) and when many PRUs were put into Special

Measures and declared unfit for purpose. The last ten years (2005- 2015) have seen a development in the Inspectorate's understanding of the specialised work of the PRU with more and better use of tracking data and measurable outcomes, particularly 'soft' outcomes like reductions in anti-social behaviours, improved attendance and development of self-esteem and confidence. The importance of a 'team' approach to working on such issues is clear.

The sixth proposition is that educational leadership is about '*working through relationships*'.

As others have shown there are a number of different so-called management 'styles' but for him all management is about trust and trust flourishes where relationships are evidently valued, where individuals are empowered and entrusted to carry out their responsibilities and where the leader's genuine commitment to the task inspires loyalty and confidence. In a PRU, relationships are frequently tested beyond the point of endurance and breakdowns occur: the importance of emotional resilience for the leader is paramount. When conflict happens, as the nature of the institution dictates that it will, the strength of mutual trust and understanding between colleagues and young people is the foundation point of the rebuilding process. Learning to trust authority figures is frequently an issue for pupils and staff alike as there may be a long history of failed relationships on all sides. In '*Class Act*' an article for the Independent newspaper magazine section, a journalist, Oscar Quine, describes being given '*rare access to the extraordinary work being done in Pupil Referral Units*'. He finds that:

'The common code of discipline at successful PRUs is that while misbehaviour will be punished, tomorrow always comes with a clean slate. Students receive unconditional second, third and fourth chances – and an acceptance of who they are, warts and all.' (Quine 2015: 21)

West-Burnham's seventh proposition is that '*personal authenticity*' lies at the heart of all effective leadership.

For him, the integrity of the individual is paramount. The Head of any institution needs the courage of his or her convictions, a consistent clarity of vision and adherence to a clear set of values.

He referred in his lecture to the work of Dr Peter Senge.

The founding chairperson of the Society for Organisational Learning and a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr Senge is the author of 'The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization' (2010).

Although the main focus of his work has evidently been on business institutions, his philosophy of management is relevant to this discussion. He believes that rather than a management system based on the delivery of measurable outcomes with targets set regardless of the context or possibility of achieving them, which he feels is the approach in many settings, a much more successful approach would be to have a system

'based on love rather than fear, curiosity rather than an insistence on right answers and learning rather than controlling'.(p 5)

And further that,

In all settings, openness, reflection, deeper conversations, personal mastery and shared visions energise change and understanding the systemic causes of problems is crucial. (p 5)

His image of a three legged stool demonstrating the mutual dependency of *'aspiration, reflection and understanding'* to the effective running of an organisation is telling. For him, the loss or ineffectiveness of one or other of the three legs would render the whole institution ineffective. (p 2)

There are echoes here of the inspirational approach of the champion of creative education, Dr Ken Robinson,(2009) whose criticism of the examination based education system that drives English schools is direct and unequivocal. For him, such a system denies the opportunity to flourish and thrive to all children whose strengths and skills may lie outside the narrow confines of the imposed curriculum.

Reflections on these criticisms of established management systems in relation to the English educational system have been important in my consideration of the research question, 'Can PRUs work?'

They led me into considering the hierarchical nature of most management systems and how the traditional hierarchical management structure in schools affects their operations. In most schools, the Senior Management Team, or Leadership team, is the crucial executive group; delivering, maintaining and moulding policy and strategy within the institution. They themselves, within their team will most probably work with a hierarchical structure; this situation will be replicated throughout all the different 'teams' in the school. As Foucault stated, 'power relationships are everywhere' and nowhere more apparently than within a school where posts of authority and responsibility are public, acclaimed and, frequently, financially rewarded.

2.11 Rules and rule-keeping

My further interest in this situation lies in exploring occasions where the top-down power relationship is challenged, where a rule agreed and adopted by all is overruled by a 'senior' figure and the 'junior' colleagues are obliged to deal with the outcome. Much confusion and friction can ensue if those who are too junior to have the authority or confidence to 'overrule a rule' feel that they have followed the agreed agenda and those 'above' them, the decision maker or makers, have ignored it.

The same difficulty does not arise if the rule is ignored or overruled by a 'junior' colleague as the outcome for the 'senior' colleague would be a more straightforward exercise of 'power' in order to overrule the 'junior' colleague's transgression, if it were deemed necessary. These kinds of adjustments and negotiations take place constantly in the dynamic environment of a school; in a PRU the fragility of the setting can mean more challenging and explosive outcomes.

At the lower end of the power relationships in schools, it would seem, are the pupils themselves; however, it is their exercise of 'power' in challenging the authority of all those above them in following instruction or obeying a rule that causes friction and uncertainty. The breakdown of law and order in a macro setting might lead to riots and looting as experienced in London and elsewhere in the summer of 2011; the

breakdown of a rule system in a school can be similarly daunting and dramatic. The keeping of rules is therefore seen as an over-riding necessity and the issue of non-application in particular circumstances a challenging contravention of an accepted and essential convention.

In spite of this strong perception, the process of deciding when to apply 'rules' and when to overrule them is a familiar one in schools. Mainstream experience of my own, at different levels of management, has given me an insight into the impact of 'overruling' rules on those directly and indirectly involved and how complex such processes of decision making and their outcomes can be. For example, a senior colleague used as a support by a 'junior' colleague to reinforce a disciplinary issue with a pupil, might have a positive relationship with the child, might have dealt with him or her frequently in the past and developed an understanding with the child, might know important information about the child, might be operating at a different level of emotional intelligence from the 'junior' colleague. All these factors will affect the nature of the requested support intervention and, as a result, it might not always be concluded in a way that seems satisfactory to the 'junior' colleague.

It is clear that a strong reliance on rules and rule keeping underpins institutions and their social structures and, in schools, with apparently good reason, is at the heart of the hierarchical system.

In their paper, 'Social Rule System Theory', Tom Burns & Nora Machado (2014) explore the phenomenon of social organisation and rule making. According to the theory, '*most human social activity – in all its extraordinary variety – is organised and regulated by socially produced and reproduced rules and systems of rules*'. (p 2)

These rules are not abstract concepts but are '*embodied in groups and collectivities of people – in their language, customs and codes of conduct, norms and laws and in social institutions of the modern world, including family, community, market, business enterprises and government agencies*'. (p 2)

From their observations they claim that, '*The making, interpretation and implementation of social rules are universal in human societies as are their reformulation and transformation*'.(p 2)

A particular relevance for me lies in their discussion on the impact of rules on actions and how shared rules impact on a group.

'In guiding and regulating interaction, the rules give behaviour recognisable and characteristic patterns – making the patterns understandable and meaningful for those sharing in the rule knowledge'. (p 2)

Most schools produce some kind of written and explicit set of rules that regulate interactions within the institution; indeed many classroom walls, with lists of school rules prominently displayed, are evidence of the confidence many feel in the efficacy of *'shared group knowledge'* about rules.

Burns and Machado describe further how a common set of rules *'provides a frame of reference and categories, enabling participants to readily communicate about and to analyse social activities and events. In such ways, uncertainty is reduced, predictability is increased.'* (p 2)

It is clear that, in relation to schools and how they are organised, such a reduction in uncertainty might be considered highly desirable and evidence of efficient management.

The paper identifies ten key types of rule categories that specify *'Group Conditions, Structures and Processes'* (p 6) that further enlighten my pursuit of the research question.

Type 1. Identity rules - 'Who are we? What symbolises or defines us?'

For a PRU, the question of identity and definition is a crucial one. As discussed elsewhere, if the PRU is the end point of a punishment process, negative perceptions of identity are inevitable and can be overwhelming for those involved, both for pupils and staff. A successful school will relish its opportunities to confirm and celebrate its identity within a community; it may have strict rules about uniform for example, that underpin the sense of identity in a public and explicit manner. For a PRU such identification is complex: some dispense with uniform altogether in order to remove the undesirable identification; others use a uniform to encourage a sense of belonging and shared experience among their pupils. For a successful mainstream

school, symbols of identity might include publication of success in examinations, information about alumni, active websites and constant information streams about activities including sports teams, drama and music performance and events and so on. For a PRU, such identification is difficult but, as some have proved, not impossible. They have succeeded in replacing the negative symbols and definitions with more positive messages involving opportunities and outcomes for their young people.

Type II. Membership, Involvement and Recruitment Rules – ‘Who belongs, who doesn’t?’ ‘What characterises members?’ ‘How are they recruited?’

This second social rule throws up issues for PRUs. The contrast between an over-subscribed school and a PRU with its ‘referred’ intake is stark. The one characteristic that the PRU pupils share is that they were not ‘recruited’ nor is their place a ‘sought-after’ commodity. However, as mentioned above, some PRUs have succeeded in providing their young people with opportunities previously perhaps inaccessible to them. They have thereby induced a sense of pride and achievement and thence, a sense of membership of a ‘special’ institution.

Type III. Rules concerning shared value orientations and ideals – ‘What does the group consider good or bad?’

The English education system includes faith schools and an increasing number of state supported ‘Free Schools’ alongside many independent institutions that are founded upon ‘shared orientations and ideals’. The notion of ‘choice’ that supports this powerful cultural and political policy is the subject of much debate as the ‘choice’ is not necessarily available to all society’s members. In the world of PRUs however, such choices do not apply. Many Local Authorities might operate only one PRU and considerations of religious belief, ethnic origin or ability level would not be applied alongside the need for a placement in its specialised learning environment. In this situation, the PRU must found its ‘shared value orientation and ideals’ on elemental societal beliefs about the value of the individual, the right to an education, the right to aspirations for the best possible life chances and respect for each other, property and the environment.

The 'shared value orientations and ideals' of one of the most prominent London based PRUs TBAP (Tri Borough Alternative Provision), are clearly expressed in their Vision 2020 document. They are dedicated to the pursuit of excellence of delivery, opportunity, experience and outcome for their young people and are ambitious in their plans to extend their ethos through their Training School to practitioners throughout the country and beyond. It is clear that all involved have a powerful shared agenda and that staff are recruited who have the desire and resilience to pursue it. However, it is not explicit in the Vision document what the school might view as good or undesirable in terms of relationships, cultural behaviours and beliefs; many PRUs, perhaps including TBAP, are faced with multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-cultural issues on a complex scale that might impact directly on their ambitions.

Type IV. Rules concerning shared beliefs and models – 'What do we know and believe about ourselves, our group behaviour and our environment?'

Type IV rules further consider the depth of self-knowledge of the group and its shared expectations about how its members will treat one another and their environment. The importance of self-reflection, self-awareness and emotional intelligence in the management of any institution is hard to over-estimate; in the running of a PRU it is crucial that those who lead are firmly embedded in self-confidence and are convinced of the value of modelling their beliefs and values for others.

Type V. Social relational and structural rules. 'How do we relate to one another, what is our social structure?' 'What are the authority and status differences characterising the group?' 'How do we interact and reciprocate with one another and with the leadership?'

As discussed earlier, schools, and PRUs, operate a hierarchical system of relationships with different, named and enumerated responsibilities at each level. The 'authority and status' accorded to each level is known and reinforced through titles and financial reward. Issues arise when individuals are not able, for whatever reason, to operate at the level to which they have been appointed and further, intriguing issues arise when colleagues at lower levels of the structure acquire

'authority and status' without the title or reward. The rules operating within a school or PRU might reflect the hierarchical relationships; for example, the Head might always be addressed or referred to by his or her title; elsewhere on the structure colleagues might use first names to address one another. Young people in some PRUs are encouraged to address staff using their first names; this is a powerful and meaningful difference and needs to be 'a rule' if it is to be implemented.

Type VI. Procedures and production rules. 'What are our characteristic activities, practices, production programs, ceremonies and rituals?' 'How do we co-ordinate activities and make collective decisions?'

Life in schools is set about with rules concerning procedures and practices. The school inspection system and the embedded examination culture requires that certain subjects are taught, that they should be taught for a specific periods of time to specific age groups and that certain methods should be employed in doing so. It is deemed that physical activity is beneficial so there are rules concerning the amount of time allocated to it; it is also deemed essential that time should be spent on social awareness and the propagation of societal values through Personal, Social and Health Education or varieties of the same. There is current debate over the value of teaching foreign languages and Arts subjects to young people but there are rules at different stages of the education process that govern their delivery too.

Ceremonies and rituals as, for example, the School Assembly are equally embedded 'rules' in many schools. Celebratory events, school plays, concerts, art exhibitions and other 'rites of passage' events like Speech Day or Leavers' Assembly are conducted along accepted lines, reflecting the shared 'rules' of the institution.

Activities are co-ordinated through timetables and extra-curricular programmes; collective decisions are sought and confirmed through regular meetings, which for most teachers take place within their 'directed time', that is, there is a rule requiring their attendance.

In PRUs these rules governing procedures and practice apply with equal measure but may be much more difficult to implement. As noted elsewhere, young people attending a PRU may have been poor or non-attenders in their mainstream setting;

requiring them to attend a full-time programme may be an expectation too far and adjustments may have to be made. Similar adjustments might apply to the PRU timetable and range of taught subjects; in other words the 'rules' exist but may be flexible in their application.

Type VII. Rules for dealing with environmental factors and agents. 'How do we cope with, make gains in the environment, dominate, or avoid, environmental threats?'

There are long-standing and statutory rules concerning safe evacuation of buildings and much and increasing security in schools to protect the community from external threat. Such rules are generally unchallenged and respected whatever the institution.

Different kinds of environmental threats might include bullying and intimidation within the PRU community and political or social pressures from outside the community. In recent months some schools in Birmingham have been the subject of Ofsted investigation following alleged attempts by Governing Bodies to influence the curriculum and coerce staff into treating some pupils differently from others based on an ideological value set. The 'rules' attached to collective assent over governance are alleged to have been set aside through intimidating behaviour on the part of a number of members of governing bodies.

Governance can be a problematic aspect of PRU management; Management Committees are expected to be representative of the whole PRU community and it is notoriously difficult to recruit parents and lay members. Overseeing rule keeping attached to the efficient running of Governing Bodies and Management Committees is the role of the Local Authority; however, the development of the Academy and Free Schools agenda has led to a lessening of local accountability in this area.

Type VIII. Rules for changing core group bases, in particular the rule regime itself. 'How should we go about changing group structures and processes, our goals or our practices?'

Constant reviews of practice and purpose are embedded in the efficient running of schools and PRUs. Ofsted inspectors would expect to see evidence of evaluations of all school processes and careful assessments of outcomes. Good practice would

involve change and adaptation where required. Rules support processes but must be evaluated systematically in order to remain relevant and effective. If such evaluation and subsequent adaptation, change or removal of a rule is pursued collectively through shared decision-making, then it is likely to be supported by the community as a whole.

Type IX. Technology and resource rules. ‘What are appropriate technologies and materials we should use in our activities (and possibly those that are excluded)?’

Schools are governed by financial constraints and accountable for their spending. Such considerations would influence the technologies employed to support various processes and activities but in spite of this limitation many schools are equipped with state of the art technological equipment that supports dynamic learning in this area. For PRUs with their limited numbers of pupils, economies of scale are hard to achieve; some have sought support from sponsors and those PRUs that are Academies are frequently supported through being part of a wider network of schools.

External pressures influence schools and institutions as they do the wider community so that issues like re-cycling, limiting paper consumption, using organic ingredients (or not) in Food Technology, respecting wildlife and walking to school are all part of a wider concern about the appropriateness of a school’s social activities and the materials that are used.

Type X. Time and Place Rules. ‘What are our appropriate places and times?’

Government education policy dictates that schools should offer their pupils 25 hours a week of tuition and for the most part this is considered to be appropriate. Reference has already been made to the adjustments that might be made in a PRU where a mixed programme of activities might be appropriate and ‘full-time’ education is a mix of formal and less formal learning activities, taking place in different locations. Levels of attendance and punctuality are expectations supported by statutory rules.

In France and Germany the school day for pupils usually begins much earlier than in the U.K. It is considered appropriate there for young people to be in their classrooms at 8am and to complete their day at 1pm. Afternoons can therefore be exploited for a variety of different activities, or none, as appropriate. In the U.K. schools begin later and the school lunch is an established cultural icon; most schools find it appropriate to serve a hot meal in an appropriate place, a dining room, at a particular time and rules abound around the delivery of the process.

More crucially perhaps is the rule that requires the school learning environment to be fit for purpose. Rules exist concerning the dimensions of classrooms, the size and design of chairs for particular age groups, the width of corridors and so on. Specialised subject areas for Science, Art and Music for example, have specific age groups attached to their design with considerations of safety as paramount. Issues as detailed as ventilation, acoustics and the size of print on warning notices are all of concern as are a myriad of others.

However, for many PRUs such rules do not apply. As revealed elsewhere, many PRUs are accommodated in buildings not designed for their purpose and where, in addition to the challenging nature of the teaching and learning that is expected to be carried out, staff and pupils may be constantly aware of the lack of public concern attached to their wellbeing.

This brief overview of the *'Rule Categories'* specified in Burns and Machado's Social Rule System Theory has given me a better understanding of how greatly institutions depend on such frameworks and structures. It is no surprise therefore, to find how much importance is attached to 'rules' by practitioners, especially in fragile settings like PRUs where structure and frameworks provide a constant norm against which challenge and divergence can be measured. It also helps to explain why, when rules are broken by those in authority who have championed their implementation, it causes such confusion and frustration, whatever might be the justification for the change.

2.12 Resilience

A further related area is the notion of resilience. This word finds its way into all areas of PRU management, for example the TBAP (Tri-Borough Alternative Provision) 2015-16 Behaviour Policy, states that,

It is critically important that staff working in TBAP AP Academies build strong **Relationships**, develop high levels of personal **Resilience** and have high expectations where the **Quality** of learning behaviours are concerned. [sic]

The concept behind the word appears to describe a state of inner strength of will and purpose that allows the individual to demonstrate an outwardly confident and purposeful demeanour, whatever may be the present distractions or challenges.

The implication behind the use of the word in these two examples is that resilience can be taught and learned; it is not seen as a personality trait that some may possess and others not.

There is evidence in the literature that there are a number of factors that contribute to a person's resilience. According to Fredrikson and Branigan (2005) the most crucial is the existence in an individual's life of one or many positive relationships which are 'mutual and caring'. For many young people referred to a PRU, such relationships may be absent or unreliable and, as a result, resilience be hard, to achieve. It is evidently the ambition of the TBAP PRU to provide those positive relationships as far as they are able and to give their pupils an insight into what such relationships might mean to them in supporting them into the future.

Further factors that they claim contribute to resilience are:

1. The ability to make realistic plans and being capable of taking the steps necessary to follow through with them;
2. A positive self-concept and confidence in one's strengths and abilities;
3. Communication and problem-solving skills; and
4. The ability to manage strong feelings and impulses

(Fredrikson & Branigan, (2005: 313-332))

The relevance to both staff and students in a PRU is clear: each of these factors is essential in the skills and qualities of a member of staff and seeking them out in a person would probably form the basis of an interview for a post in the PRU; for a pupil, the acquisition of these skills and qualities forms the basis of their learning in the specialised setting.

The purpose of this Literature Review has been to enrich my understanding of the origin and nature of the PRU phenomenon and to examine a number of related issues that are relevant to the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Preparation for tackling my mountain: learning from other climbers; planning my route; checking equipment; understanding my limitations and tempering my ambition...

Having surveyed my mountain and considered its characteristics, I needed to make detailed plans for my route and consider the appropriateness of my equipment.

3.1 The overall approach

The overall approach would depend on what I wanted to know. I had established a research question, 'Can PRUs work?' and now needed to decide on the tools I needed answer it. I had explored key ideas in the Literature Review: I now needed a robust process for building on their development.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) offer this fundamental basis for establishing a methodology.

What the researcher does depends on what the researcher wants to know and how he or she will go about finding out about the phenomenon in question. (p 115)

In their list of 14 '*paradigms which inform and underpin the planning and conduct of research*' (p 115) are found the following:

- *Phenomenological and existential*
- *Interactionist and ethnographic*

The authors describe each of these research paradigms and discuss their appropriateness for different purposes. I spent time evaluating the application of these approaches to my question.

It became clear to me that, however interesting it might be to know how many PRUs there are and what each of them does and what Ofsted has reported on them all, adopting a positivist, quantitative approach, this was not going to answer my

question about the interpretations that those involved in a PRU put upon their experiences and their emotional responses to them. For this, I believed I needed to adopt a phenomenological approach. According to Denscombe (2010: 93-94) phenomenological research generally deals with:

- people's perceptions or meanings;
- people's attitudes and beliefs; and
- people's feelings and emotions.

Denscombe further comments that:

In contrast to other approaches to research that rely on processes of categorising things, abstracting them, quantifying them and theorising about them, phenomenology prefers to concentrate its efforts on getting a clear picture of the 'things in themselves' – the things that are directly experienced by people. (p 94-95)

Though convinced this was the path I needed to tread, I spent time appraising and evaluating further approaches looking particularly at the principles of ethnography. Initially, there seemed to be aspects of my research for which this approach might be appropriate. The world of a PRU could be seen as comparable to the kind of isolated, small tribe that attracted the interest of early anthropological researchers. I might write a *'Coming of age in a PRU'*, but might also find, as was later suspected about the data gathered by Margaret Mead in Samoa,(1928) that the group I study, watch and listen to, tell me nonsense stories that amuse them and bemuse me. The notion of 'thick description' propounded by Geertz (1973) also seemed applicable as I wanted to illustrate not just the actions and behaviour of those in the PRU but also set them in context.

I had lived the PRU life through my headship role and therefore experienced the kind of immersion that ethnographic approaches require. My experiences offered me an 'insider' perspective and some degree of authority from which to speak and research the question. However, once I started to read and step out into researcher mode, I realised that my 'insider' experiences were not necessarily an advantage, and I had to explore how I would navigate some of the potential challenges. It was the

experience of being a researcher that taught me the importance of observation and listening, rather than too much engagement. This is a skill that I had to rehearse as I was very conscious of how my previous experiences could potentially interfere with my analysis. Like Ludhra (2015) this study stems from personal experience, and is guided by Kearney's advice that: '*We are the most important part of the research and it is much more useful if we do not cover our tracks. Those tracks are central to the story*' Kearney (2003: 60) but not its actual focus.

The required degree of immersion for an ethnographic study was not something I could achieve through a limited number of visits to one PRU; and the notion that *having been immersed* could offer some kind of verity to the process became totally discounted. Indeed, I began to feel that my previous experience was a hindrance to the whole exercise rather than an enriching advantage.

However, a further aspect of the ethnographical approach as described by Denscombe (2010) did seem appropriate.

The ethnographer is generally concerned to find out how the members of the group/culture being studied understand things, the meanings they attach to happenings, the way they perceive their reality. (p 80)

This was clearly an objective for me as I certainly wanted to understand the meanings they (the PRU community) attach to everyday happenings, the ways in which they perceive their realities, where they find success and positivity and how they interpret and process failings and negativity. I wanted the nature of that reality to emerge in a form that would allow me to analyse it and re-present it using the frame of my writing and the prism of my understanding.

With these demands in mind, I chose to research within a phenomenological paradigm.

Having established my overall approach, I needed to confront the realities of a 'plan of action'.

3.2 Plan of action

Access to the information I needed could only be achieved by having access to a PRU or PRUs and having permission to collect data in that environment through whatever research strategies would be appropriate. It was necessary to make an application to Brunel University Ethics Committee as a first step. (See Appendix 3 (a) for my application to the Ethics Committee).

This process obliged me to consider the ethical issues involved in seeking, exploiting and publicising the experiences and perceptions of those I might gain access to if my project were to be approved. According to the six principles underlying the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) guidelines, I needed to address the following requirements.

1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.
 2. Research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved.
 3. The confidentiality of information supplied by the research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.
 4. Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion.
 5. Harm to research participants and researchers must be avoided in all instances.
 6. The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit. (ESRC 2011)
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1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.

The intention in designing the research was that it would be able to capture the concepts and processes of success that those involved in attending, managing and working in a PRU held, outside and beyond those yardsticks wielded by the official government statistics on outcomes and outside and beyond the criteria set in place by Ofsted. It was essential therefore, to gain access to a PRU or PRUs.

As the Head of a PRU, I had joined the National Association of PRU Heads and Managers, PRUs.org. This association, now entitled 'PRUsAP' having incorporated membership from other forms of alternative provision, proved invaluable to me during my headship, both as a source of information but also as a source of mutual, non-judgemental support in dealing with challenging issues. We met termly at the Institute of Education and shared experiences and good practice, as well as receiving important briefings on government policy and relevant directives from the Department of Education. I continue to attend the meetings as a retired member of the association.

I decided that I would seek to share my research proposal with this group. I gained permission to do so from the President, and a number of Heads on this body offered their valuable co-operation.

I then needed to confront the challenge of what kind of PRU or PRUs would be the most revelatory in my research. As described elsewhere, there is no standard PRU; they vary in size, purpose, setting, governance and organisation. The common thread is that they all exist to support children under the statutory school leaving age who, for one reason or another, are unable to attend a mainstream school.

I had visited, as part of my preparation work for the project, a number of different PRUs in different parts of the country.

I decided I would focus on a PRU that was principally concerned with the management of young people excluded for behaviour reasons, as this type constitutes a majority in the range of PRUs, and one that managed a number of young people on site on a daily basis as opposed to the outreach focus of some PRUs.

I consulted another colleague who manages a Key Stage 4 provision in a northern city and after lengthy discussions and a site visit, decided that this would be the focus for my research project. Importantly, the Head was very supportive of my request and gave generously of her time in the preliminary discussions we held. Her PRU was a Key Stage 4 unit with places for approximately 30 young people. It was situated on the outskirts of a city and served a very large catchment area; in fact

young people were referred to the Centre from across the whole city. As a result, transport and travel were important issues, a typical situation for PRUs. The young people were referred from a range of secondary schools, another typical situation. There were a small number of young people attending who had been referred from Special School settings and had Statements of Special Educational Needs, again, a situation that arises frequently, in spite of the fact that the original intention when PRUs came into existence was that no young people with Statements would be referred to them. The assumption was that such young people should have their needs met in the Special School environment. The reality is however, that such schools also exclude their pupils and the PRU, as the Local Authority resource, and as in this PRU, are called into service to provide the required educational opportunity for such children.

The PRU was a Local Authority directly managed service and had a recently formed Management Committee. Many PRUs are supported by experienced Management groups, quasi Governing Bodies, but for some, as in the selected PRU, this was a new element and was in the process of becoming established. The PRU was having difficulty in recruiting governors, particularly parent governors; again, from my experience, a typical problem. The difficulties of appointing members of a Governing Body are well known; (James and Goodall 2014:1) for a PRU, they are particularly acute. Parents of those children who attend, being few in number and perhaps in fragile relationships with their children and possibly with the Local Authority, having been through the exclusion process, are notoriously difficult to appoint. (James and Goodall 2014:1) At my selected PRU, the Local Authority, one of whose officers chaired the Management Committee, had been slow to meet the statutory (DfE 2007) implementation of a Management Committee and it met rarely.

Further features of this PRU made it a choice that would support the integrity of my project. The Head was newly appointed and had previously, in 2010, been Head of a PRU with an Outstanding judgement from Ofsted.

I held my first conversations with this Head immediately after her appointment and was aware of the degree of personal satisfaction that she was feeling and of the confidence with which she was approaching a fresh challenge. She knew that there had been major issues at her new PRU and that it had only recently emerged from

Special Measures, the Ofsted extreme concern category at that time. However, with success behind her she felt that she would be able to meet the challenges, deal with them and move the PRU forward.

I eventually realised that what I was attempting to do with my research project was not only to find a PRU that resembled the one where I had been Head but also that my particular focus would be on the experience of this newly appointed Head. I recognised myself, my aspirations, my sense of purpose and my professional confidence in this person. I spent time reflecting on this and sought guidance on the integrity my project from the point of view that my potential intervention in the process might affect the validity of any data I might gather. I learned about detachment as a researcher's skill from my involvement in a separate research project and read, in Denscombe (2010) about 'bracketing'.

Researchers who use a phenomenological approach need to be explicit about their own ways of making sense of the world and, in order to get a clear view of how others see the world, they need to suspend (or bracket off) their own beliefs temporarily for the purposes of the research. (p 99)

The careful appraisal of my true motives for pursuing the research led to a consideration of exactly what data I was seeking to collect and how I should and could set about collecting them. I had set out to discover whether PRUs can successfully serve the needs of those referred to them and how those students and those who work with them view their experience and measure that success. I had moved from believing that a large-scale study, possibly involving a questionnaire and multiple observational visits could answer my purpose, to the position of thinking that a comparison between two PRUs might be the way forward. Following difficulties with this, I had finally moved to the position of focussing my attention on one PRU in the belief that the evidence thus garnered would have a validity of its own; it would be the evidence of 'concepts of success' from one PRU. I was sure it would be revelatory of this one instance and if not applicable to every institution, then of intrinsic value and validity in itself.

This decision led to an important consideration of the validity of such a 'one case' study. Having considered different approaches, the case study seemed to me the most appropriate method for collecting the data I needed. However, as Yin (1994: xiii) asserts,

The case study has long been stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science methods.

The research of those who use the tool is, he claims, regarded as having '*insufficient precision (that is quantification) objectivity and rigour.*' (1994:xiii)

He sets out to justify the method and discount the judgement, a process I necessarily had to duplicate. He believes that the case study can be a preferred strategy when 'how or why' questions are at the heart of the research activity. It also functions effectively when the researcher has '*little control over events*' and when the case study is of '*a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context*' (p 1).

Such assertions developed my confidence in adopting the method. The PRU is certainly a 'contemporary phenomenon' and as the evidence illustrates, I had very little control over events once I had gained access to the setting.

That case studies can establish cause and effect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011: 289), is an innate strength as they '*observe effects in real contexts*'. Further, the context itself is '*unique and dynamic*' and the study, if sufficiently revelatory and explanatory, captures the reality and complexity of its singularity. They claim that,

Case studies investigate and report the real-life, complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. (p 289)

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995:317) list the characteristics of a case study.

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case
- It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events

- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case and the case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report

So much of this chimed closely with my aspirations concerning the data, both in their gathering and interpreting, that I felt increasingly convinced that this was my way forward. I was confident I would be able to deliver a '*rich and vivid description*' of the context of the data; I would be able to place the data in a '*chronological narrative*' and in the examination of the outcomes, I would blend '*a description of the events with an analysis of them*'.

Most importantly I would be focussing on '*individual actors or groups of actors*' and be seeking to understand '*their perceptions of events*'. I would also '*highlight specific events*', particularly in relation to the Head of the PRU that would be '*relevant to the case*'.

The sixth hallmark seemed to me particularly apposite as I certainly felt '*integrally involved in the case*'. As my relationship with the Head developed I became convinced that she had shared her views with me in a particularly honest fashion because she was aware of the experiences we had in common.

The final characteristic of the case study, according to this listing, again seemed to me to fit with my research. Certainly it was my intention '*to portray the richness of the case*' in my data analysis chapters.

I thought it important, in view of the '*weak sibling*' judgement applied to the case study method of research to have an understanding of the criticisms levelled in its direction.

A '*journalistic approach*', picking out striking features for sensational effect or a '*selective*' approach where evidence is picked out to support a favoured conclusion are particular weaknesses (Nisbet and Watt 1984:91). I could see how this might apply in my research and realised that I would need to be scrupulous in coding and analysing the data.

Nisbet and Watt also advise the avoidance of an *'anecdotal style'* that might easily degenerate into *'an endless series of low-level banal and tedious illustrations that take over from in-depth, rigorous analysis'*. I reflected on how this might arise in my work where the data consisted of recorded conversations, with open-ended questions and random lines of development. My outcomes analysis would need to be carefully managed with thematic groupings and meaningful illustrations to combat the risk of *'banality'*.

They also warn against *'pomposity'*, where the researcher claims elaborate conclusions from scant evidence and *'blandness'*, where areas of disagreement or contrary viewpoints are ignored in order to support a thesis.

I became aware that these two were also serious considerations for me and that achieving *'integrity, quality, transparency'* as required by the ESRC in my methodology was much more of a challenging task than I had appreciated.

2. Research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved.

As I was carrying out the research on my own I had no staff to keep informed but on my first visit to the nominated PRU, I met the Head and talked with her about the *'purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research'* and discussed the project with her.

On this occasion I raised the ethical issues involved in gaining access to the staff and students. I had before me four further principles of the ESRC guidelines for research which, in sum, concern the provision of information for participants, their understanding of risk and the use to which the data might be applied and, further, their concerns with anonymity, confidentiality and consent issues. I outlined the process that I would adopt: the use of information sheets, letters of introduction and signed agreements before commencing the research. I strove, with her support, to ensure that each person I encountered would be informed about my project beforehand and, having read the proposal, would feel free to consent or not, without pressure or consequences (see Appendix 3 (b)(i),(ii) and (iii): Information, Letter and

Consent Form). We discussed the issues that arose from my request to meet young people attending the PRU. We agreed that this element of the data gathering might prove difficult to put in place.

3. The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.

We addressed confidentiality issues and confirmed that anonymity of all participants would be respected. This applied not only to the individuals but also to the PRU and its geographical location in order to protect the identities of all participants. Basit (2010) notes the importance of such a strategy.

Anonymising the participants means that the data gathered are not linked to the participants and the identity of the participants is not disclosed to anyone by the researcher. The institutions where they are working or studying need to be anonymised too. In this way the participants' privacy is assured. (p 61)

We decided that 'northern city' would be a protective description of its situation and that I would refer to participants by job title and to the students by gender and year group. If I needed to use names for any reason I would only use the first letter of the first name. We agreed that such strategies should offer sufficient protection.

4. Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion.

I asked the Head to alert the staff to my research project and to the question I would be asking, namely, their response to '*Can PRUs work?*' I would be asking them to comment on whether they believe PRUs in general are successful in achieving their stated purpose, namely, the education of young people referred to their care. I felt certain that during the course of the interview process, participants would refer to their work in their own PRU and asked her to ensure that volunteers would be comfortable talking about their roles and making comments on the degree of success they experienced as individuals. They might also make reference to failure and they needed to be reassured that their identities would be hidden in any use I might make

of the data. I also asked the Head to assure the staff that, as we had agreed, she would have no influence over the use I might make of the data.

There was to be absolutely no pressure, overt or covert, or even an approach that might be seen as persuasive we agreed would be unacceptable. They needed to make their minds up *'voluntarily and not under any kind of duress'* (Basit, T.H., 2010: 60) In the event, nine members of staff, including the Head, came forward to take part.

5. Harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances.

We discussed the nature of any potential harm that might arise from participation in the research. It was important to follow the ethical guidelines concerning talking to children: the young people I hoped to speak to could be under 16 and whether they were or not, I wanted to be absolutely sure of parental permission for participation. *'Parents' informed consent is needed as children do not have the cognitive abilities to understand the research process'* (Basit, T.H. 2010: 60)

We were confident that if adults came forward voluntarily there would be little harm that could come to them, that we could envisage. If they revealed information to me that concerned malpractice or offending behaviour I would be obliged to report the matter to the University Ethics Committee for advice and further action but the reporting process in itself would not be harmful to the participant.

6. The independence of research must be clear and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.

The Head was aware of my experience as Head of a PRU and welcomed the dimension this gave to our discussions. She felt it added to the authenticity of the questions I might ask. She agreed to ensure that the staff knew I was a researcher from Brunel University and that I was not an inspector of any kind. I was conscious of 'The Halo Effect' (Basit, T.H. 2010:65), which might impact on my research. The Effect *'indicates that the researchers' knowledge of the participants, or knowledge of other existing data about participants or situations, can affect the researchers' judgements. This can consequently cause them to be selective in the way they gather data, analyse their data and report their findings'*.

I needed to guard against my acquaintance with her and my familiarity with PRUs affecting my judgement.

3.3 The interviews: thinking, planning and the role of chance

I had decided that the best method I could employ in accessing the data I hoped to collect was through individual interviews. I wanted, after all, to capture the voices and the views of those who worked at the PRU and of the students who attended. I had considered a number of strategies including the use of a student or staff focus group in which I could facilitate a discussion on their conceptions of success. However, for logistic and strategic reasons this proved difficult to achieve: logistically it was clear that I would not be able to gather a number of members of staff together during a working day and strategically, I became convinced that I needed to allow the volunteer subjects to have my complete focus and to allow them to share their thoughts without what might be the constraining presence of peers, or, perhaps more significantly, superiors, whether actual or perceived, through their difference in role in the PRU.

For me as the interviewer, there could be other factors at play in a group situation of which I could be unaware. There could be relationships within the group that demand dominance for one party over another; there could be histories, simple and complex between the members of the group that might influence their level of participation and indeed the nature of their responses. Denscombe (1998: 179) advises researchers, in either group situations or one-to one, to be aware of issues including *'social status, educational qualifications and professional expertise of the people to be interviewed'* and urges the consideration of whether this might affect *'the interviewer-interviewee relationship in a positive or negative manner'*. He is clear that the data are *'affected by the personal identity of the researcher'*.

Oppenheim (1992: 65) adds further thoughts on the process.

The interview... requires interpersonal skills of a high order (putting the respondents at ease, asking questions in an interested manner, noting down responses without upsetting the conversational flow, giving support without introducing bias); at the same time the interviewer is

limited or helped by his or her own sex, apparent age and background, skin colour, accent etc. When taken seriously, interviewing is a task of daunting complexity.

Conscious of the daunting nature of the task I did, however, conclude that one to one interviews, especially in a potentially fragile environment, would be the most straightforward way to proceed, both logistically, pragmatically and theoretically.

I considered the nature of the interviews I would conduct. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 412) rehearse the many different types of interview. They list the six types enumerated by LeCompte and Preissle, (1993) namely:

- (i) Standardised interviews;
- (ii) In-depth interviews;
- (iii) Ethnographic interviews;
- (iv) Elite interviews;
- (v) Life history interviews; and
- (vi) Focus groups.

They then list the additions made by Bogdan and Bicklen (1992):

- (i) Semi-structured interviews; and
- (ii) Group interviews.

And the further additions:

- (i) Structured interviews (Lincoln and Guba 1985); and
- (ii) Exploratory interviews (Oppenheim 1992:65).

A further four types are attributed to Patton (1980:206)

- (i) Informal conversational interviews;
- (ii) Interview guide approaches;
- (iii) Standardised open ended interviews; and

(iv) Closed quantitative interviews.

This somewhat bewildering list obliged me to reflect further on exactly what I wanted to find out and on the most productive method for doing so. I needed to gain the confidence of strangers as quickly as possible; I needed to maintain an open mind and a sharp awareness of the need to remain 'outside' the data and I needed to have some thought for the outcomes process. I was also keen to allow the participants to develop their own thinking where possible and not impede potentially revealing comments by imposing too close a pattern on the conversation.

With these considerations in mind, I adopted elements of a number of the types. The interviews would be semi-structured, would be framed by standardised open-ended questions and would be conversational in approach. Having posed my first structured question, I then wanted the respondents to '*answer the questions in their own way and in their own words*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 413). Since all the interviews were to take place in a formal setting (a PRU), I did not believe that I would achieve 'informality' as certain limiting factors might apply, like the use of appropriate language for example, or issues applying to the security of the space where the interview might be conducted. I was aware that the interview could not be considered as a conversation, as such, as it was a planned event and not a '*naturally occurring situation*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 409) but I did hope to achieve what they call an '*informal conversational interview*' (2011:413).

The decision to hold the interviews in the PRU rather than in a remote, possibly more neutral setting was entirely dictated by my need for access to the research participants. I needed to go to them; I could have no expectation that they would come to me and I believed that I would learn valuable information about how each of the participants regarded their environment if they were within it at the time of the interviews. I needed to keep in mind that the interview is a '*social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data-gathering exercise*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011:421) and that all kinds of issues like my use of language, greetings, physical appearance, use of facial expressions and body positioning would influence the respondent's attitude to the process. I wanted to be free to prompt the speaker if I needed to and also to ask further questions to develop a point. Prompts '*enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions*' and probes '*enable the interviewer to ask*

respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response', a process that might achieve '*richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 420) which was certainly my aim.

I had to accept that the diversity of the data I gathered in such interviews might make coding and analysis a more challenging process than if I had decided to conduct a survey or submit a list of questions.

The reality in my selected PRU was that there were 40 members of staff only 4 of whom were fully qualified teachers. Having in mind the hierarchical staffing structure I hoped very much that those who came forward might in some way be representative of the various roles. However, having asked for volunteers, I was obliged to interview those people who were willing and available to take part on the days when I visited the PRU. As it turned out, the roles ranged, in hierarchical terms, from the Head to the Kitchen Assistant.

The same constraints applied to the students. I had hoped to interview three boys and three girls from across Years 10 and 11. I had asked the Head to contact parents and ensure that, having had an explanatory letter from me and a covering letter from her, permission had been given, in writing, for me to speak to the young people.

On the days when I visited the PRU however, the prepared ground fell away. The young people the Head was hoping I would meet were not present. However, she contacted two other parents by phone, explained to them the nature of the request and sought their permission for me to speak to their children. This was given but I was insistent that all the written material should be delivered as soon as possible to these parents. I also took the precaution, with her support, of meeting them in the Head's office so that she had access to us throughout. I also asked for and received two written declarations from the Head confirming that she had received verbal permission from both young people's parents.

I met two young people on my second visit and two on my fifth. I met two individually, as described above, as they had parental consent to take part and two together, with

a member of staff in the room with us as the students were keen to meet me but had no parental consent. I had to make an on-the-spot decision about whether this situation might breach ethical guidelines but, with the support of the Head and the member of staff, I decided to continue. Both young people were over 16 years of age.

The first two were selected for me by the Head principally because she felt they would cope well with a conversation with a stranger and would be sufficiently confident to share their thoughts about their experiences at the PRU with me. I was aware however, that they were likely to be on the more conforming end of the spectrum of PRU students. Indeed, all considerations of attempting some kind of representation of young people in PRUs were lost in the possibilities of the moment: I felt I was in the grip of chance, with *'little control over events'* Yin (1994: 1). This was not to denigrate the individuals concerned or to under-value their potential contribution; it was more a concern that the selection of young people by the Head, which was an inevitable process as access issues meant that I could not hope to achieve a situation where the young people might 'volunteer' to take part, might limit the range of perceptions I would capture.

I realised however, that this circumstance was precisely the nature of this kind of enquiry. It seems inevitable that data gathering through observation and interview, however carefully planned, can never replicate the carefully controlled conditions that might apply in a more strictly scientific environment; that if I wanted to attempt to capture their thoughts and feelings as an individual, then one set of these was intrinsically of as much value as any other. In my data analysis, I will show that each of the young people I met shared their experiences, their 'stories' and their opinions with revealing degrees of detail. Suffice it to say at this point that I had learned another valuable lesson in my schooling as a researcher: that events on the ground will dictate what is possible, however careful the planning beforehand might be.

The staff I spoke to were almost as equally random a selection as was the group of young people. All were volunteers but they varied in their commitment to the encounter. A few were keen to speak to me; others were happy to co-operate but made it clear that their time was limited or that they probably 'wouldn't have much to say'. I strove to reassure them about the value to me of their contributions, however

limited they might feel them to be. Following Basit's (2010: 111) advice, at the beginning of each interview I introduced myself to the interviewee, told him or her how long the interview was expected to last, reiterated the topic and purpose of the research; said how many participants were involved and confirmed what I hoped to achieve with their help, '*to generate knowledge, contribute to policy and /or improve practice*' (Basit 2010:111). I also checked carefully with the participants what their commitments were following the interview so that we could bring the conversation to an end calmly. In addition, I also checked again that the participant was comfortable with the digital recording device positioned between us and happy for the recording to proceed. It seemed to me that once we had begun talking, all the interviewees ignored the device; however, I cannot prove that they did not adjust their responses in the light of its presence. I believe that the constraints that were there were those I expected, and also felt myself, because we were strangers and because the interview was a formal encounter in their workplace where all kinds of social constraints operate. I was a visitor and they might be reluctant to be critical of the PRU in my presence. The more I reflected on the process, the more I appreciated its complexity.

I visited the PRU on five separate occasions conducting interviews as detailed overleaf in Table 1.

Table 1:

Day	Month	Interviewee(s)
The First Day	September	The Head
The Second Day	November	The Head
		A male Year 10 student
		A female Year 11 student
		The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator
		The Counsellor
The Third Day	November	The Kitchen Assistant
		The P.E. Teacher
		The Instructor (Construction, Painting and Decorating)
The Fourth Day	December	The Deputy Head (Curriculum)
		The English Teacher
The Fifth Day	June	The Head
		Two male Year 11 students
		The Deputy Head (Pastoral)
		The Head

3.4 Transcribing the interviews

As described, I recorded all the interviews using a digital Dictaphone and then began the process of verbatim transcription. I was a novice at this skill and it quickly became clear to me that, as I was inexperienced as a transcriber, professional support would be necessary. A colleague introduced me to a transcriber who completed the task for me, returning transcriptions very quickly following my submission of the recordings. I spent time listening to the recordings and then turning to the transcriptions, familiarising myself with the differences between the impact of the spoken words as opposed to the written script. The transcriber had included all the words that were used so, for example, in the Head's script there were dozens of repetitions of the phrase, 'you know'. The transcriber had also included the occasional (sighs) to indicate the pause in the flow of speech. However, I quickly realised the importance of having been in the interviews myself as not only could I hear the tone of voice with its variations of speed, character and volume when I moved from the recording to the page but also picture the interviewee, the environment in which we were set and all kinds of indicators about the person concerned ranging from appearance, body movements, facial expressions and gestures to the ability or desire to make eye-contact. Thinking back, I am glad that I attempted the process of transcription myself as I experienced an intimacy with the texts I worked on that remained with me throughout the research process.

