

**A comparative case study analysis of three secondary schools in relation to the
education they provide for their academically more able learners**

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Dedication

For Mum, Dad and Uncle Michael.

Abstracts

This research investigated how more able secondary school-aged pupils perceive their educational experience against a political agenda favouring the advancement of a meritocracy. An initial review of issues and strategies that are pertinent to the more able is presented and followed by an examination of relevant national policies.

To understand their perceptions a sample of three schools from contrasting settings were selected including an independent school, a non-selective school and because of the system in Kent, a grammar school to complete the trio. The literature that inspired this research was focused on the prevalence of underachievement of the more able in non-selective schools with various academics suggesting reasons for this phenomenon, particularly emphasising the role of context. However, what was not clear was how the pupils felt about their experiences and this prompted a direct inquiry into their views and to what extent they related to their socio-economic position. Each school differed radically from the other in terms of resources, staffing, cohort ability and available finances and these factors influenced the responses provided by the pupils.

During the research, discussions about the education of the more able were held with teachers at various levels of their organisations, and these discussions were compared with the thoughts that emerged from focus group meetings held with pupils. While it is evident that context and socio-economic factors broadly influence classroom outcomes, they also significantly shape the perspectives of the more able. The most striking finding was that, irrespective of context, the more able shared a common sense of frustration across the schools and all desired similar measures to improve their experiences. These measures are explored within these pages, promoting a discussion about what schools can do to enhance their provisions for supporting more able learners and how existing measures can be evaluated.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and Objectives.

This research aims to explore the educational experiences of the AMA (academically more able) and how these are perceived by them in different social settings. Specifically, the value and originality of this study is based on the views and voices of the AMA and how they feel about the service they receive. By gaining a understanding of their views the opportunity to fashion an experience that they find engaging and suitable becomes possible and underscores the relevance to this work. The basis of the findings are firmly informed by the pupils themselves, who had the chance to discuss their experiences and exposed common ground despite the huge inequalities in their contextual settings. The work is presented against a background of meritocracy as a concept used by recent UK governments, to promote the idea that social mobility will be rewarded based on an individual's talents and ability (UK.GOV, 2016). Furthermore, it is difficult not to reflect on variations in educational provisions pupils are able to enjoy. Some are noticeably diverse in their socio-economic and cultural make-up, whilst others are incredibly affluent and provide opportunities and experiences far beyond the reach of what would be considered at a typical English non-selective school.

The audience for this research includes those who can directly influence change within schools for the AMA, particularly the day-to-day decision-makers who form the senior leadership teams responsible for setting school priorities and driving initiatives. This also includes teachers, who are required to implement policy directives and typically spend a large portion of the school day with the learners central to this project. The ambition of this research is for schools to be able to utilise the recommendations outlined toward the end of this work to improve the school experience for the AMA, and for teachers to gain a better understanding of their needs, how to address them effectively and review procedures for incorporating a process that aims to hear the student voice on a regular basis.

1.2 The Researcher and teaching the AMA.

I spent my formative years in state education, including two years at a post 16 college, after which I attended a polytechnic that morphed into a university before the end of the course.

What followed has been a career featuring over twenty years working in independent education and several in non-selective schools or colleges. I have been fortunate enough, from a researcher's perspective, to have worked in multiple establishments and have witnessed firsthand the fundamental differences between systems that are paid for and those that are provided by the state. Needless to say, I find myself in a position where my ability to conduct research within a multiple school system is informed by personal experiences as a pupil and an adult. Being aware of disparities has shaped my own personal biases politically and in terms of education. Accordingly, I am in sympathy with those that do not have the means to access greater resources, opportunities and higher paid jobs because of their socio-economic starting point and this could be construed as envy or jealousy. However, whilst I accept it may be a fair argument to suggest caution when reviewing the findings presented later in this project I did consciously attempt to remain impartial throughout the process.

In a teaching career spanning over twenty five years the differences in the way the academically more able are treated and the outcomes they achieve have been hard to ignore. This has largely been dependent on the schools pupils attend and, in general, is dependent on the type of support and resources that are made available to them. I have observed the AMA being left to their own devices or grouped with peers of lesser academic ability and used as a support system. Neither of these represent a positive method for building skills or knowledge in a learner that needs relevant stimulus and challenge to divert them from apathy and boredom (Freeman, 2010 and Young and Balli, 2014).

In this project, I am using the abbreviation AMA, which stands for "academically more able." A leading charity who take the initiative on the theme of educating more able child, NACE (2020) use a similar term but without the inclusion of 'academically'. They refer to Highly Able or More Able as 'pupils who are currently working ahead of their age peers or have the potential to do so', (NACE, 202, p.9) Terms like "gifted and talented" or "high achievers" have, at some point, been criticised, dismissed, or found lacking as accurate descriptors of the group under investigation (Brady and Koshy, 2013, p.258). The primary focus is on children who perform well in traditionally academic subjects. However, due to time constraints and the need to maintain sensible research parameters, the study excludes those who are talented in sports, music, or the performing arts. While these areas require specific talents, my interest lies in the views of those who demonstrate consistently high achievement in academic subjects, demonstrating critical thinking, analysing, evaluating, information gathering, and presentation, particularly in subjects like Mathematics, Science, English, and the Humanities.

It is essential to recognise that "ability and achievement are not the same thing; opportunities and motivation make a difference" (Eyre, 1997, p.35). The term "able" here refers to ability as in the capability to complete tasks, solve problems, and reach solutions, which does not always correlate with high scores in school-based tests that measure achievement. It is reasonable to classify someone as 'more able' even if their achievement, measured by test scores, may be low for the reasons Eyre (1997) describes. Numerous factors can contribute to the discrepancy between measurable achievement and perceived ability, and this adds complexity to identifying the AMA. This complexity needs to be acknowledged at the policy level, as the goal of serving AMA students depends on being able to identify them accurately. If identification relies solely on test scores, a portion of those with higher ability may be overlooked.

This matter is further compounded by the need to consider prior achievement, which includes measurable historical markers of performance of data recorded in hardcopy or electronic mark books or stored in sophisticated information systems. One issue with this data is its management and recording. For example, in a subject like Mathematics, where ability can manifest in various areas, a student may excel in one aspect, such as algebra, but be weaker in another, like quadratic equations. A high score in one area does not indicate overall strength in the subject. As a student myself, I occasionally scored well in some assessments, but most of my results were recorded around the average benchmark. It is essential to exercise care and caution when identifying a learner as AMA; there should be a trusted history of frequent, consistently high performance above that of their peers in academic tests, demonstrating strength across an entire subject. This is referred to by NACE as "stable achievement."

However, achieving the construction of reliable data on progress or performance is challenging. For example, students change schools, change teachers, and one teacher's subjective assessment of a high score may differ from another's. These naturally occurring factors can cause issues in maintaining consistent records of prior achievement, meaning such data should be handled cautiously. Using a combination of current and recent data, along with teachers' observations and judgments, is likely a more useful approach and is explored in more detail in section 2.22 and 2.23.

As an active teachers I use strategies that foster good working relationships and progress have always been attempted, especially in terms of creating resources that reflect the contextual settings of schools to promote genuine interest and engagement from the learners at all levels. This approach resonates with the methods described by Apple (1999) in his work 'Democratic Schools' where the teaching priorities in schools put the needs of the community first and pursuing the development of skills that would be of most use to the community rather than work towards satisfying the contents of a state prescribed curriculum.

Under these contextual conditions teaching is more important to the cohort and better engagement is achieved. Apple argued for 'curriculum tied to the lives of pupils- making it relevant to that of the community. They become meaning makers by constructing their own knowledge.' (Apple, 1999, p.17).

I have always been fascinated by pupils who grasp concepts and display skills with far more accuracy and diligence than most of their peers. They quickly understand the teachers intentions, meet all deadlines with ease and show consistent quality in their work reflecting a sound awareness of the material covered. Often these pupils are achieving the highest grades, but when they do not, they quickly respond to feedback to enhance their marks. A lot of the fulfilment had teaching is through exploring, with the pupils, ways to extend their learning further. When pupils have completed a task, achieved high marks, often well before their peers, I am compelled to ensure that they are challenged further. Planning for the talents and interests of the AMA results in a trickle-down in benefits. Therefore, not only are the AMA pupils challenged, but the rest of the class are able to access much of the content too. Mostly they are willing educators, sharing their skills and solutions to overcome problems. An interesting point is how responses produced often includes content, ideas and thoughts that are not delivered through the normal teaching process, but have been acquired from their own personal effort and inherent opportunities.

It is hugely rewarding to assess high quality work and provide feedback that offers the opportunity for further learning and to see how much further they can go or how far their capabilities can be stretched. This is not to say that they are more able in every sphere of education or facet of life, but they do possess the ability to handle academic requirements at a more advanced level than the majority of their peers. These experiences and practices are

mine, but it is those of the actual AMA learner that fuel this research and adds to the discussion of how best they can be educated.

1.3 Underachievement and Outcomes

One of the key drivers of this research was to explore issues relating to outcomes, specifically that of the underachievement of AMA learners. Over the last ten years Ofsted (2013, 2015a and 2015b) have reported that the AMA are failing to achieve the grades of which they are capable. They have repeatedly found that the more able are not achieving grades that they are expected to achieve. There are numerous articles and government reports, highlighted in the next chapter, that comment on why pupils are falling short of their predicted potential. These findings are often based on interviews or surveys with senior leaders, teachers and parents. However, as this research progressed it became clear that the actual experiences of the AMA in schools was under represented. A limitation of the pupil voice, on this topic, is addressed here because it is important to understand the views of those directly involved if we are to provide an experience that they find fulfilling, challenging and recognises their particular needs.

1.4 Neo-liberal Education and Meritocracy

Gibb (2015), the Conservative minister for Education, gave a speech outlining education policy designed to prepare children for the world of work, specifically to secure a good job, provide skills and innovation for businesses and contribute to a growing economy. These aims support neo-liberal values, that favour competition and are seen by Klein (2007) as promoting a system of winners and losers where large corporations exploit free market conditions to make substantial profits for CEOs and shareholders. A system where the masses generate profits and capital is a feature of the work of Marx and Engels (1848) who

criticised the surplus produced by the majority of the population (the proletariat) for being channelled to the smaller minority of owners (the bourgeois) in the form of excess control, power and profits and gave rise to the social conflict theory. The social conflict theory argues that scarce resources are at the mercy of competitive forces and that those with the financial means are best able to acquire, benefit and restrict access to those who might otherwise have benefited. Furthermore, 'markets reward initial starting positions rather than talent and effort and that the job of government is to intervene to ensure meritocratic processes and outcomes that markets left to themselves inhibit (Brighouse, 2022, p.146).

In a meritocratic society, advocated by New Labour (1996-2010) and the Conservatives (2010 - 2024) that followed, citizens are supposed to find their way to roles, responsibilities and careers that aligns with their abilities. Under this system the 'brightest', regardless of background and upbringing, should have equal access to opportunities and pursue advanced careers and reach their academic potential. Whereas Brighouse (2009) asserts that meritocratic educational quality is a system that rewards talents, leaving behind those from poorer social backgrounds where their effort and talent might be harder to recognise or uncover. Winstanley (2004) points out that if meritocracy is a system of reward, to be fair children should be given the chance to demonstrate both effort and ability within schools, which can be problematic in a venue with multiple priorities.

The prospect of equality of opportunities is dismantled by Sandel (2021) in his book 'The Tyranny of Merit'. Sandel argues that social context has a far greater influence over merit in relation to a person's education trajectory and future career prospects. He exposes a system that is easily manipulated by those with means and highlights how social context can be a spring board for some and a barrier for others. This view is partially shared by Mijs and Savage

(2020), who refer to meritocracy as a deeply elitist project and that inequality and belief in meritocracy have gone hand in hand.

1.5 Rationale

As a group it feels as if the AMA have been left to fend for themselves, especially since the removal of any specific policy in 2011. It is common for those who have a gift or a talent with a musical instrument or sport to receive extra practice, guidance or coaching. Often, specialists are used to fine-tune the skills of sports stars and this can lead to enhanced performances and motivation to continue developing these abilities. Furthermore, in my experience of teaching in several schools that the pupils who were on 'borderline grades' were given extra tuition and support to move them from a D grade to C because this is part of a school's quality profile. Schools have SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) obligations for pupils who are identified as having learning difficulties or a disability that requires some form of educational support. There are also provisions in place for those who require free school meals in the form of a 'pupil premium' allowance. The literature exposes schools priorities that have been forced elsewhere and as a result slim focus is devoted to the AMA. I argue that the current education systems does very little to nurture the skills, abilities and talents of those who excel within the academic arena and that this needs to be addressed. The deflection of scarce resources, teachers time energy and attention, is not unfamiliar, as we shall see, and is a common complaint for those who are told they are underachieving.

Ultimately, in England, there is currently no national policy or strategy aimed at the AMA and this lack of attention has an impact on those concerned. A policy that supports those who have gone beyond the prescribed curriculum might help to focus, engage and assists with building skills that they will find useful beyond school. The process of being educated at school is supposed to set the way for future development at higher education or in the workforce. However, if the identification of further needs is not made (Dracup, 2003 and Lowe 2003) then opportunities for developing talent

will be missed. This is a further issue examined in the following chapter. If the provisions for those that are AMA are found to be limited or directed elsewhere then the social benefits to a wider society will also be foregone, contradicting the aims of an education system that is supposed to reward merit.

In the pages that follow differing contextual settings are explored and compared from the affluent to that more traditional associated with mainstream education. An ideal location presented itself to enable such an investigation in the county of Kent where there still remains a three system model of schooling: Independent, Grammar and Non-Selective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review brings into focus how pupils, teachers and their contextual setting are inter-related with regards to the education of the AMA. Section one predominantly deals with the pupil and teacher relationship and starts with an examination of the identification of AMA learners and who they are. This is followed by an exploration of the issues specifically related to the education of the AMA including the role of teachers, challenge and strategies that have been used to support and teach them. There is the occasional reference to language used during New Labour's years like 'Gifted and Talented Coordinator and Register', but these points are examined more closely in the second section.

The education of the AMA, beyond provisions found in fee paying schools in England, was given a new lease of life when New Labour took power towards the end of the last century, representing the first real attempt to recognise them in the mainstream system since the introduction of grammar schools in the 1944 Act. The second section inspects the development of the New Labour policies that were aimed at supporting the education of the gifted and talent from deprived backgrounds and how discourse on this topic has been driven based on the concept of meritocracy. There is also a review on socio-economic context and how this impacts opportunities for AMA learners.

2.2 Literature Review: Part 1

2.21 Purpose and Equality

When undertaking a direct focus on the AMA a poignant observation is noted that 'gifted education is in constant search of its identity' (Renzulli, 2012, p.158). If the form of educating the AMA is not clear, this may explain why working out who it is for is contentious.

There is a broad issue within education that relates to its actual or perceived purpose. One political stance is that 'since the end of the Second World War politicians have tended to see the aims of education in terms of individual fulfilment and the acquisition of skills and attitudes thought necessary for the pursuit of a successful working life' (Chitty, 2009, p.9). Reference to employment is also raised by Brighouse (2009) who refers to education as a system that provides opportunities to find rewarding work and to be able to judge the relative importance of work. Also from Chitty (2009) a view focusing on intrinsic outcomes, like promoting intellectual moral and physical well-being, are seen as important. Others feel that education can and should 'move beyond the idea of fixed intelligence limits and special gifts for the lucky few and look for new ways to enhance potential brain power' (Edwards, 2013, p.XXI) and that learning can change the way people live and think.

From a policy perspective prior to the election of New Labour, Gillian Shephard the then Secretary of State for education and employment remarked 'we must do all we can to help our young people to acquire the skills knowledge and understanding they will need to be part of a highly adaptive workforce' (Chitty, 2009, p.11). This shows a disparity in the purpose of education between politicians and those who research and work in education. One group is concerned with employment while the other more focused on personal development. In Brighouse and Swift (2009) there is recognition that education should enable its learners to deal with one another as equals, suggesting matters of equality need to be examined, echoing 'it must surely be one of the social functions of schooling to tackle issues of equity and social justice' (Chitty, 2009, p.15). Although this view was not supported by all in the 1980s. Professor Roger Scruton speaking on behalf of a right wing education think tank, the Hillgate group, argued that it was 'absurd to embrace the aims of equality of education' (Chitty, 2009, p.7). Indeed, defenders of selection, in sympathy with right wing thinking,

‘thought that educational opportunities should be distributed more generously to those with more talent’ (Brighthouse 2009, p.35).

The relevance of debating equality in this particular study explores the distribution of resources in terms of who has access to what. Commenting on the ‘highly able’ in America, Ambrose (2012), found that underprivileged children suffered from crushed aspirations because of their socio-economic setting whereas the aspirations of the privileged were ethically distorted. The issue, he explains, becomes problematic when those perceived as gifted become adults and pursue neoliberal ideals that encourage social stratification that stifles talents elsewhere in society by restricting access to resources and opportunities. Indeed, this view is given by Borland in Ambrose (2012) where the actual concept of gifted education perpetuates inequalities because it marginalises and creates divisions within education systems. Brighthouse in Winstanley (2004) argues that social class and background are not something that those in a society can be reasonably held responsible and as a form of compensatory measure the less able should have access to more resources than the more able. This suggest that those born with more perceived intellect than their peers should be denied access to resources at the expense of others, even if the child concerned comes from a poorer background too. This runs against the views of Winstanley (2004) who argues for equality of opportunity in education so that particular groups, including the more able, are recognised and supported appropriately and according to their needs. Again, Borland in Ambrose (2012) shows appreciation for the need of equality in education but does not support the notion that the more able, as a discrete group, should receive prioritises in education as a type of sub group, but that differentiated instruction, much like that advocated in the new teaching standards, would provide a more inclusive model for educating all children.

Those from poorer backgrounds have limited choices and options in terms of competencies they may wish to acquire regardless of their motivation or willingness to engage. The choice, if there is one, to acquire competence is largely in the hands of the state and what they can make available.

Parental input, raised by Brighthouse and Swift (2009) is a crucial factor that is aired in this debate. Some parents can afford piano lessons, residential opportunities at home and abroad, private education and tutors and some simply cannot, which places the burden on the state to try and achieve the equality of opportunity raised (Winstanley, 2004).

Due to inequalities of wealth in society Brighthouse and Swift (2009) affirm that matters of adequacy are important. In this respect adequacy is doing what is possible to improve access to educational performance. Brighthouse (2009) affirms that adequate education for all is more urgent than achieving equality, but this results in no principal of adequacy being adequate. A function of an adequate education, according to Brighthouse and Swift (2009) is one that equips people to live at something like subsistence for those who require it whilst those considered elites appear to warrant a different form of adequate education where they are able to engage sympathetically with those over whose lives they will exercise power. The defining line from Brighthouse and Swift (2009) is that those with lower and medium prospects should receive a greater concentration of resources in order to balance perceived intrinsic and extrinsic advantages other groups may already experience.

2.22 Identification

A lack of identification according to Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) and Peters et al (2019) results in educational neglect because pupils would not receive the support that would allow them to flourish. Weber (1999) explained that identifying AMA pupils helps provide them with an educational experience that is suited to their ability and talents and that this process should start at an early age. The school inspectorate body in England, Ofsted (2013) supported the view that identification should take place at primary school.

The search for an identity that meets a prescribed list of criteria is complex and unattainable unless it is reduced to raw performance data. Even this measure can be problematic when compared across different schools. The children at the heart of this research vary greatly. Erwin and Worrell (2012) describe them as learners that progress significantly faster compared to children of the same age. Renzulli (2002) claims that these children are above average ability and are particularly adept with challenges that require focused task commitment. Findings show that advanced learners, according to Clark and Callow (2002), can evaluate their own work more effectively and work with other like-minded children objectively. They are also shown to have a thirst for knowledge that makes them stand out. Olenchak (1999) found that gifted learners tended to have sensitive personalities whereas Freeman (1997) and Banks (1992) debunk this claiming that there is no link between personality traits and ability. This implies that those who are loud, shy, brash, challenging or of any personality type can potentially be classified as AMA as the AMA are not a homogenous group. Tirri (2017) found that AMA children are superior in moral judgement compared to their average ability peers, but Muammar (2013) implied that AMA children lack basic leadership skills which are based on good judgement. Cross (2007) produced findings that divided gifted children into intuitive and perceptive groups and went on to assign attributes to each. The Intuitive gifted learners were found to enjoy dealing with abstractions and hidden meanings in situations, whereas the perceptive types were more flexible, curious, open-minded and were able to demonstrate adaptability to life.

Interestingly, Feldhusen (1997) found similarities between gifted students' and teachers' personality types promoted the type of instruction that appears to fit with AMA pupils' preferences for learning. Cross (2007) presented findings that related to teachers with psychological personality traits similar to AMA pupils meant they were better able to support them, whereas a mismatch could lead to difficulties in the classroom. However, there was very little elaboration about what these personality types were.

To be able to identify if a learner is 'more able' there are multiple methods that can be employed. Using data derived from testing is a common starting point for teachers who draw on prior results achieved elsewhere or within their own classroom. During the New Labour parliament (1997 – 2010), and those that followed there was discussion about using IQ testing to identify those eligible to be placed on the gifted and talented register. Concerns were raised that IQ tends to be higher if social interaction with adults is normal and usually found in those whose homelife is educationally richer than their peers (Freeman, 1997). If this claim is true, then it would not be a fair measure given the various socio-economic and contextual backgrounds pupils come from. Whereas Radnor et al. (2007) asserts that children are considered gifted and talented if they have an IQ in the top 5% but pointed at other indicators like the ability to achieve well beyond the average for their year group at school. This would be measured by internal testing and assessments and comparing results at subject level. Sternberg (2017) holds the view that testing IQ does not identify the ability to solve problems but did find that people with a high IQ are likely to get good jobs and make more money in later life. Furthermore, Freeman (1997) said IQ was a poor predictor of future success. Her work looked at the outcomes of a group of girls previously thought to be academically gifted. In their 40s it was found that better predictive factors for future success includes emotional support and a positive personal outlook. Other factors for making good progress in the world of work were 'keenness and hard work allied with sufficient ability, formal educational opportunity, and an emotionally supportive home' (Freeman, 1997, p.395). The idea that intelligence is not a fixed

numerical score is particularly relevant here given the nature of this study. Renzulli (2002) prefers to view intelligence or giftedness as a type of behaviour expressed through his three ring model. An IQ score is a number that claims to indicate a person's intelligence. As educators we can choose to accept that this is an accurate measure of intelligence and that materials should be designed to suit a fixed limit. Or, we can work on the notion offered by Dweck (2017) who explains that intelligence can be cultivated and is not fixed and that a growth mindset is something that can be learned and used to move or improve upon markers of achievement like test scores. Skills can be enhanced by teachers and by adding to the repertoire of what we know and can do well represents the essence of learning. At the core of this development is accepting challenges, which are a key factor in the discussion relating to the AMA. The level, frequency and desire to accept challenges are part of the model that provides stimulus that allow students to learn more and make progress and further their perceived level of intelligence.

2.23 Professional Judgement

Renzulli (2002) views schools as places for talent development where learners are challenged to be creative and are assessed against a broader range of measures beyond those used to test cognitive abilities. Erwin and Worrell (2012) claimed that professional judgement was sound when identifying AMA children. Teachers are able to use prior academic success to predict future success. Bailey et al. (2009) also reported that teachers were more secure identifying those with talents in areas in which they themselves had developed expertise. In an attempt to identify, during the 2000s, teachers used homemade assessments and structured portfolios. They attempted to assess creativity through challenges and problem-solving tasks as well as judging motivation as part of the process.

The issue here is how motivation is to be judged, given that it appears to vary between intrinsic and extrinsic needs. According to Maslow, as cited in Turabik and Baskan (2015), motivation is rooted

in satisfying needs. The most important of these needs is self-actualisation, which pertains to personal development, including creativity, uncovering potential, and using one's talents to pursue an end goal. Furthermore, Herzberg's motivation theory is explored and highlights that success with motivation depends on hygiene factors such as achievement, recognition, appreciation, and the outcomes of work undertaken. Schools are ideally placed to address hygiene factors and offer opportunities to ascend Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly those situated at its summit. If learners are exposed to material that aligns with personal fulfilment and achievement, they are, according to this theory, more likely to willingly attempt tasks, expecting these efforts to benefit them in some way.

In this sense, motivation is seen as an individual's willingness to engage in a task or challenge. However, it must be highlighted that just because a learner is keen and motivated to participate in a given activity, it does not mean they will perform at an advanced level. For example, there may be pleasure, excitement, and personal satisfaction in completing the task, as well as tangible rewards for participating. Urhahne and Wijnia (2017) describe this as satisfying intrinsic needs, where tasks are performed with minimal encouragement required to initiate action.

When assigning tasks within schools, teachers typically channel content from a syllabus leading to a qualification, thereby positioning motivation as central to learning because a need is to be satisfied. Schools are, therefore, focused on achievement goals, which, according to Elliot and Hulleman in Urhahne and Wijnia (2023), are characterised by the intention to engage in competence-related behaviours, such as thinking and applying prior knowledge. Irvine (2018) describes this situation as an attempt to satisfy extrinsic needs, such as acquiring grades that can later be leveraged for long-term benefits like employment or promotions. It is this fulfilment of extrinsic needs for achievement that concerns most schools but often appears to conflict with the fulfilment of intrinsic needs, which

are personal to each individual. According to Irvine (2018), the goals and actions selected by an individual are easier to motivate intrinsically than tasks driven by extrinsic demands.

If such a conflict does exist, the challenge for schools and teachers is to create instructional activities that draw on intrinsic motivation while aligning with the extrinsic demands of the mandatory education system. Turabik and Baskan (2015) suggest that models to enhance motivation must involve designing tasks that foster a sense of achievement and responsibility for outcomes, enabling decision-making and advancement to further opportunities for personal development. Wallace et al. (2010) argue that intrinsic motivation is strongly fostered by parental input at home. They emphasise that the quality of engagement, rather than the quantity, is significant and agree that overly directive approaches can undermine efforts to enhance motivation.

Regardless of how motivation in schools was handled there was still issues of leaving pupils off the gifted and talented register or including them where staff disagreed. Bailey et al. (2009) noted that subject leaders made identification based on current levels of achievement, although this approach was challenged. A key figure throughout the life span of the New Labour policies was Tim Dracup who was part of the Ministry for Education and referred to as the architect of England's National Gifted and Talented Education Programme (Hymer, 2014). He pointed out that the use of attainment data for identifying ability was 'useless in identifying gifted underachievers whose ability is not yet translated into high attainment' (Dracup, 2001, p.2). In response to this it could be argued that first you need to identify who is AMA before you can pronounce them as underachieving. Children scoring low marks on assessments are going to be tough to identify as underachieving if the evidence is suggesting that they are simply not more able in the first place. Identification methods that pronounce pupils' potential to achieve is required but this adds another layer of complexity to an issue already challenging for teachers.

Some teachers felt that testing narrows the curriculum and causes stress to the pupil-teacher relationship (Webb and Vulliamy, 2006). They also claim that some high attaining children find testing exhilarating whilst low attainers find them demotivating. Testing comes with pressure to succeed, especially if a place at a desired school is at stake. Accordingly, and there may be a connection, Hajar (2020) found that there had been a rise in the recruitment of personal tutors to prepare children for entry tests, an option not available to all children. Actions like this form part of an argument associated with of a system that claims to reward effort and ability despite the multiple points where an advantage can be purchased.

In a report for the Sutton Trust, Smithers and Robinson (2012) advocated the use of Key Stage 2 tests to identify the AMA, which is the foundation upon which Ofsted made claims relating to the underachievement of the AMA. This came shortly after the Conservative government removed the requirement to identify the gifted and talented but were clearly content to use the data to inform on pupil progress in the proceeding years. Webb and Vulliamy (2006) found Key Stage 2 data only focussed on numeracy and literacy, which invoked constant testing on youngsters. According to their findings the need to produce this data, impacted on creativity and developing pupils' all-round performance. Results were and still are an accountability measure (Ball (2004) for schools and encourages commercial activity inside and out of schools and is also raised a performativity issue, which is discussed in the next section.

Casey and Koshy (2012) found very little mention of parental involvement when it came to identifying the AMA. Gross (1999) comments that this is because teachers tended not to believe nominations despite the fact parents are ideally situated to comment on the early indicators in the development of speech, movement and reading. Gross goes on to argue that teachers should receive formalised training in relation to identifying the AMA as many were not using tests that would have helped in the process and were instead relying on behaviour indicators and samples of work. On

this point there is not a clear divide between only using data or just professional judgment. The most pragmatic route appears to align with Dracup (2011) who suggested that school use qualitative and quantitative evidence available before reaching a judgement, which implies a combination of both methods would be appropriate.

2.24 The AMA Learner

There does not appear to be any compelling consistency when seeking out the characteristics of the AMA because they are a heterogeneous group consisting of individuals from diverse and varying backgrounds. The ability to produce work that is accurate, well considered, clearly produced and to a high standard is not supported by a likely best fit character profile because they are not, but there is evidence from Freeman (1997) suggest that labelling the AMA can be problematic for some young people. She found that counselling helped to improve girls' self-esteem and Kosir et al. (2016) said that this was important in aiding development. Stopper (2002) suggested that young females find same sex mentors beneficial. Both mentoring and counselling serve slightly different purposes of support but do identify the child's needs (Berman et al. 2012). Cullen et al. (2018) explains that mentoring can help to understand where a pupil feels their future lies and can encourage action accordingly. They discuss the importance and value of meaningful exchanges between pupils, parents and the school in order to make support relevant. For this to happen with any degree of impact all three parties have to engage with the counselling process and develop an environment that is supportive and where plans can be constructed with the child (Robinson and Campbell, 2010).

Freeman (1997) did find characteristics associated with high intelligence, which includes being emotionally stronger and having a greater level of motivation due to pressure to continually succeed. Freeman's earlier findings were supported by Weber (1999) who suggests that some high achieving pupils worry about letting people down if they don't achieve the perfection expected of

them. Gross (1999) mentions how some gifted children become concerned and worried about their ability to learn faster and how this does not comply with age-appropriate expectations. There are the cases that cause issues when the child outperforms the teacher, where the child is afraid to challenge or embarrass a perceived authority figure or be viewed as disruptive.

Although there is no policy to do so it is not uncommon for schools to organise learning by ability sets, with Mathematics and Science being a prime example. Bailey et al. (2003) found this approach useful in that the curriculum was set to an appropriate level of challenge, difficulty and pace according to a child's readiness to handle the content. This approach is supported by Ofsted (2013) who found that better progress is made when groups are set by ability. However, this is not always possible due to class size or the popularity of a subject if it only attracts one set within a school.

There is also a social angle relating to the behaviour of some children which centres around peer acceptance. For example, Stopper (2000) found that some gifted children will misbehave at school to avoid being ostracised by their peers. This is affirmed by Kosir et al. (2016) whose findings discuss how the labelling of AMA learners can cause stigmatisation leading to emotional distress. They found that there was a significant difference between gifted girls and non-gifted girls in terms of how they perceived their own social acceptance. It is not just the labelling by schools and teachers that needs to be aired, but the use of terms like 'egg head' and 'nerd', used by peers that according to Olenchal (1999) can elicit a negative emotional reaction like the hiding of talents, which makes detection harder. Weber (1999) and Gross (1999) discussed AMA pupils who had not been identified and would fail to flourish or as they grew older became accomplished at hiding their talents. The reason for this 'hiding of talent', according to Gross, was that children wanted to conform and gain social acceptance amongst their peers. This would make identification even harder for teachers as the child attended secondary school and joined larger groups. Eyre (1997)

found that sometimes children stop showing their initial flair after discouraging comments from teachers and peers and a lack of family appreciation leading to the further concealment of potential.

Freeman (2004) found that boys peer roles ‘obliged them to be rebellious’ often as a measure to avoid being tarnished with labels like ‘teacher’s pet’. Furthermore, Erwin and Worrell (2012) found that minority members felt they had to choose between doing well at school or being an authentic member of their racial or ethnic group. If a child has learnt that they may be ridiculed by peers, left out of social opportunities or plied with expectations that feel like a burden, then it is realistic that they will embrace strategies to avoid these situations. Another social point raised by Freeman (1997) claims that AMA children may have fewer friends due to the nature of the extra activities they undertake. This would largely depend upon the nature of the extra-curricular options and whether it was part of a group activity or a solo option like learning a musical instrument.

There appears to be a need to exercise compassion in relation to the identification process, especially if it creates a sense of unease within a young person. However, to ensure the correct educational provisions in terms of pace, care and support are made available identification is necessary. An awareness of the issues raised above may prove insightful for teachers and provide a route for better management of those concerns.

2.25 The nature of challenge.

It is important to look at the role of challenge for the AMA and how an absence can be problematic as reported by Ofsted in successive reports that state:

- The most able were not doing so well because schools failed to challenge them sufficiently from the beginning (2013).
- The opening years at secondary schools were not challenging at all for the most able (2015a).

- Pupils in non-selective schools who are more able are still not being challenged enough (2015b).
- Extension work given to the more able was to fill time and was too easy (2015c) and work is still not challenging enough.

According to Olenchak (1999), when academic achievement, i.e. grades, do not correlate with expected scores, underachievement is diagnosed. Casey and Koshy (2012) discussed the lack of guidance and support for teachers in terms of being able to successfully assign more challenging work. They found that when pupils completed work teachers were not skilled enough to be able to occupy them to allow for further progress, interest or challenge. Clark and Callow (2020) stated that teachers were not doing their best for pupils as work was aimed at the middle band. This view was raised by the Chief Inspector of Schools, Michael Wilshaw (2016), who found that disproportionate effort, time and energy was devoted to the D - C grade pupils (now likely to be the 3 - 4 pupils). A school's performance is based on its grades and moving from a D to a C is significant in terms of the report a school received from Ofsted. These findings and claims were made over a decade after Winstanley (2004) advocated for equality of challenge within schools, ensuring that pupils requiring greater challenges had access in a way that was both worthwhile and meaningful. It appears that this recommendation was not fully integrated into teaching practices or may have been difficult to implement due to other priorities within schools. Ofsted (2015b) also found that teachers were not prioritising Key Stage 3 teaching but were more focussed on the grades sought at GCSE. More experienced and skilled teachers were assigned to GCSE classes, which meant that children in lower years, including the AMA, were not exposed to teachers extending learning and addressing underachievement. These measures left the learners less exposed to richer and more challenging content that would have been useful as they moved on to Key Stage 4. Ofsted (2013) made clear that pitching lessons at average pupils limited the progress of the AMA, especially at Key Stage 3 and recommended that measures be taken to address this issue. However, Ofsted (2015a) were later to report that schools were slow to respond to these findings and underachievement was still a problem and was hindering advancement to top universities.

Boredom becomes a problem for the curious mind as the level of stimulus fails to hold a child's attention or interest. Apathy, stress and underachievement were found to surface as they child sought alternative stimulus in an attempt to occupy themselves (Freeman, 1997 and 2010). As Hymer (2014) points out a lack of stimulus will likely result in very little change in ability or become better at a given subject or specialism. This view is reinforced by Gross (1999) who claimed that a lack of stimulus could be the cause of regression in learning as children mimic behaviour of their peers in the selection of material. Young and Balli (2014) refer to repetitive tasks that become routine and ultimately cause boredom, rather than enriching and building on previous content. They go on to claim that a lack of challenge could lead to underachievement, even referring to it as a risk. They explain that children who lack appropriate learning opportunities may not achieve at the advanced levels needed to accomplish what they otherwise could, including accessing places at universities. Freeman (2006) found that gifted underachievers were typically more anxious, easily distracted, and with lower self-esteem, further negative factors worthy of intervention. The Department for Education (2011) stated that 'gifted and talented' pupils may do the minimum if inadequately challenged. Later, Ofsted (2015a) added that a challenging curriculum helps pupils achieve more.

Berman et al. (2012) found that some teachers viewed 'gifted children' in their classroom as nothing more than peer tutoring candidates and described an unchallenging educational environment as a handicap to the learner. He also found that a teacher's attitude to towards the AMA guided the willingness and approaches used to teach them. Young and Balli (2014) found that teachers were still underprepared to meet the needs of the AMA and Ofsted (2013) were recommending that staff required training to manage their demands. While it was positive that schools did have access to training Berman et al. (2012) found that initial teacher education had no

such provisions and teachers lacked an understanding about the needs of the AMA. This came at a time when schools could choose whether to focus attention on the AMA or not. Many graduate teachers can easily have started their careers and been in education for over ten years without having any exposure to inset or training that has a focus on the AMA. This is in stark contrast to the Finnish system where teachers at all levels receive academic professional training and an educational program of differentiation, through nationally produced education material (Tirri and Kuusisto, 2013). Clark and Callow (2020) discussed how the planning and teaching of the AMA needs to be first class but did not state what this meant.

Significant steps have been taken by NACE (2020) to promote a more focused understanding of challenge for the more able in schools, providing detailed guidance on what this entails. For example, they use the prefix "cognitive" before "challenge" to emphasise it as a specific approach to developing thinking skills. Cognitive challenge, they argue, should be intentionally planned and includes activities such as solving problems, recognising and interpreting information, and sharing and clarifying understanding with others. This process is highly dependent on teacher interaction and collaboration with peers, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development.

2.26 Teacher and Pupil collaboration

Bailey et al. (2010) view teachers as crucial in generating and sustaining content for ideas and appropriate social interactions. Robinson and Campbell (2010) favour encouraging opportunities for pupils and teachers to work together in the co-construction of knowledge. Furthermore, teachers should be responsible for inspiring creativity based around the learner's passions (Tirri, 2017). Renzulli (2002) added that teachers form part of a process of developing opportunities that are targeted and specific to each child. This includes "the ability to solve problems, or create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings" (Renzulli, 2002, p.69) He goes on to add the concept of the triad model where the 'teacher's role must shift from that of instructor or

disseminator of knowledge to some combination of coach, promoter, manager, mentor, agent, guide, and sometimes even colleague'. (Renzulli, 2012, p.155).

Sutherland (1992) and Riding (2002) discuss how the learner needs to be active but also having time to piece together new experiences so that they fit with existing knowledge in a gradual way. Pritchard and Woollard (2010) add that learning should be active and is more effective when engaged in social activities when sensory input is related to pre-existing knowledge. The use of exploration as a learning technique is provided through open ended tasks and means that outcomes are generated and owned by the pupils. Robinson and Campbell (2010) see this as a positive in respect to the development of an independent learner and a way to manage control, pace and the direction of their own learning. This is best achieved in an environment that provides the stimulus to promote sustained development with the teacher helping to make connections between what is already known. Vygotsky (1978) describes this as the process of working with a more knowledgeable peer or adult. He refers to the zone of proximal development as the range that can be achieved without support, compared to what they can do with assistance and guidance. The premise is that children eventually develop the ability to work alone and solve problems as a result of initial support and social interaction. This is achieved, according to Pritchard and Woollard (2010) by the teacher creating an environment that encourages investigation, invention, insight and inference combined with active dialogue between learners and instructors.

