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Wellbeing for all: How a Scottish secondary school conceptualises health and wellbeing support for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils

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Abstract

The Scottish national education policy, Curriculum for Excellence, designates health and wellbeing (HWB) as a core learning area and advocates for an integrated, ‘joined up’ approach to wellbeing promotion involving all aspects of school life (e.g., the curriculum, school ethos, organisational structure, physical environment, and relationships within and outwith the school). While policy documentation provides a framework for schools to develop wellbeing strategies and practices, this can be challenging because schools must adapt policy guidance for their own local context. Furthermore, some research suggests that school context and composition could have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils when they attend more mixed or affluent schools where they are in the minority. However, little is known about how staff in schools serving primarily affluent populations understand, interpret, and implement policy guidance to support wellbeing when they have a minority intake of lower socioeconomic status (SES) pupils.

This thesis aimed to understand the key factors which influenced how teachers and senior leaders from a school serving predominantly affluent pupils conceptualised their HWB practices, especially for those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. To do so, a Scottish secondary school was purposefully selected on the basis of demonstrating multiple good practice examples of whole school HWB support. A strengths-based qualitative case study methodology using school policy documents, semi-structured individual interviews, and dyadic interviews was adopted to provide an in-depth, situated account of the school context and practices. This positive case study approach explored how participants’ contextual and personal factors may influence their beliefs and reflections when considering wellbeing and enable their practices to support HWB. Thematic analysis of the data identified four interconnected factors which impacted and facilitated the educators’ practices: the ethos/culture of the school, an emphasis on relationships, the importance of leadership, and the impact of identity. These influencing factors suggest the educators share a holistic understanding of HWB and have adopted a multifactorial, whole school approach to supporting wellbeing. However, within this broad approach, understanding the specific needs of lower SES pupils was challenging for the school due to concerns about the risk of stigmatisation. The findings suggest that schools may
need extra support and training to assess the needs of lower SES pupils and evaluate the effectiveness of HWB initiatives, especially those targeted for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils.

This thesis provides new insight into how a secondary school serving primarily affluent pupils plans and negotiates whole school HWB initiatives when they have a minority of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It also identifies individual and contextual factors highlighted by participants as contributing to successful whole school HWB promotion, which may be useful for future research, policy, and practice.
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Student Declaration

I hereby declare that I, Stephanie Helene Hardley, have written this thesis. It is entirely my own work, other than counsel of my supervisors, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: ____________________________________________

Date: ___________________________ 7th July 2023
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Stephen Hardley. You instilled my appreciation for new experiences, new adventures, and new locales. You allowed me the freedom to make my own choices and learn from both the triumphs and mistakes. You taught me to jump feet first but with eyes wide open – to plan carefully but still be willing to take chances. You treated my wild prospect of changing careers, leaving behind stability and safety, and moving to a different country as fun rather than folly. When I questioned myself, you cheered me on and gave me perspective. If I do not say it enough, thank you for everything – so much of who I am is because of you.

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List of Abbreviations

**ASN:** Additional support needs

**ACEs:** Adverse childhood experiences

**BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, People of Colour

**CAMHS:** Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. CAMHS provide treatment and support for children and young people experiencing mental health conditions

**CfE:** *Curriculum for Excellence*. CfE is the Scottish national curriculum for children ages 3-18 years (Education.gov.uk).

**CPD:** Continuing Professional Development

**E&Os:** Experiences and outcomes. E&Os describe the curricular expectations for learning, progression, and assessment within CfE. These are written in first-person perspective defining what the learners will be able to demonstrate or explain and are broken into levels with pupils expected to progress to higher levels as learning develops (Scottish Government, 2011).

**GIRFEC:** *Getting It Right for Every Child*. GIRFEC is an education policy approach in Scotland focused on interagency collaboration to help and support children (Scottish Government, 2008).

**HBSC:** Health Behaviour in School-aged Children is a multi-national survey studying health and wellbeing of children and young people across Europe and North America. The survey is run in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Hbsc.org)

**HMIE:** His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education. HMIE conducts school inspections and produces reports evaluating quality and improvement needs of Scottish education (Education.gov.scot)

**HWB:** Health and wellbeing. HWB is thought to be comprised of four interrelated elements: physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, and is one of three core areas of focus in CfE along with literacy, and numeracy. The HWB curriculum aims to teach pupils skills for life, learning, and work such as social skills, physical education, nutrition, and career planning (Scottish Executive, 2006).

**LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and others

**MHFA:** Mental Health First Aid is a voluntary training programme that teachers can take as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). The MHFA programme provides general
information about mental health issues and initial responses; it is not training to become a mental health worker (Smhfa.com, n.d.).

**MSEWB:** Mental, social, emotional wellbeing. Three of the four elements thought to make up holistic health and wellbeing.

**PIS:** Participant Information Sheet

**PSE:** Personal and Social Education

**S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6:** Scottish secondary school can take up to 6 years, typically ranging from age 11-18. Secondary school is compulsory until age 16 (S1-S4). After completion of S4, pupils can leave for employment or other qualifications, or stay on to complete higher qualifications in S5 and S6, such as those needed for university admittance.

**SCQF:** Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: framework for understanding and comparing Scottish qualifications. The framework has 12 levels, with higher numbers indicating more difficult or advanced qualification, e.g., Level 12 is comparable to a doctoral degree.

**SDH:** Social determinants of health approach focuses on the contexts and conditions in which people grow, live, and age and how these contribute to health.

**SES:** Socioeconomic status

**SHANARRI:** Eight wellbeing indicators defined by the GIRFEC policy which equate to: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included. Schools are encouraged to incorporate these indicators into school planning (Scottish Government, 2008).

**SIMD:** Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. SIMD is based on area post code and is used as an estimate of socioeconomic status (Scottish Government, 2020).

**SLT:** Senior Leadership Team – formal leadership team within the school; includes Head Teacher as well as Depute Heads.

**UNCRC:** United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Children

**WHO:** World Health Organisation
Preface

This doctoral study began in October 2019, shortly before a novel coronavirus came to the attention of the world and before the United Kingdom (UK) went into lockdown to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Widnall, Winstone, Mars, Haworth, & Kidger, 2020). As part of this lockdown, social distancing was implemented with school campuses closed, and teaching and learning moved toward online spaces. These disease mitigation procedures represented an exceptional time and caused great disruption to daily life and routines.

Similar to the disruption to daily life, social distancing measures and school closures also represented an unprecedented challenge for this doctoral study and necessitated change and adaptation. This resulted in slight changes to the research questions as well as considerable changes to the originally planned research approach. When this doctoral study began, I was interested in understanding how contextual factors within a school could influence how HWB was conceptualised, adapted, and enacted within a Scottish secondary school and how these school HWB practices were experienced by pupils. Of particular interest, were how HWB practices were negotiated by a school serving a predominantly affluent pupil body, but with a minority of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. The following research questions (RQ) initially guided inquiry and research design:

1. How is health and wellbeing conceptualised and embedded in the structures and the culture of the school?
2. What are the key factors (personal, professional, social and environmental/cultural) that influence the way in which the school and teachers respond to their responsibilities for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing? How does this translate to the classroom practices of teachers when supporting mental, social, and emotional wellbeing?
3. How are school health and wellbeing practices experienced by pupils?
4. What are the experiences of teachers within the school as they engage in this collaborative research process and how will their experiences influence future curriculum decision-making and practice?

The research was originally designed to take place in three phases, utilising an ethnographic approach. Phase one was envisaged as extended time within the school as a participant observer to build relationships with educators, explore explicit and taken-for-granted aspects of the school structure, culture, and practices, recruit participants for qualitative interviews, and engage with class observations to understand teacher practice (RQ 1&2). The second phase
aimed to understand how school HWB practices were experienced by pupils and was planned as multiple class observations and post-class focus groups with pupils (RQ 3). And finally, the third phase sought to summarise learning from phases one and two to conduct knowledge exchange sessions with educators to feedback the study findings. These sessions were envisaged as an opportunity for reflection on the school’s understanding of HWB and how this relates to pupils’ beliefs and experiences with HWB. These sessions could also facilitate dialogue about how engagement with the research process and knowledge produced in the study may influence future practice (RQ 4).

However, due to pandemic restrictions and school closures, ethnographic engagement and the inclusion of pupils was not possible for this thesis. Therefore, through advice from my progression board examiners and discussion with my supervisors, the research approach and some research questions were adapted; however, the primary focus of the study did not change. The current thesis still focuses on understanding the contextual factors which influence and enable how educators from a secondary school serving predominantly affluent pupils understood and enacted HWB practices, especially for those pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, question three, which involved data collection measures to understand pupils’ perspectives, was removed. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of not speaking with pupils about their HWB for this thesis, particularly with COVID-19 and its myriad possibilities for negative effects on the wellbeing of children and young people (e.g., anxiety, social isolation, exam stress)(The Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland, & Young Scot, 2020), it did not seem ethical to involve young people at this time.

Consequently, data collection for this thesis took place in three phases, but several adjustments were made to consider the pandemic and ethical research. Given the unknown nature of COVID-19 and school closures, a qualitative case study approach was used instead of an ethnographic approach and all data was collected remotely. The inquiry and design of the resulting thesis was informed by the following research questions:

1. How is health and wellbeing conceptualised and embedded in the structures and the culture of the school?
2. What are the key factors (personal, social and environmental/cultural) that influence the way in which the school and teachers respond to their responsibilities for mental, social, and emotional
wellbeing? How do teachers think through translating this into their practice in the classroom, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils?

3. What are the experiences of educators within the school as they engage in this research process and how will their experiences influence future curriculum decision-making and/or practice?

Phase one included collection of school documents, both formal policy documents as well as school wellbeing plans and communications, to understand the explicit and implicit messages received by staff and pupils (RQ 1). Phase two involved individual interviews with SLT and teachers to understand their conceptualisations of HWB, interpretations of school policy and context, and how this may influence their day-to-day practice (RQ 1 & 2). Then, phase three included two dyadic interview discussions with SLT and teachers to feedback the findings and facilitate dialogue and reflection on future action. The results of these three phases are discussed in more detail in the following thesis. However, understanding pupils’ perspectives and experiences of the school HWB practices that affect them is important, and it is hoped that future research can delve into their perspectives on this topic in more detail.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Over recent decades, high-income countries have seen a notable increase in the rates of young people being diagnosed with depression and anxiety (Olfson, Blanco, Wang, Laje, & Correll, 2014). Concern about these issues has prompted many policymakers in the UK and internationally to focus on the prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental wellbeing in young people (Gunnell, Kidger, & Elvidge, 2018; Scottish Government, 2021). Subsequently, children and young people’s HWB has become a popular area of interest for policy and research (Morrow & Mayall, 2009; Spratt, 2017; Watson, Emery, Bayliss, Boushel, & McInnes, 2012). Within this health promotion and health protection backdrop, schools have been identified as playing a crucial role in supporting pupil wellbeing and presented as a logical site for wellbeing initiatives (Powell & Graham, 2017; Weare & Nind, 2011).

However, while wellbeing has become a normalised and taken-for-granted responsibility in schools (Spratt, 2016, 2017), the meaning of the term remains unclear and contested. The concept of wellbeing has been variously described as ‘conceptually muddy’ (Morrow & Mayall, 2009) and ‘holographic’ (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008), a term whose definition changes depending on who or how one looks at it. This lack of clarity around conceptual definitions of wellbeing can lead to tension around the best ways to conceptualise, implement, or evaluate wellbeing and confusion for schools as they attempt to promote the wellbeing of pupils (Hardley, Gray, & McQuillan, 2020; Spratt, 2017). These challenges have transpired within Scotland, as will be discussed next.

1.2 The Scottish policy context

The interest in wellbeing is visible in Scotland, where HWB is posited as instrumental for reducing poverty-related disparities in health and perceived to support learning and academic attainment (Mowat, 2019; Spratt, 2017). Current educational policy advocates that schools take a ‘joined up’, integrated approach to achieving policy and public health goals, with teachers seen as fundamental to promoting pupil HWB (Scottish Government, 2011; Priestley & Drew,
Two policies underpin support for HWB: *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government, 2014) and *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) (Education Scotland, 2018). GIRFEC is a framework which requires that schools and other statutory and voluntary services work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable. CfE focuses on three curricular areas: HWB, literacy, and numeracy, placing them at the centre of the national curriculum. Policy also designates HWB as the responsibility of all staff working in schools and advocates for an ecological approach which works across the whole school including curriculum, ethos, environment, and relationships within and outwith the school (Scottish Government, 2021).

CfE policy documentation provides a framework for schools to plan and develop strategies that might lead to improved HWB (Spratt, 2017). However, rather than prescribed curricular content, CfE policy is designed to be flexible, with individual school governance largely the responsibility of the Local Authority in which the school is located (Sosu & Ellis, 2014). Thus, schools (and the educators within them) are encouraged to adapt policy guidance to their own local context and even successful programmes for the development of mental, social, and emotional wellbeing may not lead to positive outcomes in all settings because of contextual variables that can influence how policy is interpreted and enacted (Adamowitsch, Gugglberger, & Dür, 2017; Banerjee, Weare, & Farr, 2014; Weare & Nind, 2011). Further to this, is the starting assumption that educators do not enact policy ‘as is’, but bring their own beliefs, experiences, and biographies which will influence the ways they read, interpret, and make sense of policy (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015). Consequently, little is known about how individual schools understand and implement HWB policy, how the knowledge and experiences of teachers influence the decisions they make about HWB practices, or how this impacts their pupils, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds.

Previous research exploring the ways schools have attempted to promote HWB highlights positive outcomes that have been achieved; however, the outcomes are often highly variable, and the nature of the variations is not clear (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). This points to the need for further research to explore the various ways policy is enacted and to take account of the unique social, cultural, structural, and economic
contexts that impact policy implementation in schools (Banerjee et al., 2014; Lupton, 2005). Understanding the role of context in everyday school life may be especially important for schools serving pupils from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Much of the current research focuses on schools serving uniformly socioeconomically disadvantaged populations (Crosnoe, 2009); however, the majority of pupils from lower SES backgrounds in Scotland attend socioeconomically mixed or predominantly affluent schools, where disadvantaged pupils may be a minority (Scottish Government, 2020). This is significant because a study from Wales found that pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend schools where they are a minority, are more likely to experience poor wellbeing compared to pupils from similar backgrounds attending schools serving predominantly low-income communities (Moore et al., 2017). Using Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)\(^1\) survey data, this study compared pupil experiences (N= 9055) across 82 Welsh secondary schools. The study found that pupils from lower SES backgrounds reported lower subjective wellbeing scores, fewer positive relationships with teachers, and less input into school decision-making when attending a more affluent school. The authors hypothesised that the relative position of disadvantaged pupils within the lower levels of the school social hierarchy could amplify aspects of inequality (e.g., negative social comparison and stigmatisation) and lead these pupils to feel undervalued by school staff and peers. The findings of this study suggest that attending a socioeconomically mixed or affluent school may be detrimental to the HWB of lower SES pupils; therefore, it is important to consider the impact that being in such a minority might have on pupil wellbeing in Scottish schools. It is also important to consider how schools conceptualise wellbeing and socioeconomic disadvantage and how educators think through their HWB practices to support disadvantaged pupils when they are a minority within a more affluent school community.

1.3. Thesis aim, approach, and rationale

Due to the conceptualisation and implementation challenges outlined above, the aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which policy for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing (MSEWB) was interpreted and enacted in a Scottish secondary school serving predominantly

\(^1\) HBSC is a WHO collaborative multi-national survey of 11–15-year-olds to study adolescent HWB
pupils from relatively affluent families and attended by a minority of pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. As the thesis aimed to explore the context-specific complexities of school life and the facilitators (as well as barriers) which influence or enable school HWB promotion, a strengths-based, qualitative case study approach was adopted. A case study approach was deemed appropriate because it allows for the exploration of complex phenomena in context - in this instance, the phenomenon of interest was educators’ policy sense-making, understandings and practices to support HWB, but educators do not enact practice in isolation from the school context (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Thus, an in-depth case study approach could provide increased understanding of the factors that influence the development of whole school mental, social, and emotional wellbeing strategies, the practices of teachers, and the impact they might have on pupils (Thorburn & Dey, 2017).

To understand these situated contextual factors, various methods of data collection were employed, including school document analysis, individual interviews, and dyadic interview discussions. Baxter and Jack (2015) argue that the use of multiple data sources is a hallmark of case study research as each data source provides a different ‘piece of the puzzle’ to aid interpretation of the study phenomenon. Within this thesis, these puzzle pieces work together to answer the following research questions:

1. How is health and wellbeing conceptualised and embedded in the structures and the culture of the school?
2. What are the key factors (personal, social, and environmental/cultural) that influence the way in which the school and teachers respond to their responsibilities for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing? How do teachers think through translating this into their practice in the classroom, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils?
3. What are the experiences of educators within the school as they engage in this research process and how will their experiences influence future curriculum decision-making and/or practice?

1.4 Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

Qualitative research is understood to be inherently subjective because it involves data relating to participants’ beliefs, values, and ways of operating in and making sense of the social world (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). To understand and explore the lived experiences and sense-making of participants, the researcher is considered a central research tool, one which will co-construct
data with participants and therefore influence data collection, construction, and interpretation (Finlay, 2002). As such, the researcher can never be ‘objective’ or ‘outside’ the research process; however, rather than seeing researcher subjectivity as a problem to be eliminated (i.e., bias in quantitative research), qualitative research sees the researcher’s experiences and values as a strength (Finlay, 2002; Probst, 2015). As Peshkin (cited in Merriam & Tisdale, 2015, p. 16) claims:

“[researcher subjectivity] can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they collected.”

Within this understanding of data co-construction, the researcher will have an indelible impact on the research results, so it is important to understand who the researcher is and what preconceptions or beliefs they might bring to the research process. One way to examine these ‘researcher effects’ is through reflexivity or the ‘conscious self-awareness’ of the researcher (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, I will start with a brief description of some formative personal experiences to explain how some of my beliefs, values, and identity came to be, and how these could influence the way I engage with the research process.

I grew up as a mixed-race child in the United States of America (US). My father was also mixed-race but born and raised in the US, whereas my mother immigrated to the US from Hong Kong as a teenager. Growing up, I felt that my dad and I were more culturally ‘American’, while my mom still retained more ‘traditional’ Chinese cultural values. Tension between ‘Western’ and ‘traditional Chinese’ values sometimes left me feeling caught in the middle, particularly when it came to school. According to Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, and Murtuza (2013), within Chinese culture, academic achievement is seen as a way to gain high social status and bring honour to the family, so academics-based success is prized, whereas more Western parenting styles emphasise children’s self-esteem and personal development. This resonates with my own experience; for example, while both of my parents stressed the importance of doing well in school, they went about it in different ways. My dad encouraged me to work hard to achieve good grades, but I felt he was more understanding and supportive if I did not do well, as long as I tried my best. On the other hand, I felt my mom was less supportive and pushed the importance of high grades seemingly to the exclusion of anything and everything
else. I also felt as if she negatively compared me to others – whether this was in relation to scholastic achievement, extracurricular accomplishments, or physical appearance – which led to feelings of self-doubt, judgement, and inadequacy.

The emphasis on grades to the exclusion of other aspects of school life also extended to my interpersonal relationships. This meant that I often felt like I could not talk to my mom about my feelings or about any struggles I might be having with friends. She would explicitly say that what mattered was doing well in school so I could go on to university and get a ‘good’ job (i.e., one that was well-paid and prestigious like a medical doctor). This sent the implicit message that my relationships and my feelings did not matter, were a waste of time, or were something to hide, which left me feeling emotionally invalidated. I also felt constrained by the implicit and explicit messages I received about what jobs, or bodies, or behaviours were acceptable or valued.

With age and reflection, I can appreciate that pushing me to succeed academically was my parents’ attempt to make my life easier in the future, they just approached it in different ways. As an immigrant who needed to learn a new language and a new culture, education seemed like the best path forward, and so my mom’s parenting approach may have come from an unconscious reproduction of what ‘worked’ from her own upbringing. Conversely, my dad told me the active steps he took to shift his parenting behaviours from some of his own (negative) experiences growing up. As an adult, I am grateful for their efforts. I grew up with material advantages neither of my parents had and learned the value of hard work and perseverance, which helped me to do well in school and professional life. I also recognise that their parenting approaches ultimately came from a place of caring. However, I do not believe that the main purpose of education should be for economic advancement and some of the experiences I had as a child had detrimental effects on my physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing which continue to influence my identity, values, and beliefs to this day.

While I have described some of the personal experiences that impacted my own beliefs, feelings, and wellbeing as an individual, it is notable that these experiences were always in relation to others. Similarly, beyond personal childhood experiences, my professional and educational backgrounds also influenced my understanding of the individual in relation to
society. My educational background was in the disciplines of social psychology and public health, and I also worked as an oral healthcare provider. Much of my education focused on understanding the social aspects of health beliefs and behaviours rather than solely a focus on individual behaviour. Additionally, while my professional life often revolved around individual health promotion and risk prevention, there was also a strong emphasis on understanding the social factors which may impact an individual’s choices and actions. For example, in my role as a dental health provider I might educate patients on how various food or lifestyle choices could impact their oral and overall health, but I would also work with them to identify determinants such as social or environmental cues which may influence their desire to smoke or consume alcohol or sugary foods.

As a result of these personal, educational, and professional experiences, I believe humans are fundamentally social and that what we think, what we do, and what we believe is shaped by interaction with others. This underscores my beliefs on the significance of relationships and that no one is an island. Children and young people do not grow and develop in a vacuum. Similarly, adults are also impacted by the people around them. It is through social interaction that we make sense of the world, and these interactions can be a source of both support and constraint. These beliefs and assumptions influenced my research approach in tangible ways:

- Ecological understanding and focus
- Importance of shared/coherent messages
- Care and good intentions may not always be received as such
- Strengths-based approach

My background experiences have reinforced my understanding of the ecological nature of the social world, and this is visible in the focus of my research. Due to these assumptions, I believe that the promotion of HWB in school needs to look beyond the individual pupil to consider the wider context. Furthermore, I believe that educators’ agency and ability to support wellbeing will be influenced by the relationships and environment around them, but also that if conceptualisations of wellbeing or success are not shared amongst all school staff this may lead to ‘mixed messages’ and confusion for pupils. My experiences also made me mindful that our
actions or practices can come from a place of care and well-meaning, but they may not always be received as such, and may even be perceived as coercive or controlling. Therefore, regular self-reflection on their assumptions and practices may be beneficial for school staff. Finally, my experiences of feeling negatively judged influenced my strengths-based approach. I wanted to avoid making claims of authority or expertise as a researcher to judge what is ‘wrong’ (deficits) within the school, and instead aimed to help participants identify their own strengths, capabilities, and resources.

Finlay (2002) notes that by examining our own reactions and responses, we may be better able to understand the participants’. On the other hand, it is important not to confuse knowledge embedded within our own personal experiences, emotional responses, or preconceptions as knowledge gained from participants (Malterud, 2001; Probst, 2015). Reflexivity is not a ‘cure’ for subjectivity and a researcher’s candidness is not an assurance that participants’ voices have been faithfully represented (Finlay, 2002). In disclosing some of my experiences, I aim to raise awareness of my sincerely held beliefs in the hope that I can then recognise and acknowledge how they have informed my research approach, data collection procedures, and understandings of participants’ experiences. This is done so that readers can get a sense of who I am, where I am coming from, and how this may predispose me to notice certain aspects of the data, so the reader can then make their own evaluations as to the rigour of my findings. Subsequently, I acknowledge that I can never divorce myself from my experiences, so this thesis will always be a partial account, situated through the unique interaction between my participants and the personal lens that I bring as a researcher. However, throughout this thesis I have tried to ground my interpretations in the literature and ‘thick description’ of participants’ own words and experiences to avoid imposing my own beliefs and responses on the data or presenting my own assumptions as the findings.

1.5 Thesis layout and chapter summaries

This thesis follows a linear layout, with subsequent chapters building on what came before, but the write-up of this work occurred recursively moving backwards and forwards through the chapters as my thinking evolved. The thesis is mainly written in third person but will sometimes
switch to first person to illustrate my thinking or reflection (e.g., when describing my reflexive preconceptions and methodological choices). There are also some departures from a traditional layout, such as the inclusion of an ‘introduction to the findings’ chapter which was included to provide extra contextual information and analysis of the policies and priorities of the school, as well as summarise the relationship between influencing factors highlighted by participants as enabling their HWB practices in school. The thesis chapters are summarised below:

Chapter One introduces the context and aim of the study. It also provides some background information about me as a researcher and some starting preconceptions I bring to the research. Chapter Two reviews the literature and problematises constructions of wellbeing in schools. Of interest for this thesis is how school contextual factors may influence practice to support wellbeing. Chapter Three describes the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis and how they help explain the influence of school context on practice. Chapter Four explains the paradigmatic assumptions of the thesis and how these are useful for understanding the nature of reality and knowledge. Chapter Five details the setting, participants, and methodological approach. Ethical considerations and strategies for enhancing trustworthiness are also addressed. Chapter Six introduces the reader to the findings of the first phase of the study which examined discourses within school documents. These discourses provide some contextual information about policy aims and priorities in the school and inform the following phases of analysis. The chapter ends with an introduction to the four factors described in chapters 7-10 and how they interact to influence whole school HWB support. Chapter Seven describes the school ethos and how this may influence conceptualisations and practices to support HWB. Chapter Eight highlights the impact of relationships on conceptualisations and practices to support HWB. Chapter Nine describes the importance of leadership to drive and empower support for HWB. Chapter Ten explores the influence of personal identity and how this influences staff motivation, practice, and buy-in to the school’s HWB priorities. Chapter eleven explores educators’ experiences and reflections from engagement with the research process and whether this may impact practice in the future. Chapter twelve discusses the findings and implications for future research and practice.
1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the context, aims, and focus of the thesis. It has also outlined the research design approach and how this may have been influenced by the experiences and beliefs of the researcher. The next chapter will discuss the literature around conceptualisations of wellbeing and of socioeconomic disadvantage and how these may influence the beliefs and practices within schools.
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Over recent decades, high-income countries have seen a marked increase in the rates of young people being diagnosed with depression and anxiety (Olfson et al., 2014). These trends were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic with evidence suggesting adolescent mental and emotional health has worsened compared to pre-pandemic rates (Inchley, Mabelis, Brown, Willis, & Currie, 2023). Concern about these issues has prompted many policymakers to focus on the prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental wellbeing in young people (Scottish Government, 2021). In the UK, children and young people’s HWB has become an increasingly important and popular area of interest for policy and research with schools being identified as a logical site for wellbeing initiatives (Thomas, Graham, Powell, & Fitzgerald, 2016).

2.2 The rise of wellbeing in Scottish public policy

Following this focus on HWB, Scotland implemented national education policies that emphasised an integrated and unified approach to achieving public health goals, with schools and teachers seen as fundamental to promoting pupil HWB (Scottish Government, 2011; Priestley & Drew, 2016, Powell & Graham, 2017). Two policies underpin support for HWB: GIRFEC (Aldgate, 2013) and CfE (Education Scotland, 2018). GIRFEC is a policy framework which promotes collaborative working to improve educational outcomes and support wellbeing for children and young people, including those from socially or economically disadvantaged groups. GIRFEC has been noted for its emphasis on the duty and responsibility of adults to care for children (Spratt, 2017), with schools encouraged to work with agency and community partners (e.g., parents and carers, statutory and voluntary services). GIRFEC principles reflect the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and defines ‘eight wellbeing indicators’ as necessary for children to develop and ‘reach their full potential’ (Aldgate, 2013, p. 7). Thus, the GIRFEC policy aims to support all children and young people to achieve the eight wellbeing indicators and feel: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included (SHANARRI).
Building upon the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators, CfE describes the totality of experiences pupils should encounter through their education and has been the Scottish national education policy for pupils age 3-18 since 2010 (Spratt, 2017; Watson, Emery, Bayliss, Boushel, & McInnes, 2012). CfE developed in response to perceived challenges facing Scotland including “the need to increase the economic performance of the nation; reflect its growing diversity; improve health; and reduce poverty” and adapt to “changes in the patterns and demands of employment” (Curriculum Review Group, cited in Watson et al., 2012, p. 48). These perceived challenges reflect key goals of Scottish policy: to increase economic competitiveness and reduce inequalities (e.g., the poverty-related attainment gap), with schools called upon to achieve both (Spratt, 2017). To address these twin goals, schools are encouraged to help pupils achieve the ‘four capacities’ to become: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). The four capacities have been both praised for their potential to allow teachers to shift from assessment focused teaching, as well as criticised for their potential to equate schooling with the production of human capital (Spratt, 2017). Whether praised or critiqued, HWB is constructed as essential for supporting learning, attainment, and achievement of the four capacities.

This emphasis on wellbeing is seen in CfE which designates HWB as a core subject alongside literacy and numeracy and makes HWB the responsibility of all school staff (Spratt, 2017; Watson et al., 2012). CfE constructs wellbeing to be inclusive of four elements (physical, mental, social, and emotional) and provides a framework for schools to plan and develop strategies that might lead to improved wellbeing. Wellbeing is often portrayed as an imperative to improve the lives of young people; however, despite becoming a popular term in political, educational, and social discussion, there remains ambiguity around the various ways wellbeing is conceptualised and operationalised in discourse as well as the normative or transformative space that wellbeing may afford to school practice (Spratt, 2017).

2.3 Wellbeing – an elusive conception

While wellbeing has become a common term in political and social discourse, the abstract nature of the concept means a discrete definition is difficult to ascertain. Wellbeing is
commonly linked to health as seen in CfE’s positioning of ‘health and wellbeing’ as a single unit (Spratt, 2017). Conceptualisations are often rooted in the 1948 World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration that ‘health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (WHO, as cited in Wright & McLeod, 2015, pg. 3). This definition shifted from a deficit viewpoint, focused on illness or infirmity, to take a more positive, holistic view of health as inclusive of physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing.

These components of a holistic concept of wellbeing often overlap and use both strengths-based discourses focused on enhancing the strengths of individuals and communities as well as deficit-based discourses focused on fixing perceived problems (Hardley et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2012). For example, the UK’s National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) defines social and emotional wellbeing as: ‘happiness, confidence and not feeling depressed (emotional wellbeing)’ and ‘the ability to have good relationships with others and to avoid disruptive behaviour, delinquency, violence or bullying (social wellbeing)’ and also notes a third dimension: ‘a feeling of autonomy and control over one’s life, problem-solving skills, resilience, attentiveness and a sense of involvement with others (psychological wellbeing)’ (NICE, 2009, pg. 8). Within these definitions it is possible to see both strengths-based discourse around confidence and autonomy, as well as deficit-based discourse such as subjective wellbeing seen as a way to mitigate other public health concerns like substance misuse, early pregnancy, bullying, suicide, and antisocial behaviour (Spratt, 2017; Watson et al., 2012).

The concept of wellbeing is often used as a catch-all, umbrella term that can be used in multiple, often changing, ways. Indeed, the terminology used to describe wellbeing often shifts depending on the field or sectors in which it is used (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Spratt, 2017; Weare, 2017). For example, the medical sector may reference wellbeing in relation to physical or mental health while the psychology sector may refer to social-emotional literacy or emotional affect. The changeability of the term and its multi-disciplinary usage has been argued as a potentially useful way to unite various sectors (e.g. medical, education, psychology, economics) in a common goal, but also makes specificity elusive (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Spratt, 2017). This lack of specificity is seen in the literature which suggests that the concept of wellbeing is usually described based on its dimensions rather than a finite definition (Dodge,
Some dimensions thought to make up wellbeing include: happiness (Seligman, 2002); quality of life (Diener & Suh, 1997); self-determination (Ryff, 2013); sense of belonging (Riley, 2019a); autonomy and capability to function (Nussbaum, 2006). Additionally, wellbeing is frequently described by what it is not, including: absence of illness or disease; absence of stress, anxiety or depression; absence of inequality or disadvantage (Graham, 2015).

Most dimensions of wellbeing are underpinned by two broad philosophical perspectives: hedonism and eudaimonism (Graham, 2011). Hedonism encompasses maximisation of pleasure and avoidance of pain, whereas eudaimonism encompasses concepts of self-actualisation, fulfilment, meaningfulness, and living a life of value and purpose. These philosophical perspectives resonate with the strengths vs deficits-based discourses seen in the WHO definition of wellbeing such as the hedonic emphasis on minimising pain (deficit focus). Similarly, Ryff (2013) highlights that eudaimonia requires self-awareness of one’s unique strengths and talents and the ability to cultivate and develop these characteristic (strengths focus).

A useful framework that integrates multiple dimensions of wellbeing is posited by White (2008) who suggests that the numerous dimensions of wellbeing fall into three main areas: the material, the relational, and the subjective. The material includes practical aspects of welfare like physical health; employment opportunity and economic assets; education and skills; environmental quality; and (dis)ability to access services and resources. The relational concerns interpersonal relations such as intimate relationships of love and connection; social support networks; social, political, and cultural identities; and relations of conflict or (in)security. The subjective involves values and judgements of life such as social and cultural norms; sense of meaning or futility; hopes, worries, and aspirations; self-esteem and self-actualisation. White (2008) argues that the three dimensions are entwined and interact. Additionally, her framework emphasises that wellbeing is not a static state, but a process that is time and context dependent. This dynamic relationship is illustrated in the graphic below (see Fig. 1).
Fig. 1: Wellbeing as a process (framework from White, 2008)

The circular arrows denote the inter-relatedness and continual interaction and co-constitution of the different dimensional areas, which are all located within a specific space, and include a temporal aspect. White (2008) acknowledges that perceptions of, and capacities to achieve, wellbeing are dependent upon contextual factors of a space/environment and that these may change over time. This framework is noted for distinguishing between having a good life (material standards of living), living a good life (values and aspirations), and locating one’s life in relation to others (shared meaning and experiences)(Camfield, Streuli & Woodhead, 2009). This distinction is important because it broadens conceptualisations of wellbeing beyond the focus on the individual to the collective, recognising the importance of wellbeing in relation to others and community. It also acknowledges that conceptualisations of wellbeing are subjective and influenced by culture, values, and norms (Graham, 2011; Weare, 2000). Beliefs about the role of the individual within wider society and what is socially acceptable or desirable can all impact evaluations of wellbeing (e.g., what constitutes wellbeing in Bangladesh may be different to that in North America).

Wellbeing has been commended for its holistic outlook, linking the physical, mental, and spiritual, and for being person-centred with a focus on subjective perceptions of being well and
what makes a good life (White, 2008). On the other hand, the concept has been described as ‘conceptually muddy’ (V. Morrow & Mayall, 2009), and ‘holographic’ or a ‘cultural mirage’ (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008) in reference to its blurry, malleable margins, as well as criticised for often being uncritically accepted as a general ‘good thing’ (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Spratt, 2017; White, 2008). Ereaut and Whiting (ibid) argue that wellbeing is a social construct and as such does not have a fixed definition. They argue it is primarily a cultural and subjective judgement of what it means to be ‘well’ or ‘good’. This subjectiveness means that judgements of wellbeing can, and will, shift over time and across contexts; thus, evaluations of wellbeing cannot be culture-free or value-neutral. However, the way wellbeing is constructed can have implications on beliefs and behaviour and therefore it is important to understand how the term is conceptualised in education policy.

2.4 Discursive constructions of wellbeing in education policy

Ereaut and Whiting (2008) contend that meaning can be affixed to a word in two ways: overtly (such as legal definitions) or subtly using discourse (such as speaking or writing as if something has a particular meaning). Discourse refers to language, both written and spoken, and has both implicit and explicit rules that govern what can and cannot be said (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2007; Rossi, Tinning, McCuaig, Sirna, & Hunter, 2009; Spratt, 2017). Since wellbeing does not appear to have an absolute, definitive definition, Ereaut and Whiting (2008) argue that the meaning of wellbeing is usually done subtly through discursive construction.

Rossi et al. (2009) suggest that education policy contains discourses articulating values, beliefs, norms, and expectations, which socialise and inform the behaviours and beliefs of educators and pupils. Moreover, these officially sanctioned discourses are dominant because policy represents the ‘voice of the state’ (ibid, p. 75) about what the government deems necessary to be taught in schools. According to Spratt (2017), the most powerful or ‘dominant’ discourses are those that become normalised and accepted as ‘common sense’. These discourses can act in powerful ways through the ability to construct meaning, behaviour, and social reality, and ability to make certain ways-of-thinking or ways-of-being possible. In this view, discourse is not simply word choice and language is not value neutral. Furthermore,
discourse and language are not seen as something that just ‘is’, instead it is considered *functional* in that it can constitute reality through its representation of the social world. Discourse can also produce social action because it can be used intentionally to further a variety of agendas, purposes, or beliefs (Rossi et al., 2009; Spratt, 2017). Notably, discourse is not only constructive of the present reality, but may also impact future possibilities because dominant discourses may influence the direction of change (Spratt, 2017). For example, a nationalistic discourse may influence beliefs around national identity or citizenship and make anti-immigration legislation more likely.

Discourse analysis is seen as a way to explore this ‘language in use’ and examine the underlying functions of discourse. In discourse analyses of wellbeing and education policy, some common discourses identified include: medical; therapeutic; flourishing; care; operational; and strengths or deficit-based (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). A medical discourse links wellbeing with physical health and health behaviours. Therapeutic discourse often links wellbeing to mental health and social-emotional literacy (Gillies, 2011). Flourishing discourse echoes eudaimonic conceptualisations living a life of purpose and meaning and emphasises pupils’ autonomy to choose what is personally of value to them (Spratt, 2017). Care discourse usually draws from Noddings’ (2012) ethic of care and emphasises adults’ responsibilities to protect the rights and safety of children and young people. Operational discourse focuses on outcomes and measurements of wellbeing. Strengths-based discourse focuses on building upon strengths and capacities to achieve wellbeing, whereas deficit-based discourse focuses on removing barriers to achieving wellbeing (Graham, 2011). Notably, these discursive areas are thought to interact and be interrelated, where a change in one may affect change in another. For example, a therapeutic construction of wellbeing focused on stress reduction and improved coping mechanisms may reduce risky physical health behaviours like self-harm or ‘self-medicating’ with alcohol, nicotine, or other substances.

### 2.5 Problematising wellbeing

Problematisation is a process of ‘defamiliarising’ a term, concept, or idea to disrupt taken-for-granted understandings and allow for new conceptualisations to occur (Mcleod & Wright,
2015). Problematising wellbeing is not an argument that school wellbeing promotion is unwarranted, rather it is a way to reflect on discursive constructions of wellbeing to understand how the term is being used, why, and for whom. Spratt (2017) argues that the way discourse constructs social reality is through the promotion of differing ideologies and that the most powerful ideologies are those that become hegemonic. Hegemonic discourse is one that has become so naturalised and normalised within a population that it is no longer questioned. When hegemony is reached, the discourse appears to be ‘common sense’ and causes people to think that their beliefs and choices are from their own free will rather than socialisation by a dominant group. When a discourse becomes hegemonic, control or command by dominant groups is no longer required. For example, a hegemonic patriarchal discourse may position men as powerful, rational, and unemotional and women as gentle, compliant, and nurturing, and these discourses may then constrain what jobs or activities men and women choose to do (or not do).

Spratt (2017) suggests that two prominent ideologies within CfE are welfare liberalism and neoliberalism and that these discourses frame the role and purpose of education. Welfare liberalism promotes ‘positive freedom’ or the enhancing of opportunities of individuals to pursue personal conceptions of a life of value. This ideological viewpoint suggests communities are strengthened through social cooperation and the skills and wellbeing of individuals. Neoliberalism often links to economics and promotes ‘negative freedom’ or the removal of government restrictions to allow individuals to maximise their potential. Neoliberal ideology encourages individualism and self-reliance (ibid). These two ideologies often have opposing conceptualisations of the relationship between the individual and society, with neoliberalism promoting individuals as separate entities from society and welfare liberalism seeing the individual as part of the collective. These different ideologies can influence the ways people think, behave, and interact with the world. For example, someone subscribing to a neoliberal ideology viewpoint may emphasise individual responsibility and perceive asking for help as a weakness. This could have detrimental effects on health if people feel they cannot or should not ask for health support for fear of judgement.
As a result of the linkage of health and wellbeing, wellbeing has become a frequent discussion topic in public health and health promotion (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; V. Morrow & Mayall, 2009). Within health research and educational policy, there is often a developmental viewpoint that sees adolescence as a volatile and vulnerable life stage that can set the course of future life chances and choices (Elgar et al., 2015). This view sees early intervention as an imperative to improve the lives of young people because research has shown that health and health behaviours strongly follow on from childhood and early adolescence into adulthood (ibid). This means that health inequalities may be established early in life and track through the lifespan. In order to sustain and build upon early childhood health interventions, research and focus on adolescence is important (Inchley et al., 2016). By focusing on the adolescent developmental stage there is potential to improve adolescents’ current HWB experiences as well as influence future health behaviours (Inchley et al., 2016; Viner et al., 2012).

However, this linkage with health has not been static, and the ‘subject’ of wellbeing discourse has changed over time. Interestingly, an analysis of British newspapers found that public discourse about wellbeing shifted over the span of two decades from one focused on society to one focused on individual behaviour. Sointu (2005, p. 259) claimed that wellbeing went from being “a term employed in debates of the health and wealth of nations” to one where “the production of wellness has become increasingly a personal responsibility”. This focus on individual responsibility reflects a neoliberal ideology, and has been criticised as potentially ‘victim blaming’, where individuals are judged on their ability to achieve wellbeing while ignoring the structural and social inequalities which can impact the pursuit of HWB (Crawford, 2006).

Understanding the trends of health inequality and their social determinants is important for understanding how policy and people supporting adolescent HWB can attempt to minimise negative effects on young people (Elgar et al., 2015). The social determinants of health (SDH) approach reflects a welfare liberal ideology and focuses on the social contexts of behaviour or what the WHO defines as ‘the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age’ (as cited in Viner et al., 2012, p. 1641). Research has shown that structural factors like national wealth, income inequality, and access to education were the strongest determinants of
adolescent HWB (Viner et al., 2012). Similarly, evidence from the HBSC survey, found that common determinants of adolescent health inequalities were socioeconomic status (SES), age, gender, and place of residence (Elgar et al., 2015; Inchley et al., 2016; Inchley, Mokogwu, Mabelis, & Currie, 2020).

A commonly used model to depict SDH is the Dahlgren and Whitehead ‘rainbow’ (See Fig. 2) which visually represents different conditions and determinants impacting health (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021). This model moves beyond a focus on the individual, such as personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, or ethnicity) and health behaviours (e.g., physical activity, alcohol, or tobacco usage), to consider the social, cultural, environmental, political, and economic contexts. This linkage of the individual to their wider context broadens conceptualisations of health beyond a medicalised-focus (which could imply interventions should be the purview of the health sector) and may facilitate multisectoral working to support HWB.

Fig. 2: Dahlgren and Whitehead model of health determinants (figure from Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021)
The SDH approach recognises that young people do not grow up in isolation, but are embedded within a complex web of family, peers, neighbourhood, school, and social and cultural factors which will impact their immediate and future HWB (Viner et al., 2012). Thus, policy should not focus solely on individualised risks or protective factors, but should take a wider, socioecological view of the surrounding context to identify structures that may influence adolescents’ chances and choices for HWB (ibid). It is important to recognise the contextual factors surrounding adolescents and the interaction of different relationships to understand how schools, peers, and family can impact the HWB of pupils (Inchley et al., 2016, 2020).

2.6 Socioeconomic disadvantage, pupil experiences, and HWB

According to the SDH approach, the circumstances in which young people grow and develop play a large role in their current and future HWB (Viner et al., 2012), with the association between SES and mental health being especially strong in Scotland compared to other European countries (Mowat, 2019). Within Scotland, a key focus is on reducing inequalities such as the poverty-related attainment gap and differences in young people’s HWB (Inchley et al., 2016; Naven, Sosu, Spencer, & Egan, 2019). To address these issues, much of the research has been on schools located in low-income communities (Crosnoe, 2009). However, fewer than half of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils in Scotland live in the most deprived areas - the majority live and attend school in more mixed or affluent neighbourhoods (SIMD, 2020). There is evidence to suggest that these pupils may be at greater risk of poor HWB outcomes. A study from Wales found that pupils from impoverished backgrounds who attend more affluent schools where they are in the minority, are more likely to experience poor wellbeing compared to similar peers in schools that primarily serve lower SES pupils (Moore et al, 2017). These findings suggest that attending mixed or affluent schools where they are in the minority may have adverse effects on the HWB of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. To attempt to mitigate these effects, it is first important to understand why this might be happening and the material, social, and personal impacts of socioeconomic disadvantage on the wellbeing of pupils in school (Naven et al., 2019; Ridge, 2011).
2.6.1 Socioeconomic impact: financial insecurity, material deprivation, and HWB

Pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds may experience greater worry over personal and/or familial financial situations, with lower SES pupils reporting lower wellbeing scores and higher stress levels in general than more affluent groups (Inchley et al., 2020). Lower SES pupils may experience greater financial insecurity due to widespread economic restructuring that has led to employment characterised by precariously, instability, and often low wages (Bentley, Baker, & Aitken, 2019; Standing, 2014). Furthermore, these families may face the ‘double precarity’ of insecure employment (and the resultant financial insecurity) and unaffordable housing stress (Bentley et al., 2019). These trends in precarity were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as virus mitigation and social distancing measures necessitated many workplaces to close (Widnall, Winstone, Mars, Haworth, & Kidger, 2020). This may mean that lower SES pupils faced greater pandemic related HWB challenges than peers not experiencing similar levels of financial insecurity.

Precarity of labour means pupils and their families may face chronic financial uncertainty (Standing, 2014) which could impact pupils’ HWB through multiple pathways (e.g., chronic stress and anxiety). Financial need and low wages may mean parents have to spend longer hours at work, which could limit parental time to monitor, positively interact, engage with, and support their children (e.g., reading books to their child, knowing who their children are socialising with). Chronic stress has been shown to have effects on adolescent brain development, and pupils’ feelings of anxiety may inhibit their ability to concentrate or engage in school which could then hinder their chances of academic attainment and success (Naven et al., 2019; Viner et al., 2012). Chronic stress and insecurity associated with precarity could also lead to feelings of helplessness or that life conditions are unmanageable, out of their control, or not meaningful (Antonovsky, 1991; Burns, 2015).

In addition to stress from financial insecurity, socioeconomic disadvantage can exacerbate material deprivation. Pupils from lower SES families may face limited economic resources to buy daily necessities like food, bedding, and toiletries as well as school materials like uniforms, physical education (PE) kit, books, or practical course materials like art supplies (Mazzoli-Smith & Todd, 2016; Ridge, 2011). These material disadvantages may mean pupils
could struggle with adequate sleep or nutrition, feel less able to choose between or join courses based on interests could limit concentration, school enjoyment or engagement, and academic attainment.

2.6.2 Socioeconomic impact: social comparison and HWB

Familial economic uncertainty is thought to impact mental, social, and emotional wellbeing in two ways: direct distress from financial insecurity and subjective distress through negative comparison to outside reference groups (Standing, 2014; Treanor, 2016). These two pathways are not mutually exclusive, and both will interact to impact HWB; however, Elgar et al. (2013) found that relative affluence appeared to have a stronger impact on adolescent HWB beyond absolute affluence. What this implies is that social comparison between the ‘have’ and ‘have-nots’ seems to increase an individual’s sense of inequality or deprivation more than solely SES alone.

There are two main theories regarding why differences in SES may affect health: materialist and psychosocial hypotheses. The materialist hypothesis mirrors the previously described idea of direct distress from financial insecurity or material deprivation, and claims that SES accounts for differences in health due to unequal access to material goods, resources, or services. Therefore, in the context of schooling, the materialist hypothesis might argue that pupils from lower SES backgrounds fare worse than their more affluent counterparts due to having less access to quality teaching materials, lack of quiet spaces in which to concentrate or do homework, or lack of teachers trained to support HWB (Elgar et al., 2013). However, in Scotland, schools in more disadvantaged areas receive additional funding, such as the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF), based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals (a commonly used proxy for socioeconomic disadvantage) (Scottish Government, 2022). These additional funds are designed to mitigate material inequities, and can be used to improve learning, attainment, and support HWB for pupils impacted by poverty.

Alternatively, the psychosocial hypothesis claims that adverse social comparison and feeling poor in relation to peers can lead to increased feelings of psychological distress, reduced coping capability, and greater likelihood of stress-related illness (Elgar et al., 2013, original emphasis). The psychosocial hypothesis reflects the concept of relative affluence and appears
better than the materialist hypothesis at explaining why socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils may have a decreased sense of wellbeing in a school with more affluent peers than in a school with similarly disadvantaged pupils (Moore et al., 2017; Treanor, 2016). Elgar et al. (2013, p. 26) suggest that two pupils with the same socioeconomic backgrounds can differ in HWB when one is among more affluent people and one is among less affluent people due to “feelings of deprivation from a desirable standard of living that is established by [school] society.” Therefore, lower SES pupils may feel an increased sense of deprivation and lower HWB in a more affluent school because their references for comparison (i.e., social peers) are wealthier and more able to achieve a desired standard of living.

Another psychosocial aspect of social comparison is poverty-based stigma (Inglis, Jenkins, McHardy, Sosu, & Wilson, 2022; Inglis, McHardy, Sosu, McAteer, & Biggs, 2019). Stigma has been defined as the co-occurrence of negative stereotyping, discrimination, and labelling associated with a disadvantaged group (e.g., poverty, mental illness, disability). Gorski (2012) stresses that stigma and stereotyping are often the unconscious symptoms of hegemonic socialisation. For example, a hegemonic neoliberal discourse around ‘meritocracy’ argues that anyone can achieve upward social mobility through hard work, while hiding unequal power distributions like access to books or tutors. These hegemonic discourses then position poor people as “poor because of their own deficiencies” rather than due to circumstance (ibid, p. 305). Poverty-based stigma is associated with adverse HWB outcomes like mental ill-health, negative self-evaluation, decreased social wellbeing, and negative emotions like shame and embarrassment. Stigma can take many forms including: self-stigma (internalised beliefs of negative stereotypes); perceived stigma (beliefs about the occurrence of stigma); anticipated stigma (expectation of stigma); received stigma (overt discrimination and stigmatisation); and structural stigma (institutional practices which disadvantage some groups). Notably, all forms of stigma can lead to negative HWB experiences, not just overt stigmatisation, and stigma does not occur in isolation but through social relations of comparison, expectation, and categorisation (Inglis et al., 2022).
2.6.3 Socioeconomic impact: social connection, social inclusion, and HWB

If socioeconomically disadvantaged adolescents are unable to afford supplies (e.g., art or craft supplies), this could negatively impact their choice of and ability to participate in certain courses or extracurricular activities. For example, in a participatory research study with Scottish pupils, Naven et al. (2019) found that costs associated with school trips, or courses like Home Economics or Art acted as a barrier for lower SES pupils. These extra costs may inhibit poorer pupils’ course subject choices or ability to attend school trips which could then negatively affect their sense of interest, engagement, or connection to the school or to peers. This in turn may have a detrimental impact on pupils’ HWB through reduction of social networks, positive relationships, or sense of social connection and inclusion. Additionally, besides necessities or school materials, material deprivation can also limit pupils’ ability to purchase ‘symbolic markers of social inclusion’ like branded clothes (Ridge, 2011). Higher cost brands have been suggested to act as symbolic markers of familial income, with the ‘right’ clothes or trainers helping pupils look ‘cool’, ‘fit in’ with peers, or avoid bullying. For instance, a study of pupils’ experiences with poverty in Scotland found there could be stigmatisation from teachers around uniform enforcement if expectations were not tempered by consideration of pupils’ circumstances (i.e., expecting immediate compliance with the correct uniform, when families may not be able to buy supplies due to only being paid once a month)(Naven et al., 2019).

If pupils feel like they will be stigmatised, penalised, or bullied for not ‘fitting in’, they may be less likely to feel a sense of belonging or safety in school (Riley, 2019), may experience fewer positive relationships with teachers and peers, and may be more likely to experience social isolation or exclusion (Hjalmarsson & Mood, 2015). This may have ramifications for lifelong health outcomes as positive relationships and wellbeing in adolescence appear to predict fewer risky health behaviours and better general health in adulthood (Hoyt, Chase-Lansdale, McDade & Adam, 2011). Furthermore, COVID-19 lockdown measures and school closures could exacerbate pupils’ perceptions of social isolation and decrease pupils’ sense of school connectedness or HWB. For example, in a qualitative study with Scottish adolescents, McCluskey et al. (2021) found that some pupils reported relationship breakdowns due to a loss of social interactions with peers, or increased stress, anxiety, or lack of motivation associated
with pandemic school closures and the sudden shift to at-home learning. The authors also cautioned that these negative effects were likely to be higher for those pupils already struggling with financial difficulty. These findings indicate negative impacts on pupils’ HWB; however, it is important to acknowledge that these negative effects were not experienced by all pupils. Some pupils reported better HWB during lockdown and better online relationships with their teachers due to a sense that teachers were checking in and listening to pupils more (McCluskey et al., 2021).

### 2.6.4 Socioeconomic impact: adverse childhood experiences and HWB

Due to the aforementioned ways that socioeconomic disadvantage can negatively impact pupil HWB (e.g., stress, material deprivation, stigmatisation), there are some suggestions that poverty should be considered an ‘adverse childhood experience (ACE)’ (O’Toole, 2022; Quarmby, Sandford, Green, Hooper, & Avery, 2022). ACEs were historically conceptualised as events which could cause trauma or stressful experiences for children and young people, and included: physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, physical or emotional neglect, parental separation, domestic violence, drug abuse, mental illness, and incarceration of a family member (Quarmby et al., 2022). However, ACEs have been critiqued for being narrowly focused on the household environment and not accounting for other external imbalances of power including experiencing: poverty, racism, bullying or peer victimisation, foster care or death of a parent, social rejection, or community violence (Mowat, 2019; O’Toole, 2022; Quarmby et al., 2022).

As the previous sections suggest, the interaction between socioeconomic disadvantage, trauma, and HWB is complex, with multiple perspectives on how various reciprocal experiences and pathways may interrelate. Mowat (2019) suggests that poverty can be considered an adverse childhood experience in itself but can also increase an individual’s chances to experience ACEs, and reciprocally, exposure to ACEs can also increase the likelihood of poverty. For example, in families dealing with poverty, parents could be experiencing their own poor HWB due to stress and anxiety over financial insecurity, or frustration and anger over inequality or discrimination. This in turn could mean parents may be away from home for long hours to generate income, could react with impatience or aggression in the home, or possibly self-
medicate with drugs or alcohol (Viner et al., 2012). This could lead to increased risk for familial adversity or strife, or decreased capability for parents to develop positive relationships and support the HWB of their children. Yet, Mowat (2019) argues the corollary is also true and that ACEs may increase the risk of future poverty. For example, young people who have experienced ACEs may be more likely to suffer mental ill-health, decreased ability to cope with stressors, or decreased cognitive functioning, which may impede future life chances (e.g., education and employment), increasing the risk of poverty. However, Mowat (ibid) cautions that an uncritical view of ACEs (e.g., assuming every pupil who experiences ACEs will be traumatised or lacking the ability to cope) risks being deficit-focused, could further label or stigmatise socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, and possibly lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy of further marginalisation. Thus, it is important to stress that trauma is not inevitable, nor are the negative HWB effects – an individual’s responses to ACEs are what will determine whether an event is perceived as traumatic or not.

Instead of a deficit-focus, researchers are calling for a more strengths-based approach to understanding ACEs and suggest the need for practitioners (e.g., educators, policymakers, service providers) to be aware that ACEs (including poverty) may elevate pupils’ risk of experiencing trauma and how this might impact their HWB (Quarmby et al., 2022). Therefore, trauma-informed practice is an approach to care that is underpinned by an understanding of trauma and how it can impact an individual’s HWB (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015; Fallot & Harris, 2008; O’Toole, 2022; Quarmby et al., 2022; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Smith (2018) suggests that ACEs exert their effects (like trauma) through chronic, ‘toxic’ stress that is not relieved by adult support. The resulting trauma then diminishes an individual’s belief that the world is a safe place and can create a sense of extreme threat which could overwhelm the individual’s ability to function or cope (Quarmby et al., 2022). These traumatic experiences may be acute (e.g., a sudden traffic accident or being the victim of a violent crime) or chronic (e.g., ongoing bullying or childhood abuse), but can have adverse effects on an individual’s HWB and has been associated with behaviours like substance misuse, eating disorders, self-harm, difficulties forming relationships or coping with stress (Brunzell et al., 2015).
Trauma is purported to affect individuals in three ways: neurological, physiological, and psychological (Quarmby et al., 2022). *Neurological* impacts from exposure to trauma include brain or hormonal effects which may impact brain development or impede stress response/regulation. *Physiological* impacts can include an increased risk for chronic disease, high blood pressure, obesity, or sleep disturbances. *Psychological* impacts include increased risk for anxiety, depression, difficulties with trusting others and forming relationships, aggression, or difficulties with concentrating. In schools, these trauma-related effects may manifest as ‘problem’ behaviours like reduced cognitive function or difficulties learning, poor relationships with peers or teachers, aggressive or disruptive behaviour, or low attendance and withdrawal. If educators are not trauma-informed then pupils’ behaviours may be misconstrued as wilful or intentional disobedience, lack of respect, lack of discipline, or as an individual ‘deficiency’ rather than as a response to the individual’s wider circumstances and which may be out of the individual’s control (O’Toole, 2022; Quarmby et al., 2022). Without a ‘trauma-informed lens’, educators may react with punitive measures to ‘problem’ behaviour rather than attempt to understand why the behaviour may be occurring, which may then further exacerbate trauma or stigmatisation. For example, if teachers denigrate pupils for ‘lacking respect’, ‘wilfully ignoring’, and not adhering to uniform rules they may stigmatise and label lower SES pupils who cannot afford or acquire said uniforms. In light of these challenges, developing a trauma-informed approach may help educators consider and cater to the needs of their pupils in a more meaningful and empathetic way (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2022; Quarmby et al., 2022; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).

Trauma-informed practice is suggested as a more strengths-based pedagogical approach focused on *healing* and *growth* (Brunzell et al., 2015). Healing encompasses supporting pupils’ self-regulating and relational abilities, which relates to the previously described effects of trauma such as difficulties regulating stress responses or difficulties forming positive relationships. Growth encompasses helping pupils identify and build upon their own resources, strengths, and abilities to enhance their ability to cope with stressors. Brunzell et al. (2015) stress that while teachers are not trained therapists or medical practitioners, they can still provide a sense of safety, stability, and routine in the classroom, and act in a healing manner.
They argue that the development of positive relationships with pupils can have a healing effect as well as the provision of opportunities for pupils to practice and develop self-regulation of emotional and stress responses.

Both the social determinants of health approach and the trauma-informed approach assert that HWB is shaped by the distribution of resources and power within the global, national, and local environments surrounding young people (Viner et al., 2012). The context around individuals (and any structural inequalities therein) will interact with individuals’ personal characteristics to impact HWB, so a socioecological view is necessary to identify risk and protective factors that could influence adolescent HWB (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021; Viner et al., 2012). Schools may be an optimal setting for identifying these risk and protective factors and tackling disadvantage because of the unique role they play in children and young people’s day-to-day lives (Weare, 2017). Research evidence also suggests that, when well implemented, school HWB promotion can have a variety of positive outcomes (e.g., improved pupil/staff wellbeing, social and emotional competencies, prosocial behaviours); however, the outcomes can be highly variable, and the nature of the variations is not clear (Durlak et al., 2011; Weare & Nind, 2011).