3.5 Analysing the data

Before I moved further into analysing the data I needed to decide exactly what I wanted it to do. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011)

There were 15 conversations. I wanted to capture the responses from each of the 13 participants so that collectively, they could throw light on the answer to my research question, 'Can PRUs work?'

I wanted the data to generate themes that arose from among the choices participants made when they answered the question. I believed that if I collected their 'Yes, *because*' and 'No, *because*' responses, a pattern might develop.

I had established already, in my questionnaire, a number of themes that I believed would emerge and allowed for the possibility that others might do so, in which case I would record their presence. I was determined to include all 15 participants in the opinion-forming, theme emerging process.

I had to make a decision, at an early stage, about the grouping of the data. There were four conversations with the Head that took place in September, November and June of one academic year. I could group them together. I could put the young people's conversations into another group. I could put teachers in another and non-teaching staff into yet another. I had to decide '*whether to present data individual by individual and then amalgamate key issues emerging across the individuals*' or, and I thought long and hard about this, I could '*proceed by working within a largely pre-determined analytical frame of issues that crosses the individual concerned.*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011: 539)

As already indicated, I had a '*frame of issues*'; perhaps this was the way forward.

After further reading and listening to the transcriptions and recordings, I decided that I did not want to lose the richness of the conversations and the personalities of the participants by breaking into them and extracting themes to move elsewhere. I wanted to '*keep the flavour of the original data*' and '*report direct phrases and sentences*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011: 539) as I believed this would be much more engaging and revealing than my interpretation of their talk. I also wanted to '*be faithful to the exact words used*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011: 539), as I believed those words would have enormous impact on my reader.

I also decided that I would present each conversation in turn, in the order that I held them. I would group them by the day and present the character and mood of the day to support my reader's understanding of the process.

I began the text analysis by allocating a code to each participant. As agreed with the Head I used the initials of the job title of each adult and the gender and year group of the young people to protect their identities. (See Appendix 3 (c)(i)) I then coded the list of issues that I had included in the questionnaire. This allowed me to read through the transcriptions annotating them as I went with the issues codes in the

margin. I set out on this task with great enthusiasm but quickly realised what a mammoth enterprise I had taken on. I had been warned about the enormous quantity of data such an activity generates (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011) but the reality was challenging. I knew about the availability of coding software but decided that I would carry on with paper and pencil.

I produced an analysis of each participant's responses (See Diagrams: Thematic Analysis (Individual) for examples 1 & 2. See Appendix 3 (c)(ii) for examples 3-9) using the themes codes and noted the additional themes that he or she brought forward. When I had completed all of them, I went back and produced the information in an opposite format, listing the themes and sub-themes and noting the participant who referred to them (see Appendix 3 (c)(iii) and (iv)).

Diagram 1: Thematic Analysis (Individual)

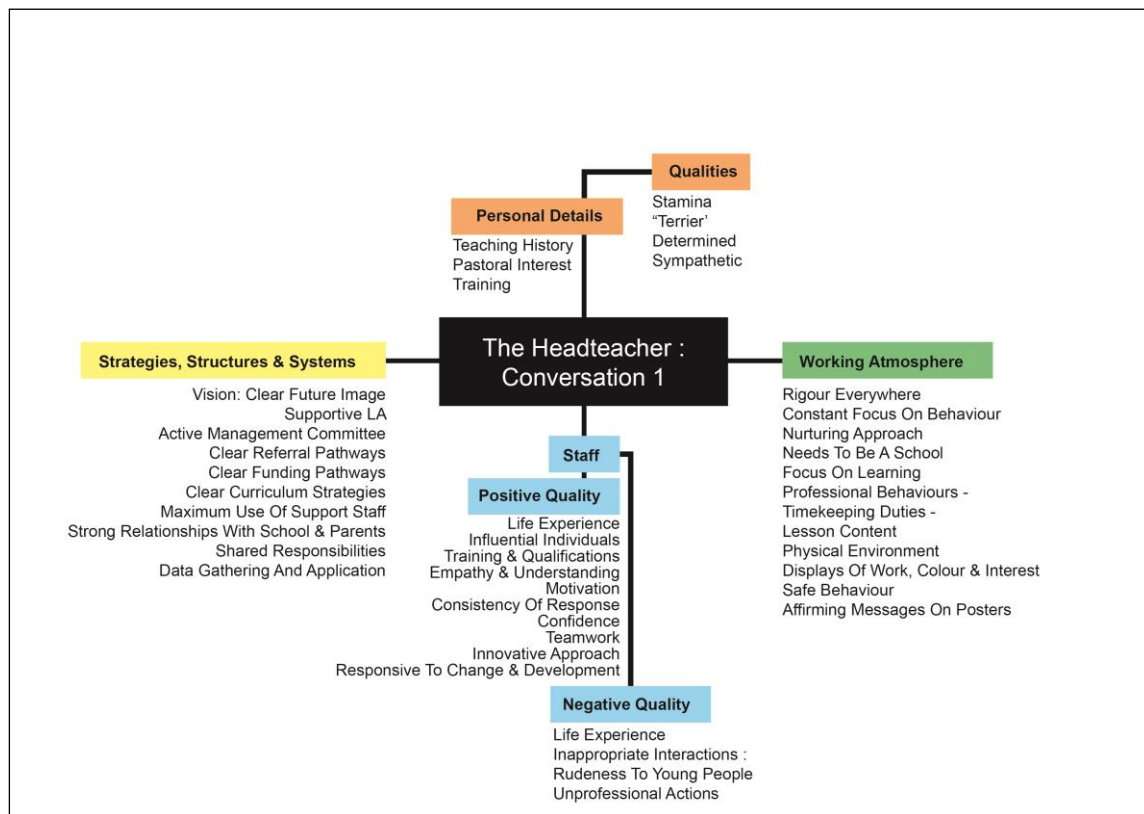
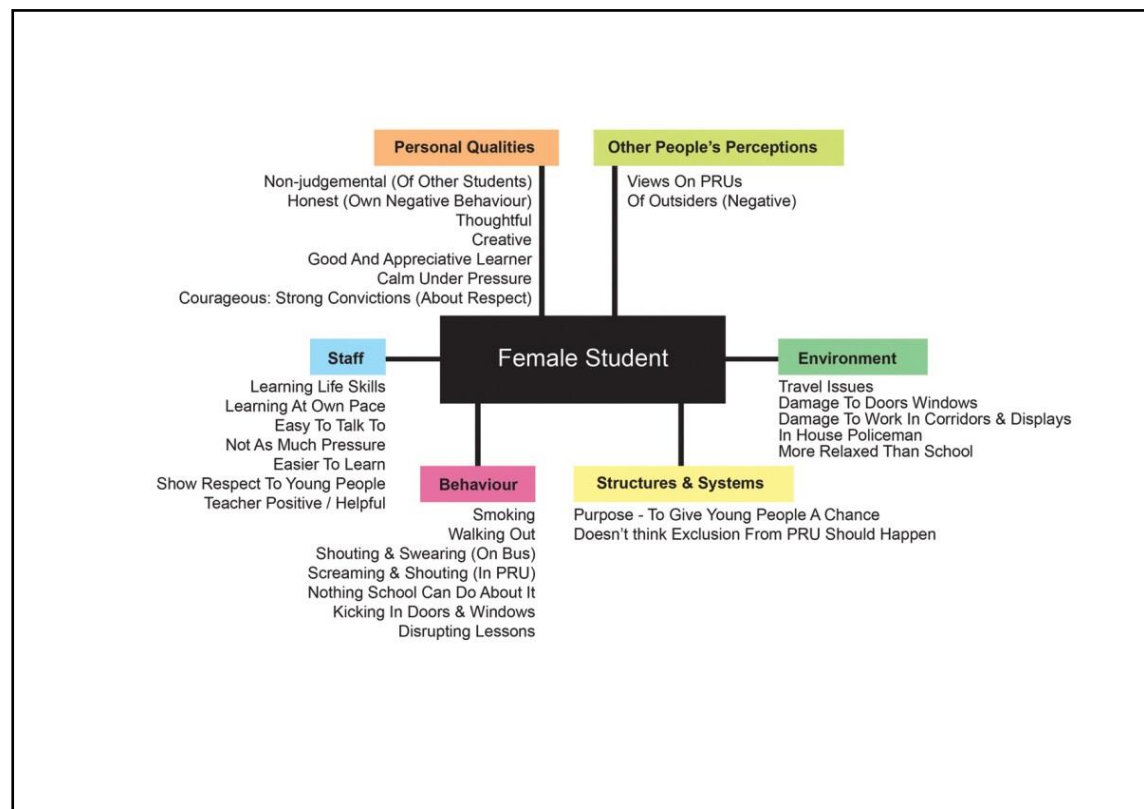


Diagram 2: Thematic Analysis (Individual)



In this way, a picture emerged of each individual's responses and a second picture of the number of people who referred to a particular theme.

I then moved on to consider the presentation of the data. Having decided I wanted to bring the character of each individual to the page and to highlight their contributions to the themes, I became aware of the role I now had to play, in selecting the key moments and passages and interpreting them for meaning. *'Data are so rich that that analysis involves much selecting and ordering on the part of the researcher'*. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011: 540)

I worked on the selection carefully but I think in my anxiety not to leave out what seemed to me to be revealing and relevant, I have included too much for my reader. I was aware that what I was doing was presenting a new, narrative account of a past event and that it was inevitably coloured by my interpretation of all that had taken place.

I decided that I could alleviate the impact of my presence in the data by removing my spoken words from the conversation and leaving the participant to speak for him or herself. However, I do intrude from time to time in reaction to what is said and I set each conversation into its time and place context, using the first person to do so.

The researcher is not an objective narrator who stands outside or above the written text; she or he is present in the writing. By visibly reflecting on her or his own positions in the writing as a researcher, she or he dismantles the illusion of direct representation and of the 'detached' researcher with her or his all-seeing eye/I. (Sermijn, J., Devlieger, P., Loots, G. 2008: 636)

Having admitted my presence in the written presentations of the participants, I believe that I have dispelled any illusion that I am detached from the process. They are as I saw, heard and read about them.

The inclusion of interpretative links between key passages and comments in the presentations is my way of *'framing reality'* (Denzin 1997: 224-225) and elucidating the various strands of each interview into a cohesive whole.

I had made an assault on my mountain; at this median point I felt I had gained height and a better understanding of my enterprise. A good deal of the climb had been more challenging than I expected and I had been obliged to adjust my route and deviate around obstacles. However, the view from this plateau was in many ways, utterly inspiring.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Exposition

As I began the data analysis process I was exhilarated by the amount I had amassed. My early questionnaire had given me a useful overview of PRU issues. My diary and recorded impressions during the gathering process were supportive personal records. The research PRU's Ofsted reports from 2011 and 2013 illustrated its recent history and its forward progression; the Head's report to the Management Committee for the academic year 2011-12 gave helpful background to the data gathering interviews I carried out in that year.

In this chapter I outline the results of the questionnaire, give background information about the PRU, present the interviews chronologically tracing the emergence of themes as they arise. In Chapter 5 I offer a broader analysis that brings the data together thematically.

The staff and students of my research PRU were generous with their time. I held fifteen interviews and shared a total of ten and a half hours with the participants, which I was able to relive through the recordings and verbatim transcriptions. As described in the previous chapter, I spent time listening to the recordings, focussing not only on the content but also on their different tones of voice and non-verbal sounds. In the analyses I aspire to capture not only meaning but also the mood and feelings that might underlie their talk.

Underpinning the interview analyses will be references to the work of Parsons on exclusion and to a number of theories I explored in the literature review. My major references are to theories of punishment (Cavadino and Dignan 2007) and Foucault; leadership theory using West-Burnham's (2014) *Seven Propositions about School Leadership* as a framework; social rules system theory (Burns and Machado 2014) which considers rule making and identity in social settings and to concepts of the term 'resilience' (Fredrikson and Branigan 2005). I held these theories in my mind as I progressed applying their constructs to the data to illuminate the issues and achieve a richer understanding of them.

4.1 The questionnaire

As reported in Chapter 1, I presented the questionnaire to a conference of PRU heads and managers in 2010. Of 120 delegates, 74 responded to it; an encouraging 62%. An analysis of their responses to the six questions offered a number of impressions that helped me to predict some of the issues that might arise in the interview data.

Question 1 asked the Heads to decide on the relative importance of the following aims of a PRU and then highlight the most important of them.

The aim of a PRU is:

- a) To replicate as far as possible, mainstream school curriculum and public examination opportunities for young people.
- b) To work to support change in a young person's attitudes, behaviour and/or conditions that brought him/her out of mainstream into the PRU.
- c) To support a return to mainstream education if appropriate and possible.
- d) To provide excluded young people with life skills to support their future roles in society.
- e) To support schools in working with their challenging pupils.
- f) To support the wellbeing of the local community by keeping excluded people off the streets and in a purposeful environment.

50% of the respondents selected (b) as their most important aspiration. The second most important in their view was (d); 29% of the respondents selected this. With this evidence, I felt that it was reasonable to assume that I might find an emphasis in the research PRU on therapeutic and behaviour intervention programmes and on 'life-skills' courses.

Question 2 asked the Heads to make a judgement on which of these aims they were most successful in achieving in their PRUs. 37% claimed that they were most successful in achieving aim (d). 28% selected (b). I noted the reversal in the strongest responses and wondered whether there was any significance to be attached to it. I was interested to discover whether *'changes in attitude, behaviour and/or conditions'* might be more difficult to achieve than *'preparation for the future'* and to what extent they were intertwined. I hoped to find information about strategies and their outcomes from the interview data.

Question 3 asked the Heads to give current numbers of boys and girls in their PRUs. The total number of boys attending the PRUs represented at the conference was 3439. The total number of girls was 1057. This preponderance of boys was not a surprising outcome to me: it is some years since Parsons highlighted this trend (Parsons 1999: 25). The latest Department for Education figures available (2014-2015: 5) reveal that boys were *'over three times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion and almost three times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than girls'*. I looked forward to discovering whether this situation applied in the research PRU.

Question 4 asked the Heads to give current numbers of male and female members of staff working in their PRUs. The total number of male staff working in the PRUs represented at the conference was 636. The number of female staff was 1344. I was intrigued by this outcome and have not found any reference to this discrepancy in the literature. I looked forward to discovering whether the research PRU operated on a similar basis and perhaps drawing some conclusions about the imbalance and whether it has impact on the PRU management and the young people attending there.

Question 5 asked the Heads to describe their PRU.

Is your PRU

- (a) Purpose built?
- (b) Housed in a former school or part of a former school?
- (c) Housed on a school site but physically separated from it?

(d) Part of a hospital site or other specialist environment?

(e) Other – (Please describe briefly)

The two largest responses were (b) and (e) both with 30; 'Other' ranged from 'converted office block' to 'wherever we can find a space' (See Appendix 1(b)). I was interested to learn about the environment of the research PRU and about the degree of importance its population gave to their surroundings. Studies on the importance of the 'physical configuration' of learning spaces point to their significance in altering or moulding behaviour (Barker *et al.*: 2009). I was keen to discover what the strengths and limitations of the research PRU's internal and external spaces might be.

Question 6 asked the Heads to indicate the relative strength of the challenges they faced in their roles. They were then asked to highlight the strongest challenge from the list.

Please circle your responses to the following:

The main challenges in managing a PRU are

(a) Dealing with challenging behaviour

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(b) Finding and keeping quality staff

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(c) Providing appropriate, good quality learning opportunities for each young person referred

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(d) Managing physical resources within budget

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(e) Preparing for inspections

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(f) Managing staff stress

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(g) Maintaining quality relationships with the Management Committee

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(h) Maintaining quality relationships with schools

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(i) Maintaining quality relationships with the LEA

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(j) Falling numbers of referrals due to cluster managed moves and in house/in cluster provision for fixed term excluded

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(k) Other: please specify briefly

Which of these challenges do you think is the most demanding?

Please circle one of the following: a b c d e f g h i j k

In these responses, (e) and (b) were the largest numbers in the 'Very Challenging' category totalling 26 and 22 respectively; (a) and (f) followed each with 19. Response (d) emerged as the overall 'Most challenging' issue the Heads dealt with. I surmised that this might reflect the managerial role of the participants in the survey but also noted the weight given to '*managing staff stress*' alongside '*dealing with challenging behaviour*'. I looked forward to learning more.

The questionnaire had been directed towards PRU heads and had been intended to reveal the relative importance of different management issues as viewed by the Head. However, in examining the interview data that I had collected from a range of

people in the PRU it became clear that most of these issues, albeit from different standpoints, concerned staff and students alike, to a greater or lesser degree.

For example, Question 6 on the questionnaire refers to '*dealing with challenging behaviour*'.

All the research participants referred to challenging behaviour at some point and commented on their perception of it and its impact upon them.

As a second example, Question 6 also asks about the issue of '*finding and keeping quality staff*'.

Although the young people I interviewed do not view the issue of staff from this managerial standpoint, they had comments to make on the staff that feed into the issue as a whole. Other members of the staff team comment on their journeys to the PRU, on the nature of their tasks, their motivation in performing their roles and the issues they face.

I felt confident that the representative nature of the respondents to the questionnaire justified my using the issues it confirmed as a framework for the emerging themes from the interview data.

4.2 Shaping the interview data

I considered grouping the interviews, perhaps putting the Head's four separate sessions into one group, the teaching and instructing staff into another, the kitchen assistant into another and the students into yet another category. However, I finally decided that I would avoid this hierarchical model, with all the potential implications of such a structure, and present the data in the chronological sequence that I collected them over five days from September to June of a school year. I planned to share my thoughts and feelings as I approached each day and to bring each participant to life in the order I met them. I would set the scene of each encounter, capture their mood and mine and draw out the essence of their opinions, experiences and concerns for my reader.

As I began the process I was determined to be mindful of the criteria of the case study, as set by Hitchcock & Hughes (1995: 317).

It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case

- It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events
- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case and the case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report

I found this a very helpful checklist and used it as a guide as I set off on the next section of my mountain.

4.3 Information about the PRU

Before tackling the climb, I include further background detail illustrating the PRU to support what follows.

As described in Chapter 3 the research PRU is located in a northern city, is a Local Authority managed service and takes Year 10 and 11 referrals from across the urban area. The Head's report (2011-2012) to the Management Committee gives the number on roll as 59 with a further 21 who had come on and off the roll during the year. Attendance figures show an overall rate of 58% for the year up to May 2012. Exclusion figures are given by term (number of days) and gender: a total of 83 days for male students and 32 for female. Examination entries show that 27 of 29 Year 11 students will take public examinations at some level.

There are 40 members of staff; only 4 are qualified teachers. The report lists movements and appointments through the year.

Under premises, it lists the types and cost of student damage to the PRU. The total cost of such damage is £3025.

In the Development Plan is included the aspiration to bring about 'behaviour change' as opposed to dwelling on 'behaviour management'.

4.4 The First Day: September

First visit; first impressions; first recording



My first impression as I arrived at the PRU was of the considerable size of the building. Dating from the 1960s, it was a former primary school with enormous quantities of green space around it. On a sunny day like this one, it offered an encouraging prospect: it certainly looked like a school. Its position on the top of a hill allowed for an extensive view over the adjacent housing estate and then to the city beyond.

We negotiated the security entrance system, and I was greeted by name by the reception team. They evidently operated a strict visitor admission policy as I signed the book and accepted my identity badge. It was calm and quiet. These details

helped me feel comfortable: I had visited some PRUs where tension was evident from the moment I entered the building.

I knew the Head well and was aware that this would mean my encounters with her would be different from others I would experience in the PRU.

I also knew that, although newly appointed as Head, she was no stranger to the PRU as she had worked alongside temporary heads at the unit in an advisory role for two terms prior to her appointment. The Local Authority had recognised the major problems that were presented at the Unit but were unable to close it such was the demand in the city for places for young people excluded from school. It was the only Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit in the city.

She had 12 years of experience working in PRUs in two different Local Authorities and had achieved two Outstanding Ofsted judgements under her leadership. Immediately before her permanent appointment the PRU had emerged from Special Measures as it was judged that progress was being made in all areas. (See Appendix 4 for 2011 Ofsted report summary). However, there remained challenging issues to address and a strong demand from the Local Authority for an improvement in standards across the board, both in academic achievement and behaviour management.

4.4.1 The first conversation with the Head

Staff

In response to my first question, 'Can PRUs work?' the Head speaks immediately about the critical importance of quality staff.

'Staff are absolutely key.'

She points to the positive qualities and characteristics she looks for in her staff, many of them embedded in skilled management and understanding of the issues that arise in the specialised PRU environment.

For her, the kinds of young people who present these persistent challenging behaviours and find themselves constantly in conflict with school authority *'improve*

with staff who know what these kids are like, who can appreciate the family backgrounds and all the reasons that come with why these kids misbehave’.

She recalls her own experience as a novice teacher in a large secondary school.

‘It had lots of support to do with my own training. I was sent on courses and I did receive INSET and we had some very good behaviour specialists come into the school who really inspired me and I thought actually, ‘There’s a different way to do this’.

So for this Head, staff who share her belief that there is *‘a different way to do this’* are critical to the success of the enterprise. However, those same members of staff, alongside an empathetic approach, have also to possess a clear understanding of the learning needs of the young people.

She describes the make- up of the staff at her new PRU. There are 40 in the team she has inherited but only 4 of them are qualified teachers. One is an NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher); others are Instructors, Higher Level Teaching Assistants and Classroom Assistants. Her first impression is that the lack of a strong leadership team for the previous few years has led to inconsistency in how behaviour is managed and a lack of confidence in believing that change is not only desirable but possible. She illustrates this by reference to the use of mobile phones in the PRU.

‘When I first came they were out persistently, there was texting and use of phones in lessons and in the corridor, 24/7 the kids had mobile phones and I thought, ‘Right, I’ve got to stop this’.

The Year 11 public examinations were used as a justification for the surrender of the phones on entry to the PRU; having written to parents and informed the young people of what was to happen the procedure was strictly followed. Only one young person refused to comply and had to be sent home. Alongside the implementation of the ‘surrender’ measure, was reassurance that the phones would be kept under strict security while out of the young people’s possession. A series of positive message posters were displayed in the PRU thanking the young people for their co-operation. In half a term it has receded to the background as a problem.

'I think the staff are pretty amazed because I don't think they thought they could achieve that.'

Building on their growing confidence by demonstrating clear expectations and a determination to work through difficult situations are key strategies in the Head's approach to staff management in her new post. She is encouraged by the quality of her two Deputies *'who are absolutely super and passionate'*. One is a teacher who has moved from a mainstream secondary position; the other has worked in the Youth Service and has responsibility for the pastoral care of the young people. Both had already given *'structure and strength'* to the PRU.

'That's where my focus has been first and foremost, before I start getting into the classroom to look at teaching and learning. Initially that had been my first, but it's not actually, my first priority is getting consistency in the way the staff manage behaviour'.

However, the subtle business of consistency in managing challenging behaviour proves difficult to pin down. She describes the conflict between the need for consistency of response and meeting the challenge of a specific situation.

'I did make a mistake, one of my pregnant schoolgirls came in and she said 'Look I really need to have the phone you know', and I said, 'Ok but you know, this is a private arrangement'. And you know, she got it out and it caused mayhem. And at briefing at the end of the day I said, 'Listen guys, I got it wrong. I take responsibility for that.'

She gives a further example.

'Three of our kids turned up yesterday morning, a little bit late and they appeared to be stoned. The Deputy Head met them at the door and one of them said, 'Yeah I've just had a spliff and he's had a toke and he's had a toke'. [He] made the decision that they were calm and ready to come into the PRU saying, 'You can't bring drugs into the PRU. You need to go away and dispose of them if you've got them, you can't be smoking or dealing drugs but if you're in the PRU and your behaviour's acceptable, that's fine'. At the end of the day, at the review, some staff, and it was only a couple, were outraged that those kids didn't get sent home. Now my take on that was that

[he] was absolutely right because every case you have to deal with on its merits. This particular member of staff wants it black and white, 'What's the policy? I said, 'It ain't black and white, it will never be black and white, it's on its own merits'.

In the first example, she admits her mistake to the staff for not following the '*black and white*' rules, for not being consistent and for mistakenly assuming she had influence over the student; in the second example, she supports her Deputy who stepped into the grey area.

Listening to her I can appreciate why these two occasions might give rise to confusion among those members of staff who were being exhorted to be consistent in their responses. Her understanding of '*a different way to do this*' evidently involves being able to evaluate a difficult situation '*on its own merits*' and take action accordingly. Her staff, in their lesser roles, might not feel they have the freedom to interpret the rules in this way. This is an intriguing issue and recalls the thinking of Burns and Machado (2014) on rules, decision-making and hierarchical structures.

She describes the INSET (In-Service Training) days that have already been held to support improved staff behaviour management skills and consistency of response when staff were asked to '*come up with five or six things that were not working well, drilling down on them, trying to agree things that will work*'.

She has introduced a behaviour item on every staff meeting agenda and a staff briefing that is held every morning and every afternoon to talk through pertinent issues, keep all staff up to date and agree strategies and expectations.

However, at her new PRU, as at her previous posts, there were some members of staff who appeared not to enjoy their work or the company of young people.

'You know, greeting the kids with, 'Oh it's you again.' I mean of course it's them again, you work in a PRU.'

Some have shown their reluctance to support her initiatives.

'I think the difficulty that some staff have presented could be a bit two-faced, that, 'Yes, yes, yes', to your face and then they don't do what you've asked them to do, so

a little bit of digging in about, you know, 'Oh yeah, we'll do that', but then you know turn round, 'I'm not doing that'. A little bit of that going on, not a lot.'

She describes the *'background history'* of her PRU as *'slack'* and ascribes this to a lack of a *'substantive head teacher'* and *'the lack of a strong leadership team'*. Staff absence has been an issue and *'a little bit of a culture about, 'Oh by the way I've got a dental appointment at 10 o'clock''*. Allied to the perceived lack of consistency in *'how we manage behaviour'* tackling this *'culture'* has been the Head's priority.

'You know again, I'm not scared about challenging staff, and you know I have had difficult conversations with staff, because you do.' The head feels that some members of staff in this PRU are not equipped to do their jobs.

'There's a good number who have very poor literacy skills. Their ICT is diabolical.'

She is keen to recruit more skilled people, like her two deputies. *'Because at the end of the day if you've got a poor PRU who in their right mind is going to come and, you know, work here?'*

She experienced the transforming power of teamwork on the staff in her previous PRU and is keen to develop this culture of mutual support. She believes she is having some impact in the staffroom.

'You know, the eyes up to the ceiling in the staff room, actually it's just one person doing that now, or two at the most, which is great, because the others are saying, 'Actually when we do work together we've got a strong team, things do work', and I really, really, you know, believe that. I've got a lot of personal resilience and energy and I really believe if the staff work together the place will change. At the INSET day in September, two weeks ago, the staff were going, 'Yeah, you know, it does feel different, it feels better.'

'We're a long way off being good but we're on the road, we're heading in the right direction. We're going up which you know is a good feeling.'

Her conversation reveals her strong sense of responsibility for her leadership role in the staff team. She encapsulates the West-Burnham principles of leadership (2014) in her focus on the core purpose of the PRU, her faith in teamwork and in her

'personal authenticity'. It might not be entirely true to say, as propounded in the first of his principles, that a leader is *'strategic, not operational'* as she is evidently directly involved in operational issues and events but her vision of the future and steadfast conviction of purpose are clear indications of the leadership qualities he describes.

Her personal qualities and *'her personal authenticity'* are crucially important to her leadership. Her Deputy had called her *'tenacious'*. She welcomes the description.

'Last week [the Deputy Head] said to me, 'You are the most tenacious person I have ever come across!' And it's because I am, if I've got to be, I'm like a terrier, if I believe in something I will hang on to it until it's done.'

She refers to another of her strengths.

'I think part of my resilience is I think I am realistic about the lives of these kids.'

Her claims echo directly three of the concepts of resilience proposed by Fredrikson & Branigan (2005). She demonstrates:

- The ability to make realistic plans and being capable of taking the steps necessary to follow through with them;
- A positive self-concept and confidence in one's strengths and abilities; and
- Communication and problem-solving skills.

She paints a picture of her past experience which she feels has led her to a better understanding of some of the young people's issues and contributed to her resilience.

She refers to her own troubled school days, *'I did present my own challenges in school'* and to her late arrival in teaching at the age of 30. She quickly found that she was drawn to pastoral management. *'I've always had sort of empathy maybe with kids who were challenging, who were struggling in school.'*

She talks of the importance of the behaviour management training she experienced and of her enthusiastic move to a PRU when the opportunity arose.

'Very quickly, within three months of being there I was promoted to acting head, the existing head was promoted elsewhere and eventually I became the substantive head and stayed there for six years.'

Her rapid progress indicates that others have recognised her skills, abilities and resilience under pressure.

Early in the conversation the Head asserted that her staff need to have a sound understanding not only of the young people's emotional needs and the issues that brought them into the PRU but also their learning needs. However, she does not refer again to their learning needs or to any aspect of the curriculum or to the quality of classroom teaching. For her, these things must wait while she tackles her priority; achieving consistency in the behaviour management skills of the staff.

I have reflected on her claim that she felt, while in mainstream that there was *'a different way to do this'*. She ascribes her conviction to the influence of inspirational behaviour management specialists who came into her school to lead staff training. This implies that she was out of sympathy with the strategies adopted in her mainstream school. She uses words like *'empathetic'*, *'non-judgemental'* and *'nurturing'* in an attempt to describe the approach that she is seeking and points to the numbers of children in a mainstream class as being the main reason why staff might not be able to adopt such attitudes in mainstream. It may be that she found mainstream attitudes to difference antipathetic, judgemental and impersonal (my attempt at the opposite of *'nurturing'*) but we did not draw this out in the conversation. There are echoes here of Parsons and his claim that schools do not do enough to address the needs of the different.

'Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?' (2005: 187)

The two anecdotes related by the Head and the confusion they demonstrate between *'sticking to the rules'* and *'breaking the rules'* when the merits of the situation are weighed in the balance seem to me to reflect her understanding of *'a different way to do this'*. She wants PRU staff to be able to think for themselves and be pro-active in their responses to managing behaviour, in other words, to be more like her, but she

also wants *'consistency'*. This is a difficult area. However, at this point in her new role she is confident that she has the *'stamina'* and *'resilience'*, tenacity, creativity and experience to lead the team forward.

Environment

It is clear that the Head is a staunch believer in the PRU model. Staff are crucial in creating the *'sort of nurturing environment'* that she believes is essential. For her, this aspect of their work is what sets them apart from mainstream.

'Mainstream schools can cope with just about any type of special need except behaviour. I mean, this is me talking here, I'm sure there's lots of evidence out there to back up what I'm saying that mainstream colleagues, time and time again, do not want kids who present with challenging behaviour.'

She is sympathetic towards her mainstream colleagues and understands that challenging behaviour in large classes can be impossible to manage for any length of time.

'I go back to having you know 20 or 30 kids in a class and all your energies are taken up 95% of the time with 5% of the kids. You can't sustain it over the long term.'

She believes, as mentioned earlier, that staff who *'know what these kids are like'*, have an understanding of the family backgrounds they might come from and are *'willing and able to teach'* in the PRU, can have a real impact on change for the young people.

'I think it's really important that these kids understand that they're here for an education, albeit an alternative one, but they do need to know that this is a school.'

She thinks the PRU building itself is not appropriate in many ways but particularly in relation to its size.

'This building we're in at the moment is very large, and it's a bit unwieldy and it becomes a bit of a playground.'

The Head ascribes great importance to the *'environment'* of a PRU and it is clear that she has both the emotional and physical environment in mind. Staff are the *'key'*;

they must create a *'nurturing'* culture and, at the same time, work to *'retain a real school atmosphere'*. I have reflected on the Head's meaning of both these expressions. 'Nurturing' implies a supportive, personal involvement with the young people where concern for their welfare is explicit and sustained; a 'real school atmosphere' seems to be set in opposition to this concept. It implies that the business of teaching and learning is necessarily different in approach and process. Learning demands responses from the young people and lays expectations of measurable achievements on them; teaching lays expectations of measurable outcomes on the teaching staff; both are overlaid with everyone's past experience of 'a real school' where measurement and judgement are constants. It will be interesting to track this duality of thinking through the data.

Structures and systems

I have already noted the systems the Head has adopted in the very short space of time that she has been at the PRU to support the management of challenging behaviour. Staff briefings, focussed In-Service training (Inset) and a carefully executed plan for the removal of mobile phones from the classrooms have all been successfully implemented.

A further innovation is her use of affirming poster messages.

'What I've done for every new thing like this that I've brought on board, I've put a poster or posters up, simple positive posters. It doesn't say, no mobile phones, it says something cheesy like if you choose to bring your phone, it will be handed in to the box, you know, we really appreciate you doing that. Thanks!'

This non-confrontational, personal approach is the kind of behaviour management strategy favoured by Rogers (2015) who advocates the use of positive statements as opposed to negative in classroom interventions and particularly champions the use of the word *'Thanks'* as a way of concluding an interaction. She adopts such an approach instinctively and builds her personal behaviour management strategy upon it.

She is also working to reduce the number of exclusions from the PRU. The practice of sending young people home when a breakdown occurs is well established and

she is determined to eradicate this system of management. She follows Parsons (1999:1) in finding the process too easily adopted. The incident she referred to earlier when her deputy allowed three young people into the PRU who were under the influence of drugs tested the system but she is determined it must be the way forward.

'At the end of the day the only reason I turn kids away from the PRU is behaviour, not drugs [...] If you want to turn away kids who have had a smoke today or are still under the influence of last night, a quarter, if not half of my kids will walk out the door and I'm not having that. I would rather they were here, we know what they're doing, they're protected, they're safe, they can come down during the day and go home. I'll only send home if we cannot manage their behaviour.'

I learned from the Management Report the Head produced at the end of the academic year for her Management Committee, that there were 79 exclusion events from the PRU in the Autumn Term in which most of my visits took place. I also learned that there were, eventually, 59 students on roll. I deduce therefore that there must have been 79 occasions when they could not 'manage the behaviour' of one of the students (although there may have been multiple occasions with the same student) and I began to gain a better understanding of the Head's urgent implementation of systems to support better understanding and management of behaviour.

One of the systems in place that I learned about on the first day, but not from the Head, is the arrangement with the local police that allows for a constable to visit the PRU and be visible in corridors and social spaces, meeting with the young people in relaxed settings. I wondered about the impact of this arrangement on some of the young people whose experience of the police might not be positive but was assured that both the PRU and the police found the arrangement productive. The Head never refers to the PRU as an instrument of punishment but it occurred to me that the presence of a policeman might reinforce this perception for young people who may have been excluded from school but were not involved in offending behaviour. Her focus is on the 'restorative' purpose of the PRU; the policeman's presence seemed to me to speak more of the 'deterrent' and possibly 'retributive' nature of the PRU as punishment, differences examined in the Literature Review.

A further issue that arises in our conversation concerns her relationship with the Local Education Authority. She is pleased that she will have her own devolved budget in the next academic year and is interested in the move towards academy status for PRUs. In the following comments she reveals her frustration at the limitations placed on her ambitions through being 'directly managed' by the authority. It is clear that in addition to the emotionally challenging nature of her leadership role in the PRU she experiences strong emotional responses to directives from the authority. One of the concepts of 'resilience' (Fredrikson & Branigan (2003) concerns the *'ability to manage strong feelings and impulses'*.

There is some evidence in the interview that she does experience those *'strong feelings'* but is apparently, as far as I can tell from this encounter, able to manage them appropriately.

'I think in the current climate becoming an academy is something that in this particular PRU, in this authority, I would seek to do. Not that I don't want to work with the local authority. I would want to maintain really strong links because we do need partners and partnerships.'

Being independent of the authority's financial control, however, is an exhilarating prospect for her.

'Certainly I think if we had sort of carte blanche to run this place as we want to on some sort of business model, I think it would be fantastic.'

She refers to some of the issues that arise as a result of being a directly managed service. The PRU had, for example, been specifically for full-time permanently excluded children but local authority pressure had led to additional children on site, presenting with different needs and posing management problems.

'If I think about dual registered kids, at the moment they're only coming for ten weeks, five days a week for ten weeks. In the past it has been a really ad hoc system. I don't think it's unusual but it's challenging.'

She was currently being pressured to take a student with a statement of special educational needs because, apparently, there was no other available provision for him.

'When you start you know having pressure on you, like yesterday we'd got nowhere to put a fully statemented 15 year old, his place is residential, he needs wraparound care, won't engage, won't do this, 'We want him to come to the PRU', and my question was, 'Why do you want him to come to the PRU? I don't understand.' And the argument was nobody else will take him. To me, that's not an argument. I asked, 'Why hasn't this boy been offered B (our local EBD school)? It's four miles down the road and they've got space'. 'Oh well, we had a meeting and we just felt they couldn't meet his needs' Now I've never met this lady I was on the phone to, she's never visited here, the care home where he stays has never visited here, why are they assuming that he can just suddenly, out of the blue pluck him out of the blue and send him here?'

In spite of her indignation, and her suspicions that the local authority is seeking the cheapest provision, she has agreed to meet the boy.

'Because, and this is where you know, I said I've still got a mallet that can sometimes take a chink out of a stone.'

She is obviously confident that she can bring about change in the behaviours and attitudes of the most challenging young people. Mallet in hand she is positive and optimistic about the immediate future and imagines herself constantly chipping away at issues as they arise. She is confident that the majority of her staff is supportive of her 'terrier' like approach and that she has the personal skills and qualities to lead them forward.

The themes of her conversation were clearly established by the Head herself. The most prominent is her absolute conviction that skilled, assertive and committed staff are essential to the successful running of the PRU. The second is the key importance of the emotional and physical environment of the PRU and the third is the necessity of establishing robust systems for the management of staff and students. Of further

importance is the maintenance of sound processes and relationships with the local authority and the referring mainstream schools.

She showed me round the building and I began to appreciate her comment about its size. There were two floors of classrooms and offices, a large hall and workshop spaces, an art room and a small ICT suite evidently equipped for music technology. A number of the spaces had a run-down air with ceiling tiles dislodged and dilapidated décor but in others there were impressive facilities. The hairdressing room was fully equipped and operated as a salon; there was a room filled with various items of gym equipment. The walls of the corridors had a number of murals and a few displays on them and, in the dining hall, I noticed the Head's positive posters. The size and number of the various spaces made me wonder about the number of students attending the PRU. There were approximately 40 on roll in the second week of September but I only saw about a dozen on that day.

I had lunch with one of the teachers who spoke positively about the impact the new head was having on staff confidence levels in dealing with challenging young people. I had a conversation with the Kitchen Assistant and watched the relaxed interactions between the young people and three members of staff who were eating with them, sitting together at long tables. It seemed to be an organised and productive environment.

However, this was not altogether an accurate impression. In my reflections on the day, I record a number of incidents that took place in the afternoon. Two boys were excluded for consistently flouting the house rules on smoking; a fight in a corridor between two further boys necessitated intervention from the Deputy Head; the physical separation of the boys followed by one to one support for both of them in quiet places and thirdly, a girl slipped on a puddle and an ambulance was called to take her to hospital as her injuries had included a bang on the head. These events took place alongside the daily activities of the PRU and gave an overwhelming impression of the unpredictable nature of the environment. They also gave me an insight into the staffing levels required, the range of demands made on the staff and the skills required to meet them.

I left the PRU feeling I had learned a great deal that would help me in my quest to discover whether PRUs can 'work' for the young people who attend them. I recorded some impressions, a few minutes after my departure.

'I'm sitting in the car; I've just left the PRU. Amazingly difficult to run a place like that, brings it all back, so much going on and some difficult young people just settling down. They're in a new place a number of them. Lots of disturbance this afternoon; a fight, two lads out, the ambulance; generally high stress levels. But she is the most amazingly calm person, just kept going, dealing with everything.'

We talked about resilience. I met another colleague who used that word without prompting, that resilience. It's about being completely consistent, about being absolutely committed, about being motivated by an absolute focussed desire to improve the lot of young people who've had a tough time. That's a fairly consistent thread.

I had lunch with a teacher who had been pointed out as possibly struggling and she talked positively about the new beginnings. And another colleague who is the counsellor was very positive about her role and was very pleased that the new head had arrived and noticing differences already.'

I talked to myself for some time thinking through impressions and information I had gathered through the day. I could feel my own views about the PRU process being challenged.

'She thinks that the PRU environment can work. Interesting because I felt for a lot of the time I was working in the PRU that without a peer group it was very hard to set norms of behaviour. But she was very committed to the idea.'

I had arranged to return two months later when I would meet with the Head again, and, if matters went according to plan, with a number of members of staff and, if possible, some young people. I felt I had made an important beginning to the data gathering process, with much to reinforce my understanding of the issues raised in the Literature Review.

4.5 The Second Day: November

A day of contrasts; of dark moods and light, of almost despairing negativity followed by beacons of hope.



The second visit was very different from the first. The exposed position of the PRU on the top of a hill surrounded by green space had seemed attractive in September. It was now bleak and cold; the views obscured by scudding black clouds.

4.5.1 The second conversation with the Head

The mood of the Head exactly mirrored the elements. The two major interwoven themes concerning the staff that emerged in the September conversation also emerge on this day, namely the importance of committed, professional members of staff and secondly their consistency and commonality of response in their

management of challenging behaviour. However, the tone of the conversation is entirely different. Difficult issues have arisen in the intervening eight weeks. Consistent responses have evidently been impossible to achieve.

There are 'thirty odd staff, so thirty odd tolerances of behaviour. Behaviour management is very, very poor and behaviour is very poor at the moment.'

The claims that the Head made in September, that staff were encouraged and empowered by her determined and confident approach and that there was only one member of staff who did not seem to be committed to following her example, have been replaced by a plethora of confused, demoralised, impatient and disappointed comments describing the current situation.

'We (the Deputy Head and the Head) just can't seem to get through to staff that they are as responsible for behaviour as we are, and that they have the wherewithal to do something themselves. We've asked staff to be a bit more accountable and sometimes we need to write things down because they're coming in saying, 'There's been a lot of problems with 'x' today and he needs to be excluded' and I'm saying 'Well I can't just exclude'.'

It emerges that exclusion from the unit was common practice under its previous regime and that any member of staff was allowed to make the exclusion decision.

'In the past they have been allowed to exclude. Yes, oh my God! So you might have a teaching assistant phoning up to say 'x' isn't allowed in tomorrow! I've said, 'Legally, I can't allow you to do that any more'.'

I had not expected to hear this: a clearer picture was emerging of the nature of the previous regimes at the PRU and the reasons for the Special Measures judgement from Ofsted. The Head has stipulated that she needs written accounts of incidents that staff feel merit exclusion and a record of the actions staff have taken to address the issue themselves. A pro-forma has been created for their use. What has developed is the over-use by staff of these daily behaviour reports and the recording of actions as 'passed on to the SMT' (Senior Management Team).

'For example, yesterday wasn't a particularly bad day, it was a very normal day, we had 54 what I call 'red strikes', on maybe about twelve kids in total. And it's too many.'

Her frustration is evident.

'The purpose of red strikes was really to record serious unresolved issues that may lead to exclusion.'

However, the kind of issues being referred are those she thinks could and should have been dealt with by the staff using their own de-escalation strategies.

'You know, verbal abuse, out-the-back smoking, things that quite honestly should have been, 'Kids you're getting it wrong, come on, let's get you back in', you know. Or you know, 'That language is not acceptable, I really, really dislike what you're saying there'. But it's now been recorded and then passed on to senior managers to deal with, to do something about.'

As a result of this she is feeling besieged.

'The staff are constantly looking to [the Deputy Head] and me for the answers and we're, we don't have them.'

One of her important innovations was the holding of a daily staff briefing before the pupils arrive and a further meeting at the end of the day. She had been determined to begin these meetings with positive comments; praise for a member of staff or encouraging news on a pupil. Although she is still maintaining the positive beginning to these meetings, they had recently degenerated into complaints about unresolved issues, lack of clarity on rules and a generally depressing rehearsal of the day's negative interactions and events. She is experiencing feelings of failure; a stressful and debilitating novelty for her.

'The de-brief at the end of the day, we're thinking about scrapping it because it's just turning into a moaning session.'

In addition to this general malaise a specific issue is threatening to overwhelm the practice of the unit.

'It's almost as if I've got a bit of anarchy in the staff because last week a member of staff, three kids barged into her room, two of them had pool cues and one of them put his hands on her shoulder and said, 'You're gorgeous miss'. And she felt absolutely devastated that they'd done that and wanted them all excluding and felt very unsafe, very, very threatened. Since then at least four of my other women have publicly, of course, at the end of the day, said, 'I don't feel safe to come to this PRU any more, the boys are using very sexualised language directed at us', which they are, you know, 'Do you want to come and sit on my dick and swivel', you know, that sort of stuff.'

She has tried to persuade these colleagues that de-escalation strategies that include the constant reiteration of calmly expressed rejection and disapproval of such language will eventually reduce its use, the Rogers (2015) approach. Her view is that a PRU is an environment where extremes of language and anti-social behaviour are to be expected and must be absorbed and deflected by staff who must have the resilience to deal with them and redirect them towards change. However, at the same time, she is obliged to deal supportively with those colleagues who find this difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve. She finds the obligation irritating.

'I'm trying to say to them look it's no worse than the kids saying, 'Fuck you, you bitch', it's the same they're just using, they're being provocative because they're getting a reaction. It's almost turning into this mass hysteria.