Another useful strategy are tasks that encourage pupils to speculate or hypothesis and follow their thoughts by explaining their reasoning (Stopper, 2000). Questioning should, according to Clark and Callow (2002) be intriguing to sustain motivation, whilst Sternberg (2017) incites the nurturing of analytical skills and creativity in responses as well as a focus on developing ethical consideration. Robinson and Campbell (2010) affirm the use of open-ended questions which probe meaning and understanding allows pupils the chance to view more sources and explore, develop and refine

responses that show greater depth and awareness of issues. This is supported by Renzulli (2012) who encourages the use of investigative tasks. He goes on to discuss promoting opportunities that are geared towards the production of a product or service specific to the requests of a particular audience's needs. Bailey et al. (2012), in a similar manner to Nace (2020) suggests there is a need to adapt the difficulty of tasks and the curriculum to challenge the cognitive systems and superior memory of the gifted learner.

The AMA, according to Freeman (1997) like to work with teachers who give honest feedback, rather than cursory statements that briefly sum up hours of effort and investigation. Good feedback acknowledges work produced, challenge findings and provide opportunities for further exploration. Stopper (2000), writing about the emotional needs of the AMA, advocates collaboration between learners to combat the peer pressure previously discussed and replacing it with peer esteem. Clark and Callow (2002) found that small groups of like-minded students worked well and perform better academically when they worked together. Their differences in ability would not be exposed as a threat or concern to like-minded peers, thus removing a barrier to the potential promotion of progress for the youngsters. Again Stopper (2000), found that they provide an appropriate social framework for support and development, are able to make faster progress as they can skip parts previously covered and discuss ideas at a pace that provides room to explore options and hear what others have to say. Clark and Callow (2002) agreed, noting that groups permit ideas to be challenged in less formal settings along with open discussion. Robinson and Campbell (2010) added that non-competitive and supportive environments are encouraged, where peer scrutiny is useful for developing ideas and co-constructing learning as well as transmitting it. A culture of cooperation becomes acceptable, whereas in normal classroom this would be difficult to manage or facilitate because the content and pace may not be suitable for the entire class. Sutherland (1992) went as far as suggesting that behaviourists believed that a class of mixed ability children cannot be taught formally together at the same time.

Beyond the classroom Gross (1999) found that provisions for extra-curricular learning, the informal curriculum, were inadequate in schools and that programmes were required that differed and stimulated children. This does not mean that the child learns in isolation but instead in environments where they are with similar learners in need of extra-challenge and support. To be effective Bailey et al. (2012) support the idea that social interaction should be planned into extra-curricular provisions for the reasons stated above and to achieve high performance. Robinson and Campbell (2010) add to this by suggesting that intellectual freedom and choice were seen to be exciting and beneficial by the students who were allowed to express themselves and learn amongst those with similar abilities. This social element is explored further by Renzulli (2012) who sees it not only as an opportunity for people with high potential to work together but also as a forum to learn responsible leadership roles in preparation for the future. According to Kaplan and Hertzog (2016) education for the AMA should be based on active models to gain experience and build new ones, whilst Freeman (2006, p.400) advocates 'education to suit the potential, opportunities to flourish, and people who believe in them'. To achieve the above schools need to be able to provide space and personnel and are reliant on the skills and winningness of educators.

Within the state school system, educating the academically more able can take place but according to Stopper (2000) this system hinders their progress. By making provisions beyond the timetable the AMA can be challenged and stimulated, their curiosity and potential can be stretched, and self-esteem enhanced (Robinson and Campbell, 2010). Moving beyond the timetable resembles the model of further coaching and attention given to those who excel in music or sport to develop their abilities. Opportunities do not have to be specifically academic like an accelerated Maths or Science classes but could explore other areas that are not from an overly prescribe syllabus like astronomy, chess or skills such as coding. Cullen et al. (2018) discussed how cultural enrichment

opportunities were found to be useful for the AMA. Giving the child time and space is crucial and such planned intervention can bring significant benefits (Department for Education, 2011).

2.3 Literature Review: Part 2

2.31 Policy for the AMA in England

In 1944 the Labour government introduced a system that was an attempt to provide specific education appropriate to the skills and abilities of individual children. The changes were based on recommendation made in 1938 by Sir William Spens whose reasoning was:

“It is becoming more and more evident that a single liberal or general education for all is impracticable, and that varying forms both of general and quasi-vocational education have to be evolved in order to meet the needs of boys and girls differing widely in intellectual and emotional capacity.”

(The Spens Report, 1938. p.2).

As part of the implementation process children moving from primary to secondary education sat the 11+ test. This was a means of determining which of the three types of schools children would proceed towards. Those who scored over a predetermined level went to grammar schools and received a more academic education and preparation for university, whilst the remaining were enrolled at secondary modern or technical schools. This was a clear method of selection according to perceived academic ability or likely vocational career expectations, based on the outcome of a test. Smithers and Robinson (2012) reported that such a system greatly affected life chances.

According to Chitty (2009), the tripartite system was based on the belief that the results of a test taken at the age of ten or eleven reflected a fixed level of intelligence, which the school system should be structured to accommodate. In the previous section, concerns were raised regarding the use of IQ scores, which are further challenged by Dweck (2017). Dweck argues that adopting a growth mindset allows learners to surpass expected educational attainment. This perspective aligns with Edward Boyle's 1963 assertion that intelligence is variable and can be developed, and that all children should have an equal opportunity to acquire intelligence (Chitty, 2009, p. 28).

Under a system that categorised children into specific types of learners from a young age, testing Boyle's claims would have been challenging. However, his views appear to have influenced policy, as Eyre (1997) describes how grammar schools were significantly reduced in number during the 1970s, having been deemed unfair and unsuccessful. Pertinent issues included unequal funding, with grammar schools receiving a disproportionate share, and evidence that grammar school test results were manipulated to match the number of available places (Chitty, 2009). The validity of the 11+ test was also questioned. Eyre (1997) cites cases of pupils who failed the test but went on to achieve doctoral qualifications later in life. Despite these criticisms, the grammar school system was not entirely abandoned and continues to exist in some areas of the UK.

Up until the 1970s grammar schools were seen as the best or only option for AMA children. By the 1980s they started to close across England, but this trend did not take hold in Kent. To this day, Kent maintains a system of secondary education that divides learners by measured ability assessed through the previously mentioned Kent Test, used to determine a child's eligibility for grammar school, and it is taken by Year 6 pupils. The results of the test are used by grammar schools to select those who have scored over the ascribed pass mark. Those that do not pass attend non-selective schools.

Recent studies found that high achieving children from deprived groups are significantly underrepresented in grammar schools. Morris and Perry (2017) and Cribb et al (2013) show that grammar school children tend to come from families with professional backgrounds who can afford tuition fees associated with passing the entry test. Lu (2020) found that grammar schools only tend to have 3% of children who required a free school meal, which is a slight increase from 2.5% in 2016. This is compared to 15% in non-selective schools (Allen and Bartley, 2017) with pupils not eligible for free school meals being six times more likely to attend a grammar school.

There are several reasons suggested for the cohort makeup of grammar schools including middle class parents being more likely to access the admission appeals processes (Cribb et al, 2013). This is supported by Abrams (2021) who asserts that they are more likely to know how the system works and are able to afford private tuition and coaching prior to the tests (Lu, 2020 and Scott, 2016). On a simpler level, deprived families may not have the funds to enable them to send their child to a grammar school if the cost of the transport is prohibitive, whereas this would not be a problem for a middle class family (Abrams 2021).

Performance data are used to market schools and ensure they sustain a good number of pupils who will strengthen the schools' performance figures. Cribb et al (2013) found that results are higher in grammar schools than in non-selective schools. In some cases grammars were found to make one to two thirds of a grade gain per subject whereas in non-selective schools pupils were one tenth of a grade lower (Allen and Bartley, 2017). These disparities according to Scott (2016) have created a social rather than an educational barrier. Lu (2020) found that parents' perceptions of grammar schools hold an image that is linked to academic success and merit being awarded with social mobility, although there is little recent evidence to support this claim. Certainly some families are better placed to exercise their choice than others. Parsons and Welsh (2006, p. 250) suggest 'Thanet risks stereotyping the needy as underserving losers adrift in a hegemonic market place'. Thanet is a part of Kent described as 'the most deprived local authority in Kent' (KCC, 2020, p.1).

2.32 The AMA and comprehensive education

Under a Labour government, from 1965, English Education was transformed into what became known as 'comprehensive' system. Eyre (1997) found that pupils were often divided into discrete ability groups for teaching, which tended to remain the same from Year 7 to 11. A government paper found that 'In the majority of schools the expectations for very able pupils were not sufficiently high. The provision for these pupils was patchy and often not seen as a priority' (HMI, 1992, p.28). Several years after this the third report of the House of Commons Select Committee

(1999) and successive Ofsted reports claimed that the needs of the highly able were not seen as a priority, teachers did not know how to identify them, had low expectations and were unsure of effective ways to teach them (Radnor et al., 2007). The issue of staff preparedness in relation to teaching the AMA according to Eyre (1997), was that a limited amount of training and support was available to assist schools in developing provision for able children and that there was a need for extensive staff development if anything useful was to be achieved. Berman et al. (2012) quoting Feldhusen (1995) discussed how gifted students need specialised teachers to help them better understand their abilities, to deal with social challenges and set appropriate goals. Weber (1999) added to this by stating that school leaders lacked information to guide gifted pupils and Olenchak (1999) recommended that training teachers was beneficial for gifted and talented pupils.

Towards the end of the 1990s the newly elected Labour government set in motion a series of policies and initiatives that were designed, according to Radnor (2007) and Brady and Koshy (2013), to boost standards and achievement in 'very able' pupils, particularly in urban areas of social deprivation. They responded to this with specific training to support the needs to the gifted and talented, a move advocated by Clark and Callow (2002) who viewed the measures as an enhancement of competency in dealing with the identified pupils. Courses, according to Lowe (2003) were provided to schools and were pitched at Masters Level. Teachers that had participated responded positively in that they were able to access high quality professional development material. The courses discussed by Lowe were specifically aimed at the gifted and talented coordinators and were not the preserve of all teaching staff, who, according to Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) were not trained well enough to cope with setting differentiated work. An absence of a coordinator meant that there was less of an impetus to fulfil this goal. A spin off for those who had attended courses was that they became valuable to the schools in which they served because they were specialised in performing the coordinators role. They possessed skills and knowledge that made them marketable as employees to other schools who were seeking to bolster

their own provisions. The expectation was that the coordinator would return to school and disseminate findings as a diluted version. Geake and Gross (2008) found that in-service training could result in improvements to teacher attitudes toward gifted and talented children and their education.

Through the government legislation (School Standards and Framework Act 1998) Labour actively put measures in place to stop new grammar schools from opening and to dissuade academic selection in other schools. They wanted a system where all types of learners were educated together, but took no action against the one hundred and sixty three grammars that remained opened. Incidentally these schools managed to increase their numbers by 26% between 1997 and 2010, when New Labour were in office (Cribb et al, 2013), which could suggest that a blind eye had been turned to selective education.

2.33 The Excellence in Cities programme (EiC)

The EiC, through one of its seven strands aimed to address the identified underachievement of the pupils from poorer backgrounds with a particular emphasis on those who were deemed to be ‘gifted and talented’. This policy was originally adopted by 25 Local Authorities (Bailey et al., 2009). The EiC was to provide children with an enhanced teaching and learning programme and was aimed at the top 5%-10% of pupils in each secondary school (Smithers and Robinson, 2012). Part of the strategy was the introduction of The National Summer Schools Programme for gifted and talented children aged between 10 and 14. It was piloted in 1999 and ran annually until 2005 (Kendall et al., 2005).

As part of a national evaluation of the EiC between 2000 and 2003, Kendall et al. (2005) reported some positive impact where free school meal levels were high. In schools where the EiC strands had been adopted there appeared to have been an increase in Mathematics outcomes and in the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at A*-C grades, although this was attributed to the

pupils' attitudes to learning rather than the strands. Those who were designated 'gifted and talented' had higher levels of achievement than their peers, at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 but the likelihood of them outperforming their peers was impacted by their attitude, ethnicity, behaviour and prior academic success. Kendall et al. (2005) thought that successful implementation of the EiC strands was to some extent dependant on the level of engagement and drive apportioned from senior management.

Despite the good intentions of the EiC programme, early on, Tomlinson (2001, p.262), argued that the EiC and following policies furthered social division. She explained that these were 'exclusionary tactics of the middle and upper classes to reproduce and sustain the advantages enjoyed by the wealthy social classes – i.e. access to the best education, top university and the resulting cultural capital to be traded for higher paid jobs'. The intention was to address the lack of opportunities experienced by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, not to provide further resources and stimulus to those deemed to already be advantaged with income and access to better schools. Tomlinson (2001) continued with the hypothesis that New Labour's education policies would be divisive and maintain the inequalities in the education sector as parents responded to league tables when making school choices. Smithers and Tomlinson (2012) discussed how schools that adopted government policies, or became a specialist school were awarded funding, which improved resources and opportunities, made the schools more attractive and resulted in increased numbers and further funding. They cited Beacon Schools, by being selective, were able to sustain good results and attract the AMA pupils.

Kendall et al. (2005) argued that identifying the most able could lead to other pupils feeling excluded and demotivated. The funding element was crucial as Tomlinson (2001) suggests that funds were channelled to the same groups who had always benefited from increased provisions,

whilst poorer children remained trapped in a system that was less well funded and ultimately keeping them in a lower social position.

Similar findings pertaining to schools looking for ways to attract extra funding and climbing league tables were presented by Apple (2001). Although his work was based on studies in America the concerns ran parallel with the policies designed for more able students in the UK. He pointed to schools who were actively marketing themselves and deliberately aiming to attract 'motivated' parents and 'able' children. The move from pupils' needs was replaced by pupil performance and the original incentives available became a tool to attract children that could do something for the school rather than what the school could do for them. At the same time he claimed schools were spending more time and energy enhancing their public image instead of on pedagogic substance. Apple (2001) accused governments of creating the market conditions, laws and institutions that perpetuated the problems they were supposed to address. As in England, money was being funnelled away from those from deprived backgrounds to the middle classes who were best able to satisfy the requirements for attending schools further from home, access tutoring support for testing and tended to come from culturally richer backgrounds.

If this was the case then it appears that the government failed to understand the effect market forces would have on education. In this instance it shows that policies intended for those from deprived backgrounds were hijacked by those who were able to manipulate, or according to Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) were able to decode and use marketised forms for their own benefits. Less fortunate children could not access extras resources and opportunities and were not as likely to be among those who would be selected and placed on the gifted and talent registers (Smithers and Robinson, 2012). Instead, they watched peers from more affluent backgrounds take advantage of extra provisions.

League tables were published highlighting who were the winners and losers. Anyone other than those deemed gifted would look less attractive to schools because school performance was linked to grades. It is easy to see why schools would have behaved in an exclusionary manner from those from poorer backgrounds if they were unable to add value to their performance reviews. This would have had a profound effect on schools and teachers. No one wants to be associated with a school at the bottom of the league. Those who attend struggling schools would already feel they were at the bottom and would have to fight harder against schools who were better resourced, attracted more experienced teachers and were able to offer flourishing extra-curricular programmes.

Smithers and Robinson (2012) found that schools receiving fundings under the EiC initiative, and others that followed, had to show value for the funding received. This would most conveniently be shown in the form of grades achieved compared to grades expected, to show where value was added. According to Radnor et al. (2007, p.288) this could cast doubt as to who is on the register in the first place; 'Clever pupils who attain are going to be a safer bet than under-achievers with potential'. This behaviour is referred to as 'fabrication' (Ball, 2004). He highlighted feelings associated with performance measures that include pride, guilt, shame and envy, the type of feelings potentially experienced by those at the bottom of a meritocratic system. These are not to be taken lightly and add weight to the argument for fabrication. This could involve the manipulation and presentation of data to show the organisation in its best light and not just be the actions of institutions, but also individuals. A coordinator, knowing that the outcome from their reports is going to result in funding will be relied upon to present details as positively as possible. The likelihood of a school reporting that they had done nothing with the money granted and made no measurable gains would be unlikely. Radnor et al. (2007) made it clear that teachers recognised that they were part of an audit society and that they had little choice but to comply and adopt strategies to help themselves prosper.

The new requirements may have taken their toll on coordinators who, according to Kendall et al. (2005) found that they did not always feel they had sufficient time to fulfil their role. The role of the coordinator was often awarded to an existing member of staff who could have had responsibilities from the classroom and other areas within the school. The added pressure of responding to a government strategy would have compounded the workload already experienced and resulted in the kind of comments found by Kendall. This view is supported by Smithers and Robinson (2012) who later found, after the strategies were removed from schools, that coordinators had little opportunity to give a big push to the education of the highly able since funding and staff time were very limited. One coordinator was quoted as having said ‘I had an hour a fortnight. I’ve got an hour a week this year because I made a noise about it’ (Smithers and Robinson, 2012, p.33). Robinson and Campbell (2010) offered similar findings suggesting that relevant staff felt that a lack of time and support was a hindrance to delivering appropriate provisions.

Ball (2004) discussed performativity as a model of regulation to aid judgements on organisations and individuals controlling human capital. He observed that so much time and energy was devoted to collecting performance information that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvements. These findings embrace the thoughts presented earlier about how marketing was becoming more important than pedagogic considerations. It would not have been the intentions of the strategy to divert the attention of coordinators and staff from improving provisions for the gifted and talented. However, when data that helped to attract funding was required the energy had to come from somewhere to record, produce and report.

2.34 The National Academy for the Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)

In 2002 The NAGTY was established under contract to the Department of Education to Warwick

University (Kendall et al., 2005, Brady and Koshy, 2013,). A request was made that schools should ‘pay particular attention to their ethos, ensuring that they consistently celebrate excellence so that

unhelpful peer pressure is countered and it becomes 'cool to be clever' (Dracup, 2003, p.114). The NAGTY was the next significant dimension of the Government's plan to address the underachievement of the gifted and talented from poorer backgrounds. Warwick University, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University provided summer schools and other support for children in the secondary sector. Kendall et al. (2005) found that there was a noticeable increase in the proportions of schools offering additional study opportunities such as homework clubs, summer schools, literacy and numeracy activities at this stage. Freeman (2004) provided details of funded homework clubs, mentors and partnerships with museums, galleries, libraries, sports clubs and theatres as part of the provisions available to those identified.

Although the NAGTY was launched in 2002 it was not until not until 2005 that a set of supporting standards were published to aid schools in its delivery. These standards were commented on by Robinson and Campbell (2010) as needing to focus at school departmental level and be consistent throughout individual schools and across schools in general. The change in strategy was designed to support children from 4-19 years of age and funding would be aimed at localised initiatives in over 80 local education authorities, for over one thousand secondary schools and over five hundred primary schools (Dracup, 2003). Funding was also to be used to make a 'distinct and discernibly different teaching and learning programme for these pupils' (Dracup, 2003, p.113), and that a whole school policy for gifted and talented education, or revision or an existing policy should be present in each school. Hilary Lowe (2003), a Senior Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University and a Director of the EiC strategy, commented that school policies were to make explicit the need for high expectations for all pupils and an intolerance of underachievement. A National Co-ordinator Training Programme provided through the Research Centre for Able Pupils at Oxford Brookes University was aimed at teaching staff who were appointed to oversee the implementation of the school's relevant gifted and talented policy. By the end of 2004 there was an expectation that one thousand eight hundred coordinators would have completed the programme (Lowe, 2003).

A key attribute of this developing strategy was that schools were instructed to create a register that included 5%-10% of pupils identified as gifted and talented. Those identified were to receive extra provisions and support to encourage their academic development and increase their chances of pursuing education at a higher level. Lowe (2003, p.122) felt that the requirement to select 5%-10% of the cohort 'can be construed as a powerful force for change and as a catalyst for challenging underachievement'. Evidence of progress under the scheme is given by Freeman (2004) who found that the academic achievements of gifted girls in school was surpassing those of gifted boys in almost all areas of study and at all ages. By 2006 all schools were to follow suit and inform the Department for Education, in their annual January census returns, who they had identified as their gifted and talented pupils (Brady and Koshy, 2013 and Smithers and Robinson, 2012).

2.35 The Young Gifted and Talented Learner Academy (YG&T)

In 2007 the strategy was to change again. The National Academy for the Gifted and Talented

Youth contract with Warwick University was replaced by The Young Gifted and Talented Learner Academy (YG&T) under The National Strategy for Gifted and Talented. Smithers and Robinson (2012, p.4) later reported that Warwick University were asked to expand the cohort from 20,000 to 200,000 but were to operate on the same budget. This was an offer that was 'not really the right kind of territory for a university', and politely declined the opportunity.

The new contract for the YG&T was awarded to the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust (Brady and Koshy, 2013) and was to take the form of an online interactive virtual academy with resources and an access point for workshops and courses for gifted and talented learners, teachers and providers (Smithers and Robinson, 2012). In each of the nine regions, 'excellence hubs' were set up in higher education institutes who worked with local authorities and schools to provide out-of-school master-classes, residential summer schools, workshops and university visits.

Geake and Gross (2008) published work that examined how those with sporting talents or musical abilities were treated differently from those with academic gifts. The reason for this was ascribed to teacher's attitudes, which they found to be opposed to special provisions for intellectually gifted children despite having no objection when it was directed at students with sports or music ability. At this stage there is a transfer in language used to refer to children of high academic ability from *gifted and talent* to *intellectually gifted*, suggesting a focus on intellectual capacity rather than a talent like acting, artistic ability or excellence in a particular sport. These findings relate to a sample taken from the EiC initiative and add to a chain of thought that appears to have originated from those charged with its delivery. In an article that looked at the impact of the strategy on physical education, aligned with the strategies of the time, Bailey et al. (2009) reported that over a quarter of departments did not have a relevant policy in place. They also found that 40% of staff did not feel that the talented cohort identified had gained any benefits, which was partly blamed on difficulties experienced identifying potential against current achievement. It was also linked to not using National Curriculum content from which to make judgements. Bailey's research took data related to the YG&T, a programme all schools were expected to follow, and only focussed on PE departments. Over a quarter of those surveyed did not engage with the process. This may have been due to of extra-provisions provide by schools like sports clubs and teams, thus lessening the need to have to put extra measures. The reason for having no policy in place was not explained but does suggest that, at least in this instance, it may not have been deemed important enough or worth the extra time and effort involved.

From Smithers and Robinson (2012), the CfBT added 'City GATES' as part of the 'City Challenge Programme. City GATES had a focus on breaking the cycle of disadvantage and educational underachievement. An interesting aspect of this initiative was that a grant of £400 was given to schools for each pupil eligible for free school meals, provided they were identified as gifted and talented. This implies that the money given should be spent on the child identified, in a similar

fashion to the Pupil Premium issued to schools now. This raises a concern in that those identified as gifted and talented were supposed to, according to Dracup in Hymer (2014) be part of a fluid process in that children could move in and out of a schools gifted and talented register. If the register was to change according to comparisons with peers and attainment (Dracup in Hymer, 2014) then a child who was experiencing the benefits of some extra provisions could suddenly find those provisions taken away and awarded to someone else. The money could have been spent on some form of technology that the child may have developed dependence and reliance on, like a laptop. The removal of such a resource could have resulted in consequences negatively impacting motivation and moral. Concerns as to why a pupil is not gifted and talented anymore should promote investigations into the teaching, school or personal life of a child. The sentiment of challenging underachievement in poorer children is good, but one could argue that it should not have just been confined to the gifted and talented, a group who were already blessed with the means of potentially moving through the academic system with more success than their peers (Geake and Gross, 2008).

2.36 National Strategies11 programme

In 2010, the contract with the CfBT was wound up, excellence hubs were discontinued and the need to create gifted and talented registers was no more. (Brady and Koshy, 2013 and Smithers and Robinson 2012). Instead the government turned to Capita's National Strategies11 programme, another spin off initiative that had one year left to run. This was the final move for the Labour government before Conservatives were elected in 2010. This switch, according to Smithers and Robinson (2012) would involve even more emphasis on bright children from low-income homes who were underperforming. The core objectives became, 'to strengthen personalised education, social mobility and our strategy for narrowing achievement gaps', (Smither and Robinson, 2012, p.4). Again, the social mobility theme forms part of the language used in policy and is linked to a meritocratic ideology. The National Strategies11 Programme ran its course and eventually the gifted and talented materials were transferred to the online National Archive and it was for the

schools to decide what additional or tailored support was appropriate, if any, for their gifted and talented pupils.

2.37 Criticisms of the National Policy.

Koshy et al. (2010) found that teachers and schools had difficulty implementing the policy guidelines and either did not know about the existence of supportive literature or were not accessing it. Shortly after the strategies had been abandoned Smithers and Robinson (2012) found that in some cases, those identified as ‘gifted and talented’ appeared to have been used as a rationing device for popular trips rather than a means of high-level education. They also found that perceptions, by teachers, resulted in varied interpretations of the guidelines, whilst others in education viewed the strategy as a special provision for the support of elitist children who were already privileged with special skills and circumstances (Radnor, 2007, Kendall, 2005 and Koshy, 2010). This type of thinking is clearly problematic ‘The sooner “gifted and talented” stops being seen as an elitist issue and starts being seen as an equal opportunities issue, the better’ (Brady and Koshy, 2013, Ev 2 a statement made to the Select Committee, 2010). They found that the opportunities specifically designed for the gifted and talented were hindered by teachers because of its reputation for elitism. For example, Radnor (2007) reported ‘The attitude that gifted children can cope by themselves has let down too many young people’ (Morris, 2002, DfEE Circular 413/98). Berman et al. (2012, p.22) recorded comments including ‘they don’t need special services because they will “get it” on their own’ and that teachers overwhelmingly displayed beliefs that gifted learners would be more of a problem in classroom settings than a blessing. This small handful of thoughts is supported by the views expressed by Cullen et al. (2018) who claimed there was a feeling that gifted and talented students will pass by themselves.

Teachers became disillusioned with the strategies despite the overriding intention to improve the educational provisions for those from poorer backgrounds. Within the space of ten years there was the EiC with the NAGTY and a range of branches directed to various locations. Then the YG&T

from the CfBT including the City Challenge Programme, Excellence Hubs and virtual academies. Each strand of the strategies requiring schools to jump through various complex hoops (register, coordinator training, evidence of impact, requests for funding). The rate of change and adaption became a cause of frustration as staff started to embed and respond to one version before it was lightly amended or overhauled so that a new incarnation had to be implemented. At the same time adhering to demands was funding dependant and schools were left with the option of getting in step with the changes or risk losing an income stream.

This is a sad indictment of the strategies that were initially supposed to support children who were from backgrounds that were anything but elite. Such measures would have had the support of Sutherland (1992) who argued that it is not acceptable to dismiss a child's educational chances because of environmental deprivation and ways to make learning meaningful for a specific child should be attempted.

Dracup (2011) raised concerns about how few pupils from poorer backgrounds were accessing the most prestigious Universities. A mere forty learners eligible for free school meals secured a place at Oxford or Cambridge, which he blamed on poor quality education still being the norm for children from poor backgrounds. Smithers and Robinson (2012) added weight to this in their report for the Sutton Trust, which evaluated the New Labour policies. They claimed that academic performance was so closely related to family background rather than ability and that free school meals, special needs and ethnic composition are much better predictors of results in national tests and examinations. These contextual findings were reinforced by Ofsted (2013) who found that the most able from poor backgrounds were more likely to underachieve.

After almost a decade the strategies did not have the impact that was intended. The responsibility for the teaching and learning of gifted and talented pupils was passed to schools after the

programme was deemed to have been ‘patchy, incoherent and inconsistent’, (Casey and Koshy, 2012, p.48). From the Sutton Trust, these sentiments are confirmed; ‘the policy and provision for the highly able (another alternative to gifted and talented) is littered by a hotch-potch of abandoned initiatives and unclear priorities. Teachers complain that the highly able have become a neglected group’ (Smithers and Robinson, 2012, p.3). Here it is now surprising to witness support from teachers in favour of the gifted and talented after having commented on issues of elitism earlier. Smithers and Robinson (2012) also found that some schools did not even produce gifted and talented registers whilst others constructed register that included 100% of their cohort. There was simply no consistency.

2.38 Limited National Focus and Problems with Identification

Since 2010 there has been no direct drive or policy by government for AMA learners. Some provisions have been written into the Ofsted inspection Handbook (2018) where schools are instructed to ‘provide effective teaching to the most academically able’, which represents a shift in language from ‘gifted and talented’, to a focus away from sport and art. The most recent policy update came in December 2021, appearing in the *Teachers' Standards* document under Standard 5: *Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils*. This guidance states that teachers should "have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.

The situation in schools remains the same today where they are responsible for the education of the AMA, as they are for all pupils, as they see fit. They can put in place special provision if they wish or include them in an over-reaching school inclusion policy that aims to educate all pupils according to their abilities. Catchall statements can be used to suggest that any pupil, regardless of ability, talent or skills, is being given adequate provision in order to assist in reaching their

potential. Regardless, the problem of gifted and talented pupils from poorer backgrounds underachieving was not solved.

Not long after the New Labour EiC programme was introduced Eyre (2001) in Radnor (2007) found out that the creation of a gifted and talented register was the most problematic part of the policy. Stopper (2000) discussed how between 1963-1983 teachers could not identify gifted pupils from poor backgrounds. This trend continued and according to Smithers and Robinson (2012) found that relatively few pupils eligible for free school meals were identified as gifted and talented. It is these pupils that were supposed to be the key recipients of the extra funding during the New Labour government strategies. This problem persisted during the phase when the NAGTY was launched as Dracup (2003) noted many schools had not worked out how to identify pupils with ability. Lowe (2003) also reported that the issue of identifying the 'gifted and talented' was deserving of greater attention and priority. It was later found, when the programmes had been dissolved, that the term 'gifted and talented' created a resistance amongst teacher and that 62% felt uncomfortable labelling children as 'gifted', preferring the term 'more able' (Brady and Koshy, 2013, p.258).

Further confusion and difficulties emerged as teachers and schools argued over the application and meaning of the expression 'gifted and talented'. Were the identified children gifted or talented? What was the difference? Did a child included on the gifted and talented register need to satisfy the notion of being gifted and talented? How was being gifted and talented to be defined? The identification factor was an area that caused significant discussion with one of the problems being a lack of consistency between schools. Dracup (2003) instructed that 'gifted' pupils are defined as those with ability in one or more curriculum subjects, while 'talented' pupils are those with talents in sports or creative arts, which suggest that perhaps two registers would have been more appropriate. Stopper (2000) proposes that a gifted child is one that shows outstanding ability in one area of the curriculum.

The Department for Children and Families (2008) suggested that schools were offered no clear method for identifying gifted and talented pupils. They were advised to construct their own and regularly review them, although a checklist was provided. Despite this Koshy et al. (2012) found that some schools did not even produce a register. If no register existed then it follows that no one would have received extra provisions. Erwin and Worrell (2012) found that minority groups were hugely under-represented on lists, which was not attributed to testing at that time. This is a likely result of a lack of services available to poorer groups, according to Peters et al (2019) who found that those from higher income homes received higher quality educational opportunities and were more likely to be identified.

Koshy et al. (2012) and Casey and Koshy (2012) found that schools were not comfortable labelling and making special provisions for a group that were already deemed to be advantaged or were perceived as being privileged. They also found that school's Gifted and Talented Coordinators were confused by the policy as the identification process was not as clear, the definition did not fit all the types of pupils and talents. This is supported by Smithers and Robinson (2012) who claimed that coordinators were unclear exactly what was meant by 'gifted and talented' and were uncertain how to identify pupils. However, at the time when the strategies were embedded in schools, in a national evaluation, Kendall et al. (2005) reported a contradiction in that coordinators were confident about the identification of gifted and talented pupils by using a series of inhouse assessments and teacher nominations.

Dracup (2011) commented that schools experience problems because they had sloppy identification practices and focused too heavily on attainment measures, which were easily measurable. Any confidence in identification was attributed to the training given through the Oxford Brookes University. It would have been a brave coordinator, fresh in the post and likely to be in receipt of

some form of responsibility allowance, to openly admit that they struggled to identify pupils for which they were responsible. Alternatively, teachers and schools may have felt safer being honest about their views after the strategy was removed and not having to face any consequences. It is interesting to note that while the programme was running schools claimed to be secure with the process, yet after it was scrapped the opposite was found. Young and Balli (2014) investigating options, shortly after national policies were disbanded, found inconsistencies in measures put in place, with many schools hardly recognising this group as requiring anything other than what was being offered through general teaching in the classroom.

At a time when a government driven programme was pushed out nationally the ability to identify pupils was problematic. Now, when no such initiative or support exists perhaps it is fair to suggest that this maybe a contributing factor towards the under achievement of AMA children. Gross (1999) argues that a diagnosis needs to be done, reviewed and support adjusted accordingly at intervals so that support remains relevant; a view supported by Dracup (2011). If it is not clear who requires extra academic challenge and what form that should take then teachers are not likely to support them?

A measure that formed part of the New Labour Strategy was for schools to produce a policy specifically highlighting the provisions being made for the gifted and talented. By having a policy a school shows intent to recognise the needs of these learners and in doing so the pupils tend to do better at school (Clark and Callow, 2002 and Robinson and Campbell, 2010). This is supported by Freeman (2010) who suggested that attention to gifted and talented pupils results in a positive spread to other pupils. Robinson and Campbell (2010) agreed with this view claiming that specific provisions have a broad reach to other areas of teaching.

The production of a policy takes thought and effort combined with firm leadership support (Cullen et al. 2018). A policy recognises that there are learners and how to identify them and the direct appropriate action required to address other learner's needs. The absence of a policy suggest an absence of support and would surely disadvantage those who might flourish or gain some sort of educational benefit. The attitude of 'they can take care of themselves' (Radnor et al., 2007 and Berman et al. 2012) is simply unhelpful.

2.39 Meritocratic Ideology and Socio-Economic context.

As a forerunner to the policies that would shape the next decade in schools the New Labour leader Tony Blair said 'New Labour is committed to meritocracy. We believe that people should be able to rise by their talents, not by their birth or the advantages of privilege' (quoted in Sandel, 2021, p. 66). After this David Cameron, a former Conservative Prime Minister on 17th Nov 2005 stated that "I am believer in meritocracy and opportunity on merit" (BBC 17th Nov 2005). During Teresa May's tenure as leader, Conservatives claimed grammars would improve social mobility and capitalise on talents, although Lu (2020) found no evidence to support this. In her first conference speech on 5th October 2016 May said 'I want Britain to be a place where advantage is based on merit not privilege; where it's your talent and hard work that matter, not where you were born, who your parents are or what your accent sounds like'. The day before, at the same conference on 4th October 2016 Justine Greening stated the aim was to have grammar schools form a 'Great Meritocracy'. Before becoming Prime Minister, Boris Johnson on 13th Nov 2013 said he wanted 'to shake the pack to ensure that the most able were able to rise to the top'. Similar language was used by successive Prime Ministers from both parties for the past twenty five years. Here we see political rhetoric, where merit is viewed as a mundane feature of political language (Mijs and Savage, 2020) claiming to promote *merit* as a way for further advancement in society. However, there is a strong suggestion that the grammar system does not align with the needs of all AMA children. Those from middle class backgrounds, with financial means are more likely to fill a grammar school than those from deprived backgrounds.

Prior to Blair's statement Bourdieu and Paterson (1977) argued that social class and background are complex situations and social mobility is unlikely through educational policy that rewards merit. Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) explained that those from middle-class backgrounds were at an advantage over those from poorer backgrounds in terms of their ability to access and benefit from cultural capital and how this translated to better academic performance. According to Anyon (2011) these opportunities remain the preserve of the middle and upper classes and policies 'that reward achievement but do not prove valid for large segments of the population' (Anyon, 2011, pp.76). She discusses how a person's social context can limit their ability to transcend the social ladder and that the inequalities in education feed into and sustain social class structures. Mijs and Savage (2022) further suggest that difficulties with social mobility become the norm and that those lower down the social ladder blame themselves for their inability to overcome sizeable barriers.

Apple (2001) explained how middle-class parents had become skilled at exploiting market mechanisms relating to choice and recruitment, in the US education system, and were benefiting from policies and incentives that were initially aimed elsewhere. Being able to afford after school clubs, camps, music tuition and any other type of extra-curricular opportunity adds to a child's cultural capital and experiences. Inevitably this gives them an advantage when it came to testing over those who are not so fortunate. Sandel (2021) discussed how the ability to pay for extra tuition in languages, music, science and maths as well as play elite sports like rowing and fencing were all used as currencies when applying to top universities, again in the US, but does suggest an equivalence with England. At the same time, those with fewer opportunities remain at the bottom of the social scale as these options are simply not affordable. Sandel (2021) gives examples of those from privileged backgrounds paying private admission consultants (along with other methods that proved to be illegal) to smooth the way to top universities. Another side effect of promoting a merit based system, according to Sandel (2021) is that those at the top feel they deserve to be there,

that their achievements are well earned and a product of their hard work. Meanwhile, those who are lower down the social ladder deserve what they get. The merit ideology ignores starting positions and appears to sustain a system for those from richer backgrounds rather than encourage the social mobility New Labour and others wanted.

There appears to be broad agreement regarding specific issues and areas that can be explored for the AMA learner. By examining the perceptions of this group of learners and their teachers the concepts presented can be investigated to ascertain how context dependant they are and how this influences the way they feel about their situation. The literature reviewed highlights problems with a meritocratic ideology that underpins this research and is explored further as is the position of educational challenge.

The education of the AMA, over the past twenty years, has been on a journey that claimed to aim at bringing a level playing field to the inequalities within the system. Measures were proposed to help raise those from poorer backgrounds, who were classified as gifted and talented, and provisions put in place to help them achieve the high grades of which they were expected to achieve, progress to the top universities and social mobility. However, issue of material poverty, ultimately leading to identifying them and the disequilibrium of provisions remains a recurring problem. There are significant issues with the identification process and how teachers are not adequately challenging, diagnosing or supporting these learners. Some schools were unwilling to properly engage with the policies by identifying all their pupils as 'gifted and talented' while others struggled with the whole process, and in some cases unwilling to acknowledge that this group required anything at all.

The findings in this research aim to recognise and explore the views of the most important stakeholder: the children. Who better to discuss issues relating to the AMA than the pupils themselves who can best comment on the conditions they face and voice their thoughts, and

signpost directions to an education that is fulfilling. This research aims to recognise and uncover the specific learning needs of the AMA and ascertain what they want from their schooling experience by asking them directly.

