ASPIRATION IN WHITLEY:

IMPROVING THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

University of Reading

Whitley CDA

Young Researchers LENS 18-55mm f4 - 5.6 IS STM

Reading Borough Council

Affinity

JOHN MADEJSKI ACADEMY

STUDY HIGHER

LIMITLESS **POTENTIAL** | LIMITLESS **AMBITION** | LIMITLESS **IMPACT**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

The Whitley Researchers is a partnership between the Whitley Community Development Association, local residents and the University of Reading to engage and involve communities in conducting their own research. We believe that communities should devise their own solutions to local issues as knowledge generation is located at community level and not just in an academic or policy domain. Top down assumptions about local communities, particularly those most disadvantaged, often miss the more relevant issues that impact on residents.

We are currently participating in the Whitley for Real initiative (W4R), which is being co-developed by Reading Borough Council (RBC) and Reading University, in partnership with the community and other stakeholders, to access this 'local voice' in South Reading. The aim is to influence both current and planned activities in the area, so that resources can be targeted more effectively, ultimately helping to enhance family lives and reduce deprivation. As part of the W4R programme, a piece of academic research was commissioned by Reading Borough Council's Decent Neighbourhoods Fund (DNF) which focuses on young people's aspirations and the school/family relationship.

One of our ambitions for this project has been to co-produce a participatory research project with young people, schools and parents that engages local people in a multi-method research programme that seeks to explore, understand and share the attitudes, experiences and feelings held around youth aspirations and transitions to work, further education and future lives. Our most exciting initiative has been the development of an award winning[1] 'young Whitley Researchers' team at John Madejski Academy (JMA) who have created their own methods, including an 'aspiration game', to explore issues around aspirations and future lives with their peers.

Community research is also an exercise in partnership and communications – it enhances the sharing of knowledge across and beyond local communities. Through this research we hope to empower local residents and communities in South Reading to co-create and manage the research design, undertake analysis and identify recommendations in collaboration with the schools, RBC and other partners.

This report reflects on what we have learned on our research journey to date and it synthesizes the findings of a number of interrelated research activities that the Whitley Researchers and partners have undertaken from May 2017 to July 2018 as part of the W4R and DNF research journey. It presents the genesis of the project and its aims and objectives including a narrative of key developments and results. The research programme has several components united in a common theme – improving relations between young people, schools, family and community to support aspiration and learning. It completes with a set of recommendations that will inform the next stage of the W4R programme, starting in September 2018 that will act on what we have learnt together in order to better support young people's life chances in South Reading.

The Whitley Researchers, August 2018

1 The Whitley Young Researchers won the University of Reading's Research Engagement and Impact award for the 'INSPIRE category (working with young people) in June 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Aims

This study explores the aspirations of young people in the Whitley community and considers the barriers they face. It also investigates how schools, families and the wider community can better collaborate in order to help their young people realise their aspirations.

Low aspirations among young people and their families in disadvantaged areas, is often seen at policy level as explaining their failure to do better at tests of attainment including access to further and higher education. Is Whitley a community characterised by a lack of aspiration and to what extent can improved relations between families, schools and communities make a difference? This research set out to respond to these questions.

Background

Reading Borough Council's Housing Services commissioned the research from its Decent Neighbourhood Fund, with the University of Reading. The proposed research project was backed by the Whitley for Real (W4R) partnership – a collaborative group of local service agencies and community groups aiming to strengthen the 'local voice'.

Following an extensive consultation and planning phase led by the Whitley for Real partnership the research commenced in May 2017.

Whitley

The 'Whitley community' is defined here as the two wards of Whitley and Church and adjoining areas of Redlands and Katesgrove wards. Whitley and Church wards are the most deprived in Reading. In total both wards contain two areas in the 10% most deprived on the overall index and three areas in the 5% most deprived on the 'education, skills and training index' (five Lower Super Output Areas as recorded by the Office for National Statistics Indices of Deprivation).

Ethos

This research initiative reflects a close partnership between the University of Reading and the Whitley Community Development Association's (WCDA) Whitley Researchers. Past collaborations have resulted in a range of research publications including the 'Working Better with Whitley' transport survey (2015). The partnership working was extended in this project to include students at the John Madejski Academy – the Young Researchers.

The ethos is one of engagement and participation – communities are encouraged to get involved in conducting their own research. The belief is that communities should devise their own solutions to local issues – locating knowledge generation at grassroots level. Top down surveys often miss the more relevant issues that impact on local residents and fail to recognise the tacit understandings that residents have of their own neighbourhoods. 'What we know is the starting point for what we do'.

Method

A participatory method was adopted to explore issues around youth aspirations, school-parent relationships and transitions to higher education, training and work. The Whitley Researchers approach places great emphasis on the research journey or process – as important as the knowledge gathered.

We co-produced our methodology with participants, partners and stakeholders over a sustained preparatory period, involving regular meetings of the W4R Steering Group chaired by Reading Borough Council's Chris Bloomfield and Jill Marston. Our most exciting initiative has been the development of an award winning 'young Whitley Researchers' team at John Madejski Academy (JMA) who have created their own methods, including an 'aspiration game', to explore issues around aspirations and future lives with their peers.

What followed was a multi-method research journey with several strands of activity and investigation shown in the Figure below – a co-produced qualitative research programme that explored the attitudes and experiences held by young people, parents and schools and also the wider community. The unifying theme was aspiration in Whitley and local co-operation for advancement.

Key conclusions and recommendations

This section presents conclusions and recommendations in the same frame as the full research report: youth aspirations, Whitley parents, teacher's views and community opinions. Overall, however the assumption is that the recommendations are supportive of cross-sectional co-operation.

Youth aspirations
Conclusions here included the following:

- There is no shortage of aspiration among young people in Whitley. The aspirations change over time from younger dreams to more mature goals as students move through the school grades. Greater support is needed to navigate and sustain the aspirational journey.

- Young people want to find their own voice and place. They want two-way relationships with adults and help in finding their voice and guidance from a range of sources to make their voices heard and to be listened to.

- Effective family and friendship networks are central to happiness and well-being – it is important to have people who believe in you and have your best interests at heart. There is perception among young people that not enough is being done about bullying and they loathe injustice.

- Students who struggled with the school work and students who felt that the school could do more to equip them for the future were less happy. Good relations with peers and teachers also had a significant impact on happiness.

Recommendations include:

- Schools with additional community assistance should hold regular reviews and evaluations of student's future hopes or intentions. This could include a systematic approach to career guidance and work experience with informed knowledge of the local labour market and use of role models. Attention should also be directed at the minority of students who are alienated from school purpose or personal direction.

- A more democratic practice should be considered in schools but also for young people in community settings. Youth voices could be heard in a variety of locations in and out of school – perhaps in the form of community panels around local issues. Schools could explore more interactive sessions with young people focused on more listening and a questioning approach.

- There should be a more informed and supportive approach between young people and their teachers (and parents) to help deal with anxiety and trauma and exam or test pressure. Access to support groups and outside help – such as Reading's proposals for a 'Trauma Informed Community' – could be explored. The aim is to enhance young people's happiness.

- Curriculum enrichment including more clubs, experiential learning outside school, joining in addressing community issues e.g. around mental health and engaging in creative and innovative ways of learning, could all help reduce issues or concerns around school work. Parents too could be invited to collaborate in these provisions.

Whitley parents
Conclusions include:

- Parents were aspirational for themselves and their children. However, parents own poor personal experiences of school were linked to fewer aspirations for their children to go on to higher education and they were less likely to engage in school activities or events such as school clubs. Overall, parents still hoped for good outcomes for their child regardless of past school experiences.

- Parent perceptions of school staff approachability is the most significant factor that shapes parent's optimism about their child's future and aspiration for their child to go on to higher education. Most parents felt that school staff are welcoming and approachable at primary and secondary level.

- When asked directly, parents felt that their child's happiness at school depended on managing well with lessons, having good peer friendships and having encouraging teachers. Additionally, happiness is associated with behaviour and parental influences. Parents felt that their children were held back by lack of confidence, lack of money (goes with lack of opportunity) and the need for the child to 'knuckle down to school work' – very few blamed teachers or negative family circumstances.

- Communication between parents and schools is influential in matters such as parental engagement in school events and satisfaction with their school. Parents who felt well-informed by the school were more likely to report their child as happy in the school. Text was the most cited mode of communication yet letters to parents may not have had their day.
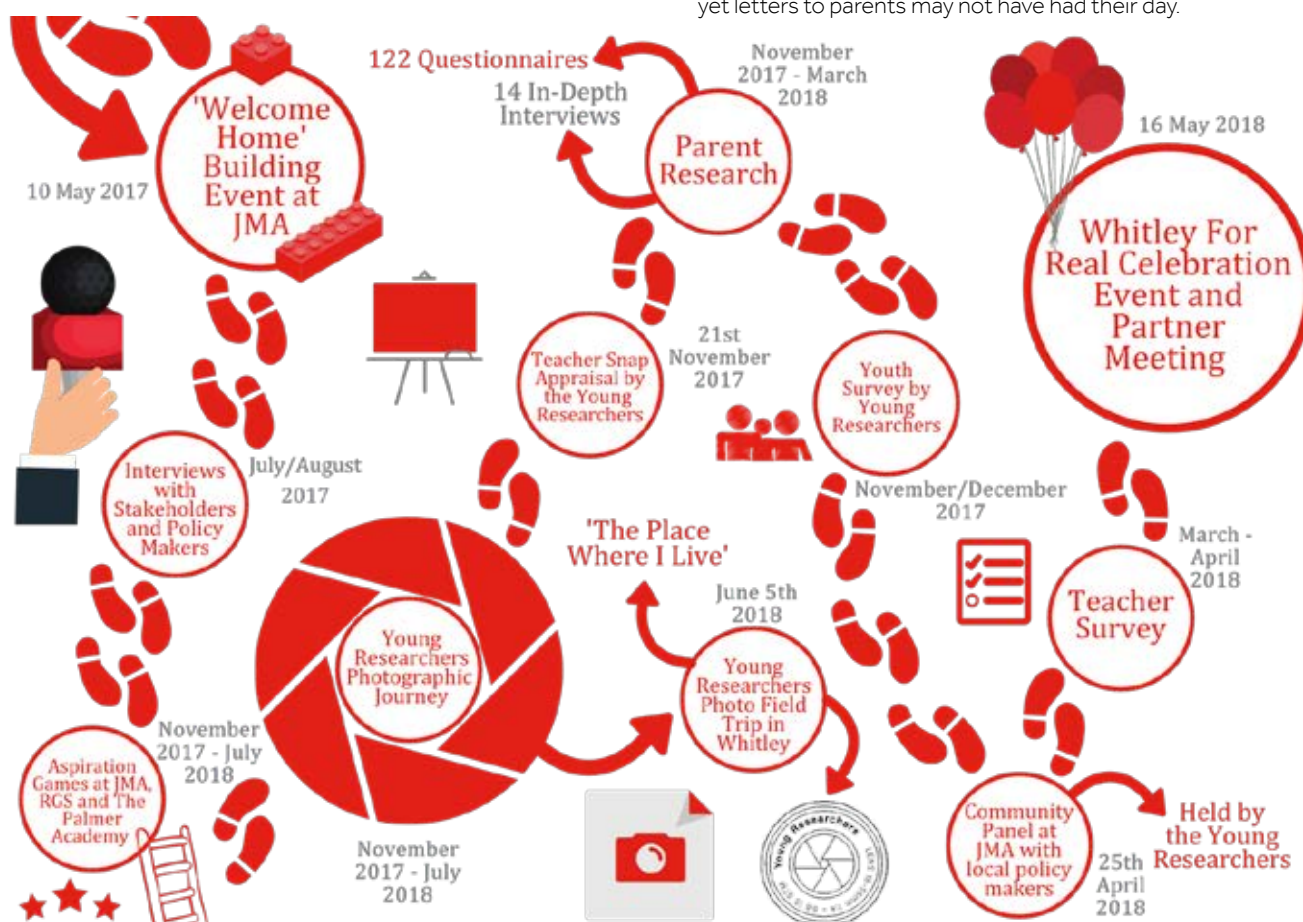
Recommendations include:

- Parents should be encouraged and supported to understand the way their school works and to co-operate with it – backing up the school rather than working against it. Keeping up with communications, attending school meetings and in particular talking positively about the school. This latter factor affects their child's attitude and also the child's long term aspirations. Joint parent/teacher groups could model new co-operative relationships.

- Establishing a community wide parents learning group run by parents in partnership with New Directions could assist parents in understanding how and what their children learn. This should not be thought of as a parenting strategy but as a means to developing with parents a sense of agency for their own learning and aspirations and a wider understanding of how school systems work locally. Knowledge of opportunities and the local labour market may also help parent's aspirations.

- Parents might also be encouraged to have a more engaged role in their school – partly to encourage a new understanding of school as a collaborator in their child's future and well-being and partly as a location where the schools assets and resources are also the parents or communities. Examples include adult education or training classes, running school clubs, joining in experiential learning such as local history, organising work based visits or supporting school councils or community panels with the students.

Teacher's views

Conclusions:

- Our research found out that secondary school teachers are less certain than parents about whether the future is bright for Whitley youngsters. Teachers have perhaps a better grasp of the difficulties facing the next generation in terms of jobs, rising housing costs and government cutbacks.

- Key factors teachers mentioned influencing children's happiness at school included positive relationship with peers, positive relations with school staff and children managing well with school structures and with lessons; responses closely matching those of parents. A third of teachers also mentioned home influences on the happiness of children at school – even coming to school hungry.

- Teachers said that the most common issue that parents raised with them was the behaviour and attendance of the child – including disputes with other children and/or bullying concerns (particularly in primary schools). For most teachers managing poor behaviour was one of the most challenging or least favourite parts of their job. Because parent-teacher communication often revolves around child behaviour, tensions in communication may be unnecessarily high.