Furthermore, it is also crucial to recognise that many social and structural inequalities are out of the control of schooling institutions, so solutions cannot rest on schools alone (Mowat, 2019; O’Toole, 2022). If there is no coherent public policy and infrastructure around schools, then what schools can accomplish will be limited and social inequalities are unlikely to be tackled in a meaningful way (Mowat, 2019). This points to the need for further research to explore the various ways policy is understood and enacted and to take account of the unique social, cultural, structural, and economic contexts that inevitably impact policy implementation in schools (Banerjee et al., 2014; Lupton, 2004). Understanding the role of context in everyday school life may be especially important for schools serving pupils from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Much of the research focuses on schools serving predominantly lower SES populations (Crosnoe, 2009); however, most pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland attend socioeconomically mixed or predominantly affluent schools, where disadvantaged pupils may be in a minority (Scottish Government, 2016). Thus, while education
has been shown to have a protective effect on young people’s HWB, it is important to consider the impact that being in such a minority might have on pupils. It is also crucial to understand how schools conceptualise wellbeing and socioeconomic disadvantage to explore how this may influence their efforts to support these pupils when they are a minority within the school community. Therefore, the next sections will examine various approaches to supporting wellbeing in schools and how school context may influence these approaches.

2.7 Approaches to supporting wellbeing in schools

School-based approaches to improving and supporting HWB broadly fall into two categories: deficit-based or strengths-based. The traditional approach tends to focus on targeted interventions to fix a particular problem (deficit) related to HWB (e.g., substance misuse, anxiety, bullying). Evidence suggests that such approaches have only small-to-moderate effects and long-term sustainability is limited (Patton et al, 2016; Mackenzie & Williams, 2018). Furthermore, the diversity of school settings means that an intervention that has been shown to be effective in one context may not be replicable in another (Foxcroft and Tsertsvadze, 2011). These types of interventions often draw on medical and therapeutic discourses, where mental health is associated with mental illness (Weare, 2004), and teachers report feeling ill-equipped to fulfil what is perceived as a therapeutic role (Kidger et al., 2010). Deficit approaches may also contribute to the fragmentation of school policies and practices related to mental wellbeing, where different initiatives led by different people may be seen as piecemeal or at odds with each other or with wider school culture. As well as creating confusion, such fragmentation may lead to teachers perceiving that wellbeing is someone else’s responsibility (Spratt et al., 2006).

Recently, interest has been growing in strengths-based, ecological approaches to promoting HWB (Weare, 2000, 2017). This type of approach focuses on all individuals within the school (not only those deemed ‘at risk’) and emphasises the assets that individuals and communities have, rather than their deficits (Graham, 2011). Instead of targeted initiatives to fix a perceived ‘problem’, ecological approaches advocate for universal initiatives aimed at the whole school. These whole school approaches reflect the Health Promoting Schools (HPS)
framework introduced by the WHO (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). The HPS framework argues that HWB promotion should go beyond individual classroom learning to permeate all aspects of school life, such as the curriculum, pedagogy, organisational culture, and physical and social environment. Whole school approaches also suggest that everyone involved in the school community should play an active role in HWB promotion, including leadership teams, staff, pupils, parents/caregivers, and external agencies (ibid). Universal, whole school initiatives have been argued as ‘more likely to make long-term changes’ (Weare, 2000, p. 34) than targeted approaches, and are posited to be less stigmatising as they impact everyone rather than treating those with ‘problems’ differentially (Weare, 2006).

However, universal and targeted approaches do not exclude one another, instead they are seen as complementary (Weare, 2017). The complementary nature of universal and targeted approaches was corroborated by a systematic review of reviews on school HWB promotion which found that both approaches were necessary and were stronger in combination (Weare & Nind, 2011). This strength in combination has led to increased calls for proportionate universalism, which argues that interventions should be universally available, but with an intensity or scale that is proportionate to the level of need. The principle of proportionate universalism is posited as a midway between universal and targeted interventions which explicitly addresses inequity (Moore et al., 2017). This principle is seen in guidance for schools which suggests HWB promotion should begin with universal support for all pupils, which is supplemented by additional targeted support and/or specialist interventions if needed (e.g., referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services [CAMHS]) (Scottish Government, 2021). This approach mirrors the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of care seen in the medical or public health sectors.

The combination of universal and targeted approaches is suggested as more equitable and less stigmatising because it helps everyone not only those labelled as ‘at risk’ (and therefore, who may be more likely to experience stigmatisation)(Weare, 2006). For instance, Weare (2017) suggests that in schools, universal approaches can provide a strong ‘foundation’ upon which targeted approaches can build. She argues that strengths-based, universal approaches can facilitate development of a supportive school culture (foundation) where it is
safe for everyone (e.g., pupils and staff) to speak about HWB, disclose struggles, or ask for help. Then, if pupils need additional assistance, the supportive foundation is already in place, and targeted HWB approaches may be perceived as less stigmatising because talking about HWB is already the norm.

Similarly, Fallot and Harris (2008) argue for a strengths-based approach to care which incorporates an understanding of trauma (its consequences as well as processes which may support healing) in all interventions and practices. This approach reflects the principle of proportionate universalism because Fallot and Harris (ibid) argue that any organisation can develop trauma-informed culture and practices (universal approach), not only those organisations targeted specifically for trauma (e.g., therapy). They highlight five core values as underpinning a trauma-informed culture, these are: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Within schools, safety entails both physical and emotional safety; trustworthiness implies clarity, transparency, and consistency on what pupils or staff may expect; choice requires prioritising the right to choose and autonomy, like opportunities for pupil voice; collaboration necessitates maximising relationships and sharing power; and empowerment emphasises building upon the strengths, skills, and capabilities in the school. Explicit within these core values is the importance of pupils’ right to have a say in how they would like to receive care. Notably, this trauma-informed focus connects discourses around care and flourishing because it emphasises pupils’ entitlements to both safety/protection (i.e., care discourse) as well as the ability to choose what is personally of value to them (i.e., flourishing discourse) (Spratt, 2017). Additionally, these trauma-informed approaches require an overall organisational culture that reflects all of these values, which suggests that these approaches require whole school buy-in to HWB promotion and cannot just be an add-on class (O’Toole, 2022).

The central idea behind strengths-based approaches is that having autonomy and control of one’s life and life circumstances is key to achieving and maintaining good health. Thus, a goal of health promotion is to help individuals and communities develop their capabilities and enable them to be in control of their lives (Burns, 2015). The move toward whole school, strengths-based approaches is seen in CfE, which explicitly makes HWB the
responsible of all teachers, and aspires to build flexibility and capability in schools to adapt
the curriculum for their unique context (Education Scotland, 2018). This policy approach
recognises the diversity of different school contexts and the importance of developing
approaches that are tailored to the needs of individual schools (Thorburn, 2016). The ways that
schools operate – their culture and how this is manifest in their physical and social
environment, organisation, pedagogy, and pastoral care – can have profound effects, both
positive and negative, on the well-being of pupils and staff (Patton et al., 2003; Patton et al.,
2016; Kidger, 2009). Consequently, whole school approaches which promote positive HWB
through focusing on social processes are gaining traction (Moore et al., 2017).

Social processes within schools, such as interpersonal relationships and organisational
culture, have been highlighted for their potential to influence HWB outcomes (Moore et al.,
2017), for example, by fostering school environments that are conducive to pupils’ sense of
safety, self-efficacy, and autonomy. Drawing on Antonovsky’s (1991) concept of salutogenesis
(in contrast to pathogenesis), strengths-based approaches rely upon a Sense of Coherence
(SOC), which denotes the extent to which an individual is confident “that one’s internal and
external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work
out as well as can reasonably be expected” (cited in Vinje, Langeland, & Bull, 2017, p. 31),
Antonovsky (1991) noted the importance of the social environment on SOC because certain
contexts may provide experiences that will enhance the SOC of the group and be more
conducive to the development of a strong SOC (Vinje et al., 2017). He argued that individuals
with a strong SOC will be better able to cope with life experiences if they believe that life is
comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Antonovsky (ibid) claimed the type of
environments that could help develop a strong SOC include those that provide stability, work
balance, and participation. Within a school setting, such an environment would denote one
where pupils feel they understand the challenges they face within their context as well as feel
understood by their school (comprehensible), where pupils feel able to handle the demands
faced at school and believe resources are available to cope (manageable), and where pupils feel
engaged and motivated by the school (meaningful) (Gary Bowen, Richman, Brewster, & Bowen,
1998).
Beyond enhancing a strong SOC, the social environment is crucial to whole school, strengths-based approaches to promoting HWB with research highlighting the importance of positive relationships between and among pupils, teachers, and school managers (Moore et al., 2017; Graham, Powell, & Truscott, 2016). Young people’s conceptualisations of their wellbeing at school emphasise the importance of social relationships over educational experiences (Gristy, 2012; Riley, 2019a; Soutter, 2011) and some research has shown that social connectedness in adolescence is a better predictor of adult wellbeing than educational attainment (Olsson et al., 2013). In a Welsh study, when pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds were attending more affluent schools, they reported lower subjective wellbeing and riskier health behaviours, with social relationships found to be a mediating factor (Moore et al., 2017).

When there is a relative minority of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils at the bottom of the school’s socioeconomic hierarchy, it seems to amplify inequalities. Adverse social comparison and stigmatisation may lead to pupils becoming disengaged and more vulnerable to psychosocial problems (Espenshade, Hale, & Chung, 2005). Pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds may experience incongruence between their school and family culture or values and may be more likely to feel alienated from and reject the institutional norms of the school (Burns, 2015). This may be compounded if such pupils are deprioritised by schools whose focus is academic attainment (Moore et al., 2017). Conversely, Lupton (2005) found while schools in more deprived areas often score lower on educational attainment, they frequently place greater emphasis on pastoral care and supporting positive pupil-teacher relationships.

The factors described above highlight the difficulty of carrying out research and comparing ‘what works’ in schools as no two contexts are the same. Research suggests schools adapt policy to meet their local needs, but that educators find this challenging, requiring significant investment in time and professional learning. The task is made more complex by the whole school nature of policy that requires an integrated approach. Research notes that an integrated approach and professional development is possible when there is strong leadership and a commitment by all teachers to contribute to the change process (Peterson & Deal, 2016).
Teacher learning can also be enhanced when they form partnerships with external experts who can provide teachers with knowledge and resources that they may not be able to otherwise access (Timperley, Parr, & Bertaneees, 2009). Collaborations with external experts encourage teachers to reflect and question assumptions about beliefs and practices. However, currently little is known about how schools develop whole school curricula and practices for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, especially in contexts where there is a minority of pupils who come from more deprived backgrounds.

2.8 School context and policy implementation

While education policy and the discourses it contains can influence schools’ perceptions and practices when supporting pupil HWB, CfE is designed to be flexible so schools can adapt policy guidance to their own local context (Scottish Government, 2007). Hence, even successful programmes for the development of social and emotional wellbeing may not lead to positive outcomes in all settings because of contextual variables that can influence how policy is interpreted and enacted (Adamowitsch et al., 2017; Banerjee et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011). Education staff bring their own biographies, beliefs, experiences, and expectations when interpreting and implementing policy discourses and directives. Educators and school staff are not mere automatons implementing policy as is, but will play an active role in policy construction and enactment (Maguire et al., 2015; Spratt, 2017).

Additionally, each school context will have its own material, cultural, and environmental features which will impact upon the capabilities of schools to enact policy and achieve wellbeing. Adding to the complexity, whole school approaches advocate for ‘joined up’ working, where various elements of the school context work together in a congruent and cohesive manner. Weare (2000) argues this coherent and integrated approach will not happen by chance but needs coordinated effort across the school. Consequently, little is known about how individual schools understand, implement, or evaluate HWB policy within their unique context (Adamowitsch et al., 2017), how the knowledge and experiences of educators influence the decisions they make about HWB practices, or how this impacts their pupils, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. While little is known about how
individual schools enact HWB policy, research suggests that whole school approaches are effective, so it is important to explore how contextual factors may influence whole school policy enactment.

2.8.1 School context and organisational ethos

Within wellbeing research, evidence suggests universal approaches, balanced by targeted support if necessary, can positively impact HWB and should include all pupils, not just those deemed ‘vulnerable’ (Banerjee et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; J. White, 2017). For example, a meta-analysis of school-based universal social and emotional learning programmes found positive improvements in aspects like mental, social, and emotional competencies, prosocial behaviour, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Another systematic review of mental, social, and emotional health promotion interventions found that the more effective programmes moved beyond classroom-focused interventions to utilise whole school, ecological approaches involving a wide range of people, methods, and intervention levels (Weare & Nind, 2011). The authors concluded that the programmes most likely to show positive effects were ones that take a multi-component approach and operate across multiple aspects of school life including teaching and learning; curriculum; teacher education; and school ethos (ibid).

However, a challenge associated with multi-component, whole school approaches is they are difficult to plan and implement, and implementation difficulties may diminish the positive results of the intervention (Banerjee et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011). As such, Banerjee et al. (2014) stress that effective whole school approaches must account for the school context and community, with organisational ethos highlighted as an important aspect to consider when planning and implementing wellbeing initiatives.

Often, there is overlap between the concepts of ‘ethos’, ‘culture’, and ‘climate’, with the terms frequently used interchangeably in research (Glover & Coleman, 2005) as well as in educator parlance. From the results of a systematic literature review on the use of the terms, Glover and Coleman (2005, p. 253) suggest that all three concepts refer to “the way in which a school works as an organisation.” Conceptualisations of ‘ethos’ frequently concentrate on the shared values, beliefs, or expectations which define the philosophy of a school and underpin
the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships within that school (Donnelly, 2000; Glover & Coleman, 2005). Ethos is often considered a part of the wider school ‘culture’, which in a similar vein, Peterson and Deal (2016, p. 163) have defined as:

“The underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools.”

As Peterson and Deal (2016) note, school values, beliefs, and expectations (ethos) can shape practice; therefore, Glover and Coleman (2005) suggest the subtle difference between ethos and culture is that ethos focuses on the underlying values themselves, while culture denotes the process of how the organisational ethos influences action. Going further, Peterson and Deal (2016) argue that culture (and subsequently ethos) influences all interactions, practices, and behaviours within the organisation, and thus acts as a foundation for school climate.

However, the concept of ‘climate’ is ambiguous and there is no agreed upon definition (Wang & Degol, 2016). It has been referred to as the ‘character of school life’ or the ‘social atmosphere’ of the learning and teaching environment, where pupils will have different experiences depending on the practices within the school (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Wang and Degol (2016) suggest that school climate is generally conceptualised as multidimensional and composed of four elements: safety, community, academic, and institutional environments. Safety refers to the sense of physical and emotional safety or security present in the school. This can be influenced by the clarity, consistency, and fair application of rules and disciplinary measures, as well as school values (ethos). For example, when a school values and believes in a commitment to diversity and respect it may enact strong anti-bullying policies which can enhance a sense of physical or emotional safety. Community refers to the relational aspects of school and highlights the importance of interpersonal affiliation such as a sense of belonging, trust, cohesion, and collaboration. Academic climate refers to the quality of teaching and learning practices including curriculum, pedagogy, professional development, and leadership. Institutional environment refers to aspects of the physical, material, or structural environment like the quality of school buildings and availability of resources, as well as organisational factors like class sizes and timetabling.
Within the aforementioned conceptualisations of ethos, culture, and climate, it is possible to infer ecological and trauma-informed understandings of school context which suggest that various aspects of the physical and psychosocial environment interact to influence the experiences of children and young people (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fallot & Harris, 2008). These conceptualisations also allude to the criticality of school ethos because the underlying values, beliefs, and expectations can play a foundational role in influencing school practice, culture, and climate (Glover & Coleman, 2005). However, there can also be tension between school ethos and practice, or tension between what Donnelly (2000) describes as the formal ethos present in school documents, and the informal ethos created through social interaction. When there is incongruence between ethos and practice (or formal and informal ethos) it could mean that desired goals may not be achieved (Glover & Coleman, 2005). For example, if a school aims to encourage respect and recognition of diverse strengths and capabilities but mainly concentrates on academic attainment and university attendance as a primary measure of success, this may impede the aspirational goals and values of the ethos (Hardley et al., 2020). This reiterates Banerjee et al.’s (2014) assertion that school ethos and context must be considered when planning and implementing whole school approaches for HWB promotion to ensure coherency of messages and initiatives. Similarly, these conceptualisations point to the importance of leadership to steer and influence the school ethos and practices, which will be described in the next section.

2.8.2 School context and leadership

Whole school approaches to HWB promotion emphasise the importance of maintaining a high profile, where HWB is perceived as a core focus and not an ‘add-on’ topic (Weare, 2000). Critical to sustaining this high profile is support and prioritisation from the top, with school leaders who commit time, energy, effort, and attention. School leaders are deemed essential for whole school approaches because they will have inside knowledge of the school context, needs, and resources available; thus, leadership should play a key role in planning and implementation of HWB initiatives (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, Weare (2000) stresses that effective leadership is necessary to plan and coordinate HWB approaches,
otherwise they are likely to become piecemeal or fragmented with individual educators enacting different initiatives in a disorganised, confusing, or incongruent manner. However, within school leadership research, there has been some debate around what constitutes ‘success’ and evaluations of an ‘effective’ leader have changed (Day, Sammons, & Gorgen, 2020). In the past, school effectiveness was often defined through pupil attainment and academic outcomes, whereas more recently, evaluations of success have included broader indicators like positive pupil engagement, motivation, socio-emotional wellbeing, and citizenship in addition to academic outcomes (ibid). The current focus on wider achievement beyond academic attainment reflects the aspirations for HWB promotion seen in CfE (Scottish Government, 2007).

School leadership has been suggested as having important effects on school organisation, ethos and culture, teaching and learning environment, and school improvement (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017; Morris et al., 2020; Scottish Government, 2021). These effects are influenced by the practices and behaviours of successful school leaders, with Bass and Avolio (1993) suggesting that effective schools need leaders proficient in both strategic thinking and culture-building. However, school leaders, especially those in formal leadership positions (e.g., senior leadership team [SLT] members), may not have had much personal contact with pupils day-to-day, though they likely would have had this contact in the past (Day et al., 2020). Meta-analysis of the impact of leadership on pupil outcomes shows this relationship is mostly indirect, with positive pupil outcomes occurring as a supplementary effect of leaders’ influence on organisational working conditions (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). Hence, school leadership can act as an influencing factor through direct effects on the organisational culture, social relationships, and learning environment. By creating a school culture and social environment that is conducive to teaching and learning and the development of positive relationships, school leadership may promote pupil (and teacher) HWB and improve pupil outcomes (Day et al., 2020).

Woods (cited in Moos, Day & Johansson, 2011, pg. 7, emphasis added) notes that “the essence of leadership is not the individual social actor but a relationship of almost imperceptible directions, movements and orientations having neither beginning nor end.” This
definition is important because it acknowledges that leadership is fundamentally an interactive relationship between leader(s) and follower(s). It also suggests this relationship is ongoing and reciprocal, where successful leaders may try to influence practice through steering the direction the school takes, but in turn they are influenced by the school context and community. Importantly, current thinking on school leadership is referring not only to formal leaders like Head Teachers and Deputes, but can also include ‘middle leaders’ such as curricular leaders and teachers, pupils, or parents who take on leadership roles (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2017; WHO & UNESCO, 2021). In the context of whole school approaches where pupil HWB is the responsibility of all, this recognition of the leadership skills and capabilities of others may have implications for distributive leadership and staff empowerment and development.

Drawing from literature on school leadership theories, Day et al. (2020) described two theories on successful leadership - transformational and pedagogical/instructional. These are not the only models on leadership, but are claimed to be the most frequently examined within education research and are often recommended for school leadership (Day et al., 2020; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). While the main focus differs slightly between the two leadership conceptualisations, they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is evidence that successful leaders frequently employ similar practices from both leadership styles, which will be discussed later in the subsection (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). The following sections will describe these leadership theories separately before comparing and contrasting some of the practices and how these may influence school outcomes.

Transformational leadership, as the name suggests, involves practices that aim to facilitate organisational change and innovation through inspiring alignment, consensus, and buy-in around a shared vision, culture, and goals (Arnold, 2017; Day et al., 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014). This leadership style has been characterised by four dimensions: *idealised influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualised consideration* (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders frequently exhibit strong values and act in accordance with them - clarifying and modelling desired goals, values, and norms, and setting high expectations of themselves and others. By exhibiting integrity towards the organisational values
and ‘doing what they say they will’, these leaders act as role models (idealised influence) who may inspire others to adopt and follow along (inspirational motivation). Through their actions, transformational leaders steer the organisational vision and goals and build a culture conducive to achieving them (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders are open to innovation, encouraging others to try new ways of doing things, while being sensitive to context and considerate of their community (e.g., staff, pupils, parents, external others). They often demonstrate more strengths-based thinking - recognising that all individuals have unique strengths and capabilities (individualised consideration) and support the development of staff and pupils through opportunities for professional development, training, shared leadership, and empowerment (intellectual stimulation) (ibid). Transformational leadership styles have been described as ones where the prime focus should be on the leader-follower relationship, and how leaders can build a collaborative culture and motivate their organisation to work together toward a shared vision (Robinson et al., 2009).

On the other hand, pedagogical leadership is often less focused on relationships and culture-building, and more focused on the conditions that will impact teaching and learning (Day et al., 2020). Pedagogical leaders often emphasise the practical, environmental, and material aspects important to achieving improved educational outcomes such as creating a disruption-free environment useful for learning, ensuring clarity of goals and expectations, using funding and resources strategically, and building capacity through professional development and supervision (Day et al., 2020). Some common practices include clarifying and clearly articulating (measurable) goals, monitoring pupil progress, and managing curriculum and teaching through use of monitoring and evaluation. Pedagogical leadership styles have been described as ones where the prime focus should be the achievement of better measurable pupil outcomes (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Two meta-analyses assessing leadership effects found that pedagogical leadership styles had a greater impact on pupil outcomes like academic attainment than transformational leadership styles (Robinson et al., 2009; Shatzer et al., 2014). Robinson et al. (ibid) posit that this disparity could be related to transformational leadership theory’s original orientation toward leader-follower relations rather than originating as an educational theory. They suggest that due to this orientation toward adult social relationships,
transformational leadership emphasises aspects like motivation, participation, and teamwork rather than teaching and learning.

While transformational and pedagogical leadership styles have been described separately in this subsection and are often positioned as dichotomous in the literature (Day et al., 2016), there are several shared practices across both models. Indeed, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (Leithwood et al., 2020) claim that regardless of leadership style, “successful leaders draw from the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.” Some examples of shared practices include: articulating and modelling the organisational vision, goals, and expectations; allocating resources to achieve school goals; building trust and respect to support collegial working within and outwith the school; and fostering professional development through provision of opportunities for continuing education. There are also several differences, such as transformational leadership is claimed to be a more bottom-up approach while pedagogical leadership is more top-down (Shatzer et al., 2014). Transformational leaders are consultative, aiming to build consensus around a shared vision then motivate buy-in and autonomous working to achieve those aims (ibid). A strength of this approach is thought to be the positive impact on social relationships and building a collaborative culture, but it has also been criticised for lacking an educational focus and lacking specificity on effective practices which may mean school leaders will not know how to enact a transformational approach (Robinson et al., 2009). Conversely, pedagogical leaders often aim to manage curriculum and working conditions to achieve predefined goals like academic attainment. A strength of this approach is there are more clear links between leadership practices and pupil outcomes, but it has also been criticised for overly focusing on leadership effects and minimising the contributions of school staff (ibid).

Echoing Bass and Avolio’s (2013) sentiment that successful leaders need strategic thinking and culture-building, Day et al. (2016) and Robinson et al. (2009) suggest that leaders should combine elements from both transformational and pedagogical leadership styles. Using data from a mixed methods study comparing 20 English schools, Day et al. (2016) found when schools used leadership that was both transformational and pedagogical, they were able to progressively ‘layer’ practices to achieve school improvement over time. For example, when
leaders developed a school vision, clarified goals and expectations, and emphasised wider
distribution of leadership they were able to achieve a sense of shared purpose and
accountability within the school. This helped motivate staff and facilitated collaborative
relationships which improved conditions for sharing practice and staff development, which was
then more conducive to improving teaching and learning (ibid). Day et al. (2016) advocate that
effective education leadership should focus on promoting both broad pupil outcomes and the
‘internal states’ of school members (e.g., motivation, sense of purpose, or organisational
satisfaction). Similarly, Marks and Printy (2003) argue an integrated approach, using both
transformational and pedagogical leadership styles, would enhance school performance and
pupil outcomes. They suggest an emphasis on pedagogy, teaching, and learning will support
high quality instruction and pupil outcomes, but that transformational practices like
consultation and collaboration will encourage staff commitment and enhance teacher
professionalism. These views that both transformational and pedagogical leadership can work
synergistically reflect whole school approaches which emphasise the importance of all people
connected to the school (WHO & UNESCO, 2021) and literature linking teacher wellbeing with
pupil outcomes (Harding et al., 2019; Roffey, 2012) which will be discussed in the following
subsection.

2.8.3 School context and teacher health and wellbeing

One of the oft-touted factors of CfE is that it acknowledges that each school will operate with
its own unique context and school priorities, and has built flexibility into the curriculum to allow
schools to adapt policy to their staff and pupils’ needs (Priestley, 2010). Every school faces
differing challenges or barriers and can draw upon different opportunities, strengths, and
resources (Roffey, 2012). Whole school, ecological approaches to support pupil wellbeing
emphasise collaboration within and partnership with outside agencies to help create a
supportive environment and to foster a context, culture, and climate that is conducive to the
achievement of wellbeing and the positive development of all individuals in the school (Sisask
et al., 2014).
As adolescence is seen as a crucial developmental period to support HWB with consequences that may carry on through adulthood, an important aspect of the whole school approach is early detection and intervention for pupils at risk of poor HWB (Sisask et al., 2014). Education staff are often seen as inhabiting a unique position to act as wellbeing ‘gatekeepers’ – employment that brings them into frequent contact with young people, the opportunity to act as first-line support, as well as the ability to facilitate referrals for extra support or services (Sisask et al., 2014). However, there is some evidence to show that school staff may lack the confidence to recognise elements of poor wellbeing like mental health disorders, or feel inadequately prepared to act in a therapeutic role (Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbell, & Donovan, 2010; Sisask et al., 2014). These feelings of uncertainty may have negative consequences for educator stress levels and wellbeing.

Indeed, teachers themselves appear to be at increased risk for common mental health disorders compared to other occupations, with teachers consistently self-reporting higher rates of stress and anxiety caused or exacerbated by work (Kidger et al., 2016; Ouellette et al., 2018). This may especially be the case for teachers who work with pupils who have experienced high rates of poor wellbeing or trauma. O’Toole (2022) notes that teachers who frequently work with pupils who have experienced trauma may exhibit higher levels of stress and decreased empathy over time, sometimes described as ‘compassion fatigue’ or ‘secondary traumatic stress’. These higher rates of stress can have deleterious effects on individual teacher’s health and personal relationships (Ouellette et al., 2018). Additionally, poor teacher wellbeing is associated with negative work outcomes like absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, burnout or attrition, decreased sense of teaching efficacy, and lowered pupil attainment (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Kidger et al., 2016). This means a focus on staff wellbeing is important not only for the HWB of teachers but may also have long-term effects for pupils.

Previous research has pointed to the importance of positive relationships for enhancing pupil wellbeing with much of the literature focused on teacher-pupil relationships (Jamal et al., 2013; Sisask et al., 2014). There is evidence that the formation of personal, supportive relationships requires considerable emotional investment from educators and can have effects, both positive and negative, on teacher wellbeing (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). For example,
positive relationships with pupils were often cited as a source of job motivation and meaning, but breakdown of teacher-pupil relationships contributed to feelings of stress and dissatisfaction (ibid). Furthermore, teachers’ stress, wellbeing, and job satisfaction may impact their ability to develop and sustain these positive relationships with pupils and to act as role models for positive social and emotional behaviours (Kidger et al., 2016; Sisask et al., 2014). If teachers’ emotional health needs are neglected, they will have reduced capacity for supporting pupils, thus it is important that whole school approaches also target the relationships and wellbeing of educators (Kidger et al., 2009). A multitude of studies about supporting staff wellbeing point to the effects of contextual and relational factors like school culture, organisational climate, and leadership styles (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Harding et al., 2019; Kidger et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2020; Ouellette et al., 2018; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Research has also noted the significant impact of school leadership, with leaders that are perceived to be fair, supportive, and inclusive believed to be more effective at supporting a positive school environment (Morris et al., 2020). Additionally, supportive school leadership practices are associated with increased staff morale and professional growth (including professional learning and opportunities for participative decision-making), as well as organisational ability to respond to staff needs (Morris et al., 2020). The school culture and climate are both thought to impact the quality of interpersonal relationships and interaction between all individuals within a school (Collie et al., 2012; Kidger et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2020).

2.8.4 School context and pupil health and wellbeing
Schools have frequently been identified as logical sites for HWB initiatives by public policy and research (Jayman & Potapov, 2022; Moore et al., 2017; Scottish Government, 2021) and noted for their potential to contribute to the wellbeing of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils (Ridge, 2011). As previously described, reviews of school initiatives show some evidence of positive, but often highly variable, results (Durlak et al., 2011; Thorburn & Dey, 2017). An alternative approach is one that, rather than interventions focusing on the individual, aims to ensure the broader school environment supports HWB (Scottish Government, 2021; WHO & UNESCO, 2021). These whole school, ecological approaches aim to address upstream, wider
social determinants of HWB, instead of primarily focusing on individual knowledge, skills, and behaviours, and may have the potential to mitigate health inequalities (Jamal et al., 2013). A core assumption behind these approaches is that having autonomy over one’s life and choices is key to achieving and sustaining good HWB.

Following from this, the promotion of HWB may be facilitated through the development of pupil functioning and the capabilities necessary for autonomy and to choose a life pupils have reason to value (Nussbaum, 2006; Smith, 2018; Spratt, 2017). Drawing from Nussbaum’s capability approach (2003, 2006), HWB rests upon human functioning or the fundamental abilities and experiences which give life meaning and value, such as the ability to have basic needs met (e.g., food, shelter, safety, access to health resources) or the ability to form meaningful relationships with others. These ‘functionings’ rely on capabilities, or “what people are actually able to do or to be” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 33). The focus on capabilities acknowledges the interrelationship between the individual and their context because not all people will be equally capable of achieving these human functionings. For example, those pupils who have experienced ACEs or trauma may have a harder time forming meaningful relationships compared to those who have not experienced trauma (Quarmby et al., 2022). Therefore, the capabilities approach emphasises creating an environment that is conducive to the development of human functioning. Nussbaum (2006) argued that practical reasoning (e.g., the ability to think, reason and critically reflect) and affiliation (e.g., the ability to form meaningful social connections and live in service to others) were the most essential human capabilities because life and health choices depend upon the ability to reason and function within the social world. If an individual is able (and enabled) to develop both of these capabilities, then they can experience autonomy and freedom to live a life of their choosing.

Nussbaum (1990) emphasised that education was fundamental to the achievement of functioning well because education can help pupils develop the essential capabilities, especially that of practical reasoning. Nussbaum’s idea of human functioning borrows from eudaimonic notions of wellbeing and the ability to live a life of self-actualisation, which resonates with discourses seen in CfE. For example, conceptualisations of eudaimonia reflect flourishing discourses (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017) that argue that pupil wellbeing depends upon the
freedom to live a life one has reason to value. Similarly, meeting pupils’ fundamental needs coincides with care discourses that focus on the protection of pupils’ rights (e.g., to safety and to have a say in the matters that affect them) (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017).

Smith (2018) suggests that the capability approach reflects a trauma-informed approach because it acknowledges the contribution of community and individual circumstances on HWB. This contextual understanding is important because it moves beyond individualisation (which could inadvertently lead to victim-blaming) to an understanding of social inequities (e.g., poverty) as a mix of material, political, and social influences. Therefore, HWB promotion should emphasise creating enabling and empowering environments which increase individuals’ capabilities and opportunities for autonomy and participation, and should “change the policy stance and service paradigm from ‘here’s your support’ to the more respectful question, ‘what do you need?’” (Smith, 2018, p. 4). Within schools, this may look like a focus on collaborative approaches, pupil ‘voice’, and maximising pupil input into school values and rules. A systematic review of the effects of school organisation on HWB found that a reduction in hierarchical boundaries between individuals could promote pupils’ school engagement due to a sense of participation, collaboration, and power-sharing, which in turn may support more positive pupil-staff relationships (Jamal et al., 2013). This suggests that a more egalitarian school organisation, one which reflects democratic values, would be more supportive of pupil HWB than a top-down, authoritarian school structure. This resonates with research that shows greater pupil input and involvement in the decisions that affect them can increase feelings of agency, self-efficacy, and ownership of school practices (Powell, Graham, Fitzgerald, Thomas, & White, 2018; Simmons, Graham, & Thomas, 2015).

However, opportunities for voice and to have a say must be authentic and meaningful. When ‘voice’ is perceived as ‘tokenistic’ or pupils feel that they are asked their opinion, but nothing is done about it, this can have a negative effect on their wellbeing. Anderson and Graham (2016) found that when opportunities for pupil voice were not acted upon, this led pupils to feel disrespected, as well as a sense of frustration, disempowerment, and ultimately made pupils less likely to engage in the future.
Furthermore, hearing and acting upon pupil voice is a children’s rights issue which schools are legally obliged to uphold. The UK Government endorsed the UNCRC rights for children, including Article 12 which gives children and young people the right to express their views and have their views be given due weight (Lundy, 2007). Lundy (ibid) suggests that in order to protect pupils’ right to have a say in the matters that affect them, four elements should be in place to increase their capabilities for voice. These are: *space* (the opportunity to express a view), *voice* (facilitated to share their view), *audience* (the view must be listened to), and *influence* (the view must be acted upon, as appropriate\(^2\)). These four elements suggest that school organisation and context must prioritise and empower pupils to share their views and have their views influence decision-making, especially for lower SES pupils who are in the minority within the school. As Lundy (ibid, p. 934) stresses, meaningful participation should be for all\(^3\), and “not just afforded to the articulate and literate” (or those judged as such by an unequal society). This may be especially important for those pupils who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as research suggests these pupils’ voices may often go unheard, not because of a lack of articulateness, but due to stigmatisation, marginalisation, or alienation from a more dominant middle-class value system in schools (Markham & Aveyard, 2003; Moore et al., 2017).

Additionally, opportunities for participation and to have a say may foster children and young people’s sense of engagement, connection, or belonging in school and have a positive impact on their wellbeing (Mowat, 2020; Nussbaum, 2006; Riley, 2019a). Belonging has been described as a sense of feeling included and involved, feeling seen and valued for ‘who they are’, as well as feeling safe and confident to be who they are and express their identity (Riley, 2019a). Belonging has been linked to improved HWB, increased engagement and motivation in school, and higher academic attainment, which in turn may impact pupils’ future HWB behaviours, and education or occupation opportunities.

Pupils highlighted positive relationships with peers and especially with teachers as important factors which influenced their sense of belonging or ‘not-belonging’ in school (Riley,

\(^2\) ‘In accordance with the age and maturity of the child’ (Lundy, 2007, p. 927)

\(^3\) All children who are ‘capable of forming his or her own views’ (Lundy, 2007, p. 927)
Opportunities for agency, voice, and participation were also highlighted as beneficial for fostering a sense of belonging through a feeling of choice, involvement, and competency. This may be especially important for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils as research has shown that they are twice as likely to feel that they do not belong in school than their more advantaged peers, and this finding may be exacerbated within a school where they are in the minority. However, Riley (2019a) cautions that agency is more than just having a say, she argues it is about having the right ‘tools’ (e.g., skills, competence, confidence) and ‘opportunities’ (e.g., enabling environment) to act. This resonates with Fallot and Harris’ (2008) trauma-informed approach and Nussbaum’s (2006) capabilities approach and again reiterates the importance of context.

2.9 Conclusion
This chapter has explored the rise of wellbeing as a policy aim and the ways the term has been conceptualised, as well as examined how these conceptualisations may influence school practices to support the HWB of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. Review of the literature has emphasised the various ways school context and organisation can influence beliefs and conceptualisations of wellbeing as well as policy enactment to support wellbeing. However, while policy documentation provides guidance for schools to develop their wellbeing strategies, this is a messy and complex process of negotiation and interpretation which will be enabled and constrained by material, social, and environmental aspects of the local school context (Maguire et al., 2015).

Furthermore, some research suggests that attending a predominantly mixed or affluent school where they are in the minority could have a negative effect on the wellbeing of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. Yet, little is known about how educators in schools serving primarily affluent populations interpret and implement policy guidance to support wellbeing when they have a minority intake of lower socioeconomic status (SES) pupils. Consequently, the purpose of this doctoral study is to work with educators from a Scottish school cluster to explore school policies and programmes for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing to understand how they were developed and enacted within the context and culture of the school.
Chapter Three: Theoretical perspectives

3.1 Introduction

In Scotland, a key focus of education policy is to reduce inequalities, with schools frequently seen as logical sites for addressing unequal educational outcomes like the poverty-related attainment gap (Sosu & Ellis, 2014). The Scottish Government allocates strategic funding to tackle poverty and improve the life chances and educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people (McCluskey, 2017; Mowat, 2020). However, there is growing acknowledgement that the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be addressed through financial support alone (Bullock, Muschamp, Ridge, & Wikeley, 2010), and instead must consider the HWB of all pupils (Mowat, 2019). Notably, research has argued that the promotion of HWB requires a strengths-based approach which moves away from deficit understandings of HWB as the absence of disease or illness (Weare, 2006; WHO & UNESCO, 2021). Drawing on principles of health promotion like proportionate universalism, Weare (2006, 2017) stressed that HWB should focus on positive wellbeing, starting with universal initiatives to build upon strengths within the school, but balanced with targeted approaches for pupils who may need additional support. Furthermore, Weare (2006, p. 120) argued that positive wellbeing promotion “involves looking at environments rather than only at individuals, as a way both to understand and also address problems.” This assertion emphasises the importance of contextual factors as these may influence both pupil wellbeing, and the understandings and practices of educators as they attempt to support and promote wellbeing in schools.

As this doctoral study was focused on the beliefs, conceptualisations, and practices of educators as they attempt to support pupil wellbeing, especially those pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, this thesis took Weare’s (2000, 2006) emphasis on context as a starting point. Thus, while educational and HWB inequalities can be examined through many theoretical perspectives, Antonovsky’s salutogenic orientation to health, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, Nussbaum’s capability approach, and Foucault’s theories on discourse and power/knowledge were selected to explore and critically examine how context may influence both pupil wellbeing and school practices when considering initiatives to promote wellbeing.
3.2 Antonovsky’s salutogenic orientation to health

3.2.1 Problematising pathogenesis

Aaron Antonovsky, a medical sociologist, argued that a pathogenic, deficit-based orientation to health had become a dominant focus within Western societies, and that this orientation inaccurately posited health as a dichotomy of healthy vs. unhealthy (Antonovsky, 1996). Using the analogy of a ‘river of life’, he claimed a pathogenic orientation assumed healthy individuals were safe on the shore and unhealthy people were struggling in the water. Thus, health interventions should focus on two main approaches - preventative ‘upstream’ methods to protect individuals from falling into the river and curative ‘downstream’ methods to save people from drowning. However, Antonovsky criticised the pathogenic orientation for primarily focusing on deficits and risk factors and challenged the default assumption that people are ‘naturally’ healthy. Instead, he argued that no one was on the shore, so it becomes a question of ‘how well can they swim?’

Antonovsky (1991) theorised that all individuals exist in an environment (i.e., a river of life) filled with stressors like inequity, poverty, unemployment, and marginalisation, and that these stressors lead to tension. An individual’s ability to ‘swim’ and manage or cope with this tension was what prevented it from becoming stress or illness (Vinje, Langeland, & Bull, 2017). Antonovsky questioned conceptions of life as being relatively smooth with only occasional major stressors, instead arguing that life was inherently stressful and that chronic life strain (e.g., long-lasting structural constraints like poverty, precarity, or marginalisation) comprised much of the daily stressors and major events for people. Going further, he argued that socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals were exposed to the worst conditions such as continuous stressors, fewer resources to handle these stressors, and decreased access to quality services (health or otherwise), and that it was the constancy of the stressors which had the most effect, stating:

“The constancy of imposed stressors in such life situations, the continuous emergencies life presents, makes it immensely difficult to resolve tension. Life for even the fortunate among us is full of conflict and stressors, but there are many instances of breathing spells.” (Antonovsky, 1991, pg. 74)
Whereas more fortunate or affluent individuals may enjoy times of calm or stability (i.e., ‘breathing spells’), the poorest rarely get breaks from stressors and that plays a role in why they tend to have the poorest HWB outcomes. This chronic stress and life adversity can have ramifications that affect health across the lifespan. For example, chronic stress has been linked to higher rates of illness (e.g., inflammation, cardiovascular disease, and premature death) as well as reduced learning ability, emotional control, and ability to cope with stressors (Burns, 2015; Steptoe, 2011).

Similarly, Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Officer of Scotland, criticised pathogenic orientations to health inequalities as possibly ‘victim-blaming’ because they often emphasised neoliberal ideology on individual responsibility with the underlying belief that poor health was the consequence of poor choices made by poor people (Burns, 2015). Drawing on the work of Antonovsky, he suggested many HWB disparities between more affluent or disadvantaged groups in Scotland are related to the social circumstances surrounding individuals and communities. This conceptualisation of health inequalities which considers characteristics of the individual as well as their context reflects previously described literature such as the social determinants of health, trauma-informed practice, and proportionate universalism, and suggests that health promotion initiatives need to take a broader view beyond individual risk (ibid).

3.2.2 Moving towards salutogenesis

In contrast to pathogenic orientations, Antonovsky (1996) coined the term ‘salutogenesis’, meaning ‘origin (genesis) of health (saluto)’. He argued that instead of a dichotomy, health is a continuum between ‘ease’ (health) and ‘dis-ease’. He suggested the conceptualisation of health as a continuum was more accurate and significant because it shifted from a pathogenic focus on the factors that cause disease (risk prevention) to a salutogenic focus on the factors that improve health (health promotion). This is not to suggest that Antonovsky did not see the value of preventative or curative methods; however, he argued that a focus on pathogenesis could limit the possibilities for thinking about health. Instead, he claimed that all individuals were in some ways healthy; thus, health promotion should focus on salutary (health-giving) factors that
can help move all individuals (not just those ‘at risk’) towards greater health, no matter where they are on the continuum.

A core element of Antonovsky’s salutogenic model is a Sense of Coherence (SOC) or an ‘orientation to life’ that could help individuals cope with life stressors and challenges and stay towards the ‘ease’ end of the health continuum (Jensen, Dür, & Buijs, 2017). Antonovsky (1996) claimed that individuals with a high SOC will believe that stressors are comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Individuals will be better able to cope with a stressor if they can comprehend the problem (e.g., understanding the symptoms and causes of the illness, challenge, or stressor) and if they believe they can manage or control the outcomes (e.g., believing they can reduce ill effects of stressors though their individual health behaviours or believing they can access resources to support coping). The last characteristic is meaningfulness, that individuals feel that life is worthwhile and are motivated to continue to cope (e.g., not giving up or adopting fatalistic beliefs). Importantly, Antonovsky (1996) did not see SOC as a static concept that an individual did or did not have; instead, he saw SOC as a developmental construct which could grow, change, and develop through a person’s life experiences. This highlights the influence of time in building up a strong SOC and resonates with Bronfenbrenner’s concept of the chronosystem which will be discussed in the next subsection.

Moreover, Antonovsky (1991; 1996) described generalised resistance resources (GRRs) as the resources that individuals or communities could draw upon to support successful coping and stress management. He suggested that these GRRs have wide (generalised) utility and share a common trait of helping an individual make sense of the world and their lives, thus strengthening their SOC. For example, having a supportive social network would be a GRR because it may help an individual feel that they have someone to ‘lean on’ and help them cope with a variety of stressors, as well as providing meaning to their lives. Consistent with literature on poverty and health determinants, these GRRs include not only individual characteristics like physical, mental, social, or emotional health, but also community, environmental, attitudinal, relational, and sociocultural aspects (Antonovsky, 1996; Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021). This
reflects a strengths-based approach which emphasises individuals’ and communities’ strengths, assets, and resources that can be drawn upon to support HWB.

Underlying Antonovsky’s river of life analogy and salutogenic orientation is an ecological understanding of the individual as part of a wider whole and living in interaction with the surrounding context and community. He noted the importance of the social environment because certain contexts may provide experiences that will support meaning-making and comprehension and be more conducive to the development of a strong SOC (Vinje et al., 2017). Antonovsky (1996) suggested that the environmental experiences that could help develop a strong SOC included those that provide consistency, work balance, and the ability to participate in decision-making. Within a school setting, such an environment would signify one where pupils feel secure, supported, and understood by their school and teachers (comprehensible), where pupils feel capable of handling school demands and challenges (manageable), and where pupils are empowered, engaged, and motivated by the school (meaningful) (Bowen et al., 1998).

Research in US public schools found that SOC was promoted in situations where pupils perceived their school as safe and their teachers as supportive (Bowen et al., 1998). Notably, this positive effect was amplified in those pupils coming from lower SES backgrounds. The authors speculated that the effect on lower SES pupils may have occurred due to those pupils having increased rates of instability in their lives outside of school, so the school environment may seem more manageable in comparison. They argue that pupils may seek resources and refuge from schooling to compensate for negative circumstances at home (Bowen et al., 1998). This resonates with Weare (2000), who suggested that schools can support a sense of safety and stability, by having clear and consistent structures, expectations, and boundaries in place. This sense of stability may enhance pupils’ SOC, facilitate trusting relationships, and enhance the HWB of pupils and staff.

Additionally, while concepts like SOC are not explicitly referenced in the HPS framework, Jensen et al. (2017) contend that there is considerable similarity between the whole school, HPS approach and a salutogenic orientation. For example, the HPS framework suggests school initiatives should promote the HWB of all, not only those at risk, and should consider the
physical and psycho-social environment. Similarly, CfE also advocates this broad approach to supporting the HWB of all pupils and embedding health promotion throughout the school curriculum, ethos, and environment (Scottish Government, 2007). CfE also encourages schools to protect pupils’ ability to participate in the decisions that impact them, which reiterates Antonovsky’s belief that participation can enhance SOC and also reflects care discourses which emphasise adults’ responsibility to protect the rights of pupils (Antonovsky, 1996; Noddings, 2012).

### 3.3 Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory

Similar to Antonovsky, psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner argued that the individual is part of a wider system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986). He argued that research on human development which primarily focused on the characteristics of the individual were missing or disregarding the influence of the surrounding environment, what he criticised as *development-out-of-context*. Instead, he posited that individuals are part of a complex, interconnected social system and develop in relation to their context. Thus, he argued that an individual’s growth, development, and HWB could only be understood if the entire socioecological system was considered. He described this as *development-in-context* or his ecological theory of human development.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) envisaged this socioecological system as concentric layers with the individual situated at the centre (See Fig. 3), with human development occurring through interactions between the individual and the encircling layers (context). However, the individual at the centre is not passive in this model, and human development is not solely determined by contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Thus, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory evolved over time - first focusing on the influence of the context surrounding the person (i.e., the ecological systems theory), then emphasising the influence of the person and their individual characteristics within their context (i.e., the *bio-*ecological systems theory). This evolution from *ecology* to *bioecology* is suggested as a way to make explicit the active role of the individual in their own development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).
Within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, the individual is surrounded by five interrelated layers. The first four layers: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem were part of his original ecological theory, then the fifth layer: the chronosystem, was added later. Within Bronfenbrenner’s updated bioecological systems theory, the role of these contextual layers on the development of the individual at the centre is described as an interaction between four elements: *Process, Person, Context,* and *Time* (the PPCT model) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The interrelated layers of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and how they relate to the elements in the PPCT model will be described next.

The first layer is the *microsystem*, which directly involves the individual, and includes social interactions with significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, friends, teachers) or significant
settings (e.g., day care, school, or religious affiliations). These interactions are bi-directional and reciprocal, which emphasises both the Process and Person elements of the PPCT model because the process of social interaction may influence development, but the person may have individual characteristics which will also influence the way they act and interact with the systems around them (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). For example, an individual may be more or less prone to being social or being anxious and these personal characteristics may influence how much they engage in the classroom or with peers or teachers. Thus, significant others can impact an individual’s development but can also be impacted by the individual, such as teachers influencing pupil development, but also being influenced by pupils’ classroom behaviours. The second layer is the mesosystem and can be described as relationships between settings where the individual actively participates (e.g., interactions amongst Microsystems). For instance, positive teacher-parent relationships can facilitate cooperation between the school and the family, which may have a beneficial effect on a pupil’s development and learning.

Notably, a key aspect of Bronfenbrenner’s concept of development-in-context was that the layers and systems around the person did not need to directly involve the individual to influence their lives. Hence, the third layer is the exosystem which may not immediately contain the individual but can still impact them through the microsystem. For example, parental access to employment can affect family affluence which will in turn influence the growth and development of the individual. Furthermore, the fourth layer is the macrosystem, which includes the wider social values, culture, and ideologies where a person grows and develops (e.g., individualistic vs collectivistic societies). The original four layers of the ecological system described above (e.g., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) make up the Context element of Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model and also reiterate that the processes around the individual, whether directly involving or more distant, can influence development. For instance, the social and cultural values surrounding an individual can have a significant effect on wellbeing, with some research in the UK suggesting a cultural emphasis on individualistic goals of success (instead of an emphasis on the collective wellbeing of others) can more adversely impact disadvantaged pupils through a sense of ‘not measuring up’ or feeling like a failure.
compared to more advantaged peers (Mowat, 2019). This resonates with research around social comparison which found ‘feeling poor’ relative to social peers had a greater (negative) psychosocial impact than absolute affluence alone (Elgar et al., 2013). These macrosystem impacts may have implications for pupils’ SOC and HWB, particularly disadvantaged pupils attending more affluent schools, and reinforces the importance of the context surrounding pupils.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1979, pg. 21) suggested development occurred through ‘progressive, mutual accommodation’ between the individual and their environment, denoting the dynamic, on-going nature of growth and development. Similar to the suggestion that an individual’s SOC changes through life experiences and shifting environments (Antonovsky, 1996), Bronfenbrenner also viewed human development as a process that changed over time and in response to exposure to different experiences (i.e. the Time element of the PPCT model). Thus, the fifth layer is the *chronosystem*, which suggests changes that occur through time. This can include the individual’s chronological age, common life changes, transitions, and milestones (e.g., starting school or moving from childhood to adulthood), as well as changes due to events such as experiencing familial divorce, illness, or bereavement (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). For example, an event like the COVID-19 global pandemic could exert significant developmental influence on pupils due to changes and disruptions in their schooling, home life, or relationships.

Ecological approaches, like Bronfenbrenner’s model, have been highlighted by various fields like medicine, public health, and education for their potential to recognise contextual factors which reciprocally influence behaviour and development (Golden & Earp, 2012; WHO & UNESCO, 2021). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s understanding of development as an interrelationship between the individual and their context mirrors literature on health determinants (See section 2.5), and showcases how HWB can be a unifying topic which may encourage action and convergence between multiple sectors such as education and healthcare (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021; Spratt, 2017).

Furthermore, a growing body of evidence suggests that health promotion initiatives (such as those aimed at improving various HWB aspects like social and emotional learning,
mental health, nutrition, or physical activity) which work across multiple school layers are more likely to effect change than single component initiatives like classroom-based interventions (Banerjee, Weare, & Farr, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2019; Golden & Earp, 2012; Weare & Nind, 2011). These approaches reflect the HPS guidelines (WHO & UNESCO, 2021), and aim to integrate initiatives across the whole school ecological system, including curriculum, ethos and culture, environment, engage all staff, and form positive relationships with families and external community. For example, a recent meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of whole school interventions to improve social and emotional development found “small, but significant” positive impact on social-emotional and behavioural adjustment as well as internalising symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, or social isolation)(Goldberg et al., 2019, p. 770). Similarly, a systematic review of school mental health initiatives found “small to moderate” positive impact on mental health, violence and bullying, and pro-social behaviour, which may be enhanced by a well-implemented, whole school approach (Weare & Nind, 2011, p. i63). However, Durlak et al. (2011) caution that HWB interventions that work across multiple levels of the whole school environment are complex and can be a challenge for effective implementation, so schools need to pay special attention during planning and enactment.

While not explicitly stated, echoes of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory are visible in the CfE documentation. For example, the CfE emphasis on ‘responsibility of all’, interagency working, and school-family partnerships reflects the idea of multiple, interconnected layers around pupils (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Scottish Government, 2007). In line with Bronfenbrenner’s argument that human development needs to take into account the surrounding environment, schools should consider context when planning and implementing HWB initiatives. This context should include consideration of pupils’ individual characteristics and their lives outside of school, and also account for ecological layers within the school (e.g., the school values and ethos, the built environment, fostering positive teacher- pupil relationships, and enabling equitable access to opportunities for participation).
3.4 Nussbaum’s capability approach

In accordance with arguments that health and education inequalities like the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be addressed solely through financial support (Mowat, 2019), Nussbaum (2006, p. 47) asserted that measures of quality of life which primarily focused on economics were ‘obtuse in human terms’ and missed aspects of a quality life which were not related to financial advantage. Building upon the theories of Amartya Sen, she argued that improving wellbeing or quality of life should go beyond material wealth and, like Antonovsky and Bronfenbrenner, that health promotion interventions should take an ecological approach focused on creating enabling contexts for health, wellbeing, and social justice.

3.4.1 Agreement with Sen and the capabilities approach

When conceptualising enabling contexts and social justice, philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2003) agreed with the work of economist Amartya Sen who advocated that the distribution of resources should account for individual context and the diversity of human experiences (i.e., equity), which resonates with the concept of proportionate universalism. Sen (cited in Nussbaum, 2006) used the example of a person using a wheelchair having different mobility needs than someone not reliant upon a wheelchair, so equal resources for mobility will not be equally accessible to all (e.g., a public sidewalk that is too narrow for wheelchair access). Instead, Sen emphasised the importance of capabilities and ‘what people are actually able to do and to be’ (cited in Nussbaum, 2003, pg. 33), which depend upon positive freedom. Positive freedom refers to social systems in which the state intervenes to expand and enhance the opportunities, freedoms, and choices of the general population to pursue lives they value (i.e., welfare liberalism), as opposed to negative freedom which Spratt (2017, pg. 25) quips is the removal of interference so individuals can “pursue the ‘good’ life unimpeded by the state” (i.e., neoliberalism)(See section 2.5).

Sen suggested some ‘instrumental freedoms’ which could contribute to overall capabilities, for example, political (e.g., freedom of speech and democracy), economic (e.g., freedom to pursue financial opportunities), or social (freedom to assemble or pursue education) (Spratt, 2017). However, Sen contended that delimiting specific capabilities was difficult due to the subjective nature of personal evaluations of a ‘good’ life; thus, he hesitated
to provide an explicit list of core capabilities (ibid). In contrast, Nussbaum (2006) suggested that whilst Sen provided a general idea of freedoms important for a ‘good’ life and which society should pursue, these freedoms were too vague. She argued that it was necessary to formulate an explicit list of the most essential capabilities required for a just society, which will be discussed in more detail below.

3.4.2 Capabilities for human functioning

Nussbaum (2006) stressed that the significance of focusing on capabilities instead of ‘rights’ or ‘freedoms’ had to do with inequities in functioning (i.e., the ability to exercise a particular right). She argued that simply stating a freedom or right exists on paper does not mean the right has been secured by citizens (ibid). For example, women may be purported to have freedom of education in a particular country, but face circumstances which prevent them from attending school, such as experiencing harassment if they leave the house. Therefore, Nussbaum (1992, 2006) argued that a goal of policy or legislation should be to ensure measures are in place to support individuals to achieve the capability to function in a particular area (e.g., political or educational participation). Similarly, Nussbaum advocated for the demarcation of a specific list of central capabilities for political purposes, suggesting it could serve as a platform for political deliberation and help cement the essential and non-negotiable nature of the identified capabilities:

“Once we identify a group of especially important functions in human life, we are then in a position to ask what social and political institutions are doing about them. Are they giving people what they need in order to be capable of functioning in all these human ways?” (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 214)

Nussbaum’s (2006) capability approach began with the assumption that every person should be able to live a life of dignity and on their own terms (having autonomy to choose what is valuable to them). She argued that for a society to secure this dignity and be considered just, the state needed to provide a basic threshold of capabilities. Nussbaum’s (2006) list of capabilities include:

1. Life – not dying prematurely
2. Bodily health – access to adequate food, shelter, and resources for health
3. Bodily integrity – choice in matters of movement and reproduction and freedom from violence
4. Senses, imagination, and thought – ability to use the mind including protections like freedom of expression, education, or religion
5. Emotions – being able to develop and express emotions freely
6. Practical reason – ability to critically reflect and make choices about one’s life
7. Affiliation – ability to form meaningful social relationships and be treated as equally valuable to others
8. Other species – ability to connect with nature and non-human animals
9. Play – ability to have fun, enjoy leisure time, or engage in recreational activity
10. Control over one’s environment – ability to participate in the decisions that impact one’s life and ability to hold property or pursue employment freely

Nussbaum (1992) suggested that HWB rested upon individuals’ capabilities to function but emphasised that the conception of capabilities was dependent on choice (autonomy). Consequently, calls for political institutions to act in relation to capabilities were to ensure that all individuals had the necessary context, conditions, and resources required to enact this choice (rather than push individuals towards a politically approved choice). She also noted that her list was not exhaustive and was open to revision because she acknowledged that evaluations of a ‘good’ life were subjective and could change, for example, based on different social or cultural values and contexts (Nussbaum, 2006). She viewed her list as a starting point for discussion, but the emphasis on autonomy means that the list is subject to revision based on citizens’ or society’s choices and deliberations. Furthermore, Nussbaum (1992) claimed that practical reasoning (e.g., the ability to reason, critically reflect and make choices about one’s life) and affiliation (e.g., the ability to form meaningful social connections and live in service to others) were the most essential human capabilities because life, health, and wellbeing choices depend upon the ability to reason, function within the social world, and form bonds with others. She suggested that if an individual can develop both essential capabilities, then they can experience autonomy and the freedom to live a life of their choosing.

Nussbaum (1992) highlighted that education was fundamental to the achievement of functioning well because education can help pupils develop the essential capabilities, especially that of practical reasoning. The capability for practical reasoning mirrors current educational emphasis on critical thinking, such as CfE’s ‘planning for choice and change’ a learning area focused on providing pupils with experiences which will help them develop their knowledge,
skills, and understanding to make informed choices about learning, life, and work (Scottish Government, 2009). This learning area is designated by CfE as a responsibility of all adults within a school. Nussbaum’s conception of capabilities for human functioning, including the capability for practical reasoning, borrows from eudaimonic notions of wellbeing (See section 2.3) and the ability to live a life of self-actualisation. Conceptualisations of eudaimonia resonate with flourishing discourses found in CfE (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017) that argue that pupil wellbeing depends upon the freedom to choose what is personally of value to them for achieving a ‘good’ life. On the other hand, appeals for consideration of context and equity to support pupils’ ability to function coincides with care discourses seen in CfE that focus on protecting pupils’ rights (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). Both discourses (i.e., care and flourishing) are related to CfE and implicitly underlie the capabilities approach in that they are concerned with the responsibilities of adults’ (or policymakers in Nussbaum’s just society) to safeguard young people’s rights (e.g., the right to self-determination) and to ensure young people have the capability to function and exercise these rights (e.g., the practical reasoning to choose between various options). However, these two discourses can sometimes be in tension with each other and can imply different practices from educators (Hardley et al., 2020). The ways in which discourse can influence the thoughts and behaviours of educators (and therefore pupils) will be discussed next.