It almost feels like, you know, a member of staff's felt threatened by a fifteen year old saying, 'You know I'm going to bum you up the arse'. I'm sorry it's get real here, but I can't say that because I've got to do the, 'I'm sorry you know, you're feeling unsafe, what I'm going to suggest to you is when the kids say that, we all say the standard thing of look John, you know, personalise it to the kid, what you're saying I'm finding very offensive, I think it's very disgusting and you need to stop. Repeat it, that's all you need to say, repeat it, do the broken record, they will stop. But if you're going to flare up they're going to think a bit of fun here lads, let's all join in'. But they're not, they're not, they almost don't want to do that.'

I could not prevent a facial expression registering my reaction to her almost casual illustrations of the verbal abuse that she has experienced and her example of the

kind of abusive threats that might be heard. My own experiences of personal abuse, though unpleasant, had been infrequent and not of this nature and although I had dealt with swearing and personal insults directed at colleagues, I realised this sexually charged abuse was beyond my experience.

Her feeling of being besieged by problems and undermined by a lack of support is further highlighted by this comment.

'A lot of my staff smoke and of course, I think smoking gives, it gives the forum. I would say about 40% of my staff smoke and I'm tolerant of it out the back and I've had the ok from the authority to allow them to do that because the alternative is they will demand their lunchtime and a break time and go off site and I would rather they were on site.'

This passage recalls the issue that I noted in her first conversation. Her *'different way to do this'* requires the staff to be imaginative and flexible in their responses to different situations yet at the same time requiring *'consistency of response'* from them. It seems that some of them have not been able or perhaps willing to address this conundrum and prefer to leave the decision making to her as she seems so confident about doing it. It seems to me that they are punishing her for expecting too much from them. The smoking issue is interesting too. It sounds as if the smokers have successfully bullied the Head into submission through compromise as she is obliged to put the safety of the young people before implementing what is effectively, the law of the land.

One of the most positive recent events, in the Head's view, was an INSET day at which a CAMHS nurse, (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) spoke on the developing knowledge of the adolescent brain and inspired the staff with her clear referencing of the kinds of behaviours they were familiar with in the unit.

'The staff were buzzing with it, absolutely buzzing. And it really gave them that insight of where the kids are at in their heads, and they were really, you know, buzzing.'

However, the Head is seeing little evidence of sustained impact on some of the staff in terms of their reactions to the young people.

'It's like, where's that training now? [...]The staff just constantly refer it back to, you know, 'I'm fed up of being sworn at!' And it's like we work in a PRU! [...] Some of the staff go on and on and on with the kids, so the kids become cross again.'

This conversation ends with a revelatory, wistful passage.

'You know, most of the stuff I've got time in the morning when the kids arrive, even if they don't want to engage, walk with them out the back and have that discussion you know. But it's, oh I don't know, it's bloody hard.'

Her resilience is evidently under threat. She has lost weight and is feeling ineffective and frustrated. Her leadership qualities, those of maintaining a clarity of vision and adhering to a core purpose (West-Burnham 2014) are being severely tested. She reveals in the final comment that she is convinced she has not lost her ability to make connections with the most challenging of her young people and is upset and disappointed that some of her staff are not able to deflect the abuse they experience, as she feels she could do.

The major theme emerging from this conversation is her perception of the weaknesses of some of her staff in responding effectively to the kind of behaviour challenges she feels are to be expected in this specialised environment. She uses the word *'poor'* to describe the behaviour but displays no shock or surprise at the nature of it, even in relation to the sexual abuse directed at some of the female members of staff. She is impatient and dispirited. Again, there is no mention of curriculum issues; her whole attention is taken up not by behaviour but by behaviour management

4.5.2 Conversation with a male Year 11 student

My next meeting on Day 2 was with a Year 11 student. He arrived at the Head's office for our meeting while she was in the depths of something near despair in her conversation with me about the PRU's problems and lack of progress. I was obliged to adjust quickly to the new situation, as was she. He had arrived promptly and was evidently relaxed and keen to talk to me.

Thinking it through

In response to my first question about whether the PRU is a good place to be and 'works' for him, he corroborates a number of the Head's observations about the extreme behaviours and language of some of the pupils.

'When you come to a school like this, you have to watch your back all the time, because you just don't know what people are like and if someone kicks off, someone kicks off, they don't know what they are doing.'

He condemns the use of bad language in the unit.

'The language is atrocious here, and I mean it's bad. They just let people do it, just let them do it.'

In view of the conversation with the Head immediately prior to this it is interesting to note his observation that *'they just let people do it'*. He implies that he would have expected, and perhaps welcomed, some kind of punitive response.

He has experienced damage to his work and believes that a lack of respect for their environment and for other people is prevalent among his peers.

'When I do my painting and decorating out back where they all go and smoke and that out there, I went out the next day, someone had drawn all over it and kicked it and scraped it all off the wall.'

He recognises that the unit itself is not an ideal setting being in need of repair and decoration; however, in his view it would be a waste of time to refurbish it.

'It will just get ruined anyway. They just don't see the point of respecting it, no, because they ain't got respect for anyone else so they're not going to respect a building. [...] They all lack respect, that's the main thing.'

Sorting it out

This student does, however, also speak positively of his time at the PRU and the influence it has had on him. He lists his exam qualifications with pride and has a

clear view of his skills and future pathway. He speaks warmly of a number of lessons and teachers.

'It's just like a normal school though they give you more chances here, like things you do here you've got more chance of getting it sorted than at a mainstream school, because they'll just tell you to go home in a mainstream school, they try and sort it here, that's the best thing about it.'

He enjoys some of his lessons, notably Maths, PE and ICT. He wants to be a computer games maker and has plans to go to college.

'Hopefully, I'll go to college, get a job. I want to make my own websites, computer games. I'm a games addict! [...] The school career worker said that she's going to try and sort it out for me, try and send me to college and learn how to do it all.'

There are obviously staff in the unit that he has come to trust and rely on.

'In a way most of the staff here have calmed me down, like my tutor, JL is a nice fella, he's calmed me down when I have trouble. I'll come and talk to him and he just sorts it out for me, helps me, he understands where I come from. And he's got a really good bond with my mum and dad so he talks to my mum and dad all the time.'

He shares memories of his recent past. On permanent exclusion from his secondary school in Year 9 he spent time in a unit for statemented pupils.

'To come here from B is a big change because you get restrained and everything, you get dragged around in B, they treat you like more mature up here. Like they used to kick off or something, they used to throw a chair over, they'd just grab you and carry you up to this room and lock you in a room for like five to ten minutes and then take you back to your lesson, if you do it again you get locked up again. It's a change though because they don't do it here, so that's the best thing about it.'

I found this matter of fact account of his experiences at the special unit shocking but decided against additional questioning about it. His focus had moved to his positive experience of the PRU and that was my focus too.

This conversation restored my equilibrium somewhat and I wished the Head had been there to hear his appreciative comments. Key members of staff have gained his trust and moved him forward and the personalised curriculum has led to positive expectations about his future. He demonstrates resilience (Fredrikson and Branigan 2005) in his developing self-confidence, his developing communication and problem-solving skills and, as evidenced from his account of his previous school experiences, is increasingly able to manage strong feelings and impulses.

The negativity of the Head's descriptions of the short-comings of her staff is balanced here by the positivity expressed by this student. It will be interesting to note whether further examples of such positivity emerge.

I noted his reference to the dilapidated state of the building and to his view that it was not worth repairing as it would most probably be damaged again by the students. I wondered whether other people I was to speak to would have a similar perception of the worth of repairs and refurbishment.

A further developing theme seems to be the need to refer to past experiences as a means of illuminating the present. In this PRU, the student has not been man-handled; he uses the expression '*they sort things out*' or similar, four times in quick succession to describe the difference between this PRU and his previous one. His tutor is in close contact with his parents; again a point of difference from his last placement. He evidently feels supported by staff and the systems in place. The movement from the somewhat punitive approach of his previous placement to the more restorative, therapeutic model of the PRU has evidently benefited him.

I felt that perhaps it was inevitable that any student who was keen to talk to a complete stranger about the PRU, as this student was, would most probably give a positive account of his experience. However, I decided that whether he was in a majority of his peers or not, his experience was valid. The PRU certainly seemed to 'work' for him.

4.5.3 Conversation with a female Year 11 student

Life skills

This student was attending the PRU part-time. She had been enrolled by her school to do hairdressing and beauty two days a week, illustrating the multi-function and flexibility of the PRU.

When I ask her if the PRU is a good place to be she talks positively about her course in hair and beauty. It has clearly given her a sense of achievement and purpose. Her teacher is helpful and works at a pace that suits her.

'When I first met her I thought she was quite nice and when I first started she showed me how to do something then she'd ask me to do it. And if I had trouble, like still now, if I can't do something she'll help me.'

In addition to the technical skills she has acquired she has learned some important lessons about managing clients. Her teacher has guided her into making conversation with the client, ensuring that he or she is comfortable and enjoying the hairdressing experience. She has learned the importance of such interactions.

'It's like one day I came in and I wasn't in the greatest mood, and I weren't talking to my clients or anything but I realised like it's a job, you're going to have to, even if you're in a bad mood you're going to have to put the face on and act like everything's OK until it's done.'

This is the first description I have heard of the teaching in the PRU and, listening to the student, it is clear to me that much expertise has been exercised in managing her learning needs. This is such an important aspect of the PRU's purpose that I am hoping that I hear more examples of classroom and other areas of teaching in the conversations to come.

Life lessons

Looking back on her difficult experiences in her mainstream schooling and in previous excluded settings, she blames herself for the problems that arose. Asked whether she was the problem or her teachers, she doesn't hesitate.

'I'd say myself first. Just trying to be awkward.'

She attempts to describe the difficulties she had relating to her mainstream teachers.

'I think it's more in mainstream schools that the teachers want to like set out a reputation for themselves, do you know, so they're like more, what's the word? [...] Like more professional. Yeah, more professional, so, but here they're more relaxed.'

My voice: 'So being professional, when you talk about those teachers in your mainstream school, what does that look like? What sort of things do they do that make you say that?'

'Well, it's just, I don't know, it's more of a show thing that they do.'

My voice: 'You think they're trying to impress or something?'

'Yes, impress people that come in and visit.'

My voice: 'People coming to visit? Not the young people? Not the students?'

'No!'

She seems to think that the 'professional demeanour' of her mainstream teachers made her feel that their efforts were not directed to support her but were principally made to fulfil the expectations of 'visitors'. She feels the PRU meets her needs because the regime and its teachers are more 'relaxed' and its expectations of her are more related to her needs than to those of any 'visitors'.

I reflect on whether this has captured what the Head means when she describes her aspiration to achieve a 'nurturing' environment. The student uses the word 'relaxed' several times and in her description of the 'professional' demeanour of her mainstream teachers may have pointed to the duality the Head had in mind when she used the phrase, 'a real school atmosphere'.

Although she has only been a PRU student for a short while, she demonstrates feelings of loyalty towards it. A sense of belonging and feeling part of a group are key elements in Burns and Machado's (2014) identity and membership social rules systems and she is clearly experiencing those effects.

'When people ask me where, what school do you go to, I go to (the PRU) and they're like, well, isn't that for bad kids? But it's not always bad kids. It's sometimes when people have moved from a different, like say they've moved from B and they've come to here and they can't find a school, they'll be here until they've found a school. So people have like a wrong impression of what it's like.'

She gives an illustration of where people's wrong impressions about the PRU might come from.

'Say we get on the bus after school like a lot of us will get on the bus and some of them will, some of us will be quiet and calm but then some of us will be shouting and swearing and things like that.'

She talks at length about the behaviour of the young people in the PRU and the behaviour management strategies of the staff. She tried, when she first came to the PRU, to remonstrate with some of the offenders.

'I have intervened before. I think it was when I first started but it just caused a load of trouble.'

Having intervened in this way and having experienced problems as a result, she seems to behave more as an observer. She gives no indication that she is involved in the challenging behaviour herself.

'Some of the behaviour is alright, but then some of it, it just goes over the top and then everyone ends up getting involved and it's just all screaming and shouting while you're trying to get on with your lessons. But most of the time it's quite calm. Then it's easy to like concentrate.'

She believes that the staff do their best to prevent it happening, without, in her view, much hope of making a difference.

'I think it's just the kids in the school that let it happen. I don't think there's any more that the school can do to stop them acting like that.'

Sometimes they'll just knock on doors and disrupt lessons and stuff and just shout. They'll walk out to go for a cig or something.'

She seems resigned to such incidents and remarks calmly on the intervention of the resident police officer who, on occasion, has been obliged to call for a car to take an arrested perpetrator away from the site. She has seen violence in other contexts and seems unsurprised by its occurrence in the PRU.

'It could happen anywhere, couldn't it?'

She comments on the damage she has seen being done to students' work displayed in corridors.

'They'll walk past it and just pull it off because it's there; for no reason, just because it's there.'

In spite of her criticism of such disruptive behaviours she does not feel that it would be right to exclude the perpetrators from the PRU.

'I don't think they should be kicked out, they should be given chances to help, well to show that they can redeem their self.'

From this student's perspective, disruptive and disrespectful behaviours, though undesirable, are inevitable and even violence is to some degree commonplace. It might be difficult for the Head to hear that, in this student's view, there is little that the staff can do to change matters.

Self-knowledge

Reflecting on her own experience she wishes she had been less challenging in her behaviour at school.

'I think when I look back I'll think well why didn't I just sit down and like, like the easier I make it then the quicker it's going to go, instead of just messing about, it's gone slowly.'

She offers advice to her fellow students.

'Well, if they want respect then they should give it, otherwise they're not going to get it back are they?'

She contributes to the emerging theme of reference to the past to explain the present.

'I moved out of my mum's house and I moved to my sister's and because she's quite young and a young mum and the financial like thing of it weren't so easy, so I couldn't get to school. So I hadn't been to school for quite a few months so they ended up referring me here instead, well, I went to a few other places first but because they were quite far and they didn't provide bus fare or anything I couldn't get there either, so they ended up sending me here.'

She enjoyed primary school and feels it all began to fall apart for her in Year 6.

'I think it's because, during primary school they make it so easy, and then in year 6 there's, they just like push all the pressure on you so it's like really hard and it's like well why can't they just do it in steps, top it up in steps instead of putting it all on you.'

I found the thoughtful approach of this student in appraising the worth of the PRU very striking. She had evidently benefited from a curriculum opportunity designed creatively to meet her needs, not just in terms of content, but also in supporting her into learning important skills for the workplace. Her philosophical attitude to extreme behaviours revealed to me an equable person, experienced in remaining calm in difficult situations. Her intervention into the offensive behaviour of her peers offered me insight into her strong moral compass and her courage in defending the 'membership rules' and 'shared values' (Burns and Machado 2014) of the PRU.

A number of new themes have emerged from this conversation. She describes an example of teaching and learning in the PRU; she talks of how the PRU is perceived by outsiders and offers criticism of both primary and secondary schools related to their management of pressure for their pupils.

4.5.4 Conversation with the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator

I next met the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, an NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) who had been in post for 10 months.

Right pupils

In response to my initial question, 'Can PRUs work?' she spoke first about her previous experience in a short stay referral unit where ten week programmes were offered for young people under threat of exclusion from school. When this unit was closed, she, and the ten week programme moved to the PRU. A theme is quickly established. She has criticisms to make of schools who exclude over minor matters and criticisms to offer of local authorities who cut resources for financial reasons. The upshot of both strategies is that the PRU is attempting to educate young people with too great a variety of needs.

'Lots of PRUs have kids in them that shouldn't really be in a PRU but there's not any sort of grey area in between being out of school and being in a PRU.'

She understands the need for boundaries and rules and as she indicates later in the conversation, applies them with rigour in her own work; however, she believes, following Parsons, that exclusion from mainstream for sometimes comparatively minor, non-conforming behaviours is an inappropriate response.

'I understand the whole principle of we have rules, we have boundaries, I totally understand that, but in some situations those boundaries need to be a little more fluid.'

This recalls the 'when is a rule not a rule' theme that was established in the Head's first conversation. The Head is seeking assertive practice from her staff and consistency in managing unwanted behaviour but is also seeking a degree of 'flexibility' in their responses. It seems clear that this colleague shares the Head's belief that there is 'a different way to do this' and is critical of the individuals and institutions that are unable to 'bend' in their management of troubled children.

Right courses

She turns to a consideration of the PRU. She believes that, in spite of her assertion that some of the young people should be in a less 'extreme' environment, it is a positive experience for most of the referred young people.

'I think it does meet the needs of a lot of our young people, just because they're a very odd mix and I think a lot of them are quite loners and they don't really have a niche they fit in.'

Her perception is that the PRU is able to adopt a more personalised approach to each student. They all have to take English and Maths but their additional programme will involve a good deal of student choice. There is a well-organised alternative programme with work experience placements, college courses and other activities. Placements meet with varying degrees of success and she describes the dismissive attitude of some of the young people to the kind of basic tasks they have been asked to do. She is convinced that the reality check that such experiences offer is an invaluable learning experience for them.

'Some work placements have been very successful, others less so. Because they don't really have the ethos of work at all, they have no concept of it and they just think, 'Oh yeah', if you ask them to sweep the floor, 'I ain't sweeping the floor!' Well in that case you need to leave! And then... I think they think back, 'If that had been my actual job I just wouldn't have a job now!'

She believes that this kind of learning, some hard lessons in the realities of life supported by skilled and caring staff, are what most benefit the young people who come to a PRU. She feels that there will of necessity be more challenging incidents and encounters to deal with but is convinced of the value of dealing with them through reflection and supportive challenge rather than exclusion.

Her role on the staff underlines the individualised approach to the young people. She runs what is effectively a single handed Learning Support Unit within the PRU.

'It seems a bit of an odd concept for some people but kids need that sometimes. I'm not a time out facility at all, my remit is very much learning and that's what I think an LSU should be, it should be about the learning.'

She works on a one to one basis or with very small groups and focuses on support for those who have slipped through the learning net. She feels that entrenched and long-standing, unaddressed learning needs often lie at the heart of challenging classroom behaviours.

'Things are quite individualised for them and that, for some of them, gives them the sense of, kind of, they belong.'

The notion of 'belonging' to the PRU was a strong element in the female student's conversation and it is echoed here, reinforcing the work of Burns and Machado (2014) on identity and membership theory. The idea that it is their personalised learning programme that makes them feel they belong is an interesting one; I had not considered the possibility as the very fact that they are treated as individuals and go off site at different times, pursuing different activities would seem to mitigate against such an identification with the PRU. The focus on non-academic subjects is also an important support in her view.

'Maybe the fact that we have more variety of kind of practical stuff because not everyone's suited to kind of book work, and to the kind of GCSE route, and you have to really explore options for those kids.'

Her comments are important as they give a view on the curriculum of the PRU. The focus on examination outcomes by Ofsted brought tensions to my PRU between the demands of the necessary academic courses and the therapeutic value of a 'variety of practical stuff' and I am keen to discover whether similar pressures are felt in this PRU.

Right staff

This teacher believes that the staff are the key element in whether the PRU will 'work' for its students. She considers the repertoire of skills and qualities adults need to work in the PRU environment, at whatever level they operate. The first is succinctly expressed.

'Patience! That's for sure! Definitely patience!'

The second relates to the importance she attaches to understanding the background from which many of the young people come.

'I think you have to be quite savvy about what's going on outside in some of these kind of real rough inner city areas. There's very few of the kids that we have here who don't come from quite a rough estate. And I think if you have no concept of what

goes on in a kid's life out there then you're never going to find that kind of understanding at all.'

Her third point reiterates the approach she feels is necessary in managing and teaching the young people.

'You've got to be quite creative with how you're going to approach things.'

The next three points reinforce her earlier comments on the need for resilience, flexibility and utter determination to keep going in the most demanding circumstances.

'It's difficult because sometimes you're like...what!! And you have to keep going, 'Yeah, can you sit down please?' And you're thinking, 'Oh my God, I'm literally going to tear my hair out in a second!' [...] And sometimes you have to go, 'That's a bit daft', and carry on and like it's nothing and kind of gloss over it because if you make a massive deal of it, it actually might well escalate! And it's knowing when to do that!'

Even the most careful planning can be overtaken by circumstances but she believes that the time spent on dealing with behavioural matters is not lost but a different kind of teaching.

'These kids are so challenging, with the best will of planning, you're rarely absolutely on track. Sifting through all that other stuff takes time, it takes energy, it takes time off learning and maybe it's a different kind of learning that's more difficult to quantify than like GCSEs and foundation learning! It's a totally different kind of learning.'

Her seventh point refers to the level of emotional maturity that staff need.

'You have to be quite calm all the time which I find quite difficult because I'm quite feisty. It is difficult but you kind of get used to it I think, it's training yourself up! And the kids know when you're losing it as well, so you have to stay calm.'

She is quick to point out the importance of the PRU team in supporting each other in difficult situations. For her, it is crucial to know one's limitations and to respect that others may have more impact on resolving issues. A degree of humility is an eighth point on the list.

'We have a strong team that you can always call for somebody to come and help you out or just to be there to diffuse a situation, because with the best will in the world, something hideous can happen and as much as you might want to diffuse it, you're not the right person to do it and I think you have to know when to walk away.'

The importance of the staff is a theme that is well established. Her list is comprehensive and enlightening.

Right environment

'In some ways we're really, really good and fit for purpose in that classroom space wise, we have a lot more room than some people have and some of the new builds have teeny weeny classrooms. But our social areas are huge and that just lends itself to running around like a twit really! And we have a lot of space.'

She refers both to outside and inside areas.

'We have a lot of land outside, a ridiculous amount of space around the building. The dining hall's vast and way too big for us I think. It would be a great gym but it's a massive space.'

A lot of space in her view is obviously more of a curse than a blessing.

She is unhappy about the age and condition of the building but feels that attempts to claim ownership of it in recent months have resulted in less damage and more respect for its fabric.

'It's an old building, it's knackered but I think there's been far less damage than in other years and I think that is down to people taking ownership of their classrooms, and displaying kids' work. We have a lot of photos of the kids up so they can see that it is their space as well. Some of the art projects encourage them to use the space for art; there's a lot of murals and things around our school. I think it's really important that the kids feel their work is there and it will be looked after. Obviously we still have moments but I think there is a lot more respect for the space than there has been before.'

Right gender relationships

From a consideration of respect for the environment, the issue of respect for each other arose, in particular the current concern voiced elsewhere on gender abuse.

'There is a very negative, generally negative feel towards female staff, to the point where it is just being really insulting.'

However, in her view, this attitude is not reserved only for female staff but is suffered by female students too. She describes how the male staff have taken a lead role in challenging it.

'It is something we are challenging hugely at the moment and I think, as other female staff here felt, it was really important for the male staff to take a lead role and very publicly challenge it.'

She believes that the pressure on the female students causes them to become more aggressive themselves and adopt more masculine characteristics as a coping mechanism. She has observed that the girls gain support from one another but also thinks it is important to have 'strong' female members of staff to offer support and that male and female staff should work with students together and demonstrate clearly that they both reject gender abuse.

'The girls do tend to stick together and I think it's important to have some strong female, not just for the girls, because the girls actually get on really well with the male staff and we tend to, as much as possible, have male and female staff together. We support each other and I would challenge something that was offensive to a male colleague in any way that I would challenge it with any staff at all, or any students for that matter.'

It is clear to me that she is not one of the members of staff the Head referred to in her conversation earlier in the day. This colleague describes the abuse and the actions she and others are taking to challenge it; they are evidently taking responsibility for the challenge themselves and not necessarily moving matters on for the attention of the Senior Management Team. This is a difficult problem and reflecting on it recalled Foucault's thinking on power relationships permeating all

human interactions. His work is a powerful contributor to understanding the tensions between the male students and the rest of the PRU community. Outward trappings would indicate that the adults have all the 'power', but it is clear that a different kind of power is effectively wielded by the male students.

Right homes and parents

'A lot of it stems back from relationships that I think they have with other adults in their lives. We have a lot of lads who have absolutely zero respect for their mothers and I think that comes out in how they speak to the female staff particularly if we're asking them to do things and it's, 'Oh you sound like my mum and then it escalates from there.'

This teacher enumerates other issues that apply particularly to the demographic of the PRU population and describes an arc of social problems.

'I know there's a lot of issues in this area and poverty and domestic abuse, families that are split up, and extended families and kids living with grandad and actual physical health issues, substance misuse, mental health issues.'

She believes it is rare to find a young person in a PRU who does not have a complex set of problems affecting their lives. She refers to the work the PRU does in making contact with families in their homes. This work is crucial in supporting attendance.

'We have a constant link with home, through coaches who coach certain kids; we all have a selection of kids that we kind of look after. Attendance officers go out frequently, you know, inviting parents in, doing home visits, having that kind of fluidity to go and actually see someone in their own home. You get a little bit more of an idea why the kids sometimes are like they are.'

This work also gives valuable insights into the attitudes of parents.

'I think a lot of parents have lost their kind of trust in school or even, don't even see education as being that important because, 'Oh well, I'm alright and I never did that', and not really wanting anything else for their kids which is a bit sad. But that's what happens!'

Right Ofsted

When asked to consider the impact of Ofsted inspections on the PRU she is quick to criticise the approach that measures the achievements of the PRU against the same criteria as a mainstream school.

'I think it's a bit unfair that Ofsted look at us on a par with mainstream schools, in league tables and things like that and it's really unfair to do that. I mean, they spend two days here and they can't possibly find it similar. Like no-one goes, 'Do you want me to break your fucking jaw?' every two minutes!'

She feels it is inevitably demoralising to be 'always at the bottom' and wonders why anyone would ever want to work in such a setting.

'We're always going to be at the bottom there aren't we really? We're always going to be the bottom! So we don't really stand a bloody chance in that respect. Not many people would want to work in a PRU, that's for sure.'

This echoes the Head's sentiment about recruitment.

Right place

In spite of the strength of her forthright comments on 'being at the bottom' in the eyes of Ofsted, she has positive comments to make about her work and the reason she stays.

'When people say, 'Where do you work?' They'll go, 'Ooohhh!' like straightaway. And I think it has a far worse reputation than it should have. Some years ago I was like, 'Oh no, I wouldn't want to work there', because it was quite dismal and quite dark and it was really unloved; there was nothing on the walls and I just think I wouldn't want to come to a place that had nothing on the walls. But it's massively changed, I think it is a really welcoming environment and the kids actually say that now, and are more willing to want to do things, that show some ownership. They're a little bit kind of acknowledging what we've done, which is nice.'

This was a lengthy conversation with a number of important themes and strands running through it. Her comments on the improved student attitude to the

environment recall the Burns and Machado analysis (2014) of the impact of 'belonging'; her clear and determined focus, creative approach and vision of possibilities are important qualities of leadership as proposed by West-Burnham (2014). She had so much she wanted to share and although we were only together for 45 minutes I was amazed afterwards at the amount of ground we had covered. I have picked out the themes that are becoming established and pointed to where there are echoes from elsewhere; her last comment on other people's perceptions of the PRU directly parallels the female student's experience. I note that the female student did not refer to sexual abuse in her conversation; perhaps she might not have experienced it or perhaps she did not want to talk to me about it. I have no way of knowing and begin to feel some frustration at my missed opportunities.

4.5.5 Conversation with the PRU Counsellor

Later in the afternoon of the Second Day, I met the School Counsellor.

Purpose

The Counsellor has a clear idea of the purpose of the PRU. To be successful, it needs to concern itself with learning but the therapeutic aspect of its work is paramount.

'I think every PRU is different and I do believe they've got a purpose but for me and the PRU that I work in, the purpose is more therapeutic, more wellbeing, more supportive and I think that's a better model than potentially some of the others.'

She knows of some alternative settings that, in her view, are more 'holding centres' than somewhere where exclusion issues are addressed.

'I'm thinking of a unit or environment where a student is, more of a holding place rather than you know, let's really work through what's going on. Learning and qualifications are so fundamental but valuing the emotional, social side is crucial.'

Her comments underline the 'nurturing/ real school atmosphere' balance that I noted in the Head's first conversation. It has appeared in every conversation in one form or another.

She believes that one of the main justifications mainstream schools use for referring a young person to a PRU is that they feel there is expertise in managing challenging behaviour in this different environment. It is clear that challenging behaviour continues but she has noticed the impact of change on some of the young people.

'I think for a lot of young people, it, I've watched a lot of young people get a lot out of being in a PRU and they've found it very nurturing. You know, it can present as an unsafe environment sometimes but on the whole it can be safe and nurturing. And I think it can actually be free, it can't always be possibly, you know, completely free, but sometimes it's free from those judgements, in the PRU that I work in anyway, I think the young person gets a sense, a bit of relief.'

The word 'nurturing' appears here and it is clear she subscribes absolutely to the Head's concept of a 'nurturing environment'. She talks of 'relief' for the students from the sense of 'measurement' they felt in school.

For her, therefore, the expertise lies in the PRU's aspiration to adopt a non-judgemental approach. She describes her frustration when she witnesses, in the PRU, actions and reactions that exactly replicate the young people's previous experiences of authority and judgemental attitudes.

'I get frustrated sometimes because I don't want to potentially repeat the patterns of their life and get caught up in that. And I see other people potentially getting caught up in that and that is frustrating.'

Her personal commitment to her role and to the PRU is clear.

'I really believe that they're all, humans are good and I really hold on to that non-judgemental concept.'

Practice

She has worked in a number of different alternative settings including in units within mainstream schools so feels authorised to make positive judgements about her current environment and the work practices here.

'How we do it here is a good way because we focus on the pastoral side. We have a multi-agency team so having it all, instead of all this seeking, trying to find partners out, trying to seek support, it's all under one roof, and I think that works really well.'

Her post as counsellor brings her into contact with the young people through an appointment system. She is convinced of the worth of her work.

'I'm a counsellor, so I think counselling has a huge place.'

'At the moment we're having a particular focus on Year 10 because we are struggling a bit, where usually it would be a kind of universal offer. So every year 10 has an opportunity to have counselling, to access myself.'

She describes two main areas of difficulty.

'It's mainly trying to engage in learning in the core subjects that seems to be a challenge. And free times, free periods, unstructured stuff, you know, lunchtimes for example, and moving from one classroom to another seems to be difficult for some of our young people.'

Her explanation for the difficulty experienced by her core subject teacher colleagues in trying to engage the young people lies in the closeness of the process to their memories of their mainstream classrooms. She believes that many of the young people have not had their needs addressed, for whatever reason, and describes how many are struggling with very low levels of achievement. The theme of criticism of some mainstream practices has emerged at several points already; it emerges again here.

'What I have sort of picked up is that sometimes that (the core subject classroom experience) can be part of an element to why they didn't succeed at mainstream, when it hasn't been sort of personalised their learning. Sometimes they could slip through huge nets and come here with reading ages, you know, of six or something and nobody even really knew, you know, all these defiant behaviours were just put down to them being purely defiant. So that's your challenge isn't it?'

She sees these issues as long standing and entrenched.

'Sometimes you're starting, actually you're not starting with a thirteen, fourteen year old, you're actually really, you know, this is going back many, many years, to the last time they engaged in a core subject potentially.'

For the teaching staff to work through the behaviours, assess and address the individual needs of the young people is, she recognises, an enormously skilled task that demands a high degree of creativity.

'You have to be creative, and it's a lot about engaging, it's about getting that level, pitching it, and engaging with that young person, hooking, it's like the hook isn't it?' And once you've hooked them in you can build on that and that's where the creativeness comes from really.'

There have been a number of comments on teaching and teaching styles in the data. The female student talked of the lessons she had learned from the hairdressing teacher that were not all about hairdressing; she responded positively to the 'hooks' the teacher used that were obviously pitched at the right level for the student. The Counsellor recognises the difficulties that teachers, particularly of core subjects, have in engaging reluctant learners but has learned from experience that teaching is *'a lot about relationships'*. She has supported teachers and support staff in their efforts to engage challenging young people and observes that they sometimes, perhaps inadvertently, trigger situations.

'Sometimes it's about working with the teachers or the support staff, more than with the young person or as much as the young person, because I think sometimes the teachers know how to hit those triggers.'

She has not been immune from difficult experiences herself but would advise colleagues to cultivate a degree of resilience, (the word crops up again), that would allow them to deflect the challenge and attempt some consideration of the underlying issue that triggered it.

'You know even when I have tough times and I have had a few incidents actually and it's not been pleasant, but you just can't take it personally. And as soon as you let that creep in and I know we're all human but you've got to try to process it without taking it personally.'

I ask her to reflect further on the frequently offered advice of 'not taking it personally'.

'You've got to work on yourself to build a system in that processes it without it penetrating, you know, that's what I'm kind of trying to say.'

She goes on to further illuminate her thinking.

'Because if your underlying thought is it actually isn't personal really, it's acting out isn't it? And sometimes for these young people it's about pushing the people that they really care for, actually, 'Will you still be there, will you still love me tomorrow and care for me tomorrow and nurture me if I do this?''

Her words echo those of the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator who talks of emotional resilience and self-training in much the same way as the Counsellor's system that 'processes without penetrating'. 'Not taking it personally' is clearly an important theme. Her experience is that most young people, on their own, following an incident, will respond to an intervention that obliges them to reflect on their behaviour and on its impact on others.

'I believe in giving it back to them, I give it back to them'.

Alongside this push towards self-examination she underlines the importance of praise. The system of rewards operated by the PRU goes some distance to encourage positive responses but she believes in the fundamental importance of praise.

'It's not just about rewards you know, like for example, we went out on a small shopping trip last week and it was great and I really enjoyed it but there was a lot more to it than just this shopping trip. It's very important that a reward comes with all these other aspects like I said, positive praise, firm boundaries.'

She recognises that achieving the implementation of 'firm boundaries' is a challenge. She is proud of the work the PRU does but accepts that more staff training might help to develop a more consistent approach to managing challenging behaviour.

'As concerns consistency of staff, I think there needs to be more training. Because it's like a family isn't it, that dynamic in a family where mum says no, they'll go to dad.'

Her first priority in the pursuit of consistency is a *'clear and precise behaviour management plan that is really clear to understand, that everybody follows.'*

Secondly, she would prioritise training on *'attachments and motives for behaviour'* and refers positively to the recent INSET day when the leader invited them to look *'at the reasons behind, almost taking the child out of it, thinking about what kind of motivates that young person to act out in that way, so that was good.'*

Problems

A further major consideration for her emerges from her reflection on what would move the PRU from 'Good' to 'Outstanding' in Ofsted's eyes. In addition to 'consistency' in approach and further staff training, the building and its shortcomings is her next thought.

'I think a lot of it would be down to, well I think a few things, the building. I don't think the building's that great and I think that does pose problems.'

She believes that the layout and dilapidated state of much of the PRU has an impact on morale.

'The set-up, the layout of the building, the age as well, I just think sometimes it's a little bit run down and you know for me there could be a bit of valuing our young people that come here, you know a lot of schools are all lovely and shiny and new and I think students, well, when I've gone round mainstream schools students are incredibly proud of these new buildings and so I think there's an element of that.'

She believes her own role is compromised by the space in which she works.

'My room for example, is just a goldfish bowl and it's just awful, it's just not a counselling space.'

However, she still feels the major impact on an Ofsted judgement would inevitably be the behaviour of the young people. She knows that Ofsted inspectors would

commend the appropriate (if they saw it) management of behaviours but thinks that most PRUs and certainly hers at that current time, would have difficulty convincing inspectors that their practice was 'Outstanding'.

'I feel that when it is so extreme, even with the best team, the best PRU team in the world, you would struggle to get inspectors to commend you for handling it, because it is pure chaoticness.'

She is concerned that the current level of challenge is having a detrimental impact on morale.

'It's off the Richter scale at the moment! It really is! And that needs to be brought under control so our good practice can shine!'

I am not surprised by her theme of challenging behaviour. However, the attribution of its influence to low morale is a further dimension; the Head's second conversation attributed her low morale to the staff's reactions to poor behaviour rather than to the behaviour itself but that is not the case for this member of staff.

She attributes her perception of current low morale not only to behaviour and challenge but also to the PRU's history of change. The new Head is welcome but the staff have had to deal with a succession of leaders and adjust to each one.

'At the moment morale is the lowest I've known it here, it is quite low. Again it's linked, what people have shared with me, it seems to be linked with behaviour. And obviously there is a lot of change, you know, we're really pleased to have a new head and a strong new head which is great but it's change. So you've got your element of change and then you've got behaviour. So morale is low.'

Further reflection on this issue of morale eventually reveals a major concern. When asked to consider the inter-gender issues that might apply in the PRU her reaction is strong. It is interesting to me that without my prompting, she might not have raised this issue. Perhaps it is a case of not wanting to wash their dirty linen in public? It is obviously a major concern.

'It's a huge issue, massive, massive issue. We are absolutely working on that, it has to be a priority for us. Again, we know it goes back to relationships with care-givers and stuff like that. But it's a massive priority.'

The most challenging aspect concerns the attitudes of the young male students to the women who work in the PRU.

'A lot of our young men are very derogatory and disrespectful to the women that work here, regardless of age, race etc. it's purely the woman aspect.'

'The young people I've worked with, it's come back to their own relationships usually predominantly with their mother.'

This echoes the similar explanation offered by the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and makes me wonder whether this has become currency as an explanation among those affected. She adds that male colleagues also experience challenges in this area and have to take particular care in their relationships, especially with the young women in the PRU.

'In a way I think the men have a harder fine line to manage than the women in terms of connecting with somebody and building those relationships with young people. But again, they have to be very mindful of, and precautions are taken you know, leaving the door open.'

Another aspect of PRU life that impacts on morale is the amount of damage that can be done to displays and pupils' work about the building. She acknowledges the problem but has noticed a change.

'I think it's got better, there have been improvements but it's... [She hesitates] When I put things up I do think, 'Ooh, how long is that going to last! You know it wouldn't be torn down in its entirety but...' She shrugs.

In spite of all these challenging issues when asked to explain why she chooses to work in such a highly charged environment she is absolutely clear.

Personal perception

'The young people, the staff as well, but fundamentally it's the young people. I think they're fantastic human beings and I just think it's a privilege to... for them to let me into their lives. And a lot of the time there's a lot of respect (another word that has appeared in the data) and I just think they're great, and I think they're more capable than they can ever believe.'

When asked to explore that powerful justification she becomes personal and explicit. As other participants have already done, she refers to her past as an explanation of her present.

'You know, if I'm absolutely, you know, let's be really honest here, and you know I am a therapeutic counsellor, I've done a lot of work on myself, but obviously an element of you comes into it and the element of me is, I was that child, I was that young person. And I think, it's like when I used to work in a drugs project years ago, I personally haven't taken drugs, but a lot of people who were fantastic workers actually have been ex-addicts. So I was that young person.'

She believes that her own chequered experience has taught her the skill of empathy. The approach does not involve sharing one's own story with them but does allow a degree of knowledge entitlement to support interventions with them.

'It's not always about sharing your story. You know, I don't go around telling the kids at all that I was like them.'

For her, the essential characteristic required for those working in a PRU is a simple, but genuinely expressed, human emotion.

'I think fundamentally, we need to be kind.'

The Counsellor spoke with such passion and commitment that it was a moving experience to hear her. She has a clear sense of purpose and a profound faith in the innate good that she believes is present in all her students. She demonstrates many of the aspects of leadership that West-Burnham enumerates (2014); among them a strong moral conviction about the worth of her role and her focus on transforming relationships as a development and healing process. If the PRU is a form of

punishment then for her its role is to be restorative and therapeutic in character and purpose and it is this that sets it apart from mainstream school.

This was another rich conversation full of detailed responses. I have pointed to a number of themes that match those of other contributors but the sense of innate value she places on the young people is a new construct. She is concerned that the dilapidated building will reinforce their feelings of rejection; she is protective towards them.

She is convinced that simple kindness is the best and most effective strategy of all in her dealings with the damaged and damaging young people who attend the PRU.

4.6 The Third Day: November

Status, Skills and Special Places



4.6.1 Conversation with the Kitchen Assistant

On our way to a quiet room where we could hold our conversation, we witnessed a fight between two male students. The police officer and the Deputy Head were quickly on the scene and it was swiftly dealt with. The Kitchen Assistant was upset by this event and felt it would give me a wrong impression of the PRU. It was certainly distracting for her and she needed some moments to collect herself before we began the recording.

Perception

She opened the conversation without my prompting, I think to reassure me following the incident we had just witnessed.

'It's a very friendly unit, we're all quite a good team, we're all quite good friends right from myself in the kitchen, right up to management, you know, there's nobody in the PRU that I can't turn to.'

In the light of the Head's desperate catalogue of issues she has with the staff that I had recorded the day before, I found this a surprising opening. I wondered whether staff relationships with each other were more supportive than any of their relationships with the Head.

The Kitchen Assistant tells me that in her opinion the PRU is an important resource that meets the needs of a particular group of students.

'A lot of them come with behavioural issues, a lot of them lack attention spans of any great length.'

However, she also feels that a number of them could and should be re-integrated into mainstream. Too long a period in the PRU may lead, in her view, to some young people becoming 'lost' and probably unlikely to achieve their potential.

'Some of these students can't physically cope with mainstream, they can't cope with a class of 30 children. They can't. But some of the students who have passed through here, I've often thought they really should go back, they need to go back, you bring them here you lose them, you can never convert them back again, once they've been here, that's what they are now.'

I heard echoes here of the Head and the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator talking of the inappropriate placing of some young people in the PRU and of the difficulty of addressing a wide range of needs. The Kitchen Assistant believes that the more relaxed regime of the PRU suits those young people who struggle with the more rigid expectations of mainstream schooling. She too is critical of mainstream approaches to children who struggle to meet their expectations; another emerging theme.

'If you look at a mainstream school, everything is a,b,c,d. Whereas here it's a,b,c,d with a side order of ' if you don't fancy it', and' if you're not gonna', you know, it's very relaxed. You know maybe he's not going to do his maths today but we know by Friday he probably will do. Whereas in mainstream, you're doing it today, you're doing it today if I have to keep you in at lunchtime. The children we have here will buck, they'll just buck at that and they'll go, then they won't turn up tomorrow.'

However, like the Head, she feels that the Unit should be clear in its purpose. In spite of the more relaxed regime, the smaller classes, the frequent use of first names and the lack of uniform, she believes that there should be no confusion.

'I think it should look like a school because it is a school. I don't think we should make it too fluffy, it's not a joy, it's not something you want to make massively welcoming, you know, it still needs to look like a school because it is, it's a school, you come in here to learn. Yeah, there is a few extra comforts and what have you but no I generally think it should look and be and feel like a school.'

Once again, the theme of balance between the two perceptions of the PRU is apparent. She clearly supports the notion that the PRU needs to be a 'nurturing' environment yet at the same time remain firmly in the student perspective as a school.

She thinks the curriculum is appropriate for the young people in so far as it provides a core of examination subjects but also offers a range of life skills courses like cookery, painting and decorating.

'Because we're still going to have to do that at some point in our lives, whether we've got maths and English and GCSEs, we're still going to have to look after our house, we're still going to have to feed ourselves.'

Here she echoes the Counsellor in valuing life skills. She feels she has a role, albeit a subservient one, in supporting the young people in the PRU.

'With the kids as well they've often come to me with issues and situations and obviously I've taken on board what they've said and referred the conversation to the relevant person above me that can obviously deal with the situation better than I.'

She is evidently proud of the fact that some young people turn to her for support but anxious to assure me that she knows her place in the hierarchy of roles in the PRU. I wonder whether there is anything lying behind this reassurance and if she has been instructed to pass on *'issues and situations'* that she learns about. I reflected later on Foucault's Power/Knowledge axis and its relevance to her situation.

In her position as kitchen assistant she finds herself frequently in an observer role, watching interactions between the young people from behind her hatch. She talks of the support they offer one another, something that she feels is often missed by others who see the young people in more formal situations or where the adult is the focus in the setting, as in a classroom or structured activity. She was not expecting to see this mutual caring in a PRU and was surprised by it.

'The one thing that did shock me about this PRU is the amount of respect (I noted the use of this word again) the kids have for each other. We have a child here, he's a boy but he's transgender at the moment and in mainstream I don't think he'd stand a chance. But here he's had a couple of comments but that's it. I stand at my hatch and I see an awful lot more than sometimes the teachers do because I'm there and I'm watching and I watch them share. Alright sometimes it's cigarettes and you know stuff they're not allowed but they will share with each other. And they check in on each other which you don't often see. They'll watch out for each other and it's kind of special to be honest.'

This is a new element in the PRU story. The mutual support she has observed between the young people indicates a level of understanding and acceptance operating between them, an intimacy that speaks of belonging to the community and identifying with each other's needs. I do not feel confident to draw this interpretation out any further: it may be that the young people she has observed have connections outside the PRU of which she is unaware. However, there are strong resonances with elements of Burns and Machado's Social Rules System theory (2014) where the impact of feelings of belonging and group loyalties are assessed.

There is evidence again here of her sharp appraisal of situations; there is also a trace of superiority in her, *'I see an awful lot more than sometimes the teachers do because I'm there and I'm watching'* comment; an attitude confirmed when she

responds to my question on the skills and qualities that people need to work in a PRU.

'The qualities that they would need are very much similar to my own. They'd need to be open minded with a massive amount of compassion and understanding and you know understanding on every level to different races, different sizes, attitudes, behaviour, you know, they need to step out of that real world for a moment and live in a PRU world.'

She has great confidence in her skills and believes she possesses a plentiful supply and that others need qualities similar to hers. This echoes the Head's similar belief.

Passion

For her, an understanding of the pressures the young people may be under in their private lives is also essential.