- Asked what hinders their school's children, teachers referred to negative parental influences including chaotic homes or disengaged parents but also external factors such as confused policies from the top and lack of resources. Help factors included activities that widened the vision and enrich lives (some extra-curricular), a positive attitude to learning and to challenge, good encouraging teachers and positive parental input.

Recommendations:

- Adequately preparing young people in school should include helping student's access pathways to understanding the opportunities offered by higher education and how to access it, improving attitudes to learning, providing curriculum enrichment relevant to children's interests, aspirations and needs and training in life skills. There should be a focus on the barriers that parents feel hold their children back such as lack of confidence and lack of money.

- Teachers might review their 'approachability' – how welcoming is the school and how respectful is it towards parents. Parents are more positive about teachers than teachers are about parents – nevertheless, parents should be encouraged not to fight on behalf of their child. Teachers and parents are on the same side. Measures such as letting parents know more effectively what is going on, giving communications a more positive tone and providing more space to enable parents and teachers to talk to each other – even informally e.g. meals together for parents and teachers.

- Explore and implement clear pathways to a brighter future – focusing on the value of work experience, the local labour market opportunities and having the 'right' attitude. Parents, teachers and students need to work together to provide sufficient preparation for the future.

- Support for teachers is vital – teachers emphasise that time is needed outside of regular classes but in school time to deal with behaviour issues and with other development programmes. Pulling in assistance from the local community and outside agencies such as charities and specialist workers could assist both teachers and parents with their children. Time and resources will need to be specially directed at these priorities.

Community

Conclusions include:

- Whitley is a community showing stark levels of disadvantage and inequality when compared with other Reading communities and low achievement in education and skills against national measures of deprivation. In spite of or because of this it also demonstrates a strong community spirit and a willingness to tackle local issues together.

- The quality of relationships across the community is often based on lack of trust and respect. There are divisions and tensions between residents/parents and local institutions and service agencies - reflected in residents suspicions about the attitudes and assumptions that these agencies manifest; some residents feel patronised and looked down on.

- For young people particularly there is a severe lack of services and activities that – if available – could play a key role in encouraging and supporting confidence, skills and attitudes that assist in sustaining aspiration.

Recommendations:

- Through the leadership of Whitley's most active and influential agencies there should be a co-ordinated effort to establish an inclusive community aspiration - one that reflects a shared hope and practices for the future of Whitley. It could take the form of a 'big umbrella' under which the community widely can agree on common values for a strong aspirational movement.

- An audit or register of local capabilities and physical assets might encourage a more positive view of the Whitley neighbourhood. Whitley has a lot to offer but lacks the knowledge of what is available; it has resources that could be marshalled for wider benefit, for instance for schools and parents. An exploration of further resources to attract should also be a priority.

- The need for more collaboration and improved relationships could be addressed via communities of practice and provision of art of conversation events. The former envisages a cross sector project bringing university, community and schools together in a joint exploration of a pressing local issue such as mental health. The latter is a series of specific events bringing together disparate groups of residents and workers in Whitley to tackle issues of respect and trust together.

- The presentation of findings in youth, parent, teacher and community headings in this research offers an opportunity to set up each as the writers of a handbook for their sector presented as a guidebook or a manual to encourage new attitudes, practices or support.

Moving Forward

The breadth and richness of this research has produced an abundance of findings and conclusions that prompt a wealth of recommendations. Underpinning the research method was an ethos of participatory engagement and community involvement and our proposal here is that the recommendations and their translation into action is equally participatory. Moving forward, the W4R Steering Group will transform into a W4R 'Action Group', augmented with new service providers, young people and their families, to help translate the findings and recommendations into co-produced task oriented plans. We suggest that young people themselves must be at the heart of designing and shaping the outcomes of future actions.

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITIES, RELATIONSHIPS AND YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

"It takes a village to raise a child...." (African Proverb)

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations derived from a kaleidoscopic range of formal and informal research initiatives conducted in and with the Whitley community (a community of two wards, Whitley and Church) that explored:

- Young people's aspirations and how they feel they might achieve them
- The school/ family relationship and how engagement with schools and the wider community can be improved
- How to strengthen links within the community to aid service provision relating to enhancing the life chances of young people

The research was commissioned by Reading Borough Council's Housing Services, which released funding via its Decent Neighbourhood Fund to support the research proposal. The research programme is nested within a supportive partnership of agencies and organisations active within Whitley. Known as 'Whitley for Real' (W4R), the partnership aimed to access and stimulate the 'local voice' so that activities, plans and policies might be targeted more effectively. Reference to the Index of Multiple of Deprivation (IMD) for 2015, considered by the W4R partnership in 2016, indicated that both wards contain two areas in the 10% most deprived on the overall index and three areas in the 5% most deprived on the 'education, skills and training index' (five Lower Super Output Areas as recorded by the Office for National Statistics Indices of Deprivation). These measures of deprivation were to provide the reference points for conducting the research with relevant focus on low skill levels and low aspiration– particularly as they impact on young people growing up in Whitley.

In response to this, a project has been co-developed with the community to access the 'local voice' in South Reading, with the aim of influencing both current and planned activities in the area. The programme is developing in partnership with the University of Reading, the Whitley Researchers, a range of stakeholders including both secondary schools in Whitley, and the wider community.

Outcomes from the research in Whitley were to include recommendations helping housing and other agencies direct and focus funding for community improvement, establishing a trained group of young researchers who would gain future learning skills and improving working relationships between schools and parents that might prompt a mutual motivational bond between school and home. These priorities were distilled into a research remit highlighting aspiration and the relationships between home, school and community which are discussed in Chapter 3.

The Whitley Researchers agreed to carry out the research with the active support and participation of the lead agencies – the University of Reading and the Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA). Whitley Researchers is a collective of residents of all ages who are trained to carry out the research priorities they have selected – the knowledge they generate becomes the basis for practical solutions. The University of Reading through its Department of Geography and Environmental Science with research leadership, support and validation by Sally Lloyd-Evans (Associate Professor in Human Geography) headed the research programme. Lorna Zischka (Post Doctoral Research Assistant) led the data analysis and crafted most of our reports.

A group of residents from the Whitley Community Development Association prepared a Community Plan in 2015[2] in which they described their community as follows:

"Whitley is a geographical community located in the RG2 post code area north of the M4 and east of the A33. The area is mainly residential but has some light industrial sites situated on its western side between Basingstoke Road and the A33 which historically provided the main source of employment for the community. The proximity of the main roads out of Reading leads to many jokes about people living here because it's easy to get away and to estate agents often omitting reference to Whitley and simply referring to the area as 'south of Reading town centre with easy access to the motorway'. It is an area with a bad reputation".

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2 See www.whitley-cda.org

An added quote from a resident states: *"Whitley is a vibrant and growing community with huge potential to achieve for itself. With a single voice and community cohesion Whitley will continue to grow and challenge old stereotypes"*.

This is the community within which the research was to be embedded and, evident from the quotes above, a community stigmatised but with the pluck to challenge its branding, a strong community spirit and ambition to community betterment.

The research began in May 2017. However, this beginning was the culmination of a lengthy period of preparation and consultation. Several meetings of the W4R partnership discussed and considered the research approach and its priorities. Local agencies including schools and community organisations joined in discussions. The Whitley Researchers reviewed the proposed research plan and added their thoughts and recommendations – specifically how the research was to be conducted. At the John Madejski Academy (JMA) the Whitley Researchers and the University of Reading with the support of JMA's Paul Allen (CIAG and Visual Arts Co-ordinator) helped develop and train a Young Researcher group of ten to twelve Year 9 students. Hence, the research initiative was well grounded in some shared understandings and a willingness to be involved.

The research plan overall had a clear remit and was precise about outcomes and objectives; broadly it was agreed to adopt an ethnographic and participatory approach. However, it was felt that there should be a collaborative and visible event that helped spark the research as an exciting and engaging process. Sue Brackley at UKCIC (Reading Borough Council's economic development arm) offered funding to support a starter activity with the Young Researcher's at JMA.

At this point, while there was an understanding that the destination was determined, the ethnographic approach was likely to be more exploratory and open to chance research opportunities. Aspiration and links between home, school and community constituted the key focus but it was equally clear that the research task itself constituted a journey of discovery – especially for our young people who would play leading roles throughout.

In short, we had a grounded participatory style, several 'constituencies' to engage (teachers, schools, parents and community), a young team prepared to 'have a go' and the resource to mark a memorable start to the journey. One of the Whitley Researchers said "We wanted to start our research journey with young people at the same point our journey through life begins – at home. It's our origin and creation and why not celebrate and affirm it in a most practical way – build it!": a route from home and family to school, community and beyond.

The Young Researchers built a life-size house out of giant Lego blocks with the help of architects as they constructed a vision of their ideal 'home'. JMA hosted the event on the 10th May 2017 and students from Years 8 and 12 worked together as a team using one and a half thousand 'bricks' to construct their home.

The research journey that followed is traced in detail in this report. However, what it also reveals is the huge variety, richness and volume of data collected – so great on all counts that the research descriptions contained here represent only the foremost and most significant elements in each item of research. Readers are encouraged to access the full reports using the links provided.

The report is structured around the research journey beginning with a review of the relevant literature and an outline of the research methodology; it then synthesises the range of research reports into themed evidence-based chapters on young people, parents, schools/teachers, and community.

Given the primacy of 'aspiration' in the research remit it may be useful here to present some preliminary thoughts. In recent years the concept of aspiration has gained some traction particularly at policy level (see Chapter 2). There is a perhaps uncritical assumption that aspiration is as good and natural as motherhood and apple pie.

Furthermore, aspiration spurs attainment – the latter understood as meeting external standards such as SATs or 'A' Levels. In addition, the tendency is to assign aspiration as an individual's responsibility[3] with each student responsible for his or her own success or failure. Lack of aspiration is seen as a deficiency that undermines academic success and attainment.

However, other literature (described in Chapter 2) suggests that outcomes do not depend on individual aspiration alone, but also on wider socio-economic circumstances. It often happens in socially deprived communities that only a low percentage of working class children achieve high academic levels[4]. In other words, there is a class gap in educational attainment which disrupts the link between aspirations and attainment. Moreover, in the face of inequalities associated with factors such as school based testing regimes, poor or overcrowded housing, low household income, caring responsibilities or lack of confidence, it is challenging to persist with aspiration[5].

3 Reay, D. (2017) Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes. Policy Press: Bristol

4 Carter-Wall, C. and Whitfield, G. (2012) The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York

5 Creegan, C. (2008) Opportunity and aspiration: two sides of the same coin? Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York

Our research explored youth, parent and community notions of aspiration. No lack of aspiration among Whitley's young people or their parents or guardians was found, and yet the evidence from the IMD clearly shows that Whitley's young people fail to attain at the level of surrounding communities in Reading. There is clearly a gap between aspiration and academic success that must be explored and addressed.

Additionally, contemporary research tells us that aspiration is first and foremost a characteristic assigned to individual students and less so but of significant importance to their parents[6]. The wider community as a significant contributor is most often overlooked. Our research addresses aspiration as an all-round or collective responsibility – students, teachers, schools, home and community.

The suggestions derived from our research are that aspiration needs continual review and support but more importantly that this quality of future orientation is not only the responsibility of individual students and students collectively but also teachers, schools and the surrounding community. In effect it collectivises aspiration: reflecting that African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child.." – the entire community is involved in helping a child to grow and realise its potential. Furthermore, we will argue that strong, positive relationships between different groups within communities are fundamental to shaping the life chances and goals of young people and their families.

The report structure is presented in eight chapters with our findings arranged around four themes: young people, parents, school staff and community. The Youth chapter outlines the design and application of a game based on snakes and ladders to help identify issues that help or hinder aspiration. Also, 38 young people from Whitley's two secondary schools were interviewed – findings from both initiatives are presented.

There is then a chapter addressing parents and the aspirations they have for their children and their relationships with their child's school – 122 parents were interviewed, overwhelmingly resident in Whitley and most in social housing. An in-depth survey with 14 parents further explored their views on education and the school.

Two surveys engaged school staff members; one involved 38 teachers and a further 15 teachers were interviewed at JMA about their own past and present aspirations – this latter survey was designed and administered by the Young Researchers team

There were three activities engaging a wide range of community representatives. The first via interviews with Whitley Stakeholders in which two University of Reading interns asked nine local agencies about their views on barriers and opportunities to community and individual aspiration. Secondly, a community panel was convened in which ten residents and agency representatives responded to questions from the Young Researchers on how the Whitley community supports the hopes and aspirations of its young people. Finally, a partner meeting led by W4R met to discuss the latest findings with a focus on generating firm conclusions as a foundation for action planning.

Each of these chapters offers conclusions based on the findings and in turn these contribute to a final set of recommendations for action. This appears to be a unique contribution to a more holistic appreciation of the place and responsibility for aspiration in a socially deprived community - its conclusions strongly emphasise a collective approach with key leadership from young people themselves but a no less stress on all associated with community betterment and improvement working in partnership with a common and binding mission.

6 Cummings, C. et al (2012) Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment: a review of interventions. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: ASPIRATIONS, LIFE CHANCES AND PLACE

Aspirations have been defined as future-oriented expressions of goals and hopes[7] and they have long been a focus of UK policy relating to education and social mobility[8]. The belief that certain social groups 'lack aspiration' has been increasingly used to explain growing gaps in educational outcomes for young people, particularly those communities labelled as 'disadvantaged', and this has resulted in the production of numerous interventions designed to 'raise' them. Within these interventions, 'acceptable' aspirations can also be narrowly defined around going to University or getting a well-paid job rather than around visions for having a good life, such as being happy or raising a family[9].