3.5 Foucault’s theories on discourse and power/knowledge
Discourses within CfE can exert powerful influence over the aims, expectations, or priorities within a school, as well as the beliefs, values, and identities of educators. Curriculum text has been argued as representing the voice of the state and may contain multiple authoritative discourses which tell educators what they should teach, and therefore, what pupils should learn (Gray et al., 2022; Rossi et al., 2009; Spratt, 2017). However, different discourses can suggest differing courses of action, making interpretation and enactment challenging (Hardley et al., 2020). Foucault’s theories provide a framework with which to examine and problematise discourse to understand how (and what) ‘truths’ come to dominate, why, in what contexts, and who may be advantaged or disadvantaged by them.
3.5.1 Discourse and its power to construct ‘truth’

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher known for his theories on discourse and its link to power and knowledge. Foucault argued that power and knowledge were inseparable (frequently written as the singular ‘power/knowledge’), and that discourse embodied this power/knowledge through its ability to define ‘truth’ (Cheek, 2008; Hardley et al., 2020; MacNaughton, 2005). Foucault (2013) conceptualised discourse as shared language (written or spoken) which could be used to construct ways of thinking and speaking (knowledge) about the world. These discourses work to order or systematise the world in certain ways (Cheek, 2008) and “frame how we think, feel, understand and practice in specific areas of our lives” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 16). However, Foucault (2013) argued that discourse is not neutral or value-free, nor is knowledge constant, objective, or universal. Instead, discourse could be used in specific ways to construct knowledge about social reality within a given time and a given sociocultural context. For example, Foucault (2013) suggested a historical discourse of ‘madness’ does not describe a singular object of madness. Instead, discourse describing the ‘madman’ at times included “different types who were lumped together: the fool, the simpleton, the drunkard, the debauchee, the criminal, the lover” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 4). These madmen were often categorised based on irregularity or deviance from a socially accepted (at the time) ‘norm’, which will be explored in more detail in the next section. Yet, these outdated definitions of madmen differ from contemporary conceptualisations of mental illness; thus, Foucault (2013) suggested discourse constitutes mental illness through all that was, is, or could be said (or thought) about it at a given point in time.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse acts in powerful ways through this ability to constitute ‘truth’ or knowledge about the world, such as defining what it is to be ‘mad’ (vs ‘normal’) in the prior example. ‘Truth’ is authoritative, and its power lies in its ability to be perceived as factual or correct (MacNaughton, 2005). The most powerful discourses are those vested with authority and legitimacy through social institutions like government or medicine, and curriculum documents are perceived as containing institutionally sanctioned discourses on what knowledge is valued and should be taught in schools (Rossi et al., 2009). However, these documents, and the discourses within them, (re)produce situated power relations in a
particular time and context because not all discourses or truths are given equal authority (Cheek, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005). For instance, those in power, such as government officials, often have privileged access to discourse compared to those not in power. Furthermore, the reproduction of these power relations is often ‘masked’ by ideology. Dominant ideologies (i.e., those ideologies which benefit the most powerful in a society) can become hegemonic - naturalised as ‘just the way it is’, taken-for-granted, and hence go unquestioned (MacNaughton, 2005).

Spratt (2017) argued that two main ideologies are present within CfE - welfare liberalism and neoliberalism (See section 2.5). Welfare liberalism sees individuals as playing an integral role in a society which is strengthened through social cooperation whereas neoliberalism often views the individual as separate to society. Neoliberalism emphasises individualism and individual responsibility and has been suggested as a dominant ideology within Western societies like Scotland (MacNaughton, 2005). However, neoliberalism has also been accused of hiding unequal power relations and legitimising unjust and inequitable beliefs and practices. For example, a neoliberal discourse of individualism in schools may present a ‘truth’ that all children can succeed if they just try hard enough (i.e., meritocracy), and work to conceal the structural inequalities some pupils face (e.g., poverty or discrimination), as well as mask the in-built advantages of those in power (e.g., greater access to wealth, social connections, or resources)(MacNaughton, 2005). If these discourses are presented (and accepted) as factual and true, it can begin to be seen as common sense and may serve to legitimise disadvantage. For example, a discourse of individualism may imply that pupils who do not succeed are deserving of blame for their own failure.

Therefore, truths can both enable and constrain, making certain ways-of-speaking, ways-of-thinking, and ways-of-being possible (Willig, 2008). They can even become a ‘regime of truth’, where discourse becomes normalised and so ‘common sense’ that it makes it difficult to challenge or resist dominant discourses or speak and think in different ways (MacNaughton, 2005). These truths then work to regulate and control individuals’ beliefs and behaviour as will be discussed next.
Theorising on mechanisms of control, Foucault (1979) suggested that within modern institutions like schools, power operates through preferential access to the production of truth (discourse), which then normalise particular frames of knowledge about the world. According to Foucault (1979, p. 184) “normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power” because by constructing what is ‘normal’ (and therefore desirable), one also constructs what is ‘abnormal’ (e.g., who is ‘mad’ and who is not, who is healthy and who is not, who is a ‘good’ teacher and who is not). These norms of knowledge act as a normalising gaze which “makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). For Foucault (ibid), modern systems of power have shifted from ‘sovereign power’ or the ability of the powerful to dominate another (e.g., the authority of a king to command his subjects), to ‘disciplinary power’ or the ability to control the ‘conduct of conduct’ by getting individuals to self-regulate to achieve socially desirable norms (or to avoid judgement). Essentially, discourses reproduce situated power relations, constructing truths (norms) which exert disciplinary power to control and regulate individuals’ understanding, beliefs, and behaviour (Ball, 2017; MacNaughton, 2005).

Within schools, Foucault (1979) argued that discourses organise and control behaviour through a system of ‘perpetual comparison’ which “differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes” (p. 183) in reference to officially sanctioned truths which “made it possible both to measure and to judge” (p. 186). These truths are value-laden and delineate what is normal or appropriate (i.e., desirable) which serve to ‘train’ (discipline) individuals in the ‘right’ form of behaviour to achieve normality. In effect, these truths serve to socialise individuals in the ‘correct’ conduct as well as open them up to judgement for their achievement (or lack thereof) of these norms. For example, a dominant educational ‘truth’ may claim that high test scores and high pupil attainment are indicators (norms) of quality teaching and learning (Hall & Noyes, 2009; Hardley et al., 2020). By defining ‘quality’ teachers as ones who achieve high test scores, this may then compel educators to focus on teaching that will achieve evaluation measures. Ball (2017) argues that these discourses reflect accountability agendas which act as a regime of
truth and serve neoliberal purposes like economic and labour market competition (e.g., league tables and targets).

However, it is important to note that Foucault did not see power as a solely repressive force, unilaterally wielded by the powerful against the oppressed. Similarly, regimes of truth are not deterministic or inescapable, and individual behaviour is not a foregone conclusion controlled by discourse. Rather, Foucault suggested power circulated and was productive in that it could be used to resist forms of domination. Furthermore, mechanisms of power “can be unmade as long as we know how it was they were made” (Foucault, cited in Ball, 2017, p. 47). If individuals understand how ‘truth’ can normalise beliefs and behaviour, and how discourse can reinforce existing power relations, this also gives them the opportunity to critically question, challenge, and contest these power relations. Similarly, problematising discourse may help individuals uncover taken-for-granted, ‘common sense’ truths to understand the conditions which make these truths possible (e.g., dominant ideologies), analyse who may be advantaged or disadvantaged by different discourses, and question discursive claims of authority. For instance, while acknowledging that meaningful employment and income generating opportunities can increase an individual’s ability to choose between different life paths and support HWB, Spratt (2017) argues that neoliberal ideology and discourse may position schools as primarily a site to train and produce human capital. Therefore, recognising accountability discourses may allow educators to challenge neoliberal emphases on measurement or conceptualisations of schools as a training site for an economically productive labour force (Ball, 2017). This may then allow the purpose of schools and education to be opened up to consideration, reflection, and (possibly) transformation.

Indeed, some conceptualisations of HWB (namely a discourse of flourishing) have been suggested as alternatives to more pathogenic, deficit-based constructions of health (and wellbeing) (Spratt, 2017). These pathogenic constructions have been critiqued for containing neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility to maintain health in order to avoid risk and be economically productive citizens (Gray et al., 2022; Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). Instead, a flourishing discourse may provide an opportunity for reflecting on the aims and purposes of education and what makes a ‘good’ life (as well as who gets to decide) and resonates with
Nussbaum’s capability approach. By presenting a different view of the role of education, as an opportunity for pupils to develop and learn about who they are and who they want to be, flourishing discourses may offer an alternative to neoliberal regimes of truth.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described Antonovsky’s salutogenic orientation to health, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, Nussbaum’s capability approach, and Foucault’s theories on power/knowledge and discourse to explore different ways that schools can consider their organisational context, and how this may influence educator practice or pupil wellbeing. Notably, these theories (and theorists) come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives such as medical sociology, psychology, and philosophy, which again highlights the potential for HWB to act as a unifying concept which may encourage interdisciplinary convergence and cross-sector working (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021; Spratt, 2017).

To address inequalities (and inequities), the role that schools can play in supporting HWB has been widely recognised (Mowat, 2019; Scottish Government, 2021; Weare, 2017). Evidence suggests the importance of autonomy, emphasising that individuals need to be in a position to choose between various options for their HWB (Markham & Aveyard, 2003; Spratt, 2017), which necessitates consideration of both individual characteristics and the contextual factors which may enhance or inhibit agency (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021; Nussbaum, 2006). Furthermore, Markham & Aveyard (2003, p. 1209) suggest that the main mechanisms through which schools can increase pupils’ capacity for autonomy is “through school organisation, curriculum development, and pedagogic practice.” The theories described in this chapter may help schools think through their processes and practices to support children and young people’s development of autonomy and HWB. For example, Foucauldian perspectives may help educators discern and identify discourses which may marginalise certain groups, and schools may be more equipped to critically examine messages within the curriculum or their school policies to challenge unjust or inequitable practices.

Beyond discourse, understanding ecological perspectives (e.g., Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, and Antonovsky’s SOC) may help schools be more aware of the individual, social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding
pupils, and possible determinants which could impact a pupil’s life chances, choices, and behaviours now and in the future. This more contextualised understanding may strengthen thinking and rationale for whole school approaches and integration of support across different layers of school life, including curriculum, organisational ethos, staff-pupil relationships, and relationships with families and the wider community. For example, Antonovsky’s theories may help educators move away from deficit or medicalised views of health (which could lead schools to think health promotion is the responsibility of the medical sector) and recognise that social processes like supportive teacher-pupil relationships can act as a protective factor in pupils’ lives.

Additionally, nuanced understanding of the influence of individual and contextual factors may encourage empathy and understanding that the diversity of human experience means that a one-size-fits-all intervention is not feasible, so schools should strive for approaches which build upon the strengths, resources, and capabilities of everyone in the school, but also incorporate targeted support as needed. School and education can play a significant role in providing opportunities for all pupils to flourish, but this takes careful consideration of the many socioecological influences (e.g., school discourses and inter-personal relationships) which can impact wellbeing and the practices to support HWB.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction
Social research seeks to describe, understand, and explain a puzzling aspect or problem of social life by asking questions such as ‘what’, ‘why’, or ‘how’ (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). In order to answer these questions, researchers are often informed by a paradigm, which denote a “set of basic beliefs...and a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba & Lincoln, as quoted in Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 9, original emphasis). Paradigms both influence (and are influenced by) the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher. For example, paradigms may suggest what can be studied or how to go about answering a question, but the researcher may also choose to work within a particular paradigm because it reflects their assumptions about reality (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Thus, the route taken to address the research question is influenced by both the research paradigm and the researcher’s beliefs about the nature of reality and of knowledge, and both will shape the techniques chosen to explore the problem (Bryman, 2001; Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

While the terms ‘methods’ and ‘methodology’ are often used interchangeably, Kaplan (2017, p. 18) notes that methodology is “the description, the explanation, and the justification of methods, and not the methods themselves.” It is important to note that research methods are not neutral tools but are intrinsically linked to different views of reality and how best to study them (Bryman, 2001). As such, it is important for the researcher to explain starting assumptions, preconceptions, and beliefs. Therefore, in the following sections I will first describe common social science research paradigms and their criticisms before explicating an alternative paradigmatic pathway to explore my research questions.

4.2 Paradigmatic assumptions: ontology and epistemology
As noted above, paradigms illustrate beliefs and assumptions held by the researcher such as their beliefs about the nature of reality and what exists (ontology) or what constitutes ‘acceptable’ knowledge within a discipline, and the relationship between the ‘knower’ and reality (epistemology)(Bryman, 2001; Scotland, 2012). Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest
paradigms are self-reinforcing in the sense that researchers usually inquire via a particular paradigm because it supports their beliefs about the world, and because they hold those beliefs, they follow the rules of that paradigm. Two traditional paradigms exist, positivism or interpretivism, and their respective assumptions and methods are commonly constructed as mutually exclusive dichotomies or ‘paired opposites’ (e.g., quantitative/qualitative, numbers/words, hard/soft) (ibid).

Researchers working within a positivist paradigm, often hold a realist or external ontology. Realist ontology argues that there is a single, external, and objective social reality that is subject to natural, universal ‘laws’ that may be ‘discovered’ (and measured) through numerical data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Importantly, this external reality exists ‘out there’, independent of the researcher and the individuals in society (Creswell, 1994), and can be studied without being influenced by the researcher (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Traditionally associated with quantitative methods and the natural sciences, studies operating under a realist ontology usually focus on empirical and observable ‘facts’ that are then quantified and correlated to test these ‘laws’ about the social world (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Thus, legitimate knowledge production within a positivist paradigm often stresses experimental research, such as manipulating an independent variable while monitoring its effects (Rawdin, 2019). Researchers holding positivist beliefs also tend to subscribe to an objectivist epistemology, believing scientific knowledge could be obtained through studying social behaviour ‘outside’ of the thoughts and beliefs of the people being researched (Fleetwood, 2014) and that researchers could be impartial, objective, and ‘outside’ of this knowledge production (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

On the other hand, researchers working within an interpretivist paradigm, often hold a relativist or internal ontology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Relativist ontology argues that social reality is subjective, internal, and socially constructed (Bryman, 2001). Therefore, discovering objective and ‘true’ knowledge about an external reality is impossible because ‘multiple realities’ can exist through the various mental constructions of individuals within a society (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Traditionally associated with qualitative methods and the social sciences, studies operating under a relativist ontology usually focus on
narratives and discourses to understand how people construct the social meanings of things or events (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019). Thus, legitimate knowledge production within an interpretivist viewpoint often focuses on “interpreting the interpretations of others” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 12) by highlighting participants’ voices and context through the use of extensive quotes and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). Researchers holding interpretivist beliefs often hold a **subjectivist epistemology**, believing knowledge can only be obtained through studying social behaviour ‘inside’ the beliefs, interpretations, and intentions of the people being researched (Fleetwood, 2014). Therefore, researchers can never be ‘outside’ the research because the interpretation of social reality is subjective and always filtered through the observer (i.e., the researcher) (Bryman, 2001).

However, this ‘either/or’, dichotomous view of paradigms has been suggested as creating “a false illusion of two distinct worlds” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 3), one dealing with numbers and facts and the other dealing in meaning systems. Positivism has been criticised as seeing the world as a ‘closed’ system (like a laboratory) and only able to describe phenomena through correlations or statistical significance of observed regularities, while ignoring the wider social context in which these observed regularities occur (Bhaskar, 2016; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Therefore, positivist approaches have been argued as inadequately making sense of the complexity of the social world, and insufficiently explaining how wider contextual variables may influence the outcomes found in experimental studies (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019; Rawdin, 2019). Conversely, by believing the social world is based upon subjective sense-making and believing that knowledge of an objective, external reality is not possible, interpretivism has been criticised as leading researchers to take narratives and discourses at face value and accept ‘reality’ as whatever people say it is (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Hence, positivist paradigms may limit conceptions of reality to knowledge that can be gained through observation (empirical knowledge) while interpretivist paradigms may take reality as entirely created within human knowledge (discursive knowledge) (Fletcher, 2017).
4.3 An alternative path: critical realism and depth ontology

As an alternative to seeing the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism and their respective assumptions as mutually exclusive, Bhaskar (2016, p. 6, emphasis added) states, ‘the understanding of science as at once a (transitive) social process in which knowledge about an independently existing and acting (intransitive) world is produced situates the mutual compatibility.’ Bhaskar’s view of the compatibility of positivist and interpretivist paradigms has come to be known as critical realism. Critical realism aims to ‘bridge the gap’ between positivist and interpretivist assumptions by arguing that while there is an objective world that exists independently of individuals’ perceptions (ontological realism), knowledge about this world is always mediated through the conceptualisations and interpretations of individuals (epistemological relativism)(Bhaskar, 2016; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As Crotty (quoted in Scotland, 2012, p. 10-11) suggests, “A tree in the forest is a tree. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of treeness”; however, “it is human beings who have constructed it as a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees”.

A key tenet of critical realism is that reality is not reducible to our knowledge of the world because our understandings of reality are subjective, imperfect, and can only touch upon a small aspect of a deeper reality (Fletcher, 2017; Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019). As Danermark et al. (2019, p. 26) explain, “science is about a reality independent of science itself”. Critical realism suggests that science, whether natural or social, has two dimensions: what Bhaskar (2016) called the intransitive and the transitive. The intransitive dimension is concerned with the independent and objective reality (ontology) that exists with or without human interaction. For example, it is possible to observe an apple fall from a tree, and it is possible to perform an experiment to try to understand how an apple may fall from a tree, but the apple would still fall regardless of whether someone was observing or experimenting. The mechanism (i.e., gravity) would still be there independently of humans and human knowledge. On the other hand, the transitive dimension of knowledge (epistemology) includes the conceptualisations of the world that are mediated by social interaction, language, interpretation, and theory (Sayer, 2000). As
Bhaskar (as quoted in Wiltshire, 2018, p. 531) suggests, “knowledge is a social product, produced by means of antecedent social products”.

Therefore, in contrast to ‘flat ontology’ which sees reality as reducible to that which can be empirically known or that which can be created within the human mind, critical realism advocates for a ‘deep’ ontology. ‘Deep’ ontology views reality as stratified between three overlapping domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar, 2016; Danermark et al., 2019). The empirical domain denotes that which can be seen, sensed, and perceived. For example, in the natural world, it is possible to watch an apple fall from a tree or see the sun rise and lower in the sky, and in the social world, it is possible to watch a couple flirting, to observe a classroom lesson, to read and interpret a curriculum document. However, Danermark et al. (2019) argue that these empirical perceptions are not experienced in a direct way because they are always mediated through the filter of human interpretation and conceptualisation of the event. For instance, to comprehend an apple falling from a tree, one must already have a conceptualisation and understanding of what is an apple and what is a tree; thus, empirical experiences are inherently theory-laden because this knowledge of reality depends on pre-existing language and concepts (theory).

While empirical experiences may seem more obviously real because, as Sayer (2000) suggests, observability may provide more confidence about what we think exists, existence is not dependent on observation. Furthermore, what happens in the world can differ from what is observed or experienced (Danermark et al., 2019). Instead, scientists should aim to identify the relationship between what is experienced, what actually happens, and the underlying causal mechanisms that produce what occurs in the world. Thus, the actual domain refers to all events that can or could occur in the world, regardless of whether they can be sensed, experienced, or observed (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). For example, a social researcher may observe a schoolyard social interaction and note that one child seems to be left out and not engaging with the other children. It is possible the researcher missed some verbal or non-verbal communication that preceded this interaction, but the singular observation of the event itself may not provide a complete explanation for the occurrence. The researcher may assert that negative group dynamics are at play and the lone child is being ostracised by their peers, but
other events, such as the children are playing a game, the teacher asked the child to wait on the side, the child was injured and is waiting to be picked up by their parents, and so on, may be generating the interaction that is observed.

Therefore, the real domain is concerned with the causal structures or mechanisms which can generate the events that occur in the empirical and actual domains (Fletcher, 2017; Sayer, 2000). Causal mechanisms are the inherent properties of objects or structures to produce events and these mechanisms are real whether material or immaterial and regardless of whether we have adequate knowledge of them. These objects or structures can be real in diverse ways, such as a tree being materially real, while an organisation can be socially real, but all are real because of their ability to have a causal effect (Fleetwood, 2014). For example, hell may or may not be real, but the concept of hell is still real because of its ability to influence the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019).

In essence, ‘deep’ ontology suggests that reality is complex, with multiple determinants which may influence the events that we experience. Critical realism argues that the complex nature of social events means that empirical knowledge (i.e., based on observation) alone is not enough to understand this complexity; therefore, critical realists must attempt to identify the causal mechanisms (conditions or determinants) through detailed investigation of the context and setting in order to develop an adequate explanation for social phenomena (Fletcher, 2017; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

4.4 Critical realism: epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality

The last section described ‘deep’ ontology and how it is useful for explaining why both the natural and social worlds are real (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019); however, by distinguishing between the intransitive and transitive, critical realism emphasises the complex, interrelationship between reality and knowledge. Due to the social nature of the transitive process, critical realism argues that knowledge about the world is inherently relative (epistemological relativism) and theory-laden because it depends upon human conceptualisation. These conceptualisations reflect the theory/language of a particular point in time and can change as new information is acquired (Bhaskar, 2016). Yet, critical realism rejects
any claims that there is no existence of reality outside theory, instead asserting the independence of this reality from our thoughts about it (Sayer, 2000).

Hence, critical realism argues that while knowledge of the world is theory-dependent because it depends upon prior conceptualisation, it is not theory determined (Danermark et al., 2019; Fletcher, 2017). What this means is that while all knowledge depends on human conceptualisation, our conceptualisations do not determine reality because the intransitive world would still exist independently of our knowledge of it. For example, a shift from a theory of geocentrism (where Earth was the centre of the universe) to heliocentrism does not mean the planetary orbits changed. Therefore, to equate or reduce ontology to epistemology is what Bhaskar (2016) called ‘the epistemic fallacy’ because our theories and knowledge are imperfect and fallible. However, as Danermark et al. (2019) assert, some knowledge can be closer to reality than others, and that while all knowledge is fallible, it does not mean all knowledge is equally fallible. The concept of *judgemental rationality* is useful here because researchers must use judgement to choose, through discussion and debate, what knowledge seems the most rational and plausible for explaining the experienced phenomena (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Wiltshire, 2018).

4.5 Causal power: emergence and potentiality within open systems

In the search for rational, causal mechanisms to explain social phenomena, critical realism proposes reality is an open system of interdependent and emergent entities (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sayer, 2000). An *open system* is one where the constituting parts (*entities*) of the system are understood to be inseparable from the surrounding environment. Unlike an experimental laboratory (a closed system) which may emphasise controlling confounding variables, an open system (e.g., society, organisations, or schooling institutions) is one that cannot be studied in isolation from its context (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019). *Entities* are those things that are real in diverse ways (whether tangible or intangible), are able to impact the world, and have causal powers (ability to behave in particular ways) in their own right (ibid). For example, abstract concepts like ‘love’, ‘social class’, ‘justice’, ‘wellbeing’ cannot be seen or touched, but are still real entities with causal power because of their ability to affect the thoughts, beliefs, or behaviours of individuals.
This causal power is characterised as emergent because various entities can interact to produce new phenomena with properties that are not reducible to its constituting elements. Thus, this emergent power is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sayer, 2000). A common example from the natural world is water which as an entity has properties not contained by its constituting elements (hydrogen and oxygen). In the social world, a ‘school’ is made up (among other things) by its campus buildings, staff, pupils, and policies. Yet, a school is more than a group of people arranged in physical space. The school’s power to educate depends not only on its constituent elements (e.g., buildings, pupils, staff, policies), but also on the relations between different elements as part of the whole (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019; Sayer, 2000). Social systems are interdependent and interrelated, where what one individual or institution can be or can do relies upon their relationship with others. Therefore, there are potentialities to this emergent power because conditions in the social world may enable or constrain the exercise of these powers. For example, teachers’ power to mark pupils’ work depends not only on their knowledge and qualifications, but also on these qualifications being accepted as legitimate by the schooling institution, pupils, parents, and wider public.

The critical realist approach with its focus on deep ontology, emergence, and potentiality is useful when thinking about schools because each school will operate with its own unique and complex context made up of, among other things, the built environment, individuals within and outwith the school, policies, artefacts, documents, and shared understandings. These various entities will have various emergent powers or capabilities that can arise through interaction but can also be enabled or constrained through conditions of the context. These enabling or constraining factors will impact what can be experienced or observed through the research process and must be acknowledged because as Wiltshire (2018) asserts, for causal explanations to have any value, they must account for both structure and agency. Therefore, the social context must be taken into account for deeper understanding of cause because the context will “provide the conditions within which agency can be enacted” (Wiltshire, 2018, p. 533).
4.6. Conclusion

This chapter examined two traditional paradigms frequently used in research (i.e., positivism and interpretivism) before setting out an argument for critical realism as a ‘middle ground’ between the two. Critical realism was deemed useful for this project because it agrees with the realist standpoint that an objective reality exists independently of individuals’ perceptions but rejects the notion that this reality can only be known through direct, empirical observation or experience. Instead, theory is believed to enhance understandings of reality and to act in real ways. For example, social phenomena (e.g., abstract concepts and theories like stigma, gender, or social class) are real because they can affect other aspects of the social world (e.g., individuals’ beliefs or behaviours); thus, reality is not simply what can be observed or measured empirically. Critical realism offers an approach that may allow for deeper understanding of the tangible and intangible aspects of a school context which can influence educators’ beliefs, perceptions, and practices.
Chapter 5: Research methods

5.1 Introduction

While the present thesis aimed to explore the ways in which policy for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing was understood and enacted, it is widely recognised that policy enactment is a complicated and messy process of interpretation, negotiation, and sense-making (Bullock et al., 2010; Maguire et al., 2015; Spratt, 2017). Educators are not simply ‘implementers’ who carry out policy as written but interpret and recontextualise policy based on their own biographies, beliefs, experiences, and context. Individual schools will have varying contextual factors which may enhance or constrain possibilities for interpretation, particularly when serving pupils from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to explore this context in-depth.

Data gathering included collecting official school policy documents, HWB messages shared with pupils, as well as conducting semi-structured interviews and dyadic interview discussions with senior leaders and class teachers to explore how the school conceptualised, negotiated, and enacted HWB policy.

5.2 Research approach

As one of the aims of the study was to understand how contextual factors may influence the understandings and practices of educators when enacting mental, social, and emotional wellbeing policy, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. Yin (cited in Merriam & Tisdale, 2015, p. 37) suggests that ‘a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context’ and that this context is inextricable from the phenomena. Educators plan and enact curriculum and pedagogy within their local school, and each school site will have specific social, cultural, and structural factors which will influence their beliefs, behaviours, and practices (Priestley, Minty, & Eager, 2014). As such, the secondary school acted as a naturally ‘bounded system’ or case for analysis. Merriam and Tisdale (2015) suggest that a case must be a single unit with boundaries delimiting what is to be studied (e.g., an individual, an organisation, or a community). For this study, particular interest was around contextual factors related to being a school serving primarily affluent pupils but
with a minority of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, the research was primarily situated within one Scottish secondary school (the case), but also included one feeder primary school for additional contextual data from across the school cluster.

Case study approaches allow for exploration of phenomena in context using various methods of data collection such as school document analysis, individual interviews, and dyadic interview discussions. The use of multiple data sources provides different ‘pieces of the puzzle’ to assist interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Furthermore, within a realist paradigm, a case is purposefully chosen to ‘test and refine theory’ (Patton, 2015, p. 112). As discussed in Chapter 3, theorists Antonovsky, Bronfenbrenner, Nussbaum, and Foucault all posited various ways that contextual factors can impact individuals (e.g., through discourse, policy, norms, culture, access to resources, or basic rights and capabilities). Therefore, by focusing on the secondary school as a case, this thesis aimed to ‘refine theory’ by exploring the contextual factors identified by educators as most influential on the HWB practices within the school.

5.3 The research context, setting, selection, and gaining entrance

In the Scottish education system, schools are largely under the purview of their Local Authority which divides counties and cities into catchment areas based on postcode (ADES, 2018). Parents or guardians can request a different school if they wish but these requests are not guaranteed, and pupils usually attend the school within their local catchment area (Kintrea, 2021). Pupils complete seven years of primary school (P1-P7) then transition to secondary school. Secondary school typically spans six years (S1-S6), from the ages of 11-18, with schooling compulsory until the age of 16 (S1-S4). After this, pupils have an option of leaving school to pursue employment or other qualifications or staying for a further two years (S5-S6) to complete higher qualifications, such as those needed for university admittance.

The research in this thesis was primarily situated in one Scottish secondary school in a Local Authority within the central belt of Scotland. The school has a pupil intake from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

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4 The ‘central belt’ includes areas with the highest population density in Scotland
(SIMD) which ranks areas into quintiles based on ‘deprivation’ (from 1-most deprived to 5-least deprived) across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, and crime (Scottish Government, 2020). It should be noted that ‘deprivation’ does not automatically equate to ‘poverty’ or ‘low-income’ status, it means that individuals living in those areas may face additional challenges such as unemployment, crime, or have access to fewer resources or opportunities like lower educational attainment or longer travel times to see a doctor (Scottish Government, 2020). Additionally, SIMD is based on postcode and not all those who live in a highly deprived area will be experiencing deprivation and the same applies to affluent areas. While SIMD is an imperfect measurement of socioeconomic disadvantage due to the exceptions just mentioned, nevertheless it is frequently used for identifying areas that may need extra support or funding (Scottish Government, 2020), as well as a commonly accepted measure for the extent to which people living in different areas may experience reduced wellbeing (Kintrea, 2021).

The school has a large suburban campus located on the outskirts of a metropolitan city and has been given the pseudonym, ‘Cityside High’. Cityside High has a catchment area of mostly affluent areas (SIMD 5, least deprived) but with a minority of disadvantaged areas (SIMD 1-4, most deprived). Thus, the majority of pupils (60-70%) come from the most affluent quintile with a minority of pupils coming from the least affluent quintiles (approximately 0-20% from SIMD 1-2 and 0-20% from SIMD 3-4)(Scottish Government, 2019). The school was purposively selected due to its catchment area as well as a supervisor’s professional network connection to a Depute Head Teacher. Collins and Gray (2015) state purposive sampling is used to deliberately select particular people or sites that represent the quality or characteristic of interest to the research. Because the current study is interested in understanding how a school negotiates and recontextualises policy to suit the local needs of their pupils, particularly those pupils who may come from more socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, it was decided that Cityside High would be suitable as a possible research location.

Once the school was identified, I contacted Mary5, a Cityside High Depute Head Teacher, to informally discuss the aims and scope of the study and to assess the school’s capacity to

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5 Pseudonyms used for all participants and schools.
engage with the research process. She seemed interested in the study aims and enthusiastic about participating. Initial contact occurred before the COVID-19 lockdowns, and while I was unable to spend extended time on campus due to pandemic closures, the following section will attempt to paint a narrative picture of the context and physical atmosphere of the school to explain how it relates to the characteristic of interest (i.e., affluence), and why the site was purposively selected for the study.

Cityside High School has a long history and was founded several hundred years ago as a boys school. It was originally located in a grand historical building before relocating to its current site. The contemporary location of the school is within a leafy suburban area that exudes a feeling of wealth. The school is situated next to a large community park, in a neighbourhood filled with sizeable homes set back from the main road, many with luxury cars in gated, private driveways. The school is large, sprawling across a wide area with multiple well-manicured sports pitches in the back that are visible when arriving by bus. The front entrance to the school is accessible via a long promenade surrounded by banners containing words denoting school values (e.g., respect, courage). Visitors to the school must check-in at the main lobby as shown in a field note:

I was asked to wait for Mary to escort me around campus. The lobby was spacious, and I noticed several posters with words like ‘respect’ and ‘resilience’ on the walls. There were displays of old class photos, trophy cases, and mannequins modelling the school uniform. There were several fliers and pamphlets available to take, such as information on the school rules and uniform, but also information about mental health and numbers for support helplines. There were a few pupils in uniform milling around, but it seemed fairly quiet, so maybe I arrived during class time. It felt pretty relaxed, with some pupils making jokes and informally calling out to Mary in the hall when we were walking. (field note, 29/01/20)

These descriptions of the school convey my impressions of the school setting and surrounding neighbourhoods as feeling quite wealthy. I arrived at Cityside High using public transportation and remember feeling a bit out of place especially in the neighbourhoods around the school, so it is possible the school and surrounding areas could instil a similar feeling in pupils from outside the catchment area, who may or may not be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. For pupils from less affluent circumstances, walking through the school vicinity and seeing classmates who grew up in these neighbourhoods could emphasise the differences between
them and higher SES pupils (e.g., relative affluence) which may lead to a sense of not fitting in or not belonging within the school and/or catchment area.

However, besides these affluent environs, my initial impressions of the school also include a sense of HWB being valued by staff and embedded in school practice in myriad ways (e.g., banners and posters with HWB-related school values, overt visibility of mental health information and support, positive relationships between staff and pupils). As the thesis aimed to take a strengths-based approach toward understanding the contextual factors which facilitated HWB support, these examples of HWB promotion and good practice provided a context useful for the current study. Thus, the school was purposefully selected as a site that could help illuminate the whole school factors which enabled HWB support and may provide fruitful insight to inform future research, policy, and practice.

Informal interest in participating in the study was explored before the COVID-19 school closures; however, continued engagement and pandemic-related study adaptations were made through ongoing discussion with school leadership. Once ethical approval was gained from Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh (See Appendix A) and the Local Authority (See Appendix B), formal consent to participate in the study was requested from the school (See Appendix C). Site access and formal consent from the school was granted by Mary, without any direct contact between me and the Head Teacher, although the Head Teacher was notified and agreed to the school’s participation.

Cityside High is relatively large compared to other schools within the Local Authority and has a roll of around 1300 pupils and 120 staff members, of which approximately 90 are teachers (Scottish Government, 2019). It is a non-denominational, co-education, comprehensive school (i.e., admission is not dependent on academic aptitude). It is considered a high attaining school with strong performance on examinations with 80-90% of pupils attaining 1 or more Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF)\(^6\) Level 5 awards (equivalent to the General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSEs] used in the rest of the United Kingdom) or Higher/Advanced Higher awards, which are qualifications that pupils need to progress to.

\(^6\) The Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework is used for understanding and comparing Scottish qualifications. The framework has 12 levels, with higher numbers indicating more difficult or advanced qualifications (e.g., level 12 is comparable to a doctoral degree; level 5 is comparable to GCSE [grades A* - C]) (scqf.org.uk)
university (Scottish Government, 2019). The school was also judged as having an inclusive ethos, high quality pastoral care, and positive school climate in the last HMIE\(^7\) report (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007). Pupils can elect to enrol at Cityside High outside their catchment, although the pupil roll was filled at the time of the study, so the school was not accepting new pupils from outside the catchment area.

In addition to Cityside High, some data were collected from a feeder primary school, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The primary school has a similar pupil composition as Cityside High in that the majority of pupils come from the most affluent quintiles (Scottish Government, 2019). The addition of the primary school was deemed to add extra contextual information around how Cityside High works across the cluster to support whole school HWB.

5.4 Sampling and recruitment

Purposive sampling was used throughout the research process, from site selection to participant selection. Individuals were selected based on particular knowledge or experience of the phenomenon of interest (supporting pupil HWB), and, importantly, availability and willingness to participate (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling meant that the sample was not ‘random’, and these individuals may not be representative of the general population; however, within qualitative research, a common emphasis is on depth of understanding rather than broad generalisability (Bryman, 2001). I was not seeking to generalise my findings across all other schools or educators but wanted to explore the expressed beliefs and experiences of Cityside High educators as they interpreted and enacted national and local HWB policy within their unique school context. Thus, participants were recruited on the basis of their interest or work in supporting HWB within the school in a broader sense, without specifically targeting course subjects seen as key areas for HWB lessons (e.g., home economics, personal and social education [PSE], or PE)(Spratt, 2017).

\(^7\) HMIE: His Majesty’s Inspector of Education. HMIE conducts school inspections and produces reports evaluating quality and improvement needs of Scottish education (Education.gov.scot)
Given that I wanted to understand how HWB, especially MSEWB, was conceptualised, embedded, and enabled in the school, participants were purposively recruited in two stages. The first stage consisted of recruiting senior leaders to explore how school leadership conceptualised MSEWB and how these understandings may impact overall school curriculum development or policy planning. The second stage involved recruiting subject teachers to explore their conceptualisations of MSEWB and school policy and how their understandings influenced their classroom practices and engagement with pupils.

Mary acted as a gatekeeper and assisted me in sending out a general recruitment email to senior leaders (See Appendix D) describing the study details. Mary was also instrumental in making suggestions of senior leaders with a HWB remit to recruit and assisted in sending out a general recruitment email to teaching staff (See Appendix E). When a potential participant contacted me, I would send them an email with the participant information sheet (PIS) (See Appendix F and Appendix G) introducing the research team (i.e., myself and my supervisors), the aims and purposes of the study, why they had been invited to take part, as well as how their data would be used. I also sent a consent form (See Appendix H) for participants to sign and return.

Internet-assisted research has long been noted for its potential such as speed, convenience, and ability to connect and share information across locations (Laporte et al., 1994); however, it also comes with challenges such as a need for internet connectivity and technological know-how (Im & Chee, 2004; Koo & Skinner, 2005). Due to COVID-19 restrictions limiting face-to-face interaction and prohibiting research from being conducted on campus, all recruitment and data collection had to be done via technological devices. The reliance on internet-based technology presented both opportunities and challenges to the present study. For example, the ability to recruit via email and virtually conduct semi-structured interviews allowed me to continue with data collection despite pandemic restrictions. The videoconferencing function also allowed for synchronous conversation, rapport-building, and visual cues (compared to telephone or email). However, videoconferencing also posed issues such as problems with selecting and using various software platforms, internet connectivity issues, as
well as low response rates, possibly in relation to the more anonymous nature of email recruitment efforts.

Initial email-based study recruitment had a low response rate, so snowball sampling was used as a method to recruit course teachers. Snowball sampling is an approach to sampling where participants with qualities relevant to the research are asked to help establish contact with other people with those qualities (Bryman, 2001). When using snowball sampling approaches, researchers should think about ethical considerations like confidentiality and anonymity (Collins & Gray, 2015). When participants are asked to tell others about the research it can reveal their participation in the study as well as information about them depending on the focus of the study (e.g., a particular health condition). However, after discussion and deliberation with my supervisors, the topic of HWB school practices was deemed less likely to be a sensitive topic, so for this study, snowball sampling was judged an acceptable approach.

Another aspect researchers should consider is privacy and consent (Collins & Gray, 2015). If already recruited participants simply give out contact details of potential new participants, recruitment can enter an ethical grey area in relation to consent (ibid), where potential new recruits may feel pressured to participate or feel irritated by unsolicited contact. To reduce risk of perceptions of undue pressure or unsolicited contact, I requested that participants give my email address to potential recruits, and they could contact me if they were interested in taking part. Additionally, all participants were reminded that they did not have to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time and without repercussions. While anonymity could not be maintained due to the active role previously recruited participants played in identifying potential recruits, during interviews most participants shared that they had already voluntarily revealed their participation to colleagues.

It is also suggested that researchers should consider how to recruit as diverse a sample as possible while still retaining the qualities relevant to the research (Collins & Gray, 2015). During interviews, participants were verbally encouraged to speak to colleagues who might be willing to participate in the study. I specified that I was looking for teachers from a variety of disciplines or with a variety of perspectives (positive or negative) towards HWB. For example, early interviews with subject teachers primarily involved participants from the PE department.
To attempt to get a more diverse sample with different professional backgrounds, subject specialties, or beliefs about wellbeing, I encouraged participants to approach colleagues from other departments not as closely linked with HWB (PE is associated with HWB in the Scottish curriculum). This effort facilitated recruitment of teachers from Biology and Maths, subject specialties which may not relate as intuitively with HWB promotion. Whilst effort was exerted to recruit teachers who may feel less confident in supporting pupil HWB, these efforts were unsuccessful. This meant the sample consisted of staff who were more likely to feel comfortable with HWB promotion, which has implications for the study findings which will be addressed in more detail in the following subsection as well as in section 12.6 on study strengths and limitations.

Additionally, as described earlier, over the course of this study, email-based recruitment had a low response rate. This may or may not have been influenced by the pandemic school closures, but due to a lack of participants it was deemed necessary to widen the recruitment pool. After discussion with my supervisors, I decided that including participants from primary schools might yield useful data relating to cross-cluster working and how wellbeing support was translated from primary to secondary contexts. I amended my ethics application and once ethical approval was received, Mary again acted as gatekeeper, sending out a generic study recruitment email to head teachers at all the feeder primaries (See Appendix D). Only one of four feeder primary schools agreed to participate due to pandemic, time, and capacity constraints.

5.5 Participants

Participants were purposively recruited based on their interest or professional remit in supporting HWB; however, taking part in the study was strictly voluntary. Twelve individuals elected to participate, of which four were in formal leadership positions (SLT) and eight were subject teachers. Table 1 (below) introduces the educators and their departments within the school, but job titles have been omitted to reduce identifiability. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.
Length of teaching experience ranged from 2-20+ years and there was an almost even divide between male and female participants. Most participants had PE-related professional backgrounds, either as current or former PE teachers, which is perhaps unsurprising given that PE is situated within the HWB curricular area (Scottish Government, 2009). Furthermore, while an effort was made to recruit a diverse sample, including negative cases such as teachers who may not feel as confident or enthusiastic about supporting HWB, the sample ultimately consisted of everyone who was willing and able to participate. Consequently, those willing to participate may be more likely to agree with, believe in, and endorse HWB support. Thus, it is important to highlight that the final sample consisted of educators who appeared to be actively engaged with and key drivers of HWB promotion within the school. As such, most study participants had HWB professional remits and training, were directly involved in HWB working groups, or were involved with one-to-one pupil HWB support. This may mean that the study participants are not representative of the general population of Cityside High educators. However, as this thesis is a positive case study and aimed to explore the factors which influence and enable school HWB practices, this sample provided rich insight into the elements which staff believed supported successful whole school HWB promotion. Additionally, whilst only one
participant from one primary school was able to take part, this added valuable contextual data on cross-cluster working and added a primary perspective to the data collection.

5.6 Data collection
To gain an in-depth understanding of a case, Baxter and Jack (2015) claim the use of multiple data sources is a hallmark of case study approaches. Various data sources offer different ‘angles’ from which to view the phenomenon in context and can be used as a means of ‘triangulation,’ or the combination of multiple sources of evidence to study the same phenomenon. The use of different data sources has the potential to aid interpretation of the phenomenon and enhance credibility of the findings. As such, three types of data sources were collected: school documents, individual interview data, and dyadic interview discussion data.

5.6.1 School documents
As I was interested in exploring the ways in which policy for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing was understood and enacted, an important first step was collecting policy documents from the school. I asked Mary to provide any formal and informal HWB school policy documentation as well as surveys or messages shared with pupils and parents. The documents she provided included two formal policies titled “Positive Behaviour Support” and “Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Procedures.” Mary also provided a Cityside High wellbeing strategy detailing different supports across the school, and a mental health feedback document with “You said/We did” statements highlighting the school’s efforts to specifically respond to concerns raised by pupils.

In addition to the previously described documents, I was given access to the 2021-2022 pupil wellbeing survey results. Cityside High conducts an annual wellbeing survey that is administered to all pupils. The survey questions were derived from discussion amongst the HWB working group and then revised based on feedback from pupil leadership groups. The survey is anonymous, with only data on pupils’ year group (S1-S6) collected to lessen chances for pupil identification. During the 2021-2022 school year, the survey was distributed to pupils during their form class (longer class period often used for administrative duties such as
attendance and roll call), with pupils given time during class to complete the survey. An email link was also sent to all pupils, so they could complete the survey in their own time if they wished. The survey was accessible via iPad through a QR code and included the questions in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Cityside High annual HWB survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How prepared do you feel to manage periods of stress throughout the year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How prepared do you feel to recognise someone who is experiencing a challenge with wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How prepared do you feel to manage the situation with a friend who is experiencing challenges with wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How comfortable would you feel talking to the following people [includes a list of different people such as a friend, parent, teacher] if you were not feeling yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How likely are the following things [includes a list of different items such as problems with friends, exams, homework load] to negatively impact your mental health?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel like I belong in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have an adult I can speak to if I was upset or worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Staff and pupils have positive relationships with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adults in school are good at listening and responding to my concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pupils were able to answer the survey questions using a Likert-style rating scale (e.g., ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, and ‘strongly disagree’; or ‘very unprepared’, ‘somewhat prepared’, or ‘very prepared’). There were also two open-ended questions where pupils could write in answers around perceived barriers to speaking to an adult at school or give suggestions for improvement in supports. The first five questions appear more concrete in nature, relating to ‘skills for wellbeing’ (Spratt, 2017) like recognising sources of stress and managing stress, whereas questions 6-9 appear more closely linked to subjective evaluations of wellbeing like a sense of belonging or having positive relationships in school. Questions 6-9 are also tracked to see trends over time. I was given access to aggregate results from the 2021 survey as well as the response trends for questions 6-9 spanning four years (2018-2021).

Collecting and analysing school documents was used as a means to identify discourses and explore how they may influence school practice. While practices within Cityside High will
be guided by national CfE documentation, I chose to focus on local school documents rather than the overall policy because extensive analysis of the CfE policies has been done elsewhere (see Spratt 2016; 2017). Furthermore, Rossi et al. (2009) claim that there cannot be a ‘complete’ discourse analysis because there are so many dimensions and theoretical lenses with which to analyse discourse that such an undertaking would be impossible. Thus, they argue that researchers must make choices about what is to be analysed which are relevant to the research questions. To retain feasible boundaries for the thesis analysis and explore how discourse may be interpreted or recontextualised at the local level, only Cityside High school documents were selected. Local school policies and procedures are meant to inform education leaders’ and teachers’ practices and, as such, these documents will contain various discourses that both conceptualise and constitute MSEWB and explicate local priorities (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). Furthermore, whether formal school policies or informal responses to pupils’ feedback, educators send explicit and implicit messages about what is deemed important to the school through their words, actions, and behaviours (Robinson et al., 2009); school documents provide insight into these messages.

Some strengths of using school documents for analysis is that they contain the ‘official’ discourses, words and rules of the school; do not require face-to-face contact and are less obtrusive to collect; and they may provide insight on contextual factors within the school (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 1994). A weakness of using school documents is that I only had access to the documents the school provided, which meant there was the possibility of incomplete data. However, documents are suggested as a good source of supplementary information to corroborate other data sources or to suggest further questions to pursue (Bowen, 2009) and provided additional contextual data in the absence of being able to enter the school due to pandemic restrictions.

5.6.2 Individual qualitative interviews

Whilst official school policy and documentation can provide one side of the story, policy enactment involves sense-making and negotiation by the policy enactors (Maguire et al., 2015). Hence, it was important to explore educators’ conceptualisations of MSEWB and
understandings of school context and policy, and how these may impact their day-to-day practices and interactions with pupils and colleagues. One way to explore these understandings was through interviewing, which allows researchers to learn about things that are not directly observable, such as participants’ feelings, opinions, and beliefs, or how they make sense of the social world and context around them (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015; Patton, 2015). Interviews have been described as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (Brinkmann & Kvale, cited in Merriam & Tisdale, 2015, pg. 107). The term ‘conversation’ draws upon Latin roots meaning ‘turning together,’ and has long been considered a rich and essential source of information about the personal and social aspects of life (Brinkmann, 2013). Brinkmann goes further, describing the interview process as ‘inter-views’, or the exchange of viewpoints, which highlights the role of both the interviewer and interviewee to co-construct the narrative, which was alluded to in section 1.4.

Interviews can be conducted in a range of formats from structured to unstructured, but a style commonly used in social research and used in this doctoral study is the semi-structured interview (Brinkmann, 2013). This style of interview is called semi-structured because it often uses pre-determined questions to guide the conversation but allows for flexibility to ask follow-up probing questions based on information shared during the interview (Scanlan, 2020). I chose a semi-structured interview format because I wanted to prioritise participants’ ability to discuss the information most important to them, while retaining the ability to pursue salient lines of discussion. An interview guide was written with open-ended questions informed by the overall research questions, the literature and theories described in Chapters 2 and 3, and discussions with my supervisors (See Appendix I and Appendix J).

Once the interview guide was approved by the University ethics board and the Local Authority, I did a pilot test with an experienced primary school teacher to check the clarity and flow of my questions. The pilot interviewee was a friend who I trusted to be willing to give constructive criticism on my interviewing and listening technique. The pilot also gave me an opportunity to test and familiarise myself with the internet-based videoconferencing technology. Piloting an interview is seen as a learning opportunity to practice aspects of active
listening, building rapport, and to work through potential problems such as confusing interview questions or technological issues (McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019).

All interviews were conducted remotely via an online videoconferencing platform (Microsoft Teams) at a time and place preferable to the participants. Interviews ranged from 45-80 minutes, but most lasted an average of 60 minutes each and followed the semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

5.6.3 Dyadic interviews for reflection
Reflective practice has been highlighted as emblematic of quality teaching and foundational for professional learning and development (MacNaughton, 2005). Being reflective has been described, at its simplest sense, as the ability to think deeply about what they do and why, as well as ‘rethink’ about prior practices. MacNaughton (ibid) suggests that reflective educators should be curious and sceptical – to demonstrate curiosity about what is happening in their schools and classrooms (and why), as well as sceptical about their own practices and whether they have the ‘best’ approach. However, she cautions that reflective practice does not happen automatically. Educators need time to consider and develop their own learning, their own conceptualisations and beliefs about being educators, and their pedagogy and practices.

When designing this doctoral study, engagement with the research process was envisaged as a professional learning opportunity for participants, providing them the time and space to reflect and consider their individual beliefs and values about wellbeing, as well as the contextual factors and structures of the school and how these may influence their practice. Focus group interviews were originally conceived as an opportunity for this professional learning by providing a space for feedback, discussion, and reflection on the study findings; however, focus groups can be difficult to form due to challenges with finding larger groups (3+) of participants with the same availability in schedule (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). This challenge may be especially pertinent for teachers due to the dynamic and complex character of schools, where timetables may need to change at short notice. Therefore, dyadic interviews (involving two participants) were used in this thesis to facilitate reflection. Similar to focus groups, dyadic interviews are considered a form of interactive interviewing where a key
strength of the approach is the ability for dialogue and interaction between participants (Morgan et al., 2013). These interactive approaches are underpinned by the assumption that individuals make decisions with other people and within a social context (Patton, 2015). Similarly, Gee and Handford (2012, p. 5) argue, “People do not make meaning just as individuals. They do so as parts of social groups which agree on, contest, or negotiate norms and values.” Thus, dyadic interviews involve a pair of people who get to hear the responses of the other participant and “can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, 2015, p. 475).

Interviews involving more than one participant should be carefully considered to create a non-threatening environment (Patton, 2015), and recruitment for an interview dyad should consider prior social connections as this may enable comfortable interaction (Morgan et al., 2013). For this thesis, the dyadic interviews were envisaged as a non-hierarchical space for professional reflection and dialogue; therefore, I purposely scheduled two dyadic interviews – one with SLT and one with teaching staff. This was done to reduce the chances that teaching staff may refrain from voicing their opinions if it was contradictory to the views of school leadership. Each dyadic interview consisted of two participants who had taken part in the individual interviews, for a total of four participants involved in the dyadic reflective discussions. Dyadic interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each, with the first ten minutes involving a presentation of the study findings, followed by time for participants to give comments and ask questions. Feedback was informed by a strengths-based approach which aimed to identify and build upon the positive elements within the school that support wellbeing, and the dyadic interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Feedback of the findings also served as a chance for ‘member checks’, where participants could comment upon the accuracy of my interpretations of their experiences. If my understanding of the key influences on school HWB promotion seemed reasonable and recognisable to participants, then this could lend credibility to my results (Shenton, 2004). After feedback of the findings, I then posed open-ended interview questions, which were developed in conjunction with my supervisors, to facilitate reflection (See Appendix L). A key aim of the interview questions was to reflect upon the findings of the study (e.g., school HWB policies and
practices), and participants’ beliefs about how these practices impact pupils from lower SES backgrounds, as well as any evidence they use to assess effectiveness of school practices. A further aim was to explore whether engagement with the research process or research findings might impact their practice and lead to any future changes in thinking or action around HWB promotion.

5.7 Data analysis
Danermark et al. (2019) argue that reality does not speak for itself, but relies upon human inference, or the use of reasoning and interpretation to relate the particular (e.g., empirical data) to the general (e.g., social theories and structures) for knowledge development. Two traditional modes of inference - deductive and inductive reasoning - are commonly described as a dichotomy. Deductive reasoning is suggested as being theory-driven (attempting to objectively test data by fitting it into existing theoretical frameworks), while inductive reasoning is suggested as being data-driven (attempting to be open-minded and allow new theory to build from the data)(Danermark et al., 2019; Thompson, 2022). However, within a critical realism paradigm, abductive and retroductive reasoning are used to ‘bridge the gap’ between deduction and induction by engaging with both empirical data and existing theoretical understandings. Thompson (2022) argues that researchers do not enter the field with an open mind; they will have theoretical understandings which will already have influenced the research process (e.g., questions, design, and methods). Similarly, Pawson (cited in Patton, 2015, p. 112) argues, “Theory provides explanations and so directs us to vital explanatory components within the world, their interrelationships and the things that bring about those interrelationships.”

Furthermore, Danermark et al. (2019) describe abduction as ‘recontextualisation’ (i.e., observing, interpreting, and explaining a specific phenomenon within a new contextual framework such as a social science theory), and retroduction as the consideration of possible causal mechanisms, conditions, or structures which may influence the phenomenon and asks questions like, ‘what must exist for the phenomenon to be possible?’ As Danermark et al. (ibid, p. 114) describe:
“Social science discoveries are to a large extent associated with recontextualisation. Social scientists do not discover new events that nobody knew about before. What is discovered is relations and structures, not directly observable, by which we can understand and explain already known phenomena in a novel way.”

Thus, abductive and retroductive reasoning (re)interpret empirical data using existing theory to find a plausible explanation for the observed phenomena. This process of using abductive and retroductive reasoning to generate codes will be described in more detail in section 5.7.2.

The previous paragraphs have highlighted the importance of theory for research, reasoning, and interpretation; therefore, Chapter 3 described some underlying theoretical understandings of the ways that context, power, and discourse may influence educators’ practices and beliefs. These theories informed my beginning understanding of the role of context and influenced my interview questions, research approach, and analysis of whole school HWB promotion. For example, theories around context and power led me to focus primarily on one school as a ‘case’ and to interview different hierarchical levels of educators within the school (i.e., SLT and classroom teachers) to understand how contextual structures could influence practice. Theory also influenced the process of coding and data analysis, which occurred in multiple phases. Each phase iteratively built upon and informed the following phase and can be summarised as:

- Phase 1: Discourse analysis of school policy documents
- Phase 2: Thematic analysis of individual interviews
- Phase 3: Thematic analysis of dyadic interviews

Phase 1 built upon work I completed for my MSc which looked at publicly available ‘good practice exemplar’ school case studies (Education Scotland, 2018) to analyse the discourses used in schools to conceptualise HWB and how they influenced practice (see Hardley et al., [2020] attached as Appendix M). Phases 2 and 3 were both informed by Wiltshire and Ronkainen’s (2021) realist approach to thematic analysis and aimed to understand the main influences which enable or constrain Cityside High educators as they try to support the mental, social, and emotional wellbeing of pupils, especially those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Analytic steps and how theory informed analysis in each phase are described in more detail in the following sections, with phase 2 and 3 described together.
5.7.1 Phase 1: School policy analysis

The first phase of analysis aimed to identify and investigate discourses within Cityside High policy documents to understand how they may construct HWB priorities or practices. This phase was informed by Foucauldian theories which emphasise the role of language (discourse) on the construction of ‘truths’ which, if accepted, influence individuals’ beliefs, perceptions, and experiences (Willig, 2008) (See section 3.5). For example, a care discourse which focuses on the responsibility of adults to care for and protect young people may position educators as experts of care and pupils as passive recipients of care and could have implications for how educators and pupils interact within school contexts (Hardley et al., 2020). Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis examines the relationship between discourse and what people think, feel, and do, and under what conditions. As this thesis is interested in how school context may influence educators’ conceptualisations of and practices to promote HWB, this was deemed a useful starting point.

As described in section 5.5.1, the two formal policy documents provided to me by the school pertained to positive behaviour and procedures for equality, diversity, and anti-bullying. To analyse these documents, Willig’s (2008) Foucauldian-inspired theoretical framework was adapted to structure analysis as well as examine how discourse can construct wellbeing and what ways of thinking or practices are made possible (see Table 3). Within this framework, the first three stages focus on identifying the various discourses and discursive constructions present and how they work to construct ‘truths’ about wellbeing. Then, stage 4 and 5, look at subject positioning and the possibilities for action based on these discursive constructions.
Table 3: Foucauldian-inspired theoretical framework (modelled after Willig, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discursive constructions</td>
<td>How is wellbeing constructed through language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discourses</td>
<td>What discourses are utilised in this construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Action orientation/functioning</td>
<td>How do these constructions function such as assigning responsibility or promoting one ‘truth’ over another?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positionings</td>
<td>How are subjects positioned within this construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practice</td>
<td>What are the possibilities for action presented by the discursive construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis began with reading through the policies to familiarise myself with the documents and noting brief initial impressions (See Appendix N). In the same fashion as my MSc work (Hardley et al., 2020), coding used a hybrid approach using both inductive reasoning to code for policy directives and discursive constructions, and deductive reasoning to identify discourses used in these constructions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), which allows for analysis and theme generation to remain data driven. Inductive analysis was conducted by coding line-by-line using gerunds to keep codes close to the data and aimed to describe what instructions or directives were visible in the policy. Once initial codes were completed, discourses were then deductively identified using a discourse manual developed *a priori* (see Table 4 below). This discourse manual was informed by the literature and by the work of Spratt (2016; 2017). These initial codes and discourses (See Appendix O) provided a starting conceptualisation of HWB priorities and directives within the school and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
Table 4: Discourse manual (abridged from Hardley et al., 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical health promotion (stemming from medical discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as the promotion of physical health behaviours with a focus on individual choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional literacy (stemming from therapeutic discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as the understanding and management of emotions within social situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as interagency collaboration and the responsibility of adults to protect and promote the rights of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flourishing (stemming from philosophical discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised around ideals of living a 'life of value' and supporting pupils' freedom to choose what is valuable to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational outcomes (stemming from accountability discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as its outcomes and effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit-based discourse (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as strategies to reduce perceived shortcomings affecting pupils, staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-based discourse (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as strategies to build on strengths of pupils, staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7.2 Phase 2 and 3: Thematic analysis of individual and dyadic interviews

The second and third phases of the analysis focused on individual and dyadic interviews respectively. These phases aimed to understand the contextual school factors which influenced educators’ beliefs and practices when supporting HWB. As described earlier, abductive and retroductive reasoning use extant theory to generate a plausible causal explanation for observed phenomena and asks questions like, what ‘enables’, ‘facilitates’, or ‘produces’ the observed effect? Therefore, Wiltshire and Ronkainen’s (2021) realist approach to thematic analysis informed coding and analysis (see Table 5 below). This approach follows the broad steps of TA (i.e., familiarising the data, generating initial codes, then identifying and defining themes), but Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) suggest that codes can be differentiated into
three types - *experiential, inferential, and dispositional* - which relate to the layers within ‘deep’ ontology (see section 4.3). These code types build upon each other to move from the specific (e.g., empirical data on participants’ beliefs and experiences) to the general (e.g., possible causal theories) to construct an explanatory account of the phenomena. However, Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) note that because of researchers’ pre-existing knowledge of social theories, moving from descriptive experiential codes to more abstract inferential or dispositional codes may occur simultaneously. Additionally, because knowledge is always mediated through the human mind, this account acknowledges it will always be a partial, situated analysis and not an infallible representation of reality.

Experiential codes refer to subjective views and experiences like beliefs, feelings, practices, or intentions. Inferential codes refer to conceptual redescriptions (inferences) using more abstract language. Dispositional codes refer to theories about the characteristics or properties that have to exist in order to produce the phenomena (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). For example, if a study was analysing reasons why teachers went into the profession, an experiential code may be *feeling inspired by their own teachers growing up*, while an inferential code may be *the importance of positive role models*, and a dispositional code may draw from theories around the relationship between role models or mentorship and career pathways.