Based on the themes discussed there is a real sense that contextual settings plays a significant role in the education of the AMA. This is where the ability to access systems through financial advantage side step genuine academic ability and benefit from initiatives that bring potential advantages. The questions in table 1 informed the methodology, which will be discussed next, coming from a range of different socio-economic starting points.

Table 1. Research questions.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the social and economic context of school influence the education received?• How do AMA pupils feel about their educational experience?• How do teachers perceive their role in relation to the education of the AMA? |
|--|

3. Methodology

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) affirm that a qualitative researcher will be involved in exploring and making sense of things, including the meanings people bring to them in their natural settings. In this case the participants are the teachers and pupils who have possession of the data required to assist in the formation of knowledge. By understanding what I was aiming to achieve the most appropriate research tools presented themselves and aligned with the aims of the study. At a simple level the aim was to understand several inter-related cases and draw forth meaning from the range of participants that were most closely associated with the phenomenon.

It is important to acknowledge that AMA learners exist in all forms of education and are not restricted to one typical environment. The literature makes it clear that those with good financial means are more likely to achieve higher grades in national qualifications, attend prestigious universities and gain employment in high paying careers (Sandel, 2021). The aim of this research is to add to the discussion relating to the AMA by trying to understand the concerns of the AMA and how they personally feel about their experiences of education from various socio-economic positions. This is a broad aim and in the interest of constructing a project that was manageable the scope and scale of data collecting was confined to one region in the UK that provides schools reflecting that of different socio-economic settings.

3.1 Comparative Case Studies.

The most appropriate way to address the questions in table 1 was to explore schools in different contextual settings. With the intention of gathering data from a range of contrasting sources, charged with similar goals, the argument for using comparative case studies was compelling. How and why questions are suited to case study methods and for this reason they are relevant. Case studies involve the process of collecting data from real world context and support exploratory lines of enquiry. Yin (2014) explains that case studies require the collection of a variety of evidence that explores actions and decisions and the reasons why such decisions are taken. Thomas (2016)

propose that cases studies offer the chance to study an event or set of actions from several angles to gain a rich picture of what is happening or has happened.

As a teacher, currently serving in Kent, the opportunity to investigate different socio-economic settings was made more accessible by the three school system that is prevalent. In Kent, secondary school aged pupils have access to non-selective, grammar and independent schools. Pupils who cannot afford school fees, often in excess of £15,000 for a day place, and do not pass the Kent Test will attend a non-selective school. This accounts for approximately two thirds of the schools available with the other one third being selective (Kelsi, 2023). Pupils who pass the Kent Test can attend a grammar school or the non-selective school or an independent school if they can afford the fees quoted above.

Findings presented in the literature review, suggested that the issues closely affecting the AMA flow from a lack of stimulus and challenge. These shortfalls are associated with poor behaviour, boredom and even talent hiding amongst learners who should be achieving the highest grades. To counter this it was found that the AMA flourish when they work with like-minded peers. These propositions are explored, queried and compared in differing socio-economic context and the resulting data also provided findings that make original claims in this topic.

This research required tools suitable for collecting data about the experiences of the AMA, their teachers and their contextual settings. To do this a contrasting sample of cases were required, Thomas (2016) suggests that there should be an emphasis on comparing, causes and reasons of differences between cases. The prospect of exploring multiple cases dictated that the data collection design had to be consistent and robust so that it could be used effectively across the sample. A single case would not allow for any comparison of context and a change in methods would impede validity of the overall findings. According to Yin (2014) this type of investigation

would be classified as an embedded case study because of the interaction required with key stakeholders. Lichtman (2006) suggests that under these circumstances there is an expectation that more focused detail, applicable to the research, can be extracted and enhances the prospect of developing a close working relationship and cooperative rapport with participants.

Myer (1997) classifies examinations of cases to obtain in depth understanding as idiographic because of the related social dimension. Alternatively, it could be termed as theoretical as an attempt is made to present a critique of a situation based on feedback from others combined with empirical research, which would aim to describe and understand particular views of the educational world (Coe et al 2017). The experiences being explored were descriptive and there was a valid cross over between the empirical and theoretical positions.

The experiences of the sample are formed in the social world of schools that are a product of the social world in which these schools are located. This involves inter-changeable parts and players providing data derived from the complex process of a social and fluid educational experience. It was expected that the views of those selected within the sample would reflect the context in which they were situated but as a defined group of learners. The aim was to achieve a contrasting representative sample of schools situated in diverse contexts and provide enough data to remove the reliance on assumptions about each environment. Opinions, view and beliefs are subject to change as new experiences are lived and added to that of the participants. According to Pritchard and Woollard (2010) all experiences are subjective and it is how they are organised in the mind that prompts reality for each individual person. Steffe and Thompson (2000) express this as individuals' knowledge being adaptations of their subjective experiences. The intention was to collect data from all the identified research sites and participants within a given time frame so that the experiences and thoughts provided fell within a point in time that was the same for all. All the participants had their own unique experiences in relation to the teaching of, or being, the AMA and

capturing them in a given time period was important to preserve claims to validity from a broader contextual setting.

The aim here is not to emancipate, but to exploit an opportunity to provide a discussion on educational experiences of the AMA, with the potential that could lead to some form of transformation, making transformation a political aim (Coe et al, 2017). Transformation in opinion, attitude or practice, even in a small way, may bring benefits to learners and their life chances and these measures are outlined in the Discussion chapter. However the validity of this study is presented against a wider set of theoretical ideas leading to analytical generalisation, a concept forwarded by Yin (2014). For example, a theme running through the literature review relates to the inequality of opportunities in education as well as the concept pertaining to policies that support meritocracy. Meaning from the interpreted findings can be described against these wider issues without attempting to exploit the ideas of inequality that are already known.

Gorard and Taylor (2004) suggests that it will be difficult to formulate generalisations from the results of case studies and this is affirmed by Creswell (2014) who attributes this issue to the uniqueness of the situation under investigation. Tashakkori (1998) goes as far as to claim that time and context free generalisations are not possible according to constructivists. Despite this, every effort was made to design a research process that is transferrable and reusable under conditions that share similar characteristics. This complements the thoughts of Burton (2009) who suggests that the reliability of results will improve as consistency over the data collection process is achieved.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological considerations

As a comparison based project that is concerned with the dynamics of different socio-economic situations a bounded relativism paradigm is the most appropriate. Moon and Blackman (2014) assert that mental constructions of reality are equal in space and time and within boundaries described as 'bounded relativism'. This suggests that a shared reality exists within a bounded

group, a group that share moral and cultural similarities, but across other groups different realities exists. This research considers how different groups function and view a certain phenomenon in different types of schools that provide the bounds and groups.

The prospect of finding multiple truths from varied settings made this study particularly interesting. Coe et al (2017) discussed how the shape of social reality takes on multiple forms constructed by individuals. Given that this study examines experiences, actions and beliefs from groups, it did not feel secure to adapt a realism perspective. This is because findings represented a range of individuals that have lived different experiences, come from various backgrounds and worked in different systems. All of these factors influenced what they believe and report when questioned. It was very unlikely that they would all feel, think and provide the same precise responses to a given situation. What might prove to be true in relation to the teaching of the AMA under one set of conditions may not be the case at another point in time or within another setting. This research focussed on using different schools and contextual settings would prove to be complex and unsuitable for a paradigm favouring a 'realism approach'.

As a researcher I believe that knowledge is formed through social processes and developed, expanded and modified in the same way. The epistemological stance I took favoured a constructionist perspective in that the knowledge generated was the result of social interaction with stakeholders in the phenomenon being investigated. This concept is supported by Burr (1995) who discussed how knowledge derived from a constructivist perspective is that which is formed through members of a society and are historically located. Myers (1997) views this process of knowledge construction as the interpretation of meanings coming from people within the context of the situations being discussed. Without a society consisting of schools, teachers and pupils, the opportunity to ask questions would not exist. This supports the epistemological standpoint that

Cohen (2018) refers to as knowledge being constructed through behaviour, which is context-dependant and where situations influence findings.

To address the epistemological requirements of this research, the ‘how can what is assumed to exist be known?’, (Coe et al 2017, p. 16) I considered the data that I was interested in collecting. The questions were related to the direct experiences of a phenomenon and responses came, in a qualitative form. Creswell (2009) asserts that qualitative inquiry explores the meaning that individuals and groups ascribe to a phenomenon by interviewing and interacting with the objects of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest that qualitative research is specifically focused on understanding the nature of social practices in greater depth from the point of view of the participants. A numerical scale would have been difficult to produce and would not have been suitable for the type of enquiry where text generated from discussions was much more preferable. Most of the data collected was qualitative and gained through direct questioning of those involved with the phenomenon. The logical processes to follow were dialectical and hermeneutical. I was looking for meaning embedded in text by examining events and situations. Knowledge was developed through a process of interpretation of what was said, heard and read.

3.3 Covid and Research

The data collected were representative of a situation from multiple perspectives closely related to a specific time and a more general context, in particular that of a pandemic that caused schools in the UK to close. All school trips were cancelled, meaning cultural capital gained from school residential or daily excursions formed a limited part of the pupil’s commentary, and lessons were taught online. The political response to the global pandemic was ever changing and dependant on the number of positive cases, hospitalisation, deaths and the requirement to balance economic needs. Given these factors, the potential for new variants and the effect they might have on the health of the population, created a lot of uncertainty with regards to how schools would operate and

the access they could allow. Visitors were generally not encouraged until the government removed most restrictions relating to social distancing and other measures to mitigate the spread of Covid. During the Covid 19 pandemic teachers became familiar with online meeting tools and technology, having been used extensively for remote teaching during various lockdowns. This proved advantageous as they provided a quick and streamlined method to collect data in a secure and easy way.

3.4 Research Methods, Design and Process

Spradley (1980) argues that to be a good researcher, training is required which would include accruing a solid knowledge of the topic being investigated. Experience of conducting semi-structured interviews with children was undertaken during a Masters qualification. Although it was not extensive it was valuable and helped to inform the interviews performed. The process of carrying out a detailed literature review helped contribute towards ‘accruing a solid knowledge’ and as a teacher with over twenty five years classroom experience, I feel have a good understanding of some strategies and methods for supporting the AMA.

To generate worthwhile case studies, several methods of data collection are encouraged by Coe et al (2014). In doing so the findings can be triangulated to help ensure further validity. The methods used were designed carefully to ensure that they could be used consistently between the cases identified. Should alternatives be used for each case this would have harmed the validity and made comparisons harder. The benefit of using a range of methods helped to identify a starting point where key people, practices and places were understood. Without a sound contextual understanding for each case, further interrogation in a relevant manner may have led to inconsistencies in the data collection process.

According to Cohen (2018) multiple methods can help focus on subjective accounts of the participants to gain a clearer understanding of why they respond in the way they do. By using more

than one method Tashakkori (1998) claims that this provides a further basis for the validity for the constructivist as it better represents the sample. This is affirmed by Creswell (2014) who also advocates the use of multiple methods in order to make the findings as detailed as possible and ensure that the voices of the participants are understood during the process. Pring (2015) adds that different methods may result in alternative explanations, but that reliable research relies on this approach. The methods used are discussed within the following pages.

3.5 The School Sample

To cover a spectrum of socio-economic settings a school from the three main sectors in Kent were approached. The non-selective and grammar school in this sample employ colleagues that I had previously worked with in different schools. An initial informal query was made through each to see if their schools would be willing participants. The independent school is my current employer and access and support was granted after a direct request was made to the Headteacher. This gave a mix of three schools that covered the three sectors in Kent. It is important to note that the school where I work has discrete sections and the part where I work in is not connected to the site in which the research was undertaken. The children and staff used in the sample were not known or taught by me at the start of the data collection process. The three schools had pupils of the same age but from varying backgrounds and experiences of education in contrasting settings and mixed gender cohorts, making them ideal for interrogating data from children from different settings.

3.6 The Teaching Sample

To be able to conduct a disciplined and balanced enquiry in a critical spirit it was important to consider the adequacy and makeup of the sample (Coe et al, 2017). With three schools established a range of teacher's levels of responsibility was desired to account for a general cross section of the teaching cohort.

A school structure typically consists of senior management (usually a Headteacher and an appointed team), middle managers and teachers. The senior management direct the focus and shape the ethos of the school. They usually have a good overview of what the school is doing and how it is performing and makes the key decisions relating to school policy. Middle managers are heads of departments or year groups and manage the teachers within them. To be in a position where rich data about the sample could be collected it was prudent to aim to create a sample that:

- Was a manageable size and practical due to time constraints.
- Represents the school decision makers on matters pertaining to teaching and learning.
- Represents the school at various levels of the organisation.
- Had experience of teaching AMA children for over five years at the school so that an informed view can be taken on the school systems and context.
- Represents departments that are traditionally associated with academic, rather than creative, pursuits.
- Includes teachers that were willing to participate and talk about their experiences and perceptions.

Having been granted access to each school by a member of the senior leadership team, I was in a good position to seek promotion of my research and offer the opportunity to participate to heads of department and teachers. The senior leadership were also made aware that their participation would be appreciated. A sample was developed from each school that consisted of a member of senior leadership responsible for teaching and learning or some other version of that title. Three heads of

departments from Maths, English, Humanities or Science and three teachers from similar subjects, giving a total of seven staff from each school. I was confident, based on prior experience, that each of the schools would have a pool of colleagues that would fit the criteria given.

Ideally, all participants needed to have had experience of teaching, or from a situation where they could adequately comment on the education of the AMA. It was important to remember that teachers are very busy and daily demands vary, especially between the different sectors.

Accordingly, the sample had to involve those that were willing to give their time and were prepared to participate with the research. This means that there was an element of self-selecting of those who were invited to commit rather than personally being able to select those that I wanted. The practicalities of research meant that some participants did not want to be involved for personal or professional reasons and contingencies had to be considered. For example, accepting teachers into the sample who had less teaching experience than was initially sought. I was incredibly fortunate that those who took part closely matched my initial sample goals and were willing participants in sharing their perceptions and experiences. The teacher sample, focus group schedule and key used during the Data Analysis chapter stage can be seen in Appendix 1.

3.7 The Pupil Sample

There is much written about the education of the AMA learners. By interacting and engaging directly with this part of the sample the research was made rich with their views, perceptions and the issues they felt were particularly relevant to them. Interviewing children provided access to those directly at the centre of the education process being examined. Pinter and Zandian (2013 p.66) said that these participants are ‘capable of providing useful and reliable insights into their own lives and they can be resourceful and knowledgeable, especially concerning their own experiences’. Indeed, this vantage point was taken by Warren Symes in his thesis submitted in 2018, and was an example that utilised the views of pupils. His work focused on the teaching and learning of more able pupils, more specifically, those from a particular department in a grammar school in the 6th

Form, which is a variation in sample to that selected in this project. Regardless, one of the findings suggested by Symes (2018, p.60) is that a lack of “pupil voice” in shaping the learning objectives resulting in “shallow” and not “deep” personalisation. Taking this further, I believe that a lack of pupil voice in this project would have made the outcomes rather shallow and instead opted for the potential to add depth by directly including these key stakeholders. Initially I was keen to understand how they perceived their education but was fortunate enough to gain much more than expected in terms of common ground, and a deeper understanding of how relationships and the contextual setting has on their educational experiences.

The selection of the sample had to be carefully considered and suited to a particular criterion that:

- Represented a group of children identified by teachers as being AMA.
- Was drawn from a body of pupils who would not be disrupted during the exam season, which is when I was best placed to carry out research.
- Had been at the school long enough to have formed an appreciation of its system, personnel, rules and routines.
- Would be willing and comfortable to talk about, in the company of peers, their educational experience since joining the school.

The best match for this criterion were groups of Year 10 pupils from each school. Again, I was fortunate to have been able to construct a sample from each school that matched the criteria above and privileged that they were such willing participants. The children identified were selected by their teachers, based on their academic strengths and it was felt that they would make a worthy and relevant addition to the research process.

3.8 Research Activity

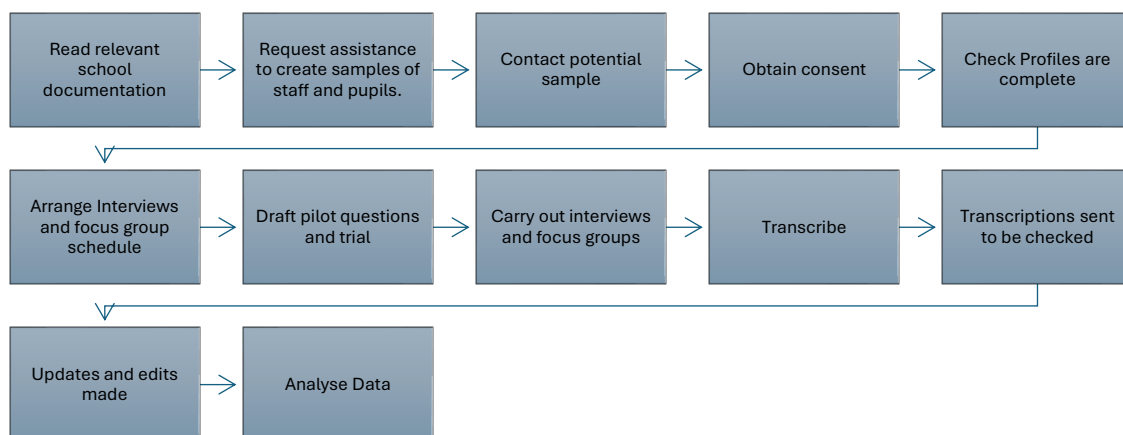
With the sample established, a draft set of questions for senior managers, middle managers, teaching staff and pupils was produced. The aim was to ensure that the questions asked could be

used coherently across each school and still remain relevant to the research. I was able, with the support of colleagues, to pilot the proposed questions and carry out refinements that improved the clarity and the order in which they were asked. The final questions used can be seen in Appendix 2, 3 and 4.



The opening stages of the research are the point where trust and dependence is forged. This is where contact with schools was made through official channels by email after approval had been given via the colleagues already known to me. Following the email was a short online video call to confirm approval, gain agreement from the school to be a participant in the research and to establish the rules of engagement i.e. research methods to be used, proposed timescales and sharing relevant ethical research documentation.

A simple form was produced to collect profile data about each participant and the details were confirmed at the start of each interview. Email was used when a sample was established, to arrange times and collect completed profile forms from teachers.



After the initial meetings a busy and intense period commenced. The senior leaders who had hosted the initial introduction were pro-active in helping to invite staff and pupils to become part of the sample. Informed consent was achieved through signing the form shown in Appendix 5. A schedule was created that suited the availability of those who were willing to assist with this research (Appendix 1) and I aimed to complete as many interviews as possible between April and July 2022 with each interview lasting approximately thirty minutes. It was anticipated that potentially up to thirty hours would be spent conducting interviews. By targeting a specified window to carry out the semi-structured interview phase of the research, momentum, consistency in approach and continuity was achieved (Pring, 2015).

3.9 Data Collection

Distinct data collection methods, shown in table 2 were used including semi-structured interviews for the staff and focus groups for the pupils. There was also a documentation review to establish a general context for each school.

Table 2: Data Collection Methods.

Method	Sample	Details
Document review	Schools	Online prospectus, most recent inspection reports and extra-curricular provisions were used for each type of school. These have not been referenced to maintain the anonymity of the sample.
Semi-Structured interviews	Teachers and senior management.	7 teachers from independent school, 7 teachers from the grammar school and 5 teachers from non-selective school.
Focus Group	Mixed gender, Year 10 Children identified by their school as AMA between June – July 2022	1 group from the independent school 1 group from the non-selective 2 groups from the grammar

A review of documentation from each school was conducted, to learn about a school's general context. The most recent inspection reports were used to gather details relating to size and cohort and to confirm status. A request for each school's extra-curricular programme was made because this was highlighted as a relevant component of the AMA children's education in the literature

review. Each school also had an online prospectus which was used to cross-reference the details provided by inspection reports.

3.10 Interviews

Coe et al (2017) discussed how interviews are an effective tool for helping to describe a phenomenon and for disclosing personal experience relating to that phenomenon. The initial interviews focused on primary areas of exploration based around a consistent set of open-ended questions with the hope that these would encourage participants to share their feelings and thoughts on the subject. To ensure sufficient detail could be achieved Coe et al (2017) recommends that multiple interviews are conducted with the same participants, which would help build rapport and deep reflection. However this was not possible because of time constraints caused by personal commitments and full time employment. However, the opportunity to meet people using online tools made more sense in terms of keeping people safe because of the pandemic. There was no need to travel to schools or participants to travel beyond their home or workplace, meaning a convenient time and place was arranged to avoid distractions during the process. Other benefits to using online tools include the ability to record the meeting so that it could be watched repeatedly, and the transcription phase was easily managed using the embedded video control features (pause, rewind). The software features scheduling tools so that appointments were generated with an associated meeting link that could be clicked to begin the interview.

3.11 Focus groups

During the same time frame that teaching staff interviews were being conducted pupil focus group meetings, at school sites, were arranged. The reliability of this method was questioned by Hill (2006) and Morgan (1997), who cautioned that working with children in focus group settings could lead to responses influenced by what the researcher or other participants want to hear. This introduces social bias and could obscure other potential data opportunities. Such influence was recognised by Gibson (2007), who described the problem as mimicry, where conformity in responses was prevalent, stifling

other ideas. Gibson (2007) also expressed concerns about managing the group, noting that participants needed to remain engaged, attention spans had to be managed, and group dynamics could become problematic if a dominant voice was allowed to consistently speak before or over others. Another factor to consider was the intellectual ability of the group and their capacity to understand and provide relevant responses (Greene and Hogan, 2005). However, given that my sample consisted of more able children selected by experienced professionals, I was confident that this issue was less pertinent than the others mentioned. To address and counter these issues, the pupils were placed in groups of eight or nine, and the questions were made available to them in advance so they could consider their responses before the meeting. Interestingly, the option of allowing the sample to prompt one another removed the researcher and potential bias from the discussion and left the opportunity open for further questioning to quantify understanding on interesting points. By bringing together a sample of pupils the opportunity to combine shared ideas helped ascertain to what extent there was any consensus. Robson (2002) states several advantages to using focus groups, which include gathering data from more than one participant at a time, the ability to access shared opinions and the empowerment of participants. This helps to build upon the social constructivist view of developing and building knowledge as a collaborative process and as Creswell (2014) explains, participants share views that are formed through negotiation and the development of a united voice.

Denscombe (2010) points out that group interviews are an appropriate aid in providing depth and insights in the questions that will be asked. For these reasons the opportunity to hold focus groups in a live forum, rather than in an online group was more appropriate. During the pandemic the use of digital tools to bring classes together was used extensively to teach but I found prompting worthwhile discussions with classes incredibly difficult because it was hard to read the class in its entirety and be able to identify who may want to speak and who was engaged. The role of the researcher in a focus group is to drive and manage a discussion and, although possible online, was

not the best option. Thankfully, at the intended time of data collection, schools were open and permission to visit and hold group meetings was approved. The request to hold the meetings during the school day was also permitted, which meant that the sample would all be present provided they were not absent for health or other reasons. Holding the meetings at school site provided familiar ground for the pupils and meant that they did not have to make specific travel arrangements to be part of the research. I was keen to host groups where I could sit down informally and proceed through the questions at the same physical vantage point as the sample. I did not want my status as a doctoral student or adult to be intimidating and I believe that this was achieved based on the conversations held and the data collected. The meetings were all held in rooms known to the pupils and this ensured a familiar space in which they were more likely to speak freely and comfortably. Another advantage of holding the meetings at schools was the opportunity to experience firsthand the environment that was offered through documentation and interviews with the teachers. The presentation of the pupil findings adds to what has been presented in the literature review and proved to be illuminating in terms of inter-dependencies between pupils, teachers and their schools.

3.12 Researcher Bias and Positionality

The validity of findings, according to Hammersley (2007) that adopt a critical framework are often open to criticism because of the political stance taken. This implies that the researcher is motivated to report in a manner that favours the argument being made rather than pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake. In an attempt to be suitably objective during this research process it was important to examine my own personal views on education, how they were formed, how this could impact on the data collection process and its interpretation. First, I unpacked my own educational experience as a pupil and educator.

During the 1980s I attended a secondary, non-selective comprehensive school that was within walking distance of home. The school system, in this small industrial town, reflected the needs of its population. The area relied heavily on industry for employment for most working adults and

there was mass unemployment at the end of the 1970s when a large steelworks closed, leaving many families, who had travelled from Ireland and Scotland, living in poor conditions. This process repeated itself again in the early 1990s when a recession took hold and many more manufacturing businesses closed. On the outskirts, within fifteen miles were several established independent schools. These were beyond the borders of where I grew up and although aware of them, I had no concept of the type of schooling they provided, but I was conscious that they were expensive and that those who attended were from, as I perceived it, families that were wealthy. At that time I do not recall a sense of injustice or unfairness between the systems, and was more concerned with the opportunities that were immediately available for my own progression. It was not until I became a teacher in an independent school that the scale of differences in social class, attitude, provisions, and opportunities became apparent.

Despite these concerns every effort was made to understand each context in its own right rather than question each school's position. Clearly context is an important part of this research, but the aim is not to decry obvious social disharmonies but is to understand the experiences of those in each environment. Other issues that needed to be reconciled included my preference for working in independent education and my role as a teacher with leadership responsibilities. It could be assumed that, given my employment, I might be inclined to defend independent education, but the same could be argued for favouring state education based on my own personal education and how it has been achieved.

My position on the education of the AMA is that it ranks low on the list of priorities for schools, and a change in attitude towards their education is needed. My personal experiences as both a learner and a teacher have brought me into close contact with this issue where I have witnessed firsthand how privilege or disadvantage can greatly influence educational outcomes. I believe government intervention is required at the policy level, with directives that recognise these learners

and implement measures to support them. In line with Winstanley (2004), I think equality of challenge should be embedded in routine pedagogy, not treated as an afterthought or add-on. Addressing the argument for fair and equitable education for the AMA begins with acknowledging that they have distinct needs. The current measures (see page 52) do not go far enough and should include initiatives to expose teachers to effective practices for working with these learners.

My views align with the principle of fairness in education: a broad range of learners should receive recognition and support. However, my perception is that provisions for the AMA tend to be reactionary, reliant on teacher goodwill or expertise. This randomness makes the system neither functional nor fair. I am particularly concerned that those most likely to excel academically are often not pushed to reach their full potential, while other groups of learners do not face the same disadvantage.

The idea of exploring just how far each individual's talents can take them is exciting. Limiting content and opportunities because priorities and resources are focused elsewhere is an issue that demands scrutiny. The "rising tides" notion presented by NACE (2020) makes a credible case for whole-school engagement in promoting challenge, but my focus is more on the individual level. I recognise that providing personalised support is incredibly difficult for most schools, even those with the best intentions and financial resources, but a broader overview of the issue is required.

From my own experience, I have noticed how easily school strategies shift towards the majority of learners. Discussions about the needs of the AMA often feel limited to acknowledging that they are enjoyable to teach and that teachers look forward to working with them (see page 138). This theme feels niche, and I would like to see it taken more seriously. The most capable learners deserve the chance to satisfy their academic curiosity. Schools should consider more deeply the potential

benefits of catering to these learners and the impact it could have on society if our brightest minds are encouraged to explore, create, and innovate.

Ultimately, I have to acknowledge that my views and beliefs are shaped by my professional experiences and observations, not by my time as a schoolboy. I was not considered to be AMA as a child and therefore cannot draw on personal school experiences from that perspective. To truly understand the experience of the AMA, engaging in dialogue with them must be an integral part of the process.

In terms of the data collection process, caution was exercised so as not to influence the participants with my own personal bias. I was also careful not to disclose my status as a Senior Leader to my sample to avoid gaining advantage through some form of preconceived authority. Instead I discussed the course I was undertaking and that I was interested in them as a researcher attempting to enhance my own qualifications and professional development. This research was conducted with a sample that had very little prior knowledge of me personally and no requirement to continue participating should they have felt uncomfortable with proceedings. Care was taken to avoid pushing participants towards a hypothesis and instead aimed for the extraction of personal beliefs and perceptions based on experience.

3.13 Ethical considerations

To begin, the ethical guidelines produced by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018) were followed because data were to be collected from teachers and pupils. Also, care was taken to conform to the ethical principles provided by Canterbury Christ Church University and approval was granted after their requirements were met (Appendix 6).

As Burton and Bartlett (2009) state, participants should feel that their input and findings are treated sensitively. It was also important to produce, according to Pring (2015), ethical rules that were

made clear and followed throughout the research process. The judgements formed about performance may be threatening to some teachers and could have result in a reduced sample size. For this reason informed consent (Appendix 5) and how to withdraw it was established.

During the process of conducting field research it was imperative that those sampled had anonymity and confidentiality assured from the outset, by suppressing, as far as possible, personal identifying factors and using pseudonyms. For each of the schools, where data was gathered, formal permission from the Headteacher was granted and relevant documentation was reviewed and returned giving further personal consent by individual participants.

There was the likelihood that access to data about children would be required and assurance of care and control over this access was agreed with schools through informed consent. All recordings of interviews and focus groups data were securely password protected on a private network. The transcripts were produced by the researcher and access was only granted to the researcher's supervisor when requested. All teacher transcripts were returned to participants for approval and content clarification before the data analysis phase commenced.

3.14 Analysing the Data

The staggered nature of data collection from multiple participants resulted in the beginning of knowledge construction. The challenge and benefit were that the analysis and data collection phase were partially running in parallel. An interview would take place and analysis began, albeit, off paper, but in conversation, as one response prompted further enquiry with questions that were not considered in advance. The transcription process formed further analysis from clarification and confirmation via transcript approval by email, which is referred to as the 'narrator check' (Coe et al, 2017). Tashakkori (1998) suggests that this method should aid reliability as participants are involved in the interpretation of the findings and differences of interpretations can provide useful new data. However, despite returning each transcription teachers only one took the opportunity to

make small edits. The majority of the participants did not respond or merely acknowledged receipt of the transcript and nothing more. This may suggest that they were content with the transcripts or possibly too busy to respond.

The process of actively engaging with the thoughts of others in the data production, interpretation and clarification was crucial to ensure that the overall findings accurately reflected what the participants truly meant. The responses varied but there were common themes and patterns and agreement derived from multiple realities forged from different starting points. Although it was not possible to find an absolute truth because of the multi-faceted nature of the responses, it was important to attempt to develop an understanding and form a general view that best represented the sample and groups as accurately as possible. The nature of the data and the variety of possible responses means justifiable challenges to validity would be reasonable to expect.

The process of analysing the data required an approach that was suitable for handling semi-structured interviews. For this I turned to The Framework Method developed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). This method is geared towards assisting with the identifying and developing themes where commonalities and differences can be highlighted for later discussion. Another feature of this approach is the flexibility it allows for deductive or inductive approaches to the analysis of qualitative data. With a deductive approach a hypothesis is tested in a more structured way, however, the requirement of this research dictated an inductive approach, which was open-ended where theories or findings emerged during the analysis phase.

The Framework model consists of several phases that suited a novice researcher and although the steps were not adhered to as rigidly as prescribe the general order was followed as closely as possible. The first stage, Transcription, was carried out soon after data was collected. The semi-structured interviews with teachers were all video recorded through online methods and the audio

was extracted. The pupil focus groups were recorded using a laptop and audio capture software, no video was taken due to the nature of the sample. This phase was very time-consuming but was the second encounter of each set of data and where themes started to form, known as the Familiarisation Stage. The familiarisation occurs because the data is played and transferred from one medium (audio) to another (text). Inevitably the data is played several times and the text is read often and from this themes emerged. Annotations and underlining's were made to comments that was particularly relevant to the research aims.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) coding of data was required. Under an inductive process there are no established themes and these emerged as transcripts were completed and compared. The process of coding was unstructured and informal but themes had started to emerge. For example, the feelings of frustration from all pupils interviewed was obvious, as were some of the shared experienced of those who taught the AMA.

The next stage was to develop an Analytical Frame and where my association with The Framework Model starts to depart. This is where numerous codes are extracted from the data and categorised. The data for pupils and teachers showed emergent themes that were kept separate because they were dealing with two distinct entities although several views did overlap. At this stage it was useful to have extracts word processed and colour coded into the various themes, printed, and displayed on a desk. From this angle I was able to sort the data into the best order from which to present the ideas that were coming into focus. The visual presentation of the themes lined up alongside each other allowed the opportunity to consider movement of various comments or quotes to suit the structure of the ideas that were forming. The themes identified were used as subheadings in the following chapter and summarised in tables at appropriate stages of the Data Analysis chapter.

The data collected were sufficiently rich to allow for multiple interpretations, which is the final stage of The Frame Work Model. This is where I was able to explore connections between the various groups and aim to understand what the participants were saying. This was a very interesting stage and where explanations from teachers and pupils experience about the education of the AMA came into light. The inductive nature of the study meant that there was no constraint of an existing theory and instead a range of inter-dependencies were formed and are explored next.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 How does the social and economic context of school influence the education received?

The following explores and strongly indicates that a school's social context has a significant part to play in the outcomes experienced by more able pupils. Those that have access to a broad range of cultural capital, a stable teaching workforce and a well-resourced environment, combined with support from home, are more likely to achieve expected grades than those who have less access to the aforementioned. Each school is dealt with discretely and presented with comments from teachers at various levels of their organisations. Schools are the arena where children spend their formative years with people of similar ages and for a great deal of time over many years. This is the working environment where opportunities are provided along with space, time and personnel to support academic progress regardless of a perceived level of academic ability, and the simple answer is that socio-economic context is very influential. Table 3 on the following page provides an overview of data that can be used to compare each school. Interestingly, the grammar school receives less funding per pupil and spends less on each pupil, whereas the academy is allocated over 17% more funding and still appears to overspend on that allocation. The boarding fees charged by Prince John's cannot be included as spending per pupil because the school also offers bursaries and makes other donations, but it does provide some insight into the potential finances available.

Other notable differences include class sizes and the pupil-teacher ratio, which is three times lower in the independent school than in Loveday Academy. The extra-curricular programme offered by each school is also revealing: the independent school provides double the opportunities of the grammar school and more than four times those of the academy. These details are significant in terms of the time and attention pupils are likely to receive, as well as their access to resources, opportunities for further support, and expertise.

Table 3 School Comparison Data

	Prince John's	St Christina's	Loveday Academy
Type	Independent -Mixed 75% Boarders 25% day students	Grammar – Mixed 100% day students	State Academy – Mixed 100% day students
Pupils on Role in Secondary Section	860	956	1610
Year Groups	9 – 13	7 – 13	7 – 13
GCSE Years	10 and 11	10 and 11	9, 10 and 11
Post 16	A levels	IB	A levels
Identification methods used	Entry testing develop at the school, formal reporting system and ranking by ability system based on subject testing results.	Have passed the Kent Test, regular reporting and testing in all subjects.	Scores achieved through regular subject testing and formal reporting system.
Number of qualified teachers	142	77	91
Pupil Teacher ratio	1:6	1:12	1:18
Average class sizes core subjects	26	29	30
Average class sizes GCSE Option subjects	17	22	25
**Cost to state per pupil or parents/guardians	Cost to the source Day £24000 Boarding £39000	Cost to the state £5315	Cost to the state £6256
**Spend per pupil in year		£5160	£6917
School Day hours			
Monday to Friday	08:30 – 17:00	08:40 - 15:20	08:30 am–15:05
Saturday	08:30 – 12:00	Closed	Closed

	Prince John's	St Christina's	Loveday Academy
Term length	(includes Saturdays)		
Term 1	13 weeks	14.5 weeks	14.5 weeks
Term 2	10 weeks	11.5 weeks	11.5 weeks
Term 3	11 weeks	13 weeks	13 weeks
No of Inset days per year	4	5	5
Extra-Curricular	Appendix 8	Appendix 9	Appendix 10
No. Monday Academic	13	10	0
No. Monday Non Academic	27	16	1
No. Tuesday Academic	14	7	3
No. Tuesday Non Academic	23	9	8
No. Wednesday Academic	6	10	3
No. Wednesday Non Academic	19	9	7
No. Thursday Academic	15	3	3
No. Thursday Non Academic	21	8	7
No. Friday Academic	7	3	0
No. Friday Non Academic	18	4	5
Total Academic	55 (34%)	33 (42%)	9 (24%)
Total Non-academic	108 (66%)	46 (58%)	28 (76%)
Total	163	79	37

**<https://schools-financial-benchmarking.service.gov.uk>

4.11a Prince John's independent school.

4.12a Position of the Parent/Guardian: The Consumer

Parents at Prince John's are consumers buying into a system of education, therefore it is important to examine this relationship.

“The teachers and the school and the parents together have imbued into them that academic success is important in a way that working class kids elsewhere haven't been. It's not just about how bright you are it's how much you want it as well.”
(Paul, Philosophy, PJs Ind)

The school is required to meet conditions from the parents because there are always expectations when a purchase is made. If those expectations are not met the consumer can choose to go elsewhere. School's such as Prince John's rely on fees to pay staff, buy resources and the upkeep and maintenance of their resources and facilities. Therefore, they are obliged to meet the needs of the parents in order to survive and compete. The fee imparted covers extras that non-selective or other types of free schools cannot provide at the same level of quality. Some of the expectations are likely to include the schools prior reputation, teaching from well qualified teachers, good results, regular communication and excellent resources allowing for exceptional opportunities . These expectations fuel the competitive nature of the private sector and mean that, like the other sectors, they are not immune to performativity factors (Ball, 2004) like exam results, which are projected to be better than or as good as similar types of schools.

Good grades, prospects and experiences can be delivered when time, skill, resources and behaviour management are more favourable than in other systems. In a commercial sense, payment for this service can be argued to represent an investment as the end result is hoped to be a well-rounded, qualified individual that is ready to take a high paying post, in a good organisation, after attending a good university. By paying for an independent education there may be a perception that the outlay is worthwhile if it means securing better prospects later in life. The message presented is that 'success is important'. Many aspects of modern life are important such as the ability to shelter ones

family and keep them fed and warm, but the parents at Prince John's have the option to take such priorities for granted and can focus on other elements as 'important' because the basics are already achieved.

Parental support and input was discussed by Stopper (2000), Freeman (2010), Cullen et al. (2018) and Robinson and Campbell (2010), in the literature, as being significant. They discussed the value of forging a partnership between the school and family to help understand a child's needs and ensure that issues are raised and addressed collaboratively. Admittedly, some parents take a more active role than others but the exchange of information is really important as well as cooperation to ensure that what the school is doing is what the child needs. This is not to say that the experience is tailored uniquely to each individual; that is not practical. It does mean that allowances can be made when it is right to do so and extra support can be applied when required. This is supported by Cullen et al. (2018) who discussed promoting an environment that is supportive. At Prince John's this model appears to be in place with the school and family working towards the same common goals.

