Schools and Deprived Communities: A Case Study of a Community-Oriented School

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2013

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Word count: 87,090
Abstract

The increase in intra-urban polarisation in Britain has seen the inter-linking of multiple problems amongst certain sections of society (Hills et al., 2010; Aldridge et al., 2012). Within the context of these processes, schools have frequently been positioned as a local regeneration delivery mechanism (Lupton, 2006) with the expectation that they can mobilise a response. However when compared to the totality of other social and economic factors at work, their capacity to do so is weak (Bernstein, 1970). Schools thus occupy a difficult position; rather than driving social change, they struggle to mitigate the relationship between deprivation, poor educational outcomes and poor life chances in general (Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, 2006; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Dyson, 2012).

The community-oriented school approach has been adopted across a number of countries in an effort to tackle these issues (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Dyson & Raffo, 2007). This thesis addresses the relationship between schools and their communities using the distinctive example of a school which took a community-oriented approach in an effort to tackle issues which beset the deprived community.

Weston Academy opened in 2008 and was sponsored by the main social housing provider in the area, Weston Housing Trust. The school sought to not only improve standards of education but also provide services and support through a joined up approach. This study forms part of a three-year development and research partnership between Weston Academy and the University of Manchester. As a member of the research team, I conducted a longitudinal case study to explore the development of the school and used family case studies to track the impact of their efforts on community members’ lives. The research reveals that despite their promising approach, Weston Academy had limited impact. I recognise that although Weston Academy sought to improve standards, this over-shadowed their more community-focused efforts, meaning that they developed on two separate tracks. However, this study shows the effects of these actions were increasingly intertwined. I thus argue that the standardised nature of how schools operate ultimately restricts the extent they are able to tackle issues which beset deprived communities. I close with a consideration for what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might be expected to make in the future.
Declaration

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Dedication

In loving memory of Lee Wyatt

Acknowledgments

I remember the night I came home to tell my partner, Lee, that I had been offered the PhD studentship. We were over the moon, and as we sat out on our balcony looking out over the Manchester landscape, it felt like the world was our oyster. Three months later at the age of 24 Lee was diagnosed with bowel cancer, and in April 2010, a year and a half later, he passed away. As a consequence, my PhD became intimately tied up with coming to terms with his death, and though he has gone, I feel like he has been with me all the way. To show my appreciation for the time we had and for what I learnt from Lee, I dedicate this thesis to him.

There are a number of people I would like to thank for helping me along the way. Firstly, I would like to say thank you to my supervisors Alan Dyson and Helen Gunter for their academic support and valuable input. I continue to find their work a source of inspiration for my own. Thanks also go to my colleagues at the University of Manchester, especially Maxine Whybrow who helped me to find inner strength.

Secondly I would like to thank the Research and Development Partnership for the pathway it provided me to an interesting and challenging research project. I would also like to thank those who took part in the research, in particular the families who welcomed me into their homes.
Thirdly I would also like to thank my friends from near and wide for their continual support and encouragement. Special thanks goes to Ruth McGinity, Jodie Whitaker, Sam Cordery, and my sister Charlotte Mosey for their patient and thoughtful proof-reading and comments. Also to Beth Carley, my PhD comrade who helped me work out what I wanted to say and kept me going until the end. Thanks also go to my lovely housemates, Jodie, Martha and Charlotte for putting up with me throughout the thesis and for making sure that I took time out away from the computer screen for the therapeutic consumption of tea and beer.

Fourthly I want to thank my Mum and Dad – for always believing in me and for demonstrating that faith with continuing support, love and interest.

Finally a huge thank you goes to my partner, Sonny, for his patience, understanding and helping me to find joy in my life again after losing Lee.
List of Abbreviations

CPD – Continual Professional Development

FSES – Full Service Extended Services

SESI- School Effectiveness and School Improvement

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between schools and their communities. More specifically, whether schools can make a difference to social and economic issues which beset many communities situated in deprived areas of the United Kingdom. To further explore this research area, a distinctive example of a school sponsored by a local social housing provider is offered as a case study. In the introductory chapter, I outline the research focus and locate the study within the literature. Finally, I explain how the data was collected, give an overview of the findings and outline the wider implications of the study.

1.1 Focus of the study

In this section I detail the research problem by initially exploring the relationship between deprivation, poor educational outcomes and life chances in general. I then outline the community-oriented school approach as a response to these issues and identify how the literature has conceptualised whether schools can make a difference. Finally, I explain how this study will explore the research problem further and outline the research questions.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the concentration of spatial deprivation is nothing new in Britain and whilst absolute poverty has decreased, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased (Dorling et al., 2007; Hills et al., 2010). Those living in poverty today are even less likely to be able to obtain the minimum standard of living than they were four years ago (Aldridge et al., 2012). This not only includes fulfilling individuals’ basic needs but also being in a position whereby one can participate in society. The previous New Labour government was particularly concerned with this problem; ‘social exclusion’ was recognised to be the ‘extreme consequence’ of
multiple inter-locking problems typically associated with deprived areas (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009).

In this context, schools have been positioned as a local delivery mechanism for driving regeneration, not just because of the resources they possess but also their ‘embedded’ position within the communities they serve (Lupton, 2006: 3; Dyson, 2010). During their time in government, as well as during the specific period in which this study takes place, New Labour introduced an unprecedented programme of rapid reforms, turning the policy context into a sort of ‘educational laboratory’ (Finkelstein and Grubb, 2000). However doubts as to whether schools can make a difference to their communities remain. Not only has there been limited change in terms of the gap between attainment levels of more and less advantaged students on a national level (Aldridge et al., 2012), education has seemingly made a limited contribution to the improvement of life chances (Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, 2006) whilst social mobility, although difficult to measure, (Hills et al., 2011) has arguably declined (Blanden et al., 2006; 2007).

The community-oriented school approach has been recognised to have the potential to ‘make a major contribution to solving some of the most intractable problems that have traditionally beset disadvantaged communities and their schools’ (Dyson and Raffo, 2007: 299). Unsurprisingly, it has attracted much attention across the world whilst New Labour showed significant commitment to the approach when, in 2005, they embarked upon a ‘remarkable experiment’ requiring all state-controlled schools to offer access to a ‘core offer’ of extended services (Cummings et al., 2011: 6; DfES, 2005).

Despite these high expectations, community-oriented schools have arguably been something of a disappointment and have struggled to achieve fundamental or wide ranging impacts (Szirom et al., 2001; Henderson and
Mapp, 2002; Sammons et al., 2003; Crowther et al., 2007; Dyson, 2010; Cummings et al., 2011). Thus it seems that Bernstein’s (1970) dictum is as applicable as it was forty years ago, education, it seems ‘cannot compensate for society’. As Bernstein recognised, when compared to the totality of other factors, the power of education is relatively weak.

For some, schools are actually considered to be part of the problem meaning that they (re)produce wider structural inequalities at play within society (Getwirtz, 2001; Lipman, 2004; Maguire, 2006). Therefore a more radical approach is needed which tackles the root causes of poverty (Anyon, 2005). For others, there are a range of school related factors and processes that can influence educational outcomes which are ‘open to modification’ (Rutter, 1979: 273). Thus, schools can make a difference despite contextual factors (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Sammons et al., 1997; Sammons, 1999; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Hopkins, 2001; Harris et al., 2003). In contrast, some have argued that schools ‘can ignore what lies beyond their gates, but they cannot escape it’ (Cummings et al., 2011: 92) and have therefore emphasised that the lack of transformative impact of community-oriented approaches does not mean that such impacts are ‘worthless’ (Riddell & Tett, 2004: 227).

These different perspectives underline the extent to which the question of, whether schools can make a difference remains complex and difficult to address. Moreover, the approach that schools need to take in the future seems even less clear.

This thesis will explore this research problem further by providing a case study of Weston Academy, a distinctive example of a school sponsored by a social housing company which sought to take a community-oriented approach. The school is situated in Haleton, a highly deprived area on the outskirts of a large conurbation in the North of England. A longitudinal,
qualitative case study was conducted which tracked the development of the school and family case studies were used to assess the impact of the school on their lives. The study has two main research questions:

1. What did Weston Academy hope to achieve and what happened in practice?

2. How did Weston Academy impact students in the sample of family case studies?

The study will also seek to use the empirical evidence gathered from the case study to look more broadly at the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools. This will lead to a consideration for a more over-arching concern for what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make.

1.2 Broader context

In this section I outline the community-oriented movement in more depth in order to situate the study within the broader theoretical and policy context. I then identify where this study will make a contribution to the literature. However, this will be revisited in the final chapter, Chapter Six, once the findings have been fully articulated.

On a fundamental level, Cummings et al. (2011: 1) assert that the community-oriented approach ‘calls into question what we have historically believed schools to be and to be for’ because they are not just concerned with learners per se but with the contribution that schools can make to students, their families and the wider community. As they explain:
They are concerned with how children thrive – or fail to thrive – within their families, and therefore with how families can best be engaged and supported. They are also concerned with the communities within which children and their families live, and how these communities in turn can offer the best support for children’s development. In this sense, they define their role in terms not only of what happens in classrooms, but also of what happens beyond the school gates.

(Cummings et al., 2011: 1)

In the United Kingdom, community-oriented schools can be traced back to when Henry Morris (1924) established Village Colleges in Cambridgeshire over one hundred years ago. The community school movement and compensatory education became increasingly popular in the 1960s and 1970s (Halsey, 1972; Midwinter, 1973) and such trends continued with an abundance of policies that New Labour introduced during their time in office. Internationally, the approach was said to spread like a ‘revolution’ from the 1980s in the USA and continues today with similar initiatives such as Harlem Children’s Zones and Obama’s Promised Neighbourhoods (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002: 2; Whitehurst and Croft, 2010). In Canada, a special task force was created in Saskatchewan, to make recommendations for how ‘SchoolsPlus’ would work (Tymchak, 2001) and in South Africa ‘Full Service Schools’ have been an important development in making schools more inclusive (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 2005). Thus, the community-oriented school movement is a broad church; no common international term exists to describe them, whilst a variety of aims and rationales are used (Dyson and Raffo, 2007).

Despite this ambiguity, schools that adopt the approach are commonly located in deprived areas (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). Typically, they involve a
reconfiguration of services; by themselves they are often regarded as ‘failing’ to meet the complex needs of those living in such areas. Thus a more coherent and ‘joined up’ approach is seen as necessary (Dryfoos, 1994; Dyson et al., 2002; Crowther et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2004; Dyson and Raffo, 2007). In this sense, the approach recognises that families living in deprived areas face particularly challenging circumstances meaning that schools in their ‘privileged position as key players in all children’s lives need to ‘step into this breach’ (Cummings et al., 2011: 2). Thus, schools are positioned as needing to tackle issues which beset the community in order to fulfil their core business of teaching and learning.

There is a vast amount of literature and research on community-oriented schools. The field is saturated with ‘how-to-do-it-guides and advocacy texts’ (Cummings et al., 2011; 72) whilst others have speculated about the rigour and quality of the evidence on which some studies have been based (Dryfoos, 2000; Wilkin et al., 2003). In their recent literature review which conceptualises school and community relations, Dyson et al. (2011) observe that the majority of research works within existing societal arrangements rather than those which aim to transform structural inequality. Furthermore, most studies are concerned with ‘exogenous agendas’- those determined outside the community itself by policy makers and professionals (Dyson, et al., 2011: 6). The field also contains a number of evaluations (Sammons et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2010) but these tend to only report ‘snapshots’ of the experiences of beneficiaries. As Blank et al. (2003: 47) encapsulate it: ‘There is much more that needs to be learned about how community schools make a difference to children, families, schools and communities.’ Thus, this study responds to limitations of existing research, and aims to contribute to the literature by using family case studies in an effort to explore how the selected community-oriented school impacted on
the lives of those families. This will then be used to consider how community-oriented schools might make more of a difference in the future.

1.3 Outline of study

In the final section of this chapter, I detail the characteristics of Weston Academy and outline how the data was collected. I then give a general overview of the findings and briefly consider their wider implications.

Weston Academy opened in 2008 and replaced two previously failing secondary schools. As per the requirements of New Labour’s Academies Programme at the time, the school has a sponsor (DCSF, 2008). Interestingly in this case, the school’s sponsor is Weston Housing Trust, the main social housing provider in the area. The development of Weston Academy is directed by an executive board which includes senior professionals from backgrounds in both education and housing.

Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive of Weston Housing Trust, described the effects of deprivation on the community as ‘stark and challenging’. Other characteristics described by the executive board include a high employment low wage economy with some sections of intergenerational worklessness, with other compounding factors such as poor health, low level crime and racial tension. Weston Academy also inherited a challenging history from the predecessor schools, one of which was previously placed in special measures by Ofsted. Like most schools in deprived areas, Weston Academy has a higher than national average of students who are eligible for free schools meals, whilst the number of students with special educational needs also exceeds the national average. Around a third of pupils who attend the school come from homes where English is not the first language. The school is also larger than average with around 1300 students on roll (Ofsted, 2011).
The rationale behind Weston Housing Trust’s sponsorship of the school was particularly interesting. As Martin recounted:

We have different primary concerns and agendas but the families in our houses are the same ones who are sending their kids to the schools. The problems that we are experiencing on our estates I expect are the same ones the teachers deal with every day. So, it makes sense for us to work with each other and I’m hoping a more combined effort will produce positive effects for both of us.

26/09/2008

As expressed by Stuart Painter, the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, they also hoped that the school would act as a ‘vehicle’ to access the community, enabling them to continue their regeneration efforts to transform Haleton into ‘a sustainable community’.

The executive board had a distinctive vision for what they hoped to achieve. Thus in line with the community-oriented approach, they not only sought to improve educational standards but also tackle issues which beset the community as a consequence of the effects of deprivation. As Stuart Painter, explained:

We see providing a school with a good reputation for educational standards as central. For us though, it’s not just about improving learning but creating a sort of ‘community hub’ where everyone can benefit. We see the Academy as not just improving educational chances but life chances; improving employability, aspirations, health and general wellbeing of our residents and others living in Haleton.

08/10/2008
Weston Academy’s distinctive approach meant that the school offered a particularly interesting research opportunity. Weston Housing Trust was also keen to track the progress of the school and use research evidence to further inform their work. Therefore, in 2008 a three year ‘Development and Research partnership’ was formed between Weston Academy and a team of educational researchers from the University of Manchester. Under the aegis of this partnership the research team collected evidence and acted as a critical friend (Ainscow, 2002). A key element of the partnership was the sponsorship of a doctoral studentship. I was the holder of this position and this thesis is the product of this arrangement. Although the research team’s work was used to further contextualise this study, I was solely responsible for collecting the data which is the subject of this thesis.

A longitudinal case study was conducted in order to track the development of the school. This involved a quasi-ethnographic approach which included attending meetings with various stakeholders and conducting regular qualitative interviews with members of the executive board. Although I maintained contact with the school through the ‘Development and Research partnership’ for three years, the main period of data collection was for the first two years. In order to assess the impact of the academy, ten family case studies were conducted. The families were tracked during the second year of the fieldwork for a period of twelve months. Data collection with the families consisted of a minimum of two interviews with each student and at least one parent. Students were interviewed separately from their parents. I also collected data on an opportunistic basis, such as observing occasions where they participated in activities or accessed support offered through the school or housing trust. I also interviewed a number of teachers and support workers in contact with the families during the twelve month period in order to provide further contextual information.
The sample of families was purposively selected. Five families were considered as particularly vulnerable and were already in receipt of a number of support services provided by Weston and other community services. The children in these families tended to have learning and behavioural difficulties and consequently struggled to achieve. The other five families in the sample were less vulnerable and had limited outside support. In contrast to the other part of the sample, children in these families tended to achieve at an average or above average level. Broadly the sample also aimed to be reflective of the academy’s intake, containing children of different ages, genders and ethnicities. With the exception of one, all the families lived in a house which was either owned or located on an estate managed by Weston Housing Trust.

From tracking the development of the academy it was found that, despite the executive board’s distinctive approach, the resulting picture was markedly different from what was originally envisioned. From the beginning, the executive board struggled to translate their vision into practice. The vision never managed to progress beyond ‘blue sky thinking’ whilst the ambiguity surrounding the community-oriented school approach seemed to be reflected in the way the school operated in practice.

The New Labour policy context also seemed to place competing pressures on Weston Academy, meaning that the school’s efforts to improve standards of education and to tackle issues which beset the community developed on two separate tracks. This meant that rather than being part of cohesive strategic plan, few links were made between the two different ‘types’ of activities. Moreover, the pressure to improve standards together with the school’s precarious market position seemed to create a situation which side-lined the school’s more ‘community-focused efforts’ and instead prioritised the need to raise standards. Thus, the school became synonymous with attempts to
improve previously failing schools using standard school improvement strategies with some ‘additional’ extras. This in turn meant that whilst the school did offer a number of services and means of support, they tended to be run on an opportunistic, ad hoc basis. As the need to improve attainment was prioritised, Weston Housing Trust’s influence on the development of the school also decreased. This seemed to lead to a situation whereby the executive board increasingly lost sight of the more distinctive elements of their vision and thus the direction of the school was somewhat different than originally hoped.

In terms of the family case studies, overall impact of the school was found to be limited. To begin with, my analysis reflected the division between Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts’ by examining the impacts of each independently from one another. However, as I started to compare the impacts, I found that whilst the two ‘types’ of activities developed separately in practice, the effects upon the individuals within the family case studies were intertwined. In particular, I found that the standardised processes employed within the mainstream school in an effort to improve standards, seemed to restrict the broader impacts the school was able to have at a community level. This was further constrained by wider practices the school adopted, in terms of how it operated as a teaching and learning institution. Despite these issues, I was able to conclude that Weston Academy had been able to make some isolated but fairly significant impacts to some particularly vulnerable families through its ‘community-focused efforts’.

With regard to the overarching concern of this study, I argue that the evidence reported here confirms much of the existing research in showing that schools can only make a limited difference to their communities. I therefore acknowledge that a radical approach to addressing wider structural
inequality would be favourable. However, I assert that such a position not only casts aside some of the more meaningful impacts that Weston Academy achieved but also seems to remain off the policy agenda (Rees et al., 2007). Therefore, I occupy a position of ‘complex hope’ (Grace, 1994: 59) aiming to demonstrate ‘an optimism of the will’ (Grace, 1994: 59) which recognises the need for radical change, but also considers ‘what might be done’ (Dyson et al., 2011: 196 original emphasis). In light of this position I conclude by considering how community-oriented schools might make more of a difference in the future, pinpointing some of the main factors which limited the impact of Weston Academy and reflecting on what can be learnt from the case study to propose some future possibilities.

Summary

This concludes the introduction. In this chapter I have outlined the research focus by explaining the research problem and identifying how the study will further explore these issues in relation to the research questions which guide the study. I also gave a broad overview of the literature which this thesis is concerned with and how this study will make a contribution. I then outlined how the study was conducted and explained the main findings from the analysis of the data. Finally, I reconsidered the research problem in light of this study and outlined the position that I take in order to consider how community-oriented schools might make more of a difference in the future. In the next chapter, I review the literature which this study is concerned with in more depth.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter aims to offer a detailed account of the literature which underpins this study. The first three sections will further contextualise the research problem presented in the previous chapter. Therefore, I outline the relationship between schools and their communities, explain the spatial distribution of poverty and how this has been affected by market-based policies and finally discuss the relationship between deprivation and educational outcomes. I will then offer a broad overview of how the community-oriented school approach aims to respond to these issues. From the analysis of the literature I demonstrate how, despite the potential of the approach, evidence suggests that community-oriented schools tend to achieve limited impacts. Section five of this chapter will then detail three broad tendencies in the literature in response to the issue of whether schools can make a difference to their communities. The penultimate section provides an overview of the policy context which formed the backdrop of this study and finally I consider the bigger picture by comparing some of the main points made in each of the sections. At the end of the chapter, I acknowledge that whilst the chapter has served a number of purposes the research problem which this thesis is concerned still remains. Therefore this study aims to further explore the research problem and the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools whilst offering a consideration for the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make.

2.1 The relationship between schools and their communities

In this section I will discuss the relationship between schools and their communities in depth. I start by problematizing the term ‘community’ by identifying how despite being used in a range of contexts, its meaning
remains contested. I will then discuss how schools and communities have been positioned in relation to one another and how they interact. Issues surrounding the classification of schools and communities using geographical terms alone will be explored including a consideration for how marketisation has affected the interactions between the two. Overall, I recognise that the relationship between schools and their communities remains complex and multi-faceted.

Within theoretical conceptualisations, ‘community’ has recognised to be a ‘contested concept that defies easy categorisation’ (Bertotti et al., 2011: 2). A variety of meta-narratives are used within different research traditions and the concept itself has undergone a number of shifts in meaning as society has responded to changes such as the emergence of the state, industrialisation and more recently the phenomenon of globalisation (Bertotti et al., 2011). However, these shifts in meaning are rarely acknowledged outside of theoretical discussions and are difficult to apply on a practical level. Put more simply, a community is usually defined either as a geographical area, a group of people who live in a specific place or an area of common life (Smith, 2001).

Since the beginning of mass education in the UK, the relationship between schools and their communities has been frequently discussed. Debates have ranged from those who advocate the ‘deschooling’ (Illich, 1971) of education altogether by dissolving schools into the community itself, to those such as Henry Morris who established Cambridge Village Colleges in an attempt to ‘abolish the duality of education and ordinary life’ (Morris, 1925: XV). The positioning of the relationship has varied from the school ‘as a community’ to being ‘in the community’ (Musgrave, 1973: 167 original emphasis). Those associated with the community-oriented school approach tend to position the
school as not just in the community but as a ‘unifying force’ (Hanna and Naslund cited in Musgrave, 1973: 167).

Regardless of the conceptualisation of the relationship between schools and communities they remain intimately connected. Due to their physical location and public nature, schools interact in daily neighbourhood life. As Lupton (2006) further explains:

> [Schools] link with community organisations in local projects and with businesses for work experience, sponsorship and careers advice. They deal with the impact of new housing or demolitions. They manage the fall-out from local unemployment. They cope with family break-ups, neighbourhood feuds and spates of crime or anti-social behaviour. They liaise with other local organisations such as police and social services.

(Lupton, 2006: 3)

Despite the various connections that can be made, the relationship between schools and their communities is often presented in geographical terms. This simplification presents a number of problems, not least because communities themselves cannot be classified on a geographical basis. Furthermore as Crowther et al. (2003) recognise, defining what ‘counts’ as a school’s community can be problematic because schools do not serve distinct communities. Children who live on the same street will not necessarily play together and attend their local school because successive policies in education and housing have weakened ties between schools and communities in the name of choice (Woods et al., 1998).
Therefore, despite the apparent simplicity at first sight of the relationship between schools and their communities, they remain deeply complex. In the next section, I further explore how the relationship is impacted by social and economic factors at play within neighbourhoods.

2.2 Spatial concentrations of poverty, housing and education

When exploring the relationship between schools and their communities, it is also important to recognise that in many ways the interactions between the two are more complex and arguably more important when schools serve areas where resources are scarce. In this section, I explore some issues that arise when schools are located in deprived areas. I also argue that the marketisation of housing and education has further exacerbated such problems. Finally, I consider the spatial concentration of poverty in more depth and how this has led to an increasingly polarised British society.

In areas where deprivation is particularly concentrated, schools are frequently positioned as one of the main drivers for social change due to their unique position and the resources that they possess (Lupton, 2006; Dyson and Raffo 2007; Dyson, 2010). However, schools often seem to find themselves in a situation where the decline of the area and the decline of the school reinforce one another (Power and Mumford, 1999). Areas that are characterised by multiple social and economic problems are often served by schools that struggle to combat the effects of these issues. Schools located in deprived areas are more likely to be judged by Ofsted as ‘failing’ to provide an adequate standard of education not just in terms of academic results but also a lower quality of teaching and learning (Ofsted, 2000). A number of studies have shown that schools located in deprived areas often go into a reactionary ‘firefighting’ mode; meaning that less time is spent on curriculum
development whilst fraught relationships between staff contribute to poor staff retention (Lupton, 2006: 6; Gewitz 1998; Thomson 2002).

A number of critics (see Crowther et al., 2003, Woods et al., 1998) have identified that the marketisation of schooling and housing has contributed to such patterns of disadvantage in particular urban areas. When the Conservative government applied market theories to the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s it was claimed that by creating a climate of competition, schools and housing would improve as they strived to reach the high demands of the customer (Woods et al., 1998). However, such policies also allow better-resourced people to opt out of less favourable schools or move out of the area entirely which in turn reinforces segregation within neighbourhoods (Meen et al., 2005). To make matters worse, the country has also experienced a process of ‘residualisation of public housing’ where social housing has become increasingly concentrated in particular areas and only targeted at those labelled as ‘the poor’ (Gregory, 2009: 12).

Such concentrations of deprivation are not new in Britain; the industrial revolution brought with it concentrations of poverty to urban cities and as manufacturing and economic activity later declined, these areas suffered (Hunt, 2004). However during this time, although absolute poverty has diminished, relative deprivation has increased resulting in a wider gap between the rich and poor (Hills et al., 2010). Whilst there is a long history of research which has mapped poverty, more recently efforts have focused on understanding polarisation. For example, as detailed in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report entitled ‘Poverty, wealth and place in Britain, 1968 to 2005’:

The results of analysis of segregation (dissimilarity), along with those of polarisation and spatial concentration, support the conclusion that
with respect to both poverty and wealth, Britain became increasingly segregated and polarised over the past two or three decades of the 20th century. Particularly notable is the clustering of poverty and low wealth in urban areas, and the concentration of wealth (especially with regard to exclusively wealthy households) in the South East of England.

(Dorling et al., 2007: 87)

Studies have shown that the increase in intra-urban polarisation has meant that particular sections of society who live in poor areas have increasingly been subjected to the inter-linking of multiple problems associated with disadvantage. They have thus been cut off from the opportunities and experiences that characterise mainstream society and commonly classified as ‘socially excluded’ (Piachaud et al., 2009).

The negative effects of social exclusion on a variety of social, economic and political outcomes for individuals as well as the intergenerational effects have been explored in a number of studies (Hills et al., 2010; Tunstall, 2011; Aldridge et al., 2012). In light of the focus of this study, the next section will explore the relationship between deprivation and educational outcomes in more depth.

2.3 The relationship between deprivation and educational outcomes

Now I have outlined the relationship between schools and communities and considered how the interactions between the two are affected by concentrations of deprivation, I will now explore specifically how social and economic issues affect educational outcomes. Although school processes can make a contribution to mediating these links, I contend that the social and economic dynamics of an area powerfully shape educational experiences. I
then discuss two areas of literature that have sought to understand and conceptualise the processes at play between educational outcomes and deprived areas. Despite the contributions these research studies have made to the field, I recognise how the interactions between place, socio-economic factors and educational outcomes remain ambiguous. Therefore in light of the over-arching concern of this study, I argue that the complexity behind these processes makes it very difficult to know what kinds of differences we can realistically expect community-oriented schools to make.

Although the link between education and deprivation has been clearly demonstrated (Chitty, 2002; OECD, 2008) the relationship is not simply deterministic and can take a number of routes. Thus the interactions between education, material deprivation, social group cultures and family characteristics remain complex (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Duckworth, 2008; Raffo et al., 2010).

In the narrow sense of attainment, the amount of students living in disadvantaged homes is considered to be the most determining factor between successful and low achieving schools (Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). Educational outcomes in a broader sense of overall wellbeing are also significantly affected by the social context in which children and their families live (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Machin and McNally, 2006; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). Conversely, those who achieve low educational outcomes are at a higher risk of securing low paid work, experiencing unemployment and living in poverty (Aldridge et al., 2012). There have also been limited improvements to life chances in general (Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, 2006) whilst social mobility has arguably declined (Blanden et al., 2006; 2007). There is also evidence to show that these trends
continue from one generation to next (Bynner and Joshi, 2002; Aldridge et al., 2012).

Although, the evidence is mixed, efforts by school improvement and effectiveness researchers have shown that inside school processes make a difference and can contribute to attainment scores but are not able to fully compensate for wider inequalities (Lupton, 2006). Duckworth (2008) reaches similar conclusions after reviewing the literature in this area and concludes that social and economic factors seem to be more powerful in shaping students’ educational outcomes rather than the individual characteristics of the schools themselves.

It seems therefore that something matters about the place where a school is located. In an effort to establish how exactly the conditions of where people live impact educational outcomes, researchers have sought to conduct a variety of studies which assess ‘neighbourhood effects’. There are a large number of studies in this field, broadly they can be separated into two strands. Firstly, those which belong to the community studies tradition and mainly concentrate on investigating the internal dynamics of neighbourhoods, often using a qualitative case study approach (for example see Lupton, 2001; Meegan and Mitchell, 2001). In the second strand, there is a growing body of literature which compares the effects of social and economic inequalities within different types of areas. Typically, such studies use large national data sets to aid comparison of how these impacts differ (for example Buck, 2001; Gibbons, 2002).

The main two strands in the neighbourhood effects literature represent quite different approaches to investigating the same phenomenon. However as Lupton (2003) identifies, this divide has caused a number of problems. In the case of the second strand, theorists using quantitative methods often struggle
to reflect physical and social aspects of neighbourhoods meaning that they find it difficult to incorporate how people’s interactions change and reproduce the characteristics of those neighbourhoods. In contrast those who are part of the first strand, are often keen to prove that neighbourhood effects are larger than quantitative studies are able to show and tend to focus on deprived areas in isolation thus exaggerating the effects. Lupton (2003) argues that a mixed method approach could help to overcome some of these issues. However the field remains dominated by quantitative studies particularly in the United States.

A second area of literature which explores the relationship between educational outcomes and deprived areas is the emerging field of spatial understandings of education and place (Reay and Lucey, 2000; Gulson and Symes 2007a; 2007b, Hollingworth and Archer, 2010; Maguire, 2010; Lupton, 2010; Raffo 2010; 2011). Many of these studies draw on the work of Lefebvre (1991), conceptualising space as a socially produced phenomenon, mediated by how people interact and relate to one another who occupy the particular neighbourhood. Therefore, places are not inert, physical backdrops to human activity but interact with individual’s identities and their social relationships in complex ways. As Lupton explains:

Space must play a part in structuring both the meaning of poverty and the meaning and value of learning. What it means to be poor, what constitutes valid and useful knowledge, and how institutions of learning appear to either alleviate or reinforce poverty are all understandings that are constructed through space.

(Lupton, 2010: 113)
Researchers using this theoretical conceptualisation of the importance of space also recognise how spatial interactions are not just influenced by conditions at the local level but also national and global events (Thomson, 2002). Therefore, they recognise how global patterns of resource distribution and competing, often contradictory structural forces impact what it means to live in a poor place and how this affects young people’s educational outcomes.

Gulson’s (2005) research on ‘Mondale’, an area of Tower Hamlets which was part of the New Labour’s Excellence in Cities programme is a particularly interesting example of this type of study. He engages in ‘spatialised policy analysis’ and focuses on how the regeneration of the Docklands area has impacted community members’ experiences of ‘place’ and in turn their educational achievements (ibid: 142). In particular his research finds that some teachers were using Canary Wharf as a ‘symbolic enabling device’ of ‘what students could do if they achieved in school’ (ibid: 154). However Gulson (2005) theorises how in order for students to take the journey to educational achievement, they are required to enter a ‘discursive frame’ denying more familiar ‘local’ understandings forcing them to undergo ‘an educational renovation of identity’ (ibid: 154). As he further explains:

To undertake this journey towards educational achievement students may have to recognise that their parents are deficient in terms of understanding educational processes and practices. Here physical location acts as a disabling device. Students are placed in the invidious position of acknowledging deficiency and striving towards a goal that may or may not be achievable.

(Gulson, 2005: 154)
He further recognises how the renovation of their educational identity is thus seen as an individual’s responsibility whilst it is also cheaper for the state to encourage individuals to do so rather than tackling structural inequalities.

Despite these various contributions, how schools should seek to mediate or compensate how living in a disadvantaged area negatively impacts educational outcomes seems unclear. The relationship between how the realities of a place is mediated within the physical and social space that actors inhibit is complex. Furthermore, how these realities translate and interact with educational processes is entrenched in ambiguity due to the lack of uniformity or causality between these relationships (Raffo et al., 2011). In the absence of certainty in how to tackle these relationships, it seems the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might be expected to make remains in doubt. In the next section, I outline how the community-oriented school approach has sought to tackle these issues.

2.4 The community-oriented school approach

As outlined in Chapter One, this study is particularly interested in the community-oriented school approach. In this section I explore the movement in more depth by firstly acknowledging the breadth of the approach and secondly detailing some of the broad similarities. I then consider some of the implementation challenges experienced by community-oriented schools and analyse the impact of the approach. I then argue that the limited overall impact of community-oriented schools is perhaps not surprising in light of the points made in the previous three sections.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that using the label ‘community-oriented school’ in some ways disguises the complexity of the movement but for the purposes of this study this term has been adopted to describe the approach. In
Chapter One, I observed how the community-oriented school approach is a broad church whilst no common international term exists to describe them (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). Therefore, when exploring the community-oriented school approach it is necessary to use a range of literature. Although some focus on a particular policy development such as Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) they all broadly fit within the same framework. Similarly, I have also drawn upon literature from outside the English context in order to further explore the movement.

To further clarify the breadth and diversity of those who adopt a community-oriented school approach, it is worth quoting Dyson (2010) at length, as he explains:

These attempts have been enormously diverse, but basically involve some mixture of enhancing the resources available in the school for working with students whilst making the school’s resources available to families and local people. Often, these attempts result from the initiative of particular school principals attempting to meet what they see as the needs of their students and of local communities. Sometimes, however, they take the form of more or less well-organised programs sponsored by national or local governments, or by non-governmental organisations. In these cases, the preferred model of provision may be dignified with a title - full service schools, community schools, extended schools, schools plus, for instance.

(Dyson, 2010: 255)

Despite these differences they are some broad similarities. Perhaps the most crucial one of these is how the community-oriented school approach is not just concerned with students as learners per se but the broader contribution
that schools can make to their communities (Cummings et al., 2011). The approach is commonly adopted in deprived areas because the school is recognised to occupy a unique position whilst possessing a range of resources (Lupton, 2006; Dyson and Raffo 2007; Dyson, 2010). Therefore, the school is positioned as being able to somehow compensate for the social and economic problems at play within deprived communities and in turn not only improve the educational achievement of their students but also actively tackle issues which beset the community. As Dryfoos further explains:

…schools are failing because they cannot meet the complex needs of today’s students. Teachers cannot teach hungry children or cope with young people who are too distraught to learn. Anyone working in an inner-city school, in a marginal rural area, or even on the fringes of suburbia will tell you how impossible her job has become. The cumulative effects of poverty have created social environments that challenge educators, community leaders, and practitioners of health, mental health, and social services to invent new kinds of institutional responses.

(Dryfoos, 1994: xvii)

As I observed in Chapter One, the need for a new approach is precisely why such attempts call into question what schools are and are for (Cummings et al., 2011). Thus not only does the approach often involve a reconfiguration of services but also a radical attempt by schools to tackle issues which beset deprived communities.

On a basic level, the approach is also little more than a matter of common sense (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). As was shown in the earlier discussion, the effects of living in a deprived area are clearly related to students’ often poor
educational outcomes. Therefore, it seems logical that schools should become involved in tackling these issues particularly because of the position they occupy within their communities. In this sense it becomes clear that schools cannot just simply concentrate on teaching and learning but also must consider the conditions ‘outside’ the school gates and how in turn these seem to permeate the walls of the school.

Although there are a diverse range of models that are adopted, community-oriented schools therefore tend to involve a variety of strategies which are aimed at both improving standards of education and tacking issues which beset the community. Sometimes actions will be targeted at a particular aspect of the school’s work or at a group but often their outcomes are seen as multi-ranging. For example, holding out-of-hours activities for students and their families often attempt to broaden experience, increase social interaction or even reduce crime but they also aim to improve attitudes to learning or enable the development of new skills (Big Lottery Fund, 2006). Therefore, it is hoped that offering these opportunities will enhance what is available for students and their families in the local community but also improve the achievement of learners inside the classroom.

In terms of particular models or approaches adopted by schools, the pattern on the ground has been complex. Through research carried out by Crowther et al. (2003) on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation they identify three broad approaches. Firstly, the ‘Community Resourcing Model’ is where a schools aims to increase the amount of resources available for the disadvantaged community they serve in an effort to maintain and improve quality of life. Secondly, the ‘Individual Transformation Model’ is where the school is less concerned with the regeneration of the community and area but more so with the need to improve the life chances of individual students by
providing an effective education. In this sense, the efforts of the school aim to give students a chance to escape disadvantage but simultaneously may do little to improve the present situation of the community in which they live. Finally, the third model puts equal emphasis on the importance of education as the second but highlights the need to do this within the context of the community. Thus the ‘Contextual Transformation Model’ recognises the difficulties of detaching students from their families and communities they live within and aims to invest in the community to ensure that those influences are as positive as possible.

The diversity within the community-oriented school movement and the differences between the types of approach means that providers may have very different ideas about the relationship between schools and their communities and the outcomes they hope to achieve. Furthermore as previously noted, whilst community-oriented schools can involve quite dramatic reorientations of how services operate, they also raise questions about what schools are for and in turn their relationship with society. For example, Morris (1924) saw the creation of Cambridge Village Colleges as vital to sustaining rural life but also essential to making communities viable. Whereas more modern attempts conceptualise community-oriented schools as a ‘comprehensive response to the needs of 21st Century children and their families’ enabling them to ‘earn a decent wage, become responsible family members, and contribute to the larger society through good citizenship’ (Children’s Aid Society, 2001: 27).

However, translating these hopes in practice and knowing what actions will lead to these outcomes is of course a lot more difficult. Moreover, although engaging in efforts which seek to tackle issues which beset the community seems commonsensical, in many ways such efforts are outside the core
business of schools in terms of teaching and learning. This throws up a number of questions for those engaging in community-oriented school efforts, as Russell Hobby, Head of Education Consultancy of the Hay Group who has worked with FSES schools in England explains:

At the heart of their professional identity, teachers have always seen themselves as more than exam machines or tools for the standards agenda. They have a genuine interest in helping children as individuals: they recognise the limitations of the classroom when isolated from the other forces in student’ lives. At the same time, they ask questions. What if I can’t identify a clear community? Will ‘extended school’ become a synonym for ‘failing’ school? Will I become accountable for outcomes beyond my control?

(Forward in Craig et al., 2004: 3)

As Russell Hobby later identifies, there are ‘no single right answers to these questions’ (Craig et al, 2004: 3). This has meant that exactly how the actions of school’s will lead to such outcomes is often shrouded in ambiguity.

**What types of impact are community-oriented schools expected to have?**

Due to the diversity within the community-oriented school approach and the fact that many choose to answer the questions which the approach raises differently, there are a wide variety of different impacts which are often expected. Furthermore, there is often much ambiguity in the approach which is adopted, how the school’s actions will lead to the envisioned outcomes and how the school will measure and define impact (Cummings et al., 2011)

For the purposes of this discussion it is perhaps useful to adopt an approach similar to Crowther et al. (2003) and instead think in terms of the
contributions that schools may be able to make when adopting a community-oriented school approach. Crowther et al. (2003) identify a number of broad contributions and show these in the form of an indicative hierarchy. They are shown in the figure below:

**Figure 1: An indicative hierarchy of schools’ contributions to communities**

![Hierarchical diagram showing the contributions of schools to communities.](image)

**Activities directly related to teaching and learning**
- Raising levels of attainment and accreditation among children and young people
- Developing the wider skills and attributes which young people will need in the adult world
- Contributing to positive cultural change in communities, particularly with regard to learning
- Providing direct support to community members and pathways to other sources of support
- Enhancing the material and other resources available to disadvantaged communities

**Activities indirectly related to teaching and learning**

**Considering the impact of community-oriented schools**

Such issues have not only made it difficult for those engaging in community-oriented school efforts but also made evaluation the impacts of their attempts problematic. Instead, the field is dominated by practical implementation guides and advocacy texts rather than systematic or rigorous attempts to evaluate impact (Wilkin et al., 2003). In the remainder of this section I review the literature concerned with the impact of community-oriented schools, again it has been necessary to cite research from beyond the English context whilst also using studies which fall under the broad umbrella of community-oriented schools, such as FSES’s.
In terms of attainment, community-oriented schools have been found to have mixed impacts whilst attribution and significance has also been a problem. For example, as Cummings et al. (2011) recognise performance in attainment may improve as a consequence to a school’s efforts but this may disappear when aggregated to the school level. Similarly, establishing what actions lead to improvement and whether they were even part of the school’s efforts to be community-oriented is also tricky (Blank et al., 2003; Henderson and Mapp, 2002). It is also worth noting that because such attempts often arise in deprived areas, it is likely that there are a number of strategies taking place at any one time which may again make attribution a problem (Cummings et al., 2011).

As recognised previously, community-oriented schools do not only aim to improve attainment but also impact a whole host of other parts of students’ and their families’ lives. Many of these outcomes are also much harder to measure than attainment and may take a long period of time to materialise. For example, the earlier quote from the Children’s Aid Society (2001) hoped that such efforts would contribute to students becoming responsible family members and actively engage in wider society. However, evaluations often are not conducted on a long-term basis and mainly focus on professionals rather than beneficiaries experiences (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Dyson et al., 2011).

The most significant impacts of community-oriented type efforts seem to be those which put families in contact with a network of support. For example in Cummings et al.’s (2011) study of FSES schools, they demonstrate particularly significant impacts, in some cases transformative, for families facing significant challenges. Where this was the case, families were often put in contact with multi-agency teams and as these relationships became
established, a range of support mechanisms were put in place from a variety of different services which prevented problems from further escalating in the future. The long term nature of the support also meant that such teams were able to work with the underlying causes and repeating patterns of particular issues. Riddell and Tett’s (2004) study of New Community Schools in Scotland also found that multi-agency teams had some positive results and whilst they may not have always produced dramatic change, such efforts sometimes prevented a crisis or sustained modest improvements (Riddell and Tett, 2004).

Despite these positive findings, when reviewing the evidence from their vast empirical work in this area, Cummings et al. (2011) found it difficult to provide evidence to show that FSES schools can achieve significant even transformative impacts beyond exceptional or particularly vulnerable families. Similarly, whilst the Coalition for Community Schools (2009) demonstrate impact across a range of indicators in some schools, other studies are unable to identify any improvement or have not been able to show significant differences between schools who did not take a community-oriented approach and those that did (Szirom et al., 2001; Sammons et al., 2003; James-Burdumy et al., 2005). Furthermore, it is difficult to provide evidence that impacts across the board can be sustained and can be transformed into other areas of recipients’ lives which would mean that the effects of social and economic disadvantage can start to be negated across a life course (Cummings et al., 2011).

As detailed in Chapter One, the community-orientated school approach is often held in high regard and is considered to have the potential to ‘make a major contribution to solving some of the most intractable problems that have traditionally beset disadvantaged communities and their schools’ (Dyson and
Raffo, 2007: 299). However as this discussion has shown, this has rarely been the case.

**Not surprising? The limited impact of community-oriented schools**

I now want to briefly compare the main points from the previous discussion on the relationship between schools and their communities and the effects of concentrated deprivation on educational outcomes with those made in relation to community-oriented schools. In light of these points, together with an acknowledgement of the powerful effects of structural inequality, I argue that variable impacts are perhaps not surprising.

Earlier, I observed how the relationship between schools and their communities is complex and often fractured. However, schools were also found to be intimately connected to their communities and often caught in the same cycle of decline. I also observed the clear links between living in a deprived area, poor educational outcomes and life chances in general. Although these were not found to be deterministic they were very complex meaning that exactly how disadvantage affects educational outcomes and even life chances is difficult to establish. Due to the complicated and often ambiguous nature of the interactions involved, it thus seems somewhat unsurprising that even the commonsensical approach of community-oriented schools may find wide-scale impact challenging.

It is perhaps even less surprising when the nature of disadvantage is considered in more depth. Earlier I explained how whilst the concentration of disadvantage is nothing new, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown meaning that some areas are subjected to the inter-linking of multiple problems. However, as Rees et al. (2007: 271) argue such incidences cannot be defined as ‘remaining pockets of disadvantage in a wider context of
increasing affluence’ because the social and economic issues that deprived areas face are local manifestations of structural inequalities at play in wider society (Rees et al., 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that efforts which are solely directed at how these processes play out in particular communities at a local level do not have the capacity to tackle endemic inequalities which are a part of British society at large. As Cummings et al. (2011: 111) argue: ‘a smattering of full service and extended schools will change little in societies where social and economic inequalities are rampant, and poverty is allowed to grow.’