Table 5: Coding framework for a realist approach to thematic analysis (adapted from Wiltshire and Ronkainen, 2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological domain</th>
<th>Code type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed experiences - 'the empirical'</td>
<td>Experiential codes</td>
<td>Subjective viewpoints and experiences captured in the data (e.g., beliefs, feelings, practices, intentions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unobserved, but occurring experiences and events - 'the actual'</td>
<td>Inferential codes</td>
<td>Inferences and conceptual redescriptions using more abstract language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unobservable causal powers and potential mechanisms - 'the real'</td>
<td>Dispositional codes</td>
<td>Theories about the properties and powers that must exist in order to produce the phenomena</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis began with data familiarisation during the initial transcription of interview recordings as well as subsequent (re)readings. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and coding was conducted inductively using gerunds to keep codes close to the data and create experiential codes about beliefs, intentions, feelings, and practices, with analytic notes also recorded in the transcript margins to aid interpretation (see Appendix P). Experiential codes are mainly descriptive and relate to ‘the empirical’ ontological domain or to things that can be observed (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). An example of an experiential code and extract are seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential code</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating a range of holidays and festivals</td>
<td>“There's certainly a shift towards inclusivity that I've noticed over the last couple of years. Ringing in festivals, like celebrating Eid and all that kind of thing rather than just sticking to Christian festivals, to try and include ethnic minorities more.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used abductive reasoning to develop inferential codes from experiential codes which Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) claim is an abstracted ‘redescription’ or inference of what may be happening in ‘the actual’ ontological domain whether they can be directly observed or not. An example of the experiential and inferential codes and extract are seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential code</th>
<th>Inferential code</th>
<th>Extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating a range of holidays and festivals</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>“There's certainly a shift towards inclusivity that I've noticed over the last couple of years. Ringing in festivals, like celebrating Eid and all that kind of thing rather than just sticking to Christian festivals, to try and include ethnic minorities more.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, the inferential code is an inference informed by school wellbeing literature and theory. The move from experiential code to inferential code demonstrates a more abstract understanding of the phenomenon of teacher practice beyond simply what is done by a specific participant in the study to conceptualise how this may relate to teachers and the school more
broadly, i.e., relating the particular to the general (Danermark et al., 2019; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). This inferential code relates the practice of celebrating various festivals to a more conceptual idea of creating a sense of belonging (i.e., being included and a valuable part of the school). Saldaña (2015, p. 9) also notes that coding is ‘dynamic and malleable’ and that the same codes may fit into several conceptual categories to consolidate meaning and explanation. For example, the experiential code ‘celebrating a range of holidays and festivals’ could be applied to inferential codes of ‘belonging’ (i.e., conceptualised as a sense of belonging to and part of the school) as well as ‘recognition’ (i.e., conceptualised as valuing pupils and staff as individuals with diverse interests).

The third type of coding is dispositional, or theorising on what must exist for the phenomena to occur (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021), i.e., what causes or enables teachers to focus on creating a sense of belonging? Dispositional codes relate to the ‘the real’ ontological domain and rely on retroductive reasoning informed by “grand theoretical narrative about why the world is as it is” (ibid, p. 173). An example of the dispositional and inferential codes is seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispositional code</th>
<th>Inferential code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, the dispositional code is informed by theory and provides a ‘higher order’ explanation for the inferential codes, (e.g., due to the understanding that individuals derive meaning from affiliation with others, teachers within the school often try to recognise pupils as individuals and foster a sense of belonging in pupils)(Nussbaum, 2006). The incorporation of extant theory to interpret and conceptualise allows for an ‘educated guess’ (judgmental rationality) about likely conditions which may enable or constrain action (Thompson, 2022), but must also recognise that knowledge is fallible and will be impacted by my assumptions, such as familiarity with certain theories.

This coding process was ongoing, with each interview transcript coded using the same process, but codes were also compared across interviews, with codes refined or combined over
time when there was significant similarity. Experiential codes were shortened as they were refined over time (e.g., ‘Celebrating a range of holidays and festivals’ became ‘Celebrating diversity’), with the relationships between codes continually abstracted to build explanation. However, given the focus of the research questions, these relationships were labelled in the language of schools so higher order dispositional concepts like affiliation or democracy were recontextualised as ‘influencing factors’ like relationships and ethos within the school. The experiential, inferential, and dispositional codes and influencing factors are tabulated in Appendix Q.

The third phase of the analysis analysed reflective dyadic interview discussions but followed the same procedure and framework as detailed in phase two. This phase built upon phase one and two as the prior inferences and explanations informed my interpretations of the phase three data. The experiential, inferential, and dispositional codes developed from the dyadic interview discussions are presented in Appendix R.

5.8 Trustworthiness of the research

The aim of research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is to produce rigorous and trustworthy new knowledge. However, because qualitative research is informed by different ontological and epistemological assumptions to quantitative research, different terminology is frequently used in place of more positivistic terms like validity and reliability (Cypress, 2017; S. L. Morrow, 2005; Stahl & King, 2020). First suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) these ‘parallel’ qualitative terms include trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The first concept, trustworthiness, denotes the quality or rigour of qualitative research and the level of trust or confidence readers can have in the findings. Researchers should include consideration of four criteria (the latter four terms) in the pursuit of a trustworthy study (Cypress, 2017; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). Stahl and King (ibid) argue that the onus is on researchers to demonstrate how their study fulfils standards of trustworthiness; therefore, strategies used in this doctoral study to increase rigour are outlined in Table 6 and described in more detail below. Importantly, close connections between the four criteria mean that steps taken to
improve one criterion may improve another, and indeed, the reader will see some overlap of strategies to improve different rigour criteria.

Table 6: Strategies used to improve rigour and trustworthiness of the doctoral study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rigour criteria</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Strategies applied in the doctoral study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>How congruent are the findings with the study phenomenon?</td>
<td>• Triangulation: methodological, data source, and informant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Member checks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Thick description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Debriefing with supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Could similar results be obtained if the study was repeated?</td>
<td>• Audit trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Debriefing with supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>Are the findings applicable to other situations?</td>
<td>• Thick description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Do the findings reflect the study phenomenon (or the assumptions of the researcher)?</td>
<td>• Triangulation: methodological, data source, and informant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audit trail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is used in preference to validity and relates to how congruent the findings are with the research phenomenon under investigation (Stahl & King, 2020). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is one of the most important factors necessary for establishing trustworthiness. Several steps were taken to improve credibility in this thesis.

In line with a case study approach, I used a variety of methods for data collection and analysis (i.e., discourse analysis, individual interviews, and dyadic interview discussions) and various sources of data (i.e., school documents and individual and dyadic interview transcripts) to explore the same phenomenon, which are techniques for methodological triangulation and data triangulation respectively (Stahl & King, 2020). Triangulation can enhance credibility by providing multiple perspectives and vantage points of the study phenomenon which can
corroborate each other and enhance interpretation. In this study, individual and dyadic interviews gave me insight into educators’ beliefs and practice, while school documents gave me insight into the school context, ethos, and priorities.

Shenton (2004) also encourages triangulation of informants, or the use of a wide range of participants with different characteristics to compare and contrast their experiences. Within this thesis, I aimed to sample a range of participants from diverse educational departments to get a wider view of how contextual factors (e.g., school or departmental culture) may influence educators’ understandings and practices when enacting mental, social, and emotional wellbeing policy. This interest in departmental background arose during the course of data collection as some teachers indicated their perception that the PE department attempted to create their own departmental ethos which connected to the overall school ethos. While the majority of participants were from the PE department or had PE professional backgrounds, meaning the sample may not be representative of the wider staff population, there were also some participants from the Maths and Biology departments. This allowed for some comparison across participants and departments to get a richer understanding of staff beliefs, conceptualisations, and practices.

Stahl and King (2020) also suggest informants can be utilised to verify research interpretations using member checking. Member checking occurs when the researcher solicits participant feedback on the accuracy of their interpretations during or after data collection. In this study, member checking occurred during interviews when I would ask clarifying questions around my initial, on-the-spot interpretations like, “Do you mean...” or “It sounds as if you are saying [interpretation], is that right?” Additionally, during dyadic interviews, participants were invited to ask questions or give feedback in relation to the overall interpretations.

The comparison and amalgamation of multiple informants, sources of data, and methods helped to substantiate the research interpretations and compile rich details to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomena. Ponterotto (2015) specifies that a thick description goes beyond simple detail of what is observed and should include detailed interpretations of social action, interaction, or intention that are situated within the context where the action occurred. Similarly, Geertz (1973) suggests a thick description must provide
enough detail of the context and relationships between people and/or environment, so that readers can come to their own conclusions about the credibility of the research findings. Another strategy to enhance credibility was regular, collaborative debriefing sessions with my supervisory board throughout the doctoral study. These sessions allowed for frequent discussion and critique of my research conceptualisations, choices, and practices, and helped me see new ways of thinking or looking at the phenomenon (Cypress, 2017; Shenton, 2004).

5.8.2 Dependability

Dependability is used in preference to reliability and relates to whether similar results would be obtained if the study was to be repeated (Cypress, 2017; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The criterion of dependability suggests that researchers should include a detailed description (i.e., audit trail) of their research choices, analytic decision-making, and emerging interpretations. This detailed audit trail could thereby allow another researcher (or the reader) to assess the logic of analytic decisions or ostensibly repeat the work (Shenton, 2004).

To improve dependability in this thesis, I have written a detailed, in-depth description of and rationale for my research choices including research design, choice of methods, and framework for analyses (see earlier in this chapter). I have also detailed the theoretical frameworks which informed my understanding of the influence of school context (see Chapter 3). I have also included appendices and examples of analytic codes and theme generation.

Additionally, while the proposition of repeatability or replicability of qualitative research is contested due to the assumption that knowledge is subjective and co-constructed, Stahl and King (2020, p. 27) argue that peer debriefing or “using another researcher to read and react [to data sources] with their embedded researcher interpretations” can enhance dependability and trust in the findings through confirmation. Thus, throughout the study I engaged with monthly debriefing sessions with my supervisory team which allowed for audit and discussion of my research choices and conceptualisations, but also provided an opportunity for confirmation of my analysis. Both supervisors were given two anonymised transcripts to independently code, so that we could compare codes and pattern identification. This facilitated discussion of
alternative interpretations, identification of ‘blind spots’, and aided my conceptualisation and analysis of the data (Shenton, 2004).

**5.8.3 Transferability**

Transferability is used in preference to generalisability and relates to whether the findings could be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). While transferability of qualitative research is disputed due to the subjective and context-specific nature of personal experience, nevertheless, expanding knowledge through the transferability of findings from one context to another is a goal of qualitative research. However, Stahl and King (ibid) stress that transferability is not something that can be claimed by the researcher but must be determined by the reader (consumer) of the research. Additionally, transfer is only possible if there is a thick description that is detailed enough to portray the contextual circumstances of the phenomenon under investigation. To enhance transferability of the findings, I included detailed descriptions of contextual factors in various ways throughout this thesis including description of the Scottish policy context, the school setting, participants, and procedures.

As this study aimed to understand how Cityside High staff conceptualised, negotiated, and enacted HWB policy, I provided detailed description of the policy context in Scotland, where the school is located, as well as characteristics of the school setting such as size, school composition and socioeconomic intake, and academic reputation (See section 5.3). During write up of the results, I also included detail around the participants’ personal and professional backgrounds and experiences when they related to the research questions and my interpretations (see chapter 10). Additionally, when writing up the results, I aimed to balance participant quotes with my research interpretations to aid conceptualisation and understanding of the findings (Morrow, 2005). This was done to give prominence to participant ‘voice’ and experiences but provide enough thick description for the reader to understand the contextual circumstances influencing those experiences.

**5.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is used in preference to objectivity and relates to whether the findings reflect the phenomenon being studied or whether they represent the assumptions and beliefs of the
researcher (Morrow, 2005). Morrow (ibid) suggests that many of the strategies to improve dependability will also improve confirmability. For example, inclusion of a detailed methodological description (audit trail) may help readers understand the research process and assess the ‘goodness of fit’ of my choice of theories, methods, analytic frameworks, or ways of presenting the findings. Additionally, triangulation of multiple methods and sources and use of a variety of sources may aid understanding and corroboration of the interpretations. In this thesis, triangulation of methods, informants, and data sources to study the same phenomenon was useful to enhance the breadth of data (collection of multiple viewpoints) and aid interpretation through comparison and confirmation of how educators conceptualise and enact HWB support. However, it is important to note that in this instance, ‘confirmation’ means strengthening interpretation of the contextual factors which may influence participants’ beliefs and behaviour (e.g., personal biographies, discourse, or social norms), not proof of some universal fact or ‘Truth’.

Additionally, within qualitative inquiry, the indelible influence of the researcher to co-construct the data and narrative must be acknowledged. These researcher and participant effects mean the study findings are not ‘objective’. However, qualitative researchers should take steps to consider the impact of their involvement and recognise their presuppositions to avoid presenting them as the participants’ experiences. To that end, engagement with reflexive writing was done in an attempt to be self-aware and recognise my implicit beliefs and assumptions and how these may affect the research inquiry (Finlay, 2002; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). In chapter one, I outlined some of my personal, educational, and professional experiences and explicated how these influenced my research questions, approach, and theoretical positionings. I will also have impacted the data during collection based on who I am and who the participants believe me to be (Finlay, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For example, due to my personal background of feeling negatively judged and criticised as a child, I was keen to have a more positive, strengths-based focus in this study. Thus, when building rapport and reviewing the study purposes at the beginning of individual interviews, I consciously presented myself as an ‘outsider’ – one without classroom teaching experience, who was not judging or evaluating participants’ job performance in comparison to ‘good’ standards. I wanted
participants to perceive me as an empathetic and supportive researcher interested in their beliefs and experiences, not an external ‘expert’ trying to find and fix problems within the school or their practice. Only the participants know to what extent they trusted me or felt comfortable to share their ‘true’ feelings, but I was surprised by the candour participants showed when reflecting on their own experiences (e.g., experiences of childhood trauma or struggles with learning difficulties, bullying, or mental health). On reflection, I believe participants were forthright and that collected data reflected their beliefs and experiences rather than what they thought I wanted to hear.

Additionally, on the surface I am an Asian-American and so will have had different lived cultural and educational experiences than the participants who mostly appeared White Scottish (no demographic information was requested); however, with a more critical view I was similar to many participants in that I grew up middle class. While I did not collect demographic data from participants, Hamby (2021) argues that regardless of upbringing, the process of joining the professional class (e.g., becoming a qualified teacher), will make an individual ‘other’ to low income or working-class populations. This could mean that the similarity participants and I share could be in being dissimilar to socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils and their lived experiences.

5.9 Ethical considerations

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines and principles were adhered to throughout this study (BERA, 2018). Prior to any data collection, ethical approval was granted by the Moray House School of Education ethics committee at The University of Edinburgh (Appendix A) as well as the Local Authority where Cityside High resides (Appendix B). Once ethical approval was granted, I sought informed consent from the school (Appendix C). After the school agreed to participate, I began to recruit potential participants. All participation was voluntary, and potential participants were given a detailed participant information sheet outlining the study aims, purposes, the nature of their involvement and how their data would be collected, used, stored, and disseminated, and their rights to withdraw at any time.
Appendix F and G). Participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix H), and I also sought verbal consent to begin audio-recording before each interview.

Participation in the study was strictly confidential; however, the use of snowball sampling meant that participants referred colleagues to the study, thereby revealing their own participation (Collins & Gray, 2015). To consider matters of consent, participants were asked to give my contact details to potential (snowball) recruits, so they had time to consider whether they wanted to participate without undue pressure from me. Additionally, while confidentiality between participants could not be maintained, care was taken to maintain confidentiality of participants’ individual responses and experiences. Therefore, pseudonyms have been used for the school and all participants, and only departmental affiliations were included to minimise the chance of identification.

Additionally, while sensitive data relating to protected characteristics (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, disability) was not sought as part of the study, occasionally participants would reveal these characteristics as part of their identity. Only when these characteristics were relevant to answering the research questions were they included, and then only in a general sense, separate from any single participant. All data has been securely stored and accessible only to myself and my supervisors.

5.10 Conclusion
The present thesis aimed to explore how educators make sense of and enact HWB policy. As the process of policy sense-making has been described as messy and complex (Maguire et al., 2015), an in-depth qualitative approach was deemed necessary. This chapter has provided a detailed description and rationale for the research design, choice of methods and approach, and framework for analysis. I have also included some methodological and ethical considerations so that the reader can assess my choices and come to their own conclusions about the trustworthiness of my study.
Chapter Six: Introduction to the findings

6.1 Introduction

This introduction to the findings chapter will briefly summarise how the Scottish national curriculum relates to whole school approaches and policy aspirations for educators. Then, it will interrogate the findings from the first phase of data analysis (e.g., school policy discourse) to understand how wellbeing is constructed through discourse, how this may constitute educators’ roles in the promotion of HWB and examine possible implications for pupils from lower SES backgrounds. Finally, it will introduce the four factors identified during the doctoral study as key influences on the ways that teachers enact HWB support within Cityside High (which are explained in more detail in the following chapters).

6.2 Scottish national policy and a whole school approach

This section will briefly summarise the key aims and directives within CfE as they relate to the whole school roles and responsibilities of educators. This summary will serve to provide information on the contextual conditions in which Cityside High operates (See sections 2.2 and 5.3), rather than act as a comprehensive breakdown of the national curriculum which has been done elsewhere (see Spratt 2016; 2017).

A key priority of the Scottish Government is to ‘close the poverty-related attainment gap’ and the government allocates strategic funding to reduce the negative outcomes associated with poverty and inequalities in education (Education Scotland, 2016; Mowat, 2020; Sosu & Ellis, 2014). In response to worries over negative schooling outcomes, wellbeing has risen as an attractive policy strategy to achieve public health goals and compensate for social inequalities (Mowat, 2019, 2020; Spratt, 2017). Thus, current Scottish education policy sets ‘health and wellbeing’ as a core learning area in schools and considers HWB as necessary for the achievement of other educational aspects like learning and preparation for independent living (e.g., learning, life, and work) (Scottish Government, 2007).

The national curriculum also encourages a joined-up whole school approach, that advocates for HWB promotion to go beyond classroom-based learning and teaching
content to permeate all areas and aspects of the school (Scottish Government, 2021; Weare, 2000; WHO & UNESCO, 2021). These approaches see all members and features of the school community as integral to supporting HWB, including school policy, the ethos/culture of the school, relationships within the school and with the surrounding community, school leadership, and the built environment (ibid). This whole school approach is reflected in the curricular concept of ‘responsibility of all’ which emphasises adults’ duty to protect the rights of children and young people, and advocates that all school staff have a responsibility to support the mental, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of pupils (Scottish Government, 2007).

Within CfE, the role and responsibility of educators has shifted from one of prescriptive content deliverers to ‘agents of change’ characterised by flexibility, autonomy, and professionalism (Priestley & Drew, 2016). However, Humes and Priestley (2021, p. 183) note the risk that flexibility means policy is ‘subject to mutation’ depending on context and that aspirations of autonomy or empowerment may not match with the ‘lived reality of teaching’. Thus, it is important to explore how Cityside High’s local school policy constructs the responsibilities of teachers and how this may be interpreted or recontextualised in their practice.

6.3 School policy: discourse, action, and the (self) formation of the educator

Phase one of this thesis involved identification of discourses within Cityside High school policy documents to explore how they may construct wellbeing and teachers’ responsibilities, which may then influence beliefs, experiences, and behaviour (Foucault, 1979; Willig, 2008). As described in Chapter 3, policy and curriculum documents can act as ‘the voice of the state’ and contain discourses that denote what the government considers necessary for teaching and learning (Rossi et al., 2009). As such, they compel action (i.e., directives on how and what teachers should teach, and pupils should learn) and act to socialise individuals on norms, values, and beliefs of how they should behave (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). Ball (2015) calls this ‘policy as discourse’ or the ways in which discourses can form and re-form educators as subjects and subject to policy. Identification and interrogation of discourse is seen as a way to uncover the hidden structures which work to maintain power relations (Gray et al., 2023)
and ask “questions about the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (subjectivity), what they do (practices) and the material conditions within which such experiences may take place” (Willig, 2008, p. 113). Thus, Foucault’s theories on the mechanisms through which discourse can frame and constitute everyday life and practice were helpful for this stage of analysis.

Using the discourse manual from Table 4, the Positive Behaviour Support Policy and Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy were examined, and discourses identified. While a range of discourses were examined such as ‘physical health promotion’ and ‘social-emotional literacy’ (see Table 4), the most prevalent discourse was one of ‘care’ which emphasises adults’ responsibilities to protect the rights of pupils. For example:

“Every child and young person has the right to a high-quality education. Positive relationships and behaviour in all aspects of school life are fundamental to enable effective teaching and learning to take place.” – Positive Behaviour Support Policy

“We are a Rights Respecting School. This policy covers the following articles of the UNCRC: Article 2-You have the right to protection against discrimination. Article 19-You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated. Article 29-You have the right to an education which develops your personality and your respect for other’s rights and the environment.” – Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy

These extracts explicitly define the rights of pupils and draws legitimacy from an authoritative source (the UNCRC). From a Foucauldian perspective, these officially sanctioned truths (norms) about the rights of children implicitly construct what is a ‘high quality’ or ‘rights respecting’ school and thus, govern the beliefs, actions, and responsibilities of school staff. For example, discursive demarcation of what constitutes a ‘high quality education’ could influence what is deemed ‘normal or desirable ways to think, act, and feel’ in schools (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27), such as a belief that positive relationships are a means to achieve effective teaching and learning, rather than a goal in themselves.

It is important to note that a critique of care discourse is not a disavowal of educators’ duties to care for, protect, and safeguard pupils; however, by identifying these discourses it is possible to interrogate and problematise ways in which they can be used for particular purposes or become a regime of truth which constrains thought and action. For instance, previous analyses of care discourses found that they were frequently linked with ‘operational’
discourses that focus on outcomes and measurements and have been critiqued as possibly serving neoliberal purposes (Gray et al., 2023; Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). This discursive link was seen in the Cityside High policies, for example:

“For individual teachers, good organisation, lesson planning and preparation will help to create the right environment within the classroom. Flexibility, choice and, where appropriate, differentiation will also help to minimise challenging behaviour. However, even in these conditions, some children and young people will present with challenging behaviour.” – Positive Behaviour Support Policy

“This policy exists to protect all children, young people and staff within [Cityside High School] from all form of unacceptable behaviours by other children and young people. The emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people is at the heart of achieving the outcomes that our children have the best start to life and are ready to succeed and become: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens, Effective Contributors” – Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy

Within these school policy excerpts it is possible to see reiteration and repetition of CfE language and assumptions, namely reference to the four capacities and the claim that HWB supports the achievement of other outcomes (Scottish Government, 2007). There is also a discursive link made between care discourse (e.g., protection of pupils and staff) and operational and deficit-based discourses. These discourses work together to frame HWB as necessary to achieve other outcomes like the four capacities, or as a method to reduce risk of ‘challenging or unacceptable behaviour’. These discourses contain a moral judgment because they construct the right to a safe school environment as one that is free from ‘unacceptable’ behaviour (a norm). This norm then suggests action, such as that HWB concepts like flexibility, individualisation, and pupil choice can (or should) be used as a technique to achieve specific outcomes (e.g., ‘good’ behaviour as defined by adults). This resonates with research that suggests that HWB is often represented as a prerequisite for other purposes, like learning or behaviour management, instead of HWB being perceived as a goal in itself (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2016, 2017).

Additionally, Spratt (2016) suggests Scottish policy depicts operational HWB outcomes (e.g., individual skills in behaviour or emotion management) as facilitated by caring contexts. However, Noddings (2012) cautions that this form of caring (where care serves other aims) is not really just or ethical if it does not attend to the needs expressed by the pupils. Importantly,
these needs may be expressed in a variety of ways such as direct verbal communication, or through non-verbal behaviour (even those behaviours that may be seen as disruptive, withdrawn, or ‘off-task’); thus, educators need to consider the myriad ways that pupils may express themselves. Noddings (2012) stresses that for social relations to truly be considered caring, the care must be given and received as such. Therefore, if schools or educators simply impose ‘care’ based upon ‘the voice of the state’ rather than being attentive to what the cared-for (i.e., individual pupils) want and need, then this is not true caring. This form of ‘caring’ risks becoming ‘an empty marketing slogan’ or ‘strategic rhetoric’ (McCuaig, 2012, p. 864) to disguise neoliberal aims, like the “state caring for its citizens as a means of looking after itself” (Hunter, cited in McCuaig, 2012, p. 865).

Similarly, discourses of care based upon institutionally defined norms of ‘acceptable’ behaviour can act as a regime of truth that compels not only action, but conduct. Care discourses have been critiqued as ‘dangerous’ (McCuaig, 2012) because by constructing normative truths about ‘good’ behaviour or ‘good’ behaviour management, care discourses constitute the notion of what it is to be a ‘good’ teacher. From a Foucauldian perspective, norms about the ‘good’ teacher renders educators visible, open to judgement, and subject to improvement. These norms then coerce and control by compelling self-improvement (conduct); however, as teachers “get ‘better’ and more competent, [they] are made more biddable” (Ball, 2015, p. 309). According to Foucault (1979), this influence on conduct is how discourse can exercise domination – through the constitution and self-formation of teachers as subjects who are then subjectified by the power relations hidden within discourse.

However, Foucault argued power circulates and could be used to resist more dominant discourses. While the previously mentioned care discourse was prevalent within Cityside High school policy, there were some hints of an alternative discourse of flourishing. For example:

“[Cityside High School] supports every young person to achieve and attain their very best. We respect individuality and celebrate diversity. We provide opportunities for success through a variety of curricular and extra-curricular options and pathways.” – Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy

This excerpt describes the school’s efforts to support pupils to achieve their best through a ‘variety of options and pathways’. This implies the school recognises the subjective, individual
nature of ‘success’ and aims to provide different choices and options so pupils can discover for themselves what their success may look like. Notably, these options are more open to interpretation compared to the prior extract which constructed ‘choice’ as a method for ‘minimising challenging behaviour’. A conceptualisation of choice that is open to a variety of possibilities seems to function as an act of resistance against more directive care discourses which define what is ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’. This more open notion of choice resonates with flourishing discourse and Nussbaum’s concept of practical reason, both of which advocate for individuals’ rights to choose between different options what is personally good or valuable to them (rather than having it defined by the state or the school).

This flourishing discourse provides a different conceptualisation of HWB and the teacher’s role in supporting HWB, one that emphasises facilitating choice. Flourishing discourse can offer an alternative to more neoliberal conceptualisations of ‘care’ or HWB as a prerequisite that serves other purposes; it may also create an opportunity to disrupt taken-for-granted truths and norms of the ‘good’ teacher which could constrain practice. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that while tension between flourishing and care discourses has been found in prior research (Hardley et al., 2020), the two discourses do not have to be mutually exclusive. When describing care, Noddings (2012) differentiates between the needs assumed by the ‘carer’ vs the needs expressed by the ‘cared-for’ and argues that educators should attend to the expressed needs of pupils (as well as the multitude of ways that pupils may express need, such as through non-verbal behaviour). This attentiveness to expressed needs may be especially important for pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as evidence has shown that these pupils may be less likely to feel that they have a say and less likely to feel ‘heard’ when they are in the minority in a more affluent school (Moore et al., 2017).

Similar to notions of choice within flourishing discourse, in school policy there was some emphasis on providing choice and empowering pupils which appeared to draw from trauma-informed approaches to care. For instance, while ‘trauma’ was not directly referenced in the Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy, the policy demonstrates implicit awareness of trauma noting that they ‘recognise the effects that bullying and discrimination can have on a young person’s feelings of worth, on their health and wellbeing and on their schoolwork.’ This
shows an understanding of the ways in which bullying or discrimination can cause trauma for the affected young person such as psychological (e.g., decreased feelings of worth or HWB) or neurological (e.g., challenges with memory or concentration affecting their schoolwork) (Quarmby et al., 2022). The policy also demonstrates a collaborative approach to resolving issues. For example:

“Our support to pupils who are bullied or discriminated against:

- Young people are reassured that they do not deserve this and it is not their fault.
- We assure them that it was right to report the incident.
- We encourage them to talk about how they feel and try to ascertain the extent of the problem.
- We involve them in making choices about how the matter may be resolved.
- We discuss strategies for being safe and staying safe.” — Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Bullying Policy

Within this excerpt, it is possible to see echoes of the core values emphasised by Fallot and Harris (2008) such as safety, choice, and collaboration, in how the bullying will be handled and what the pupil might need from the school. This excerpt also demonstrates how care and flourishing discourses can intersect, with educators upholding their responsibilities to safeguard and protect pupils, but that they can do this in a collaborative way that upholds pupils’ autonomy and self-determination (Noddings, 2012).

Furthermore, Noddings (2012) argues that attentiveness is a key component of a caring relationship and avoiding care that is ‘done to’ pupils. In schools, this means educators ought to ‘listen’ (e.g., through careful attention and consideration of the different ways pupils may communicate) and act on needs as expressed by pupils. There was evidence of this listening in Cityside High. I was given a copy of a ‘You said/We did’ mental health feedback document sent to pupils, and while this was not a formal policy document, it provided further evidence of informal or implicit messages (discourse) about school priorities. This document detailed specific changes the school was taking in response to feedback from the pupil body and included items like signposting to staff that pupils could speak to if they needed support, such as Mental Health First Aiders, guidance, Intercultural Youth Scotland; transparency around the limits of confidentiality in the event of pupil safety; noting amendments to the curriculum to
rectify repetitive lessons, and so on. Within the ‘You said/We did’ document was the implication that the school was listening to and taking on board (care, choice, and collaboration) the opinions of pupils and trying to provide different options for pupils to choose what would best support them (flourishing and choice). There was also evidence of a whole school approach, with amendments going beyond just the curriculum, and working with outside agencies to provide a variety of supports.

As educators engage with policy interpretation and enactment, these alternative discourses may open up new possibilities for educator self-formation and/or (possibly) transformation (Ball, 2015). However, Priestley and Minty (2013) argue that enactment does not just mean faithful delivery of policy as is, but careful and considered interpretation and reflection on the curricular messages, aims, and purposes of education. Moreover, they point out that possibilities for transformation, innovation, or for educators to act as ‘agents of change’ depends on context:

“Agency is ecological; agents act by means of their environment, so that the achievement of agency strongly depends on cultural (meaning, interpretation and understanding), structural (relationships, power) and material resources. The promotion of teacher agency is therefore not solely a matter of enhancing individual capacity, but also requires change to the cultural and structural conditions within which teachers work.” (Priestley & Minty, 2013, p. 50)

Thus, while school documents provide evidence of discourses which conceptualise HWB and may influence policy enactment, further analysis is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the whole school, contextual factors within Cityside High which may influence, enable, or constrain educators as they respond to their responsibilities for HWB promotion.

6.4 Influencing factors within Cityside High

The previous section detailed the findings from phase one of the doctoral study and elaborated on the explicit and implicit messages (discourses) within school policy to explore how these may construct wellbeing or compel action from educators. This is important because education policies (and the discourses therein) are said to reflect the ‘voice of the state’ (Rossi et al., 2009) and work to socialise and shape the beliefs and behaviour of school staff and pupils. As such, the discursive constructions of wellbeing detailed in phase one provide some insight into
policy priorities and inform the second phase of the doctoral study which aimed to understand factors which influence educators’ beliefs and practices to support HWB.

However, education policy is not simply enacted ‘as is’, but subject to translation and (re)interpretation by professionals who will bring their own beliefs, biographies, and experiences to their ‘reading’ of policy (Maguire et al., 2015). Additionally, Priestley and Minty (2013) note the ecological nature of agency, alluding to the impact of context on educators’ ability to enact policy. As this thesis is interested in understanding the key factors which influence how educators from a secondary school serving predominantly affluent pupils conceptualise and enact their HWB practices, especially for those pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, it is important to explore the viewpoints of educators.

This section will briefly introduce the findings from the second phase of the research, which involved analysis of the individual interview data and distinguished four factors highlighted by educators as key influences on their practices. This section will also explain an infographic representation of the relationship between the key influencing factors described by participants (see Fig. 4 below). The four factors highlighted by educators as key influences on their practices as they attempt to support children and young people’s mental, social, and emotional wellbeing are:

- The ethos within the school
- Relationships between staff, pupils, and wider school community
- The importance of leadership
- The impact of personal experience and identity

While each of the four factors exerts individual influence on the practices within the school, they are also overlapping, interrelated, and intertwined, where a change in one factor may create a change in another. This relationship is illustrated and explained in more detail below.
Fig. 4: Collaborative working to support whole school health and wellbeing: influence of four interrelated, enabling factors

This infographic illustrates the relationship between the four factors highlighted by participants as enabling their practices to support HWB. The child at the centre demonstrates the primary focus of participants’ HWB initiatives, which is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, but also represents the centrality that children should play in the decisions that affect them (e.g., notions of voice and participation). The circular nature of the graphic illustrates that each factor makes up a ‘piece of the whole’ of a supportive system surrounding each pupil, reflecting the necessity of each factor for a whole school approach to HWB promotion. Additionally, the circular arrows denote the iterative nature of whole school HWB promotion, which is enhanced by on-going, positive interactions between the four factors. For example, a positive school ethos with shared goals and values may foster an environment that is conducive to the development of positive, collaborative relationships. However, authoritative leadership
may be required to create a cohesive vision and coherent school priorities. Similarly, educators’ motivation and buy-in to school priorities will be influenced by their personal and professional identities, beliefs, and experiences. The findings from this study highlight the key contextual factors perceived by participants as contributing to successful HWB promotion within the school, which corroborate the whole school framework advocated by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2021). However, it is also important to acknowledge some limitations of this model. This infographic illustrates a micro-view of the interrelationships between school-based factors highlighted by participants as enabling their practice. As such, wider contextual factors like interagency working or the views of parents are not represented. These limitations are addressed in more detail in section 12.6.

6.5 Conclusion
This chapter has described Scottish national curriculum aspirations for educators and how these aspirations may relate to local policy within Cityside High. The chapter also explored the findings of phase one, which consisted of a discourse analysis of local policy. This stage identified two dominant discourses of care and flourishing and examined how these discourses could influence educators’ practice. This chapter also introduced four factors identified by study participants as enabling their practice. In the following chapters, these four factors are examined in more detail. Each factor is described separately for clarity’s sake, but with explicit discussion of how the four factors overlap and influence each other and teacher practice.
Chapter Seven: Influencing factor - Ethos

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on ethos as a key influencing factor, where ethos is defined as the underlying values, beliefs, goals, and expectations that influence school practices and the ways in which different members (e.g., leadership, staff, pupils, and parents) of the school community interact (Glover & Coleman, 2005). However, the terms ‘ethos’ and ‘culture’ are used interchangeably to reflect participants’ word choices (See section 2.8.1). The chapter will begin by examining the ethos/culture within Cityside High, then explore how educators’ understandings of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage are reflected in the school ethos and how these understandings may impact school practices and contribute to overall school wellbeing.

7.2 The ethos/culture within Cityside High

Research has suggested that a positive school ethos may support and amplify pupils’ mental, social, and emotional wellbeing by creating the conditions and environment which will allow for social and emotional skills to be developed and practised (Banerjee et al., 2014). Going further, Banerjee et al. (2014) argue that whole school approaches, involving the entire school community, are crucial for creating and reinforcing this positive school ethos.

The ethos within Cityside High, as well as one of its feeder primary schools, appeared to focus on various social processes to support wellbeing, namely: belonging, recognition, normalisation of speaking about wellbeing challenges, non-judgement, and trust. These processes will be discussed in the following sections.

7.2.1 Belonging

Within Cityside High there appears to be an ethos that focuses on creating an environment where pupils feel included, connected, and that they belong in the school – with the motto of the school relating to belonging¹. The concept of school belonging has become a popular topic in education research because of wide evidence of a positive association between belonging and HWB (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018; Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters,
Descriptions of school belonging have emphasised feeling accepted, valued, and safe and being able to form connections within the school community (Riley, 2019a) and these characteristics are seen in the way participants described the school ethos:

“Ensuring that everybody feels that they have the ability to achieve, they can all progress and succeed, and ensuring that everyone feels like they have a place and that they belong...We want them to all feel like they're going somewhere, that they belong where they are, and that they're safe where they are.” – Kathleen, Biology

“Our vision [relates to belonging]...like whether you can identify with being a pupil at the school...the range of activities on offer...being able to identify with a member of staff who you connect with, that you can talk to, gives you that sense of belonging or as a group.” - Mary, SLT

These excerpts emphasise pupils feeling safe and like they have a place at the school. Mary also notes the importance of being able to form positive relationships with school staff for pupils’ sense of belonging. This reflects literature that has pointed to the key role that relationships play in supporting feelings of belonging (Riley, 2019a). Schools have been argued as important sites for supporting belonging due to their ability to foster social interactions and social networks for young people (Allen et al., 2016). School belonging has also been posited as especially important during adolescence (age 12-18) due to the developmental transitions pupils undergo. This time period may include changes in physical environments as pupils transition from primary to secondary school (Holt, Hardley, Gray, & McQuillan, 2022), transformation of identity formation, shifts in parental and peer relationships, and changes in priorities and expectations (Allen et al., 2018).

Notably, the emphasis on belonging and wellbeing applied not only to current pupils, but prospective pupils as well, with participants from both Cityside High and a feeder primary school sharing the cross-cluster work they do to ease transition and support HWB, especially mental health. For example:

“We’re now moving towards working with our primaries so looking at our Primary 5-6 strategies...so before they even arrive with us, they’ve got skills for dealing with mental health...they’d have got a resilience of transition, particularly those who are anxious or maybe feeling that going to high school might be challenging for them.” – Olivia, SLT

“We’ve got a strong relationship with the high school, and...the cluster schools we meet regularly. We contact them at the high school...to make sure that they know individual children well. We talk about supports that we’ve got...and how they are going to either transfer or adapt
them at the high school. And yeah, I feel like we've got key contacts of people, we know where to go to, and we know that the support is going to be translated.” – Helen, Primary SLT

In these excerpts, transition appears to be a frequent topic for school planning with regular cross-cluster meetings and collaboration. Olivia and Helen both describe interagency working to ensure continuity of supports from primary to secondary, and efforts to ease the transition of pupils ‘before they even arrive’ at the secondary school. Helen explicitly notes how the cluster schools meet regularly to discuss existing supports in primary and how they will be transferred to the secondary context. It is clear that Cityside High and one of the primary schools in the cluster are aware that transition can be a difficult time for pupils as they face new environments, teachers, friendship groups, and expectations which can cause anxiety or worry (Holt et al., 2022; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

While research suggests that transition-related anxiety or decreases in wellbeing often dissipate quickly (West et al., 2010), some suggestions for easing transition include increased liaison time between primary and secondary schools (Zeedyk et al., 2003). Increased time spent on transition, rather than a ‘one-off’ event at the end of the school year, allows for more effective information sharing about pupils’ needs, supports, and school practices (Holt et al., 2022; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Increased time and information sharing resonates with the ‘joined up’ working encouraged by whole school approaches, and may support pupils’ sense of safety, belonging, or wellbeing. Weare (2000) suggests that schools that provide pupils with a sense of consistency and stability, such as through information sharing to ensure continuity of existing routines and supports, may provide a sense of safety, help pupils cope with change, and ease transition. Similarly, Allen et al. (2016) and Riley (2019a) suggest that a feeling of safety at school can play a role in creating a sense of school belonging. Research also points to the importance of strong leadership and collaborative relationships for facilitating cohesive and consistent approaches to support pupils’ wellbeing during transition, which may also benefit from more time spent on transition activities (Holt et al., 2022). These strategies suggested by prior research - increased time spent on transition activities, leadership, and collaborative working towards common goals – appear to be present in the current doctoral study.

Beyond the transition period, in Cityside High the ethos and focus on belonging and inclusion extends across the school including activities, events, and celebrations:
“There’s certainly a shift towards inclusivity that I’ve noticed over the last couple of years. Ringing in festivals, like celebrating Eid and all that kind of thing rather than just sticking to Christian festivals, to try and include ethnic minorities more.” – Malcolm, Maths

Within this excerpt there is explicit recognition that changes in the demographic makeup of the school (e.g., ethnicity or religion), means a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to celebrations or teaching content may not be relevant for all pupils. The school’s acknowledgement of the differing needs of pupils may be especially important for those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as research has found that in the UK, pupils from lower SES backgrounds are twice as likely to feel they do not belong in schools than more affluent pupils (Riley, 2019a). This can have negative implications for lower SES pupils as ‘not-belonging’ is associated with lower school engagement, decreased HWB, and decreased academic outcomes (ibid).

Participants noted that ‘not one thing works for everybody’, thus believe providing a more diverse range of activities, supports, or extracurricular activities might help foster a sense of inclusion and belonging. This reflects literature that found that extracurricular activities which were based on pupils’ interests promoted a sense of belonging and school connectedness with the researchers hypothesising this was because a wide offering of activities could increase pupils’ participation, development of relationships, and connection with the school (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). Furthermore, Rowe and Stewart (ibid) found that the association between extracurricular activities and sense of belonging transpired when pupils felt they had a say in determining the activities offered. Providing pupils with opportunities to have a say and to contribute reflects flourishing discourses which suggest wellbeing is enhanced when individuals have the right to autonomy and self-determination about what they are able to do and who they are able to be in school (Hardley et al., 2020; Nussbaum, 2006; Powell et al., 2018; Spratt, 2017). This is seen in the practices of Cityside High which emphasise pupil voice and creating an ethos where pupils feel they are listened to, included, and are a valued part of the school:

“If you walked into the school, you would see boards surrounded with pictures of the [anti]bullying ambassadors, the respect ambassadors, the equalities group, and I think it’s certainly a forward-thinking school with regards to everybody [belonging]; nobody has got more say than anybody else. There’s a big, big push on pupil voice [which] is included in every policy.
Teaching and learning models, everything has a pupil version that’s been contributed to by form reps [pupil representatives].” – Graeme, PE

“Pupils have amazing opportunities to go into a range of interests, so I think we've got lots to offer, and we have a really strong pupil voice in school. That's something that we kind of developed a lot over the past few years is really promoting the pupil voice and making sure that they are at the centre of all decisions, and actually are the main influencers of decisions that go on in the school, along with the staff and parent body.” – Rory, SLT

These excerpts demonstrate that the school seems to be focusing on creating an ethos that champions democratic values and encourages opportunities for pupil agency, participation, contribution, and engagement. This focus on pupil voice reflects Spratt’s (2017) and Nussbaum’s (2006) suggestion that wellbeing and flourishing rely upon individuals’ freedom and capability to choose what is personally of value to them. However, Nussbaum (ibid) cautions that ‘freedom’ and ‘capability’ are not the same thing, and that freedoms like the right to participation and to have a say are only really secured if pupils have the capability to exercise these freedoms. For instance, if lower SES pupils are less likely or less capable to contribute their ‘voice’, then their freedom to participate only ‘exists on paper.’ Likewise, participants in this doctoral study described multiple efforts to ‘hear’ pupil voice (e.g., pupil-led groups, pupil representatives, channels for anonymous feedback, and focus groups), but it was less clear how pupils were selected for inclusion in these efforts, whether pupils from lower SES backgrounds felt as able to participate, and how this may impact their feelings of belonging within the school. This question will be examined in more detail in Chapter twelve.

Similarly, participation in extracurricular activities, opportunities to have their voice heard, and feeling a sense of school belonging may not be equally accessed by all pupils, for example, if socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils feel unable to attend school trips or participate on sports teams, they may feel socially excluded or as if they do not ‘fit in’ with their peers. This possibility is recognised by Cityside High and so the school takes practical steps to reduce financial barriers for pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds including fee-waivers for classes or extracurricular activities, lower-cost uniforms, and ongoing fundraising to cover costs. For example:
“Whenever we were aware of a barrier that was financial, we try and mitigate that by providing whatever they need, [but] we have struggled in the past to know how best to reach out to those families without offending them.” – Mary, SLT

“These kinds of practical solutions I do think have a knock-on effect to pupils’ mental wellbeing because, actually, you’re removing that implication without any questions being asked. You’re removing costs, for example, which can be a huge burden to the pupils and their parents and carers. So, removing that, I suppose, helps that kind of sense of belonging.” – Rory, SLT

These excerpts show the school is aware that structural or financial barriers may mean some pupils do not feel like they belong or may have fewer positive experiences at school which can negatively impact their HWB. The school is also aware that barriers beyond finances can limit pupil participation or belonging, so educators actively monitor other challenges such as being ‘looked after’ (in foster care) or having caring responsibilities. The school is trying to take proactive steps to mitigate some of these various barriers, such as extra homework help, but this can be challenging. Mary notes the risk of inadvertently causing feelings of shame, offense, or stigmatisation when offering support and admits that this may have impeded efforts in the past, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter 8.

Additionally, the emphasis on belonging and inclusion has not always been the ethos within Cityside High with several participants sharing that in the past, the main goal of the school was high attainment. The school’s current focus on recognition of diverse strengths and achievements beyond simply attainment and how this may support feelings of wellbeing will be explored next.

7.2.2 Recognition

Recent research has highlighted the potential of recognition for promoting wellbeing in schools and suggests that children’s wellbeing is enhanced when they are recognised and respected (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Graham, Powell, Thomas, & Anderson, 2017; Thomas et al., 2016). Graham et al. (2017) contend that there are three modes of recognition visible in schools – pupils feeling ‘cared for’, ‘respected’, and ‘valued’. Feeling cared for appears similar to concepts of belonging in that it relates to a sense of feeling safe, loved, and accepted in school and social relationships. Feeling respected often relates to ideas of ‘rights’, such as having the right to have a say and the right to being treated fairly (i.e., without prejudice). Feeling valued related
to feeling known as an individual and supported in difference (e.g., celebrating diversity or individuality). The idea behind recognition is that the wellbeing of both staff and pupils can be enhanced when they feel acknowledged and accepted as individuals, feel treated with fairness and respect, and appreciated for their unique differences, strengths, and contributions (Thomas et al., 2016).

In Cityside High there seemed to be a changing ethos around ideas of recognition, with several participants noting the ‘traditional’ history of the school as high performing and high achieving. Part of that traditional history was an emphasis centred around levels of high academic attainment, where recognition of pupils often focused on ‘high-flyers’ and those achieving strong test scores; however, participants also noted how this focus has shifted over time to recognise and celebrate more diverse achievements:

“That’s changed a lot. We’ve come from quite a traditional middle-class school where the Cityside High pupil did well and everybody else ‘just had to get on with it’, to really moving to an ethos that is very much: everybody’s here, everybody belongs here, and everybody can be successful.” – Olivia, SLT

In the past, “it was very much just about attainment and to be somebody you had to be an attainer. Whereas now, yes, we still recognise that, and I think it’s really important to do that, but we are much wider in terms of pupils’ achievements are recognised and celebrated in the same way as attainment, and that creates a far more inclusive environment.” – Mary, SLT

These excerpts demonstrate how the school believes recognition of achievements beyond attainment is more inclusive and beneficial for pupil wellbeing. The school still celebrates when pupils do well on exams and qualifications, but they are actively trying to recognise and value other achievements and other versions of success. For example:

“Some pupils, a successful school day for them is, ‘I got through all my work’, which is fine. For other pupils, a successful school day was ‘I stayed in all of my classes’. It depends on each individual pupil. I think a big part of what I feel like is important to do, if you know these kids...you celebrate that success regardless of what it is. So, I think that’s sort of where I’m coming from, that [achievement] looks different for everybody because everybody is in a different place, on a different journey.” – Kathleen, Biology

Implicit in this focus on wider recognition, is the acknowledgement that pupils bring their own histories and context (e.g., individual abilities, cultural or economic backgrounds, day-to-day lived experience) to school which can impact their sense of belonging (Riley, 2019a), attainment, achievement, or relationships with school staff and peers. As Kathleen notes above,
‘everybody is on a different journey’ and while successes may look different, they are all worthy of recognition and celebration.

Similarly, taking a wider view of success and achievement was seen as an opportunity to recognise and validate different abilities and paths through life:

“Not being as clever as someone else in the school doesn’t mean you’re not going to be successful in your own right. Sometimes it takes you a wee bit different path to find out what it is that you’re going to end up doing.” - Alistair, PE

This quote seems to mirror the school’s acknowledgement that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to achievement and demonstrates a strengths-based focus on recognising the abilities that pupils already possess (Whiting, Kendall, & Wills, 2012). This strengths-based focus echoes a flourishing discourse and is more likely to be inclusive as it asserts there is no ‘right’ way to achieve, to be, or to live, but encourages pupils to learn what may be of value to them (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017).

7.2.2.1 Staff recognition

In the school, a goal is not only recognition of pupils, but also staff. Mary described a practice within the school of distributing a stuffed toy owl to staff members when they were recognised for doing well in supporting pupil HWB, especially mental health:

“What that did was two things: one, it made the member of staff feel valued and they would then go talk about it with their colleagues that, ‘I got an owl today.’ Their responsibility then was to keep that owl for a week and then once they heard about somebody else who had done something, they then passed it along. What then began to happen is that pupils would ask - ‘what is the owl for?’ So, what it did was it's about keeping the mental health agenda really high and that it's okay to talk about it.” – Mary, SLT

This practice appeared to act as a fun way to foster staff camaraderie by creating an opportunity for conversation, and a method to support staff wellbeing through positive recognition of their good work. Mary suggested that the owls could facilitate dialogue as staff and pupils would discuss the appearance of the owl and why it was received, which in turn served as a chance to raise awareness and normalise talking about mental health. The feeder primary school also attempted to recognise the good work of their staff with a tangible object, a mug with candy/sweets or a card acknowledging their efforts and contributions. The mug and card were perceived as nice gestures to help staff feel valued, recognised, and appreciated.
Besides tangible objects to recognise the work of different staff members, positive recognition was seen in the way SLT talk about the teachers:

“The staff really care, you know, really care. They’re not just teaching young people, they’re teaching people. So, they’re really interested in, ‘Are you ok? Is there anything I can do to help make things better for you?’ I think that feature in our school is what makes it really strong to be honest. That would be my biggest asset, is the people.” – Olivia, SLT

Equally, teachers often spoke highly about the senior leaders, for example:

“The belief they’ve [the school and SLT] shown in me. It’s very inspirational that they’ve shown me the belief, the trust. They’ve seen the difference I’ve made to pupils… Aye, that makes me feel pretty emotional myself that they believe in me like that.” – Alistair, PE

These excerpts suggest a shared sense of mutual admiration and respect between school leaders and teachers and reflects research on the impact of recognition for wellbeing (Thomas et al., 2016). Thomas et al. (ibid) found that feelings of wellbeing were enhanced when individuals felt known, cared-for, respected, and valued, which they suggest are all components of recognition.

7.2.3 Normalisation of challenge and non-judgement

In Cityside High, as well as one of the feeder primaries, a key focus is on raising awareness and understanding of HWB, which appears to be seen as a way to normalise a spectrum of emotions, both positive and negative. The school wants to ensure that pupils understand the different elements of their own HWB as well as how to get support when they are not feeling well. For example:

“It’s about creating that awareness of what is good health and wellbeing. Then making young people feel comfortable enough to understand what it is that they’re feeling and that it’s okay to be feeling that, and to understand the reasons why they’re feeling these things. And then the next one would be the support available. How can the school then help when, you know, once the pupils are aware of the problem?” – Kieran, PE

In this excerpt, there is an emphasis on how the school supports pupils with aspects of their HWB, reflecting a care discourse (Hardley et al., 2020; Noddings, 2012). There is also an implicit acknowledgement that positive HWB is not constant, with Kieran noting ‘when’ (rather than ‘if’) pupils experience a problem. However, rather than see this as a problem or deficit to be fixed,
he notes the school ethos focuses on helping pupils understand their emotions, both positive and negative, as well as normalising experiencing challenges or periods of decreased HWB.

This focus was reiterated by several participants who note the importance of discussing struggles and seeking support in an effort to normalise and destigmatise dealing with challenges like mental health issues. For example:

“There’s a big emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. We’ve got a lot of Mental Health First Aiders; I’m trained as a First Aider, and there’s a lot of discussion about that. We have mental health surveys that we give out to the kids where they can anonymously talk about things. We are very open about the fact that it’s okay not to be okay.” – Kathleen, Biology

“When something is secret and you don’t talk about it - which I think mental health was for a long time, and it was considered to be almost a weakness, particularly in boys - you just didn’t talk about it. Because it’s now right across everybody [experiencing mental health challenges], it’s become…normalised that it’s ok to talk about it. So, it’s that, ‘It’s okay to not be okay’ message that has given us the opportunity to say, ‘Look everybody needs a toolbox. Everybody will need help sometimes. This is not just for that little group over there; this is for all of you.’” – Olivia, SLT

These excerpts both describe the school trying to be open about speaking about mental health. Olivia expressed beliefs that mental health became a common topic in public discourse due to general decreased wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Yet, while mental health was negatively impacted by COVID-19, Olivia also appeared to see this as an opportunity to normalise experiencing and speaking about challenges due to the perception of impacting ‘right across everybody’. She also described her view that this openness could help reduce the idea that mental health is a ‘taboo’ subject.

Similarly, there was also an emphasis on non-judgement. Several participants spoke of making mistakes and highlighting them as opportunities to learn:

“I think the culture is that we know people will make mistakes. We all make mistakes...You have to make mistakes, otherwise you don’t learn. So, there’s not that sense of judgment.” - Helen, Primary SLT

“Getting them to realise...that part of growing up is making mistakes. You have to fail, or you’ll not learn.” – Alistair, PE

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8Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a voluntary training programme that teachers can take as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers trained in MHFA wear colourful lanyards that show they have received the training. The MHFA programme provides general information about mental health issues and initial responses; it is not training to become a mental health worker (Smhfa.com, n.d.).
This appears along the same lines as being open about challenges, where the school wants to normalise making mistakes and experiencing setbacks. This was seen as a chance to reduce judgement, shame, or stigma associated with ‘failing’ by highlighting that everyone makes mistakes and that they are a chance to grow, learn, and develop.

Notably, as the excerpts above demonstrate, the focus on normalising and destigmatising making mistakes appears to be a mutual goal across Cityside High and their feeder primary, suggesting a shared vision and ethos. A shared ethos may be important for cross-cluster initiatives to support HWB as previous research suggested shared understandings could help foster more cohesive implementation (Holt et al., 2022).

7.2.4 Trust and collegiality

When speaking about supporting pupils’ HWB participants often spoke about trust.

“I suppose it’s about creating that environment and that relationship with the pupils where you can establish that level of trust and support.” – Kathleen, Biology

“A lot of kids started getting support because we made the environment one where we don’t slander each other [for experiencing problems]. Kind of that circle of trust, where if you’re in here we’re not belittling people’s feelings - this is a safe space if you’re comfortable enough to talk about them [feelings], you can talk about them.” – Liam, PE

As highlighted in the previous section, these excerpts demonstrate that the teachers believe an emphasis on non-judgement contributes to building a sense of trust. By creating an ethos and environment where pupils trust and believe that they will not be belittled, judged, or laughed at, pupils may feel safer from social ridicule. It is also apparent that teachers believe trust can lead to positive relationships between pupils and staff, where pupils feel comfortable opening up and sharing their experiences or asking for support. This echoes research which found trust to play a substantial role in relationships, where pupils linked trust with notions like feeling loved, safe, and cared for (Powell et al., 2018).

The linkage of non-judgement and trust did not only apply to pupil-teacher relationships, but also to staff-leadership relationships and the relationships between colleagues:
“Previous Head Teachers have led the school very well, but maybe micromanaged staff to the extent that they were afraid to take any kind of decisions or risks, which kind of stifled, I think, progress. Whereas [now], I think staff were positively encouraged at the outset to take risks and do things that may not work but at least we've tried.” – Mary, SLT

When educators felt trusted to make decisions and felt like they were not going to be judged or reprimanded for making mistakes, then this enhanced feelings of safety, confidence, and willingness to try new things. Not only were they willing to try different approaches, but they were also more willing to disclose challenges to colleagues, seek advice, share practice, receive feedback, and request support:

“The depute…she's who I go to when I don't feel like I'm mentally doing well either, and she's sort of my sounding board of, 'Okay, this is my approach I'm taking with this class and this kid. Does this sound reasonable?' Being able to go to the guidance staff and have a chat with them, because I feel like I take a lot of it on personally, and so I have discovered over the years that I have to go and speak to people.” – Kathleen, Biology

“What I really like about it is that people will go, and they will seek advice from their colleagues. They will seek advice and feedback from the pupils. They'll seek advice and feedback from the families. Everyone is constantly striving to see how they can make a difference, how they can make things better, how they can work collectively to improve.” - Helen, Primary SLT

These excerpts demonstrate that educators felt like they could share challenges and concerns with colleagues without fear of judgement. This was also seen as having a positive effect on collegiality and ‘collective improvement’ because staff members were willing share advice and practice.

7.3 Conceptualisations of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage reflected within the school ethos

As detailed in Chapter 2 (see section 2.9.1), school ethos is frequently conceptualised as the underlying “range of values and beliefs, which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organisation” (Donnelly, 2000, p. 134). These values can influence school culture, relationships, and practices (Glover & Coleman, 2005); thus, it is important to examine how HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage are reflected within the ethos of Cityside High.
Within the school there appeared to be a shared understanding of HWB as holistic - comprised of physical, mental, social, and emotional components. These holistic conceptualisations were both explicitly and implicitly expressed. Participants often spoke explicitly about physical aspects of wellbeing, such as:

“If you're coming in and let’s say for example, that you haven't had the positive start to the day, you’re less nurtured or haven't had that breakfast you know, that sets you off on the wrong footing, so making sure that health and wellbeing is in place is hugely important.” – Rory, SLT

“Promoting healthy eating and about reproduction and safe relationships...anything from nutrition and physical activity to...getting kids to understand how your brain works and...why you might be feeling what you’re feeling. So, all of those kinds of things feed into [HWB], it's an enormous subject.” – Isla, Biology

In these excerpts there are explicit references to things like nutrition, physical activity and physical safety in terms of sexual relationships and reproduction. Beyond physiological needs, Rory and Isla also make links to more intangible aspects like being ‘nurtured’ or understanding the mind and different feelings or emotions.

These physical elements echo what Nussbaum (cited in Markham & Aveyard, 2003) called fundamental human needs, including food, shelter, sleep, and safety. However, Nussbaum suggests individuals have further needs like the ability to form affiliations and connections with others. Likewise, Riley (2019a) suggests pupils require both physical safety and emotional safety. These more intangible needs like social connection and emotional safety are reflected in the ethos of Cityside High with its focus on belonging, inclusion, recognition, non-judgement, and trust. For example:

“Physical health [was] always the one kids knew more about because of things in PE or it’s more advertised...whereas the rest of the wellbeing [aspects] were not necessarily ignored, but it was only if you went to the doctor with issues that it would start to be addressed. Whereas now, having the ability to be more confident to talk around it...especially in school when we started including mental health stuff. Things like, we’re a LGBTQ+ school, we obviously try and go for equality, so everyone is treated as equals. I think that made a big difference because people who were dealing with those issues tend to have that fear of bullying and stigma around them. And because you were tackling that, that opened doors to tackle other areas.” – Liam, PE

“A huge focus of the work with the equalities, I think that kind of directly has a link with wellbeing. So, part of that is the school’s motto and the work with the equalities is about that sense of belonging.” – Lachlan, PE
These excerpts seem to refer to intangible needs like emotional safety as well as school values like belonging and equality. In these quotes, the term equality appears to be used in the sense of non-prejudice or non-discrimination, for example, Liam notes ‘everyone is treated as equals’, while Lachlan appears to reference ‘equalities’ in terms of protected characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation). This emphasis on non-discrimination evokes philosophical ideals of inclusion, fairness, and respect – where pupils trust that they will be treated equally, feel safe to be who they are, and can have a say in the decisions that affect them. These ideals reflect flourishing discourses which suggest HWB and being able to live life well hinges upon autonomy and the freedom to choose between options for their own wellbeing (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2016, 2017).