Children's less successful progress in education is often blamed on their, and/or parents' poor aspirations by schools and government reports, defined by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) as the 'Poverty of Aspiration'[10]. This deficit model tends to blame individuals and their families for their lack of ambition rather than challenge wider structural inequalities that shape their access to jobs, housing and education[11]. Children in stigmatised communities often have the same high aspirations as their peers in wealthier neighbourhoods, although their access to achieving their goals may be constrained by the conditions linked to poverty – stress, living conditions, and lack of resources[12].

Parents are seen to be 'valued socialisers' in the shaping of their children's perceptions on occupation or career related decisions, making them a key focus in the aspiration literature[13]. While the effects of income and educational levels of parents on aspirations has been debated, research states that varying parental situations do not affect their belief in their children and their aspirations for them, although parental circumstances may influence factors such as time to help with homework, resources for extra-curricular activities, knowledge and confidence in dealing with school matters[14].

While our report will also challenge the myth of low aspiration, research does tell us that the places where young people live play an important role in shaping their life chances. In 2011, Kintrea et al[15] investigated the influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations of young people. They found that although the young people in their study had 'high aspirations', these differed greatly according to multiple place-based factors relating to the everyday pressures of school, family, community and wider society. The authors concluded that place, family and schools tend to coalesce around particular views of future options that are mutually reinforcing.

Research also argues that adolescents tend to be affected positively when a relationship is sustained between their home and school environments, meaning parental involvement with school activities and a positive relationship between teachers and parents contribute to the behaviour and aspirations of students[16]. While the amount of parental involvement can differ with parents' particular circumstances, it has been found that student perceptions of parental involvement is linked to academic performance as a positive relationship between home and school results in a more motivated child.

It is also important to consider the relationship between teachers and parents and the effect that relationship has on a child's academic motivation[17]. Our research will also argue that relationships beyond the parent-teachers nexus also matter and that families/schools also benefit from supportive two-way relationships with the wider community. Strong and resilient relations also provide better social networks, social capital and opportunities for young people to realise their ambitions[18].

7 Hart, C. S. (2016) How do aspirations matter? Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 17(3), 324-341.

8 Spohrer, K., Stahl, G. and Bowers-Brown, T. (2018) Constituting neoliberal subjects? 'Aspiration' as technology of government in UK policy discourse, Journal of Education Policy 33 (3), 327-342

9 Brown, G. (2011) Emotional geographies of young people's aspirations for adult life, Children's Geographies 9 (1), 7-22

10 Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, (2017) Can we put the 'poverty of aspiration' myth to bed now? The University of Edinburgh. Available at: https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/25787/CRF briefing91Treanor.pdf [Accessed 24 August 2018].

11 Macleod, J. (2018) Ain't no makin it: aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood, Third Edition. Taylor and Francis

12 Wheeler, S. (2017) The (re)production of (dis)advantage: class-based variations in parental aspirations, strategies and practices in relation to children's primary education. Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 1 – 16.

13 Phukan, D., and Saikia, J. (2017) Parental Influence, gender socialization and career aspirations of girl students: A study in the girls' colleges of Upper Assam. International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, 4(2), 31–37.

14 Reese, E., Peterson, E. R., Waldie, K., Schmidt, J., Bandara, D., Atatoa Carr, P., Grant, C., Pryor, J., Morton, S. M. B. (2016) High hopes? Educational, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences in parents' aspirations for their unborn children. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 25(12), 3657–3674.

15 Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. and Houston, M. (2011) The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

16 DePlanty, J., Coulter-Kern, R., and Duchane, K. A. (2007) Perceptions of parent involvement in academic achievement. The Journal of Educational Research, 100(6), 361–368.

17 Dotterer, A. M., and Wehrspann, E. (2016) Parent involvement and academic outcomes among urban adolescents: examining the role of school engagement. Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 36(4), 812–830.

18 Fuller, C. (2014) Social capital and the role of trust in aspirations for higher education, Educational Review 66 (2), 131-147

In summary, our review of published research draws our attention to three important themes. Firstly, there is need to work with young people and their families, local schools and communities to understand the specific place-based opportunities and barriers in their neighbourhood. Secondly, although most young people have high aspirations these alone are not enough – young people need to understand and be able to charter the pathways to reaching their goals and this journey requires continual support. Thirdly, the relationships between young people, families, schools and the wider community are key to shaping local attitudes to, and outcomes arising from, beliefs around 'aspirations' - positive relationships are fundamental to shaping young people's life chances.

3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Living in Whitley: Research Context

In official language Whitley is variously described as working class, disadvantaged, underprivileged, relatively poor, deprived, less affluent or in marketing terms, mostly categories C2, D and E. Conversely, Whitley is also termed a 'community' and this conveys warm evocations of cohesion and togetherness – something altogether desirable. Placing the two descriptors together e.g. deprived community or disadvantaged community, may appear contradictory.

The assertion here is that there is no inconsistency – our research conveys evidence of a strong community spirit but also highlights stark areas of inequality between Whitley and other areas in Reading. More generally communities such as Whitley are mostly described in the language of 'deficiency' – often interpreted as a catalogue of failings reflecting faults or weaknesses in the resident population. Less apparent or addressed is the failure of serving institutions or agencies – often statutory providers – to meet the challenge of internal attitudes and processes and more seriously perhaps the crushing impact of severe cutbacks at a time of austerity.

Our context, therefore, is two-fold - Whitley as the most 'disadvantaged' community in Reading and Whitley as a positive community.

'Whitley' is located to the South of Reading town centre and stretches down to the M4 between the two main roads south (the A33 and Shinfield Road)[19]. The popular definition of Whitley extends beyond Whitley ward itself (the southern half of this area) to include Church ward and parts of Katesgrove and Redlands. Here are some summary features of Whitley ward (Reading Borough Council, Berkshire Public Health Shared Team 2018):

- There are 12,157 people resident in Whitley, 24.7% are children aged 0 to 15 and 10% are older people aged 65 and older (ONS population estimates 2016). The non-white British population accounts for 29.9% of the total population. 82% of the population were born in the UK which is more that the average for Reading[20] .

- Of Reading's 16 wards, Whitley is the most deprived. 31.6% of children are at risk of living in poverty compared with 18.7% for Reading[21]. 38.2% of residents had an income after housing costs that was 60% of the median which represents some of the worst levels of poverty in Reading. Two areas within Whitley and Church wards are within the 10% most deprived in the country, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015.

- In Whitley 15.2% of the population claim benefits compared with 9.6% in Reading (2017). 63.4% of the population aged 16 to 74 years are in employment, which is lower than the average for Reading. The majority of people in employment (37% of workers) were employed in manual occupations with 17% in elementary occupations – twice the level in other parts of Reading (Census 2011).

- 30.4% of working age people in Whitley have no qualifications. For Reading, 48.2% were qualified to NVQ level 3 or higher compared with 28% for Whitley (Census 2011).

- 56.4% of children living in Reading achieved 5 GCSEs at grade A to C. The figure for Whitley is 38.9% (2016). Children living in Reading achieved the expected level of attainment at Key Stage2 at 56.4% - for Whitley the equivalent figure was 42.9% (2012).

- 22.1% of children living in Reading and attending schools in Reading are eligible for and receiving free school meals. 37.4% of children living in Whitley are eligible for and receiving free school meals. One secondary school in Whitley has 53.9% of pupils eligible for the pupil premium – the figure for Reading is 28.4% (The pupil premium provides additional funding to raise attainment of disadvantaged pupils) (EFA Pupil Premium allocations 2015/16)

- There are a total of 4,741 dwellings in Whitley – the most common type being semi-detached which accounts for 43.1% of all housing. The average household size in Whitley is 2.6 people and 8.9% of housing in Whitley is classed as needing one or more bedrooms more than it has, to be adequately sized for the number of people living there. Approximately 35% of housing in Whitley is socially rented compared to 16% for Reading. (Census 2011)

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19 The census data presented here is for Whitley ward, although local perceptions of Whitley boundaries vary and include a much wider area

20 Office of National Statistics (2011) Census Data, 2011

21 Reading Borough Council JSNA (2018) Whitley Ward Profile, Report by Berkshire Public Health Shared Team.

- 15.9% of adults in Whitley feel that their lives are limited to some extent due to ill-health or disability (Census 2011). An estimated 29.9% of adults in Whitley are obese and 19.1% binge drink. 26.2% of Year 6 children in Whitley are obese compared to 21% in Reading.

- 27.9% of all households in Whitley do not own a car or van (Census 2011). 72% of people in Whitley had experienced a problem with local transport and 55% of carless respondents were unable to find the transport they need. Whitley residents facing transport barriers were more likely to be women and families with dependents particularly those with up to 3 young children and living in certain Whitley areas – mainly RG2 7 postcodes e.g. Hexham or Staverton[22].

These statistics present a daunting and depressing chronicle of inequality. They also reflect deep structural fissures in our society - structural inequalities may be understood as a bias built into our organisations and institutions that discriminate by gender say or social class. Whitley is by no means the most deprived or unequal among the nation's 9,456 wards but the glaring differences evident above cry out, no less than in other areas, for attention and action. An outsider peering into Whitley through our statistical window will conclude that the residents must lead cramped and unrewarding lives. At every turn some life constraint exerts pressure, often in multiple ways – whether in employment, transport, income, health, lifestyle, education, housing or safety.

There are other more positive views of Whitley that emphasise resilience or cohesion and a tenacious capacity to 'get by'. They are by no means universal qualities across the community not least because people often experience hardship or stress as a personal lot – they and not the inequalities outlined above are responsible; hence, some susceptibility to low self-worth.

However, there is some constructive evidence to support a more positive picture of Whitley and some of this is based on community practice known as ABCD or asset based community development. This addresses community advantages whether social, cultural or material – it's what communities have rather than what they lack; the assets could include skills and knowledge locally, networks and connections, effective community groups and physical facilities such as community centres or community cafes[23].

In 2009, Reading Borough Council, Affinity Housing and Groundwork Thames Valley conducted a neighbourhood survey in the Whitley area including Whitley Wood. The response rate was 16% or 1 322 people. 41.2% or respondents were social housing tenants. Here are some findings:

- 45% volunteered or did community work and 25.6% were members of a group, club or association. 40.5% wanted more local café access and more social clubs.

- 26.3 % agreed that Whitley was a close knit neighbourhood and 39.1% were willing to help neighbours.

- 46.2% would like to be more involved in decisions affecting their area with the caveat that this depended on the issue or concern.

- The main conclusions showed that awareness of local activities and facilities was low as was take up of local facilities. People wanted to know more about what opportunities and activities were available locally. People were also keen to engage and participate for their own and others benefit.

In 2014 the Whitley Big Local Rep conducted a survey of 69 residents in 5 locations including Stockton Rd, Hexham, Sure Start, Whitley Park primary school and Whitley library coffee groups. The survey was entitled 'What we want and what we are good at'. What we want included:

- More support for each other and people getting to know each other – having a community, there are too many lonely people (Stockton Rd). Lots more things for young people, something for single parents and young children and get rid of druggies (Hexham). Others included better parks, improve the library, help people with depression, clear up the dog mess, more youth work.

- People also emphasised Whitley as a nice place to live, friendly, strong sense of community, everything is on your doorstep, people mostly look out for each other, it's a diverse community, you can easily get to know people and there's lots for baby group activities.

- What people said they were good at:

- Lots of practical matters such as cooking, driving, gardening, DIY, art and drawing, sewing, fixing bikes and scooters, child minding, learning languages, building things, cleaning and several references to singing.

- More relational matters included, encouraging others, social work, caring for others, counselling people who are ill, communicating with people, being a mum, looking after a home and family.

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22 Lloyd-Evans et al (2015) Working better with Whitley: exploring the everyday transport needs and experiences of local communities in South Reading. University of Reading and Whitley Big Local. Available from http://localtrust.org.uk/assets/images/uploads/Whitley_Report_25.09.2015_FINAL_VERSION.pdf

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23 The WCDA community café on Northumberland Avenue has taken a central role in community development since it opened in 2015

Our evidence underlines the adherence to aspiration in adults and young people in Whitley. However, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2015) indicates that in 'education, skills and training' three areas in Whitley are in the most deprived 5% nationally. There is evidently an 'aspiration gap'.

Further evidence[24] suggests there is no direct causal relationship between aspiration and attainment. Additionally, aspirational opportunities may be wasted through circumstances and events that individuals have little control over[25] – if individuals are disadvantaged through poverty and inequality this limits future hopes and aspiration.

3.2 'The Whitley Researchers'

Founded in 2014, Whitley Researchers[26] is a partnership between the Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA), local residents and the University of Reading to engage and involve communities in conducting their own research. We believe that communities should devise their own solutions to local issues as knowledge generation is located at community level and not just in an academic or policy domain. Top down assumptions about local communities, particularly those most disadvantaged, often miss the more relevant issues that impact on residents. We asked a couple of our researchers, Sonia and Aneta, to tell you in their own words about their experiences of doing the research. They write as follows:

Sonia Duval

A Whitley Researcher, is a local resident to Whitley who wishes to join the group to go into the community, undertake research and to make any improvements with the residents of Whitley.

I am a Whitley Researcher. I have been with the Researchers since they established officially in May 2014. I originally joined to do something to get me out of the house while my children were at nursery/school. It was a flexible means of working. It also enabled me to regain my confidence after being at home with my children for a number of years.

What have the Whitley Researchers done for me? It has given me a sense of purpose. I am not only a mother but I am also part of an award winning team. Over the years the personnel have changed

24 Carter-Wall, C. and Whitfield, G. (2012) The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap. Joseph Rowntree Foundation

25 Creegan (2008) ibid

26 See www.whitley-cda.org for further details

but the principles have remained the same. It has also made me a more confident person and it has also helped me in my darkest days to know that my "family" of Researchers are there to support me. Without the community our research would be meaningless as they are the people that are there to engage with to undertake the research so we wouldn't exist without them.