4.13a Learning Focus

In relation to being academically more able:

*"... there isn't a stigma around being bright and clever and successful thankfully."
(John, DoS, Science, PJs Ind)*

The idea of success is raised again and this time it is in conjunction with intelligence. It is acceptable, even normal, to display these attributes but there is an implication or understanding that such a 'stigma' can be problematic. This aligns with the findings of Kosir et al. (2016) who commented that stigmatism can cause mental distress. Also, in a culture where intelligence is valued, pupils are less likely to hide their talents and detection of their abilities becomes easier. In this environment there would be no need for a child to stop showing their initial flare because of discouraging comments (Eyre, 1997). By

normalising success and intelligence the school creates a place that is less likely to have pupils choosing a social alternative over an academic one. Pupils will feel more supported and able to express themselves and to achieve as expected, because these actions conform to social norms.

Embedded within the school are further expectations placed on teaching staff and their role.

“And then there are those who are bright, but they are A grade bright not A grade bright and there is an expectation to polish those pupils.”*

(Nicole, HoD Science, PJs Ind)

It is not enough to settle for ‘good’ grades, especially when achieving excellent grades is possible. There is time and space, and track record of supporting pupils towards the highest grade. The implication is that pupils are challenged to aim as high as possible and that the school is equipped to match that need. There does not appear to be doubt or concern as to whether this is possible, more an assumption that it can and should be done. Gross (1999) warned that without challenge pupils could regress as they mimic behaviour of peers in the selection of material and allowing pupils to do so may be seen as a disservice by parents who have high expectations. The act of polishing a pupil’s performance shows a willingness to extend and challenge pupils and to go further academically.

4.14a Opportunities

Unsurprisingly, the opportunity to try out new experiences at Prince John’s are in abundance. The school hosts and organises a huge programme of extra-curricular opportunities (Appendix 8). The list shows an array of options demonstrating a commitment to those identified by Sandel (2021) who classifies provisions like fencing, rowing and lacrosse as elite sports designed to appeal to elite universities. This sets the tone and expectations that the pupils are presented with on a daily basis. The school also boasts several coaches, who are former professional sports people. There is

an expectation and contractual obligation on all teaching staff to offer some form of activity as part of a regular schedule.

When presented with a wealth of opportunities the case arises where pupils appear to have too much choice and even the chance to be over committed.

“To have a conversation, debate and discussion, but it’s always going to be the case whatever time I choose, half of them that can’t come because they are blowing the trumpet or playing cricket.”

(Paul, Philosophy, PJs Ind)

Perhaps there is too much on offer with one activity competing against another. However, this scenario introduces pupils to the decision making process. They cannot do everything on the programme, but they can indulge in their passion as a musician if they are so inclined, or try a new sport. The programme alters each term with new options added and adjusted to suit the seasons. This means pupils with a clash in what they want to do may also see a solution at a later date. All pupils sign up to something and the list shows many avenues of interest catered for including religious openings to physical activities. There is an understanding that not all pupils want to play sports and they can engage their curiosity in academic challenges. The range is broad and rich and delivered by staff who accept the extra-curricular programme as a typical part of the school week. Pupils are exposed to opportunities to compete, collaborate, perform and push themselves beyond their own comfort zones.

4.15a Context specific: Resources

To be able to offer elite sports, drama production on a grand scale, and overseas excursions requires skills and facilities. This is summed up succinctly:

“We have phenomenal resources, we are very lucky to have great facilitiesand libraries, very well qualified staff too.”

(John, DoS, Science, PJs Ind)

Provisions like trampolines, cricket nets, science labs and libraries require constant maintenance and renewal. Personnel need to be employed and adequately trained or experienced to ensure opportunities are equipped and functioning. There is not room here to examine the costs of teaching against that of the extra programme, but it will be significant.

The reference to ‘very well qualified staff’ is aimed to assure parents that the experience pupils are receiving in the classroom is just as good as the opportunities outside. As in all competitive environments the consumer will want assurances that what they are buying represents good value for money. This means teachers qualified and have proven track records of success in terms of grade output. Additionally, the teachers at Prince John’s have multiple roles and, in many cases, undertake boarding duties at least one evening each week. This is a significant pastoral role that means pupils and staff are spending more time together. Pupils can access teachers before and after lessons and engage in dialogue and this is a standard part of boarding life. It can foster productive and supportive working relationships between staff and pupils and also aligns with findings based on collaboration with teachers (Renzulli, 2012 and Woollard, 2010). It is important to point out that Prince John’s, like all schools, does not have an unlimited budget, but their financial position does allow for spending on more resources, appropriately qualified staff and the maintenance of an environment that is attractive and conducive for learning, social development and networking.

4.16a Post School

Pupils have support with the prospect of attending a top university. In relation to Oxbridge applications:

“It’s perfectly available to people that don’t want to go to Oxbridge to set their academic horizons a bit higher or prepare for some other strong Russell group application.”

(Ashley, Classics, PJs Ind)

Blomefield, (2022) provides data (Appendix 7) showing that thirty five of the top eighty schools supplying students to Oxford or Cambridge were from the independent sector. Independent schools account for approximately 5% of the schools in England, which illustrates how beneficial it can be to attend. Ashley runs the Oxbridge application group which is designated to prepare pupils for entry to Oxford or Cambridge university. The idea of academic success is extended with this provision and also caters for other universities deemed to be desirable academically. Attendance at these universities inevitably results in an entry on a curriculum vitae and the associated prestige. The comment above refers to this as setting ‘academic horizons a bit higher’. The ability to apply to university is open to all school children but at Prince John’s the process ensures a quality application is engineered. The terminology denotes that strength is required to be successful with an application that is not good, but ‘strong’. Academic strength over perceived academic weakness. There is a competitive feel to this with a triumph of academic prowess being rewarded with a place at an Oxbridge universities.

Potentially, parents may perceive this process as another part of their investment. The absence, considering its wider value in terms of future prospects, may be questioned. For the AMA, it makes sense to have this option, although it is healthy to make it clear that there are other options that might be more suitable. The school is able to demonstrate commitment to this process as the lead teacher is a former Cambridge student who maintains links with the university. The opportunity to have this resource is beneficial and means they are able to access relevant information, like insider knowledge, in a timely way.

The overriding picture here is a school that is wonderfully resourced and able to offer an immense range of opportunities. The school provides small class sizes, excellent facilities and includes specialist teachers in their own subjects. The combination of these factors, with parental

expectations complements the aims of the school to provide an environment that is much more likely to promote academic success. Feedback from the academic staff was that their more able learners do not underachieve.

*“.... it tends to be our good pupils do very very well. “
(Kim, HoD Languages, PJs Ind)*

This comment from Kim show that expectations are being met and particularly favourably for the more able learners. The context at Prince John’s closely favours a model that incorporates challenge and collaborative working between staff and the opportunity for pupils to work with likeminded pupils. These conditions favour an environment for the AMA to succeed academically, although later there are some reservations voiced by the pupils.

4.11b St Christina's Grammar School

4.12b Position of the Parental/Guardian: The dependant

Parental support was discussed at St Christina's from a perspective that shows potential consequences for learners.

"you can really notice the support from parents, from home...there is not that drive and some people's parents don't have the academic ability themselves to comprehend what the kids are doing...."

(Shelley, Maths, SCs Grm)

If the school is doing everything it can to stretch and challenge then there is a strong sense that parental input is crucial to support the process and ensure that every pupil stands the best chance possible of reaching their academic potential. The comment above is clear about parental support similar to that advocated by Stopper (2000), Freeman (2010), Cullen et al. (2018) and Robinson and Campbell (2010). There is a strong implication that to adequately support, a certain level of education is required. It could be argued that the nature of acquiring a degree means teachers are equipped for the task, but parents may not be in this position. Teachers usually have ongoing regular professional development opportunities like the 'challenge for all' initiative provided by NACE, that underpins and informs teaching at St Christina's, whereas parents may be committed to their own careers and trust the school to do what is required. Those at Prince John's are classified as consumers because of the transactional nature of the system. However, at St Christina's the choice is limited and parents are therefore more dependent on the school.

The concept of 'drive' is raised again, this time suggesting that it is not as purposeful as we saw in the case at Prince John's. This implies that a metaphorical push and an element of pressure from home carries benefits that contribute towards academic success. Ideally, parents are going to ask about a child's day, what they studied and how things are doing. This gives the child the opportunity to respond and hold worthwhile discussions, especially if the parents show a genuine interest and can manage subject content with a degree of understanding and differing viewpoints.

This can add breadth and depth to learning and expose different valid positions that may not have been covered at school. The idea that parents cannot ‘comprehend what the kids are doing’ means that they are in a state where content is unfamiliar or complicated, which would make engaging with it difficult. The suggestion is that they might be short on academic experience themselves, resulting in them struggling to support or understand the materials taken home. Although this view is based on only one teacher’s experiences and observations it is worth consideration.

4.13b Learning Focus

Interviews revealed that the main intention of the school is to treat all pupils as if they are capable of accessing the higher grades. Pupils have passed the Kent Test and with this knowledge the school can tailor learning to a cohort of high ability learners.

“... we teach them all at that high challenge level. We encourage our teachers to teach with their highest attainers in mind but then to scaffold down in order to support all learners and make sure that no learners are left out.”

(Mel, Asst Head T&L, English, SCs Grm)

Mel is responsible for the teaching and learning at St Christina’s and exhibits a good awareness of the needs of all pupils. It is encouraging to note that the AMA are prioritised, after which measures are in place to support the rest of the class. It is important to remember the range of grades will not be extreme, which means teachers can focus on delivering the higher grade material. By being well prepared the pupils are very likely to access appropriate material that will stretch them in a manner that supports their needs. If they are receiving the more complex content in a timely way they should not feel under stimulated or bored. Freeman (1997 and 2010) highlighted how boredom and a lack of stimulus is a problem for the curious mind and the result of inadequate challenge. With the teacher providing the necessary stimulus and challenge, the onus is on the pupil to engage with the material and demonstrate that they have understood and can apply it under various conditions like assignments and exams.

By scaffolding down children are exposed to material at a variety of grade levels and can intuitively attempt work that suits them at that particular time, and build up from a comfortable starting point. This is a system that supports the pupil's need for complexity but caters to circumstances where they might not be ready for the most challenging content. There was a broad agreement amongst those interviewed that they did indeed pitch lessons more towards the top and then provide material to ensure all learners are included. To do this teachers themselves have to be secure in their subject knowledge and be able to respond to the demands of a class with high expectations.

Teachers are required to differentiate their materials to suit a range in abilities. However, the staff at St Christina's are mainly teaching high achieving children and the need to teach low level content is not as prevalent. Some of the sample alluded to pupils skipping over the basics when applying complex formulas, but this is more a study habits issues rather than a problem with ability and can be remedied with feedback. If teachers are not spending time on low grade content then they can spend more time adding depth and breadth of knowledge to the higher grade material, skills and understanding in the pursuit of higher grades.

The awareness of the needs of pupils and their ability is expressed by Imran:

"They will sometimes have, actually a much greater depth of knowledge than you would expect. I think sometimes you've got to act with a bit of humility and actually appreciate the fact that it might well be that they know something you have missed or you have forgotten and actually by listening to them and appreciating what their point of view is."

(Imran, Physics, SCs Grm)

What resonates with Imran is the sense of humility in accepting the position of the child's knowledge, in certain cases, being superior to the teacher. In this situation a teacher could be dismissive, embarrassed or argumentative about the situation, but the nature of listening and conceding is likely to be received much more positively by a pupil than a negative, dismissive response. Teaching is a social occupation and teachers need to be able to communicate, negotiate

and work effectively with children, colleagues and parents. The prospect of collaboration with pupils on an intellectually equal footing should be welcomed because of the benefits of developing knowledge together. By appreciating a pupil's point of view and ideas the teacher is recognising the effort taken to develop those views and the confidence to raise them. A teacher cannot know or remember everything but they can ignite the possibility of finding out something that will add depth.

There are expectations that the cohort will be achieving the best possible grades because they have been selected based on their academic ability. Regardless, they still need good teaching and they also need sound preparation for the examinations.

“by the time we are at January of Year 11 it's exam questions, practice, practice, mark these exemplars, and all of that will get more out of them in terms of checking the boxes to do well in the exam and they are learning, but that passion and love for picking apart an argument, being critical about what someone else is saying, really being enthusiastic inevitably gets lost as we get closer to exams.”

(Michelle, History, SCs Grm)

The school must prepare its pupils for public exams, and this they have historically done very well. However, it appears to be at the expense of acquiring skills like presenting, discussion and further research that this teacher deems valuable. Michelle's remarks show that there is something worthwhile in exploring content in more detail and 'picking apart an argument'. This process is supported in the literature by Renzulli (2012) who discussed the importance of how pupils use information rather than being concerned with the process of gathering. The support to achieve high grades is in place and the situation amongst the staff is said to be stable, but it is telling that teachers feel that they can, or should be, offering more. Perhaps, this is a by-product of working with the AMA or the teacher herself being academically strong. There could also be an underlying issue associated with the time available in which to explore and become critical with content.

4.14b Opportunities

As with Prince John's, St Christina's offers opportunities beyond the standard curriculum. The pupils tend to take around eleven GCSEs each and have the chance to experience many other challenges that are diverse, practical or academic (Appendix 9)

"...and I worked hard to get him more on board with being someone that revises but did he often choose going to football over History intervention? Yes. How much more could I do?"

(Michelle, History, SCs Grm)

There is a similar issue here as at Prince John's in that children make their own decisions regarding extra-curricular pursuits and this may be at the expense of something academic. Michelle is clear in how much she supports the boy's grade but the reality is that there is only so much teachers can do. Each has limited time and the teacher has given as much as she can and the boy will have other academic demands and a social scene into which he fits. In this instance grades could be sacrificed over other priorities. Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) warn that such pressures need to be considered and challenged if full potential is to be achieved in the classroom. The opportunity to work hard for, and with, children is possible at St Christina's and capitalised upon, but there is a feeling that not all potential is being achieved because of social dynamics. The pupils at Prince John's live work and play together on one site and the extra-curricular program is compulsory but not so at St Christina's.

4.15b Context Specific: Learning Partnerships.

The teachers are provided with inset that the school feels is most appropriate. This involves equipping them with the tools to support, prepare and teach this particular cohort. It is now common practice for all teachers to be involved in some form of on-going professional development and in this scenario the school have made an over-riding decision that teachers need to be exposed to inset that is tailored to the school and the pupils. In this sense educational development is being sculptured to suit a niche market; that of the AMA child and in creating an environment in which they are best served with the resources and personnel.

The inset titled ‘challenge for all’ was raised by several colleagues during the interviews. This initiative is ongoing and with regular sessions designed to ensure all learners are receiving the education most appropriate to their ability.

“One of the questions I always ask is ‘do you find the work challenging and if you do what are the teachers doing to help you access that really challenging content’? I love speaking to the students because they are so perceptive.”

(Mel, Asst Head T&L, English, SCs Grm)

This is a form of internal research and a way to audit how well the initiative is being received, and if it is having the desired result. Engaging in dialogue with pupils is important to give them a chance to discuss their opinions, confirm or discuss what is happening in the classroom and the opportunity to feel as if they are part of the process. They can also ask questions and make recommendations. Engaging with and having discussions with pupils, rather than being dictated to was mentioned by Robinson and Campbell (2010) who advocate the use of questioning to explore and develop understanding. By accepting feedback from pupils the management and teachers will be better placed to respond to their needs or are able to counter concerns. Asking specifically about challenge means the conversations have a purpose and this helps in building relationships with pupils as the educational experience becomes shared and based upon actions from pupils and teachers. By finding out what is challenging pupils, the management are able to build a bank of resources and ideas that can be shared and allows them to ascertain how well the initiative is running.

This combined with what was discussed earlier, in relation to how pupils respond to dialogue, feels like an important feedback loop. Mel is a member of the senior leadership team and part of the decision-making process. It may help break down barriers perceived about hierarchy as the senior staff are interested and present in the education of the child. This may seem obvious but, as we shall see later, this sentiment is not always shared by the pupils.

4.16b Post School

St Christina's has provisions for university applications but they recognise that this is an area in which they need to improve.

"... Oxbridge. We have struggled with that....we also realise that we need to do something about that and we are actively making a conscious effort to learn ourselves and to inform those students and help them with those opportunities."
(Mel, Asst Head T&L, English, SCs Grm)

To be able to equip pupils with good applications, requires specialised experienced staff familiar with the process. Staff are a scarce resource and may be in demand in other schools, including other independent schools. It gives a school a competitive marketable edge if they can boast how many candidates secure places at Oxbridge each year. Parallels can be drawn with schools who know how to navigate application processes with universities against parents who know how to navigate appeals processes discussed earlier in the literature review. It looks as though the ability to move comfortably within the education system is, for some, achievable up to a certain point, i.e. getting into a grammar school, and after that the challenge becomes greater.

It is encouraging that the school recognises that they have much to learn about the process and that it will probably involve a dedicated member of staff, who will need time to understand the procedures, attend conferences and try to establish themselves as a point of contact with the universities in question. By doing so, that member of staff then adds to their own personal skills and capital and potentially becomes an attractive proposition for a competing school. For a grammar school, having a stable application programme may be desirable and this objective is not impossible but, given the market in which schools operate, combined with parental expectations, it is certainly difficult.

At St Christina's there is stable teaching from staff who are enthusiastic and interested in developing pupils. The system of support for their education looks to be well resourced and

supported and, as such, the pupils have a good chance of achieving their potential. However, providing opportunities is unsurprisingly where the independent school is able to trump the grammar. They have more resources and more opportunities to explore and develop cultural capital. At St Christina's they do it well but there are gaps, possibly caused by market forces and the reliance on scarce skills for which they must compete. The underlying message coming from staff is that the pupils achieve well and that the more able do not underachieve.

"We just had a stunning set of IB results, so I would argue that our students are not underachieving. We had 100% pass rate of the diploma of the IB. Our percentage of top grades 7s and 6s went up to 59% whereas 38% in 2019."

(Mel, Asst Head T&L, English, SCs Grm)

Pupils have enough support and opportunities to achieve the goal of good grades but not quite enough to push into the top tier universities.

4.11c Loveday Academy

4.12c Position of the Parental/Guardian: The missing resource.

There is a need for parents to work with the school so that the school can perform its role. If parents do not offer support with homework, or extra reading or attendance, then the school may experience issues getting the best out of the child.

“Some of the parents here aren’t that supportive at all. The more able students, I think some of their effort doesn’t come from their parents, their direction hasn’t been pushed at home. They understand that they are bright enough to understand that if they want to go somewhere they have to do the work themselves.”

(Sachin, HoD Chemistry, LA Non-Sel)

Sachin sees the role of the parent as a partnership where the school and family are working together to support the child. The school can only do so much and beyond the gates there appears to be a suggestion of academic abandonment. Pupils are having to work out what they need to do, and where they want to go but are lacking some of the basic tools required to reach their destination. If parents can be approached as a resource the pupils will stand more chance of success because they will have somebody to discuss content with, and perhaps have access to more materials or transport to places that offer exposure to content and cultural capital. This issue of support and parental involvement runs parallel to that raised at St Christina’s. Support will convey to them that what they are doing is important and has value and should be taken seriously. If this is not happening at home, then an alternative message may be received, that may not be as educationally fruitful.

Sachin will have had contact with parents, made requests of them, or noted that they do not respond to school correspondence or attend parent meetings. By not responding to correspondence, a pupil can miss out on opportunities to listen to guest speakers, attend trips or any number of culturally rich opportunities. The comment suggests that pupils need to build resilience and self-dependence if they are to make progress. If parents are not able or do not want to get involved in the process of support, the pupil will have to compensate for this through other methods. Achievement through this route is possible but will require commitment to using tools and resources to add depth to

knowledge based on enhanced independent learning skills. This is asking a lot, especially of a school pupil, who may have any number of family commitments to contend with after school. Support from home is really important as low aspirations from home can have a real impact on achievement (Cullen et al, 2018)

In 2018 the school was classified as ‘Good’ by the school inspectorate, Ofsted. Interestingly the outcome was critical of how the school handles its more able learners but did acknowledge good practice in areas that had a more overreaching impact on a larger number of the cohort. The general feeling of inspectors is that the school is working hard to provide a good education to all but the main focus is towards the pupils achieving low to mid-range grades at the expenses of the more able.

4.13c Learning Focus

In response to the cohort needs the management use the model discussed below.

“...we put our less experienced teachers, which we do have a lot of, we have a quite high staff turnover, they go in Years 7, 8 and 9. I think then these pupils in those key years, years 7, 8 and 9 where they often don’t have the strongest teaching, they can be real make or break years and I think it’s common place in schools like ours where they put strength in teaching in Year 11 to fix everything in the last years.”
(Alfie, Asst Prin, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

It could be argued that if this model is being regularly used then there is some form of support, but when explored more closely it does not offer the stability required for the AMA to reach the grades of which they are capable. High staff turnover indicates that there are regular changes to personnel meaning that familiarity a child encounters in the classroom will need to be established time and time again. Not only can this be unsettling for pupils but for a new teacher time is required to learn new systems, routines, build trust and take charge of their teaching area. The pupils may be in a position where they feel they cannot trust any teacher because of the rate at which they come and go. For them this could be a risk to work with a teacher who might not be around before the end of a course.

Three year groups are not getting the ‘strongest teaching’. Ofsted (2015b) discussed how this model disadvantaged the more able children. This is one of various times when high achievers can become disengaged with learning because they do not feel challenged or stimulated. The school is in a difficult position because they have to prioritise where to use the scarce teaching resources to bring the maximum benefit to the school. Perhaps the strongest teaching should be aimed at Years 7, 8 and 9 instead to create a foundation for later teaching, with less experienced colleagues, after the pupils have been instilled with good learning habits. However, it also makes sense to have the strongest teachers involved in the years that are taking public exams because these are performance measures (Ball, 2004) that schools are held accountable for, and used for promotional purposes. It is a real dilemma and does put a lot of pressure on staff to ‘fix’ issues and aim for grades after what may have been some turbulent years for many pupils.

At Prince John’s and St Christina’s this was not an issue. There is staff turnover but it was not problematic. Both suggested that teachers were in the departments that align with their qualifications and prior experience. This means support is consistent in the grammar and independent schools but not so in the non-selective. Ultimately, when staff leave they have to be replaced. Sometimes this can create a vacancy in a position of responsibility, which can be filled internally but the net result is that a new member of staff will need to be recruited.

“.....subject knowledge is a real barrier at this school in terms of being able to recruit the teachers with adequate subject knowledge to be able to stretch the top end. It’s difficult to get people with those qualifications.”

(Alfie, Asst Prin, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

Teachers are a scarce resource, as is the knowledge they share, and the ability to do so, comes from a pool of people who are:

- Looking for employment

- Are willing to work at Loveday Academy
- Have the skills and experience to deliver in the classroom

Loveday Academy is competing against thousands of other non-selective schools as well as grammar and independent schools. If a teacher has already had experience of a non-selective school they may have experienced similar conditions and favour the other two options, thus making recruitment even harder. There were reported shortages of teachers in various subjects evidenced by incentive schemes from the recent Conservative government to attract people to teach Computer Science and Maths (Worth and Van den Brande, 2019). If there is a shortage of teachers joining the profession and the demand for staff is rising the problem of recruitment is compounded. Alfie appreciates the value of subject knowledge in relation to quality teaching for the AMA. He is qualified to teach English but teaches Maths and has done for several years, at the request of the school. In markets where there is a reliance on scarce resources, competition increases. Schools need to be able to market themselves as attractive to recruit and retain staff that are competent and suitable to teach all abilities and levels. If staff are not working in the subject they are qualified in or do not come with ‘adequate subject knowledge’, the pupils may not get the expertise they need to access the higher grades. Many teachers are very good at classroom management and have good working rapport with their classes but if they do not possess the knowledge required to challenge the class, including the AMA, then there could be a shortfall in learning.

Next, we see the problem faced by one teacher who looks as though he is having to sacrifice, or at least stretch himself out of shape, in an attempt to reach the AMA. Juggling is not an easy task and takes time to learn, especially in a classroom where the balls are changing shape and there are often other hurdles to jump through.

“It’s like a juggling act between teaching the class, helping out naughty kids and then on the third hand, that I don’t have, make sure they are still learning for the more able.”

(Sachin, HoD Chemistry, LA Non-Sel)

It is encouraging to see that there is a sense the teacher is trying to satisfy everyone's needs. It is not possible to give equal attention to individual learners but certain groups, 'naughty kids', do seem to take priority at Loveday Academy over all others. This is not the case in the other two schools because attention is focused on learning or is specifically targeted with the AMA in mind. The process of teaching involves delivering content, but this is being interrupted. An activity may be set, which some learners will attempt but not all. If pupils are not engaged they will likely occupy themselves with 'off topic' interests. While this is happening, those who want to work are probably being disturbed. If the teacher can get everyone working they have more chance to respond to queries and support the learners who are engaged. If teachers are struggling to do that, then the attention and support the others need will not happen. Pupils can go so far on their own but do rely on a more knowledgeable other to push them further (Vygotsky, 1978). It would appear that the pupils at Loveday are those likely to be stuck in their proximal zone of development because the support needed is curtailed by the demands of others.

4.14c Opportunities

The extra-curricular activities at Loveday Academy for one term is shown in Appendix 10.

"... we are very very big on extra-curricular and experiences and things like that. We offer a lot of enrichment clubs after school."

(Alfie, Asst Prin, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

At the end of each school day multiple buses collect pupils and take them home, which means they are unable to attend after school events. The programme shows several entries for Maths and Science, but there are fewer entries for other academic subjects, although it is broad, but it is likely that the whole picture has not been provided. Still, there are some opportunities for the AMA to access further challenges and enjoy some enrichment opportunities.

4.15c Context Specific: Behaviour

One of the main features that was raised by multiple staff at the Loveday Academy was the issue of behaviour. This was expressed by one colleague:

“We do suffer with our behaviour being fairly horrific.”
(Jenny, HoD Physics, LA Non-Sel)

The process of *suffering* suggests a real impact on the ability to function as the school would like. Good, compliant behaviour is going to allow for more purposeful work and an enjoyable experience in the classroom. Teachers, in all sectors, plan lessons with a range of content and activities and aim to execute them, with some flexibility, according to the timetable. However, to follow a productive plan requires compliance and willing participants. Even teachers with vast amounts of experience can find themselves being seriously challenged by poor behaviour. Pupils can arrive upset from a trauma at home, may have fallen out with a peer, misplaced materials or a multitude of issues distracting them from what their teacher is trying to achieve. This is normal at schools and, to a certain degree, expected and manageable, but when behaviour is said to be ‘fairly horrific’, the level of management required takes on a new dimension. Poor behaviour takes up time and prompts conflict and issues. While this is taking place, teaching time is being lost. Behaviour management takes priority over learning because learning cannot take place if pupils are not focussed, are misbehaving, calling out over the teacher and arriving to class with little intention of engaging.

It is not a pleasant experience to come to work and have to manage a class instead of teaching content whether or not there is a real passion. If teaching is hindered because of poor behaviour, this can call into question the competency of the teacher as a classroom practitioner and adds stress and anxiety to an already demanding post. If the day consists of being ignored, breaking up disruptions and not exploring the interesting parts of the subject, then this may be a motivator to seek employment elsewhere. The teacher is charged with offering support to pupils that will enable them to prepare for exams and explore their learning potential if difficult if behaviour is ‘horrific’?

The AMA will see others in the class taking the majority of the teacher's time and attention and this will affect how they perceive their needs and value within the class. Lesson plans are likely to be detrimentally impacted because it will not be completed, or it makes allowances for behaviour management. Support is important to all pupils aiming to learn and it is less feasible at Loveday Academy. Pupils do not have a learning environment where they are able to discuss, explore and access the higher content in many lessons. It cannot be a pleasant experience for pupils wanting to learn or staff trying to teach.

This is in stark contrast to Prince John's and St Christina's where they have good support. The issue of behaviour was not raised at all in either school where problems focused on too much choice and pupils having to make decisions about what extras they wanted on top of the curriculum.

4.16c Post School

Prince John's has a dedicated Oxbridge coordinator who looks after applicants that have set their sights on Russell Group universities. St Christina's acknowledges that it could do more for the Oxbridge contenders but does have a good number of its cohort progressing to university. At Loveday Academy the contrast could not be clearer.

"I run the Kent Academy Network programme for the school. It's for 5 Academies in Kent. It is only open to pupils that either their parents have never been to university, they live in a free school meal house, from a split family, a carer, you have to fall into a certain amount of criteria ... That is very good for the more able but it's only open to 3 a year."
(Jenny, HoD Physics, LA Non-Sel)

In this instance Loveday Academy has to rely on a nearby independent school to seek support for applications. This is far removed from the systems at Prince John's and St Christina's that it barely looks to be an inclusive or serious proposition, especially as accepted numbers are so low and have to meet specific criteria. It is encouraging to see an attempt to boost applications from non-selective schools but it must feel dreadful for those who are not accepted knowing that support has been withheld because the supply cannot accommodate the demand. The competition for a place at

an application support group pales in comparison against those competing without such concerns for places in the elite establishments.

4.17 Summary

Table 4: Summary of context based findings.

	Prince John's	St Christina's	Loveday Academy
Position of Parents/Guardians	Expectations of a high quality service and getting a competitive edge.	Parents rely on school as best option from choices available and some parents cannot provide support required.	Concerns over an absence of parental support as a resource to achieve a working partnership.
Learning focus	High expectation for challenging all pupils and a concerted push to highest grades.	Pedagogically focused on delivery high grade content to challenge and stimulate particular cohort.	Dictated by available staff and the needs of the majority of pupils. Impacted by staff turnover and available skills.
Opportunities	Abundant and focused on broad range of sports and building cultural capital.	Available but limited to constraints of school day and the ability or willingness of pupils to attend.	Thought to be broad and accessible but the full picture is not clear.
Context specific	Exemplary and well-funded resources designed to appeal to and match parental expectations.	Collaborative and in partnership between pupils and teachers and specific to high ability children.	Learning interrupted and impeded by poor behaviour. Ability to access high grade material in lessons is often hindered.
Post School	Focussed and supportive of application to most prestigious universities.	Focus on top university places needs strengthening to improve.	Limited for the academically more able to a partnership programme. More support appears to be required to access university.

Pupils that have access to multiple, consistent extra-curricular opportunities and staff in their own subjects, focussing on the syllabus are more likely to achieve their expected grades. This is made clear at Prince John's and St Christina's. The main difference between these two schools is the support for advancement to universities recognised for academic excellence, and how well directed they are towards the extra-curricular programme. The schools with the financial means have dedicated staff to prepare them for life beyond school at 'top universities', whereas those in government funded schools do not. However, to counter this disparity the grammar is actively engaged in promoting and disseminating professional development opportunities that involves building capacity within staff that prompts them to encourage pupils to think more deeply, listening and engage in meaningful dialogue.

At Loveday Academy there was mention of extra-curricular opportunities but these tend to be offered in a reactionary way for academic subjects, or not well attended or hosted on a consistent basis. Prince John's pupils have more choices from which to select extra pursuits. As a result they are required to make decisions that mean sacrificing other enticing options. At St Christina's pupils have some decisions to in terms of extra-curricular opportunities but they are not as extensive as those found at Prince John's. The poor behaviour at Loveday Academy, alluded to by staff in this section and pupils in the next, impacts the amount of decisions pupils at Loveday Academy can make and there are fewer opportunities. Possibilities are restricted to what staff can feasibly achieve whilst 'juggling with the third hand' that they do not have.

The children at Prince John's are more exposed to school based opportunities because they live at the school and it is an embedded part of the culture. Parental involvement is a significant factor where expectations are due to the transactional nature of the system. At St Christina's the role of the parent is that of dependency on the school because, in some instances, the school is filling a

need that the parent is not equipped to perform. Meanwhile at Loveday Academy the need for parents to engage and be part of the process in a supportive manner appears to be required.

4.2 How do AMA pupils feel about their educational experience?

This section examines the experiences from the view of academically more able pupils from the sample schools. The comments are presented with the school identified first followed by the pupils' comments. The findings, show despite contextual differences that the pupils agreed on specific wants and needs lacking in their educational experience. This also resonates strongly with the findings that high ability children prefer to work with teachers and like-minded peers in a more focused and meaningful way (Clark and Callow, 2002 and Stopper, 2000). These are explored under identified themes with the voices across the schools combined to provide a coherent and clear representation of their situations.

With fewer opportunities, regularly feeling let down and wondering 'why bother?', it is not difficult to imagine that a pupil's attitude to learning is in danger of being adversely affected.

Loveday Academy

Jane: ... if you're capable of learning and willing to learn, then you should get put into a higher room where you get more, one to one with the teacher, and they actually give you attention and focus on your learning.

4.21 Perspective on Pedagogy

Pupils were asked about the teaching they received.

Prince John's School.

Alex: We don't do any like stuff that's actually helpful. We don't do any independent work.

Liz: You know, the work we did in three years of Spanish, at our junior school, was really really good.....even a year at junior school, I learned more than two years here .

Salah: I'm pretty sure I'll get the same score that I got now for my exam. When I was in Year 8, I'm used to not learning a single thing in Maths class.

Alex: Same for me in Spanish.

Liz: I knew French better last year when I was preparing myself for the scholarship exams than I do now because I would just talk to my French friends at school. Everyone's French is going down.

The pupils feel that their learning is regressing. If they are not learning anything new, then their needs as ambitious, high attainers are not being fulfilled. The teacher is perceived to be aiming to establish common ground so that they can address the class as one and the only way to do this is to establish who knows what. This is reflective of Gross (1999) who referred to it as the process of cutting poppies so that they are all the same size. While this is happening time is not being used as fruitfully as the pupils would wish and they believe that the process is detrimental to their learning. This is the case in the mixed ability groups where the range is thought to be more extreme. Interestingly, Alex opens with a desire to work independently, showing awareness of a useful learning strategy.

Their concern is over access to new content and the prospect of treading water is not appealing and appears to be a source of frustration. It is tedious for them to sit through content previously explored and wait while peers catch up. What is deemed to be catching up for the more able may be a perfectly good pace for everyone else and this could lead to friction or some form of disharmony in the classroom. They are finding this aspect of their education disappointing.

However, as we shall see, they want to go beyond the syllabus and are keen for more challenge and engagement, far more than the prospect of sitting and waiting to be spoon-fed to fulfil the requirements of a syllabus.

Prince John's School.

Scott: In fact, I have asked my English teacher various things about what poetry we're gonna be doing Like any literature or plays or something, and actually my English teacher told me don't read. My actual English Teachers told me some interesting things like not to read complex literature and to read things that I enjoy that kind of thing.

Even though Scott has taken the initiative and requested further material he feels rebuffed. The sentiment in the statement shows bewilderment in that it is the 'actual' English teacher that is not supporting the pupil with the opportunity to lay a foundation for them by refusing to share the material to be studied at a future date. There is then further confusion when told 'not to read complex literature'. As advanced learners they are able and willing to engage with complex material and that the lower grade content is not enough. The content being held back and the opportunity to work with the teacher, in this case, has been missed.

A poem or a play can be read relatively quickly if the pupil is so inclined. If this does happen the pupil will have to read it again at the pace the teacher feels is appropriate, in class, which might mean stopping and exploring various parts in more detail. For the pupils this may be frustrating because they have already read the entire text and will be aware of how the story unfolds and the discussion on the text is delayed. In the instance above, the teacher may feel they have issued a sensible alternative because attempting complex text without the teachers input, guidance and expertise could leave the experience rather shallow. For Scott, it feels more like a delaying tactic and a measure that does not match his keenness to progress. The pace of learning, for the pupils looks to be frustrating and has them asking questions about the validity of the model, especially if they assume there is a better alternative.

The AMA may not want the brakes applied when they are making progress and would rather continue to travel through the material provided. It would be simple enough to continue without the rest of the class by reading through the text book being used, watching more clips online or searching for more relevant texts but this is not mentioned. Pupils understand that when new content is introduced it is followed by discussions, questions and then challenge. What they want is the removal of delaying tactics seen as a barrier to progress.

The problem of pace is not confined to Prince John's. The pupils at Loveday Academy held similar views.

Loveday Academy

Jane: We would understand it. So we finish, we were told not to go ahead because we're going too fast.

Mary: We were literally told not to do the work.

Jane: We finished this stuff so fast and it was like, no, don't do the work you're going too fast.... so they are just in favour of those who aren't able to complete it and yes, were able to complete it, and in that time frame, I don't think we should be penalized for that..... wouldn't you consider that a positive thing? It eventually just creates sort of a 'there's no real point of trying to hone in or trying to do well' because you're just going to get dragged backed down so what's the point?

At Loveday Academy it looks like they have taken off but after getting airborne have been brought back down to earth. They do not want to be slowed down while the rest of the class catch up and there is no mention of work being provided to extend or challenge them after they have achieved the initial goal. Gross (1999) states that this should be avoided because if they are slowed down they are hearing 'you can wait, it's okay and we will all move at the same level and pace'. Test scores and other assessments have told them they are AMA and they do not want to be taught at the same pace with simple content; this does not acknowledge their level of ability or give them the recognition for their efforts and talents.

Jane does not see much point in completing work quickly because it does not lead anywhere until everyone else has caught up. The picture presented is that the teacher wants to keep them all working on the same content at the same time despite varying ability levels. Jane and Mary see finishing fast as a route to more material but they have to reconcile trying to achieve academic excellence by being rewarded with what they perceive as a penalty.

The theme continues at St Christina's:

St Christina's

Roger: So, like I don't think we would need to say different teaching to the rest of the class. But they would just like teach us the basic stuff, then we can further develop it on our own.

This shows the level of confidence that can potentially be gained from studying at St Christina's. The prospect of taking content and being able to convert it into something that exhibits more detail and depth is a skill likely to serve this pupil as he moves through the system. Here we see less of a reliance on the teacher except for the initial introduction, which supports the proximal zone of development proposal (Vygotsky, 1978) and allows for a greater reliance on the pupil's own independence. Roger feels he has the tools to develop content and these must have been acquired somewhere. If a child is developing these skills, there is good reason to explore the contextual settings, home and school, to understand how they have been acquired. It may be a result of teachers imparting wisdom, parental input or a combination of many aspects impacting on the pupil. Possibly, the stable nature of the school and home is a key contributor to this outcome. Roger gives a sense that the teaching is suitable and it allows the opportunity to explore further and make connections with prior content, and prompt investigation into new areas, resembling the model of independent learning discussed previously by Alex.