These points are particularly important to consider when thinking about what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. Thus, as I explained in the introduction of this chapter, the first three sections of the literature review aimed to provide an in depth analysis of the context behind the research problem which this study is concerned with. I then detailed the community-oriented school movement and identified how the approach seeks to tackle such issues. The impacts of this approach together with some of the implementation challenges they face were then considered. In the next section, I outline three broad tendencies in the literature of how educational researchers have positioned themselves in relation to the issue of whether schools can make a difference. These were briefly outlined in Chapter One and will be used again in Chapter Six when I consider the wider implications of the study.

2.5 Three broad tendencies: can schools make a difference to deprived communities?

In this section I attempt to provide a conceptualisation of three tendencies which can be found in the literature in response to the issue of whether schools can make a difference to their communities. Although Dyson et al.
(2011) have recently produced a framework for analysing the literature on school-community relations in disadvantaged areas, I found that this did not quite fit the focus of this study as I wanted to specifically concentrate on how the literature has responded to whether schools can make a difference. Similarly, Dyson and Robson’s (1999) conceptualisation of how the literature portrays the interactions between schools and their communities has influenced my portrayal but their focus is also slightly different from this study. I also take inspiration from Raffo et al.’s (2011) framework which distinguishes the differences between socially critical and functional approaches to conceptualising the relationship between education and poverty. Therefore, the tendencies I outline in the following section are merely offered in an attempt to make sense of some of the broad positions within the field. The conceptualisation will also be revisited in Chapter Six when I consider the wider implications of study in terms of how the arguments that I make fit with other positions in the field and in turn how this affects the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. Finally, it is also important to note that although this study is focused on community-oriented schools, the studies that I use as part of this conceptualisation are concerned with the relationship between schools and deprived communities more generally rather than focused on this specific approach.

First tendency: radical structural change needed

The first tendency within the literature that I want to consider is encapsulated by Basil Bernstein’s (1970) famous dictum ‘Education cannot compensate for society’. Here, proponents recognise that in the face of deep seated social and economic inequalities, there are limits to what schools can achieve. They emphasise that the potential for education to cure society’s failings has often been overstated and is not the magic bullet which we just need to direct in the
right way. When education is compared to the totality of influences in society, it is argued although an important factor; it does not have the power to override the totality of other influences. Despite an educator’s best efforts, social and economic inequalities will still be a determining factor in terms of outcomes and opportunities available to different groups and therefore attempts made by schools will have limited impact.

For a large proportion of scholars who advocate this perspective, schools themselves are seen as part of the problem (Ball, 2005; Wilson, 1987; Reay et al., 2005, Smith and Nobel, 1995; Maguire, 2006; Gillborn 2008; Barton and Walker, 2011). For them, schools reflect and reproduce current inequalities within society which advantage and disadvantage particular social groups. The state administered education system is seen as intentionally ensuring that the middle classes will succeed, whilst the working classes will not only struggle to achieve but such patterns will normalise exclusion and failure for certain groups.

Maguire (2006) is an example of someone who takes this position, in her review of research investigating the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes in the 1960s she emphasises how the structure of schools and the curriculum reinforces current inequalities. She argues that both the school structure and curriculum are concerned with ensuring that the middle classes achieve, at the cost of the working classes who are judged to be less supported and prepared to meet the demands of an overtly classed system.

Others, such as Anyon (1997; 2005) take a more historical approach and emphasise how inequality is ingrained in the education system due to power games played by different sections and groups in society. In ‘Ghetto Schooling’ (1997) she uses a case study of Newark, New Jersey to show how
patterns of racial segregation and industrial decay together with political and corporate decisions fundamentally silenced the voices of the urban, mostly black poor. She charts the history of numerous failed education reforms and argues that no amount of ‘small victories’ by schools can combat the more powerful ingrained effects of poverty. For her, encouraging schools to compensate for the failings in urban cities is like ‘trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door’ (1997: 168). What is required is a more radical approach that tackles the root causes of inequality:

To really improve ghetto children’s chances, then, in school and out, we must (in addition to pursuing school-based reforms) increase their social and economic well-being and status before and while they are students. We must ultimately, therefore eliminate poverty; we must eliminate the ghetto school by eliminating the underlying causes of ghettoization.

(Anyon, 1997: 164)

Therefore, within this tradition of thought schools can only make a nominal amount of difference to social and economic inequalities in society. Without renewed efforts to radically change current systems of how goods and resources are administrated and co-ordinated through public systems, schools will continue to lose the battle and at worst perpetuate inequalities.

Moreover, sustaining the myth that schools can in fact make a difference to what goes on outside their school walls means that those in positions of power can hide behind the veil of various educational reforms which gives the impression of an ‘active government’ but in reality does little to change current arrangements (Rees, et al., 2007: 272). Commenting on area-based
initiatives, a policy approach which can be broadly aligned to community-focused efforts, Rees et al. (2007) further explain:

The state is not in a position to engage with social inequality, structural shifts in the organisation of economic activity and their consequences, except at the margins. The kinds of redistribution which would be necessary to do so simply do not appear on the policy agenda...They provide a means of presenting the promise of ‘active government’, but within the highly restricted policy repertoire which in reality is available.

(Rees, Power & Taylor 2007: 272)

In consideration with how this tendency in the literature broadly responds to the issue of whether school’s can make a difference, it seems that proponents would argue that in order for schools to make significant and wide-ranging impacts, radical structural change is necessary. However, as those such as Rees et al. (2007) acknowledge, the type of actions which would be needed in order to do this often do not appear on the policy agenda. This means that those advocating this position sometimes propose ‘radical’ solutions which broadly fall under the ‘socially critical perspective’ which tends to challenge ‘the prevailing ‘truth’ rather than accepting the current order as ‘necessary and inevitable’ (Lipman, 2004 cited in Raffo et al., 2010: 43).

Second tendency: concentrate on inside school processes

The second tendency in the literature presents a less deterministic view of how social and economic factors affect the work of schools. Although in most cases, proponents acknowledge that these processes do impact upon what schools can achieve, they identify that a range of school related factors can influence educational outcomes (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Sammons et al., 1997;
Sammons, 1999; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Hopkins, 2001; Harris et al., 2003). Such factors and processes are seen to be ‘open to modification by staff rather than fixed by external constraints’ (Rutter, 1979: 273). Therefore, those who advocate this position would generally regard that schools can make a difference by concentrating on modifying and improving school practice.

The majority of scholars who advocate this view are part of the school effectiveness and school improvement (SESI) research traditions. From this research base there is consistent set of core findings that identifies how particular classroom practices and ways of organising schools can improve students’ progress over time (Sammons et al., 1995). A large proportion of this work focuses on schools with high levels of students from low socio-economic contexts and provides insights into how school processes can be improved in order to aid student performance (Hopkins, 2001). Thus, such bodies of research suggest that there are things that schools can do to improve students’ outcomes regardless of their social and economic background.

However, there is also a growing body of research which contests the SESI research base. Some critics do this on account of flawed statistical models and analyses (for example Gorard, 2010) whilst others such as Thrupp (1999: 4) argue that the message that schools can make a difference has been ‘thoroughly overplayed’. For Thrupp (1999) SESI research is inevitably flawed. Using Dale’s (1992) terminology, he argues that much of the research in this tradition falls into the category of ‘problem solving’, and thus fails to be ‘sufficiently critical’ in that it ‘takes the world as it finds it’ rather than ‘standing back from the social order and asking how that social order came about’ (Dale cited in Thrupp, 1999: 4). Therefore, Thrupp (1999) takes a socially critical perspective which is in line with the first tendency, arguing that schools, by themselves, cannot make a substantial difference because
social order and therefore the education system is recognised to be inherently segregated by class.

In the past, SESI researchers have also been criticised for failing to address issues of equity, promoting a narrow view of education (Chapman and Gunter, 2009). Chapman (forthcoming) takes up some of these challenges in his new book, and recognises the need for the SESI community to develop strategies that ensure that a student’s gain is not at the loss of another. However, as Lupton (2006) recognises, for such strategies to be effective they need to acknowledge that ‘schools do not operate with a ‘hermetic seal’ around them’ (Thompson, 2002 in Lupton, 2006: 8).

Despite such criticisms, SESI research tradition has been increasingly popular in the last twenty years. Although, there are a number of reasons for this, one of the most overriding factors seems to be that the claims made by educational researchers were particularly appealing to policy-makers. Since to assert that schools can make a difference by improving internal processes meant that the more difficult questions of how macro social and economic structures in society contribute towards inequality could remain untouched (for a sociological account concerned with these questions see Whitty, 1985; 2010). In contrast to the first tendency I outlined, proponents of this position tend to put forward functionalist solutions which acknowledge how social and economic factors affect educational outcomes but instead emphasise the difference that certain strategies can make in spite of these (Raffo et al., 2010). However some still find this untenable because such a position often plays scant regard for the dynamics of the communities in which schools are located and instead encourages schools to simply focus on concentrating on the core business of the school in terms of improving teaching and learning.
practice. Therefore, such a position is also markedly different from the community-oriented school approach.

**Third tendency: complex hope**

The third tendency is much less prevalent in the literature than the previous two but offers an interesting alternative. Those who lean towards this tendency often occupy a stance referred to by Grace (1994: 59) as ‘complex hope’ he draws on Gramsci and describes this as ‘an optimism of the will that recognises the historical and structural difficulties which need to be overcome.’ In this sense, those who occupy this position try to avoid the pessimism of the first tendency whilst also avoiding being naively optimistic since they also acknowledge the need for structural change (Dyson et al., 2010). However, they also attempt to be realistic and consider ‘what might be done’ (ibid: 196) and thus aim to avoid the stalemate position whereby schools are simply expected to simply wait for radical change in order for them to achieve more than limited impacts.

In 2005, the British Education Research Journal ran a special issue comprising of articles from BERA’s Social Justice SIG. In Thrupp and Tomlinson’s (2005) introductory article they outline a number of problems facing research which is focused on issues of social justice and educational policy. They contend that many academic discussions concerned with this topic ‘suffer from the charge of utopianism or idealism as well as vagueness and oversimplification’ (ibid: 549). In an effort to avoid these pitfalls, Thrupp and Tomlinson adopt a position of complex hope arguing that this allows them to:

...respond to charges of utopianism and oversimplification by beginning from a realistic and sophisticated assessment of the structural pressures against social justice and the possibilities of human
agency in relation to those pressures...complex hope needs to be encouraged where naïve and simple hope is what too often dominates when social justice matters get discussed in the education policy arena.

(Thrupp and Tomlinson, 2005: 550)

The same, it seems could be said for debates as to whether schools can make a difference. As previously recognised, the community-oriented approach tends to be dominated by advocacy texts but there is little critical reflection in terms of the aims, purposes or rationale behind such efforts (Wilkin et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2011). Moreover there is much ambiguity in terms of what schools are for whilst there also seems to be limited direction from the literature of how schools might make more difference in the future.

Therefore, attempts which occupy a ‘complex hope’ (Grace, 1994: 59) position often try to propose possible alternatives. The last chapter in Raffo et al.’s book (2010) by Dyson et al. (2010) entitled; ‘What is to be done? Implications for Policy Makers’ is a good example of this. In this chapter, they propose a number of possibilities of how the relationship between poverty and poor educational outcomes might be more realistically tackled.

Similarly in Wrigley et al.’s (2012: 12) recently edited book collection ‘Changing Schools: alternative ways to make a world of difference’ he compiles a number of chapters by a range of authors who attempt to provide ‘resources for optimism regarding contemporary school change.’ He justifies his approach as follows:

Our future depends on good schools, good school leaders and good teachers producing critical thinkers and local global citizens, as well as challenging the intransigent nexus between student social class
background, school learning and achievement. Our collection is thus offered in the spirit of Raymond Williams’ (1983) insightful observation that progressive politics is always about making hope practical, rather than despair convincing. This is not stupid optimism: the chapters here provide good reasons for hope, and recognise the necessity of hope as we struggle towards a better future.

(Wrigley et al., 2012: 12)

Although this approach needs to be careful not to wander into the realm of blind optimism, it seems that such a position is attractive particularly in terms of thinking what might be possible for schools to achieve in the future. From this discussion it is clear that there are some overlaps between these tendencies in the literature. However this framework will provide a useful heuristic tool in Chapter Six when I consider what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to achieve. For now I will move on to outlining the policy context which formed the backdrop to this study.

2.6 Analysis of the policy context: The New Labour years

In this section, I will seek to analyse the policy context which was the backdrop to Weston Academy, the case study of this thesis. Although, I will draw from other periods of history where relevant, I will chiefly concentrate on the period that New Labour was in office from 1997 to 2010. During this time, New Labour embarked on unprecedented programme of rapid reforms. A number of extensive reviews of New Labour’s educational policy have been produced (Tomlinson 2005; Coffield et al., 2007; Strain and Simkins, 2008) whilst some have analysed particular policies (Gunter, 2011) or themes such as privatisation and neoliberalism (Ball, 2007).
In this review of New Labour’s educational policy repertoire, I pay particular attention to the division between their ‘standards-focused reforms’ and their ‘community-focused reforms’. Thus I recognise how in the case of the former, New Labour introduced a number of policies which were predominantly influenced by neo-liberal ideology and strengthened many of the previous market-based reforms which were aimed at improving achievement through competition, choice and diversity. In contrast, the latter set of policies broadly comprised of a number of universal and targeted reforms in an effort to encourage schools to play a broader role in their communities. In particular, schools located in deprived areas became a central delivery mechanism for efforts which encouraged educational providers to tackle social and economic issues which beset communities. I recognise that in a variety of ways these two sets of policies placed contradictory demands on schools whilst they also seemed to configure the relationship between schools and their communities differently. I also highlight a number of issues with the policies themselves. I end with a consideration for how these policy reforms compare with some of the points raised earlier in the chapter, particularly in relation to community-oriented schools.

Third way approach

Before detailing New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’ and their ‘community-focused reforms’ in depth, it is necessary to explore the background context to these policies. New Labour famously pursued a ‘third way’ approach (Giddens, 1998). This was designed to avoid some of the freedom and unsustainable growth of the welfare state of the first way whilst also avoiding the pitfalls of the second way where the introduction of markets had increased coherence and accountability but stifled innovation and creativity (Rees et al., 2007). In terms of education, Labour sought to strike a balance between the blanket market influenced policies which aimed to
promote competition and diversity in the system whilst also make the system more equitable through a range of state directed reforms designed to target disadvantaged groups.

How successful they were at striking this balance is questionable; the overwhelming consensus amongst educational researchers is that at least in terms of improving equity in education, the market based reforms were very damaging (Chapman and Gunter, 2009). Most notably their continued use of market-based reforms served the interests of those who are well-resourced and able to compete thus ensuring that particular groups remain at the bottom (Ball, 2007; Woods et al., 2007). Furthermore, the majority of accountability mechanisms sought to measure improvements in standards rather than efforts to tackle disadvantage meaning that considerable more pressure and emphasis was often placed on the former rather than the latter (Cummings et al., 2011). I will return to this point later but for now I will provide an overview of New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’.

2.6.1. Standards-focused reforms

*Improving attainment*

New Labour’s objective to improve the education system and in turn society through a combination of market-based policies whilst showing a commitment to tackling disadvantage is none so more obvious than in their unrelenting quest to improve standards. In contrast to previous structural redistributive efforts of the social democratic movement such as the introduction of Comprehensive Schools in the 1960s, New Labour argued that it was ‘standards not structures’ that mattered (DfEE, 1997: 6). In practice this meant that centrally held tenets of the socially democratic settlement were rendered taboo; educational failure would no longer be linked to class and poverty or thought to be perpetuated by structures within the education
system (Harris and Ranson, 2005). Using ideas associated with the SESI research tradition, Labour focused on the need to improve internal school processes rather than counteract the negative forces of how particular structural arrangements seemed to disadvantage particular groups. Instead, it was argued that context could no longer be used as an excuse and schools located in deprived areas could ‘succeed against the odds’ (Maden, 2001).

Docking (2000) argues that much of the ‘fuss’ over the need to improve educational standards can be accounted for by New Labour’s preoccupation with improving economic prosperity. Thus, New Labour’s commitment to improving education was based on the recognition that in order for a relatively prosperous country like the UK to succeed in the globalised economy, a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce would be needed. Unlike poorer economies, the UK could not compete by selling cheap labour thus the government sought to establish a knowledge driven economy. However, as Blunkett (1999) frequently repeated New Labour sought to guarantee ‘excellence for many, not just the few’. Thus, New Labour was keen to improve educational standards across all schools to ensure ‘all our citizens’ could contribute and benefit from a growing economy (Blair, 2005).

The need to improve educational standards for all was also consistent with New Labour’s third way approach. In order for the country to prosper, the government could not afford to have sections of society that were unable to contribute to the economy. Yet they recognised that large sections of society remained unskilled and were disadvantaged by where they lived and the schools they attended. Thus, by improving the standard of education across all schools, New Labour sought to create the right conditions for individuals to help themselves. As demonstrated by Ruth Kelly, the then Secretary of State for Education ‘that is why’…
I see my department as the department for life chances. And that is why I see it is my job to boost social mobility...Our task is to make sure that for everyone involved in learning, excellence and equity remain a reality.

(Kelly, 2008)

Kelly’s position is typical of the so-called third way approach as her sentiments are couched in welfarist language, yet the reforms relied on the use of the market which enabled the state to limit government intervention in public life. Excellence and equity were also seen as complimentary goals; high standards of education would be available to everyone in an effort to ensure that individuals and in turn society would benefit.

**Accountability and competition**

New Labour’s quest to improve educational standards in an effort to compete in the globalised economy meant that England’s education system is commonly recognised as a ‘high stakes accountability system’ (Muijs and Chapman, 2009; 28). Although, the origin of these accountability measures can be found in the neo-liberal conservative reforms of the Educational Act of 1988 and 1992, New Labour strengthened these mechanisms and continued to promote the need for high standards. Schools were held accountable through a strict combination of target setting, inspection and assessment. The government also continued to make the performance data of schools publically available, grounded by the belief that competition between schools would drive up standards (Woods et al., 1998). Thus, performativity dominated the educational landscape, based on the assumption that it is possible to objectively measure the performance of individuals and institutions (Broadfoot, 2001).
Choice, diversity and academies

Throughout New Labour’s administration they also developed a strong commitment to choice and diversity. Thus, by increasing differences between schools, competition could be increased whilst greater power could be given to the consumer in effort to encourage parents to become central players within a marketised system. Schools continued to be self-managing institutions that controlled their own budgets whilst the power and control of schools was increasingly centralised and the role of local authorities diminished (Mongon and Chapman, 2009). Thus, during New Labour’s time in office schools became less accountable to their localities and increasingly expected to manage their affairs on an individual institutional basis.

These trends were typified by the introduction of the City Academy Programme (2000). Schools which converted to Academy status replaced ‘failing’ urban secondary schools, operated outside local authority control and were autonomous from national curriculum and teaching and pay conditions (Gunter, 2011). To begin with, academies were managed by external sponsors who were also expected to contribute financially to the schools (DCSF, 2008).

Since the early days of the City Academies, the programme has undergone significant changes. Some of the key changes include, for example, the dropping of ‘City’ from the name in 2002 in order to expand the programme outside urban areas (Beckett, 2008). The restrictions on sponsors also dramatically changed throughout the existence of the programme and the requirement of a sponsor was eventually dropped completely (Balls, 2009). Despite these changes, the thrust of the policy remained the same; by giving schools more freedom it was argued that they would be able to drive improved standards whilst creating different types of schools within particular localities promoting competition and further securing improved educational outcomes.
Of course, the emphasis which New Labour placed on the importance of competition and choice was in many ways a continuation of the previously introduced 1988 Education Reform Act. In this sense, New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’ were very much in-line with those introduced by the previous Conservative government. Similarly, New Labour also maintained the National Curriculum but did start to relax the ‘straitjacket’, recognising that the ‘one size fits all’ philosophy was problematic (West and Muijs, 2009). Thus, in their third term they took steps to encourage schools to think about how they could better meet the individual needs, abilities and interests of students in an effort to further improve attainment. Such efforts became known as ‘personalised learning’ and consisted mainly of attempts to increase the use of formative assessment, diversify curriculum choice and flexibility through the use of vocational pathways whilst fostering strong partnerships extending beyond the school in order to remove barriers to learning (DfES 2004). Therefore within New Labour’s efforts to improve standards, there was some acknowledgment that the education system needed to be responsive to learner needs rather than the onus being on the student to adapt to existing structures.

2.6.2. Analysis of standards-focused reforms

Issues for schools in deprived areas

Having outlined the motivations and the main points of New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’, I will now discuss some issues that have been identified within the literature. Firstly as noted before, though the language of choice is seductive, market-based policies work against disadvantaged groups (Ball, 2007; Woods et al., 2007). In the case of schools, the market dictates that high performing schools will fulfil demand much quicker whilst low performing schools will typically have places free which are inevitably filled
by disadvantaged students who lack informal knowledge or capital to compete in the first place. Such schools fall into ‘cycles of decline’ and regardless of incentives issued by the state to encourage schools to improve their performance, they fail to counteract the negative forces of the market (Whitty, 1997). Therefore, it seems that although New Labour often dressed up such policies in rhetoric which positioned the government as trying to tackle the relationship between disadvantage and poor educational outcomes, they actually made it more difficult for schools in deprived areas to improve.

Research has also shown that New Labour’s obsession with measuring the performativity of schools through various centralised accountability mechanisms also had negative effects for schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged students. Despite Blair (2001) emphasising that ‘our ideology is based on a notion of equality that is not about outcomes’ the quality of schools was frequently judged by Ofsted, not on their ability to improve teaching and learning per se but the performance of students in examinations (Lupton, 2004). As recognised earlier, social background has long been shown as a determinant in student performance; schools that serve high proportions of disadvantaged students thus struggle to perform favourably in league tables (Muijs et al., 2004). Since middle class parents are also more equipped to access the necessary information to navigate school choice systems, the use of such indicators also resulted in more affluent parents working the system in their favour, increasing the numbers of students from lower social and economic backgrounds in particular schools (Ball and Gewitz, 1999).

These pressures also had negative consequences for how school’s in deprived areas operated. For example, research has shown that some tended to offer a narrow curriculum and teach to the test (Creemers, 1994). Furthermore the desirability of measuring school quality using such crude measures was so
dominant, the validity of such methods practically went unquestioned (Broadfoot, 2001). However, it seems that such measures were unfair and further disadvantaged schools that already had a number of challenges stacked up against them.

The controversial nature of academies

Although, New Labour began their administration with an emphasis on the need to focus on standards not structures, they were responsible for the introduction of one of the most dramatic changes to the organisation of our schools; the Academies Programme. Similar to the other efforts to improve standards, the need to transform schools into academies was couched in rhetoric which aimed to justify the policy in terms of improving equality in educational outcomes across all schools. In fact, academies were seen to be the solution which would finally break the cycle of underachievement in areas with high concentrations of social and economic disadvantage (DfES, 2004).

The evidence on the impact of Academies is mixed. Research carried out by Machin and Vernoit (2010) recognises the importance of allowing the ‘academy effect’ to emerge and shows that those which have been established for two years or more have generated a significant improvement in GCSE performance (an extra 3% of pupils gaining 5 A*-C GCSEs when compared with similar schools without academy status). However, research carried out by Gorard (2009) has shown at least in terms of attainment, schools which have academy status were no more likely to improve students’ examination results than similar state schools with like for like intakes. In terms of school processes, concerns have also been raised in terms of the impact of sponsors on the curriculum (Hatcher, 2009) and how academies have manipulated their intake in an effort to appear that they are offering an improved standard of education (Quinn, 2008).
The Academies Programme was one of the most contentious policies issued by New Labour mainly due to the worryingly autonomous nature of the schools and seemingly limited space for public accountability (Chitty, 2008). In a view expressed by Peter Wilby (2009) and widely expressed by others, (for instance see Glatter, 2011) the academies programme signalled a gradual accumulation of the government’s efforts to marginalise the power of local authorities and in turn democratic participation in the delivery of public services. Whilst researchers such as Chitty (2011) accept that some local authorities have struggled to meet the demands of their essential functions, they argue that this does not legitimise the dismantling of one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. Although the requirement of academies to be sponsored was later removed, critics also showed concern as to how this feature of the programme could threaten the public accountability of such schools. The motivations of some sponsors were particularly bought into question whilst many had little or no connection with the school’s locality (Mansell, 2009).

From this analysis, it seems that at least in terms of introducing policies which would attempt to mitigate the relationship between disadvantage and educational outcomes, the research evidence is worrying. Despite New Labour’s emphasis on the need to improve standards for all whilst showing a no tolerance attitude for schools in deprived areas which continued to underperform, it seems that many of the policies actually worked against such goals. This discussion has showed that intensifying competition between schools through market-based polices and strict accountability mechanisms seemed to make it more difficult for schools in deprived areas to improve. Furthermore, the emphasis on increasing diversity in the school system by encouraging schools to be self-governing institutions and freeing them from local authority control not only may have damaging effects in terms of equity.
but also the democratic control of our public education system. However, it is important to remember this discussion represents one particular strand within New Labour education policy. Although, the standards agenda and the related policies discussed in this section were particularly strong features of the regime, there was also a second strand within their repertoire which will be discussed in the next section.

2.6.3. Community-focused reforms

The role of schools in tackling social exclusion

In contrast to the ‘standards-focused reforms’, New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’ arguably demonstrated a real commitment to ensuring better outcomes for all. They placed fundamental importance on the relationship between schools and their communities as a way to tackle not just educational disadvantage but also the effects of the concentration of deprivation in general. Therefore, some of the principles behind such efforts had much in common with those associated with the community-oriented school approach previously outlined. However, as I identify in the proceeding discussion, these efforts also required schools to work in a markedly different way from the ‘standards-focused reforms’ placing schools in a difficult position.

The need to tackle the spatial concentration of disadvantage, or in New Labour terminology ‘socially excluded communities’ was a particularly strong theme throughout the government’s ‘community-focused reforms’. As recognised earlier, due to the relationship between schools and their communities, educational providers are often used by the state as a delivery mechanism for regeneration efforts (Lupton, 2006; Dyson and Raffo, 2007; Dyson, 2010). However, schools were also found to be adversely affected by
the spatial concentration of disadvantage and found themselves trapped in the same cycle of decline as the communities they serve.

As part of New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’ they sought to bring these issues to the forefront of their efforts to tackle disadvantage. Initially they set up a specific ‘Social Exclusion Unit’ which was responsible for co-ordinating the forthcoming initiatives. A series of publications were also issued including ‘Bringing Britain Together’ (SEU, 1998). In this report, they argued that previous governments had failed because they had tackled problems separately, what was needed was a more ‘joined-up’ approach. In this sense, the Social Exclusion Unit was designed to get different departments in Whitehall working together. They subsequently commissioned a number of ‘Policy Action Teams’ who were expected to investigate various aspects of social exclusion and suggest how these problems could be tackled (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, 2001).

**Area-Based Initiatives**

The government also recognised that the complexity involved in tackling social exclusion meant that system wide improvement would not sufficient. As a consequence, they issued a variety of targeted initiatives at particular sections of the community where multiple disadvantages were concentrated. Collectively, these initiatives are often referred to as ‘area-based initiatives’ (ABIs) and although previous administrations had issued similar policies in the past, the approach was particularly prevalent during the New Labour administration.

The majority of ABIs issued by New Labour were implemented at the sub-local level through a partnership between national and local government (Dyson et al., 2009a). In this sense, they served as an acknowledgement that
certain areas needed targeted interventions because the concentration of disadvantage was greater in certain geographical areas (Power et al., 2005). Schools became the target delivery point for many of these initiatives due to their aforementioned position and the access they had to such communities. New Labour also sought to put a number of preventative measures in place; schools were acknowledged to have the resources to be able to specifically target those at risk of becoming socially excluded.

ABIs were first used by Labour in the 1960s and 1970s in the form of Educational Priority Areas, an initiative directed through schools which aimed to target extra resources in an effort to increase educational attainment (Smith, 1987). Education Action Zones were introduced in 1998 and aimed to encourage schools to work with local authorities in an effort to combine the resources of private, public and voluntary organisations (Dyson et al., 2009a). In a similar vein, Excellence in Cities was issued a year later and aimed to improve academic attainment. Low performing schools were targeted and given extra resources in an effort to improve learning and behaviour support (Dyson et al, 2009a). Later, in 2003, the London Challenge was launched but was later renamed the City Challenge as due to its apparent success, the model was replicated in Manchester and the Black Country. Broadly, the initiative aimed to encourage schools to develop partnerships in order to share good practice and develop more cohesive networks between schools in a particular area.

New Labour also acknowledged that in order to tackle social exclusion, area-based initiatives needed to focus not just on education but other areas of public life and neighbourhoods as a whole. To this end a number of interventions were introduced such as New Deal for Communities, Sure Start,
Employment Zones, Single Regeneration Budgets and a number of Crime Reduction Programmes.

**Multi-agency reforms**

Whilst ABIs were an important strategy used by New Labour to target particular areas of concentrated deprivation they also introduced a range of reforms which sought to improve the delivery of services for all. The Every Child Matters agenda and the associated reforms to multi-agency working are an example of this trend. Unlike area based initiatives, these policies were applied universally but in practice vulnerable or ‘socially excluded’ groups were targeted in an effort to ensure their needs were met more effectively.

The motivations behind wanting a targeted yet universal approach seemed to be a mixture of three main ideas which policy-makers were conscious of during this time. Firstly, it is important to remember that many of the multi-agency reforms, in particular the Every Child Matters Agenda (2003) came about because the system was recognised to be ‘failing’. The trigger for this assertion was the high profile case of Victoria Climbie, who died at the hands of her carers but was known to a number of service providers. The government response was not just to improve child protection but see this case within the wider context of how children services could help combat social exclusion in general (Dyson et al., 2009b). Secondly, social exclusion was seen as dynamic rather than static process which is the outcome of a variety of factors (Walker, 1995). Thus, policies responses needed to be multiple in an effort to tackle the range of factors which contributed towards sections of society being ‘socially excluded’. Thirdly, by applying multi-agency reforms universally the government sought to prevent more individuals becoming socially excluded. The term ‘at risk’ entered policy circles and was often used in reference to designate individuals who were in
danger of failing school and therefore unlikely to enter work and contribute to the economy (OECD, 1998).

These policy motivations meant that the logical response was the need to radically reform the structure of children’s services to ensure that different service providers were consolidated at both a national and local level. Subsequently, during New Labour’s thirteen years in office they would introduce a whole raft of policies which changed the face of multi-agency working in England. In the same year as the Laming report, the inquiry into Victoria Climbie’s death, the Green Paper (2003) titled Every Child Matters was issued. The paper proposed a framework of five desirable outcomes for all children these included being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing. All children services were expected to make a contribution to these goals through professional collaboration with other service providers. The subsequent Children Act was issued in the following year and legally required the integration of children service departments in the form of children trusts in each local authority (Audit Commission, 2008). These were responsible for implementing the Every Child Matters framework and developing shared working practices across all services. As one of the major children’s services with unique access to all children, schools played a major role in shaping how the outcomes would be delivered and how services would seek to work together.

In practice, multi-agency collaboration consisted of teams of professionals from various different services seeking to come together to establish shared working practices in an effort to best meet the needs of children in their care. Practice varied widely across different local authorities and collaborative efforts covered a range of organisational forms (Wilkin et al., 2003; Audit
Multi-agency reforms also included initiatives which sought to redistribute roles and responsibilities of children service professionals. Workforce remodelling was pursued by New Labour across the public services in the name of increasing efficiency and driving up standards (Ofsted, 2004). In practice for schools, it meant that teachers were no longer required to spend time on administrative and management tasks, instead these would be carried out by support staff. This would enable, as the government argued, for teachers to spend more time on their core business of teaching and learning in an effort to improve standards (DfES, 2003). In response to these changes, schools employed a variety of support staff, who often possessed a range of experience but were rarely qualified teachers (Edwards et al., 2010). The changes also meant that a variety of new roles were created but the deployment of their roles and responsibilities varied widely from schools to school. Such members of staff were also responsible for collaborating with other service providers outside of school in an effort to meet the needs of often vulnerable children in a holistic way (Webb and Vulliamy, 2001).

**Full Service Extended Schools**

The final area of New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’ I want to detail is the development of the Full Service Extended School Initiative. As previously noted, such efforts have much in common with the community-oriented school approach. In the remainder of this section, I will outline the specifics of New Labour’s approach.
Similar to the rationale behind the area-based policies and multi-agency reforms which were introduced, such efforts were also in response to the government’s recognition that schools were increasingly unable to tackle problems associated with social exclusion on their own (Tett, 2000). Such schools were found to spend a ‘disproportionate’ amount of time on ‘trying to access social services, health services etc. before being able to tackle the educational achievement’ (DfEE, 2000: 28). Thus, this in turn was hampering the government’s attempts to raise standards in order to ensure that such individuals would have the skills to gain employment and contribute to the increasingly competitive global economy (Cummings et al., 2011). The logical response was the need for an integrated service that could meet the variety of needs and that was sufficiently ‘joined up’ to ensure all public services were involved in providing a more holistic package of support (Wilkin et al., 2003).

New Labour’s commitment to schools offering extended services can be first identified in their 1997 White Paper ‘Excellence in Schools’ (DfEE, 1997) which detailed how schools would be able to offer out-of-hours activities through the New Opportunities Fund. As part of the efforts to reduce social exclusion, team eleven of the eighteen Policy Action Teams was named ‘School Plus’ and set the task of identifying cost-efficient approaches to ‘using schools as a focus for other community services’ (DfEE, 2000: 8). However, it was not until New Labour’s second term that they introduced legislation to enable schools wishing to embark on more ambitious programmes of support for their communities. The White Paper ‘Schools; Achieving Success’ laid plans for schools in disadvantaged areas to provide ‘childcare, study and family support using schools as a community resource’ (DfEE, 2001) and ‘extended school demonstration projects’ were subsequently implemented in three areas of England and an evaluation of the pilot projects was commissioned (Dyson et al., 2002).
In the 2003, the most significant pilot was introduced, named the ‘Full Service and Extended School Initiative’ which ran for three years. Although to begin with the project was set to involve one school in each local authority, the programme grew and was adopted in nearly one hundred and fifty schools of which all received up to £162,000 of funding in their first year which they were expected to further supplement (Cummings et al., 2011). Such schools were expected to offer a diverse range of activities and access to services to students, families and the wider community. The specifics were decided by the schools themselves in an effort to enable the schools to tailor to the needs of the communities and work with particular service providers in their area. Before the three year project had come to an end, the government extended the project to include all schools rather than those who had just volunteered to offer additional out-of-hours services. The requirements of the programme stayed largely the same except for how schools were encouraged to collaborate with each other and further signpost families to specialist services on offer in the area. Thus, as Cummings et al. (2011) recognise the extension of the policy was quite dramatic because it required all schools to offer activities and services whether they served socially excluded communities or affluent areas.

2.6.4 Analysis of community-focused reforms

In this section I will offer a critique of New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’. In particular I will focus on how these reforms compare with ‘standards-focused reforms’ as the division between the two sets of policies is important to this study. I also reflect upon how some of the issues raised in the earlier part of the review compare with some of the short-comings of New Labour’s community-focused efforts.
Limited impacts of Area-Based Initiatives

Similar to community-oriented schools, New Labour’s ABIs have been criticised for the limited impacts that they achieved. For example, Rees states:

...the evidence to date suggests that ABIs continue to have limited impact and any benefits are, at best, patchy. With reference to education focused ABIs, research on England’s EAZs, for example, shows that relatively few of the programme’s original objectives were realised...Even in terms of attainment targets, there was little measurable improvement and is some EAZs there was even a negative zone effect.

(Rees et al., 2007: 265)

There are a number of reasons for these dismal conclusions. Dyson et al. (2009a) argue that ABIs often fail to meet their objectives because of their narrow scope. For example, in many of New Labour’s ABIs, they sought to improve academic achievement as one of their primary objectives. However, they did not seek to counteract the reasons why students were underperforming as such initiatives often involved limited attempts to tackle issues which beset the community by working on a more holistic basis. Therefore, it seems that the focus on attainment undermined the original motivations behind such policies which originally aimed to target the effects of social exclusion in a number of ways by adopting a more cohesive approach.

Like the community-oriented school approach, the limited power of ABIs to achieve transformational impact has also been emphasised. Critics have argued that ABIs cannot expect to make anything more than marginal impact because of the short term nature of many initiatives and the inadequate
amount of resources they deploy. In Smith’s (1987: 33) retrospective account; ‘Whatever happened to Education Priority Areas’ he recognises that the resources that are allocated are ‘puny’ in comparison to the ‘major social forces’ they seek to counteract. Such criticisms are similar to those identified as part of the first tendency in the literature that I outlined earlier in response to whether schools can make a difference to deprived communities. In this case it seems that attempts by schools to deliver area-based solutions, were found to not have the capacity to counteract the major structural forces which reinforce wider inequalities at play within such communities.

Lupton (2006) also criticises the approach because spatial understandings of place are largely absent within policy documentation on ABIs. Therefore, attempts by schools to offer area-based solutions to tackle the effects of deprivation on educational outcomes often posit learning as an individualised activity whilst places are conceptualised simply as inert containers of people. In contrast as I explained in the earlier discussion concerned with spatial understandings of the interactions between place and educational outcomes, learning is posited as a historical and situated activity whilst learner identity is shaped by global, national and regional forces (Thomson, 2002). Lupton (2006) therefore recommends that in order for place-based disadvantage to be addressed, policies need to incorporate an understanding of the processes taking place at different spatial levels.

**Challenges to multi-agency working**

As outlined previously, other attempts which formed part of New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’ included attempts to improve multi-agency working. Some of the issues with these efforts will now be discussed. Earlier, I recognised how as part of workforce remodelling, teachers were encouraged to concentrate on standards whereas a range of multi-agency staff were
employed in an effort to meet the more holistic needs of children. However, Edwards et al.’s (2010) work in this area has shown that such divisions between staff caused a number of issues. As Edwards et al. further explain:

This separation of curriculum from pastoral placed the welfare managers in positions of relative uncertainty when compared with teachers. They were required to follow children’s trajectories, negotiate interpretations and responses and, as major players in the new space of action, weave these responses together. Teachers were not negotiating their work with their publics, despite enrolling parents as partners in meeting school targets, while the welfare managers were constantly negotiating with young people and with those who might support them.

(Edwards et al., 2010: 42)

Thus, it seems that support staff and teachers were forced to operate in very different spaces which at times were incompatible with one another. Such divisions show how New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’ seemed to encourage schools to work in a particular way which was in turn at odds with some of the more community-focused efforts thus creating issues for staff at the ground level.

Research investigating the challenges of multi-agency working also recognises how the roles and responsibilities of support staff are often unclear. In a study carried out by Atkinson (2001) on multi-agency working ‘confusion over roles and responsibilities’ was one of the most frequently reported issues. Such ambiguities were also reflected in government policy as exactly how multi-agency workers should seek to establish shared working practices was not made clear and guidance from the government remained
limited (Dyson et al., 2009b). However as Dyson et al. (2009b) recognise, in some cases this lack of guidance also meant that spaces opened up which enabled practitioners to develop their own frameworks for collaboration. Thus, it seems despite the more narrow focus of the standards-focused reforms, some staff were able to develop new ways of working.

*Full Service Extended Schools: a familiar story?*

The criticisms in the literature levelled at the attempts of school’s to offer extended services are comparable to those which were raised in relation to the community-oriented schools earlier because of the similarities between the two approaches. For example, Cummings et al. (2011) recognise that the guidance issued to schools as part of the FSES’s initiative was limited and vague. Thus similar to the difficulties experienced by those embarking on community-oriented school approaches, professionals often struggled to translate the outcomes that they hoped for into practice. Cummings et al. (2011) also recognise how the lack of guidance and support offered also meant that school’s struggled to be strategic or target their services effectively.

On a more positive note, Cummings et al. (2011) also acknowledge how the lack of guidance on FSES meant that some schools saw the ambiguous nature of the policy context and the uncertainties it created as opportunities to learn. This meant that they experimented with management structures, engaged in a variety of partnerships with community agencies pooling resources in new ways and developing more holistic ways of working with families. However, some schools, already under considerable pressure felt threatened by this uncertainty. In the worst cases, this caused them to retreat to their core business or manage their extended service provision as an ‘add on’ or ‘additional extra’ to ensure that such efforts did not dramatically affect the standard school practices at the school (Cummings et al., 2011). From their
vast empirical work in this area, Cummings et al. (2011) identify how schools experienced such tensions caused by the ambiguous policy context to varying degrees. However, schools located in deprived areas were often forced to manage these challenges to a greater extent since the need to offer such services and improve attainment was often more imperative.

These themes in the literature therefore acknowledge that balancing the demands of the ‘standards-focused reforms’ with those of the ‘community-focused reforms’ was sometimes difficult. As Ranson (2008) observes the policy context placed schools in an ambiguous position where they were forced to meet the demands of very different agendas. In some cases, this meant that a divide opened up between the school’s efforts to improve attainment and develop extended services (Cummings et al., 2011). This was also reflected in some management structures where different staff would be allocated to meet the demands of each. Whereas, in other cases more integrated models were developed because efforts in both areas were seen as mutually beneficial. The direction taken by schools was largely dependent on the ‘dynasmism’ of the head and other school leaders particularly in terms of what they believed to be the priorities of the school (Cummings et al., 2007a: 4).

Similar to the issues raised earlier in terms of providing evidence of the impact of community-oriented schools, evidence from the literature on FSES schools also identifies how they struggled to demonstrate impact. For the most part, this was because schools found compiling or accessing such data difficult (Cummings et al., 2011). This absence of baseline data made it difficult for schools to demonstrate impact whilst the activities themselves often had a number of aims. Dyson and Todd (2010) also recognise that schools lacked appropriate evaluation methodology because this desire to
collect baseline data then measure improvement was borrowed from the input/output models that were used to measure attainment but were unsuitable for measuring the types of impact that extended services hoped to achieve. Indeed, the so called ‘outputs’ of extended services involved outcomes which were much more difficult to measure than attainment scores whilst baseline line data was difficult to collect or did not exist in first place (Cummings et al., 2011).

From this analysis it seems that New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’ produced a range of opportunities for schools to engage in work which sought to tackle issues which beset the community. Whilst these reforms significantly differed from the standards-focused efforts, there were a number of points where they seemed to overlap. However, rather these two sets of policies acting in mutually reinforcing and complimentary ways they seemed to place schools in a difficult position where the demands of each were difficult to meet. These points will be further explored in Chapter Five and Six but to the end this chapter I will now consider the ‘bigger picture’.

2.7 Considering the bigger picture

Thirteen years after Blair forthrightly committed his government to an unprecedented raft of educational policies, research found that in England, educational outcomes were still structured by social and economic background (Schools Analysis Research Division, 2009). More recent research also suggests that this is still the case whilst the spatial concentration of deprivation continues to have detrimental effects on not just educational outcomes but also social mobility (Aldridge et al., 2012).

The previous discussion highlighted a number of issues with the policies themselves. The ‘standard-focused reforms’ increased competition,
accountability, choice and diversity in the system. Based on market logic, these mechanisms increased the autonomous nature of schools making them less accountable to local concerns whilst the market-based policies seemed to make it more difficult for schools serving deprived areas to improve. These reforms were invariably dressed up in welfarist language but were increasingly found to further disadvantage schools which had high proportions of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In contrast, the ‘community-focused reforms’ arguably represented a significant commitment by the government to tackle educational inequality. Through a variety of both universal and targeted policies they dramatically changed how schools were expected to work with other services and agencies. It was argued that a more joined-up approach would start to tackle ‘social exclusion’ and that schools were the best place to deliver and coordinate these efforts. However, guidelines and support for how schools should seek to work with other agencies were limited whilst the expected outcomes were ambiguous. Furthermore, schools efforts were often undermined by the strength and emphasis that was given to the ‘standard-focused reforms’ whilst both sets of policies seemed to contradict one another.