Our past research included improving transport links from Whitley to Reading but also to the Royal Berkshire Hospital. After our research we, with the help and cooperation of Reading Buses re-routed a bus to enable the people of Whitley to get to the hospital by one bus instead of two. Other projects are Financial Exclusion, Decent Neighbourhood Fund and Reading Place of Culture - these projects we hope will enrich the community's lives.

Ease, Empower and Enable are our principles we apply to all our research. We would like to help ease the problem, empower the community to help themselves and enable them by helping them have the resources to undertake it.

Aneta Banas

I am a Whitley Researcher and I've been working on aspirations in Whitley since October 2017, mainly through questionnaires and the Aspiration Game.

Firstly, being present during the whole process of creating the parent's questionnaire felt very rewarding, I felt part of the group and went then proudly to use it. What struck me the most was the enormous faith and aspiration of parents for their children, whether primary or secondary schooled. People of Whitley believe their children do their best at school and when it comes to barriers in their future - I often heard there were none: 'nothing will stop my child achieving their goals'. I think that's a very powerful message and I felt inspired by it.

Secondly, I've been privileged to accompany the Young Researchers during their Aspiration Games. I've watched them during their very first game at JMA, being not so confident, and needing support - to grow to confidently run the game throughout at The Palmer Academy. These young people have grown so much since I've met them. They are the true inspiration. They show us what you can achieve if you only want it.

Lastly, I remember thinking, when I was starting, that the whole point of the research will be finding out what aspirations and dreams Whitley parents have for their children. That comes without doubt. What I didn't expect, however, was how much I'd learn from these people, from other parents, from the Young Researchers. For which - I'm enormously grateful.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the core funding for the Whitley for Real research programme has been RBC's Decent Neighbourhoods Initiative and the University of Reading (UoR) but a number of other organisations/institutions have supported particular strands of this research including: Study Higher, Affinity Housing Association, Reading UKCIC and Bewley Homes, John Madejski Academy (JMA), Reading Girls School (RGS), The Palmer Academy, the Whitley Excellence Cluster (WEC) and WCDA.

Whitley Researchers Team Members

- John Ord, ex Big Local Representative (Project Manager)
- Local Whitley resident researchers, that included 10 paid community staff:
  - Mo McSevney (Whitley Community Development Association)
  - Sonia Duval (Data and Administrative Assistant)
  - Sandra Clare (Community researcher)
  - Liz Ashcroft (Community researcher)
  - Naomi Lee (Community researcher)
  - Aneta Banas (Community researcher)
  - Natalie Merritt (Community researcher)
  - Katherine Cooke (Community Researcher until October 2017)
  - Julia Spence (Community researcher until March 2018)
  - Carla Allamby (Community researcher until September 2017)
- Dr. Sally Lloyd-Evans and Dr Lorna Zischka, from the Department of Geography and Environmental Science at the University of Reading; and 7 University undergraduate research placement/volunteer students from 2016 to 2018:
  - Abi Becker
  - Olivia Cheer
  - Bethany Brown
  - Hayley Ryall
  - Abi Brown
  - Elisha Russell
  - Georgia Ward
- Paul Allen from John Madejski Academy, and 10-12 young researchers from Year 9

3.3 The Whitley Young Researchers (YRs)[27]

The Young Researchers have grown from a group of students at the John Madejski Academy who have an active interest in photography. The opportunity to pursue this interest has been important for this group. It has meant that they have been willing to pursue the initial requirements of the research, most of it in their own time after school on a Friday because there has always been a positive reason for their involvement. Previous attempts to form a Young Researchers group without this approach were unsuccessful. Nevertheless a key turning point in the success of the Young Researchers was the agreement from the school in the following year that what they would be involved with would take place during school time and not as an addition to their school day. From that time on the Young Researchers met for 1 hour per week on a rolling timetabled basis. This meant that time could be given to plan and develop events such as the Community Panel and the Aspiration Game event (see Figure 3.1).

As the group's understanding of their role developed the Young Researchers became increasingly confident with gathering research material from groups that are sometimes quite difficult to reach. One example during the Aspiration Day event involved writing a questionnaire for teaching staff, canvassing staff and providing the research team with the completed documentation within a couple of hours. In addition to their growing research skills, outside groups and individuals have been able to visit the group on a regular basis for discussions and questions about ideas and plans they have. This has been done in both formal and informal settings. In addition to this the Young Researchers have been able to visit other community groups and schools in order to work on aspects of the research programme. The work of this group is continuing to evolve as their role within the school and the Whitley community develops.

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27 In addition to the core DNF funding, the Whitley Young Researchers programme has received additional funding (financial and 'in kind') from Study Higher, the University of Reading and John Madejski Academy.

3.4 Our Research Journey

As discussed in Chapter 1, our research adopts an iterative, participatory methodology to exploring issues around youth aspirations, school-parental relationships and transitions to higher education, training and work. Participatory research recognizes the importance of actively engaging local communities in the research process so that projects are run with communities rather than about them[28]. We also aimed to build collaborations between residents, researchers and institutions that would help facilitate new community partnerships for the future.

Our approach aimed to empower communities to co-create and manage the research design, analysis and identify recommendations in collaboration with the schools, RBC and other partners. The Whitley Researchers collective believes that the 'research journey' is as important as the knowledge we gather and research has shown how community driven qualitative research can help to empower residents and local organisations to develop coping strategies, resilience and more creative initiatives for tackling poverty and social exclusion[29].

We co-produced our methodology with participants, partners and stakeholders over a sustained period of time (18 months). Regular meetings with the W4R Steering Group, Chaired by RBC's Chris Bloomfield and Jill Marston, and South Reading Cllrs provided oversight and support for the research. In order to unpack and explore the attitudes and experiences around aspiration and education in Whitley, the research had five main objectives, outlined here:

1 Co-produce a participatory research project with young people, schools and parents that equips all participants with new skills, confidence and research experience.

2 Engage local people in a co-produced, qualitative research programme that seeks to explore, understand and share the attitudes, experiences and feelings held by young people, schools and parents around youth aspirations and transitions to work, further education and future lives.

3 Develop a better understanding of the links between young people's future aspirations, transitions and parental engagement with schools in order to identify strategies to enhance working relationships and engagement.

4 Facilitate a participatory partnership between students, parents, primary and secondary schools, and the wider community, to develop a set of recommendations that aims to inspire higher student attainment and empowers them to aspire to further education, vocational training, volunteering and community engagement.

5 By facilitating communication between the relevant parties, social connections are created through which actions for change can subsequently be channelled.

28 Kindon, S., Kesby, M. and Pain, R. (2007) Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place. Routledge: London and New York. Lloyd-Evans, S. (2016) Focus groups, community engagement and researching with young people. In Evans, R. and Holt, L. (eds) Methodological Approaches: Geographies of Children and Youth 2. Springer: Singapore.

29 Darby, S. (2017) Making space for co-produced research impact: learning from a PAR case study, Area 49 (2), 230-237
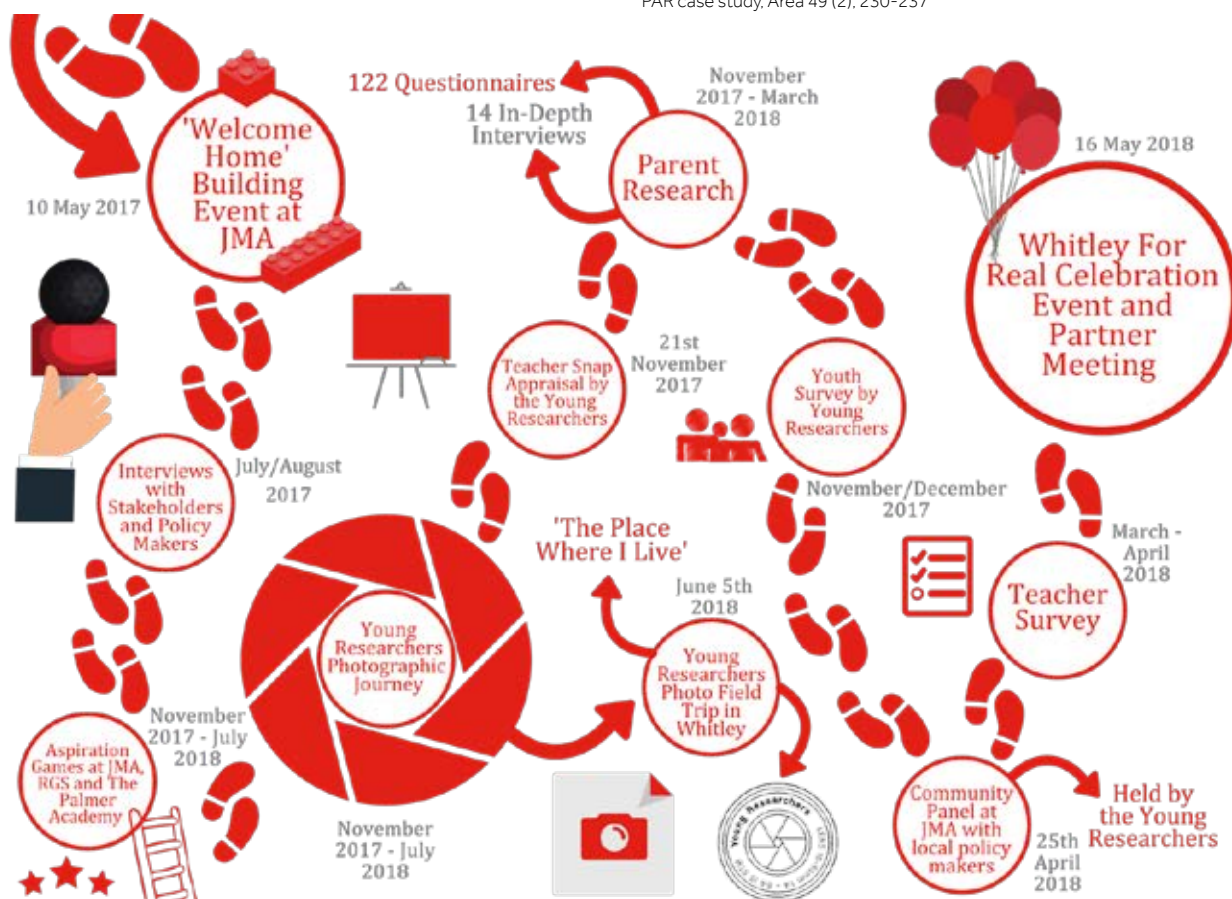

Figure 3.1 – Our Research Journey

In order to meet these objectives, our co-produced research includes both quantitative and qualitative techniques and Figure 3.1 illustrates the key strands of our multi-method research journey. Further details on the methodology and outcomes of each strand follow with further detail available in a series of individual reports[30].

Home Building Event (10th May, 2017)[31]

Aims: This is where our research journey commenced – as so many life journeys begin – at home. JMA students (later to become Young Researchers) discussed and then constructed their conception of an 'ideal' home from giant blocks. They engaged a group of young people attending JMA to build an innovative 'home' using the blocks to generate a greater and explicit awareness of the place of home in a wider community, establish a core group of young researchers and develop team working skills.

The Method: A partnership of several agencies including JMA staff and students, Whitley Researchers, University of Reading and UKCIC and Bewley Homes supported a group of 12 JMA students as they planned and constructed their 'ideal' home out of 1500 large blocks. This happened on the 10th May in a sheltered but open location on the JMA campus. In a single day the home was planned, constructed and dismantled. A productive relationship was established between school, university, community and a local building company – this resulted in closer links between these agencies.

The event emphasised the importance and the value of taking a risk with innovative activities beyond the traditional methods of quantitative research to generate by young people themselves a more qualitative approach. It also helped launch the wider aspiration research project as the young team of builders approached their peers and investigated their ideas and understanding of aspiration.

Interviews with Key Community Stakeholders (July/August, 2017)

Aims: To interview key stakeholders and policy makers associated with the Whitley for Real partnership to gain insight into issues in Whitley and find out what information they might want to get from the DNF research to inform future service delivery and engagement with the local community.

The Method: Two University of Reading interns[32], Hayley Ryall and Bethany Brown, supported by University and Reading Borough Council staff interviewed nine representatives of Whitley for Real partners in the summer of 2017 to explore barriers and opportunities to community and individual aspiration.

Key recommendations included the need to increase engagement between schools and parents and improve careers advice for both students and parents.

30 Reports available from Sally Lloyd-Evans, Associate Professor in Human Geography, University of Reading via s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk

31 'A Welcome Home Report' is available on request from Sally Lloyd-Evans. The event was funded by Reading UKCIC, Bewley Homes and UoR's Participation Lab

32 Funded by the University of Reading's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Placement Scheme

33 The Young Researchers programme received additional funding from Study Higher from January 2018

Youth Aspirations: Playing the Aspiration Game (September 2017 – March 2018)

Aims: To launch the Young Whitley Researchers in their role of discovery and communication, exploring the subject of youth aspirations with a wider group of JMA students in a way that was both thought-provoking for the participants, and informative for the researchers.

The Method: The Young Whitley Researchers[33] in collaboration with Whitley Researchers, JMA staff and the University of Reading prepared a game based on snakes and ladders – the Aspiration Game. On 21st November, other JMA students were invited to play this game, which provided the basis for conversation about things that help the students' forwards in life, things that hold them back, and about aspirations more generally. The Aspiration Game was also played with Year 8's from Reading Girls School on the 14th March 2018 and with The Palmer Academy's School Council on the 23rd March 2018.

The Young Researchers also documented their journeys through photography and film. The game provided insights into the centrality of supportive family, school and friendship networks, the effects of school pressures and how the young people wanted to find their own voice.