7.3.2 Conceptualisations of socioeconomic disadvantage reflected within the school ethos

Similar to understandings of HWB, conceptualisations of socioeconomic disadvantage within the school ethos often had a holistic focus, making connections between disadvantage and mental, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing. When participants reflected on ways that socioeconomic disadvantage might impact the HWB of pupils, they often spoke of access. For example:

“With the low socioeconomic background...the access to, from a PE point of view, getting involved in team sports, that social aspect might not be as readily available as [those] coming from a family, who, you know, takes you to football training and then pushes you off to swimming after. You’re getting this great kind of social circle, where you feel like you’re part of something. Feeling slightly more isolated and stuck at home and feeling like things, I can see why that would build up problems with mental, social, and emotional [wellbeing].” – Kieran, PE

Within this excerpt it is possible to see links made between practical, physical aspects of disadvantage (e.g., inability to access or attend sports and extracurriculars) and mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, such as feelings of isolation, social exclusion, or decreased belonging.

Similar to conceptualisations of wellbeing, descriptions of socioeconomic disadvantage often made links to concepts of belonging, equity, access, and capability. For example:
“Part of our strength as a community is there’s a lot of fundraising that goes on to go into the opportunities fund, that helps support all pupils to get equal opportunities....making sure that parents and families know that they can take part in all the opportunities just the same as everybody else. We’ve got uniform exchanges, we’ve got uniform swaps, we’ve got prom hire set up, we’ve got all the things that mean a lot to pupils but may not necessarily be able to access it. But we will remove that barrier, which is just a huge kind of stress relief for many. Home economics payments, craft and design payments, extracurricular payments, we’ve got rid of as much as we can.” - Rory, SLT

“We do to try and ensure that every young person believes that, so no matter how they feel, what barriers they may feel are in their way, that there is something in the Cityside High School which allows them to be successful.” - Olivia, SLT

Olivia acknowledges the ‘barriers’ that some pupils face, and Rory describes the school’s efforts to provide ‘equal opportunities’, pointing to philosophical concepts of equity, justice, inclusion, and fairness – where pupils will have the same opportunities as their peers, unhindered by financial barriers. Beyond financial support, some participants also noted attempts to provide flexibility around assignment deadlines to accommodate pupils who may have household environments or responsibilities that are less conducive to homework. These examples show that Cityside High is aware of the unequal contexts some of their pupils face and school efforts to compensate for them. These excerpts reflect a care discourse which emphasise adults’ responsibilities to protect pupils’ rights (e.g., autonomy, participation, and equal opportunity) and the school’s duty to create a supportive environment for wellbeing (Noddings, 2012). Cityside is actively trying to care by considering pupil context when assigning schoolwork, providing supports like uniform exchanges, and ensuring practical measures are in place to increase socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils’ opportunities for autonomy and ability to participate.

However, Weare (2000) acknowledges the limits of autonomy. She argues that the degree of freedom to choose must be suited to pupils’ age, maturity level, and personality, which will engender some aspect of judgement on behalf of the school. Still, she contends that schools should aim to enable autonomy and independence for pupils as much as possible (ibid). Similarly, Spratt (2017) and Noddings (2012) caution that a power differential can exist between the ‘carer’ and the ‘cared-for’ which could mean caring behaviours may not always benefit the young person and could sometimes even be detrimental to their wellbeing. Noddings (ibid)
argues that in order to be truly considered caring, educators must attend to the needs expressed by pupils, and allow pupils to choose and have a say in their care. Moreover, Nussbaum (2006) argues, ‘freedom to choose’ is not guaranteed unless there are reasonable measures in place to ensure pupils have true agency, autonomy, and capability to make choices for their own wellbeing.

This tension – between a care discourse and care done ‘in the best interest of pupils’ (as determined by adults), and a flourishing discourse, encouraging choices made by the pupils themselves – was seen in previous research conceptualising wellbeing (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2016, 2017). Schools can face challenging decisions and discussions as they navigate this tension and try to appease conflicting viewpoints, which was seen in Cityside High as they considered relaxing strict uniform rules. The school reflected on the ‘traditional’ history of the school uniform but acknowledged the option between more or less affordable blazers could ‘highlight differences’ between pupils and be a source of stigmatisation. For example:

“Our uniform policy has loosened slightly because of COVID restrictions...the kind of relaxation of the school blazer, the fact that [pupils] can come in slightly more casual, as long as it’s still black and white uniform has, I think, probably helped that stigmatisation.... So, currently the Head Teacher has a consultation outwith both pupils, staff, and parents regarding our school uniform [and] how we move forward.... What we’re finding...from the feedback, there is a very diverse range of opinion in relation to school uniform...so it will be very interesting and challenging to find, I suppose, a way forward that’s going to keep everybody on board. I think it’s one of these issues that will divide, some people have very strong opinions about what it should be like - both pupils, parents, and staff.” – Mary, SLT

This excerpt demonstrates the challenge that Cityside High faces as it tries to balance the needs and desires of the whole school community. Educators in the school may have had their own opinions but were working to consult, listen to, and involve the community in the decision-making process. The school recognised that changes to deep-seated cultural beliefs, values, or expectations take time and can be challenging, but were worthwhile to pursue in the effort to reduce inequalities for their pupils.
7.4 “It’s only words on walls, unless we live by them”: the importance of embodying the culture/ethos

Several participants noted that posters displaying words reflecting the school’s values were hung around campus. These posters include words like ‘respect’, ‘resilience’, ‘teamwork’, or ‘courage’. However, these words need to be embodied by staff and pupils to be considered part of the school ethos/culture:

“A lot of people have got a lot of words on walls, but they don’t live by them. They don’t break the words down to really understand what it means. So, if I ask a group of lads what ‘courage’ means they might talk about fighting and things like that. That’s not courage, courage is doing the right thing no matter what. Courage is being there for someone. Courage is showing your feelings and your emotions.” - Alistair, PE

“I suppose it’s like any business where you could want the world, but if it doesn’t suit people’s ability to do it or skill sets you can never create it. Or some people just don’t believe in it.” - Liam, PE

Alistair and Liam express beliefs that unless the school community believes in, supports, and has the capability to ‘live by’ the school values, then they run the risk of simply being ‘words on walls.’ This represents the possibility for incongruence between ethos and practice, where the formal ethos may suggest purported school values, but practices may suggest different values (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Ensuring the school community believes in the ethos and values can be difficult as it may involve changing long-standing opinions and expectations. For instance, Olivia notes changing the school ethos/culture to be more inclusive and to recognise wider achievements beyond attainment has been challenging:

“That's all been a gradual process. I've been here for six years, and it's probably taken me four years to see that culture moving through. You know, it's because you've got to change the hearts and minds of everybody. It's not just about the pupils and how they feel about their school, but also about the parent body, the staff, you know. We have had in the past, staff say, ‘Well, that's not a Cityside High pupil.’” – Olivia, SLT

She notes that the school ethos does not just apply to pupils, but also staff, parents, and the wider school community. This reflects a more ecological view where the ethos/culture is one part of the school system, and the school is one part of social systems encompassing pupils’ lives. However, pupils are surrounded by multiple socioecological systems (e.g., family, peers, school, or neighbourhood) which can all impact pupils’ wellbeing (Allen et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021). Therefore, initiatives to support
wellbeing may be more effective if they take a whole school approach, working across multiple factors that influence pupils’ experiences at school.

As such, the school tries to affect behaviour change and encourage a cohesive approach amongst staff by using personal stories:

“What I’ve tried to do is make sure that we’re using real life examples with staff so when we’re introducing, you know, whatever mental health, whatever strategic approach we’re taking, that we make it real to them. So, it’s either our pupils who are talking about their experience or another young person...I think that when you hear from a young person themselves and their experience it’s very hard not to think, ‘I need to do better.’” – Mary, SLT

“I think those stories bring it to life...to hear someone’s story about what it feels like to come to our school and it not be right for them, that’s when you think: ‘Oh yeah, I could have done something there,’ and that’s where we saw the change, the culture shift.” – Olivia, SLT

Cityside High seems to be using personal anecdotes and experience to raise awareness, humanise different HWB topics like mental health, and encourage reflection amongst staff. The use of personal stories has been found to be an effective method for reducing stigma associated with mental health challenges (Pinfold, Thornicroft, Huxley, & Farmer, 2005), and may contribute to cohesive strategic school goals by encouraging empathy and buy-in from staff.

7.5 How ethos contributes to wellbeing

7.5.1 Pupil wellbeing

The ethos and values in the school appeared to focus on philosophical and conceptual ideas of human needs, including belonging, recognition, non-judgement, and trust. Riley (2019a) suggests these needs foster a sense of connection and affiliation with the school and wider community and are fundamental for the human psyche. She also argues these needs are fundamental responsibilities for schooling communities as a place to help children and young people learn about who they are and how they fit into wider society. This sentiment is echoed by a participant who expressed his view that:

“I think, traditionally, at Cityside High School that the main focus was attainment...and increasingly, there is a shift towards becoming, leaving the school as good human beings.” - Malcolm (Maths)
If the school ethos is emphasising intangible human needs, this could mean the values within the school may shift away from a focus on narrow outcomes like attainment, to broader goals of schooling like supporting pupils’ ability to grow and develop into personhood. This is what Biesta (2009) calls socialisation, or the way education can help individuals become members of a society through transmission of cultural norms or values.

The values reflected in the school ethos were also visible within the way educators spoke of their practice to support HWB. Notably, rather than describing specific initiatives for supporting mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, teachers mostly referred to the way they interact and relate to pupils:

“Starting conversations with like, ‘Oh I’ve noticed this…is everything OK?’ or asking like, ‘Do you understand why, maybe I’m having a chat with you at the moment?’ And most time, pupils know why you want to have conversation and I think they’re really appreciative about [teachers] asking why that is so…and I guess in terms of how they’re feeling it gives them… a genuine sense of caring about how they’re getting on in the class.” – Lachlan, PE

“We have a motto, ‘We Are Cityside High,’ and a lot of the kids, I think, really, really feel that. Like, it feels like a really strong community. It was such an emotional day, the first lockdown, knowing that we weren’t going to see each other. Like, all the sixth years sort of lined the corridors and clapped everyone going out. I’m getting emotional, just because I don’t know, it becomes like a big family.” – Isla, Biology

“Every day I’m speaking to a different pupil and learning a wee bit more about them and just making sure they know they’ve got my time - 100%” – Alistair, PE

Support for HWB within Cityside High mostly appeared relational in nature, with the importance of pastoral support highlighted. These seemingly simple gestures (e.g., asking after someone’s day, learning pupils’ interests or hobbies, listening and giving pupils full attention) may give pupils a sense of being cared for, support positive relationships, and have a beneficial effect on wellbeing. Isla also referred to personal relationships within the school and how these may affect a sense of community, belonging and wellbeing, which has been well-documented in research (Allen et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2018; Riley, 2019a; Thomas et al., 2016), and which may be especially significant due the disruption and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns.
7.5.2 Staff wellbeing

Beyond pupil wellbeing, positive relationships (such as the relationships between staff, or between staff and pupils) can also play an important role in staff wellbeing (Roffey, 2012; Spilt et al., 2011). As described in the previous section, the values reflected in the school ethos appear to highlight fundamental human needs. These values seemed to have positive effects on teachers’ interpersonal relationships, such as those with colleagues and leadership:

“I certainly think that the ethos and the strategies that have been put in place do impact staff. Just little things like recognising staff birthdays and having random acts of kindness happening. You know, having similar systems in place for staff...so in terms of our own wellbeing, it’s reassuring the way these sorts of issues are discussed. It certainly would probably make me more likely to come forward or seek support.” – Graeme, PE

“I think one of the big things we try and promote is leadership at all levels, not just like in a top-down model, you know. [Promote] staff feeling empowered to lead and really kind of take charge.” – Rory, SLT

These excerpts suggest values like recognition and non-judgement that are embedded in the school ethos have a positive effect on staff wellbeing. Just as pupils feel a sense of being cared for, respected, and valued, these positive effects also apply to staff. This could mean educators may be more confident and willing to ask for and receive support from colleagues or share good practice within the school. Additionally, leadership is trying to support staff empowerment, the rights of staff to have their voice heard, and to allow staff to pursue areas of interest to them whether through leadership, research, or extracurricular opportunities.

However, there is always room for improvement. Staff wellbeing is an important part of whole school wellbeing and if staff do not have wellbeing, this could negatively impact pupils as well. For example:

“Some of the core values in the school are resilience, courage, teamwork, being together. So, I guess for me, it’s living them as well. If we’re going to be resilient, we all have to be resilient. I think, for me, maybe some things that go missing is there’s that much focus on, are all the pupils ok, but when do we actually ask the staff? Because are we just meant to be ok because we’re adults and stuff like that. I think we talk about resilience...[but] it cannot be ok for the kids if it’s not ok for us.” – Alistair, PE

Other participants echoed this sentiment and noted that people ‘can’t give from an empty cup,’ thus whole school approaches to wellbeing should keep staff wellbeing at the forefront alongside pupil wellbeing.
7.6 Conclusion

Schools are frequently identified as important settings for HWB promotion, with whole school approaches advocated as an effective method to support holistic wellbeing (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). A whole school approach suggests HWB promotion should be embedded in all aspects of school life, such as school policies and organisation, course content, and teaching methods, as well as include all individuals in the school community like pupils, staff, leadership, and parents (ibid). Whole school approaches recognise the ethos can articulate the values, expectations, norms, and goals within the school and influence the ways the school community interact. As such, the school ethos is important for creating a consistent, cohesive and supportive environment for HWB promotion (Warin, 2017).

The ethos in Cityside High appeared to highlight values reflective of philosophical ideals and conceptual ideas of human needs, like needs for belonging, recognition, affiliation, trust, and connection with the school community, as well as rights to autonomy, participation, equal opportunity, and respect. These values may be especially important for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils who may be less likely to feel like they belong or fit in at school (Riley, 2019a) or less likely to feel ‘heard’ and like they have a say in the decisions that impact them (Moore et al., 2017). Consequently, the school ethos emerged as an important influencing factor on the way educators conceptualised and enacted HWB support, with educators often referencing relational approaches that focused on HWB as a process to enable pupils to learn about themselves and who they want to be.
8.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, whole school approaches suggest HWB promotion should go beyond classroom learning and teaching to permeate all aspects of the school and include all members of the school community (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). This suggests the need for a ‘joined-up’ approach to ensure support is coherent, collaborative, and coordinated (Weare, 2006), with positive relationships between all involved.

This chapter will focus on relationships as a key influencing factor on the conceptualisations and practices of educators at Cityside High as they responded to their responsibilities to support mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. Interconnections between key influencing factors such as ethos, leadership, and relationships will be examined to understand how this may impact collaborative working across the school and cluster. The chapter will also explore how educators’ understandings of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage are reflected in the relationships within and outwith the school (e.g., between the SLT, staff, pupils, and wider community) to examine how these understandings may influence school HWB practices.

8.2 How ethos contributes to relationships among the school community

As described in Chapter 6, within Cityside High and one feeder primary, there appears to be a shared ethos that emphasises creating a sense of belonging, trust, and non-judgement. Having common values, goals, and a shared vision appears to be seen as a way to facilitate collaborative working relationships. For example:

“I think we've got a very collegiate culture within our leadership team. When I say our leadership team that extends to our curricular leader body and guidance, so probably within that team there are 25 people, and to try and get us all, you don’t necessarily need to think the same way, but to have the same kind of vision and values.” – Mary, SLT

“The school ethos means that I think everybody has autonomy and I feel everybody knows and recognizes that they have autonomy. So, I think that people know that they can come, and they can seek advice. But equally, people know that if they make a decision, as long as they are, their reasoning has the best interests of the child placed at the centre, then we're always going to be supportive of that.” – Helen, Primary SLT
These excerpts highlight the importance of collegiality and close working relationships, and that these relationships are believed to facilitate sharing practice, advice, and support. Mary notes that a shared ethos and vision may help support collegiality because everyone is working towards similar goals. Additionally, implicit in Helen's account is a sense of trust – that staff trust that they can ask for advice, but also trust that the leadership will support their decision-making, as long as they are maintaining the values of the school, like ensuring child-centred care. Shared values and goals like child-centred care, trust, and non-judgement also appear to influence the relationships within the school by fostering dialogue and openness:

“We’ve created a culture at Cityside High where it’s okay to try something, and if it doesn’t work, we’ll stop it.” – Olivia, SLT

“I think the culture is that we know people will make mistakes. We all make mistakes…. So, there’s not that sense of judgment. And I do think that it, that’s reflected in the staff morale and ethos because people will come to us and they’ll say, ‘Actually, you know what, this has happened today’, and they’ll feed [that back].” – Helen, Primary SLT

These excerpts both appear to emphasise the value of non-judgement and how this may impact relationships within the schools. Olivia gives the implicit impression that there is no judgement or repercussion if an initiative does not work, which may support staff to be willing to innovate and try new approaches. Likewise, Helen notes her belief that non-judgement helps staff feel comfortable to share their feedback, mistakes, and experiences with work.

Helping staff feel confident and comfortable to share their experiences and challenges reflects ideas around emotional safety (Riley, 2019a) and may contribute to greater dialogue. This sentiment was echoed by other participants who noted:

“I think the most important thing the school has done is created a culture where staff are confident enough to ask for support…and they know the process and support is available if they need.” – Graeme, PE

“Now kids are much more able to identify mental health issues that they’ve got, and not be embarrassed by [it]. And I think, speaking to staff as well, I spoke to you at the very beginning of the interview about my own mental health issues at the beginning of this year. Would I be comfortable speaking about that five or six years ago? I’m not so sure…. There’s been a big shift not only with staff, but certainly with pupils as well, they just feel more comfortable speaking about it.” – Malcolm, Maths
Graeme and Malcolm both reflect that a non-judgemental, supportive ethos may help foster dialogue because staff may feel a greater sense of safety to be open or vulnerable. If fears of being negatively judged for sharing challenges or discussing topics that may have been stigmatised in the past (e.g., mental health) are removed, then trust and closer relationships may be able to form (Powell et al., 2018).

Beyond staff members’ sense of emotional safety, an ethos of non-judgement can also help pupils feel comfortable to share their experiences with teachers. For example, when reflecting on her relationship with a pupil who sometimes exhibits challenging behaviours, Isla noted:

“Say he leaves another class and he's wandering around school. If he sees that I'm free, he'll just come and sit in my room. He'll just think like, it's kind of easy to come in, and doesn't feel like I judge him for not being able to stay in that class or [for] something like inappropriate that he's maybe said to someone else. He can tell me about like, why he said it and not feel judged or like he's going to get in trouble. Maybe [he] feels a bit understood.” – Isla, Biology

This excerpt demonstrates Isla’s belief that her relationship with this pupil is facilitated by him not feeling negatively judged. Again, this reflects ideas around emotional safety (Riley, 2019a), where pupils feel safe and secure to share their thoughts and experiences and build trusting relationships with teachers, which in turn may support their HWB by feeling accepted or understood (Powell et al., 2018).

8.3 Conceptualisations of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage reflected within the relationships in the school

8.3.1 Conceptualisations of HWB within the relationships in the school

Like the emphasis on equality seen in the school ethos, an emphasis on equality and fairness was perceived in the way participants spoke about relationships. One teacher explicitly noted his efforts to treat pupils as ‘adults’ (and equals):

“I always tend to find that young people go towards teachers who treat them like adults. So...I chat to kids as if I was chatting to [an adult] in terms of I don’t have that hierarchy of ‘me-teacher, you-pupil, I’ll do whatever I please, but you need to listen to the rules’. I don’t believe in that, and kids relate to that.” - Liam, PE
Liam believes that pupils respond more to those who act with fairness instead of enforcing one rule for pupils and another for staff. Thus, he makes an effort to speak to pupils as if they were adults, where there is an underlying connotation of equality. This demonstrates his belief that treating pupils as equals instead of maintaining power hierarchies can facilitate better relationships. This emphasis on breaking down hierarchies reflects Brown and Evans’ (cited in Moen et al., 2019) assertion that building positive relationships depends upon moving past vertical, top-down relations to ones which are more horizontal and reflect values like democracy and equality.

An emphasis on democratic, egalitarian relationships echoes research that points to the importance of children and young people’s right to have a say in the choices that affect them (Anderson & Graham, 2016; Thomas et al., 2016), and reflects the rights-respecting, child-centred approach advocated by CfE (Scottish Government, 2007). Cityside High also appears to strive for more horizontal relationships and pupil input by emphasising a robust system for receiving feedback. The school solicits pupil voice through various means including elected pupil representatives for each year group, focus groups, anonymous feedback boxes, as well as a dedicated email and text number for pupils to share their thoughts and concerns.

Likewise, another participant noted the emphasis on encouraging pupil participation and empowerment in the relationships across campus and with special working groups:

“I do think there is a motivation among staff and leadership team at school to provide access to, or opportunities for pupil voice.... Pupils taking initiative is something that’s highly encouraged and [for] lots of staff working groups, there’s equally a pupil working group that goes alongside it....There’s lots of opportunities that are kind of encouraged for pupils to be engaged in taking the initiative to create some change within the school.” – Lachlan, PE

School leadership and staff appear to encourage democratic relationships and empowerment, where pupils can effect change and play an active role in the decision-making within the school. This reflects a flourishing discourse which highlights the importance of having the right to self-determination and the freedom to choose between options for their own wellbeing (Spratt, 2017).
8.3.2 Conceptualisations of socioeconomic disadvantage within the relationships in the school

When reflecting on disadvantage, all participants acknowledged general challenges that pupils may face due to socioeconomic status. For instance, there was recognition of the influence of context and that pupils’ responses to teachers’ efforts to build relationships could sometimes differ:

“I tend to find from a sporting context and a practical context that sometimes pupils from a lower SES background can appreciate things a little bit more...in maybe they’re not getting the same level or volume of opportunities outside of school so when people take time to take an interest in them, or give them feedback, or try to help them improve in something, it’s maybe not something that is the norm.” – Graeme, PE

Within this excerpt it is evident that Graeme is mindful that coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background can impact pupils’ relationships and social networks outside the school, as well as their response to relationships within the school. He went on to describe school supports and processes available to try to counteract these disadvantages such as referrals to counsellors or guidance for extra support. However, staff were keen to note that challenges associated with socioeconomic disadvantage were generalisations and not a foregone conclusion. Thus, every participant emphasised that they form relationships based on the individual rather than using socioeconomic information to determine the way they interact with pupils. For example:

“I don’t necessarily see any difference in the relationship I have with a pupil from whether they are decile 1 or decile 10. What I find is that...it’s usually kids with [additional support needs] they’re the kids that I actually have better relationships with and that’s because I spend more time with them.” – Mary, SLT

In this excerpt Mary notes that her relationships with pupils often depends upon the amount of time they spend together rather than socioeconomic background. This reiterates findings from Moen et al. (2019) who found close relationships are only built over time and with personal investment in the relationship. Thus, Mary may be able to develop closer relationships with pupils needing additional support for learning or HWB due to greater proximity, exposure, and interaction.
Similarly, another participant noted the importance of forming relationships with each pupil as a person. He emphasised that he is especially vigilant to avoid stereotyping or making assumptions:

“I don’t change [my practice] based on SIMD, I change for the kid... I always feel that as soon as you start to say lower SIMD, that people’s instant expectations are lowered straight away, and I don’t like that. I could be wrong, but people [may] instantly assume that [pupils] have barriers whereas they might not.” – Liam, PE

Liam describes his concern that if people (e.g., teachers, guidance) have unconscious preconceptions around poverty this could result in lowered expectations (or judgement) of pupils, which could then act as a self-fulfilling prophesy and impact the expectations that pupils have of themselves. Thus, he tries to form relationships with each pupil as an individual, and then determine support and teaching strategies on this individualised basis rather than socioeconomic background. This approach is used in an attempt to avoid stereotyping or assuming what these pupils will need.

Liam’s approach to teaching and relationships with pupils reflects Noddings’ (2012) argument that caring relationships should be built on the needs expressed by the cared-for rather than those assumed by the carer and echoes a distinction made by Clark (2019) around ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ care. Clark suggests that soft care is one which could lead carers to pity pupils or their circumstances, and culminate in lowered expectations, whereas hard care upholds high expectations for pupils despite their circumstances. These high expectations are not necessarily around academic attainment but may be expectations around values and conduct. For example, a ‘hard caring’ teacher might shift teaching strategies away from electronic homework if they are aware that some pupils may not have reliable internet access at home, but they would still expect pupils to complete work to their highest capability. Clark (2019) argues that hard care is more socially just because it emphasises responsiveness to pupil needs but maintains expectations and pushes pupils to reach their potential.
8.4 Senior leadership team relationships

8.4.1 Staff

Across the school cluster, SLT emphasised the importance of collaborative relationships to facilitate a coordinated approach to supporting HWB. Central to this coordinated approach was a belief in the importance of shared vision and goals.

“We've got four feeder primaries into our school, and we work really closely with them already. So, we have a cluster plan that we work to every year where...all five schools take forward certain themes so that we have themes running clearly through all of our schools...so we have key goals, so we all have the same targets we’re working towards, so that we’re not all pulling in different directions.” – Olivia, SLT

Common goals were seen as a way to ensure that the messages and priorities within each school and across the school cluster were clear, consistent, and coherent, without ‘pulling in different directions.’ Crucial to this shared vision and shared goals (ethos) was stewardship ‘from the top’ which emphasises the importance of leadership and the interrelationship between the four key influencing factors highlighted by participants (see section 6.4). Several teachers noted the influence of the leadership team to drive goals and expectations, for example:

“I do think if you’re involved in leadership...you kind of make the decisions, but it has to be informed decisions having discussed it with staff and with pupils.” – Kieran, PE

“Solutions are maybe facilitated from the top, but that’s because feedback or pupil voice or parents or something like that have brought an issue up. So, I think we do have really strong protocols for pupil voice and for parents to be in touch, and for staff to get in touch, and then it’s probably a case of SLT act on it and try to put the wheels in motion to try and achieve a solution.” – Graeme, PE

As these excerpts point out, stewardship from SLT was seen as necessary to drive decision-making, but importantly, decisions were based on democratic and dialogic relationships and values, where leadership consulted and listened to feedback from staff, pupils, and parents. When these horizontal relationships were in place it was seen to foster greater communication and sharing of practice. For example:

“It's nice to just have that close working relationship. You know, we can just pick up the phone and ask for advice and support, and I feel that everybody, yeah, everyone is very supportive, and you know, they will, they'll offer advice and things. And if they're not sure, like people are honest and they'll say I'll get back to you on that one.” – Helen, Primary SLT
8.4.2 Pupils

Beyond fostering staff relationships, horizontal decision-making was seen as a way to foster pupil wellbeing through promoting their right to have a say and to be heard. It was also seen as a way to empower pupils. For example:

“We’ve been very much pupil-led, so there’s been, right from the start, we’ve had surveys and focus groups, we’ve had a mental health group of young people who really lead what we’re trying to do. And we keep going back to them and asking, ‘Is this what you need? Is this working? Is it making a difference?’” – Olivia, SLT

“All the main points from the [pupil] council meetings are then discussed at the pupil parliament and all that is fed back into the senior leadership team and staff. And then we have feedback to the pupils in terms of ‘you said, we did’ type things in terms of what change we can make.” – Rory, SLT

Rory notes that school leadership focuses on democratic relationships, consulting and encouraging pupils to participate in the decision-making process. Relationships were also seen as a way to demonstrate to pupils that school staff and leadership care about them through their actions and behaviours:

“It doesn't take much of an effort to say good morning or how are you doing and sometimes that's enough. Because, you know, I think sometimes...that actually sometimes for that pupil, maybe that’s the only hello or how are you doing that they’ve had in the day or maybe had in the week.” – Rory, SLT

“Behaviour for me is a huge area of interest and I think that all naturally intertwines with health and wellbeing. And so, I've been promoting, ‘Behaviour is communication’ and the importance of every morning greeting every individual in your class, being really visible, having a shared approach, knowing that all adults are interested, all adults want to know how everyone is and that includes wanting to know how the other adults are as well. I think it's collective.” -Helen, Primary SLT

These excerpts show leadership are actively investing time and effort to get to know pupils on an individual basis and trying to build relationships. As Rory and Helen note, small acts like greeting pupils and asking how they are can show through their actions that school staff care. Helen also notes these caring actions help foster relationships with other staff as well. This reflects Moen et al. (2019, p. 12) who state, “The teacher does not tell the pupils [or adults] to care, rather s/he shows them how to care by caring.”
8.4.3 Parents

Parents and families appear to be seen as a key source of information and a key partner for a whole school HWB approach, so Cityside High and one feeder primary appear to be focusing on relationships to nurture these partnerships. For example:

“I think having that partnership working between families and families knowing, and we very much have like an open-door policy, and so quite often we will get emails in to say, you know there has been something, something’s happened or you know, so-and-so had a tricky morning…. So, the families communicate that with us. Often that comes directly to the Head or myself, and then we are then enabled to pass that on to the teachers, and then they can support.” – Helen, Primary SLT

“We have our SIMD numbers...those are on their files, so that we know those numbers and qualification for the bursaries and things like that.... But there are families and pupils whose SIMD might be 9 or 10, but actually they’re living in extreme poverty. I feel like because of where we are...that we’re in an affluent area and we have these higher SIMD kids, there’s a lot of challenges that I think are just hiding. And they’re masked and it made me wonder, if 50 families said they couldn’t feed their families, how many families didn’t say? So, I think that’s a challenge is identifying and helping.” – Kathleen, Biology

Helen describes the importance of ‘partnership working’ to foster communication and information-sharing between families and the school. Kathleen also notes the importance of communication so challenges are not ‘masked’ because SIMD data alone may not identify individual families facing socioeconomic disadvantage due to being based on postcode, which means even those who live in a more advantaged area (e.g., SIMD 9-10) can still be experiencing poverty (see section 5.3). Thus, Kathleen notes the need for good parent-school relationships, where families feel safe to disclose when they are struggling.

Still, this dialogue and communication must be two-way, not just a one-way flow of information from the school to parents (Graham et al., 2021). Kathleen noted the importance of families reaching out and seeking support from the school, but equally the school should enquire after the needs of their pupils and parents. For example:

“Sometimes it's just asking the parents themselves, you know, ‘So what is it we can do? What else can we do to support?’ And because we have small numbers then usually we can bespoke something to make whatever the issue is that they’re raising, to actually put in place something to mitigate against it.” – Mary, SLT
Mary describes Cityside High’s efforts to support two-way dialogue through soliciting parental feedback and participation. She also reiterates the importance of strong school-parent relationships to develop ‘bespoke’ pupil support that is coherent and relevant to their needs. These efforts to form partnerships with families reflects literature which suggests whole school programmes to support HWB are more effective when there is parental involvement and closer integration of home and school contexts (Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie, & Moore, 2016; Weare & Gray, 2003). For example, parents can play a vital role in alerting schools to challenges pupils may be facing, which research has shown can increase the schools’ ability to know, understand, and support their pupils (Holt et al., 2022). Reciprocally, schools can bolster the capabilities of parents and carers to understand and support their child’s HWB (Weare, 2017). This reciprocal relationship reflects the mesosystem within Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory which highlights the influence of interactions between various microsystems around pupils.

However, when positive relationships between parents and schools are not in place, this can lead to HWB support not being received. For example, when reflecting on some challenges in supporting socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils, participants noted that a lack of good relations and links between schools and families can mean families do not trust the school system. These families may then hesitate to engage with support or feel offended when support is offered:

“[Pupils] and their families possibly feeling like we’re part of the problem, so not wanting to engage...with our services, and hence there’s no help going into the family or the young person. For a long time, early intervention was removed...because the budget couldn’t support it and that’s gradually coming back in. So, family workers are working with families much earlier now, so [support] becomes normalised, it’s just part of what they do. [Families] trust them more, they get a bit of a link with the service and hence, will seek help rather than seeing it as something they want to stay away from or somebody who may well get them in trouble.” – Olivia, SLT

“It doesn’t always work. Sometimes parents can be offended by the fact that they've been offered [support]. You know, 'We can manage' type thing. So yeah, it is quite difficult.” – Mary, SLT

A challenge to supporting pupils and families from lower SES backgrounds appears to be around offering support in a sensitive, non-offending manner, with trusting relationships seen as a mediating factor. Cityside High believes some families may not trust the school, and thus, may
not want to engage with school services or accept help. Trusting relationships are important because evidence suggests higher levels of parental trust in schools have been shown to predict parents’ educational involvement, and is associated with positive pupil outcomes such as higher academic attainment and increased prosocial behaviour as well as decreased HWB difficulties (Santiago et al., 2016).

However, trust is not automatic. Instead, trust is built up through repeat positive interactions (Adams & Christenson, 1998), which points to the necessity of sustained time, effort, and contact between families and schools. These findings suggest that efforts to build trusting family-school relationships should preferably start before secondary school because earlier interaction may mean increased length of time and exposure between families and school supports which may facilitate the development of trust. Additionally, for socioeconomically disadvantaged families, efforts to build these trusting family-school relationships must be considerate of the needs and experiences of lower SES families to avoid stereotyping or negatively judging parents for a perceived lack of school involvement which may be out of their control (Naven et al., 2019). Furthermore, developing these relationships may require funding, which is not always available as Olivia alluded to when describing early family intervention being reduced due to budget cuts.

8.5 Staff – pupil relationships

Belief in the importance of staff-pupil relationships and being able to connect with a trusted adult was highlighted by all participants. The sustained time and effort needed to develop good relationships was also acknowledged by staff members such as Alistair who highlighted efforts by the school to create an ‘open door’ ethos:

“I think the school has improved as we go, between when I first came until now. It’s building month-on-month, year-by-year so it’s a good place to be. All the staff wear their [Mental Health First Aid] lanyards, so kids know they can stop you at any time. They’ve got photos of all staff that have done the First Aid training on the walls so anybody coming into the school, anybody passing...they can have a look and if they recognise you, they can stop [you].” – Alistair, PE

Alistair appears to see an open-door ethos – one where pupils are aware of staff they turn to for support, and where they feel they can always receive support (‘stop you at any time’) – as
positive for fostering pupil-staff relationships, promoting wellbeing, and making school ‘a good
place to be’. This view is echoed by Liam who notes his approach to talking to pupils:

“I’m one who’ll say good morning, good afternoon every day to every kid I meet even if I don’t
know them, don’t teach them. They get to know who I am. I might never know their name, but
I’ll say good morning to them every day in the hope that if they wanted to come ask, then they’ll
come to me. And if I can’t help them, I can at least try to build their confidence to seek a person
that can offer the support.” – Liam, PE

Liam describes his efforts to speak to all pupils, regardless of whether they are in his classes,
and who appears to see time and personal investment as important for building and sustaining
good relationships. This reflects philosophies of care encouraged by Noddings (2005) who
suggests caring is relational and characterised by attentiveness to the needs of others.

Additionally, the democratic, horizontal relationships espoused by the leadership also
appears to influence staff- pupil relationships. Some teachers reported their efforts to
empower pupils and encourage their participation. For example:

“I kept telling [pupils] they should lead the change. If they want change to happen, they should
lead the change and they did…. it’s just trying to empower the young people as well, that they
can, they should lead the shift towards a more inclusive school.” – Malcolm, Maths

Malcolm describes his efforts to empower and encourage pupil participation and build up
pupils’ confidence and self-efficacy to effect change in the school. Having opportunities to
influence school practice and have a say is important; however, these chances cannot be
‘tokenistic’ (Anderson & Graham, 2016). If pupils feel that they raise an issue, but nothing
happens or is done about it then there is a risk that the school’s request for feedback will seem
insincere or like ‘lip service’. If opportunities for pupil voice seem inauthentic, then there is the
chance that pupils may disengage from school social processes and experience decreased levels
of wellbeing.

The chance for school disengagement is theorised by Hirschman (cited in Lumby, 2012)
who suggests that when individuals are dissatisfied with institutions like schools, they tend to
respond through exit, voice, or loyalty. Exit may be literal, such as physically leaving or avoiding
class, or it can be psychological such as disengaging from lessons. Voice is the ability to have a
say or to achieve change in the school, such as pupils disclosing the reason why they are
dissatisfied in the school and what is needed to improve the situation. Whereas loyalty is the level of commitment to school which can influence decisions to exit or to use voice. If pupils feel loyalty to the school, they may be more likely to use their voice to speak up and strive for change, but if they do not feel loyalty to the school, then they may be more likely to disengage.

In schools, an exit response might occur when young people are dissatisfied with the institution but feel unable to affect change. For example, if pupils believe that their teachers do not care for or support them, but also feel that they have no control or recourse to change the situation, they may try to skip class or mentally disengage from the course content. Hirschman (ibid) argued that voice was the response where schools could exert the most influence, and thus pupils’ voices need to be taken seriously.

The importance of pupil voice and ensuring pupils feel their voice is being heard was echoed by participants. A focus on transparent communication was suggested as a useful way to share information about the school processes for listening to pupil voice, build relationships, and support wellbeing. For example:

“One thing that pupils maybe didn’t realise was if they went to the guidance teacher and spoke about behaviour, a bullying problem, and the guidance teacher did an intervention, if that intervention didn't work, pupils felt disenfranchised. Like, 'I went and spoke to them, and it didn't stop'…. So, I think being a bit more open about that was really helpful...explicitly being like, ‘It's not that we can just flip a switch and stop it. And if it's not working, you have to tell us. It's not a one-and-done, you didn't fix it’. So, I think letting [pupils] understand sort of the processes and not letting processes be hidden to them, it was a big deal.” – Kathleen, Biology

Kathleen notes the importance of clear communication for building relationships and to support pupils to feel their voice is genuinely being heard. She notes the school’s efforts to explicitly ‘talk about their actions, either future actions or what they have already done’ in response to pupil feedback to demonstrate to pupils the change processes within the school and how their voice is taken into account.

8.6 Staff – colleague relationships

The importance of positive relationships was also highlighted for staff, with shared goals and ethos seen as beneficial for relationships. For example:
“It has to be from top-to-bottom, everybody is on the same page...that we’re all signing off the same sign-in sheet.” – Alistair, PE

“I talk a lot to people, other people in the school and my friends, and I think that's been a big influence on how I [practise].” – Kathleen, Biology

Working towards similar goals and objectives could facilitate the development of staff relationships through opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and information sharing. Collegial relationships could also influence practice through staff members feeling able to turn to colleagues for advice or support.

Staff relationships were also seen as a source of social support that could impact teacher wellbeing, as was recognised by Kathleen and echoed by other participants:

“I think everyone is really excited to be able to connect again because we've been very much stuck in our department bubbles, even spaced away from each other this year. I think that's definitely had an impact on how the teams across the school have been feeling, and I think everyone is quite keen for us to invest a bit time in staff wellbeing.” – Lachlan, PE

“Your job is to focus on wellbeing in the pupils, but I certainly think that the...ethos and the strategies that have been put in place do impact staff. Just little things like recognising staff birthdays and having random acts of kindness happening.” – Graeme, PE

Lachlan notes his view that staff wellbeing may have been impacted through the social distancing and isolation measures taken due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Graeme also expresses beliefs that staff wellbeing could be influenced by the ethos and practices within the school such as an emphasis on recognition which could foster positive relationships or support teachers’ sense of being valued members of a team. The positive effects of good staff relationships perceived by participants reflects research which found that supportive relationships and a school culture of trust and respect were associated with feelings of teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction (Kidger et al., 2016).

8.7 Pupil – peer relationships

While the current study did not involve feedback from the pupils themselves, a belief in the importance of pupil-peer relationships was highlighted by all participants. This aligns with research that suggests positive relationships and friendships provide a source of emotional support which fosters pupils’ wellbeing and sense of connection to the school (Gristy, 2012;
Holt et al., 2022; Riley, 2019a). Several participants described their efforts to support pupils’ social interactions, noting the importance of creating an environment (both physical and social-emotional) conducive to forming relationships. For example:

“I run an eco-club and there’s a lot of kids who I’d say aren’t that into sustainability, but it’s kind of like a safe space for them to go where they feel part of something. I just think that kids appreciate a safe space to go at lunch time. So, if there’s a classroom open, where there are a couple of other people there sitting for lunch, it’s much easier to go there than into a big cafeteria with loads and loads of tables and having to think of who am I going to sit next to or go outside and eat lunch sometimes by themselves. So, quite a few of those kind of kids in that situation will come along and they’ll just know that there’ll be like a big, like round table in the middle and everyone just sits and eats together, and it’s just kind of a bit easier to manage than a whole cafeteria or playground filled with lots and lots of faces.” – Isla, Biology

“Part of that has got to be a warm environment, if you’ve got a warm environment people are going to tend to open up a bit more or share a bit more.” – Liam, PE

Isla describes how extracurricular clubs can create a ‘safe space’ – a lower stakes, less socially-pressured environment – for pupils to go to at lunchtime. Implicit in Isla’s description is an awareness that eating alone or navigating a large cafeteria can be anxiety-inducing for some pupils, which reflects ideas around emotional safety (Riley, 2019). She also notes elements of the physical environment, such as a ‘big, round table’ where everyone sits together, which may create a space that is helpful for social interaction. Additionally, Liam notes the importance of a ‘warm’ environment for fostering relationships which again suggests conceptualisations of emotional safety. This focus on the physical as well as social-emotional environment aligns with research that found whole school approaches that included changes to the psychosocial environment were more effective (Cushman, Clelland, & Hornby, 2011).

8.8 How positive school relationships impact practice

Within the school cluster, a shared school ethos, vision, and values appeared to support collaborative working and sharing practice because everyone was working towards the same goals. This cohesion and collaboration in turn supported positive relationships throughout the school and cluster in a recursive feedback loop. The focus on shared values, two-way dialogue, and horizontal relations influenced practice, with several participants noting efforts to create
their own ethos in their individual classes or departments which reinforced the overall school ethos and how these helped support relationships. For example:

“We’ve got a culture within the school, but we also need to have our own values in PE...still linked to the bigger culture within the school. If every department did that, the pyramid becomes wider and stronger.” – Alistair, PE

“One thing that I do quite a lot with at the start of the year is about like asking like, ‘What do I need to know about you?’ And we have that as a little project about best ways that people feel they learn, [and] about commitment with class values, which usually finds, it creates quite a nice environment. What ones that normally kind of come to the surface which I'm always quite fond of...is a society of everybody sort of being like respectful of one another and how, like, everyone’s different needs in the class and we have a conversation around that.” – Lachlan, PE

Alistair and Lachlan both describe their efforts to create a shared ethos/culture in their classes and how this might support wellbeing and facilitate relationships. Lachlan notes that shared values such as respect can create ‘a nice environment’ as well as act as a conversation starter about acceptance of differences. This focus on creating an environment conducive to building relationships is echoed by Kathleen:

“In practise it’s, ‘Is everybody safe? Is everybody nurtured? Is everybody ok?’ It's just creating that atmosphere in my classroom. It's not necessarily in individual lessons. It wouldn't really matter what I was teaching, I'd want them to feel the same way and I’d want them to have the same relationship with me. I want them to be able to interact with each other and things like that. So, it's more about, in practise, the sort of ethos and environment of my classroom and how it feels to be in that classroom.” – Kathleen, Biology

Kathleen also references the importance of ethos and creating an environment that can support relationships. She also notes her belief that HWB promotion is not an ‘individual lesson’ but permeates her classroom through relationships and the ways that people treat each other. This aligns with Noddings’ (2012) description of care as one that is based on relational interactions, where both parties contribute to and maintain a caring relationship.

8.9 Conclusion

Noddings (2012) suggests that it is through relationships that individuals develop and grow, and Macmurray (cited in Noddings, 2012, p. 771) claimed, ‘teaching is one of the foremost of personal relations.’ Importantly, teaching does not only apply to those who bear the professional title of teacher but involves everyone in the school. Within whole school policy and
from an ethics of care philosophy, it is the responsibility of all staff to support wellbeing, suggesting the necessity of positive relationships for creating a collaborative, cohesive and supportive environment for HWB promotion (Noddings, 2012; Scottish Government, 2021).

As described in this chapter, it was evident that Cityside High and their feeder primary placed great significance on relationships for supporting pupils’ mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. Consequently, relationships emerged as an important influencing factor on the way educators conceptualised HWB and their practices to support HWB. The school conceptualised wellbeing support in an ecological manner with the relationships between various members of the school community, including staff, pupils, and parents, all highlighted as important areas for communication, collaboration, and whole school HWB promotion. As such, school practices frequently aimed to support the formulation of these relationships.

There was also considerable interaction between school relationships and other influencing factors, such as ethos and leadership, for example, a supportive ethos with shared goals and values was believed to enable collaborative, egalitarian relationships, and this ethos was supported when leaders facilitated horizontal power-sharing and distributive leadership. These more egalitarian relationships were believed to empower pupils by providing opportunities for participation, which reflects flourishing discourse around the right to choose between various options for their own wellbeing (Hardley et al., 2020). This may be particularly important for pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who may be more likely to report having less say in school practices, having less positive peer relationships or feeling less valued by teachers when attending a more affluent school where they are in the minority (Moore et al., 2017).
Chapter Nine: Influencing factor – Leadership

9.1 Introduction

Within whole school approaches, all people and aspects of school life are encouraged to take an active role in HWB promotion, including leadership teams (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). Research has shown that school leadership can have a substantial influence on school organisation, reform, and improvement, as well as the wellbeing of pupils and staff (Cann, Riedel-Prabhakar, & Powell, 2021; Lummis, Morris, Ferguson, Hill, & Lock, 2022; Morris et al., 2020). A recent review by Day et al. (2020) highlighted that leadership often has an indirect effect on pupil outcomes but is a significant influencing factor through direct effects on the ethos/culture, social relationships, and teaching and learning environment within the school (see Chapter 2).

As was alluded to in chapters 7 and 8, senior leaders play a role in steering the values, goals, and expectations within Cityside High, and driving the organisational ethos/culture. Additionally, within the school, there appeared to be a focus on encouraging autonomy and empowerment and allowing opportunities for staff and pupils to take on leadership roles. This chapter will examine characteristics of school leadership and how these influence the priorities, ethos, and relationships in the school. Then, it will explore how conceptualisations of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage are reflected in the school leadership and priorities, and explore how this may impact how staff think through their practices to support HWB in the classroom. For clarity, this chapter refers to the actions of ‘leaders’ and ‘leadership’ to denote those in formal leadership roles (e.g., Head Teacher and Deputes), but acknowledges that leadership may be exercised informally by staff, pupils, and external others.

9.2 How leadership influences and contributes to the school ethos/culture

To review, the ethos in Cityside High and one feeder primary school emphasises values such as belonging, recognition, non-judgement, and trust, and is underpinned by philosophical ideals like democracy, equality, and fairness (see Chapter 7). The ethos is then believed to help support positive relationships and collegiality within and outwith the school community, which in turn reinforces school values. This section will go into greater detail on how school leadership attempts to influence (and is influenced by) the ethos and values in the school.
9.2.1 Emphasis on transparency and good communication

Within Cityside High there seems to be a strong emphasis on transparency and communication, with communication seen as a way to support HWB. For example:

“Communication feeds into health and wellbeing, you know. If a pupil’s wellbeing is kind of protected a lot more, if you have communication in advance, if you're transparent with when assessment dates are, if that’s shared with home, if that’s shared with pupils, if you've advertised opportunities that are available. I think being transparent with communication has certainly been something that seems to be working for us.” - Rory, SLT

Rory describes the school's effort to communicate and disseminate information to pupils and families, and explicitly expresses his view that communication supports HWB. He notes his belief that this ‘no surprises’ approach is working for the school because pupils may be more aware of the expectations the school has of them, and the different supports or opportunities available for them. This reflects literature that found that effective school leaders were both responsive and demanding in that ‘they give a lot and expect a lot’ (Dinham, 2007, p. 268).

Dinham (ibid) draws upon parenting styles to argue that this style of leadership is authoritative and balances high levels of responsiveness (e.g., being warm and caring, aware of individual pupil capabilities, and sensitive to their needs) with high levels of demandingness (e.g., maintaining high expectations, and setting consistent and appropriate rules and limits). Going further, he suggests authoritative leaders explain the reasoning behind their decisions and expectations rather than demanding blind obedience, which substantiates the importance of communication.

This view is echoed by others who note the importance of communication and transparency for both pupil and staff wellbeing. For example:

“There’s quite clear systems in place – there’s an anonymous email account that [pupils] can email asking for an appointment with a certain teacher, then that gets put into place for them, so they just get an appointment card, and they just have to turn up at that time and place. So, if anyone was ever struggling with any symptoms of a lack of wellbeing in whatever area, I think it certainly gives them confidence that they can come forward, it gives them options to try and share the issue.” – Graeme, PE

“The fact that it’s spoken about so much - so you know who to go to to look for help, you know the advice to give. I think being a bit more open about that was really helpful, and it was also helpful for me to hear that that is the process so that then I can verbalise that to the kids as well.” – Kathleen, Biology
Graeme notes that there are clear systems and processes within the school which may help pupils feel confident about what to do to access support or report a problem, which implies the need for reciprocal communication and dialogue. Kathleen also notes the importance of communication for staff as it may increase teacher confidence in acting as a liaison to explain school processes to pupils. Clear expectations, systems, and procedures in the school may mean there is less guesswork or anxiety involved for staff and pupils around processes to support HWB or methods to access support. Going further, Weare (2000) argues that clarity is an essential element of school effectiveness and that any whole school approach to support HWB should prioritise clear expectations, processes, and boundaries. She suggests that without clarity ‘the world becomes frighteningly boundless’ (2000, p. 57) and people will feel unsafe to participate, develop autonomy, or engage socially due to a lack of certainty around the expected norms and rules of behaviour.

Clear communication can also reinforce school values like fairness and equality because the school community will know what values or behaviours are expected or desired from them and therefore what is not desirable. Transparency of expectations may facilitate perceptions of fairness because pupils and staff will feel that they understand what is expected of them as well as what to expect in return, and that any rewards or sanctions will be justified. Perceptions of fairness have been shown in the literature to support HWB by fostering a sense of trust, safety, and respect (Thomas et al., 2016). Drawing on qualitative data of Australian pupils’ conceptualisations of HWB, Thomas et al. (ibid) suggest that when pupils feel they are being treated fairly, in a consistent and non-arbitrary manner, they are more likely to feel respected. In this instance, fairness does not necessarily mean equal treatment, but that pupil-teacher interactions are reasonable, logical, and justified so pupils gain a sense of safety or trust that they can make sense of the world. This resonates with Antonovsky’s (1991) concept of Sense of Coherence, that when school environments and relationships are predictable and comprehensible this can foster wellbeing and coping abilities. Likewise, Weare (2000) argues clear and consistent expectations and responses help pupils gain a sense of certainty and stability which may support wellbeing. Both pupils and staff may feel greater levels of trust and wellbeing because they feel that they are being treated fairly - this can apply to both sanctions.
and rewards, for example, if the ‘punishment fits the crime’ or if recognition appears to be evenly distributed instead of given to a select few. A sense of trust may also increase staff agency because believing the leadership is supportive and ‘in their corner’ may embolden staff decision-making:

“The senior leaders in the school know that, they understand that we’re all working on the same agenda, and you trust your colleagues are doing the same and that’s filtering down then into their departments. And... I feel there’s a distinct change of how also staff perceive pupils. You know, for example, a pupil that may be displaying challenging behaviour is no longer seen as just a problem to be removed from a class, but, ‘What do I need to do in order to make the child feel that sense of belonging in my class, that they want to be there, and what do I need to do differently’ rather than, ‘I want them out.’” – Mary, SLT

“I feel everybody knows and recognises that they have autonomy... people know that if they make a decision, as long as they are, their reasoning has the best interests of the child placed at the centre, then we’re always going to be supportive of that.” – Helen, Primary SLT

Mary explicitly describes leaders’ trust that the school ethos, goals, and vision (agenda) will be upheld and trickle down into departmental decision-making. She also notes her belief that this trust and support from leadership may be influencing the school culture towards greater empathy for pupils. Helen notes the implicit trust that leadership has in staff to make decisions in line with school values, and that staff have in leaders to support their decision-making. Dinham (2007) suggests that trust is an element of mutual respect, so school leaders who cultivate a culture of respect may contribute to more positive relationships between the whole school community. Louis and Murphy (2017) also suggest leadership can enable school improvement by cultivating an ethos of trust, because when staff believe that the leadership supports and trusts their decisions this can bolster their feelings of self-efficacy, empowerment, and sense of being valued and respected (Cann et al., 2021).

9.2.2 Ethos embodiment and modelling by leadership

Bass and Avolio (1993) argue that leadership and ethos/culture are interrelated and constantly interacting. They suggest leaders develop, influence, and reinforce cultural norms, expectations, and behaviours through their actions, role modelling, and the things to which they commit time, energy, and funding. Likewise, leadership is influenced by the culture in a school in that differing organisational expectations and structures may constrain action.
However, Bass and Avolio (ibid) contend that culture is not static, leaders can promote cultural change and adaptation if they adopt leadership styles that encourage innovation and change.

This interplay between culture and leadership was seen in Cityside High in that a ‘traditional’ culture of high expectations around academic attainment was described by several participants. Participants also noted ongoing efforts to expand this attainment-focused culture to recognise wider achievements beyond attainment. The leadership’s emphasis on outcomes beyond attainment appeared to be empowering for some teachers, for example:

“[The Head Teacher] and the Depute Rectors, they cannæ do enough for this [health and wellbeing]... And equally, [HWB] would be put first before your lesson, if somebody was struggling and you felt you had to give them time, there’s a lot of understanding for staff as to why you maybe had to stop a session early or whatever.” – Alistair, PE

Alistair describes the attention the leadership puts toward promoting HWB, as well as the support he feels is provided to staff. The understanding and empathy provided when teachers feel the need to ‘put HWB first’ then acts as a form of modelling, where the leadership embodies the values that they are promoting. This understanding may also empower and encourage staff because they feel their decisions are trusted and valued.

Similarly, a shift in leadership style from one that was perhaps more directive or micromanaging, towards one that encouraged taking risks and trial and error was perceived as supporting a culture of innovation, change, and development:

“I certainly think our current leader is the kind of leader brings about really positive, inclusive change but keeps people, you know, brings people with them. Previous Head Teachers have led the school very well, but maybe micromanaged staff to the extent that they were afraid to take any kind of decisions or risks, which kind of stifled, I think, progress. Whereas [now] I think staff were positively encouraged at the outset to take risks and do things that may not work but at least we've tried, which was a very different culture to, I suppose, previous leaders. So yeah, I do think that [the current Head Teacher’s leadership style] is a key aspect of the change that has happened.” – Mary, SLT

This excerpt demonstrates Mary’s belief that the current leadership style has had a large influence on the school’s culture and the school’s ability to change and adapt. Part of this quote may seem familiar because it was used in section 7.2.4 to exemplify how a school ethos of trust may facilitate collegial relationships. The repetition of this extract is purposeful to emphasise

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9 Scottish term meaning ‘cannot’
and reiterate the overlap of the influencing factors identified in this thesis (e.g., ethos, relationships, and the impact of supportive leadership) and showcases the interrelationship and necessity of each factor for whole school HWB promotion (see section 6.4). For example, by encouraging experimentation and trying new things, alongside a sense of non-judgement when things ‘may not work’, leadership is building a foundation of trust and safety for staff that they will not be penalised for failure. This in turn may enable and embolden staff to take risks and to embrace opportunities for professional learning and development. This approach appears suggestive of transformational leadership styles which encourage staff empowerment, innovation, and ‘new ways of thinking about old issues’ (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 85). This also supports literature that found when staff feel safe, trusted, and supported by the leadership they are more likely to contribute to decision-making and leadership (Morris et al., 2020).

However, while there appeared to be a high level of trust between staff and leadership that the school ethos was being upheld, occasionally there could be need for firm leadership to steer the school towards the desired vision. Whilst the leadership explained how they tried to listen to, respect, and respond to the views of the school community, there were also instances where school leaders needed to challenge these views.

“We’ve come from quite a traditional middle-class school where the Cityside High style pupil did well and everybody else ‘just had to get on with it’ to really moving to an ethos that is very much: everybody’s here, everybody belongs here, and everybody can be successful.... We have had in the past, staff say: ‘Well, that’s not a Cityside High pupil.’ Well, that culture is really poor and quite toxic and so kind of moving away from there, but certainly I would say our culture now is on the inclusive side.” – Olivia, SLT

“The Head Teacher has done a significant amount of work in [SLT] development, this collegiate development. So often we’ll have these days away where we’re working together, sometimes on really challenging, challenge your beliefs and the culture within the school.... And I think that has really helped [foster] that really kind of cohesive unit now.” - Mary, SLT

Olivia describes efforts from leadership to change the school ethos from one focused mainly on academic attainment to one more inclusive of HWB. This represents the tension between school values and practices (see Chapter 2), where if actions (i.e., mainly focusing on high attainers, and everyone else just needs to ‘get on with it’) do not match the purported ethos and values (i.e., improving HWB, celebrating achievement and attainment) then the value-aspirations are less likely to be achieved (Glover & Coleman, 2005). However, changing long-
standing cultural values can be difficult. Drawing upon the earlier point about transparent communication and authoritative leadership that is both responsive and demanding (Dinham, 2007), cultural change may require firm leadership to challenge or question these long-standing values. Nonetheless, Mary notes that having these challenging conversations is worthwhile because driving this change in values may create a more cohesive vision, which in turn may facilitate greater collegiality and collaboration. While achieving full consensus on values is not always possible or desirable, by providing space for staff and leadership to engage in these challenging conversations it may facilitate greater dialogue, debate, and consultation than leadership simply dictating school practices in a top-down manner. This consultative approach has been suggested as more commonly seen with transformative leadership styles, which emphasise consensus-building, and argued that consultation can act as a technique to foster working relationships, collaborative culture, and help organisations find common ground (Day et al., 2020).

### 9.2.3 Sharing power: Influence of distributive leadership

As described earlier, school leadership can influence organisational culture through reinforcing norms and expectations, modelling behaviours, and challenging past beliefs. Research has also suggested distributive leadership, where leaders recognise, respect, and draw upon the strengths, knowledge, and expertise of their staff and pupils, is more likely to create a positive school ethos and cultivate a culture of innovation, collaboration, and trust (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Morris et al., 2020). Additionally, Day et al. (2020) argue that leaders can enable school improvement by building shared values, goals, and purpose within the school and setting high expectations aligned with those values. They suggest this focus on values and purpose is associated with transformational leadership, where leaders help develop the school vision through collaborative decision-making and transparency about the choices behind school values, goals, and decisions. This collaboration and communication motivate buy-in from the school community. For example:

“In terms of the [school motto]...we were able to bring in a vast number of pupils into our assembly hall to consult with them on what our values should be and also our motto. I was actually at the table when one of our pupils came up with the [motto relating to belonging]. He was our first transgender pupil that we had in the school and as soon as he said it, everybody
Mary describes the consultative approach the leadership took to develop the school ethos and values. While it is not clear how the pupils were chosen for participation (a caveat which will be considered in further detail in the discussion), she mentions how one pupil’s contribution ‘resonated with everybody’, so it seems the motto was elected through more collaborative and horizontal working rather than top-down. This distributive approach may facilitate a sense of ownership and agreement with the school values and motivate a shared sense of purpose amongst the school community (Day et al., 2020).

Similarly, when leaders are attentive and responsive to the voices of the school community, this may help staff and pupils feel heard, valued, and cared for. For example:

“When my decision-making comes through it is very much about looking outwards into our community...what is my school telling me it needs just now? And that might not be what you want to hear, sometimes it isn’t, ’cause you want to go a different direction, but you’ve got to listen to that and then think right, okay let's get the ship sailing in the right direction, let’s get that in place and that’s what then impacts my staffing decisions, finance.” - Olivia, SLT

Olivia describes the leadership team’s efforts to listen and respond to the school community (e.g., pupils, staff, parents) and their needs, even when it may not be what the leadership wants to do or to hear. She also notes the school’s efforts to adjust decisions according to the expressed needs of the school community. This reflects literature that argues authoritative leaders are responsive to their community (Dinham, 2007) and should act through caring relationships that attend to the needs identified by their staff and pupils (Noddings, 2012).