Throughout the discussion, it was recognised that whilst improvements were made and there was evidence of good practice, schools found it difficult to dramatically transform or impact disadvantaged communities. Impact was often, at best, patchy and schools struggled to balance the requirements of the ‘standards-focused reforms’ together with those which sought to broaden their role and tackle issues which beset the community. Although, there were problems with the policies themselves and the extent of the government’s commitment to really tackling educational inequality can be questioned, it remains the case that this was a time of unprecedented rapid educational
reform. Thus, there were opportunities for schools to start to tackle some of the issues outside their school gates to a greater extent than before. Yet for a number of reasons, it seems that significant impact was still hard to achieve.

As recognised throughout this chapter, some researchers have responded by identifying particular issues with the policies New Labour introduced (for example Chapman and Gunter, 2009). The framework that I introduced outlining the three tendencies in the literature also suggests there are a number of ways in which to respond to the issue of whether school’s can make a difference. This discussion has repeatedly acknowledged the seemingly limited power of schools to combat larger structural forces at play within deprived communities. There have also been a number of occasions where it has been evident that schools struggled to balance efforts to raise attainment with that of attempts to play a broader role. These difficulties could offer support to the second response I outlined which encourages schools to concentrate on inside school processes. However, it was also repeatedly shown that in line with sentiments of the community-oriented school approach, schools seemed to find improving achievement difficult because of the issues which beset communities as a consequence to disadvantage. Similar to the third response outlined as part of the framework, there were also a number of points in the discussion where schools were found to be developing some new practices and having some impact but these seemed to be often curtailed by the contrasting requirements of the standards-focused reforms. Therefore whilst there may be some signs as to how schools might make more of a difference in the future they seem to be fairly unclear.
Summary

This review of the literature has served a number of purposes. I have further explored the research problem, discussed the community-oriented school approach, outlined three tendencies in the literature in response to whether schools can make a difference, provided an overview of the policy context and drawn links between this and earlier points made in the discussion. However, it seems that the research problem remains increasingly complex whilst the question of what kinds of differences community-oriented schools can be expected to make remains difficult to answer. Therefore it seems that they remain in an ambiguous position whilst there seems to be limited consensus within the literature in terms of how schools might make more of a difference in the future.

This thesis will seek to further explore the research problem through the use of the case study of Weston Academy, a school which took a community-oriented approach in an attempt to improve achievement and tackle issues which beset the community at the time of the New Labour policy reforms. In the next chapter I outline how the study was conducted.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This study is concerned with the relationship between schools and their communities. In particular this study aims to investigate whether schools can make a difference to social and economic issues which beset deprived communities. To further explore this research area, a case study of a distinctive example of a school which took a community-oriented approach is offered. This chapter details how I tracked the development of Weston Academy using a longitudinal case study approach together with family case studies which were used to explore the impact of the school on their lives. In this chapter I firstly provide an overview of the Development and Research Partnership of which this study was a part. This will help to contextualise the study and explain the rationale behind the research design. I then detail the formulation of the research questions and outline the methods which were used to collect the data. The main elements of the fieldwork will then be explained, these include ethics, access and assembling the sample. The subsequent section will discuss the strategy and procedure I adopted for analysing the data. Finally, I consider the philosophical implications of the study and outline two threats to validity.

3.1. Contextualising the Research Design: The Development and Research Partnership

In the spring of 2008, before Weston Academy opened, a Development and Research Partnership was formed between a team of four academics from the Education Department at the University of Manchester and the executive board of Weston Academy. The research team consisted of Professor Alan Dyson, Professor Mel West, Professor Christopher Chapman and Professor Daniel Muijs. The executive board of the academy comprised three board members from Weston Housing Trust: the Chief Executive of Weston
Housing, Martin Rayner, the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Stuart Painter, and Gillian Frost, the Executive Director of People. William Pugh, the Head of the school, and John Burgess, the Deputy Head, also sat on the board. Parveen Gupta, originally employed by Weston Housing Trust, was seconded to the school and given the role of Community Director. This position was intended to serve as an intermediary between the two organisations.

As part of the research partnership arrangement, funding was allocated for a PhD studentship. I was the holder of this position and this thesis is a product of this arrangement. I formed a part of the research team and contributed to the research activities. As the name suggests, the purpose of the partnership was to provide research-based feedback to the executive board to inform the development of the academy. Steering group meetings were held three times a year to discuss the development of the academy and give feedback. A range of research activities took place during the three year partnership including both qualitative and quantitative data collection activities.

3.2 Research Design for this study

Although I was responsible for designing this study, the decisions that I made were influenced by my experiences as a member of the research team. Furthermore, whilst I had a considerable amount of freedom in defining the focus of the study, negotiations took place between myself, other members of the research team and most importantly the executive board to agree the final design.

The Development and Research Partnership was established to operate over a three-year period, however the doctoral case study was conducted over two years from September 2008 to September 2010. Nevertheless, I maintained contact during the final year of the partnership in 2010/2011 and continued to
collect data of relevance to the main body of evidence on an opportunistic basis.

One of the main advantages for this study of its execution within the context of the Development and Research Partnership was the fact that it allowed me to have unique access in the field. In many ways, I was also the central cog in the partnership machine because I was responsible for co-ordinating the research activities. Unlike the other members, my central focus was the research partnership and therefore I was immersed in various aspects of the arrangement to a greater extent than others.

The study was designed with the intention of maximally exploiting the unique position I occupied vis-a-vis the school and the access that I was able to enjoy as a consequence. A case study approach was considered to be the best option in this regard, as it would enable ‘rich and multi-dimensional’ data to be collected (Hodkinson et al., 1996: 2). I also wanted to track how the school developed over time and take advantage of the length of time I would have access to the school through the development partnership. Therefore, I took longitudinal case study approach (Ruspini, 2002; Saldana, 2003). My involvement with the various research activities and meetings which I attended also offered opportunities for data collection for my own study, whilst those which were directed towards the partnership added further contextual information.

The design process of the study was further influenced by a desire on my part to make use of my own experiences and strengths. Prior to starting the PhD, I conducted a range of small-scale qualitative research studies where the sample consisted mainly of children (for example see Rowley and Butson, 2011). I also had experience of working with children and their families as a teacher, youth worker and ChildLine counsellor. From these experiences of
working at the ‘ground level’ I was also aware that if I conducted research solely at the level of the organisation, I would be missing part of the story. Therefore, I decided that I would conduct family case studies to assess the impact of the school on their lives (Gilgun et al., 1992).

The main focus of the family case studies was the children who attended Weston Academy. However, I established the family as the unit of analysis in order to gain an understanding of parents’ perceptions and experiences as well as those of the students. Family case studies would enable ‘valuable and unique insights’ into their experiences, providing the freedom to explore the different ways that the actions of the school impacted their lives (Denscombe, 1998). The family case studies were conducted in the second year of fieldwork from November 2009 to November 2010.

The resulting design was a two-level case study with data collection and analysis taking place at both an organisational and beneficiary level. This aspect of the design aimed to provide a multi-dimensional approach allowing insights both into the strategic-level direction taken by the school and the way this played out in the school’s relationships with students, families and community.

The unique access I gained as part of the Development and Research partnership together with the length of time I was able to spend in the field permitted a quasi-ethnographic approach. The study was not purely ethnographic, as observation was not the primary method of data collection and I did not ‘share the lives’ of the participants in one particular setting (Descombe, 1998). However, I did spend a sustained period of time in the field which enabled me to submerge myself in the culture of the school and ‘respond to serendipitous events’ as well as collecting data on a more formal and planned basis (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004: 540)
3.3 Formulation of the Research Questions

As Robson (1993: 25) observes, ‘there is no foolproof, automatic way of generating the research questions’ but for him they are usually developed after the research focus has been decided. The research focus together with the research problem was decided in the relatively early stages of this study. However, the research questions were formulated as part of an iterative process of deciding the research design, methodology, and data collection methods. In this sense, the process was akin to Campbell et al.’s (1982 in Robson, 1993: 25) assertion that the ‘selection of innovative research questions is not a single act or decision.’ Two research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What did Weston Academy hope to achieve and what happened in practice?

2. How did Weston Academy impact students in the sample of family case studies?

The research questions correspond directly to the two levels of the case study: tracking the development of the school and the impact of Weston Academy is addressed by the first question and the family case studies by the second. The study also seeks to use the empirical evidence gathered from the case study to look more broadly at the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools. Finally, I go beyond the empirical based research questions to address an overriding concern for what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make.
3.4 Data collection methods

Having detailed the overall research design and formulation of the research questions I will now explain the two types of data collection methods which were used.

*Participant observation*

As previously mentioned an important element of the Development and Research Partnership was the steering group meetings which were held on an average of three times a year for the duration of the partnership. The meetings were attended, where possible, by all the research team members and the executive board of Weston Academy. The meetings were held at Weston Housing Trust and usually lasted for an average of two hours. The meeting usually began with a progress report on the research activities which I compiled (see example Appendix 1). This would then be followed by members of the executive board giving information about developments at the academy and this often included their reflections on the progress the school was making overall.

These occasions therefore presented an ideal opportunity for data collection. The primary method I used was participant observation since my position within the research team meant that I was a participating member of the observed group (Robson, 1993). I was also not just physically present within these meetings but verbally participated and shared my own reflections and the findings from the research I had conducted.

During the meetings I recorded the data using fieldnotes. I tended to use an unstructured, informal approach to data recording in this setting (Robson, 1993). A more structured approach would have been difficult in the presence of so many other people and whilst contributing to proceedings myself. After
the meeting I typed up the notes in two formats. The first provided the basis of the minutes which were circulated to the research team and executive board members. The second version provided data for my doctoral study.

Participant observation was also used in a number of other settings during my time in the field. For example, I attended staff briefings and management meetings as well as governors meetings. I also participated in opportunities to observe students and their parents from the family case studies when they attended activities or meetings held by Weston Academy or Weston Housing Trust. For example, during the twelve month period I was in contact with the families, I attended parents’ evenings, multi-agency meetings, out-of-hours activities held at the school, and participated in the neighbourhood schemes run by Weston Housing Trust, which were held in the community. Fieldnotes were also kept on these occasions and used an unstructured, informal approach.

**Interviews**

As previously mentioned, the main period of data collection where I tracked the development of Weston Academy was from September 2008 to September 2010. During this time I conducted an interview with Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive of Weston Housing Trust and William Pugh, the Head of Weston Academy at the start and end of each academic year. Therefore I carried out four interviews in total. Interviews with Parveen Gupta, the Community Director were conducted on a more regular basis. By the end of data collection the total was eight. These three individuals were selected as they had the most responsibility and involvement in Weston Academy. I had more regular contact with Parveen Gupta because she acted as the main gatekeeper to both the school and housing trust in her position as intermediary between the two organisations.
The family case studies were conducted from November 2009 to November 2010. Data collection consisted of three cycles: during the first and the third cycle I carried out an interview with each student and their parents on separate occasions. The second cycle consisted of interviews with teachers and support staff who were connected to the families and the previously mentioned participant observation activities. The interviews with students were conducted at Weston Academy during the school day whereas the interviews with their parents were conducted at the family home after school hours.

All the interviews I conducted used a semi-structured format featuring a number of open-ended questions. An interview guide (Patton, 1990) or ‘aide memoire’ (Holloway, 1997) was developed beforehand, listing the topics which I aimed to cover (See Appendix 2). The semi-structured design enabled an in-depth conversation to develop and the order in which topics were covered was flexible. The approach also meant that the interviewee could develop their ideas and speak openly about the issues that I raised (as per Denscombe, 1998). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that although I tried to give participants the opportunity to explore and share their experiences, I set the agenda, as Patton (1990) emphasises is the case in a semi-structured approach. I also used prompts and probes when I required more detail or wanted the interviewee to elaborate or clarify a particular point (as per Patton, 1990).

The executive board members and students who were interviewed all gave their consent to be audio recorded. In contrast, I was invited into the family home when conducting interviews with parents and therefore entered ‘their space’. The informal, personal setting of a family home meant that recording the interview was not always appropriate. On each occasion I asked the
parent their preference between recording or making notes of the interview, and respected their wishes.

3.5 Fieldwork

Having detailed the methods of data collection, I will now discuss the ethical considerations for the study, how I gained access, and how I compiled the sample of family case studies.

Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Associations Guidelines of Educational Research (2011) and permission was sought from the Ethics Panel of the University of Manchester. My previous experience of doing research involving children meant that I was familiar with Article 12 of the United Convention on the Rights of a Child which outlines the fundamental rights that all children are entitled too. The classic principle any researcher should consider is ‘do no harm’ (Greig et al., 2007: 180). Such considerations are especially significant when working with children, vulnerable or marginalised groups. In this kind of research it is important to consider a number of specific ethical considerations, which are examined below.

Beginning with the issue of consent, there is a general consensus in the literature that informed consent not only needs to be sought from parents or guardians but from the children themselves (Greig et al., 2007). I took a number of steps to ensure I gained informed consent from all participants. Firstly, I provided an information sheet explaining the purposes of the research, details of the Research and Development Partnership, how the data would be shared, where it would be stored, and how I would maintain anonymity. Three types of information sheets were developed which were
aimed at the different types of participants in the study: one for professionals, one for parents and one for children (see example in Appendix 3). I ensured that the language I used was appropriate for each of the subjects to understand. The information sheets were given to each participant at the start of the interview; they were asked to sign the form and given an opportunity to ask any questions. I also ensured that all participants knew they had the right to withdraw at any point during the data collection period. I also sought permission from the parents of each of the students involved. All these considerations accord with the conditions Kent (1996 in Silverman, 2006) sets out. Denscombe (1998) notes that gaining informed consent when conducting participant observation can sometimes pose particular problems for those who engage in covert research, however this study was conducted with full disclosure to research subject of my position and the research study.

Together with following the recommendations of British Educational Research Associations Guidelines of Educational Research (2011), I took steps to ensure that children’s voices were heard and respected and that they were treated as individuals (Greig et al., 2007). In each research encounter I endeavoured to establish a rapport between the children and myself in an effort to make them feel comfortable and able to ask questions if they were unsure about any aspect of the research.

Ethical considerations need to be taken into account both at the start and throughout the research process, particularly in the case of research involving vulnerable groups. As LaRossa et al. (1981) acknowledge, the researcher needs to weigh up the potential risks and benefits for vulnerable groups, and if the former outweigh the latter, the research must be abandoned. I therefore remained alert to any new ethical concerns arising in the course of fieldwork and changed plans where this was deemed necessary. For example, in light of
the level of intervention and upheaval one of the sample members experienced when he was taken into foster care I consulted the gatekeeper and we decided to cancel the final interview which was due to take place.

The closed, personal environment in which family case study data collection took place meant it was also important to consider the issue of safeguarding, both of the participants and myself. With regard to my own safety, I ensured that when visiting the family’s home I was accompanied by one of the gatekeepers. Safeguarding is also particularly important when working with vulnerable or marginalised groups. Although the research did not aim to explore family dynamics or personal issues that family members were experiencing, the very nature of the relationships which were established meant that participants sometimes disclosed information of this kind. As Cohen et al. (2007) observe, when such situations arise the researcher must be careful to avoid the extremes of sacrificing the research or ignoring the rights of the subjects. Fortunately because I was always accompanied by a gatekeeper who worked as part of the support and multi-agency team at Weston Academy, I was able to ensure that any matters which raised concern for the welfare of the students or their families were passed onto those who could take action if necessary.

**Access**

As previously mentioned, the Development and Research Partnership allowed unique access to Weston Housing Trust and Weston Academy. However, negotiating access to all participants was not always easy. In this section I discuss some of the strategies I used to gain access and some of the issues I experienced. Some of these points will be expanded on in Chapter Six when I consider the limitations of the study.
Due to the partnership arrangement, it was a relatively straightforward process to gain access to members of the executive board. Meetings and interviews were arranged through negotiation with their personal assistants and the regularity of contact allowed me to establish good working relationships.

A large proportion of the fieldwork was also conducted at Weston Academy. Entry to the school was already secured through the partnership, but gaining access to teachers and students was more complex. As Burgess (1991) notes, having permission from the head does not guarantee other members of the school will take part. To begin with, I was introduced to the staff by William Pugh, the Head, and Parveen Gupta, the Community Director, during a morning briefing. I explained the research partnership and my own doctoral study and explained that I would be approaching teachers to take part in various research activities. Although Parveen facilitated access to some of the members of staff, I spent a considerable amount of time approaching and negotiating opportunities to meet with staff. Due to the high-pressure nature of schools and the limited time available, this was sometimes particularly difficult. However, from my experience of being a teacher I was able to convey some understanding of the pressure teachers were under and was as flexible as possible.

I will explain how I assembled the sample of family case studies in the next section but here I will briefly explain how I gained access to students and their parents. Rather than establishing access to research participants through one gatekeeper, in practice a series of gatekeepers was needed, with negotiations taking place as an on-going process (Burgess, 1991; Peace, 1993).

Although I had permission from those in executive positions within each organisation to approach families, I was aware that in order to gain access to
the families, I would need to establish relationships with members of staff who had regular contact with families, both in school and in the community. I also wanted the sample to comprise a range of families, including those who were classed as vulnerable or hard to reach. From past experience of conducting similar research I was aware that approaching staff who had specific responsibilities for pastoral care would be a good place to start. From then on, Margaret Gilmore, manager of the Behaviour and Support Unit, became an important gatekeeper to some of the families. She also introduced me to two family liaison officers, Farooq Habeeb and Paul Walker. Both worked in school and the community whilst they also made regular home visits. Therefore, they became vital to facilitating contact with families and arranging when interviews would be conducted.

As Denscombe (2010) acknowledges, due to the significant role that gatekeepers play, cultivating a good relationship is vital. It is also important that in the eyes of the gatekeeper, the researcher and the study have credibility (Denscombe, 2010). As Hammersely and Atkinson (1983: 78 original emphasis) note ‘whether or not people have knowledge of social research, they are often more concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the research itself’. I also spent significant periods of time trying to build up rapport with both gatekeepers and family members. For example, after building a relationship with the mother of the Harrison family, when I visited the family home I would often spend time playing with their youngest daughter whilst I was also often invited to share a meal with the Nissar family.

However, as Gurney (1991) recognises, there is a fine line between building rapport with research participants and gaining high quality data. Sometimes it was also necessary to put rapport aside in an effort to probe the participant
further. However, doing this is difficult when someone has invited you in to their own home, particularly as sometimes we engaged in some quite sensitive topics. Furthermore, as Gurney (1991) observes, knowing whether it is appropriate to probe is often hard to judge whilst even the experienced researcher can overstep the mark meaning that they either jeopardise the data or the relationship or both. Fortunately I was able to manage these situations successfully; the only times when access was terminated was for reasons which were beyond my control.

**Assembling the sample**

A number of sampling techniques were considered during the processes of assembling the sample of families who would take part in the research. The purposive sampling technique was found to be most appropriate because this would enable families to be targeted on the basis of their characteristics whilst also ensuring that the sample was broadly reflective of the population of the school. Robson (1993) provides the following definition of purposive sampling:

> The principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher’s judgement as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in the project.

(Robson, 1993: 141/142)

As discussed previously, I was particularly interested in assessing the impacts that Weston Academy had on students’ lives, as well as gaining the perspective and experiences of the parents in terms of their contact with the school. Therefore I aimed to purposively select some of the more vulnerable families where impact was more likely to be observed in light of the range of interventions they received. At the same time, I ensured that some families in
the sample were included who did not have this level of support. This would enable comparisons to be made between different types of families who accessed Weston Academy and how the school impacted their lives.

In order to assemble the sample, I engaged in a complex and rigorous process that consisted of three main stages which I will now discuss. During the first stage I started to identify possible families who could take part. Fortunately during the first year of the Development and Research Partnership, a team of staff from Weston Housing Trust and Weston Academy started to compile a database of families who attended the school and which of those were tenants of Weston Housing Trust. Mapping software was then used to plot where families lived in the area and from this one could view who lived in each house and whether they attended Weston Academy. I helped with this process and was given access to the data to assist with selecting the families which would form the sample.

In order to narrow the range, firstly I decided to concentrate on ‘Beech Estate’. The estate is managed by Weston Housing Trust and the majority of families are Weston housing tenants. The estate is also adjacent to the school and thus a large proportion of children attend Weston Academy. The estate has also been subject to a range of regeneration initiatives because of the level of deprivation.

I compiled a list of twenty families who lived on the estate. All of these families were tenants of Weston Housing Trust and had children who attended the academy. I then added information about the children from ‘The School Information Management System’ used by Weston Academy. For example, I included the age(s) of the children, details of their academic performance and whether they were in receipt of any interventions. This list was then discussed during a meeting with the three gatekeepers, and ten
families were selected to be suitable for consideration. Letters were sent to
these families and six of them agreed to take part.

The majority of families who live on the Beech Estate are white British.
However around a third of students attending Weston Academy are of Asian
heritage. Therefore I approached Farooq Habeeb, the Asian heritage family
support officer, to recommend families he had contact with which could
possibly be a part of the study. Six families were contacted and four agreed to
take part. The table below details information about each of the family case
studies.

Table 1: Details of family case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family name</th>
<th>Family members</th>
<th>School year at beginning of data collection</th>
<th>Tenants of Weston Housing Trust</th>
<th>Eligible for Free School Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baldock</td>
<td>Tina (P)</td>
<td>Y10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox</td>
<td>Gill (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houghton</td>
<td>Shelia (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massood</td>
<td>Raha (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umah</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>Zarina (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kaleem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grove</td>
<td>Jackie (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>Paula (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nissar</td>
<td>Saifdar (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asjad</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Rachel (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kieran</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan</td>
<td>Citralli (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(P) denotes parent; Families in grey = more vulnerable; Families in white = less vulnerable
3.6 Strategy and procedure for data analysis

In this section I describe the process I undertook to analyse the data. In particular, I detail some of the difficulties I encountered when using a formalised coding system and the reasons behind my decision to use thematic analysis.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that I had a large quantity of data, reflecting the length of time I spent in the field and the breadth of the study, insofar as it encompassed both the organisational level and the beneficiary level. My involvement in the Development and Research Partnership meant that I had also began data analysis early on within the process whilst I was still collecting data. As mentioned previously, I was required to give regular feedback reports at the steering group meetings and for which purpose I started to identify themes from both tracking the development of the school and from the family case studies.

There were a number of pluses and minuses to this situation. The sheer volume of data I had was initially quite overwhelming, whilst the relationships I had built up in the field meant that translating ‘sentimental and interpersonal thoughts into more theoretical ones’ was challenging (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 266). However the quantity of data I had collected offered the potential to give a very rich and multi-dimensional account of how the school developed and how it impacted the lives of the family case studies. Beginning data analysis from an early stage also meant that I became very familiar with the data, whilst I was also able to reflect upon the themes which were emerging not only with the research team but also the executive board.
After finishing the main period of data collection and entering the third year of my doctoral studies I started to engage with the analysis process more fully. To begin with I experimented with a range of techniques such as assigning codes to the data. These more formalised procedures are aligned with grounded theory and designed to enable the researcher to engage in ‘mining’ the data by ‘digging beneath the surface to discover hidden treasures’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 66). However, I found generating the codes difficult and felt on occasion that I was becoming ‘lost’ in the data. In keeping with the grounded theory approach I also tried to keep an ‘open mind’, as my research study did not set out to test a particular theory and I did not have a rigid framework which focused data collection (Denscombe, 1998). As Glaser and Strauss explain:

To be sure, one goes out and studies an area with a particular...perspective and with a focus, a general question or a problem in mind. But the researcher can (and we believe should) also study an area without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, ‘relevancies’ in concepts and hypotheses.

(Glaser and Strauss 1967: 33)

However, I became increasingly aware of my ‘theoretical baggage’ (Blaikie, 2000: 103), therefore limiting the extent to which the research strategy could be considered purely inductive. Thus, whilst I did not set out with a specific hypothesis I did have a strong grasp of the policy context and literature. This not only influenced how I analysed the data but also what I focused upon during the data collection process.

At this point I decided to go back to the initial themes which had been identified during data collection and which had been fed back to the
executive board. I separated the themes which were concerned with the development of the academy and those of the family case studies. To begin with I solely concentrated on the transcripts from the interviews with members of the executive board and started to reassess the themes which had been identified previously and built upon these. Later, I used the fieldnotes to further contextualise the data. I started to identify a number of patterns and interconnections and similarities and differences between the themes, as suggested by Denscombe (1998). I repeated the same process for the family case studies, initially treating each family case study separately and then on a cross-comparative basis, as Silverman (2011) proposes.

During the generation of the themes I also went back to the literature. Conceptual tools from the literature were applied to make further sense of the themes which emerged from the data, and I started to develop emerging arguments. This process was ongoing and relationships were established between the themes from the findings and those contained within the literature. During this process I continued to treat the findings at the level of the organisation and those of the family case studies separately.

Like Jones, (2010) I therefore engaged in a research strategy which was neither purely inductive nor deductive but sought to balance the two. As she explains:

Firstly, the literature acted as a set of analytical tools which the data was interrogated with. Secondly, the data drove which literature was examined and which concepts were appropriate in further understanding it...The approach is cyclical moving between top-down theory testing and bottom-up theory generating.

(Jones, 2010: 80)
Moving between the theoretical understandings generated from the literature and those from the findings is also akin to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) notion of ‘theoretical sensitivity’. This process involves re-examining the data as new concepts emerge in an effort to limit researcher bias and ensure that the explanations fit with the patterns emerging from the data. The issue of researcher bias will be returned to later but for now I will consider the last stage which featured as part of my analysis of the findings.

The final stage in analysis involved thinking about how to generalise the findings. As previously noted this study aims to use the empirical findings more fully to explore the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools and furthermore consider an overriding concern for the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. Thus, part of the analysis needed to consider the wider implications of Weston Academy in terms of what can be learnt from the case. This part of the analysis also required the findings to be looked at as a whole by comparing and contrasting the main themes which were identified at the organisational and ground level.

A number of critics have questioned the generalisability of case studies especially those which are predominantly descriptive and seek to explore a single case (Eckstein, 1975). Like these critics, Denscombe (1998: 36) advocates the researcher considering ‘how far the case study example is similar to others of its type’. However, as Blaikie (2000) notes, demonstrating the uniqueness of a particular case study as well as its typical features can be difficult. A way out of the problem is to instead employ Bassey’s concept of ‘relatability’. As he explains with regard to educational research:

An important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher
working in a similar situation to relate his [sic] decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case is more important that its generalisability.

(Bassey, 1981 cited in Blakie, 2000:222)

I will return to this point in Chapter Six but for now it is necessary to consider some of the philosophical implications of the study and issues of validity.

3.7 Philosophical implications: research strategy and validity

Further reflections on research strategy

This study employed a research strategy which moved between inductivism and deductivism in a similar way to that described by Jones (2010), cited above. This has philosophical implications for the study as a whole. A purely inductive approach requires the researcher to make objective observations and set aside preconceptions in order to develop ‘theory’ (Blaikie, 2000). In this sense, the ‘hidden treasures’ which need to be mined are an attempt to find ‘facts’ or ‘truths’ within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 66). Therefore, the researcher relies on their ability to observe. However, the deductive approach contests this and highlights the dependency of observation on the researcher’s own interpretation. Reality cannot be observed objectively; scientific enquiry must therefore employ existing theory to develop propositions which frame the collection of data. The testing of these propositions using the resulting data allow existing theory either to be consolidated or modified (Blaikie, 2000: 105).

In terms of the philosophical understandings which underpin this particular study, they reflect the aim of balancing these two strategies. Ontologically I assign to the idea of the existence of a reality separate from our knowledge of
it. For example I accept the structural forces of social and economic disadvantage within which schools operate as being more than a social construction, existing only in terms of the ‘meanings’ that we attach to them. Meanwhile in terms of epistemology which is concerned with ‘how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998: 8), I do not accept that it is possible to objectively view the data. My view of the case study is necessarily influenced both by the ‘theoretical baggage’ (Blaikie, 2000: 103) of existing research, and by my own interactions in the field. With regard to the latter, I therefore accept the idea of reflexivity: that ‘individual researchers inevitably inject something of themselves into the research process’ (Blaikie, 2000: 254). This is discussed further below. However, the understandings which I came to were driven by themes identified from within the resulting data, rather than being strictly defined by my own pre-defined position or hypothesis.

**Considering the validity of the study**

In line with Maxwell (2005: 106) the term ‘validity’ is used in this study in a ‘fairly straightforward, commonsense way’ rather than assigning to ‘the idea of an objective truth which an account can be compared.’ Indeed, as Maxwell (ibid) observes rather than a ‘gold standard,’ researchers instead need to consider ‘how they might be wrong’. Therefore they need to identify ‘threats’ to the validity of their study. I have identified two validity threats for this study, which will be discussed below.

**Researcher bias**

Firstly, in line with the previous discussion it is necessary to consider my own influence on how the data was conducted and analysed. As Kleinman notes:

> Our attitudes affect what we choose to study, what we concentrate on, who we hang around with or interview, our interpretation of events,
and even our investment of time and effort in the field, Because analysis begins at the start of the study (whether we acknowledge it or not), our values and feelings are caught up in the analysis.

(Kleinman, 1991: 184)

Earlier, I acknowledged some of the issues of a purely objective approach and instead recognised how my ‘theoretical baggage’ (Blaikie, 2000: 103) influenced data collection and analysis. However, using a purely deductive approach also runs the risk of only concentrating on the data as far as it fits ones theoretical framework. At the same time, basing ones interpretations solely on the data which ‘stand out’ to the researcher is also dangerous because of the unreliability of our observations (Miles and Huberman, 1994 in Maxwell, 2005: 108). This discussion therefore acknowledges the possible biases which threatened the study and how balancing a deductive and inductive approach attempts to limit this.

It is also important to recognise that in Chapter Five I also present the findings with very little analysis but instead try to provide the ‘stories’ of those who participated in the study. Part of the rationale behind this is to give the reader the opportunity to start to interpret these for themselves. In this sense, I use a similar presentation style to that employed in Hodkinson’s et al. (1996), which presents case studies of young people’s transition from school to work.

**Reactivity**

The second validity threat I have identified is concerned with my influence on the individuals I studied and the settings where the data collection took place. As noted earlier with reference to the notion of reflexivity, the goal of trying to eliminate influence is seen as futile due to the nature of the social world.
Instead the researcher needs to understand their influence and use it productively (Maxwell, 2005). Researcher position is considered in Chapter Six at the end of the study but here I briefly want to acknowledge the complex position I occupied. As a member of the research team for the partnership between Weston Academy and Weston Housing Trust, I was viewed as an ‘outsider’. However the ethnographic nature of this study and the time I spent in the field also had implications as I started to feel like an ‘insider’. Managing to ‘switch’ between these positions was at times challenging. However, I was particularly conscious of this and included these reflections in my fieldnotes which further fed into the analysis of the findings. I further develop some of these considerations in Chapter Six.

**Summary**

This chapter has served a number of purposes. In particular I have outlined the rationale behind the research design of this study, data collection methods, the fieldwork process, how the data was analysed, and finally philosophical considerations and possible threats to the validity of this study. In the next chapter I present the findings. I aim to provide the reader with an opportunity to begin interpreting what happened during the development of Weston Academy and how the school impacted the members of the family case studies in line with the research questions.
Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

In this chapter I present the findings for this study. I start by outlining the area and school characteristics. I explore the broad rationale behind Weston Housing Trust’s sponsorship of the school and provide the findings from tracking the development of the school. This section therefore relates to research question one. I will then present four of the family case studies in full. Two from those families considered as more vulnerable in the sample and two who were less so. The final section of the chapter provides the preliminary themes from analysing the entire sample of family case studies as a whole. Thus the second half of the chapter presents the data concerned with research question two which is concerned with the impact of Weston Academy on students’ and their families’ lives.

4.1 Outlining the area and school characteristics

Weston Academy opened in September 2008 and is located on the outskirts of a large industrial conurbation in the North of England. The academy joined together two previously separate secondary schools; Lakeside High School and Abbey Hay High School. Weston Academy inherited a challenging history from the predecessor schools. Lakeside was placed in special measures in December 2006, after a sequence of different heads. The school was inspected again in October 2007 and was found to have made satisfactory progress. Both Lakeside and Abbey Hay achieved well below national average examination results and were under-subscribed.

As previously described, Weston Academy is a larger than average secondary school. The Ofsted (2011) report details how the school has a higher than average number of students eligible for free school meals whilst the number of students with special educational needs also exceeds the national average.
Around a third of pupils who attend the school come from homes where English is not the first language.

The characteristics of Weston Academy are broadly reflective of the local area. Haleton is considered as a highly deprived, possessing many of the issues traditionally associated with towns in England with low social and economic status. Like many towns, Haleton has suffered the effects of deindustrialisation. From interviews with the executive board members as part of the Development and Research Partnership, the following features of the area were identified:

- Relatively high employment but low wage economy
- This situation was believed to have contributed to low expectations and low achievement, particularly in terms of literacy and numeracy
- In some sections of the population, this is compounded by inter-generational worklessness
- Other compounding factors include poor health, low level crime and some pockets of racial tension

Weston Housing Trust Group is the main social housing provider in Haleton and surrounding areas. Weston was created in 1999 after the former local authority housing stock transferred to their control. Since then, the group has grown considerably and now oversees two other housing associations in other parts of England. To date, the group owns around 18,600 homes.
4.2 Broad rationale of the sponsor and vision for the school

Weston Housing are one of the first landlords in England to sponsor an Academy and invested two million pounds, as per the requirements of the programme at the time. Weston Housing Trust saw the sponsoring of the Academy as a crucial extension to their continuing efforts to improve Haleton, as Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive explained:

The effects of deprivation on Haleton are stark and challenging, we want to change this. As a housing trust, we made promises to our tenants. We have improved the houses themselves, updating kitchens, bathrooms and so on; then we turned our attention to the physical environment – improving lighting and security, regenerating the ‘no-go’ areas. We promised our tenants lots, and we delivered (recent survey suggests 90% satisfaction level amongst tenants). Now we are promising them an academy that will work for them too – they expect us to deliver.

26/09/08

Furthermore, whilst Martin recognised that their core business was different from that of the schools, they operated in the same neighbourhood and were dealing with similar problems. As he explained:

We have different primary concerns and agendas but the families in our houses are the same ones who are sending their kids to the schools. The problems that we are experiencing on our estates I expect are the same ones the teachers deal with every day. So, it makes sense for us to work with each other and I’m hoping a more combined effort will produce positive effects for both of us.
At the beginning, it was clear that Weston Housing Trust hoped that they would be an active rather than silent partner. For them, the partnership would lead to a number of goals which would ultimately result in the creation of ‘a sustainable community’. As a social housing landlord, they were knowledgeable of the challenges facing the community of Haleton and saw the creation of Weston Academy as central to building a brighter future for residents. Stuart Painter, Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, said:

We see the school as acting as a vehicle to accessing more parts of the community. Schools are well placed to do this, we want to help residents build a sustainable community which they are proud of. We see providing a school with a good reputation for educational standards as central. For us though, it’s not just about improving learning but creating a sort of ‘community hub’ where everyone can benefit. We see the Academy as not just improving educational chances but life chances; improving employability, aspirations, health and general wellbeing of our residents and others living in Haleton.

Weston Housing Trust had a distinctive rationale and vision of what they hoped to achieve through their sponsorship of the academy. They also saw the need to raise standards whilst also broadening the role of the school in the community. In this sense, there are clear links that can be made between the school and the community-oriented approach as detailed in the literature review.
Interestingly, as the previous quote shows, as well as Martin’s below, the executive board also theorised the type of community they hoped to build and started to think how residents would play a part of this. As Martin Rayner’s comments demonstrate:

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Eventually I suppose we would want to do ourselves out of a job, that’s the weird thing about regeneration but our approach hopes to empower residents and encourage them to take ownership of the improvements.
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26/9/08

Despite their grand vision of what they hoped to achieve, it became clear from the initial steering group meetings, the executive team found setting the vision down in a concrete form difficult. Therefore, as part of the Development and Research Partnership activities we sought to make the vision more explicit by adopting a theory of change approach (Anderson, 2005; Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Dyson and Todd, 2010). In brief, this approach sought to elicit a theory which explained what broad actions the executive board planned to employ and what outcomes they hoped, in time would materialise. In order to start to map the theory, members of the executive board were interviewed. This data was then modelled diagrammatically and revised through group discussions. Therefore, the theory was co-constructed through an iterative process between the research team and executive board members. It was also hoped that the theory would be a useful strategic tool which could be referred to and revised during the tracking period in an effort to inform the development of Weston Academy.
Figure 2. Representation of Weston Academy’s vision using a theory of change approach

Figure 2 displays the theory of change diagram which was produced and used as part of the Development and Research Partnership. The broad themes of action appear across the top and the right hand side of the diagram, these are then linked to the outcomes that the executive board hoped to achieve. Those along the top are more directed to teaching and learning whereas those along the side more focused on the community. The causal pathways between how executive board members believed the broad themes of action would contribute to the final outcomes are also shown (arrows). Therefore, the diagram shows how the executive board planned to implement multiple actions which would contribute both in individual and mutually reinforcing ways to the end point outcomes. Thus, creating the impression of a complex and comprehensive picture of what they hoped to achieve.
Ideally, the above theory of change diagram would have been further populated with information as Weston Academy developed. Thus, further details as to what the chains of actions consisted of and how executive board members envisioned these would contribute to the achievement of the end point outcomes would have been theorised. However, as will be explained in the next section, Weston Academy developed in a dramatically different way than was originally envisioned. Furthermore, rather than their actions according with those set out in the diagram, their efforts developed on an opportunistic and hap-hazard basis. This meant that whilst the theory of change diagram was a useful way of pictorially representing the executive board’s original vision, it became redundant in terms of its ability to frame what happened as the academy progressed. Instead, the next section outlines the main themes which resulted from tracking the development of the school.

4.3 Tracking the development of Weston Academy

Building the partnership between Weston Academy and Weston Housing Trust

From the beginning, the executive board sought to take a number of steps to solidify the partnership between Weston Housing Trust and the school. For example, William Pugh spent three months before the opening of the school working at the headquarters of Weston Housing Trust. Within the initial formation stages of the academy, Weston Housing Trust was also keen to have someone that could act as a bridge between the two organisations. They created the Community Director position for this purpose and seconded one of their senior professionals Parveen Gupta to fulfil this role. Stuart Painter, Executive Director of Neighbourhoods at Weston Housing explained Parveen’s role as follows:
We hope that she will act as the midpoint between the two organisations, a bridging point if you like, so we can share the expertise that exist in both organisations. We also thought it would be useful to have someone who could regularly be in school and act as a vital communication point. We also wanted someone from our end to be heading on the community agenda and ensuring this was integral to the academy’s development.

26/09/08

Thus, Stuart articulated how Weston hoped that the creation of Parveen’s role between the two organisations would help expertise to be shared and aid communication but most importantly that the sponsor’s motivations for getting involved in the Academy would remain strong.

In the beginning stages of Weston Academy, Parveen worked closely with William Pugh, the Head and John Burgess, the Deputy Head. These three members of the executive team had specific responsibilities in terms of the direction of the school whereas the other executive board members held key positions within Westin Housing Trust. In this sense, they acted as a three-point leadership triangle. Therefore, William, Parveen and John were mainly responsible for the day-to-day running of the academy. To begin with, this arrangement seemed to work well. As Parveen explained:

I think we make a good team, we are all getting on really well. So far, I haven’t felt that I have needed to compromise my loyalties at all which was something that I worried that I might have to do. William and John are completely on board so that has been great.

26/9/08
Therefore, in the early stages of the academy, there were positive signs that the management of the academy had the potential to enable professionals to share their knowledge and build upon one another’s expertise.

The next logical step might have for John, Parveen and William to start translating the executive board’s vision into practice. However, the team experienced a number of difficulties in doing this, which I will now explore.

One of the main issues seemed to be predicting what types of interventions would produce the outcomes they hoped for, as Parveen explained:

> We know what we are aiming for but how we get there is difficult. It’s not like you can start from fresh. There is already lots in place. It’s hard to know which interventions produce the most impact or even how we can provide evidence that we have made progress.

11/12/08

As I previously recognised, in many ways the vision for the school was distinctive. However, exactly how they would get to the broad and fairly ambiguous goals they hoped for was not clear. The executive board also struggled to set their vision down in concrete form. Although the research partnership attempted to assist with this, in practice, the executive board still seemed to struggle.

Another major factor which made it difficult for Weston Academy to turn their grand vision into a coherent community strategy was the lack of guidance available. Although, the executive board was able to make numerous connections between issues experienced inside school and outside the school gates, they were often at a loss to know how to co-ordinate their
work in order to tackle these jointly. Martin explained this problem as
follows:

In many ways, what we are trying to do is ground breaking so we have
got to expect to do a bit of a trial and error. It would be useful if we
had some kind of framework or at least some policy guidance. There is
very little support available or accountability measures for setting up
community initiatives yet a lot of government policy seems to be
encouraging this sort of work.

27/07/10

Therefore, it seems that although the school’s vision was in-keeping with
some of New Labour’s reforms, particularly those which encouraged schools
to play a broader role in their communities, Martin felt there was limited
guidance.

Pressure to Improve Standards

At the same time Weston Academy was under mounting pressure to improve
standards particularly because of the poor history they had inherited from the
predecessor schools. As William explained:

We need to be seen to be raising achievement quickly. If we don’t
manage to get the scores on the doors we are going to be in the same
position as the predecessor schools. Special measures, Ofsted knocking
on the door not to mention the adverse effects it will have on the
reputation of the school and indeed Weston, we simply can’t afford not
to.

11/12/08
Thus, the executive board was under a great deal of pressure to improve attainment because of the negative repercussions not doing so would have on the school’s ability to compete within the educational marketplace.

However, during the initial stages of the academy’s development it became apparent that the executive board would need to concentrate on putting in place core school practices before they could hope to improve attainment. As mentioned previously, Weston Academy inherited a particularly challenging history from the predecessor schools which meant that staff morale was also particularly low. In William’s words this meant that they needed to play ‘step up and catch up’.

William also invested a significant amount of time in the staff themselves and aimed to establishing a new ‘can do’ school culture. As he explained:

One of the obstacles in the way of improving results is low staff morale. The problems at the predecessor schools mean that for a lot of them their confidence is at an all-time low. We have inherited the majority of our staff too so in order to start improving things we need a rebirth from within.

02/02/09

For William, the renaissance would be secured through investing in the staff themselves through a range of continuous professional development opportunities and regular lesson observation.

As well as investing in staff, William and John started to introduce a whole host of strategies which were designed to specifically improve standards. As John said:
It’s excellent having William as he has so much experience in school improvement. We are really starting to think differently about teaching and learning, making sure we have strict target setting programme for the students so we can track performance. We are also introducing attendance and behaviour policies and more support for those students who struggle to attain.

During this time, the school became increasingly focused on attainment and the use of standard school improvement strategies. William’s expertise in this area meant that they also hoped that these strategies would improve teaching and learning quickly. As John further explained: ‘the strategies we are introducing are quite straight-forward, we expect them to inject improvement and change relatively quickly.’

**Community Strategy**

Due to William and John’s expertise in this area they took control of these efforts and instead Parveen Gupta was given the responsibility of translating the vision into practice. However, because of her limited experience of improving attainment, she only focused on aspects of the vision which were more focused towards the community. As the Community Director, she set about trying to launch ‘a community strategy’. The strategy was intended to plan how the school would work with Weston Housing Trust together with a plan of what extended services and support mechanism they would offer.

However, in practice Parveen struggled to develop a community strategy due to the seemingly ambiguous nature of the vision. As she commented:
I don’t even know where to start! It’s like trying to make an amazing chocolate cake without a recipe and a vague idea of the ingredients but no idea what order or amount!

27/11/08

This indecision continued for the majority of the first term of the Academy’s opening. The lack of urgency to develop a strategic plan seemed partly due to the sheer level of pressure the academy was experiencing. As Parveen explained:

Most of the time we are fire fighting – dealing with whatever comes through the door so trying to act strategically can be a real challenge.

11/12/08

Despite these difficulties, there were various attempts to formulate a strategic community plan. The first strategic plan that Parveen produced chartered the activities that had taken place during the year rather than specifically planning the types of interventions they hoped to introduce in the future and their expected outcomes. When reviewing the document, Parveen justified her approach:

It’s a little ad hoc at the moment but that’s because I’m still working out what is already taking place within school. It’s been hard to get my head around all the things that are going on – what agencies we already have links with and who we still need to develop relationships with. That’s why I feel like we need to do some kind of audit.