Despite resources, teaching personnel and context there is some consensus. In the classroom they all want to be actively engaged in learning; especially when they have completed the intended

initial activity. One set of pupils feel like they are in reverse, another suggest they keep stalling and another feels that they can go further when they are given an adequate start. One of the simplest ways to find out what they want is summed up by Freeman (2010), “It is easy to find out what interests a child – they tell you.” The path to keeping them occupied and challenged relies on opening dialogue and being able to respond in a way that promotes engagement.

4.22 Identity and value

Through the course of discussion the position of the AMA within their school and how they perceive themselves and what this means for their own self-worth was raised.

Loveday Academy

Gary: That's what I've been saying for months now I need 6s and I'm off to the Grammar school. It gets to a point where I'm so sick to death of sitting and waiting and being in school to be honest I don't even care.

There is an anticipation shown over the grades required to enable Gary to join the nearby grammar school. What is surprising is that he does not feel particularly confident that the grades will be six or above. Although six is a good passing grade Gary is a pupil expected to be achieving eights and nines and there should be little doubt that he will get over six for most subjects. However, as we shall see the opportunity to access and achieve higher grades is not straight forward. The process is similar to an employee seeking advancement to a better position with more prospects, but in this case it is a move between schools. In this scenario the challenge is achieving grades well within potential and moving to a situation where he will be working with others of the same ability. The language used is strong and direct and, when combined with the comments already examined, it does look as though the pupils really do not feel acknowledged and this is reciprocated by at least one pupil. There is frustration which is leading to the desire to find a better alternative, but we also see that Gary is showing determination not to settle for a system that he sees unfit for his needs. Although he is dissatisfied, he has not reverted to strategies outlined by Gross (1999) where he could be content to mimic the behaviour of peers and take the easy option. This is a display of

valuing ones self-worth and future prospect by pursuing an option that he perceives will satisfies his academic ambitions.

Choice and equality of challenge in education are important for children if they are to develop. This was discussed by Gross (1999), Winstanley (2004) and the Department of Education (2010). The challenge for some of those at Loveday Academy looks to be surviving the day through the frustration of unknown teachers, poor behaviour and limited access to stimulating material. The choice is to build resilience, aim to develop independent learning skills or seek a better experience elsewhere.

Loveday Academy

Mary: That's one thing, you struggle, they say they're listening, but they don't necessarily hear your concern.

Gary: Students don't get listened to.

A net result of staff time being directed and dedicated to dealing with poor behaviour is that they are perceived as not listening to the concerns of the pupils. The statement implies that staff are finding time to listen, but that they are not taking any action, which prompts the worry that pupils are not being heard. If the pupils are not seeing any changes or responses to concerns they may feel devalued. As a collective they have no voice and what they do say has no value and, even when they do speak out, it is a pointless exercise. They want to be able to learn, make progress and for the school to react to their needs but they do not see this happening. When people do not feel heard, they are likely to become frustrated, and misunderstandings can occur because the whole picture has not been presented or considered.

Another factor to consider is if the pupils do not feel they can talk to teachers the opportunity to discuss issues will fade. Dialogue was raised several times in the literature review by Pritchard and Woollard (2010) as a key tool for developing learning in collaboration with trust. Pupils spend a large part of the day with teachers, which means they must be able to talk to them. The use of the

word 'struggle' denotes that the pupils do care and, perhaps, they want to see evidence through actions that the school also cares.

Loveday Academy

Lloyd: What I hate the most about it is that all of this nice stuff just starts getting taken away and it takes your entire attitude to school away. I want to go into a lesson and be optimistic to learn and to improve. But it's just difficult to do that.

The pupil is acknowledging that trying to maintain a sense of optimism is confronted with multiple barriers, some of which they simply cannot resolve or challenge. They experience poor behaviour in lessons on a regular basis and they don't feel that they are listened to and there are issues with staff turnover. This comment followed a discussion about school trips that had been passed to another year group after initially being proposed for the Year 10s. Despite this, there is a desire for academic progress being expressed, which is not matched by what they are experiencing. Instead, there is a sense of disappointment with the systems. The prospect of wanting to learn should be welcomed, nurtured and supported, and if it is not, the pupil, again, will feel less valued and cared for by the school. The underlying messages of having someone care about them, and their own self-worth and value is doubted. That scenario appears to be played out often and will impact on how the child feels about their position in school.

Similar feelings pertaining to personal value are expressed at Prince John's where something to look forward to had not materialised. Despite having healthy budgets, stable and 'phenomenal resources', it appears the school is not immune to criticism. On this occasion the conversation was direct and broadly aligned with comments from the Loveday Academy.

Prince John's School.

Liz: The scholarship exams were amazing.

Jess: Scholarship Maths was so fun.

Liz: I enjoyed all the Scholarship papers.

Jess: We did the scholarship exams it was quite a few people, who were like really good candidates 'we're going to do extra stuff with you guys, we're going to do clubs, we're going to do activities with this particular group because we can see that you're bright'. Nothing, just nothing, not even an attempt. That was last year, this year they were supposed to do something, nothing.

The scholarship process is important to pupils because it identifies them as being different in a positive way. There is a feeling of frustration caused after entering the school and being sold the prospects of many exciting opportunities that did not happen, which caused Jess to feel let down, like Gary earlier. Initially, she would have been made to feel special and that her achievements and efforts were being recognised and catered for with extra provisions designed for pupils like her. There was a lot to look forward to, get involved with, experience and engage with beyond the classroom. To discover, over one year later, that nothing has materialised is a disappointment. Liz and Jess will see and experience the wonderful resources and facilities the school has on offer, and are aware of previous provisions that were available to high achievers in the past. This will raise questions: Why do we not have the same? Are we less valued? Were they better than us? The status and perceived value of having activities and some form of recognised provisions will feel punctured. Pupils who work hard, study longer hours and take academic work seriously will feel let down if promised rewards are nowhere to be seen. The experience of looking forward to something only to realise it is not forthcoming was also experienced by those at Loveday in terms of expected

trips. The concept of overpromising and underdelivering will impact trust and expectations between the school and the pupils.

The pupils were asked if they felt that the school made any special provisions for them as learners.

Prince John's School.

Alex: Feeling more towards no than yes though.

Salah: Extracurriculars that are more academically raised up, much less, you know, no one really puts attention into them. Like we had model UN. That was completely student run. We didn't go to any competitions or anything just because no one really put effort into it. Debating as well, like it used to be a massive thing at the school. Now it's just like deflating.

The theme of disappointment and frustration is continued. The opportunity to impress, show ability and be challenged in competition has not been present. It is possible Salah feels short-changed because an expectation of an interesting experience, where ability can be tested and displayed, has not come to fruition. Opportunities were in place, but in a mock-like state and preparation for the real event was not on the agenda. If this is the case, the time spent on a trial version of an event could have been spent doing something else, something with a perceived end value, that offers challenge and the chance to work with peers.

Pupils appear willing and ready to develop further, showing that they are motivated to be challenged, try out new things and compete. They are confident enough in their own ability and will certainly understand that a recognition or attention in the form of a certificate, trophy, article and mention in assembly may follow good performances. Maybe it is this recognition that they crave and are disappointed when the chance is removed. Their motivation to undertake extra activities is encouraging and was a point they all agreed upon. This drive and willingness needs to be harnessed otherwise they could form expectations that such opportunities do not carry any value.

Pupils perceived that they were important, and an aspect of their identity was valued and would be challenged when they first arrived at school. Again, it is important to reference the Covid pandemic and how this impacted extra-curricular programmes, but it is interesting that this factor was not raised by pupils at St Christina's or Loveday Academy. All of the pupils would have been at home during lockdown and would have been in close proximity to their friends. This may have been a good substitute for an extra-curricular programme that could not run during a pandemic.

Despite the good balance, teaching and thought behind developing learners at St Christina's there is an area of some concern presented below.

St Christina's

Sally: ... the people we don't know see more of an opportunity to give you a ribbing.

Beth: Like in class I found myself sort of scared but not scared but like nervous to actually openly be good. Like good at something. Sounds really like weird, but I found myself acting just dumb for no reason. Yeah, but I mean I'm not that dumb, but I found myself acting really dumb when I can do something.

Sally: You're viewed as infallible, that's the thing is that if I did something wrong, people like gasp.

This was an interesting finding and could be argued that these types of experiences are relative given the nature of the cohort. The sample was selected from the most academically able from a body of children that could all be classified as more able if in a non-selective school. Therefore, in a system there will be those achieving higher grades than others thus creating an academic hierarchy. 'Talent hiding' (Eyre, 1997 and Freeman, 2004) is a coping strategy to avoid teasing and being exposed as someone that is different. Beth makes it clear that she is dumbing down her own potential to move the attention away from herself because she does not like being teased for being good.

The majority of comments given were positive in terms of what they were receiving but also contained critical elements in areas already discussed that relate to what more can be achieved. The net result in this case is an able pupil consciously restricting her own learning activity and action that is detrimental to her progress and this could cause her to miss opportunities if she feels that teasing will follow. Not all pupils will be affected this way but for those who are there are a number of consequences. Gross (1999) suggests that pupils may hide their talents so that they can conform with social group expectations. If this happens during transition from junior to secondary education, the process of identifying able learners becomes harder. If a pupil is not identified they can miss out on appropriate teaching because they are responding to content that matches less able peers and presenting it at the same level as friends. With this can follow further disengagement and boredom, not to mention the loss of valuable achievable learning.

Teasing is a form of abuse and the pupils above refer to comments made by those beyond their friendship groups. Sally has good self-awareness about her own abilities and what she is likely to achieve, but also has a perception of how she is viewed by others, and this makes her feel uneasy. This is not a good situation for any learner, especially when an AMA one is made to feel inadequate for making minor mistakes. Being 'infallible', for some of these children, carries extra pressure to always answer questions correctly, to achieve high grades and always do well. This can be a heavy burden to carry, and if it can be lightened by not being part of a group who 'always get things right', it is not surprising that this option is taken. Schools are social places with hundreds of potential opportunities for developing meaningful friendships. Sacrificing the academic spotlight for social reasons may make sense to a teenager, at least more sense than feeling isolated and being teased.

Not all experiences are negatively framed. Brian, below, gives an insight into how he feels about his ability to move forward with his learning.

St Christina's

Brian: I'm quite motivated to do well, I'd be happy if I got like really good grades now and then really good in A level and then go to good university. But I don't feel like I need to like, go above and beyond and start doing A level work in Year 10.

Brian displays clear self-confidence and good awareness of a potential route through education.

Interestingly, there are no signs of doubt that this will be difficult to achieve. The prospect of attending a good university and being stretched and challenged all appear possible. This could be the result of the focus and teaching directed at a whole school level through the professional development initiative and highlights that those at St Christina's are having different experiences. There is also the positive note given about being motivated and seeing the value in an education that is making achievement accessible, and that the school is meeting these expectations. There is also a degree of trust being placed on the system and that the current level of progress being made is acceptable. During the meeting these pupils did not reveal any particular areas of stress, which suggests that the school is getting the balance right in terms of challenge and expectations. Brian reflects a contented learner, trusting the system and not consumed by personal and system related doubts. This looks to be a healthy situation in sharp contrast to that at Loveday Academy and perhaps Prince John's.

There are a several negative concerns given above and feelings that, at certain stages of schooling, the pupils either feel let down or devalued as AMA learners. To be classified as an AMA learner requires a degree of effort involving extra-reading, research and engaging diligently with content when it is being delivered and received. Note taking, editing and reviewing will also be a tool in their armoury as well as access to cultural capital in which they may have sought out themselves or through family but may have engaged with in more meaningful ways.

Opportunities that are not delivered as expected are frustrating and engaging in active regular dialogue appears to be important to these learners as well as making the child feel that they are being heard. Ultimately, what we see is the expression of the pupil's wanting 'more' in terms of the attention they receive.

4.23 Dependency on school

When asked about the role of school Gary was quick to questions the current system and its purpose.

Loveday Academy

Gary: The thing is, in the end it's like these state schools, right are made for the purpose of us. We just feel bad... and it's like what is... where did the country's tax money go to, like when it could be going to much better ways of education and like these policies they are putting and why should a population fund it. if it makes sense?

Lloyd: Yeah, this is a processing facility.

Gary: They just don't care about us.

In this instance I believe that Gary is questioning the value for money tax payers receive for the education he is receiving. When an amount of money is spent on a product or service there is usually something tangible to take away or an agreed upon service that meets certain expectations. He feels as if the system is not working and that an alternative must be possible so that those who want to learn have that opportunity. The context at Loveday Academy suggested the process of learning is disrupted, unstable and not the service that allows the AMA to reach the grades of which they are capable. Gary does not see any value in the education he is receiving, and as there is little perceived value this may prompt him to consider his own value. He is correct in the assumption that schools exist for him, and millions of other children like him but the system is viewed as something more sinister, a 'processing facility'. This is a very industrial term and conjures up images of conveyor belts with the bare bones of a product placed at the start and a fully formed, ready for sale, item delivered at the end. It almost feels like the children view school as some sort

of holding pen that keeps them occupied until they are ready to leave for the next stage of the neo-liberal process where they find a job and create capital.

The current experience does not bring satisfaction because they do not feel that they are being educated, nor are they reaping the benefits of a system that their families and one day themselves, are paying for. The final line in the comment further highlights where they see themselves and do not feel cared for by the school. When a pupil does not feel that their education is important enough for the school to care about then they are likely to have a negative school experience, which will impact grades. If motivation is affected the willingness to attend extra opportunities may also be adversely affected.

The situation at St Christina's is vastly different in terms of the experiences the AMA pupils face. The conversation was far more upbeat but there was criticism about depending on the school to prepare them for the future.

St Christina's

Brian: They're not teaching us to be critical thinkers, or how to like gather information in the digital age, is a huge skill that not many people have. But instead of teaching us that they're getting us to memorize things.

The process of passing exams was raised at all three schools and, in each, all the pupils referenced memorising routines and extracts from mark schemes. The pupils recognised the value of this method for passing exams but they are thinking further ahead, and towards the skills they will need to move through academia. It is encouraging to note that being a critical thinker is an area in which they see value. Critical thinking encourages the learner to look at causes and motives and helps to broaden their understanding and construct a balanced argument. This makes them more curious learners and develops skills that go beyond remembering key processes and routines for passing

exams. They understand exams are a short term necessity that shows what they can do, but it is not the only skill they will have to rely on when they enter industry.

The comment also deals with the changing landscape of education and the requirements desired of a modern workforce. Using technology to gather information is becoming easier, and the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence is making effective use of those tools a priority. Artificial intelligence is not going to go away and it will advance and become accessible like all technology. Children must learn how to get the most out of it to make them effective communicators, learners and colleagues, and to understand the limitations and issues arising from such powerful advancements. The pupils at St Christina's have grown up with technology, and it is part of who they are and how they operate. They want to be part of that, and have the skills that allow them to use technology effectively and productively. People buy, sell, shop, trade and communicate online and it is normal for the physical world of commerce and the digital world to work hand in hand. The pupils have raised a concern that the current model of education is not keeping up with what is happening in the real world. The culture at St Christina's support the acquisition of the grades they should be achieving, which is commendable, yet the pupils want more. This craving for further stimulus is reinforced by Hymer (2014) who notes a lack of stimulus will result in little change in ability.

The pupils understand their position within the educational system and some of the external forces that put pressure on schools. This is highlighted below:

St Christina's

Beth: if they focus on the lower part of class, at least they know that we're going to have a really good pass rate and people will be able to go to 6th Form or college. But I think it leaves a lot lacking in the academically more able side of things.

Beth shows an awareness of the nature of schooling and how they need to serve the majority of students. However, this represents a slight contradiction proposed earlier where it was implied that

the school appears to have the balance right. A ‘really good pass rate’ looks promising for the school and shows that the teachers are performing the role of which they have been entrusted and the pupils are all able to progress into other areas of education. The perception is that while this is happening the more able are overlooked, while the priority is focused on ensuring potential lower grades are boosted. This aligns with the thoughts from Loveday who also see themselves as less of a priority. The case could be argued that the more able are being left to their own devices because their grades are secure, at least at St Christina’s. The logical decision for school leaders is to lift the lower grades because they cannot obtain the high achievers any higher than the top grade available. The promising point is that there is no complaint that the higher material is not being accessed, or worries over building meaningful relationships with staff. The focus is about what can be done to counter disengagement and boredom, and the idea that they have become invisible because they have reached the top. The problem is not so much ‘how do we get them to the top’, but ‘what do we do with them once they arrive there?’ The ability to think critically or at least be trained to do so may fall into this category. If pupils believe there is ‘a lot lacking’, it suggests that they know there is a lot more available.

At Prince John’s the following highlighted that some pupils did not feel totally reliant on the school and were aware of alternative opportunities.

Prince John’s School.

Carl: Do you get the opportunity for one to one here?

Salah: No, we just find our own like outside school.

Scott: School tutors.

Salah: Messaging feature, that's the only thing is like just one sentence.

Scott: Pay extra, yeah.

Surprisingly, given the fairly personalised nature of the school in that a large percentage of the pupils live there, the pupils do not feel that one-to-one support is available. This may be the

byproduct of a system that is incredibly busy with much of the day structured with various activities. However, what is interesting is that despite paying for the services pupils feel comfortable switching to outside resources and have the means to do so. They do this if the school does not provide what they feel they need, or could have been directed towards a resource from the classroom. Alternatively, because of technology, they can spontaneously make an enquiry about a topic or ask a question as it arises to an online source. This can occur before or after timetabled class or during evening sessions when the pupils are required to sit and work quietly on homework.

They are at ease with a system that replicates how those in industry work, in that they foresee an issue, problem or require further information, and consult an available resource to help solve the problem. At school this would usually be the teacher but there is no reason why this should always be the case. This shows good awareness of opportunities and resources beyond school and the ability to access them is supported by finances if required.

In this section the amount pupils rely on their school varies but it is still important to highlight that it is central to assisting them on their academic journey. In one case the school is not giving enough, another provides so much yet the pupils access more beyond what is paid for while the other could do more to strengthen the perceived skill base the pupils feel they will need in industry.

4.24 What they want

The opportunity to find out what the AMA want prompted a discussion about the need for a specific teacher, helping them to develop as learners, and add more opportunities for cultural capital. This sounds like the role of the gifted and talented coordinator that was part of the New Labour drive before being abolished in 2010. Pupils also discussed the opportunity to add further qualifications or certificates in time that could be taken from subjects where they are assured of the top grade. For example, instead of eight maths periods six could be used and the remaining two could be delegated to something else. The prospect of more personnel is explored further:

St Christina's

Sam: I know I just think like that if they had more teachers. It would be easier to split the groups up because sometimes I'll spend the lesson I'm thinking we're wasting so much time doing this random starter I've finished in one minute and they still got like lots of time left.

Sam wants lesson time to be purposeful and useful and a 'random starter', particularly an easy one, has little value for him. If the starter is completed quickly then it is probably not challenging enough and this can lead to boredom (Freeman 1997 and 2010). Challenge is important for the AMA and without it they can stray and exhibit the symptoms previously mentioned. Perhaps Sam sees value in smaller groups as a result of having more teachers, which could expose him to more opportunities, more expertise, more dialogue and more content. He understands that extra personnel is required to achieve this aim but he is not critical that it cannot be achieved, which shows good awareness of the schools limitations and reliance on scarce resources. In smaller groups there is less competition for the teachers attention and if they are set by ability with other high ability children the teacher can plan for the most suitable level of complexity. This is where pupils can be taught in more depth, make detailed notes and ask questions that encourage exploration of the content. This is a model that would be hard to refute in schools, but only possible where staff levels are high and stable and, there is enough physical space.

A key point is that there is frustration at not being challenged sufficiently at the outset of a lesson. This sets the tone for what is to follow and for a pupil looking to be stretched, a good start is important as it shows they are valued as learners and that they are being factored into the planning of each lesson. AMA pupils do not want to be on the same page as everyone else as this means they cannot be recognised for being more advanced learners. Moving faster and further and showing an accurate understanding highlights them as AMA pupils and this recognition may be reward enough. It appears that they have developed certain habits which mean they can work faster than their peers and it is a habit they do not want to disrupt. To do so may make them feel that they are being brought down a level or that their learning is being restricted.

At Loveday Academy there was a similar sentiment.

Loveday Academy

Jane: I think we should have the option only people willing to learn, and if you're capable of learning and willing to learn, then you get put into a higher room where you get more, one-to-one with the teacher, and they actually give you attention and focus on your learning.

The desire for one-to-one attention is made clear as is the ‘focus’ on learning, that is dramatically affected by poor behaviour, which is explored in the next section. Similar benefits as to those given above will surface, especially as Jane has identified parameters for being included in her stated group. During conversation the pupils mentioned that top sets did indeed include the more able but they also include those with potential that did not want to work and constantly disrupted learning, which they found unacceptable. They see more potential for learning effectively if they are taught alongside peers with similar abilities and attitudes, which is a prospect supported by Stopper (2020) and Clark and Callow (2002). At some point in her school career Jane must have had exposure to this model and has called upon it as a solution to the problems foreseen in class. The phrase ‘actually give you attention’ denotes first of all that attention is scarce and secondly that it is something they want. They cannot get the attention they want in regular classes because it is all being directed at those who are not engaging or being disruptive. This shows that a mixed approach to learning styles may be appropriate for the AMA as they have now drawn on independent and similar peer ability models.

In terms of expectations the Loveday pupils could be accused of setting the bar low as they are only seeking a likeminded group of learners whereas at Prince John’s expectations are further focussed.

Prince John’s School.

Jess: Yeah, well just I guess like if someone is struggling or something, maybe someone like a teacher which is specialised we can just like contact immediately.

There are several differences with the first being a request for a specialists, which suggests that the role is undertaken by someone who is specifically charged with performing duties and are best suited to the post. Also, the person concerned is to be available beyond class in an 'on call' capacity. This shows that Jess suspects there is value in having access to a person with whom they can raise concerns, engage in dialogue and seek further challenge at times other than in lessons. The expectations are set higher than at Loveday Academy but it does provide the nemesis of an proposal that has potential. The idea of some form of group or knowledgeable other is repeated in each school with the inclusion being a positive move not only in supporting their needs but also recognising them as valid and just as important as those who perhaps benefit from extra support from the SEND department. Although this department is a requirement in all schools they were not mentioned once in any of the group meetings.

4.25 Differences

The following features two significant extracts from Loveday Academy that highlight key differences between them and the other two schools. The focus is on behaviour and staff. The issues raised were not factors of concern elsewhere but are significant and worthy of discussion because of the impact they have on the opportunity to learn. On the issue of staff Jaz adds:

Loveday Academy

Jaz: Well, speak of staff leaving that's been happening a hell of a lot more recently.

Mary: Yes, so many good teachers.

Jaz: It's been an absolute exodus of staff, there was a point, obviously was affected by COVID, yes, but there was a point where I thought if substitute teachers just decide not to show up this place would collapse.

Gary: Yeah, this place is dependent on substitutes.

Jaz: And the subs can't speak English properly, unqualified. Our learning just goes down the drain.

Staff turnover features highly on the list of grievances presented by pupils. The language used displays frustration and concern over the perceived rate that staff come and go. Again, the 'good teachers' may have earned that label because they are trusted by the pupils, can handle a difficult class and may have listened to their concerns. They will speculate as to why so many staff are leaving, which could include the idea that the staff do not like the school, the management or them. The opportunity to build relationships is once more at risk with high staff turnover and pupils may not be willing to take that risk. If pupils fear good staff will leave they may see this as another avenue where opportunities are taken away and with it the prospect of stability to their learning.

The relationship between having reliable staff and learning is explored by the pupils. They want staff who they can bond with and want them to stay. They do not view substitute teachers as the best option for this. Instead, they see the situation as detrimental to their education and learning. The values they have as learners being challenged is not being met, which again may feel that no

one cares about them, especially if teachers do not want to work at the school. If they perceive role models not wanting to stay they may develop similar feelings. They know substitute teachers are temporary and changeable on a daily basis, which means they are not an avenue where they can develop working relationships. They do not perceive substitutes as a good option as they do not see them matching a threshold of competence in some cases, and language ability in others. They are regarded as classroom minders until their regular teacher reappears or a replacement is hired.

The whole idea of a fulfilling education presented by Renzulli (2012) and Freeman (1997 and 2010) is in jeopardy. Bond building, dialogue, trust and the ability to stretch and challenge is not possible with fluctuating staff. The priority of the school may be viewed by the pupils as occupying them until they leave, which was previously expressed as a 'processing facility'. They do not want to be part of a holding system; they want to be engaged, challenged and enjoy their education but when they do not know who is delivering it causes frustration. Action is limited and the effect on their expectations is incrementally lowered each time they feel let down or a new face is seen in the corridors.

Loveday Academy

Mary: There's too many people in there, misbehaving, and it's just it's out of control and it's hard to learn about anything.

Lloyd: It's like in Art, there's so many students who are constantly getting told off she has to give her attention to the students that are misbehaving.

The language demonstrates that some classes are not suited for productive learning. This means teachers will most likely not be able to teach all that they want and pupils will have less chance of accessing the higher grade content, attention from the teacher or challenge. The reference is not just about one or two children disrupting the class. It is 'many people' and 'so many students'. It must be unbearable to be involved in classes like this especially if you are keen to learn, have a passion for the subject and want to secure a high grade. There is also the perceived injustice of where the teachers attention is focussed. Again, it must be hard to reconcile for the well-behaved advanced

pupil who craves the intellectual exchange with the teacher only to see time being spent with those who are not valuing the lesson or the benefits it can bring. There will be frustration to compound the lack of progress that exists in a class that is ‘out of control’. This sounds terrible and rather than a lesson sounds more like a baby sitting service for teenagers and must be incredibly demoralising. Achieving any grades of any sort where learning is sacrificed over gaining control is worthy of praise. Persistent poor behaviour is also going to impact the teachers and this is possibly evidenced by the turnover seen.

4.26 Summary

Table 5: Summary of pupil findings.

	Prince John’s	St Christina’s	Loveday Academy
Perspective of pedagogy	A feeling that they are in reverse, which causes frustration.	Content that they can move forward with a good start.	Get started but often stall, which causes frustration.
Identity and Value	I am able but don’t forget about me.	I am able and appreciate your support.	I am able but you don’t acknowledge me.
Dependence on School	Comfortable looking beyond the school.	Keen for preparation after school.	Cannot depend on current model.
What they want	More attention, challenge, opportunities and recognition.		

The comments from Loveday Academy pupils have been emotive and strongly framed. They are unhappy, frustrated and feeling under-valued because of where they perceive they are positioned within the schooling system. They do not feel cared for and in return, are showing signs that they do not care either, which can have a damaging effect on their potential academic outcomes. The pupils discussed issues with behaviour and others who get far more attention. They are let down by the system and frustrated that opportunities have passed them by. The pandemic has had an impact on what the school can and cannot do for them but there are regular hints that these children want the school to function well and not forget and value them in some way. Stability in the teaching cohort to provide a stable and warmer culture would make a huge difference to these learners.

The comments from St Christina's show mixed responses of needs and thoughts. Some want more focussed teaching, others are happy with the status quo but the general feeling is that their experience is good in terms of readying them for exams. However, there is a hint that they would like more beyond the highest grades, and opportunities to develop further learning or acquire other qualifications. An awareness that the school culture is a place for them to learn is evident in the fabric of the school and processes, so much so that the pupils can identify it as part of the ethos without it made obvious through self-promotion or constant reminders.

At Prince John's there are numerous opportunities to confirm their identity and ability through challenges in and beyond school with testing and competitions. For those in the grammar school, recognition was not as prevalent which may be the result of the cohort all being high academic performers, and to be recognised as such is simply a normal occurrence. Those in Loveday Academy want recognition but it seems incredibly difficult to come by because they are not the priority. The priority are the learners who need pushing to the mid-range pass grades and those that disrupt learning. It must be hard for the sample to reconcile this, especially as they are capable of producing the headline grades that the school can publish and use for marketing purposes.

All the pupils seem frustrated to some degree. Some want to be well prepared with content before lessons whilst others want a peaceful yet engaging environment in which to work, and some want to be taught beyond the curriculum. Those who can access great resources and high grade material will be acknowledged as conforming to a meritocratic paradigm, but is this real merit when the deck is stacked so unfavourably against the rest of the players?

4.3 How do teachers perceive their role in relation to the education of the AMA?

Throughout the interviews with teachers there was much agreement with the literature review relating to characteristics of the AMA. This included questioning, linking content with other topics, enthusiasm for the subjects, levels of motivation and supporting their peers. This section draws together the interrelated dependency of relationships between pupils, teachers and their schools and how these relationships impact on the level of satisfaction a pupil is likely to feel about their education. There are several common themes explored with the comments from the schools combined to highlight the points being made.

4.31 Personal Enthusiasm

Throughout the interviews it was evident that the teachers were enthusiastic about teaching the academically more able.

*“I think a lot comes down to the individual teacher. If you have a teacher who is interested in their subject and themselves academic, then the child will be looked after very well.
(Roger, History, PJs Ind)*

Being ‘interested’ in their own subject at Prince John’s can be capitalised on through time spent with other colleagues, courses, internal support, workshops that encourage exploration and independently researching and adding to their own set of resources. This process of sustaining an interest is similar to what the pupils experience when they actively engage in learning. The teacher is taking on the role of the pupil and passing on the benefits in the classroom. This requires action and a willingness to take part in adding to their skills, engaging with new ideas, materials, equipment and resources, and for Roger it is a formula that fits the needs of the AMA learners. We are introduced to the importance of the teacher/learner relationship and how teachers who model the behaviour of a learner can set a positive example to follow.

To handle a discussion on complex content a certain level of competence and understanding is required so that the conversation can be directed towards a path that is mentally fulfilling. Perhaps

this is what Roger means by ‘looked after very well’. Their education is part of a system that challenges and gets them into good learning habits and involves some aspect that nurtures and cares about the developments taking place. To be a teacher it is common to have a degree, obtained from an academic institute, relating to a particular topic, which is then combined with a teaching qualification like Qualified Teaching Status. Perhaps a combination of teaching experience alongside good subject knowledge is adequate to affirm the ‘academic’ label, and when added to a well-funded and stable environment, like Prince John’s, the results should be positive.

Also at Prince John’s, Kim gave her thoughts on the same theme.

“Sometimes that can create apprehension in terms of making sure everyone is well catered for. Generally, excitement or enthusiasm because it’s fun to see them make progress.”
(Kim, HoD Languages, PJs Ind)

To be feeling ‘apprehensive’ shows that Kim is conscious of getting the difficult balance that recognises and aims to satisfy all learners at every stage of the lesson. In this instance the message is one of care for the pupils, which is a recurring emotional response that is repeated by several teachers in this section. Pupils can be judgemental and can be amongst the first to let a teacher know if they are doing a good job or not. There is a subtle link between the comments from Roger and Kim acknowledging that the role requires a conscious interest in what is going on and how much the pupils are gaining from the teacher. For the experience to be rewarding, according to Kim, effort is required when planning for engagement to ensure all pupils are making progress. When an AMA child makes progress the outcomes can take the teacher away from the regular, familiar and repeatable content. This allows them to become the learner and in a position where a collaborative experience is evident matching the claims of Stopper (2000) and Clark and Callow (2002). Again, there is the perception that the needs of the AMA is dependent on teachers demonstrating good learning practices themselves.

To complement the progress being made it is likely the teacher will be in a position where they are assessing original, thoughtful and interesting responses. As a teacher this is rewarding, it gives a sense of accomplishment that an interest and passion is being developed because of the work they are doing and is perhaps why, attested to below, teachers across the sample enjoy working with them so much.

"...its fun to talk to clever kids. Obviously, I really enjoy them".
(Ashley, Classics, PJs Ind)

"I enjoy the challenge of teaching more able pupils, they keep you on your toes".
(Nicole, HoD Science, PJs Ind)

"...the top sets are much more enjoyable to teach and that's normally where you find the more able ones".
(Jenny, HoD Physics, LA Non-Sel)

...it's a challenge which I enjoy and just trying to unlock their potential".
(Virat, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

"I definitely enjoy teaching the higher ability more, just trying to push them".
(Sachin, HoD Chemistry, LA Non-Sel)

and that is quite an enjoyable side because you are forever pushing your subject knowledge".
(Henry, HoD Geography, SCs Grm)

"I thrive on it, I love it. Part of the reason why I teach at this school".
(Oscar, HoD Physics, SCs Grm)

Pupils confirm understanding and produce work based on what they have been taught, which means they are learning and that teaching has been effective, heard and understood. The AMA are generating job satisfaction for teachers and it becomes apparent why teaching and working with them is deemed to be such a positive experience, and this is not just the case in Prince John's.

At St Christina's Imran describes his experience of teaching the AMA and how he has gained value for himself whilst aiming to create an engaging teaching environment.

"There is that element of the unknown I think with those sorts of students. You don't know what they are going to come up with, which adds to the intrigue. You teach

your subject because you love it. So that element of trying to find out more, getting a different perspective of something actually can be quite exciting.”
(Imran, Physics, SCs Grm)

The ‘element of the unknown’, for the teacher can bring with it anxiety, similar to Kim’s ‘apprehension’, at the prospect of being caught out or wanting in some way, but in this case the term ‘exciting’ is used. For the teacher the prospect of adding to their own knowledge is welcomed. New insights can involve the application of something current or an alternative way to attempt a task. With increasing processing power the ability to approach many experimental tasks, that may have taken a long time can now be reduced through modelling software or similar tools that allow for discovery to be made in a more time efficient and interesting way. These may be seen as short cuts but it can also be argued that they are better ways, saving time, energy and resources and opening the door to more discussion and the chances to play with variables and note outcomes.

What can also be taken from this comment aligns with those made earlier by Roger at Prince John’s where he discussed the type of teacher best suited to teaching the more able child. Imran has a passion for his subject and the prospect of going deeper is attractive. He is not only the teacher but also the pupil, looking to further his own knowledge and enjoying the prospect of working with likeminded peers. The impression that he is working in partnership with the pupils to satisfy his own thirst for knowledges is evident. The relationship between the pupil and teacher takes on relevance here and suggests that there is value in the form of peer collaboration. Certainly in schools, teachers would classify each other as peers despite the obvious generational gaps between young newly qualified teachers and those closer to retirement. Therefore it could be the same between pupils and teachers if they exhibit the same desire to learn. This method of encouraging explorations plays to the curiosity of the learner. Pupils mentioned how they can use mark schemes to memorise answers to prepare for an exam and that this is a route towards higher grades.

However, being given the chance to explore, discuss and analyse are the tools used to develop critical thinking and deeper understanding and this is what they want.

So far the discussion has been centred around passion for teaching and the desire to raise academic excellence. In the next comment Dwayne talks about what it takes to get the academic edge over the pupils and sustain a position of knowledge authority in the classroom.

*“I make sure that I put in a lot of extra effort before the lesson, read up, answer the questions they are going to get given in the book myself, with full answers.
(Dwayne, HoD Maths, LA Non-Sel)*

Dwayne shows further modelling of positive learner attributes reflecting independent learning skills. If Dwayne was not enthusiastic about his subject he would not commit so much energy to work through difficult processes to ensure he is serving the cohort to the best of his ability. He can sustain a position where he can answer questions, has an understanding that the work is challenging and has mutually accepted the same challenges the pupils will face. By practising what he expects the pupils to do he is sharpening his skills and working on areas that may have originally been weaknesses. This preparation can be avoided by accessing online resources, and as a maths teacher Dwayne could use technology to produce worked examples with very little effort at all. However, this would not provide the learning and understanding that he can take with him into the classroom. The chances of the AMA pupils identifying a teachers weakness are increased if they show limited understanding of the concepts being taught. This may undermine how they feel about the teacher and his or her ability to meet their needs.

4.32 Experience and Expertise.

When asked how he felt about teaching the AMA Paul gave the following response.

“Well, I quite enjoy that I suppose. It means there is less work to do in one way because you don’t have to plan so much because you can let conversations take their natural course and manage that to some degree, but allowing you to explore ideas themselves will help you cover what you want to cover without having to prescribe it in advance.”

(Paul, Philosophy , PJs Ind)

To teach in the manner suggested by Paul requires a certain level of subject expertise, confidence and experience. Familiarity with the cohort and the subject specification are crucial if this model is to bear fruit. The ability to work in a flexible way is a skill that develops over time and through regular engagement with the content. The option of moving around, through and over multiple parts of a specification is interesting but is not something that can be achieved without first having a clear understanding of exactly what must be covered, and only desirable content can be included if time is permitted. The opportunity to ‘explore ideas’ points towards the teaching of critical thinking, a skill that the pupils believe has value for them and matches what they want. It also represents their need for challenge and opportunities to question and develop (Gross, 1999 and Robinson and Campbell 2010).

On the same theme, Michelle gave this account:

“I think I always have something as an extension that will be prioritisation of factors or making a complex judgement and using developed explanation to formulate their opinions.”

(Michelle, History, SCs Grm)

In the previous section the pupils in each school alluded to wanting to develop deeper learning skills that was classified as critical thinking. Additionally what we see is another example of a teachers experience as key to catering for the AMA learners after the required content has been introduced. Prior experience allows the teacher to draw on instances and opportunities that are likely to work and provide challenge when appropriate or required. To make complex judgements pupils are

required to delve deeper into subject content and explore areas that may not even be known to the teacher. By building knowledge in this way pupils can start to form their own opinions and be offered the opportunity to express them in creative and interesting ways, open up further dialogue and respond to questions based on their work. It is an exciting proposition and gives the learner the tools that enable them to build arguments and is also an example that recognises them and the further challenge they want.

This is an approach that may suit an environment that consists of many high achievers and provides a route towards the higher grades. These are methods that encourage deeper learning and also match the claims of Renzulli (2002) and his thoughts on educating children who show advanced skills. By teaching in this way there is something for all learners, especially if it is consciously planned and supported with an experienced educator who can draw on prior expertise. This offers evidence that teacher experience is an important driver in relation to the teaching of the AMA.

“There are areas where I feel I do find perhaps you feel a bit weaker. I do find myself doing some background reading, or doing wider reading around a case study you know, that you’re going to deliver, and just trying to second guess the sort of questions your likely to get ...that have come from experience of delivering it in previous years.”

(Henry, HoD Geography, SCs Grm)

Planning ensures that he is ready for the likely questions his pupils will ask and where it can be directed. There is a whole host of planning that can take place but experience means that Henry can do it efficiently. He has learned the most appropriate and useful resources to access and those that add value, not only to himself as an educator but to the pupils. There is also a sense that Henry does not want to appear inadequate or under-informed in terms of his own subject knowledge. Maybe he has a perception that the AMA want to be taught by someone knowledgeable and genuinely interested in their subject, echoing the thoughts expressed earlier. The value of experience as a resource to draw upon shows many benefits

for the more advanced learners. Experienced teachers know what will be interesting and what will waste time, and time is a commodity that the AMA do not like to squander.