'Some days, all of them, they'll come in, they'll be extremely pliable, polite and pleasant. Other times something could have happened ten minutes before they've walked through the door and that's it for the day, they're not interested. As soon as you see the kids you sort of realise, right, today this is how we're doing this, as opposed to yesterday. So you have to come in every single morning with the biggest open mind you could possibly have, because none of the two days are ever going to be the same.'

In her role, she has contact with the young people in a direct, clearly understood relationship. She serves lunch to them through the hatch; they have to address her directly to tell her their lunch requests and she makes no demands on them other than expecting a respectful manner in their dealings with her.

'And I don't suffer any of those ill effects of this job, I really don't. I have a massively good rapport with the students. I don't get the swearing and things. And if they do, tomorrow's another day, I don't follow it on you know, they could come in and eff and jeff and do whatever they've got to do and kick and carry on but like I say, I wake up the next morning, it's like, right, it's a different day and I tend to deal with it that way, I don't carry anything over [...] But what I will do is I will speak to the student and say,

look, yesterday you upset me, I don't appreciate being spoken to like that, if you want to move forward with me, is there any chance we can sit down, have a talk about it, see what went on, perhaps an apology maybe? And you know, we'll let it go. And nine out of ten times, I'm sorry S, I didn't mean it, I just, you know...'

This passage stands out for me. It illustrates again her understanding of precisely the kind of approach to challenging behaviour that the Head is advocating. The Kitchen Assistant hears the abuse, does not engage with it but chooses her moment when the dust has settled to address the issue directly with the young person. The Head has spoken to the staff about 'personalising' their responses, using a first person response in exactly the way that the Kitchen Assistant describes.

'Yesterday, *you* upset *me*; I don't appreciate being spoken to like that; if *you* want to move forward with *me*...' and so on: these are exactly the kind of personalising approaches the Head recommends. Rogers (2015) has written, lectured, made films and produced teaching materials extolling this first person strategy. Yet the Kitchen Assistant has had no formal training in behaviour management techniques. It seems to me she has an intuitive understanding of how and where to choose her ground in addressing the issues with the young people. The Head, the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Counsellor have all referred to non-confrontational approaches; she adopts the same strategies.

She has advice gained from her experience to offer to those colleagues she has observed who do not always achieve her degree of flexible acceptance and resilience to offence.

'The students here will receive back what you give out to them. To be honest, if you come in guns blazing, they're going to give you guns blazing, if you come in with an open minded, kind of chilled out attitude towards stuff, where you push forward but without being invasive, you get what you want from them. You can't come in and say this is what you're having, and that's that.'

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator expresses similar views but again, I am struck by the Kitchen Assistant's apparently intuitive understanding of non-confrontational approaches and the value of keeping calm under pressure. The

ability to *'push forward without being invasive'* seems to me to be an extraordinarily subtle skill and I am obliged to admit to myself that I had not expected such responses from this person. I too had been operating within a hierarchical structure of assumptions. Once again, I am reminded of Foucault's work on Knowledge effecting Power and its impact on people's perceptions of those deemed to be in positions of authority.

Personal development

The Kitchen Assistant reflects on the impact the PRU has had on her personal development.

'I've learned a lot of skills working here to be honest, I've learned a massive amount of patience and not to assume that every day is going to be the same, to open my mind to different possibilities and situations. I've learned to deal out a lot of compassion, whereas before you would probably just see it as a bad child, now you see more. Being here has really opened my eyes to the fact that if I saw a child on the street and he was doing something horrendous you've got to, you've got to come back out of that and think well he's needing something, he's wanting, something's happened, you know, people aren't just bad. But coming here has opened my eyes to an awful lot of stuff, an awful lot [...] Obviously home life takes a lot, plays a massive part.'

The importance of the home background is an emerging theme; she prioritises it as an influence on the young people.

She came to the PRU *'purely to fill in'* in the kitchen having previously worked in primary schools. She did not expect a life-changing experience.

'If somebody had come up to me then and said would you like to go and work in a PRU, I'd have laughed! But when I got sent here, within a month I thought, right, this is the job for me. I aspire to be a behavioural support worker. To be honest, I'm determined that's where I want to be, that's what I want to do.'

This was an inspirational conversation. The Kitchen Assistant impressed me with her understanding of the needs of the young people, her observational skills and her pro-

active approach to resolving issues. She has clear notions of the skills and qualities staff need and aspires to move on to become a Behaviour Support worker.

She has great confidence in her skills and believes she possesses a plentiful supply. She demonstrates three of the concepts of resilience proposed by Fredrikson and Branigan (2005) in her 'positive self-concept', her 'communication skills' and her 'ability to manage strong emotions'.

I was left to ponder on my mistaken assumptions about the Kitchen Assistant. I felt I had been in the presence of an expert. It made me wonder about other assumptions I might be making, perhaps the other way round; assuming the Head, her deputies and the teachers had superior skills might be mistaken. I was testing the Foucauldian concept of Knowledge/Power in action.

4.6.2 Conversation with the P.E Teacher

The PE teacher reflects first on whether the PRU meets the needs of the referred young people. His theme is quickly apparent.

The old days

'I think one part works very well, one part basically needs to go back to what it was years ago. Because we have the situation now where the kids are leaving with qualifications, which is great, but at the same time a lot of the kids are leaving and the behaviours are still very similar to when they started. So, you know, it's great having all these qualifications, but if we're not putting them ready to actually walk into college or walk into a job, and to stay there, then I don't think we've met that need.'

He is clearly in the 'nurturing' camp. In the past, he claims, the PRU would have been happy to send a pupil to college for re-sit GCSEs or into employment without qualifications because they felt they had equipped the young person with the social skills to cope.

'When I started, it was a case of if pupils leave here and they can get a job or they can go back to college where they re-sit their GCSEs or do another course that's

appropriate to them, we've done our job because they can do that, you know, and we've changed behaviours which is what we're for.'

The new ways

He believes that other colleagues share his frustration at the recent shift of focus.

'I mean, some staff here feel very, very strongly on it you know and they're always, 'We're here for behaviour, we're here for behaviour,' and they're quite right because the pupils are here because of their behaviour not because, you know, they're not academic or anything. Some of our kids are academic but they just don't have the behaviour strategies in place to do it.'

He emphasises his position with expressions like *'which is what we're for'* and *'they're quite right'*. He is very committed to this point of view.

He recognises the effort that has been made to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the students but is not convinced that the difference in how they spend their time leads to difference in behaviour outcomes.

'You know, we do a great curriculum with fantastic subjects all over the place, stuff I never did at school but yet the kids are still behaving the way they are in some places.'

He understands that the thinking behind the shift of emphasis is that young people might find their way to improved self-esteem through gaining accreditations but is not convinced.

'I mean the kids do recognise when they achieve, but a lot of them, through that process, a lot of them aren't bothered, it's a case of, 'Oh I can't be bothered today, I'm not bothered.'

I have included this passage to pick up the nuances of his position. He has obviously listened to the arguments put forward by the new regime; that *'kids do recognise when they achieve'* and *'kids are leaving with qualifications, which is great'* but he is not convinced and feels the PRU will do better to focus on social skills and preparation for the workplace.

I begin to see more clearly where the Head has made an impact and that the shift of focus is causing unrest among some of the staff. The Counsellor talked of the staff *'dealing with change'* and this is an indication of some difficulty with adjustment to new expectations.

When asked to describe a typical PRU pupil, he sighs before responding.

'For us, a typical PRU pupil would be someone who is very well-known to the police, will have had multiple arrests, a lot of them are drug users, a lot of them have very little respect for a lot of people, they do for certain people but not for the majority.'

Like others he feels that some of the young people who come to the PRU should probably not have been referred and suffer as a result. This is now a recurring theme.

'You know, on occasions, we do have pupils come here and you can tell straight away they're a fish out of water and basically, it's one of those sink or swim things, it's like are you going to go with the flow or are you just going to end up on your own?'

He is critical of mainstream schools that, in his view, set expectations that will inevitably mean failure for some children. He cites an example of a newly opened academy in the city that set, in his view, unachievable uniform rules for their pupils when they opened.

'You're talking about kids in you know really poverty stricken areas and they can't afford things like that, but that's the attitude they've got, 'If you don't conform to this, you're out.'

He is aware that many parents and pupils were probably supportive of this draconian approach and had enjoyed the freedom the new school had to set its own agenda on expectations of uniform and behaviour.

'They were probably supportive of the very strict environment but for kids who maybe do have a behaviour issue already, you know, or maybe not had the upbringing that most people would like...' He shrugs.

He is clear that an education is the right of all children.

'There should be differentiation not just in the work they do, it's how a child is treated, you know, what they're offered, down to so many levels. We get kids who go, 'Oh I couldn't do the work it was too hard'. Well why is that kid being given that work? You know, they're going to get frustrated, they're going to kick off, as the kids say, and you know they're going to get kicked out of school eventually.'

His criticisms of aspects of mainstream practice mirror those of the previous participants. A strong theme is emerging that shows dislocation between the practices and expectations of some mainstream schools and the needs, as they are perceived by some who work in the PRU, of non-conforming young people.

Theory and Practical

However, in spite of his firm commitment to individual worth and the therapeutic role of the PRU, he has found teaching PE in the setting a challenge.

*'Yes, it's not as easy as I first thought it would be, simply because, you know, you try and put a sport towards a group of kids, 'I'm not ****ing doing that', it's this, it's that or the other. 'Have you ever done it?' 'Well no, but I've seen people do it and it's rubbish.' 'Well, let's give it...' 'No, I'm not doing that.'*

He imitates the dismissive tone of the student voice.

I noted his impression that the role might have been 'easy'. I will be interested to learn if other teachers had the same perception of working in the PRU.

The theory element of the GCSE PE course demands skills that recall lessons in core subjects and for some that means rejection.

'Now, with doing GCSE and BTEC and things they've actually got theory work to do and sometimes that can be a bit of a boundary, because they don't see it as oh I'm doing PE now, but I'm doing English or I'm doing maths or whatever.'

This echoes the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator's experience of problems with the delivery of core subjects in the PRU.

He attributes much of their dismissiveness to the influence of their friends, their homes and their lifestyle outside the PRU. The importance of a student's home background is a further theme that is emerging from the data.

He makes reference to the other influences he thinks impact on their lives: *'drugs and you know, gangs and stuff,'* and a further issue that affects him: their diet.

'A lot of our kids live on energy drinks, which obviously isn't good. We do try to do a lot of nutrition work in PE and also in cooking as well, but...' He breaks off with a gesture of hopelessness.

He has experienced difficulty in delivering the practical element too. In spite of having an enormous field with a football pitch, two tennis courts and a basketball court that doubles as a five-a-side pitch, it is apparently a struggle to persuade the young people to participate. Part of this is the simple reason that the courts are unenclosed so balls have constantly to be fetched back.

'It's strange because you'd think the kids would love to go outside and play football but because they have to go fetch the ball if it goes out, 'I'm not fetching that ball, I'm not going outside'. And if they do go outside they think it's an excuse to go for a fag!'

When asked why he thinks they behave differently if taken off site to some purpose built facility he muses on the reasons.

'There's a five-a-side football place, outdoor, they go there, superb, they'll play football for an hour with maybe one little drink break in the middle. If we ask them to do that here, 'Oh no, I'm tired, I'm not doing that.''

And further,

'It's one of those things you rack your brains about. I think as soon as they go out of the centre it's, 'I'm not at school anymore,' and they can relax.'

He attributes this reaction not to any particular tension in this PRU but to a general perception held by the young people.

'One of the kids said to me the other day, he said, 'You could be a proper teacher you know', and I said, 'I am a proper teacher'. 'Well why do you work here then?' And that upset me because they don't see, you know, they don't see this as a school!'

This led to an exploration of how the young people perceive their placement in the PRU, their understanding of its purpose and the worth they attach to themselves through their attendance at such a place.

'I think the view the school gives, right you're out of school, you're not going to school any more, well where am I? I can't be at school because I'm not going to school any more, I've been told that. So where is this place? I don't really know, they're teaching me things but it's not a school.'

The confusion the young people feel about their status and the nature of the PRU is an interesting illustration of Burns and Machado's (2014) theories on membership and identity. I reflect on the fact that a number of PRUs have a uniform for their young people and that others deliberately drop the practice.

He believes that the condition of the PRU itself confirms the young people's perception that it is not a 'proper school'.

'I mean this building's atrocious... it's falling apart. I think the kids deserve a nice building you know. I mean just because you've been thrown out of school doesn't mean you need to go to what virtually needs condemning in some parts with boards over the doors and things like that. They need to go somewhere that's a nice standard because you know how can they respect something that's falling apart?'

The environment of the PRU has emerged as an important theme in the data. Several participants have noted its negative influence on morale and behaviour. He comments on the young people's reluctance to use the outdoor facilities that are on site but they are poorly equipped and rundown. The courts are without nets. These factors alone seem to me to offer an explanation of their reluctance to participate; they are keen to visit the new, well- equipped facilities and enjoy the quality of the experience.

In spite of the negative issues, the PE teacher is proud of his work in the PRU.

He came into the PRU world after several years of work in mainstream primary education and now he would not consider going back to mainstream. This too is emerging as a strong theme. The Kitchen Assistant was equally adamant that she had found her niche. He values the opportunities the PRU has given him to develop his skills in meeting challenges and engaging with challenging children.

'I came here initially for just a few weeks to see what it was like and I'd never go back to mainstream, I wouldn't do it.'

A nasty surprise (or two)

However, he does not find it easy to cope with personal abuse and, like other staff, refers to the sexual nature of some recent encounters.

'It's sometimes difficult, sometimes you can just brush it off other times it can get, the kids get very personal. I mean, I've got a wife and step-daughter and I'm very proud of them and I've got pictures on my desk and the kids come in and you know they're going through a phase at the moment because my daughter, she's thirteen she looks about seventeen and ... (he hesitates) and that is your daughter? Yeah. 'Oh, I'd love to do this' or 'your wife was doing this to me last night', all that. And that gets a bit personal.'

I cannot completely hide my surprised reaction to this information. Apart from the re-iteration of explicit offensive language which is disturbing, in my own PRU, we were very careful not to display personal photographs for security reasons. However, I remain within my researcher identity and resist a response.

When asked what action he took to deal with this kind of exchange, he refers to 'red strikes', the internal reports of extreme incidents designed to trigger Senior Management Team involvement. He describes the attempts he might make to remonstrate with the young people at the time of such incidents.

'I say, 'Well come on that's not appropriate, you know', I say, 'How would you react if I was talking about your sister or your mum or something like that?' They say, 'Well, I'd hit you, I'd smash a chair over your head'. And I say, 'So you're talking about my wife but you're expecting me not to do that.'

Some colleagues have advised radical action. Again, I have to conceal my reaction to his words.

'I mean I've had staff say to me, "Well say to the kid, if you speak about my daughter like that, I'll hit you'. And it's like well you can't say, you know, we're not in a position where we can say that because you know we're trying to show these pupils that you can't just follow on something with a violent action you know. You're not hitting them because you don't want to hit anybody. But you really have to sort of hold back. Yeah, sometimes they do get really close to the bone.'

The Counsellor refers to the sexual abuse towards staff as affecting both female and male members and he has given me an insight into his experience. The advice he received from a colleague is extraordinary but he rejects it. The theme of abuse of staff by the students is developing and is raising questions in my mind about the need for advice and specific training on the issue. I am also wondering about the advice from the colleague and whether such comments are ever delivered directly to the young people. Does the abuse happen the other way around? I experienced two such situations in my time as a head.

He believes that his primary background helps him be patient and calm in such situations. He demonstrates a degree of resilience (Fredrikson and Branigan 2003) in how he deals with the challenges he faces; there is some evidence of his *'ability to manage strong feelings and impulses'* here.

The conversation ended at this point. I found this encounter difficult. I have tried to give an impression of his generally negative air by the inclusion of the sounds and gestures he made during the conversation. It is clear that he shares the Counsellor's commitment to the therapeutic role of the PRU and in spite of the exam successes he has achieved in P.E. (that I learned about later) he seems to feel the pursuit of accreditation has created an imbalance in their overall sense of purpose. The *'nurturing'* position versus *'real school atmosphere'* theme is clearly illustrated here. His approach to his teaching makes me wonder about his enthusiasm for the subject; he gives the impression of being to some degree demoralised by the negative attitudes of the young people.

4.6.3 Conversation with the Construction, Painting and Decorating Instructor

I had a break following the meeting with the P.E. teacher and sat in the staffroom listening to general conversation and watching members of staff engaged on various missions. It felt familiar and positive and it was quite hard to process some of the detail of what I had just heard against this background. I began to wonder about the motivations of those colleagues who had put themselves forward to take part in my project and worried about the validity of making any general assumptions about the PRU on the basis of what I had gathered in the conversations.

I had arranged to meet the Instructor in his workshop. This room is his territory and he obviously felt comfortable using it for our conversation. It is full of equipment of various kinds and has working areas dedicated to practical skills.

The Instructor has been in post for four years and has a generally positive view of the PRU, its work and his role. He does, however, have a number of observations to make about the management of the young people and is not convinced of the paramount importance afforded to the examination curriculum. For him, developing a relationship with a young person who may have few social skills, even fewer academic skills and a fractured experience of school, home and relationships in general is the important facet of his job.

'To be truthful, I think sometimes, we tend, all our kids have behaviour problems and I think sometimes we put too much emphasis on getting GCSEs.'

I am immediately taken back to the conversation with the P.E. teacher and note the resemblance between their positions.

Building skills

He believes strongly that what many of the young people need is trade skills so that they can always find employment and will always be able to look after their own homes.

'My philosophy is, and I'm probably a bit biased, is get a trade because it's with you for life and you know you can go anywhere with a trade.'

He expresses his views diffidently but with increasing conviction.

'I know everyone goes on about you need IT skills and everything else and maybe in the construction industry you do use them and stuff like that but I sometimes, like I say well, when a computer can redecorate my home and lay my carpets, that's when I want to use them! But you know, that's me.'

He masks strongly held opinions under a veneer of diffidence.

'I would rather a lad leave here with a couple of BTEC qualifications rather than a GCSE and not go to prison than walk out of here with a couple of GCSEs but no skill in anything and then end up in a Young Institute, offenders, you know?'

His impatience with the focus on GCSEs is clear. He makes a direct connection between being unskilled and going to prison; it is an extreme position but it is clear where he is planted: in the 'nurturing' camp.

'I think sometimes we, mm, it gets a little bit frustrating sometimes, because I know everything's targeted, results are the be all and end all of everything.'

There are indications here that he too is struggling with change, a theme that was established by the Counsellor.

His ideal PRU would include purpose designed and built skills areas so that there could be a real focus on the vocational curriculum. However, he recognises the importance of basic skills. Some of the young people in the PRU work well with him but find core subject lessons difficult and some refuse to attend those lessons at all. He has a strategy for dealing with their reluctance.

'I try and teach them a little bit of maths, back door style, because we get a lot of them that don't like English, they won't go to English, they don't like maths. We've got to explain it's used in everything we do, you know, English, you've got to be able to read instructions, you've got to be able to read things off paintings or joinery drawings. Maths again is the same, you've got to use it. So we try and do a little bit back door as well, to help the maths and English people that are in here.'

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator talked of teaching English across the curriculum; of making connections between different activities and learning language skills alongside practical skills. A theme of creative approaches to teaching is emerging.

He also helps the young people to recognise that success and achievement demand effort. He feels that instant gratification that can be experienced in many areas of their lives affects their approach to learning. He emphasises the importance of practice.

'It's society in general that's, 'I want it and I want it now', and their outlook on life is, 'I want to be a joiner but I want it now', but that's not going to happen, you've got to take them back, you've got to learn it, you've got to practise it. The thing with any trade, it's practice and they'll say, 'I've done that, I'm bored with that, I've done that once'. 'Yeah, but let's look at it, you weren't very good, we have to practise it, even when you become good, you still practise it.'

Building relationships

He refers to one of his students in a class that week.

'We were doing some joint works on Tuesday afternoon with a couple of them and one of them was getting so frustrated, I can't do it, it's shit, I can't. And he was giving up. So I took him outside, just explained to him that when I started I couldn't do things like that, I had to work at it and learn it, and to get them to take time because they tend to rush.'

His use of a personalised approach recalls the Kitchen Assistant's strategy. It also makes me reflect on the female student's attempts to describe the distance she felt from her mainstream teachers. She thought it was their 'professionalism' but perhaps it was simply that they tended not to use the first person in their teaching. This is an interesting theme and I will be listening for further examples of this simple but evidently effective technique.

He has experienced verbal abuse from the young people but has learned how to deal with it. He offers advice to others on how to respond to challenging behaviour.

'It's not personal. When they explode at you and call you every name under the sun, which they do, and they may look, it may sound personal, the way they're firing at you and everything, you just take it, it's not personal, it's just their way, they hit out and they seem to hit out sometimes I think at people they like more than people they don't like.'

His skill at deflecting the abuse and depersonalising it matches the Kitchen Assistant's. They both demonstrate the kind of techniques that I believe the Head is seeking from those staff who tend to react emotionally to it. It is interesting to find another skilled practitioner. He believes in keeping calm and not raising his voice when frustrations happen.

'I'm usually very laid back, the kids can talk to me, I very rarely raise my voice, I very rarely shout. I mean, don't get me wrong because sometimes, we're human beings, it does get to us! But I try to be as calm and as laid back as possible. But I will speak to the kids in a firm and fair way rather than shouting and bawling because shouting and bawling doesn't get you anywhere. And they've a tendency to listen to you more when you're just like constant and keeping calm.'

There are times when he needs to stand back and allow himself some 'time out'.

'There's days I've walked out just round the back to get some fresh air and stuff and I've just like I need ten minutes, I've got to have ten minutes, you know, and I need it sometimes because you can't be just calm all the time unfortunately, I wish, it would be great, but you can't, and you do need to take some time out and just, just offload a little bit yourself.'

I reflect as I did during the Kitchen Assistant's conversation that this is an untapped source of wisdom in the PRU. The hierarchical system not only attributes authority and responsibility to its leaders but also attributes knowledge and a notion that they are 'the best' at everything, not just leading. I am reminded of Foucault's reflections on power relationships but also note how such perceptions close off opportunities.

When asked about whether the PRU meets the needs of the young people who are referred to it, he observes that there are some young people he doesn't think should be there. I am struck by this response; it is a constantly recurring theme.

He is also critical of mainstream schools; another recurring theme. He thinks they sometimes send young people out too quickly as he finds that many of them respond well to him and the tasks he sets them.

'Some of the young people that come here I think sometimes they're sent here and I don't think they should be here. We have a scenario some kids, why they've been excluded, I think to myself well that's just a cop out from the mainstream school why they've, you know why they've sent this lad who shouldn't be in this environment.'

His evidence lies in their demeanour in his workshop setting and in their attitude to him.

'It's just the way they act and the way they respond to doing the work, the way they respond to you, the way they talk to you. They're positive and polite and I think sometimes it's, you know, one of those things. I just think sometimes mainstream are a bit too quick to push them out. Some of these kids they need counselling, some of these kids they slip through the net, they don't get what they need out there.'

He gives examples of what he means and of what the PRU does to address the issues.

'We've had a few with, where their mothers have died or the fathers have died and they don't seem to have had any counselling and they've got bereavement things and stuff like that. And we pick up on it because we try to gain confidence with them and build a relationship and you can sometimes get stuff out of them and this is what we try to do.'

The counsellor would support these observations. I wonder if they have contact with each other.

However, there are times, in his experience, when some of the young people do not respond and remain challenging and beyond the collective skills of the PRU staff to attach and engage them.

'But sometimes some of the kids are like beyond us, if you know what I mean. We can't reach them.'

He is self-deprecating in manner and apologetic for his lack of knowledge of the 'jargon' that is used by others in relation to the description of the young people's needs and the diagnoses of their various conditions but seems to see a difference between those with a diagnosis and those without.

'I don't know all the ins and outs of the jargon that they use, and all the jargon that's used from education that we have, unfortunately I don't know them all. But some kids are statemented, we still get them when I don't think we are supposed to and things like that. So it can be difficult.'

Building the future

His focus, as demonstrated earlier, is on preparing the young people as best he can for the world of work, or at least for the world as they will encounter it once beyond the PRU.

'What I try to do when I'm teaching painting and decorating and things, I try to teach it as though this is what it's going to be like when you're actually working. I try to explain that once they get into the jobs market, they've got to impress, nobody's going to be out there to hold their hand. I know they kick against us and everything because of the way some of them are but I think it's a fear they've got.'

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator also spoke of the young people's 'fear' of making a mistake as a potential explanation for reluctance to put pen to paper; the Counsellor shares his belief that the young people will kick against them as a way of testing their resolve in helping them. The connections between them and their perceptions are emerging.

He has been visited by former pupils who have returned to share their experiences with him and to confirm his predictions.

'Some have come back and they say to us, I didn't know it was going to be like this! And we say, 'Well we did try to tell you! We did try to explain what it was really going to be like!' 'Yeah, I know, but I didn't expect it to be like this!''

He has also received cards from some students expressing their thanks to him and it is at moments like these that he experiences the most intense job satisfaction.

'Some of them, you know, they send, I mean we've had cards back saying, 'Thank you for putting up with us', you know, and I appreciate it and you think, 'Wow!' It makes you feel good.'

This is the first explicit expression of job satisfaction I have heard. Others have indicated the strength of their emotional engagement in the PRU and the Counsellor spoke movingly of her belief in the innate worth of the young people. It is clear that in spite of the challenges, he feels it is a job worth doing.

His evident respect and care for the young people he works with appear again in his comments on the environment of the PRU. As indicated earlier, his ideal PRU would have purpose built vocational areas but his reflections on the subject go further.

'I mean, this place is old and the ones that I have seen around the city, it's like nobody wants the kids, so they put them in buildings that nobody wants as well.'

He expands on this theme.

'You know, they're building all these lovely new academies and new schools, but for these type of kids they're like, they're shoved to one side and they're put into buildings like we've got here, which is falling down.'

This is a recurring theme, and he expresses his view vehemently.

I am surprised, I suppose because of the negative conversation with the Head yesterday which is still in my mind, when he tells me how the staff have created useful areas and done the required construction, painting and decorating themselves, but he is conscious that this is a less than ideal situation. He thinks a purpose built environment would give a different message entirely.

'But a purpose built PRU, where the kids can look and say well this is nice instead of turning up into ones that are patched up and put together.'

He imagines himself in the young person's shoes, again demonstrating his empathetic approach.

'I think if I was a kid that no mainstream don't want and then I get shoved into a building that's falling apart, you just push the message that, well, they didn't want me there, they put me in here, nobody wants this place, and I think they do pick up on it.'

He shares these views with others; it is an established theme.

He is realistic however and knows about the destructive behaviour of some of the students. His belief in the negative impact of an uninspiring and run-down environment may be strong but he believes that damage would probably occur, whatever the setting. He is hopeful that the level would be reduced however.

'I mean, even if we had a purpose built place they would probably still do things to it but maybe not as much, you know.'

His words echo the opinions of the male and female student who talk of the lack of respect their fellow pupils have for the environment.

His awareness of the sensitive issues prevalent in the PRU extends to an understanding of the importance of personal security for all staff.

'Sometimes we get problems when the kids come in and we read their profile and they may have a problem with female staff or they've got a problem with male staff and they hit out at that particular gender.'

He understands the fragility of particular settings especially where they might involve male or female members of staff working on a one to one basis with a student of the opposite sex.

'Unfortunately we might have some female students that have a record of making inappropriate accusations, so you've got to have, if you've got a male teacher, you need female support to work with him. It unfortunately does go on, it's the real world.'

He does not refer directly to the abuse currently being experienced by female colleagues; his comments refer to standard practice and precautions. He does not seem to me to be feeding into the recurring theme in this respect.

He evidently has a degree of dedication to his work that has come through working with the young people and learning to respect them. He talks of those outside the

environment, and includes himself before coming to the PRU, as quick to judge and condemn challenging young people and reject them as worthless and undeserving of attention or resources.

'If you'd have said to me five years ago that I would be working in a PRU with kids like that, I would have laughed at you. Because I was one of those, a lot of people out there go, 'They want a good swift...' Do you know what I mean? That's how a lot of people see these kids, 'Oh, they want a backhand, they want this, that and the other, I'd soon whip them into shape'. But a lot of people out there don't realise the background that a lot of these kids come from, and I didn't until I got into it.'

The Kitchen Assistant told me almost exactly the same thing. There is a tone of surprise in both their voices.

He has no regrets about his move from the world of construction, painting and decorating into the PRU. He is aware of his academic shortcomings but has found rewards and satisfaction in working with the young people that he had no expectation of finding.

'I think to myself, if I can stop one or two of these kids going to jail, or get one or two of these kids into employment, I've done a good job. That's how I look at it. I can't, you can't save everybody, but if I can get one or two off the path...'

The Instructor demonstrates a number of the concepts of resilience listed by Fredrikson and Branigan (2005). He is evidently an effective communicator and is skilled at managing strong feelings; he can deflect challenge and depersonalise abuse. His concern about the impact of the dilapidated building on the self-perceptions of the young people shows an awareness of their needs; it seems to me that for him too, if the PRU is a form of punishment, then his role is to ensure that the process is a restorative one.

We ended the recording at that point but I stayed in the workshop so that he could show me round. I realised that this was probably one of the members of staff who was struggling with the assessment and written reporting that was now required in the PRU and began to wonder whether I had been mistaken in agreeing with the Head, to myself, that these were necessary skills for all staff. I reflected on the

impact of the hierarchical staff structure on the morale of the Instructor. He demonstrates qualities of leadership, focus, moral purpose, determination and resilience as enumerated by West-Burnham (2014) but appears to have no public recognition of his skills.

I recorded some impressions of the day before I left.

'I'm going to leave because they've just had a major fight here and police arrest and another lad going off to hospital for a check- up and I just think they're so distracted it's just not fair to have a stranger around, so I'm going to go.'

But I go away again with the most amazing impression of the hard work that gets done for these young people and the commitment and the people here who have such enormous compassion and goodwill towards them, that they're prepared to work here and support them and take each day as it comes.'

4.7 The Fourth Day: December

Managing and Teaching; Inspiration and Perspiration



4.7.1. Conversation with the Deputy Head (Curriculum)

Reflection

The Deputy Head was in favour of PRUs for young people referred from mainstream.

'The idea is a good one, although it depends very much on the sort of reasons for doing so.'

He is strongly convinced that some children find it difficult to cope in large, busy environments for a variety of different reasons.

'We have some young people here that simply could not cope in a mainstream school but what I mean by that is a sort of comprehensive, thirty in a class, busy corridors, everything like that.'

I note this theme again. It has appeared in every adult conversation. He thinks that it is essential to meet their individual needs or problems.

'We have some students here who absolutely are very individual and do need to have their needs met otherwise it leads to all sorts of behaviour issues, disaffection and everything like that.'

How successful the alternative provision might be depends largely, in his opinion, on size and resources.

'The size of the PRU is the key variable. When you're putting together sort of 60 to 80 maybe up to 100 kids of equally complex need, high levels of disaffection, all working at completely different starting points, it's exceptionally resource intensive.'

He is clear where his frustration lies; it does not reside in managing challenging children but in areas outside his immediate control.

'Currently, the frustration for us as senior leadership team is very rarely coming from the kids, it's actually the challenge coming from the Authority and coming, well, from our leaders in terms of resourcing, in terms of doing things differently in order to meet the needs of the kids.'

This takes me back to my first conversation with the Head in September. The issue of being a local authority directly managed service is evidently still a concern for the Senior Management Team.

He is convinced of the importance of the pastoral work that goes on in the PRU and frustrated because their success in this area is not easily quantifiable and is not rewarded in any outside measures through the local authority or Ofsted.

'We're challenged following special measures in terms of school improvement, local authority challenge, everything like that, we have to raise standards in terms of academic standards and you know the success indicators are always academic'

unfortunately, or attendance based or whatever, when actually a lot of the most valuable work we do is very much around the sort of pastoral.'

It is this aspect of the work that brought him into the PRU world. His job satisfaction lies in being able to work with children in a more personal way than he was able to do in mainstream.

'Just getting involved in kids with their home lives, building relationships with parents, the multi-agency side of it was always the thing that hooked me into working in PRUs and Special Schools. Being able to be involved in a far more sort of holistic approach to the kid's life and having a relationship with YOT (Youth Offending Team) officers and social workers and, you know, doing our part of the deal and doing it to the best of our ability. It was always that other side that appealed to me coming in.'

Aspiration

For him, therefore, the staffing of a PRU would ideally include an Educational Psychologist, perhaps a social worker and a youth worker so that the PRU could develop a more cohesive approach to the students and their issues.

'I think, off the top of my head, we are limited to ten hours a month of Ed. Psych. (Educational Psychologist) time. It's not, that wouldn't be enough for one kid. I could pick a kid here, a number of kids who need that amount.'

One area he would most like to develop is the PRU's relationship with parents. He meets parents he would like to challenge and hold more accountable for their children but he also works with those who are deeply frustrated by their children and unable to influence them.

There have been references to the importance of the influence of home life on the young people but his perspective gives a fuller picture of the issue.

'The biggest challenge is parenting, and I think it's one of the things we have least control over. I'd love to be able to work more closely with parents and in some respects hold parents more accountable for their kids but you know, quite often the parents are as frustrated or have as little control as we do with some of the most challenging kids.'

In his experience a number of the Key Stage 4 students had been in alternative settings in Key Stage 3 and some even in Key Stage 2.

'The relationships with kids who have been in a special setting since Year 7 are a lot stronger and more sort of reliable but at the same time if you've been in a special setting or a PRU for five years you become a little bit institutionalised. The sort of level of support, the level of intensity that they get from us, as soon as that's withdrawn at sixteen, it's pretty scary really.'

He illustrates his point by telling the story told to him by one of his maths staff.

'He told me about a kid who, you know, we'd pushed and pushed and we'd worked so hard on him and he'd come round to us sort of February to March time, you know, done ok in his exams, 240 points I think he got over all, but then he went and got locked up a month after leaving school, because when school wasn't there, his friends weren't there, his support wasn't there, his mum kicked him out for whatever reason, I don't know, and he ended up doing a few robberies, got caught, got locked up.'

You think to yourself, 'Well, I've kind of pleased the Authority or pleased Ofsted in terms of we've made progress with this kid but actually he's now locked up and so have we prepared him for adult life?'

The length of time the PRU has to effect change makes the dilemma even sharper.

'When you've only got two years to do that for twenty five hours a week with 70% attendance, the best case scenario!, that is exceptionally broad remit to do in a short period of time.'

There's a statutory obligation to provide (full time education) for all excluded kids after the sixth day (of their exclusion); there's a statutory obligation about kids who have moved into the authority with a statement and we have to provide for them for two terms; then there's the dual reg., which is a real head scratcher for us at the moment because you know if I sat and asked anyone involved in the decision making, why do we offer dual reg., is it for behaviour change? The answer's no. Is it for respite for schools? The answer's yes.'

His experience of working with mainstream schools on transfer issues has left him convinced that many of them are not primarily concerned with the child's wellbeing.

'When you're sat around a table at a dual reg. meeting or whatever and you're listening to the school and their perceptions of the kid, the conversations I'd have with a school where they didn't know the individual, they didn't know the child, they were far more concerned about three things basically, impact on attendance, impact on the league table results and the money. Some schools are you know child focussed and friendly but some schools are exceptionally mercenary and they don't hide it very well either.'

He believes that the £2400 a school might have to find for a dual registered place is money well spent. The PRU works intensively with young people and, he believes, 'go the extra mile' to support them. He is not convinced that all schools do the same to support their problem children and he has, on occasion, been shocked when he discovered the behaviour strategies that had been followed in some mainstream settings.

'I believe that we try to meet the needs of the individual kid far more than some. I think we work harder to do that than any other setting that I've seen around the city. And you know, I've been to the best of the schools and I've been to, you know, schools that have high exclusions and don't hide their strategies particularly well. But I do believe that, it really does warm my heart when I see how we go that extra mile and the kind of level of support we'll offer the kid and when you find out where they've come from or what's happened in the past, you just think, oh my God, we would not have done it that way.'

Criticism of mainstream practice in relation to non-conforming young people has been a recurrent theme throughout the data. The Deputy's comments are based on his direct experience of attending referral meetings in schools and as such are striking in their authenticity.

When asked to describe the recording processes the PRU has in place to illustrate their 'extra mile' it is clear that they have found such illustrations difficult to achieve. As part of their movement from Special Measures, in an attempt to improve their

monitoring of pupil progress, they created an ILBP (Individual Learning and Behaviour Plan) for each pupil and attempted to embed the practice of keeping a daily operational aspect to it, recording positive and negative events. However, sustaining the maintenance of the plans proved difficult.

'Behavioural baseline assessment, no, I don't think we do formally, but what you have to bear in mind with us as a centre is that we've come an exceptionally long way in a short, short time, and two years ago there wasn't even any sort of academic assessment going on. When Ofsted came in the whole SEN paper trail was horrendous, from the safeguarding to the academic, you name it, it was very poor.'

'What we developed were ILBPs (Individual Learning and Behaviour Plans), every kid had one, personalised targets, personalised success criteria. In theory it should be assessed every half term and it was a really intensive document and I think it was designed a little bit with Ofsted in mind and we tried to make it work, but it just didn't because the kids didn't buy into it and the staff, I don't believe, bought into it.'

Having experienced such difficulty with an unwieldy system, they now apply stringent tests to their recording processes.

'So, we've pulled it all back now. The litmus test for me is, is this process going to help the teacher plan the lesson, is this going to help the kid understand? If it doesn't do either of those things, it doesn't make it on to the paper.'

He claims that, with the help of a newly appointed data manager, this 'litmus test' is being applied with rigour and meaning and gives direction to teachers and pupils that can lead to behaviour change.

'We now have systems that are becoming a lot more intelligent in the way they record behaviours and more than anything, we're not just collecting data and kind of saying, well, you know, this is what's happening, we're actually analysing the data, sitting down and attempting to build in systems that will offer an element of change.'

Universal targets remain but the personalised elements of the Plans have to be negotiated for different students and can be different for different teachers and settings.

'We've scaled back the ILBPs massively and one of the targets for us at the next training day will be to say to staff, right, we do want universal targets and we do want kids to be on the same page but you've then got to tailor that to that individual, and you have to make them SMART and you have to be able to say, right, your target's simple, no red strikes for this week.'

He knows that the challenge will be making sure that *'all the systems we have run together.'* Consistent application and consistent motivation are not easy to achieve as he has learned from past experience.

'We used to rely on SLEUTH, a mainstream system. It was computer based and for a member of staff, you know, if an incident happened they'd have to sit down, log on, load the system, which took a while, put in the user name, put in the user code, go through the system and to log one behaviour incident might take you five minutes and I'm sorry, the majority of times, the vast majority of times... [he hesitates] there just wasn't the inclination to do that.'

He knows that it is a challenge *'to have a comprehensive system that's sort of straightforward and easy to use'* and one that will encourage positive reporting while at the same time, supporting staff, who work with challenging children and deal with sometimes almost overwhelming levels of negativity, to report their concerns.

The embedded 'in-house' system of giving 'red strikes' to pupils who transgress the rules and expectations of staff is a major behaviour management strategy in this PRU. The 'red strikes' consist of single sheet reports that are directed to senior managers for action. They are designed to draw attention to behaviours that have challenged the classroom teacher or member of staff and which they feel need intervention from a senior colleague.

He describes a recent end of the day debriefing session. He has found these sessions difficult as they frequently seem to be *'a barrage of anecdotes about how bad a kid had been, how bad things had been.'*

There'd been 50, up to and around 50 red strikes a day for a couple of weeks and a red strike is supposed to be a kind of final action after a series of interventions.

‘And I asked the question, just sat back and asked, ‘Just give me a quick vote, do we need red strikes?’

This challenge evoked a strong response.

‘A member of staff went, ‘Absolutely yes,’ and another member of staff went, ‘No, no.’ Why, why? ‘Because it’s a sanction, it’s recording. I feel powerless without it.’ ‘I deal with it in my own way.’ Two completely different thought processes, and these were just two people who were good enough to speak out; I’m sure others had their thoughts.’

He invited the two who had spoken and others who wanted to be involved, to work with him on refining the ‘red strike’ process.

‘So, we’ve got red strikes here, we’ve got behaviour recording here and we’ve got green strikes which are the positives.’

I noted that this was the first time I had heard about ‘green strikes’; no one had mentioned them. He has also put in place a team to pick up the red strike referrals that does not include senior managers but colleagues from the support team.

‘We’ve now put in, what I’ve tentatively called the ‘behaviour change team’ or the ‘behaviour response team’ where at the end of the briefing, rather than the SLT going yeah, yeah we’ll sort it out or yeah, exclusion, exclusion, exclusion, I’ve asked the attendance officer, the care and wellbeing co-ordinator and an inclusion support worker, all of whom are very good with the kids, all of whom are very, very child friendly, and I’ve asked them to form a little team and at the end of every de-brief, any issues. We hand them over to them.’

He is confident that this group will apply themselves to this challenge and have the skills and resourceful approach to effect change.

‘Their challenge is twofold: one, to reduce exclusions and two, to manage the interventions that take place after an exclusion. So they’ll be going away and looking at things like restorative justice, things like mediation, personal grudges between kids and staff, things like, just focussed coaching sessions, or when a kid gets back off

exclusion, a little bit of self-reflection, all these things that we know can make a difference, it's just that they get lost in the ether of the day.'

I find his energy and creative responses to the business of moving the PRU forward fascinating. What I have heard from other members of staff is the reaction to this dynamic programme of innovation, some of it positive, some not. In a term he has scrapped the computer based system for recording behaviours, introduced a complex in house recording system, worked with it, found it was unwieldy, scrapped it, brought in a simplified version, set up a Behaviour Change team to operate as first base for dealing with incidents and organising responses, brought together a working group to look at the problematic 'red strike' system having challenged the staff to justify their use of them and appointed a data manager so that they can now record and scrutinise their outcomes.

He is an impressive manager, full of innovative ideas and the drive to see them through. He encapsulates the concepts of resilience and leadership offered by Burns and Machado (2014) and West-Burnham (2014).

I begin to have a better understanding of why some staff might have been struggling to meet the expectations of a determined, problem-solving Head and this powerhouse of a Deputy. The theme established between them is their matching innovative practice and their determination to succeed in moving the PRU forward to an improved Ofsted judgement.

Understanding

When asked to reflect on remaining issues, he agrees that the major challenge lies in staffing.

Like the Head, he is attracted to the idea of becoming an Academy as it would involve a complete re-structure and an opportunity to bring in further excellent practitioners but he knows that some of the issues are deep-seated and might not be easily resolved by a change in personnel.

'If we were to go to an Academy and do an entire restructure, keep whoever you wanted to keep, bring in other staff you knew to be excellent practitioners, we'd still

have problems with staff somewhere down the line. I'm not naïve enough to think that it's just a case of chopping the personnel and bringing in a load of people who do subscribe... you need different approaches.'

And further, 'Last year, when things were tough, there was a massive divide in the staffroom between the academic staff, the trained teachers and their buddies, and the youth work staff. So you had two completely different ethos. And it's kind of like, there was a distrust between the two, so there was like, well, she's just forcing him out of the lesson because she doesn't like him and well, he's just going to them and just putting his feet up and chatting about it.'

I am very interested to hear this comment. In my own PRU these were exactly the issues that arose between staff employed on different pay scales with different motivations and modes of working.

He describes his attempts at intervention, at building trust between members of staff working in what seems to be opposition to one another.

'You see, I could sit there and say, well he's not engaging, so the teacher's made a decision and now, you know, I trust you to go away and do a bit of work around that, dig into what the issue is, is it a personal one, is it the lesson, is there something we can do different? And getting that trust between staff is nigh on impossible, as soon as you get above a team of seven or eight but it's bringing together all the different approaches and just trusting each other to do a job.'

Contrary to his experience, the evidence I have indicates that support for the core subject teachers has been forthcoming from the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, from the Counsellor and the Instructor. I am looking forward to talking to the English teacher and have decided I must return in the summer to meet the Deputy Head (Pastoral), who is a trained Youth Service practitioner and currently on extended leave.

My evidence indicates an implicit tension between some members of staff and the leadership team who are seen as swinging the pendulum away from the 'nurturing' purpose of the PRU towards the academic.

The Deputy is critical of teachers he has met in the PRU world who have come into the environment thinking that the workload might be less; fewer pupils, perhaps less paperwork, fewer reports to write and so on. For him, the absolute opposite is the case; he is looking for well-trained, highly motivated practitioners who understand that through the rigour of their application will come a renewal of self-esteem for their damaged learners.

'I need somebody with the rigour and the training to cope with new initiatives and to understand why assessment for learning is important and why bridging the gap is important and who is willing to work, because teachers, they don't work twenty five hours a week, they don't work thirty five hour weeks, you know, your average teacher, forty to forty five hours, it's part of the job and it is what it is.'

I am reminded of my conversation with the P.E. teacher who, by his own admission, falls into this category.

So, for the Deputy, PRU teachers have to have 'an ethos', a towering belief in the worth of what they are doing, be willing to work hard and 'put the workload in', but there is an important further element.

'And, you know, that kind of, third thing, loving being around the kids and that was the common factor in all the colleagues I respected that I enjoyed working with and that I had success with because the kids know if you want to be with them.'

This is a crucial observation. I think back through the conversations and reflect on which members of staff I have met have given me the impression they enjoy the company of the young people. My impression is that this applies to most of them, but not all.