22/04/09
Therefore, Parveen felt she needed a clear idea of existing activities and links across both organisations that were currently in use in order to plan what needed to be done in the future. However, a full audit was never produced which meant that the executive board did not have a clear picture of what was already in place and in turn what needed to be developed.

Parveen also seemed to find it difficult to separate actions which were part of the original vision. Originally, the vision included actions which aimed to improve teaching and learning and ensure the school played a broader vision in the community as per the theory of change framework. This meant that she abandoned using this and in response from pressures to the governors, tried to formulate a ‘community improvement plan’. As her comments show:

> Now I’m not concentrating on the achievement, only the community stuff I need to somehow separate it but I’m not really sure how. The governors also want me to produce something like a ‘community improvement plan’ so that will need to be set out differently from the framework.

10/11/08

To coincide with the community strategy a committee was also formed in an effort to try and co-ordinate the various initiatives detailed in the plan. The team consisted of Parveen, two middle leaders, four teaching staff and one member of the pastoral team. In an interview I conducted, one of the middle leaders described how the committee worked:

> It is difficult to get a time where we can all meet, we have only managed to meet a couple of times this term. Some of us have teamed up, started to apply for funding and have planned loads of stuff. There
is stuff going on all the time, various opportunities to hold events and run new schemes in school with different partners but it’s not really linked into the original plan, it’s more organic and opportunistic.

12/5/10

Therefore, it seems that although the team struggled to meet regularly and adhere to the strategic plan there was still a lot of activity. This meant that many of the initiatives were ad hoc and opportunistic rather than a co-ordinated attempt to achieve Weston Academy’s original vision. However, despite the lack of co-ordination from the executive board it seems that some of the staff were acting on their own initiative to run activities and new schemes with various available partners.

Community Director Position

Some of the difficulties that Parveen encountered when trying to translate the sponsor’s vision into practice also seemed because of some of the challenges she faced as the Community Director. As we saw earlier, the role was intended to enable her to act as a mid-point between the two organisations but in practice she struggled to do this. One of the initial problems she seemed to face was her limited knowledge of the education sector. As her comments demonstrate:

I am just about getting used to how things work around here I think. The education sector is very different from housing, the timetable is very restricting and a lot of people are set in their ways. It takes a long time to get things done and there is a lot to work around and get my head around, getting used to all the acronyms and speaking the lingo has been a big hurdle in itself.
She further admitted that on some occasions she had ‘felt out of my depth’ due to her limited experience of the education sector. Thus, as Parveen was forced to acquaint herself with some of the intricacies of the education system she recognised that bridging both sectors was more difficult that she had originally envisioned.

As time progressed, it also became increasingly obvious that the lack of clarity regarding the aim and responsibilities of her role further impeded Parveen’s ability to fulfil the original aims of her post. For Parveen, this ambiguity was partly due to the originality of the venture and the uniqueness of her role. As Parveen recognised:

Because having a ‘Community Director’ is new for us and the rest of the school we are still all working out what it involves. A lot of the staff don’t really know what I do. In reality, I am playing multiple roles – mentoring staff, being the go between for the sponsor, multi-agency link worker and picking up a lot of extra’s too.

Therefore, in the absence of clear remit, Parveen recognised that rather than follow a predetermined course her role organically evolved to meet the immediate demands and concerns of the school. In reality, this meant that her ability to bridge both organisations effectively became more difficult because she was increasingly pulled in multiple directions. Thus, rather than concentrating upon the original objectives she was distracted away from the core purpose of the role.
As time progressed, it also became clear that because Parveen was concentrating upon meeting the immediate concerns of the school, her role became increasingly reactive. Parveen found herself in a situation where because her time was not as restricted as other professionals in the school this enabled her to effectively ‘pick up the pieces’ and deal with situations that arose within school. She explained that her role had become very reactive and described how the level of challenge present within the school had meant they had become ‘very lastminute.com’.

Another major factor in the development of Parveen’s role was the difficulties she experienced in trying to ‘fit in’ within the education world, when previously the majority of her experience had been in housing. She said:

I feel like a bit of a fish out of the water a lot of the time. I need to get used to all this education lingo. But I think in some ways it’s a good thing – I’m always the one in meetings who is questioning and I think that outsiders perspective is helping some people who have been in education a long time think a bit differently.

27/03/2009

Thus, Parveen identified that although on occasions she felt out of her depth, her outsider’s perspective provided a critical interpretation of some established practices within the school.

However, as time passed, Parveen gradually felt more comfortable in her role and was able to secure her identity within the Academy and as a representative of the school. She explained:
I used to be the idiot who didn’t know any of the education lingo; now I know all the acronyms. I’m not the ‘one from housing’ anymore, people see me as someone from the Academy, I even get called miss!

10/06/10

Although, Parveen actually saw this as positive development it had negative impacts for the extent that Weston Housing Trust was involved and the extent to which their initial motivations for sponsoring the Academy were taken into consideration. For example in an interview with Martin Rayner in the July of the second year of the Academy’s opening he said:

I think it was important at the beginning for Parveen to spend the majority of her time at the Academy. I think we now need to get her to split her time a bit more evenly between the two sites, after all she needs to be the bridge between the two organisations and she can’t do that if she is always at the academy.

27/7/10

For Martin, the solution was for Parveen to balance her time between the two organisations. However, Parveen saw the situation slightly differently:

I don’t see how spending time at Weston will help, it’s all very hands on; if you are not in schools it’s easy to miss opportunities. The problem is, Martin doesn’t really know how things work around here, he is housing, not education. I didn’t get it until recently but it’s a different beast-with different rules and types of expectations so I need to go about the community agenda differently than they had originally envisioned.
Therefore, it seems that the gap between the two organisations had shifted; initially, Parveen found it difficult to fit into the world of education but in time she acquired the necessary knowledge and was able to make this shift. However, the gap now seemed to have shifted between Parveen and the Housing Trust and rather than facilitating a free flow of information and understanding between the two organisations she found it difficult to communicate her newly acquired knowledge to her original colleagues. Thus, this further impacted how effectively Parveen could fulfil her role, both in terms of acting as the bridging point between the two organisations and making progress with the community agenda.

**Increasing divides between standards-focused efforts and community-focused efforts**

There seem to be a number of themes emerging from the findings which I have reviewed so far. Firstly, it seems that the executive board struggled to translate their vision into practice because of the ambiguity which was a part of their original vision. Secondly, because of the pressure to improve standards the school put in place a number of standard school improvement strategies. These were in marked contrast to the more community-focused efforts because they were more straightforward and guaranteed to produce quick results. In contrast, the community-focused strategies seemed to develop on more of an opportunistic and ad hoc basis whilst Parveen also found acting as the mid-point between the two organisations increasingly difficult.
During this time, there was also evidence to show that these two ‘types’ of efforts seemed to develop on increasingly separate basis. As Parveen’s comments show:

We have lots of things happening both on the school and community side of things. I’m not sure how they link up at the moment but I’m hoping that this will become clearer as time goes on.

3/3/09

It seems although the executive board made links between their efforts to improve standards and play a broader role in the community in their original vision, this was challenging in practice. Furthermore, it also seems that the divisions within the management team also made co-ordinating their efforts difficult.

**Increasing focus on the need to improve standards**

During the tracking of Weston Academy, there was also evidence to show that the efforts to increase standards seemed to dominate. This seemed to be because of a combination of the pressure to raise standards, the accountability mechanisms in place together with the high pressured nature in which the school was forced to work within. As Parveen explained:

At the moment, we are concentrating on getting things up and running and establishing basic standard school practices so we can get attainment up, this has to be our priority at the moment because at the end of the day this is what we will be judged on. It’s all very fast paced.

11/12/08
This environment also seemed to create a situation where teachers felt increasingly pressured. As one teacher said:

The pressure on us to try and make sure that we can get as many kids as possible on target is inescapable. It is pretty stressful, there is a lot more going on with all the CPD, meetings and checking up. It takes a lot of time too – inputting all the data and then levelling, I had no idea really when we started but I am starting to get the hang of it.

10/03/09

The increasing dominance of the need to improve attainment also seemed to have particular implications for how the community-focused efforts developed. In particular, there was evidence to show that this situation seemed to side-line the importance of those efforts which were more directed towards the community.

These themes can be particularly seen in the case of how the school responded when one of the members of support staff was forced to take sick leave. Farooq Habeeb, the family support officer was an important mechanism of support for the majority of Asian families at the school as such he was often over-stretched. He played at important role in acting as an intermediary role between home and school and was particularly well respected in the Asian community. He explained his role as follows:

My job is my life. I am also part of the Asian community myself, I have unique understanding of our culture and values but also the difficulties that many Asian families experience. It extends outside school too, I go to their mosque, use the same supermarkets and live in the same area.
Farooq also showed unfaltering levels of commitment to his role, he said:

I am not just their support worker, I am their friend, their religious advisor, their legal representative, their career advisor or even their immigration officer.

However, when Farooq was forced to take sick leave for three months, this support was withdrawn whilst the school did not put alternative provisions in place. During Farooq’s absence Parveen tried to raise awareness of this issue but found that these mechanisms of support were ‘additional’ when compared to efforts to improve teaching and learning. She explained further:

I have been trying to get some funding so we can employ some more support staff which are designated to supporting Asian families but it feels like the money keeps getting pushed in other directions. At the end of the day, it’s considered as additional, if we need another maths teacher that’s what the money will spent on. They think I can just do it because I’m Asian but it’s not enough we need more support staff, we can’t expect one member of staff to manage all these students, it’s unrealistic.

When I was tracking Weston Academy there were a number of examples, such as this, which suggested that rather than acting in a way which was outward and community focused, they seemed to instead concentrate on the ‘core business’ of the school. For example, the school aimed to offer a variety
of extended services, some of these were directed towards teaching and learning whereas others were designed to engage families. In particular, in line with the school’s efforts to improve standards, they offered a number of after-school and weekend revision classes. John Burgess, the Deputy Head explained the rationale behind the additional sessions:

We are trying to give the kids as many chances as possible to pull up their grades. It has mainly been up to the departments themselves how and when they organise the sessions. The main thrust has been English, Science and Maths, this is what most of the intensive courses have been focused around. The take up has been pretty good too, perhaps better than we expected.

15/06/10

As well, as additional sessions designed to improve attainment, Weston Academy also offered opportunities for families such as parenting classes and ‘family fun days’ which were similar to a school fete. However, in contrast to the revision sessions there was limited participation. As one teacher identified, ‘hardly anyone comes but there is not much emphasis or publicity about the events so it’s not really surprising’.

These themes help to demonstrate how the school seemed to increasingly act in ways which focused on the need to improve attainment which in turn seemed to have a negative effect on their more ‘community-focused efforts’. Instead of acting in an outward way, trying to engage students and their families, it seems that the school had a fairly narrow focus and prioritised the need to improve attainment.
**Sixth form provision**

In line with their efforts to improve standards and in turn the market position of the school, Weston Academy sought to establish a sixth form as part of the school. Neither of the predecessor schools had offered post sixteen learning opportunities. The provision was also a requirement of the school’s academy status and was broadly in line with Weston’s vision to enhance the educational profile and employability of students.

The sixth form opened in September 2010, a year after the academy had opened and consisted of 45 students who had all previously attended Weston Academy. Despite the relatively small intake, this seemed deliberate, as William explained:

> The number of students we are offering a place is ideal; we want to make sure they are given individual attention and can offer a personalised teaching approach. We identified our high achievers and those who had potential to go onto higher education and ensured we invested time in them and offered them a package that they couldn’t refuse.

6/7/2010

Thus, William made it clear that they intentionally targeted the sixth form provision at a particular set of high achieving students. William also explained the rationale behind the range of subjects they planned to offer:

> We wanted to provide our students with access to a range of traditional A-levels and high class teaching which would enable them to go onto university and enter professional careers.
Therefore, the Academy had clear intentions in terms of what path they hoped the students would take. They also sought to attract students with a range of additional benefits including providing each student with a laptop, smart phone and business suit.

However, the type of sixth form that Weston Academy chose to offer was somewhat different from the provision detailed in the original planning documents for the Academy which were produced at the very beginning of the schools conception. Originally, they had stated that the academy would provide access to a range of vocational training and focus on providing skills for employment. Whilst in the initial meetings, executives at Weston Housing Trust said that they were particularly interested in providing work based training placements and qualifications in construction.

The change in direction seemed mainly due to the executive board reassessing the local competition of local colleges in the area. As William further explained:

We realised that we couldn’t compete with the two other colleges – they have the facilities and the reputation for a wide array of vocational courses. So we needed to offer something different and we recognised that the area lacked a high performing A-level provider. We recognised the gap in the market and believed it would also bring additional benefits to Weston Academy and the area as a whole.

In terms of additional benefits he later elaborated and said:
We are hoping an academically focused sixth form will give students lower down the school something to look up too, to heighten their aspirations and encourage them to achieve the best they possibly can.

06/07/09

Therefore, William justified the approach in terms of what was already on offer in Haleton and how offering an academic sixth form was also in keeping with efforts to raise educational achievement. He further justified his approach and said:

We see ourselves as very much part of the borough’s family of schools, we have good links with the other colleges so if students want to go down the vocational route we can support them in this transition and ensure all students are catered for.

6/7/2010

Therefore, William was confident that Weston Academy could support students who preferred to undertake vocational courses at the local colleges.

However, there was also evidence that some tension existed. When interviewed Martin, the Chief Executive of Weston Housing Trust said:

I feel a little anxious in how it fits in with Weston’s values but it seems the safest manageable route. Right now it feels like we have bitten off more than we can chew because of the poor state of the predecessor schools so I think its best we play it safe.

27/07/2010

Parveen seemed to echo is concerns and said:
I am worried about what type of messages we are sending out; I think we are in danger of making the kids think we are only interested in the clever ones. I can see why we would have struggled to compete with the other colleges but I can’t help but worry about the tenants as its unlikely many of them will attend our sixth form.

8/9/2010

Thus, Parveen showed awareness for some of the possible adverse effects an academically focused sixth form could have, especially for those students who were not high achievers or were from poorer backgrounds. Interestingly, of the 45 students on role in the first year of Weston Academy’s sixth form, only two of them lived in Weston owned housing. There was also evidence to suggest that Martin felt it was best to ‘play it safe’ whilst it also seems that they had under-estimated the challenges which they had inherited from the predecessor schools.

However, the development of the sixth form also suggests that in an effort to raise standards the school adopted practices which seemed to contradict their original vision. Instead of responding to the community’s needs it seemed that the school prioritised the need to raise attainment. Therefore, there was evidence to show that the school developed in a markedly different way than originally envisioned.

Decreasing role of sponsor

The final area of the data that I want to present in relation to the development of Weston Academy is a consideration for the decreasing role of Weston Housing Trust. This section started by presenting data which demonstrated how Weston Housing Trust had a distinctive rationale for the involvement
and wanted to be an active rather than silent partner. However, as this discussion has shown, Weston Housing Trust has rarely featured.

One of the main problems which seemed to result was how the executive board members struggled to meet on a regular basis. For example, through the work of the Development and Research Partnership it became evident that the executive board only met when we organised steering group meetings which were designed to give updates on the research we were undertaking. Considering the seemingly strong desire of Weston Housing Trust to use the school as a ‘vehicle’ to extend their existing regeneration efforts, it was surprising that they did not meet as a board outside of the research partnership context. However, the fact that all the executive board members were in high powered positions within each organisation meant that they had a number of demands on their time. As Stuart Painter, the Director of Neighbourhoods recognised:

'It’s very difficult to get times when we all meet together. At the end of the day our focus has to be housing and theirs, for the time being, needs to be getting standards up.'

20/06/10

Despite the executive board being able to make numerous connections between their work as educators and social housing providers, it therefore seems that due to their differing priorities, the two organisations struggled to achieve a ‘joined-up’ approach.

There was also evidence to show that the importance which was ascribed to the need to raise standards, further limited the role that Weston Housing Trust could play. As Gillian Frost, the Director of People further explained:
It is difficult to know where we fit in sometimes especially because our expertise is in regeneration and housing not raising attainment. I’m starting to realise that there just isn’t enough space for attempts like this as we are constrained by the need to fulfil the requirements of our core remits.

10/09/10

Her comments are particularly indicative of the state of play at the end of the tracking period. Although this is not intended to infer that Weston Housing Trust did not remain committed, there seemed to be a gradual realisation of the limits of what they could achieve whilst they also seemed unsure about how to reassert their influence. As Martin Rayner’s comments from his last interview demonstrate:

I think it is fair to admit that we have been forced to take a backseat role because of the emphasis that had to be placed on improving teaching and learning. It’s very difficult to view these things at the time though and reflect on what we have done and where we are going. I’m not sure how this situation will change either. I mean the policy context is always changing but it seems to be going in a direction which does not facilitate this type of working.

10/09/10

This concludes the end of the presentation of the data which specifically relates to the tracking of Weston Academy. A number of preliminary themes have been identified which will be further analysed and interpreted in the next chapter. However, at this point it seems important to note that despite the executive board’s distinctive vision of what they hoped Weston Academy
would achieve, the resulting picture was markedly different. In particular, it seemed that the school increasingly prioritised the need to raise standards and introduced a number of standard school improvement strategies to this end. This seemed to over-shadow the school’s attempts to take a broader role and tackle issues which beset the community.

4.2 Presentation of four family case studies

As explained in the methodology section, I conducted ten family case studies as part of this study. The data is particularly important for answering research question two which seeks to assess the impact that Weston Academy had upon students and their families. In this section, I present four of the family case studies. They were chosen because they exemplify many of common trends with were found in the other family case studies.

As detailed in the methodology section, I purposefully selected broadly two types of families in order to see how the impact of Weston Academy differed depending on the family’s level of vulnerability. Two are from the set of families which were considered more vulnerable and two from those who were in need of less support. At the end of this chapter, the full sample of ten families will then be compared to further assess the similarities and differences across the family case studies. This will then be followed by Chapter Five where I present the analysis of the findings.

4.2.1. The Massood Family Case Study

The Massood family is a large Muslim Pakistani family who live in a small modern terraced house close to the centre of Haleton. Umar, who was the focus of this family case study received support from Weston Housing Trust and Weston Academy. This was mainly due to his poor levels of achievement and his often challenging behaviour. Umar was frequently involved with the
Police and Neighbourhood support team due to nuisance activity and low level crime that he was involved with mainly on the estate where he lived. Therefore, the Massood family occupy the first broad type of families in the sample because Umah received intensive support from a variety of professionals.

The Massood’s family home was owned by Layton Housing, a partner of Weston Housing Trust. The house is close to a large purpose built Mosque and there is a large concentration of Asian heritage families who live in the area. Umah, was the only one of his six siblings who attended Weston Academy; Umah’s younger sisters attended a nearby girls school whilst his other siblings were past school leaving age. Umah’s parents were often absent as they made frequent visits to Pakistan. When they were away from home, Umah and his younger siblings were mostly looked after by the eldest sisters. Although, his eldest sisters had families and houses of their own they spent much of the time at the family home. On both occasions that I visited the Massoods, Umah’s parents were absent therefore I interviewed his eldest sister Raha.

**Umar Massood**

Umar was 15 years old when I began tracking him, he had just begun year ten and was starting his GCSEs. Throughout Umar’s time at secondary school he found school life difficult for a number of reasons. A member of the support team at Weston Academy described some of Umar’s issues as follows:

He can be very violent and aggressive. He definitely has anger management issues which can be scary because he is a big lad. He does not take instructions off women and has been threatening towards
some female members of staff so some teachers in the past have refused to have him in their class.

20/11/09

Therefore, the support worker identified how some staff members feared Umar and found managing his behaviour difficult. A combination of persistent truancy and fixed term exclusions has also meant that Umar’s attendance has been erratic during his time at secondary school. Furthermore, his poor behaviour and low attendance also negatively impacted his progress.

In contrast to his predecessor school, Umar felt there was an increased focus on attainment at Weston Academy. He also explained how he felt that teachers were much more focused on ‘getting us through the exams’. However, he did not feel that these improvements had impacted on him positively. Umah’s Math’s teacher offered the following explanation for his lack of progress:

The problem for Umah is that his literacy and numeracy skills are so low it’s difficult for him to progress. He lacks the basic building blocks and as he gets older this becomes more of an obstacle. Unfortunately, we will struggle to get him decent grades in his GCSEs now as it’s too late.

9/03/10

Thus, Umah’s teacher identified how due to gaps in his learning it was difficult for Umah to progress at the same rate as other students. Furthermore, his teacher identified how many students in the school were experiencing similar difficulties to Umah:
Lots of our students are in this position; we are trying to push them through the parts of the curriculum just for the sake of it. Instead of being flexible and letting us go back to go back to basics we are expected to trudge through stuff that is beyond their current capabilities.

9/03/10

Umah also expressed how he thought the other major difference between his predecessor school and Weston Academy was the increased expectations in behaviour. Umah explained how the Academy imposed stricter monitoring of his behaviour and tried to enforce punishments more. However, the system did not seem to have a positive impact upon Umah. He said:

It just means I am basically on report all the time, sometimes I get suspended for a couple of days or they try and give me detention but I don’t go. I don’t really care what they do, it’s no big deal anyway because I’m with all the thicko’s.

23/11/09

Thus, such strategies did not seem to improve Umah’s behaviour. He also explained how he was in the bottom sets for all his subjects: ‘the teacher’s don’t care about us cos we are not going to get the grades.’

During the initial tracking phases Umah was also linked to a number of racial incidents that took place at Weston Academy. Umah explained how he was considered as the ‘the ring leader’ by many of the staff at school. Whereas, he felt that other Asian students looked up to him because ‘I have earnt their respect cos I help people out when they are in trouble’. Umah also felt that due his Asian heritage, he was treated unfairly and unnecessarily blamed for
many of the incidents in school. Eventually, Umar was given a fixed term exclusion in March 2010 due to a particularly violent incident in which the police had to be called.

When Umah returned to school his behaviour had improved and the frequency of race related incidents seemed to be less. However, the improvement in Umah’s behaviour did not seem of consequence to an intervention imposed by the school but rather the influence of Umah’s father. As Umah explained:

My Dad came back from Pakistan and told me to put my head down so I did. I don’t do stupid stuff anymore, I just try and keep my head down.

6/11/10

Umah did not feel that he had benefitted from additional opportunities which the school offered outside the curriculum. He also did not participate in any out-of-hours activities. He explained this was because ‘I would rather not be here any longer that I have to be.’ Thus, it seems because of Umah’s negative experiences of school, this impacted how inclined he was to participate in school on a voluntary basis.

Like other Asian heritage students, Umah received additional support from the designated Asian Heritage family liaison officer, Farooq Habeeb. He often acted as mediator for Umah particularly after an incident of bad behaviour. Farooq also communicated information to Umah’s family and made home visits especially if he was suspended from school. Umah valued Farooq’s support and noticeably missed his support when Farooq was forced to take sick leave. He said:
We haven’t got anyone to fight our corner anymore, it’s just us against them now.

6/12/10

Umar further explained what he saw as the consequences of Farooq’s absence:

Since he left there has been five Asian lads suspended, without him here Mr Pugh is just going to try and expel as many Asians as he can.

6/12/10

Therefore, it seems for Umah, the school acted in a way that made him feel excluded. Furthermore, there seems to be a clear racially motivated divides between him and the mainly white members of staff.

During tracking Umah did not participate in any neighbourhood schemes. This seemed mainly because he lived outside the targeted area of Positive Youth and New Record which were the two main neighbourhood participation schemes that Weston Housing Trust ran.

Raha Massood

Raha was Umah’s eldest sister and was his main guardian when their parents were in Pakistan. When I asked Raha whether she thought anything had changed at the school since it became Weston Academy she said:

No I don’t think much has changed apart from the uniform and the head of course

25/11/09
Furthermore, she explained how, if anything, the amount of contact that she has with the school has decreased during the last year. She said:

We used to get a lot of phone calls from the school telling us that Umar had done something, sometimes they used to make us go in for a meeting especially if he was suspended. But we don’t hear much these days, I don’t know whether it’s because his behaviour is better, or whether they have just given up. They never tell us if he has done anything good just the bad stuff so we have to assume no news is good news.

5/11/10

Therefore, it seemed that Raha felt a little in the dark about how exactly Umah was doing at school. She was not aware of any improvements in standards of education at the school but felt that they now dealt with behaviour in a much stricter fashion. She expressed frustration at the school for suspending Umah as she felt this was further contributing to his lack of progress and disengagement with his studies.

During Raha’s first interview she recognised how Farooq, the family liaison officer provided crucial contact and information about how Umar was doing at school. She explained how Farooq made regular home visits and had built up good relations with both Umar’s parents and his sisters over the years. She described how:

School and home are liked two separate boxes or islands and Mr Habeeb acts as a bridge between the two for us and for Umar.
Therefore, Raha recognised how Farooq acted an essential link between the family and Weston Academy. Furthermore, she said:

> Things would have been much worse if Mr Habeeb wasn’t in school, I think they would have permanently kicked Umar out by now if it hadn’t been for him.

25/11/09

Raha and her sisters were also not aware of any efforts to engage the family further in school life. She explained how they did attend one of the cultural festivals but were not made aware of the recent festival because this was during the time that Farooq Habeeb was absent. However, Raha and her sisters were interested in engaging more in school activities. Umah’s second eldest sister said:

> It can often feel like we are a bit boxed in, I would like to do more, I have been thinking about enrolling into college. I think if the school did activities I would go, mainly for the social contact really.

25/11/09

The family was also not aware of any ways the school was working with Weston Housing Trust to provide services or opportunities for residents in the local community. Their only connection point to the local community was through the mosque which they attended on a fairly regular basis.

In summary, the impact that Weston Academy made upon the Massood family was quite limited. Despite Umah feeling that there was more of a focus upon attainment since the school became Weston Academy, he did not feel these improvements had positively impacted his own progress. Furthermore,
it seems that he increasingly lacked the necessary skills to participate in the curriculum whilst the teachers felt unable to accommodate his needs. Umah expressed a great deal of animosity for how teachers treated him and how the school tried to deal with his bad behaviour. This seemed to limit how willing he was to engage on a more voluntary basis with the school. Both Umah and his family relied heavily on Farooq Habeeb’s support and found his absence difficult. His family seemed to have limited involvement with the Academy and seemed largely unaware of any changes that had taken place at school. They also expressed a willingness to participate in the school and their community due to feelings of isolation but were not aware of any opportunities to do so.

4.2.2 The Baldock Family Case Study

The Baldock family live in modern semi-detached house on Beech Estate. Tina Baldock leases the property from Weston Housing Trust and lives in the house with her two daughters Stacey and Courtney who were focus of the case study. Stacey Baldock has complex learning and behavioural needs. Courtney was making good progress at school and on the whole did not present with challenging behaviour. The family received intensive support from Weston Housing Trust. Paul Walker, the family liaison officer who acted as a gatekeeper for this family explained this was mainly due to Tina’s frequent failure to pay rent remittance, reports of criminal activity at the property and complaints made by other residents due to nuisance behaviour.

In this family case study, I present data from the interviews carried out with Stacey and Courtney Baldock. I also supplement this with interview data from those carried out with professionals who worked with the family. I was not able to obtain data from Tina and therefore I am unable to present data from the parent’s perspective. Myself and professionals who worked with the
family both tried to arrange interviews with Tina, numerous meetings were arranged but she either failed to attend or was not at home. After a number of attempts, I sought permission from Tina to interview Stacey and Courtney in school and did not further pursue Tina since it became clear that she did not want to participate herself.

**Stacey Baldock**

Stacey was in year ten when I began tracking the Baldock family, she seemed fairly ambivalent when I asked how the school had changed since becoming an academy. She explained how, from her perspective, very little had changed:

> I don’t know really, it doesn’t seem much different to me, it’s still school isn’t it? I mean we got a new head, Mr Pugh...I think it’s stricter.

19/11/09

Stacey also did not feel that the teaching had improved at the school or that her own progress had got better, as her comments show:

> School is not for me...I’m thick aren’t I? It’s pointless me being here because I’m not going to get anywhere with it and learning what they tell me will make no difference to my life at all.

19/11/09

Stacey was also identified as having learning difficulties and also had very low attendance. Therefore, she found it very difficult to access the mainstream curriculum and gradually fell further behind her peers in terms of academic performance.
Stacey’s progress was also affected by her persistent challenging behaviour. Stacey found her temper particularly difficult to control and was recognised as having emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. In her second interview, she explained how she was frustrated with her reputation for bad behaviour at school:

I do wish that I could start again sometimes, I would do stuff different, most of the teachers just think I can’t be good and treat me the same even though I am better at controlling my temper now, they still write me off straight away and send me out the classroom to the unit.

11/11/10

When I interviewed Stacey’s English teacher she explained how she often struggled to meet her needs:

I don’t have time to give her the extra help she needs so she ends up struggling with her work and when she gets frustrated and can’t do it she acts up. It’s very stressful because now the school is an academy we have to make sure those who can are getting their target grades so I don’t have time to pander to her needs.

22/03/10

Stacey’s teacher also explained the new behaviour policy at the Academy encouraged her to send students who misbehaved to the support unit. She believed this was advantageous for the other students but detrimental for those like Stacey because she often received limited information about her progress from the support unit. She also expressed her concern for the lack of time that students like Stacey spent with ‘qualified’ teachers. She further explained:
The behaviour and support unit just about manage to keep her in school and manage her behaviour but sometimes I wonder how much good that does... I know they do a lot for some of the kids in there and it does relieve some of the pressure from us but they don’t have enough qualified teachers so the kids who spend most of their time there aren’t really being taught as such if you know what I mean. The staff in the unit also tend to be ‘matey’ with the kids which just makes us look like the bad guys.

22/03/10

In contrast, Stacey said:

They just know how to wind me up, most of the time they are just waiting to send me out of class which is fine for me because I’d rather go to the support unit anyway.

11/11/10

Therefore, Stacey implied that the teachers lacked patience with her and that she would prefer to spend her time in the support unit. When I further asked Stacey to try and explain to me the difference between support staff and teachers she said:

They are less stuck up for starters they are more on our level. They know what it is like to live round here and they have more of an idea what is actually going on in our lives, the teachers don’t get it, they don’t have a clue about what things are like for me.

11/11/10
Stacey seemed to feel more understood by support staff and benefitted from the individual support they were able to offer her. She also found that she was able to cope better in a small classroom environment where there were less distractions.

By the second round of data collection, Stacey’s behaviour had escalated to an unmanageable level and after a violent incident involving a member of staff she was given a fixed term exclusion. On her return, Stacey was given a reduced timetable and arranged a number of ‘additional learning placements’. Margaret Gilmore, head of the support and behaviour unit at Weston Academy further explained the motivations behind the school’s decision:

It just got ridiculous; she was getting sent out of pretty much every lesson. With the reduced timetable she just comes into the support unit for a few hours a day and we mainly concentrate on the core subjects. It’s more realistic in terms of what she can manage and we can supplement it with some learning placements

11/11/10

Margaret also further commented upon how she felt that the changes had positively impacted Stacey, she said:

She is a lot calmer and less agitated. I think she is starting to feel a bit more confident in herself too because the targets we are giving her are more realistic and manageable. The thing is, mentally Stacey was very strained, the school environment was very stressful for her.

11/11/10
Therefore, the reduced timetable seemed to have a positive impact on Stacey’s emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, despite only studying the three core subjects, Margaret Gilmore felt that this approach was more realistic.

To supplement the reduced timetable, Weston Academy arranged a number of additional learning placements for Stacey. Paul Walker, the family liaison officer was responsible for securing these placements. However, this was not done through a formal relationship but rather on an opportunistic basis, as he explains:

I knew they had some kids on work placements so I talked to a few people and trialled the learning placements for students like Stacey. So far they are working ok, we are hoping to get some sort of accreditation set up but so far they are done on an informal basis but it’s proving difficult.

9/3/10

Therefore, through Paul’s connections with Weston Housing Trust he was able to trial new ways of accommodating students who struggled in school such as Stacey. However, he went on to explain how they were often short term in nature but enabled Stacey to gain work experience.

The pastoral team also worked hard to find Stacey other additional learning opportunities and means of support. For example, Stacey was targeted for anger management courses through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and ‘teens and tots’ a scheme targeted at students at risk of becoming teen parents.
However, sometimes they struggled to fill the standard school timetable which meant that Stacey was not always strictly receiving a full time education. Stacey explained what she did with her free time as follows:

> When I’m not on placement or school, I just hang out at home, stay in bed and watch tv. If I go out I hang out on the estate with some of my older brother’s mates who haven’t got jobs so they are about in the day.

11/11/10

Although Stacey did not engage in any lunchtime or after school activities run by the school she did participate in the neighbourhood schemes run by Weston Housing Trust; Positive Youth and New Record. Stacey was specifically targeted to attend these schemes due to past offenses of anti-social behaviour. Paul Walker who ran the majority of the sessions explained how her attendance was ‘better than school so we must be doing something right’.

**Courtney Baldock**

Courtney was part of the first cohort of year seven students that entered Weston Academy. When I first interviewed Courtney she described how she felt about school:

> I think the school is good, I like it. All my friends are here and most of the teachers are alright. I am doing well too, I am reaching all my targets and everything.

19/11/09
In contrast to her sister, Courtney did not have any learning or behavioural difficulties and achieved well at school. She occasionally got into trouble for talking too much in lessons but generally remained on track academically. However, Courtney also felt that she had to prove to the teachers that she was not like her sister, as she explained:

I got annoyed when I first came here, like when my technology teacher met me for the first time he said ‘Oh no not another Baldock’ and now he just goes ‘morning Baldock’ (cynical tone in voice). I had to show teachers like him that I wasn’t like Stacey.

19/11/09

When I interviewed Courtney for the second time she reported how she was not enjoying school as much this seemed mainly because of some negative experiences where she had been sent out of the classroom. In contrast she said:

The ones in the support unit are much nicer. Well I suppose it’s more their job like to make sure we are ok and get to the bottom of any trouble. Most of the teachers don’t care, all they care about is whether you are on your target grade.

12/11/10

When I first began tracking Courtney she participated in a number of out-of-hours activities. However, when I interviewed Courtney for the second time her level of participation had considerably decreased. In contrast she continued to regularly participated in Positive Youth and also attended a variety of sessions at the community youth centre. As Courtney commented:
I prefer doing stuff on the estate than in school. It’s more relaxed and we get more control over what we do because we get to pick the activities.

19/11/09

The dedication and contribution Courtney made to the community was recognised by Weston Housing Trust when she was awarded a bright young star award. However, despite the relationship between Weston Housing Trust and the academy, Courtney’s achievement was not officially recognised by the school. She said:

I told some of my teachers what I have been doing and that I got the award but they wouldn’t know unless I told them, just because the school is called Weston Academy doesn’t mean they know what I am doing on my estate.

12/11/10

Therefore, it seems that there was limited communication between the academy and how Weston Housing Trust was engaging and celebrating the achievements of students on the estate.

In summary, there were a number of ways that the Baldock family were impacted by Weston’s involvement with the academy. Both Stacey and Courtney seemed to have quite negative opinions of the teachers whereas they increasingly relied on the support from pastoral members of staff. In the case of Stacey, this seemed to negatively impact how she behaved towards teachers whilst she also seemed to not always be in receipt of full-time education despite efforts to accommodate her elsewhere. Where significant impact was achieved, such as Stacey’s additional learning placements or
Courtney’s participation in neighbourhood activities, this seemed due to Paul Walker, the family liaison officer.

4.2.3 The Grove Family Case Study

The Grove family live in a modern three bedroomed house on Beech Estate. They moved house ten years ago and became tenants of Weston Housing after falling into financial difficulty which resulted in the repossession of their privately owned property. The family consists of Jackie and Michael who are husband and wife and son Luke. At the beginning of data collection, Luke was in year eleven and did not have any particular learning or behavioural difficulties. Therefore, the Grove family was considered as one of five families in the sample who received less support and therefore not considered as vulnerable.

Luke Grove

During data collection, Luke’s trajectory was dominated by two factors; completing his GCSEs and deciding to study for A-Levels at Weston Academy sixth form. Luke achieved ten A*-C GCSEs and achieved much higher than he expected. Luke identified his improved academic performance was due to the increased academic support which he had received throughout year eleven at Weston Academy. Luke explained how throughout the year the teachers had gone to considerable lengths to try and improve academic performance. He said:

In maths they made sure every lesson that we understood everything so we could pass, we didn’t move on until they knew we had got it.

11/11/10
However, he later acknowledged some of the draw backs:

All my lessons got pretty boring, we tended to just do exam practice every lesson.

11/11/10

Therefore, Luke identified how the intensive exam preparation improved his performance but meant that lessons often were often tedious.

Luke also took advantage of the revision sessions that took place at lunchtimes, after school and at the weekends. He explained:

The extra sessions really helped, they also meant that I could push up my coursework grades.

11/11/10

He also attached particular significance to those held at the weekends and the improvements in teaching at the school:

I think the Saturday classes were key really. It’s difficult to say whether I would have got the same grades if the school was still Lakeside but I think the teaching has got better, the definitely pushed us more.

11/11/10

Luke also acknowledged the increased effort and time the teachers had given him and his peers in an effort to improve their performance. He thought these changes were the most significant since his predecessor school had merged to form Weston Academy.
Luke attached little importance to how his predecessor school had changed to an academy and was now sponsored by Weston Housing Trust. He was aware that Weston was a social housing provider but did not seem to have any awareness of the rationale behind the sponsorship of what Weston hoped to achieve. For him, the influence of Weston was not important, he said:

I think it might as well have been Tesco! I think the school basically just needed a sponsor, it didn’t matter who it was we just needed some extra money and a new head.

11/11/10

Thus, the investment and new head seemed more important to Luke than the influence of the sponsor.

The importance attached to the change in leadership at the school was a reoccurring theme throughout Luke’s interviews. During his time at Lakeside High School there had been three different heads. According to Luke, the new head since the school became Weston Academy was ‘the only one that has been any good’. Luke went onto say:

I think he is worth every penny - the feel of the school has really changed there are higher expectations and there isn’t as much trouble.

11/11/10

Therefore, Luke also identified how Mr Pugh had also been responsible for the improvements in behaviour at school. He explained further about how behaviour had been at poor at the predecessor schools and that people tended to do ‘what they liked’. However, he felt that since the schools had emerged to form Weston Academy, behaviour had improved.
The second significant factor that dominated Luke’s trajectory during data collection was his decision to continue his post sixteen education as part of the first cohort of students at Weston Academy sixth form. Interestingly, when I first interviewed Luke in November 2009 he expressed a desire to go into the army once he has finished his GCSEs and didn’t mention the idea of further study. He explained how he thought going into the army was the best option for him because ‘they look after you, give you opportunities and training’. Luke also explained how he felt that there were few opportunities in Haleton and saw the army as a good escape route.

However, when I interviewed Luke a year later he had decided to stay on at Weston Academy to study for his A-Levels in Biology, PE and Business. When I further investigated his apparent change in direction. He said:

I wasn’t going to go to college but when they asked me it just seemed to make sense, I thought I might as well give it a try cos I can always drop out if it doesn’t work out. I knew it was going to be tough to get a job because of the economic situation so I thought I might as well stay on.

11/11/10

It seems therefore that studying A-levels was not something he had previously considered but his decision was made on the basis that ‘they asked me’ together with the declining economic situation.

Luke’s decision to stay on at Weston Academy sixth form also seems strongly connected to the selection process that was enforced for the first cohort of students. Luke also explained how he appreciated the time that the teachers
had spent helping him choose which subjects he would study but felt that the actual selection process was unfair:

They only invited the top eighty people to the open evening, if you weren’t on the list you didn’t get to go. I think it was unfair, I mean some of my mates wanted to learn and would have been up for staying on but they weren’t asked.

11/11/10

During tracking, Luke gradually seemed to dislike attending sixth form. In particular, he expressed how he felt the school was trying to ‘mould me into something I’m not.’ This seemed in response to their efforts to encourage him to attend university. However Luke expressed how the expense put him off because ‘from living round here I know what debt does to people.’

Luke he did not engage in any additional activities outside the core curriculum or received any additional support. Despite having a strong interest in sport, Luke did not attend any of the lunchtime and after school sports sessions. Furthermore, Luke did not feel there had been an increase in the range or amount of activities on offer at the school since becoming Weston Academy. Luke said that he preferred to ‘just chill out with mates’ during lunch and go home after school.

Jackie Grove

On the whole, Jackie was pleased with Luke’s progress at the Academy. However, she did not seem aware of any particular improvements that had taken place since the school had become Weston Academy. She said:
I don’t think it is much different really. They have changed the uniform and the name but that’s about it I think.

12/11/09

Despite being a tenant of Weston Housing Trust, Jackie also seemed unaware of what they hoped to achieve or why they had decided to sponsor the Academy. After a brief explanation of their vision she said:

I never really thought of it like that. I didn’t realise that’s what they were doing. The rumour was just that they wanted to build houses on the old school sites. To me, it doesn’t feel like they are doing much different from what the other schools were doing before.

12/11/09

Jackie’s perspective of how the school had changed also seems partly due to the lack of difference between how the predecessor school and Weston Academy sought to engage with her family. She did not feel that the amount of contact had changed since the school became Weston Academy and said that she did not feel the need to ‘check up on him’ by using the ‘mychild@school’ internet record system that Weston Academy had begun to use. The amount of face to face contact Jackie had with the school had also not changed.

During tracking, Jackie was involved in some schemes run by Weston Housing designed to encourage residents to get involved in their local community regeneration projects. For example, Jackie participated in a gardening scheme and residents committee but she was not aware of any efforts by the school to offer engagement activities to families.
In summary, Weston Academy seemed to have limited overall impact on members of the Grove family. The most significant feature of the case study was Luke’s decision to continue his education at Weston Academy sixth form. Furthermore, it seems that he would have not previously pursued this route if the school had not offered him this opportunity. Interestingly, Luke felt the main improvements at the school were in teaching and behaviour but did not feel that the school was offering a variety of activities that would broaden his experiences outside the standard school curriculum. Although Tina Grove engaged in activities in the neighbourhood she did not seem aware of those offered by the school.

4.2.4. The Nissar Family Case study

The Nissar family live in a modern three bedroomed semi-detached bungalow on a mixed tenure housing estate. Although, their house is part of a small Weston housing development it is surrounded by narrow streets of old back to back terraced housing. The family have lived in the area for ten years and in their current house for five. Previously, the Nissar’s lived in Spain but were originally from Pakistan. The family consists of Safdar and Madihah who are married and have five children of which two currently live at home; Asjad and Fahrad. The family maintain strong Muslim and Pakistani traditions and speak Punjabi at home. At the beginning of data collection, Asjad was studying for his GCSEs and was in year eleven, by the end of data collection he had just began his A-Levels and had continued his education at Weston Academy sixth form. His brother, Fahrad had previously attended one of the predecessor schools and had gone onto study at a local higher education college.

Similar to the Grove family, the Nissar family is considered to be part of the group of families in the sample who were less vulnerable and not in receipt of
any particular support. Asjad, who was the focus of this study excelled academically and there were no problems with his behaviour.

*Asjad Nissar*

Asjad was an academically gifted pupil; throughout the time that I tracked his progress at Weston Academy he continued to achieve highly in all his subjects. Asjad had a serious and dedicated approach to his studies and worked hard in order to ensure he achieved good grades. By the end of year eleven, Asjad gained sixteen GCSEs this included his BTEC Business Studies qualification which counted as four GCSEs and his BTEC IT qualification which was worth two GCSEs. Asjad’s grades were second highest in his year; he achieved five A*s and eight grade As. His outstanding performance was recognised by the school with a special award, Asjad described how he felt about his results:

I was quite surprised but really pleased, I was expecting some A*s and As because I had done well in my coursework but I didn’t expect quite so many! I studied pretty hard though because I wanted to do well.

11/11/10

Asjad and his family felt his achievements were due to a combination of factors but significant importance was placed on education at home. As Safdar explained:

Neither my wife or I can read and write very well but I have very high aspirations for my sons. I expect them to do well. I have always tried to emphasise the importance of education to them and make sure that they work hard.
Asjad also recognised the importance of education and explained how he wanted to do well so he could provide for his family.

Both Asjad and his father also expressed how Weston Academy had also contributed to Asjad’s high academic achievements. More specifically, Asjad felt that his predecessor school Abbey Hay had much lower expectations and that he was not expected to work as hard. He said:

I don’t think that I would have got the same grades if the school was still Abbey Hay, the teachers expectations are much higher since the school became an Academy which has meant that we have worked harder.