Ashley, after only two years of teaching reflected on how experience shaped her approach.

“...experience taught me to be proactive to go to this one experienced member of department and compare marking with him, whenever I’m wondering where we are at”.

(Ashley, Classics, PJs Ind)

The interesting point here is that the value comes from drawing on someone else’s experiences to inform her own. Ashley had previously secured good results for her classes, but not the highest, and was keen to understand how to convert the As to A*. Henry pointed to providing tools the pupils will need when they move onto more advanced qualifications of analytical responses and deeper understanding. These can be found in textbooks about teaching but it is much more likely to amass in value when the merits of such practise is understood and accrued through practical experience.

“... you’ve got to be confident enough in your subject knowledge to be able to support that direction or at least confident enough to say ‘I don’t know the answer, but let’s explore it together’. I think subject expertise really plays a part.... “

(Alfie, Asst Prin, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

Alfie alludes to the skill required to perform competently in a classroom with AMA learners. There is a reference to subject competency developed over time and aids in the evolution of tools that can be used or avoided. The prospect of working collaboratively, similar to those already raised is given again, in this instance it is the staff working with the pupils to make discoveries. This does carry with it the prospect of running into dead ends, going down a path that may be too complicated or time consuming or being found to be less purposeful than expected. For a teacher this is a significant risk because it will impact on the faith the pupils have in the staff. Pupils need confidence in their teachers and believe they are in the company of a practitioner who can give them what they need academically.

The skill here is not just having enough understanding of the content but being able to develop learning opportunities when not equipped with the answers to questions pupils might ask. Experience allows a well prepared teacher, with good subject ‘expertise’ to draw on prior occasions when further exploration and engagement has been prompted and resulted in interesting findings and discussion. The AMA pupils do not what to be repeating what they already know because they thrive on the chance to add more to a foundation and build.

Classroom test data and reports for parents are the tools drawn upon to aid in the selection of the samples used to construct the focus groups in each school. This illustrates that there are measures in place that represent achievable actions to identify the AMA. Despite the differing contextual set-up of each school, the methods for identifying AMA pupils show a similar understanding of characteristics and these can be seen in Table 6. Across the three schools, during interviews, teachers found it very easy to suggest how they would identify a more able learner.

Table 6: Factors provided by sampled teachers across the three schools that indicate if a pupil is AMA

Asks good questions	Writes with clarity	Grasps difficult concepts with ease	Shows evidence of extra reading
Links content to prior knowledge	Demonstrates good subject knowledge verbally	Solves problems independently	Independently reinforces or adds to their own learning
Regularly scores high marks	Good presentation skills	Makes complex judgements	Correct and confident use of subject specific terminology
Finds set tasks too easy	Enjoys pace to a lesson	Completes work early and to a high standard	Assessments are consistently higher than peers

4.33 Pedagogical and other Opportunities

At Prince John's, where resources are plentiful and teaching is carried out by a stable body of colleagues it feels compelling to explore the following comment that was asked in relation to how well the more able are catered for.

"No. I think here at Prince John's we are lamentably bad at stretching our really able pupils."

(Roger, History, PJs Ind)

While there is an appreciation that the school has AMA pupils Roger feels that the school could go a lot further with them in terms of academic development. It appears that the opportunity to do more is not taken and that such a situation is regrettable. The sentiment of doing more aligns with the discussion with the pupils in that they want more challenge and opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

However, on closer inspection it is clear that there are many opportunities for pupils to develop cultural capital and engage with new experiences.

"...a huge number of opportunities and pupils who are choosing to take them....there's a really unusual wide range of talks and societies and visitors, trips perhaps, you never know quite what inspires and triggers interests".

(John, DoS, Science, PJs Ind)

This is evidence of opportunities to challenge with multiple options and forums in which to make connections that satisfies them academically. It is exciting to be part of a group that is doing interesting projects and exploring ideas, engaging in arguments and developments that cannot be found under normal classroom arrangements. The potential of the staff mixed with the desire to do more with willing and knowledge-hungry pupils provides an educational cocktail that is dynamic, interesting and rewarding for all. Deep discussion can be promoted, new ideas explored, consultation with experts in a particular field are all possible and this runs counter to Roger, perhaps because it is open to all pupils and not just the AMA.

This theme continues at St Christina's where Rita views access to cultural capital as a means required by the AMA pupils as part of their academic development.

"So, that is really my driver, my thinking behind curriculum choices, extra-curricular choices, assessments choices, everything is sort of permeated with this idea of cultural capital because I think it's absolutely massive, its centrally important to challenging all students, but the academically most able most prominently I imagine."

(Rita, HoD English, SCs Grm)

Rita believes there is value in providing forms of cultural capital, especially for the advanced learner. It is important to remember that the entire cohort have been selected based on reaching a particular academic standard from a test taken at the age of eleven. Arguments presented earlier in the literature review strongly suggest that grammar school pupils are more likely to come from family backgrounds that are supportive of education and consist of parents who can navigate the process of gaining a place. At a general level there is an assumption that many pupils will have experienced access to some forms of cultural capital that may not have been available to peers. Private music lessons or sports coaching, for instance, would fall into this category. Access to regular excursions with family or guardians to places like the theatre or museums will also expose them to further opportunities to experience cultural events. As an English teacher Rita has established a positive link in academic performance and the position of cultural capital. Her subject is likely to explore classic literature and well-known popular plays that will be analysed and explored as part of the public examinations system. However, there is more of a sense that accessing and working with elements of cultural capital is central to what Rita is doing in and out of the classroom. This could be subject specific but it is worth exploring further if this prospect has merit elsewhere. The act of attending a conference or listening to a guest speaker on a particular topic provides attention and takes effort to organise. School trips to museums, parks, zoos, the coast or overseas can all provide access to new experiences and get up close to what is being studied. Questions can be asked on location and responses given immediately, which turn into a conversation. These measures are advocated by Freeman (2004) who found positive impacts when similar partnerships were applied during the New Labour tenure. A book can be given to read and

the teacher can field and respond to questions but the chance to see a performance acted out gives the learner more of an experience and relevance that may clarify a scene or passage. Being able to touch, smell or hear gives more depth of understanding than reading a description about an artifact. Cullen et al. (2018) discussed how experiences were beneficial for AMA learners. Lectures on Psychology by Harvard professors to videos that explain how to do various mathematical equations are a few examples of other opportunities that can be accessed. This model provides learners with access to more content, more detail and people involved in particular fields who might engage with pupils. Cost will be a barrier for some and a door opener for others. Pupils at Prince John's alluded to having access to private tutors and many also enjoy private music tuition that gives them access to learning and delving deep into classical pieces that would be valued on a university application or converted into a paper based response in an exam paper.

At Loveday Academy Jenny highlighted how pedagogical opportunities can be limited.

"I can picture a few right now just as we are talking and some of them finish early and will immediately start misbehaving because they are done. As soon as they are done, that's it, that's great and some of them sit very quietly, you feel bad for them because they are done and they are much higher than others I suppose. Sometimes frustration, especially when you are doing group activities."

(Jenny, HoD Physics, LA Non-Sel)

Pupils are moving at a pace that is beyond that of their peers and sometimes resulting in behaviours that are barriers to academic progress. Jenny is implying that the more able are not keen on group tasks but this runs counter to the claims by Robinson and Campbell (2010) who found benefits arising from group work opportunities. However, they found that the group dynamics were enjoyed more when the ability range of each member was similar. This provides the AMA with a more enjoyable forum because they are working with, and not for other group members. The reason being is that they are not responsible for the majority of work that less able children depend on them to do and effort levels vary in mixed groups, which can impact grades. Mixed ability group work

does not offer the same recognition as individual projects because scores may be lower, or group dynamics are difficult if some members struggle with the content or produce very little.

Where behaviour is problematic and staff stability is limited, having the time, energy or opportunity to prepare for the more able may be difficult to achieve. Despite this Alfie offers:

“...we are very very big on extra-curricular and experiences and things like that. We offer a lot of enrichment clubs after school”.

(Alfie, Asst Prin, Maths, LA Non-Sel)

‘Enrichment clubs’ suggests that there are opportunities that can be accessed should a pupil have the capacity to attend. The issue of extra opportunities at Loveday was discussed in the Context section and by the pupils who found it to be reactive and impromptu rather than structured and ongoing. The perception of what is offered by teachers and what can be accessed by pupils is an area of concern.

4.34 What the pupils want.

In the previous section there was a discussion about what the pupils want from their own perspective. The same theme reappeared when the teachers were interviewed suggesting a sense of empathy with the needs of the more able learners.

“Then we sometimes get some who get very frustrated. You can see that they are finding the pace of the lesson annoying because the others are struggling and they are getting it.”

(Nicole, HoD Science, PJs Ind)

The opening part of Nicole’s statement runs parallel to that of the pupils who discussed frustration as a symptom of a lack of challenge, and aim to fill time independently. These learners could show more tolerance for their peers but it could also be argued that they should be occupied to avoid potential frustration and a divergence from the lesson objectives. Teachers inevitably find themselves pitching to the majority of learners before catering for the more or less able. At Loveday Academy, this makes sense and shows how the relationship between the teacher and AMA

pupil can be adversely impacted. Pitching to the top does have an appeal but it can leave others confused or disengaged.

A frustrated pupil can be silent and day dream, which draws no attention and with no attention comes little progress. Alternatively, they can become vocal and restrict what others can do or be disruptive. Even muffled comments can create an unwelcome atmosphere within the classroom. It is important to remember that teachers are human and despite best efforts, it can be frustrating for teachers when pupils are ‘struggling’ to get it. Balance is raised and regardless of the system pupils are in, be it government funded or private, each pupil deserves to be taught at a level that challenges them. This requires the juggling discussed earlier and can be solved if learners accept and manage the content being delivered with the same motivation as each other. However, this is not the reality of many, if any classroom, and remains a dilemma for teachers to plan for and aim to control.

At St Christina’s the following was expressed:

“If you set your expectations high enough the students quite often will surprise you and rise to the challenge. I’ve found that when you plan for the bottom then the students will meet you there.”

(Oscar, HoD Physics, SCs Grm)

Oscar demonstrates good awareness of the needs of the more able in terms of understanding the importance of sustaining inquiry at a level where a child’s ability is suitably engaged.

The relevance of adequate challenge is acknowledged as well as the consequences of the not aiming high enough. Planning for the bottom does mean that the majority of the class will be involved but it is a false economy because those that require more will not have their interest held for long and will seek alternatives forms of amusement. This could involve distracting others, turning to material relating to another subject and most likely losing faith in the ability of the teacher to satisfy them academically. The ‘surprise’ factor can come in many forms including completing work quickly and moving on to make new and interesting

discoveries that had not occurred to the teacher. For example the pupil may be able to relate content in History to something relevant to where they live, a person they know or location they have visited. They will be able to apply their experience to what they are learning and in this instance give some credibility to the value cultural capital can have when exploited in the classroom. There is also the fulfilling experience for the teacher of moving through material quicker than expected in adequate detail and quality to ensure learning has taken place. Setting expectations high shows the class the intent a teacher has, that they are going to attempt something difficult and that he or she believes the class can manage something complex or challenging. The more able will welcome this as it gives them the opportunity to access the higher grades and to work with content that matches or goes beyond their current level of ability or understanding.

The findings in the pupil voice section strongly suggested that pupils want ‘more’ and Oscar, through experience, or by engaging with the content of the school’s professional development, or both understands this and uses it to sustain interest and engagement.

The following from Sachin is particularly firm on what he feels benefits the AMA pupils.

“We have to push students I think, and it is easy to go ‘my class are passing I’m going to reinforce the passing knowledge’, but then it doesn’t help any student going forwards because then they will be complacent, especially the more academically able students, they need the push, because if they are not pushed they will be ‘I don’t need to revise, I can get a 7 or an 8, I don’t need a 9’.”

(Sachin, HoD Chemistry, LA Non-Sel)

Sachin is sending a message to his pupils that he expects them to do well, he believes they can do well and that they will be challenged. This message will come as a counter measure against the context and the pupils perception of what to expect each lesson. Sachin is making it clear that he wants the pupils to achieve the best grades of which they are capable and looks to be focused on individual achievement rather than on fulfilling the requirement of a whole class statistic. By doing this, regardless of final grades, pupils should feel a

sense of value. Learning should not regress, behaviour of the AMA should not become questionable and there should be less distractions. Also, represented by Sachin is the type of mentality raised earlier where the teacher is demonstrating a passion for their subject and teaching. Sachin is aiming to take pupils who are doing relatively better than their peers, already appear to be securing good grades, and pushing them further, beyond what they think they need. If this is being achieved it shows a personalised model of teaching that is encouraging given the contextual setting.

Finally, Sachin's views represent an understanding of his pupils and perhaps their attitude to learning, which he is keen to challenge. He is not content to help pupils secure good grades when better is achievable. Even though there are significant disruption the brakes are not being applied and opportunities for all are being attempted.

4.35 Summary

Table 7: Summary of teacher findings.

	Prince John's	St Christina's	Loveday Academy
Personal Enthusiasm	Teachers modelling good learning characteristics and a willingness to work collaboratively and in partnership with pupils.		
Experience	Dialogue builds value as does familiarity of content and cohort.	Understanding what works well and planning efficiently.	Confidence with subject expertise and collaboration.
Pedagogic and other opportunities	Access to broad extra-curricular and well trained, conscientious staff.	Cultural capital and looking beyond the classroom is crucial.	Difficult to achieve because of behaviour issues.
What the pupils want	To be given more appropriate challenge.	To be part of making new and interesting discoveries.	To be challenged with high expectations and pushed further.

The main focus is on the relationship between the school context and the interactions with pupils. Teachers perceived that they are best positioned to accommodate the AMA if they themselves are genuinely interested in their subject, have a good rapport with their classes and have experience of

teaching AMA children. This resonates strongly with Freeman (2006, p.400) when she advocated 'an education to suit the potential, opportunities to flourish, and people who believe in them'. The needs of the children are further supported by extending opportunities beyond the classroom into extra-curricular and cultural based options.

Teachers will have prior experiences of what has gone particularly well and can be edited, reused or rephrased. St Christina's manage these expectations with whole school professional development. Prince John's teachers have accrued many years of teaching and have access to expertise and training they see fit for themselves. The focus at Prince John's is not on extra challenge but more on sustaining a general level of quality throughout the school rather than recognising the AMA as a discrete group. At Loveday Academy there are good intentions and a desire to serve these pupils but it is difficult to achieve amidst a complex larger setting where the needs of others are more immediate and pressing than the AMA. There is not enough time, despite good intentions, to really satisfy them at an academic or holistic level. What does present quite clearly though is the teachers above give the impression, through their actions and words, that they genuinely care about the education of the AMA, yet the AMA themselves are calling for more attention and maybe not recognising that the efforts of staff is the attention they seek.

5. Discussion of Research Questions

This research, set during a global pandemic, involving three distinctively different schools with samples drawn from the teaching body and pupil cohort, has provided significant findings in relation to the education received by the AMA. Teachers were individually asked about their experiences of teaching the AMA, focus groups of AMA pupils were interviewed and the schools, with obvious differences in context and socio-economic status, provided the venues in which the data was collected. Initially, the inception of this research was concerned with the underachievement of AMA pupils highlighted by Ofsted (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). They were finding that AMA children in government funded schools were not securing the grades that they were expected to achieve and that teachers were not prioritising their needs. Although the issue of underachievement has been addressed by prior research, what was not clear was how AMA pupils viewed their own school experiences, which is the direction this research turned towards. By speaking directly with the AMA in three very different schools it was clear that they were all frustrated and all wanted more challenge and attention, albeit in slightly different forms.

This section reverts back to the original research questions in Table 1 on page 59, and discusses the findings provided through research and, where relevant, makes connections with the theory raised in the literature review. There then follows an emergent model, the 'More Dependency Model', that looks at factors relevant to schools, teachers and pupils as three dependant entities and how they can work together in pursuit of providing a more enhanced education experience for the AMA.

5.1 How does the social and economic context of school influence the education received?

The New Labour policy aimed to support children from deprived backgrounds and this is morally sound, but practically there were too many factors making implementation and success difficult. The school is the catalyst for action and the venue for teachers and pupils to interact. Their actions and intentions are fundamental for directing operations and the application of policy. There are several key factors found to be associated with the school and its relationship to the AMA. One of these concerns was raised in the literature review of identification and how this process was confusing for schools, not executed particularly well or in some cases not done at all (Young and Balli, 2014). As a result pupils can resort to hiding their talents to conform to new friendship expectations (Gross, 2008) or select material that suits the group rather than their potential (Freeman, 2004). However, the schools sampled and the staff spoken to expressed no such concerns with identifying pupils (Table 6 on page 145) and they all used broadly similar methods of in-house regular assessments and regular reports home to comment on pupils progress and trajectory. It is hard to reconcile the problems experienced at a time when national policy was enforced with the situation presented by the sample. Identification does not appear to be an issue and this is something teachers are confident in doing. Even in a cohort of high achieving children the sample managed to distinguish who their AMA were in relation to peers. Identifying them represents the foundation of addressing their concerns and without it nothing structured is likely to happen.

A briefing paper produced on behalf of the government by Danechi and Loft (2020) reviews the support for more able children and found that the only provision for the AMA at national level is the Pupil Premium. This is a financial award schools claim against the number of pupils who require free school meals. How the funds are used are at the discretion of schools but the literature reviewed did not show any findings that suggest the funds are used for the AMA. The Pupil

Premium accounts for AMA from deprived backgrounds only, which means that there is virtually no other provision.

One of the tangible features available for the AMA are grammar schools, but with only one hundred and sixty three in the country, of which thirty two are in Kent (Kelsi 2023) and hardly represents the solution for tackling their problems. A wider strategy is required to include AMA learners in all educational settings because there currently is very little support for this group of learners. At the time of writing the only area of accountability is a schools Progress 8 performance. This figure looks at a school's value added data derived against public exam grades achieved against those expected based on testing several years before the exams are taken. The closest statement provided by Ofsted is that good and outstanding schools 'nurture, develop and stretch pupils' (Danechi and Loft, 2020). The type of learner is not made clear and this statement can be applied to every pupil.

Regardless of socio-economic context a policy is required that offers formal recognition of the AMA cohort. Evidence of this is clear from the New Labour policies that promoted action, with some positives achieved (Kendall et al. 2005), but when removed so too were the provisions designed for them. A policy prompts thought towards relevant action schools can take to provide specific solutions to the problems expressed by their AMA. There is no call for an allocation of time, specific personnel or facilities to be directly channelled to the AMA, or a national definition or requirement to keep a register of who the AMA are (Danechi and Loft, 2020). A register would also align with the Education 2030 initiative regarding the theme of inclusion. This initiative aims to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO 2015, p.6). As a sub-group of school learners, with very few specific provisions, schools can show foresight in this regard and highlight an acceptance and awareness that this group exists and has needs. Until this changes other priorities will absorb scarce resources and issues will remain prevalent. The focus needs to be the responsibility of individual schools that are willing to

look at the implications that feature in the inter-related trinity of schools, teachers and the AMA.

This will be explored later to show how each of these entities influences the goal of improving the experience for the AMA.

Another relevant area is that of general staffing. The findings suggested that, where staff turnover is low and teachers are working within their specialised areas (page 76), the pupils tend to receive a better experience in terms of grades achieved because there are fewer disruptions during lessons. Staff turnover is inevitable but an attempt to challenge a high rate is worthy of some strategic consideration. Achieving a stable staff team in schools like Loveday Academy appears to be difficult (page 104 and 133), and was an area of frustration for pupils.

The effect on the AMA was that they did not feel valued or cared for and this caused despondency. This is further compounded for the school by having to continuously recruit and provide cover, not to mention the associated costs.

The three schools that took part in this research had varying programmes for extra-curricular development (Appendix 8, 9 and 10) but some are able to do far more than others. Despite this, opportunities to explore, collaborate and carry out interesting tasks were provided in each school and pupils were encouraged to engage. However, options specifically for AMA were found to be lacking and confirms the findings presented earlier by the Sutton Trust, 2018. Constructive time beyond the classroom allows for further challenge and can be based on staff skills and suit a range of talents and abilities, making further use of school resources. Teachers and pupils can collaborate with one another on group projects or provide space where they can work quietly on a task that they find particularly interesting. Paul at Prince John's alluded to pupils not being able to do all that they wanted because of the busy nature of the school.

“...but it’s always going to be the case whatever time I choose, half of them that can’t come because they are blowing the trumpet or playing cricket.”

(Paul, Philosophy, PJs Ind)

However, they are excellently positioned to serve their AMA cohort as a specific group. Even for those in other schools time, with pupils most often revolves around lessons and any extra-curricular opportunities that might run after school or lunch time.

At St Christina’s the focus is on a whole school initiative called ‘Challenge for all’ provided by NACE and the findings suggest that it is appropriate for a cohort consisting of pupils selected by academic ability. While this programme of professional development is not specifically for the AMA it does focus on challenge, which is particularly pertinent to the AMA. This shows that there are options and initiatives available that can be adopted. One avenue a school can take is that of developing their own programme and encouraging teachers to undertake some form of inset related to the AMA, an area much neglected (Casey and Koshy, 2012).

The aforementioned can be achieved by school policy decisions that can be implemented, and what is practical for teachers. If some consideration can be directed towards the AMA, it would represent a positive step towards providing the attention and challenge they want. This is a dilemma and complicated to implement, especially with limited resources. There are barriers for non-selective and grammar schools that independent schools do not face largely due to their differing financial situations. Table 4, on page 109, provides details where staff to student ratios varied hugely and the spend per student is significant alongside smaller classes, access to expertise, facilities, time and opportunities. However despite the obvious advantages the AMA in the independent school did voice the same concerns as their peers elsewhere. Fundamentally, the

socio-economic position of a school and its ability to provide for extra opportunities, a stable staffing situation, resources and expertise is crucial.

5.2 How do AMA pupils feel about their educational experience?

Central to this research are the students themselves and it is their perceptions that are explored next. Research highlights the significance of appropriate, relevant and timely challenge that is required to stimulate and enthuse learning (Young and Balli, 2014 and Gross, 2010). The data presented confirms the importance of challenge and aligns with the literature, and it is interesting to note that this commonality is present regardless of context. Pupils felt that progress in some subjects was slow because the material they were receiving had already been covered or, particularly at Loveday Academy, the work was not challenging because teachers were struggling to access the higher grade content due to frequent poor behaviour. Elsewhere the pupils who had been taught the high grade content felt that there was still room for more challenge.

Frustration was a common response from each of the focus groups, although it was manifested in different ways. For example, there was broad agreement that if they were not occupied in a meaningful way they found this frustrating. At Prince John's the pupils commented that peers who were working more slowly than them was frustrating because they would often finish work quickly and be left waiting for something else to do. Meanwhile at Loveday Academy, classes were frequently disrupted by poor behaviour causing frustration and meant that attention was being diverted elsewhere, at the expense of the AMA pupils. Instead of being taught high grade content teachers were dealing with behaviour issues or supporting lower grade pupils to push up their grades or follow a predetermined scheme of work that catered for the majority of learners.

Frustration was also presented in other ways, particularly in relation to the issue of identity. In the independent school, pupils found themselves being awarded the title of scholar but became

frustrated after the label was diluted the longer they stayed at school. At the grammar school, pupils were not formally recognised at all. However, they understand that having passed the Kent test they are recognised as being in the top 20% of learners in the region, and as a consequence they feel that they are capable of achieving more than they are being offered. At Loveday Academy, teachers know who the more able are, but there is no focus on them as a separate entity at all. A general view from the sample was that being AMA had to be worth something in terms of their own self value or value to the school. To gain a scholarship, entry to a grammar school or consistently score higher marks than peers takes effort and impacts on time and this perceived lack of recognition causes further frustration.

The area in which I am keen to develop this discussion further is that of ‘more attention’. Again, this was agreed upon by the pupil sample and represents an original contribution to the topic of educating the AMA and what they feel would be beneficial to them. The concept of challenge is valid but further exploration of ‘attention’ as a theme has not received much exploration and will be addressed here.

Loveday pupils claim to observe, on a regular basis, attention going to those who misbehave and cause disruption. In the other schools the AMA felt that they had less personal attention because they did not require additional support to complete tasks that had been set. The particular type of attention they all agreed upon was one-to-one personal dialogue with someone acting in a mentoring capacity. They want the chance to explore feedback and develop new ideas. By addressing this need for attention it may be possible to reduce the level of frustration they claim to experience.

The literature review provided several pedagogical approaches that were favoured by the AMA and could be classified as methods that constitute providing attention. They are all very much

classroom based approaches whereas the methods raised by the sample are more favoured towards personal dialogue.

Table 8: Methods of providing attention to AMA Pupils.

Literature review (A)	Findings from data (B)
Like-minded peer collaboration Co-authoring and co-discovering with teachers Suitable pace of learning Meaningful and relevant challenge	Personal mentor Recognition for academic status and achievement

The findings in Table 8, column B, are not explicit in the literature review but are raised as methods favoured by the pupil sample for addressing the needs of the AMA. A focus on dialogue and co-production offers some form of recognition but they are not as targeted as the role of a mentor. A mentor would be aware of and recognise their abilities and provide the time and space they desire to explore their own identity.

Although there is much discussion on the role of schools and teachers in educating the AMA it is also prudent to look beyond the school. An exchange of information between the child's home and their school can raise awareness about experiences and achievements that have been acquired. Schools can adjust expectations and perhaps avoid repeating material that has already been mastered. Teachers will be in a position where they can draw on previous experiences and generate discussions or build on them in a meaningful way. The process of engaging in dialogue in this way will also contribute towards some form of attention and recognition.

Freeman (2006) highlights taking account of the context a child is from at any given time. Matters like divorce, frequently moving home, family income, opportunities for enrichment and parental attitudes all have an impact. This is not to say that all of those receiving positive stimulus will be

AMA, but it is likely to make a difference to what the child can and cannot access at school. Cullen et al. (2018) mentioned low aspirations at home can impact on achievement. Eyre (1997) stresses that opportunities and support are vital to success and children need access to them at home and school. Freeman (2010) advocates the collection of data pertaining to out of school experiences as a supportive measure and to understand the needs of the AMA. Children will undergo changes in their emotional states and knowing what may be causing stress or anxiety can be useful. Given that this aspect carries significant value it must be a consideration when working towards creating relevant provisions and the management of the AMA learners.

What is surprising is the level of agreement found on these points, especially considering the differences in provisions each group in the sample can access. It would be interesting to note the response of a pupil at Loveday Academy upon hearing that their counterparts in Prince John's also want '*more*'. They already have access to great resources, a stable teaching body of very well qualified teachers teaching in their own subjects, personal tutors, former professional sports people coaching teams, wonderful support for progression to top universities, a huge extra-curricular programme, guest speakers and relatively good behaviour amongst the cohort; how could they possibly want more?

Pupils at Loveday have a fraction of this and in a form that, to a Prince John's pupil, must look like a system struggling to survive, never mind satisfactory. Yet both sets of pupils want more of the same thing. Prince John's want more beyond what they already have because their grades are secure and without further challenge they do not feel fulfilled and without attention they do not feel valued. Loveday Academy pupils want more because they are not getting enough access to the top grade material in the first place, regardless of the extra provisions of cultural capital that they might also benefit from and the spending the school allocates to them (see Table 4 on page 109). Perhaps the concept of '*more*' is human nature and an ever-changing phenomenon regardless of context?

The normal expectations of a typical school experience for each group are so different in terms of quality and resources that it is easy to see inequalities, but to hear that pupils who appear to have everything still want more might be hard for those with less to understand, even if they are AMA.

Ideally the pupil will have unrestricted access to all they want but often this is not reality. Some catch a bus home, may have after school work or have other commitments that keep them from attending extra-curricular pursuits. However, if a pupil is willing to engage there are opportunities possible via technology and independent contributions. This would impact on their time, but would be driven by them, their schools tapping into their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and would represent action towards providing more attention and challenge.

5.3 How do teachers perceive their role in relation to the education of the AMA?

Teachers are key to generating and sustaining content for ideas and appropriate social interaction (Bailey et al., 2010) and forms the final part of the trinity proposed in the More Dependency Model that follows. During the data collection stage the teachers interviewed spoke positively about their experiences of teaching the AMA, even when there was sometimes a sense of apprehension.

“Sometimes that can create apprehension in terms of making sure everyone is well catered for.”

(Kim, HoD Languages, PJs Ind)

Despite this, teachers were at ease to provide factors that they attribute to a pupil deemed to be AMA. The responses, regardless of experience and type of school, were all very similar and indicated that identifying learners within their own subjects was not complicated (see Table 6 on page 145). When the teacher is responsible for identification, a more centred focus on the pupil’s ability is established for that particular subject. Again, these findings challenge those that suggested teachers struggled with identification during the New Labour years (Sutton Trust, 2018).

One of the most clearcut findings was that teaching the AMA was something teachers enjoyed and looked forward to (page 139). Bonds can be formed and relationships are developed when staff get to know each individual learner. It allows for them to work in partnership with pupils and model good learning habits through trust, developing dialogue, confidence and subject knowledge through good planning. Teachers in the sample alluded to how hard they worked in preparation for the AMA (pages 141-143) so that they could give them the attention they felt they required in class. The teaching sample discussed how having a genuine passion and care about their own subject knowledge was valuable.

“If you have a teacher who is interested in their subject and themselves academic, then the child will be looked after very well.”

(Roger, History, PJs Ind)

Experience was also perceived as having value alongside high expectations of learners (Section 4.32, page 142) and enhanced through, in the case of St Christina's, purposeful professional development.

Some teachers in the literature review had the attitude that the AMA were elitist and did not require further provisions or support, (Radnor, 2007, Kendall, 2005 and Koshy, 2010), but this runs counter to the findings here from both pupils and teachers. Teachers focussed on what they believe the AMA need and alluded to the AMA wanting teachers that are well prepared and emulate good learning habits alongside the offer of a sense of discovery. Although the pupils did acknowledge this to some degree, at Loveday they did not feel cared for at all (page 125) and their needs were directed towards more challenge and attention.

One area in which the teacher will have the biggest impact, and how they are a crucial part of the model, is based on what they do in the classroom. Some teachers felt that pitching lesson content at a high level was preferable (page 94) and that pace (page 149) is a factor to consider so that learning is not stalled or becomes a cause of frustration. Teachers are regularly in meetings, handling data, marking and planning and to compound this, extra-curricular requirements can impact on their remaining physical and mental reserves. A taxing work schedule could mean the ability to support the AMA may not always be possible or practical. Evidence of the effect of teachers' workload on pupil attainment is provided by Churches and Fitzpatrick (2023) who found that when workloads were reduced staff well-being increased and pupil attainment improved.

The teachers in this sample felt that their role was vital for the development of the AMA but concerns were expressed that often, especially in the state funded schools, this was difficult to achieve because of other priorities dictated by the needs of the school. For example, there may be more of a focus on handling poor behaviour then encouraging further development within the AMA cohort.

5.4 The More Dependency Model

The following model has been derived from research undertaken in three schools in one county with contrasting socio-economic characteristics. The pupils all agreed that they wanted more challenge and attention and it is appropriate to develop these points at the centre of the aforementioned trinity. The following explores how providing more challenge and attention can be attempted or hindered by a school's contextual background where education has many internal and external influences that create strains and pressures. In well-funded schools with stable teaching and extensive resources a list of desirables would be easier to achieve, yet attention and challenge was still said to be lacking. Elsewhere, with multiple priorities, targets and demands it is not realistic to expect a radical overhaul, but schools should be able to do something for AMA learners. Key factors that influence outcomes have been explored and show how the initial starting point is with a schools policy to counter the underlying problem of limited provision specifically for the AMA. With a conscious effort a more satisfactory and less frustrating experience may be possible.

The reason it is important to address the issue of frustration by providing more attention and challenge, is to counter the problems of boredom and apathy that were raised during the data collection phase and were apparent in the literature review. Providing attention shows recognition of a pupil's efforts, talents and ability and acknowledges the hard work and commitment applied to consistently achieve at a high level. A reduction in frustration can give way to a more positive educational experience where the AMA know they will be challenged, supported, heard and

appreciated. The likelihood of accessing high grade content, as well as material that is not examined, should also be attractive and ensure that every opportunity to reach the highest grades are provided. Measures like these may also address underachievement that are seen as prevalent in the non-selective system and attention maps the way for positive relationships and increase collaboration between teachers and like-minded peers. Interests can be shared and a general feeling that they are being seen as individuals of value may enhance motivation.

The More Dependency Model is inspired by the Three ring concept, Figure 1, proposed by Renzulli (1998). The fundamental difference between the two models is that Renzulli's explores factors that contribute to establishing a method for identifying gifted behaviour, whereas the new 'More Dependency Model' looks at what is required to satisfy the needs of the AMA. However, with reference to Table 6, on page 145, there is one proposed identifier that does not clearly fall into one of the Renzulli circles but is still worthy of being considered as 'gifted behaviour' and that is 'Enjoys pace to a lesson'. The other identifiers could be placed into the Renzulli model and complements his findings. However, the prospect of enjoying learning at pace is an emotional factor that could perhaps reside along task commitment rather than neatly into a particular circle.

There is some overlap in ideas in that Renzulli's model looks at task commitment and the More Dependency Model relies on the effort of the AMA to engage with opportunities where possible. Renzulli's brings forth the element of creativity whereas the More Dependency Model is focussed on providing the opportunity where creativity can flourish.

Figure 1. The Renzulli model for factors that contribute to identifying gifted learners.

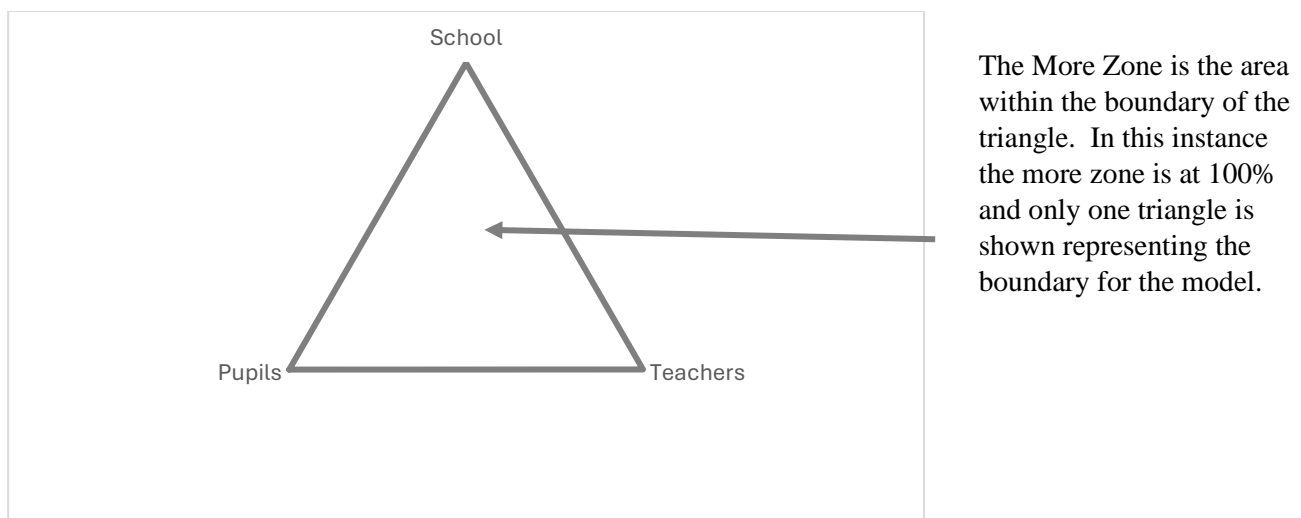


The most obvious visual differences in the models is that Renzulli's uses overlapping circles in a Venn diagram style whereas the proposal here is illustrated using triangles. Central to the More Dependency Model is the 'More Zone' which is the area between three points in the model and represents how close a school is to providing the environment in which more challenge and attention for the AMA is likely. The model is developed by assessing the capacity and actions of schools, teachers and pupils to be able to engage with activities, policies or actions designed to provide more challenge and attention. However, sustaining a model is not straight forward and there are tensions, discussed later, in terms of competition for scarce resources that make some objectives harder to achieve.

The model represents a starting point in the shape of a perfect equilateral triangle based on an equal number of questions for each entity. The distance from the boundary corner shows if more or less capacity is being committed or possible by each entity. To be able to create a schools 'More Zone' a system has been developed that provides a numerical value for each of the entities. A higher

values represent positive actions and a low value will constrict the More Zone showing that it is harder to fulfil the needs of the AMA and where frustration and possibly underachievement could be more prevalent.

Figure 2. The More Dependency Model in the Ideal Scenario



The outcome in Figure 2 is achieved by returning 'Yes' to all the questions in Appendix 11. Where there is a 'No' or 'Partially' response the score will begin to fall and the centre area, the More Zone, will start to contract, which can be observed in Figure 3 on page 172. The model provides the opportunity and scope to edit, add or remove questions making the proposal flexible and negotiable as a starting point of a new idea. The triangle does not need to be a perfect equilateral and can be altered to suit any number of questions relating to each entity; in this example there are ten questions for each. The numerical values used to create a school's 'More Zone' are adaptable and open to discussion. However, the questions posed are derived from themes and ideas that have been revealed throughout the course of this research making them appropriate for the construction process.

Although there is a list of questions (Appendix 11) to help a school evaluate its position regarding More Able education, I also felt that a graphical representation would be useful for indicating

strengths and weaknesses at a glance. Originally, a Venn diagram was attempted, but issues arose with scales and arriving at a model that made sense. It felt more prudent to construct a visual that treated each entity as a discrete body, each worthy of its own area of discussion and investigation. While the priorities and functions of a school overlap with those of teachers and pupils, the use of a Venn diagram proved too complex to execute and cumbersome for quickly ascertaining what the diagram was showing. I was keen to develop a system that allowed for quick data entry, once scores had been determined, and was relatively easy to interpret. As shown in Figure 3, the school entity scores are low, directing the user to review the questions that produced the visual and focus on which areas caused the marks to appear low.

The best tool for handling numeric data of this kind is a spreadsheet, and my background as an IT teacher meant that I possessed the skills and knowledge to construct the required system. The questions were placed under the relevant headings of 'School,' 'Teacher,' and 'Pupil.' A sum formula was used to calculate the total for each heading, and these totals were plotted in a radar diagram, a feature built into the software. Given that only three total figures were used, the radar diagram inevitably formed a triangle.

To create the outside guide for the main diagram (figure 2), I plotted a perfect scenario diagram by allocating maximum marks for each heading. The triangle produced by an external agency, using the system, would then be plotted inside this guide, providing the desired visual representation. Figure 3 shows the system with a scale added, offering more accuracy indicating the overall score for each entity. However, I chose not to include a scale in the figures displayed later to avoid distracting from the inherent differences between schools when plotted together.