Teacher Snap Appraisal (21st November, 2017)

Aims: This was a spontaneous research event initiated and designed by the Young Research team during the lunch break. The concentration in the morning sessions on their peers' aspirations led in feedback discussion to curiosity about their teachers aspirations.

The Method: The Young Researcher team quickly devised a questionnaire, shared this with the University and Whitley Researchers present and sallied forth to find teachers to interview. At least 15 teachers answered a series of questions about their own aspirations and what influenced them; the helps and hindrances they encountered and their views of JMA student aspirations.

Parent Research (November 2017 to March 2018)

Aims: To explore parents' attitudes towards school-family relationships, understand their aspirations for their children's future lives and identify opportunities/barriers that might be addressed through wider community initiatives.

The Method:

- 122 parents from primary and secondary schools were interviewed by the Whitley Researchers using a semi-structured questionnaire with a view to understanding their relationship with their child's school and the aspirations they have for their children (see Appendix 1). The Whitley Researchers piloted and redesigned the survey with help from the Whitley Excellence Cluster (WEC)[34] before it was launched in November 2017 around schools and community events. The lively (sometimes fraught!) discussions in our research meetings have highlighted the strength of feeling and raw emotions that are exposed when parents are asked to talk about their children, schools and future hopes and fears.

- The team also undertook 14 in-depth qualitative interviews with local parents (11 mothers and 3 fathers).

Parents are aspirational and they place great store on school approachability and school-home communications.

Youth Survey (January to March 2018)

Aims: To explore younger people's attitudes to school, thoughts for the future and barriers to progress.

The Method: With help from the Young Researchers, 38 students from Whitley's two secondary schools (JMA and RGS) were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire format (see Appendix 2).

The results present a telling picture of the pressures, anxieties and optimism young people have about their future life chances, the need for good relationships with people who believe in them and the greater support that is needed to navigate pathways to work, training or higher education.

Teacher Survey (April 2018)

Aims: To understand teachers' thoughts on student aspirations and child development in Whitley, reflecting also on the role of the school and of parents.

The Method: 38 primary and secondary school staff members completed questionnaires (see Appendix 3). The questions were framed in such a way that their responses could be compared and contrasted to the responses of parents and children.

The dedication of teachers towards their pupils came through, with some important ideas for how school provision may be improved.

Community panel (25th April 2018)

Aims: To explore how the wider community in Whitley community might offer a better future for its young people.

The Method: A panel of 10 representatives of local agencies responded to questions from the Young Researchers on how local service agencies and the Whitley community might address the hopes and aspirations of its young people. The event used a 'Question Time' format designed and facilitated by the Young Researchers at JMA. A wider audience of community members were also given the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

The recommendations that were put forward reflected a real will to collaborate for the betterment of Whitley community.

Whitley for Real Partner meeting and celebration event: reflecting on emerging themes (16th May 2018)

Aims: The Whitley for Real partnership led this collaborative celebration event to consider the latest research findings with a focus on generating firm conclusions as a foundation for action planning.

The Method: the Young Researchers and the Whitley Researchers talked of their personal development during this research process, and highlighted their understanding that supportive relationships between people are key to change.

This event again brought diverse players into one room for a common purpose, helping to form the relational networks through which change can take place. Members of Whitley's less well-heard social groups were able to voice their points of view. Positive and direct communication is important in countering stigma and negative commentary, and helps to create a collaborative environment.

3.5. Conclusions

This chapter has provided background on the geographical context of South Reading and outlined the diverse methods that we used to explore the theme of 'aspirations' and understand the connections between schools, families and the wider community. As the next four chapters will reveal, we believe that relationships between these different spaces are key to understanding how youth aspirations are shaped and reinforced in South Reading.

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34 WEC Head teachers' provide helpful comments on our questions and helped the Whitley Researchers access parents in some schools.

4: YOUTH ASPIRATIONS AND THE YOUNG RESEARCHERS

4. 1 Introduction

A core aim of our research programme was the development of a participatory methodology that placed young people at the heart of our research journey. The Whitley Young Researchers (YR's) of nine sometimes ten or twelve students, emerged mainly from Year 9s in John Madejski Academy (JMA) following the 'home build' project (see Chapter 3).

This chapter brings together the findings from a series of interactive research activities that were designed by the Young Researchers to open up conversations with primary and secondary schools students in South Reading. It also traces the journey taken by the Young Researchers through their exploration into the theme of 'aspiration' using four main methods[35]:

- Playing the 'Aspiration Game' – a snakes and ladders inspired game designed by the team.
- Peer-led survey with 38 young people.
- Photographic fieldwork around Whitley and the University's Whiteknight's Campus – their photographs as displayed throughout this report[36].
- Community Panel (discussed in Chapter 7).

This chapter is divided into two sections: 4.2 Youth Aspirations and 4.3 Student Survey.

4.2 Youth Aspirations: The Aspiration Game

Design and development of the 'Aspiration Game'

In October 2017, the YRs devised a game based on snakes and ladders through which they could open honest conversations with peers about the things that hold them back and about the things that help them forwards. The team designed the board themselves with the help of Mr Allen and John Ord (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 The Aspiration Game designed by the JMA Young Researchers

- In November 2017 the YRs invited other JMA students from Years 7-10 to play the game.
- In March 2018, the game was played in Reading Girls' School[37] (RGS) with a team of nineteen Year 8 students.
- March 2018 children from Years 1-6 played the game in The Palmer Academy.

In total, around 70 young people were involved with playing the game from these three venues – all games were led and supervised by the YRs.

The game appeared to be a simple and effective way of getting people talking things through, and thinking about where improvements can be made[38]. It also helped students to express what they feel. As some students put it, the process gave them a voice.

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35 This chapter presents the data from the aspiration game and youth survey. The Young Researchers could not be individually named due to data protection rules.

36 We hope to run an exhibition of their entire collection in Autumn 2018

37 Reading Girls School and The Palmer Academy are both members of the Whitley Excellent Cluster of partner schools.

38 A detailed report on the methodology and data analysis is available

Playing the aspiration game at JMA

About 30 JMA students from years 7, 8, 9 and 10 played the game. Participants sat around a metre-sized board based on the snakes and ladders game; snakes hindered and ladders helped aspiration. Extra symbols such as stars, or circles invited further reflections. The adult Whitley Researchers[39] were on hand to help record the conversations and report back on the day. At game completion individual students completed a personal aspiration card.

JMA Student Aspiration

Everyone who filled in the aspiration cards (26 in total) laid out some aspirations, even though not all were clear about their future career objectives and thinking about aspirations did not come easily to all. Four respondents only mentioned very short-term goals to do with achieving present targets at school, and had nothing to say about their wider or longer-term goals. Outcomes included:

- The majority of students mentioned some kind of career, with most having thought of specific jobs already, and a couple even mapping out detailed career paths including getting work experience and/or certain qualifications to meet their goals.

  Possible careers ranged widely from fashion model, or performer, through to designer or diplomat, to the medical profession. It could be observed that many career ideas were not fixed. Students who mentioned a specific career were often inspired by someone they knew or admired.

- Besides aspirations to do with work, most people also (and sometimes exclusively) mentioned non-career related goals. The top non-career related goal was linked to relationships. Firstly, students hoped for happy families. Secondly, having plenty of money - especially for a nice house. In third place were aspirations related to the kind of person students wanted to be – being a better person, being able to help people and helping family at home were all mentioned.

- Girls were more likely to mention non-job-related aspirations than boys. Younger respondents were just as focused in their answers as older respondents.

- Three students were entirely dismissive about their future, even refusing to fill in the cards or engage with the questions in the game. Two of these did not want to interact at all except to say that they have "no idea about the future". Three young people alienated from the current system are not many, although they still represent a good 10% of the sample, and a significant number of other students also expressed uncertainty or confusion about occupational aspirations.

In summary, the majority of young people had clear aspirations in spite of a significant level of uncertainty, and educational attainment played a prominent part in these. 'Aspiration' was not confined only to career related goals however. Good relationships were key and girls especially recognized this.

What holds students back and what helps them forwards

Information on what holds students back and what helps them forward was mainly drawn from conversations during the playing of the game, but also from whole group feedback at the end, and from comments posted on the comments board. Figure 4.2 shows some of the emotional responses JMA student's discussed when they landed on a symbol and Figure 4.3 highlights some of the issues raised in the snakes and the ladders.
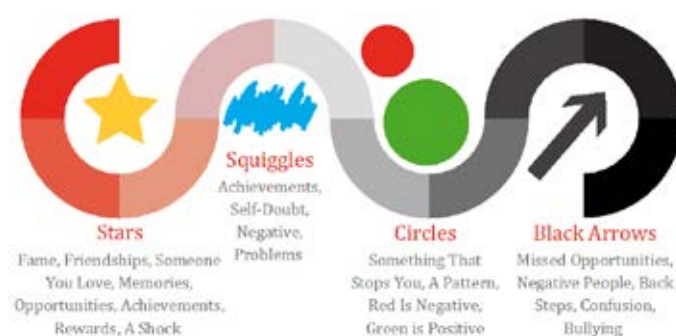
Figure 4.2 – Student's responses to landing on symbols

Figure 4.3 Snakes and Ladders: what helps and hinders

Summary of key conclusions from JMA

Through discussion with JMA students it was possible to explore the theme of youth aspirations with a view to understanding how better to support students in their progress. Following the playing of the game the YRs drew out the following key issues and recommendations:

1 **Relationships are important.** This is especially in the home (many homes are very busy, and multiple traumatic experiences were touched on). The influence of friendships turning sour is also huge. Bullying is a concern that needs to be better adressed.

2 **Young people are inspired/led by others.** The positive influence of visitors, guest speakers and role models was emphasised. It would help expand horizons if new people were to come in to talk about their experiences, or if students could go out to see what other people do. Negative influences are also prevalent in the locality, which can pull students into unhelpful ways. Visiting speakers can also help to raise awareness of these dangers.

3 **Getting help at school.** Students find it easier to ask for help from teachers they know and have taken an interest in them by asking questions in and out of classroom settings.

4 **Students want a voice.** Although they look for guidance from role models, and although this could be helpful to them if they have positive influences, our participants need to be helped and inspired to find their own way and to work out their own steps into the future. There could be value in introducing a space in which constructive two-way conversations may be had, such as was provided in the context of this exercise.

5 **Students feel under pressure to get high grades.** Current pressures are acutely discouraging to those who do not get high grades. Tailoring advice and direction in ways that are appropriate to the circumstances of each person is of more value than generalised pleas to 'raise aspirations'.

JMA students felt the pressures to get good grades were clearly alienating them from the whole schooling process when things were not working out. Indeed, many students expressed high levels of discouragement when they hit another setback.

How can these students be supported, and especially in the face of a severely testing social and emotional environment for many?

(There is considerable debate about the effectiveness of the link between aspiration and attainment – please see our full report presenting an outline discussion here from s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk).

6 **Life chances and family trauma.** A significant number of students face a testing social and emotional environment, and this is known to negatively impact aspirations. Family trauma, such as missing family, crowded and unhappy households, eviction and illness were all mentioned by JMA students. Anxiety was an issue that came up repeatedly. Understanding and addressing these stress factors is important in order to reduce discouragement and allow aspirations to rise.

7 **Aspiration and community.** One of the most notable findings from observing conversations around the aspiration game at JMA was the lack of discussion around 'the community'. Many young people had very limited experience of what's happening in their own communities, they rarely attended after school clubs or had relationships with anyone outside of the school and home.

Young people often feel isolated and disconnected to the wider world and this impacts on their understanding of future opportunities. Community issues outside of the school were only just touched on, despite the influence they are known to have on attainment, and we feel this is a significant gap that needs to be addressed. (Explored further in Chapter 7).

Issues for exploration include:

- The extent to which schools can provide a more tailored curriculum with enriching activities;
- How students who do not get high grades can be encouraged to take on a positive attitude towards learning and their life options;
- More information on barriers related to life in the wider community, including housing and family issues as well as relationships between people more broadly.

Playing the aspiration game at Reading Girls' School

As part of Reading Girls' School's (RGS) Activities Day programme, nineteen Year 8 students were led in the aspiration game by the Whitley Researcher's team. A whole group discussion was also facilitated about the concept of aspirations before the students each filled in cards about their aspirations and played the game.

RGS Student Aspirations

Out of 19 responses in total, 17 students mentioned an aspiration (mostly career related) and two did not. Out of the two that did not mention aspirations, both said that they had not decided on a career yet, the 'yet' implying an expectation that they expected to make a choice of career in time.

Regarding the sort of jobs that the students picked, there was a fairly even split between creative jobs (hair dresser, designer, performer etc.) and jobs such as teacher, lawyer or medic. There were just three non-career related aspirations, which included getting good exam grades, a character-related aspiration and job related travel.
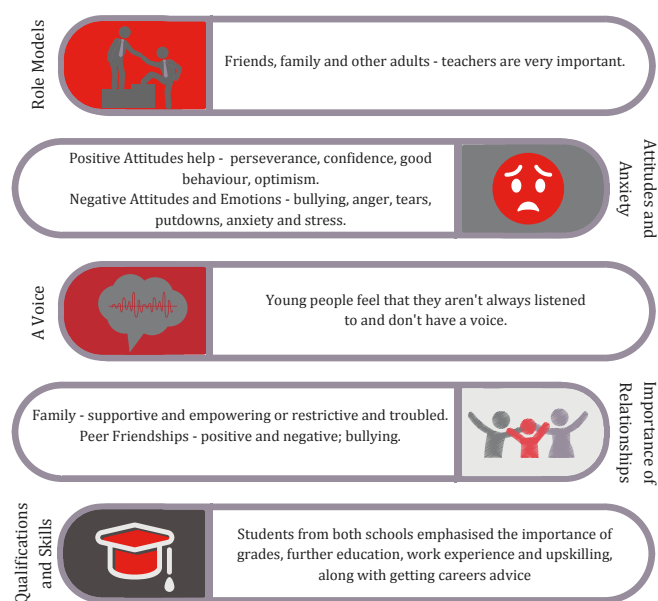
Wanting a family (or not) and how to juggle family responsibilities came up, along with the importance of taking care of one's parents when old and how you need your own children to do the same for you.