Therefore, Asjad recognised that since the school changed to Weston Academy there has been an increased focus on academic performance which has meant that students have put more effort into their studies.

Asjad also expressed how he thought that the support and additional lessons had also meant that he performed better than he would have done at Abbey Hay. He further explained:

I don’t think Abbey Hay would have put on anywhere near the amount of extra classes, they might have done a few revision sessions but not all the way through the year. I have tried to make the most of what was on offer so I could get good grades.
Therefore, Asjad was impressed at the amount of extra support he received throughout the year which in turn helped him to achieve good results.

When I first interviewed Asjad he was planning to study for his A-Levels at a local college when he had finished his GCSEs. However, Asjad later changed his mind and decided to continue his education at Weston Academy’s new sixth form. Although, both Asjad and his father highlighted a combination of factors which led to his decision to stay on at the school, the most prominent reason seemed to be Farooq Habeeb’s involvement, who was the Asian heritage family liaison officer. The Nissar family received regular contact and home visits from Farooq as he was a family friend rather than as a result or particular targeting by the school. Asjad’s father further explained how Farooq had visited their house as part of his routine contact with the family to discuss post sixteen choices. He said:

He convinced us that Weston Academy was the better option, originally I had planned for Asjad to go to the local college like his brother but Farooq said that Asjad would get more support because the class sizes would be small and the teachers know him.

5/11/10

Therefore, it seems that without Farooq Habeeb’s involvement, the Nissar family would have chosen for Asjad to attend the local college.

Another deciding factor in Asjad’s decision to continue at Weston Academy was the selection process as Asjad further explained:

They choose who could stay on, they only invited students who were going to do really well in their GCSEs. I was glad that the ones who mess around would not be allowed to stay on.
Asjad was also very complimentary about the wide range of additional learning opportunities he received which would support the application he intended to make so he could attend university. He said:

Well I’m going on some uni trips and we went to Barcelona which was really good. My form tutor has been helping me sort out work experience too and I’m doing Young Enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh.

Therefore, Asjad took advantage of a range of opportunities that were designed to enhance is application for university. He was grateful of the school’s support and how they had set up particular schemes that he would be able to benefit from.

Throughout the time I tracked Asjad, he tended to concentrate on his studies rather than participate in a variety of none core activities at school. Asjad showed an interest in cricket and throughout the majority of high school played once a week at but was unable to after school because he attended classes at the mosque. He also used to play Badminton but had to give this up when he decided to take further classes in statistics to advance his mathematic skills. Furthermore, Asjad did not feel that the school offered a wider range of non-academic activities since becoming an Academy:

I think there are more after school classes for help with your work but I haven’t really heard about more sports or extra things to get involved in outside school. I don’t really have time though with my school work and mosque.
Therefore, it seems that for Asjad since the school became an Academy the focus has been to advance his academic skills rather than promote opportunities for him to participate in other activities. Asjad also did not participate in any activities in his neighbourhood.

_Safdar Nissar_

Throughout the time I tracked the Nissar family, Safdar was increasingly positive about Weston Academy, particularly in terms of Asjad’s academic progress. Safdar explained in his first interview that he welcomed Weston Housing Trust’s involvement and how the school had changed to an Academy. He expressed how he felt that the government had ‘given up on schools like Abbey Hay’ and that the school now ‘had a better chance now Weston was involved’. The main reason why Safdar seemed to welcome Weston’s involvement was due to the increased investment in the school they would provide together with a change in management. He also reported how he felt that the increased resources and new head teacher had enabled academic performance to become more of a priority than it had been in the predecessor school. In contrast, Safdar did not seem aware of Weston Housing Trust’s motivations or how they hoped that the academy would further their existing community regeneration work in the area.

Although, Safdar gave a positive review of the school, direct contact between himself and the school remained limited. Safdar did not feel that contact had increased since the school had become Weston Academy and felt that the school continued to use similar methods as the predecessor schools. Safdar also explained how direct contact with the school was difficult due to the language barrier. Safdar also expressed frustration at the school for failing to
communicate how the data they had collected through questionnaires would be used. For example, his daughter filled out a questionnaire on his behalf about how the school could better cater for his family’s religious and cultural needs but felt that nothing had been done.

The main route in which Safdar was informed about Weston Academy was undoubtedly through Farooq Habeeb, the Asian heritage family liaison officer. Safdar described his relationship with him:

> Farooq Habeeb is a family friend but he has always regularly come round to the house to let me know how Asjad is doing. He has supported us in many ways, helped us get a house and apply for residence. He has also been a constant support for Asjad at school, making sure that he can do the best he possibly can. I am very grateful to him.

7/12/09

However, when Farooq became ill in September 2010 and was forced to take long term sick leave this level of contact became difficult as Safdar acknowledged:

> I realised how much we relied upon him, we were used to daily or weekly contact with school, we felt the gap and contact definitely became less, I don’t think this should be the case, the school should have filled this gap.

5/11/10

During conversations with Safdar, he often expressed how he was interested in becoming more involved with the Academy but was not aware of any such
opportunities. He also felt that the school was failing to take advantage of some resources within the local community. For example, he explained how he felt that some of the Asian women in the area could provide language support in the classroom and how the mosque was interested in hosting joint community events. Farooq Habeeb further explained how he had fed Safdar’s ideas to Parveen Gupta, the Community Director but was disappointed with the lack of outcome. He said:

I have been trying to arrange for students to gain accreditation for the additional languages they can speak but management do not seem interested. I have also tried to facilitate some links between the school and the community but they haven’t been taken up.

5/11/10

Like his son, Safdar was also not aware of any community regeneration schemes run in his area. In the past, Safdar explained how he had been in regular contact with Weston Housing Trust due to the racial abuse his family had received. This included physical attacks on their home, his wife and regular verbal abuse.

In summary, the Nissar family case study is a good example of how Weston Academy impacted some student’s levels of academic achievement. All the additional learning opportunities that Asjad participated in were focused on improving his academic performance. Although, these seemed to have a positive impact, Asjad’s involvement in non-core curriculum opportunities was limited. However, he was particularly appreciative of the school’s efforts to help him pursue his goal of attending university.
The support of Farooq Habeeb, the designated Asian heritage family liaison officer also seemed to be an important factor to Asjad’s success and decision to stay onto the sixth form. The Nissar’s also relied upon Farooq to receive much of their information, without his involvement and during his absence contact with the school was limited. On the whole, Safdar was positive about Weston’s involvement in the school. However, the family did not seem aware of the sponsor’s original rationale and seemed to be much more aware of the improved focus on academic attainment. Safdar also showed an interest in becoming more involved in the school and tried to put forward some ideas which did not seem to be acted upon. Thus, his participation in the academy and the neighbourhood remained limited. Therefore, despite the family showing an interest in contributing towards Weston’s wider vision they were only really aware of the improvements to academic standards.

4.3. Comparing the Family Case Studies

In this section I will compare the findings from the ten family case studies which were carried out in order to assess the impact of Weston Academy. The purpose of this section is to draw out the prominent themes that existed across the case studies in order to ascertain the patterns within the data. The themes were established through a process of cross comparative analysis which involved generating themes to establish the similarities and differences between the family case studies.

**Awareness of sponsor’s vision**

The majority of children in the sample did not seem aware of Weston’s vision or rationale behind the sponsorship of the academy. Most of the children knew of Weston Housing Trust but did not have a full understanding of the function of the organisation. When asked about the difference between Weston Academy and the predecessor schools, they were much more likely to
talk about the change in the name of the school, the uniform or the head. Many of the other children were also more likely to mention the changes in behaviour and standards rather the influence of Weston Housing Trust. For example, as presented in The Grove family case study, Luke attached no significance to the type of sponsor but saw Weston’s involvement as significant in terms of their investment and the appointment of Mr Pugh.

The majority of parents were also not aware of Weston Housing Trust’s rationale behind sponsoring the Academy. Some parents viewed the sponsorship suspiciously as a way to acquire land to build more houses on the predecessor school sites. This view was expressed by Jackie Grove and Linda Harrison who were both from the less vulnerable half of the sample.

**Impact of efforts to improve standards and behaviour**

All the students from the five families in sample who were from the half of the sample who were considered as less vulnerable reported that standards in teaching had improved. They also recognised that there was increased focus on the need to improve attainment and ensure that target grades were met. This theme was clearly present within the case studies of Luke Grove and Asjad Nissar which were previously detailed in full. Aisha Khan, another student in this group of families in the sample also reported that since the school had converted to Weston Academy, the teachers were pushing her to achieve higher grades to a much a greater extent. Furthermore, all three of these students recognised how these improvements had positively impacted their academic progress. Such themes were common across all the students in this half of the sample.

In contrast, students from families classed as vulnerable tended to report that improvements to teaching and behaviour had not positively impacted them.
These students often found coping in the classroom environment difficult. When talking with the students from this group of families many felt that academically succeeding within school was out of their reach. This theme was prominent in the case of Stacey Baldock as previously detailed. Similarly, Lauren Cox’s mother, another vulnerable family in the sample expressed how within the standard school curriculum, Lauren struggled to achieve. She said:

No matter what the teachers do she won’t achieve, her learning difficulties mean that she simply won’t be able to get any decent grades.

9/3/10

All the students in the more vulnerable families, with the exception of Stacey’s sister Courtney, struggled to access the curriculum and mainstream learning activities to differing degrees. This seemed mainly due to their poor numeracy and literacy skills. For example, Umah Massood’s teacher recognised that he struggled to progress in Maths because the requirements of the curriculum presumed that at his age, he would be at a certain level but Umah himself lacked these ‘essential building blocks’. Students such as Lauren Cox also struggled to access the mainstream curriculum due to her learning difficulties and the seemingly restrictive nature of the curriculum. Such difficulties mean that it is unsurprising that these students did not feel that academic standards had improved since the changes had limited effect on their own learning or achievement.

The increased emphasis on the need to reach targets also seemed to have further negative effects on their on perceptions as a learner. For example Kaleem Malik said:
The teachers are constantly on at me, ‘you didn’t reach that target’, ‘you are below your age range’… if anything, that has got worse since the school became Weston Academy. It makes me feel like I might as well give up because it feels impossible.

19/11/09

Thus, Kaleem identified how the pressure from the teachers reach his targets was worse at Weston Academy but rather than encouraging him to work harder his difficulties to achieve meant that he became further disheartened.

Many of the parents were either not aware or did not feel able to comment as to whether educational standards had improved at the Academy. Citrali Khan (mother of Aisha) and Safdar Nissar (father of Asjad) were the only parents to mention explicitly how they thought teaching and attainment had improved since the school became an Academy. Both these parents were also amongst those in the sample who seemed to take the most interest in the academic progress of their children. Whilst out of the students in the sample, Aisha Khan and Asjad Nissar were also amongst those who were most academically gifted.

Some students also mentioned how they thought that standards of behaviour had improved since the predecessor schools joined to form Weston Academy. However, students in the sample who had learning and behavioural difficulties tended have more negative experiences of Weston Academy’s efforts to improve standards of behaviour in the school. Both Umah Massood and Kaleem Malik reported that they felt labelled by teachers and that regardless of what they did, teachers would assume that it was their fault. This was also the case for the Baldock sisters as Courtney reported how she
was frustrated when she started secondary school because the teachers assumed she would regularly be in trouble because of her sister’s past record.

Students within this half of the sample also spent significant periods of time outside the classroom environment due to their behaviour needs. For example, Courtney Baldock was the only child in this group of families not to be given a fixed term exclusion at some point during the tracking. In the cases of Lauren Cox and Stacey Baldock, they were both placed on a fixed term exclusion due to particularly violent episodes where members of staff were threatened. Michelle, Lauren’s mum expressed her frustration at the school giving Lauren a fixed term exclusion and ‘respite’ days since the latter was legally questionable and the combination of time out of school put considerable strain on the family. Due to repeated issues with Lauren and Stacey’s behaviour both were put on reduced timetables whilst the rest of their time was spent in alternative educational placements. Sam Houghton, Kaleem Malik and Umah Massood were also given fixed term exclusions during tracking but were reintegrated back into the mainstream school.

The strategies adopted by Weston for managing bad behaviour also seemed to have particular implications for the progress such students were able to make with their learning. When individuals were given fixed term exclusions they consequently were not in receipt of full time education. Whereas if they misbehaved during lessons, they were sent to the behaviour section in the support unit. During the time I tracked the students in the sample, I observed what happened when Lauren, Stacey, Sam, Kaleem and Umah spent time in the support unit due to bad behaviour. Depending upon the nature of the incident they were either sent there for a single lesson, or put in seclusion for the whole day. Sometimes the students were sent with work whilst others had to be given a task by support staff to occupy their time. They were expected to
complete their work in silence but often found it difficult to remain focused. Members of staff were also frequently trying to get students to be silent and concentrate, students tried to create distractions or simply sat there. Thus, the progress that such students could make with their learning seemed limited, instead the behaviour section of the support unit seemed to act as sort of holding pen for students who failed to comply with classroom expectations.

Kaleem further explained how he felt about being sent to the support unit and the impact he felt it had on his learning. He said:

I’m always getting sent out of my lessons and having to go to the support unit. It just means that you end up sitting in there and not doing much or just answering questions out of a text book. Sometimes, I prefer being there at least you don’t get any hassle but I often can’t do the work because you are not allowed to talk or ask for help.

19/11/09

Such measures meant that students who frequently misbehaved in lessons spent large amounts of time away from the classroom environment. It therefore seems unsurprising that these students did not feel they had been positively impacted by the school’s efforts to raise standards.

Additional learning opportunities and support

All the students who were from families who had learning and behaviour difficulties were targeted for support. Due to their learning and behaviour needs Sam Houghton, Stacey Baldock and Lauren Cox all had learning mentors who supported them in particular lessons. They also received specific lessons in the support unit from specialist staff to improve their numeracy and literacy skills.
After their fixed term exclusions both Lauren Cox and Stacey Baldock were put on a reduced timetable and their time was supplemented with alternative educational placements. Both student placements were secured through Weston Housing Trust. For example, Stacey gained experience with Weston’s human resources department and their maintenance team. Lauren was also allocated a place at ‘Breakthrough’, an independent regeneration charity partly funded by Weston Housing. Paul Walker, the coordinator of Weston’s Youth Services Team was responsible for securing the majority of placements.

In the case of Lauren, Paul explained how the school initially found it difficult to find her a placement but he was surprised that the school had not already contacted Breakthrough due to the existing links with Weston. As he further explained:

> I don’t know what they would have done otherwise. It was me that recommended that Breakthrough run alternative education projects. I’m not sure what they had got planned before I suggested it but they seemed to get right on it after I suggested to them. I’m not sure why they didn’t think of it before really with Weston’s links and everything.

1/12/10

Thus, although Paul made use of the school’s links with Weston, such efforts seem more about finding a short term solution to accommodating Stacey and Lauren’s needs. Whilst Weston Academy seemed to find it increasingly difficult to accommodate their needs inside school. Paul’s actions were also not in response to any direction given by the executive board or related to any strategic plan that linked back to Weston’s original vision. Instead, his response seemed mainly due to his intuition and dedication to students like Lauren and Stacey.
Both Lauren and Stacey were mainly positive about their experiences of alternative education placements. However, Michelle, Lauren’s mum expressed concern:

I’m not sure how long they will keep her at Breakthough it’s expensive apparently. I don’t think they know what else to do but I don’t want her spending any more time at home, it’s not good for her or us.

9/3/10

As previously shown in the full case study of Stacey Baldock, Lauren’s educational future was also uncertain. Like Stacey, Lauren also was not always in full time education because of their short term nature and the difficulties of finding alternative education placements.

Students in the half of the sample considered as less vulnerable also participated in a range of additional learning opportunities but these were of a different nature to the students who had complex needs. In contrast, they mostly engaged in activities which were designed to improve their attainment. For example, Luke Grove, Asjad Nissar and Katie Harrison all were due to take their GCSEs during the tracking period and engaged in additional revision classes run during lunchtimes, after school and at the weekends. Luke and Asjad were both complimentary of the support they received and how they had benefited from the revision classes. Whereas, Katie was unable to attend some of the after school and weekend sessions due to family child caring responsibilities.

During tracking, Kieran Newton also explained how he had engaged with an additional learning opportunity arranged through the school with the army. However, unlike other students who engaged in course, he was not targeted
specifically but after hearing about the opportunity asked to attend the course himself. He also expressed frustration that only students who presented issues were targeted for such opportunities exclaiming:

Just because I’m already doing well doesn’t mean I don’t need to do stuff like this. Why should they get to do more stuff just because they can’t cope with the classroom? It’s unfair.

11/11/10

The remaining children in the less vulnerable set of families - Phoebe Harrison, Aisha Khan and Aaron Newton did not participate in any additional learning opportunities. All these students were in year nine below and achieving average or above average results. Thus, it seems that because they were not working towards their GCSEs or A-Levels and did not present any particular issues they were largely off the radar. This meant that unlike the other students who benefited from new opportunities they did not feel that the range of their learning experiences had increased since the school became Weston Academy.

The Newton family children engaged in the most out-of-hours activities compared with other students in the sample. Michelle and Kieran both took part in a range of sporting activities whilst their brother Aaron took advantage of the new scheme aimed at year seven students to learn a musical instrument free of charge. However, the Newton family children were the exception to the rule because many of the other children in the sample did not engage in out of school activities or did on ad hoc basis. Whilst students in the half of the sample who were considered as more vulnerable and often had fairly negative experiences of school tended to report that they would prefer to not spend anymore time in school than necessary.
Therefore, across the sample there was a variation of trends when comparing student’s engagement with additional learning opportunities. Above all, there seemed to be a clear difference between the types of opportunities targeted to different types of students. Those students in the sample who had less support were either off the radar or targeted to take part in opportunities within school which would improve their attainment. In contrast, students who were classed as vulnerable were increasingly accommodated outside of the school and targeted for specific opportunities through links with partner organisations. There was limited participation from the majority of students in out-of-hours activities and unless they were targeted specifically due to their difficulties with coping in school the onus seemed on the children themselves to take advantage of additional opportunities. Therefore, the students in the sample who had complex needs and in contrast those who achieved at an average or above average level had different types of opportunities available to them and consequently different educational experiences. This further had implications for what they learnt, which types of staff they came into contact with, where they spent their time and ultimately what qualifications they received.

**Pastoral support and multi-agency working**

The majority of students in the sample who were achieving well and did not present with challenging behaviour had less involvement with the members of the pastoral team at Weston Academy. The slight exception to this trend was the Nissar family. As shown in the earlier case study for this family, Farooq Habeeb, the designated Asian Heritage family liaison officer supported Asjad Nissar in school and made regular contact with his father Safdar. However, the contact did not seem as a result of the family being specifically targeted by the school but rather because Farooq was a family friend of the Nissar’s. Where this link did not already exist, students in this
set of families were unlikely to have much contact with the members of the pastoral team but instead were more likely to go to their teacher or a member of their family if they had a problem.

In contrast, the set of families in the sample who were considered as vulnerable had considerable contact with members of the pastoral team. As demonstrated in the Baldock family case study, Stacey and Courtney had developed important relationships with members of the pastoral team. This was also the case for other families in the sample, for example after I observed a review meeting of Sam Houghton’s progress in which Sam’s mother, Shelia attended she said:

I don’t know what we would do without it, they have done a lot to help me and Sam, they have made getting help easier, I don’t have to go to loads of different people now, I just go to Margaret.

24/11/09

Michelle Cox also spoke positively about the multi-agency meetings she attended which were organised by the support unit staff. She said:

They are good because it means I get to sit down with staff from the school, social services and Weston housing people.

25/11/10

This was a common theme for these families whilst there was also evidence that due to this level of collaboration, staff were developing new ways of working with families. For example one member of staff from Weston Housing Trust reported how they felt they were starting to make use of the ‘pluses and minus’ of their job in order to overcome professional boundaries.
As recognised earlier, the students in this set of families also spent a considerable amount of time in the support unit and therefore developed close bonds with pastoral staff who worked in the unit. This was demonstrated in Stacey Baldock’s case study who spoke about how she preferred pastoral staff to teachers because she considered them to be ‘more on her level’ and ‘less stuck up’ than teachers. For her, the teachers did not understand what ‘living round here is like’. Whilst during observations of Sam Houghton and Lauren Cox, their relationships were also noticeably different with pastoral members of staff working in the support unit than classroom teachers. This trend was also present within Umah’s case study, for example commenting Mr Habeeb’s absence he felt that it was ‘just us against them’. Thus giving the impression that Mr Habeeb acted as a sort of middle link between the students and teachers and without him Umah felt isolated.

Like the parents who had considerable contact with pastoral members of staff, the students spoke positively about the impact of their support. However, the difference in student’s attitudes towards teachers as opposed to pastoral staff seemed to have some negative implications for these student’s learning. Commenting on Stacey, Sam, Lauren, Umah and Kaleem Margaret Gilmore, the head of the support unit reflected:

I think they have developed an ingrained ‘I won’t work for you’ type attitude towards a lot of their teachers. Thankfully, they seem to work better for us but it’s a real problem. I don’t really know what it is about maybe because they spend most of their time in here [the support unit] or maybe it’s because we know what is happening with those children and can give them more individual support.

3/3/10
Margaret went onto explain how such students often worked better when in the support unit or when they were being taught by pastoral members of staff. She also seemed to echo Stacey Baldock’s sentiments that one of the possible reasons for this was because of how support staff were on a similar level to such students:

Quite a few of the teachers don’t live in Haleton and are not from round here. Whereas as most of us are [referring to support staff], we know a bit more so we can relate to them better.

3/3/10

Therefore, there was a sense that one of the reasons for the differences between the relationships such students had with pastoral staff as opposed to teachers was due to more of a shared understanding which in part seemed to relate to experiencing what it was like to live in Haleton.

Such trends in the data show marked differences between the levels of contact that students and their families had with pastoral members of staff and the implications that this had. Students in the sample who were academically achieving at an average or above average level tended to have limited contact with the pastoral team. In contrast, students who had complex needs received a high level of support from the pastoral team. Although, this support was valued by both students and their parents it seemed to contribute to a divide between themselves and the teachers. This further seemed to have negative implications for their approach to work. Such students also seemed to have negative attitudes towards teachers and found it difficult to relate to them whereas they seemed to develop more successful relationships with support staff because of a common understanding of the challenges of living in Haleton. Such trends in the data may further explain as to why students who
had intensive involvement from Weston were less likely to feel comfortable in the mainstream classroom environment and able to achieve. Instead they had increasing levels of contact with pastoral members of staff rather than teachers and were increasingly separated from the main activities of the school and in turn students who were achieving at an average or above average level.

**Support for Asian heritage students**

There was also a strong trend in the sample of families in terms of how all the Asian heritage families received support from Farooq Habeeb to greater or lesser extent depending on their need. As shown in Umah’s case study, his family received regular support due to his difficulties in school, this was also the case for Kaleem Malik. The Khan family received the least support largely because it was not necessary whilst the Nissar’s received regular contact with Farooq though this was largely due to family friendship.

All the families who received Farooq’s support spoke positively and relied on his support to a considerable extent. For example, Kaleem Malik expressed how Farooq acted as his ‘voice’ and ‘is good at putting our views across’ because ‘he understands our needs and our culture’. Whilst Umah’s elder sister felt that Farooq acted as bridge between the family and the school.

Mr Habeeb was a particularly important source of support for Umah and Kaleem when they found themselves in trouble with the school due to bad behaviour. In such incidences, he often acted as a mediator between the students and teachers whilst he also made home visits to explain to the parents what had happened. In contrast, Mr Habeeb supported Asjad Nissar in his efforts to achieve high standards in his academic studies whilst he also
convinced the family that Asjad should study for A-Levels at Weston Academy sixth form.

All the families expressed how they missed the support and contact with Farooq during his absence. None of the families received additional support or contact from the school during this time. Kaleem explained what things were like for him without this support as follows:

Without Mr Habeeb things have been proper hard, I can’t tell anyone else when I’m finding things hard. Other teachers don’t understand me or some of the other Asian kids

5/11/10

During Farooq’s absence Kaleem was later given a fixed term exclusion, something he felt would not have happened if he had been at the school. Whereas, Umah expressed how he felt that Asian students had been purposefully targeted and excluded during Farooq’s absence.

Although, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Asian students were treated unfairly during Farooq’s absence they clearly missed his support and in some cases felt isolated and vulnerable. The lack of alternative means of support and the over-reliance on particular individuals also seems clear. Farooq’s absence had particular implications for students and their families who heavily relied upon him whilst the communication between all the Asian families in the sample and the school was also notably less during his absence. The families were also not aware of any attempts made by the school to make alternative arrangements and therefore were forced to manage with the situation themselves. Such limited support, in the case of Umah and Kaleem also seemed to further contribute to their feelings of racial contempt.
towards the school. Such trends show how individuals like Farooq Habeeb were crucial to such families and their engagement with Weston Academy. Whereas the school itself struggled to supply the same degree of support in their absence and did not have systems in place to accommodate for when they were not there.

**Engagement with the sixth form**

The introduction of the sixth form at Weston Academy was significant for two families in the sample. The impact on Luke Grove’s trajectory was significant because he had not previously planned to study A-levels. Whilst Asjad, had always planned to go onto further study but was originally going to attend a local college. Both Asjad and Luke felt that the selection process was key to their decision. In the case of Asjad he appreciated that the sixth form had been tailored towards academic students and that the smaller class sizes would mean he got more individual support. Whereas, Luke expressed how he had not considered doing A-levels until he was asked to stay on at the sixth form.

Despite this, Luke expressed concern about the effect of the selection process on other students. For example, Luke believed the selection process was unfair since he had friends which were not targeted but showed an interest in continuing in education. He also expressed how there was limited support for less academically able students. His concerns were also further substantiated by the case of Katie Harrison who was not selected for Weston Academy sixth form and had very limited support from school in terms of finding out information about local colleges. As her mum, Linda further explained:

> She just did it off her own back really, told us when the open evening was and we just went along. Weston sixth form isn’t really for people like us, we want her to stay local. Katie needs to be able to get a job
after college and doing a childcare course will mean she can get a job in a local nursery and carry on looking after neighbour’s kids for cash in hand money.

Thus, not only was Katie not selected and given limited support, the family also felt that the school’s provision did not cater for her needs.

Luke Grove and Asjad Nissar were mostly positive about their experiences at Weston Academy sixth form. Asjad was particularly positive about the additional opportunities that he had been given and felt that the school was making a real effort to support students to apply to university. In contrast, Luke was frustrated with the school’s constant pushing of university since he did not want to incur the debt that going to university would entail. At times, the sixth form did not seem consistent with Luke’s own interests and aspirations whilst there was some doubt at the end of the data collection period as to whether he would continue his A-Levels into the second year.

One of the more indirect themes that seemed significant within the data connected to the sixth form is the apparent mismatch between some of the student’s interests and expectations and those of the school. This can be seen in both the cases of Katie Harrison and Luke Grove. For Katie and her family there is a clear sense of how they felt that Weston Academy sixth form did not cater for their needs because the courses they were offering were not vocational. Whereas, Luke seemed to feel that the school was trying to change his aspirations and lead him down a path which was different from his own future objectives. Thus, both Luke and Katie seemed to have a strong sense of who they are and what sort of job they hoped to do. However, the school
failed to tap into this and instead tried to impose a different agenda which was not consistent with what the student’s themselves wanted.

Thus, there are a number of interesting themes which are apparent in terms of the impact of Weston Academy’s attempts to establish a successful sixth form. Out of the three students in the sample who had interactions with the sixth form, Asjad seemed to benefit the most. This seems largely because the sixth form predominantly catered for high achieving students and those who wanted to go to university. Luke also seemed to benefit since he had not originally planned to go on to further education but found integrating into the sixth form difficult since his interests and aspirations were different from those of the school. Katie’s future aspirations were also not catered for in terms of the courses on offer and therefore decided to go to another college. However, she seemed to have very limited support from the school in securing a place in an alternative provision. Therefore in both the case of Luke and Katie there is a sense that the sixth form did not cater for their interests or their hopes of what they would do after they had finished full-time education. This meant that there was an apparent gap between the students and the academy which had further implications for the extent that students and their families in the sample wanted to engage with the school.

*Parental engagement*

The parents in the sample had differing amounts of contact with Weston Academy during the tracking period. Families who had the most contact with the school were those who had children who had more complex behavioural and learning needs. Thus, the parents in the Baldock, Houghton and Cox families had the most contact whilst the Massood and Malik parents also had regular contact. As explained in the pastoral and multi-agency section, the majority of contact was facilitated through staff who worked in the support
unit. A number of pastoral staff played a key role in liaising between the school and the student’s parents whilst the family liaison officers also played a key role within this process. For example, as shown in the earlier section, Farooq Habeeb, the designated Asian heritage family liaison officer was in regular contact with the Asian heritage families.

In contrast, the other five families in the sample who had children who were achieving average and above average standards had fairly limited contact with the school. On the whole, these parents had contact with the school through the usual methods such as termly parents meetings and letters. None of the families reported that they used the school’s intranet site ‘mychild@school’ to track their children’s progress. This lack of engagement seemed to be due to a combination of lack of awareness coupled with limited access to internet and few families having a home computer.

The two families which seemed to find direct contact with the most difficult were the Malik and Nissar family due to language barriers. Although, both received information through Mr Habeeb they very rarely had contact with teachers. Parent’s evenings presented particular problems for these families which resulted in the students having to act as translators or the family sending alternative family members who could speak English instead. In both cases, there were no attempts by the school to provide families with additional support which would have made direct communication easier.

None of the parents identified that there had been increased effort by the school to engage parents. Many of them also said that they were often not aware of events taking place at the school and would sometimes only find out about them after the occasion. A number of the families also reported negative experiences of communication that they had with the school. For
example, Michelle Cox felt that she had been kept in the dark about how Lauren’s behaviour had become worse.

Citrali Khan was the parent who seemed to participate the most out of the families in the sample but her participation also decreased throughout tracking. She attended a number of parent participation events but after attending the parent consultation on the new school building her engagement decreased. This seemed mainly because she did not feel the school had taken her views about providing prayer facilities for the Muslim students into consideration.

Despite the low participation in school life from the majority of parents, many of them expressed how they would be interested to be involved more. Feelings of isolation and low self-esteem were particularly common especially amongst the mothers I interviewed. Some parents expressed how they would be interested in more social interaction whilst others were keen to pursue possible learning opportunities.

Thus, it seems that throughout tracking the level of engagement between Weston Academy and the parents in the sample was fairly limited overall. Although, some of the more vulnerable families who had children with more complex and behavioural needs had more contact, this contact seemed to rely on particular key individuals within the pastoral team. Furthermore, this contact rarely extended to classroom teachers. Where families had children who presented minimum or no concern, contact remained limited and mainly consisted of traditional methods. None of the families seemed aware of how the school was trying to engage parents to a greater extent and many did not seem aware of the attempts by the school to create opportunities for parents to attend events at the school. There was also a strong sense that many of the parents in the families would have welcomed the opportunity to participate
more but were either not aware of the opportunities currently offered by the school or had not been fully encouraged to make that step. Therefore, on the parents behalf there was willingness to be more engaged in school life but it seems that the academy only offered them limited opportunities to do so.

**Student engagement in neighbourhood activities**

Sam Houghton, Lauren Cox, Stacey and Courtney Baldock all engaged in both the neighbourhood activity schemes run by Weston Housing Trust; Positive Youth and New Record. Michelle Cox, Lauren’s mum explained what she saw the benefits of the schemes were:

> I always try to encourage her to go as much possible as possible because she isn’t very confident and doesn’t find mixing with other people very easy. Lauren is easily led and just gets dragged into trouble a lot of the time but I think since the neighbours have seen her doing stuff like clearing gardens they have thought better of her.

9/03/10

The children themselves often also spoke enthusiastically about the activities. In particular the neighbourhood schemes were particularly successful at engaging students from vulnerable families. This was in marked contrast to the school who seemed to struggle to engage students and their families generally.

Throughout the tracking period there was limited evidence of improved links between the academy and the neighbourhood schemes run by Weston Housing Trust. For example, Courtney Baldock was awarded a ‘bright young star award’ for her continuous contributions to her neighbourhood by Weston Housing Trust but this was not acknowledged by Weston Academy.
Although, Paul Walker, the family liaison officer was encouraged to develop links he felt he had not been given sufficient time to do so. There was also evidence that the time he now spent in Weston Academy was proving useful in terms of improving the support offered to vulnerable students. For example, he was responsible for securing the alternative education placements for Lauren Cox and Stacey Baldock. Paul also raised the alarm when Sam went missing after his mother had left the area with her boyfriend and failed to arrange alternative care for her son. Paul found Sam and contacted social services for them to put the necessary safeguarding measures in place. Such examples show that Paul’s involvement was crucial for these students whose trajectories may have been very different if he had not been able to act as the middle point between home and school.

**Community involvement and regeneration**

Few parents in the sample participated in neighbourhood schemes. Generally, when parents were asked they were unaware of efforts by Weston Housing to encourage residents to get involved and improve their area. Sam Houghton’s mother was the only person in the sample to volunteer her time to Positive Youth but this seemed more a case of Paul devising a way to have contact and share information with her rather than a deliberate intervention. Jackie Grove also used to attend a residents committee and some regeneration activities.

This concludes the end of this section. As shown, there were a number of preliminary themes from comparing the family case studies. They also provide a perspective of what was happening at a ground level. Furthermore, from identifying the impacts of Weston Academy on the family case studies, it has provided a broader picture of some of the other processes which seemed to be taking place as part of how the school operated. These themes
will be raised again in the next two chapters but for now I recap the main parts of this chapter.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have presented the findings of this study. Firstly, in relation to research question one I provided an overview of the executive board’s vision and what happened when I tracked the development of the academy. I then presented four of the family case studies in full. Finally themes across all the family case studies were compared. In the next section, I present the analysis of the findings.
Chapter Five: Analysis of Findings

This chapter presents the themes from the analysis of the findings of the previous chapter. I begin by considering the main themes from analysing the development of Weston Academy. Here, I am predominantly concerned with the first research question. I then present the analysis of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts’ separately to mirror the divide between these two sets of activities which happened in practice. Here, I focus on findings from the family case studies and consider the impact of the school’s efforts in order to work towards answering the second research question. Through the analysis of the themes, I identify that the impacts were limited. I also show that whilst the ‘standards-focused efforts’ developed separately in practice from ‘community-focused efforts’ the effects on the family case studies were intertwined. Moreover, by looking at the relationships between the impacts of the ‘standards-focused efforts’ on the family case studies and those of the ‘community focused efforts’ I show that the former restricted the latter. Therefore, I argue that the ways in which the mainstream school operated appeared to restrict the extent the school was able to tackle issues which beset the community.

5.1. The development of Weston Academy

In this section, I present the themes from tracking the development of the school. I begin by recapping the focus of the study and analysing the executive board’s vision of what they hoped to achieve. I show how they struggled to translate their vision into practice, which ultimately meant that the resulting picture was markedly different to that originally envisioned. I also consider how the executive board lost sight of the more distinctive elements of the vision due to the pressure to raise standards. Thus the effort to tackle issues which beset the community seemed to become ‘additional’
rather than integral to the development of the school. Such issues predominantly seemed to arise due to the dual focus of the New Labour policy context. The section is preceded by an analysis of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ in more depth.

Recapping the focus of study

As stated throughout this thesis, this study is concerned with the relationship between schools and their communities. More specifically, whether schools can make a difference to issues which beset deprived communities in the UK. Schools are commonly recognised as being well placed to tackle such issues. However, they are often faced with adversity, and struggle to combat the relationship between deprivation, poor educational outcomes and poor life chances in general (Machin and McNally, 2006; Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, 2006; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Dyson et al., 2012).

The community-oriented schools movement was introduced in Chapter One and fully explored in the literature review. I observed that the approach has been adopted across a number of countries in an effort to tackle these issues. There is limited consensus about the aims, purposes and rationale which are the basis of such schools (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). Typically, they involve a reconfiguration of community services; schools alone are often regarded as ‘failing’ to meet the complex needs of those living in deprived areas. Thus a more coherent and ‘joined up’ approach is seen as necessary (Dryfoos, 1994; Dyson et al., 2002; Crowther et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2004; Dyson and Raffo, 2007).
Weston Academy as a community-oriented school

As discussed in Chapter One, Weston Academy can be conceptualised as a type of community-oriented school due to the common elements it shares. As Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive acknowledged, both Weston Housing Trust and the two predecessor schools were adversely affected by a number of issues typically associated with deprived neighbourhoods. As two central community providers, it was identified that they had specialist knowledge and were both well placed to tackle such issues. It was hoped that by working together, they would be able to achieve more of a substantial impact than had previously been possible when working individually.

Such an interesting and distinctive approach offered a unique research opportunity to further explore the relationship between schools and their communities and whether schools can make a difference to deprived areas. To begin with I sought to track what happened when Weston Academy tried to convert their vision into reality. This area of the study also specifically relates to my first research question: What did Weston Academy hope to achieve and what happened in practice?

Analyzing the executive board’s vision

First, it is necessary to explore the vision the executive board of Weston Academy hoped to achieve in more depth. As I identified in the previous chapter, the vision was not set out in a concrete form by the executive board. However, there was a ‘broad rationale’ behind the sponsor’s involvement. Stuart Painter, the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods hoped that the school would act as a ‘vehicle’ to access the community, enabling them to continue their regeneration efforts to transform Haleton into ‘a sustainable community’. I also argued that the sponsorship of the school by the local social housing provider was distinctive. Thus, the reconfiguration of two
central community service providers – housing and education, posed a unique opportunity to tackle a range of social and economic issues.

As shown in the previous chapter, the vision was made more explicit by the theory of change framework produced by the research team as part of the Development and Research partnership (Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Anderson, 2005; Dyson and Todd, 2010). The framework included a number of ‘strands of action’; some of these were directed specifically at the school such as efforts to improve teaching and learning, whilst others were more directed at the community. The executive board made a number of links between how these actions would complement one another and how they saw both ‘types’ as integral. The outcomes they hoped to achieve through these actions were ambitious and wide-ranging. For example, they hoped their actions would eventually lead to a ‘skilled workforce’ and ‘improved life chances’. Therefore, it seems that the executive board engaged in some searching debates about the type of community they were trying to create and how they hoped to transform Haleton.

Translating the vision into practice

One of the functions of the research partnership was to provide ‘critical friendship’ (Ainscow, 2002) in order to support and collect evidence to inform the development of the Academy. The start of this process was the construction of a theory of change framework which was intended to be used as a development tool. However, the framework was not further developed or used to any great extent during the tracking period.

Instead, the vision seemed to stay within the realm of ‘blue sky thinking’ rather than being translated into practice. The executive board was able to make numerous connections between issues experienced inside the school
and the community. However, they were at a loss to know how to co-ordinate their work. As Parveen Gupta, the Community Director commented:

I don’t even know where to start! It’s like trying to make an amazing chocolate cake without a recipe and a vague idea of the ingredients but no idea what order or amount!

27/11/08

Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive of Weston Academy, also emphasised the ‘ground-breaking’ nature of what they were attempting and therefore identified how such an attempt would involve ‘some trial and error’. He also became frustrated at the lack of support available despite the ‘government encouraging us to tackle social exclusion in a joined up way’.

From analysing these themes in the data there seems to be two main reasons why the executive board struggled to translate their vision into practice. The first reason relates to previous conceptualisation of Weston Academy as a ‘community-oriented school.’ As I outlined in the literature review, the distinctive element of the approach is how this type of school is not just concerned with learners per se but the broader contribution that schools can make to their communities (Cummings et al., 2011). Although the approach was seen as commonsensical because of the position schools occupy, quite how they should balance this with their core-business of teaching and learning is not made clear. I also identified how such a conceptualisation also raises questions of what schools are and are for (Cummings et al., 2011). However, as Wilkin et al. (2003: 5) identify, there is an abundance of advocacy for community-oriented school approaches but ‘little systematic, rigorous evaluation of the concept and its implementation.’ Thus, it seems
unsurprising that this ambiguity translates onto schools which take a similar approach.

Secondly, there is also limited theorisation or guidance contained within policy texts. Thus, as Cummings et al. (2011) consider in the case of FSES schools, policy texts tend to list the type of activities schools might offer rather than explicitly theorise how offering such activities might contribute to particular outcomes. Elsewhere, Cummings et al. (2007b: 198) also identify how there is a ‘lack of serious engagement with fundamental issues in government guidance’ which means that professionals are left to use ‘their own best judgement’.

Therefore, the difficulties experienced by the executive board are not particularly surprising. Furthermore, it seems that whilst they had a distinctive approach and a wide-ranging vision, in practice they struggled to translate this into action. In the next section, I identify how the school’s actions to achieve their vision were increasingly divided and therefore markedly different from the original vision.

*Standards-focused efforts and community-focused efforts: two separate tracks*

As previously stated, the theory of change framework which sought to make the executive board’s vision explicit, included two broad strands of action; those specifically directed at the school and those focused on the community. A number of links were made between the two and they were both seen as integral to the vision as a whole. However, the executive team struggled to translate the vision into practice. Furthermore, it seems that as the school developed their actions separated on to different tracks with limited links between the two. On one track, the actions were aimed at improving
standards of achievement. They were focused on the ‘core business’ of the school in terms of functioning as a teaching and learning institution. The second track comprised of actions which were concerned with the school making a broader contribution, attempting to tackle issues which beset the community. The terms ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ have been adopted as shorthand for these separate tracks of actions.

The ‘standards-focused efforts’ mainly consisted of standard school improvement strategies. Those directed at staff included Continual Professional Development opportunities and residential for staff, lesson observations and specific efforts to ensure they monitored students’ progress. A number of strategies were also aimed at students, including improving attendance and behaviour, providing diverse learning opportunities and setting attainment targets. These initiatives were mainly led by William Pugh the Head, with John Burgess, the Deputy Head supporting these efforts. In contrast, the ‘community-focused efforts’ compromised of a wide range of extended services such as out-of hours activities, community events and efforts to provide multi-agency support to families. These efforts were led by Parveen Gupta, the Community Director.

**The influence of the Policy context**

To further interrogate the theme of how the ‘standards-focused strategies’ and ‘community-focused strategies’ became separate it is important to consider the influence of the policy context. In order to this I firstly need to introduce some conceptual tools, which will be used to interpret the themes in the data. In the words of Ball, (1994:19) policies ‘do not normally tell [schools] what to do’ but ‘create circumstances in which the options available in deciding what to do are narrowed and changed’. Thus, it seems the policy context can create
and limit opportunities for schools, and in the context of this study can affect the role that schools play in their communities.

The tradition of policy scholarship is extensive. For the purposes of this study, earlier studies such as those conducted by Bowe et al. (1992) are relevant since they consider the role of schools in the policy process. In their book ‘Reforming Education and Changing Schools’ they contend that the role of schools has been marginalised in the past, meaning that policy is presented as linear and something which is simply ‘done to’ schools (1992: 6). In contrast, by conducting school case studies Bowe et al. (1992: 13/14) sought to recognise ‘ambiguities, contradictions and omissions’ created by the policy context whilst also identifying ‘space for manoeuvre’ for schools within the policy process. Ball et al. (2012) also consider ‘policy enactment’ in schools, identifying how schools are forced to respond to multiple policies at once. Thus, ‘policy enactment’ involves ‘creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation’ in light of a school’s ‘culture, ethos and situated necessities’ rather than a simple process of direct implementation (Braun 2010: 548; Ozga, 2000).

**Weston Academy as reflective of the dual policy context**

From the beginning, there were clear links that could be made between the school’s vision and the policy context. For example, the very premise of Weston Housing Trust’s involvement was influenced by the emphasis placed on the need for collaboration and partnership working. Thus, as discussed in the literature review, ‘joined-up working’ and in particular, improved relations and working practices between different community providers were seen as central to tackling social exclusion (Riddell and Tett, 2001). Whilst New Labour also introduced particular policies which targeted deprived
areas and sought to facilitate collaboration, in the literature review these were referred to as ‘Area-Based Initiatives’.