He muses on the possibility of remarketing PRUs to sell them as rewarding places for the very best teachers to work.

'You'd have to completely re-market PRUs and you'd have to incentivise working with them to get what we've described there, to get the best teachers, because we need the best teachers.'

His words echo the Head's insistence that she wants good teachers, with 'rigour' and high expectations of outcomes in the classroom.

He knows that some education settings offer inducements to potential staff: membership of a gym; shopping vouchers, more flexible working hours and so on and he wonders whether freedom from the local authority might allow a different approach to such matters.

'I looked at a job spec a few weeks back for working in a college and there were about a dozen things you could do and would do and could get for free and flexible working hours and all this great stuff. I just kind of thought, yeah, I could, could do it this way.'

He is constantly exploring new ideas; considering options.

However, whether or not it might be possible to attract top people to work in a PRU they would need to be there for the right reasons and not for inducements, smaller classes or shorter working days. He meets PRU staff like this from time to time.

'There was a time, where I think PRUs were just kind of full of... [he hesitates] it's where teachers came to let their careers die a little bit.'

He knows there are people on the staff of his PRU who fit this category and he finds it deeply frustrating.

'Even now, when you talk to staff who are looking for that next stage of their career and you ask the question, have you ever thought about going back to mainstream? And the answer was no, well would you?'

They quote shorter hours and fewer pupils as though they were the principal considerations.

'You know, those guys, and I'm talking about colleagues here, you know, they're here for the wrong reasons and it frustrates the hell out of me because those who are here, you know, for the kids first, they are the strongest members of staff and they make a difference and they never shirk any responsibility and they understand what it is you're trying to do.'

His criticism of the uncommitted goes further.

'Even if they play the game so to speak, they'll do it in a kind of tokenistic, tick boxy way and say, yeah I did this, yeah I did this.'

He knows exactly the kind of people he needs and the skills and qualities they require.

'You know, you need starter/finishers, you need resilience, you need real charisma and you need to more than anything, you just need to be as thick skinned as hell and realise that no matter what behaviour is presenting, 95, 98% of the time it isn't about you.'

A number of participants have made this point. *'Not taking it personally'* is recommended by the Kitchen Assistant, the Counsellor and the Instructor. This skill is more easily recommended than practised for those who do not share the intuitive understanding of the Kitchen Assistant and the Instructor. It is a recurring theme and indicates that there are those in the PRU who do *'take it personally'*.

He is a passionate advocate of the PRU experience but knows that however rich the alternative curriculum they might put in place for a young person, however detailed their behaviour change strategies might be, however focussed and expert their pastoral interventions might be, in the end, change for the young people happens more as a result of relationships and the realisation that they have value as individuals; that other people enjoy their company and care what happens to them.

'The kids know if you want to be with them. Even if they do know your buttons, if you're enjoying their company and vice versa, you know you're on to a winner.'

This was another inspirational conversation. The Deputy Head encapsulates many of the qualities of leadership defined by West-Burnham (2014); he is resourceful and focussed, determined and resilient.

He seems to me to directly illuminate Senge's (2006) three-legged stool simile: to be successful an institution needs *'aspiration, reflection and understanding'* simultaneously and interdependently; precisely what is apparent here.

4.7.2 Conversation with the English teacher

The subject

We began by talking about his subject. He claimed that English is generally recognised as being one of the most difficult curriculum areas to deliver in the PRU. There is evidence in the data that other colleagues agree with him. As a core subject, English is a requirement for the whole spectrum of young people who attend, whether for long or short periods of time, at whatever stage of development they might be and whatever their level of skill. In his experience, for many of them, communicating through speech appears not to be a problem; writing, however, is a different matter.

'I think it's widely recognised that English is one of the toughest areas in the PRU. A lot of the kids have got some fantastic oral skills, really used to sticking up for themselves but give them a pen and they shut down or they shut their brains down or they've not, no confidence whatsoever.'

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Instructor both talked of the young people's lack of confidence and their 'fear' of making mistakes.

He thinks a flexible approach, finding the right material, coaxing responses and being carefully non-judgemental about content and skills works well.

'It's finding something that they, they've all got something that they'll read, that they have read, that they're interested in and, initially, in Year 10 it's having the freedom to just be concerned to engage, which might mean we're doing song lyrics, looking at magazines and then maybe, even if it's just a poster to begin with, just building confidence.'

He has found that they are 'scared of formal marking' so he corrects through feedback and discussion, slipping in teaching points where he can.

I am reminded of the Instructor teaching English in his 'back door style'.

'It's having the flexibility to be able to go where they want and try and steer them via any interest they may have into thinking about the language that they're using, not

hitting them with, what is punctuation, what is grammar, that has to come accidentally, sneakily, on the side appear somewhere in maybe some feedback and not formal marking.'

The students

In his experience, all effective work depends on building trusting relationships. They will probably take time and may not happen at all in some cases.

'So it's gentle, slow, friendly, silly, if we can, trust and relationships, and until you've got trust and until you have some form of friendly relationship with them, then you can forget it.'

There is evidence in the data from a number of participants about the importance of 'trust' and 'relationships'. I have just heard the Deputy make the same point.

The English teacher is clear that he does not achieve these relationships on his own and that he is dependent on the team approach of the PRU.

'Building relationships, it's a team thing. It's certainly not just me. I think you can mess it up on your own but you can't create it on your own. You can mess it up if you're not relaxed and friendly and open to their input.'

I've made mistakes like everyone else. You might have kids who seem to be doing really well in other subjects but as soon as they see your face, it's, 'Oh God, that's him who told me to do that eight weeks ago.' And it's a real battle to get them back'.

He illustrates his point by telling the story of one of his students.

'He only came in the room once in the entire year, he would not come into the room. Then something happened in the summer, maybe he grew up a little bit I don't know and he tried in September and after three lessons he was, 'Yeah, you're alright you,' and he stayed.'

The situation was fragile but, with careful handling, he feels he achieved success.

'I know the pressure was on in those first two or three lessons for me to just, not put him off, do something ooh I don't know! And then thankfully, he was interested in something that I had an idea to do and we had a laugh with it.'

Such situations are not cost free for this teacher and demand a level of resilience in approach and, according to him, a particular flexibility of response.

'Sometimes you have to endure and that is the trouble with teaching in a place like this, sometimes you have to let them loose a little bit and not jump on them when they're doing things, which in any other classroom would have to be jumped on.'

This approach too finds echoes in the data although it may be that one person's interpretation of 'flexibility' does not match another. There are claims about the necessity of flexible responses from the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, the Counsellor, the Kitchen Assistant and the Instructor. It is evidently an important skill for everyone who works there.

When asked to expand on his comment he refers to language and physical behaviours.

'Well it might mean the language they're using. It can be quite abusive sometimes. They can get frustrated and kick something or throw something and shout at someone.'

He admits that on occasion he has objected and retaliated, not in kind but by matching their anger.

'Yes, we do have the occasional clash where I retaliate back to them as much as I can in the same, well not exactly the same things but similar.'

However, his usual reaction is to let some of it happen, then perhaps encourage them, or direct them to the 'time-out' space, called 'Engage', and follow matters up when tempers have cooled.

'Often it's just giving them a chance to get it out because often their anger or animosity to this subject that they're bringing in here is nothing to do with me, or

here, it's something else that's been brought in and I just have to give them room to let off steam sometimes.'

The 'don't take it personally' theme has been well established in the data. However, this is the first mention of anger; the P.E. teacher talks of his frustration and the anger he feels but he does not admit to displaying it.

The English teacher adopts a variety of strategies to deal with challenging outbursts but is all too aware of the pressures of expectations from all sides.

'Whether that's saying go away, go to Engage [internal quiet space], come back in ten minutes, I'll be there soon, please go away and gently pushing them out, or whether it's let's do something else, you've got to be so flexible and so adaptable here, which you can get away with in Year 10 but Year 11, when you've got GCSE pressure and deadlines for coursework, that's when it gets tough, so if you've not won them by Year 11, then Year 11 can be really hard.'

He makes what he feels is a realistic assessment of the potential of the young people he teaches.

'Generally they're in with such low ability that the first year, if we have them for Year 10, is just trying to get them to engage in education and learning and I'll go at whatever pace they can handle. Usually in Year 11 I can't be targeting As and Bs; I'm trying for Cs but I'm happy with Ds and I feel a failure if they're on Es and Fs.'

When asked how the PRU assesses ability on entry he sighs before replying.

'That's done by our SENCO who does a baseline assessment. We are, to be truthful, reshaping all of that and developing how to use that information more successfully.'

As far as he is aware, they receive little information from schools to support induction work.

'Generally we get nothing from a school with a child, nothing comes in with them at all, that may be because they haven't been to school for a long time or it may be just that the schools are not willing or able to pass anything on to us.'

Criticism of mainstream practice occurs frequently in the data.

He had nothing to build on when he entered the PRU as far as recording systems or assessment processes were concerned but the new management is changing all that, to his great satisfaction.

'So I inherited no system but, management here are fantastic at, interested in developing literacy across the school and co-ordinating our SENCO's work and leading towards, you know, better quality and standards in English.'

This is yet another initiative that has been undertaken by the Senior Leadership team. The list is long.

One of the issues that is difficult to manage in the assessment process is the erratic nature of referrals. Young people can join the PRU at any time and each time there is movement, it poses a challenge to the management of his teaching group. Some referrals are short term; others longer; others permanent.

'So we don't know how long they're here, they might be here for three weeks. For example, I had one boy who was clearly of a reasonable standard in English but he was a little intimidated by the other people in the group and, happily for him, another school offered a place. So after three weeks of trying to organise, catch up with the controlled assessment results from his last school, organising his next one, all of a sudden, he's gone!'

In spite of the frustrations he has no desire to be in a mainstream environment. He taught adults, A level and re-sit students in an F.E. college. When the college closed he was offered temporary work in a PRU and various other EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) settings before joining his current PRU.

'I loved it straightaway. I think I found that it it's much more fun, it's demanding certainly. I do miss the A and A talented, gifted, really interested kids but then again the thrill of getting one of these kids interested in something is beyond...'* (He waves his hand.)

A number of contributors to the data have talked about their commitment to the PRU. He is equally certain that he will stay.

The system

When asked to consider the PRU as a general concept he responds carefully.

'It certainly has to be thought through. It has to be not taken lightly to take a kid out of mainstream into a PRU because there are all sorts of consequences for their education. We can't match the subjects, that's for sure.'

This is the first time I have heard a reference to the limitations of the PRU curriculum.

He is also concerned that for vulnerable children who find themselves alongside young people with challenging behaviour patterns, the PRU a difficult environment.

'If a child has certain vulnerabilities then other PRU kids, with behavioural problems, can eat them for breakfast and it can be a very difficult place for a vulnerable child to progress.'

'I worked at an EOTAS that was far more nurturing and distinguished the behaviourally difficult children and the emotionally difficult, the children who were absenting themselves from education or found it difficult to engage in education because of their own emotional turmoil, rather than those that had particularly, as here, very aggressive tendencies, behavioural disorders, attitudes towards staff and education.'

He feels the PRU might not be able to manage the extremely vulnerable, and it might also not be able to manage the extremely violent but it does work well for those who fall between the extremes.

'We might have one or two aggressive, we might have one or two extremely vulnerable ones, shy ones, who can't come in but there's an awful lot of kids in the middle who exhibit traits of either but not to the extremes of the others.'

There are frequent references in the data to the kinds of young people referred to the PRU and the difficulties the more vulnerable have in coping with more confident and more challenging students. Foucault's consideration of the treatment of difference is relevant in this context. The notion that society nominates and rejects its lepers applies.

The staff

For him, the success of the PRU lies in the quality of the staff. The paramount importance of a skilled, motivated team has been a theme from the first moment of the Head's first conversation. Her *'Staff are absolutely key'* statement has been in my mind throughout the gathering process.

'The staffing's got to be supreme. When I came here you could tell straight away that the staff here were superb, a mix of experience, age, interest, you know, life.'

He is particularly struck by the lack of tension between the teachers and support staff. In the Further Education world he found a lack of respect between colleagues who had different roles or had different levels of qualifications. In this PRU, he feels it is entirely otherwise.

'I found a lot of mutual respect for what one another did, there's certainly no division between teaching and assisting or behavioural management or hair and beauty, or an 'English' teacher! None whatsoever! And it's fantastic!'

This is quite a startling comment in view of the Deputy Head's reference to a troublesome split in the staffroom between the teaching staff and the support staff. For the English teacher, this shared commitment and mutual respect forges a bond that is particularly apparent when *'things go wrong'* and they need one another's support.

He is clear that if he had the task of appointing staff to the PRU he would always look for people who had some experience of the kinds of issues the young people face or had some experience of teaching and working with such children.

'I wouldn't have anyone who couldn't show, either in their personal life some experience of the sorts of issues that kids here have or had some sort of prior experience of teaching, I certainly wouldn't let them near the place.'

When asked to develop this statement, he reveals personal circumstances which he feels have helped him to empathise with some of the young people.

'One of the first things I volunteered at interview was not just that I had the experience of three or four years teaching in similar settings but my brother's disabled and I was brought up teaching someone who was outside mainstream education and had his own special needs.'

He also reveals that his own school experience was uncomfortable.

'And although successful academically, in mainstream education, I hated the damn place, I couldn't wait to get out, like a lot of these children, you know.'

He thinks this personal experience helps his understanding of the PRU students and allows him to be more empathetic than judgemental in his approach. It also equips him to employ a degree of subtlety in his relationships with them that he feels might otherwise not be there.

He is impatient of Ofsted inspections as he feels this subtlety is often invisible to inspectors.

'I think any teacher will say whatever they are, that the, the Ofsted, bless them, they haven't got a clue how to come in and observe us. I've had great conversations with Ofsted people, I've had three I think since I've been working in this sort of area, three great conversations afterwards but three weeks of nightmarish reading out of rules and regs and what you have to fit beforehand and you think well, they were all a waste of time because they're nothing to do with my classroom, or very little to do with it.'

He describes the importance he attaches to working across the curriculum in his pursuit of developing English skills.

'If I'm looking for something that a child's interested in I might have to snatch that from the Music Department or go and take the kid to work on English in the Music Department or in Art or Cookery or wherever it is. So we really have to have strong cross-curricular links.'

He is excited by the potential of the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Education) qualification for his students and for the greater freedom it will allow him to focus on skills and release his students from the straitjacket of coursework.

'If I can get them appreciating language and their usage of it, I will just jump up and down for ever but this new certificate, IGCSE, will give me the flexibility to spend two years building up skills, it's skills based and skills are about interest and practical worth.'

Having reflected on the importance of staffing and the curriculum, he was then asked to consider the management of the PRU and to assess its behaviour management systems in particular.

'Some of the rules, I think some of the rules are valid and are about people's safety and about including, giving everybody an opportunity to learn. I think other rules are just a hindrance and a pain and they're just things left over from, brought down from mainstream schools that aren't relevant to alternative settings.'

He illustrates his point by describing the current situation of five students. They spend the afternoons working at an off-site provider where the restrictions of the PRU are not applied. He agrees that if disruptive students are preventing others from learning then action has to be taken but he implies that it was the, as he sees it, imposition of irrelevant rules, that has led to their exclusion.

'We have five boys, for example, who are at another site and they pretty much, they can keep their hoods on, they can drink while they're working. We don't care as long as they engage.'

'Why do that for just those five, if it will work for everybody else why not work for everybody else, it doesn't bother me.'

He understands the necessity of rules and systems but challenges the relevance of some of those pursued in the PRU.

'Although you certainly can't have carte blanche with kids wandering around doing what they want, you have to have rules and systems, I think you should be as flexible as you can.'

It is clear that he has some problems sharing the current expectations of management concerning dress, 'wearing hats' and so on and feels his illustration of the five boys working elsewhere supports his views.

It is interesting that five students are attending elsewhere for their English GCSE; the PRU is operating an exclusion system of its own.

When asked to comment on the appropriateness of the building to the needs and aspirations of the PRU, he is clear that the only space that matters to him is his classroom. The rest matters *'Not a jot'* to him although he knows that its size and unwieldy large spaces cause problems.

'If I close the door and I've got a classroom as long as I've got you know, these glorious things, boards and computers and things and places to display, I'm happy, perfectly happy. Perhaps the building is a little too big and there are too many places to run away and hide but having said that, somewhere that's light and airy and large, gives them space...'

He pushed hard for more computers in his classroom and enjoys the opportunities they offer for learning, especially for fragile and reluctant learners.

He likes the non-judgemental aspect of computer skills work and recognises the opportunities it offers for interaction.

'The computer has identified something as wrong and they want to know why. That's great, that's fantastic for me because I go over and I try to explain why and then we correct it together.'

He knows that the PRU world lacks career opportunities and reveals that he is without his QTS, Qualified Teacher Status. He had moved on from FE before the current progression process became available and now finds himself without the crucial qualification and therefore unable to move into mainstream should he wish to.

'So as it stands now, even though I've been teaching for twelve years, thirteen years, I can't go to a mainstream school unless I go as an NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) which I'm not prepared to do.'

However, he has no desire to move and enjoys his current position very much.

'There are friendly and caring people around here who at the same time are committed to doing as professional a job as they possibly can.'

He regrets the criticism that the PRU world receives from the Government and from Ofsted and even from the media. He also hints at criticism closer to home.

'When we're criticised for not doing our professional job to the criteria of Government standards and boxes, that sometimes upsets a few people. We're all subject to boxes aren't we, I'm afraid, so we've got to live with it but I just wish that someone, people had a bit more flexibility about judging us. Not just Ofsted, from above here as well, yeah. And sometimes you know the occasional bit of media attention about what we do (sighs) I think it can be a misrepresentation of what actually goes on here.'

He would not change his job however and is committed to what he does.

'Yeah. It's fun'.

The English teacher evidently cares very much about his role, usually enjoys contact with the young people and is a thoughtful practitioner, constantly seeking ways to encourage engagement and support growing confidence. However, there were hints that he might be finding some of the new expectations around recording data and planning irksome. He is impatient of what he sees as petty rules and I had the impression that he might not have supported the move to an outside setting for five of his students.

However, he obviously finds enormous job satisfaction in tiny improvements in progress or behaviour in his classes.

A number of established themes are apparent in his conversation; the shortcomings of mainstream, the pressure of Ofsted, the crucial importance of quality staff and teamwork. He also makes reference to his past experience to illuminate the present; another established theme.

His reference to the treatment of vulnerable pupils by their peers recall Foucauldian analyses of the treatment of difference and of power relationships embedded in human situations and relationships.

4.8 The Fifth Day: June

Summer Days: work done and time to reflect



4.8.1 The Third Conversation with the Head

Seven months lie between the second and third conversation with the Head. Immediately apparent is a lightening of her mood from the dark day in November when I recorded her thoughts on her progress. Looking back she recalls the relentless pressure.

'I think I was, coming up to late November, December, I was exhausted, I was absolutely exhausted'.

She lost 2 stones in weight between September and December and this she attributes to the 'constant challenge'.

'I lost a lot, just because the working day was a constant challenge and that's eased off quite considerably because the place is in a much better place, you know. We've turned the curve basically on the management of the Centre.'

'It's been commented on by visitors, you know, regular visitors, they'll say the place feels far more manageable.'

She attributes the improvement to the relentless focus on behaviour management that she and the Deputy Head (Curriculum) have maintained.

The staff chrysalis

'I think the vast majority of the change is through P's (Deputy Head) and my push regarding behaviour, and just to keep on and on and on to the staff about it.'

Earlier in the year they had set up behaviour teams led by the staff members outside the leadership team but these had fallen away quickly as they were ineffective in dealing with issues.

I recall this strategy as an innovation described by the Deputy Head. I notice that as a team, she and the Deputy are quick to make a judgement about the success or failure of an innovation and move on to the next. This is an established characteristic of their management style.

'We (the Deputy) and I sat down and discussed why it failed and it's actually because it needs one of the leaders to lead it, the staff don't have the wherewithal to know actually what they're doing... and (sighs) exclusion is always the answer.'

One of her strongest principles is that exclusion from the PRU is an absolute last option. She was adamant that the young people would not be excluded for swearing at staff.

'I'm not having it. It's a PRU. So I said, 'Absolutely not. We're not excluding kids for swearing at staff you know.'

She and the Deputy worked hard to tease out the most contentious issues and the ones that were less important, that didn't in fact prevent achievement in the classroom. Then they pressured the staff to work with them to challenge

contravention wherever they saw it so that, collectively, they could make a consistent impact.

'We looked at the things where we could be more tolerant on the kids, that wouldn't have an impact on their achieving in the classroom. We made it absolutely crystal clear to staff, these are the areas that you, we're all going to have to challenge and this is what we do about it. So for example, with hats, we allowed hats because we thought actually, we don't like it, but what impact does that have on the classroom? It doesn't.'

I wondered about the English teacher's comments about the 'hat' rules and whether he had had any influence on this compromise. There has been a strong theme running through the data about the need for 'flexibility' of response; the SMT is showing that it can adapt too.

However, the wearing of hoods was a different matter.

'We drew the line at hoods because kids can hide behind hoods. There's something about a hood that's sort of, it puts somebody away, it hides them and you know we didn't want that because it's also, on the CCTV you cannot identify a person in a hood, you can in a hat.'

They looked at a number of '*niggles with the staff*' and agreed a set of responses concerning, for example, bringing drinks into the centre, (not allowed), smoking at the back of the building during lesson time (not allowed).

'We boned up on the things that seemed to be always the niggles with the staff but we said that the expectation is that every single member of staff challenges these things. And you know we were able to answer things like, 'OK, what if we find a child out the back smoking during lesson time, will you give them a red strike?' We said, 'If they're refusing to come in then you could perhaps call for senior managers but you've got to try it yourself first otherwise you're disempowering yourself and the kids won't respect you for it.'

This clear message to staff had obviously had an impact.

'We were quite determined to challenge staff who weren't challenging kids about, you know, hoods and things. We're still doing that but considerably less because most staff challenge the kids and the problems have gone.'

As proof of improvement, she points to the dramatic drop in the number of exclusions from the PRU since Christmas.

'September to Christmas, there was, off the top of my head, ball park figure, there were something like 90. Now it's 12.'

She describes further initiatives designed to keep challenging behaviour under constant review. A new behaviour management team, led by the Deputy Head (Pastoral) will focus their efforts and resources on three or four young people for an intense period.

'We have asked [the Deputy Head (Pastoral)] to lead a staff behaviour team which is set up and working now. We focus on three or four kids and they do very personalised behaviour targets for those kids with very clear outcomes, 'This is what you'll get if you do this, this is what will happen if you do that.'

The Counsellor felt that a clear behaviour management plan would be an important step towards consistency; this initiative is the latest strategy in their pursuit of an effective plan.

The student chrysalis

A further initiative was implemented before Christmas when five difficult students were educated off-site for a time. Staff from the PRU went with the young people to an available space and the Head and Deputies visited regularly.

'To try and sort of help stabilise the PRU, before Christmas we sent a group of five of our very challenging, violent boys to a youth centre, but we used our own staff to tutor them. So even though they were on half timetable, they were getting our two best teachers who are English and Maths teachers. They were supported by B, (an Instructor) who is sort of you know one of the men who can manage really challenging kids.'

The project evidently relieved pressure at the PRU but she was disappointed that the five did not make as much progress as she had hoped.

'I would say the project was a success for the centre. I don't think it had any detrimental effect on the kids but it didn't generate the sort of progress that we expected.'

She attributes this to the extent of the boys' disengagement with learning.

'It was because the kids just, they were so far gone down the line, you know, not interested in achieving'.

She feels they did everything they could to give the five opportunities to move forward and attributes their lack of progress to their lives out of school.

'We really feel that we did everything, parents were contacted you know we did home visits, P (Deputy Head) and myself regularly went down just to touch base and say, 'Are you alright lads?' you know, 'How are things going?' and we got them a nice lunch and they were taxed and... I feel we did everything we could...'

'They enjoyed it on the whole but you know school of any form is low on their agenda, they're streetwise, drug-taking... offending young people.'

In spite of her expressions of disappointment however, those same young people were in fact, present on the day in June that I visited, taking a GCSE examination.

I reflected on this initiative. The PRU works with dual registered pupils on a ten week turnaround programme. Those pupils are referred out of their mainstream schools ostensibly to focus on their needs. However, listening to the Deputy Head in December, I was left in no doubt about his view that such programmes are principally effective in giving the mainstream schools some respite time and do not, in his experience, bring about major change in the young people. It strikes me that the PRU has followed the same path in dealing with these five students and the outcome is similar. The programme was successful in that the five obviously attended the alternative centre; the most interesting aspect is that the PRU staff followed them and taught them there. There is an established theme of innovative strategies running through the data; this one seems particularly bold.

They had tried a different creative approach with a group of four Year 10 girls. The four girls attended an off-site centre for two days a week, attending the PRU for the rest of the time. The focus was on '*relationship building*' so that their time in the PRU could be more productive with less confrontation. It was led by the Literacy and Numeracy teacher who runs the one to one skills development programme and whose thoughts on her work appear earlier in the data on Day 2.

According to the Head, this project has worked very well.

'That's worked, I would say, very well. Relationships with the girls are considerably improved.'

She recounts a telling episode.

'There was a small gym at this place. When the girls first went down there, they were obviously unsettled about that and excited about... because they were in a small building that had space for 16 kids and the staff asked, 'What shall we do?' And I said, 'OK, let them play. Let them play, play hide and seek with them. And they did! They said, 'Do you know that was such a beautiful day'. These kids are not used to playing with adults.'

Sadly this building, which suited their needs very well, is no longer available but the Head is convinced of the value of such focussed off-site, short term interventions and is keen to do similar projects in the future.

'If we can identify groups like that in the future, we will look to do that again, to move staff out.'

These two strategies are part of a pattern of their management style. If something is not working, they are bold and innovative in looking for solutions.

She then talks of her plans for the induction of the following year's students. She already knows there will be 25 starting at the centre, moving from the Key Stage 3 PRU.

'Now obviously we're about to take on our new year 9s and there's about 25 of them plus any new permanent exclusions that come through, so September will be hard

but we've changed what we're going to do about transition. Last year this time we already had the most challenging year 9 kids and it was too unsettling. So this year we're doing it over a condensed three-week period at the end of term. The first week my staff will go to the Key Stage 3 PRU, just sitting there and watching. The second week the kids will come here with their Key Stage 3 staff and the third week the kids will be here with just 2 or 3 staff from their centre.'

She has further innovative ideas about how to ease the induction.

'And we're also going to ask some of our more reliable current year 11s if they would work with us on those transition weeks just to be around the place as like monitors, head girls and boys, you know...

And if they're not in employment or at college in September perhaps do a couple of weeks with us and we can give them £50 worth of shopping vouchers.

So we thought you know a bit of mentoring like that would be good. And we've earmarked three kids who we think would be positive mentors for the kids, all challenging kids in their own way but you know, I think will leave this place having achieved.

So that's good'.

There are so many positives to take out of this development. It indicates close working relationships with the feeder PRU; co-operative staff within the PRU taking up the initiative and strong personal relationships with the Year 11 students who want to work with the staff in this completely innovative way.

The difference in the Head's manner from November is striking. She began this conversation by talking positively about improvements to behaviour and enumerates with animation one initiative after another, each one demonstrating a determinedly problem solving approach, using opportunities when they arise and making the best, as she sees it, of available resources.

She moves on to describe further positive developments.

She has appointed a data manager and is pleased they are now able to produce evidence to support their perceptions of progress.

'We've got the evidence now, because we've got a data manager who is having all this stuff fed in and we can actually show that we are closing that gap and it's within what Ofsted are saying we should, mainstream should be going.

So that you know is absolutely fantastic.'

They have also worked hard on delivering an even more focussed personalised curriculum for each of the students. This benefits not only the individual students but also has a benefit for the PRU base.

'As far as the curriculum goes, P (Deputy Head) is my curriculum manager, he works incredibly hard and creatively getting the right timetable for these kids and he'll liaise with K (Alternative Programme Manager) about alternative programmes so that we don't have all our kids on site at any one time because it would be a nightmare.'

She has also been enormously heartened by a chance appointment to the staff. This dynamic individual had transformed much of the extra-curricular programme and had been a huge influence on morale in the PRU.

'We had a long term absence from a member of staff who had his knee stomped on and in his absence we had a young woman who is PE trained and she supported PE but she was also so vibrant round the centre...

I almost cried when (the long term absentee) came back to work! Because she was getting kids to come in at half 8 in the morning to do gym, was prepared to work after school, she could do dance with the girls and she brought a lot to the place and we're actually thinking you know could we do more PE, at the end of the day the kids actually like that physical side.'

It is clear that the Head is constantly thinking about creative solutions to all kinds of issues and is constantly looking ahead. She is keen to find a role for this supply teacher on her staff.

'And she would be capable of delivering something like PSHE. She would be available and I know when she left us two weeks ago she said, 'I have so much enjoyed my time here', she would want to come back, you know, which is great.'

She breaks off from thinking about this young woman to express her excitement and satisfaction at their collective achievement in the past year.

The Ofsted chrysalis

'This is the stuff that makes me buzz and want to get out of bed in the morning and feel really good about the fact I think this place has turned a corner. And I feel confident, if Ofsted came in, bar attendance which is still poor, we would be a good PRU.'

Now I was not saying that in the Autumn Term!

When asked to reflect on those things which have not improved so much she refers again to attendance.

'Attendance is still chronic and I'm not sure what more we can do about that.'

She fears for the outcome.

'If we squeeze 60% and that's, you know... that will put us back into Special Measures within four years. And we've got, you know, a parent support worker, and attendance officer, we phone home every day...'

One of the major issues is the geographical location of the PRU. It is on the northern edge of the city but the schools that refer to the PRU are on the east and west. The north is the lowest excluding area.

'I'll give you an example, we were referred a dual registered kid and I said, 'It's not going to work'. They said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Because his attendance is 6%, you know! And you're asking him to come across the city!''

She claims that they have been able to demonstrate improved attendance figures with many of their intake and goes on to prove her case.

'In this case, his attendance here was 11% which is actually about a 100% improvement but it's still not enough because that's one day a fortnight coming into school.'

She graphically illustrates the nature of the problem.

'It's, you know, you go back to the family and it's unfortunately, single parent, mother has a part-time job but she goes to work at 7 o'clock in the morning and she can't get the boy out of bed. And if she was a stay at home mum, the boy rules the roost, you know, and will tell his mother to fuck off and hold a knife to her throat, say, 'I'm staying in bed', you know...'

She has pursued prosecutions for lack of attendance but finds it an uncomfortable process.

'If I put myself into those parents' shoes with their skills and ability and life experience, could I do any better than they're doing? And the answer's probably not, you know.'

She gives an example of an intervention with another student that had unintended consequences.

'We sent our parent support worker round, we've offered parenting classes, we sent the safer schools officer around who confiscated a Playstation saying, 'Until you get into school you're not getting it back'. But then he goes, and the kid smashes the TV. So the mother is then left without a TV, you know...'

She describes the strategy adopted to move the PRU out of Special Measures before her appointment.

'The reason this place managed to come out of special measures was because in a very short period of time, I think it was over two months, they raised the attendance from 55% to 75%, but it cost a lot of money because the families were bribed. And that's not sustainable.'

They were bribed with food vouchers. You know, if so and so comes in four days out of five, you'll get a £30 food voucher. Well, that's quite a lot to the families but it's not

sustainable and it's not fair either because it's all false. So Ofsted come in and say, oh yeah, you've done that and they're not interested in the hows, the whys, the wherefores... you know, taxis were put on for all of those kids. I mean I don't know what the total cost was because you're not talking hundreds, you're talking several thousands.'

Although disapproving of this earlier strategy, she uses a system of rewards for attendance.

'We offer rewards, because students who are poor attenders, they have targets set with their families and we do give £50 shopping baskets to those parents. But it's still not enough incentive for some.'

She illustrates the difficulty with a further example.

'I'm thinking of one of my kids who is a really nice kid, he's a young father, no longer with the girlfriend but does see his daughter from time to time, and he'll come in and, or very rare occasions he'll come in, I'll say oh... I'll call him Danny. You know, 'Lovely to see you Danny'. So he's welcomed into the centre. And you know, 'What have you been up to?' And it's like, 'Oh not a lot'. And it's like well, 'Why don't you come in, you know, we can feed you, give you breakfast, lunch, a bus pass'. And he said, phew, he said, 'What's the point, I earn more selling drugs on the street'. And it's like, 'Yeah, I get that now, but do you want that for your daughter?' You know, so we're using the daughter as sort of the reason... And it's like he's not the brightest of kids so he can't understand the concept and he can't see beyond today, he absolutely can't see beyond today. And you know I talk to him about his capability of getting qualifications which might secure him a job, which has got longevity, he's absolutely not interested. He said, 'L (her name), I get pissed and stoned every night. I can't get up before 12 o'clock, you know. I've come in today because I was down at a mate's down the road and I've come up for some lunch.'

Anecdotes like this, in my view, can only support the Head's claim that they are unable to deliver improvement in attendance rates for all their students. She might be forgiven for feeling a degree of hopelessness, akin to her state of mind in November. However, she remains positive and optimistic as the conversation draws to a close.

'You know, in the year I've been in post, you know, we really feel that this place... it's a little chrysalis that's emerging... it could be a beautiful butterfly!'

4.8.2 Conversation with two Year 11 male students

The conversation with these two male students was the result of an opportunity seized from a moment in a corridor. They asked the Deputy Head (Pastoral) who I was and following an explanation, she asked them if they would like to talk to me as she was sure I would very much enjoy talking to them. I was not able to gain permission from home so, having confirmed the arrangement with the Head, the Deputy Head sat in the room with us. Both students were Year 11 students over 16 years of age. They were very excited as they had just come out of their final GCSE exam and were very pleased with themselves. I think they decided that I did not look too official or challenging; the Deputy Head was encouraging them to take part and they were sufficiently intrigued to trust me.

They would only talk to me together and even when I explained that I would not disclose their identities in any subsequent published material, they both decided that they wanted to be known by names other than their own. The banter about the choice of names went on for a few moments. However, the first speaker responded directly to the question of how he had found the PRU experience.

'Good experience. Because I was bad before I came here, always fighting and like talking to teachers and badmouthing them and that.'

He had come to the PRU at the beginning of Year 10 so had been there for five and a half terms. He had been permanently excluded from school after a series of fixed term exclusions.

'I got sent off site like 7 times and I got kicked out of there.'

He had not wanted to come to the PRU initially.

'Not really, not at first but now obviously I'm glad I came.'

I note the word 'obviously' and wonder if I can draw out more. He had settled in quickly in about a month. When asked what was good about being in the PRU as opposed to school, again the response was unhesitating.

'There's not many students in this school, in a normal school there's loads of students and you've got to walk far to get to classrooms and the teachers are different so obviously it's better.'

'Obviously' begins to take on meaning for me. He said that he enjoyed primary school and that things began to go wrong for him when he moved on to secondary. It was here that the fighting started which he claims was in response to being bullied.

'I got bullied, so obviously I stood up to my bullies.'

He describes the bullying as:

'They would just walk over and say, oh give me your cigs or have you got any money for me?'

According to him, the bullies got away with it and are still at school.

'They got off.'

However, he does not feel that he would rather be back at school. There are many aspects of life in the PRU that appeal to him.

'At school, if you treat the teacher as your friend you get detention or put in isolation. If you treat a teacher as a friend here they take it as a compliment really. I like teachers to be friends as well as teachers.'

The use of first names for staff in the PRU struck him as odd when he first arrived and he recalls his early mistakes with amusement.

'I called them 'sir'! I called people sir and madam.'

He is also pleased that the PRU does not have a uniform.

'Don't like it.'

On the day of the conversation he had taken a maths examination and when I ask him what grade he thought he might achieve he was absolutely clear.

'A low C.'

He had also taken exams in English, PE and PSHE and was looking forward to going to college to study Catering and Hospitality. He talked about his interest in cooking and when asked if he aspired to be a Jamie Oliver indicated the depth of his interest by reference to a different celebrity, a well-known Caribbean chef.

'I compare myself to Levi Roots to be honest. I know about sweet potato and Saturday soup!'

When asked what message he might like to pass on to others following him through the PRU, again he was clear and unhesitating.

'Don't wait till year 11 to get your head down.'

His positive attitude to his teachers was evident.

'Obviously I'm thankful yeah, they helped me a lot.'

When asked what message he might like to give them, he gave a cryptic but optimistic reply.

'See you in the future!'

This student had evidently had a positive experience at the PRU. The only negative he referred to was dealing with a fellow student who had hygiene problems. At this point the second student joined in the conversation. He had remained quiet up to this point but was moved to corroborate the difficulty they had experienced with this fellow student.

'He didn't trouble anybody but just needed to watch his hygiene a bit more.'

'You can't say it obviously, because you want to be nice don't you? Oh but, that was a bit hard work to be honest.'

This led to a brief exchange about the support they received from home, best understood verbatim.

My voice: *Have you got a lot of support at home?*

First student *Me, yeah.*

My voice: *So somebody does your washing for you?*

First student: *Oh yeah, my mum.*

My voice: *These well-trained mums.*

Second student: *That's what they're there for'.*

The second student had come to the PRU from another city and had not attended secondary school in his new area but had been placed directly in the PRU. He described his secondary school experience before coming to the area.

'Basically from the start of high school I started, I don't know, just started smoking weed and that and then I got a bit, you know, at school, started telling the teachers to like, I don't know, just swearing at them and then me and my mates started fighting all day, every day.'

As a result of this he found himself being constantly sent home.

'So like one week I'd go in, in 10 minutes I'd get sent home for the week, come back the next week, go in. Then, on the teachers, like bullying a bit, get sent home again for the week. So I was never really there, my attendance was something like 20%.'

At first, he found it difficult to settle into the new environment.

'I didn't like being here because all these people in this school, specially this guy here, thought I was a gangster. No, you're not, you're still at school, you know what I mean?'

Eventually, he began to trust the teachers and then made some friends.

'But you get used to it. It took me a while to settle in and that. I got on with the teachers first and then, I think it was this guy I talked to first in this school!'

For him, the PRU has been a good place to be. He is clear in his response to this.

'When I first came here I was all, always this, always that, I didn't want to change. But then I came here and it sort of changed me as a person, so like I think I'm more open to things, and I stopped doing drugs.'

He credits the PRU with turning him into a 'better person'. He still spends time with his friends out of school but no longer feels the necessity to follow them into whatever activity they might pursue.

'Sometimes, I don't know, it's just basically been, it's made me a better person, like I go out now and I see what my mates are like and I'm thinking am I like that? It's quite embarrassing you know when you look back and you think I was that type of person. So, but I still talk to them and that, I still chill out but I just don't go on because they go off and do all these stupid things and I think that's just pointless that. So it's basically made my mind set a lot broad, like broader than it was.'

When asked how he feels when he hears other students using foul language towards teachers and staff, his response is non-judgmental and reflects the self-awareness indicated above.

'It doesn't... [he hesitates] I don't know because I, like I can't say I haven't abused a teacher here myself. I've been... (he hesitates again) I used to bully a teacher here myself. It's what you do. But I don't know, you just, you focus on yourself when you're in here, just focus on yourself innit? If I'm doing good then why should I focus on what other people are doing?'

When asked to consider the difference between his relationship with his teachers in his previous school and those in the PRU, he recalls one teacher with whom he held important conversations.

'Well, there was only one teacher that I really used to talk to and that was when I used to get sent out of class, just before they were going to send me home I'd go and sit in there, talk to them for a little bit.'

He draws a comparison between his mainstream experience and the PRU.

'In a mainstream school it's like your teacher is your master, you know what I mean? Where in this school, a lot more of the difference in this school, it's about mates, innit? Because they just get on with you.'

He considers the notion of whether he has 'respect' for his PRU teachers.

'Oh, a lot of respect, a lot of respect, yeah.'

The first student chimes in: *'I've got a lot of respect for every teacher in the school.'*

The second student develops the idea further. *'It's not, because other schools show respect to the teachers... [he hesitates] I think it's more of the case like, like they're coming down to you, not to your age but to your...(he hesitates) like they're mates with you and it's basically you go in there and do stuff, they'll have a joke with you, like you're their mates so you take on, you just have a joke back and then it builds a bond basically.'*

He is proud of his achievements at the PRU.

'I done my ICT, maths, English PE, PSHE, I got a leadership award as well so!

I think this place has got more out of me than a mainstream school would have.'

He is looking forward to a career as a chef. When asked to consider the kind of discipline he might have to work under in a professional kitchen, he understands the import of the question.

'Well, it's different to being in school I think because when you're getting paid for it you've got a lot more responsibilities on you. But when you're in school you think I don't have that responsibility I live at home, my mum does this, my mum does that, my dad, you know what I mean, you just rely on your parents to take responsibility for you. But when you get older you get your own, so you think more about, oh if I ever go back I'm going to lose my job kind of thing.'

When I ask him to consider what advice he might have for younger children he reveals the extent of his understanding of his position.

'Well I didn't realise that I had to concentrate in school until about 3 months ago and I, I've had to work really hard and I've been sleeping a lot and I've had to work really hard. It's best to do your work when you can, early, before you do it all and if you can, stay in a mainstream school because it's better for you and you get more opportunities from a mainstream school.'

The opportunities he has in mind are chiefly concerned with sport but he makes another crucial observation.

'When you get a reference from school to go to like college and when they look at it and think oh he was in a PRU, so his behaviour might not be this... [he hesitates].'

He misses the team games and was a keen footballer, rugby, basketball and table tennis player. He has some experience of playing in community football and rugby groups but is not regularly involved.

'When I was younger it would be me and my mates would meet and do you want to come for a game of football or something but now it's more like, oh do you want to... [he hesitates] do other things. Do you know what I mean?'

He is a keen Liverpool fan but would not go to a match unless he had the money to buy a seat in a box. His answer hints at his perceptions of a different world outside the PRU.

'The only time I'd actually go to Liverpool is if I had enough to go and sit in my own box away from all the other people with their Stanley knives!'

I ask about the wearing of hoods.

Voice one: *'I used to be in my hood all the time. I used to wear my hood 24/7. Bad man's in the hood!'*

Voice two: *'That were me back in the day.'*

When I ask if the hood had meant that they wanted to hide from people, the response was clear.

Voice one: *No! The hood was like leave me the f... alone you know what I mean! Obviously I used to wear it, but now I don't wear my hood.'*

When I ask them as a final question to reflect on what difference the PRU has made to them, the response from Voice 2 is clear.

'We've just matured haven't we!'

These two students had just completed their final exam when this interview was recorded. They were good-humoured, positive and confident in dealing with a complete stranger asking questions.

Voice two uses the word 'gangster' and I discovered later that his hopes of a career for himself are threatened by a 'gangster' parent who, allegedly, runs a powerful drug operation in another city. Apparently he expects his son to follow him in 'the business'.

This conversation was a most extraordinary experience. The first student was confident and able to respond immediately; the second student took longer to become involved but then took over the conversation. They talked without any apparent reluctance about their lives before they came to the PRU; they did not find it so easy to look back at their behaviours at the PRU and the second student hesitates a good deal before describing how he bullied a teacher. Such moments seem to me to reveal how their attitudes have changed, how they have taken responsibility for themselves and their actions and how much they realise they owe to the staff in the PRU. Listening to them I reflected on the conversation I had just had with the Head. So much time, effort, creativity, determination and thought has gone into the management of these young people. It must be unbelievably rewarding to feel responsible for the change in their attitudes, to hear their pride in their achievements and their concern for the adults who have supported them.

A number of themes that have arisen in the data reappeared in their conversation.

Criticism of mainstream practice occurs frequently as a theme: one of these two prefers the smaller numbers and the different relationship with the teachers in the PRU.

The importance of trusting relationships appears in the data: they both feel that the teachers in the PRU are more like 'friends' and one refers to a teacher in mainstream as 'a master'. The Female Student also tried to pinpoint the difference: she thought her mainstream teachers were more 'professional'.

Much else of what they say can be heard as responses to the various management strategies around behaviour, attendance and classroom work that appear in the data. One of them claims to be 'more open to things', to have a 'broader mind set'; to have stopped taking drugs and become a 'better person'. He feels more sure of himself and does not feel he has to fall in with the behaviours of his peers. He looks back on his rudeness to at least one of his teachers with embarrassment.

4.8.3. Conversation with the Deputy Head (Pastoral)

I was pleased to meet the Deputy Head (Pastoral) as I had heard from the Head that she had given '*structure and strength*' to the PRU and was '*super and passionate*'.

She has nominal responsibility for pastoral matters throughout the PRU but is not a qualified teacher. Her background is in Youth Work and although she has a degree in Anthropology and Education Studies and is well experienced, has come up against '*certain barriers and prejudices*' within the PRU. She attributes this to her lack of Qualified Teacher Status, an issue referred to elsewhere by others.

'I'm on a different leadership scale to everybody else. I've not got teachers' pay and conditions. A lot of our instructors are very, very competent teachers and are working at that level, running an art department, you know, and so on, running the hair salon but they're on 20 grand less than the senior teachers in this building that aren't doing any more, necessarily, so you know, it's difficult.'

She is sure that this situation affects morale.

'People do get disgruntled about it. People almost sort of thought, 'Well, hang on a minute I'm just going to stick to my job description'.'

However, she feels that those people are in the PRU because they are motivated to the point where they put their own situation to one side, *'because they naturally are very committed to the needs of the kids and seeing them through'*.

The Deputy Head (Curriculum) talked to me about the split in the staffroom the previous year between the teachers and the non-teachers and although the English teacher claimed he could detect no problem in the team working together, it is clear to me that there are problems relating to the mixed status of members of staff.