For each of the schools used in this research a model has been produced based on the researcher's interpretation (Appendix 12, 13 and 14) of the situation (Figures 3, 4 and 5). Ideally the questions

would have been answered by the relevant groups and the potential for them to do so and for other schools does exist. This short-coming is acknowledged and regrettable but the practicalities of achieving this were limited given that many of the questions require a negotiated response from a number of participants and this was simply not possible due to time constraints. Regardless, the aim is to demonstrate and introduce the model and accept that refinements are inevitable. To arrive at credible responses would rely on a general consensus of those representing the three entities and would most likely, in many cases, be dependent on lengthy discussion. The enticing opportunity here is the prospect of hosting these discussion and seeing what they reveal as part of an audit process. Independently agreed-upon results, within a single school, collated and their own model produced for further discussion, is certainly an exciting proposition.

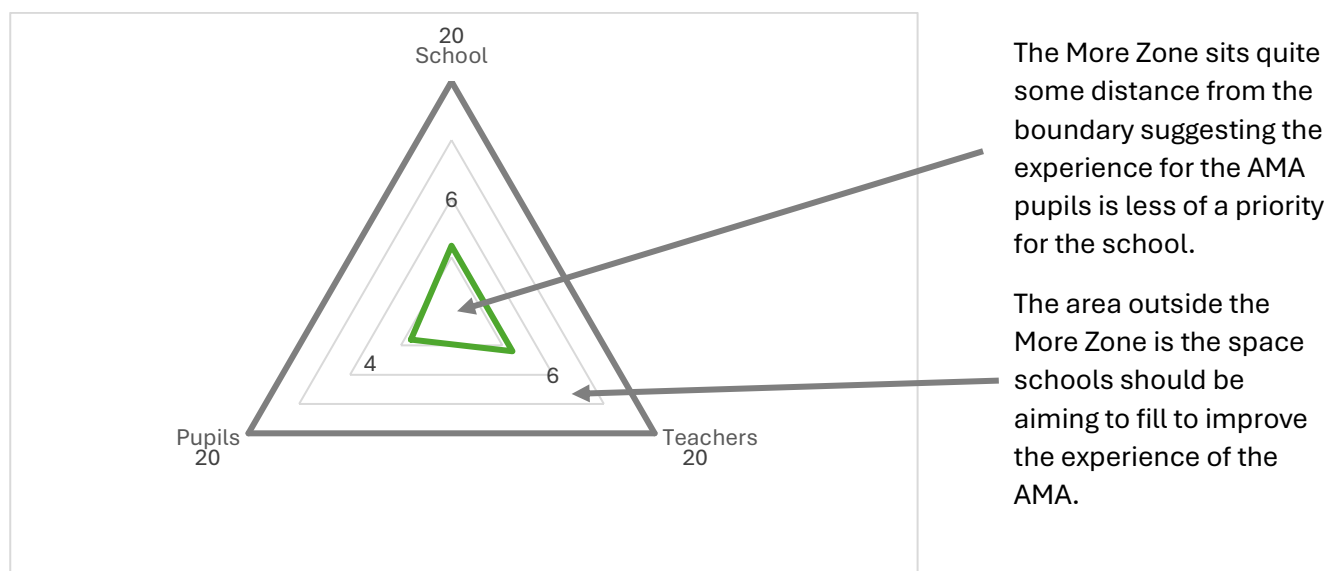
5.5 Negative impacts on the More Zone

Factors under the control of a school rely on the management of how resources, staffing and budgets will be used to have the broadest impact on the cohort. Inevitably, smaller groups like the AMA in schools like Loveday Academy, will not be as high on the priority list as those who are on grades that can be converted from 3s to 4s. This is the point where pupils are deemed to have passed a subject and a school's focus may be more directed to that goal rather than improving provisions for the AMA. If budgets, staff time and the classes allocated do not recognise the AMA a School entity score will fall and in doing so reduces the 'More Zone', which is detrimental for the AMA.

The same will happen to the teacher entity if extra-curricular provisions are limited, staff turnover is noticeably high and there is little continuing professional development for staff to engage with that relates to the AMA. The pupils can expect to receive less challenge and attention because the focus is elsewhere, possibly the majority of pupils who may be misbehaving or taking up the teachers time in other ways. In a scenario where a teacher is going through the motions, with little time to

plan and prepare, the AMA are less likely to get the attention they crave. With no national policy driving an initiative for the AMA the responsibility to oversee provisions may be non-existent. If nobody is given responsibility for the AMA, or staff do not feel it is their responsibility this should be a concern. It is not uncommon for staff to have multiple roles, similar to those in the sample, like classroom teacher and Head of Year (Appendix 1). With so many other responsibilities prevalent in schools, even with the best intentions, teachers may not have the time to devote extra energy to the AMA.

Figure 3. The Researcher's More Dependency Model for Loveday Academy.



The Loveday Academy More Zone, represented by the green triangle above, is quite small in comparison to the other two schools in this research (Figures 4 and 5). This is because the majority of the cohort are not AMA and the schools priorities are focussed on strengthening the teaching in the public exam years (page 102). There is also a lot of pressure on staff in the classroom to deal with problem behaviour (page 106) and this curtails the time that can be spent on accessing the high grade material. Figure 3 indicates that pupils may have problems accessing opportunities after school or are not motivated to attend and that teachers are probably not receiving professional development specific for the needs of the AMA. In this model it does not look as though the AMA

pupils receive very much attention or challenge. However, this does not mean the school is ineffective at serving the majority of its learners, especially as its most recent Ofsted, conducted in January 2024, found them to be 'Good'. It is also important to remember that the cohort consists largely of children who did not pass the Kent Test and the school policies must take this into account.

If a school is perceived to show little interest in AMA learners, or any pupil for that matter, it is likely to affect how pupils feel about their position. They are not going to expect much attention in an environment that does not recognise them. Their attitude to school and potential to engage can be adversely impacted if they sense they are not appreciated or challenged and may gravitate to less educationally inclined options similar to choosing social group distractions (Freeman, 2004).

Likewise, if teachers are too busy for them, or extra-curricular opportunities are of little interest or inaccessible, the 'More Zone' is going to contract as the pupil entity score declines. There are unfortunate situations where opportunities are available that a pupil cannot access because they are too expensive, or they have to leave school on time to catch a bus home, thus curtailing the chance of attending something that they may have found useful. If a child is unable to attend certain activities this too will negatively impact the 'More Zone'.

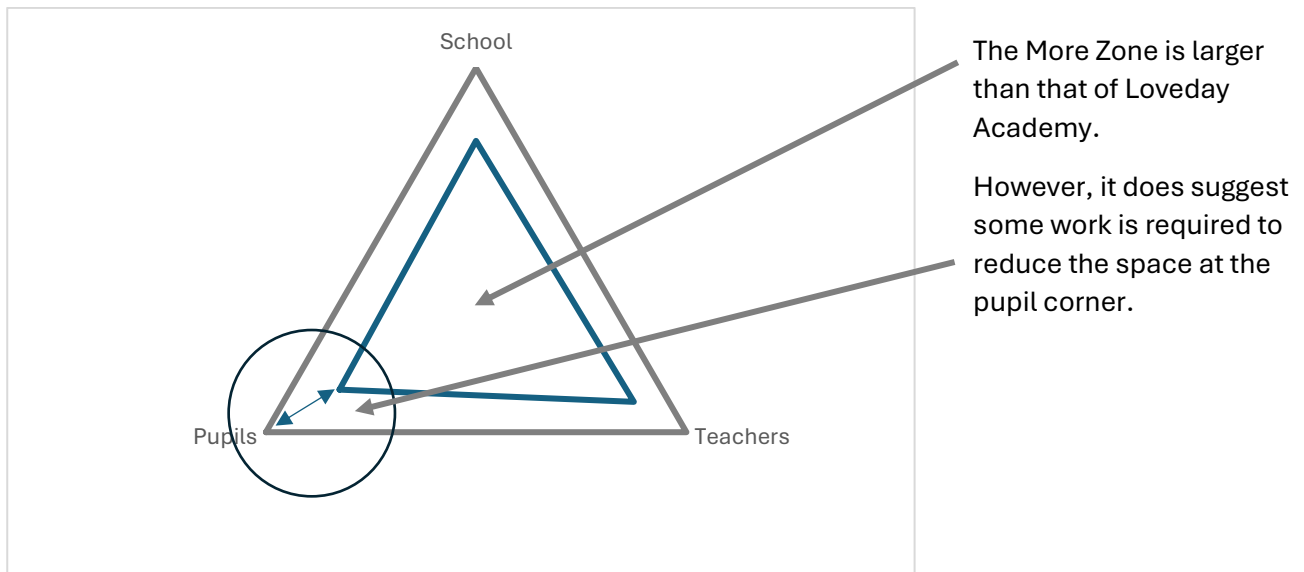
5.6 Positive factors on the More Zone

When a school can create an environment that attracts and retains teachers they are in a stronger position, not only for the AMA, but the entire pupil body who will feel part of a settled and well managed system. In a school where staff turnover is low, funds are committed to training staff to focus on the AMA and provide opportunities such as theatre trips, excursions and guest speakers, then the possibility to increase the 'More Zone' is heightened as these commitments increase the school entity score. Also, time may be allocated for regular discussions between staff and pupils

that allows for productive professional guided learning. This is likely to be the case where the needs of the AMA are a priority and where the cohort has a high proportion of these learners.

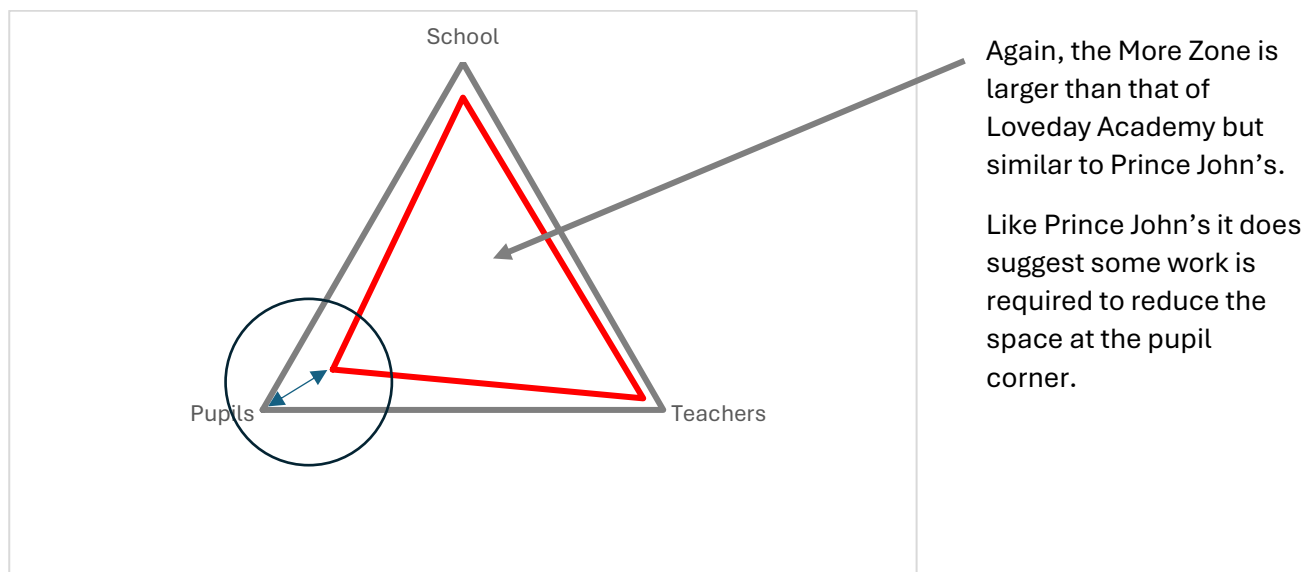
If a school is focused on the needs of the AMA the pupil capacity should increase and enhance the 'More Zone' further because there are more opportunities to access. The ability to be present for extra opportunities is crucial and improves the possibility for engagement. By exploring opportunities pupils may get a chance to co-author towards them, which would impact on self-worth and with more stimulus there should be less frustration. To be in a position where the 'More Zone' increases pupils need teachers that demonstrate a genuine care for their pupils and subjects. They are able to engage in dialogue on a personal level about the work they are doing or have completed. They display an obvious passion for their subject and engage with CPD that keeps their subject knowledge fresh and are able to access developmental material that relates to challenging learners. Teachers will have high expectations of their pupils and be able to balance responsibilities in and out of the classroom sufficiently so that they can build functioning relationships. This is a positive recipe, but there needs to be recognition that this cocktail of professional output is going to be impacted by internal and external pressures.

Figure 4. The Researcher's More Dependency Model for Prince John's.



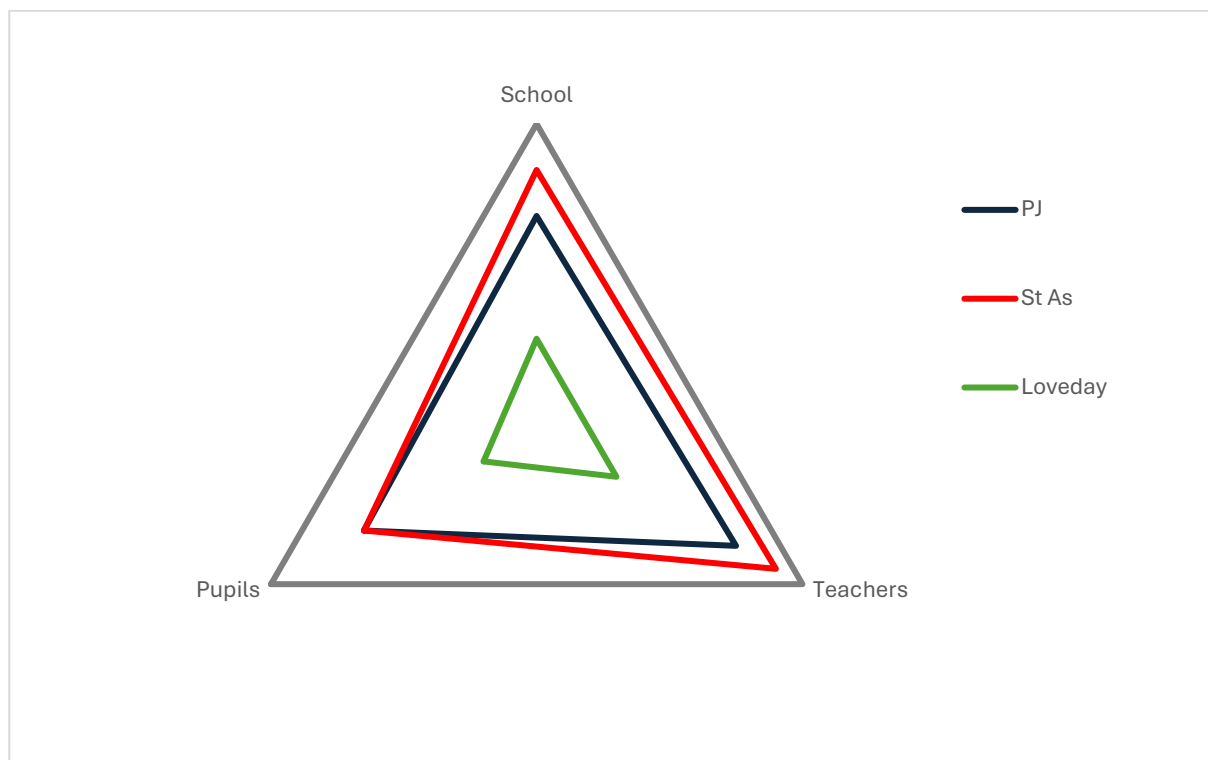
The first obvious difference between the Prince John's model and Loveday's (Figure 3) is that the More Zone is much larger. This is to be expected considering the variation in differences between the two schools. Prince John's is well resourced, teachers, teach in their correct subjects, there is a broad range of extra-curricular opportunities, access to cultural capital and the general focus is on teaching mid to high ability children. While there is an expectation of excellence, time is devoted to other causes beyond the AMA and there is no specific focus on them after scholarship exams are taken. In this case pupils still want more attention and challenge but they do have a stable system in which to learn. The increase in provisions for them involves access to someone specifically charged with catering to their identified needs.

Figure 5. The Researcher's More Dependency Model for St Christina's.



In this model the school and pupil positions are similar to Prince John's and the teacher point being close to the border is probably due to the specialist training they receive. This represents a school where the cohort is mainly academic and the prospect of wanting more attention displayed above, if introduced, may improve the position of the pupil corner. Despite this, the More Zone is healthy compared to Loveday's and should be expected given the nature of the school. The pupils at St Christina's may miss out on extra-curricular and other opportunities because they have to travel home to satisfy external commitments, but the overall picture is promising in this instance.

Figure 6. The three schools combined More Dependency Models from the Researcher's perspective.



The combined models illustrate the contrast between Loveday Academy and the schools, highlighting that, in this instance, the non-selective school is a difficult environment in which to support the AMA, and reflects the comments and thoughts gathered from the sample. It is important to reiterate that these models are based on the researchers' assumptions derived from interviews and focus groups and the reality may differ.

The model proposed is flexible in that it can take into account actions from the school, teachers and pupils. Each entity score shows how various efforts within the contextual setting can improve the opportunities for pupils to access more of what they want or if behaviours and actions are likely to negatively impede chances. A key test of the model would be to create a scenario where factors are pushed towards creating a greater 'More Zone' and asking if this promotes a move that provides

more meaningful attention and challenge. The hypothesis is that the greater the size of the ‘more zone’ the more satisfied AMA learners will be with their educational experience because they have more attention and challenge, and there may also be a serious challenge to underachievement. Alternatively a reduction would sustain frustration, despondency, dissatisfied learners and continued underachievement.

At this stage, the More Dependency Model represents a proposal. However, there is scope for further use that some organisations may find valuable. For example, multi-academy trusts could produce a model for each of their schools, compare outcomes, and share good practice among themselves. Enhancements to extra-curricular programmes, resource allocation, or staff training may be identified through planning sessions, or better attempts to manage pupil well-being could be prompted. Alternatively, and more ambitiously, comparing results from a range of schools in similar socio-economic groups might also expose areas where development is required. For example, if staff turnover is impacting all schools in similar socio-economic groups, this would form a compelling argument for government intervention.

Individual schools could use the model as an auditing tool annually, either on a whole-school basis or for each year group. In some circumstances, only the pupil variable would change, displaying different outcomes as different cohorts are factored in. Perhaps the differences between year groups might reveal other interesting findings that prompt original actions or investigations. The ability to track changes over time is also appealing, as the visual representation can highlight areas needing further development or support, and how these efforts have evolved can be clearly seen by referencing prior data.

Ultimately, the model is designed to promote discussion and serves as a valuable outlet for giving attention to a cohort that may feel unheard or lower in the order of school priorities. Elevating the student voice with the intention of improving the school experience for the AMA has the potential to inform school policy and generate ideas that benefit all learners.

5.7 Scarce resource inequality within a neo-liberalism climate.

Whilst the More Dependency Model is conceptual, it sits within an educational policy context of meritocracy espoused by Prime Ministers for at least twenty years. The proposal is that those students who work hard enough and 'deserve' it, will achieve and succeed through social mobility and high paying occupations. Reflecting on the work of Sandel (2021), I explain how my research demonstrates that meritocracy is a flawed and insidious policy aim.

Central to all schools' ability to access and gather resources is their budget, and Warwick University in Danechi and Loft (2020) proposed the removal of financial barriers to improve provisions for the AMA. However, there was limited discussion based on this recommendation, which at first glance appears to be a fairly obvious solution. A budget pays for resources and is competed for across departments. Schools, regardless of status, have to balance needs against wants and ensure that the best value for money is achieved for every pound spent. Most schools in England are funded by the government. Spielman (2020) provides details in a government article that illustrates how school leaders are concerned about rising costs and reductions in funding, which directly impacts on decisions on staffing levels and workload. Recently, this has been compounded by the rapid increase in fuel costs (Bolton et al, 2022), which undoubtedly adds further pressures on school budgets. Independent schools are also having to carefully consider their financial position under threats of removing VAT exemption and charity status if Labour win the general election of 2024 (Sibieta, 2023). They may have

to pass on costs to parents who could find increases difficult to manage. Ultimately, negative impacts on budgets will filter through to the children and the resources that can be purchased for them.

A neo-liberal system encourages competitive behaviour in the pursuit of increased efficiency and excellence in public and private services, and this is where parents compete against one another for school places and schools compete against one another for pupils. This paradigm impacts on status and the right to recruit and select those who will bring the most value and sustain their position. The challenge for schools is to manage the scarce resources they have so that they can compete.

Schools with fiscal power are better placed to compete for the scarce resources required to operate and best serve each pupil, regardless of ability. A large budget can pay for more staff, possibly the most important of the scarce resources, and attract who they perceive to be the best. In some cases they can accommodate them too and provide broad on-going training, comfortable working conditions and resources to allow them to undertake their role with more freedom and creativity and fewer restrictions. More funds means more access to cultural capital and well-resourced extra-curricular opportunities. The ability to attract pupils will be far easier than it is for a school that has staff shortages and is limited by a budget that is spread thinly. Most families will want to be able to select the best for their children and this creates an environment where places become scarce due to the popularity of certain organisations. Potentially, fees can reflect the level of demand creating even more funds to be spent on providing a quality education. However, even with attractive conditions the AMA pupils may still be frustrated and feel that the system does not provide adequate attention or challenge them sufficiently. The market conditions have been deployed to

attract them and, once admitted, they are assimilated into a system where, at least in this small research study, they do not feel they are truly seen.

A meritocracy is supposed to recognise and reward people or groups based on abilities or talent and has been used as a tool by successive UK Prime Ministers for at least the last twenty years.

However, the ideal does not take into account the social privilege or disadvantaged backgrounds people originate from and how this impacts outcomes. Attributing success to effort or ability can be misleading, especially if an AMA child sees those with less perceived academic ability making better social and financial progress than themselves.

Trying to encourage a meritocratic education system that rewards and recognises those who are AMA looks difficult to achieve. Those born into privilege, AMA or not, can choose to go to schools that offer a rich and diverse curriculum and a broad extra-curricular programme. This benefits learners and exposes them to teachers who have the time to plan, prepare and nourish their own skills and ultimately assist them towards grades, universities and jobs that will keep them in a position that will allow them to compete in a similar manner for their own children. Those that do not possess the finances to afford independent education, specifically in Kent, are left with two options; grammar or non-selective schools. Having access to generous finances means parents can navigate the system and prepare to make the most of their options through short term tuition for the Kent Test, or being able to enjoy culturally rich opportunities such as music lessons or sports coaching. This makes children more attractive propositions for the schools lining up to recruit them or turn them down and this amplifies the drawbacks of a meritocracy creating winners and losers (Sandel, 2021). It is this illusion of choice which is detrimental to the AMA who cannot afford a place in an independent school and does not live in Kent with the opportunity to attend a grammar school. In a real meritocracy the AMA would all follow the same path but the system is

not shaped to allow that to happen. It is those with the best funding behind them who reap the rewards because they are in a position to pass exams with grades mostly relating to expected outcomes. Whereas the AMA in non-selective schools are underachieving because teaching is not delivered at the level they require, by staff who stay in post for long periods of time and lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. The meritocracy portrayed by Sandel (2021) highlights a system of those believing themselves to be in a position of high academic standing because they deserve to be there, regardless of bestowed advantages. Meanwhile those that are lower on the socio-economic ladder deserve to be where they are too, again regardless of barriers of limitations faced.

Placing this argument into a dialectical framework presents the thesis that a meritocracy rewards talent and ability running counter to the antithesis, that true meritocracy is not possible because of different socio-economic starting positions. According to dialectical principles the thesis and antithesis, at some level, interact with one another. The potential outcome of this interaction is that, at a societal level, talent and ability are sometimes rewarded and because it is possible it has become a tool proposed by politicians. What this means for the AMA who cannot afford an independent education or attend a grammar school is that under a neo-liberal, school v school competitive system, a meritocracy is difficult to attain. Those in non-selective schools do not have the same tools with which to compete as those from more affluent backgrounds, and it is these tools that are vital to allow children to reach the heights their academic potential should be allowing them to achieving. A meritocratic system that is being exploited by those with financial means is more than likely to sustain itself and could result in restricting or blocking talent elsewhere. Again, the current system favours those with the ability to access certain privileges as opposed to those with academic ability.

The reason some of the aforementioned factors are so hard to achieve is because they are scarce resources such as time and skilled personnel, and there is competition between schools for them. This research acknowledges that there is a connection between socio-economic context and achievement. The data were collected from three distinct groups operating in the educational competitive environment, where the outcomes for pupils involve attempts to gain capital. The social conflict theory, proposed by Marx and Engels (1848), argued that social groups compete for scarce resources with the most affluent aiming to sustain their position of dominance by suppressing the less privileged.

To apply the social conflict theory we need to understand how the underachievement of children in non-selective schools is relevant. First, Marx and Engels (1848) discuss how methods of production are used to make items of value or capital. When there is surplus capital this can be problematic to control for the dominant group and this potentially leads to revolution or a change to the system. This change may see the dominant class being replaced or restructured. The capital produced by schools are the grades children achieve in public exams that are traded for further education or employment. The better the grades held by an individual the more opportunities they have within a competitive market to acquire more capital and achieve economic stability, comfort, affluence and power. Those holding grades that have less value are more likely to occupy positions that have less economic value in later life. There will be exceptions to this but the general view holds that children from affluent backgrounds achieve better grades due to the context in which they are educated.

Marx and Engels (1848) were also concerned with modes of production; the labour, land and buildings. In this scenario the mode of production, the methods used to create grades are schools and teachers. Independent schools are privately funded by those who use them and non-selective

and grammar schools are funded by the government through taxpayer contributions. It is important to recognise that the dominant class, those using independent schools, if UK citizens, contribute to the funding of non-selective schools, schools they elect not to use. However it could be argued that they are used by children who, in later life, will benefit the dominant class by producing capital for them. If the modes of production were to produce excess capital this can upset the current system and lead to change i.e. revolution. However, schools are in a position where the capital they produce is dependent on the children they educate. Their aim is to provide an education so that pupils can achieve grades to trade for their labour after school, college or university. When there is good funding and the availability of resources and expertise, similar to that found in the contextual settings of independent schools, grades are good and match potential. It would follow that if all children had access to this model then more would likely achieve higher grades than are currently published. However, because the non-selective system is reliant on government funding, which is a finite resource and competed for by other departments, the chance of non-selective schools being able to compete with the dominate model is unlikely and the system remains unchanged. The most recent significant change, on a grand scale, was the promotion of the Academy system, particular since 2010 when the Conservative government came to power. However, funds still come from central government and the ability to compete with independent schools persists. Although Academies were supposed to give schools autonomy from government control their operations are still directed towards satisfying central policy objectives in relation to budget control, admissions and pupil outcomes (Keddie, 2019) potentially hindering their ability to generate the income streams required to compete.

It is difficult to imagine what a high grade surplus economy would look like. This is a situation that would exist if all children were exposed to the same level of economic input as those in the independent sector. This would see children from poorer backgrounds possibly gaining high

grades, being able to access places at prestigious universities and resulting in greater competition for higher paid jobs. The political version of meritocracy implies that people are able to benefit from social mobility according to their abilities. However, the findings in this research add to those of Sandel (2021) and suggest the current system of education does not support the ambition of a meritocratic society. If those who possess the greatest academic promise are not given access to what they need to make progress then the current state of play will be sustained and instead they are likely to continue to underachieve.

The AMA need an environment where they can develop their skills and talents. The best mode to achieve this is limited to 5% who can afford to pay for it, although my sample still wanted more challenge and attention despite their glaring advantages. At this time there is no government policy or initiative, but when there was it was partially exploited and navigated by those from affluent backgrounds and eventually scrapped. A meritocracy under current educational conditions is a myth, as indeed is the idea that our society is meritocratic (Brighouse, 2022) a deflection or distraction from what is really happening. Until all children can access the same resources and opportunities it can be expected that under achievement of the AMA will remain prevalent in non-selective schools. There will be little change as to who attends elite universities and move on to the high paying positions of influence, power and control. Going back to the social conflict theory, we see an education system that is competitive and those with the access to wealth are in the best position to get the most out of it because they can access and familiarise themselves with what generates the greatest value.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations.

6.1 Conclusions

Successive Prime Ministers and governments, for at least twenty years, have advanced the narrative of a meritocratic society where effort and ability is rewarded by good careers and social mobility. However, the findings here do not support this discourse but do agree with Sandel (2021) who argues that this type of thinking creates a system of winners who believe they belong at the top and losers who deserve to be at the bottom. A meritocracy cannot be a realistic or serious proposition when the starting positions of those involved vary so much. Some are free to run with assistance of carefully engineered support while others are moving through heavy ground weighed down and having to navigate obstacles that make it difficult to even see a finish line never mind cross it in the first place. Until education is provided on an equal footing the problems of underachievement of the AMA will remain, and the affluent will continue to prosper. At this time, there does not appear to be much hope for change.

The aim of this research was to try and understand how the AMA feel about their educational experiences from contrasting socio-economic positions. Schools that have very good funding, like an independent, are able to provide better outcomes in terms of grades, extra-curricular opportunities, stability within the teaching body and access to cultural capital. In this project Prince John's pupils enjoy smaller classes and a broader range of resources that contribute towards an experience that is radically different in continuity and expectations to that of the non-selective school. At Loveday, experiences are hindered by an unstable staffing situation that suffers with high turnover and, at the time of data collection, a reliance on substitute teachers. Yet, despite the advantages or shortfalls the pupils across the sample, including the grammar school, all expressed a

sense of frustration relating to the pace at which they are taught and the lack of recognition being AMA affords them. The Loveday pupils are frustrated because they are unable to access high grade material because lessons are regularly disrupted by poor behaviour or taught by teachers that are not qualified to deliver the material. At the grammar, frustration manifests itself in the sense that they could achieve more, but of the three groups, there is a feeling that they are served well due to the schools objectives of meeting the needs of a cohort that are largely AMA. They do feel that more could be done for them in terms of preparation for university and gaining the skills like critical thinking, whereas the pupils at Prince Johns's feel that initial academic success and recognition is diluted and that their value to the school is diminished. Much of the frustration experienced impacts on their sense of identity as learners, who they are and how valued they feel. At Loveday Academy they do not feel valued at all, or heard. In St Christina's they receive no special provisions and this is also the case at Prince John's.

To enhance their experiences and counter frustration, the pupils were in common agreement, regardless of socio-economic setting, that they should be challenged at a pace and level that suits their ability, and they want more attention. This was suggested in the form of a member of staff specifically tasked with listening to them and supporting their needs as AMA learners. This ambition should not be short on teachers willing to fulfil the role given that all of the teachers in the sample enjoy or look forward to working with and teaching the AMA. The prospect of co-discovering and co-authoring between the AMA and teachers represents an opportunity to provide what they seek.

6.2 Recommendations

Schools are pivotal to addressing pupil's needs and the following recommendations can be considered if they wish to improve the experiences of the AMA. The points raised refer to the

fundamental role of leadership and their overriding responsibilities to manage the school experience, which significantly overlaps with the practice undertaken by teachers. Therefore, this section suggests action and some content that can form part of a school's policy to act as a driver for the implementation of these recommendations. There are two specific areas of focus starting with leadership followed by that which can be undertaken in general practice.

Policy-Leadership

- Schools should aim to designate a member of the leadership team to take responsible for the AMA across the school. This reflects the role of the Gifted and Talented coordinator from the New Labour years, but there is scope to enhance the position and its requirements so that it is relevant for each particular schools. This raises the profile of AMA education and recognises that they have specific needs. This person would be responsible for ensuring that:
 - the teaching and learning policy or equivalent, includes reference to more focussed challenge and attention the AMA require.
 - schools explore how more focussed challenge and attention can be achieved by consulting with the AMA cohort and teachers.
 - the school designates staff to be available to the AMA to act within a mentoring or coaching capacity. This overriding desire from those in the sample was raised in each school and seen as crucial in terms of recognising their needs.

- a method of information exchange and sharing between school and home for AMA pupils is established. This partnership can be designed to raise expectations of parents and understand the barriers faced in supporting their children. This process can bring to the attention of all parties prior accomplishments, aspirational goals and help to construct manageable support systems.

- pathways to improve guidance and preparation for university beyond partnership programmes already in place are explored. This may involve accessing inset for particular personnel and the time to carry out investigative work to establish links and formulate good practice.

- the school aims to develop an extra-curricular programme that attracts the AMA and challenges them to create and work with peers with similar interests and abilities. They can be encouraged to compete, design, discuss and engage with cultural capital that stimulates their interests or encourage them to design their own projects.

- relevant inset for teachers that inform on strategies for teaching the AMA and how best to challenge them are promoted and offered when and where relevant.

The Leadership Policy recommendations can be further delegated to other personal but it is important that somebody takes an overview on each item including the following:

- Teachers should, with the aim of avoiding the ‘lethal mutation’ referred to by Alfie at Loveday Academy, be encouraged to:
 - be responsible for identifying AMA pupils within their own subjects or departments.
The number of pupils deemed to be AMA does not need to be restricted to fulfil a quota. A register can be held departmentally and reviewed termly to coincide with unit tests or mock exams during each school year to ascertain if it is up-to-date or requires edits or amendments.
 - Create and develop opportunities to extend learning with ambitious strategies and outcomes. This could include presenting work in alternative formats, such as videos or podcasts, or reaching out to experts or knowledgeable adults in industry to gather opinions, engage in conversations, and add depth and breadth to the understanding of a topic.
 - aim for meaningful collaborations, with similar ability peers, to take place and allow for exploration and the adding of depth and breadth to what is being taught. Exposure to opportunities to engage with cultural capital should also feature in this consideration.
 - involve the pupils in the process of planning for their learning and school experience. The insights gained in this research show that there is a discrepancy between what teachers think the pupils want and what the pupils actually say they want. Teachers provided

good observations about providing quality teaching and how they can best serve the AMA. However, they did not explicitly highlight the level of attention that was lacking, although several colleagues did recognise the situation for pupils as frustrating if there are delays or issues with behaviour. Listening to the voice of the pupils represents the nemesis of attention and an outlet to help direct a route to more satisfaction.

6.3 Limitations

This research has highlighted several areas of concern regarding the school experience for the AMA pupils. However, on reflection, it would also have been prudent to explore areas of satisfaction and examples of good practice experienced by the AMA and assess how achievable these would be within the current education system. The research was conducted in a county that retains a system of selective and non-selective education. Although grammar schools are not unique to Kent, the most common form of education throughout the rest of the country is limited to non-selective schools. It would be interesting to see if a focus group approach, involving pupils from other counties, would yield similar results and findings. Expanding the sample beyond three participants could provide greater insight into the school experience of AMA pupils, potentially reinforcing existing findings or uncovering new perspectives to enrich the discussion.

One area in which I would have liked to collect data is the educational background of the teachers. For example, understanding their own educational experiences and qualifications might have offered valuable insights into the types of teachers more commonly found in each type of school.

This research was limited to interviews with Year 10 students and teachers of traditional academic subjects. Due to the constraints outlined in the Methodology section, it was necessary to adhere to a

tight schedule to minimise disruption to pupil timetables. Each focus group meeting was scheduled for approximately one hour, but there was a sense that they could have continued longer. The same limitation applied to the teacher interviews; while they often had more to share, the busy nature of their roles meant their availability was restricted.

To further explore the theme, including pupils from all secondary school year groups might provide a broader understanding of experiences and highlight any evolution in their perspectives as they progress through school. Additionally, including AMA pupils excelling in creative arts and sports could offer valuable comparisons and enrich the findings.

Follow-up conversations with both teachers and pupils would have been helpful to clarify the initial data, which, while insightful, were somewhat overwhelming. These follow-ups could have provided opportunities to delve deeper into the findings and discuss conclusions drawn from the data regarding the need for greater challenge and attention.

Teachers did not appear particularly supportive of the New Labour policies implemented in the late 1990s. However, responses from the teacher sample suggested that, when given autonomy, they were willing to act as co-learners with the AMA pupils and embrace the challenge themselves. During interviews, teachers expressed a desire to plan lessons that encourage exploration and enable the brightest pupils to excel. However, data from the pupils suggested that this was not always feasible in mixed-ability groups, where content is often tailored to the majority and fails to sufficiently challenge or engage AMA learners. In all the schools studied, ability grouping was applied only in core subjects like Maths and Science. This issue may persist unless schools extend ability grouping to option subjects, though implementing this in practice presents logistical challenges.

Another challenge is the cost associated with implementing recommendations, such as training, recruitment, retention, and funding for positions and resources. Schools must balance their budgets to benefit the majority of learners, which may limit their ability to focus on AMA pupils. Such initiatives might be more achievable in schools where the cohort predominantly comprises AMA pupils or where resources are less constrained. However, financial strain highlights the broader issue of scarce resources and competition to secure them. Expecting teachers to remain in the same school for their entire career is unrealistic, and retaining staff at a sustainable cost can be difficult. Career progression is often dependent on staff turnover, and frequent staff changes can disrupt the bonds and trust pupils develop with their teachers.

The overarching recommendation is that schools maintain ongoing dialogue with their AMA pupils and establish regular opportunities to engage with the pupil voice. This approach acknowledges their contributions, recognises them as valued learners, and involves them in shaping their educational experiences. Giving serious consideration to AMA pupils' frustrations and aspirations represents a long-term investment in their potential, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their school and the broader community.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The schedule of Semi-structured interview and focus groups in the Summer term of 2022.

Interviews

Date of interview	Position	Post held	School	Years at School	Total Years Teaching
03/05/2022	Teacher	Maths	Prince John's	8	8
06/05/2022	Teacher	Classics	Prince John's	6	6
23/05/2022	SLT	Director Of Studies	Prince John's	5	22
03/06/2022	Teacher	History	Prince John's	7	16
12/06/2022	HOD	Head of Science	Prince John's	14	25
12/06/2022	HOD	Head of Modern Languages	Prince John's	7	9
06/07/2022	HOD	Head of Philosophy	Prince John's	5	27
20/05/2022	HOD	Head of Geography	St Christina's	8	28
07/06/2022	HOD	Head of English	St Christina's	4	7
12/06/2022	HOD	Head pf Physics	St Christina's	4	8
12/06/2022	Teacher	Maths	St Christina's	11	12
12/06/2022	Teacher	Physics	St Christina's	4	7
15/07/2022	SLT	Asst Teaching and Learning	St Christina's	13	19
15/07/2022	Teacher	History	St Christina's	3	1
15/07/2022	Teacher	History	St Christina's	6	20
18/07/2022	Teacher	Head of Lower Maths	Loveday Academy	4	5
19/07/2022	Teacher	Head of Physics	Loveday Academy	2	3
22/07/2022	HOD	Head of Chemistry	Loveday Academy	3	4

25/07/2022	HOD	Head of Upper Maths	Loveday Academy	6	11
27/07/2022	SLT	Asst Prin Teaching and Learning	Loveday Academy	5	5

Focus Groups

21/06/2022	Prince John's Pupil Focus group
23/06/2022	St Christina's Pupil focus group
13/07/2022	Loveday Academy Pupil Focus group

Where quotes are given the following key can be used to determine the role and school of each participant. All names were changed to ensure anonymity as best as possible.