(RGS help and hinder factors are available in the full report from Sally Lloyd-Evans).

Summary of key conclusions from RGS

Despite some differences, there were a number of reoccurring themes common to both Reading Girls and JMA, shown in Figure 4.4

Figure 4.4 Findings from JMA and RGS

Role Models — Friends, family and other adults - teachers are very important.

Attitudes and Anxiety — Positive Attitudes help - perseverance, confidence, good behaviour, optimism. Negative Attitudes and Emotions - bullying, anger, tears, putdowns, anxiety and stress.

A Voice — Young people feel that they aren't always listened to and don't have a voice.

Importance of Relationships — Family - supportive and empowering or restrictive and troubled. Peer Friendships - positive and negative; bullying.

Qualifications and Skills — Students from both schools emphasised the importance of grades, further education, work experience and upskilling, along with getting careers advice

Playing the aspiration game at The Palmer Academy Primary School

"When you are very young you are full of big ideas, but as you grow up you lose them" (Young Whitley Researcher commenting on playing the game with The Palmer Academy)

The Young Researchers were invited to The Palmer Academy in March 2018 to play the aspiration game with members of the school council. This is made up of 22 children from years 1 to 6 who were each elected by their class mates to be their representatives[40].

The event was led very effectively by the Young Whitley Researchers from JMA who explained the programme, asked children about their aspirations, ran the snakes and ladders game with them and also interviewed each child individually for a video presentation. Other members of the Whitley researchers helped to record the conversations during the event.

The Palmer Academy student aspirations

100% of the children said that they had aspirations. They were very forthcoming, random, changeable and enthusiastic! Nearly all of the child aspirations were job related. Just over half of these jobs were sports or performing arts related, and the others varied from policewoman and teacher through to scientist, doctor, vet, archaeologist and astronomer! A few covered several different options and one or two were more general ('I want to be a leader' for example).

The children enjoyed thinking up ideas for what the different symbols on the board could mean and came up with some very creative answers, sometimes telling whole complex stories around possible positive or negative scenarios. There were a few wide-shot answers to questions about things that help you forward (e.g. playgrounds, Christmas!) but on the whole the children were very aware of similar issues as the older students.

(The Palmer Academy help and hinder factors are available in the full report from Sally Lloyd-Evans)

Summary of key conclusions from The Palmer Academy

Attitudes were recognized as important, especially confidence, hard work, and seeing the big picture. Anxiety issues were already being mentioned as problematic.

Some incredibly discerning comments were made about the impact of small achievements or small failures, which subsequently encourage (or discourage) you from moving on to bigger things.

Children talked about examples that were taken directly from their own experiences: "Mum can't earn money if it is snowing", "we can't go on holiday because of work", "the family is threatened by the police" (a refugee family) as well as mental breakdown; sickness; "parents having other ideas to me..."

The Young Whitley Researchers remarked, following the experience of interacting with years 1-6, on how it is that "when you are very young you are full of big ideas, but as you grow up you lose them." Perhaps 'reality hits' as they become more aware of the limits they face. It was clear that the older students had become more perceptive and discerning regarding the positive and negative impacts that other people were having on them.

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40 The structure of the school council was presented to us by the Council Chair (from Year 6).

The Aspiration Game: Key Findings

The key findings uncovered by the Young Researchers and their participants at RGS and The Palmer Academy revolve around six themes that we will discuss in turn:

1 The centrality of family and friendship networks:

- Family and friendship networks change everything, whether helping you forward or setting you back – weak relationships with the wider community and/or parent-school relationships can have a negative impact.

- "Fake friends" and bullying were sources of heartache; Young people do not feel that enough is being done about bullying. They loathe and are disturbed by injustice.

- It is important to have people who believe in you and who have your best interests at heart. Not everyone gets this from family. Some young people who felt supported were inspired to "make [their supporters] proud".

2 The desire young people have to find their own voice and place:

- Young people want two-way relationships with adults. They want a voice, and help in finding their voice and place-tailored guidance. Also opportunities to have a go at things.

- Understanding where other people are coming from is important: "Hearing how others think helps your own thinking." "Sometimes you don't realise what other people are dealing with." Being understood/having someone to talk to is also important.

- Young people did not feel that their circumstances hold them back. This sense of "the future is up to us" is positive in terms of motivation and progressive action. But learning not to feel pressured by things that are beyond personal control is also important to wellbeing.

- Many young people do not have regular trips/experiences outside of Whitley. "We go from home to school and back home." "I'm not going anywhere." Involvement in out-of-school activities is low.

3 The high levels of anxiety faced by young people who are sometimes found to be in highly stressful family circumstances:

- Anxiety came up repeatedly. "The grass in the park helps me to calm down." Even several primary school children mentioned anxiety and were very familiar with the vocabulary.

- Some young people face highly stressful events that affect their families. Missing family, crowded households, eviction, illness, mental breakdown, busy/preoccupied family members and conflict were all mentioned.

- Anxiety also affected attitudes to visiting unfamiliar places: "There are bad people. " "Bad things happen."

4 The positive role of teachers:

- Understanding (listening and supportive) teachers make a huge difference to a young person's perception of the school environment.

- Students find it easier to ask for help from teachers they know and have taken an interest in them by asking questions in and out of classroom settings.

5 The pressures and sometimes discouragements that surround the drive for high grades:

- Young people feel the pressure to get high grades. This can be discouraging to some. A few who face setbacks don't want to cooperate with the system.

- Nearly all young people were well aware that they will benefit from working hard and from perseverance, but some struggle in spite of this as they find school boring and restrictive.

6 The importance of role models:

- There is a desire for positive role models. Role models and especially those who are similar to you are felt to influence aspirations (this feeling is confirmed in wider research).

7 Developing positive relationships:

- The research points to the need that young people have to be part of secure wider environment (community) which features positive two-way relationships which the young people can draw on when needed, and into which they are inspired to give their own contribution.

- Constructive relationships might be found in family, school, one's friendship network or an out-of-school organised group or activity. Any of these may provide positive or negative influences, but helping each young person to feel securely attached within at least one positive environment may be an action point. Knowing that there are other people with our best interests at heart aids a sense of security.

- Attachment cannot be manufactured from nothing (research carried out by 'Fusion' for example suggests that young people have no desire to be 'placed' into mentoring relationships)[41]. Instead, positive relationships grow as people invest into one another's lives.

41 Fusion 2015. Research Report into the needs of the Youth and Community of Whitley, Fusion Youth & Community UK. Reading.

8 Aspirations: goals and dreams

- Almost all teenagers named one or more goals, although some were limited to the very short term (e.g. school targets). Uncertainly featured strongly, also regarding which career to choose and the pathways to achieving it. Many students have limited interactions with their wider community, after-school clubs and experiences outside of Whitley.

- Finally, 'aspirations', goals and dreams change. Primary school children were full of boundless career ideas. These became somewhat more modest and less exclusively career focused in secondary school (family life, wealth and personal qualities also featured). Older children were more discerning and opinionated about people in their lives than the younger ones.

The findings from the youth survey in the next section provide complementary and explanatory insights into these factors.

4.3 Youth Survey

Participation

Thirty-eight young people completed questionnaires regarding their school experiences, thoughts for the future and barriers to progress. Half of these were from RGS, and half from JMA. They were all from years 8 and 9 (approximately 13-14 years old). Almost three quarters of the respondents were girls (which makes sense since half the surveys were conducted in a girls school). Their responses could be compared and contrasted to the responses of teachers and parents, aiding our understanding of how positive aspirations may be promoted and fulfilled.

Student happiness in school

Our students did not see themselves as happy as parents rated their secondary school children (see Chapter 5). However, they reported levels of happiness very similar to the teachers' views on how happy an environment the secondary school is (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Parent and teacher perceptions of student happiness

Q to parents: How happy is your child at school? Q to teachers: How happy an environment is school? Q to students: How happy are you at school?	Secondary school parent view	Secondary school teacher view	Youth view
1 = not happy at all	0%	5%	5.5%
2	3%	0%	8%
3	15%	47.5%	31%
4	52%	47.5%	50%
5 = completely happy	30%	0%	5.5%

Summary by gender

- Girls tended to be less happy than boys, although parents had not made this distinction (parents reported similar levels of happiness for sons and for daughters). Girls seemed particularly affected by relational issues in and around school rather than by the school work or by worry about future prospects.

- Particularly with peer relationships, but also when it came to approaching teachers, girls were more likely to see problems than boys. They were also more sensitive to issues in the home than boys, less likely to feel safe or feel they have a voice. Girls did not struggle more than boys with the work however, and they were not more likely to feel the school is not providing them with skills. They were just as confident as boys about getting a job and were more likely than boys to talk about moving on to higher education.

School impact on happiness

The young people were asked an open question about what affects their happiness at school.

- Their top response had to do with peer relationships, with just over half the students (and especially girls) volunteering the information that friendships made the big difference.

- The next most important reason, mentioned by a third of all respondents, was that teachers made a difference, especially the way the teachers manage the class and keep order (neither pupils nor teachers find it easy to bear disorderly classes and constant tellings off).

- This was closely followed by matters to do with the lesson subject – young people are happy about particular subjects, especially if they are good at that subject or if it was presented well. Teachers also emphasised managing well with school structures.

- Almost 20% of students mentioned that their happiness was also affected by being able to have fun in school, not only with peers, but they appreciated fun activities, special events and trips outside of the school.

Links between student responses to happiness in school and responses to other survey questions

1 **School-parent and child satisfaction go together** as there were close correlations between the student's self-reported happiness at school and how positive they report their parents or guardians to be about the school:

- Just over 80% of students felt their parents were positive or completely positive about the school (the top two of five categories).

- A student's report of being bullied was strongly correlated to negative parental perceptions about the school.

- The need for schools to address parent concerns, and the need of parents to ensure they speak in a supportive way about schools to children, are both important in the wellbeing of students. Children who were unhappy at school were more likely to be absent from school and we discuss this in a later section.

2 **Happiness at school is associated with being able to identify someone to talk to in case of a problem.** Most students (61%) identified a particular member of staff they would want to talk to. In addition, a few mentioned friends and just 4 mentioned family (esp. Mum). Because of the importance of school staff when finding someone to talk to with a problem at school, those finding it difficult to approach teachers were less likely to say they knew someone to talk to. 14% of respondents were not able to name someone they could go to, and 42% mentioned at least some hesitation in approaching teachers with a problem.

Of staff that were mentioned as persons to talk to, a lot of young people mentioned the same persons. Some of these may have been dedicated staff members available to listen to student concerns, but the fact that over 40% of students felt some degree of hesitation in approaching teachers with a problem suggests that further work could be undertaken here.

3 **Finding it difficult to approach teachers and also the feeling of having no voice and that views are not understood and respected links with unhappiness.** They also felt less happy when peer relationships were not going well and especially if they were being bullied or did not feel safe. Broken peer friendships, the feeling that one's views are not understood and respected, the feeling that the school is not providing the right skills for the future and feeling unsafe were also relatively widespread problems (mentioned by at least 50% of students).

Young people were less happy at school when they mentioned problems with school work, and when they felt that the school was not providing them with the skills they need for the future. Those less happy at school were less likely to mention going on to Higher Education.

4 **Young people (and their parents) were happier about school life when the young person was involved in a club outside of normal school lessons.** Clubs enable young people to interact with more adults who are investing in their welfare. These positive relationships with adults are also seen in school life; students who attended clubs were more confident about approaching teachers with a problem as well as being happier in school. They were also more positive about their future prospects and more likely to think they would find a good job after school (although they were not more likely to aspire to higher education outcomes. Clubs mentioned were mostly sports related. There were just a few mentions of art and drama activities. 'Young Researchers' was mentioned by three students.

Student happiness at school was not affected by problems at home, by negative influences in the community, by social media issues or by disliking general class management.

Absenteeism

Students were asked how much school they missed compared to others in their class. This is how they responded to the options given:

I almost never miss school - 37%

I miss less school than average - 29%

I miss about as much school as others - 30%

I miss more school than average - 4%

Although people have a tendency to put themselves in a more favourable light than is actually the case, the fact that we have four categories means that we still have some basis for comparison.

Absenteeism, which had no gender differences, was linked to being unhappy at school and it was particularly related to:

- Feeling unable to approach teachers with a problem.
- The feeling of having no voice.
- Lack of confidence about getting a job.
- Broken friendships and problems at home.

It was not linked to struggling with the work or feeling the school doesn't equip you with the right skills, suggesting that this is more of a relational matter than a work-based matter.

Problems for young people

We asked students about the problems they faced in and outside of school[42]:

- Fake friends/broken friendships was mentioned by 63% of young people, with one third of these saying it was a big problem. Bullying was also mentioned by a third.
- The way that teachers managed a class was mentioned by 66% BUT mostly as a small rather than a big problem.
- 49% mentioned direct teacher-pupil relations, with one third of these mentioning it as a big problem.
- Feeling able to approach teachers with a problem was significantly associated with happiness, and this was at least some degree of a problem for 42% of students.
- Half of students did not feel entirely safe when going somewhere other than their usual route to and from school. This lack of confidence is associated with wellbeing, and particularly affects girls.

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42 These potential problems are placed roughly in order of the number of mentions they got, although not necessarily in order of the negative impact they had on the student.

- Around half of students also see negative influences in their community as a problem (boys as much as girls this time), but this is rarely felt to be a big problem. Interestingly, those mentioning Higher Education after leaving school were the most likely to see community influences as a problem.