Acting in an attentive, responsive, and caring manner can support positive relationships amongst the school community and may be empowering for staff and pupils:

“I think the way in which we have it set up now, well I would hope, that the staff do feel they have a voice and that the way that we consult widely and regularly, and involve people in decision-making...I think the way in which we are all communicating, especially the Head Teacher, those regular communications...operate in allowing staff to have a voice...[and] that is really helping staff to still feel involved and that they are being listened to, consulted on, before key decisions are made.” – Mary, SLT

Mary reiterates the importance of communication and describes her belief that regular consultation and solicitation of feedback allows for shared decision-making and for staff to feel listened to and valued. This also reflects Weare (2000) who suggests that the ability to
participate and have a say can improve staff and pupil morale, motivation, level of engagement, and sense of community within a school.

9.2.4 Time, space, and encouragement

Within Cityside High, there appears to be a strong emphasis on relational aspects of wellbeing with the school ethos and values focused on social relations and processes. This reflects literature which found positive relationships to be the most significant factor that influenced pupils’ and staff’s feeling of belonging, emotional safety, and wellbeing in school (Allen et al., 2018; Riley, 2019a; Thomas et al., 2016). However, these positive relationships take time to build and can be challenging to form. Bass and Avolio (1993) argue that leadership can enable organisational culture and structures through their actions and the things they commit energy towards – this can be in the form of attention, time, and resources. For example, Alistair and Lachlan both voluntarily engage in opportunities to support pupil wellbeing, which involve additional duties beyond teaching. When leadership provides staff with the time and space to dedicate to HWB, this may empower staff to take on more responsibility and enhance professional development, which in turn may lead to enhanced teaching and learning.

“Along with my role [in the PE Department], I work with certain one-on-one, individual cases helping with their mental health and wellbeing...there’s time on my timetable that’s put aside for this now.” – Alistair, PE

“That's a voluntary position and you get a protected block within your timetable to look, to take on that leadership role. So, if it's divided by two people - like it is with [mine], we get one block each protected in our week, where we can't get taken for cover or anything, when it's solely for focusing on and progressing within that role and the tasks or projects you've got going on. Some people around the school in the leadership roles, they’re the only person taking it on, so they'll have two protected blocks dedicated to whatever projects they've got going on at the time.” – Lachlan, PE

These excerpts describe the voluntary roles Alistair and Lachlan do to support pupil wellbeing, either one-on-one or as part of a committee. As part of this effort, they both describe being given dedicated time in their timetables to focus on HWB promotion. This time is used to support pupil wellbeing but may also support staff wellbeing. Providing protected time for pupil support may mean that staff are less likely to feel overwhelmed or stressed by extra responsibilities on top of their teaching roles, and echoes research that found leaders’
organisational practices can significantly impact teachers’ feelings about their working conditions (Day et al., 2020). Additionally, as positive relationships have been found to have a substantial effect on wellbeing (Allen et al., 2018; Riley, 2019), the dedicated time to focus on developing these relationships may be critical. By providing this protected time for staff to focus on HWB, school leadership can encourage and enable staff professional development and implicitly embed wellbeing into the school culture.

Beyond timetables, leadership can also provide encouragement through opportunities for professional learning. Studies have shown that when leaders are supportive and embrace staff participation, distributive decision-making, and choice in professional learning, staff have a greater sense of morale, investment, and ownership of their professional development (Cann et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2020). For example:

“I really believe that you have to have an outward-looking staff.... All of our staff have got the opportunity to go out and see what’s happening nationally or internationally. We do lots of study visits out and about to see: are there things out there that we should be taking notice of, could we maybe be looking at this? Then they will all come back in and as part of our improvement planning process they will say, ‘Well I saw this in this other school that was working really well. This might be something that we need to consider.’ Then as a staff, we will look at all these little ideas and think, what do we need to do as a school, what works for us, and what are we going to take forward?” - Olivia, SLT

This excerpt suggests that the leadership team encourages staff to study, share practice, and report back different initiatives being implemented outside the school. It also appears that staff are consulted during improvement planning and can have a say and input into the initiatives that are trialled or taken forward within the school. Cityside High’s openness to new ideas may support a culture of innovation, change, and reform. This reflects the concept of transformational leaders who build a strategic organisational goal and vision, and then create a culture conducive to meeting that vision (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Day et al., 2020). For example, changing a previous culture by bringing in outside ideas and building on the strengths, capabilities, and motivation of staff through discussion and distributive leadership.

Furthermore, an important aspect of professional development is that opportunities for development are meaningful to the individual (Cann et al., 2021). Leadership that actively encourages ‘looking outward’ and provides opportunities for staff to study and trial different initiatives of their choice may foster this sense of meaning. Similarly, leaders who encourage
staff autonomy and involvement in choosing professional development opportunities may foster CPD which is more individually relevant and meaningful, and which builds upon the capabilities of staff (Weare, 2000). This reflects more strengths-based approaches, which recognise and celebrate the unique strengths of staff, and mirrors ideas of individual flourishing because staff can choose what is personally of value to them (Spratt, 2017), and may enable a sense of ownership, agency, and self-efficacy as staff are consulted and play a participative role in the formation of new school initiatives (Weare, 2000).

9.3 Conceptualisations of HWB and disadvantage reflected within the leadership in the school
Throughout this chapter, the interplay and reciprocal effects of school leadership and school ethos/culture has been highlighted. The leadership impact school ethos through their actions and cultural norms and expectations may then influence the beliefs within the school. The next sections will describe how leadership influences the school ethos and how this may affect conceptualisations of HWB and disadvantage.

9.3.1 Conceptualisations of HWB within the leadership in the school
In Cityside High, there is a shared understanding of HWB as holistic (see Chapter 7), with mental, social, and emotional health given as much priority as physical health. There also appears to be a shared belief that schools should play a role in challenging general societal views on HWB struggles, particularly mental health:

“In Scotland we were quite bad for [thinking], ‘It’s not cool to say you’re not okay.’ You know, we bottle it up, that’s our culture. So, changing that culture has been a challenge and we really need to tackle that more and more in schools. Just keeping it on the front burner about we need to talk about mental health.... It needs to be normalised, it needs to be ok to seek help, it needs to be ok to not be ok, and keep going with that so it doesn’t become a hidden problem again.” – Olivia, SLT

“I think there’s still a, perhaps the culture is changing, but it’s still a culture, maybe more in males than females, that ‘You don’t speak to someone about mental health issues.’ And I think, while that is changing, more work’s got to be done on that.” – Malcolm, Maths

Olivia and Malcolm express their belief that within overall Scottish culture it was previously seen as ‘uncool’ or taboo to discuss HWB issues, as well as their belief that schools should play a role in changing this culture and challenging mental health stigma. As described earlier,
leadership is seen as essential for school change, reform, and improvement (Dinham, 2007; Morris et al., 2020). Transformative leaders work to build a clear, cohesive vision, even if that means challenging and changing long-standing cultural norms (Bass & Avolio, 1993). For example:

“I would personally say the Director [Head Teacher] because she, as much as academics obviously mean a lot and there are points systems in schools and stuff like that, she has made it clear to the staff that it’s not the be all and end all... She’s just driven it and made it clear to staff on in-service days that, of course academics are important, and we will still get that, but we need to make sure that the HWB of pupils is at the forefront.” – Alistair, PE

As Alistair notes, the Head Teacher has made it clear to staff that a school culture that mostly prioritises academics is no longer acceptable if it comes at the expense of pupil wellbeing. By being firm and explicit in these expectations, school leadership is driving a new culture and a new vision, one that challenges outdated beliefs that HWB, especially poor mental health, is something to hide or bottle up. By trusting and championing the efforts of teachers to support HWB, school leadership may be empowering and enabling staff to participate and take on more responsibility for achieving the new school vision and goals (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Lummis et al. (2022) also suggest that when approaches to school change and reform are consultative and allow for participative decision-making, this supports the sustainability and acceptability of the changes amongst the organisation.

9.3.2 Conceptualisations of socioeconomic disadvantage within the leadership in the school

As both a national priority and a school priority, reducing barriers due to socioeconomic disadvantage is a top focus in Cityside High. When conceptualising disadvantage, the ethos in the school emphasises both practical aspects of support such as monetary support, but also relational aspects of support. As previously described, school leadership can drive and enable the organisational ethos, strategies, and support through their actions, attention, and energy:

“It’s about making sure that as a school we are ready to put resources, we’re ready to put strategies in place to support these young people and families - by having family learning opportunities, by having additional study sessions, by pulling them out of class and having a bit of group support or one-to-one support. And I suppose taking a bit of responsibility behind that as a leadership team to make sure that we’re really keeping an eye on progress and not just letting them slip through the net until it’s too late.” – Rory, SLT
“I think the key in schools is leadership. I’ve got [a Depute] who has been outstanding at just grabbing the bull by the horns and making it a priority for our school. But that’s not the case in every school, so you really do need somebody who’s going to lead the charge…. I’ve worked in schools where [the attitude is], ‘It’s not our problem, it’s somebody else’s problem.’ But actually, if the young person isn’t well in their entirety, then they can’t learn, so it is our problem. So, it’s changing that perception.” – Olivia, SLT

As these excerpts indicate, school leaders have a responsibility and duty of care to support their pupils whether through academic, financial, or socio-emotional support. Rory describes the school’s approach to offer different resources and his belief that leaders should play an active role in monitoring and responding to pupil need and pupil progress. Olivia also acknowledges the importance of leadership to drive and prioritise the school agenda, values, and goals.

Within Cityside High, pupil support often takes the form of resources to reduce financial barriers for lower SES pupils and families, for example:

“I think as a school we’ve obviously, there are loads of opportunities that we do have for young people, but with a lot of those extended opportunities in the likes of school trips, there are finances associated with them, so we are really proactive in terms of making sure that we will provide financial support with anybody with free school meals or who is from decile 1 and 2.” – Mary, SLT

“We have additional money from pupil equity funding [PEF] where we can put in place additional resource for courses or whatever is needed for those people who are coming from more vulnerable backgrounds. So, for example, one of our pupil support officers does low intensity anxiety management courses. She is specifically paid for through our PEF funding so that young people of low SES backgrounds can access that resource in school on a daily basis if needed.” – Olivia, SLT

Mary describes proactive steps the school takes to provide direct financial support to pupils such as fee waivers for extracurricular activities, and Olivia notes that funding is used indirectly to put different support structures in place. For instance, pupil equity funding is used to provide a pupil support officer and to pay for specialised training like low intensity anxiety management (LIAM).

There is also evidence that school leaders conceptualise socioeconomic disadvantage as interconnected with holistic HWB, where poverty can impact physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. For instance:
“I think [financial support] does help remove some stigma at times that pupils may attach to themselves. I suppose we have a challenge of trying to make education as equitable as possible...and I think if we can do that, then it goes some way to making pupils feel, I suppose, equal. You know, that they have exactly the same opportunity regardless of their background, and I feel like there is still work to do there for us as a school, but we’re certainly making the right noises, so these kind of practical solutions I do think have a knock-on effect to pupils’ mental wellbeing because actually you’re removing that implication without any questions being asked.” – Rory, SLT

This excerpt describes leaders’ efforts to reduce subjective evaluations of disadvantage or stigma between more or less affluent pupils, and their aspiration to encourage equity within the school. Rory expresses his belief that practical, financial support can promote mental wellbeing by fostering a sense of belonging and helping disadvantaged pupils have equal opportunities in the school. This reflects research that found that a sense of belonging can play a significant role in promoting mental health, but that pupils experiencing poverty may be less likely to feel that they ‘fit in’ or belong at their school (Mowat, 2019).

Furthermore, the school is also aware that support for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils can be perceived as a source of stigma, where lower SES pupils or families feel singled out or different from the rest of the school. This awareness is visible in the statement above about reducing financial barriers automatically, ‘without questions being asked’. It is also reflected in the approach the school takes to offer support, for example:

“What we've done is offered support universally but then targeted those individuals individually. So personal invites, we've had study support sessions just for parents of kids who are from decile 1 or 2 because they maybe feel more comfortable with one-to-one sessions or small group sessions.” – Mary, SLT

This excerpt shows that Cityside High is trying to be sensitive to the chance for stigmatisation by adopting an approach that is universal and offered to all pupils, but then followed up with targeted (private) communication for those pupils experiencing disadvantage. Going further, Mary noted the school ‘sent out a letter to everybody...but then followed it up with anyone who maybe didn't [reply].’ Additionally, the school is aware that families may have different preferences in how they would like to receive support and tries to offer individualisation and choice to respond to these different preferences. For example, Mary highlights the school’s efforts to respond to different preferences by providing a variety of choices in study support sessions depending on parental comfort levels (e.g., one-to-one or small groups). Rather than
focusing on pupils’ individual study skills, these sessions aim to help parents and guardians support their children in the home. This reflects a whole school approach which encourages involving parents and families, instead of mainly focusing on school or classroom-based strategies, as well as an understanding that support needs to be individualised and tailored to the needs of the pupil or their family (Weare, 2000).

9.4 How school leadership impacts practice

Within Cityside High, HWB promotion is commonly seen in the relationships and social interactions between the school community. Teachers frequently reported that instead of focusing on HWB in a specific lesson, they tried to model caring behaviours and embed wellbeing implicitly by creating a warm, welcoming, and safe environment for pupils. For example, all participants described their efforts to learn every pupil’s name and their interests, so they could relate to them on a more personal level. However, staff also acknowledged the importance of leadership to facilitate and enable some of these relational approaches, for example:

“The senior leadership team are really open about what they would like their focus to be and are really great at sort of giving teachers all something to focus on so that the kids see sort of consistency across the school. There's like mental health weeks, or during the first [Covid] lockdown, everybody just got a day off in the middle of the week, just to not look at screens and laptops. Like, obviously as an individual class teacher, you couldn't say to all of your pupils, ‘Right. Okay. Just all have the day off. Don't look at any of your classes.’ So, that kind of has to come from the top down, but I think it’s really apparent to kids how much SLT are looking out for them and care about their mental wellbeing.” – Isla, Biology

This excerpt again suggests efforts to shift the school ethos away from more attainment-focused towards one that is more protective of HWB. Isla notes that the school leadership gave pupils a day off to get a break from academic coursework and have a rest for their mental health, which may have been especially important during COVID-19 school closures which were perceived as negatively impacting many pupils’ and staff’s wellbeing. Isla appears to view these leadership decisions as demonstrative of their HWB support through their actions, rather than ‘lip service’. This reflects Robinson et al.’s (2009, pg. 107) claim that leaders influence organisational culture and norms by sending ‘symbolic messages about what is important’
through their actions and behaviours (i.e., leaders act as role models). By encouraging and enabling a mental health ‘day off’, the leadership are embedding HWB promotion into everyday school practice and implicitly showing their commitment to HWB goals. However, teachers may not feel they have the authority to implement classroom practices that might go against the wider school culture. As Isla notes, she would not have felt she had the ability to give her pupils a day off as an individual teacher. Thus, supportive leadership is necessary to drive these priorities or cultural changes, and whole school HWB approaches often require direction that comes ‘from the top down’. In other words, efforts to put the wellbeing of pupils at the forefront relies upon strong leadership who understand, encourage, and empower these practices (Robinson et. al., 2009; Weare, 2000).

Additionally, like the school’s efforts to promote meaningful professional development, there seems to be a similar focus on pupil HWB promotion that encourages individualised choice. The school tries to offer a range of supports and resources for pupils to choose from:

“We built our resources [for HWB] toolbox style, so we give [pupils] lots of tools...and they can engage with them...[because] not one thing works for everybody, so...you have to have lots of different approaches and then kids themselves make the decision about what works for them.” -Olivia, SLT

While the ‘toolbox’ approach to HWB appears to be deficit-focused, as resources to solve a problem, it is universal in nature – providing resources and tools to every pupil rather than targeting individuals experiencing problems. Weare (2006) suggests this type of approach is less stigmatising as it is designed for everyone, rather than making pupils experiencing challenges feel like they are being singled out or treated differently. There are also quiet hints of a flourishing discourse in the sense that the toolbox is available for all pupils to make a personal choice on what may be meaningful or useful for them (Spratt, 2017).

Going further, Olivia acknowledges the importance of soliciting feedback to guide leadership and the provision of different resources:

“You know, we think we know what’s best for them, and we have ideas about where we might want to go, but actually when you talk to pupil bodies, it’s very different. So, what services we might think might be helpful, they find are old-fashioned or not accessible for them in the way that they want. So, we’ve been very much pupil-led, so there’s been, right from the start, we’ve had surveys and focus groups, we’ve had a mental health group of young people who really lead
what we’re trying to do. And we keep going back to them and asking: ‘Is this what you need? Is this working? Is it making a difference?’” - Olivia, SLT

As Olivia summarises, the school may think they know what pupils need, but unless they ask, these are merely assumptions. Therefore, the school leadership attempts to regularly evaluate resources, solicit feedback, and consult pupils – allowing them to play a participative role in the decisions that affect them.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored efforts by Cityside High leaders to guide the school organisation, priorities, and the direction of planning and improvement, as well as how this impacted the practices of staff. These leadership efforts are important because schools have been highlighted for the role they play in children and young people’s lives, and can be an environment which, for example, fosters positive relationships; provides a sense of safety, stability, and belonging; and helps pupils to learn about themselves and how to be a part of a wider society (Scottish Government, 2021). However, not all pupils’ experiences in school are equal, and research suggests that pupils from lower SES backgrounds often experience lower academic attainment, lower sense of belonging, or lower subjective wellbeing than their more advantaged peers (Moore et al., 2017; Naven et al., 2019; Riley, 2019a). To address these inequalities and improve pupil outcomes, Mowat (2019) argues efforts must begin by changing the behaviours of adults. She suggests that this behaviour change depends on effective leadership and may involve challenging long-standing assumptions around poverty or the purposes of schooling (e.g., an emphasis primarily on academic attainment), and increasing adults’ sense of responsibility to bring about change.

Additionally, while leadership is just one factor within an interconnected web of influences in the whole school system, leaders can make a large contribution to organisational change through their leadership styles. Marks and Printy (2003) suggest that leaders who integrate a combination of transformational (e.g., focused on building shared purpose and collaborative culture) and pedagogical (e.g., focused on strategies to enhance teaching and learning) leadership styles may be better able to achieve high quality pedagogy, positive school
culture, and desired pupil outcomes if they are able to inspire staff motivation, commitment, and build upon organisational capabilities for shared leadership. Similarly, Dinham (2007) argues that leaders who demonstrate authoritative leadership style balance being highly responsive and highly demanding. They can provide clarity on the school’s goals and vision through firm and transparent communication about school directives and expectations (demand). Authoritative leaders combine demand with high levels of support, encouragement, consultation with the school community, and explanation about the reasoning behind decisions (response). This combination of demand and response may be conducive to creating the conditions necessary for empowering staff and pupils within the school (Scottish Government, 2018).
Chapter Ten: Influencing factor – Personal experience and identity

10.1 Introduction

Schools are complex systems, where various practitioners such as senior leaders, teachers, sports coaches, guidance, and pupil support officers engage in a process of policy interpretation, meaning-making, and pedagogy to support the learning and development of pupils (Maguire et al., 2015). These education practitioners negotiate their practices as they engage with colleagues, pupils, the wider school community, and policy; however, they do not come to school as a ‘blank slate’. They are also an amalgamation of their own biographies and backgrounds, and these personal experiences inform their identities and practices. Therefore, this chapter will expand on how participants described their personal experiences, how their experiences may reveal implicit aspects of their identity, as well as how these experiences and identities may act as a key influencing factor on their school practices.

According to Bukor (2015, p. 306), “ones identity may be expressed in the form of beliefs, assumptions, values, and actions as well as the various ways one perceives oneself and the world.” Going further, Palmer (2017, p. 13, original emphasis) defined identity as:

“By identity I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic make-up, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am.”

This definition emphasises a holistic and ecological view of identity as constituted by an individual’s significant others, sociocultural context, and personal experiences as well as the internal characteristics that make up ‘who they are’. These factors are highly personal and fundamentally entwined, exerting a strong influence on both personal and professional identity (Jourdan, Simar, Deasy, Carvalho, & Mannix McNamara, 2016). Beyond who they are, teachers’ professional identities can influence their self-esteem and self-efficacy, the meanings they attach to their work, their relationships with pupils and colleagues, and can manifest in their actions (Bukor, 2015; Day & Gu, 2010). For example, all the participants in this study referenced
their backgrounds and personal experiences as being a main influence for how they conceptualise HWB and how they attempt to support HWB in schools.

Therefore, it is important to explore how personal experience and identity may have shaped and influenced the practices of the educators in this study. First, this thesis will explore elements of participants’ personal experience and how this may have impacted their identity. Then, it will explore how their understandings of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage are reflected in their identity, and finally, it will describe how their identity may impact how they think through supporting HWB in the classroom.

10.2 Personal experience and identity

All participants highlighted events in their personal and professional lives which influenced their understanding of HWB and the way they perceive themselves. For example, one educator who teaches within the PE department, and serves in a voluntary position on a school HWB working committee noted:

“My family and friends have had challenges with their mental health. That’s something that was quite prevalent with those who are in my life, so I’m used to supporting people or…being that sort of supporting person for those who are having challenge at that point.” – Lachlan, PE

This excerpt shows how HWB may have become normalised for Lachlan because significant others in his life experienced challenges with their wellbeing, especially mental health. This may have impacted both his interest in the concept, as well as his confidence in supporting HWB, and could have influenced him towards the role of a ‘supporter’ within Cityside High.

Another educator noted that he “wasn’t very academic”, did not go directly to university after school, and “didn’t really behave at school that well”. He revealed that he struggled in more traditional courses like maths or physics but flourished in sports-related activities.

“Back when I was in school, things were different. There was not all the support for anybody that was really struggling, you were just categorised, put into the ‘dumb class’...but anytime I was going swimming, or [playing] rugby or football, or boxing, it’s like you come alive. That was my thing, where I felt safe, wasnae judged.” – Alistair, PE

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10 Scottish term meaning ‘was not’
This excerpt suggests that while he might not have felt supported by the overall school system during his own schooling experience, sporting activities were a positive influence in his life. Visible in this excerpt are implicit links to holistic HWB as sports and physical activity appeared to play a supportive and protective role in his own HWB. This history appears to have influenced his identity as a sporty and athletic person, so it is perhaps unsurprising that Alistair now works within the sport and PE department. Moreover, his identity is also reflected in his non-judgmental approach when teaching or providing one-on-one HWB support to pupils. As he describes, his personal ethos is that “you’ll never get the best out of people until you get to know them”, so he hopes that pupils see him as “somebody who’s just willing to sit and listen and not pretend I’ve got...all the answers”.

Importantly, as Jourdan et al. (2016, p. 108) note, teacher identity is not fixed, but is a fluid and “on-going process of interpretation and re-interpretation” of personal and professional experiences. This is seen in Isla’s interview where she reflects on her prior professional experience with young people whose challenging personal circumstances resulted in them being taken into care. She noted the experience made her more ‘outward’ thinking rather than focusing mainly on behaviour management in the classroom:

“I think I try more to understand why that is a behaviour and where that is coming from. Just because of sort of the horrific things I’ve seen before, really trying to understand what is behind all of those behaviours and what they are actually trying to communicate rather than just being [seeing the behaviour as] what is deemed as like ‘naughty’ in class.” -Isla, Biology

She went on to describe how she used humour to ‘diffuse the situation’ if a pupil was being disruptive, rather than more punitive actions like removing them from class. She also shared that she wanted her classes to be more “laid-back as opposed to like a formal classroom setting”, while still getting the required work completed, and her belief that she tends to get along with pupils because “they see that I’m trying to sort of understand from their perspective”. These reflections appear to highlight that her professional experience made her more aware and compassionate towards the different contexts of pupils and may have influenced her identity as a more relaxed, non-judgmental, empathetic, and understanding teacher willing to use alternative or non-traditional approaches.
These examples highlight the ecological nature of identity and how various experiences (e.g., personal, professional, and sociocultural) can influence how teachers see themselves and how they wish to be seen by others. Many participants also shared the importance of non-judgment, as seen in the prior excerpts, which resonates with the overall ethos and culture within the school. This is important because research has shown that teacher identity is not only influenced by internal characteristics, but also the interaction between personal experience and the sociocultural and environmental factors of the workplace (Day & Gu, 2010). Crucially, identity has implications for teachers’ motivation and engagement to overarching school HWB priorities because when teachers believe the school values correspond with their personal values, they are more likely to identify with and be committed to these priorities (Jourdan et al., 2016).

10.3 Conceptualisations of HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage reflected within educators’ identities

When teachers were asked to describe their understanding of HWB, there was often explicit reference to national policy language and terminology (e.g., E&Os, GIRFEC, and the SHANARRI indicators). Teachers generally appeared to accept and repeat national and school policy terminology and directives, but as noted above, teachers’ tacit conceptualisations and beliefs may affect their commitment to and enactment of these priorities (Jourdan et al., 2016). Therefore, the next two sections will explore the more implicit understandings teachers held around HWB and disadvantage.

10.3.1 Conceptualisations of HWB and educator identity

Besides policy language, all participants appeared to view HWB holistically with implicit references to the relationship between mental, social, emotional, and physical elements in their reflections. For example, one teacher noted his background as an athlete helped his social networks and social wellbeing:

As “somebody who’s always been involved in sport, had a supportive family, had quite a good circle of friends, just I suppose always being sociable and surrounded by supportive people has probably shaped my emphasis on the importance of having good conversations and different
conversations... just having a mixture of different things to go and do and to socialise, to unwind and switch off. To listen, but also to just have conversations that reassure you.” – Graeme, PE

This excerpt suggests Graeme sees positive links between physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, considering sports and other hobbies as a way to ‘switch off’ or get support and reassurance if dealing with a HWB challenge.

Another teacher revealed that his identity and priorities changed when he became a father. When he was younger, he had been taught and had believed that work was the most important thing in life, so he chased promotions and pay raises early in his career. However, as his family role changed, so too did his perspective, and now he believes in the need for balance:

“There [are] a lot of people that push themselves in their 20s and 30s and end up unwell through the rest of their adult lives, just because, you know, they’ve driven themselves too hard. And I just think having a balance between work and socialising, work and life, family time, is the perfect position to be in.” – Malcolm, Maths

Within this focus on balance there appears to be an implicit understanding of wellbeing as a holistic and ecological concept that comprises multiple elements such as work (or attainment), physical and mental health, social life, and family.

Similarly, another teacher made links between mental, social, and emotional aspects of wellbeing along with attainment when reflecting on her own experiences in school:

“When I was in school, I was bullied a lot and I felt very socially excluded. None of my teachers seemed to really clock on or notice anything like that because academically I was doing great. So, from the outward appearances, I felt like it looked like I was getting on okay, but I actually really, really struggled socially and mentally at school.” – Kathleen, Biology

This excerpt suggests that Kathleen conceptualises HWB holistically and as broader than academic attainment. She also acknowledges that pupils’ challenges with HWB can be missed, especially if teachers or schools mainly focus on attainment (or other needs assumed by adults) and do not attend to the needs as expressed by pupils (Noddings, 2012).

Moreover, this view reflects a wealth of literature which suggests that while experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage can negatively influence school experiences (See Mazzoli-Smith & Todd, 2019; Mowat, 2019; Naven et al., 2019; Sosu & Ellis, 2014; Spratt, 2017), a focus on attainment alone is not enough to tackle the issue. Therefore, in the next section I
will examine some of the implicit and explicit conceptualisations teachers held around socioeconomic disadvantage and how this may (or may not) relate to their conceptualisations of HWB.

### 10.3.2 Conceptualisations of socioeconomic disadvantage and educator identity

Previously, a strong emphasis on attainment was noted as an expectation within the school due to prior history and reputation as a high attainment school, with one teacher noting:

“I suppose we do suffer, possibly more than some schools, with the anxiety and stress related to doing well enough with the expectation of the area and the demands of parents, and the traditions of possibly all their siblings who have gone on to university and done well.” – Graeme, PE

He noted that the school’s reputation for high attainment often led to high expectations and could act as a barrier to HWB for both affluent and disadvantaged pupils if they were anxious about not being able to meet these expectations. However, Graeme also noted that the culture and ethos had changed in recent years to be more inclusive and to recognise achievements beyond academic attainment. This sentiment was echoed by other teachers who shared:

“I went to similar school where majority of pupils were from affluent backgrounds and there was a small percentage of the pupils that weren’t, and they felt ostracised slightly. And I think that was the case in this school for a small time, but I don’t think that’s the case as much now. I think that there’s greater inclusion, and a lot more’s being done to support these kids.” – Malcolm, Maths

“As much as academics obviously mean a lot and there are points systems in schools and stuff like that, [SLT] has made it clear to the staff that it’s not the be all and end all.” – Alistair, PE

These participants believe the school is moving away from a culture that mainly prioritised attainment to one that aims to be more inclusive and supportive. The first quote also touches upon the idea of ostracism and demonstrates Malcolm’s awareness that disadvantaged pupils may experience feelings of not belonging as much or in comparison to their more affluent peers. This reflects literature that found that disadvantaged pupils who are in the minority in a more affluent school may experience a lower sense of wellbeing than if they were in a school with peers from a similar background (Moore et al., 2017).
This potential for negative social comparison to more affluent peers is reiterated by another participant who noted:

It’s about “getting them to believe in themselves and not looking at what somebody else is doing. It’s...about what I’m doing well, what I can do better, what I can achieve. Not making them feel like they [may] have felt for x% of their life – like you’re not going to amount to anything, you’re not going to be able to do that.” - Alistair, PE

Implicit within this quote is a recognition that those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional barriers to wellbeing, such as the possibility for stigma, or decreased self-belief or confidence, and while not explicitly stated, it is possible to infer that these beliefs could have been influenced by his own history or feelings as a ‘not very academic’ pupil.

However, it is also apparent that he does not believe these challenges are insurmountable, and instead of focusing on the problems, he appears to take a more salutogenic approach encouraging pupils to recognise their individual strengths, achievements, and capabilities to make personal improvements vs. comparison to an external goal point (Antonovsky, 1996).

This strengths-based, salutogenic orientation is significant because as White (2008) notes, there is a fine line between identifying an individual or group as disadvantaged and singling them out for social stigma. Deficit-based understandings of disadvantage have frequently been criticised for focusing on ‘risk’ or ‘vulnerability’ associated with socioeconomic status, which may inadvertently position disadvantaged pupils as passive agents ‘in need of saving’ (Ecclestone, 2012; Hardley et al., 2020; Lumby, 2012). Indeed, Spratt (2016; 2017) argues that within the national curriculum and policy directives like ‘responsibility of all’, a common discourse revolves around ‘care’ which emphasises adults’ responsibility to protect the rights and wellbeing of pupils. If teachers implicitly hold more deficit-based conceptualisations of disadvantage or wellbeing, this can influence their practices toward increased intervention and ‘caring’ actions done ‘in the best interests’ of the child or young person. Additionally, beyond policy directives, teachers’ personal identities as ‘caring teachers’ may also compel them toward intervention to reduce the various risks perceived to be facing pupils. However, Noddings (2012) and Ecclestone (2012) caution that caring actions can easily turn into something that is ‘done to’ pupils if teachers are not attentive to the views and desires of pupils. Thus, it is important to investigate how teachers’ identities and implicit beliefs about
wellbeing and disadvantage may influence their school practices when trying to support pupil HWB.

10.4 “Who I am as a teacher is because of who I was as a pupil”: Identity and practice

All of the participants in this study recognised their personal experiences as a main influencing factor for how they conceptualise HWB and how they attempt to support HWB in schools. When identifying practices to support wellbeing, a prominent focus was on relationships with participants noting their identities and experiences helped to facilitate these relations. Therefore, the next three sections will explore how teachers’ experiences and identities helped heighten awareness of HWB, increase opportunities to connect and relate to pupils, and empower pupils.

10.4.1 Personal experience and identity as a sensitising influence

For many participants, ruminating on their own experiences and struggles seemed to increase their empathy and compassion. For example:

“I suppose I’ve got quite a lot of empathy and a lot of sympathy for them as well. Just from my own background and my own childhood, I’m a 4 ACEs+ [adverse childhood experiences] young person coming through the woodwork, so I’ve had to deal with some of the things they do, so I get difficulties.” - Liam, PE

“I had to ask for time off because I just could not get sleep...and I was really, really struggling. So, when I came back to work...I think for me, it was a case of, well, if I had to go through that, then what are the other pupils and staff at the school experiencing?” – Malcolm, Maths

These quotes suggest that experiencing their own challenges with wellbeing could act as a sensitising influence, making them more conscious that others could be facing HWB challenges. Moreover, their experiences also appeared to heighten their awareness of the ‘hidden’ nature of HWB and that that anyone could be struggling with their HWB:

“[HWB] became a topic that I was quite involved in and quite interested in, or kind of aware that it was...people who you might not necessarily think maybe having challenges with their wellbeing.” – Lachlan, PE

“I don’t think I appreciated how many pupils have it not great at home...I think it just maybe changed my perspective a little bit that even kids that present as having it totally together and
quite happy and bubbly can have some of the worst circumstances going on behind the scenes."
– Isla, Biology
For Lachlan and Isla, considering their histories and backgrounds appeared to make them more
conscious that outward appearances could be deceiving. This awareness appeared to increase
their understanding of, and compassion for, pupil context.

Similarly, when remembering her own history of hiding challenges with bullying and
poor HWB, Kathleen had a strong emotional response that influenced her desire to support the
wellbeing of her pupils and motivated her actions as a teacher:

“I think noticing off days is a big thing because a lot of the time people are really good at
masking and presenting and things like that. You kind of have to just learn who they are as
people, because some people just aren’t happy all the time, and that’s their normal, and that’s
okay... You have to know them as people, so then you can recognise any sort of signs and
interactions and a lot of it’s the sort of subtler things.” – Kathleen, Biology

These sensitising experiences appeared to make teachers more vigilant and motivated to know
their pupils well and notice shifts in behaviour that could indicate a change in wellbeing for
young people. This vigilance seemed to come from a caring place where teachers wanted to
protect, support, and ensure their pupils’ wellbeing.

Central to supporting pupil wellbeing was the notion of relationships. All participants
expressed conviction around the importance of trust and knowing pupils well, with several
participants noting their experiences and identity were useful for building relationships and
creating space for dialogue with pupils which will be described in the following section.

10.4.2 Identity as a strategy for building relationships

All participants expressed their beliefs in the importance of positive pupil-teacher relationships
for supporting wellbeing, and noted different strategies they used to understand, relate to, and
build relationships with pupils. Some strategies included subject-specific material such as
linking mental, social, and emotional wellbeing topics like stress with heart rate or happiness
with physiological neurotransmitters such as serotonin. However, most strategies appeared
broader and more generalised, highlighting elements like listening and non-judgement for
fostering trust within relationships with pupils. For example:
“One of the things that I always make sure to emphasise at the beginning of having a new class is that there’s no wrong answers, you’re not going to be teased if you get anything wrong, don’t be afraid. Get to know the kids...knowing their back story, knowing what their expectations are.” – Malcolm, Maths

“Listening without judgment. I think just establishing that bond is really important to me, and then giving them the space if they feel like they need to say anything they can, and if they feel like they don’t want to say anything, then they know I’m there anyway.” – Kathleen, Biology

These quotes suggest the importance of non-judgement for create a trusting relationship and environment where pupils will not fear being shamed for making mistakes and can feel safe to open up and talk.

Some participants were also willing to share their own experiences and identities with pupils as part of this dialogue. Teachers’ personal involvement and familiarity with a wide range of experiences like learning difficulties, mental health challenges, sexual orientation, or bullying appeared to not only influence their empathy, but also the way they relate to and interact with pupils:

“One thing that I’m fairly open with pupils about is my own challenges within learning. So, whether that was learning with dyslexia, ’cause that for myself, had a whole sort of array of feelings and challenges in the school environment...so I can completely understand pupils’ worries where there’s, they have challenges with their learning. If someone had had a conversation with me...and normalised that for myself when I was growing up...I know I would have really appreciated it, ’cause that did happen towards the end of my time in school, and it was something that was really impactful for myself.” – Lachlan, PE

This excerpt suggests how reflection increased Lachlan’s self-knowledge about his identity and the impact of his experiences, which in turn helped him empathise with pupils and see the value of open dialogue. This inspired him to be more transparent, appreciating that disclosure around his own challenges could be a valuable tool to normalise speaking about difficulties and to de-stigmatise differences.

Similarly, when reflecting on his background, Alistair recognised his experiences may differ from a majority of pupils at Cityside High who traditionally had high attainment and went on to university. However, he saw this as a chance to show pupils that there are multiple paths to success and to creating a life of value:
“I guess for me, not being as clever as someone else in the school doesn’t mean you’re not going to be successful in your own right. Sometimes it takes you a wee bit different path to find out what it is that you’re going to end up doing…it just might take you longer to find your feet than others... It was just a good opportunity to say: ‘Look, it’s alright to fail, it’s alright to be wrong, it’s alright to maybe take your time’” – Alistair, PE

This quote suggests that Alistair sees challenges or setbacks as an opportunity for learning. By reflecting on and sharing his own experiences with pupils, he may create space to normalise making mistakes, champion various forms of success, de-stigmatise differences, and showcase diverse life paths.

However, James (2012) cautions that personal experience and identity have the potential for projection and blind spots – where schools and teachers may inadvertently ascribe challenges and needs to pupils based on their own experiences, feelings, and beliefs. This can be problematic, especially if teachers implicitly hold more deficit views of HWB or disadvantage, as teachers may then be compelled to act to reduce these assumed needs. This reflects Noddings’ (2012) distinction between the needs assumed by the school, curriculum, or carer (care ‘done-to’) and the needs expressed by pupils (care ‘done-for’).

Noddings suggests that in order to be truly caring, relations should be based on mutuality, where both parties contribute to the maintenance of care. This necessitates attentiveness (Noddings, 2012), caution and humility (James, 2012) – where teachers listen attentively to what pupils have to share; use caution when listening so as not to judge, dismiss, or invalidate pupils’ views; and maintain humility so as to be willing to change their beliefs or preconceptions based on what they hear. Mutuality also requires that pupils have a say in their care and are able to express their needs and have their voices heard. Hence, participants’ efforts to access and understand these pupil voices will be described next.

10.4.3 Identity as a strategy for empowering pupils to flourish

When describing practices to support HWB, several participants noted the importance of pupil voice. Participants described the efforts made to access and understand pupils’ views and voices. For example:

“Within the health and wellbeing working group at Cityside High School, we've had a pupil questionnaire sent out...and that is essentially then going to...impact on what happens in the
future years in terms of health and wellbeing priorities. So definitely, we’re taking in the young people’s views and concerns because, you know, we [staff] can be up to date with things, but we don’t really know what young people are feeling until we speak to them and seek their opinion.” – Kieran, PE

“So annually the kids get to fill out a questionnaire about how they’re feeling...but sometimes they take a randomly picked set of pupils out of classes and talk to them about what's going on in their classes, how they feel that their teachers are doing in certain subject areas, such as mental health and wellbeing, and then they feed that back to all of the teachers. I haven’t really been in a school environment that had done that before. Like, taken directly the words from the kids and fed them back to the teachers...So the pupils, I think they've got sort of the biggest voice in this, because it's about them.” – Isla, Biology

These quotes describe several school-wide initiatives to access pupils’ voices and feelings, such as questionnaires and focus groups. Kieran also recognises that teachers ‘don’t really know’ pupils’ needs and concerns unless they ask - reflecting Noddings’ (2012) distinction between expressed and assumed needs.

However, beyond simply accessing pupil voice and responding to these needs, teachers also appear to want to empower pupils to play an active role in the care relationship. Within the school, for every staff working group there is a pupil-led working group, and teachers noted ways they try to involve and encourage pupils to participate in the process:

“We’ve realised there’s a challenge here, what can we do together to help address some of these challenges? So then working with that pupil group to help facilitate them becoming kind of like the drivers of change.” – Lachlan, PE

This quote suggests teachers are actively trying to encourage and empower pupils to take the lead and be ‘drivers of change’. Teachers are attempting to act as facilitators, supporting pupils to co-construct practices within the school and respond to identified challenges and needs. Implicit within this approach is a ‘flourishing’ discourse (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017) that focuses on supporting pupils’ freedom to choose what is valuable to them. Flourishing discourse is underpinned by the belief that wellbeing relies upon autonomy and self-determinism - where pupils have some choice in what they do, who they are, and have opportunities to compare different options (Spratt, 2016).

This emphasis on self-determinism is also seen when teachers try to provide choice and personalisation within the curriculum. For example, one participant described his involvement
in setting up new ‘wellbeing options’ for senior level pupils (S5-6). Instead of compulsory PE periods, pupils could choose between different options to support their wellbeing (e.g., PE, outdoor learning, art, and drama), but importantly, these options are ‘not study-based’ or attainment-focused:

“What happens now is they get one dedicated session of PSE and then their 2nd period...we give them a say in what they would like to see. Basically, an option in the week that they can look forward to, that’s something laid back and that focuses on wellbeing. It’s a chance to speak to a member of staff, and just get away from a screen and get away from any pressure...I think it’s been a strength in that we’re really listening, we’re not saying everybody has to do PE anymore in S5. Those that want to can still do it, but also those that want to just get a bit of wellbeing time in something else can choose something a little more appropriate to them.” – Graeme, PE

Within this excerpt, there are implicit elements of his own identity as Graeme had previously shared his belief that sports and hobbies could provide an outlet for stress relief and support wellbeing (see section 10.3.1). This quote also highlights teachers’ efforts to foster pupil agency and reiterates a flourishing discourse.

10.5 Conclusion
This chapter explored how teachers described their practices to support HWB in school but asserts that these practices are not simply ‘as is’ policy implementation. Instead, teacher practice was a process of policy interpretation and sense-making that was informed by their own experiences, beliefs, and identities in conflux with sociocultural aspects of the school environment (Spratt, 2017). The chapter took as a starting point Palmer’s (2017) definition of identity as the nexus of all the forces that constitute an individual (e.g., internal characteristics, personal and professional experiences, significant others, sociocultural and organisational context), and Jourdan et al.’s (2016) assertion that the various forces that shape identity all influence teachers’ decisions, assumptions, and attitudes about what, how, and why they teach.

All the participants within this study acknowledged that their identities were a central influencing factor on the ways they conceptualised and supported HWB. When reflecting on their practices to support HWB, there was a clear emphasis on relational approaches and personal identity appeared to facilitate the development of these relationships. Personal
identity also appeared to correspond with school ethos, with teachers espousing goals like normalising challenge, being non-judgemental, and celebrating various forms of success. This illustrates the overlap and interrelationship between key influencing factors (e.g., identity, ethos, and relationships) identified in this thesis and how they can enable whole school approaches to HWB promotion.

These findings may also have implications for leadership, organisational structure, and priority setting as teachers’ personal and professional identities could influence their motivation, engagement, and commitment to school policies, priorities, and directives, which in turn can impact the experiences of pupils. This may be especially important for those pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as research suggests these pupils are less likely to feel connected to schools or teachers, which can have negative effects on their HWB and school experiences (Mowat, 2020; Riley, 2019a). Thus, Jourdan et al. (2016) suggest that initial teacher training and continuing professional development could explicitly consider teacher identity alongside development of collaborative cultures to encourage staff commitment to school HWB promotion.
Chapter 11 – The role of reflection

11.1 Introduction
Reflective practice has been highlighted as beneficial for quality teaching because it encourages learning from previous experience through the use of reflection (i.e., thinking about prior practice and evaluating how to do it differently or better)(Mann, 2016). Reflective practice has been conceptualised as a process or an ongoing ‘disposition to enquiry’ about practice, rather than the acquisition of specific skills, and is believed to be a critical element of professional learning and development (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). Thus, reflective educators should be willing to ask questions about themselves, their schools and classrooms, the impact of their own practices, and whether they have the best approach; however, this requires time to consider their own learning, their own conceptualisations and beliefs about being educators, and their pedagogy and practices (MacNaughton, 2005).

11.2 The role of reflection in this study
This doctoral study aimed to provide educators with an opportunity for professional learning through provision of time and space to reflect on their beliefs about and reasoning behind their wellbeing practices, particularly for those pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Wolcott (2009) suggests that the very act of a researcher pointing out things that may be unclear can help ‘disrupt’ taken-for-granted assumptions or reveal ambiguities or tensions about the school, which may serve as a catalyst for reflection. Furthermore, Nixon (cited in Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012, p. 11) argues that educators should “work out their educational values, not in isolation and abstraction but in collaboration with colleagues and amid the complexities of school life.” With this in mind, dyadic interviews were selected as a method to facilitate this collaborative reflection, with feedback of study findings followed by time for paired discussion and consideration on practice (see Chapter 5).

The reflective discussion questions were adjusted based on the interview dyad (i.e., with SLT or with classroom teachers) to reflect their roles within the school, but a shared question across both groups related to whether participation in the study impacted their thinking on how they support pupils from lower SES backgrounds and whether it may change their practice.
in the future. The results of these reflective dyadic interview discussions are analysed below. The analysis of each dyad is presented separately for clarity, but with relevant comparisons made across as needed.

**11.2.1 Senior leadership reflections**

Described throughout this thesis were numerous examples of good practice to support HWB and reduce the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage. There also appeared to be a shared belief of the school as being ‘a good place to be’ and positive pupil and staff wellbeing; however, what was less clear was how the school knows this or whether it was more an anecdotal feeling. Thus, given the participants’ position in formal leadership roles, the discussion questions related to the overall school ethos and motto related to a sense of belonging, as well as the school systems to capture pupil voice.

When asked whether pupils from lower SES backgrounds felt a sense of belonging in the school, the participants acknowledged that some may not:

“The phrase that they use is, sometimes that ‘I stick out like a sore thumb.’ That they don’t have the same labelled clothing that other pupils have, they don’t have the cars and the private houses that some of our other pupils have. And that’s not necessarily anything that we have immediate control over within school, but just as, you know, reflection on society, that they feel that divide. And when they come into school, they continue to see that.” – Mary, SLT

This excerpt demonstrates that school leaders recognise that socioeconomic disadvantage can impact pupils beyond aspects like material deprivation, to affect dynamics like social status and hierarchy. While limited access to resources like food and other daily necessities can negatively impact pupils in obvious ways, disadvantage can also impact the ‘symbolic markers’ of social status or inclusion such as wearing the ‘right’ trainers or driving the ‘right’ cars (Ridge, 2011). This resonates with Mowat (2019) who argues that many of the negative impacts of poverty (e.g., social exclusion or sense of not-belonging) are driven by economic inequality at the societal level, and as such, the solution cannot rest in schools alone. Much of the negative social comparison (e.g., having the ‘right’ car or house) described in the excerpt above is out of the control of Cityside High, or any school. However, this nuanced understanding of the myriad ways poverty can impact pupils is an essential first step and has translated into practice. The
school makes efforts to waive fees for extracurricular activities, practical subjects, and school trips which may inhibit course choice or participation for pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. They are also currently in consultation with the wider school community (e.g., pupils, staff, parents) about a relaxation of their uniform rules:

“There are still inevitably, there are issues that come up... I think even our uniform, you know you've got wool blazers or polyester blazers. And even that, in itself, can be, can highlight differences in terms of affordability for example. So, there's all these kind of small things that go on in schools and where stigmas will be attached, but I suppose doing what we can to remove any barriers as much as possible, I think will have a positive impact.” – Rory, SLT

The removal of costs which could restrict pupil participation (e.g., subject choice, attending school trips, uniform) have been shown to impact pupils’ sense of belonging and social inclusion (Mazzoli-Smith & Todd, 2019; Ridge, 2011). The school also provides support like ‘prom hire’, understanding that these symbolic social markers can mean a lot for pupils. Additionally, an awareness of ‘small things where stigma will be attached’ is fundamental for addressing stigma. In audits of UK school practices and poverty stigmatisation, Mazzoli-Smith and Todd (2019) found that it was usually not direct stigmatisation that caused harm, but processes which overlooked stigma, such that the experiences of pupils went unnoticed. For example, in one school, the authors found free school meals were distributed in distinctive packaging which then inadvertently identified recipients as low-income (ibid).

However, a key challenge for the school centred on the difficulty of hearing the experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils and whether they feel a sense of belonging due to the chance of stigmatisation. This raised an important question around how to learn about these pupils’ experiences in a sensitive manner:

“All of these questions are really good, but they're making me think - ‘I can't say. That's not my lived experience’ and therefore, I don't know unless we ask pupils what it is they need from us. We need to ask those direct questions. Maybe stop being scared, and be brave, and take chances that we might cause some offense, but the motivation for us asking the questions is to bring about a change that's going to make [lower SES pupils] feel you belong here or more included.” – Mary, SLT

“Interestingly, I had this exact conversation... talking about how we can actually, I suppose, put a bit more rigour around the system to make sure that we are actually having a full representation of all our pupils sitting on things like form representatives or Nation Council. I think Mary used the word earlier of that kind of positive discrimination, and it's about some of
these behind-the-scenes conversations going on to encourage these pupils to be applying, to aid them with the application process, to encourage them to kind of put the best foot forward, you know. So, there's a lot of things that can be done through some of our key adults in the school, but also just changing our process slightly to make it a bit more inviting.” – Rory, SLT

These excerpts suggest a shared awareness that experiences of belonging or inclusion are subjective and cannot be known unless the school consults with pupils directly. It also alludes to the notion that support may not be helpful or perceived as supportive if the needs of lower SES pupils are not well understood. This raised an important reflection point that the school may inadvertently miss the views and voices of lower SES pupils if, out of a worry of stigmatisation, they do not specifically include them. Therefore, the school acknowledged that in the future it is crucial that they ‘stop being scared and be brave.’

Lundy (2007) argues that ‘voice’ can be problematic if schools do not ensure systematic ways of consulting with pupils. She suggests four elements are necessary to increase pupils’ capabilities for voice, which are: space (the opportunity to express a view), voice (facilitated to share their view), audience (the view must be listened to), and influence (the view must be acted upon, as appropriate). According to Lundy (ibid), there is a significant overlap between ‘space’ and ‘voice’ elements, which is particularly salient for this doctoral study. This overlap suggests that schools should take proactive steps to provide opportunities, facilitate, and encourage pupil input (not just passively receiving feedback) which has implications for inclusivity and rights-protecting practice, especially for lower SES pupils who are in the minority within the school. Lundy’s (2007) proactive approach to ‘voice’ reflects the idea of proportionate universalism because the school should provide universal opportunities for pupils to have their voices heard. However, as lower SES pupils are more likely to face barriers to sharing their voice and are at higher risk of going ‘unheard’, they should receive extra, targeted support (e.g., the notion of ‘positive discrimination’). Therefore, Lundy (ibid) argues active steps must be taken to access the voice of pupils who may be marginalised due to, for example, socioeconomic status, social stigma, disability, or language. This suggests schools should implement systematic methods to consult with pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may struggle to share their views. This also raised further questions around
how to evaluate the effectiveness of the school supports in general, especially as experienced by lower SES pupils, which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

11.2.2 Teacher reflections

Throughout this doctoral study, educators described their practices to support wellbeing which often appeared to draw upon individual identity in terms of personal biographies and experiences, as well as expectations and aspirations as a teacher. Teacher practice often centred on building strong relationships with pupils, but what was sometimes less clear was whether teachers were aware of pupils’ socioeconomic backgrounds and whether (or if) this influenced their approaches to providing support. Given the participants’ roles in classroom teaching, the reflective discussion questions pertained to practices and knowledge of pupils in class. Both participants noted that the school is data-rich with a school tracking system that compiles pupils’ needs and that “the information's out there if you're willing to go and get it.” However, this access and use may vary across teachers in the school depending on identity and teaching philosophy:

“Again, it goes to depending on the teacher... Some teachers could tell you – Kathleen probably is a very good example. She'll be able to tell you in her class which ones are in [what] SIMD and what supports she’s already got put in place. If I’m being brutally honest, I tend to wait to see how the kids react to my class. I hate having a preconception of their [needs]. I'll look up things like learning barriers so that I can make the environment comfortable, but in terms of like socioeconomical, I don't tend to look at that until I get to know the person and then from that, I'll put supports in place.... I think it’s probably because I was a kid from poverty is that I didn't like, I always hated that idea of people making that judgment of me straight away [that he would want or need extra supports].” Liam, PE

In this excerpt there is explicit acknowledgement of how personal history and identity can impact teacher practice. Liam notes his experiences feeling judged in school because he was ‘a kid from poverty’ and how that influences his current beliefs. He notes he is more reactive to SES as he believes this will help to avoid pupils feeling judged, whereas other teachers may be more proactive. However, Kathleen posits that teachers can be proactive with support without judgement, to which he agrees:
“Yeah, I’d say it’s on your clock. I wouldn’t think, that [pupils] come in and like immediately, ‘Well, you’re not gonna have a pencil, so here’s a pencil’. It’s just something you clock, I don’t know.” – Kathleen, Biology

“To be fair, I don’t know about you, but for me [SES] is not something I see as a fixed barrier as it used to be because you’ve already got the perception that kids might not come with equipment, so we have stuff to spare.” - Liam, PE

“Yeah, it’s global support really, isn’t it? They are there to cover, like with free school meals being offered to more.” – Kathleen, Biology

These excerpts suggest that the participants aim to be aware of the potential need for support, but equally aim to avoid assuming need. They also demonstrate a shared approach of starting with universal provisions before adding targeted support if needed, again, reflecting the principle of proportionate universalism. The focus on universal support is important because the literature suggests it is less ‘othering’ or stigmatising than targeted approaches which begin with deficit-based views of children (White, 2008). Additionally, literature suggests that deficit-based views could position children as lacking agency and ‘in need of saving’, which could then become a self-fulfilling prophesy (Mowat, 2019). These literature findings were echoed by participants in the dyadic interview discussion, who challenged some of the messaging around socioeconomic disadvantage:

“We’re basically telling kids this is how they [will] be because they’re poor rather than... That’s how it came across to me, as somebody from [poverty]. Like we’re saying if you’re poor, this is likely to happen.... This is what statistically could happen, and then that’s what [pupils] listen to, and it’s all teachers listen to as well.” – Liam, PE

“I have wondered about that. Sometimes I feel like the pitch of some assemblies and things like that, it’s speaking to the majority – ‘This is something that happens, this is something that could be silently happening to people you know.’ Like, trying to, they’re trying to raise awareness and empathy...but in doing so [possibly othering the minority].” – Kathleen, Biology

From these excerpts, it appears that participants believe the school is trying to help and has good intentions to ‘raise awareness and empathy’ but also that these efforts could have unintended effects which may exacerbate stigmatisation. Liam also notes his own lived experiences which influence his thinking, as well as his belief in the need for self-representation, noting the work in other equalities groups:
“We’ve had a big turnaround in our BIPOC\textsuperscript{11} community, and their kind of awareness and I suppose it’s been led by BIPOC pupils who have got experience in it rather than white people deciding what would be best for the BIPOC community. We’re all affluent or middle-class people trying to decide what’s best for poverty people…. I think it’s the same as anything. If you want change, it’s gotta be people that have had lived experiences that help with the change.”

Liam notes the problematic nature of a more advantaged group deciding ‘in the best interest’ of what a disadvantaged group needs, and raises important questions around whose voices get heard, what knowledge is valued, and who gets to decide. School supports can be well-intentioned, but could also be seen as patronising or infantilising, taking away agency from an already marginalised group. This resonates with the risk of care being ‘done to’ pupils if not thoughtfully considered and the target group not consulted about their needs (Noddings, 2012). This suggests the school should take steps to specifically involve pupils from socioeconomic disadvantage, which resonates with Rory’s (SLT) reflections around the school’s efforts for behind-the-scenes, positive discrimination to enable lower SES pupil participation. However, due to stigma and the chance for negative social comparison many pupils (or staff) from low SES backgrounds may not want to self-identify with those groups, so enabling their involvement may be challenging, which resonates with Mary’s (SLT) reflection:

“I think that the challenge for us is how to make sure we’re not causing any offence if we’re going to engage with pupils from SES background…. I have no issue in taking forward some of our other equalities groups (e.g., race, sexuality) because those pupils come forward and want to be part of those groups, and therefore, they have a voice within the school and a mechanism in which to bring forward action points for change. We don’t have that [for SES].”

This again points to the need mentioned previously about systematic approaches to facilitate and encourage pupil voice and participation from lower SES groups (Lundy, 2007). These systematic approaches may build upon existing good relationships between school staff and pupils or there may even be scope to bring in an outside resource to help evaluate. In a review of school poverty audits, participants shared a belief that their pupils could be more open with a third-party evaluator than they were with staff (Mazzoli-Smith & Todd, 2016). This could be because an outside auditor may be perceived as ‘neutral’, so pupils may feel more comfortable to share negative experiences if they do not think they will get in trouble by school staff.

\textsuperscript{11} BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Colour
11.3 Possible impact on practice

In both dyadic interview discussions, participants were asked whether participation in the study had impacted their thinking on how they support pupils from lower SES backgrounds or impacted how they might support pupils in the future. Some participants noted that their thinking had not changed in relation to support, but that engagement with the research process was useful for dedicated time to think and reflect:

“I would say no because it's something that we naturally do; however, I do enjoy having the opportunity and the space. You've given us the opportunity, and the space, and sort of designated time to actually think about and discuss things, and they are important things to think and discuss. Talking with you about them and stuff like that is all very helpful, so I like it from that aspect. And I think any time to reflect is good, but I wouldn't necessary say it's moved my thinking on.” – Kathleen, Biology

This excerpt suggests that while engagement with the research did not radically shift thinking per se, it was still useful as an opportunity for discussion and reflection. Moreover, there were some important reflections on current practice which may need to be examined in the future such as the messaging within assemblies and the risk for othering pupils or acting as a self-fulfilling prophesy, as well as the importance of careful, systematic consideration of pupil voice activities to ensure that socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils have a say. Additionally, teachers also noted that the people willing to participate may not have necessarily needed to shift their thinking because they are already engaged and doing the work to be aware and support lower SES pupils (a point which will be addressed further in section 12.6).

Furthermore, the research process also served as a reminder to keep awareness of socioeconomic disadvantage and HWB agenda in focus so that supportive, equitable practices are not left by the wayside due to competing responsibilities:

“I suppose your [study] is just seeing how people do things... so you still got teachers to chat about it and to discuss. Which again, we talk about awareness is half the problem and it's the biggest issue is just keeping that awareness going because you hit it for two or three weeks and then something new comes along... so I suppose it’s maintaining that constant thought process.” – Liam, PE

“It's just again, revisiting or building back up that momentum because what's happened in the last two years... is there's been an understandable drive with equalities, but within equalities, SES hasn't really featured [as much], you know, it's very much those with protected characteristics where schools have really been driving forward, and as a school if you’re driving forward that, it's sometimes difficult to take forward everything.” – Mary, SLT
These excerpts demonstrate the complexity of school practice as educators must balance many competing pressures and expectations. Reflection on the school values, motto, and beliefs may serve as a reminder and motivator to continue with the good work that has already been accomplished. The strengths-based focus of the feedback and study was also highlighted as a positive reminder of the existing capabilities in the school:

“I think it's really nice to hear the positives. I think sometimes we do kind of... we focus on the negatives too often and I think there is a point of celebrating some of the positives that are going on. And I like, it's actually reassuring to see that relationships is coming through so strongly as a positive. And actually, the leadership behind that, because you know, I think one of the big things we try and promote is leadership at all levels, not just like in a top-down model. Staff feeling empowered to lead and really kind of take charge of that.” – Rory, SLT

As Rory notes, it can sometimes be easy to focus on the negatives or deficit-based thinking, but there is value in acknowledging what is going well. This affirming focus may serve to ‘reassure’ and validate what educators are already doing and help identify strengths that already exist within the school. As SLT, understanding the factors within the school which are conducive for a whole school HWB approach is important so that they can be strengthened and built upon. This strengths-based focus may also inform future practices within the school:

“I'm going to go back to something that Rory mentioned about being data intelligent... We are pretty data rich as a school, but a very simple fix for us would be actually attaching some decile to some of the analysis that we do in relation to how we gather and generate our at-risk groups and so on. That's just one example, is that we can then make sure that nobody is missing out. So, what we are doing is seeing who is say, decile 1-2, but what we’re not doing is [saying], Who else could have been included in that group? And if they aren’t included, why are they not included? Why are they doing either better or worse and it's just a simple thing, but it will generate really good data for us to then go and have conversation and it doesn't need to be about SES. It's about why, you know, ‘Here’s what you’re doing, here’s your achievements - what are some of the things that are contributing to your successes?’” – Mary, SLT

This excerpt demonstrates a more strengths-based focus – highlighting pupils’ achievements and asking them about what they think contributes to their success rather than attempting to identify problems. This reflects a more salutogenic approach that may help pupils identify their own capabilities and achievements, and which may empower them to build upon these strengths in the future (Antonovsky, 1996). This in turn may help bolster pupils’ self-belief and
self-efficacy, which may be especially important for pupils who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds or who experience stigma (Riley, 2019b).