Although the executive board’s vision for the school was not part of one specific national strategy, there are clear comparisons that can be made between Weston’s underlying rationale for involvement and what they hoped to achieve. For instance, through their sponsorship, Weston Housing Trust aimed to use the school as a ‘vehicle’ to access the community in multiple ways whilst also working with other community service providers to provide more holistic means of support. In this sense, Weston Housing Trust also seized upon the ‘space for manoeuvre’ and tried to use the opportunities created by the policy context to further extend their attempts to regenerate the area (Bowe et al., 1992: 14).

However, as detailed in the literature review, New Labour’s policy repertoire did not only consist of those which sought to improve collaboration between service providers and target those most at risk of the harmful effects of living in a deprived area. Their ‘third way approach’ (Giddens, 1998) also retained and extended a variety of market-based principles, believing that competition is an efficient and effective way of improving quality of service (Harris and Ranson, 2005). In terms of educational policy, as detailed in the literature review, New Labour introduced a number of ‘standards-focused reforms’. These were underpinned by the belief that choice, competition and diversity would improve quality (Philips and Harper Jones, 2003), creating a culture of ‘performativity’ (Broadfoot, 2001; Ball, 2003) within a ‘high stakes accountability’ system (Mujis and Chapman, 2009). They also required schools to act as independent institutions and further distanced them from local democratic control (Ranson, 2008; Beckman et al., 2009). The Academies Policy was the logical conclusion to such efforts as such schools, like Weston
Academy, were independent from local authorities (Rowley and Dyson, 2011). As I explained in the literature review, this set of policies are different from those discussed earlier and detailed at length in the literature review under the heading of ‘community-focused reforms’.

The dual nature of New Labour’s policy context thus seemed to pull the school in two different directions rather than co-ordinating their ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts’ as part of an overall strategic plan. On the one hand, the school tried to meet the demands of New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’ by implementing a number of practices which aimed to improve the previously low standards of the predecessor schools. At the same time, they also introduced a number of strategies akin to New Labour’s ‘community-focused reforms’. For example, the school offered a range of services and means of support in an effort to tackle issues which beset the community. However, there were few attempts to link the two sets of strategies, resulting in them developing on two separate tracks. As Parveen’s comments show:

We have lots of things happening both on the school and community side of things. I’m not sure how they link up at the moment but I’m hoping that this will become clearer as time goes on.

3/3/09

Using Ball’s (2012) concept of ‘policy enactment’, it can therefore be shown that Weston Academy was forced to respond to the policy context in its entirety. Furthermore, the ambiguous nature of the executive board’s original vision together with the dual policy context adversely affected how well they were able to co-ordinate their efforts. This meant that efforts to improve
teaching and learning seemed to develop separately from those which sought to tackle broader social issues.

**Unequal importance**

As the school developed there was increasing evidence that the need to put in place standard school practices in order to improve attainment would take precedence. William, the Head emphasised the need to play ‘step up and catch up’ because of the ‘poor state’ of the predecessor schools which were ‘plagued with bad practice and low staff morale’. The pressure to improve attainment to enhance the market position of the school was also considerable. As comments from William demonstrated, the threat of Ofsted knocking on the door and the possibility of the school returning to special measures was ever present. Similarly, a teacher described the pressure to get students reaching their target grade as ‘inescapable’ and ‘stressful’.

In turn, this meant that attempts to establish a range of community services and support mechanisms were increasingly side-lined, whilst the emphasis placed on the need for the school to improve attainment seemed to limit the role the school was able to play within the community. Thus, Weston Academy found themselves in a situation whereby the resulting picture was markedly different from their original vision. Rather than the school acting in a way that was outward and community focused, their approach was increasingly bounded and concentrated on improving standard school activities.

Such themes in the data show that similar to Ball et al.’s (2012) study of ‘policy enactment’, schools are very much a part of the policy process. Thus, in their recent book ‘How Schools Do Policy’, Ball et al. (2012) identify that when schools respond to a multiple number of policies at once they are forced
to interpret and balance the often contradictory demands of the policy context. In a similar vein, evidence from Weston Academy suggests that the duality of New Labour’s policy put competing demands upon the school and since more emphasis was placed on standards this undermined their ‘community-focused efforts’. Thus, the ‘standards-based reforms’ meant that schools were forced to work within a tight prescriptive framework (Day and Sachs 2004; Maguire and Dillon, 2007). This in turn limited the extent to which Weston Academy could fully pursue their original vision, particularly in relation to their ‘community-focused efforts’.

Such issues are not unusual for schools which try to extend their role and tackle problems which beset deprived areas. As I discussed in the literature review, the emphasis placed on the need to improve standards, has resulted in more schools developing ‘community-focused efforts’ as an ‘add on’ to ensure that such efforts do not dramatically affect the standard school practices (Cummings et al., 2011).

Such findings are similar to those reported as part of this study. For example, Parveen seemed very much aware of the need to establish standard school practices and improve attainment since ‘this is what we will be judged on’. She also struggled to raise the status of ‘community-focused efforts’ at the school. For instance, when commenting on providing more cohesive and sustainable support for Asian heritage students she said; ‘it’s considered as additional, if we need another maths teacher that’s what the money will spent on.’ Thus showing she was aware of the pressures and how in turn the school prioritised efforts which were seen to directly link to standards rather than the community.
Contradictions between vision and practices adopted

When analysing the findings there was also evidence that the dual focus of the policy context meant that the school adopted practices which seemed to contradict their original vision. An example of this is the development of sixth form provision, which will now be discussed. The creation of an academic sixth form seemed to be predominantly motivated by the belief that this type of provision would help to raise standards, rather than the sponsor’s original intention to provide vocational training in an effort to enhance students’ employability. For example, William Pugh said:

We are hoping an academically focused sixth form will give students lower down the school something to look up too, to heighten their aspirations and encourage them to achieve the best they possibly can.

06/07/09

Thus, it seems the importance put upon attainment and the position of the school in the market-place trumped Weston’s original plans. Although, Martin expressed how he felt ‘anxious about how it fits with Weston’s values’ and Parveen was worried ‘about what kind of messages we are sending out’ the plans were not changed because as expressed by Martin it seemed the ‘safest, manageable route’.

However, the limited repertoire of the sixth form and the selection process also seemed to exclude parts of the community meaning that it directly contradicted the school’s original inclusive approach which sought to build a sustainable community for all. These themes in the data also correspond with points made in the literature review where I discussed how New Labour’s dual policy focus placed contradictory demands upon schools. For Ranson (2008) such contradictions are the result of how the two sets of policies
positioned schools and their relationship with their communities in an entirely different way since they are based on fundamentally different value systems. In this sense, Weston Academy can be seen as ‘a product of its time’ that fell afoul of the inherent difficulties contained with New Labour’s policy repertoire (Rowley and Dyson, 2010).

**Playing it safe**

Such examples show that due to the pressure on the school to raise achievement, they began to lose sight of what was distinctive about their vision and instead ‘played it safe’ by adopting strategies aimed to improve standards. Although schools do engage in progressive and inspiring ways in testing times, it seems that the risks of carving out new courses of action remain too high for some schools (Wrigley et al., 2012). Thus, schools in precarious situations cannot afford to ignore the demands of the market which creates a system of winners and losers. Such losers are also likely to be schools which are located in deprived areas, which due to the challenges of the context, find raising standards and competing against other schools more difficult (Whitty, 1997).

In light of this, the policy context therefore inhibited the progress Weston Academy was able to make because the school was not in a position to be able to take risks in prioritising their ‘community-focused efforts’. The school pursued the safer option of concentrating on improving attainment, shifting the balance away from their original vision but ensuring that the academy was more likely to survive the educational marketplace. Thus, it seems the amount of ‘space for manoeuvre’ for Weston Academy was somewhat less than originally envisioned (Bowe et al., 1992: 14).
The development of the school’s ‘academic’ rather than vocational sixth form is a good example of how the school tried to ‘play it safe’ rather than developing practices which seemed to be more in-keeping with their original vision. Thus, due to the pressure to raise standards and the difficulties inherited from the predecessor schools, the executive team felt they had ‘bitten off more than they could chew’ (Martin Rayner). This meant their efforts were concentrated on improving standards at the cost of the ‘community-focused efforts’. Furthermore, this led to situation whereby the school became synonymous with attempts to improve previously failing schools through standard school improvement strategies with some ‘additional extras’. In this sense, the executive board seemed to lose sight of the more distinctive elements of their vision.

*Divisions in the management team*

During the analysis of the data, it became increasingly evident that rather than adopting a management structure which mitigated the divisions within the policy context, Weston Academy’s approach reflected such divisions and thus seemed to further exacerbate such issues. As detailed in the previous findings chapter, Weston Academy adopted a three point management structure. William Pugh and John Burgess as Head and Deputy Head respectively concentrated on the core learning and curriculum activities, whereas Parveen Gupta, the Community Director was responsible for the ‘community-focused efforts’.

The creation of the Community Director position was a bold and innovative step taken by the sponsor, who seconded Parveen from Weston Housing Trust. They hoped that she would act as the ‘mid-point’ between the trust and the school and ensure that the vision remained central to the school’s development. Initially the arrangement seemed to work well. Parveen
expressed that she felt they made ‘a good team’ and described how she felt William and John ‘were completely on board’. However, it seemed that over time, this honeymoon period began to fade.

As detailed in the findings chapter, it seemed that Parveen began to feel ‘out of her depth’ and had difficulties in ‘fitting in’ with the education sector due to her limited knowledge and experience of working in schools. Due to the unique nature of her role, it also seemed that there was limited clarity around her responsibilities which meant that she spent much of her time being reactive and ‘picking up the pieces’. As her comments showed ‘everything is lastminute.com round here.’

At the same time, William and John became increasingly preoccupied with inside school improvement strategies due to the issues inherited from the predecessor schools and the pressure to raise standards. William and John were also experienced in putting in place standard school improvement mechanisms and hoped for quick results. As John explained: ‘the strategies we are introducing are quite straight-forward, we expect them to inject improvement and change relatively quickly.’

In contrast, Parveen came from a background in housing rather than education, and found developing a cohesive community strategy difficult due to the ambiguous nature of the vision and the increasing division between the ‘standards-focused efforts’ and the ‘community-focused efforts’. As presented in the previous chapter, she initially used the theory of change framework produced by the research team but found working with this difficult as her comments show:

Now I’m not concentrating on the achievement, only the community stuff I need to somehow separate it but I’m not really sure how. The
governors also want me to produce something like a ‘community improvement plan’ so that will need to be set out differently from the framework.

To begin with she conducted an ‘audit’ which charted the existing activities and means of support offered by the school together with their partnerships with other community organisations. In the February of the first year of the Academy’s opening, she produced a ‘community improvement plan’ which detailed specific objectives, areas of activity and how the success of these would be judged.

However, as reported in the previous chapter, despite Parveen producing a ‘community improvement plan’, their efforts to extend the role of the school in the community did not follow a strategic plan. Instead, as expressed by one of the middle managers, initiatives tended to be in response to funding opportunities or an apparent need and thus developed on an ‘organic and opportunistic’ basis. This meant that whilst there was an abundance of activity, it was fairly ad hoc and hap-hazard.

As previously mentioned, the ‘community-focused efforts’ had less status and were considered to be ‘additional’. Correspondingly, as William was responsible for driving improvements in teaching and learning, his status and influence on the school also increased. The divisions between the school’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts’ also meant that William and Parveen worked separately from one another. Rather than the school finding an approach which helped them to balance the contradictory policy context, the management structure seemed to re-emphasise such divisions. Furthermore, the absence of an over-arching
framework meant that there were limited links made between the two broad types of efforts. Thus the school developed in a markedly different way from initially envisaged.

**Decreasing influence of Weston Housing Trust**

Gradually, as the need to improve attainment intensified, Weston Housing Trust’s influence over the development of the academy also seemed to decrease. Although members of the executive board from Weston Housing Trust were keen to be involved, they had limited experience of how to improve attainment. This meant that such responsibilities were mainly left in William’s ‘capable hands’ (Martin Rayner). This situation put William in an increasingly superior and more powerful position than that of the rest of the executive board.

There was also evidence to show that as Parveen began to feel more comfortable and knowledgeable about the education sector, rather than facilitating the free flow of information between the two organisations, the gap shifted and Parveen struggled to communicate her newly acquired knowledge to her social housing colleagues. Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive of Weston Housing Trust wanted her to split her time more evenly between the two organisations, however, Parveen felt that Martin ‘doesn’t really know how things work around here’ and that spending more time at Weston Housing Trust would mean that she would ‘miss opportunities’.

The limited influence Weston Housing Trust gradually had on the direction of the school was evident in the data from the family case studies. For example, whilst the majority of families were aware that Weston Housing Trust sponsored the academy, none of them seemed aware of the vision for the school and what the academy hoped to achieve. In contrast, many families
reported that the most significant change was the appointment of a new head and the improvement in standards at the school. For example, one sample member, Luke Grove boldly exclaimed that the sponsor might as well have been ‘Tesco’ since the increased investment was what he thought the school needed.

The limited influence of Weston Housing Trust on the direction of the school remained throughout the tracking period. The space for them to reassert their influence did not materialise since the need to improve standards dominated whilst opportunities for the ‘community-focused efforts’ to regain importance were few and far between. As Stuart Painter, the Executive Director of Neighbourhood’s explained:

It’s very difficult to get times when we all meet together. At the end of the day our focus has to be housing and theirs, for the time being, needs to be getting standards up.

20/06/10

Thus, despite the sponsor’s intentions to be actively involved in the school’s development, balancing this with the need to manage Weston Housing Trust was difficult.

As the Academy progressed, Weston Housing Trust seemed to continue to take more of a back seat role. At the same time, the original vision gradually faded further into the background and instead William continued to lead the school in a direction which aimed to improve standards. This meant that the ‘community-focused efforts’ continued to be ‘additional’ and run on an ad hoc basis. Thus, the resulting picture was somewhat different than the executive board originally envisaged.
Summary

These were the main themes which resulted from the analysis of the data collected from interviews and meetings with executive board members. Overall, the analysis shows that despite the executive board starting with a vision which interlinked their actions and saw both broad types as integral, in practice the ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ developed separately. Furthermore, due to the pressure to improve standards, efforts to improve teaching and learning dominated rather than the more distinctive elements of the original vision. In the next section, I present the analysis of the main themes which emerged from the family case studies therefore I am concerned with research question two: How did Weston Academy impact students in the sample of family case studies?

5.2 Analysis of themes from Weston Academy’s standards-focused efforts and their community-focused efforts.

The chapter will now be separated into two large sections; the first will discuss themes that arose in the analysis of the impacts of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and the second will focus on the themes from the ‘community-focused efforts’ on the family case studies. This separation thus reflects the division between Weston Academy’s efforts to improve attainment and their efforts to extend the role of the school in the community. I will also analyse the relationships between how Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ impacted the family case studies compared with the impacts of the ‘community-focused efforts.’ This will lead to an appreciation of the implications for the extent that the school was able to tackle issues which beset the community.
5.2.1. Standard-focused efforts

_Divided educational experiences_

One of the main themes which developed from the analysis of the family case studies was how the strategies to improve standards impacted differently upon the two broad ‘types’ of families. Students from the five family case studies who were from the more vulnerable families and thus had more involvement from Weston were less likely to feel that the improved educational standards at the school had a positive impact on their attainment. These students often struggled to meet the demands of the curriculum. For example, Kaleem Malik felt like ‘giving up’ because reaching his target grade felt ‘impossible’. Furthermore, because these students found it difficult to abide by the expected standards of behaviour in the classroom, they were often catered for elsewhere and sometimes suspended.

The measures to accommodate students elsewhere as opposed to the mainstream classroom had mixed impacts. For example, Stacey Baldock who spent much of her time in the support unit reported that she preferred being absent from the mainstream classroom. Whilst Margaret Gilmore, the manager of the behaviour and support unit felt that after being given a reduced timetable and sent on alternative learning placements, Stacey was ‘less agitated’ and ‘feeling more confident in herself’. These students were also often targeted for a variety of learning support programmes and vocational opportunities outside of school. However, these students were often not in receipt of full-time education which for some, put a strain on family life, as expressed by Lauren Cox’s mum.

In contrast, students from the five families in the sample who had less involvement from Weston because they presented with minimal risk were likely to report that their attainment had improved. Some students in this part
of the sample were also targeted for additional learning opportunities designed to help them achieve higher grades or more qualifications. For example, Asjad Nissar attended an extensive range of extra revision and coursework sessions and also took an additional course in statistics. Both Asjad and Luke Grove, who completed their GCSEs during the tracking period, reported that they didn’t think they would have gained such high results had the school not changed to Weston Academy.

Students in this part of the sample were more likely to be targeted for additional opportunities within the standard curriculum rather than those which broadened their educational experience. For example, Kieran Newton expressed frustration at how he had to ask to go on an army taster course whereas students who were struggling to achieve were likely to be targeted for such opportunities. Other students in this group who were achieving at an average or above average level and did not present any risk were unlikely to engage in any additional learning opportunities outside the national curriculum and thus considered to be ‘off the radar’ (English teacher). In this sense, students such as Katie and Phoebe Harrison, and Aisha Khan seemed particularly unaffected by Weston’s efforts to ‘diversify the curriculum.’(Paul Burgess, Deputy Head).

These findings are particularly interesting in light of the earlier themes in the data concerned with the development of Weston Academy and the considerable emphasis and corresponding effort that went into improving attainment. Thus, rather than the ‘standards-focused efforts’ having a positive effect on all students, they were most likely to enhance the educational experiences of those who were already likely achieve. Furthermore, the school adopted some practices which specifically aimed to increase the likelihood that these students would achieve, whilst lower-achieving students tended to
spend limited time within the classroom. Thus, there was a sense that students’ educational experiences were divided across the two different broad ‘types’ of families in the sample.

Evidence of ‘rationing’

In order to further interpret these findings I now want to use some concepts from Gillborn and Youdell’s (2000) book ‘Rationing Education’ as their work is particularly useful for further interpreting the theme of ‘divided educational experiences’. They argue that the emphasis on attainment has produced an ‘A-to-C economy’ where ‘the bottom line’ is judged on how many students can achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs. Due to the pressure to convert grade D’s into C’s, they identify how schools typically direct additional resources towards particular students. However, their research shows that these resources are often not targeted at those who are least likely to achieve and therefore such strategies are not addressing the unequal access to opportunities which are structured on the basis of gender, ethnic origin and social class. Instead, teachers are forced to perform a sort of ‘educational triage’ where they identify under-achieving pupils (ibid, 134). The remaining students are either considered as ‘safe’ and likely to achieve whilst the others are deemed as ‘hopeless cases’ and thus ‘left to die’ (ibid, 134). Furthermore, rather than giving a second chance to those students who need it most, educational triage acts like an elaborate insurance policy where those who were already deemed to have the necessary level of ability receive the extra support.

Gillborn and Youdell’s (2000) analysis thus provides a useful lens through which to view some of the patterns in the data collected as part of this study. In the case of Weston Academy, the phenomenon of ‘rationing education’ seemed to take place for students of low ability. Thus, it could be interpreted
that their educational experiences were ‘rationed’ in the sense that these students tended to spend large amounts of time away from the mainstream classroom. They also tended to be educated by non-qualified teachers in the support unit or sent on alternative education placements. Due to emphasis placed on the need to get students to reach their targets there was also a sense that classroom teachers were forced to give more attention to those students who were likely to achieve. For example, Stacey Baldock’s English teacher said she did not have time to ‘pander’ to Stacey’s needs and found catering for her difficult within the classroom environment.

There is also evidence in the data to suggest that students who were likely to achieve experienced some adverse effects due to the emphasis placed on standards. For instance, their educational experiences tended to be narrowly located in the confines of the national curriculum. In contrast, students who were struggling to achieve were more likely to be targeted for opportunities outside the school curriculum. Therefore, in this sense, more able students’ educational experiences were ‘rationed’ in terms of the breadth of learning opportunities available to them.

Thus, rather than adopting strategies to improve all students’ attainment, such interpretations suggest that the school ‘rationed’ students’ educational experiences in differing ways. Furthermore, the school acted in the interests of those who were likely to achieve because of the pressure to increase standards of achievement. In the next section, I analyse how Weston Academy’s efforts to improve attainment affected the inclusion of students with learning and behavioural difficulties.
Standards versus inclusion

When analysing the impact of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ there was evidence to suggest that students’ educational experiences in the sample were divided in terms of where they spent the majority of their time in school. Lower-achieving students were likely to be catered for outside the mainstream classroom which in turn raises issues with regard to the inclusion of these students. Furthermore, it seems that the mainstream school practices acted in an increasingly narrow and restrictive way. This seemed to be a consequence of the school’s efforts to improve standards which meant that some students had to be catered for elsewhere. Therefore, rather than adapting classroom practices to cater for a diverse range of students, the school adopted practices which aimed to improve the attainment of those most likely to achieve. These themes will now be explored in more depth in the following section.

As previously mentioned, students from the more vulnerable families in the sample tended to spend a large proportion of their time in the support and behaviour unit. Sometimes this was because they had dedicated time within the school day to receive specialist learning interventions but also because they often struggled to conform to classroom expectations and were therefore sent by their teachers to work in the unit. These themes are demonstrated in how Stacey Baldock felt that teachers were often just ‘waiting’ for her to misbehave so they could send her out of the classroom.

The evidence also suggests that teachers found balancing the need to improve attainment levels and catering for students with learning and behavioural needs increasingly difficult. As the earlier comments from Stacey Baldock’s teacher show, she felt that she did not have time to ‘pander’ to her needs whilst Sam Houghton’s teacher emphasised how the behaviour policy
enabled him to ‘concentrate on those who are going to get the grades’ because ‘now we have got provisions for those who disrupt the class for others.’

Students from the five families in the sample who were considered to be more vulnerable were also found to often be suspended from school due to bad behaviour. With the exception of Courtney Baldock all the students in this part of the sample were suspended at some point during the tracking period. There were a variety of reasons for the suspensions including violence towards members of staff and other students. However, as Umah’s comments show being suspended was ‘no big deal because I’m in all the bottom sets with the thicko’s’. He went onto describe how he often did poorly in tests ‘so the teachers can’t be bothered with me’.

These themes in the findings suggest that in an effort to improve attainment, the school adopted practices which favoured students who were more likely to attain and made provisions for those who struggled in the classroom environment. The findings also show how rather than adapting the classroom to cater for the diverse needs of students, they introduced practices such as the behaviour policy which were restrictive. Such practices seemed to be aimed at enabling teachers to concentrate on students who were ‘going to get the grades’. The evidence also suggests that due to some practices adopted by the school such as ability grouping and emphasis on test results some students misbehaved because they struggled to fit within this framework.

*Standardised practices and ‘remedial education’*

There is a significant body of literature which considers issues of inclusion and in particular the effects of the standards agenda in the context of students of varying needs (Dyson et al., 2005; Ainscow et al., 2006a; 2006b; Cigman, 2007; Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007; Glazzard, 2011). In terms of interpreting
the themes in the data for this study, the work of Dyson and Millward (2000) together with Golby and Gulliver (1985) are of particular use. The former study acknowledges some of the benefits to separate support and behaviour units but postulates that such practices are adopted in order to take away the ‘burden’ from teachers (Dyson and Millward, 2000: 141). Golby and Gulliver’s (1985: 14) seminal piece on ‘remedial centres’ identifies how such practices leave the curriculum largely unchanged and although the system is ‘accident prone,’ remedial education acts as the ‘ambulance service’ which compensates for an otherwise ‘functioning’ system.

Therefore, some of the themes from the analysis of the impact of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ suggest that because the restrictive nature of the mainstream classroom, the support and behaviour was forced to act as a sort of ‘remedial centre’ (Golby and Gulliver 1985: 14). Although, the system was ‘accident prone’, having the provision enabled the mainstream classroom to cater for those who were more likely to achieve (ibid). Thus, teachers could concentrate on improving standards without the ‘burden’ of the other students who struggled to conform to the restrictive nature of the classroom.

Elsewhere in the literature, other scholars have recognised how the pressure to improve standards contradicted other policies which sought to improve inclusion (Booth et al., 1998; Armstrong, 2003; Dyson, 2005). Thus, as Hall et al. (2004: 814/815) argue, on the one hand inclusion involves ‘celebrating difference and maximising diversity’ whilst on the other hand the pressure to improve standards ‘seems to push schools towards ability grouping, testing and competition, thus making a climate of exclusive practices.’

Therefore, it seems that some of the evidence from the family case studies was also indicative of how the standards agenda seemed to be affecting other
processes at play within the school. Some of the findings seem to suggest that
due to the pressure to improve standards, the school adopted a number of
practices which particularly affected how the mainstream school operated.
This in turn seemed to negatively impact those who ‘do not meet the
standard’ (Armstrong, 2003: 147) who were increasingly separated as a
consequence to the school acting in the interests of those more likely to
achieve. In the next section I develop these themes further by looking at how
some students experienced difficulties in terms of ‘fitting in’ with the
practices operating within the mainstream school.

Mismatch between school and the community

When analysing the impact of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’
it seems that there is evidence of a ‘mismatch’ between the school and
community. This seemed to be a consequence to the school adopting
strategies which were narrowly focused on improving attainment rather than
trying to ‘recognise’ what was important to students and the wider
community. This theme is particularly apparent for students with behaviour
and learning difficulties and those who came into contact with the school’s
sixth form provision. Moreover, these patterns in the data seem particularly
related to how students’ experiences of living in a deprived area ‘mismatch’
the practices at play within the mainstream school.

As previously identified, students who had learning and behavioural
difficulties often found it challenging to cope in the classroom environment.
They also struggled to access a number of elements of the basic school
curriculum. These issues seemed to negatively impact their relationship with
school and how they viewed themselves as learners. For example, Stacey
Baldock viewed herself as ‘thick’ and felt that being in school was ‘pointless’
because ‘learning what they tell me, will make no difference to my life at all.’
Lauren’s mother stated; ‘no matter what the teachers do she won’t achieve, her learning difficulties mean that she simply won’t be able to get any decent grades’. Umah Massood and Kaleem Malik also seemed to struggle to access elements of the curriculum. As Umah’s teacher identified, Umah seemed to ‘lack the basic building blocks’ which were needed in order for him to make progress with his studies.

Consequently, these students often had poor relationships with their teachers but tended to have much better relationships with members of the pastoral team, particularly those who worked in the behaviour and support unit. This seemed mainly because students felt support staff ‘know what it is like to live round here, cos they do too’ whereas teachers were viewed as ‘stuck up’ (Stacey Baldock). The negative experiences that these students had with teachers seemed to impact adversely on their approach to their work. As identified by Margaret Gilmore, the manager of the Behaviour and Support Unit, such students often developed an ingrained ‘I won’t work for you type attitude’ towards the teachers but tended to work much better when in the unit.

Similarly, Umah Massood and Kaleem Malik relied heavily on the support of Farooq Habeeb, the Asian family liaison officer. As Kaleem explained ‘he understands our needs and our culture’. In contrast, both Umah Massood and Kaleem Malik seemed to have feelings of resentment towards teachers because they felt they were often blamed for racial unrest at school. For example, after Farooq was forced to take sick leave, Umah expressed how the lack of support meant that it was now ‘just us against them’. Farooq expressed how he did not think the school made an effort to value skills Asian heritage students bought with them to school. For example, Farooq attempted to arrange accreditation for the additional languages which students had
knowledge of, but felt that the school was unwilling to introduce such opportunities.

**Spatial understandings of place**

There are a number of ways that these patterns in the data could be explained. For example, as detailed in the literature review, some of this ‘lack of fit’ between some students and Weston Academy could be because schools are part of an overtly classed system. Thus, I could use the work of Maguire (2006) to show how the structure of schools’ curricular and pedagogical practices reproduce class inequalities at play within wider society. However, although this study took place in a deprived area where the impacts of social and economic structural forces seem to have particularly devastating consequences, the particular features of the context or ‘place’ seemed important. Therefore, in order to make sense of some of the patterns in the data, I will use some conceptual tools from the emerging field of spatial understandings of place and education. Some of these were introduced in the literature review whilst I will also consider some other concepts from the field which I found useful when interpreting the findings.

The field of spatial understandings of education ‘remains relatively underdeveloped’ (Gulson and Symes, 2007b: 100). However, there are a growing number of scholars who are increasingly considering the role of place on educational identity, agency and attainment (Reay and Lucey, 2000; Hollingworth and Archer, 2010; Maguire, 2010). Those who occupy the recent ‘spatial turn’ in educational theory and research (Gulson and Symes, 2007a) typically base their work on classical theories of spatial processes (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1993; Soja 1996). For example, as mentioned in the literature review, Lefebvre (1991) conceptualises ‘space’ as a socially produced phenomenon; its meaning is therefore produced by the actors who inhabit the
space through their actions and networks they operate within. Young people’s learner identities are therefore constructed by the meanings at play within this space – how being poor affects one’s life and choices, what constitutes as valid or useful knowledge and whether educational institutions are likely to reinforce or alleviate the injustices that they experience (Lupton, 2010).

Raffo (2011) has built on this body of work, using Nancy Fraser’s (1996) concept of the ‘politics of recognition’ suggesting that:

> Educational injustices occur because of the way these groups of young people and their families have their identities, funds of knowledge and educational desires silenced by dominant educational discourses or paradigms that operate at both the state, and school/neighbourhood levels.

(2011: 335/6)

Raffo (2011: 336) develops this conceptualisation further by recognising how young people enter schools from ‘different niched structural positions’ which are embodied by different ‘social habits’ and ‘cultural dispositions’. These are in turn adapted to their local conditions and operate within and through ‘place-based social relations’ (ibid). Young people’s ‘cultural disposition’ is then considered to acquire differing amounts of ‘capital’ depending on how closely their disposition fits in with ‘standard cultural codes that dominate in mainstream schooling in such things as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment’ (ibid). Raffo (2010) goes on to consider how students experience a lack of fit because the cultural habits which they bring to school are not utilised or ‘recognised’.
Educational experiences and place

These conceptual tools will now be used in light of the findings presented earlier in order to further make sense of the apparent mismatch between the school and the community. Thus, it was found that low ability students in particular, experienced a ‘lack of fit’ when in contact with the mainstream school. Therefore, it is possible to interpret these themes to represent how such students seemed to experience particular ‘cultural injustices’ due to the lack of ‘capital’ placed upon their ‘cultural disposition’. In the case of Stacey and Lauren, there was evidence to show that this lack of value meant that they (and others) regard themselves as ‘failures’ (Raffo, 2010: 11). Whilst the same could be said for Kaleem Malik and Umah Massood who seemed to internalise the lack of value placed on their ‘cultural disposition’ as a particular misrecognition of their ethnicity. This meant that they felt unfairly treated by teachers and felt that the school was purposively excluding students of Asian heritage.

Stacey regarded the knowledge she could learn in school as having limited use and would ‘make no difference to my life at all’. Farooq also became frustrated with how the school seemed to be unwilling to ‘recognise’ Asian students’ proficiency in other languages. Thus, using these conceptual tools, the data can be interpreted as showing that rather than such students bringing limited funds of knowledge to school, they are being ‘silenced’ or more simply their ‘virtual schoolbag remains unpacked’ (Thomson, 2001: 1).

Such issues also seemed to negatively impact these students’ relationships with their teachers. Interestingly, students also attached particular significance to support staff due to their exposure to knowing ‘what it is like to live round here’. These findings give the impression that students and support staff were able to establish more of a shared understanding because
of their similar experiences of ‘place’. In contrast, teachers tended to live and occupy quite different ‘places’ which seemed to create a distance between themselves and their students. Wrigley et al. (2012: 204) make a similar point, arguing that due to the strong boundaries that exist between traditional schools and their geographical neighbourhoods, teachers tend to be ‘isolated’ from students ‘vernacular lifeworlds’ this in turn creates a ‘professional learning gap’. These issues are thus considered to limit the opportunities that schools can ‘build upon family and community-based learning’ whilst meaning that such gaps are ‘all too easily filled by pathologising generalisations’ (ibid).

These interpretations are also interesting in light of the previous analysis concerned with how the school seemed to adopt increasingly narrow and restrictive practices in an effort to improve standards. These practices were also found to significantly affect how the mainstream school operated. Thus it seems that due to the processes at play within the school there was even less space for some students’ ‘cultural dispositions’ to be valued or recognised. Similarly, their funds of knowledge were also not utilised within this narrow framework meaning that they viewed themselves as failures. Furthermore, because teachers were a part of these structures and processes operating within the mainstream school which ‘misrecognised’ students, this seemed to negatively impact their relationships with them. In contrast, the support staff were not as constrained by the narrow processes as they functioned as part of a quite different system which was separate from the mainstream school. This implies that this distance away from these practices enabled them to ‘recognise’ students’ place-based understandings to greater extent.

These themes also seem connected to the earlier observations of how mainstream classroom practices didn’t seem to cater for a diverse range of
students needs and instead were directed towards those likely to attain. Such findings suggest that in order for students to be included by structures and processes at play within the classroom, practices need to ‘recognise’ how young people’s learner identities are constructed by the meanings at play within the ‘spaces’ they occupy. However, the standardised practices which aimed to raise attainment seemed to be at odds with these spatial meaning making processes. This in turn seemed to create a mismatch between the school and the community.

**Issues of place and the sixth form**

I will now consider another area of the data which was connected to Weston Academy’s standards-focused attempts; the development of the sixth form. Incidentally, the analysis of this area of the data also showed how some students seemed to feel out of place and thus a ‘mismatch’ seemed to arise between the school and the community. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the school developed a sixth form which aimed to raise standards rather than a provision which was sensitive to young peoples’ experiences of ‘place’.

As detailed in the findings section, Asjad Nissar, Luke Grove and Katie Harrison all finished compulsory education during the tracking period and thus made decisions about further education. Both Asjad and Luke studied at the newly created Weston Academy sixth form whilst Katie went to a local college. Asjad seemed to have the most positive experience; he favoured studying the more traditional academic subjects as he was a high-achieving student and hoped to attend university. In contrast, Luke originally did not consider further study but after being ‘selected,’ he chose to continue at Weston Academy. However, during the tracking process there seemed to be a growing distance between what was on offer at the school and what Luke felt was useful for him. Similarly, Katie also decided that the school did not cater
for her interests. Thus, with limited support from the school she secured a place at the local college.

Using the conceptual tools which were introduced earlier, this data could be interpreted as showing that Luke and Katie’s ‘cultural disposition’ acquired less ‘capital’ than Asjad’s, when in contact with the standard cultural codes at play within the school (Raffo, 2011: 336). Furthermore, Katie and Luke’s educational desires seemed to have been silenced due to the value and importance the school placed on traditional academic subjects and attending university. In Luke’s case, this meant that he felt the school was trying to ‘mould’ him into something he was not whilst Katie used her agency and decided to study somewhere different altogether.

Interestingly, during the tracking of Katie and Luke’s educational experiences there was also evidence that their decisions were particularly tied to how their identity and agency had been particularly affected by ‘place’. To further investigate, I will explore the relationship between place, space and identity in a little more depth. In line with Lupton (2010), Raffo (2010: 4) states that ‘what it means’ to be disadvantaged or poor is ‘constructed in and through space’ yet he also considers how the peculiarities particular to a place are also important to formations of identity. Using Massey (1994) Raffo (2010: 4) sees ‘space and place as theoretically intertwined so that place is seen as an articulated moment in spatial relations’. He thus suggests that places and identities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are ‘similar yet different’ to others. This implies that young people living in these neighbourhoods have identities and agency which are ‘place-based’ and are reflective of ‘particular manifestations of spatial social relations’ (Raffo 2010: 5) where ‘place and identity are inexorably linked’ (Thrift 1997 cited in Raffo 2010: 5).
Raffo (2010: 8) also uses Sanchez-Jankowski’s (2008) work to interpret further how ‘meso-level structural and cultural contours’ and ‘the associated micro social dynamics’ can influence how young people construct their position, status and sense of belonging in the networks within their neighbourhood. He uses Sanchez-Jankowski’s (2008) ethnographic study of poor neighbourhoods in New York and Los Angeles to identify how the lives of inhabitants seem to reflect value orientations whilst also supporting particular behaviours and identities. Inhabitants are recognised to position themselves in terms of their status and sense of belonging in particular ways depending upon the dynamics and realities of these neighbourhoods at particular times. Raffo (2010: 8) encapsulates this as their ‘place-specific identity’.

I will now apply these conceptual tools to some of the themes found within the family case studies. Thus, in the case of Katie, the data could be interpreted as showing particular implications of micro realities which were at play within her neighbourhood and family life which turn seemed to impact her behaviour and navigation of local networks. Katie and her mother both showed a strong sense of belonging to the local area and felt it was important for Katie to do a course that would enable to get a job in the immediate vicinity. Katie’s mother also seemed acutely aware of their status; she felt that the reason why Katie had not been targeted to attend Weston Academy’s ‘academic sixth form’ was because ‘it’s not for people like us’. Similarly, Katie also wanted to study locally so she could continue to receive the incentives she had acquired by her successful navigation of local networks, such as receiving cash in hand money for caring for neighbour’s children.

Similarly, the case study of Luke could also be interpreted to show how his ‘place-specific identity’ impacted on how he positioned himself in relation to
his neighbourhood and whether to pursue higher education. Thus, his
decision to stay on at Weston Academy sixth form was partly due to his
aspiration of moving out of the area and getting a good job. In this sense, he
seemed to want to ‘distance’ himself from particular local networks in his
neighbourhood which he viewed ‘as trouble’ and contained people who ‘are
going nowhere fast’. The value orientations he adopted due to his experiences
of the neighbourhood also seemed to impact how he viewed the benefits
verses the costs of attending university. Thus, he said that he did not want to
pursue higher education because ‘from living round here, I know what debt
does to people’.

It seems that some of the findings from the family case studies again seem
indicative of how the school increasingly adopted practices which aimed to
raise attainment rather than ‘recognise’ students. These practices seemed at
odds with some students’ ‘place-specific identities’ which meant ‘fitting in’
with these structures was difficult (Raffo, 2010). This in turn seemed to create
a mismatch between students and the community and had implications for
how effective these practices were. Thus, it seems similar to how some
students were excluded from the mainstream classroom, in the case of the
sixth form, students were excluded depending on how ‘academic’ they were.
This also seems connected to how due to the pressure to raise standards the
school played it ‘safe’ rather than taking a risk to offer an approach which
attempted to recognise rather than silence students ‘cultural disposition’
(Raffo, 2011: 336)

**Summary**

Overall, evidence from the family case studies suggests that at best the
‘standard-focused efforts’ had mixed or limited impacts upon students. In
particular, it seems that as a consequence to the pressure to raise standards
the school increasingly acted in the interests of students who were likely to achieve. This meant that students’ educational experiences seemed to be divided and ‘rationed’ in differing ways (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). The school also seemed to adopt a number of practices which were geared towards higher attaining students, however these tended to be narrow and restrictive meaning that those ‘who did not meet the standard’ had to be catered for elsewhere (Armstrong, 2003: 147). Therefore, it seemed that the pressure to improve standards significantly influenced the types of practices adopted by the school and how these processes were implicated in the mainstream operation of the school. Due to the restrictive nature of these practices and processes there also seemed limited space for students to be ‘recognised’. Instead, such practices were therefore narrowly focused on attainment rather than trying to incorporate young people’s experiences of place or their ‘virtual schoolbags’ (Thomson, 2001: 1). In terms of the sixth form, the school seemed to largely silence young people’s ‘place-specific identities’ which again showed how due to the narrow focus on attainment some students were excluded (Raffo 2010: 8). Therefore, I suggested that the school seemed to be unwilling to adopt practices involving higher risk and instead opted to raise standards within a restrictive framework.

5.2.2 Community-focused efforts

Pastoral and multi-agency support

Although, Weston Academy’s efforts to develop pastoral and multi-agency support were connected to raising standards, I have chosen to analyse this area of data as a part of the school’s ‘community-focused efforts’. As it has already been shown, the support and behaviour unit operated as a sort of ‘remedial centre’ for students who struggled to cope in the mainstream school. Although, staff were often involved in organising learning
interventions for these students, in line with New Labour’s policy developments they were also expected to work on a holistic basis with families. This often involved multi-agency collaboration with a range of community service providers in an effort to meet the often diverse needs of families.

As detailed in the findings chapter, Weston Academy created a multi-layered ‘family support services team.’ This consisted of an array of different types of staff including management of pastoral care, those with expertise in providing support for students with learning or behavioural difficulties and those with specific responsibilities for liaising with parents. However, as described in the previous chapter, in practice their roles were blurred since they tended to work on a case-by-case basis. The majority also did not have professional teaching qualifications but invariably had a background in social or community care.

Weston Academy’s approach to pastoral care is not dissimilar to the majority of urban schools. However, as Best (1989: 7) identifies, pastoral care is a ‘complex, complicated phenomenon’ which has also changed dramatically in recent years due to a process of restructuring which came in the form of workforce remodelling (Nathan, 2011). As explained in the literature review, workforce remodelling sought to redistribute roles and responsibilities by reallocating the majority of pastoral work to non-teaching staff to give teachers more time to concentrate on raising standards (DfES, 2003).

The sponsorship of the Academy by the local social housing provider means that Weston Academy is a particularly interesting example of these developments. For instance, a positive development for the school was how the pastoral team started to work collaboratively with Weston’s youth services team and their housing officers. This meant that professionals from
both education and housing could share their knowledge, expertise and links to other community services. To facilitate collaboration, Weston Academy set up multi-agency meetings which were attended by a range of professionals, the students and their parents. Weston Housing Trust staff also attended and provided ‘a new perspective that we have not previously had access to’ (Margaret Gilmore). Such developments were particularly useful when supporting vulnerable families where access was often difficult. As explained by a member of Weston’s youth services team, this seemed to be because families viewed them as ‘less threatening’.

**Impacts of pastoral and multi-agency work on families**

Families in the part of the sample who were considered to be vulnerable experienced a number of positive impacts as a consequence to the increased pastoral support and multi-agency work. For example, Shelia Houghton, Sam’s mother said:

> I don't know what we would do without it, they have done a lot to help me and Sam, they have made getting help easier, I don't have to go to loads of different people now, I just go to Margaret.

24/11/09

The evidence also suggests that students had started to benefit from the more holistic approach. For example, a member of Weston Housing staff felt that the multi-agency meetings had enabled professionals to make use of the ‘pluses and minuses’ of their jobs in an effort to overcome professional boundaries and share information more effectively. Stacey Baldock’s mother also said she appreciated the multi-agency meetings as ‘they also are not just sorting school stuff out but also help with her anger and trouble she is getting into on the estate’.
Such findings show significant impact on families, particularly in terms of linking home and school whilst providing a central point for students and their parents to access a range of means of support. The family liaison officers – Paul Walker and Farooq Habeeb were found to play an important role in this process. For example, when the school was struggling to cope with Lauren Cox and Stacey Baldock and could not find them alternative education placements, Paul was responsible for securing places on two schemes funded by Weston Housing Trust. Such contacts were vital for securing some access to education for these students, as Paul recognised; ‘I don’t know what they would have done otherwise’. Paul was also responsible for raising the alarm on a number of safeguarding issues with particularly vulnerable students, as evidenced when Sam Houghton went missing. Farooq was particularly important in providing support to Asian heritage families particularly in terms of being able to facilitate communication between the school and parents who had limited knowledge of English. He also helped Asian families access a range of support, as he explained:

I am not just their support worker, I am their friend, their religious advisor, their legal representative, their career advisor or even their immigration officer.

03/06/10

Extending the boundaries of the school

These findings suggest that as part of the ‘community-focused efforts’ the school was starting to craft new practices in an effort to tackle issues which beset the community. Thus, rather than just concentrating on the core business of teaching and learning, members of staff were acting in a wider capacity in order to support and provide services for particularly vulnerable
families. Staff were also developing new ways of working with service providers and exchanging knowledge meaning that families’ needs were addressed in a more holistic manner. Such developments also seemed to show that this extra layer of support was significant for those families involved. Moreover, the evidence also suggested that some outcomes may have been quite different if they had not had this.

There is a varied set of literature on multi-agency working (Tett et al., 2003; Webb and Vulliamy, 2001; Dyson et al., 2009; Harris and Allen, 2010) and workforce remodelling (Yarker, 2005; Gunter, 2007; Edwards et al., 2009; 2010). The findings from this study can be further interpreted using Edwards et al.’s (2009, 2010) work on inter-professional collaboration. As a consequence to workforce remodelling, Edwards et al. (2010: 28) argue that pastoral and support staff are developing a ‘new space of action’ at the boundaries of schools (2010: 28). Their research further identifies how such developments have also enabled professionals to provide ‘sensitive and responsive work’ (ibid). However, the study also identifies how such developments ‘sit oddly’ with the framework in which workforce remodelling was set as they were simply intended to ‘take over mundane tasks for teachers’ (ibid: 32). Thus, Edwards et al. (2010) agree with Gunter (2007: 5) who acknowledges that such changes involve ‘a very complex struggle over ideas and territory’ meaning that ‘new forms of ‘professionality’ are being negotiated (Nixon et al., 1997 cited in Edwards et al., 2010: 33).