- 55% were not convinced that the school is providing them with the skills they need for their future, and this interacts with their happiness at school as well as their hopes for the future; 39% secondary school parents and 60% of secondary school teachers also felt that the school was not preparing pupils adequately for the future. Teachers and parents particularly want more instruction in life skills.

- Having problems with schoolwork affected 45% of students, but only to a small degree.

Clearly around half of all those involved are not confident that everything that could be done is being done in Whitley, and clearly this has important repercussions to the confidence of young people.

Home is not perceived as a 'problem' for most children, and problems at home do not affect self-reported happiness at school, although there is an association between problems at home and parents rating the school badly. Problems at home are also weakly associated with poor attendance. The fact that problems at home are only mentioned by 21% of children interviewed suggests that child identity is wrapped up in the identity of their parents – the young people do not necessarily see parental attitudes as something separate from themselves which affects their development, but rather home is part of who they are.

Despite adult concerns, the least perceived problem by students is appearance on social media. Less than 20% of students mentioned this at all, and most of these as just a small problem.

After school: higher education not seen as a pathway to a better future

When asked about life after school, 55% of students said they were confident of getting a good job after school, and 44% were not sure. For the 44% lacking confidence about getting a job was associated with: parents being negative about school, absenteeism (weak association), and unhappiness at school, general gloom about the future and not being able to identify anyone to talk to about a problem at school. It was also weakly associated with feeling that teachers are unapproachable. Students who did not feel the school was providing them with the skills they need for the future were also less confident about finding a job.

Confidence about getting a job had nothing to do with aspirations for higher education. Interestingly, young people did not associate higher education with better prospects.

When asked about what they see themselves doing after school:

- 83% of students saw themselves as being in a job by the age of 25 (or, if they were less confident, they at least mentioned looking for a job).

- More students mentioned a job/work than parents did when asked a similar question about where their students will be at the age of 19 and 25.

- 43% students interviewed mentioned Higher Education after school in the open question about what they see themselves doing at the age of 19. This is a lower number than parents (66% secondary school parents believed that their children aspired to higher education). This suggests that students are less 'higher education' focused than their parents believed; instead they are job focused.

- 34% of students also mentioned other things besides work or education such as buying a house/moving to one's own house, pursuing a hobby, or travelling and 6% mentioned having a family of their own.

Students who aspire to higher education, compared to those who did not mention it, are more likely to be worried about school-work and about negative influences in their community. Wanting higher education did not make them more confident about getting a job or more confident about the brightness of their future. Somehow the students mind was not connecting higher education as a pathway to a better future. Aspiring to higher education did go with feeling happy at school however. Girls were more likely to mention higher education than boys.

How bright is the future?

Young people judged the brightness of their future on a similar level as their parents (the particular categories vary, but overall, there was no significant difference in average response). Interestingly, both children and their parents were slightly more optimistic about the future than their teachers however (see Table 4.2).

Part of this may be because teachers were asked about young people generally, whilst parents were asked about their own specific children, who they might not want to 'condemn' to a poor future even in their thoughts. Whatever the reason, both parents and teachers predominantly place the prospects of Whitley children at a midway point on a scale of one to five, suggesting that there is uncertainty for the future. The majority of young people are a little more optimistic for themselves.

Table 4.2 How bright is the future?

How bright do you think the future is for you/ your child/ the children you teach (on a scale of 1-5)	Secondary school parent view	Secondary school teacher view	Youth view
1 = not at all bright	0%	6%	0%
2	3%	6%	8%
3	41%	61%	27%
4	28%	22%	54%
5 = very bright	28%	6%	11%

- Students who were happy at school and felt their parents were happy with the school were more likely to talk of a bright future. Those going to clubs saw the future brighter.

- Hopes for a bright future had nothing to do with aspirations for higher education. Parents who aspired to higher education for their child were more likely to see the future as bright, but their children did not see this association. Instead, it was young people who were confident about being able to get a good job after school who were the most positive about the future.

- Problems with school work were weakly associated with less confidence for the future, and likewise problems approaching teachers or the feeling your views are not understood or respected. Not feeling the school provides you with the skills you need was likewise associated with lower confidence for future.

- Broken peer friendships and bullying were both associated with lower confidence for the future. However, reports of problems at home or with community influences had nothing to do with confidence for the future, and nor did self-reported school attendance.

What helps and hinders you?

In a manner similar to the aspiration game, young people were asked a direct and open question about the main matters that help them forward, and the main things that holds them back.

1 'Relationships' was the most frequently mentioned issue (69% of young people mentioned this). On the negative side, about half referred to friends and (less so) to family, and half referred to teachers. However, teacher impact was mentioned as a positive far more than an negative in the research overall.

   Almost 20% of all students interviewed volunteered the information that having supply teachers could sometimes be problematic.

   Friends on the other hand were more likely to be seen on the 'holding back' side than on the helping forward. Family was not mentioned much, but where it was, it was rather on the positive side than the negative.

2 Linked to relationships, mentions were also given to **anxieties versus a positive mindset**. Kindness and other life skills (like listening skills) were also seen to be important. 38% all students interviewed mentioned such issues – nine in a positive context (life skills, positive thinking) and six in a negative (anxieties, lax attitude).

3 **Getting good grades or a job** - 42%. Getting good grades was seen as helpful, along with talent and the aspiration for a particular job. Not getting good grades was also mentioned as a problem, but people rather mentioned grades when they were getting on well.

4 **Other issues** that hold you back included racial discrimination, and two mentioned medical issues that held them back. There were 3 mentions of the school environment as being helpful, one mention of school in a negative sense and one frustration with age rules.

Once again, it can be seen that relationships come out as a top factor affecting young people's happiness and how they see their future. Everyone agrees to the importance of supportive relationships – the harder bit is making sure everyone is linked in to them. Teachers were particularly strong on the importance of parental influence, although students barely mentioned this (perhaps because their home and family life actually constitute their own identity). Parents mentioned money barriers but this was not an issue mentioned by young people.

In summary: happiness shapes future views

Our surveys with young people supported much of what we learnt playing the aspiration game but they allowed us to make some additional conclusions around the role that happiness plays in shaping aspirations and life chances.

1 Unhappiness in school was related to being less likely to hope for a bright future by parents, teachers[43] and children and unhappy young people are less likely to aspire to higher education and be less certain about getting a job.

   Girls reported in significantly less happy than boys at school, and were particularly affected by issues to do with relationships. They were not fazed by the schoolwork or future prospects, and they were more likely to see themselves in higher education. To improve the wellbeing of girls, it is clearly important to address relationships.

2 Children were not as happy as parents believed (only 18% of the secondary school parents interviewed did not rate their child happy at school) and with the school environment not being rated as a happy place even by half of the teachers (see Chapter 6). It is worth looking at which factors are involved in this.

   Students were particularly unhappy at school (as well as less confident about their future) when:

   - Direct personal relationships were affected. Almost two thirds of young people said they were set back by problems with peers, and one third mentioned concerns with bullying.

   - They felt that teachers could be more approachable. Almost half of young people mentioned this.

   - They also feel that are they misunderstood or disrespected. Almost half of students expressed problems in this area.

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43 Analysis of the teacher survey is presented in Chapter 6

- Feeling less happy at school and less confident about the future was also associated with not being able to name someone to talk to in the event of a problem. Over one third of students could not identify someone. Being in clubs is associated with more positive outcomes, although almost half of the teens interviewed were not linked to extra-curricular activities.

Having supportive, personal connections with peers and adults is clearly important.

3 Parental negativity about school was associated with children's negativity about school and about the brightness of their future. Teachers were also keen to point out that whether parents support their child and the school in their child's education affects outcomes. This survey does not negate the idea that how parents talk about the school in front of their children makes a difference.

Parental negativity about the school was also associated with children not feeling they can approach teachers.

4 Having said all this, a report of problems generally at home was not associated with unhappiness at school, nor was it associated with reduced hope for a bright future. This fits with a point made at the community panel run by the Young Researchers (see Chapter 7) "wherever you start from you can still go forwards". It would seem that the school can still be a good place to be even when things are hard at home. The way parents talk about school is something important that parents might quite easily change.

Problems with the school work were associated with student unhappiness at school and lack of confidence about the future, even though students reporting problems were often those who hoped to go on to higher education. Young people feel the way lessons were presented made a lot of difference to the subject.

5 Young people were also not happy when they felt that schools were not equipping them with skills they need for the future[44], and feeling this lack of upskilling was closely associated with uncertainty about getting a good job. Around half of students, teachers and parents agreed that the school could do more to prepare pupils for the future, the area of life skills being particularly noted by parents and teachers as an area to improve.

6 Unhappy children were more likely to miss school, which has a negative association also with their hopes for getting a job after school. Absenteeism was particularly marked amongst children who were unhappy in their relationships, both in school with peers and teachers, and also at home. Absentee students were more likely to have a problem approaching teachers and to feel that their views were not understood or respected.

Certainly external studies indicate how having a mentor show a personal and informed interest in the day to day progress of a student affects both grades and attendance[45]. (Schools simply sent a text to the mentor about what is going on in class to help the mentor to talk to the student about school work).

7 Young people did not necessarily see higher education as a route to better outcomes (outcomes like confidence in getting a good job or having a bright future). There was no positive correlation between student aspirations for higher education and expectation of these outcomes, even though there was a positive association when the same questions were asked of parents. Parents also tended to think their children wanted higher education more than the children themselves -receiving more direct information from universities might help both. At present, 43% of students mentioned higher education when asked what they saw themselves doing at the age of 19, and this was connected with being happy at school.

8 Less than 20% of students saw social media as any kind of problem and problems at home were also given little importance. Like their parents, children resisted the idea that their background held them back. The sense of being in control of one's own future is positive, although learning not to feel pressurised by things that are beyond personal control is also important to wellbeing. Moreover, it is clearly a misperception that Whitley young people have low aspirations.

More to the point is directing them on the pathway to sustaining and achieving their aspirations. Good connections and adult time to listen to young people can help with this:

- Approachable teachers with good soft skills are of great value. It was good to find that more students remarked on teachers in a positive light than a negative light.

- Young people may benefit if schools give dedicated time to teachers to deal with out-of-class issues.

- Parental attitudes to school matter since children's approaches are intimately bound up with their parents.

- Extra-curricular clubs seem to be beneficial too – they are another way of giving adolescents positive contact time with adults.

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44 It might be the case that students with a negative attitude about the future may be less motivated about being at school and therefore interact less positively with others and with the work. Our analysis notes correlations, not causality, but whilst being cautious about jumping to conclusion it is still of value to note what factors are particularly associated with unhappy youth.

45 Soon, Z., Chande, R. and Hume, S. (2017) Helping everyone reach their potential: new education results Behavioural Insights Team [online] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/education-and-skills/helping-everyone-reach-their-potential-new-education-results/

4.4 Conclusions

Through their aspiration game and student surveys, the Young Researchers helped us gain rich insight into the hopes and fears that young people have about their future life chances. In addition to the everyday stresses facing adolescents, such as getting good grades and peer pressure, some young people also have to cope with a testing social and emotional environment at home. Young people need help to develop coping strategies and resilience to deal with anxiety and stress, particularly young women.

Young people also need good relationships with people who believe in them and who have their best interests at heart. Positive two-way relationships between young people and their families, teachers and peers have an important impact on young people's well-being, happiness, and belief in a bright future. Bullying was frequently seen a barrier to reaching goals. We have also shown significant links between good parent-school communication and engagement in school, better student behaviour and higher aspirations.

Many young people needed greater support to navigate the different pathways into work, training and Higher Education but they want to have a central role in shaping how this is delivered – having a voice is also important.

Box 4.1 Youth – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

• Children were less happy at school than their parents thought, and this was associated with less bright hopes for their own future, less confidence about their job prospects, less aspiration to higher education and higher levels of absenteeism.

Happiness at school was correlated to:

• Positive peer relationships (almost two thirds of children mentioned problems with peer friendships, and one third mentioned concerns with bullying. Young people do not feel that bullying problems are adequately addressed). More work needs to be done to reassure children that bullying is being addressed.

• Feeling that teachers are approachable and feeling understood and respected (almost half of students express problems in these areas). Approachable teachers were appreciated. Over one third of students could not identify someone to talk to in the event of a problem at school.

• Being member of an extra-curricular club (almost half of the students interviewed had no extra-curricular formal connections. Many young people also did not have much experience of life outside of Whitley. This may add to a sense of insecurity – half the students did not feel safe about venturing off their usual routes to and from school).

• Managing well with the school work, and liking the way work is presented (45% students interviewed expressed struggles with schoolwork and 65% with class management).

• Feeling that the school is providing relevant skills (55% students (as well as teachers and parents) felt the school could do more to prepare pupils or the future).

• Girls were less happy at school than boys, being particularly affected by difficulties with interpersonal relationships. However, girls were more likely than boys to anticipate going on to higher educations, in spite of their negative feelings about school.

• Relationships at home matter. Many homes were crowded and some stressful situations were mentioned. Problems at home did not necessarily mean that students saw school as a bad place to be and were not associated with young people being less positive about their future. However, parents who talked badly about the school have children who are less happy at school.

• Poor relationships (both at school and at home) were associated with absenteeism.

• Social media was the least important issue in the eyes of young people (less than 20% of them identified it as a problem).

• Less than half of the students interviewed saw themselves in higher education at the age of 19. Students hoping for higher education did not expect better life outcomes than others. They need a better understanding of the link between higher education and better prospects.

• Young people felt many uncertainties regarding their future career and pathways to achieving their aspirations. Anxiety (also stemming from wider circumstances) was widespread. They wanted opportunities to test different pathways and find their own way forward. They wanted space for constructive two-way conversations. They wanted a voice.