Position	
Dos	Director of Studies
Asst T&L	Assistant Head Teaching and Learning
HoD	Head of Department

School	
PJs Ind	Prince John's Independent
SCs Grm	St Christina's Grammar
LA Non-Sel	Loveday Academy Non-Selective

Appendix 2 -Semi-structured and pre-sample interview questions for Senior Leaders.

Participant data.

These may be presented on a standardised pre-interview form that can be filled in prior to the online interview.

Name

Length of service at current school (years and months)

How many years have you been teaching? (years and months)

Subject/s taught

Year groups taught

Post/s held at current school

Number of previous schools worked at

Qualitative questions

The following questions will be asked online via a 1:1 semi-structured video call lasting approximately 30 minutes, although 1 hour will be allowed as a contingency.

Does the school actively identify academically more able pupils? If so what procedures or processes are used in the identification process?

Please explain the measures in place to support the education of the academically more able learners.

Are there any barriers the school or teachers experience in relation to the education of the academically more able?

What additions would you add to your school that would enhance provisions for the academically more able?

What, if any, are your views on the teaching of the academically more able?

Do you perceive, or have you experienced, any benefits of planning specifically for this group of learners?

Do you feel the school promotes a culture that actively supports the academic development of these learners?

Do you feel you have necessary skills/knowledge to support the academically more able?

Inspectors claim that academically more able learners have been underachieving for years. Do such learners in your school achieve or surpass their predicted grades and what are your thoughts on this issue?

Do you have anything else you would like to add on this subject?

Appendix 3 - Semi-structured and pre-sample interview questions for Heads of Departments/Subject Leaders and Teachers.

Participant data.

These may be presented on a standardised pre-interview form that can be filled in prior to the online interview.

Name

Length of service at current school (years and months)

How many years have you been teaching? (years and months)

Subject/s taught

Year groups taught

Post/s held at current school

Number of previous schools worked at

Please confirm that you currently teach Key Stage 4 pupils (Y/N)

Qualitative questions

The following questions will be asked online via a 1:1 semi-structured video call lasting approximately 30 minutes, although 1 hour will be allowed as a contingency.

What are the signs you notice that indicate a pupil is an academically more able learner?

What emotive responses do you have prior to teaching a lesson that includes academically advanced learners?

What, if any, are your views on the teaching of the academically more able?

Do you prepare especially for these particular learners each lesson. If so, how?

Do you perceive, or have you experienced, any benefits of planning specifically for this group of learners?

What strategies do you use to promote continued learning if the main lesson task is completed?

What, if any, issues, barriers or problems have you experienced in relation to the teaching of the academically more able learners?

If there are issues, barriers or problems what could be done to address them?

Do you feel that you work within a culture that actively supports the academic development of these learners?

Do you feel you have necessary skills/knowledge to support the academically more able?

Are there any whole school initiatives to support the academically more able?

Appendix 4 - Focus group and pre-sample interview questions for Year 10 Pupils.

Participant data.

This will be collected manually on the day focus groups are held.

Forename

DOB

Year group

Tutor

Please confirm you have been at your current school since the start of Year 7.

Questions

The following questions will be asked during a focus group exercise with approximately 6-8 pupils preselected by their schools having been identified as academically more able.

Does your school actively identify academically more able pupils? If so, do you know how they do this?

If not, do you think they should? Why?

Can you tell me about the measures in place to support your education in class and any extra-curricular opportunities that are designed for you?

What barriers or problems do you think your school experiences in relation to teaching high ability children?

What would you like to see at your school that would enhance provisions for the academically more able pupils?

Do you think that those with high academic ability require different teaching to other children? Explain.

Do you feel the school promotes a culture that actively supports the academically more able learners?

Are you satisfied that the school is challenging you enough in the classroom or beyond? Explain.

What does the school do support your aspirations for preparing for careers and further study?

Do you have anything else you would like to add on this subject?

Appendix 5 – Sample Consent Forms



CONSENT FORM - Teachers

Title of Project: *A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Three Secondary Schools in Relation to the Education they provide for their Academically More Able Learners.*

Name of Researcher: *Carl Lyon*

Contact details:

Address: *N Holmes Rd, Canterbury CT1 1QU
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education*

Tel: *01227 287272*

Email: c.lyon430@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- 2. (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
- 3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#)

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent <i>(if different from researcher)</i>	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant
 1 for researcher



CONSENT FORM - Pupils

Title of Project: *A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Three Secondary Schools in Relation to the Education they provide for their Academically More Able Learners.*

Name of Researcher: *Carl Lyon*

Contact details:

Address: *N Holmes Rd, Canterbury CT1 1QU
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education*

Tel: *01227 287272*

Email: c.lyon430@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers, before the focus group meetings, will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#).
4. I understand that data collected in a focus group meeting cannot have a guarantee of confidentiality. However, I understand that all reasonable steps will be taken to anonymise my involvement and that confidentiality relies on trust in the group.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
6. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature Pupil:
		Signature Parent:
Name of person taking consent (<i>if different from researcher</i>)	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

CONSENT FORM - School

Title of Project: *A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Three Secondary Schools in Relation to the Education they provide for their Academically More Able Learners.*

Name of Researcher: *Carl Lyon*

Contact details:

Address: *N Holmes Rd, Canterbury CT1 1QU
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education*

Tel: *01227 287272*

Email: c.lyon430@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. (If applicable) I confirm on behalf of the school that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
3. I understand that any personal information provided to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#)
4. I understand that the school's participation is voluntary and that I am free, on behalf of the school, to withdraw participation at any time, without giving a reason.
5. On the schools behalf, I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of School and Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent (<i>if different from researcher</i>)	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant and 1 for researcher

Appendix 6 – Ethics Approval



Mr Carl Lyon

School of Humanities and Education Studies

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education

13th April 2022

Dear Carl

Confirmation of ethics approval: A comparative case study analysis of three secondary schools in relation to the education they provide for their academically more able learners

Your ethics application complies fully with the requirements for ethical and governance review, as set out in this University's Research Ethics and Governance Procedures, and has been approved.

You are reminded that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the [Research Governance Framework](#) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines.

Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course will require an amendment application, and may require a new application for ethics approval.

It is a condition of approval that you **must** inform ethics@canterbury.ac.uk once your research has completed.

Wishing you every success with your research.

On behalf of

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education Ethics Panel

FAHE.ethics@canterbury.ac.uk

Appendix 7 - Oxbridge – Which Schools Get the Most Offers?

Harriet Blomefield

Last Updated: 4 November, 2022

The Spectator produced a fascinating table listing the various figures showing which schools achieved the most Oxbridge offers last year. Over the years, both universities have increased the proportion of acceptances from state schools: 69 per cent, up from 52 per cent in 2000. Of the 80 schools, 35 are independent, 21 grammar, ten sixth-form colleges, seven selective sixth-form colleges, six comprehensives or academies, and one is a further education college.

The top 10 independent schools were as follows (overall ranking in brackets):

	Independent School	Type	Applied	Offers	Success Rate
1	Westminster School	Independent	198	79	40%
2	The Perse School	Independent	137	48	35%
3	Eton College	Independent	194	47	24%
4	St Paul's Girls School, London	Independent	98	46	47%
5	St Paul's School, London	Independent	154	40	26%
6	Magdalen College School, Oxford	Independent	120	32	27%
7	City of London School	Independent	105	31	30%
8	Sevenoaks School	Independent	123	31	25%
9	Highgate School	Independent	94	28	30%
10	Brighton College	Independent	122	28	23%

Stand out points from the top 10 independent schools listed:

Location, Location, Location:

- Half of the schools are situated in London
- All of the top ten are situated in and around London, with The Perse School, Magdalen College School and Brighton College being the furthest afield.

Single-Sex or Co-ed:

- 7 out of the top 10 schools are single-sex at least up to Sixth Form
- Of the single-sex schools, Westminster, Magdalen and City of London take girls at Sixth Form
- Eton and St. Paul's are the only schools in the top ten that are all-boys the whole way through
- St. Paul's Girls is the only all-girls option in the top 10

Boarding versus Day:

- The only fully boarding option in the top 10 is Eton
- The other schools with the option of boarding are majority day (e.g. Brighton College 34% boarding; Sevenoaks 32% boarding; St. Paul's boarding only available in Sixth Form)

Academic Selectivity at Entry

- All of the top 10 independent schools listed are known to be extremely academically selective at entry (whether that's 11+/13+ or 16+)

Top 80 Schools for Oxbridge Offers

	School	Type	Applied	Offers	Success Rate
1	Westminster School	Independent	198	79	40%
2	Hills Road Sixth Form College	State	300	69	23%
3	Peter Symonds College	State	208	56	27%
4	Brampton Manor Academy	State	242	54	22%
5	Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College	State	219	52	24%
6	The Perse School	Independent	137	48	35%
7	Eton College	Independent	194	47	24%
8	St Paul's Girls School, London	Independent	98	46	47%
9	St Paul's School, London	Independent	154	40	26%
10	Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	State	103	39	38%
11	St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School	State	126	37	29%
12	Harris Westminster Sixth Form	State	138	35	25%
13	Magdalen College School, Oxford	Independent	120	32	27%
14	City of London School	Independent	105	31	30%
15	Sevenoaks School	Independent	123	31	25%
16	Henrietta Barnett School	State	88	30	34%
17	Winstanley College	State	120	30	25%
18	Newham Collegiate Sixth Form	State	151	29	19%
19	Highgate School	Independent	94	28	30%
20	Brighton College	Independent	122	28	23%
21	London Academy of Excellence	State	89	27	30%
22	Woodhouse College, Finchley	State	132	27	20%
23	Pate's Grammar School	State	103	26	25%
24	Tiffin School	State	126	26	21%
25	King's College School	Independent	77	26	34%

26	Greenhead College, Huddersfield	State	114	25	22%
27	Wilson's School	State	84	24	29%
28	North London Collegiate School	Independent	86	24	28%
29	The Judd School, Tonbridge	State	91	24	26%
30	Colchester Royal Grammar School	State	103	24	23%
31=	King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford	State	97	23	24%
31=	Manchester Grammar School	Independent	97	23	24%
33	Barton Peveril College	State	103	23	22%
34	King's College London Mathematics School	State	52	22	42%
35	Hereford Sixth Form College	State	59	22	37%
36	Reading School	State	68	22	32%
37	Tonbridge School	Independent	77	22	29%
38	The Sixth Form College Farnborough	State	117	22	19%
39	Loreto College, Manchester	State	74	21	28%
40	Guildford High School	Independent	56	20	36%
41	Latymer Upper School	Independent	81	20	25%
42	Truro and Penwith College	State	82	20	24%
43	The Latymer School	State	83	20	24%
44	Winchester College	Independent	91	20	22%
45	The London Oratory School	State	55	19	35%
46	King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys	State	65	19	29%
47	The Tiffin Girls School	State	71	19	27%
48	Runshaw College	State	104	19	18%
49	Dulwich College	Independent	116	19	16%
50	Royal Grammar School Guildford	Independent	54	18	33%
51	Camden School for Girls	State	56	18	32%
52	Dame Alice Owen's School	State	66	18	27%
53	Dr Challoner's Grammar School	State	71	18	25%
54	Exeter College, Hele Road Centre	State	76	18	24%
55=	Haberdashers' School for Girls, Elstree	Independent	43	17	40%
55=	South Hampstead High School	Independent	43	17	40%
57	Kendrick School	State	44	17	39%

58	Wallington County Grammar School	State	46	17	37%
59	Alleyn's School, Dulwich	Independent	60	17	28%
60	The Cherwell School	State	62	17	27%
61	Wellington College, Crowthorne	Independent	66	17	26%
62	Abingdon School	Independent	72	17	24%
63	Mossbourne Community Academy	State	45	16	36%
64	Watford Grammar School for Boys	State	52	16	31%
65	Royal Grammar School, Buckinghamshire	State	59	16	27%
66	Wycombe Abbey School, High Wycombe	Independent	73	16	22%
67	Haberdashers' Boys' School	Independent	75	16	21%
68	Hampton School	Independent	80	16	20%
69	Saffron Walden County High School	State	42	15	36%
70	King Edward's School, Edgbaston	Independent	59	15	25%
71	King Edward VI School, Warwickshire	State	59	15	25%
72	The King's School, Canterbury	Independent	60	15	25%
73	City of London School for Girls	Independent	65	15	23%
74	Aylesbury Grammar School	State	41	14	34%
75=	Trinity School, Croydon	Independent	54	14	26%
75=	Oundle School	Independent	54	14	26%
77	The Godolphin and Latymer School	Independent	57	14	25%
78	Harrow School	Independent	80	14	18%
79	University College School	Independent	88	14	16%
80	Aylesbury High School	State	33	13	39%

Appendix 8 - A sample of Prince John's Extra-Curricular Opportunities Term 1 2022

Note: Teacher and location details removed to protect anonymity

MONDAY

Time	Activity	Year Group
08.15-08.55	Wind & Strings Chamber groups	Invite
13.10-14.10	6a Philosophy Revision Clinic	6a
13.45-14.35	Computer Science Clinic	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
13.45-14.30	IGCSE English Clinic	6b
13.50-14.25	5th Physics drop-in clinic	Fifths
13.55-14.30	Crypt Choir	Invite
13.55-14.30	Sh & R Horn Quartet	Invite
14.30-16.30	Junior Games	Rem, Sh
16.15-17.15	Junior Boys Hockey	Rem, Sh
16.15-17.15	Cricket net	Sh (boys)
16.30-17.30	Junior Girls Football	Rem, Sh
16.30-18.00	Tennis Academy (Sh/Rem)	Invite
17.00-17.40	Sinfonia	Invite
17.00-17.40	Fifth Form History Clinic	Fifths
17.00-18.00	IELTS clinic for 6a and 6b	6a, 6b
17.00-18.00	Fifth DT Excellence	Invite
17.00-18.00	Maths Clinic	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Junior Art Scholars	Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	GCSE Photography Prep Clinic (Week B)	Fifth, Rem
17.00-18.00	GCSE Art Prep Clinic	Fifth, Rem
17.00-18.00	A2 Geography Exam Clinic	6a
17.00-18.00	Young Enterprise	6b (Invite)
17.00-18.00	Senior Rowing	Invite
17.00-18.00	Senior Boys S&C	Invite
17.00-18.00	Senior Girls S&C	Invite
17.00-18.00	Fifth Form S&C	Fifth (Invite)
17.00-18.00	Squash Club	Invite
17.00-17.45	Physics 6a revision clinic	6a
17.00-17.40	Cappella	Invite
17.00-18.00	Drama Club	Rem, Sh
17.00-18.30	Musical singing rehearsals	Invite

17.15-18.00	Ethics, Religion and Philosophy discussion group	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.15-18.30	Linacre Society: Medics Dentists Vets	6a, 6b, Fifth
17.15-18.15	Remove Boys Cricket nets	Rem
17.45-18.40	Symphony Orchestra	Invite
17.45-18.30	Model United Nations (MUN)	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
18.00-18.35	French Grammar Practice	6a, 6b
20.15-20.55	Chapel Wardens	Invite
21:00-22:00	Musical rehearsals	Invite
21:00-22:00	Football indoor (invite only)	Invite

TUESDAY

Time	Activity	Year Group
06.30-07.45	Swimming	Invite
08.15-08.55	Concert Band	Invite
13.45-14.30	Italian beginners	Sh
13.50-14.30	Junior Flute Group	Invite
13.50-14.30	Rock Band	Invite
13.50-14.10	Physics drop-in clinic (lower school)	Rem, Sh
13.50-14.30	Fifths Form Spanish Clinic	Fifth
13.50- 14.30	Spanish Grammar and translation	6a
13.55-14.30	Jazz Combo	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
13.55-14.25	Music Theory Grades 1–5	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
14.00-14.30	Mandarin support	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
14.30-16.30	Senior Games	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.15-17.15	Cricket net	6a, 6b
16.30-17.30	Girls' Football	Sh, Rem
16.30-17.30	Girls' Rugby	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.30-17.00	Biochemistry Club (fortnightly)	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.30-17.00	Pupil Science Council (fortnightly)	6a, 6b
16.30-18.00	Tennis Academy (6a, 6b, Fifths)	Invite
17.00-17.55	Chamber Orchestra	Invite
17.00-18.00	Tai Chi	6a, 6b, Fifths, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Remove DT Excellence	Invite

17.00-18.00	GCSE Italian	Invite
17.00-18.00	TSA Preparation	6a
17.00-18.00	Maths Clinic	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Fifth/6a Photography Prep Clinic	6a, Fifth
17.00-18.00	Photography Darkroom Open Access	6a, 6b Invite
17.00-18.00	German Grammar Clinic	Rem
17.00-18.30	Musical Rehearsals	Sh, Rem, Fifths
17.00-18.15	Socratic Society	6a, 6b, Fifth
17.00-18.30	Junior Debating Practice	Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.15-18.45	Cricket Nets (Senior Squad)	Invite
17.00-18.00	Junior Sports Excellence	Invite
17.30-18.00	Music Scholars' Enrichment	Invite
17:30-18:30	Basketball	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
18.00-18.45	Big Band	Invite
18.00-18.35	French Clinics: Translation	6a, 6b
19.30-20.30	Marlowe Society (Week B)	6a, 6b

WEDNESDAY

Time	Activity	Year Group
08.15-08.55	Wind & Strings Chamber groups	Invite
13.45-14.20	MeDeVe interview practice	Invite (6a)
13.45-14.15	Junior School Philosophy Society	Sh, Rem
13.45-14.30	A level Music clinic	6a
13.30-17.00	Voluntary Community Service	6a, 6b, Fifth
13.50-14.30	Accounting	6a, 6b
14:00-18:30	Musical rehearsals	Invited
16.00-17.00	Economics	6bs
16.30-18.00	Fencing Squad	Invite
16.30-18.00	Cricket net	Removes
16.30-18.00	Basketball	Invite
16.30-17.30	Junior History Society	Sh, Rem
17.00-18.00	Philosophy Revision Clinic	6a
17.00-17.40	Senior Brass	Invite
17.00-18.00	Senior Girls S&C	Invite

17.00-18.30	Senior Boys S&C	Invite
17.00-18.30	Fifth Form S&C	Invite
17.00-17.40	Chapel Choir	Invite
17.00-17.45	Environmental Group	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Senior Rowing	Invite
17.00-18.00	Squash Club	Invite
17.45-18.30	Model United Nations (MUN)	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
18.00-18.45	Choir	Invite
21.00-21.30	Religious Studies GCSE Revision	Fifth
21.00-21.30	Compline	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh

THURSDAY

Time	Activity	Year Group
06.30-07.45	Swimming	Invite
1.30-2.30	Mixed Tennis	Invite
13:30-14:15	6a Physics revision clinic	6a
13.45-14.35	Computer Science clinic	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
13.45-14.30	Italian Adv	Invite
13.45-14.30	Politics Academic Clinic	6a, 6b
13.50-14.25	6a Spanish Grammar & Translation Clinic	6a
14.00-18.30	Musical Rehearsals	Invite
14.00-14.30	Mandarin support	6a, 6b, Fifths, Rem, Sh
14.30-16.30	Senior Games	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.15-17.15	Cricket net U16	Invite
16.30-17.30	Senior Boys Hockey	6a, 6b, Fifth (Invite)
16.30-17.00	Science Journal Editorial Team	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
16.30-17.30	Science Conference Club	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.30-18.00	Tennis Academy	Invite
17.00-18.00	DT Excellence	Invite
17.00-17.30	Muslim Society	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh

17.00-18.30	Musical Rehearsals	Invite
17.00-17.40	Chamber Choir	Invite
17.00-17.40	Theory / Aural classes	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-17.40	Shell Rock Band	Invite
17.00-18.00	A2 Geography Exam Clinic	6a
17.00-18.00	History Sixth Form Extension	6a, 6b
17.00-18.00	Maths Clinic	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	GCSE Italian	Invite
17.00-18.00	Spanish Literature	6a
17.00-18.00	German Grammar Clinic	Fifth
17.00-18.00	Hamlet Revision clinic	6a
17.00-18.30	Senior Debating Practice	6a, 6b, Fifth
17.15-18.00	Junior Sports Excellence	Invite
17.15-18.00	Hamlet Revision clinic	6a
17.15-18.15	Cricket Nets (Senior Squad)	Invite
18.00-18.30	Science Journal Meeting	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
18.30-19.30	Chorus	Invite
18.30-20.00	Symphony Orchestra	Invite
21.00-22.00	Interhouse Debating (Weeks 2-9)	6a, 6b, Fiftths, Rem, Sh

FRIDAY

Time	Activity	Year Group
08.00-08.30	Holy Communion	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
13.45-14.20	Italian Beginners	Sh
13.50-14.20	BMAT & Oxbridge Preparation	Invite (6a)
13.55-14.20	Oxbridge Group for Linguists	6b
13.55-14.30	Sunday Service Choir	Invite
13.55-14.20	Singers	Invite
14.30-16.30	Junior Games	6a, 6b, Fifth
16.00-17.00	Junior Girls Cricket (after half term)	Sh, Rem
16.00-17.00	Junior Girls Indoor Hockey	Sh, Rem (Invite)

17.00-18.00	Drama Excellence (Sh, Rem, Fifth)	Invite
17.00-18.00	Oxbridge applicants meeting	6a
17.00-18.00	Jewish Society	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Hindu Society	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh
17.00-18.00	Senior Girls Cricket (after half term)	Girls – Seniors
17.00-18.00	Senior Girls Indoor Hockey	6a, 6b, Fifth (Invite)
17.00-18.00	Shell DT Excellence	Invite
17.00-18.00	Senior Art Scholars	6a, 6b
17.00-17.30	Fridays @ 5 Informal Concert (PSR)	Invite
17.00-18.00	Current Affairs / Politics Society	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem
17.15-17.45	Senior Science Book Club (Week A)	6a, 6b
17.15-17.45	Junior Science Book Club (Week B)	Rem, Sh, 5 th
18.00-18.35	French Clinics: Literature	6a, 6b
18.00-19.30	Modern Jazz (Studio/PSR)	Invite
18.00-18.45	Cappella	Invite
21.00-22.15	C***** Society	6a, 6b, Fifth, Rem, Sh

Appendix 9 - A sample of St Christina's Extra-Curricular Opportunities Term 2 2022

Monday		
Lunchtime	Year Group	Time
6 th Form Band	12 and 13	1:20-1:50
Gospel Choir	All	1:20-1:50
Gardening Club	7 and 8	1:15-1:50
Drama Club	7 and 8	1:25-1:50
EPQ Support	12	1:15-1:50
Culture around the world	All	1:20-1:50
Badminton	9, 11 and 13	1:20-1:50
Duke of Edinburgh's Award Support Club (WEEK B ONLY)	Duke of Edinburgh's Award Participants only	1:20-1:50
GCSE Computer Science Support	11	1:25-1:50
Year 7 English Support	7	1:15-1:45
GCSE Spanish Support	11	1:20-1:50
GCSE Food/Nutrition Support	11	1:15-1:45
After School	Year Group	Time
Orchestra (Grade 2 and above)	All	3:20-4:10
A Level Chemistry Support Club	12 and 13	3:20-4:20
GCSE Art Support Club	11	3:20-4:30
A Level Sociology Drop-In Support	12 and 13	3:20-4:20
Football Club	All	3:20-4:15
Swimming Club 20 students only Sign up sheets outside SS1	All	3:30-4:15
Badminton WEEK A YEARS 7,8 and 9 WEEK B YEARS 10,11,12 and 13	WEEK A Years 7,8 and 9 WEEK B Years 10,11,12,13	3:20-4:15
AWS Get IT	8	3:20-4:30
GCSE Geography Drop-in Support	10 and 11	3:20-4:00
GCSE Psychology Drop-In Support	9, 10 and 11	3:25-4:25

(WEEK B ONLY)		
GCSE German Speaking Cafe	9,10 and 11	3:30-4:30
Board Games Club	All	3:20- 3:45
Year 11 English Support	11	3:20-4:15
GCSE Food/Nutrition Support	11	3:20-4:30

Tuesday		
Lunchtime	Year Group	Time
String Ensemble (Grade 3 and above)	All	1:20-1:50
GCSE DT Practical Session (Support or Catch-Up)	11	1:20-1:50
GCSE Art Support Club	11	1:20-1:50
Spanish Speaking Club	11 and 13	1:20-1:50
Basketball Club	7-11	1:20-1:50
Diversity Discussion Group KS4	9,10 and 11	1:20-1:50
Year 8 English Support	8	1:15-1:45
After School	Year Group	Time
Dungeons and Dragons	All	3:30-4:30
Poetry Club	All	3:30- 4:30
GCSE French Support Club	9 and 10	3:25-4:15
GCSE Science Support Club	9,10 and 11	3:25-4:25
KS3 LAMDA	7 and 8	3:30-4:30
Trampoline Club (KS3) First 20 students only Sign up sheets in SS1	7 and 8	3:30-4:30
Netball Club WEEK A Year 7 and 8 CHI ONLY WEEK B Year 7 and 8 KLP ONLY	7 and 8 WEEK A CHI WEEK B KLP	3:30-4:15
Coding Club	7, 8 and 9	3:30-4:30
A Level Psychology Drop-In Support (WEEK A ONLY)	12 and 13	3:25-4:25

Wednesday		
Lunchtime	Year Group	Time
Flute Ensemble	All	1:20-1:50
Recorder Ensemble	All	1:20-1:50
Languages Club	7 and 8	1:20-1:50
GCSE Biology Drop-In Support (WEEK A ONLY)	11	1:20-1:50
KS3 Art Club	7 and 8	1:20-1:50
GCSE Spanish (How to revise)	9,10 and 11	1:20-1:50
Netball Club KS4 and KS5	10,11,12 and 13	1:20-1:50
Debating Club KS3 and Year 9	7,8,9	1:20-1:50
Maths Club Drop-In support	All	1:20-1:50
Year 7 Transition Club	7	1:20-1:50
GCSE Textiles Support	11	1:20-1:50
Year 9 English Support	9	1:15-1:45
Dance Rehearsal Space	All	1:20-1:50
Wellbeing Wednesdays - Just Dance	All	1:30-1:50
After School	Year Group	Time
A Level Biology Drop-In Support (WEEK A ONLY)	12 and 13	3:30-4:15
Trampoline Club (KS4 and KS5) First 20 students only Sign up sheets outside PE Office	9,10,11,12 and 13	3:30-4:15
GCSE and A Level Textiles Support Club (WEEK B ONLY)	9,10,11,12 and 13	3:30-4:30
GCSE Further Maths Club	11	3:20-4:30
GCSE and A Level History Support Club	11 and 13	3:20-4:00

Thursday		
Lunchtime	Year Group	Time
Choir (Please arrive promptly)	All	1:20-1:50
Guitar Ensemble	All	1:20-1:50
KS4 and KS5 LAMDA	9,10,11,12 and 13	1:20-1:50
Philosophy, Religion and Ethics Club	All	1:20-1:50
Textiles Club KS3	7 and 8	1:20-1:50
Chess Club	All	1:15-1:50
GCSE German Support	9,10 and 11	1:20-1:50
Badminton Club KS3 and Year 10	7 , 8, 10	1:20-1:50
A Level and GCSE Textiles Drop-In	11,12 and 13	1:20-1:50
After School	Year Group	Time
Rugby Club Years 7-9	Year 7,8 and 9	3:30-4:15
Year 10 English Support	10	3:20-4:15

Friday		
Lunchtime	Year Group	Time
GCSE Music Exam Support "Theory is Fun"	11 (Year 10 by invitation only)	1:20-1:50
Volleyball	All	1:20-1:50
Book Clubs KS3 and KS4/5	All	1:20-1:50
Year 7 Food Crew	Selected Year 7 only	1:20-1:45
A Level and GCSE Textiles Support Club	11,12 and 13	1:20-1:45
After School	Year Group	Time
Cascade Dance – Audition Only (External Provider)	All (Termly Fees apply)	3:30-5:00
A Level English Literature Drop-In Support	12 and 13	3:30-4:45

Appendix 10 - A sample of Loveday Academy Extra-Curricular Opportunities Term 1 2022

Club Name	Day	Start Time	Finish Time	Location
Community Futsal	Monday	15:05	16:05	Sports Hall
Biology	Tuesday	15:05	16:05	251
Scrabble Club	Tuesday	15:05	16:00	SEN intervention rooms
Senior Cadets Meeting	Tuesday	15:15	16:15	142
Mandarin Learners Club	Tuesday	15:15	16:15	512
Girls Football Club	Tuesday	15:05	16:05	Grass Football Pitch
Lego Club	Tuesday	15:05	16:05	6.1
Year 7 and Year 8 Dance Club	Tuesday	15.05	16	Room 100
GCSE RE revision	Tuesday	15.05	16	165
Year 8/ 9 Football Club	Tuesday	15:05	16:05	Grass Football Pitch
Year 7 & 8 Maths Club	Tuesday	15.05	16.05	145
GCSE/A-Level Maths Club	Tuesday	15.05	16.05	141/144
Science Club	Wednesday	15:05	16:00	252
X Drive Dance Junior	Wednesday	15:05	16:00	100
XDrive Dance Senior	Wednesday	16:00	17:00	100
Programming and Coding	Wednesday	15:05	16:00	246
Chemistry	Wednesday	15:05	16:05	154
Netball	Wednesday	15:05	16:05	Courtside

Pokemon/Warhammer Club	Wednesday	15.05	16	66
Year 11 Football	Wednesday	15:05	16:05	Grass football pitch
Engage Club	Wednesday	17:00	18:30	Sports Hall
GCSE/A-Level Maths Club	Wednesday	15.05	16.05	143
GCSE/A-Level Maths Club	Thursday	15.05	16.05	143
Mandarin Learners Club	Thursday	15:15	16:15	512
Year 11 Unseen Poetry	Thursday	15:15	16:15	511
Year 11 Dance Choreography	Thursday	15:05	17:00	100
Physics	Thursday	15:05	16:05	255
GCSE PE CW catch up	Thursday	15.05	16.05	213
Reading Plus and TT Rockstar Club	Thursday	15:05	16:05	6LTR Classroom
Year 10 Football	Thursday	15:05	16:05	Football pitch
Year 7 Football	Thursday	15:05	16:05	Football pitch
Community Netball	Thursday	16:30	17:30	Courtside
Trampolining club	Friday	07:30	08:30	Sports hall
Get Set/Reading/Maths	Friday	15:15	16:15	6DPA Classroom
Badminton Club	Friday	15:05	16:05	Sports Hall
Esports Club	Friday	15:05	16:00	245/246
Basketball 6th form	Friday	16:15	17:15	Sports Hall

Appendix 11 - Question used to produce the More Dependency Model

Numerical values are awarded: Yes = 2 Partially = 1 No = 0

General School questions	
Does the school have a policy that includes reference to the AMA?	
Does the school provide or encourage training specifically aimed at challenging the most able pupils?	
Does the school assigned a specific teacher to oversee provisions for the AMA?	
Does the school offer a broad and rich extra-curricular programme?	
Is the school satisfied with the staff turnover rate?	
Is the school able to attract and appoint staff in subject specific areas?	
Is there a process in place where pupils can discuss their academic performance?	
Does the school possess the means and resources to support the AMA with cultural capital opportunities?	
Are the schools main objectives relevant to the AMA?	
Does the school have a system to identify the AMA?	
General Teacher Questions	
Have teachers received specific training directly related to the teaching of the AMA?	
Do teachers plan and prepare with consideration of the AMA?	
Do teachers enjoy teaching the AMA?	
Do teachers provide opportunities for co-learning with peers and staff?	
Do teachers offer extra-curricular opportunities beyond the normal curriculum requirements?	
Is behaviour in lessons conducive to learning?	
Are teachers able to access and teach the higher grade content?	
Do teachers work at a pace suited to the needs to the AMA?	
Do teachers pitch lesson content at a relevant level for the AMA?	
Do teachers have enough time to perform all their duties well?	
General Pupil Question	
Are there any special provisions specifically for the AMA?	
Do you feel the school meets the needs of AMA learners?	
Do you feel that the majority of teachers are happy working at your school?	
Do pupils have a member of staff that they feel comfortable discussing their needs with ?	
Are you able to access the opportunities the school provides for you?	
Do you feel the school recognises your needs?	
Do you feel that lessons suit your learning requirements?	
Do you feel that the school provides enough opportunities to challenge you?	
Do you feel you have good support from home with your academic development?	
Do you feel the school deals with issues relating to your learning needs effectively?	

Appendix 12 The Researches More Dependency Model for Loveday Academy

Numerical values are awarded: Yes = 2 Partially = 1 No = 0

General School questions	
Does the school have a policy that includes reference to the AMA?	0
Does the school provide or encourage training specifically aimed at challenging the most able pupils?	0
Does the school assigned a specific teacher to oversee provisions for the AMA?	1
Does the school offer a broad and rich extra-curricular programme?	1
Is the school satisfied with the staff turnover rate?	0
Is the school able to attract and appoint staff in subject specific areas?	1
Is there a process in place where pupils can discuss their academic performance?	1
Does the school possess the means and resources to support the AMA with cultural capital opportunities?	1
Are the schools main objectives relevant to the AMA?	0
Does the school have a system to identify the AMA?	1
General Teacher Questions	
Have teachers received specific training directly related to the teaching of the AMA?	0
Do teachers plan and prepare with consideration of the AMA?	1
Do teachers enjoy teaching the AMA?	2
Do teachers provide opportunities for co-learning with peers and staff?	1
Do teachers offer extra-curricular opportunities beyond the normal curriculum requirements?	1
Is behaviour in lessons conducive to learning?	0
Are teachers able to access and teach the higher grade content?	0
Do teachers work at a pace suited to the needs to the AMA?	0
Do teachers pitch lesson content at a relevant level for the AMA?	0
Do teachers have enough time to perform all their duties well?	1
General Pupil Question	
Are there any special provisions specifically for the AMA?	0
Do you feel the school meets the needs of AMA learners?	0
Do you feel that the majority of teachers are happy working at your school?	0
Do pupils have a member of staff that they feel comfortable discussing their needs with ?	1
Are you able to access the opportunities the school provides for you?	1
Do you feel the school recognises your needs?	0
Do you feel that lessons suit your learning requirements?	1
Do you feel that the school provides enough opportunities to challenge you?	0
Do you feel you have good support from home with your academic development?	1
Do you feel the school deals with issues relating to your learning needs effectively?	0

Appendix 13 The Researches More Dependency Model for Prince John's School

Numerical values are awarded: Yes = 2 Partially = 1 No = 0

General School questions	
Does the school have a policy that includes reference to the AMA?	1
Does the school provide or encourage training specifically aimed at challenging the most able pupils?	0
Does the school assigned a specific teacher to oversee provisions for the AMA?	0
Does the school offer a broad and rich extra-curricular programme?	2
Is the school satisfied with the staff turnover rate?	2
Is the school able to attract and appoint staff in subject specific areas?	2
Is there a process in place where pupils can discuss their academic performance?	2
Does the school possess the means and resources to support the AMA with cultural capital opportunities?	2
Are the schools main objectives relevant to the AMA?	1
Does the school have a system to identify the AMA?	2
General Teacher Questions	
Have teachers received specific training directly related to the teaching of the AMA?	0
Do teachers plan and prepare with consideration of the AMA?	1
Do teachers enjoy teaching the AMA?	2
Do teachers provide opportunities for co-learning with peers and staff?	2
Do teachers offer extra-curricular opportunities beyond the normal curriculum requirements?	2
Is behaviour in lessons conducive to learning?	2
Are teachers able to access and teach the higher grade content?	2
Do teachers work at a pace suited to the needs to the AMA?	1
Do teachers pitch lesson content at a relevant level for the AMA?	2
Do teachers have enough time to perform all their duties well?	1
General Pupil Question	
Are there any special provisions specifically for the AMA?	1
Do you feel the school meets the needs of AMA learners?	1
Do you feel that the majority of teachers are happy working at your school?	2
Do pupils have a member of staff that they feel comfortable discussing their needs with ?	1
Are you able to access the opportunities the school provides for you?	2
Do you feel the school recognises your needs?	1
Do you feel that lessons suit your learning requirements?	1
Do you feel that the school provides enough opportunities to challenge you?	1
Do you feel you have good support from home with your academic development?	2
Do you feel the school deals with issues relating to your learning needs effectively?	1

Appendix 14 The Researches More Dependency Model for St Christina's School

Numerical values are awarded: Yes = 2 Partially = 1 No = 0

General School questions	
Does the school have a policy that includes reference to the AMA?	1
Does the school provide or encourage training specifically aimed at challenging the most able pupils?	2
Does the school assigned a specific teacher to oversee provisions for the AMA?	1
Does the school offer a broad and rich extra-curricular programme?	2
Is the school satisfied with the staff turnover rate?	2
Is the school able to attract and appoint staff in subject specific areas?	2
Is there a process in place where pupils can discuss their academic performance?	2
Does the school possess the means and resources to support the AMA with cultural capital opportunities?	2
Are the schools main objectives relevant to the AMA?	2
Does the school have a system to identify the AMA?	1
General Teacher Questions	
Have teachers received specific training directly related to the teaching of the AMA?	2
Do teachers plan and prepare with consideration of the AMA?	2
Do teachers enjoy teaching the AMA?	2
Do teachers provide opportunities for co-learning with peers and staff?	2
Do teachers offer extra-curricular opportunities beyond the normal curriculum requirements?	2
Is behaviour in lessons conducive to learning?	2
Are teachers able to access and teach the higher grade content?	2
Do teachers work at a pace suited to the needs to the AMA?	2
Do teachers pitch lesson content at a relevant level for the AMA?	1
Do teachers have enough time to perform all their duties well?	1
General Pupil Question	
Are there any special provisions specifically for the AMA?	1
Do you feel the school meets the needs of AMA learners?	1
Do you feel that the majority of teachers are happy working at your school?	2
Do pupils have a member of staff that they feel comfortable discussing their needs with ?	1
Are you able to access the opportunities the school provides for you?	1
Do you feel the school recognises your needs?	1
Do you feel that lessons suit your learning requirements?	1
Do you feel that the school provides enough opportunities to challenge you?	2
Do you feel you have good support from home with your academic development?	2
Do you feel the school deals with issues relating to your learning needs effectively?	1