**Restrictions on efforts to extend the boundaries of the school**

Despite support staff developing a ‘new space of action’ (Edwards et al., 2010: 33) there was evidence to show that teachers were not part of this. For example, a Humanities teacher said:
I used to enjoy the pastoral side of this job but now we just have to pass stuff like that on. I never really get to hear what’s happening because they work really flexibly and are not constrained by targets and timetables like us.

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Similarly, as presented in the previous chapter, Margaret Gilmore, manager of the behaviour and support unit recognised how working separately from the mainstream school meant that she enjoyed ‘a certain amount of freedom to try out new approaches and learn from trial and error’ but she also acknowledged how sharing information with teachers was problematic.

Edwards et al. (2010: 36) argue that these new ways of working are ‘incommensurate with the established achievement-orientated practices’ of the school. Their work thus suggests that because of the restrictive structures that schools operate within, teachers are often not part of these new spaces. Edwards et al. (2010: 38) also identify how teachers were frustrated with the loss of their pastoral responsibilities and thus felt ‘left out of the loop’.

Similar to Tett et al. (2003) there is also evidence to suggest that tension between pastoral staff and teachers existed due to differences in working styles associated with their profession. For instance, Stacey’s English teacher questioned the benefits of students spending the majority of their time in the behaviour and support unit. Although she recognised that such measures ‘kept her in school’ she was concerned about the limited contact Stacey had with qualified teachers and resented the ‘matey’ style of some support workers.
These findings are interesting in view of the earlier interpretations of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’. Previously I argued that in an effort to improve attainment, the mainstream school seemed to predominantly operate within a narrow and restrictive framework. This seemed to have particular implications for the extent that students were recognised and ‘fitted in’ to the structures and processes at play within the mainstream school. However, from the analysis of some of Weston Academy’s more ‘community-focused efforts’ in terms of pastoral and multi-agency work it seems that the restrictive nature of the mainstream school not only adversely affected students’ educational experiences.

Thus, it seems that the narrowly focused practices within the mainstream school also prevented teachers in taking part in the ‘new space of action’ developing at the boundaries of the school (Edwards et al., 2010: 28). Furthermore, it seems that the divisions which existed between the two types of staff also seemed to a consequence to the importance put upon the need to improve attainment. However, these divisions also meant that teachers were not able to embed these new practices into their work. Therefore, some students continued to find it difficult to be recognised or fit in within the mainstream school.

Such tensions are interesting in light of the previous analysis concerned with the differences between some students’ relationships with support staff and teachers. Thus it was found that whilst teachers were distant from students’ ‘vernacular lifeworlds’ (Wrigley et al., 2012: 204) support staff had more of a ‘shared understanding of place’. This in turn seemed to help them build effective relationships with students and develop new ways of working with families. Therefore, not only were teachers uninvolved with the ‘new space of action’ (Edwards et al., 2010: 28) because of how the mainstream school
operated, they were also unlikely to come closer to students’ ‘vernacular lifeworlds’ (Wrigley et al., 2012: 204) due to their lack of involvement with support staff.

By reflecting on the impacts of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and relating this to the impacts of the ‘community-focused efforts’ on the family case studies it seems that although in practice they developed separately their effects were intertwined. Moreover, practices at play within the mainstream school seemed largely incommensurate with those which were adopted as part of the school’s more ‘community-focused efforts’ which in turn restricted their impact. Therefore, it seems that the practices adopted by the school which were narrowly focused on improving attainment not only had negative implications for students’ educational experiences but also the extent that the school was able to tackle issues which beset the community.

**Acting as a ‘community hub’**

As well as developing pastoral and multi-agency support, Weston Academy’s ‘community-focused efforts’ included efforts to offer a wide range of extended services and means of support. In this sense, the executive board hoped the school’s efforts would tackle issues which beset the community by acting as a ‘community hub’. In this section I discuss the themes that emerged from analysing this area of the data.

Firstly it is important to recognise that the experience of the sponsor and their position within the community put the school in a favourable position. As their strapline - ‘great neighbourhoods, great people, great homes’, together with their decision to sponsor the academy demonstrated, the trust was committed to improving the area for residents. Weston Housing Trust had also built up a high reputation for delivering ‘resident satisfaction’ through...
involving and empowering residents in a range of community consultation and participation opportunities. For example, they conducted regular surveys, organised resident forums, neighbourhood activities and events, specialist intervention schemes for vulnerable families and ensured a high presence of neighbourhood and housing officers on their estates.

Similarly, the executive board’s vision for the Academy placed central importance on the involvement of community members. Coming from a social housing background Stuart Painter, the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods explained how local people needed to be seen ‘as customers who we should be striving to attract by providing a great school and a great neighbourhood.’ He continued ‘our residents have rights; they deserve to send their kids to a school that meets their needs.’

As previously mentioned, the school’s community services tended to be offered in an opportunistic and ad hoc way. However, the school offered a wide range of out-of-hours activities, events and support mechanisms for students and their families. They aimed to develop students’ sense of pride through various community projects whilst also developing their entrepreneurial skills in the hope they would be future local employers. As Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive reflected; ultimately, the aim would be ‘to do ourselves out of a job’ because the community would be in a position of power to sustain the success of the community themselves.

Limited engagement

Despite their good intentions, levels of engagement in practice seemed to be limited. As previously discussed, the ‘community-focused efforts’ became ‘additional’ to raising attainment whilst the influence of Weston Housing Trust decreased. The services offered were designed and administered by a
range of staff members. There were few opportunities which were designed to illicit views of community members. Parveen formed a ‘parent focus group’, but reported that she was ‘disappointed’ with the number of parents who attended. William also said that the out-of-hours activities were mainly attended by ‘families who had a history of participation’ he therefore expressed how he thought there needed ‘to be a culture change.’

Evidence from the family case studies showed limited participation in terms of parents’ general involvement with the school. For example, some of Asian heritage parents had poor English skills and thus found communicating with the school difficult which may have deterred them from attending parents evening. The majority of parents in the sample also reported issues with not knowing how to use the school’s intranet portal ‘mychild@school’ and not having internet access. Citrali Khan was the only parent in the sample who engaged in the parent focus group but later stopped attending because she felt her views were not taken into consideration.

The majority of Weston Academy’s community-focused attempts were led by professionals, doing what, in their eyes was in the best interests of students and their families. For example, one member of staff from the behaviour and support unit said:

We are providing the things they need, filling in the gaps…it would be great if the impetus came from them but in practice this rarely happens because most of them can’t cope, the shit is getting them from all angles.

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As recognised by Margaret Gilmore, the manager of the behaviour and support unit, the majority of improvements in terms of how young people and their families were supported were not because of ‘direction from the top’ but the ‘dedication and commitment’ from particular members of staff. This theme is demonstrated by Farooq Habeeb, the Asian family liaison officer who continually showed unflinching levels of commitment to the unfortunate cost of his health. As he expressed: ‘my job is my life’.

This approach seemed to work fairly well for targeted interventions and support for particularly vulnerable families. As shown in the case studies, the Baldock, Cox and Houghton families relied on the support they received, particularly when they were struggling to cope and near a crisis point. However, where participation in services was more voluntary this professional-led approach seemed to work less well. For example, it was found that there was extremely limited engagement from families in terms of out-of-hours activities and community events. Both the Grove and Baldock family’s reported that there was a lack of communication from the school. Perhaps more worryingly, other students in the sample actively choose not to engage. For instance, Umah Massood said that he would rather not be in school ‘any longer than I have to be.’ However, there seemed to be a gap of understanding between the school and the community; mothers in the sample reported how they often felt isolated and would welcome opportunities to socialise and learn new skills. The only students in the sample who did seem to extensively engage in out-of-hours activities were from the Newton family. However, this seemed largely because of their interest in sport and past involvement in such activities at the predecessor schools.

This summary shows a rather different outcome from what was initially envisioned. Although, the executive board started with a vision of a school
that would act as a ‘community hub’ engaging and empowering local people, there was limited involvement from students and their families whilst services and activities themselves tended to be run by professionals. Furthermore, there was evidence that despite the commitment of professionals, some took a rather deficit approach.

Focus on disadvantage

Such findings are similar to those that Cummings et al. (2011) have found in the case of FSES schools. They argue that the problem of the approach is the unrelenting focus on disadvantage; this reinforces the asymmetrical relationship between professionals who are automatically put in more powerful position whilst demoting students and their families to being dependent on their help. This leads to a deficit approach where the shortcomings of communities are emphasised rather than their ability to deal with extremely challenging circumstances (Crowther et al., 2003; Cummings and Dyson 2007; Cummings et al., 2011; Cummings et al., 2007a; Cummings et al., 2007b).

However, as Cummings et al. (2011) identify, such an approach is understandable to a certain extent, given the environment and policy context within which such schools work. Education is often positioned as the main ‘escape route’ whilst professionals working in such schools are in contact everyday with students who have to face the effects of living in harsh poverty. Furthermore, as I explained in the literature review, New Labour explicitly focused on disadvantage or ‘social exclusion’ as it became known, whilst offering very limited guidance to schools. In this sense, it comes as no surprise that professionals had few alternatives but to rely on ‘their own best judgement’ (Cummings et al., 2007b: 198).
Issues of parental engagement

Unfortunately, such criticisms are not specific to FSES schools or similar attempts typically associated with community-oriented school efforts. Although, parental involvement in education is considered as crucial to improved outcomes for children, the track record of schools in this area often remains weak (Lareau, 1987; Vincent, 1996; Desforges, et al., 2003 Fernstein et al., 2008). As Dyson and Raffo (2007: 308) argue, parental participation within education is limited to the confines of the ‘well-worn choice agenda’ where democratic space in and around schools is limited and instead the individual rights and responsibilities of parents are emphasised. Whilst others (Gewitz 2001; de Carvalho, 2001; Crozier, 2001; Gillies, 2005) identify how parental participation is set within a narrow framework which imposes middle class values on the poor.

Engagement in the community

Interestingly, as shown in the previous chapter, the sponsor of the school, did manage to engage students within the neighbourhood itself. Thus, a number of students in the sample spoke very positively about the neighbourhood schemes ran in the area by Weston Housing Trust – ‘Positive Youth’ and ‘Newground’. Furthermore, such schemes were also successful in engaging and building positive relationships with challenging students such as Stacey Baldock and Lauren Cox who often resisted various attempts made by the school. Paul Walker, one of the family liaison officers also created a volunteering opportunity for Sam Houghton’s mother. There was also evidence that Tina Grove had previously engaged in some regeneration community projects but in contrast felt that the school ‘couldn’t make contact with them any more difficult if they tried’.
A number of studies conducted in this area (Warren, 2005; Small, 2006; Shutz, 2006; Warren and Hong, 2009) have advocated an approach whereby schools engage students and their families from within the community itself. Such an approach encourages schools to go ‘beyond the ‘within the four walls’ mentality’ (Warren, 2005: 2248). In his damning literature review of school engagement, Shutz (2006: 716) argues that; ‘the field of education has developed few if any effective, broadly applicable strategies’. Both Schutz (2006) and Warren (2005) cite the unequal power and often deficit relationships between school staff and community members as the problem and argue that instead community-based organisations can help lever support.

These findings suggest that the school missed an opportunity, as although they recognised the potential for collaboration between the school and Weston Housing Trust’s neighbourhood schemes, they failed to give Paul Walker, who led the schemes, sufficient support or time to do so. Thus, whilst these schemes were successful at engaging students, particularly those who were typically ‘hard to reach’ they did not extend this to further enhance students’ engagement in school. Staff also seemed to have limited awareness of how students and their families were involved in community projects. For example, Courtney Baldock who participated extensively in Weston’s neighbourhood schemes and was consequently awarded a ‘bright young star award’ commented said that the teachers would not know unless she had told them.

**Family liaison officers**

The family liaison officers; Paul Walker and Farooq Habeeb were a more successful engagement mechanism used by the school. Frequent references have already been made to both Paul and Farooq in this chapter. Both Farooq
and Paul facilitated access to a number of families in the sample and accompanied data collection visits. Therefore, I was also able to observe their relationships with the families. Both made regular home visits and had worked with many of the families for a number of years. They also lived in the same local area and saw members of the families they supported in differing capacities. As Farooq explained:

My job is my life, its 24 hours because I am a community worker but I am also part of the community myself. I go to the same mosque, the same shops. I’m always bumping into students and their parents.

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Due to this regular contact and their understanding of different family’s situations, students and their parents seemed to particularly rely on their support. However, due to the school’s over-reliance on family liaison officers and the lack of alternative means of support, Paul and Farooq were very overstretched. The implications of which were particularly exposed when Farooq was forced to take sick leave. For example, Kaleem Malik felt that he would not have been suspended from school, if support from Farooq had been available.

Both Paul and Farooq consequently provided a crucial link between home and school for the families they supported. They often acted as a sort of ‘mediator’ between the families and the school particularly when students were finding school difficult. For example as Farooq explained: ‘I am the one that tries to re-engage them and organises a meeting to try and achieve a balance between how they see things as opposed to what the school expects.’ In this sense, the family liaison officers played an important role in ‘translating’ the hidden expectations of the school.
These findings are similar to those of studies which have also been conducted in this area (Kirschenbaum, 1999; Chrispeels and Rivero, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2003). Howland et al. (2006: 52) show that one of the reasons these mechanisms of support are successful is because such individuals play the role of ‘cultural broker’ by acting as a crucial bridge from home to school, helping families to navigate and interpret the education system.

Restrictions on engaging students and their families

I will now relate the themes which were concerned with the impacts of Weston Academy’s efforts to act as a ‘community hub’ to those which were identified within the ‘standards focused efforts.’ Similar, to the points I made in connection to pastoral and multi-agency work in terms of extending the boundaries of the school, I will also identify how the ways in which the mainstream school operated also seemed to restrict the extent that the school was able to engage students and their families. In particular, I will argue that the narrowly focused efforts to improve attainment prevented the school from adopting engagement methods which would have threatened the restrictive framework within which the mainstream worked.

Earlier when analysing the themes from tracking the development of Weston Academy, I showed how the emphasis placed on the need to improve standards meant that the school’s ‘community-focused efforts’ had less status and developed on an ad hoc basis. I further observed using Cummings et al. (2011) that developing efforts to tackle issues which beset the community on an additional basis also means that such attempts do not dramatically affect the standard school practices. Similarly, Weston Academy also seemed to adopt engagement strategies which did not threaten the narrow practices which the mainstream school operated by in order to improve attainment. Thus just as the ‘new space of action’ was found to be ‘incommensurate with
the established achievement-orientated practices’ of the school, so too it would seem, are less traditional ways of engaging the community (Edwards et al., 2000: 36).

Instead, the school used fairly traditional ways to engage the community and missed further opportunities to build upon the seemingly more successful approaches ran in the community by Weston Housing Trust. However, this meant that the methods used by the school tended to involve a deficit approach whilst the level of engagement was also limited. Thus, just as the mainstream school did not cater for a diverse range of learners but instead adopted practices which acted in the interests of those likely to attain, the school also did not experiment with new ways to engage students and their families. This meant that the school was able to maintain the narrow practices which the mainstream school operated by and continue to prioritise the improvement of standards.

It also seems that engaging in non-traditional approaches would mean that the school would have to start to relax the restrictive and narrow framework within which the mainstream school operated. Thus, developing links with the neighbourhood schemes and involving the family liaison officers would seem to involve a willingness to start to adapt and perhaps ‘recognise’ the community to a greater extent. However, such attempts seem to be at odds with how the school operated in response to the pressure to improve standards.

These observations also imply that within this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Weston Academy’s attempts to provide extended services and additional means of support only achieved limited engagement from community members. Earlier, I argued that the school increasingly acted in the interests of those most likely to achieve, which meant that many of the
practices operating within the mainstream school were restrictive. This meant that students found it difficult to ‘fit in’ whilst there also seemed to be limited space within these structures for students to be recognised. This seemed to create a situation where some students in the sample felt excluded from the school and there appeared to be a mismatch between the school and the community. Therefore, it seems somewhat unsurprising that some students were not inclined to, and in some case actively resisted to engage with the school when they were not obliged to.

Similarly, the data could be interpreted as showing that services which were offered within the community were more successful because rather than being offered in a setting where some felt ‘misrecognised’, their ‘place-based understandings’ were instead validated (Raffo 2010: 5). Furthermore, these schemes were facilitated by the family liaison officers and some members of the support staff who unlike the teachers seemed to ‘know what it is like to live round here’ (Stacey Baldock).

Finally, it is important to recognise that the difficulties experienced by Weston Academy in terms of engaging students and their families in a voluntary capacity raises issues with regard to the legitimacy of their attempts. Furthermore, this calls into question what schools like Weston Academy would need to do differently in order to engage families and thus tackle issues which beset them on a wider community level. Besides some of the earlier issues raised around the ambiguities around the aims, rationale and purposes of community-orientated schools, this study suggests that narrowly focused practices which the mainstream school operated by, restricted their ‘community-focused efforts’. Although these two ‘types’ of activities developed separately in practice, by relating the themes from the impacts of each on the family case studies it seems that their effects were
increasingly intertwined. In particular, the pressure to improve attainment and in turn affected how the mainstream school operated restricted the extent the school could tackle issues which beset the community.

Overall, the analysis of the findings showed that there was some positive evidence that the school was tackling community issues by extending the boundaries of the school and offering extended services. However, the impacts on families tended to be quite isolated. Although the outcomes for these families may have been different if they had not had this support, overall the ‘community-focused efforts’ did not transform their lives. The analysis of Weston Academy’s efforts to provide pastoral and multi-agency support showed that the school was developing a ‘new space of action’ at the boundaries of the school. Despite the positive impacts from the more holistic approaches, they were found to be restricted by the narrowly focused practices at play within the mainstream school. Thus, it seemed that rather than enabling teachers to become a part of the ‘new space of action’ they were instead separated so they could concentrate on improving standards.

I also observed how the school tended to use traditional deficit approaches to engage students and their families. Although this seemed to work well for targeted support, there was limited engagement in the voluntary services offered by the school. I also found that although Weston Housing Trust and the family liaison officers seemed to engage community members, the school did not develop these links. I therefore suggested that non-traditional methods to engage the community would have involved the school relaxing the narrowly focused practices of the mainstream school. However, this would have not been in keeping with the school’s efforts to raise attainment by adopting practices which acted in the interests of those most likely to achieve.
Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the analysis of the main themes identified from the findings for this study. I began by considering the executive board’s vision and how they struggled to put this into practice. I argued that the dual policy context seemed to negatively influence the development of Weston Academy meaning that the school’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ developed on two separate tracks rather than as part of a cohesive strategy. Moreover, due to the pressure to raise attainment, the school’s efforts to raise standards overshadowed efforts to tackle issues which beset the community. I then analysed the themes within two broad types of activities and found that neither seemed to have more than limited impacts for students and their families. Furthermore, by analysing how the impacts of the ‘standards-focused efforts’ related to the ‘community-focused efforts’ I argued that the former seemed to restrict the latter. Thus it was suggested that the standardised practices at play within the mainstream school curtailed the extent that to which the school was able to tackle issues within the community.
Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications

In this chapter I start by providing a detailed summary of the answers to research questions one and two. I then start to reflect on the research study as a whole by outlining the limitations and contributions to knowledge that I have made. I then consider the wider implications of the study. Here I start to reflect upon the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools and link this to a consideration for the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. In order to this, I firstly recap the research problem which was discussed in Chapter One. I then consider how the overall findings for this study compare with others in the field and outline the position that I wish to take. I observe that like the majority of studies on community-oriented schools, Weston Academy achieved limited impact overall. However I argue that despite the seemingly weak position of schools in general, this does not mean that they cannot make a difference. I conclude by elaborating this argument to consider what can be learnt from Weston Academy about how schools might make more of a difference in the future.

6.1 Answering the research questions

6.1.1 What did Weston Academy hope to achieve and what happened in practice?

In this section I provide a detailed answer to the above question. I start with a contextualisation of Weston Academy by recapping the characteristics of the area and the predecessor schools. I then revisit Weston Housing Trust’s motivations for sponsoring the school and what Weston Academy hoped to achieve. Four main themes in the data will then be discussed which I have identified to be the most crucial to explaining what happened during the development of the academy. Most importantly, they help to explain why
Weston Academy developed in a markedly different way than originally envisioned.

**Motivations and vision**

Firstly, in order to explain what Weston Academy hoped to achieve it is important to consider the characteristics of the predecessor schools and the local area. As detailed at the beginning of Chapter Four, Weston Academy inherited a challenging history from both the predecessor schools. Students who attended the schools consistently achieved well below the national average whilst one of the predecessor schools had been placed in special measures by Ofsted. The intake of Weston Academy was found to have a higher than national average of students who were eligible for free schools meals, whilst the number of students with special educational needs also exceeded the national average (Ofsted, 2011). The effects of deprivation on Haleton were considered by Martin Rayner, the Chief Executive of Weston Housing Trust to be ‘stark and challenging’. Characteristics of the town described by the executive board included a relatively a high employment low wage economy with some sections of intergenerational worklessness. There were also pockets of the community who experienced poor health, racial tension and persistent low level crime.

Through their sponsorship of the school, Weston Housing Trust ‘wanted to change this’. Martin also explained how the trust had invested significantly in the area and sort to regenerate ‘no-go areas’, in its capacity as the main social housing provider. He also emphasised the high levels of resident satisfaction they had achieved meaning that ‘now we have promised them an academy, they expect us to deliver’. In many ways, Weston’s sponsorship of the school was therefore a continuation of their efforts to improve Haleton and change the deprived area into ‘a sustainable community.’ Stuart Painter, the
Executive Director of Neighbourhoods also explained how he hoped that the school would act as a ‘vehicle’ to enable the trust to effectively access the community whilst Martin hoped that a more ‘joined up’ approach would lead to greater impact. I argued that this was what made Weston Housing Trust’s approach distinctive, as the reconfiguration of two central community service providers meant that there was potential for social and economic issues to be tackled at a community-wide level.

In previous chapters their efforts were also compared to the existing community-oriented school approach. I identified how the approach is not just concerned with learners per se but with the wider contribution schools can make to communities. I also explained that although no common international term exists, there is a widespread tendency for the approach to be adopted in deprived areas in an effort to reconfigure services which by themselves are regarded as failing to meet the complex needs of the community (Dryfoos, 1994; Dyson et al., 2002; Crowther et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2004; Dyson and Raffo, 2007). In the specific case of the community-oriented approach adopted by Weston Academy, I observed that the executive board’s vision of what the school hoped to achieve was grand, in line with the distinctiveness of the partnership with the sponsor. However, the executive board did not set out their vision in concrete form and therefore one of the first activities which the Development and Research Partnership conducted was the construction of a theory of change framework which sought to make the vision more explicit. As shown in Figure 2, there were a number of ‘strands of action’; some of these were directed specifically at the school, such as efforts to improve teaching and learning, whilst others were more directed at the community. The latter involved providing a wide range of support and services in an effort to tackle issues which beset the community. Both different ‘types’ were seen as integral, as links were
frequently made between the two. The executive board also engaged in some searching debates about the sort of community they hoped to build and the outcomes they hoped to achieve were ambitious and wide-ranging. However, as explained in the previous chapter, the results achieved by Weston Academy appeared markedly different from what the executive board originally hoped for.

In the remaining part of the answer to the first research question I identify four main themes in the data which help to explain why this was the case.

**Theme One: Putting the vision into practice**

Firstly in order to understand how the school developed, it is critical to appreciate the extent to which the management team struggled to translate their vision for the school into practice. As previously mentioned, the research team tried to assist with this by mapping the broad areas of action and the outcomes the school hoped for, using a theory of change approach. In spite of this, the vision stayed within the realm of ‘blue sky thinking’ and instead efforts to produce a plan were increasingly left to Parveen Gupta, the Community Director. She came under pressure from the governors and the rest of the management team to produce a framework which ‘was more like a school improvement plan’. Although Parveen eventually produced a ‘community improvement plan’, the practices employed by the school did not directly accord with this and instead seemed to be on run on an ad hoc opportunistic basis. Furthermore, although both ‘types’ of actions were seen as integral to one another in the original vision, the improvement plan only included those focused on the community. Therefore, in practice limited connections were made between the two ‘types’ of actions.
There seemed to be two main reasons why Weston Academy found it difficult to translate their vision into practice. Firstly, I identified how the extremely ambiguous nature of the community-oriented approach seems to impact on those schools which adopt it. Thus, in the literature on community-oriented schools, it was found that whilst advocacy is common, there is limited theorisation of the rationale, purposes or aims of such schools (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). In line with this, the executive team of Weston Academy also struggled to realise their vision for the school because of the lack of guidance or support available. They recognised that despite New Labour encouraging such efforts with various policies, there was limited support and no ‘blueprint’ or model to follow.

**Theme Two: Separation of the standards-focused efforts and community-focused efforts**

The second significant theme in the data relating to the development of Weston Academy is the separation between the school’s efforts to raise attainment and those which sought to tackle issues which beset the community. In the analysis of these two sets of activities I therefore used the shorthand terms ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ to reflect the division between the two foci. Although the original vision placed equal importance on these two sets of activities and saw them as mutually beneficial to development of the school and the community as a whole, they developed separately. This had significant implications for how the school evolved because their efforts were not co-ordinated. However, given the ambiguous nature of the vision and the difficulties that the executive board experienced when trying to put their ideas into practice, such outcomes do not seem particularly surprising.
When I analysed the findings, I identified how the influence of the policy context seemed to be one of the main factors which led to the separation of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts.’ In the literature review it was noted that on the one hand New Labour’s ‘standard-focused reforms’ encouraged schools to compete within a marketised system and improve academic achievement regardless of the school’s context. On the other hand the ‘community-focused reforms’ introduced a number of system-wide and targeted reforms which were focused on tackling the effects of deprivation through ‘joined up’ working and additional services for communities delivered by schools. These two reform strategies were found to be based on different fundamental values which caused a number of tensions and contradictions for schools attempting to fulfil both, including Weston Academy. Thus, in the previous chapter I recounted the way in which these two sets of policies seemed to pull the school in two opposite directions which in turn further inhibited their ability to make links between the two, as they had done in their original vision.

The division between Weston Academy’s efforts to improve standards and those which were more focused on the community was also reflected in the designation of responsibilities within the management of the academy. Thus, we saw how William Pugh and John Burgess, the Head and Deputy Head were in charge of the ‘core business’ of the school in terms of improving teaching and learning. Meanwhile, responsibility for development of services and support for the community was assigned to the Community Director, held by Parveen Gupta. I therefore argued that rather than adopting an approach which would mitigate the apparent divisions in the policy context, the allocation of responsibilities to separate roles reflected and arguably further exacerbated such tensions.
These divisions in responsibilities and the dual nature of the policy context meant that Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’ developed on two separate tracks. Furthermore William, the Head, was experienced in implementing standard school improvement strategies which were fairly straightforward and likely to achieve quick results. In contrast, Parveen had limited experience of the education sector, found it difficult to act as mid-point between the school and sponsor, and tended to spend much of her time working on a reactive basis.

Theme Three: Unequal importance

This leads us to the third main theme in the data which is fundamental to understanding how Weston Academy developed in practice. Throughout the previous two chapters, it was repeatedly shown that unequal importance placed on the need to raise attainment side-lined the more ‘community-focused strategies’. Thus, as the academy developed it became increasingly obvious that the pressure to raise standards was leading to the prioritisation of ‘standards-focused strategies’ over and above attempts to tackle issues which beset the community.

This third main theme in the data can be linked specifically to the greater importance placed on the need to raise standards within the policy context as opposed to efforts which were more focused on the community. Thus, as we saw previously, New Labour simultaneously introduced policy reforms which encouraged schools to raise attainment and tackle issues which beset the community. However, greater importance was placed on the former whilst the risks involved in prioritising the latter were seen as particularly great for schools in precarious market positions. In the words of William, this meant that Weston ‘could simply not afford to ignore’ the need to raise attainment.
The greater importance attached to standards of achievement therefore seemed to over-shadow the development of Weston Academy’s ‘community-focused efforts’. This in turn meant that the community services and means of support offered by the school became increasingly ‘additional.’ As Parveen observed, when commenting on providing more cohesive and sustainable support for Asian heritage students: ‘it’s considered as additional, if we need another maths teacher that’s what the money will spent on.’ Thus, like Cummings et al. (2011), I argued that the lesser status of such activities meant that they were pursued as an ‘add on’ meaning that they did not dramatically disrupt how the mainstream school operated in its quest to improve attainment.

The policy context was therefore recognised to be an important limiting factor which particularly influenced how Weston Academy developed and consequently the extent to which the school was able to pursue its original vision. It was recognised that policies ‘do not normally tell [schools] what to do’ but the pressure placed on the need to raise standards ‘narrowed’ (Ball, 1994:19) and constrained the types of practices introduced by Weston Academy. Furthermore, although Weston Academy originally made use of the ‘space for manoeuvre’ (Bowe et al., 1992: 13/14) when developing the vision for the Academy, over time the room they had to further develop this became less as the need to improve standards seemed to intensify. I thus recognised that due to the school’s precarious market position the risks in carving out a new course of action remained too high. This meant that the school chose the safer option which shifted the balance away from the more ‘community-focused efforts’.
Theme Four: Losing sight of the more distinctive elements of the vision

The final significant theme which is crucial for understanding how Weston Academy developed recognises how the increasing importance placed on raising standards not only side-lined the ‘community-focused efforts’ but also seemed to force Weston Housing Trust to take more of a backseat role. This in turn, together with the other issues experienced by the executive board, meant that they seemed to lose sight of the more distinctive elements of their original vision.

In the analysis of the findings in the previous chapter, I observed the way in which Weston Housing Trust’s influence decreased as the need to raise standards was increasingly prioritised. This seemed primarily because the increased status that the Head, William, enjoyed as a consequence of his expertise in implementing school improvement strategies. Furthermore, Weston Housing Trust also had limited experience in such matters, meaning that the direction of the school was increasingly left in William’s ‘capable hands’ (Martin Rayner).

In the previous chapter, I also reported that the pressure to improve attainment appeared to lead the executive board to ‘play it safe’. Thus, rather than developing practices which were more in line with the community-focused aspects of their vision, they concentrated on less risky and more straightforward strategies. This was particularly the case with the development of the ‘academic’ sixth form. So whilst the housing trust’s chief executive Martin articulated feeling ‘anxious about how it fits with Weston’s values’, the plans were not changed because it seemed the ‘safest, manageable route’. Thus, the importance put on attainment and the corresponding position of the school in the market-place seemed to trump Weston’s original plans to offer a more vocational sixth form. Such examples also show how
Weston Housing Trust’s influence over the development of the school decreased whilst the space for them to reassert their influence was also limited because the school continued to be under pressure to raise attainment.

In the analysis in the previous chapter, I also identified how the decreasing influence of Weston Housing Trust on the development of the school also seemed to result in a situation whereby the executive board lost sight of the more distinctive elements of the school’s vision. Thus, instead of creating a school which had the potential to contribute towards the creation of a ‘sustainable community’, the school became synonymous with attempts to improve previously failing schools through standard school improvement strategies with some ‘additional extras’. Rather than the executive board prioritising actions which sought to reconfigure service provision, they instead played it safe and concentrated on developing less risky achievement-oriented practices. I therefore argued that due to the pressures the school was under, together with the challenging history inherited from the predecessor schools, the executive board seemed to concede in the face of the standards-driven policy context.

6.1.2 How did Weston Academy impact students in the sample of family case studies?

This section provides a detailed answer to the second research question. As was the case in Chapter Five, I structure the answer to reflect the division that emerged in practice between Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their more ‘community-focused efforts’. However, I also reflect on how the impacts of the former were affected by the latter by considering the themes from the analysis of the relationship between Weston Academy’s attempts to tackle issues which beset the community, and those aimed at raising attainment. This will lead to articulation of the main argument that
was made from the analysis of the findings from the case studies in Chapter Five. Thus I argue that although Weston Academy’s efforts to improve standards developed separately from those which were more community-focused, their effects on the family case studies were intertwined. Moreover, it was found that the narrowly focused ways in which the mainstream school operated in its quest to improve attainment restricted the impacts of those which aimed to tackle issues which beset the community.

**Analysing the impact of Weston Academy’s standards-focused efforts**

There are three main themes which I want to focus on in order to summarise how Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts impacted the students in the family case studies. These include ‘divided educational experiences’, ‘standards verses inclusion’ and ‘mismatch between school and community’. In this section, I revisit these themes which were explored in more depth in Chapter Five and draw out the main points from each. Most importantly, I aim to show how evidence from the family case studies suggests that the mainstream school seemed to operate in an increasingly restrictive framework because of the narrow focus on efforts to improve attainment.

**Theme One: Divided educational experiences**

The first theme which is important to understanding how Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ impacted the family case studies is how the strategies which were used seemed to divide the educational experiences of the two broad ‘types’ of families in the sample. Thus it was found that students from the families which were considered to be in less need of support and therefore had less involvement from Weston were likely to report that their attainment had improved. For example, both Asjad Nissar and Luke Grove said that as a consequence of the predecessor schools changing to Weston Academy, they had achieved better grades in their
GCSEs. However, students in the other part of the sample who had intensive support and were considered as vulnerable to varying degrees tended to think that Weston Academy had not positively impacted their levels of attainment. Instead, these students often spent time away from the mainstream classroom in the behaviour and support unit or at alternative learning placements.

Measures to accommodate students outside the classroom seemed to have a range of impacts. The strategy appeared beneficial in reducing the stress levels displayed by students in this environment, however their separation meant that they were not in receipt of full-time education due to the combination of reduced timetables and temporary nature of many of the school’s efforts to accommodate them outside of the classroom. Using Gillborn and Youdell (2000) I observed that students who were vulnerable and considered to have a low ability seemed to experience a ‘rationing’ of their education because of the time they spent away from the mainstream classroom which in turn meant that they were often educated by non-qualified teachers. Thus, it was found rather than ‘pandering’ to the needs of low ability and often disruptive students, teachers did not have to deal with them and could instead concentrate on those more likely to achieve.

I also observed how despite students in the other half of the sample reporting positive impacts of the school’s efforts to raise attainment, their educational experiences also seemed to be rationed in a different way. Thus it was found that their educational experiences tended to be narrowly confined within the National Curriculum. This meant that they often did not benefit in the same way as those in the more vulnerable half of the sample in terms of the school’s links with various service providers to offer a variety of learning opportunities such as work placements.
Therefore, although the school introduced a whole host of strategies to improve standards of achievement, evidence from the family case studies suggests they had mixed impacts. Rather than improving the educational experiences of all students, the different impacts suggest that the school adopted strategies which were more likely to positively impact higher attaining students in line with external pressure to measurably improve standards.

**Theme Two: Standards verses inclusion**

The second theme which emerged from analysing the findings from the family case studies relates to the previous theme of divided educational experiences but focuses more upon the inclusion of students with learning and behavioural difficulties. Thus as previously mentioned, these students seemed to spend the majority of their time being catered for outside the mainstream classroom. As part of the school’s efforts to raise attainment it seemed that the mainstream school operated in an increasingly narrow and restrictive way. Therefore rather than adapting the mainstream school to cater for the diverse needs of students, practices instead seemed to exclude these students so that efforts could be concentrated on those most likely to attain.

Thus, I found that students in the sample with learning and behavioural difficulties spent the majority of time in the learning and behavioural unit. Although, sometimes this was because they were receiving specialist learning support it was often because a teacher had sent them out of the classroom for misbehaving. Using Golby and Gulliver (1985) I thus argued that the unit acted as a sort of ‘remedial centre’ or ‘ambulance service’ in order to compensate for the fact that the classroom did not cater for their needs. I also observed that such practices enabled the mainstream school to cater for those
more likely to achieve and thus continue their quest to improve attainment within a narrow and restrictive framework.

I also found that other practices operating in the school seemed to adversely impact students with learning and behaviour difficulties. For example, these students seemed to find it difficult to accord to the school’s behaviour expectations and were consequently often suspended. Indeed all but one of the students from the set of families in the sample considered more vulnerable were suspended at some point during the tracking period. These students also seemed to be adversely affected by other practices such as ability grouping.

Referencing the existing literature, I found that the pressure to raise standards and cater for students with a diverse range of needs resulted in a number of contradictions for schools. This appeared to exemplify Hall et al.’s (2004: 814/815) argument that on the one hand inclusion involves ‘celebrating difference and maximising diversity’ whilst on the other hand the pressure to improve standards ‘seems to push schools towards ability grouping, testing and competition, thus making a climate of exclusive practices.’ I therefore suggested these findings from the family case studies seemed indicative of how the pressure to improve standards also affected other processes within the school. Some students struggled to fit in with this framework and therefore were excluded in a number of ways. Thus, those students who did not ‘not meet the standard’ (Armstrong, 2003: 147) seemed to bear the brunt of some of the more exclusive practices such as ability grouping and restrictive structures imposed by the behaviour policy which they struggled to conform to.
Theme Three: Mismatch between school and community

The third main theme explored in Chapter Five in relation to the ‘standards-focused efforts’ of Weston Academy is the apparent mismatch between the school and community. As observed earlier, some students found it difficult to ‘fit in’ to the school. For some, this was because they struggled to meet the demands of the curriculum and the expectations of the classroom. For others, as we saw in the case of sixth form, it seemed that they felt that the school was imposing something which was at odds with their own perceptions of themselves and their aspirations. I therefore suggested that the mismatch that seemed to exist between some students and the school was a consequence of the school adopting strategies which were narrowly focused on improving attainment rather than trying to ‘recognise’ what was important to students and the wider community. This created a ‘mismatch’ between the school and community meaning that there was a gap between what some students and their families expected from the school and what was provided in practice.

Spatial understandings of place offered an interesting framework in which to view these trends. Thus, I noted how some young people’s ‘cultural dispositions’ were given very limited value when in contact with the standard cultural codes in which the mainstream school operated by (Raffo, 2011: 336). For some this seemed to have particularly damaging consequences as they internalised this lack of value and viewed themselves as ‘failures’. There was also evidence to show that such issues also contributed to students feeling that they were treated unfairly because of their ethnic heritage which seemed to further negatively impact how they viewed their (mainly White) teachers. I observed how the narrow framework in which the mainstream school operated seemed to limit the amount of space there was for students’ ‘cultural dispositions’ to be recognised (Raffo, 2011: 336). Thus the ‘virtual schoolbag’ of knowledge, skills and experience which they brought with them from
home remained unpacked; rather than students being able to apply what limited ‘funds of knowledge’ they carried with them within the school environment, they were simply silenced within the current system (Thomson, 2001: 1; Raffo, 2011: 336). This seemed to not only adversely affect students’ perceptions of themselves as learners but also how likely they were to feel that the ‘knowledge’ they were being taught would be useful to them.

In terms of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’, it was also found that such processes also negatively impacted some students’ relationships with teachers. Thus in Chapter Five, I explained how there seemed to be a ‘professional learning gap’ because teachers were often ‘isolated’ from students’ ‘vernacular lifeworlds’ (Wrigley et al., 2012: 204). I suggested that teachers’ relationships with their students appeared to be adversely affected by the narrow achievement focused practices which placed limited value on students’ ‘funds of knowledge’ and misrecognised their ‘cultural dispositions’ (Raffo, 2011: 336). Such issues also seemed to negatively impact students’ academic progress, as they were found to develop an ‘I won’t work for you’ type attitude towards teachers (Margaret Gilmore, manager of behaviour and support unit). In contrast, support staff did not seem constrained by these practices to the same extent as teachers because they operated somewhat separately from the mainstream school, allowing them space to recognise and value students. They were found to understand ‘what it is like to live round here’ (Stacey Baldock) and thus were able to establish good relationships with students, based on a shared understanding of place.

In case of the sixth form, it also seemed the mismatch between some young people’s ‘place-specific identities’ (Raffo 2010: 8) and the processes at play within the sixth form, created particular conflicts and dilemmas which had implications as to whether they felt that the sixth ‘was for them’. Thus, we
saw how Luke Grove felt that the sixth form was trying to ‘mould’ him into something that he felt was at odds with his own aspirations and identity, whilst the emphasis that Katie and her mum placed on staying ‘local’ also seemed not to fit with the emphasis that the school placed upon preparing students to go to university. Once again, therefore it seemed that there was a mismatch between what some members of the community valued and what was recognised by the school in practice within the narrowly attainment focused framework in which they operated. This seemed to create a situation where some students found ‘fitting in’ with this framework difficult. I further noted how such patterns in the data seemed to be related to the pressures the school was under to raise achievement. Thus, earlier it was shown that the school seemed to ‘play it safe’ by acting in the interests of high attaining students rather than trying to cater for the diverse needs of the community. In a similar vein, the evidence suggested the school continued to operate via ‘standard cultural codes that dominate in mainstream schooling in such things as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment’ rather than taking risks to recognise students’ ‘cultural dispositions’ (Raffo, 2011: 336).

Overall, I argued that the evidence from the family case studies suggested that at best Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ had mixed or limited impacts on students. Although it is true to say that some students in the sample seemed to be positively affected by the school’s efforts to raise attainment, it seemed that these students were already likely to achieve. In contrast, students who were more vulnerable and of a lower ability seemed to be further adversely affected by the narrow focus on attainment since within this framework these students found it difficult to ‘fit in.’ Within a system which caters for those who already likely to achieve in order to raise standards via the safest route possible, students who do not ‘meet the standard’ therefore had to be catered for elsewhere (Armstrong, 2003: 147).
Findings from the case studies also suggested that because of the narrow and restrictive processes operating within the school, there was limited space for students to be recognised on their own terms. This seemed to create a mismatch between what students and families expected from the school and placed value upon and what the school provided in practice. In the next section of this answer to research question two, I relate these themes to those which were identified from analysing the impacts of Weston Academy’s ‘community-focused efforts’. Thus, I aim to further show how the way that the mainstream school operated in pursuit of improved standards restricted the extent that they were able to tackle issues which beset the community.

The impact of Weston Academy’s community-focused efforts

I now want to consider the impact of Weston Academy’s ‘community-focused efforts’ on students and their families in more depth. Two main themes have been identified from those discussed in Chapter Five, they included ‘extending the boundaries of the school’ and ‘issues of engagement’. I will now recap the main points from each and further reflect how the school’s efforts to tackle issues which beset the community seemed to have been restricted.

Theme One: Extending the boundaries of the school

The first observation I want to make is how there seemed to be evidence of significant impact in terms of Weston Academy’s attempts to provide improved pastoral and multi-agency working. For example, Sam Houghton’s mum said she wouldn’t ‘know what to do without it’. Meanwhile Paul Walker, a family liaison worker who worked as part of this team, also raised the alarm after a number of safeguarding issues with the Houghton family. There was also evidence that the school and Weston Housing Trust’s youth services team together with some housing officers had also started to provide
a more ‘joined up’ approach to working with families. For instance, housing professionals who attended the multi-agency meetings were able to provide a new perspective in the educational setting. Support staff also made use of the ‘pluses and minuses’ of their jobs in an effort to overcome the professional boundaries of their roles.

It is important not to underestimate the importance of this work. Although, their efforts were often not transformational simply because of the level of challenges such families faced, they mattered to the individuals involved. Indeed, the lives of students and their parents may have been quite different without this additional layer of support. Such arrangements seemed to be particularly significant in terms of linking home and school and providing families with a central access point to a variety of services.