11.4 Conclusion
This chapter described the findings from the third phase of the doctoral study which involved reflective dyadic interview discussions about educators’ beliefs and rationale behind their school wellbeing practices. This phase aimed to understand the experiences of educators as they engaged with the research process and whether reflection on their beliefs and values may change their future practice. Reflections included some interesting discussions around how to best understand and facilitate pupil voice, especially for those pupils who are already marginalised and in the minority within the school.
Chapter 12: Pulling it all together

12.1 Introduction

This thesis provides new insight into how a Scottish secondary school serving primarily affluent pupils plans and negotiates whole school HWB initiatives when they have a minority of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The thesis aimed to understand the contextual factors perceived by educators as key influences on how they conceptualised their HWB practices, and which facilitated and contributed to successful whole school HWB promotion. Thematic data analysis identified four interrelated factors which influenced the school’s practices: the ethos within the school, an emphasis on relationships, the importance of leadership, and the impact of identity. This chapter will revisit the research questions and discuss how these four factors impacted school practices, before exploring some challenges identified in the study and questions for future research.

12.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

12.2.1 Research Question 1: How is health and wellbeing conceptualised and embedded in the structures and the culture of the school?

The findings of this study demonstrated that there was a shared conceptualisation of HWB between Cityside High School and one feeder primary. The study participants all shared a common understanding of HWB as holistic and comprised of physical, mental, social, and emotional elements. All participants in the study agreed that HWB was important, with balance between the four elements believed to be necessary for the ‘whole’ child and their overall sense of wellbeing, as well as their ability to learn. Participants also demonstrated an ecological and multifactorial understanding of HWB, noting the importance of context and the many factors which could influence HWB (e.g., social relationships, socioeconomic background, home life, school environment). While participants acknowledged tangible needs that they associate with HWB like adequate nutrition and physical safety, they also emphasised intangible needs like feeling a sense of emotional safety, trust, and connection at school, as well as feeling cared for, valued, and accepted as individuals. In the effort to meet these intangible needs, participants described a school ethos which focused on creating a sense of belonging,
encouraged respect and non-judgement, aimed to widen ideas of success and achievement beyond academic test scores, and attempted to normalise experiencing challenges. The schools’ focus on these areas seemed geared towards fostering pupils’ sense of safety, belonging, and affiliation with the school and with teachers.

Beyond the school aims, participants also highlighted democratic values like respect, justice, autonomy, and opportunities for participation as important for HWB, and these values influenced the ways HWB support was embedded within the school. Rather than focus on teaching specific ‘skills for wellbeing’ like management of difficult emotions (Spratt, 2017), study participants demonstrated an understanding of HWB as underlying the relationships and social processes within the school and the ways in which individuals worked together. Thus, the school moved beyond an emphasis on discrete, classroom lessons to take an ecological, relational, and whole school approach to HWB promotion. For example, while HWB influenced the culture within the school in overt ways (e.g., school values displayed on posters on the walls), it also factored into social relationships in the school (e.g., developing shared school values through consultation amongst pupils, staff, and leadership). Additionally, the importance of promoting HWB applied not only to pupils, but also to an overall emphasis on HWB within the school, including staff wellbeing. This manifested as a general emphasis on respect, trust, collegiality, distributive leadership, and positive relationships within and across the school cluster, with participants noting opportunities for pupil and staff input into the ways the school operated.

Participants’ conceptualisations of HWB often echoed the language within CfE curriculum, with several participants explicitly referencing GIRFEC, the SHANARRI indicators, and the E&Os. Local school policy documents and participants’ conceptualisations of HWB as a prerequisite for learning also reflected CfE perspectives that view HWB as critical for supporting effective learning (Scottish Government, 2007). This represents what Spratt (Spratt, 2017, p. 103) describes as the “naturalisation of policy discourses”. She suggested that discourses within curriculum influence educators in both overt and covert ways, such that policy discourse may explicitly direct educators on what they are to teach in schools, but can also implicitly suggest certain social values, mores, or expectations. For example, policy discourses may describe specific curricular
expectations as well as send tacit messages around what makes a ‘good’ teacher, where characteristics of a ‘good’ teacher often imply achievement of curricular aims like the E&Os. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Spratt (2017) suggests that the most powerful discourses are those that become so naturalised that they are no longer questioned. The echoing of policy language suggests that the participants readily accepted (i.e., no longer questioned) CfE and its emphasis on ‘responsibility of all’ as well as care discourses, with every participant indicating a sense of responsibility for HWB and a duty of care to ensure pupils felt safe and included.

However, participants also used flourishing discourse, with HWB regarded as instrumental to support pupils’ capability to make their own choices about what is personally of value to them. While study participants accepted policy imperatives to care for and safeguard pupils, they also showcased a nuanced view of HWB as a process for allowing pupils to grow, develop, and become who they want to be (Hardley et al., 2020). As Fielding (2007, p. 403) advocates, “Teaching subjects and getting results are only justifiable insofar as they help young people to become better persons.” Likewise, participants appeared to view their role in supporting HWB as more facilitative, allowing pupils the space and freedom to explore different options, make their own choices, learn about themselves, and become better people. This was reflected in the educators’ descriptions of distributive and consultative approaches to teaching and leadership as well as school emphasis on democratic values like autonomy and participation.

12.2.2 Research Question 2: What are the key factors (personal, social, and environmental/cultural) that influence the way in which the school and teachers respond to their responsibilities for mental, social, and emotional wellbeing? How do teachers think through translating this into their practice in the classroom, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils?

Within Cityside High and one feeder primary, four main factors appeared to be highly influential on the ways in which educators conceptualised and enacted HWB support across the school. These four factors are:

- The ethos within the school
- Relationships between staff, pupils, and wider school community
- The importance of leadership
- The impact of personal experience and identity
The four factors (visualised below in Fig. 4) are interrelated, each interacting in a reciprocal manner to influence the HWB practices in the school and each factor is seen as critical for enabling a whole school approach to HWB promotion.

Fig. 4: Collaborative working to support whole school health and wellbeing: influence of four interrelated, enabling factors

The four influencing factors interacted to influence teachers’ practices in a variety of ways. As noted in the previous section, the school championed democratic values like respect, participation, and autonomy and these influenced the ethos/culture of the school. This focus on creating a culture of care and respect appeared to foster a sense of trust and emotional safety for staff which empowered them to contribute their voice and views and practice autonomy.
Teachers noted a sense of safety and agency because they trusted that school leaders and colleagues would be respectful and understanding of their professional decision-making. This in turn enabled collegiality, practice-sharing, and positive staff relationships within and across the school and cluster. This sense of respect, trust, and agency also filtered into teacher-pupil relationships with teachers describing efforts to listen to and empower young people’s capabilities to share their voice, take on leadership positions, and exercise independence and autonomy regarding choices that affect them.

However, it was noted that the school ethos and these positive, collaborative relationships depended upon (formal) school leaders to promote and enable participation and debate, and to be willing to listen and adapt school initiatives in response to feedback. When the leadership embodied the democratic values of the school and encouraged distributive decision-making, this appeared to foster teachers’ sense of feeling seen, heard, and valued, which in turn promoted staff wellbeing. While I was unable to speak to any pupils for this doctoral study, research suggests feeling listened to and having a say is also be beneficial for pupil wellbeing (Anderson & Graham, 2016; Riley, 2019b). When school leadership encourages and supports collaboration and consultation, this may help steer a shared vision and ethos for the school.

Additionally, the individual identity of educators also impacted their motivation, support and buy-in to the school ethos and goals. All the teachers involved in this study believed supporting HWB was an important aspect of their role, but their own personal and professional identities appeared to influence their approaches. For example, one educator who self-identified as ‘not very academic’ and who had worked as a tradesperson appeared highly motivated to show that there are many pathways to a life of value beyond the traditional route of high academic attainment, university, and then career. He aimed to widen pupils’ perceptions of ‘success’ and foster pupils’ confidence in their unique abilities, demonstrating a strengths-based approach to supporting wellbeing (Antonovsky, 1996). This educator’s identity may also have influenced his belief and buy-in to the schools’ ethos and priorities like the emphasis on celebrating achievement as well as attainment.
When supporting pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, these four factors influenced teacher practice more through a general awareness of SES and the ways it could negatively impact pupil wellbeing, rather than targeted practices of support. For example, all teachers described getting to know pupils as individuals and attempting to build positive, caring relationships with them, regardless of economic background. Their approaches echoed the school ethos (e.g., a focus on providing choice, opportunities for participation and empowerment, creating warm environments conducive to a sense of belonging and emotional safety). These relational efforts were for all pupils; however, teachers also noted systems within the school to monitor SIMD or additional support needs of pupils so that pupils did not ‘fall through the cracks’ of support.

12.2.3 Research Question 3: What are the experiences of educators within the school as they engage in this research process and how will their experiences influence future curriculum decision-making and/or practice?

Whilst COVID-19 was not a focus of the study or research questions, the pandemic influenced the research process throughout due to changes in school access, sampling, and recruitment (see preface). Participants also noted challenges they experienced due to changing rules and regulations during the pandemic. School leadership was frequently concerned with how to maintain the learning environment while navigating school closures. Teachers often noted concerns over distance learning and how this could impact pupil engagement or social isolation. Interestingly, while negative aspects of the pandemic were described (e.g., social isolation or feeling like momentum could be lost on wellbeing initiatives), several participants also highlighted some perceived positives. For example, one staff member expressed a belief that the school closures were beneficial for some pupils who may feel a sense of anxiety about attending classes in person. In a similar vein, other staff perceived the switch to virtual learning platforms (with their associated features such as a ‘chat’ function) as allowing certain pupils to ask questions they might not have felt comfortable asking in person. There also seemed to be a viewpoint that shared struggles due to the pandemic helped foster a sense of community and social cohesion, and that this cohesion helped to strengthen relationships within the school.
Additionally, beyond pupil HWB, participants also described how COVID-19 influenced their own wellbeing. For instance, participants noted professional challenges like uncertainty around adjusting to new systems and online learning technology, as well as personal pandemic challenges with stress, anxiety, and their own feelings of isolation. While all study participants were involved in HWB initiatives - and as such, more likely to be supportive of pupil HWB - several participants noted their experiences made them more conscious and empathetic towards pupils’ wellbeing. Thus, the pandemic seemed to heighten awareness around wellbeing in general, for both pupils and staff.

When designing this study, engagement with the research process was envisioned as a professional learning opportunity for participants, providing them time and space to consider their personal and professional values and beliefs about wellbeing, and reflect on the ethos, structures, and practices within the school. Interviews alongside feedback and discussion of the findings were conceived as an opportunity for this professional learning, and feedback was informed by a strengths-based approach, aiming to identify the positive elements within the school that support wellbeing. Since the school places emphasis on belonging, a point raised during the feedback was around whether educators believed pupils from lower SES backgrounds felt a sense of belonging within the school, and if so, how they know this. This fostered some discussion that HWB (and its association with belonging) can be difficult to measure due to its subjective nature, but that assessing the HWB of lower income pupils is especially challenging because of the chance of stigmatisation. This raised an important reflection point that the school may inadvertently miss the views and voices of lower SES pupils if, out of a worry of stigmatisation, they do not specifically include and take systematic steps to ensure the participation of lower SES pupils. This raised further questions around how to evaluate the effectiveness of the school supports in general, as well as how the school can understand the experiences of lower SES pupils in particular, which will be discussed in further detail in the next subsections.

Moreover, discussion about the findings were envisaged as an opportunity to explore how engagement with the research process may have impacted participants’ thinking or practices to support the mental, social, and emotional wellbeing of pupils from lower SES
backgrounds. Relating to the reflection of possibly missing the views of lower SES pupils, one participant recognised that they will not know what these pupils need unless they ask those direct questions. One possible impact was the school may reconsider their approach and aim to directly engage with socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils in the future, as well as consider decile when forming pupil groups for consultation on school decision-making. There was discussion around ‘positive discrimination’ and behind-the-scenes efforts to encourage pupils from lower SES backgrounds to try out for leadership roles. They may also consider enacting a similar strengths-based approach as the study and attempt to gather information on what lower SES pupils report as being helpful and beneficial for their mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, rather than focusing on barriers or deficits. This strengths-based approach also relates to a reflection point raised by a teacher who worried a focus on the negative associations of poverty could act as a self-fulfilling prophesy, where pupils from lower SES backgrounds may experience more problems due to the belief that they will experience problems. This resonates with Jindal-Snape et al.’s (2019) research on school transition which found that pupils’ expectations about transition related to their experiences of transition. In other words, if pupils had positive expectations, they were more likely to experience a positive transition.

Additionally, in an ongoing climate of increasing demands, pressures, and accountability measures, educators are frequently spread amongst many competing responsibilities (Riley, 2019b). During feedback discussions, participating SLT members acknowledged the challenges in balancing priorities such as supporting pupils from lower SES backgrounds, those with additional support needs, or those with protected characteristics. This challenge was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the priorities within the school. However, participants noted that engagement with the study and feedback discussions served to validate the good work that has already been done, and act as a prompt to (re)focus awareness and attention on poverty-related challenges. Similarly, teachers also noted that the strengths-based feedback sessions were a source of affirmation that provided a feeling of ‘being on the right track’ and sense of self-efficacy in supporting pupil wellbeing. This sense of
validation and affirmation may in turn support educators’ own sense of confidence, efficacy, and wellbeing (Collie et al., 2012).

12.3 Measurement and evaluation of HWB

In Scotland, HWB has been designated as a core subject in school curriculum and a responsibility of all adults who work with children. Within the current climate of accountability, performance, and global competition, schools face strong pressures to achieve (measurable) outcomes like academic attainment and high-test scores (Beatty & Campbell-Evans, 2020). This pressure for measurement and evaluation increasingly extends to the concept of wellbeing (Martela & Sheldon, 2019), and has been critiqued for its possibility to co-opt wellbeing into a tick-box exercise emphasising performative, neoliberal metrics (Wright, McLeod, & Flenley, 2022). Nevertheless, evaluation is important for identifying the needs of pupils and understanding the effectiveness of various school HWB supports (Scottish Government, 2021); therefore, careful consideration of school efforts to measure and evaluate wellbeing is required. However, the use of wellbeing as an amorphous umbrella term “makes clarity elusive and accountability for wellbeing problematic” (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008, p. 8). Ambiguity around the term ‘wellbeing’ means many fields alongside education have differing views on how to define, conceptualise, or implement wellbeing (Hardley et al., 2020; Spratt, 2017). Similarly, this lack of definitional specificity may mean that evaluation of wellbeing and identification of need is equally elusive.

Within Cityside High, some efforts to evaluate wellbeing include monitoring pupil attendance, attainment, and behaviour. Additionally, an annual wellbeing survey is administered to all pupils (previously described in detail in section 5.6.1 but summarised again here for ease of discussion). The survey is anonymous, with only pupils’ year group (S1-S6) data collected to reduce chances of identification. During the 2021-2022 school year, the survey was distributed to all pupils to complete and included the questions in Table 2 below. Pupils were able to answer the survey questions using a Likert-style rating scale (e.g., ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’; or ‘very unprepared’ to ‘very prepared’) or they could write in answers to
two open-ended questions concerning perceived barriers to speaking to an adult at school or suggestions for improvement in supports.

Table 2: Cityside High annual HWB survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How prepared do you feel to manage periods of stress throughout the year?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How prepared do you feel to recognise someone who is experiencing a challenge with wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How prepared do you feel to manage the situation with a friend who is experiencing challenges with wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How comfortable would you feel talking to the following people [includes a list of different people such as a friend, parent, teacher] if you were not feeling yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How likely are the following things [includes a list of different items such as problems with friends, exams, homework load] to negatively impact your mental health?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel like I belong in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have an adult I can speak to if I was upset or worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Staff and pupils have positive relationships with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adults in school are good at listening and responding to my concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the doctoral study, I was given access to aggregate results from the 2021 survey. I was also able to see the response trends from questions 6-9 for the previous four years - showing a general rise in positive responses from 2018-2020, and a slight decrease in positive responses seen in 2021. The survey had a response rate of approximately 50% of all the pupils. However, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it was unclear who did or did not respond and whether these groups differed. It was also unclear whether the respondents were similar or different to the general population in Cityside High. Additionally, because of the lack of demographic information beyond year groups, it is not possible to draw any conclusions as to the wellbeing experiences of lower SES pupils. This raises questions about how to understand or evaluate the needs of pupils from lower SES backgrounds.

While maintaining anonymity and confidentiality can be an important component of trust, anonymity within the wellbeing survey means the school must rely on pupils to disclose their struggles. Yet, coming forward or asking for help can be difficult, especially for pupils who
may contend with one or more sources of stigmatisation (e.g., lower SES backgrounds, mental health or medical conditions, or protected characteristics). Knifton and Inglis (2020) argue that in Scotland, childhood poverty can be a source of poor mental health due to issues like stress, stigmatisation, or precarity. They also suggest that mental health-related stigma can combine with poverty-related stigma to amplify the negative effects of stigmatisation on the individual. Furthermore, experiencing stigma may inhibit help-seeking behaviour (Romeo, McCrone, & Thornicroft, 2017). In a Canadian study looking at secondary school pupils’ help-seeking behaviours, research showed that pupils with lower levels of mental wellbeing and sense of belonging in school were less likely to seek help than peers who reported higher levels of mental wellbeing (Doan, Patte, Ferro, & Leatherdale, 2020). This suggests that those pupils who may need mental health support the most (e.g., pupils who may be experiencing poverty-related or mental health-related stigma), are less likely to seek support. If these pupils are less likely to seek help, then relying upon pupils to come forward may be problematic. Cityside High may need to directly engage with pupils from lower SES backgrounds to understand and evaluate what supports might be most useful for promoting wellbeing or a sense of belonging and what barriers may impede help-seeking behaviours. This may necessitate collecting more demographic data in their wellbeing survey and more direct communication, discussion, and transparency on the reasoning for this action.

12.4 Hearing pupil voice: opportunities vs. capabilities for participation

Evaluating wellbeing using a survey with limited demographic data meant that linking feedback to specific groups and understanding the specific needs of pupils from lower SES backgrounds was challenging. However, the school seemed to care greatly that pupils were able to have a voice in the school and attempted to collect multiple sources of feedback. Beyond survey data, they collected other feedback to understand and evaluate the needs of pupils, such as focus group data, discussions with pupil representatives, and pupil-led groups. Yet, it was not always clear how pupils were selected for these roles, and whether the school is able to ensure pupils of all characteristics (e.g., lower SES backgrounds, protected characteristics, or ASN) have chances to participate. Thus, there is the possibility that pupils from socioeconomically
disadvantaged backgrounds (or other marginalised groups) may be missed and their voices unheard.

Similar to issues around stigma influencing help-seeking behaviour, research suggests that individuals who internalise stigma and believe the negative stereotypes others may have about them, may be more likely to experience lower self-efficacy, self-esteem, or wellbeing (Romeo et al., 2017). This in turn, may influence these pupils to be less likely to participate or engage with pupil voice and feedback opportunities due to holding negative self-beliefs. This possibility was suggested by some teachers who were concerned that negative discourse around poverty could act as a self-fulfilling prophesy. If socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils internalise stigma or hold negative self-expectations, they might feel a sense of futility, hopelessness (Burns, 2015), or lack of control to change their circumstances, so they may not engage because they do not see the benefit of the effort. This reflects Antonovsky’s (1996) concept of Sense of Coherence and that pupils will be more able to cope with life stressors if they believe stressors are manageable. If lower SES pupils do not believe school stressors are manageable and that they do not possess the capability to achieve, then they may be less likely to seek help or engage with coping behaviours. This possibility was alluded to in the survey responses, with some identified barriers to speaking to an adult at school being worries over stigma, not believing anyone would listen, or not seeing any benefit to talking to someone. It is a concerning and important consideration for the school if any pupil feels this way; however, again, these anonymous responses were unable to be linked to any specific demographic groups.

If pupils from lower SES backgrounds feel less able to share their voice and opinions or less likely to be listened to, then this could have negative effects on their wellbeing and infringe on their rights as citizens to have a say and have their views heard (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). This could then constrain some of the aspirational aims of CfE, namely development of ‘responsible citizens’, because Graham and Fitzgerald (ibid) contend that children and young people’s ability to ‘be’ a citizen does not come from biological growth, but from social and developmental experiences. Thus, schools need to create these democratic and participatory spaces and opportunities to build pupils’ understanding, efficacy, and capacities to evaluate
different choices and practice agency. These considerations also reflect current debate around Scottish national curriculum reform which suggests a need for review of CfE aspirations, particularly responsible citizenship, and how this translates into schools’ efforts for active engagement and participation, especially for marginalised groups (Muir, 2022).

Additionally, if socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils feel less able to contribute their views, then their capabilities for functioning in a participatory way will not be achieved, which Nussbaum (2006) suggests is a matter of social injustice. According to Nussbaum (ibid), all individuals should have the freedom and ability to make personal choices and live a life that is meaningful and valuable to them, reflecting a flourishing discourse. Thus, schools should provide opportunities and resources for pupils to develop their capabilities to participate, practice autonomy, and cultivate their understandings of what makes a valuable life for them. However, she argues equal opportunity to participate does not ensure equal outcomes due to individuals needing different levels of resources to have the same capability for participation. Furthermore, these resources and opportunities for participation should not solely be financial, as lower SES pupils may face barriers beyond monetary disadvantage. For example, if a lower SES pupil has internalised stigmatising or traumatic beliefs that they are not likely to succeed in school they might be less likely to ask for homework help to raise their attainment levels or voice suggestions on how to improve existing school supports because why try if they do not expect their efforts to make a difference? Compared to their more affluent peers, lower SES pupils may need extra support, reassurance, and nurturing to overcome negative self-belief and increase their capabilities for participation. Cityside High may need to consider time or resource allocation to implement targeted efforts to empower lower SES pupils to participate such as encouragement to join focus groups or pupil leadership teams. Notably, reflection and engagement with the research process led SLT to consider trying to implement many of these targeted actions to include pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Additionally, if the school is unable to hear the voices and expressed needs of lower SES pupils, there is the risk that the school may enact initiatives that relate to needs assumed by educators, the curriculum, or policy (Noddings, 2012). For example, national policy may assume high attainment and qualifications are needed to increase pupils’ competitiveness in the global
market and emphasise high stakes testing. However, with the national curriculum under review, there is growing debate around whether testing regimes are appropriate as well as growing critique that an emphasis on ‘successful learners’ has become preeminent at the expense of the other three capacities (e.g., confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens)(Muir, 2022). School wellbeing initiatives may not achieve what they set out to do and may even be perceived as unsupportive or uncaring by pupils if they are unable to account for and respond to the needs as expressed by these pupils. Noddings (2005; 2012, emphasis added) stresses that care must be both given and received as such and cautions that caring actions can easily become care that is controlling or ‘done to’ rather than ‘done for’ children and young people if educators are not attentive to pupils’ needs.

However, empowering and enabling meaningful participation and engagement for all pupils, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, is challenging and requires time and resources. In addition, schools and educators may need additional support and training to accommodate the wide variety of pupils’ needs. Yet, the education climate has been criticised for ever-increasing demands, limited resources, and high stakes testing which can make enactment of CfE goals challenging and may lead some schools to use performance or accountability measures to drive implementation approaches (Hardley et al., 2020; Riley, 2019b). The challenge to balance many competing demands was highlighted by participants in this study, especially SLT; however, engagement with the research process served to remind staff and school leaders of both the good work that had already been achieved as well as a reminder to keep HWB, especially for lower SES pupils, a priority.

### 12.5 Summary of the findings, contribution to new knowledge, and key recommendations

The findings from this doctoral study identified nuanced understandings and conceptualisations of HWB and of socioeconomic disadvantage amongst all the study participants. While local school policies showed some repetition of curriculum discourse constructing HWB as a means to other ends (e.g., good behaviour and learning), there were also hints of a flourishing discourse which championed HWB as a goal in itself and highlighted efforts to promote pupil choice and autonomy. Participants identified four factors of the school context which enabled
their practices to support HWB which included: the ethos/culture of the school, an emphasis on relationships, the importance of leadership, and the impact of identity. How these factors relate to the existing literature and contribute to new knowledge will be summarised next.

There is now a wide range of evidence suggesting HWB is collective not just individual, and therefore, HWB promotion should permeate the whole school rather than focus on pupils’ individual skills, knowledge, or behaviours (Kidger et al., 2010; Mowat, 2019; Riley, 2019a; Roffey, 2012; Shirley, Hargreaves, & Washington-Wangia, 2020; Weare & Gray, 2003). Furthermore, research indicates that wellbeing is significantly influenced by the quality of relationships within a school, with ‘good’ relationships being ones that promote trust, fairness, mutual respect, a sense of belonging and safety, and feeling valued and cared for (Graham et al., 2017). Notably, these good relationships promote not only pupil wellbeing but also staff wellbeing; however, these positive relationships are only likely to happen in contexts that are conducive to warm, caring relations (Weare & Gray, 2003). This sentiment is echoed by Shirley et al. (2020, p. 2) who note:

“Positive emotion was likely to occur when educators pursued a deep sense of purpose together with a work environment that made it achievable; when there was collaborative professionalism that was founded on strong relationships with mutual respect for expertise; and when there was time and space to know people well and perform the job in a way that supported a sense of accomplishment.”

Similar to the literature described above, the participants in this doctoral study also noted the importance of feeling respected, supported, and valued in school and how this helped their own sense of empowerment, capability, and efficacy when supporting pupil HWB. The four factors identified by participants also reflect the literature in the following ways: a school ethos that aligned with their own values and identities may facilitate staff motivation and buy-in to the goings-on in school; collaborative and collegial relationships with a sense of egalitarianism may support a sense of ownership around what happens in the school; and a belief that leadership would listen to, respect, and support their decision-making may empower staff to be willing to share practice, adapt, and try new things to support pupil HWB. These findings corroborate and strengthen literature around the importance of relationships and of teacher wellbeing alongside pupil wellbeing.
The findings also emphasise the importance of school leaders to create an environment conducive to positive relationships and meaningful practice, which may have implications for leadership and teacher education. This resonates with whole school policy guidance which advocates that all staff and leaders should have ongoing opportunities for learning and development (Scottish Government, 2021). This necessitates time, space, and professional learning and development that is tailored to the individual needs of staff members and the school community. Additionally, the Scottish Government highlights staff wellbeing as a core tenet of a whole school approach, so ongoing professional development opportunities should also focus on training all staff and leaders in how to support their own and colleagues’ HWB.

The findings from the thesis also contribute to the evidence base by providing empirical insight into how a school serving primarily affluent pupils plans and negotiates whole school HWB initiatives when they have a minority of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As some research suggests that attending a more affluent school could be detrimental to the HWB of lower SES pupils (Moore et al., 2017), understanding what contextual factors might facilitate and support teachers’ sense of capability and efficacy to support lower SES pupils is especially important. However, given the challenges with evaluating pupil wellbeing described in section 12.3, educators may need extra support or training with how to develop close relationships and engage with lower SES pupils in a sensitive way that minimises chance of stigmatisation and enables meaningful participation. The following recommendations are informed by the results of the current doctoral study but may be useful for other schools with a similar pupil composition or context.

**Key recommendations:**

- The literature and the participants of this study highlight the importance of a whole school ethos which aligns with educators’ values and identity. This suggests that schools and leadership teams should emphasise a collaborative approach to co-create a school ethos which is attentive and reflective of the needs and values of their local community.
- The findings of this doctoral study emphasise the influence of leadership to the development a whole school ethos and initiatives. This has implications for leader and
teacher education, and schools may need ongoing support and opportunities for learning, leadership training, and professional development.

- Evaluating the effectiveness of HWB supports can be challenging, especially for lower SES pupils who may experience increased difficulties with sharing their voice or asking for help. The literature and study participants demonstrate the need for positive relationships and a sensitive approach to engaging with this population, so schools may need support or training on how to develop respectful, supportive relationships particularly with socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils.

- Socioeconomic status can be a source of stigma so embedding whole school awareness of the effects and contributors of poverty beyond the individual (e.g., structural, social, political) is important. However, to avoid further stigmatisation or a ‘self-fulfilling prophesy’, care should be taken to recognise that not all individuals who experience poverty will struggle; trauma-informed philosophies may be helpful in this regard.

- Meaningful participation is important for wellbeing and also relies on positive relationships to facilitate pupil (or staff) voice and collaboration. Trauma-informed practice with its strengths-based orientation to autonomy and collaborative working may again be helpful in this regard, so schools may need support, education, or training in trauma-informed approaches.

12.6 Strengths and limitations

Reviews of school-based approaches to support social, emotional, and mental wellbeing (Weare & Gray, 2003; Weare & Nind, 2011) suggest that multi-component, whole school approaches, when well-implemented, may be more effective than solely classroom or curriculum-based approaches. These approaches emphasise the school system as a whole, rather than mainly focusing on discrete classroom lessons (Weare, 2006). Taking this evidence as a starting point, this current study attempted to understand the features within Cityside High which would support this broader approach to whole school HWB. As part of this whole school approach, my questions aimed to explore the main factors which influenced educators’ conceptualisations of and practices to support HWB, and how these factors impact and enable
the ways in which school members work together for HWB promotion. A strength of the study is that it included educators from different levels of leadership within the school (as well as one feeder primary) and was able to hear the views of both the senior leadership team and classroom teachers. This provided insight into the organisational systems, structures, and priorities across the school and how they interact to impact whole school HWB support. Another strength was that while most teachers worked within the PE department (which was unsurprising since HWB and PE are linked within CfE), there was also some representation of other curricular areas not as explicitly linked with HWB like Maths and Biology. This diversity of curricular backgrounds helped provide awareness of how various teachers understood HWB and considered it within their subject specialties, and how they supported HWB within the CfE principle of ‘responsibility of all’ and the school context. Additionally, while only a single participant from one feeder primary was able to participate, this provided some insight into the primary school perspective and the organisational factors which can influence working relationships across the cluster.

However, the scope of this study was impacted because the fieldwork was conducted during COVID-19 school closures, thus, access to schools and participants was inhibited. Due to these constraints, the research only involved data collection from educators who mainly came from Cityside High and one feeder primary school. Weare and Gray (2003) suggest that research on whole school approaches to support mental, social, and emotional wellbeing should ideally work with multiple aspects of the school system, including leadership, teachers, parents, pupils, the built environment, and the wider community. Whilst this breadth was not feasible due to pandemic restrictions, the current study chose to focus on school leadership and teachers as the key ‘enactors’ of whole school initiatives. Therefore, one limitation of the study was the sample, and as was alluded to in section 6.4, this limitation is visible in the infographic illustrating the relationship between the four factors identified in this thesis (see Fig. 4). In line with the data and the limited variety of participants (i.e., views of SLT and teachers), the infographic only provides a narrow representation of the interactions of the four factors within school bounds (Rowe, Stewart, & Patterson, 2007). Future research should aim to expand this infographic to further conceptualise the interconnections between the school and
the wider community. To achieve this aim, future studies should consider obtaining the perspectives of the wider school community, such as parents or external agencies, to further understand the context and organisational factors surrounding the school.

Additionally, educators were recruited through snowball sampling and were purposively selected based on their work implementing HWB initiatives and their experience supporting pupils’ HWB. Therefore, another limitation of the study is that the sample consisted of educators well-versed and actively engaged in HWB promotion within the school, which could mean that these teachers may be more likely to be in agreement with school HWB policies. Furthermore, these educators may be more knowledgeable, confident, or proficient in enacting HWB practices. As such, the study participants may not be representative of the wider Cityside High teacher population, which could mean that challenges in HWB enactment, or even possible opposing perspectives about the HWB efforts in the school, were not adequately captured or explored in the study findings. However, as the study aimed to gather in-depth, detailed data on educators’ beliefs and experiences with planning and supporting wellbeing as well as the school factors which enabled their practice, purposive sampling was considered appropriate. Another limitation of the study was it was primarily interview-based. This meant that I could explore educators’ thinking and beliefs about their practice, but I could not directly observe their practices and interactions with pupils and the environment within the school. Future research may consider recruiting teachers who do not feel as confident with HWB support or including elements of observation to provide further data and evidence.

Furthermore, due to feasibility and access issues, I was unable to explore the experiences of pupils and their feelings about the wellbeing initiatives in the school. While this was a disappointing adaptation in response to COVID-19, it was deemed more ethical to focus on educators. Work with pupils, particularly those who come from lower SES backgrounds, to explore their experiences of being in a minority within a more affluent school, as well as their experiences with the school’s HWB initiatives will be important for future research.
12.7 Concluding remarks

This thesis explored how a Scottish secondary school serving predominantly affluent pupils but with a minority intake from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds interpreted and enacted HWB policy, and how this might impact their pupils, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds. Participants highlighted four interrelated factors (e.g., ethos, relationships, leadership, and identity) which were key influences on how they conceptualised HWB and socioeconomic disadvantage, and how they enacted HWB promotion in school. The findings of this thesis suggest schools can play a significant role in promoting positive HWB and providing opportunities for pupils to succeed and flourish. However, this necessitates careful consideration of the many social and ecological influences (e.g., discourse and policy; organisational ethos, culture, and structure; and interpersonal relationships) which can impact wellbeing and practices to support HWB in schools. The findings suggest that HWB approaches require a holistic approach that considers local context and embeds HWB promotion across all aspects of school life, which reinforces the whole school approach encouraged by national policy (Scottish Government, 2021; WHO & UNESCO, 2021).

Whole school approaches which build upon the strengths and capabilities of everyone in the school, create an environment that is conducive to HWB for all, and enable the development of positive relationships within school and with families and external agencies are more likely to facilitate long-term, sustainable HWB support (Weare, 2000). Still, schools are only one aspect of the myriad ecological systems surrounding children and young people. It is important to recognise the school as part and parcel of the surrounding community (Rowe et al., 2007), and encourage a supportive infrastructure (e.g., policy, research, and training) around schools to support interagency working, strengthen home-school partnerships, and create space for multi-sectoral dialogue (Mowat & Macleod, 2019). Mowat (2019) argues that HWB promotion requires that school professionals (e.g., teachers and SLT) are supported in their roles through ongoing high-quality training and assistance to develop strong relationships with pupils, families, and communities. Thus, future research should privilege the voices of the whole school community, such as pupils, staff, parents, and external agents, to identify needs,
foster collaborative cultures, and understand the school as an interconnected part of the wider community.
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Negotiating the Transition from Primary to Secondary School: Perceptions of Pupils,
Appendix A: Ethical approval from the University of Edinburgh - Moray House School of Education (original)

Ref: 2785

Stephanie Hardley
Moray House School of Education and Sport

Date: 10th September 2020

Dear Stephanie,

Title: Understanding mental, social, and emotional wellbeing for socially and economically disadvantaged students attending a secondary school located in a predominantly affluent catchment area

The School of Education and Sport Ethics Sub-Committee has now considered your request for ethical approval for the studies detailed in your application.

This is to confirm that the Sub-Committee is happy to approve the application and that the research meets the School Ethics Level 2 criterion. This is defined as "applies to non-intervention research where you have the consent of the participants and data subjects. This may include, for example, analysis of archived data, classroom observation, or questionnaires on topics that are not generally considered 'sensitive'. This research can involve children or young people, if the likelihood of risk to them is minimal".

A standard condition of this ethical approval is that you are required to notify the Committee of any significant proposed deviation from the original protocol. The Committee also needs to be notified if there are any unexpected results or events once the research is underway that raise questions about the safety of the research.

Should you receive any formal complaints relating to the study you should notify your MHSE Ethics Committee immediately by email to MHSEthics@ed.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of:
Dr Martin Toye and Dr Mary Bovill
Co-Conveners, School Ethics Sub-Committee
Appendix A: Ethical approval from the University of Edinburgh - Moray House School of Education (amendment)

Stephanie Hardley
Moray House School of Education and Sport

Date: 30\textsuperscript{th} June 2021

Dear Stephanie,

Title: Understanding mental, social, and emotional wellbeing for socially and economically disadvantaged students attending a secondary school located in a predominantly affluent catchment area

The School of Education and Sport Ethics Sub-Committee has now considered your request for ethical approval for the studies detailed in the above application.

This is to confirm that the Sub-Committee is happy to approve your application and the amendment submitted in June 2021 and that the research meets the School Ethics Approval criterion for this particular project. A standard condition of this ethical approval is that should any amendment, or deviation from the original protocol outlined in your application need to be made to carry out or continue your research, please notify the Ethics Sub-Committee at MHSES-Ethics@ed.ac.uk

The Committee also needs to be notified if there are any unexpected results or events once the research is underway that raise questions about the safety of the research.

Should you receive any formal complaints relating to the study you should notify the MHSE Ethics Committee immediately by email to MHSES-Ethics@ed.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of:
Dr Fiona O’Hanlon
Convener, School Ethics Sub-Committee
Appendix B: Ethical approval from Local Authority

From: HARDLEY Stephanie < >
Sent: 15 September 2020 13:53
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: school research access

Dear [REDACTED],

My name is Stephanie, and I am a 2nd year PhD student with the University of Edinburgh. I am emailing about gaining access to start a study involving staff and teachers within a secondary school in [REDACTED]. I have included the research access questionnaire along with supporting documents (participant information sheets, consent forms, interview schedule, and University ethics approval letter). I aim to recruit adult participants and will not interact with students on an individual basis, so I do not believe PVG clearance to work with minors will be necessary. Please let me know if there is any further information or documentation you might need from me.

Thank you so much for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,
Stephanie Hardley

From: Anne Fitzpatrick < Anne.Fitzpatrick@ea.edin.sch.uk>
Date: Wednesday, 16 September 2020 at 8:50 am
To: HARDLEY Stephanie >
Subject: RE: school research access

Hi Stephanie,

I am sorry. Unfortunately the school does not have the capacity for this at the moment.

Regards

[REDACTED]

From: HARDLEY Stephanie < >
Sent: 16 September 2020 16:40
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: school research access

Hi [REDACTED],

I am sorry. Unfortunately the school does not have the capacity for this at the moment.

Regards

[REDACTED]
Thank you for your swift response to my email and for considering my application.

I am aware that this has been an incredibly difficult time for schools as they navigate the uncertainty around the pandemic. I also understand that school campuses are currently closed except for staff, students, and essential workers. Covid-19 and changing government guidelines create a complex environment for research, and foremost in my mind is protecting the wellbeing and health and safety of the school, staff, and students. I completely agree that there is no question of me going to the school in person – this research would only be carried out remotely.

I have had ongoing contact with the Depute Head from the proposed school since the beginning of the year. While the pandemic has presented unexpected challenges, she has indicated the school would like to continue to be involved in the study and sees the value of what may be learned about student wellbeing, particularly through these trying times. For safety, she and I have discussed different ways for me to ‘enter’ the school remotely, such as beginning with an analysis of school policy documents to explore the school’s main priorities/messages. This would be a way to start the study, but without actual in-person contact. We have also decided to convert to online, internet-based methods for any future interviews or focus groups to limit contact and adhere to social distancing. Until guidelines change, we will stick to remote access, and all participation will be strictly voluntary.

Please let me know if my discussions with the school and our proposed research adjustments seem feasible to you.

Kind regards,
Stephanie

From: Anne Fitzpatrick <Anne.Fitzpatrick@ea.edin.sch.uk>
Date: Thursday, 17 September 2020 at 11:50 am
To: HARDLEY Stephanie < >
Subject: RE: school research access

Hi Stephanie,

Your access has been approved.

Regards
Appendix C: Project information and consent form (for the school)

Project Title:
Understanding mental, social, and emotional wellbeing for socially and economically disadvantaged students attending a secondary school located in a predominantly affluent catchment area

Research Team:
Stephanie Hardley (principal investigator) – The University of Edinburgh
Dr Shirley Gray (PhD supervisor) – The University of Edinburgh
Dr Ruth McQuillan (PhD supervisor) – The University of Edinburgh

Dear [Name],

Thank you and [Name] for your interest in this project. Please read the following information carefully before agreeing to participate. If you decide to take part, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering this request.

Purpose of the study:
The Scottish education policy, *Curriculum for Excellence*, provides a framework for schools to plan and develop strategies that might lead to improved mental, social, and emotional wellbeing but research suggests schools adapt policy to their unique context. Understanding the role of context and composition in everyday school life may be important for schools serving mostly students from affluent backgrounds, but with a minority of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The main aim of this study is to explore how individual schools understand and implement health and wellbeing policy and how the knowledge and experiences of educators influence the decisions they make around their practices to support mental, social, and emotional wellbeing (MSEWB), particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

What will the research involve?
The research will involve the following:

1. The principal investigator will analyse school policy and curriculum documents to identify the overall school aims and priorities pertaining to student MSEWB
2. The principal investigator will conduct qualitative interviews or focus groups with interested teachers or senior leadership
3. The principal investigator will conduct observations of classroom lessons or health and wellbeing planning sessions (remotely or in person if government guidelines allow)
Confidentiality

All information collected in this study will be kept confidential both during and after study completion. Data will only be viewable by the research team listed above. Results of the study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations, but data will be anonymised so that your school, staff, and teachers will not be identifiable in any way. If you have further questions, you can contact the principal investigator at Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk, or one of the supervisors at Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk or Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk.

By completing and emailing this form to the principal investigator you are agreeing with the following statements:

- I have read and understand the above information
- I am fully aware of the procedures involved in the research
- I consent to the school and staff taking part in this study if they so wish
- I understand that the results of the study may be published, but that the identity of the school, staff, and students will be hidden.
- I understand that participation is completely voluntary and that the school and staff can withdraw from the study at any stage

Name: .................................................................

Signature: ..............................................................

Date: .......23rd Sept 2020 ................................................

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephanie Hardley
(Principal Investigator)
Appendix D: Recruitment letter (SLT)

Stephanie Hardley
Moray House School of Education
The University of Edinburgh
St Leonard’s Land
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ
Email: stephanie.hardley@ed.ac.uk

Dear [Redacted] senior leadership team member,

My name is Stephanie and I am a PhD student from the Moray House School of Education in the University of Edinburgh. As part of my doctoral research I am conducting a study exploring how your school understands mental, social, and emotional wellbeing (MSEWB) and what they do to support student MSEWB, particularly for those students from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

You are being invited to participate because of your work in policy and curriculum development to support students’ health and wellbeing. Your knowledge and experiences can provide valuable insight into what has worked when supporting student wellbeing and what resources may be necessary to further support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Any information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone at the school.

If you would like to participate, please read the attached information sheet describing the study and fill in the consent form. The consent form can be emailed to the principal investigator at: stephanie.hardley@ed.ac.uk. If you have any questions or would like more information about the research, please do not hesitate to email.

Thank you for your consideration of my project.

Kind regards,

Stephanie Hardley

(Principal Investigator)
Appendix E: Recruitment letter (Teaching staff)

Stephanie Hardley, MPH
Moray House School of Education
The University of Edinburgh
St Leonard’s Land
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ
Email: stephanie.hardley@ed.ac.uk

Dear School Teacher,

My name is Stephanie and I am a PhD student from the Moray House School of Education in the University of Edinburgh. As part of my doctoral research I am conducting a study exploring how secondary school teachers understand mental, social, and emotional wellbeing (MSEWB) and what they do to support student MSEWB, particularly for those students from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

You are being invited to participate because of your work supporting students’ health and wellbeing. Your knowledge and experiences can provide valuable insight into what has worked when supporting student wellbeing and what resources may be necessary to further support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Any information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone at the school.

If you would like to participate, please read the attached information sheet describing the study and fill in the consent form. The consent form can be emailed to the principal investigator at: stephanie.hardley@ed.ac.uk. If you have any questions or would like more information about the research, please do not hesitate to email.

Thank you for your consideration of my project.

Kind regards,

Stephanie Hardley

(Principal investigator)
Appendix F: Participant information sheet (Secondary school)

Participant Information Sheet (Educators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title:</th>
<th>Understanding mental, social, and emotional wellbeing for socially and economically disadvantaged students attending a secondary school located in a predominantly affluent catchment area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal investigator:</td>
<td>Stephanie Hardley (<a href="mailto:Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk">Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Co-investigators: | Dr Shirley Gray ([Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk))  
Dr Ruth McQuillan ([Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk)) |

Please take time to read the following information carefully. You should keep this page for your records.

Who is the researcher?
Stephanie Hardley is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. She is supervised by Dr Shirley Gray and Dr Ruth McQuillan.

What is the purpose of the study?
The Scottish education policy, Curriculum for Excellence, provides a framework for schools to plan and develop strategies that might lead to improved mental, social, and emotional wellbeing but research suggests schools adapt policy to their unique context. Understanding the role of context and composition in everyday school life may be important for schools serving mostly students from affluent backgrounds, but with a minority of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The main aim of this study is to explore how individual schools understand and implement health and wellbeing (HWB) policy and how the knowledge and experiences of educators influence the decisions they make around their HWB practices when supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why have I been asked to take part?
The target group are educators involved with supporting students’ health and wellbeing, particularly mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. As a member of that group, your input will help us understand how the school conceptualises wellbeing, what they do to support student wellbeing, and the perceived barriers or facilitators which may impact that support.
Do I have to take part?
No – participation in this study is strictly voluntary regardless of whether the school’s Head Teacher has agreed to participate. You can withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions. If you wish to withdraw, contact the PI. We will stop using your data in any publications or presentations submitted after you have withdrawn consent. However, we will keep copies of your original consent, and of your withdrawal request.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
The research may involve observations of wellbeing planning sessions or classroom practices as well as one-to-one interviews and focus groups.

Observations:
The purpose of the observations is to gain insight into how educators engage with HWB curriculum in day-to-day practice; it is not meant to assess or audit performance. The observations are purely a means to explore, in more depth, how you understand and enact the HWB curriculum, building on what is learned from the interviews. Observations may involve online observation or include on-campus observation if government guidelines allow. Observations may be of HWB planning meetings to explore curriculum engagement and the topics of discussion. Observations may also include classroom lessons to explore individual teacher’s curriculum enactment and daily practices.

In addition to the signed consent form, the researcher will inform you when they will be observing and ask for verbal consent for each observation session. The researcher will observe these planning meetings or class lessons and take written notes. All notes will use pseudonyms for participants and no identifying information will be reported to the senior leadership team or Head Teachers. If you do not wish to participate during observations, you can inform the researcher and no notes will include you.
Interviews and/or Focus Groups:
You may be asked to discuss wellbeing in general with a group of your peers, or may be asked more in-depth questions related to the topic in an individual interview. There are no right or wrong answers, so you may answer based on your own experiences. The process will happen inside a GDPR-compliant, University-hosted video conference system called Collaborate or on-campus if government guidelines allow. Interviews or focus groups will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with your consent.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?
There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Are there any benefits associated with taking part?
The interview questions will ask you to describe and discuss your understandings of mental, social, and emotional wellbeing and your pedagogical practices. Involvement with the research may provide an opportunity to reflect on your professional decision-making. A summary of the results will also be shared with the school which may provide an opportunity for school-wide learning and professional development. The findings from the research may also inform the school’s future curriculum planning.

What will happen to the results of this study?
The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will be anonymised and we will remove any information that could be used to identify you. In the event that a quote or comment is deemed important yet considered by the researcher to possibly lead to identification upon publication, it will only be used with your express knowledge and permission. Your data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years. With your consent, your anonymised data may also be archived for use in future research.
Data protection and confidentiality.

Your data will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will be referred to by a pseudonym. Your data will only be viewed by the research team.

All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected encrypted computer or on the University’s secure encrypted cloud storage service (DataStore), and any paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the PI’s office. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk.

What are my data protection rights?

The University of Edinburgh is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer at dpo@ed.ac.uk.

Who can I contact?

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions at Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk

Or contact the supervisors: Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk or Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk

If you wish to make a complaint about the study, please contact the Deputy Director of Post Graduate Studies, Dr Shari Sabeti, at Shari.Sabeti@ed.ac.uk

For general information about how we use your data go to: https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/privacy-notice-research
Appendix G: Participant information sheet (Primary school)

Participant Information Sheet (Educators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title:</th>
<th>Understanding mental, social, and emotional wellbeing for socially and economically disadvantaged students attending a secondary school located in a predominantly affluent catchment area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal investigator:</td>
<td>Stephanie Hardley [<a href="mailto:Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk">Stephanie.Hardley@ed.ac.uk</a>]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Co-investigators: | Dr Shirley Gray [Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk]  
Dr Ruth McQuillan [Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk] |

Please take time to read the following information carefully. You should keep this page for your records.

Who is the researcher?
Stephanie Hardley is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. She is supervised by Dr Shirley Gray and Dr Ruth McQuillan.

What is the purpose of the study?
The Scottish education policy, *Curriculum for Excellence*, provides a framework for schools to plan and develop strategies that might lead to improved mental, social, and emotional wellbeing but research suggests schools adapt policy to their unique context. Understanding the role of context and composition in everyday school life may be important for schools serving mostly students from affluent backgrounds, but with a minority of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The main aim of this study is to explore how individual schools understand and implement health and wellbeing (HWB) policy and how the knowledge and experiences of educators influence the decisions they make around their HWB practices when supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why have I been asked to take part?
The target group are educators involved with supporting students’ health and wellbeing, particularly mental, social, and emotional wellbeing. As a member of that group, your input will help us understand how the school cluster conceptualises wellbeing, what they do to
support student wellbeing, and the perceived barriers or facilitators which may impact that support.

Do I have to take part?

No – participation in this study is strictly voluntary regardless of whether the school’s Head Teacher has agreed to participate. You can withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions. If you wish to withdraw, contact the PI. We will stop using your data in any publications or presentations submitted after you have withdrawn consent. However, we will keep copies of your original consent, and of your withdrawal request.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

The research will involve one-to-one interviews where you may be asked questions related to wellbeing in an individual interview. There are no right or wrong answers, so you may answer based on your own experiences. The process will happen inside a GDPR-compliant video conference system such as MS Teams or University-licensed Zoom. Interviews will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with your consent.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Are there any benefits associated with taking part?

The interview questions will ask you to describe and discuss your understandings of mental, social, and emotional wellbeing and your pedagogical practices. Involvement with the research may provide an opportunity to reflect on your professional decision-making. A summary of the study results will also be shared with the school which may provide an opportunity for school-wide and cluster-wide learning and professional development. The findings from the research may also inform the school’s future curriculum planning.
What will happen to the results of this study?
The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will be anonymised and we will remove any information that could be used to identify you. In the event that a quote or comment is deemed important yet considered by the researcher to possibly lead to identification upon publication, it will only be used with your express knowledge and permission. Your data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years. With your consent, your anonymised data may also be archived for use in future research.

Data protection and confidentiality.
Your data will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will be referred to by a pseudonym. Your data will only be viewed by the research team.

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Or contact the supervisors: Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk or Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk

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Appendix H: Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

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| Co-investigators: | Dr Shirley Gray ([Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Shirley.Gray@ed.ac.uk))  
Dr Ruth McQuillan ([Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Ruth.McQuillan@ed.ac.uk)) |

Please tick yes or no for each of these statements.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study, that I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and that any questions I had were answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Retracting will not affect any of my rights.

3. I consent to being audio-recorded.

4. I consent to my anonymised data being used in academic publications and presentations.

5. I understand that my anonymised data can be stored for a minimum of five years.

6. I consent to my anonymised data being used in future ethically-approved research.

7. I consent to be observed as part of this study.

8. I consent to participate in interviews or focus groups.
9. I would like to receive a copy of the full final thesis.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of person giving consent</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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<td>____________________________</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Hardley</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes   No
Appendix I: Interview guide (SLT)

[Introductory tasks: Thank participant for joining, review aims of the study and provide time for questions, ask if they are willing to proceed with the audio-recorded interview]

Icebreaker questions:
Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (Your role, how long you have been working in education and what originally got you into education?)

How would you describe your school? Size, demographics, etc?

Wellbeing conceptions and practices:
1. What does health and wellbeing mean to you? (What do you think has been the biggest influence on how you understand HWB?)

2. How would you describe the culture or ethos of the school?
   a. How do you think the school ethos might impact the wellbeing of students and staff?
   b. How do you think the school ethos impacts your own practices or decision-making in relation to supporting wellbeing?
   c. Has the ethos of the school changed over time, and if so, in what ways and why?

3. What would you say are the main health and wellbeing curriculum priorities in your school and why?
   a. How do these priorities relate to mental, social, or emotional wellbeing?
   b. Can you share examples of what has worked thus far and what have been the main challenges?

4. How would you describe the structure of the school?
   a. How are MSEWB policy or programme decisions made and why?
   b. Who tends to drive the MSEWB decision-making or planning and why?
   c. How are school MSEWB policies and decisions shared with wider staff and students?

5. How large a role do you feel like MSEWB plays in your day-to-day job?
   a. In what ways does MSEWB explicitly inform your curriculum or policy planning or HWB programmes or initiatives?

6. What actions or events (behaviour, verbalising, etc) might make you believe that a student is struggling with their MSEWB?

7. What do you think are the main assets, strengths, or features that the school has to help support MSEWB? Why?
8. What do you think are the main challenges to supporting MSEWB in the school? *How might they be overcome?*

**Socioeconomic status (SES) and wellbeing:**

1. How or in what ways do you think socioeconomic background might impact students’ MSEWB?
   
   a. *What challenges or opportunities might SES present in relation to supporting student wellbeing?*

   b. *What challenges and opportunities does this present in relation to supporting your own MSEWB?*

2. How or in what ways do you think that a student’s socioeconomic background might impact your practices or decisions in relation to supporting MSEWB?

3. What actions or events (behaviour, verbalising, etc) might make you believe that a student is struggling with their MSEWB? *Have you noticed a difference in these behaviours/verbalisations between higher or lower SES students?*

4. What resources do you draw from to support the MSEWB of students from lower SES backgrounds? Why?

5. What are the main challenges to supporting the MSEWB of students from lower SES backgrounds? *How might they be overcome?*

6. Do you feel like your relationship with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is the same or different to your relationship with higher socioeconomic students? Can you share specific examples?

Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to add?

*Thank you so much for your time!*
Appendix J: Interview guide (Teaching staff)

[Introductory tasks: Thank participant for joining, review aims of the study and provide time for questions, ask if they are willing to proceed with audio-recorded interview]

Icebreaker questions:
Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (Like your role, how long you have been working in education and what originally got you into education?)

How would you describe your school? Size, demographics, etc?

Wellbeing conceptions and practices:
1. What does health and wellbeing mean to you? (What do you think has been the biggest influence on how you understand HWB?)

2. How would you describe the culture or ethos of the school?
   a. How do you think the school ethos might impact the wellbeing of students and staff?
   b. How do you think the school ethos impacts your practices when supporting MSEWB?
   c. Has the ethos of the school changed over time, and if so, in what ways and why?

3. What do you think are the main priorities of the HWB curriculum in the school and why?
   a. How do these priorities relate to mental, social, or emotional wellbeing?
   b. Who do you believe determines these priorities?

4. What do you do in the classroom to support MSEWB? Can you share specific examples?

5. What are the key factors that have influenced your teaching strategies or decisions in relation to supporting MSEWB (personal or professional knowledge, curriculum or policies, relationships, culture, environment, etc)? Can you share specific examples?

6. How large a role do you feel like MSEWB plays in your day-to-day job?

7. What do you think are the main assets, strengths, or features that the school has to help support MSEWB? Why?

Socioeconomic status (SES) and wellbeing
1. How or in what ways do you think socioeconomic background might impact students’ MSEWB?
2. What actions or events (behaviour, verbalising, etc) might make you believe that a student is struggling with their MSEWB? *(Have you noticed a difference in these behaviours/verbalisations between higher or lower SES students?)*

3. How or in what ways might a student’s socioeconomic background impact your practices in relation to supporting MSEWB?

4. In relation to the range of socioeconomic backgrounds of students in your classes, what challenges and opportunities does SES present in relation to supporting MSEWB?

5. What do you think are the main assets, strengths, and resources that you are able to draw upon to help support MSEWB in your class? Why? *(What about for students from lower SES backgrounds?)*

6. What do you think are the main challenges to supporting MSEWB in your class and how might they be overcome? *(How might these impact students from lower SES backgrounds?)*

Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to add?

*Thank you so much for your time!*
Appendix K: Interview guide (Primary SLT)

[Introductory tasks: Thank participant for joining, review aims of the study and provide time for questions, ask if they are willing to proceed with the audio-recorded interview]

Icebreaker questions:
Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (Your name and role, how long you have been working in education or what originally got you into education?)

How would you describe your school? Size or makeup? What is the school known for?

How would you describe your school’s relationship with the secondary school? What do you know about their health and wellbeing policies/practices?

Wellbeing conceptions and practices:
1. What does health and wellbeing mean to you? (What do you think has been the biggest influence on how you understand HWB? - personal experience, policy directives, professional learning, culture, etc)

2. How would you describe the culture or ethos of your school?
   a. How do you think the school ethos might impact the wellbeing of students/staff?
   b. How do you think the school ethos impacts your practices or decision-making in relation to supporting wellbeing?

3. What would you say are the main health and wellbeing curriculum priorities in your school and why?
   a. How do these priorities relate to mental, social, or emotional wellbeing?
   b. *How do these priorities relate to the health and wellbeing priorities in the secondary school?

4. How would you describe the structure of your school?
   a. How are MSEWB policy or programme decisions made and why?
   b. Who tends to drive the MSEWB decision-making or planning and why?

5. How large a role do you feel like MSEWB plays in your day-to-day job?
   a. In what ways does MSEWB explicitly inform your curriculum and policy planning, or health and wellbeing programmes and initiatives?

6. What actions or events (behaviour, verbalising, etc) might make you believe that a student is struggling with their MSEWB?

7. What do you think are the main assets, strengths, or features that your school has to help support MSEWB? Why?
8. What do you think are the main challenges to supporting MSEWB in your school? How might they be overcome?

**Socioeconomic status (SES) and wellbeing:**

1. How or in what ways do you think socioeconomic background might impact students’ MSEWB?

2. Can you describe the composition of your school in relation to student SES?
   a. What challenges or opportunities does SES present in relation to supporting student MSEWB in your school? Can you think of any specific examples?
   b. What do you think might be the biggest challenges or opportunities that SES presents in relation to supporting student MSEWB in the secondary school? (Are they the same/different compared to the primary school? If different, what makes them different?)

3. How or in what ways do you think that a student’s socioeconomic background might impact your practices or decisions in relation to supporting MSEWB?

4. In terms of actions or events (behaviour, verbalising, etc) that could indicate a student is struggling with their MSEWB - have you noticed a difference in these behaviours/verbalisations between higher or lower SES students? If yes - what makes them different?

5. What resources, strengths, or assets can you draw from to support the MSEWB of students from lower SES backgrounds? Why?

6. What are the main challenges to supporting the MSEWB of students from lower SES backgrounds? How might they be overcome?

Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to add?

*Thank you so much for your time!*
Appendix L: Dyadic interview questions (SLT and teaching staff)

For SLT

The school motto [relates to belonging]:

- How do you think the school motto is experienced by students?
- How do you ensure that students from lower SES feel that they belong in the school?
- How do you know if they feel this way?
- How do you cater to the social, emotional, or mental wellbeing of diverse learners, especially those from lower SES?
- What are the main challenges for the school in achieving a sense of belonging for students from lower SES backgrounds?

From the interviews, your school values pupil voice and has a sophisticated system in place to capture pupil voice from your student body.

- For lower SES students in particular, what mechanisms do you use to ensure you capture their pupil voice?
- What are the main challenges with capturing this voice? (Do you feel like your system is effective in capturing their voice? If not, why not? If yes, what have you learned?)
- Are there any pupil-led groups that focus on SES, either explicitly or covertly?

Has participating in this research study influenced your thinking around how to support students from lower SES backgrounds?