The Deputy Head is evidently sufficiently motivated to remain at the PRU.

She tells me that she has worked in residential care and for a number of charities focussed on work with young people. However, it was her entry into the Educational Welfare system that led her into roles that expanded her responsibilities into Education provision itself.

'I came into doing education welfare. Then I took on managing off-site provision in three different community schools in (the city.) We had provision in three different community centres and accommodated over 60 students a year.'

This structure reflects the city's earlier approach to dealing with the issues raised by young people at risk of exclusion from school.

'The students were on the brink of exclusion from those high schools. And I actually set up a key stage. I mean it's amazing because I, we, did that with 7 staff and then people coming in on different days to add capacity.'

Only one of those additional members of staff was a qualified teacher.

'There was one, one qualified. She looked after the curriculum and I actually got a guy in who wasn't a teacher to lead the Key Stage 4 programme and we ran the Prince's Trust programme.'

Her move into the PRU brought hands-on experience of working with young people but her understanding of the 'cluster' strategy leads her to be concerned about the geographical position and strategic role of the PRU.

'Our challenge is we're not really anchored anywhere because we're city wide, we don't really belong in our community, we don't have any students from this area.'

The PRU is the only Key Stage 4 provision in the city and this means that young people referred there are usually better known to clusters in other areas. Her role includes outreach to those clusters, not only to develop relationships and share information but also to conduct the sometimes delicate operations around funding for PRU places. The PRU is not attached to an official 'cluster'.

'We have students who travel for an hour and a half, that live in other parts of the city and somebody out there will be working with their family in another capacity. We have to do quite a bit of challenging advocacy to try and get some additional support.'

'We still feel very much on our own in the city, I must say.'

Her description of the local authority's alternative education provision is helpful to my understanding of a recurrent theme in the data. Several participants refer to the presence of young people in the PRU who they think should not be there. Some crucial alternative provision has evidently been lost under re-organisation in the authority and not only has that had the effect of increasing the range of needs in the PRU but also meant that most of the young people are obliged to travel distances to attend.

In principle, however, she is in favour of the 'separate setting' of the PRU. For her, there are two types of young people who are excluded, whether temporarily or permanently.

'Some of them need to be away from the environment entirely and need somewhere like us that is less formal and less pressured. We've had lots of situations where students come here and whilst we have strong expectations about achievement, we work with them a lot more on the behaviour rather than just kind of, 'Right that's it, I heard you swearing, you're going to go.'

The second kind are those more vulnerable students who *'should and could be successful in mainstream but there's some sort of gap in how their needs have been*

nurtured, met, what have you, and that possibly within mainstream they could come up with more internal solutions to what's happening'.

She adds a third kind who are excluded for *'very stupid incidents, like setting fire to a piece of paper, setting the fire alarm off, saying a stupid racist comment that maybe the child didn't mean'.*

In her view, such incidents should not lead to permanent exclusion and the child should be in mainstream.

'So I think some students you see here should never actually have been here really.'

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, the Kitchen Assistant, the P.E. teacher, the Instructor and the Deputy Head (Curriculum) all offer the same opinion.

She has noticed that on admission, students will describe all the difficulties they are under both at school and at home and then, after sometimes a very brief period of 3 to 6 weeks, will appear happier and more settled. She attributes this to the change of environment.

'I mean, we get students who come to contract meetings and they'll be telling you everything that they do at home, and everything that's going wrong and then sort of 3 weeks to 6 weeks down the line they're like, they're just a happier person because they've got that little bit more space to be themselves, and you know, to explore and to learn differently.'

I am immediately taken back to the conversation I have had moments before with the two Year 11 students. Their account of the changes in their behaviour and attitudes exactly confirms her view.

She describes the initial assessment process that the PRU is developing. Alongside an assessment of levels of knowledge and ability, they use the PASS system (Pupil's Attitude to Self and School) and for some entrants, the Myers & Briggs personality test. She finds collecting baseline academic data from schools is notoriously difficult and *'it's often nonsensical'.*

The English teacher claimed to receive little or no information from referring schools. He told me that the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) was responsible for initial assessments and that his data came from her.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is convinced of the value of collecting data on personality and emotional intelligence and that it is equally crucial and directly relevant to the students.

'We are doing all the emotional intelligence and stuff, so they get to understand themselves as learners and how they are fixed in context to other pupils in this environment.'

The two Year 11 students give the impression of directly benefiting from such assessments.

She is obviously proud of the progress the PRU has made towards improving their Ofsted grading.

'We've done that sort of storming, norming, forming, you know, performing. I think we're still forming somewhat in a way and I think we have pockets of really performing, and people really coming together and everybody being on board and feeling that they've got common purpose, irrelevant of their role. And you know the students definitely benefit from that.'

The conversation ended at that point and I felt satisfied that I had a better understanding of the conflict between 'nurturing' and 'a real school atmosphere' as it applied beyond a concept of the difference to the realities of the mixed roles, terms and conditions of those working in the PRU.

The difficulty that arises over the mixed status of members of staff recalls the work of Burns and Machado (2014) on shared identity and rules that govern 'who we are', their Social Rule System Theory. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) refers to the unsettling impact on loyalties to the institution: some colleagues felt they were not as valued so suffered feelings of rejection and demonstrated an unwillingness to co-operate.

She is clearly a leader: much of what she has achieved both before her arrival at the PRU and after, is impressive evidence of this. She encapsulates many of the

principles, skills and qualities of leadership presented by West-Burnham (2014) in his Seven Propositions on the subject.

4.8.4 The Fourth Conversation with the Head

As this was to be our final conversation I first asked the Head to comment on some of the themes that had emerged from my talking to members of the PRU.

The impact of the hierarchical staff structure on behaviour management strategies had come up in a number of my conversations.

The Head answers by reflecting on past experience.

'I sometimes wonder if I got away with much smaller staff numbers in my previous PRU because they were all qualified teachers working to the rigour and knew the teacher standards inside out, that's what we worked to and they were proud of that. Whereas here, I haven't got the teachers so I need more people. I need twice, three times the number to do one person's job because of the lack of training, the academia, the skills, the knowledge.'

A second theme concerned the number of members of staff I had spoken to who talked of their own negative experiences at school as helpful in their approach to the young people. The Head was dismissive of this as a qualification for working in the PRU. She felt it might be helpful to have a degree of empathy but to claim a better understanding of the young people's problems because of one's own experiences was misplaced.

'People say, they work here and it's very easy to say you know I understand these kids because I've had a chequered life as well, I've had a difficult life, blah, blah, blah. I think we've got to be careful here because the home lives of some of these kids fall way below the standard of anybody teaching here or working here you know. We know that some of these kids sleep on the floor, they stink, they haven't had a shower, a bath, you know, they've got nits... that sort of thing.'

I ask her about the word 'respect' that was used by the two young people I had met that day. It seemed to carry an enormous depth of meaning for them as a description

of how they felt about their teachers. The Head pointed out that the two students were examples of successful outcomes for themselves and the PRU but it was, sadly, not true for all who attended. She referred to a student who occasionally attends but when he does, creates enormous problems.

'He's highly disruptive because he refuses to go to lessons, he refuses to hand in his phone, he's a barefaced liar. He's destructive, aggressive and threatening.

His attendance is chronic and we've tried alternative programmes he's refusing to do. Mum was in yesterday and she is beside herself with worry because he says what he will and won't do and that is the law in their house. She's scared of him because he will, he will, it's not beyond him to punch her, you know.'

She agrees that in the majority of cases, there is usually someone on the PRU team who can find a way in with even the most difficult of young people but this time she feels they are defeated, at least for the time being.

'Just at the moment, he is impenetrable. Nobody has found a way in with him. And he's frozen because of something, something's happened to that kid but he won't let any of us near enough to know.'

She is frustrated by the difficulty in securing support from CAMHS, the mental health specialist team.

'I get frustrated with, you know, when CAMHS take the approach that the young people have to go to them for appointments. I despair of them at times, absolutely despair.'

When I asked her to reflect on her progress with staff management issues, it is clear that she still feels a degree of frustration with colleagues who find consistency of approach difficult. She is already looking ahead to September when the PRU will be full again and very busy.

'I'm sort of bracing myself for September and already thinking about the INSET that I'll do for the staff about, 'We've all got to be working together guys and if you're not doing it, you'll be in my office you know!''

As she frequently does, she illustrates her point with an anecdote.

'I'll tell you one. This was probably about January. We were talking about behaviour again and some of the things that were annoying and it came up that some of them were annoyed because the kids were still getting their phones out and using them in class and stuff. And I said, 'That's because you are not following the rules that we have all agreed, right?' Most of the staff were nodding with me because the rule was they hand it in when they come into the centre. I said, 'If they're getting it out in lesson time you can call for a senior member of staff who will deal with it.' But the staff weren't doing that and so you get ineffective staff saying, 'Put your phone away, put your phone away, put your phone away', and they say, 'Fuck off' and blah, blah, blah instead of doing what they are supposed to be doing. Ok? They weren't following the system we had all agreed.

But during that discussion two members of staff were on their phones texting!

They were on their phones texting! And it's like, 'Don't you get it guys? Don't you understand? You're telling me it's offensive, it's the worst thing a kid can do in school and you're sitting here doing the same thing yourself!

Well now, if a phone rings in like a staff meeting, all the staff, you know!

And I mean there's usually a sort of laugh or something but they know it's absolutely not acceptable.'

As a final question, I asked the Head to look to the future. As mentioned elsewhere, she was already making plans for the September intake and was keeping staffing and curriculum issues under constant review. However, it emerged that the longer-term future of the PRU was a major concern to her.

The local authority had undergone a number of reorganisations and her newly appointed line manager had no experience of PRUs and no interest in working with her.

'I've now got a line manager who I think it's fair to say had the PRUs dumped on him and he does not want to manage the PRUs. And we're kept at arm's length.'

In addition to this change, the authority has cut its specialist support teams and there is no longer a Behaviour Support team as there used to be.

'So if I ask any questions, there's nobody to ask, you know, there's no steer, there's no lead at all.'

Moreover, the local authority was, at this time, involved in a Department for Education pilot scheme where monies for supporting excluded children were directed away from the local authority and paid directly to schools so that they could choose support for excluded or potentially excluded pupils for themselves. They were free to spend the money on new facilities or on outside providers from the private sector, or on the PRU, as they chose.

'Nearly all the schools have joined up and been given £150,000, £250,000. So the authority are saying there's no money for you because we've given the money to schools to manage the kids.'

Her budget in the next academic year will be reduced by 75%.

'I've got my budget for this year and it's the same budget I had last year. But I've been told that from then on I will get £8000 per student and I said, but that's a quarter of my current budget. 'Yeah, well, you'll have to find the money from somewhere else.'

She felt that the impact on her PRU could be terminal. She and her team were working as creatively as they could not only to manage the current situation but also to deal with this threat to their future. They had been visiting schools to talk through the issues with heads.

'We've had some very honest discussions with heads, I mean I've gone to see them, I've said to them, 'I need you to be absolutely frank and honest with me because I need to know if you do or don't want us.' And they've been quite forthright in saying, 'L (her name), the local authority have said my school's going to get £250,000. I'll tell you I've already spent the money because I'm having a new build on my site and I'm staffing it myself and my kids are going to go there. I won't need you, you're up the other end of the city for me.'

She is not convinced that this will be a long term solution to school's behaviour management issues as she is convinced of the value of moving children off-site.

'I mean we were here sort of 15 years ago with inclusion units you know, and schools took the money and they said, 'We'll look after our kids and you go through this lovely period of about a year where everything is hunky-dory and suddenly it doesn't work. It's no good keeping the children on site. But by then it could be too late for us.'

In addition to the inappropriate geographical situation of the PRU she feels she has two further major barriers to attracting heads of schools to use her provision. One is the PRU's past reputation.

'There's a problem because don't forget for ten years this was a failing PRU.'

The other is the state of the building.

'This building is terrible, I mean it needs hundreds of thousands spent on it, it's a fantastic site but it's not right for teaching these kids and it needs a lot of money spent on it. So the building and the site itself is a drawback.'

She understands why heads might look elsewhere if they are funding their own places.

'There are a lot of alternative programme providers in the city and there are some that are highly rated. I'm thinking of one, it's as big as we are, it's a charity and they do things like, it's very vocational, so they've got boxing, catering, plumbing, joinery, mechanics, sport. The kids love it.'

She is working on their own strengths with a view to attempting to compete. She agrees they could market themselves as a full-time provision with expertise in GCSEs and taught courses but is daunted by the realities of funding.

'We're trying to get out to heads to say, 'We can offer you a service, we're here'. But realistically I couldn't have more than 40 children on site because it would go beyond mass control, right? Which immediately reduces what we can offer, you know 40 full time. So it would reduce you know, £8000 a kid, plus you know, whatever.'

The future is evidently a difficult place for the Head as she contemplates the possibility that all their enormously hard work in the PRU might come to an end however determinedly they work to prevent such an outcome.

‘Actually what we can do is tiny, what we can do is what we’re doing, going to see the heads, you know, speaking to people, and when we know what the heads want, if they want it, we’ve got to cost it, we have to reorganise and we have to deliver it.

But can we do it in this building? Probably not.’

On this somewhat depressed note the conversation came to an end. I was left to contemplate the extraordinary environment within which this Head operates.

She tackles issues on an everyday basis that most professionals, both within education and without, would find unacceptably challenging to their physical and mental stamina. She has little support if any from an inactive Management Committee and increasingly less from the local authority, her line managers. She is caught up in changing times in terms of funding for excluded children and, as she seeks innovative moves forward, finds her hands if not completely tied, at least severely restricted by issues beyond her control; the building, the geographical location, budget limitations and government policy. My admiration of her and respect for all she does is unbounded.

4.9 Summing up

In the next chapter I work to draw out the themes that emerged from the conversations. I will make reference to the theoretical and conceptual studies that have enlightened my understanding of the issues.

When I began the data analysis I was determined to bring my data gathering experience to life as best I could for my reader. I have used the criteria of the case study as set by Hitchcock & Hughes (1995:317) as my guide.

I believe that I have given *‘a rich and vivid description of events’* and a *‘chronological narrative’* of them. I have blended *‘a description of the events with the analysis of them’* and focussed on *‘individual actors’* and a group of actors and sought to

understand '*their perception of events*'. I have highlighted specific events that seem to me to be '*relevant to the case*'. I know that I have been '*integrally involved in the case*' and that it must give the impression of being '*linked to the personality of the researcher*', myself. I have certainly felt emotionally engaged with the people I have had the privilege of meeting and I am sure this element will be apparent to my reader.

Finally, I have made strenuous efforts to '*portray the richness of the case*' in writing up my report. I hope that I have succeeded in doing so.

Much of the data finds echoes in the theories and concepts discussed in the Literature Review. The educational, social and political background of the PRU are the concerns of Parsons; the criticisms of mainstream practice and Local Authority management are embedded in his work. The PRU's determination to adopt restorative and therapeutic practice can be set against the backdrop of punishment theory (Cavadino and Dignan 2007); leadership qualities, enumerated by West-Burnham (2014), are evident in many of the contributors and not limited to the nominated leaders and there are frequent references to the notion of resilience (Fredrikson and Branigan 2005). Social Rule System Theory is evident throughout the data. Both staff and students talk of 'belonging', of valuing and respecting one another and of the feelings of self-worth they experience.

I have been working hard climbing my mountain, putting one step in front of the other and feeling the weight of the rucksack on my back. I look up and realise that I have still a way to go to the summit, but when I turn round, am amazed by the view. So much has been revealed about the surrounding landscape...

Chapter Five: Outcomes and Emergent Themes

In this chapter I bring together the themes that arise from the data in the previous chapter. My purpose throughout the case study has been to learn as much as possible about the research PRU and about its management and efficacy from a group of people who are experiencing the phenomenon, both as students and staff. Their evidence is crucial to me as I seek an answer to my research question. If I can discover whether this PRU 'works' then I will come closer to knowing if others might do so too.

Four major themes emerge from the data. They are:

1. The overarching purpose of the PRU

I have grouped a number of topics that emerged from the data within this major theme. They include perceptions of the benefits and limitations of the PRU; the learning opportunities it offers; the impact of Ofsted; the PRU's relations with and perceptions of mainstream provision and its external management structure.

2. The importance of quality staff

Again I have grouped a number of sub-themes within this major theme. The importance of professional training; the issue of the mixed status of the staff that includes different pay scales; the issue of staff stress; the challenge of finding the 'right' people for the PRU and the qualities required to work there are all topics that recur within the data.

3. The young people and the challenge of managing their behaviours

Within this theme appear examples of positive outcomes and negative behaviours; issues concerning behaviour management strategies; the Head's perception of some staff responses to challenging behaviour; the structures in place to support behaviour management and staff training.

4. The environment

Within this theme are all issues to do with the condition of the building; its negative impact on morale and on perceptions of the PRU; the problems with internal and external spaces and issues connected to damage to its fabric.

As I worked on the analysis, I held a number of conceptual and theoretical frameworks in mind to support my thinking. I use them again here to further enlighten the discussion of the themes and to help fix the outcomes within a developing dynamic. As before, my references are to punishment theory (Cavadino and Dignan (2007: 37-46)): the underlying purpose of the PRU; the tension within it; the strategies employed to manage discipline and more public issues concerning attitudes to the maintenance of the building are evidence of its relevance. I refer to Leadership theory using West-Burnham's (2014) *Seven Propositions about School Leadership* as a framework; social rules system theory (Burns and Machado 2014) which considers rule making and identity in social settings; to concepts of the term 'resilience' (Fredrikson and Branigan (2005)) and to principles of behaviour management theory (Rogers: 2015). References to the process and experience of exclusion; to its social impact and status; to its justification and efficacy; all recall the work of Parsons examined in the Literature Review and the work of Foucault on the treatment of difference. Within each of these theories I have found resonances with the study I have made of the PRU phenomenon and within the data I have gathered.

In the discussion that follows, where I refer to a view or opinion expressed by one of the contributors to the data I have included a quotation to illustrate the point. These quotations have all appeared in Chapter 4 where there is a rich amount of data: I use them here as aide-memoires.

5.1 The overarching purpose of the PRU

I found it helpful as I worked through this theme in the data, to recall the questionnaire I refer to in Chapter 1. In the questionnaire I asked the PRU heads and managers to put the following list of aims of a PRU into rank order. The list appears in the questionnaire in Appendix 1 (a): I include it here for ease of reference.

The aims of a PRU are:

- a) To replicate as far as possible, mainstream school curriculum and public examination opportunities for young people;
- b) To work to support change in a young person's attitudes, behaviour and/or conditions that brought him/her out of mainstream into the PRU;
- c) To support a return to mainstream education if appropriate and possible;
- d) To provide excluded young people with life skills to support their future roles in society;
- e) To support schools in working with their challenging pupils; and
- f) To support the well-being of the local community by keeping excluded people off the streets and in a purposeful environment.

The majority of respondents chose (b) as their most important aim. The next highest number chose (d) as their most important aim. The majority of respondents chose (a) as their second most important aim. (See Appendix 1(b) for full analysis.)

In the data presented in Chapter 4, a number of the contributors refer to the overarching purpose of the PRU.

As I discussed in Chapter One-, the ultimate punishment for transgression in our mainstream schools is exclusion and for many young people, in this position, their destination will be a PRU. It seems inevitable therefore, that with this progression in mind, the PRU experience will be viewed essentially as a punitive for those students involved. The question for the Head and the staff of any PRU is how to achieve positive outcomes in what may seem in prospect an essentially negative environment.

However, an interesting, and for me, reassuring outcome from the data is that none of those I met in the research PRU who took part in the conversations, sees the institution in this light; they are all committed to the therapeutic aspect of their work

and to overcoming the negative connotations attached to the referral. No-one mentions that the purpose of the PRU is to punish an individual on behalf of a school. On the absolute contrary, every adult I spoke to at the PRU is committed to a 'restorative' approach towards the young people who attend. The potentially deterrent and incapacitating motives (Cavadino and Dignan (2007: 37-46) behind the exclusion from school do not, from the evidence, influence their activity. It seems clear that each young person is offered a clean slate; that whatever issues led up to the exclusion are put to one side and that the PRU experience is presented as a new beginning. It is difficult to match the description of PRUs as 'Sin Bins' in The Daily Telegraph (Paton 2013) against this picture of positive re-engagement.

However, there is within the PRU a nuanced difference in the concept of restoration. For the Head, her Deputies, the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Counsellor, for example, their restoration process is two-fold. They all subscribe to the '*nurturing*' approach that can be achieved with smaller class sizes and supportive, personal interventions. However, they also believe that '*a real school atmosphere*' is crucial to the recovery of self-esteem. The '*real school atmosphere*' in the Head's new regime involves a rigorous approach to teaching and learning, to achieving accreditation for courses, to record-keeping and target setting. There are some members of staff, the P.E. teacher and the Instructor for example, who find this an irksome approach; they see their main purpose as '*working to support change in the young person's attitudes and behaviour*' (see List of Aims on p 278) and feel the pendulum has swung too far towards qualifications being '*the be all and end all*' of what they do.

'I mean, some staff here feel very, very strongly on it you know and they're always, 'We're here for behaviour, we're here for behaviour!', and they're quite right.' (P.E. Teacher)

These outcomes clearly reflect the 'restorative' and 'nurturing' approach that is seen in the data. The purpose of the PRU, seen through the perceptions of the Head and most of her team, is to '*work to support change in attitudes and behaviours*' but alongside it, and entwined with it, is the conviction that for such change to be sustained beyond the PRU there needs to be an intense focus on achievement.

The benefits the PRU offers

A number of contributors refer to the positive benefits the PRU offers. The Head, The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, the Counsellor and the two Deputy Heads are all convinced that isolation from mainstream and from the majority of their peer group gives referred students an opportunity they might not otherwise be offered. They are able to reflect on their histories and regain or acquire feelings of self-worth through pursuing a different curriculum more suited to their needs. These contributors reveal their sense of the PRU's '*shared value orientation and ideals*' (Burns and Machado 2014). The PRU is unlike any of the schools the young people might have attended: they did not choose to come; it is the only resource of its kind so no other choice is available. It has no orientation to do with ability or faith; its orientation is solely based on whether its societal benefits are recognised and celebrated by those who work within it.

The two Year 11 students whom I met seem to encapsulate this summation of the purpose and value of the PRU. They have reflected on their histories and, by their own admission, changed their behaviours and attitudes. They take pride in their achievements and have developed an awareness of how much they owe to the staff. They have enjoyed attending the PRU.

'Now obviously I'm glad I came.' (First student)

They have both developed a sense of belonging to the PRU and demonstrate a clear understanding of its purpose. The P.E. teacher, however, talks of the confusion that he believes some of the young people feel about the nature of the PRU.

'...you know, they don't see this as a school!'

He believes the young people struggle to make sense of what kind of institution the PRU is. They feel that it cannot be a school because they have been told they are no longer attending 'school'; there is no uniform and first names are used. They find these signals confusing.

In their consideration of the social rules constructed around identity Burns and Machado (2014: 7) ask, '*Who are we? What symbolises or defines us?*'

The two Year 11 students talk of the adjustment they had to make to this new construct: one of them laughs at himself for mistaking the 'rules' of the PRU in calling the teachers by formal titles.

'I called them 'sir'! I called people sir and madam.'

Limitations on the benefits

There are, however, limitations to what the PRU can achieve and an element of a price to pay for the referral. One of the Year 11 students misses team sport; the English teacher is cautious in his review of the benefits of the PRU as he is aware how many subjects from the mainstream curriculum are lost.

'...there are all sorts of consequences for their education. We can't match the subjects, that's for sure.'

Other aspects of mainstream experience such as belonging to teams, clubs, taking part in school productions and a myriad of other extra-curricular activities are difficult for a PRU to replicate with the result that the referred young person may suffer in more complex ways than might have been intended by the referring school. One of those ways is the construction of feelings of identity and 'belonging' to an institution that come through such activities. Burns and Machado (2014:7) offer identity and membership rules that define and support the ethos of 'belonging'.

A further limitation to the benefits of this PRU is the difficulty in managing a range of presenting needs. There is a repeated claim that there are young people in the PRU who should not be there. The English teacher talks of 'vulnerable' children who can be 'eaten alive' by other students in unprotected situations.

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator, the Deputy Head (Curriculum) and the PE teacher make similar claims. The Co-ordinator has an explanation for their presence; she knows of other learning centres that have closed leading to an increase not only in PRU numbers but also in the range of needs.

A contrary view is expressed by the Kitchen Assistant who is impressed by the caring and sharing she sees going on between the young people.

'They'll watch out for each other and it's kind of special to be honest.'

Managing curriculum issues in the PRU

The PRU offers GCSE in English, Maths, P.E. and Art and a range of other certificated subjects. The English and Maths lessons appear to be those that pupils reject most determinedly; both the English teacher and the Instructor refer to the difficulty of engaging the young people in subjects, they assume, remind them most forcefully of their school experience and evince associated feelings of failure. The Counsellor comments on her experience:

Sometimes they could slip through huge nets and come here with reading ages... of six or something and nobody even really knew... all these defiant behaviours were just put down to them being purely defiant.'

This theory is supported by the experience of the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator who has found many of her pupils poorly skilled in these core subjects. She believes that their school experience has been so fractured from such an early stage that sequential learning has never been established and that their basic skills are under-developed. In her view, much of the challenging behaviour, and in at least one case in the data, a refusal to enter the English classroom for up to a year, lies in the students' fear of the exposure of their limitations. This argument seems to her to be justified as she finds their confidence increases and aggression decreases as their skills develop. This finds resonances in Parsons (2005:187). He asks,

Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?'

The Instructor illustrates how he overcomes the rejection of the subject titles, Maths and English, by slipping in the use of language in instructions and the use of mathematics in measurement and calculation. He feels that his influence is important as he is able to persuade many young people that these basic skills lie at the heart of job opportunities, especially for those students who may be directed towards skilled trades.

'I try and teach them a little bit of maths, back door style, because we get a lot of them that don't like English, they won't go to English, they don't like maths.

The data illustrates that much effort is applied in the PRU to developing a meaningful, personalised curriculum beyond the core programme. Reference has been made to the Hair and Beauty course and to the Mechanics workshop. Both these departments operate in fully equipped areas; the hair salon is open to visitors for appointments and is seen as a valuable resource offering good quality learning opportunities.

One of the major strengths of the PRU lies in its work experience and off site learning and activities programme. One full time post is allocated to the task of placing the young people in appropriate work settings, on courses at FE colleges or other Alternative Education programme providers. All the students are offered alternatives but all are expected to extend their lessons and courses within the PRU through the addition of off-site commitments. The Deputy Head (Curriculum) is particularly emphatic about the value of this programme and of his absolute dedication to its quality.

This necessitates a good deal of essential quality control activity from him and other members of staff . The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator refers to other out of school settings where she has worked where the off-site provision was used solely as a respite for the base from the difficult behaviour of the students. She and others in the data are clear that the PRU's off-site programme is an enrichment opportunity for the young person, not an off-loading exercise.

Maintaining work experience placements demands particular effort from the PRU staff. The Deputy Head praises the work of those colleagues who not only carry out this difficult preparation work but also support the young person and the employer when the work period begins. Breakdown is frequent and sometimes predictable; the data shows how for some young people the reality of work is a shock. For some rejection is immediate; for others there is an opportunity to thrive and possibly be offered employment. For many, the shades in between provide an important opportunity to mix with adults in different environments where they will be judged according to the task in hand and on their ability to learn new skills, make

relationships and work as a team. The student hairdresser clearly indicates how important such a new direction can be for a PRU student.

The aspiration to provide good quality learning opportunities for each young person referred evidently lies at the heart of this PRU's ethos. No one I spoke to on the staff sees him or herself as simply a minder of difficult children or carrying out a public duty by keeping them off the streets. The Counsellor talks of other alternative settings where she has worked and found them to be 'holding centres' where the emotional needs of the young people are neglected in favour of the pursuit of qualifications.

For her, good quality learning opportunities can only be built on the back of good quality therapeutic strategies and she believes this PRU has achieved an effective balance. Her main focus at the time of recording was addressing the inappropriate sexually offensive behaviour of some of the Year 10s that was causing such distress to some members of staff. She felt her creative interventions were having some impact and allowing some better relationships to develop.

An area of the curriculum that is particularly difficult in PRUs is PE. Team games are virtually impossible to replicate because of small numbers. In this PRU there is an equipped activity room, a good sized, adaptable dining hall and, outside, enormous amounts of green space, two netball courts and a basketball court. However, when I was there, there was no netting around the courts; there were no football pitches marked on the grass and the featureless space itself was so enormous as to be intimidating. It used to be a Primary School blessed with playing fields but for the number, age ranges and interests of the PRU population it is inappropriate.

The PE teacher is frustrated by the negative attitude of many of the young people he tries to engage. Further, he is also, like some of his colleagues, suffering from the personal and sexually explicit derogatory comments of some of the Year 10 students. He sounded dispirited but in spite of all the issues, remained committed to his work in the PRU. For him to provide good quality learning experiences for all the young people who were referred to him was proving exceptionally challenging.

Managing Ofsted

The Head is well acquainted with the expectations of Ofsted and in a short time has developed many of the necessary measures of achievement and produced the resultant evidence. Attendance figures in a PRU, for example, are frequently a cause for concern; it might seem unrealistic to expect young people for whom regular attendance has probably been an issue to suddenly achieve 93% on entering the PRU but that is the expectation.

She has initiated the creation of pen portraits of each student's background story that include detailed information on attendance before and after entering the PRU on an individual basis.

The English teacher makes reference to at least two Ofsted visits. He is convinced that for the most part the inspectors have no idea how to judge what they see in his PRU classroom. They may have no experience of working in the environment and be confused and possibly shocked by what they hear and see. He believes they have no way of grasping the subtlety of the interactions between him and his pupils in a short visit to his classroom.

It is clear from the evidence of the Head and Deputy Head (Curriculum) that they have worked to support colleagues preparing for inspection, insisted on the collection of baseline data, on planning and reporting mechanisms that underpin the teaching and learning and on strict collection of attendance figures. It is also clear from the evidence that a number of colleagues found this stringent attention to structure challenging and were unsure of its value.

The PRU's external management structure

The PRU is directly managed by the Local Authority. In the Head's conversations it is evident that her frustrations concerning management and funding are deep and debilitating. The Management committee to whom she is accountable is principally manned by Local Authority representatives and has not met in the time she has been there. The limitations on spending prevent any strategic decision making on her part; however, she works diligently and creatively within the limitations as set. In a short time, she is able to implement physical changes in the building pressing staff into

service to take part in decorating and finding funds to renew notice boards, signs and displays. She has bought plants for window ledges and although these have occasionally met with accidents, by the time of my third visit they were an established part of the scene.

The desire to become self-sufficient however is strongly expressed by the Head and Deputy Head (Pastoral).

He and the Head have followed the development of the Academy programme with interest and would be glad of the opportunity to meet this challenge and develop the PRU as an independent local resource. They feel they have the confidence to carry this out but, at the time of writing, the Local Authority has no plans to devolve the PRU and leaves the management of the resource to the Head and Management Committee.

The Head is clear that she has no real working relationship with her Management Committee. Although such a committee has been a statutory requirement since 2006, hers has not met except on one occasion when it had been called but had not managed a quorate. As a result of this inaction on the part of the Local Authority, there was a good deal of frustration experienced by the Senior Management as they strove to move the PRU forward. I learned that delays and restrictions on decision making regarding staffing, curriculum, purchasing requirements and payroll and personnel issues, all of which demand line manager approval, were frequent and debilitating.

The Head talks of the many changes of personnel and structures within the authority that have left the line management of the PRU unclear.

These changes have affected the management of the whole special and alternative provision in the local authority and there is uncertainty as to future arrangements. For the Head, finding her way through the delicate issues and learning where there is interest and support for her work is challenging. There are clear indications in the data that in addition to the stress she is experiencing in managing the staff within the PRU, she is also feeling some anxiety and impatience with what appears to be a lack of direction from her line managers.

In the fourth conversation, when she is feeling buoyed up by the forward movement of the PRU and just beginning to see the fruits of their efforts, she is beset by uncertainty about the future of the PRU.

Such feelings contribute to her keenness to explore the possibility of becoming an 'academy' as is happening to PRUs elsewhere; however, without the involvement of the Local Authority such aspirations are, in her view, futile. Meanwhile, she is obliged to consult on the smallest of expenditure issues and, apparently, receives little support for the largest of personnel issues.

Managing relationships with mainstream schools

In the data there are many criticisms of mainstream practice. It is clear that a number of the PRU staff regard some schools as draconian in their application of rules and lacking in flexibility when working with non-conforming pupils.

Contributors to the data believe that some schools can be too quick to exclude their pupils. They describe the different kinds of students they experience in the PRU and believe that some of them are inappropriately placed. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) points to young people who are excluded for one-off incidents *'like setting fire to a piece of paper, setting the fire alarm off, saying a stupid racist comment that maybe the child didn't mean.'*

She believes re-integration or a managed move to an alternative school might have been a more appropriate strategy. Some, she believes, are excluded with undiagnosed learning needs. She feels they *'should and could be successful in mainstream but there's some sort of gap in how their needs have been nurtured, met, what have you, and that I think possibly within mainstream they could come up with more internal solutions to what's happening'*.

The Instructor talks of young people who, in his experience, cannot cope with formal classrooms and who may have undisclosed emotional needs; he has come across bereaved teenagers whose needs have never been explored. A further issue arises when young people are referred to the PRU temporarily because there is no mainstream place available for them; they have also accommodated young people

with Statements of Special Educational Needs, in spite of the fact that originally PRUs were not designated as appropriate environments for such children.

The English teacher refers to the lack of information from schools about the young people.

'Generally we get nothing from a school with a child, nothing comes in with them at all, that may be because they haven't been to school for a long time or it may be just that the schools are not willing or able to pass anything on to us.'

However, it is clear from the Head's evidence that she understands the importance of good working relationships with the schools from which her pupils may be referred. Without their students there would be no PRU. Her PRU admits students from across a wide area; from the length and breadth of the city. As a result of this Local Authority strategy, it is difficult for her to know the referring schools well but she has put time and effort into learning about the area and getting to know the vital personnel.

She believes strongly that schools need PRUs. Dealing with non-conforming behaviour in the long term is not easy in mainstream schools where so much depends on examination results and attendance data. She has worked in mainstream herself and knows how hard schools work, in general, to include all their students in their communities but believes that attendance elsewhere, particularly in a well-run and successful PRU, is a positive and constructive alternative for troubled and troublesome young people.

In practical and professional terms, certainly for the Senior Management Team, maintaining quality relationships with schools is, in their perception, an essential part of their role.

Throughout this section have been constant resonances of Parsons (2005:187) where he asks,

'Is the young person associated with the adjective or adjectival phrase of 'at risk', 'disaffected' or 'socially excluded' or is it another agent that has placed them 'at risk', caused their disaffection or excluded them? Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?'

Parsons's view is that everyone involved in the exclusion process, particularly those agents with a statutory duty of care must scrutinise their practice in the light of these questions. National and local political policies, limited resources, pressure on outcomes and training issues are all beyond the control of the young people at the heart of the operation and Parsons is clear that however 'intolerable' the behaviour, however 'disaffected' the motivation, their needs must be central to any provision offered to them. Simply blaming them for their 'disaffection' and challenging behaviour is an inadequate and 'intolerable' response.

5.2 The importance of quality staff

The importance of professional training

In the Head's first interview she states categorically that the key to the success of the PRU lies in the quality of its staff.

In her new post she has inherited a staff of 40 only 3 of whom are qualified teachers.

The data illustrates that teachers do not necessarily have a better understanding of the young people and their issues than other colleagues on the staff who do not carry that label, (Kitchen Assistant, Instructor, for example) but it is clear from the Head's evidence that she feels much of her success in her previous slightly smaller PRU was related to the fact that she had only 10 members of staff, 8 of whom were teachers. For her, the rigour that experienced and motivated teachers bring to learning in the PRU is her most valuable resource.

Her route to recovered self-esteem for her pupils is clear: enable them to achieve at their best possible level and empower them to believe in the possibility of taking their place in the future alongside their peers from mainstream. The data shows that a number of members of staff are absolutely committed to this approach. The Deputy Head (Curriculum), the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the English teacher, among others, all stress the importance of working for qualifications as the most powerful restorative strategy for the young people. Good quality teaching is a pre-requisite for success. She has evidently addressed Parsons's questions.

The mixed status issue

The Head recognises the contribution made by her Deputy Head (Pastoral) to her aspirations for success. In the first interview she speaks highly of this colleague and of the impact she has on the pastoral work of the PRU. However, the Deputy is not a qualified teacher and in her own evidence, she speaks of the imbalance in the pay structure in the PRU and of the resentment that this causes. She believes she is unique in the Local Authority in holding the Deputy Head position and being a qualified social worker but she is not remunerated to the same level as the other Deputy. Not surprisingly perhaps, she feels that her role, although crucially important to the PRU is not as valued as that of her fellow Deputy.

This imbalance and the tendency to resentment it causes between people who effectively see themselves as carrying out very similar roles, between a teacher and an Instructor for example, I believe also has an impact on the behaviour management issues outlined earlier as those who are paid less feel justified in leaving difficult issues for the better paid qualified teachers to resolve. This echoes Burns and Machado's work(2014) on 'belonging' to an institution and the feelings of loyalty it generates.

The English teacher claims that there is a wonderful team spirit in the PRU and that he relies on the teamwork to help him as he knows he would not be able to tackle the issues he is presented with without the support of his colleagues.

The Kitchen Assistant talks of being able to go to any member of staff with a problem as they all support each other.

These are strong impressions of mutual respect and teamwork but I was also left with an impression of gaps in my knowledge; those who had elected to talk to me were more likely to be positive in their attitude to their work and less concerned about possible imbalance in their status and remuneration. In the business of finding and keeping quality staff this is an important element.

The importance of staff development

There is in general little career progression within a PRU; the staff levels are small and responsibility posts few in number. In the past this has had the effect of limiting the number of ambitious, career minded practitioners and, in my experience, has sometimes led to a stagnation of staffing opportunities. There is some evidence of this in the research PRU and the Head was vigorously addressing the need to move some colleagues into different settings and to put pressure on others to improve the level of their skills and qualifications through further training. The Deputy Head talks of *'a time, where I think PRUs were just kind of full of... [he hesitates] it's where teachers came to let their careers die a little bit.*

You know, those guys, and I'm talking about colleagues here, you know, they're here for the wrong reasons and it frustrates the hell out of me...'

One of Parsons's questions comes to mind.

'...is it another agent that has placed them 'at risk'?'

Commitment to the young people

A common thread running through the data gathered from the teaching and support staff I interviewed is their commitment to the young people and their wellbeing.

The evidence shows clearly that working in the PRU is a demanding task for all concerned at whatever level they operate yet the Head, the two Deputies, the Counsellor, the PE student teacher, the English teacher, the Instructor and the Kitchen Assistant all say that they feel satisfied and glad to be there.

The Kitchen Assistant came into the PRU by chance on a temporary replacement and has stayed on; the Instructor was made redundant from his engineering job and came to the PRU on the suggestion of a friend who thought he would work well with the excluded young people; the English teacher came from a closing FE college and now would not go back. It transpired that he is not a qualified teacher and thus is ineligible to teach in mainstream schools but was completely engrossed in the challenge of the PRU. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is a trained social worker but has no plans to return to that work.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction for the PRU staff lies in the small successes they experience with some of the young people; the English teacher sums it up by saying that it felt good in previous teaching roles when his groups did well; in this job he was excited by perhaps one young person turning a learning corner when all had seemed lost.

'I loved it straightaway. I think I found that it it's much more fun, it's demanding certainly. I do miss the A and A talented, gifted, really interested kids but then again the thrill of getting one of these kids interested in something is beyond...'* (He waves his hand.)

An empathetic understanding and a non-judgemental, non-confrontational approach unites them.

Finding these members of staff had for the most part been lucky accidents; it was clear from the Head's evidence that there were others, including one of the four teachers, whom she felt had been 'unlucky' accidents. She finds them ill-suited to their roles and is convinced they should never have been employed in what for them is such an inappropriate setting. She feels that a good deal of her time is spent supporting these colleagues some of whom she is sure have no liking for the young people and no motivation to overcome their issues in dealing with them. She feels that these colleagues place the blame for any difficulties they experience firmly on the young people and spend little or no time thinking through what contribution they may have made to volatile situations. Parsons's *'intolerable or just not tolerated?'* question is central to this situation.

The issue of staff stress

There is a good deal of evidence in the data about the high levels of stress experienced by staff in the PRU. Everyday experiences involve contact with some young people for whom the normal controls on social behaviour do not operate consistently. The result is that volatile behaviour is a frequent event.

Managing challenging behaviour is a draining experience and the qualities and skills that are required for coping with it emerge from the data. Patience, a sense of humour, determination and stamina alongside good mental and physical health are

all referred to. A number of participants use the word 'resilience' (Fredrikson and Branigan 2005) to describe the essential quality.

'You know, you need starter/finishers, you need resilience, you need real charisma and you need to more than anything, you just need to be as thick skinned as hell...'
(Deputy Head (Curriculum))

The issue of sexually abusive behaviour and language

However, the particular issue of sexually explicit abuse is having a marked deleterious effect on the morale of the staff. According to the Counsellor it is a 'massive issue'.

'A lot of our young men are very derogatory and disrespectful to the women that work here, regardless of age, race etc. it's purely the woman aspect.'

This is her explanation; the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator has the same explanation. The Head's attitude to this behaviour and her strategies for dealing with it are seen in a following discussion in 'Young people: the management of their behaviour.'

Self-help is advocated by the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Counsellor who both talk about not allowing stressful incidents to overwhelm them.

'You know even when I have tough times and I have had a few incidents actually and it's not been pleasant, but you just can't take it personally. And as soon as you let that creep in and I know we're all human but you've got to try to process it without taking it personally.'

The importance of training in combating stress

Experience and training are evidently important elements in the development of 'resilience'; the Kitchen Assistant and the Instructor seem to have more resilience than others and an intuitive understanding of how to deal with volatile behaviours but for others it can come through training and modelling from colleagues. Faced with the situation described above, the Head of this PRU brought in a speaker who

focussed on recent developments in the understanding of the teenage brain and of the risk-taking behaviours that are part of the adolescent psyche. This in-service training opportunity had a tremendous impact on many of the staff and the Head felt it had alleviated the immediate difficulties by broadening the staff's level of understanding and, underlining the need to model adult and controlled reactions to difficult behaviour.

The Counsellor believes that training in behaviour management would be useful.

She believes that some staff are unskilled in managing fragile young personalities and, following Rogers (2015: 32) believes they often trigger negative responses through their own inappropriate or untimely reactions.

She believes training would be helpful in achieving a more consistent response to issues across the board.

'As concerns consistency of staff, I think there needs to be more training. Because it's like a family isn't it, that dynamic in a family where mum says no, they'll go to dad.'

She would also prioritise training on *'attachments and motives for behaviour'* and refers positively to the recent INSET day when the leader invited them to look *'at the reasons behind, almost taking the child out of it, thinking about what kind of motivates that young person to act out in that way, so that was good'*.

According to the Head this training day 'set everyone buzzing'. It had the effect of reminding the adults that they were working with children and that, however it seemed to the contrary, they were among the key modellers for the behaviour patterns of those young people. For some colleagues, this had a lasting effect and its impact can be detected in the evidence provided by the Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Counsellor for example. However, according to the Head's evidence, there remained some staff who quickly lost the direction the training offered and reverted to their, in her view, over-emotional responses and judgements. The relevance of Parsons's questions, *'Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?'* is threaded through this situation.

The stress that the management of such reactions place on the Head and Senior Management team is a further issue. There is little evidence however, that the Head sees further training as the solution to some of the inadequacies she sees on her staff in dealing with challenge and the resultant stress.

The Head's tough approach

The Head describes herself as tough and uncompromising; 'a terrier', and utterly determined to resolve conflict wherever it appears so that standards can be raised and outcomes improved. This degree of forcefulness is attractive to many, a relief to others but intimidating to a few who feel unable to aspire to her expectations and seem to experience a further degree of stress in their attempts to do so. The Instructor feels unable to meet expectations in terms of report writing and record keeping; he talks of his feelings of inadequacy. He has possibly detected her view expressed in private that appears in the data.

'There's a good number who have very poor literacy skills. Their ICT is diabolical.'

West-Burnham's (2014) 'collective capacity' principle of leadership is not apparent here. There is some evidence that strengths the Instructor might have brought to the PRU could be overlooked.

The lost counselling service

I learned from the Deputy Head (Curriculum) that the counselling service that used to be offered to staff by the local authority had been a victim of recent cuts. This is a particularly disappointing development for them all. There seem to be no plans in place to replace it.

There is evidently no systematic support for staff suffering from stress. There are models elsewhere, in social work, for example, where regular 'supervision' is part and parcel of the process of managing staff working in stressful environments but there seemed to be no structural arrangement in place in the PRU.

The PRU is a particularly sensitive environment and the data reveal both overt and covert levels of stress within it. If educational leadership is about 'working through relationships' (West-Burnham 2014) and

Finding the 'right' people

Finding the right people to work in the PRU is evidently difficult; keeping them is also a challenge. It is clear that for teachers there are enormous differences between working in mainstream and in the specialised environment of the PRU. Mention has been made in this thesis of the short-term involvement of many PRU students; of the fact that they may enter a PRU at any point during a school year and be of any level of ability. This PRU is a Key Stage 4 setting so the focus is on completing statutory education in the most productive way possible. The data indicate that some teachers enjoy the feeling that they are making a difference in the lives of damaged young people; the reduced scale of their impact from perhaps several hundred children to perhaps 20 has intensified the teaching experience for them and the short term nature of their involvement means that enormous skill has to be applied to engage the young person in the first place and then to drive them towards the best possible outcome. The English teacher describes his experience with one of his students at the PRU.