In order to further interpret these findings I used Edwards et al.’s (2009, 2010) work on inter-professional collaboration to identify how a ‘new space of action’ seemed to be developed at the boundaries of Weston Academy (Edwards et al., 2010: 33). This was found to enable staff to provide a ‘sensitive and responsive’ approach to working with particularly vulnerable families (ibid). However, using Edwards et al. (2010: 36), I also noted how these ways of working were ‘incommensurate with the established achievement-orientated practices’ of the school. Thus, I observed that teachers were not part of the ‘new space of action’ (Edwards et al., 2010: 33) because, as part of workforce remodelling, they were encouraged to solely operate within a restrictive framework which was narrowly focused on attainment. This meant that the impacts of Weston Academy’s attempts to extend the boundaries of the school were constrained by how the mainstream school operated. Teachers were found to be frustrated by their loss of pastoral duties; they also seemed to have limited access to information concerned with how
support staff were working with students and their families on a holistic basis. Furthermore there was evidence of tension between support staff and teachers due to their different working styles. The combination of tensions between the two different types of staff and the restrictive nature of the framework teachers were forced to work within, limited the extent to which teachers were able to embed these new practices into their work. This in turn meant that some students would continue to find it difficult to fit in with the mainstream school.

In Chapter Five I examined these issues with regard to relationships between students and teachers on the one hand, and students and support staff on the other. I found that student-teacher relationships seemed quite different from relations between students and support staff. As mentioned previously, I observed that some students seemed to have poor relationships with their teachers which further adversely affected their approach to school work. Using Wrigley et al. (2012: 204) it was therefore suggested that teachers seemed to be ‘isolated’ from student’s ‘vernacular lifeworlds’ and were prevented from coming closer to these due to the attainment focus of their work and exclusion from the holistic approaches adopted by support staff. So whilst students had better relationships with support staff because of their ‘shared sense of space’, the way in which the school operated prevented teachers from engaging in practices which might have fostered better relationships with students and in turn supported teaching and learning.

By relating the themes concerned with the impacts of the school’s ‘community-focused efforts’ to those of the ‘standards-focused efforts’ I was therefore able to show how although they developed separately in practice, their effects on the family case studies were intertwined. Indeed, evidence from the family case studies suggests that the restrictive nature of how the
school operated as part of its efforts to improve standards limited the impact of some of the more ‘community-focused efforts’. Therefore although some of the evidence suggests that the school was tackling issues which beset the community by extending the boundaries of the school, the impacts were restricted by the achievement-orientated focus of the mainstream school.

**Theme Two: Issues of engagement**

The final main theme which was discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the analysis of the ‘community-focused efforts’ was ‘issues of engagement’. I will now recap the main points which were outlined in order further assess the impacts of this area of the findings on the family case studies.

This theme was concerned with how the school wanted to act as a ‘community hub’. As described in Chapter Four, Weston Academy offered a range of out-of-hours activities, participation opportunities and additional means of support. Such efforts were in line with those offered by the sponsor, Weston Housing Trust. Thus, we saw as part of their rationale for sponsoring the school, the trust hoped to extend their efforts to empower residents by involving them in regeneration schemes. Such efforts were also part of the executive board’s vision to build a sustainable community by moving towards a situation where they would effectively ‘do themselves out of a job’ (Martin Rayner) as residents would be in a position to be able to sustain the continual improvement of the community themselves.

However as explained in the previous chapter, there was limited evidence that members from the family case studies were involved in opportunities which were designed to illicit their views. Although, the school formed a school council, none of the students from the sample were involved. Similarly, Parveen expressed how she was ‘disappointed’ with the amount of
parents who participated in the parent focus group that she set up. Only one parent from the sample, Citrali Khan, attended the group, but later discontinued participation because she felt her views were not acted upon.

Instead, the school seemed to predominantly rely on professionals to design and run the services and means of support. Although, this approach seemed to work fairly well for targeted interventions, the evidence implied that this approach worked less well for activities which were offered on a more voluntary basis. Thus, as observed earlier, targeted support for particularly vulnerable families such as the Cox, Baldock and Houghton families seemed to have fairly significant impact. However, there was limited evidence of impact of out-of-hours activities and community events on sample members, as their participation was rare. There seemed to be a variety of reasons for such limited engagement including issues in communication and also reluctance on the part of some students to engage in anything offered by the school which was not a formal requirement.

In contrast, I found evidence of higher levels of engagement with activities which were offered in the community itself. For example, the family liaison officers were found to act in a variety of capacities in order to provide the role of ‘cultural broker’ enabling families to seek support not just from the school but a range of service providers (Howland et al. 2006: 52). I also found evidence that some families in the sample seemed more likely to engage in neighbourhood schemes run by Weston Housing Trust. In particular, these schemes seemed to engage vulnerable students and their families who the school considered as ‘hard to reach’. I therefore argued that the school seemed to miss an opportunity to develop these links whilst such evidence also shows that there was limited collaboration between the school and the sponsor.
In Chapter Five, I referenced a number of critics in the literature who have evidenced the limited ability of schools to engage students and their families. For example, the work of Cummings et al. (2011) on FSES schools shows how the relenting focus on disadvantage had led schools to take a deficit approach. I also cited a number of studies which support the argument that schools need to go ‘beyond the ‘within the four walls’ mentality’ (Warren, 2005; 2248). Despite Weston Academy’s arguably good position from which to engage in such approaches, it seemed that here too they ‘played it safe’ and relied on traditional school engagement mechanisms.

However as argued in Chapter Five, these findings are perhaps not surprising when the impacts of the ‘community-focused efforts’ are viewed in light of those from the ‘standards-focused efforts.’ Thus, earlier I used Cummings et al. (2011) work to argue that offering extended services on an additional basis, as Weston Academy did, means that such efforts do not dramatically affect the standard school processes. Similarly, I argued that Weston Academy also seemed to adopt engagement strategies which did not threaten the narrow practices within which the mainstream school operated by as part of their crusade to improve attainment. I also proposed that, just as the ‘new space of action’ was found to be ‘incommensurate with the established achievement-orientated practices’ of the school (Edwards et al., 2010: 36), so too were less traditional ways of engaging the community. I thus suggested that engaging in non-traditional mechanisms would require the school to relax the narrow and restrictive framework within which the mainstream school seemed to work. For example, developing links with the neighbourhood schemes and giving family liaison officers more of a central rather than peripheral role would require a willingness on the school’s part to relax their boundaries and perhaps even ‘recognise’ the community to a greater extent. However, once
again this seemed at odds with how the mainstream school operated as part of its attempts to improve standards.

Within the context of some of the themes from the analysis of the ‘standards-focused efforts’ the limited levels of engagement also do not seem particularly astonishing, as observed in the previous chapter. Examples of elements of the ‘standards-focused efforts’ which may have impacted on the levels of engagement include the focus on acting in the interests of those likely to achieve, rather than meeting the diverse range of students’ needs, and issues of ‘fitting in’ relating to the mismatch between what the school recognised and what the community valued. Thus, it seems hardly surprising that students and their families more likely to engage in activities which were run in the neighbourhood itself by staff who ‘are like us’.

This concludes the answer to research question two. I have shown that whilst Weston Academy did have some positive impacts on students’ and their families’ lives overall they were limited. Thus, although there was signs from the family case studies that the school was tacking issues which beset the community these seemed to be restricted by how the mainstream school operated. In particular, there seemed to evidence that the school operated by practices which were narrowly focused on achievement due to the pressure to improve standards. These practices in turn seemed to limit the extent that the school could engage in action which was outside the schools’ role of acting as a teaching and learning institution.

6.2 Reflections on the research study

Now I have answered the research questions, I want to start to reflect on the research study in its entirety. Firstly I reflect on the limitations of the study, three main issues are discussed as I consider these to be the most pertinent.
They include: my position as a researcher, negotiating the field, and drawbacks to breadth of literature. I then discuss the two main contributions to knowledge that this study makes.

6.2.1 Limitations

*My position as a researcher*

As I discussed in Chapter Three, I occupied a complex position as the holder of the PhD studentship within the Development and Research partnership that existed between Weston Academy and a team of educational researchers from The University of Manchester. Reflective accounts of researcher position typically involve binary understandings of researcher’s position as insider or outsider (e.g. Adams 1999; Tsang, 1998). By contrast, my position seemed to dramatically change depending on the context. To make sense of this, I will use Gunter and Thomson’s (2011) concept of ‘liquid researcher’ which is inspired by Bauman’s (2000) work on ‘liquid identities’. Their conceptualisation captures the idea that research practice often involves the researcher adopting ‘multiple positions’ meaning that their identity is not static or fixed as the insider/outsider model suggests (Gunter and Thomson 2011: 25). Instead, they recognise how researchers often experience ‘highly fluid relationships’ which are ‘highly contingent’ and may be at work simultaneously (ibid).

In the field I was forced to adopt multiple positions due to the breadth of relationships I had with different stakeholders. Furthermore, the dynamics of those relationships often seemed to change depending on the setting and the people who were present. For example, I adopted the position of ‘critical friend’ during the steering group meetings and felt much more of an outsider because of my membership within the research team (Ainscow, 2002). However, after spending significant periods of time in school, I felt like an
insider referred to by staff and students as ‘Miss’. Data collection for the family case studies also involved adopting multiple positions; I was not just a researcher but I was invited into their homes, shared meals and developed close relationships with some of the students and their parents.

Although the multiple and complex positions I occupied as a researcher meant that I was able to collect rich and varied accounts from different stakeholders, at times ‘switching’ identity and presenting simultaneously very different identities was very difficult. As previously noted, the situation also presented some ethical dilemmas as occupying so many different positions meant that the boundaries of my role were sometimes blurred.

The multiple positions that I occupied had implications not only for my own experiences of collecting the data, but it also for the data itself and the analysis process, since I was effectively the research instrument (Golafshani, 2003). However, I took a number of steps to minimise threats to validity, which were detailed in Chapter Three. I also have two forthcoming publications (Rowley, a, b) which seek to specifically engage with the interesting and complex research position that I occupied.

*Negotiating the field*

Due to the Development and Research Partnership, I enjoyed unique access to the school and Weston Housing Trust as the sponsor of the school. The partnership also meant that I had relatively easy access to the executive board members and was not only able to arrange interviews but also attend a variety of meetings involving different stakeholders. However arranging data collection opportunities with staff from both the school and the housing trust was more challenging, whilst assembling and maintaining access to the family case studies was often fraught with difficulties.
As Burgess (1991) notes, it is often assumed when conducting research in schools that access to participants will be straightforward once the researcher has permission from the head teacher. However Burgess (1991) observes that in practice the head will have limited influence on people agreeing to take part in the research. Therefore, rather than encountering just one gatekeeper, the researcher is often required to establish relationships with ‘a series of gatekeepers’ (Burgess, 1991: 48).

After being introduced at the end of morning briefing to staff, I was ‘left to my own devices’. Through talking to members of staff predominantly in the staffroom, interviews were negotiated. However, time was often limited and unforeseen events often came up meaning that interviews had to be rearranged, cut short or cancelled. Therefore, despite the backing of the executive board, their influence was limited.

When I decided to conduct family case studies, I naively thought that access would be relatively straightforward. After all, the children attended the academy and their parents (mostly) lived in housing owned or situated on estates managed by Weston. However, not only was establishing the sample difficult, maintaining contact over twelve months was particularly challenging. I gained access to the families predominantly via three gatekeepers. However as previously reported, I was dependent on their cooperation and support throughout the research process, particularly for the more vulnerable families and those who spoke limited English. As Peace (1993: 34) observes the research process was therefore ‘an on-going process of negotiation.’ Not only did I have to negotiate and re-negotiate with the gatekeepers over settings and information they helped me gain access too, I also had to do the same with the families. There was also a number of occasions ‘where spanners were thrown in the works’ (ibid). For example,
when one of the gate-keepers, Farooq Habeeb, was forced to take sick leave, I had to delay the final round of interviews. Other families in the sample were also under significant pressures and lived ‘chaotic’ lives which meant that despite previous arrangements they would not be at home at the agreed time. Such obstacles meant I was not able to conduct any interviews with Stacey and Courtney Baldock’s parents. Similarly, whilst I gained access to Sam Houghton’s mother, I observed multi-agency meetings and neighbourhood activities she attended because arranging interviews was too problematic.

Such issues meant that there were a number of limitations on the data I collected. Despite my efforts, I was not always able to carry out interviews which were planned with staff or family members. However, due to the length of time I spent in the field and the range of stakeholders I had contact with, I collected a substantial amount of data, which allowed me to provide an account of considerable breadth and richness.

**Drawbacks to the breadth of literature**

The previous two reflections have been methodological issues, the final reflection considers a limitation of the thesis itself. In Chapter Two, I presented a detailed literature review which predominantly focused on the relationship between schools and their communities and the policy context which defined the backdrop to this study. Although some spatial considerations in terms of the distribution of poverty and their effects on schools were discussed, I only outlined some of the spatial understandings of place briefly. As some of the conceptual tools associated with this area of research became increasingly useful within the analysis of data, I did outline them in more depth in Chapter Five and used these tools in a range of ways to suggest interpretations of my findings.
However, I am aware that I have only scratched the surface of the field from where these conceptual tools originate (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey 1991; Soja, 1996). Furthermore, the field of 'children’s geographies’ might have been useful to employ in a more extended study (for example see Gill & Holloway, 2000; Aitkin, 2001; Holt, 2010). I came to these spatial understandings of place and how they have been applied within the field of education relatively late within the research process. Although the conceptual tools proved particularly useful for this study, they are rarely used in research which is concerned with community-oriented schools.

I also introduced a number of conceptual tools from the literature in Chapter Five, whilst some of these originate from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two they were not detailed at this point. Instead I chose to present them alongside the findings to reflect how these conceptual tools were used to make sense of the themes that were identified during the analysis process. Thus, reflecting the inductive and deductive approach I adopted during data analysis.

Using the literature in this way thus shows how the research process presents a number of new avenues along the way and enables one to reflect upon the literature in different ways. Although I adeptly use the conceptual tools from the literature to further interpret the themes in the data, I acknowledge that some of these tools come from a literature base which is beyond the scope of this study. However such an approach also gives rise for these tools to be further used in the future. I will return to some of these considerations when I discuss implications for further research but for now I will identify the main contributions to knowledge that this study makes.
6.2.2 Contributions to knowledge

Part of the process of reflecting upon the study also involves the identification of how the study contributes to knowledge. In this section I consider two areas: the first is concerned with methodology whereas the second recognises how I have made a contribution to the literature in which this study is located.

Earlier I described the difficulties I experienced in conducting family case studies with regard to access. In Chapter Three, I also considered the ethical and methodological implications of research with vulnerable families and young people. However, the use of in-depth studies of students’ and their families’ engagement with schools that take a community-oriented approach is limited, if not unprecedented. As previously noted, the field is saturated with ‘how-to-do-it-guides and advocacy texts’ (Cummings et al., 2011: 72). There is also a substantial body of evaluations (for example Blank et al., 2003; Sammons et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2010) but these tend to involve fairly short time scales due to funding constraints (Henderson and Mapp, 2002) meaning that when they do include data from families they have tended to only capture ‘snapshots’ of their involvement. As Blank et al. conclude:

There is much more that needs to be learned about how community schools make a difference to children, families, schools and communities.

(Blank et al., 2003: 47)

This study thus makes a substantial contribution to this area as it is rare not to find in-depth qualitative accounts of students’ and their families’ experiences of community-oriented schools.
The second main contribution this study makes was somewhat more unexpected as it emerged in the course of data analysis rather than being an aspect of the study design; namely, it considers how the pressure to raise standards and the often narrowly focused attainment practices schools adopt in response, limited the capacity of schools to make a difference to deprived areas. As demonstrated in my answer to research question two, the main thrust of my argument developed as a consequence of examining how the themes which emerged from assessing the impacts of Weston Academy’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ related to those from the analysis of the ‘community-focused efforts’. From this, I was able to draw out findings showing how the school seemed to operate within an increasingly narrow framework, due to pressure to raise standards, which in turn seemed to restrict the extent to which they were able to tackle issues which beset the community.

It is not unusual to find criticism of how the ‘standard-focused reforms’ introduced by New Labour have led schools to work in a tight, prescriptive framework meaning that the purposes and practices of schools have become narrowed (for instance see Day and Sachs, 2004; Maguire and Dillon, 2007; Alexander et al., 2009). However, these studies tend to exclusively focus on the role of schools as teaching and learning institutions rather than the implications of these processes for the capacity of schools to make a broader contribution to their communities. In contrast, studies located within the field of community-oriented schools have tended to only pay attention to the teaching and learning aspect of schools to try to show positive impact upon attainment as a result of the additional services and means of support offered by the school (for example see Richardson, 2009). Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the literature by considering how the standards agenda and the school’s response, limited its capacity of to make a difference
to the deprived area in which it was located. I will return to this point in the next section where I consider the wider implications of the study.

6.3 Wider implications of the study

In this section I consider the wider implications of the study by reflecting more broadly on the implementation challenges associated with community-oriented schools. This will then lead to a discussion of what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. To begin with I reconsider the research problem and reflect on how this study adds to the debate in terms of what can be said about the overall impact that Weston Academy achieved. I will return to the three tendencies in the literature which were outlined as broad responses to the issue of whether schools can make a difference. I then put forward a response in light of the findings from Weston Academy and offer a number of ideas about how community-oriented schools might make more of a difference in the future.

6.3.1 Reconsidering the research problem

This study aimed to explore the relationship between schools and their communities, more specifically whether schools can tackle issues which beset deprived communities. In Chapter One, the research problem was outlined at length. In sum, I recognised how increasing intra-urban polarisation in Britain has meant that particular sections of society have been subject to the interlinking of multiple problems (Hills et al., 2010; Aldridge et al., 2012). Within the context of these processes, the community-oriented school was recognised to be an approach that has been adopted across a number of countries to tackle such issues. However, despite the commonly held high expectations, they have been found to achieve limited impacts (Szirom et al., 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Sammons et al., 2003; Crowther et al., 2007; Dyson, 2010; Cummings et al., 2011). Therefore, I argued that whether
community-oriented schools can make a difference to deprived areas is a complex and difficult question to answer. I further asserted that it seems even less clear what approach community-oriented schools should take in order to make more of a difference in the future. Thus, the case study of Weston Academy was offered as a distinctive example of a school which took a community-oriented approach in an effort to further explore the implementation challenges associated with this type of approach. Furthermore, I am aimed to consider what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make.

6.3.2 Considering impact

In order to consider how this study adds to the debate of whether schools can make a difference to deprived communities, I will firstly discuss what the findings suggest in terms of the overall impact of Weston Academy. Debates about the generalizability of the findings are not my concern, here I simply want to ‘extrapolate’ in order to further explore the research problem and move towards drawing some conclusions (Alasuutari cited in Silverman, 2005). Thus overall, it seems reasonable to assert that Weston Academy had limited impact whilst there were no signs of a specifically transformational impact. I argued that what was achieved in practice was markedly different from what was previously envisioned, and that the executive board seemed to have lost sight of the more distinctive elements of their vision. It is also fair to say that whilst it may take time for considerable impacts to materialise, the findings from this study suggest that the school was moving in a direction which was not consistent with the requirements of a transformational, community-impact agenda. Thus I argued that the pressure to improve standards of attainment meant that the school conceded in the face of the policy context and became synonymous with standard school improvement attempts.
The limited impacts achieved by Weston Academy are also in line with the general consensus of those reported in the literature concerned with community-oriented approaches. Thus as previously outlined, even when researchers have been able to demonstrate impact, they have often been variable (Szirom et al., 2001; Sammons et al., 2003; James-Burdumy et al., 2005) or not significant beyond individual families, whilst even less evidence has been found that such impacts can be sustained (Cummings et al., 2011).

Responding to the issue of limited impacts in light of the findings of this study

When I considered the issue of the seemingly limited impacts that schools are able to achieve in Chapter One, I outlined three possible responses. The first emphasised how schools have limited power to make a difference and may even negatively (re)produce wider inequalities at play within society. The second advocates concentrating upon inside school processes in an effort to improve educational outcomes by modifying practice. Finally, the third position acknowledges the difficulties that schools face but recognises that their efforts are not in vain as there is ‘no inherent problem with impacts that are only ameliorative’ (Cummings et al. 2011: 93). Thus despite the weak position of schools and the somewhat limited impacts they can achieve in the face of inequality, such efforts are not ‘worthless’ (Riddell & Tett, 2004: 227).

These responses will now be considered in light of the findings from this study in order to consider what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be expected to make. In line with the first response which was outlined and the limited impacts which Weston Academy seemed to achieve, one option would be to say that community-oriented schools will continue to make limited kinds of differences unless more radical steps are taken to address underlying structural inequality. However, as observed in
the literature review, at present the state seems only able to engage in such efforts ‘at the margins’ whilst the scale of redistribution which would be needed ‘simply does not appear on the policy agenda’ (Rees et al. 2007). Such a position would therefore seem to suggest that community-oriented schools will not really make significant differences until such radical change happens. However this would seem to offer schools like Weston Academy limited direction in the meantime and, as Dyson and Raffo (2007: 308) acknowledge, there may be limitations on the impact that schools can have on communities but ‘work with them they must.’

In consideration for the second tendency, it seems that given the often limited impacts of community-oriented schools, one could argue that the approach is in fact misplaced. The community-oriented schools approach tends to position schools as being able to make a wide variety of differences to families and communities particularly in terms of tackling issues which beset deprived communities. However, it seems that often schools which take the approach often struggle to achieve these kinds of impacts. Thus rather than concentrating upon efforts which aim to extend the role of schools within their communities, the second tendency in the literature would advocate that schools would be better spending their time modifying internal school processes. In the sense, anything outside the core role of the school as teaching and learning institutions is nothing more than a distraction (Robson, 2007). Thus, such a position would seem to entail positioning the community-oriented schools approach as redundant. However, I am inclined to agree with Cummings et al. (2011) who argue:

Schools can ignore what lies beyond their school gates but they cannot escape it…The choice is not whether to allow the outside world into
the school. It is whether to do so openly and thoughtfully, embracing the challenges and opportunities this presents.

(Cummings et al., 2011: 131)

With these points in mind, I will attempt to argue that it is possible for community-oriented schools to make more than limited impacts despite the challenges of structural inequality. In order to do this I adopt the same stance, taken by others (Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005; Raffo & Dyson 2007; Dyson et al., 2011), of what Grace has called ‘complex hope’ (1994: 59). Therefore as I explored in the literature review, I will aim to demonstrate ‘an optimism of the will’ (Grace, 1994: 59) by acknowledging the sentiments of the first response I outlined in terms of how radical change is needed, whilst pragmatically considering ‘what might be done’ (Dyson et al., 2011: 196 original emphasis).

Such an approach is also in-keeping with the considerations I made in Chapter Three in terms of the generalisability of case studies. Therefore, in consideration of the recommendations made by Bassey (1981) I will seek to demonstrate the ‘relatability’ of the case study in an attempt to provide some considerations for those working in schools located in deprived communities.

6.3.3 Conceptualising how community-oriented schools might make more of a difference in the future

In order to consider what can be learnt from the case of Weston Academy, I will firstly outline what seemed to be at the heart of the school’s difficulties. I then make two proposals which offer potential for thinking about what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be able to make in the future. I argue that the tensions between Weston’s ‘standards-focused efforts’ and the ‘community-focused efforts’ and in turn the inherent
contradictions at play within New Labour’s policy context were not simply there by accident but were central to the implementation challenges that Weston Academy faced. Using Gunter et al (2010) I outline the fundamental tensions operating within the education project and recognise that there is a considerable degree of ambiguity around the purposes of schools and in turn what role we expect them to play in society. Therefore the first proposal I put forward in an effort to consider how community-oriented schools might make increased differences in the future, recognises the need for local debates. I argue that it is unrealistic to expect community-oriented schools to make any more than limited kinds of differences or impact if there is limited theorisation in terms of what they are aiming; indeed such debates may assist schools in translating what they hope to achieve into practice. Secondly, I recognise how the balance between the fundamental ideas at play in the education project which inform how schools operate has become skewed. Thus, I make a second proposal that recognises in order for expectations of what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might be able to make to not be restricted, the balance needs to be readdressed. However, I recognise that such a balance between ideas within the policy context is unlikely to be realised. There, I propose two ideas in terms of how schools might address this balance themselves.

**Considering the heart of the issue: tensions between standards-focused efforts and community-focused efforts.**

In order to begin the process of conceptualising what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be able to make in the future, I explore the study in its entirety by outlining how the main points from research question one and two relate to each other. Research question one was concerned with how Weston Academy developed at an organisational level whereas the second was concerned with how their efforts impacted the family
case studies at the ground level. There are a number of interesting points which can be made when examining how these two levels interacted. In particular, I want to identify how the heart of the issue seemed to be the tension which arose from the school trying to balance the need to act in a teaching and learning capacity and make a broader contribution to the community.

As explained previously, a crucial element of the executive board’s vision was how they hoped the school would not only lead to improved standards of education but also tackle issues which beset the community. As shown in Figure 2 the vision included broadly two ‘types’ of actions: those focused on improving teaching and learning and those more focused on the community. Both were seen as mutually beneficial and a number of links were made between the two. However as we saw earlier, in practice these two types of actions developed on two separate tracks with little regard for one another. The pressure to improve standards also meant that the former over-shadowed the latter, with the school increasingly operating via narrow achievement focused practices. Meanwhile analysis of the data from the family case studies revealed that although the two broad ‘types’ of efforts developed separately at the organisational level, their effects at the student and community-level were intertwined, with one constraining the other. Therefore, it seems that at both the level of the school and the family case studies, there was evidence of a continual struggle between attempts to raise standards, and at the same time tackle issues which beset the community.

Previously when I analysed these themes, I recognised that such tensions could be traced back to the dual nature of the New Labour policy context. Thus, in the literature review, I outlined New Labour’s ‘standards-focused reforms’ and their ‘community-focused reforms,’ and in the analysis of the
data in Chapter Five, I drew a number of comparisons between these and the development of the academy. Here, I observed how even though policies ‘do not normally tell [schools] what to do’ they ‘create circumstances in which the options available in deciding what to do are narrowed and changed’ (Ball, 1994:19). I therefore argued that the dual policy context seemed to pull the school in two different directions but because of the pressure to raise standards, the school increasingly focused on this at the cost of their more ‘community-focused efforts’. I also recognised how the policy context seemed to place contradictory demands upon schools because, as Harris & Ranson, (2005: 577) assert, the two sets of policies are ‘coded with different informing principles’.

Fundamental ideas behind the education project

I now want to take some time to conceptualise ‘the fundamentals of the education project where positions within and about policy can be traced back’ (Gunter et al., 2010: 164). Thus, this discussion will seek to expose some of the ideas which seem to be informing policy developments and in turn seek to investigate further what seems to be causing such tensions when schools try to act in a community-oriented manner.

Gunter et al. (2010) conceptualise the education project using two binary approaches. The first is termed the ‘Neo-liberal Project’ and is concerned with the role of the state in terms of securing economic productivity. This approach places importance upon the individual and need for education to ensure the acquirement of skills and credentials to ensure they are ready for work. The second, the ‘Civic project’, closely aligns education not just with personal development but with social democratic development. Thus, education is seen as important in developing the participation of individuals in decision-making for the good of the self and society as a whole.
The tensions which arose within New Labour’s policy context and in turn those which Weston Academy was forced to wrestle with are not simply there by accident; they reflect the tensions between these two projects and the fundamental questions about the purposes in society we expect education to fulfil. Such sentiments are also in line with the initial observations which were made when I outlined the community-oriented school approach in Chapter One. As Cummings et al. (2011: 1) assert the community-oriented approach ‘calls into question what we have historically believed schools to be and to be for.’

In the case of Weston Academy it seems that these issues were particularly apparent whilst the difficulties they experienced when translating their vision into practice were traced back to the ‘lack of serious engagement with fundamental issues in government guidance’ (Cummings et al., 2007b: 198). As Cummings et al. (2011: 128) note in a later publication: ‘it is unusual to find anything in the scholarly or policy literature…which explicitly addresses the question of the ‘good life’, or the ‘vibrant community’, or the ‘healthy society.’ Thus, it seems in order to start to address the tensions which lie behind the policy context and in turn play out in schools, the ideas about what purposes we expect community-oriented schools to play in society need to be made more explicit. Without doing so, it seems that it would be impossible to arrive at a position where realistic expectations in terms of what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might be able to make are established.

Making a difference: Two proposals

Proposal One: The need for local debates

As outlined earlier, the purpose of this discussion is to consider what kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be able to make in
the future. Therefore, I could argue that in order to make these ideas more explicit, debates need to take place at a policy level. However since this seems unlikely, it would seem more realistic to hope that these discussions could take place at a local level. As previously observed, the executive board of Weston Academy did start to engage in debates about the type of community they hoped to build. Thus, it seems conceivable that given more favourable conditions, schools might be able to embark upon such a process to a greater extent in the future. Such efforts would seem to at least offer the potential for community-oriented schools to conceptualise the kinds of differences they might realistically expect to make which may in turn help them to translate what they hope to achieve into practice.

Such considerations are similar to those which are made by Cummings et al. (2007) in response to the often deficit approach that school’s adopt when attempting to act in community-oriented manner. Indeed such issues were also present in the case of Weston Academy. However on a more interesting note, I also observed how the executive board engaged in discussion about the type of community they were aiming to create. Unfortunately, they seemed to lose sight of this but as Cummings et al. (2007: 198) recognise, such examples give hope that ‘meaningful engagement’ at a local level between schools and communities is possible. However, ‘we must hope for more’ (ibid).

Proposal Two: Addressing the need for balance between the neo-liberal and the civic Project

In consideration of the findings from Weston Academy, it seems that in order to conceptualise more realistic expectations of the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might realistically be able to make in the future, the balance between the ideas contained within the ‘Neo-liberal’ and ‘Civic
project’ outlined in the above section needs to be addressed. As previously identified, the implementation challenges that Weston Academy experienced when balancing their ‘standards-focused efforts’ and their ‘community-focused efforts’ seemed to be the ‘heart’ of the issue whilst the emphasis on the former seemed to restrict the impact of the latter.

Such sentiments were echoed by the late James Callaghan, the New Labour Prime Minister some forty years ago. In his famous speech at Ruskin College, Oxford he asserted that education is a balance between ‘equip[ing] children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive, place in society’ and fitt[ing] them to do a job of work’ (Callaghan, 1976). As Cummings et al. (2011) observe, Callaghan’s warnings of how ‘we have a responsibility’ not to let the balance go in the wrong direction in the future seems to have fallen on deaf ears, whilst there is little sign that this is likely to change in the near future.

In the spirit of ‘what might be done’ (Dyson et al., 2010: 196), it seems worthwhile thinking about how schools which want to take a community-oriented approach might address balancing such issues themselves. In the remainder of this discussion, I will thus offer two possibilities, expanding on Proposal Two. Both are in response to issues experienced by Weston Academy and would seem to offer potential in terms of managing the tensions between their ‘standards-focused efforts’ and ‘community-focused efforts’.

**Expanding Proposal Two: An area-based curriculum**

As discussed at length in Chapter Five, when I analysed the family case studies there seemed to be evidence of mismatch between the school and the community which meant that the school failed to recognise and give value to students’ own ‘cultural dispositions’ (Raffo, 2011: 336) and their ‘place-
specific identity’ (Raffo 2010: 8). This limited the willingness of students and their families to engage in activities ran by the school which were not obligatory. Therefore, I argued that such issues seemed to restrict the impact that Weston Academy’s efforts to tackle issues which beset the community. Therefore it would seem that the case of Weston Academy points towards the need for teaching and learning to operate via less narrow practices. Instead attempts need to be made to recognise rather than silence students’ ‘funds of knowledge’ (Raffo, 2011: 336). One possibility which would seem to offer potential in this regard is the use of an ‘area-based curriculum’. The RSA’s ‘area-based curriculum project’ is an example of this; the approach was initially adopted for a year within three schools in Manchester, and lessons from this project are now being taken forward as part of the ‘Citizen Power’ project which is based in Peterborough (RSA, 2012). Keri Facer, who evaluated the Manchester project, defines the approach as follows:

The aim of an ‘area-based curriculum’ seems elegant in its simplicity to enhance the educational experiences of young people by creating rich connections with the communities, cities and cultures that surround them and by distributing the education effort across the people, organisations and institutions of a local area.

(Facer, 2010: 2)

Therefore, by involving the ‘local’ in terms of subject matter and its people, the school co-creates the curriculum with the community (Thomas, 2012). Such an approach therefore challenges the ‘top down hierarchical curriculum’ (Thomas, 2012: 6) and diversifies the types and sources of knowledge that are given value within the classroom context in an effort to ‘make a curriculum that is ‘relevant’ to children’s lives and experiences and thereby enhance their engagement with learning (Facer, 2010:10).
Attempts to implement area-based curriculums face a number of issues and, as the RSA’s project reports show, they continue to grapple with these (Facer 2009; 2010 Thomas, 2012). However, for the purposes of this discussion they remain an interesting prospect for how school’s like Weston Academy would balance the inherent tensions which are a part of the education project. Furthermore, it would seem that the approach may also enable teaching and learning to take place in a less restrictive framework which in turn offers potential for greater impact of efforts to tackle issues which beset the community by offering extended services and means of support. Thus it seems that adopting such an approach at least might mean that community-oriented schools could start to achieve a number of different kinds of impacts which did not fall foul of some efforts restricting that of others.

**Expanding Proposal Two: Addressing divisions between staff**

The second idea which offers potential for schools to balance some of the inherent tensions within the work is a relatively simple but seemingly effective idea. In the case of Weston Academy, we saw how divisions between different types of staff seemed to further restrict the impact that some of their actions were able to have. Therefore in order to balance the differently focused efforts of schools and ensure that one does not restrict the other it would seem that divisions between different types of staff also need to be addressed.

One attempt to do this is included in Wrigley’s et al. (2012) recent book ‘Changing Schools: Alternative Ways to Make a World of Difference’. Chris Sarra, a head teacher of a school in Australia catering for mainly Aboriginal students, describes the following familiar scenario:
On my arrival at the school, there was an older lady everyone referred to as ‘Mum Rae’ - an incredibly powerful and proud black woman with a detailed insight into just about every family. Yet, inside the gate, any power she had seemed to be rendered useless. She had worked as a teacher’s aide for more than 15 years and reduced to performing basic tasks such as photocopying.

(Wrigley et al., 2012: 65)

For Chris Sarra, this made ‘no sense’ and instead Mum Rae became his ‘right hand man’ on school and community matters (ibid). Therefore it would seem that the tensions which are inherently a part of schools may be more effectively managed by thinking about how some staff may be more effectively used in order to blur the divisions between the differently focused efforts. In the case of Weston Academy these ideas would seem to suggest that the likes of Farooq Habeeb and Paul Walker - the family liaison officers and other members of the support staff team, would need to play less of a peripheral role and instead be more actively involved in how the mainstream school operated.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Although, this study has made a number of contributions, it was a small-scale, single case study of a school which took a community-oriented approach. Therefore in an effort to further advance the prospects of the kinds of differences community-oriented schools might make in the future, I will discuss two recommendations for future research.
Firstly as previously noted, ‘there is still much more’ that needs to be known in order to try and understand exactly how schools make a difference to students, their families and the wider community (Blank et al, 2003: 47). Moreover, it seems that more research needs to be conducted using students and their families as a central focus, in order to capture their ‘stories’. Although, this study has gone some way to contribute to this, it seems that much can be learnt from studying those who are the intended beneficiaries, particularly on an in-depth level.

As Dyson et al. (2011: 8) note in their recent literature review conceptualising school and community relations, the majority of researchers ‘align themselves with educational professionals’ and have tended to focus on ‘how professionals might act more effectively.’ They recognise that this bias is most likely due to the comparative ease of gaining access to professionals rather than community members. However, they recommend that more research is needed to understand ‘how disadvantage is experienced by community members and the roles that schools can play in responding to this’ (ibid : 9).

Similarly at the end of Chapter Five, I identified that attempts by schools to be community-oriented face a number of challenges in terms of the legitimacy of their efforts. As Craig et al. (2004: 35) observe: ‘simply dictating undifferentiated, unresponsive services will miss the point entirely’ since without the participation of community members in such efforts they will fail to have impact. Furthermore in light of some of issues experienced by Weston Academy in terms of engaging community members, efforts to research their experiences would seem to go some way to meeting this challenge.

Secondly, in light of the consideration of ‘future possibilities’ and how helpful these were in thinking about what might enable community-oriented schools to make increased kinds of differences in the future, it seems more research is
required which offers promising examples of ‘what can be done’. Wrigley et al.’s (2012) recent book ‘Changing Schools: Alternative Ways to Make a World of Difference’ is a good example of this. As they explain in the introduction to the book:

The future we desire requires a rethought social imaginary, one stretching well beyond the failed reductivism and inequitable effects of the neoliberal project…We offer this collection as evidence of small narratives of progressive school change, and as thinking towards a reimagined future, which would result in reworked schooling systems and different policy frame, as part of a new social democratic social imaginary.

(Wrigley et al., 2012: 12)

Michael Apple (2006: 41) has also encouraged such efforts and sees this as essential to ‘interrupting the right’ and presenting ‘real answers to practical problems’ that show ‘critical education is actually ‘doable’. Thus in his new book ‘Can Education Change Society?’ he positions himself as a ‘critical secretary of interruptive work’ and seeks to ask the question ‘what does the alternative look like?’ (Apple, 2012). Although, Apple belongs to a somewhat more socially critical tradition, such examples aim to offer hope despite the challenging times we face.

Summary

This chapter has brought together the findings from this study and has considered the wider implications of the study by considering what can be learnt from the case of Weston Academy for both future research and policy approaches. This led to a consideration of some future possibilities which the findings suggest might enhance the capacity of community-oriented schools
to make increased kinds of differences in the future. As I have previously emphasised, these are not intended as a panacea and there are likely to be many other possibilities. Furthermore, these possibilities have been put forward in the spirit of ‘complex hope’ (Grace, 1994: 59) in recognition of the fact that ultimately radical structural change is needed. However, since this seems unlikely, I have instead tried to put forward some ideas of ‘what might be done’ (Dyson et al., 2010: 196 original emphasis) in an effort to conceptualise how community-oriented schools might make more of an impact in the future within the reality of a restrictive policy context. This study has shown the importance of understanding both what can and has been achieved and of scrutinising the limits of impact and the nature of the constraints causing this. Of course more theoretical, radical reflections are necessary in order to prevent issues of structural inequality from slipping out of view. However studies such as this, which offer in depth insights into the practical impact of transformational ambitions, are crucial to moving towards a future where community-oriented schools are able to make a multitude of differences to deprived communities.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Example of Progress Report

Progress Report Steering group meeting Monday 5th July 2010

Extended Services Evaluation

As discussed at the last steering group meeting, Weston Academy will be used as one of the case study schools for the DCSF’s ‘Evaluation of The Extended Services Initiative’ which Alan is leading on with a team of academics from Manchester University and Newcastle University. Alan, Lisa and Harriet have met with Parveen to discuss the Academy’s Extended Services provision. The research has involved collecting information on the characteristics of the area/school and gathering evidence of the extended services currently provided by the school. From previous discussions, we have also started to unpack the underlying rationale behind the school’s extended services programme in an effort to use a theory of change framework to map this with the expected outcomes. In other words, the motives that underpin the school’s approach will be mapped against the current activities that the school offers compared with the school’s projected long term outcomes. This enables the team to construct chains of actions and the expected changes that will result in an effort to predict how these will contribute to wide-scale change in the future.

The team are due to meet again after the steering group meeting on Monday 5th July to continue further with this work.

Academies Support Programme

Weston Academy was also involved in the NCSL Academies Support Programme Evaluation led by Chris Chapman. Harriet interviewed William and number of other members of the senior leadership team about the programme, they discussed how the Academy has utilised the resources connected to this programme and reflected upon the strengths and weaknesses of the support they received. Harriet compiled a report of the findings which was fed into the final evaluation. The final report has now been submitted to SSAT and Chris and his colleagues are waiting for feedback.

ESRC Seminar series; Area Based Initiatives
The ESRC awarded a team of academics from The University of Manchester, The University of Chester and The London School of Economics to hold a series of seminars focusing upon the development of Area-based Initiatives (ABI’s). The seminar series began by looking at the history of ABI’s and how such policies have tried to tackle the relationship between education, disadvantage and place. The seminar series also involved discussions that aimed to understand why, to date, ABI’s appear to have limited impact and consider how such initiatives need to be reframed in the future to enable greater impacts. The team was very grateful for the contribution that Tony Powell made to the discussion by sharing insights from the partnership between Weston Academy and the Academy and how the trust has been trying to address the effects of deprivation at an area level in the Haleton area. Harriet also shared some findings from her PhD research.

**Forthcoming meetings**

Mel and Harriet are due to meet with William on Tuesday 6th July to discuss the Academy’s progress.

**Mapping area data**

Harriet met with Paul Smith from Haleton council in May to recap what data the partnership is interested in mapping and how Paul could take this work forward. We are hoping that the initial analysis will be done by the end of the summer and a meeting will be arranged to discuss the findings.

**Harriet’s PhD**

Harriet has started to compile the data that she has collected together and identify preliminary themes from her findings; these were discussed at the last steering group meeting. Harriet has continued to build upon this work and has been developing the structure of her thesis. She has also been concentrating upon drawing together the literature review which will form the basis of her argument in the thesis.

Harriet will begin another round of interviews with the families in her sample in September. She will also be continuing to collect other data in school by being involved in a variety of meetings and initiatives. Recently, she has been engaged with tracking the progress of some students involved with the initiative focuses on
improving the aspirations and achievements of a group of year 9 and 10 boys who are eligible for free school meals.

Harriet has also attended a number of conferences to share her research. In June, she was one of twenty PhD students selected to attend a two week long workshop on inequality organised through a partnership between the University of Manchester and Harvard University. A wide range of leading academics from a range of disciplines attended the conference which enabled the fields of political science, economics and social science to come together and discuss a range of issues. Harriet is also due to present her research at the European Conference on Educational Research in Helsinki and the British Education Research Association at the University of Warwick over the summer.
## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Sub-topic</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
<th>Probes</th>
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| Background information on family         | Characteristics            | • Make-up of family  
• Occupation  
• Interests  
• Particular issues |                                            |
| New Charter Academy                      | Academic                   | • Perception of school  
• Engagement with school  
• Awareness of academic progress  
• Key relationships/events/developments | • Positive/ negative  
• Particular successes/issues  
• Change over time  
• How they would like it to be |
|                                          | Extended Services          | • Perception of Extended Services  
• Engagement with Extended Services on child’s behalf/for themselves  
• Key relationships/events/developments | • Positive/ negative  
• Particular successes/issues  
• Change over time  
• How they would like it to be |
|                                          | Support Services           | • Perception of Support Services  
• Engagement with Support Services on child’s behalf/for themselves  
• Key relationships/events/developments | • Positive/ negative  
• Particular successes/issues  
• Change over time  
• How they would like it to be |
| Neighbourhood                            | Physical                   | • Perception of physical environment  
• Engagement with schemes/activities/groups  
• Key relationships/events/developments | • Positive/ negative  
• Particular successes/issues  
• Change over time  
• How they would like it to be |
|                                          | Social                     | • Perception of community  
• Engagement with schemes/activities/groups  
• Key relationships/ | • Positive/ negative  
• Particular successes/issues  
• Change over time  

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| events/developments | • How they would like it to be |
Appendix 3: Information sheet for children

Information sheet for Children

A development and research partnership has been set up between a group of researchers, from Manchester University and Weston Academy. We think Weston Academy is an interesting example of a school that wants to not only improve the standard of education that is on offer but also provide support and a range of services to their families.

As part of this research, I am hoping to work with around ten families whose children attend Weston Academy. Your family has been specially selected to take part. I am really interested to hear about what YOU think of the school, your home and the neighbourhood where you live.

If you agree to take part I would arrange to talk to you a few times over the next year, this would be wherever is easiest for you and as often or as little as you liked. I may with your permission, talk to other professionals involved with your family such as teachers, social workers and housing officers. Depending upon how the research goes and how our relationship develops I may sustain contact with you for the full year, in other cases we may only meet once. This will be agreed together and will be depend on what you feel most comfortable with. In each case, you are free to withdraw at any time and do not have to give a reason.

The research will contribute towards my PhD, the information will be shared with other researchers at the University of Manchester. All the data will be kept securely and kept confidential. During the interviews, I will take written notes these will be kept securely and appropriately destroyed once I have typed these up. These notes will be anonymised and kept on password protected files on my computer. Sometimes, the information will also be fed back to New Charter to help them improve the services that New Charter offer. The research may also be published in book and journal articles which may be available both in hard copies and electronically on the internet. In all cases, quotes may be used but no names will be identifiable and all the information will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions at anytime please feel free to ask. You can contact me by email harriet.rowley@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Thank you for your time

Harriet Rowley