- If so, how?
- Do you think this experience/reflection might influence your future curriculum decision-making and practice?

For Teachers

Think of a class where most students are affluent, but 1-2 students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds:

- Do you know which students are from lower SES backgrounds, and if so, how do you know? (How often might you use the tracking systems to account for SIMD? When might you use the system to look at SIMD?)
- How do you think students’ background may influence their experience in school?
- How do you respond to students’ background - how might it influence your planning, pedagogy, teaching approach, or relationships with students?
- How do you cater to the social, emotional, or mental wellbeing of diverse learners, especially those from lower SES?

Has participating in this research study influenced your thinking around how you support students from lower SES backgrounds?

- If so, how?
- How might this experience/reflection influence your future pedagogy and practice?

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A critical discourse analysis of Curriculum for Excellence implementation in four Scottish secondary school case studies

Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education

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Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Stephanie Hardley is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh. She is interested in exploring how individuals understand health policy and make health decisions.

Shirley Gray is a senior lecturer in physical education at the University of Edinburgh. She is interested in understanding the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy.

Ruth McQuillan is a senior lecturer in global health and co-director of the online Master of Public Health degree at the University of Edinburgh. She is interested in understanding ways to support mental health within schools.

*Corresponding author:
A critical discourse analysis of Curriculum for Excellence implementation in four Scottish secondary school case studies

Improving the health and wellbeing (HWB) of children and young people has become a policy priority due to perceptions of decreased mental health and academic outcomes. This interest is seen in the Scottish education policy, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE); however, ambiguity around the term ‘wellbeing’ may hinder successful curriculum enactment. Drawing on Foucauldian theories, a critical discourse analysis was conducted on four secondary school case studies to analyse how discursive constructions of HWB were recontextualised at the local level. Analysis found that schools primarily conceptualised HWB as either teaching for achievement of predefined learning outcomes or teaching as a process for character development, and these competing curricular aims may constrain teachers’ pedagogic autonomy and impede the more aspirational tenets of CfE policy. The findings point to the need for further clarification of CfE policy aims to better support implementation.

Keywords: curriculum; pedagogy; health and wellbeing; discourse; knowledge; power

Introduction

Improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people has become a policy priority among many high-income countries due to concern about a marked increase in the rates of young people being diagnosed with depression and anxiety (Olfson, Blanco, Wang, Laje & Correll, 2014). In the Scottish context, current policy emphasises the prevention of ill health and the integration of services to achieve public health goals (Scottish Government, 2011) with schools and teachers seen as key to promoting student health and wellbeing (Priestley & Drew, 2016). However, while wellbeing is applauded as a holistic goal, its achievement is usually
hampered by ambiguity around the term ‘wellbeing’ that may lead to uncertainty in schools about how to convert government policy into everyday practice (Chapman, 2015).

This political interest is visible within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), the Scottish national education framework that describes the ‘totality of experiences’ to be planned for young people aged 3-18 in schools. This learner-centred curriculum aspires to help students develop ‘four capacities’ to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors (Scottish Executive, 2006). To achieve this, the Scottish Government has prioritised three core learning areas: literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing (HWB), which are considered the ‘responsibility of all’ school staff. The aim of the HWB component of the curriculum is to ensure that ‘children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future’ (Scottish Government, 2009, p.1). Schools are supported in their enactment of policy by ‘experiences and outcomes’ (E&Os) – a series of first-person statements that set out what young people should experience and achieve as they progress through school (Gray, MacLean, & Mulholland, 2012).

It has been argued that the position of HWB as a core learning area was established as a result of the Scottish Government’s concerns about national health issues such as increased obesity rates, heart disease and poor mental health (Horrell, Sproule & Gray, 2012). Furthermore, policy documentation claims that mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing are essential for successful learning and successful development of the four capacities. However, the ways in which teachers enact this curriculum may be related to the ways in which they conceptualise HWB (Gray, MacLean & Mulholland, 2012). This issue is
further complicated by the fact that the term wellbeing remains an elusive concept with competing discourses on the best way to conceptualise, measure or increase wellbeing (Spratt, 2017).

This study proposes to explore how conceptions of HWB are enacted in local school practice. To do so, Foucault’s concepts of discourse, knowledge and power were used to analyse case studies that describe the ways four secondary schools enacted HWB policy. This research builds on previous critical discourse analyses conducted by Spratt (2016; 2017) on common discourses found in the CfE policy documentation and aims to address two main research questions: 1. how discursive constructions of HWB in the CfE policy are recontextualised and enacted at the local level, and 2. how responsibilities of school staff and students are understood within local schools.

Background

*Health and wellbeing: problems of definition*

Despite the concept of wellbeing becoming prominent in political, educational, and public discussion, there is a lack of consensus on definition (Graham, 2011). Discussions about wellbeing are often linked to health, as seen in the CfE policy which references ‘health and wellbeing’ as a single unit, and discourse frequently points to the 1948 WHO definition that ‘health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (cited in Spratt, 2017). This definition was ground-breaking as it moved beyond mere physical health to take on a more holistic view encompassing the individual’s mental and emotional states.
Compared to more holistic conceptions, public discourse around children’s HWB is often punctuated by dichotomous rhetoric of youth as both vulnerable to, or perpetrators of, risky behaviour (Burrows & Wright, 2007). Improving children’s HWB is seen as important due to reports of increased antisocial behaviour, poverty-related attainment gaps, and low school engagement (Watson, Emery, Bayliss, Boushel, & McInnes, 2012). This is especially the case in areas of social and economic disadvantage, where concerns about children being ‘at-risk’ or ‘risky’ serve as justification for policies and interventions to improve children’s HWB (Burrows & Wright, 2007). Evans, Davies, and Rich (2008) suggest that this risk discourse can serve to assert control over the lives of young people and their families through techniques of surveillance and monitoring. Such interventions are underpinned by a socio-political agenda that sanctions intrusive controls and can lead to feelings of powerlessness and alienation, especially when interventions do not take account of the contexts of their lives. The ways in which this embodied position influences young people’s health must be understood to inform the development of strategy intended to support them, and in doing so, problematise the neoliberal notion that young people and their parents must take responsibility for their own health. However, the shape these interventions take will ultimately be affected by tension between various discourses, because different discourses will suggest differing solutions to purported problems (Graham, 2011).

**Health and wellbeing discourse and policy**

Critics of risk discourses argue that they often frame wellbeing from a deficit standpoint that may regard children as passive victims of negative experiences (Graham, 2011). Critics point out
that wellbeing is more than just the absence of problems, that it should also focus on strengths
and enabling individuals to flourish (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). However,
strengths-based and enabling discourses have also received criticism that they may favour the
creation of the ‘model’ student who exemplifies self-regulation to achieve ‘acceptable’
behaviour (Chapman, 2015).

Contemporary examples of the intersection of deficits vs. strengths-based discourses
include the Every Child Matters (ECM) policy in England and Wales (Watson et al., 2012) and the
Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) policy in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2008). Both
policies underpin government and school directives and have directly informed legislation to
ensure the rights and safety of children and young people in the UK reflect recommendations in
collaboration to support children and conceptualise wellbeing as developmental and
dependent upon children achieving the prescribed policy aims (Watson et al., 2012). Within
these policies it is possible to see discourses from fields outside education, including medical
(Ereaut & Whiting, 2008), therapeutic (Gillies, 2011), ‘flourishing’, economic (Burrows & Wright,
2007), and ‘care’ (Spratt, 2017).

In a discourse analysis of ECM, Ereaut and Whiting (2008) propose that
conceptualisations of wellbeing primarily rely on medical discourses that focus on the
connection between wellbeing and physical health. A common corollary of medical and risk
discourses is a healthism discourse where children are positioned as individuals whose current
and future HWB is threatened by ‘unhealthy’ choices (Crawford, 2006). This type of discourse is
intended to encourage the production of responsible individuals who are obliged to safeguard
and manage their health through learning of ‘safe’ practices (McEvilly, Verheul, Atencio, & Jess, 2012).

With holistic notions of HWB, Gillies (2011) suggests a therapeutic discourse of emotion management has also permeated British school policy. Therapeutic discourse comes from psychology and emphasises mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, often articulated through concepts like emotional intelligence. Social and emotional skills, or the lack thereof, are often tied to perceived behavioural outcomes as seen in ECM’s construction of emotional wellbeing as a remedy for ‘crime and anti-social behaviour’ (HM Treasury, 2003: p.6). This therapeutic discourse will advocate for the production of socially and emotionally competent individuals who can maintain ‘appropriate’ emotionality (Gillies, 2011).

Further holistic notions of HWB include ‘flourishing’ discourse that comes from philosophy and centres on the idea that wellbeing relies on individuals being able to live a life they have reason to value (Sen, cited in Spratt, 2017). Spratt (2016, original emphasis) comments that living a life one has reason to value implies that individuals have freedom to choose between different options for their own personal wellbeing. In schools, this discourse suggests interventions should focus on increasing children’s autonomy to self-manage and improve wellbeing, and has also been argued as the most ‘educational’ because educators can provide learning opportunities for students to choose what is worthwhile to them (Spratt, 2017). Notably, in previous critical discourse analyses of CfE policy, Spratt (2016; 2017) found limited reference to flourishing discourse and claimed that CfE policy appeared to overlook the intrinsic value of education, subsuming it to academic achievement.
Another common discourse focuses on economics, demonstrated through overt language about children ‘not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential’ (HM Treasury, 2003: p.6). However, researchers caution that many economic discourses conceptualise the ‘poverty-related attainment gap’ as something that can be conquered through proper student training and knowledge transfer (Watson et al., 2012), and contain a neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility for overcoming barriers (Spratt, 2017). Beliefs that students can succeed if they just work hard and learn the required curriculum skills, minimise the structural inequalities that some children face (Udagawa, 2014). This legitimises social inequity, positions students as accountable for overcoming disadvantage, and may inadvertently lead to ‘student-blaming’ where children are judged on the basis of their achievement of HWB (Crawford, 2006).

In contrast to the aforementioned discourses which emphasise individual responsibility, ‘care’ discourse comes from the field of social care and focuses on adults’ responsibilities to work collaboratively to protect children’s rights (Spratt, 2016). This discourse is demonstrated in the CfE policy’s repetition of ‘responsibility of all’ and emphasis on interagency work to promote wellbeing. Noddings (2005) argues that to be a truly caring relationship, the carer and the cared-for should be equals, with children’s right to have a say in their education protected. However, within professional caring relationships, teachers are usually fixed in the carer role, leading to teacher-driven care that may constrain students’ autonomy (Spratt, 2017).

Spratt (2017) asserts different discourses from fields outside of education have crept into school wellbeing policies. She contends that the plethora of discourses show how wellbeing can act as a unifier that brings together different agencies for the benefit of children.
However, she also acknowledges that competing discourses may emphasise different directives causing confusion for schools as they attempt to enact policy.

Policy enactment in schools: national program directives

At the national level, policy discourses have led to school-based programs like Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) in England and CfE in Scotland (Watson et al., 2012). The SEAL program used the Every Child Matters policy as a template to create a school practice framework. The CfE framework, founded on GIRFEC aims, directed HWB to be an essential curriculum focus (Spratt, 2017). Within SEAL there are several references to deficit and therapeutic discourses that conceptualise HWB, especially social and emotional wellbeing, as learned skills necessary for better behavioural outcomes. This is seen in the definition provided for self-regulation: “When we have strategies for expressing our feelings in a positive way and for helping us to cope with difficult feelings and feel more positive and comfortable, we can concentrate better, behave more appropriately, make better relationships, and work more cooperatively and productively with those around us” (Department for Education, 2010, p. 5). This form of HWB construction will then oblige the teaching of individualised emotional control in order to reduce the threat of antisocial behaviour, poor learning outcomes, and reduced wellbeing (Gillies, 2011). CfE relies on medical, therapeutic, and economic discourses that also conceptualise HWB as necessary for successful learning. This HWB conceptualisation may compel teaching of specific skills and charge students with the responsibility to become citizens who express socially acceptable behaviours and emotions, and contribute back to the economy (Spratt, 2017).
While national policies contain various discourses that attempt to influence behaviour, dominant discourses are not always accepted entirely (Spratt, 2017). Policy writers cannot control the meaning of their text as it enters into the context of practice. Educators bring to their interpretations unique experiences, knowledge and values that enable them to adopt, adapt or even reject the policy text (Ball & Bowe, 1992). Consequently, it is very difficult to know how policy is understood and enacted at a local level and how this enactment is influenced by competing discursive conceptualisations of HWB. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a Foucauldian-inspired critical discourse analysis to understand how CfE HWB discourses were understood and enacted within the local context. This was done by analysing four case study documents that described local school HWB enactment practices and were portrayed as ‘best practice exemplars’ for other schools.

**Methods**

*Discourse and power: Foucauldian theories*

Discourse is commonly understood as language that can be used to construct social life and make certain ways-of-being or ways-of-thinking acceptable (Willig, 2008). Educational policy is considered a type of text that embodies discourses articulating beliefs, values and practices of society (Rossi, Tinning, McCuaig, Sirna, & Hunter, 2009). Hence, these policy texts and the discourses within them socialise the population by defining the norms and rules of how individuals are to behave (Spratt, 2017).

Discourse is commonly associated with Michel Foucault, a social philosopher known for his treatises on the indivisibility of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Foucault argued that
discourse was the embodiment of power and knowledge because of its ability to define ‘truth’ and that power was exercised through preferential access to discourse. Knowledge can become so influential that it produces a ‘regime of truth’ that makes it difficult to see or think in any other way and can create a powerful constraint on how and what can be done (MacNaughton, 2012).

Foucault theorised that within modern schooling institutions, power is mainly operated through technologies of power like classification, normalisation, surveillance, and regulation - mechanisms through which norms of thought and behaviour are produced (Foucault, 1979; Gore, 1995). For example, *classification* occurs when individuals are differentiated by dominant discourses such as a risk discourse defining those who may be ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’.

*Normalisation* often works through comparison where certain activities are deemed appropriate. For instance, within therapeutic discourse, positive emotional states are often socially constructed as ‘normal’, while negative affect may be pathologised as ‘at risk’. *Surveillance* occurs when individuals are being or expect to be monitored with reference to certain truths (Gore, 1995). This constitutes the ‘normalising gaze’ whereby individuals anticipate being evaluated according to norms that delineate proper behaviour and regulate themselves to avoid judgement.

*Critical discourse analysis*

‘Critical discourse analysis’ (CDA) is generally understood as the examination of communication to uncover how language is used and for what purpose. It questions the text to understand how language is recruited to define truth, what is normalised or pathologised, and what practices
are made acceptable by these ways of thinking (Rossi et al., 2009). As this research aims to examine how policy texts are enacted in secondary schools and how HWB discourses may control school practices and behaviours, Willig’s (2008) Foucauldian-inspired theoretical framework (adapted in Table 1 below) was chosen because it analyses the ways discourse can be used to control social and pedagogical practices. This framework explores how discourses conceptualising wellbeing can create subject positions that may become a powerful ‘truth’ that defines what ways of thinking or practices are possible. For example, within care discourse that emphasises adults’ responsibility to protect children, students labelled as ‘at risk’ are positioned as subjects in need of saving, which may compel teachers towards increased surveillance and intervention, and inhibit students’ autonomy.

Table 1: Foucauldian-inspired theoretical framework (adapted from Willig, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discursive constructions</td>
<td>How is wellbeing constructed through language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discourses</td>
<td>What discourses are utilised in this construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Action orientation/functioning</td>
<td>How do these constructions function such as promoting one 'truth' over another?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positionings</td>
<td>How are subjects positioned within this construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practice</td>
<td>What are the possibilities for action presented by the discursive construction of wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Documents for analysis

In order to understand how power structures within CfE’s wellbeing discourses work to control behaviour (of education staff and students), four secondary school case studies were examined. The studies were produced by an external consulting firm at the behest of Education Scotland (ES), the national body in Scotland for supporting quality and improvement in learning/teaching. Their purpose was to construct accounts of HWB implementation in four case site schools - how schools interpreted HWB; what actions were taken to implement policy; the impact this had on schools, students, and staff; and what forms of evidence were used to demonstrate the impact of HWB. In each school, the consulting firm conducted discussion groups with leaders, teachers, partner organisations, and with pupils. The case studies are publicly available on the ES National Improvement Hub website, a searchable repository of good practice resources for educators interested in improving the quality of learning and teaching. Each case study is presented as a text document with the intended audience of teachers, senior managers and head teachers in secondary schools (Education Scotland, 2018).

The four schools were highlighted because ES considered them to have demonstrated good progress in implementing HWB; as such, these school sites may not be representative of all Scottish schools. However, the case studies were selected for analysis because by highlighting them as ‘good practice exemplars’, ES may be using them as a normative standard to influence the actions of other local schools. The University of Edinburgh ethical procedures were followed, and ethical approval was granted.
Overview of the study schools

The schools serve students age 12-18 in different Local Authorities. Two schools - Kirkland High School and Community College in Fife and Smithycroft Secondary School in Glasgow - are from areas with high levels of deprivation (decile one on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). The other two are from areas with low levels of deprivation - Calderglen High School in South Lanarkshire (decile seven, fairly affluent) and Meldrum Academy in Aberdeenshire (decile ten, mostly affluent) (Education Scotland, 2018).

Data analysis

Analysis occurred in a multi-step process of initial coding to categorise comparable HWB school practices into themes which were then analysed to identify various discourses using a discourse manual developed *a priori* based on common discourses used to conceptualise HWB - available in Table 2 (Spratt, 2017).

Table 2: Discourse manual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical health promotion (stemming from medical discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as the promotion of physical health behaviours with a focus on individual choice</td>
<td>'Fitness for Life' programme, which involves pupils receiving an extra period of PE a week to focus on their fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional literacy (stemming from therapeutic discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as the understanding and management of emotions within social situations</td>
<td>Young people are encouraged to discuss all aspects of their work, with a strong emphasis on feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as interagency collaboration to protect and promote the rights of children</td>
<td>Collaboration between the school nurse and school Chaplaincy Group to deliver anti-stress techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flourishing (stemming from philosophical discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised around supporting students’ freedom to choose what is valuable to them</td>
<td>Meldrum Academy provides young people with opportunities to be active participants, take leading roles, and develop relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational outcomes (stemming from accountability discourse)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as its outcomes and effects</td>
<td>Kirkland High undertakes an annual review of health and wellbeing, structured around the experiences and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit-based discourse (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as strategies to reduce perceived shortcomings</td>
<td>Staff ‘profile’ the young people, taking account of family background and experiences, and identify targets for each individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-based discourse (stemming from discourse around social care)</td>
<td>HWB conceptualised as strategies to build on strengths</td>
<td>Both staff and young people take part in a 200-question survey which generates five core character strengths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The themes were then examined using the Foucauldian theoretical framework (Table 1) to explore how the schools conceptualised wellbeing, what common discourses were used, and what implications these conceptualisations might have had on the actions and responsibilities of staff and students. Analysis discerned schools primarily described and conceptualised HWB as serving two distinct goals, which are discussed below.
Discussion of Results

This study found two main constructions of HWB as teaching for outcomes or as a process for character development. There is tension between these constructions as each will imply different modes of action and evaluation by school staff, which may leave teachers caught between conflicting curricular aims.

Construction 1: Health and wellbeing as teaching for outcome achievement

In this construction, schools predominantly seemed to conceptualise HWB as a pedagogic approach for teaching skills to achieve specified outcomes (i.e. E&Os and positive destinations for learners after graduation), and appeared to view HWB as teachable skills required for learning and attainment (Spratt, 2017). Three themes developed around schools focusing on HWB implementation to facilitate outcome achievement, emphasising collaborative working to support HWB implementation, and using HWB outcome attainment as a measurement of success.

Theme 1: Focusing on HWB implementation to facilitate outcome achievement

The case studies specifically emphasised integrating and achieving outcomes in the reports. This focus on outcomes is seen in the way schools describe their curricular decisions. For example:

Kirkland High undertakes an annual review of health and wellbeing, structured around the experiences and outcomes within Curriculum for Excellence. The school considers each of the outcomes, and how different subjects can contribute to achieving these. (Kirkland High)

It has taken a structured approach to ensuring that the responsibility of all areas are considered across the school, starting with a subject audit. The Principle Teacher supported each
department (and staff member) to record how their work linked to the health and wellbeing responsibility of all outcomes. (Smithycroft Secondary)

These statements suggest schools are focusing on achieving outcomes like the E&Os in order to structure and evaluate teaching practices. According to Foucault, these E&O expectations constitute a ‘regime of truth’ that regulates teachers’ actions and may push teachers towards an audit-type approach for enactment and assessment (MacNaughton, 2012; Priestley & Minty, 2013). This was evident with case schools noting the use of systematic audits to identify how different subjects contribute to the outcomes.

Theme 2: Emphasising collaborative working to support HWB implementation

Contrary to a previous discourse analysis of CfE that found HWB was mainly conceptualised as the individual responsibility of students (McEvilly et al., 2012), the case studies appear to focus more on the responsibilities of adults. The most prominent discourse within this construction was one of ‘care’. Care discourse focuses on adults’ responsibilities to work collaboratively in the service of child protection (Spratt, 2017) and was often linked to operational and deficit-based discourse. This discursive link emphasises an ethos of cooperation and joint responsibility to safeguard children and facilitate attainment of the HWB outcomes. For example:

Responsibility of All in its widest sense extends beyond the school to the community, partners, agencies and the local authority. The school and its partners have a single objective which at its heart is getting it right for all young people. (Meldrum Academy staff member)

The mental health of young people had been a concern for the school, as there had been a small, but not insignificant number who were self-harming. They arranged for Scottish Association for Mental Health to come to school to train the pupils in a resource called SafeTALK which is a suicide awareness training tool. (Calderglen High)
The first statement explicitly references the GIRFEC policy focus on shared accountability to improve outcomes for children (Scottish Government, 2008), and both statements appear to reiterate CfE’s rationale that HWB is necessary to diminish the perceived risks facing children. This emphasis on protecting children highlights one of the critiques of caring – that a ‘top-down’ approach to care means there is an inherent power differential between staff and students (Noddings, 2005). This power hierarchy may position school staff as experts tasked with safeguarding children’s rights and wellbeing, as well as responsible for the transmission of requisite knowledge (Willig, 2008; Priestley & Humes, 2010). This may then lead to care that is ‘done to’ children and treat them as passive agents reliant on adults to make decisions on their behalf, which conflicts with aspirational language that advocates for raising student autonomy and capabilities.

These subject positions may again act as a regime of truth and compel teachers to use technologies of power to control student activity (Gore, 1995). This was seen in the case studies with the focus on ‘monitoring’ and ‘identifying’ (surveillance) those students ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ (classification) for decreased HWB (normalisation) in order to ‘tackle the situation’ and ‘improve outcomes’ (regulation). This is especially concerning for those pupils from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who may be more likely to be classified as at risk. Evans and Bairner (2013) argue that interventions designed to support their health and wellbeing must begin from a position that takes account of their lives and how they understand and embody health. Failure to do so by creating top-down and controlling contexts for learning may result in feelings of disempowerment, alienation, shame or stigmatisation.
Theme 3: Health and wellbeing outcome attainment as a measurement of success

All of the schools concentrated on demonstrating positive results from HWB enactment, primarily focusing on measurable methods like achievement of the E&Os as evidence of impact:

Kirkland High is clear that its primary aim in integrating health and wellbeing within the school is to achieve the outcomes set out in Curriculum for Excellence. It monitors attainment and achievement levels, and school staff believe that the approach to health and wellbeing has contributed...to recent improvements in attainment and achievement. The school has also seen an increase in positive leaver destinations. (Kirkland High)

By linking measurable outcomes as evidence of impact, the case studies seem to equate E&O-achievement with success which may create a normative standard that necessitates frequent monitoring for evidence. This standard may then be used to inspect and evaluate teachers’ activities and might compel ‘scholastic accountancy’ (Ball, 2003). Some schools questioned this evaluation approach, particularly in relation to time barriers, and felt the approach increased pressure on teachers to formally document their practices. However, schools may not have felt confident in challenging policy and justified the accountability measures by equating them with established practices:

We always did it [health and wellbeing] anyway, but now it’s all recorded, and it’s more work for everyone...for this thing we were already doing. (Smithycroft Secondary staff member)

The main challenge was time. Teachers were initially quite reluctant, seeing this as ‘something else to add to an already very busy workload.’ However, initial fears were allayed through Continuing Professional Development, and an understanding that teachers would be ‘promoting and identifying what we are doing already.’ (Kirkland High)

In these excerpts both Kirkland and Smithycroft (schools serving high deprivation areas) reference HWB implementation as challenging due to extra work and time barriers, as well as
equate new HWB practices with previous teaching methods. This may be problematic as Priestley and Minty (2013) suggest schools that do not have time to engage with the CfE curriculum commonly rely on previous pedagogical practices and are less likely to innovate. Additionally, it has been argued that if CfE privileges one type of objective, then the curriculum will likely be restricted by the objectives used for assessment purposes (Priestley & Humes, 2010). In the case studies, equating E&O-attainment and success may constrain pedagogy to approaches that will expressly lead to those outcomes. This limiting of teaching practices has been described with notions like ‘teaching to the test’ (Priestley & Minty, 2013), and supports what Ball (2003) calls a ‘culture of performativity’ which may be problematic if it inhibits teacher flexibility and innovation (Priestley & Humes, 2010).

Again, this can be especially damaging for young people from areas of social and economic disadvantage, who are typically marginalised by traditional, teacher-centred approaches. For those young people it is likely that practices associated with a culture of performativity, e.g. making judgements, comparisons, and use of sanctions, may be damaging to their health and wellbeing (Lupton, 2005). Lupton (2005) suggests that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit both academically and emotionally from creative pedagogies (Jeffrey & Woods, 2009) that are founded on democracy and inclusion, and rely on the teacher’s professional expertise, risk-taking and relationship with their pupils. Importantly, these approaches reject the notion of fixed ability and assume that all pupils are capable of transformation, and thus, they have the capacity to contribute to more equal educational outcomes.
**Construction 2: Health and wellbeing as a process for character development**

Another dominant conceptualisation within the case studies is HWB as a process for character development, which views HWB as the collective activities to enable development of the four capacities (Scottish Executive, 2006). Two themes developed around supporting positive relationships with students and enabling student engagement and participation.

**Theme 1: Emphasising collaborative working to support student and staff relationships**

There was an interesting shift in the case studies when discussing relationships. When relationships were treated as an outcome, the focus was on teaching skills to sustain relationships. However, when focusing on HWB as a process, relationships were described in a more interactive and participatory way:

‘Nurture’ is a key focus at Smithycroft Secondary School – and is one of the most innovative ways in which the school supports its young people to develop positive relationships. Nurture groups are designed to enhance young people’s opportunities to interact with others in a positive way in a safe environment, something they may have been unable to develop in their home environment. (Smithycroft Secondary)

Many initiatives across the school promote positive relationships including the Acts of Kindness project. They have been given small ‘act of kindness’ cards to help them notice opportunities to practice kindness and encourage others to do the same. Young people reported this gave them a ‘sense of purpose.’ (Calderglen High)

When focusing on participatory relationships the schools show more parity, allowing for back-and-forth contribution of teacher and learner, and appear to balance responsibility between adults to enable opportunities for learning and on learners to participate in learning. In this process-focused construction, the dominant discourse was one of flourishing, where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. Flourishing discourse appears to favour
social liberal ideology and ideals of equity and justice. Within this ideology, education should support students’ capabilities to decide what is of value to them regardless of socioeconomic background (Croxford, 2010).

Notably, in these excerpts Smithycroft (serving a high deprivation area) appeared to reference deficit-based discourse more than Calderglen (serving a fairly affluent area), acknowledging the unequal home lives some students face. This represents the ways curricular goals may be transformed from policy to practice, and compared to a prior CDA of CfE that found limited reference to flourishing discourse (Spratt, 2017), the case study schools appeared to balance neoliberal and social liberal discussions. However, this possibility for increased focus on deficits for students in more disadvantaged areas may lead to unequal learning opportunities. Students perceived as ‘at risk’ may be subject to more school intervention in the name of protection, which may have the unintended effect of these students having fewer opportunities for autonomy and self-directed learning (Bialostok, 2015).

Theme 2: Providing opportunities for students to participate and contribute

The case studies often highlighted schools’ efforts to support student involvement in shaping the curriculum:

Meldrum Academy provides young people with opportunities to be active participants, take leading roles, and develop relationships. Young people felt involved and listened to, due to open two-way dialog and a culture of inclusiveness. (Meldrum Academy)

Kirkland High uses a ‘Distributive Leadership Model’ – promoting an open culture and collaborative working – which was seen as vital to its success. Leaders and teachers agreed that being open and willing to consider anything that was offered to the school (within reason and remit) meant that young people had more opportunities to be part of something positive. (Kirkland High)
These statements highlight collaborative working but appear less hierarchical than the caring discourse involving schools making decisions for students. In these statements the student-staff relationship seems more egalitarian and focuses on children’s ability to choose what is personally important to them. Within this HWB construction, schools and students are involved in a more egalitarian relationship with students positioned as autonomous agents with the right to self-determination, and school staff positioned as facilitators of this student development (Priestley & Minty, 2013). These subject positions will impact both schools’ and students’ actions such that pupils will have more agency and be expected to take an active role in affecting their own learning (Willig, 2008). Teachers would also have more flexibility to move away from narrow outcome-based teaching and experiment with pedagogic changes.

However, teacher autonomy does not only depend on individual capability, but also the interaction between individuals and their context (Priestley and Minty, 2013). Hence, while CfE emphasises higher levels of teacher autonomy, teachers may be limited by structural features of their environment and unable to enact the curriculum as it was intended. This restriction is visible in the case studies, such that ‘time’ was mentioned by all schools as having an impact on successful implementation of HWB approaches. Notably, the more affluent schools noted time as a positive factor, with teachers provided dedicated time to devote to HWB. Conversely, the more disadvantaged schools both noted a lack of time and resources as barriers to enacting policy. This difference may have ramifications on educational experiences and perpetuate inequality if disadvantaged schools struggle more with barriers that decrease teachers’ ability to recontextualise policy to suit their students’ needs.
Furthermore, teacher autonomy may be constrained by evaluation requirements. The E&Os have been set out as the standards against which teachers are to evaluate day-to-day learning (Scottish Government, 2011) which may be problematic because it is argued that to maximise the potential for development, evaluations need to be flexible rather than predefined (Priestley & Humes, 2010). Stenhouse (cited in Priestley & Humes, 2010) argued that predefining objectives potentially narrows the curriculum and may inhibit innovation and creativity. This may leave school staff caught in the middle between two contradictory goals: defined objectives and open-ended opportunities for student development (Reeves, 2008). This tension was apparent in the case studies with some staff reporting feeling supported to be more autonomous, yet the schools all relied on prescribed outcomes (E&Os) to guide planning and enactment.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand how HWB policy discourse was interpreted and enacted at the local level, and what effects this might have had on the actions of school staff and teachers. The findings revealed two main constructions of HWB in the schools as either teaching for outcome achievement or as a process for character development, and mostly relied on differing discourses (i.e. care and flourishing respectively). Tension arose because these two constructions implied different modes of action from educators.

HWB centred on outcome achievement puts responsibility on teachers to transmit the required knowledge and may lead teachers to rely on predefined objectives to evidence learning. Constricted emphasis on outcomes may stifle both teacher and student autonomy.
(Priestley & Drew, 2016) and conflicts with the underlying aspiration of HWB as a process to give greater flexibility to teachers to enable student-driven learning. Competing discourses around wellbeing may leave schools uncertain how to convert curriculum goals into practice and may lead schools to depend on previous practices that might inhibit pedagogical innovation and maintain the status quo (Priestley & Drew, 2016).

These findings suggest that in order to encourage successful curriculum implementation and support educators, additional clarification around curricular goals and assessment measures is needed. Furthermore, schools may need more time to engage with local curriculum planning, especially those schools located in areas of social and economic disadvantage. The case studies revealed there were differences between affluent and disadvantaged schools in perceptions of implementation barriers, particularly time availability. Previous research has shown that if teachers do not have time to fully engage with the principles of CfE, they may be more likely to rely on previous practice and allow assessment needs to drive pedagogy (Priestley & Minty, 2013). This may have negative consequences on the HWB and equity of learning opportunities for more disadvantaged students if teachers do not have the time or capability to recontextualise the curriculum to suit these students’ needs. This may also lead to apprehension and decreased HWB for educators if schools feel unable to make meaningful changes to the curricular agenda.

A limitation of this research was that it relied upon pre-produced case studies which limited the study authors’ ability to solicit further clarification from school participants. Additionally, the case studies profiled schools deemed to be demonstrating good HWB implementation and held up as models for other schools to improve their practices. As such,
these schools are more likely to be aligned with government policy aims and may not be representative of other Scottish schools. Further research could aim to generate primary qualitative data exploring how teachers engage with and enact HWB policy in real life, and the effects of this enactment on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Participation in the research process may facilitate deeper learning for educators and support their confidence in pedagogic planning and innovation of methods to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

References


Appendix N : Cityside High school policy impressions

Positive Behaviour Support Policy
- Some mention of HWB, but brief and often in relation to learning and behaviour
- Title appears focused on how to promote positive student behaviour, but document mainly highlights responsibilities of adults:
  - Emphasis on creating an embedded ethos, supportive environment and promoting positive relationships as a foundation for improved behaviour.
  - Strong emphasis on clarity and consistency of expectations (for both students and staff) and responses/consequences.
  - Clear administrative steps/protocols regarding school procedural responses in event of poor behaviour, and also ways to reward good behaviour
  - Emphasis on regular evaluations, and revisiting procedures and outcomes (not a one-off, tick box exercise)

Equality, Diversity and Anti Bullying Policy and Procedures
- Emphasis on rights-focus of school: repeats UNCRC articles regarding discrimination, being hurt/badly treated, and right to an education.
- Emphasis on the protection of students and staff.
- Suggests emotional HWB necessary to achieve 4 capacities and other outcomes
- Appears to have a deficit-based focus:
  - Prevention of and protection from discrimination and bullying.
  - Draws upon law/legal definitions – protected characteristics for equalities. definitions and examples of different types of bullying or discrimination.
  - Care discourse around protecting students’ rights.
- Emphasis on rights, responsibilities, and expectations of the whole school community (e.g., students, staff, parents).

However:
- While focus is on fixing problem behaviour, how the school wants to tackle it appears more strengths-based:
  - Embedding positive ethos through values-based expectations and use of restorative approaches
  - Focus on supporting and restoring relationships.
  - Clear procedures on what to do, who to see if students are being bullied or are aware of bullying rights groups.
- Implicit hints of trauma-informed approaches to care:
  - Commitment to listen to both victim and perpetrator of bullying.
  - Involving students who have been bullied to determine how they want the matter resolved (choice and collaboration)
  - Empowering students to challenge antisocial or bullying behaviour.
Appendix O: Sample of Cityside High policy discourse coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behaviour Support Policy</th>
<th>Coding gerunds</th>
<th>Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most students behave well most of the time, not because they fear sanctions, but because they</td>
<td>Voicing positive expectations and beliefs about pupil behaviour</td>
<td>Strengths-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have chosen to behave. This has contributed to the atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation,</td>
<td>Believing good behaviour supports an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation between staff-pupils</td>
<td>Strengths-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which usually exists between teachers and students in [Cityside High School].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best way to encourage good standards of behaviour in the school is through a clear code of</td>
<td>Believing good behaviour is supported through clear and consistent standards and expectations</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conduct backed by a carefully balanced combination of acknowledgements and sanctions applied</td>
<td>Believing that recognition, punishment must be applied consistently for all pupils</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistently within a positive and supportive atmosphere. The ‘Expectations for Learning’ must be</td>
<td>Believing a positive and supportive atmosphere will encourage good behaviour</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clearly set out and shared with every student in the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For individual teachers, good organisation, lesson planning and preparation will help to create</td>
<td>Believing teacher preparation key to setting tone and positive environment</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the right environment within the classroom. Flexibility, choice and, where appropriate,</td>
<td>Believing pupil choice/autonomy will minimise challenging behaviour</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation will also help to minimise challenging behaviour. However, even in these</td>
<td>Acknowledging that some pupils may still demonstrate challenging behaviour</td>
<td>Deficit-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditions, some children and young people will present with challenging behaviour.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum for Excellence cannot be delivered without good relationships and positive behaviour. The starting point for learning is a positive ethos and climate of mutual respect and trust based upon shared values across whole school communities where everyone can learn and work in a peaceful and safe environment.</td>
<td>Emphasising the importance of positive relationships for effective implementation of CfE</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
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<tr>
<td>The breadth, flexibility and individualisation of Curriculum for Excellence, along with the support it affords, will be transformational in helping to create peaceful and positive learning environments with more opportunities for children and young people to be engaged and motivated in relevant and enjoyable learning. Social, emotional and behavioural skills are key skills for learning, life and work. Readiness to learn, and ongoing positive relationships and behaviour, depend upon social and emotional wellbeing. Health and wellbeing across learning is a responsibility for all. Children and young people should feel happy, safe, respected and included in the learning environment and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive behaviour in the classroom, playground, and wider learning community. Underpinning this is the emotional health and wellbeing of staff.</td>
<td>Repeating CfE’s assumption that flexibility and individualisation will improve learning, motivation, and create positive environment</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every child and young person has the right to a high quality education. Positive relationships and behaviour in all aspects of school life are fundamental to enable effective teaching and learning to take place. Learning environments should promote and support positive relationships and equalities.</td>
<td>Reproducing policy language (CfE, SHANARRI and GIRFEC)</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believing HWB (social, emotional, behavioural skills) supports learning, life, and work; repeating CfE assumptions</td>
<td>Care, operational, social-emotional literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believing staff HWB is as important as pupils’ and crucial to achieving CfE aims</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focusing on children’s rights to high quality education</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believing positive relationships enable good behaviour, teaching and learning</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emphasising the importance of positive environments for prosocial behaviour and positive relationships

Care, operational

[Learning environments should] prevent behaviour that is disruptive, unlawful or injurious to others. Inappropriate behaviours should be managed to minimise the risk of occurrence, escalation or harm to learners or to staff, ensuring that any physical contact is appropriate to the situation.

A very small proportion of children and young people will require greater levels of support. Accordingly, approaches to positive behaviour will incorporate interventions appropriate to young people with more pronounced behavioural needs. This will include measures to address inappropriate behaviour and manage the risk of disruptive, unlawful or injurious behaviour, within the classroom, within schools and in other settings beyond schools as required.

In any classroom the teacher’s personal approach will set the climate, the pace, the sense of achievement or failure. Teachers who are successful make clear to their students:

• what behaviour they want from them and, therefore, what they don’t want;
• what will happen if they choose to show either the desirable behaviour or the undesirable behaviour.

Emphasising efforts for behaviour management and the [implicit] expectations of teachers

Care, operational

Noting some pupils may need extra support and these must be appropriate [individualised] to their needs to manage risk and address behaviour

Care, operational deficit-based

Emphasising teachers' roles and responsibilities in setting clear and consistent expectations, managing behaviour, creating a positive environment

Care, operational
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality, Diversity and Anti Bullying Policy</th>
<th>Coding gerunds</th>
<th>Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We are a Rights Respecting School. This policy covers the following articles of the UNCRC: Article 2 – You have the right to protection against discrimination. Article 19 – You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated. Article 29 – You have the right to and education which develops your personality and your respect for other’s rights and the environment.</td>
<td>Defining the school is rights respecting</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasising pupils’ [and staff] rights</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeating UNCRC articles to emphasise/legitimise aims of policy</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting out behavioural expectations and purpose of the policy (protection of pupils/staff, minimisation of problem behaviour)</td>
<td>Care, deficit-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believing emotional HWB underpins other outcomes (success, 4 capacities)</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeating CfE policy language and assumptions - that HWB supports other ends (learning, life, achievement of the 4 capacities)</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasising pupils' (and staff's) right to feel happy, safe, included</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describing values of the school (e.g., respect, high aspirations, achievement and</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
resilience they need for the future. We have the courage to aspire to the very best we can be. We belong to our school and we are very proud of our tradition and heritage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reproducing policy language (CfE, SHANARRI and GIRFEC)</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasising belonging, pride in the school, and opportunities for success through a variety of options</td>
<td>Flourishing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We use restorative approaches to repair and strengthen relationships between staff and pupils within our whole school community. We actively foster good relations between diverse groups and individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasising positive relationships to promote diversity</th>
<th>Care</th>
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</table>

We recognise the effects that bullying and discrimination can have on a young person’s feelings of worth, on their health and wellbeing and on their schoolwork. We recognise that certain individuals and groups in society experience disadvantage, prejudice or discrimination because of their age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender change, looked-after status, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, culture, sexual orientation and socio-economic status or any combination of these. We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all and we work actively towards eliminating all forms of bullying and discrimination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledging negative effects of different types of disadvantage, including SES</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describing values of the school (equal opportunity for all, protection from discrimination and bullying)</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlighting school’s commitment to eliminating forms of discrimination</td>
<td>Care, operational, deficit-based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bullying is an abuse of power that is defined by its effects, regardless of whether these were the intended effects. People who are bullied are hurt, physically or emotionally, by something someone else has done or said to them or about them. They are likely to fear that this will happen again and feel powerless to stop it. Bullying is also a breach of children’s rights under several articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining bullying and its negative effects</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining bullying as a breach of pupils’ rights</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
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</table>

We use the legal definition of ‘equalities’, which gives protection to people who have specific characteristics - for example being gay, lesbian or bisexual or from a recognised ethnic group or disabled or old. It also includes boys and girls and anyone undergoing gender change, as well as those of particular faith groups. The Equality Act 2010 defines these as ‘protected groups’. Looked-after children, young carers and children and young people from poor backgrounds are also included as equalities groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining 'equalities' and the protected groups covered by the concept</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drawing on law (Equalities Act) to provide support for the definition</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
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</table>

The Head Teacher is responsible for the introduction and implementation of this policy. However, all staff, all pupils and their parents/carers must play an active part in the development and maintenance of the policy and in its success. Teachers and support staff are expected to be proactive, to treat all allegations seriously and to refer reports of incidents to other staff as appropriate, who will maintain accurate appropriate records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasising the Head Teacher as the person mainly responsible for school policy</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlighting responsibilities and expectations of the whole school in supporting school equality</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pupils** are asked to:
- report all incidents of bullying and suspected incidents that other young people may be afraid to report
- Support each other and to seek help to ensure that everyone feels safe and nobody feels excluded or afraid in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasising role that pupils can play in stopping bullying and supporting inclusion, HWB</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requesting pupil support - 'asked to'</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**All school staff** are obligated to:
- be proactive in implementing the policy
- to treat all allegations seriously
- to keep records
- to inform the equalities co-ordinator of any instances of bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasising responsibilities of school staff</th>
<th>Care, operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noting 'obligation' - meaning this is a requirement, not a request</td>
<td>Care, operational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P: Sample of individual interview coding

I: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Just sort of your name and role in the school, how long you've been working within education or what originally got you into education?

P: So yeah, I'm just [redacted]. I'm currently doing a Depute Head job at [redacted] High School. I have been in this role for over a year and a half. Prior to this role, I was doing an acting depute job in [redacted] High School and my background is PE. So, I was a PE teacher, trained at [redacted] High School and I was a curricular leader of health and wellbeing which can encompass PE and home economics. Did that for around five years before moving into a kind of depute role. On the kind of side of, I suppose, kind of going through the PE and the depute route, I've kind of completed my Masters, [redacted] through the University of [redacted]. And I've finished my qualification for headship this year as well, so I've kinda been balancing the professional learning on the side of the job.

I suppose I always kind of wanted to or had an interest in the teaching line and education because I've always enjoyed, I suppose, having an impact and making a difference in a positive way. And I've always kind of enjoyed that experience and feeling of, I suppose, being able to see the progression of a student or groups of students over a period of time. So that was probably something that was a draw for me in education. None of my family are from education backgrounds which I think is kind of rare in teaching. Always seems to be a kind of family link, but I was kind of the first to go into it, and yeah, really enjoying it. And I've always kind of, even in summers, I've done the [redacted], worked at a school in [redacted] and always quite enjoyed, I suppose, being immersed in some kind of education.

I: Nice, maybe you can influence the next generation to go into teaching, inspire them.
In terms of [redacted] High School can you describe the size and make up or what the school’s mainly known for?

P: Yes, so our school roll continues to rise. So, we're sitting around just shy of 1350 pupils in the school, so we're one of the largest kind of comprehensive schools in [Local Authority]. [redacted] a lot of [redacted] High School is steeped in history and it's something that we're still pretty proud of and celebrate. So, you'll find that [redacted] High students are quite proud of being a pupil and a former pupil of the school and have form stories to tell. We've got a really, I suppose, as I said, fully comprehensive catchment so we've got students from all SIMD backgrounds which I think is an absolute strength of the school.
In terms of, I suppose, what we are known for, I think we always do pretty well in terms of students achieving above their, kind of what would be classed as virtual comparators. So we, our teaching and learning is recognised as being very strong in the school. And we say the opportunities that we offer as a state school is impressive, both study support and extra-curricular support. I think students who come to ______ High School get a really great deal in terms of the full package. Students have amazing opportunities to go into a range of interests, so I think we've got lots to offer and we have a really strong pupil voice in the school. And that's something that we kind of developed a lot over the past few years is really promoting the pupil voice and making sure that they are at the centre of all decisions and actually are the main influencers of decisions that go on in the school, along with the staff and parent body.

I: Nice, so what type of activities do you do to kind of draw out that pupil voice?

P: So we've got a fairly organised structure. We've got what we call 'form classes', so every year group has around 10 form classes. We've got ______. Each of those ______, there are form classes through all the six year groups and for each form class we have a pupil representative. That pupil representative then meets as part of what we call ______. And a pupil representative from each form class meets to represent the voice of their form class. And then what we have from there (and that's led by our nation captains). On top of the nation council meetings, we then have a school parliament. So we have representatives from every year group [who] are then put forward to represent the pupil parliament and our school captain team leads the pupil parliament.

So essentially there are points that are raised through form classes which are then fed into nation council meetings, we take all the main points from the nation council meetings that are then discussed at the pupil parliament and all that is fed back into the senior leadership team and staff. And then we have feedback to the pupils in terms of 'you said, we did' type things in terms of what change we can make. And we've got various committees set up in terms of equalities group, respect group, and a representative from each of these committees is also part of the pupil parliament, therefore we're kind of making sure we've encompassed all committees and interests across the school, that are feeding into the main forum. I would say it's one of our main strengths as a school is our pupil voice.

I: Great and so it sounds like the senior leadership and Head Teacher all take onboard what the students say, or as much as possible.
**P:** To the extent that our pupils are actually involved in the self-evaluation process of school, so they are involved in the walkthroughs of the Department - you know when we're looking at what's going well, what could be improved, the pupils involved are involved in that process. Pupils are involved in promoting host interviews. We have pupil panels. Pupils are also the captain team that are invited to feedback... So right now the way we're doing it is they join our meeting through a live Teams (meeting) and have a 15 minute slot if they choose to discuss the ongoingness of the pupil voice. So it's fairly well embedded now and as always there's things that can be tweaked and improved, but... And we've also, for students who obviously don't want to necessarily go through the more formalised forum, there's anonymous boxes and a pupil app where students can get in touch and feedback, kind of positives or concerns. So we like to think that we've ticked a lot of boxes in terms of hearing the pupil voice.

**I:** That's great, yeah. So who do you think tends to drive the health and wellbeing decision-making and planning then? The students or senior leaders or what?

**P:** I think, obviously the structures and the strategic and operational side of things, the bare bones if you like, is set out I suppose nationally, you know. We kind of go off national advice and we then as a Council we've got health and wellbeing priorities. Our council priorities come from the national priorities, and then the school priorities come from the Council and national priorities so it all kind of feeds into the school, so I would like to think that health and wellbeing is kind of always one of the top items in the agenda. So I would say as a school we drive it-you know in terms of the vision and strategic side of things, but in terms of influencing what goes on in health and wellbeing pupils have a fair part to play there.

**I:** Great! Besides policy goals of course and the students, are you taking other input from outside agencies or parents? Any other people that are involved or that you take their consideration on board when you're planning health and wellbeing initiatives?

**P:** Yeah, definitely and I think health and wellbeing has evolved so much as you'll know. Health and wellbeing is regarded as a responsibility of all and that comes with a lot of pressure in some ways because I think at times staff feel, particularly teaching staff, have got their classes to teach and they wonder, "What is health and wellbeing?" And it does encompass so much, I suppose, within a school context, and we have so many people now feed into health and wellbeing within the school. So, we've obviously got our staff...
team, but then we've got external agencies that work with staff, that work with students. We have people that we have appointed as a school so we have youth workers, we've got school counsellors, and they all feed into the school wellbeing, but as I say, there's a lot of aspects to health and wellbeing within a school. So I think staff can, at times, probably feel that although it's responsibility for all, it's sometimes reassuring that actually, health and wellbeing isn't about you know getting up and doing a bit of exercise, it's about making pupils feel safe in the building and that's a first priority. It's about making sure that they feel that there is respect going on and that they feel nurtured and included in their learning. These are the types of things that encompass health and wellbeing, not just the kind of obvious physical wellbeing.

I: Yeah absolutely. I know it's such a big question, health and wellbeing and trying to define it, but what does it mean personally to you?

P: I suppose HWB to me, it is all about for me I suppose it is about students feeling these things I was talking: so health and wellbeing is about our students feeling safe, and this is obviously this is the kind of obvious one and this is what is kind of drilled into my head in terms of health and wellbeing, but you know, the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators which is feeling safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, I'm testing myself now, active, respected, responsible, included. You know, these are the things that make up health and wellbeing and to me, that's what it's all about. I think health and wellbeing has to encompass all these aspects, so yeah. Some students within our school context I suppose maybe have struggled with some of these aspects of wellbeing more than others. Some are, probably come across as being pretty ok with them all, while others struggle with them all, but I think it's important to look at the big picture of health and wellbeing as opposed to just making it too narrow.

I: Does the big picture to you, so the big picture to you is that sort of holistic understanding?

P: Yeah, absolutely.

I: Okay got it, okay. What do you think has been sort of the biggest influence on how you think about health and wellbeing? I know you mentioned the SHANARRI so a little bit of policy, but any other major influences in the way you think about health and wellbeing?

P: I suppose, personally, wellbeing for me is a non-negotiable in the sense of, from kind of personal experience you know, that in order to
get the absolute best out of myself in a professional context, you have to have a wellbeing balance and so for me, the wellbeing that I take into account is the kind of exercise. You know, that's my non-negotiable and if I get that part right then I know that actually I'll be far more productive in the workplace. You are able to get things done more productively, and yeah, I suppose that influence, that personal influence for me feeds into a lot of what I do. Almost seeing health and wellbeing as an absolute non-negotiable, not something that is an add-on. It's health and wellbeing as absolutely pivotal to making sure that you are getting the best out of you, you know? And treating yourself with respect.

I: Yeah, so it sounds like you see health and wellbeing as sort of the foundation for everything else, is that correct?

P: That's probably quite a neat way to put it actually, yeah. I would say it is the bedrock of it, or the foundation, of everything else you know. The health and wellbeing has to be right, and these things have to be in place for everything else to work, particularly in education. If you're coming in and let's say, for example, that you haven't had the positive start to the day, you're less nurtured or haven't had that breakfast you know, that sets you off on the wrong footing, so making sure that health and wellbeing is in place is hugely important.

I: When you say 'everything else', what do you mean by that?

P: Where did I say, sorry?

I: Well you said health and wellbeing is non-negotiable because without it you can't achieve anything else or you're less capable....

P: I suppose from my personal side, I suppose I'm thinking I'm more productive with the work that I have to get through in the day. But from a student point of view, you know, I would say you see the effect on concentration, in terms of getting through the work, in terms of engagement in a lesson, in terms of retention of knowledge. There's no doubt about it, there is a connection there.

I: Okay got it, yeah I fully agree as well. Definitely if I exercise, I feel more kind of alert and capable too.

P: Yeah, I suppose I like this idea of it being a kind of non-negotiable. And I know that that's maybe not for everybody is the physical exercise, but for me certainly that's a, I see as a non-negotiable. Instead of trying to squeeze health and wellbeing into your day it's part of what you do, it's priority.
I: So, a strong emphasis on sort of the physical health aspect from your own personal experience. What about mental, social, and emotional wellbeing?

P: Yeah, again, I think physical feeds into these quite, I suppose, almost fairly neatly. I think if you, again probably talking personally, I think that getting the physical part right helps your mental, emotional, and social side of wellbeing. But we also see, many of our students who don’t have the same physical emphasis, and therefore it is about looking at other ways to engage them. And that doesn’t necessarily have to be exercise, but that can be through some kind of wellbeing that is an interest to them, something they’re interested in. So if that’s gaming, fine. If that’s something where they’re socialising with friends, that’s fine. I think having that outlet then feeds into helping the mental, emotional, and social wellbeing, and particularly, I’m thinking, the social wellbeing. Having an interest allows you to then feed in with different people, you’re seeing different people, and that’s good for you to be working with different groups of people. Having an interest is good for your mind in terms of the mental wellbeing, and allows you to forget about education, or your homework, or whatever it may be - an assessment that’s coming up, for a while and helps you forget about your home circumstance for a while, you know? Having that outlet...

I: Absolutely. So how large a role do you feel health and wellbeing plays in your day to day job when you’re thinking about policy or curriculum planning or school programmes?

P: I would say now, it goes hand-in-hand with every single thing we do in school. It would be irresponsible to plan without health and wellbeing in mind, and that is everything from curricular to extra-curricular. So if we think about now, our curricular schedule: communication feeds into health and wellbeing, you know. If a student’s wellbeing is kind of protected a lot more, if you have communication in advance, if you’re transparent with when assessment dates are, if that’s shared with home, if that’s shared with pupils, if you’ve advertised opportunities that are available... I think being as transparent with communication has certainly been something that seems to be working for us. And it’s no doubt there are areas for improvement in communication, but it definitely health and wellbeing goes hand-in-hand with everything that we do now.

I: Okay, so it’s informing you every day then you feel?

P: Yeah, I would say it absolutely is. I mean, particularly the role that we’re in now, I would say any role within a school, you’re seeing so

(Personally)
Believing physical health as ‘feeding into’, underlying holistic HWB

Recognising not all students will share his emphasis on physical.

Seeing student interests as a way [for educators] to engage with them and for students to engage with others.

Believing social engagement is important, a good thing

Believing students’ interests provide ‘an outlet’ or way to forget about stressors and help their overall HWB

Believing HWB should (and does) underpin all curriculum planning [because he sees it as foundational

Emphasising Importance of clear and continuous communication and transparency

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many students in one day, that you are, and probably coming from a PE background, you're used to seeing students possibly in slightly different light. You see the social, emotional sides of wellbeing that you might not necessarily see in a classroom environment, so I think you will be watching out for these little changes in behaviours and triggers, and we are doing a lot of pastoral check-ins, we're doing a lot of wellbeing checks with students, both informally and formally. I think even just that, I suppose, on-the-spot observations of seeing groups of people going past, judging body language, pulling them in for a quick chat, speaking to groups of people, making sure that you've got that visibility and not underestimating saying, "Hello" and "How are you doing?" and asking a little bit about [them] and taking that role with a bit of responsibility is really important. So yes, it informs our decision-making every day. We're consciously making an effort to check in informally and formally throughout the day.

I: That's great, I'm sure the students appreciate it, a little more attention, particularly during these times.

P: I think it's having that active kind of 'botherness' (?) to speak to students, and it doesn't take much of an effort to say good morning or how are you doing and sometimes that's enough. Because, you know, I think sometimes, maybe I haven't realised until we moved into different positions that actually sometimes for that student, maybe that's the only hello or how are you doing that they've had in the day or maybe had in the week. So it's about listening to them, and listening to the response, and acting upon that, having a duty of care to respond to what they say.

I: So how would you describe the health and wellbeing curriculum in the school in terms of the main priorities?

P: I think, I suppose when we say curriculum, health and wellbeing as I said, is recognised as a responsibility for all, and staff have that on their shoulders that they do have a responsibility for health and wellbeing. I think when I say that I suppose for me, that's about promoting a culture of feeling safe and feeling secure, both for staff and students. Making sure that pupils feel safe and secure in the building. In terms of the promotion of wellbeing for all, it's about creating that climate where students feel listened to and feel secure and safe to discuss things with staff. So, for me it's about creating that environment, and obviously it's then reacting to that and having physical opportunities, having mental opportunities, and social and emotional opportunities for pupils in place. But I think in terms of the overall responsibility, it's about that culture of feeling safe and secure, and where students feel listened to.
I: Okay, can you kind of describe the overall culture and ethos of the school?

P: I suppose our kind of motto is: [relates to belonging]. That's kind of instilling that pride, that students do want, they want to be a student of the [REDACTED] High School regardless of where they come from, their background, their religion or race. So I think you would feel that walking through the school. What would you feel walking at [REDACTED] High? I think you'd feel a sense of pride as you walkthrough, we like to celebrate achievements of students, we like to encourage students to do their best regardless of the stage they're at. You'd see respect in the school, that kind of mutual respect. You'd certainly, you'd find students maybe giving you a nod or saying hello, and you'd see an individuality despite students wearing their uniform, you notice the individuality and the celebration of that individuality within [REDACTED] High School. I also think that something that we're getting better at now is that building of resilience. Because there's this idea of aspiration at [REDACTED] High, we try and punch above our weight in terms of teaching and learning and attainment, but within that, particularly protecting wellbeing, resilience is absolutely key. You want to create that culture where students have that kind of growth mindset, and don't fear getting things wrong, and are able to ask questions, and want to get better and improve. That's something that I would hope you would see is part of our culture and ethos.

I: How do you think that kind of overall sense of belonging and that school ethos, how do you think that might impact the wellbeing of students and staff?

P: I think because we, essentially it's shared values and it's a shared vision between staff and students and parents. I think part of the importance of that was getting it right from the outset. We're steeped in history, but it's almost about having the values and vision, and sticking to those values, you know. Because staff, students, and parents created the values together and these are kind of looked at every few years, to see whether they are still current, to see whether they're still relevant. It's almost a bit of a joined-up contract, do you know, that well we've created this together, this is where we're going, this is a shared journey. I think you would feel that, and of course there are students who will get it right, there are students who will get it wrong, but if you've got your core values that are absolutely kind of non-negotiable and you believe in those [values] as staff and pupils then that's a reference point, that's where you go to as part of the bigger conversation.
## Appendix Q: Individual interview realist codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential code</th>
<th>Inferential code</th>
<th>Dispositional code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widening ideas of success</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement and attainment</td>
<td>Safety (physical/emotional)</td>
<td>Dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judgement</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges as normal</td>
<td>Normalisation</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure as an opportunity to learn</td>
<td>Buy-in, ownership</td>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easing transition</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Professional responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple pathways to success</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Moral/ethical responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating diversity</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Welfare liberalism/democratic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for engagement</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Neoliberalism/market values</td>
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<td>Distributive leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanisms for feedback</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparency and communication</td>
<td>Care discourse</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil voice</td>
<td>Flourishing discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational outcomes (attendance, attainment)</td>
<td>Social inequity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>Social comparison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy and curriculum</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Material support</td>
<td>Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing practice</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
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**Appendix R: Dyadic interview realist codes**

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<tr>
<td>Community consultation</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Dignity</td>
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<td>Pupil voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualisation</td>
<td>Social inequity</td>
<td>Justice</td>
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<td>Opportunities for engagement</td>
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<td>Stigma</td>
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<td>Positive discrimination</td>
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<td>Reprioritising poverty agenda</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Moral/ethical responsibility</td>
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<td>Competing priorities</td>
<td>Care discourse</td>
<td>Welfare liberalism-democratic values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relaxing uniform rules</td>
<td>Flourishing discourse</td>
<td>Neoliberalism/market values</td>
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<td>Fear of offence/stigmatisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of shared lived experience</td>
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<td>Data tracking</td>
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<td>'Covert' inclusion and full representation</td>
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