'He only came in the room once in the entire year, he would not come into the room. Then something happened in the summer, maybe he grew up a little bit I don't know and he tried in September and after three lessons he was, yeah, you're alright you, and he stayed.'

The situation was fragile but, with careful handling, he feels he achieved success. Senge's ideal system (2010:5) *'based on love rather than fear, curiosity rather than an insistence on right answers and learning rather than controlling'* might have served as a model for his approach.

The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator's conversation reveals her thoughtful approach to her work and the time she has spent in thinking how best to address the issues. In the course of her conversation she adds patience, self-awareness and humility to the array of skills essential for an adult working in the PRU. Her notion of 'humility' echoes the Head's concept of the degree of 'service to others' in their work. West-Burnham (2014) describes leadership as a 'moral activity'; this supports his approach.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) adds a commitment to the wellbeing of the kind of young people who come into a PRU as an essential requirement for staff. She believes that whatever may be the minor or major differences between their individual approaches, they must all share an unshakeable core belief in the value of the young people and of their work with them. This echoes the words of the Head, Deputy Head (Curriculum) and of several others in the data. It is also reflected in the words of the young people who were interviewed who spoke of the respect they felt for staff who were helpful, showed understanding and treated them as, in their word, 'friends' not inferiors. The use of first names between staff and pupils is evidently a powerful indicator of trust and respect for the young people and also serves as a reminder to them that the adults in the setting are acting as themselves, not hiding behind a veneer of unearned status. Their criticism of the teachers they remember from mainstream lies in the way they made their pupils feel inferior and judged.

'In a mainstream school it's like your teacher is your master, you know what I mean? Where in this school, a lot more of the difference in this school, it's about mates, innit? Because they just get on with you.' (Year 11 male student)

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) includes a need for an understanding of these emotional needs of the young people. She is skilled in the use of light touch, '*corridor coaching*' as she calls it, and thinks all staff should have a sensitive awareness of when and how to apply pressure and be confident and consistent in applying it. West-Burnham (2014) talks of '*working through relationships*' in his sixth proposition on leadership and '*consistent personal values*' underlying a professional approach in his second.

Finding and keeping quality staff is thus a constant occupation of any management team: for the Head of the research PRU there are particular issues to deal with among the staff she inherited and for her therefore, it is more a matter of keeping and empowering some and moving others on. The appointment of new staff is severely limited by budget constraints.

The impact of personal experience

A number of members of staff referred to their own school experiences. The English teacher hated his secondary school and couldn't wait to leave; the Head admits to being 'challenging' in her own school days. The Counsellor reveals,

'I was that child, I was that young person.'

It is tempting to assume that such experiences might lead to a better understanding of the issues faced by the pupils in the PRU system but the Head herself warns against such assumptions. She is firmly of the opinion that however attractive the theory might be it is seriously flawed. Firstly, she believes that whatever might have been the chequered personal experiences of staff they do not necessarily contribute to a more profound understanding of the young people's issues than that of colleagues who have not had such experiences. Her knowledge of the backgrounds of her pupils leads her to believe that whatever the staff's experiences might have been they cannot presume that they equal in difficulty those faced by the young people.

'We know that some of these kids sleep on the floor, they stink, they haven't had a shower, a bath, you know, they've got nits... that sort of thing.'

She believes that a degree of humility is required from the adults in the PRU. They need to recognise the element and notion of service in what they do, putting aside their own concerns and whatever issues they may have dealt with along the way as they work to alleviate those faced by their current pupils. She clearly demonstrates a number of crucial aspects of leadership; an unshakeable core purpose and a powerful moral code. (West-Burnham 2014)

An outsider judgement

A study carried out by the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) (2000) looked at a number of successful provisions for excluded pupils. One of the unexpected findings, and a source of admiration among the researchers, was the extraordinary commitment of members of staff who remained dedicated to improving

the personal and educational outcomes of excluded young people in the face of major challenge and personal rejection.

'The commitment shown by respondents to excluded youngsters was a notable - and quite humbling feature of this study's interview programme.' (Kinder et al (2000:147))

It was also a 'humbling feature' and the lasting impression of my own 'interview programme'.

5.3 The young people and the challenge of managing their behaviour

Positive outcomes

All four of the young people in the data speak positively about the impact of the PRU on their different situations.

The male student relates how he was sometimes 'out of control' in his previous placement (also a 'special' environment) and how he would be manhandled into a secure space until he had cooled off. He appreciates that this is not how the PRU deals with inappropriate behaviour and also speaks warmly of a particular member of staff who, he feels, understands him and has supported him. This person is in regular contact with the student's parents. As a result of this productive relationship and of the generally positive approach of the PRU, his confidence has developed to the point where he is planning his future training and career.

The female student has also found an opportunity to develop her confidence in the PRU environment. She admits to being difficult at school and has experienced a number of moves to different education provision. She has been able to learn hairdressing and beauty therapy and speaks warmly of the tutor who supports her. She looks forward to coming into the PRU; she feels able to focus on her own interests and needs, is aware that she has made progress and feels able to plan ahead.

The two male students I met on a different occasion were both clear that they appreciated what the PRU had done for them. They recognised that their behaviour elsewhere, and, indeed, when they had arrived in the PRU, had been difficult for

people to deal with and both felt they had learned important lessons about self-control and were grateful to the teachers for helping them.

The Head pointed out that the two Year 11 students were examples of successful outcomes for themselves and the PRU.

All three recall the restorative and therapeutic approach to punishment as defined by Cavadino and Dignan (2007).

Negative behaviour

The data contains many examples of the kind of negative social behaviours experienced in the PRU.

Reference is made to:

- (i) Swearing in front of adults;
- (ii) Swearing at adults;
- (iii) Personal abuse directed at staff, particularly female staff;
- (iv) Refusal to follow an instruction;
- (v) Refusal to attempt classroom tasks or take part in directed activities;
- (vi) Lateness;
- (vii) Truancy;
- (viii) Drug-taking and subsequent behaviours;
- (ix) Smoking on the premises;
- (x) Use of phones at inappropriate times;
- (xi) Physical assaults on fellow pupils; and
- (xii) Damage to displays and students' work.

The sexually charged personal abuse that is reported in the data shocked me. As I recounted in Chapter 4, I had experience in my headship of a PRU of much abusive language and many personal insults exchanged between students and also directed

at members of staff. However, the examples of the language and the incidents as described by the Head brought me up short.

The Head's approach to the negative behaviour

For the Head, dealing with rudeness and insults, including the shocking personal insults to female members of staff described in the data chapter, must be dealt with, following Rogers (2015) in a personalised, repetitive, consistent, determined and explicit manner.

'You know, that language is not acceptable, I really, really dislike what you're saying there.'

She describes her strategy as the '*stuck record*' approach. Much of her practice finds corroboration and support in the recommended behaviour management strategies of Bill Rogers, an Australian education consultant whose focus on the importance of non-confrontational but directional responses to challenge has been influential. She knows the importance of keeping the message simple, clear and constant (Rogers (2015:11): she has found from experience that this eventually reduces the frequency of the abuse and that her lack of emotional response to immediate situations, even in the face of extreme provocation, reduces the impact and equalises the 'power' relationship (Foucault: cited in Ball 2013) in a situation. The power in such exchanges appears to be claimed by the young people who reject authority and are not restrained by any respect for social norms. In the Head's view, the task of the adults in the PRU is to earn authority by reinforcing adult reactions and refusing to be drawn into the feckless world of uncontrolled behaviours and, in so doing, reclaim the right to direct, instruct, suggest, forget, forgive and lead the move forwards. (Rogers 2015: 16)

The Kitchen Assistant corroborates the Head's approach.

'The students here will receive back what you give out to them. To be honest, if you come in guns blazing, they're going to give you guns blazing, if you come in with an open minded, kind of chilled out attitude towards stuff, where you push forward but without being invasive, you get what you want from them. You can't come in and say, 'This is what you're having, and that's that'.'

In the first conversation, the Head seems entirely confident of her ability to manage difficult behaviour, of her skill in deflecting personal abuse and of her resilience in terms of maintaining her feelings of self-worth in the face of daily challenges. With the support of her two deputies who are *'super and passionate'*, she is convinced that she can empower the less confident members of staff to the point where they will be able to follow her lead and deflect challenge without a disabling degree of emotional engagement in difficult situations.

However, the Head's mood changed in the course of her first term at the PRU. In the second conversation her confidence is sadly shattered. Instead of developing their own skills in imitation of hers, many of the staff have simply adopted the practice of referring behaviour issues on to her and her Deputies for resolution. She is frustrated, disappointed and angry. She has a clear understanding of the kinds of challenge that the young people are likely to pose and is impatient with colleagues who expect co-operation, polite interactions and conforming behaviour from young people who have been excluded from their schools precisely because they were not displaying those characteristics.

She believes that challenging, even anti-social, violent behaviour and indeed, personal abuse, has to be expected in the PRU and is impatient of those who complain about such incidents.

'The staff just constantly refer it back to, you know, 'I'm fed up of being sworn at.' And it's like we work in a PRU!'

The importance of 'not taking it personally'

A number of those members of staff who were interviewed insisted that it was essential not to take abuse from the young people as 'personal'. The Instructor refers to times when he has to remove himself from the room and take 'time out' to recover his equilibrium. The Kitchen Assistant refers to her strategy of not remarking on issues at the time but addressing matters the following day by expressing disappointment and hurt to the young person concerned. The English teacher admits that he has sometimes shouted back but is not proud of those moments and

recognises that personal abuse from the young people is symptomatic of complex emotional needs and inadequacies.

The Counsellor goes further.

'It actually isn't personal really, it's acting out isn't it? And sometimes for these young people it's about pushing the people that they really care for, actually, 'Will you still be there? Will you still love me tomorrow and care for me tomorrow and nurture me if I do this?''

However, the Head describes situations where some members of staff are so threatened and insulted that they feel powerless to deflect the abuse. In her view, their reactions are inflammatory, as displays of emotion whether of anger, distress, disgust or shock exacerbate a situation and take much more time and effort to address.

'We (the Deputy Head and the Head) just can't seem to get through to staff that they are as responsible for behaviour as we are, and that they have the wherewithal to do something themselves.'

The Head tells how those colleagues who experience this abuse and feel threatened by it complain vociferously about their humiliation, generating difficult negative reactions in the staff room. They expect the Head and Deputies to take action on their behalf, usually by excluding the young person concerned. When support for this action is not necessarily forthcoming resentment grows and challenge from the staff room to the Senior Management team increases. The feelings of frustration on both sides are perniciously damaging to the wellbeing of all concerned. As can be clearly seen in the data, the Head was close to despair at the time of the second conversation. West-Burnham's proposition (2013) that *'the leader must set the vision and then work to convince the followers to achieve it'* is an imperative that would be difficult for her to accept at this point.

Some reflections on the conflict

Reflecting on this it became clear to me that complicated factors were operating. It seemed that the more she expressed her frustration, the more some members of

staff felt unwilling to attempt to adopt her strategies. The hierarchical structure of the staff team meant that some of those who considered themselves, correctly, to be at a lower level of responsibility than the Head and Deputies did not see it necessarily as their task to absorb, deflect, challenge and redirect behaviours in the manner expected. They had seized on the reporting mechanism, which had been intended as a 'last move' strategy for them, as a means of indicating to the Head that they could not, and in some cases, would not, meet her expectations. West-Burnham (2013) believes that leadership is not about demanding that people 'work harder'; it is about 'transformation' as illustrated in the 'phones' episode.

A further complication

What I did not appreciate at the time of the second conversation was that in addition to these issues, there had been a rift in the staffroom between the qualified teachers and the 'youth work staff'.

The issues were not limited to practice; underlying the mistrust was the negative impact of differentiated pay scales.

'People do get disgruntled about it. People almost sort of thought, 'Well, hang on a minute I'm just going to stick to my job description.' (Deputy Head (Pastoral))

Faced with these complex problems, the Head had lost two stones in weight between September and December and the whole senior management team was under enormous strain. The staff were unsettled and in some cases, apparently rebellious.

Thinking it through: The Head and the Deputy break the line

As an outside observer I felt that the Head and Deputy Head (Curriculum) had, perhaps unwittingly, laid a heavy burden on some of the staff lower down the 'pecking order'. They were impatient with them for displaying anger and distress in challenging situations and for not responding consistently. They had constantly urged staff to be vigilant on maintaining the expectations within the Behaviour Policy. Yet both of them, on different occasions recounted in the data in Chapter 4, had broken the line. One occasion concerned the Head allowing a student to keep her phone;

the other concerned the Deputy Head allowing three young people who were obviously under the influence of drugs, to come into the PRU.

According to the Head, there was much upset among the staff on both occasions. They pointed to the 'rules' that had been flouted and suggested that there was one behaviour policy for the senior managers, and another one for them. They felt that abandoning consistency was challenging to them and made their efforts to achieve expectations even more difficult. The agreed set of rules, a necessary and secure reference had been broken.

'In guiding and regulating interaction, the rules give behaviour recognisable and characteristic patterns – making the patterns understandable and meaningful for those sharing in the rule knowledge'. (Burns and Machado: 2014:2)

For the leadership, flexibility of response in dealing with individual students and their needs is a tool in their toolbox of strategies designed to increase the confidence and trust of the young person. Many times over, the flexibility, the compromise, will be rewarded by a development in understanding between the young person and the manager. However, when the trust is flouted, as in the case with the phone, the outcomes for everyone are difficult. The Head felt betrayed by the young person; the staff felt betrayed by the Head. The young person was seen to have '*got away with it*'; the Head to please herself when applying the rule that she herself had insisted the rest of the staff should follow. Most members of staff would not have felt they had the authority to flex the rule. Moreover, they would not have had the confidence to believe that the Head would have approved of such action if they had. Foucault's 'Power relations' (1983 cited in Ball (2013)) are indeed, 'everywhere'.

However, there are some members of staff who also use 'flexibility' as a tool in their behaviour management strategies. The Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator prefers to talk of 'boundaries' rather than 'rules' but obviously feels confident in negotiating adjustments to them in her teaching. The Instructor also knows when to absorb and deflect, rather than reject.

The difference between their 'flexing' of the boundaries and the incidents involving the Head and Deputy seem to me that the teachers' adjustments to the rules were

between themselves and the young people and took place in their own environment, were not public and affected no-one else. The Instructor chose to ignore the language and dismissive behaviour of his student; he is focussed on the student's learning needs. In spite of this difference of scale of impact, it seems clear that some adults in the PRU are much more skilled than others in the kind of de-escalation and deflection techniques the Head has in mind.

The reality of the ebb and flow of daily relationships is that staff may frequently find themselves having to make delicate, balancing judgements about 'keeping to the rules'. For the Head, flexibility is part of the system, one of the 'rules' to be applied, one of the tools in her toolbox. The challenge for her is to empower her staff, at every level of the operation, to develop their confidence in themselves as 'makers of judgements' and their confidence in her that she will support them as they do so. The 'Rules concerning shared orientations and ideals' (Burns and Machado 2014) and the 'Social relational and structural rules' analysed in the Literature Review are strongly evidenced in this data.

Behaviour management is evidently the core business of the PRU. How best to deflect challenge and move forward to positive outcomes is the daily concern of all those I spoke to. This discussion of the Head's management problems and examples of conflict may have given the impression that there is little success to be recorded. However, it is clear throughout that many members of staff enjoy their roles and would not want to work anywhere else. They enjoy the company of the young people and believe in their worth.

The Deputy Head (Curriculum) offers his experience.

'The kids know if you want to be with them. Even if they do know your buttons, if you're enjoying their company and vice versa, you know you're on to a winner.'

To sum up, the outcomes from the data on the issues surrounding the young people's challenging behaviour and its management in the PRU seem to me to be captured in the following statements.

- (i) An enormous degree of skill is required from those who work in the PRU in absorbing and deflecting challenging behaviour. The skill can be learned.

- (ii) An unusual degree of resilience, self-confidence and determination is required to deflect personal insult and abuse and to maintain a positive attitude. These qualities can be developed.
- (iii) An unshakeable belief in the value of the PRU's work and the worth of the young people is essential.
- (iv) The management structure of the PRU lends itself to overloading of 'issues to be dealt with' at the 'top' and potentially, to overlooking the potential contribution of those at the 'bottom'. Inclusive management strategies are in place in the PRU to alleviate these problems.
- (v) Clear and shared expectations are essential; however, a strong and subtle understanding of the difference between expectations and rules is important shared knowledge among the PRU team; problems arise where there are different permissions for interpreting this difference.
- (vi) A good understanding of the individual backgrounds of the pupils, their needs, learning styles and triggers for unexpected behaviours is essential knowledge.

5.4 The environment

Several contributors to the data make reference to the state of the PRU building. In some cases these comments describe the dilapidated state of the fabric; in others they describe the unsuitable range of rooms and facilities for the PRU. There is a strong feeling within the evidence that the run-down state of the building contributes to low morale for staff and students alike. The large indoor spaces and open areas create opportunities for uncontrolled behaviours indoors; the enormous amount of open space outside is superficially attractive but inappropriate for the small numbers of pupils at the PRU.

In the view of the Instructor, its condition is a powerful indicator of how the Local Authority views the worth of the PRU. As he puts it, for a young person who is 'not wanted' in his or her school to be placed in a building that no-one wants, does not help in the process of rebuilding self-esteem. In fact, he believes, it has a directly negative effect.

'You know, they're building all these lovely new academies and new schools, but for these type of kids they're like, they're shoved to one side and they're put into buildings like we've got here, which is falling down.'

Foucault's exposition in 'Madness and Civilisation' (2001) on the treatment of difference, the 'leper' syndrome, finds resonances here.

The PRU building is a former primary school built on two floors in the 1960s. It is certainly uninspiring in appearance and although some cosmetic work has been done on internal decoration, it remains a somewhat gaunt and unwelcoming environment.

The Head's view is unequivocal.

'This building is terrible, I mean it needs hundreds of thousands spent on it, it's a fantastic site but it's not right for teaching these kids and it needs a lot of money spent on it. So the building and the site itself is a drawback.'

A further feature is that its position at the edge of the city means that some young people are expected to travel long and difficult distances to reach the PRU. For those for whom attendance is already an issue, this poses particular problems as is made clear in the data.

A number of contributors refer to damage. The female student talks of doors being kicked open against locks and of windows being smashed. She also mentions the vulnerability of displays and 'work on walls'; ripping down and damaging other students' work is a behaviour mentioned by the male student also.

'When I do my painting and decorating out back where they all go and smoke and that out there, I went out the next day, someone had drawn all over it and kicked it and scraped it all off the wall.'

The Instructor believes that a purpose built, new building would do wonders for teaching, behaviour and morale but claims not to be so naïve as to believe there would be no damage done.

The PE teacher is emphatic in his view.

'They need to go somewhere that's a nice standard because you know how can they respect something that's falling apart?'

The importance that the Head attaches to the environment of the PRU can be seen in the enthusiastic way she sets about improving its internal appearance. The relevance of Burns and Machado's *'Rules for dealing with environmental factors and agents: How do we cope with, make gains in the environment, dominate or avoid environmental threats?'* is evident here.

Once again, underlying the whole issue are Parsons's questions.

'Is the young person associated with the adjective or adjectival phrase of 'at risk', 'disaffected' or 'socially excluded' or is it another agent that has placed them 'at risk', caused their disaffection or excluded them? Are they troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not tolerated?'
(2005:187)

5.5 Final thoughts

Many of the contributors, both adults and young people, having expressed some profound concerns and shared some shocking experiences, describe, sometimes with surprise, how important the PRU is for them. They refer to the poor reputation the PRU has in the wider community and to the amazement felt by their outsider peers that they enjoy being a part of it, that they 'belong'. All the young people I spoke to believe the PRU has helped them to move their lives forward and to have more respect for adults in general and teachers in particular. Many of the adults I spoke to would not exchange their posts for mainstream settings, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the daily challenges they face. Failure is commonplace but the success when it comes, the feeling of 'making a difference' in the lives of some extremely troubled young people, gives them job and personal satisfaction that they have not experienced elsewhere.

So, now my mountain is nearly climbed. I must reflect on the experience and decide whether the enterprise has affected my thinking on the principle behind the PRU: that bringing young people, all of them with behaviour issues to

some degree or another, out of mainstream to a removed setting away from their peers, where the environment is inappropriate for their needs and resources are limited, can possibly 'work'?

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The mountain scaled at last. Looking back I can see the places where I stopped to deal with a problem, the difficult stretches where I struggled to move upward at all and nearly gave up altogether and this last section, the toughest of all, with the summit constantly shrouded in cloud...

6.1 Chapter One revisited

This whole enterprise, this thesis, stemmed from my experience as the Head of a PRU. As I described in Chapter One, after three years in post, I managed, with my team, to achieve a 'Satisfactory' judgement from Ofsted, which at that time meant we had succeeded in convincing the inspectors that we were making progress in all areas and had, most importantly, the capacity to improve. It was the first Ofsted inspection the PRU had experienced.

This was a very heartening outcome as the three years had been the most challenging professional experience of my life. I retired soon afterwards feeling I had achieved what had been asked of me by my line managers, the local education authority, but also, in reality, disappointed that we had not made better progress. I knew that a number of other PRUs were recording 'Good' and even 'Outstanding' judgements and was keen to find out how these had been achieved, given the problems I had encountered.

I had the valuable opportunity to undertake research into the issue at Brunel University and this thesis is the outcome. For the framework of this final chapter I found the work of Ludhra (2015) particularly helpful.

6.2 A very personal project

It has been a very personal project.

Like the Head in the data, I had gravitated towards the pastoral ladder of promotion in my secondary school teaching career. I enjoyed the holistic approach that came

with pastoral responsibilities. However, a conversation with a Brunel colleague on how important our own identities were in our research made me consider more carefully what and who had influenced my thinking.

We discussed my family background, my education, my cultural and religious setting and my political stance.

The project therefore, developed some sense of being a further stage in my own life story. The process of research has not simply been an objective appraisal of the information I have been able to gather but an emotionally engaging exercise. There are many voices in the data but the one that threads its way throughout is my own.

6.3 The research question restated

‘Can PRUs work? A search for the answer from within a lived experience.’

In Chapter 1 I wrote about my own experience as the Head of a PRU. The experience was challenging and although ultimately ‘Satisfactory’ in Ofsted terms, I was personally disappointed by the quality of what we had achieved. I knew that other PRUs were moving forward and beginning to achieve Good and even Outstanding Ofsted judgements and was keen to know ‘how these had been achieved, what had been achieved and where the difference lay.’

I included the possibility that at least some of the difference might be found in me.

It was against this background that, following my retirement from the PRU, I set out on the research project.

6.4 The aims of the research

I stated my aims for the research in Chapter 1 and repeat them here for the benefit of my reader.

‘The aim of this research project is not only to add to the sum of knowledge about the world of the PRU, although this in itself seems a worthwhile objective. In my experience, politicians, policy makers, civil servants and the great majority of those

involved in the education of young people have never worked in a PRU, will possibly never have visited a PRU or know much about the issues they face and the work they do. I hope that this research project will enrich their understanding of PRUs.'

A further aim is to bring the generally unheard voices of those who attend and work in PRUs to a wider audience. In listening to them, I aim to answer the main research question, 'Can PRUs work?'

6.5 The research outcomes: four emergent themes

Four major themes have emerged from the research. The themes are a summation of the comments and views expressed by the contributors on the subject of their PRU. They were given an initial question to respond to but, generally speaking, following that opening, they were able to choose the direction of the conversation and select the aspects they wished to describe, assess and judge.

The themes are:

- The purpose and character of the PRU
- The staff
- The young people
- The environment

6.6 The first theme: the purpose and character of the PRU

The first of the themes reflects the participants' attempts to get to the heart of the matter. As discussed in Chapter 5, there was agreement that the core business of the PRU was to 'restore and repair' the young people. (Rogers 2015). There was a divergence of view however, over the process of restoration and repair work. The majority of the contributors followed the Head in placing equal importance on a 'nurturing' approach and a rigorous programme of learning, including GCSEs, as the quickest and most effective route back to a mainstream setting. Others, in this Key Stage 4 provision, felt that a focus on life and social skills, without the pressure of public examinations, would be more productive in addressing their needs. They felt it

was the young people's behaviours that were 'getting in the way' of progress in other studies and effective work placements.

This subtle but important difference reflected my own experience. For example, some of my teachers believed that their primary role in their lessons was to address personal issues, some indeed very pressing, but at the expense of achieving their learning targets. I believed their primary role was to teach and that extended private conversation, during lessons, was inappropriate. Like the Head in the research PRU, I sought a balance between 'nurturing' and 'teaching'; in fact I perceived 'nurturing' to be 'teaching'.

The sub- themes emerging from the data are all concerned with the 'restore and repair' over-arching purpose of the PRU. The teaching purpose is reflected in the personalised curriculum and the emphasis placed on work related learning in addition to academic courses. The restorative purpose is clear in the roles of the Literacy & Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Counsellor. The supportive purpose is shown in the efforts made to connect with families and schools. Where aspirations to achieve the best possible restoration and repair are firmly in place and shared across all stakeholders and providers, then successful outcomes are surely more likely to be achieved. The research PRU was rich in support staff that meant it could adopt a holistic approach to the young people through counselling, learning support, home/school liaison and attendance officers and so on. I had very few.

The Head's relationship with her Management Committee and the local authority is unsupportive and lacks direction and purpose. It was no surprise to me that she and her Deputy were actively seeking to achieve academy status. My situation was different: my Management Committee and local authority were closely involved with the PRU. However, their expectations of what we could achieve, with our limited resources, placed enormous stress on me, and my Deputy.

6.7 The second theme: the staff

The outcome from the data is clear: committed, qualified and well-trained members of staff are critically important to the success of the 'restore and repair' work in the PRU. Finding and keeping the 'right' people is key to the Head's aspirations of

moving ahead on the Ofsted scale. Some of the voices in the data speak of a level of job satisfaction that surprises them. They talk of having respect for the young people and a sense of their worth.

There are voices that speak of problems that arise because of the mixed status of members of staff resulting in differentiated scales of pay; there had been tension in the staffroom as a result.

There is strong evidence however that some staff struggle with the intensity of the challenge of dealing with extreme behaviours: it is clear that working in the PRU demands a particularly 'resilient' form of self-belief. The Head is impatient of adults who respond emotionally to anti-social, even violent and abusive behaviour: modelling 'adult' behaviour is the consistent approach she adopts and needs to find in her colleagues. As far as I could tell there was little, if any, support in place for staff suffering from stress other than from their peers.

The sub-themes emerging from the data reflect the importance of maintaining the staff's sense of personal worth. This is crucial in such an environment. Voices speak of the problems of mixed status and differentiated pay scales; however there are also references to training opportunities and personal development; by the time of the fourth conversation the Head has completed a full cycle of performance management interviews.

My own PRU experienced a number of complex staff and staffing issues. Some of those resonate with the mixed team issues in the research PRU; we had a similar situation. In many cases, I found staff reactions to some of the young people more difficult to manage than the original behaviours and found maintaining my personal resilience a challenge.

6.8 The third theme: the young people

The outcome from the data is two-fold. There are negative and positive perceptions of the young people. The positive reflect the benefits of attending the PRU: the young people recorded in the data are all successful PRU students in that they report major problems with their behaviour and attitudes before entering the PRU: they now

consider themselves to have moved on to a different set of perceptions and attribute their change to the staff who have supported them through it. They show gratitude and awareness of their debt. The 'restore and repair' process has been successful.

The negative strand in the data concerns the kinds of anti-social behaviours the young people display. Much of the data concerns the management of those behaviours. There are systems and structures in place in the PRU to support the process, some of which work successfully, others less so.

My own experiences with the young people who attended my PRU were equally challenging. Unlike the research PRU, we took referrals of young people from across the spectrum of need and from Key Stages 3 and 4. I experienced personal abuse and was, for the first and only time in my career, assaulted by a student. I found this very difficult to come to terms with. Luckily, I also experienced some enormously rewarding successful outcomes. I learned useful lessons from my Social Services colleagues: their practice of regular supervision and post-traumatic event support proved very helpful.

6.9 The fourth theme: the environment

Many voices in the data speak of the environment; the PRU building is in need of major repair; its condition appears to affect morale. Much effort is made to improve matters and by the time of the fourth conversation with the Head a good deal of refurbishment and decoration has taken place. The real issue with the building is the negative message of their perceived worth that it gives to the young people; there are new school buildings in many parts of the city that are giving very positive messages to the young people who attend them.

My own PRU was on two sites. One was dilapidated and depressing and was shared with Social Services provision for young people; the other, a wing of a primary school, much more light and airy with classroom spaces and appropriate facilities. We too worked hard to overcome the negative impact of the dilapidated building in order to alleviate the impact on our morale, painting the corridors ourselves before a crucial Ofsted inspection.

6.10 The difference to be found in me

This final process of working through the emergent themes and briefly comparing them to my own experience of a PRU has helped me to process my response to the research question. My own experience has intruded into the data on occasions; I was making constant comparisons in my own mind but worked hard to keep them there. However, throughout the data gathering, analysis and re-presenting, I have held the comparison in mind.

On most points within the emergent themes I feel comfortable with the comparison. Much of what is said resonates absolutely with me. I was not surprised by any of the behaviours apart from the sexually charged abuse. I recognised the impatience of the Head in dealing with staff who were reluctant to act for themselves. I remembered the difficulty of dealing with challenging behaviour in a child alongside emotional staff. I understand the claims about the impact of the building on morale; we experienced precisely the same problem. However I now reach the point where I can no longer delay a response to the claim I made in Chapter 1.

'My research was founded on my own challenging experience and my knowledge that some PRUs had achieved 'Good' or even 'Outstanding' judgements from Ofsted and I was keen to know how these had been achieved, what had been achieved and where the difference lay. I included the possibility that at least part of the difference was likely to be found in me.'

The research PRU was not an 'Outstanding' PRU. It had recently moved out of Special Measures and had achieved a 'Satisfactory' outcome. The year following my interview work the PRU achieved a 'Good across all areas' outcome. In other words this PRU was making rapid strides in improvement. Much of what I saw and heard on my visits to the PRU gave me this strong impression of forward movement.

The Head had been headhunted for the post at the PRU. The local authority had become aware of her two previous 'Outstanding' achievements and had brought her in to advise the PRU on improvement strategies. They had asked her to stay on and lead the PRU to Outstanding.

It is at this point that I accept that 'at least part of the difference was to be found in me'. I had experience of senior pastoral posts within secondary schools but only limited experience of working in a PRU. I had no experience of headship. Having noted the importance of training for others, I am happy to acknowledge that this was a missing element in my case when I took up the post and probably accounts for at least some of the difference between the PRUs and their outcomes.

6.11 The evolution in my thinking

With the evidence in the data allied to my observations in the PRU, my thinking has gradually evolved from an essentially negative position, following my own PRU experience, to the point where I can accept that a PRU can be successful in what it sets out to do. The research PRU, though beset with many morale sapping issues and apparently intransigent problems is going from strength to strength under the leadership of a 'terrier' and her talented Deputies. As I indicated earlier, the evidence of one institution does not necessarily indicate that others will work too, but it does indicate that if they were to work to match the following statements, then they might hope to emulate the achievements of this PRU.

All the statements are based on the evidence I gathered.

6.12 This PRU works because:

- It has clarity of purpose, led by the Head and subscribed to by the majority of the staff. Where there is a divergence of view, the Head is over-riding it and directing compliance.
- It is led by a Head with a clear vision of what success looks like and who generates confidence and a sense of forward movement.
- It aspires to be non-judgemental and non-confrontational in its approach to the young people.
- It is populated by a number of well-trained, motivated staff, who have made positive choices about their place of work, are committed to their task and are skilled in behaviour and people management strategies.

- It has a positive learning atmosphere that is reminiscent of school, but not the same as school.
- It carries out initial assessments and keeps staff informed about progress, needs and targets for the young people.
- Some of the teaching is professional, engaging and resourceful in approach. This applies to a range of teaching settings in the PRU. There may be more.
- It has skilled support for learning and for counselling from professionally qualified practitioners.
- It provides and supports relevant training opportunities and staff personal development.
- It has systems in place that are constantly monitored, implemented and/or scrapped depending on their effectiveness in promoting learning and positive social behaviour.
- It works to involve parents and has trusting relationships with a number of them.
- It works creatively to improve its internal environment.

I was invited to visit the PRU a year later when they had just had an Ofsted inspection and achieved a Good in all categories. Although the outward appearance of the PRU had not changed there was a significant change internally. There were colourful displays everywhere, photographs of pupils involved in a variety of different activities, reports of work experience and college courses and art work of all kinds around the building. One classroom had been completely refurnished as a colourful, comfortable space for small group work and meetings.

The enclosed outside space in the centre of the building had been transformed into a



garden full of vegetables. The Head was particularly proud of a large pot plant that was on a windowsill in a main corridor. For many weeks she had judged the temperature of the PRU by whether the plant was on its side, on the floor or still in place. Gradually, it had stayed in place more and more until the point where, at that time, it rarely moved. There was a palpable sense of wellbeing throughout the community.

At this point those members of staff who had needed to be persuaded that thorough and detailed preparation for Ofsted was necessary had evidently changed their minds and were enjoying the general sense of achievement.

I learned that the English teacher had gained his Qualified Teacher Status, the Counsellor had gained further professional qualifications and the Deputy Head (Curriculum) had pursued training for headship and had gained his NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship).

I have included the summary of this second Ofsted report in Appendix 6 for additional interest.

6.13 My contribution to educational research

I believe that my unique contribution to the field of educational research lies in the realisation of my stated aims. As far as I can ascertain, this work is the only extended internal study of a PRU.

I have brought thirteen 'generally unheard' voices and much circumstantial detail out into the open. I hope that for all my readers this research will enrich their understanding of PRUs.

I believe I have demonstrated that, given the factors operating in the research PRU, PRUs can 'work'.

6.14 The audience for my research

I am confident that this research will be of particular interest to:

- Government ministers as they seek a holistic understanding of the issues affecting some of the most troubled young people in our society;
- Education policy makers as they consider the future direction and funding of PRUs and Alternative Provision;
- Teacher educators (Brunel University now offers placements in alternative settings within its teacher training programme);
- PRU practitioners as they compare their experience and practice to this improving PRU; and
- Mainstream schools as they reflect on their 'nurturing' practice.

6.15 The limitations of my study

The case study limitation

As I outline in my methodology in Chapter 3, I took time to decide exactly how to carry out this research. I considered approaching a number of PRUs with a

questionnaire; I considered analysing the Ofsted outcomes of the growing number of PRUs that were achieving an 'Outstanding' grade. However, when the opportunity arose to have privileged access to a PRU, I was convinced this was the way forward for me. I believed that I would be able to study in microcosm the issues that affect PRUs in macrocosm. As I wrote in Chapter 3, it would certainly be the study of 'a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context.' (Yin 1994:1)

I found a further assertion reassuring: 'If sufficiently revelatory and explanatory, (the case study) captures the reality and complexity of its singularity.' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011: 289)

I used the characteristics of the case study as listed by Hitchcock & Hughes (1995:317) to support the data analysis in Chapter 4.

A further limitation

A further limitation lies in the limited number of contributors to the data. There were 40 members of staff in the PRU; I spoke to 9 of them. There were 59 young people on roll; I spoke to 4 of them. The missing voices include some of those who play important roles in the data: the abusing students (although one of the Year 11 students admits to bullying a teacher at the PRU: 'It's what you do') and the abused staff. Their absence may be significant: information about the interview programme was presented to the staff by the Head; they may not have wished to co-operate with her if they felt she was not supporting them on the issue. The young people were selected by the Head; it is unlikely that she would have selected one of the abusers to talk to me. The voices I have captured are essentially well disposed towards the PRU.

All the contributors to the data are worlds in themselves and, I believe, in that respect, have status and validity. To re-assure myself, I have from time to time submitted my work to a 'critical friend', the head of a different PRU. I have been heartened by her responses. I give an example as a flavour of her communications to me concerning Chapter 4.

To start, I think the voices definitely sound genuine and, oddly, consolingly similar to those I have been part of in EBD settings. Your

tone and authorial voice is very accessible, at the same time as feeling credibly rooted in rigour and theoretical backdrop. In the data analysis chapter, your opening analogy to Mount Improbable is convincing; and your account of the head's experience over time particularly powerful. I agree that there may be some worth in structuring the presentation of the data/interviews – if only for ease of reading for those of us that are 'dippers in and out'.

(Critical friend: by email)

6.16 Recommendations

I make the following recommendations based on the outcomes of this research.

- The role and purpose of PRUs should be clear to all those involved in education policy making at local and national level.
- Where PRUs are managed by Local Authorities they should be embedded in the local provision and regarded as a positive benefit, not a necessary evil.
- Funding arrangements should be as straightforward as possible: the main focus of the referral process should be the welfare of the pupil, not the financial implications of the move.
- Close working with referring schools including the sharing of data, mutual development of good practice, joint prevention initiatives, secondment of staff, training opportunities and so on should be explicitly directed towards improving outcomes for the referred pupils.
- Staff should receive specialised, continuing awareness training to meet the challenges of the PRU.
- Staff should have regular professional support, similar to the Social Services supervision model for those who work in fragile, challenging environments. Appointments to all roles in PRUs should include careful

exploration of the applicants' understanding of the environment, their commitment to the task and their resilience under pressure.

- Curriculum provision in PRUs should be personalised and creative: the use of outside placements and providers, carefully appraised and monitored is a proven beneficial strategy that should be adopted if absent.
- Foundation Futures, based in Newcastle upon Tyne, is an example of a provider that aims to develop self-esteem through a series of enriching experiences.
- PRUs should be supported, resourced, respected and celebrated by all their stakeholders.
- Their buildings should be fit for purpose and maintained appropriately.
- Managers should have a clear understanding of the impact of the environment on the self-esteem of all those who attend and work in PRUs.

6.17 Further research

I believe further research into the following subjects would be valuable:

1. The feminisation of behaviour management

- My questionnaire revealed that there were twice as many boys as girls in the PRUs of those questioned; and
- It also revealed that there were over twice as many female members of staff as male staff working in their PRUs.

The research would investigate this phenomenon and evaluate its implications.

2. Support structures for staff in PRUs

- The conversations with the Head revealed her level of stress

- Other members of staff were suffering from stress
- The Counselling service offered by the local authority had been cut
- Social Service practice includes 'supervision' designed to relieve stress

The research would investigate the need and best model of practice to tackle the stress issues in PRUs.

6.18 Final thoughts

I have arrived at the top of my mountain. I am exhausted. All I can think of is the trouble it has taken me to get here. I am certain there were other routes up this mountain, ones where I might have had a better view of the landscape or an easier path to tread. However, for what it's worth, I have reached the summit. I think I will stay for a while and listen to some of the voices in the wind before I descend.

'I've watched a lot of young people get a lot out of being in a PRU and they've found it very nurturing. You know, it can present as an unsafe environment sometimes but on the whole it can be safe and nurturing. And I think it can actually be free, it can't always be possibly, you know, completely free, but sometimes it's free from those judgements, in the PRU that I work in anyway, I think the young person gets a sense, a bit of relief.'

'Sifting through all that behaviour stuff takes time, it takes energy, it takes time off learning and maybe it's a different kind of learning that's more difficult to quantify than like GCSEs and foundation learning! It's a totally different kind of learning.'

'I used to be in my hood all the time. I used to wear my hood 24/7. Bad man's in the hood!'

'If you'd have said to me five years ago that I would be working in a PRU with kids like that, I would have laughed at you. Because I was one of those, a lot of people out there go, they want a good swift, do you know what I mean? That's how a lot of people see these kids, oh, they want a backhander, they want this, that and the

other, I'd soon whip them into shape. But a lot of people out there don't realise the background that a lot of these kids come from, and I didn't until I got into it.'

'They don't get what they need out there.'

'We have a strong team that you can always call for somebody to come and help you out or just to be there to diffuse a situation, because with the best will in the world, something hideous can happen and as much as you might want to diffuse it, you're not the right person to do it and I think you have to know when to walk away.'

'We're always going to be at the bottom there aren't we really? We're always going to be the bottom! So we don't really stand a bloody chance in that respect. Not many people would want to work in a PRU, that's for sure.'

'I really believe that they're all, humans are good and I really hold on to that non-judgemental concept.'

'They all lack respect, that's the main thing'.

'I don't think they should be kicked out, they should be given chances to help, well to show that they can redeem themselves.'

'I think the view the school gives, right you're out of school, you're not going to school any more, well where am I? I can't be at school because I'm not going to school any more, I've been told that. So where is this place? I don't really know, they're teaching me things but it's not a school.'

'The students here will receive back what you give out to them. To be honest, if you come in guns blazing, they're going to give you guns blazing, if you come in with an open minded, kind of chilled out attitude towards stuff, where you push forward but without being invasive, you get what you want from them. You can't come in and say this is what you're having, and that's that.'

'The staffing's got to be supreme. When I came here you could tell straight away that the staff here were superb, a mix of experience, age, interest, you know, life.'

'They know if you want to be with them.'

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (a): The Questionnaire

TO ALL DELEGATES AT THE PRU NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2010

From: Hilary Dodman (retired PRU Head)

Would you be kind enough to help me collect data on PRUs through this questionnaire?

I am working on a research project at Brunel University looking into the issues and challenges PRUs face and their effectiveness in dealing with them.

If you are happy to do so, I would be very grateful if you would add your name, PRU name and an email address so that I could contact you for further information.

Name:

PRU name:

Email address:

Thank you very much. Your co-operation is much appreciated.

Hilary Dodman

hilary.dodman@brunel.ac.uk

Question1

Please circle your responses to the following:

The aim of a PRU is

- (a) To replicate as far as possible mainstream school curriculum and public examination opportunities for excluded young people
Very important/Important/Not very important

- (b) To work to support change in a young person's attitudes, behaviours and/or conditions that brought him/her out of mainstream into the PRU
Very important/Important/Not very important

- (c) To support a return to mainstream education if appropriate and possible
Very important/Important/Not very important

- (d) To provide excluded young people with life skills to support their future roles in society
Very important/Important/Not very important

- (e) To support schools in working with their challenging pupils
Very important/Important/Not very important

- (f) To support the wellbeing of the local community by keeping young people off the streets and in a purposeful environment
Very important/Important/Not very important

Which of the above aims is most important in your view?

Please circle one of the following: a b c d e f

Question 2

In general how successful would you say you are in your PRU in achieving:

Aim (a)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

Aim (b)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

Aim (c)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

Aim (d)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

Aim (e)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

Aim (f)

Very successful/Successful/Not very successful

In which of these six aims do you think you are most successful?

Please circle one of the following: a b c d e f

Question 3

Approximately how many boys are currently attending your PRU on a full or part-time basis?

Number:

Approximately how many girls are currently attending your PRU on a full or part-time basis?

Number:

Question 4

How many male members of staff work, full or part-time, or as visiting professionals, in your PRU? (Staff) includes all adults who work in your PRU. Give an approximate number if necessary.

Number:

How many female members of staff work, full or part-time, or as visiting professionals, in your PRU? (Staff) includes all adults who work in your PRU. Give an approximate number if necessary.

Number:

Question 5

Is your PRU: Please circle one of the following

- (a) Purpose built
- (b) Housed in a former school or part of a former school
- (c) Housed on a school site but physically separated from it
- (d) Part of a hospital site or other specialist environment
- (e) Other (please describe briefly)

Question 6

Please circle your responses to the following:

The main challenges in managing a PRU are

(l) Dealing with challenging behaviour

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(m) Finding and keeping quality staff

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(n) Providing appropriate, good quality learning opportunities for each young person referred

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(o) Managing physical resources within budget

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(p) Preparing for inspections

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(q) Managing staff stress

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(r) Maintaining quality relationships with the Management Committee

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(s) Maintaining quality relationships with schools

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(t) Maintaining quality relationships with the LEA Very

challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(u) Falling numbers of referrals due to cluster managed moves and in house/in cluster provision for fixed term excluded

Very challenging/Challenging/Not very challenging/Not a problem

(v) Other: please specify briefly

Which of these challenges do you think is the most demanding?

Please circle one of the following: a b c d e f g h i j k

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 1 (b) The analysis of the Questionnaire

Question 1

Please circle your responses to the following statements.

The aim of a PRU is:

- a) To replicate as far as possible, mainstream school curriculum and public examination opportunities for young people.
- b) To work to support change in a young person's attitudes, behaviour and/or conditions that brought him/her out of mainstream into the PRU (SSS)
- c) To support a return to mainstream education if appropriate and possible.
- d) To provide excluded young people with life skills to support their future roles in society.
- e) To support schools in working with their challenging pupils.
- f) To support the wellbeing of the local community by keeping excluded people off the streets and in a purposeful environment.

Aim	Very important	Important	Not very important
a	17	41	11
b	69	3	0
c	53	14	4
d	69	3	0
e	38	29	3
f	20	40	10

Question 1 (supplementary)

Which of the above aims is the most important in your view?

a	b	c	d	e	f
3	36	0	21	2	3

Question 2

How successful are you in achieving the aims listed in question 1?

Aim	Very successful	Successful	Not very successful
a	19	50	1
b	31	36	11
c	19	37	13
d	31	35	4
e	21	30	16
f	19	38	10

Question 3

- Approximately how many boys are currently attending your PRU on a full or part-time basis?
- Approximately how many girls are currently attending your PRU on a full or part-time basis?

PRU	Boys	Girls
1 (5 centres)	80	20
2 (15 centres)	250	20
3	90	29
4	13	12
5	80	45
6	34	1
7	3	1
8	40	20
9	280	100
10	-	-
11	25	15
12	30	12
13	19	3
14	25	8
15	50	10

16 (8 centres)	300	40
17	9	2
18	50	20
19	120	30
20 (5 centres)	25	25
21	28	6
22	30	10
23	30	8
24	26	3
25	28	4
26	17	3
27	60	30
28	60	20
29	17	1
30	12	3
31	12	3
32	20	10
33	7	5
34	20	8
35	2	8
36	70	7
37	4	3
38	22	1
39	30	10
40	100	30
41	10	5
42 (3 centres)	75	20
43	-	-
44	16	3
45 (2 centres)	120	85
46	12	3
47	-	-
48	13	3
49	65	30

50	23	1
51 (6 centres)	200	100
52	65	20
53	36	1
54	45	13
55	50	15
56	25	0
57	14	7
58 (3 centres)	135	15
59	10	5
60	-	-
61	50	10
62	20	5
63	-	-
64 (3 centres)	40	20
65	40	12
66 (pregnant school girls)	N/A	15
67	60	10
68	5	2
69	130	45
70	2	6
71	60	20
72	-	-

Question 4

- a) How many male members of staff work full or part-time or as visiting professions in your PRU? ('Staff' includes all adults who work in your PRU)
Give an approximate number if necessary.
- b) How many female members of staff work full or part-time or as visiting professions in your PRU? ('Staff' includes all adults who work in your PRU)
Give an approximate number if necessary.

PRU	Male	Female
1 (5 centres)	20	25
2 (15 centres)	100	100
3	0	60
4	6	6
5	4	26
6	5	20
7	0	8
8	-	-
9	15	25
10	-	-
11	-	-
12	6	14
13	5	11
14	7	10
15	10	30
16 (8 centres)	15	60
17	4	9
18	10	40
19	-	-
20 (5 centres)	7	14
21	12	28
22	10	30
23	4	10
24	5	14
25	5	7

26	3	8
27	14	25
28	5	35
29	5	1
30	2	11
31	2	11
32	6	10
33	3	8
34	5	11
35	0	6
36	15	15
37	3	3
38	5	1
39	7	10
40	10	21
41	3	9
42 (3 centres)	11	11
43	8	8
44	7	7
45 (2 centres)	67	52
46	7	15
47	-	-
48	2	22
49	5	37
50	2	11
51 (6 centres)	30	70

52	19	50
53	3	13
54	7	13
55	5	15
56	4	9
57	4	6
58 (3 centres)	35	45
59	7	10
60	6	11
61	10	60
62	4	4
63	2	10
64 (3 centres)	5	7
65	5	10
66 (Pregnant schoolgirls)	0	10
67	2	10
68	3	4
69	20	26
70	6	6
71	-	-
72	12	60

Question 5

Is your PRU

- a) Purpose built?
- b) Housed in a former school or part of a former school?
- c) Housed on a school site but physically separated from it?

d) Part of a hospital site or other specialist environment?

e) Other – (Please describe briefly)

a	b	c	d	e (see below)
9	30	4	4	24

	e – (Other)
1	Children's home
2	F.E. College
3	Portakabin in school car-park
4	Refurbished building with no playground space
5	Youth centre
6	Former child and family provision
7	Youth service building
8	Former social services building
9	College
10	Portakabin
11	Temporary hut on college campus
12	Residential houses
13	Old prefabricated offices
14	New portakabin
15	Children's centre
16	Converted stable block
17	Former children's home
18	"Wherever we can find a space"
19	Youth centre
20	70's office block (converted)

21	Converted office block
22	Large Victorian house
23	F.E. College site
24	Former residence (head-teachers house attached to primary school)

Question 6

Please circle your responses to the following statements.

The main challenges in managing a PRU are:

- a) Dealing with challenging behaviour.
- b) Finding and keeping quality staff.
- c) Providing appropriate, good quality learning opportunities for each young person referred.
- d) Managing physical resources within budget.
- e) Preparing for inspections.
- f) Managing staff stress.
- g) Maintaining quality relationships with the Management Committee.
- h) Maintaining quality relationships with schools.
- i) Maintaining quality relationships with the LEA.
- j) Falling numbers of referrals due to cluster managed moves and in-house/in-cluster provision for fixed term excluded.
- k) Other – (Please specify briefly).

Response	Very Challenging	Challenging	Not very challenging	Not a problem
a	19	43	9	0
b	22	30	8	14
c	5	48	13	5
d	18	35	10	4
e	26	38	6	0
f	19	34	18	1

g	9	12	30	17
h	5	27	20	15
i	10	17	27	14
j	2	6	12	46
k	See below			

	k – (Other)
1	Getting support from social services and CAMHS
2	Dealing with reducing budget
3	Finding work-related learning
4	Pupils remain too long; no exit strategy (including statemented children)
5	No cut-off point for numbers; continually rising
6	Lack of borough-wide behaviour initiative
7	Keeping up to date with information especially regarding the curriculum.

Question 6 – Supplementary

Which of these challenges is the most demanding?

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
5	10	4	14	13	9	1	2	2	1	6

Appendix 1 (c) An Outstanding PRU Ofsted Report (Summary)

School report

The Rowans

Silverbank, Churchill Avenue, Chatham, Kent, ME5 0LB



Inspection dates 26–27 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students' achievement is outstanding. They make excellent progress and, for many of them, it is the first time that they have experienced success in education.
- Year 11 leavers gain a wide variety of recognised academic and vocational qualifications which enable them to go on to employment, training or apprenticeships.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and the senior team has brought about significant, rapid and sustained improvement since the last inspection.
- The school has rigorous and highly effective systems for checking on students' progress and on the quality of teaching.
- The management committee is highly knowledgeable about all aspects of the school and provides excellent support and challenge to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Teachers are expert at gaining students' interest and challenging them to improve their work. Students respond extremely positively and the vast majority want to do well.
- Students make outstanding progress in English, particularly in reading, and in mathematics.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around school is typically outstanding. Students show respect for each other and for adults.
- The school's procedures for keeping students safe in school are excellent and they say they feel extremely safe. They know that there are adults to whom they can turn if they need support.
- The school places importance on coming to school regularly. In most cases, when students join the school, their attendance improves significantly. Attendance rates are close to those in mainstream secondary schools.

Appendix 3 (a) Extract from Ethics Application Form



UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FORM

FOR

RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

6. In lay terms, please provide an outline of the proposed research, including:

- background
- objectives
- research methodology
- contribution of research
- justification of benefit

(max 1000 words).

There is urgent, current concern about the outcomes in terms of life chances for young people who are excluded from mainstream school, either permanently or temporarily. There is growing awareness that large numbers of young people who find themselves in the NEET group (Not in Employment, Education or Training) at post 16, have experienced exclusion from school and have spent time in alternative provision, frequently the Local Education Authority's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Pupil Referral Units were established in the early 1990s to support LEAs in their obligation to educate all children in their catchment areas, including those who had been excluded from school. Prior to this legislation, provision for such children was ad hoc and not subject to inspection. There are currently 450 LEA PRUs in England.

There is no standard PRU.

Some units are specifically for young people who have been permanently excluded from school, whether primary or secondary.

Some units provide resources for permanently excluded pupils alongside pupils on fixed term exclusions and those not excluded but referred out of school before exclusion takes place.

A number of units contain pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs.

Some units provide education for young mothers; others accommodate young mothers alongside their excluded pupils.

Some units support long term school refusers, long term sick and other emotionally needy young people; others accommodate such young people alongside their excluded pupils.

The PRU title includes hospital schools, specialist mental health and social services provision. There are other providers including charities (e.g. Barnardo's) and some private sector institutions.

The quality of education provided in PRUs and the progress young people make towards reaching their personal levels of potential while attending them are the focus of intense scrutiny from Ofsted, and in particular, in the new political climate, from Government.

According to Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, PRUs are 'the weak link in the chain, without an accountable person responsible for making sure these children progress' (Guardian newspaper interview 01/10/2010).

According to Ofsted's Annual Report 2009 – 10 'The proportion of Pupil Referral Units judged to be outstanding has increased each year from 2007/8 when it was 7% (of those inspected) to this year when it is 21%.' (136 PRUs were inspected in 2009-10).

The primary objective of the research is to inform the current debate concerning the purpose, nature and quality of experience for young people excluded from school and placed in a PRU. The two perceptions above illustrate the need for a better understanding of the role and practice of this form of education. The project will seek to inform policy makers in their decision making in the rapidly changing field of alternative provision for excluded pupils. It will focus on the needs of those excluded from mainstream schooling for 'behaviour' reasons though issues concerning the education of the chronic sick, those sectioned under the Mental Health Act, pregnant schoolchildren, young mothers and young offenders will be addressed in the literature review.

The research will adopt a phenomenological approach in elucidating the lived experiences and the ensuing constructions placed upon them by those involved in the life and work of a Pupil Referral Unit. Repeated immersion in the gathered data will allow me to develop a theoretical framework in which to set my evidence based judgements on the research question.

It will incorporate aspects of social psychology, the study of relationships between people and settings and will examine theories of punishment, retribution and reformation with particular reference to Foucault (Discipline & Punish 1975).

The major research activity will consist of semi-structured interviews with members of a PRU community including the PRU Head, teachers, parents, pupils and representatives of commissioning bodies (e.g. Local Authority officer, mainstream headteacher).

The PRU selected will be one that works with secondary school age pupils excluded

from school principally for 'behaviour' reasons. Primary PRUs exist but the research will focus on older children where outcome issues become critical for the post 16 stage and where a return to mainstream schooling begins to be unlikely. It will be a PRU that has had an 'outstanding' judgement from Ofsted in order to reflect the highest levels of achievement currently prevalent in PRUs and also to indicate where issues lie for those which do not achieve this standard. It will be in an urban area in order to reflect the concentration of need. (There are particular issues facing rural PRUs that will be considered in the literature review.) The interviews will take place at a time of high usage of the PRU; i.e. mid Autumn term 2011.

The selection of the type of PRU, its location, its participants and the timing of the interviews are crucial aspects of the planning process for the project.

There are particular ethical issues in working with this kind of vulnerable community. PRUs are inevitably associated with failure and those who work in them have a heightened consciousness of how the pre-experience of failure in mainstream may affect the young people who are referred. It may also affect their parents, their referring schools, the LA officers who oversee the process and members of the wider community who may have been involved. These may include the Police and the Justice System, Social Services, Health Authorities and a range of educational support services. There may be a defensive reaction from some or all of the contributors to the data gathering and I will need to be particularly aware of their sensitivity to questioning, however carefully such questions are framed.

The research will contribute to the literature on the impact of exclusion on the life chances of those who experience it by investigating the practice and quality of this form of alternative provision and the progress that can be made in an excluded setting. It will seek to draw attention to the needs of this group of young people, and those who work with them and care for them, by giving them a voice to articulate their own thoughts, experiences and concepts of success.

Appendix 3 (b)(i) Information Leaflet for Research Project

Do PRUs work?

Conceptions of success in educating excluded young people in Pupil Referral Units.

10 points about the Research

1. What is the purpose of the study?

The project aims to discover how an outstanding PRU (according to Ofsted) meets the needs of the young people who are referred to it with such success. It will explore the experiences of those who work in it and those who attend it and their parents and carers. It will also seek the reflections of Local Authority officers and a local Headteacher who refer students to the PRU.

The research will then be able to inform decision makers, policy makers and public service commissioners about the issues facing those who work in PRUs and how the best succeed.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part as you have had experience of the PRU and I want to find out your views on it.

3. Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary. Before I begin the research, I will ask you if you would like to take part (if you are under 16 I will also ask a parent/guardian for consent). If you choose to participate, once the research has begun, you are free to stop taking part at any time without giving a reason.

4. What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to take part, you may be invited to participate in an in-depth discussion about the Pupil Referral Unit. For young people, this will happen during the school

day on PRU premises. For other participants (staff, parents, others) this will happen at a place and time convenient to you.

5. What are the benefits of taking part?

The research will offer you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and your practice at the Pupil Referral Unit. It will benefit others by allowing them an insight into the work of an Outstanding Alternative Provision of this kind and support other students and providers in the field.

6. What are the risks of taking part?

There are no specific risks to taking part, additional to the everyday risks you might face when you attend the PRU.

7. What if there is a problem or if I have a complaint?

If you have a problem or complaint, you can let me know (in the first instance) and then the supervisors of my research at Brunel University.

8. What will happen to the results? Will my taking part be confidential?

The results will be used to inform my PhD thesis. The comments you make during the discussions will be made anonymous in any publication. All names will be changed, including the name of the Pupil Referral Unit.

9. What happens if I don't want to carry on with the project?

You can withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason and without consequences.

10. Who is organising the research?

The research is being organised by Hilary Dodman, a PhD student at Brunel University and supervised by two Professors from the School of Sport & Education, Professor Mike Watts and Professor Roy Evans.

Appendix 3 (b)(iii) Consent form for research project

Do PRUs work? Concepts of success in educating excluded pupils in a Pupil Referral Unit.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I agree to take part in the project.
4. I agree that the interview/discussion can be audio recorded.
5. I agree to the researcher processing this information from me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purposes set out in the information about the project and my consent is conditional on the researcher and University complying with their duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature of participant:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature of researcher:

Appendix 3 (b)(iv) Interview Questions for Staff and Students

Interview questions for staff

Do you think PRUs are a good idea?

What are the strengths of a PRU?

What are the problems as you see them?

Does this PRU work? Does it meet the needs of the young people who come here?

What are its strengths?

What are the main issues as you see them?

Is challenging behaviour an issue here?

Is it possible to change behaviours here?

What does success look like in the PRU?

Is the curriculum appropriate to the students' needs?

Can you give me some examples of innovative practice?

What skills and qualities do you think people need to work here?

Is it easy to find people to work here?

Do you enjoy your job?

Do staff support each other?

What made you decide to work here?

Do your family and friends ever comment on your working at a PRU?

What improvements would you make to the PRU?

Is the environment important?

What would your ideal PRU look like?

Interview Questions for Students

Do you think PRUs are a good idea?

Has it helped you to come here? Do you think you have changed at all? Could you talk to me about the problems you had before you came?

What are the good things about the PRU?

Are there any bad things about the PRU?

How is the PRU different from your school?

What is behaviour like here?

Can you give me some examples of problems to do with behaviour?

Do the students support each other?

Do you enjoy your lessons at the PRU? Which subjects are going well for you?

Which subjects are not going so well?

Was it easy or difficult to get to know new teachers?

Did you find it difficult or easy to settle in here?

How far do you have to travel to get here?

Do you find it easy or difficult to attend regularly?

Do you have plans for when you leave the PRU?

How do your family and friends feel about the PRU?

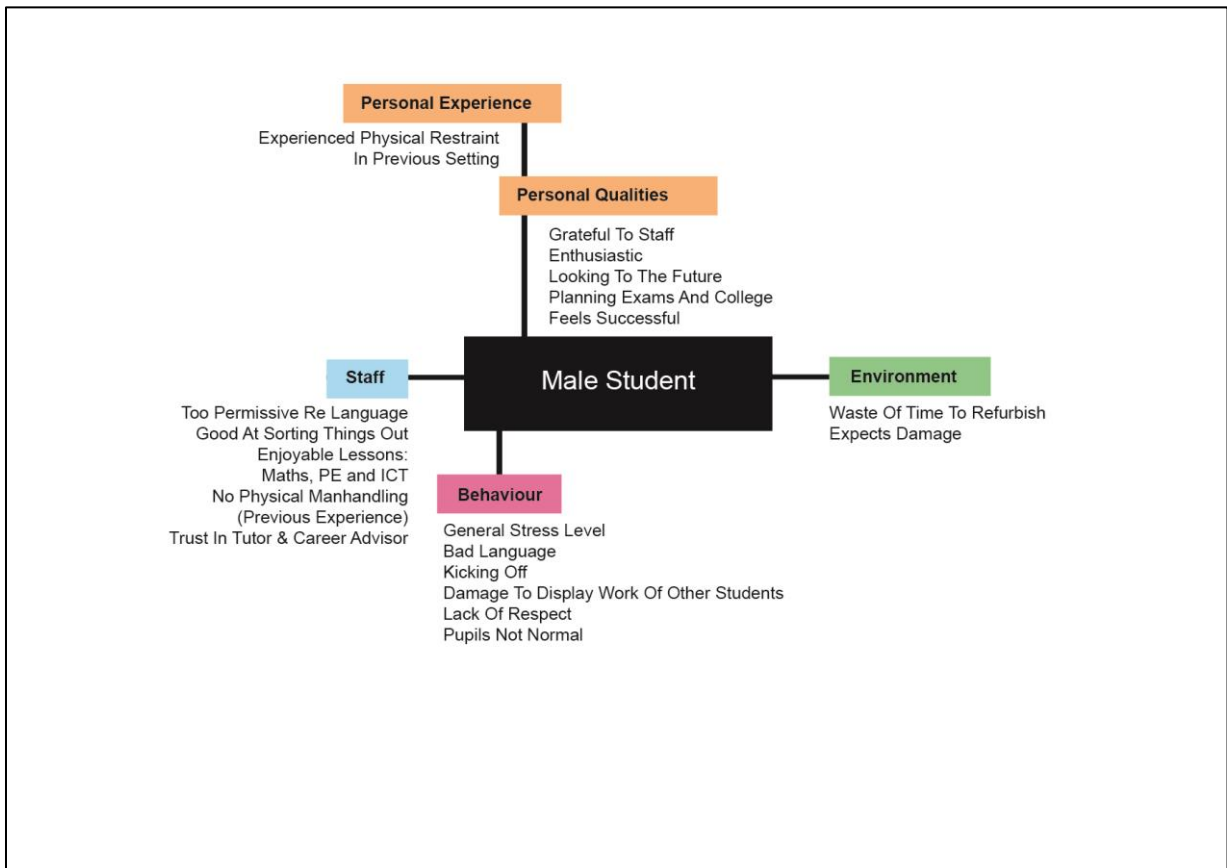
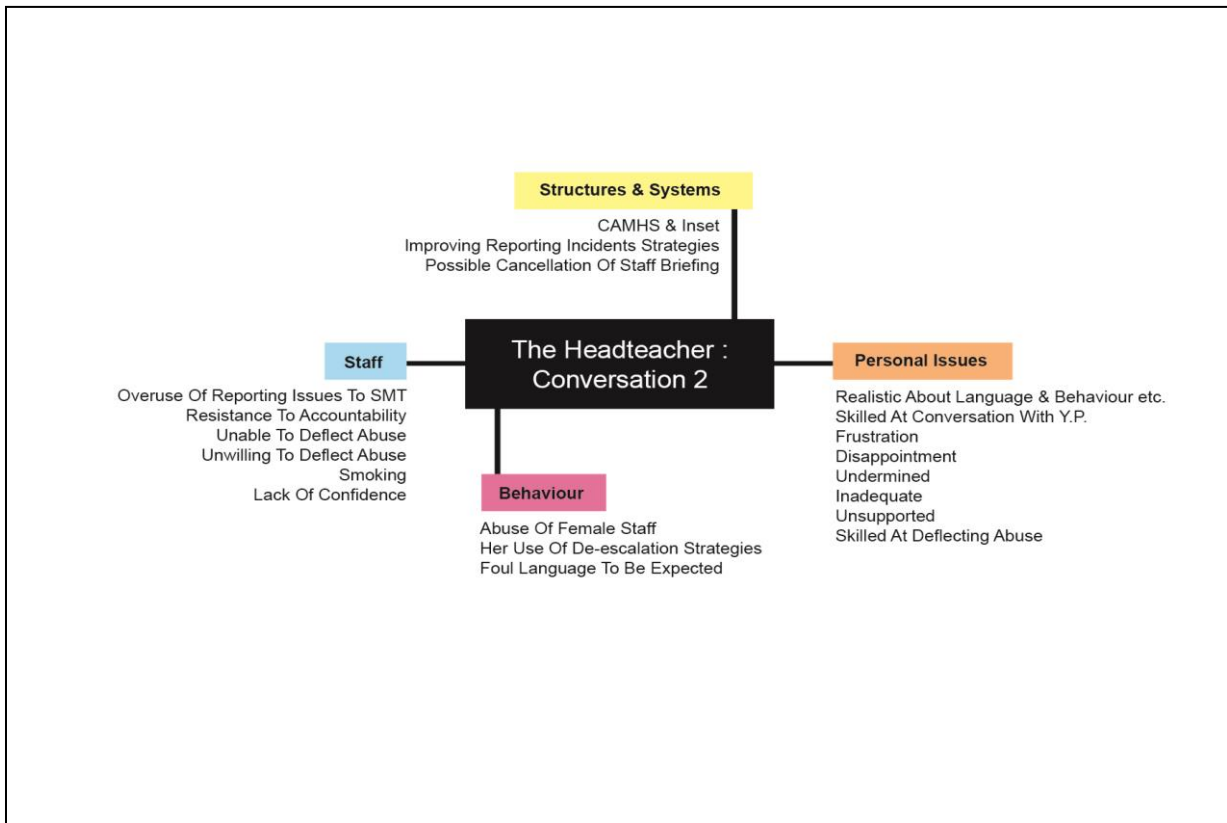
What improvements would you make to the PRU?

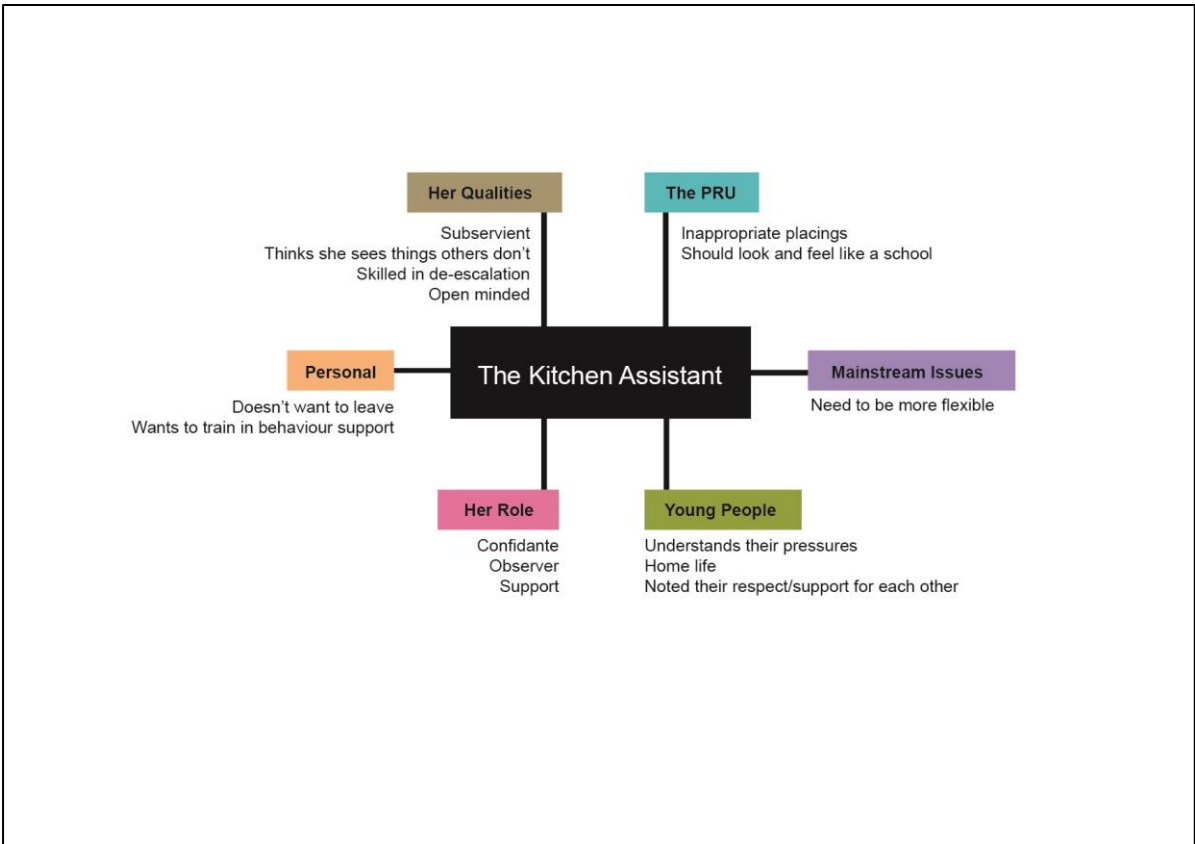
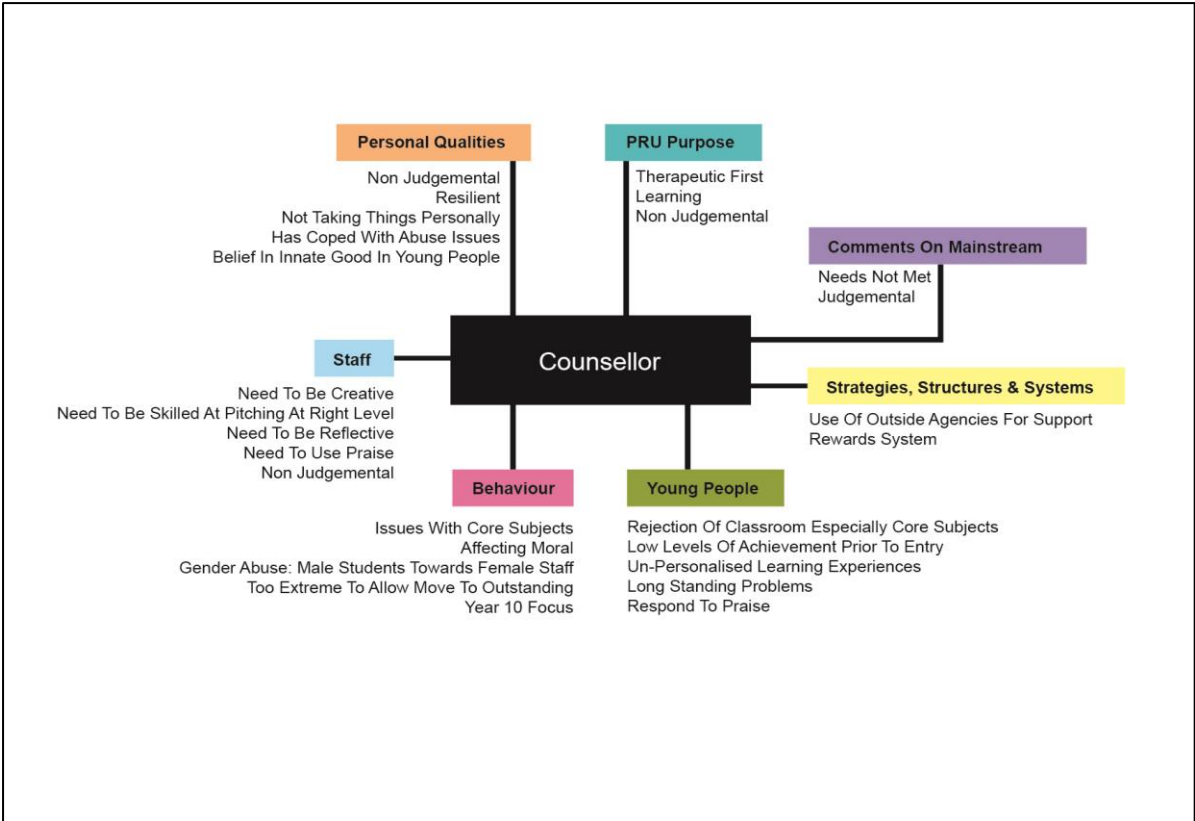
What would your ideal PRU look like?

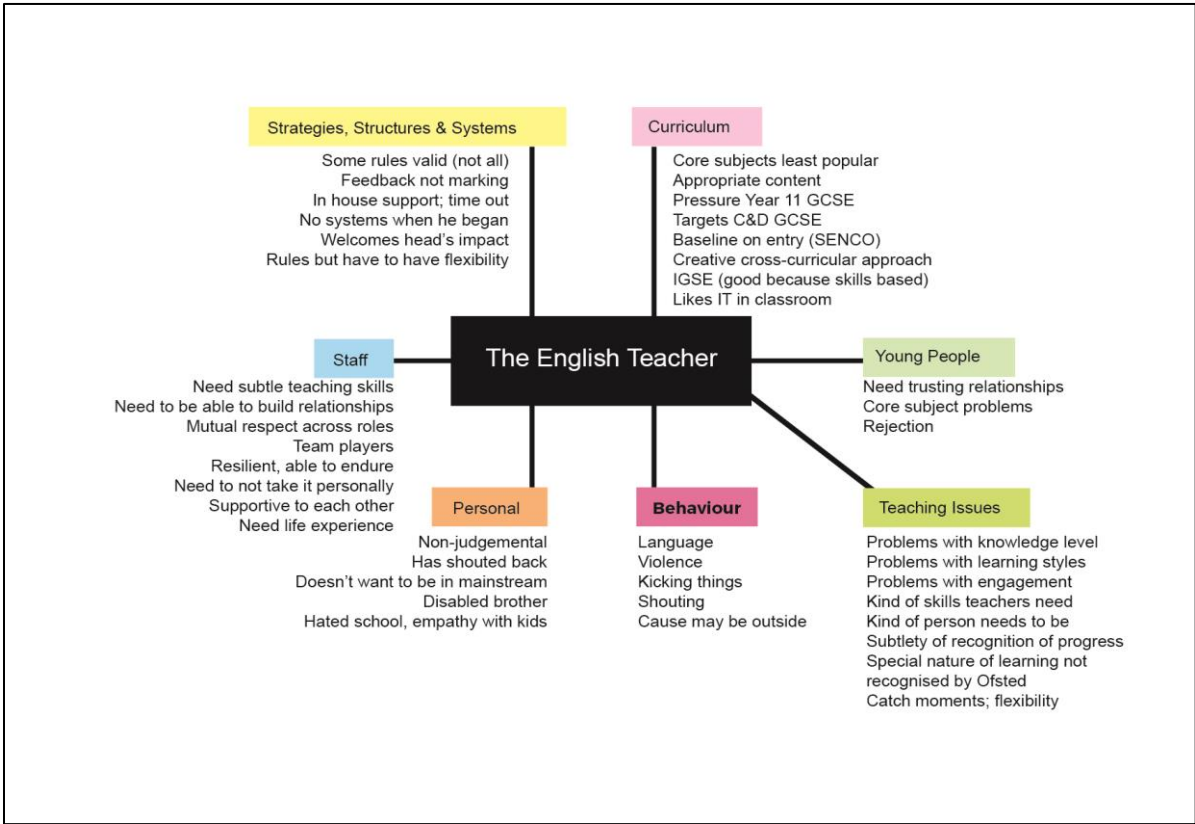
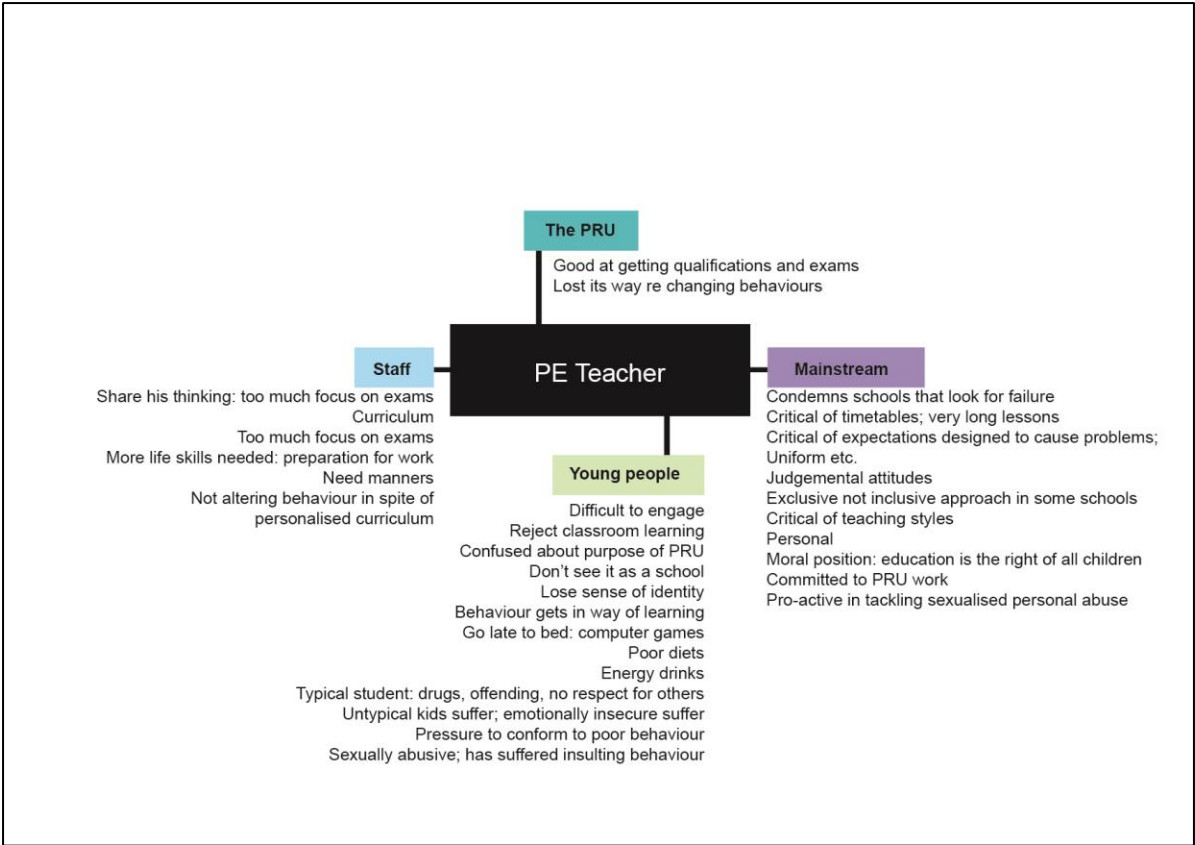
Appendix 3 (c)(i) Key for data analysis

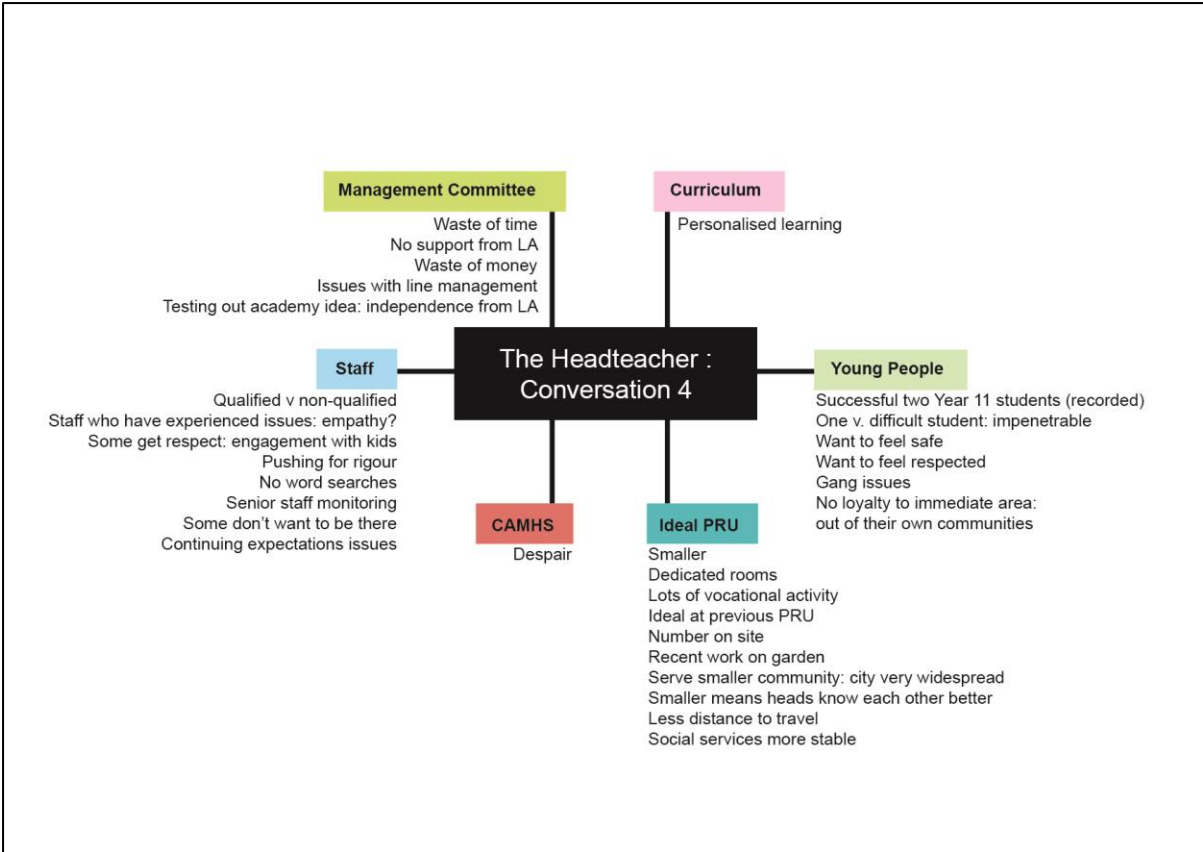
Key	
Head	H
Male Student	MS
Female Student	FS
Literacy & Numeracy Co-ordinator	L&N
Counsellor	C
Kitchen Assistant	KA
PE Teacher	PE
Instructor	I
Deputy Head (Curriculum)	DHC
English Teacher	ET
Two Year II Students	2S
Deputy Head (Pastoral)	DHP

Appendix 3 (c)(ii) Diagram of themes from each interview









Appendix 3 (c)(iii) Data Analysis: Themes

PRU purpose						
Nurturing	PE	I				
Real school						
Joint purpose	HI	DHC	DHP	L&N	C	
Meets needs	L&N	C	KA			
Limitations	PE	I	ET			
Wrong children	L&N	KA	PE	I	DHC	DHP

Staff qualities						
Positive	H	MS	FS	L&N	KA	2S
Negative	H	DHC				
Teaching issues	PE	E	L&N	C	I	
Teacher/instructor issues	DHC	DHP	I	KA		

Job satisfaction	L&N	C	KA	I	ET
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Behaviour								
Description	H	MS	FS	L&N	C			
Management	H	L&N	C	DHC	ET	KA	I	PE

Environment					
Sense of belonging	L&N	C	MS	FS	2S
Building Negative	MS	C	I	DHP	H

Curriculum					
Core subjects issues	C	ET	I		
Personalised learning	MS	FS	L&N	PE	DHC
Support sessions	L&N	C			
Life lessons	MS	FS	L&N	PE	

Systems							
Behaviour management	H	DHC	C	DHP	KA	I	PE
Assessment	DHC	ET	PE	I			

Importance of good relationships	C	DHC	ET	MS	FS
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Parents	MS	FS	L&N	KA	PE	DHC
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Outsider perceptions	FS	L&N	KA	I
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Mainstream criticisms	H	FS	L&N	KA	PE	I	DHC	ET	DHP
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Local authority	H	DHC
------------------------	---	-----

Academy issues	H	DHC
-----------------------	---	-----

Ofsted	H	DHC	ET	L&N
---------------	---	-----	----	-----

Past histories	H	MS	FS	L&N	C	KA	ET
-----------------------	---	----	----	-----	---	----	----

Appendix 3 (c)(iv) Data Analysis: Sub-themes

Young people						
Innate good	C					
Confused about identity	PE					
Have fear of making mistakes	L&N	I	ET			

Teaching						
Appropriate level	PE	ET				
Tackled sideways	I	ET				
Flexible approach	ET					
Cross-curricular strategies	L&N	ET				

Staff						
Recruitment	H	L&N	DHC			
Wouldn't leave	PE	ET	KA			
Training	H	L&N	C			
Don't take it personally	L&N	C	I	DHC		
Consistency	H	C				
Need to be respectful to young	C					
Need to be kind	C					
Them and us feel	KA	I				

Dealing with change	C	PE				
Keep calm	L&N	I				
Awareness of unmet needs	I	DHP				
Recognise limitations	L&N	I				
Job satisfaction	PE	I	DHC	KA	ET	C
Hardworking	DHC					
Inappropriate in role	H	DHC				
Belief and commitment	DHC					
There for the right reason	DHC					
Teamwork	H	ET	KA			
Qualifications	I	ET				
Relationships with LA/Outside	H	DHC	DHP			
Advantages of academy	H	DHC				

Appendix 4: Research PRU Ofsted Report 2011 (Summary) (Redacted)



[REDACTED]

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	[REDACTED]
Local Authority	[REDACTED]
Inspection number	[REDACTED]
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	John Gornall HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	[REDACTED]
Headteacher	[REDACTED]
Date of previous school inspection	13 December 2006
School address	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Telephone number	[REDACTED]
Fax number	[REDACTED]
Email address	[REDACTED]

Age group	14–16
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Inspection number	[REDACTED]

Introduction

When the [REDACTED] was inspected in October 2009 it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was inspected on three occasions. At the last monitoring inspection the school was judged to be making good progress.

This inspection was carried out at no notice by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by 14 teachers or instructors. They held meetings with the acting headteacher and senior leaders, the chair of the management committee, the School Improvement Partner and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors also met with the newly appointed headteacher who takes up her post on 1 April 2011. They talked to staff and groups of students and observed the school's work. They looked at students' records, including their attendance and progress data. Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including the self-review submitted by the school's leaders, the assessment system employed by the school, minutes of the management committee and the school's plans for improvement. Inspectors also visited an off-site setting where some students had been placed for the day.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of teaching to see whether students are making sufficient progress.
- The impact of the school's strategies to improve attendance.
- The effectiveness of care, guidance and support to meet the needs of all students.
- How effectively the leadership and management team quality assure the work of the school and drive improvement.

Information about the school

[REDACTED] has undergone a significant restructuring since its last inspection. Previously it consisted of two separately managed centres located to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] which provided for disaffected pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. It is now housed on a single site to the north of [REDACTED] and provides for Key Stage 4 students only. An interim head of centre, supported by an executive headteacher, has led the school since the time of the last inspection. Due to the recent absence of the interim headteacher, the school has been led by an acting headteacher.

The school's fundamental role remains unchanged; it supports students who have been excluded or are in danger of exclusion from mainstream secondary schools. It also supports pregnant girls of school age and teenage fathers. The vast majority of the students are White British and a small number of students are looked after by the local authority. A few students are spending time in secure units. Fifty two per cent of students are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. [REDACTED] is now providing its students with a satisfactory quality of education; students enjoy lessons, morale has improved and staff are working as one to take the school forward.

Two key strands in the school's improving profile are the good quality of care, guidance and support, and the complementary skills of the senior leaders. Leaders have been very effective in working with staff, parents, carers and outside agencies to ensure the school is not only a much safer place but also an environment conducive to learning. There has been a resulting swing in the school's culture from one of controlling behaviour and simply keeping students occupied to one of carefully planned teaching with an increasing focus on learning. There have been significant improvements to how the school assesses and records students' needs and then tracks and evaluates their progress.

Students' achievement and enjoyment are satisfactory. They are making steadier progress because the quality of teaching has improved, with the result that lessons are calmer and more interesting. However, due to sporadic attendance throughout their school lives, most students have significant gaps in their prior learning and standards are low. Many students have not acquired the necessary basic skills in literacy and numeracy and find recording their work a struggle. Targeted support programmes and a high level of adult help in classrooms are encouraging students to catch up and boosting their confidence. Approximately half of the teaching is satisfactory and half good.

The curriculum has improved and is now more suitable for the needs of students. Staff have worked hard to introduce four curricular pathways representing a range of study opportunities and styles. A key feature is that all students now follow an individual personalised learning programme. This is having a marked impact on the attitudes of students as they begin to see the relevance of their guided choices. As one student commented, 'my chances of getting on and obtaining a qualification are better here than when I was in mainstream'.

The students' attendance has improved from around 50% at the time of the last inspection to nearer 70% now. Attendance remains a concern, however, because too many students are missing days. There are a significant number of persistent non-attenders who are proving hard to engage.

The senior leaders' strategic planning for improvement, helped and supported by the local authority, has been first rate. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders have demonstrated a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

Appendix 6: Research PRU Ofsted Report 2013 (Summary) (Redacted)

School report



Inspection dates 11–12 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The vast majority of students become involved with learning and accelerate their progress in most subjects. They successfully secure places in further education or employment.
- All students make good progress, and some make outstanding progress in their personal development. This enables them to be involved in their education and this, in turn, prepares them well for the next step in their lives.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.
- Students are welcoming. They are increasingly successful in managing their own behaviour and this is helping them to make good progress.
- Partnerships with other agencies, and with parents and families, are good. Parents say that the students feel safe and that they receive regular information about progress.
- The senior leaders are effective in raising the achievement of students by both planning a curriculum which matches the needs of the students well, and improving teaching.
- The management committee has been reorganised recently and this has further improved its effectiveness. Members support and monitor the progress of the centre well. They know what they want the centre to achieve and make plans to ensure that they are involved in bringing this about.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A few students are not punctual or do not attend as often as they could.
- Not enough time in the day is allocated to English and mathematics.
- Occasionally, teaching does not challenge students to achieve their potential.
- The specific skills that students need to develop in literacy and numeracy are not identified and promoted for each student in lessons, other than those in English and mathematics.