• Introducing positive role models that relate to the lives of young people in Whitley was seen as an important help in finding direction. These can also counteract the influence of negative role models in the locality, helping young people to distinguish the outcomes they want.

• Students felt under pressure to get high grades. Those who did not were discouraged. They need advice and direction appropriate to their circumstances. Young people were aware of the benefits of hard work and perseverance, but some still struggled as they found school boring and restrictive.

• Young people in Whitley were generally aspirational, rarely feeling that their circumstances or background held them back. Aspirations change however. They became more modest and less exclusively career-focused as children turned to young people. Young people were also more discerning about the people in their lives than children.

5: WHITLEY PARENTS
'VIEWS ON CHILDREN'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND 'ASPIRATION'

5.1 Introduction: conversations with 136 local parents

The aims of this strand of the research were to understand the role of parent-school/teacher relationships in South Reading and to investigate how these relationships shape parental aspirations for their children. This was undertaken via:

- A questionnaire survey with 122 local parents in face-to-face interviews.
- 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews that informed the questionnaire.
- Reflections from meetings, workshops and community events.

This chapter explores the key findings[46] from our parent responses.

5.2 Parent's experiences of their children's schooling

In total, 122 parents participated in the face-to-face survey undertaken by the Whitley Researchers in a range of community and school locations (see Chapter 3). The majority were parents of children in primary school, but 29% (35 individuals) were parents of children in secondary school.

The questionnaire was biased to a female point of view since three quarters of all those interviewed were women, and 62% of the children they referred to were girls. However, there were enough male representatives in the sample to check if there were major differences in response by gender.

The majority (55%) of those interviewed had two children in the home, although 29% of the sample had more than two children. The questionnaire was filled in only for the oldest pupil to keep the responses focused. The children in the sample ranged in age from 4 - 16 years, with the biggest representation from 8 and 9 year olds.

In addition to these questionnaires, the in-depth interview participants were mainly mothers (11 compared to 3 fathers), aged between 25 and 55, and with children in both primary and secondary schools.

Why this school?

58% of parents chose their children's school in South Reading because it was local, accessible and 38% based on good reputation.

Parents who chose their school on the basis of reputation were more likely to report their children as 'happy in school' and more likely to report positively on the approachability of teachers.

The most important reason why parents picked the schools they did was having the school close by (see Table 5.1). Whether parents felt the school had a good reputation was also an important factor.

Table 5.1 Why did you choose your current school?

Local and easy to get to	58%
Good reputation	38%
Other family / friends there	19%
Offers the kind of support my child needs	16%
Only school available - no choice	13%

16% of parents selected the school because they hoped it would provide the type of support their child needed. This issue often surrounded catering for the special needs of a child.

Only 13% of respondents sent their child to the school they did because they 'had no choice' - with the greatest negativity surrounding a couple of primary schools and less so the secondary schools, even though Whitley's secondary schools were rarely chosen because of 'good reputation'.

Parents who selected none of these options mostly selected the school after visiting and getting a positive feel for it. All this suggests that most parents interviewed are not resentful about their child being in the school they are at.

Children's happiness:

Over three-quarters of parents felt their children were happy.

Approachable staff, happy children and having chosen the school on the basis of reputation (feeling the school is a good school) were all interconnected features.

As shown in Table 5.2, the majority of parents felt their children were happy at school. Over three quarters of parents put their children in the top two categories for happiness (40% and 36% respectively). Parents who had been happy at school were more likely to report their children as being happy at school:

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46 A more in-depth and detailed report on the analysis of parent's questionnaire and interviews is available on request from s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk

Table 5.2 How happy is your child at school?

1 = not happy at all	3%
2	7%
3	14%
4	40%
5 = completely happy	36%

When asked an open question about what influences happiness, the most frequently cited conditions were said to be:

- Managing well with lessons
- Having encouraging teachers
- Having good peer friendships

How well children managed in these three areas was partly attributed to personality or personal attitude, and partly to conditions outside of the child's control. The perceived approachability and efficiency of school staff was closely linked to reports of happier children.

Communications and relationships between school staff and parents

Communication between parents and schools is influential in matters such as parental engagement in school events and satisfaction with their school. Parents who felt well informed by the school were more likely to report their child as happy in the school.

79% of parents feel that they have sufficient information from their children's school.

Although text is the most cited mode of communication between schools and parents, there was a statistical association between receiving letters home and the feeling of getting enough information.

Text is the most cited mode of communication between school and parents, with email in second place. Face-to-face communication through parent's evenings is also cited by 65%. It is interesting that only 54% parents ticked 'school reports' as a main mode of communication. Are half the parents not even reading the reports the school sends out? Or do they not find them meaningful?

Table 5.3: The main ways your school communicates with parents

Email	74.58
Text	78.63
Parents evenings	64.71
Other face-to-face interaction	36.75
School reports	53.78
Leaflet and written material	33.05
Phone call	41.03

It was interesting to find that different parents noted different ways of communication for the same school, suggesting that different people latch onto different ways of communication, and a multi-dimensional approach is appropriate, given that many channels of communication go unperceived by some parents.

21% of parents did not feel that they received enough information from the school that is useful to them and especially parents of children in a minority of primary schools.

There was a general feeling among this minority of not really knowing what their children were up to or where they were academically. This feeling applied especially to people who were simply not getting the information that is available but also to a minority who were getting all the information coming in, but wanted to be more involved in the education of their child.

It was interesting that parents in receipt of the least common mode of communication – leaflets and written material – were the ones most likely to say that communication was sufficient. Letters home may not yet have had their day then.

Messages to one's phone were the second most likely form of communication to correlate to the feeling that enough information is getting through.

Some parents who did read school reports felt that they were not detailed enough or were impersonal. They would prefer more face-to-face time with their child's teacher – although they appreciated that teachers already have so much to do. Speaking to staff personally was, for a small number of parents, a valued link with their school. As one father commented:

" I would like better and more communication. I would LOVE to have more meetings with the teachers" (Father, aged 25-35)

A number of parents felt that they would like to have more notice about school events and assemblies due to work commitments, more careers advice and updates of when their children had done well. Some suggested that they might keep up with their child's progress via homework that the parent can engage with. It could be seen from later data that parents who felt that communications were good were significantly more likely to make it to school events.

Research outside of this project on young people has shown that texting a 'study supporter' (which can be a parent) with information about school work can have a significant impact on final grades, as well as on school attendance. Parents find out which upcoming tests they need to ask after and show interest in, which can encourage the child to study.[47] Text is a particularly valuable source of communication because it is extremely likely to be read, it's short, and does not require access to a PC or sign-in. However, modes of communication that require parents to download a particular app, are less likely to be accessed[48].

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47 Soon, Z., Chande, R. and Hume, S. (2017) Helping everyone reach their potential: new education results Behavioural Insights Team [online] http://www. behaviouralinsights.co.uk/education-and-skills/helping-everyone-reach-their-potential-new-education-results/ The specific study involved young people needing to retake Maths and English GCSEs. Over 1,800 students in 9 institutions took part, half of which were sent texts and half were not. Comparing students whose study supporters were and were not texted, the supportive text messages resulted in a 7% increase in attendance and being 27% more likely to pass their exams.

48 Sanders, M. & Groot, B. (2018) Why text. The Behavioural Insights Team. [online] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/trial-design/why-text/

Parents who felt well informed by the school and via multiple channels were more likely to report their child as happy in the school. The perceived happiness of children was also very closely related to how well parents felt that school staff handled their concerns. It is not clear from this whether good parents of happy children also read communications and collaborate well with teachers, or whether good teacher communication is the driver of child (and parent) happiness. Probably neither factor should be disregarded.

Whitley Researcher: *What do you think the barriers are to having a good relationship with school?*

"Bad or lack of communication between school and parents. This is the main barrier. Without proper communication, teachers can be misunderstood and parents might feel neglected or feel the school does not care enough" (Mother, aged 25-35)

Just over three quarters of the parents interviewed had experienced a school-related concern. A small minority of these (5%) had not mentioned this concern to the school, and of the rest, there were varying degrees of satisfaction regarding how the school handled their concerns.

Table 5.4 Satisfaction with the way the school has handled issues and concerns:

School staff not helpful	8.5%
School staff been of some help	38%
School staff very helpful	53.5%

The majority of parents interviewed (84%) feel that school staff are welcoming and approachable, both in primary and secondary schools (although relationships tend to become more distant in secondary schools). Where the score was less than 5, parents often mentioned particular staff members who spoilt the atmosphere even though they felt appreciative towards the majority of staff.

Table 5.5 How welcoming and approachable the school staff are (on a scale of 1-5):

1 = not at all welcoming and approachable	4%
2	3%
3	9%
4	40%
5 = very welcoming and approachable	44%

Although most people felt that school staff were helpful, 8.5% of respondents who had raised a concern did not feel that school staff had been at all helpful. These persons were also negative about the approachability of school staff, suggesting that parent-teacher relations are (or became) tense in such instances.

The Importance of Staff Approachability and School Support

Parent perceptions of school staff approachability is the most significant factor that shapes parent's optimism about their child's future and aspiration for their child to go on to Higher Education.

84% of parents feel that school staff are welcoming and approachable, both in primary and secondary schools (although relationships tend to become more distant in secondary schools).

Nearly half of all parents felt that schools could perform better for their children.

It's good to know that most Whitley parents feel that school staff are welcoming because when it came to a parent's optimism about their child's future, and also when it came to parental aspirations for their child to go on to Higher Education, our data tells us that the **approachability of school staff is the most significant factor**:

- The quality of staff in terms of their approachability was much more important a factor than how good the information flow was between teacher and parent.

- Staff approachability and successful communication were related to how likely it was for parents to attend school events with their child, even controlling for parental school background.

- The 'soft skills' of teachers matter to school experience, parental engagement with the school and with the future outlook of children in their parents' eyes, and this retains some effect even where parents are not getting all the school communications.

Despite the mostly positive reviews on school staff, nearly half of all parents (and particularly mums) still thought that the school could perform better for their children. The other just-over-half were satisfied with things as they were.

The remainder were asked an open question about what the school could do more as highlighted in Box 5.1. Issues included better preparation on life after school, information on qualifications and information, training in life skills and better transitions to secondary school. This wish was especially strong amongst parents who had not had a good school experience themselves.

Box 5.1 – Parent's views on school improvements

- Catering for the brighter[49] children. It was noted that a lot of resources get sucked in by children with bad behaviour, and some concern was expressed with the academic progress of children.

- Child and parent-friendly (listening) approach of staff. It was noted that teachers are quicker to feed back negatives than positives.

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49 Dorling, D. (2010) Injustice: Why social inequality still persists. Policy Press: Bristol . See Chapter 3 for discussion on 'ability'

• Extra homework and information to help parents engage where desired (this idea had several mentions). Also getting parents into the school to work together with their children. Some parents had a real desire to work together with teachers in the education of their child but were not sure how to engage.

• Having more one-to-one help available for children to get their work done which includes having more teachers to spread the load. It was noted that teachers are overworked and under resourced.

• Ensuring good behaviour and some focused training for children in support of social behaviour which is specially resourced. Also having more sport, tackling bullying, helping children work through loss and to gain confidence.

• It is hard for working parents to get to events or to contact the school after work.

Child behaviour

Parents were asked an open question on their child's behaviour at school. The question was, 'If and when your child gets into trouble at school, what are the biggest contributing factors?'

Almost half the parents responded that their children did not even get into trouble at school[50]. The other half mentioned three main issues in order of frequency of response:

1 In first place, the child's own choices or lapses - included forgetting school equipment, falling out with other children, acting up in class, losing concentration, distraction with peers, inappropriate dress, not doing homework or getting to grips with work generally, and not getting along with teachers. It also included special needs related behaviour problems and simply not understanding what they were supposed have done (mentioned multiple times and suggesting a communication problem).

2 Peer influence.

3 Poor staff management (but only mentioned by a handful of participants).

Gender did not make much difference to the likelihood of having been in trouble at school although if anything, girls were less likely to have experienced getting into trouble.

The move from primary to secondary school made little difference in the likelihood of children misbehaving but there were some differences:

• **Primary school:** children in primary school were less likely to have misbehaved where their parents were helping them with homework or engaging with the school by helping with a school event.

• **Secondary school:** parents tend to be less 'hands on' and these forms of engagement were not predictors of behaviour. Getting into trouble and feeling that school staff should do more to support children went together – perhaps these parents were expressing a felt need for help.

In the interviews, parents mentioned the transition to secondary school as a particular area of concern:

"Primary schools are failing to prepare children for secondary"
(Mother, 45-55)

Parental engagement with the school is influenced by communication

54% of parents stated that they were not at all likely to help with a school event.

Parents who reported good communication with the school were more likely to help out with school events, attend school events and send their children to school clubs.

Parents who were in good communication with the school (who felt that school communications were sufficient) were more likely to help out with school events, attend school events and send their children to school clubs.

In terms of parental engagement with the school, parents were asked whether different forms of engagement were likely, possible or unlikely to have happened in the last month:

• 86% of primary school parents and 52% of secondary school were likely to have helped with homework.

• 84% of primary school parents pick up their child from school

• 50% of all parents attended schools event or sent children to a school club in the last month.

• Only 40% had spoken to school staff.

• 54% of parents were 'not at all likely' to help out with a school event (only 12% were likely to do this and this was mostly at primary school).

People whose own experiences in school had not been positive were less likely to attend or help with school events.

One's own past experience of school also affected the likelihood of helping children with homework – parents who had had a good experience of school themselves were more likely to engage in this way.

Helping with homework, picking the child up personally and sending the child to clubs tended to run together. Parents who did these things were also more likely to aspire to higher education for their children. Households where a member of the family was working were more likely to get their children into clubs.

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50 The questionnaire only asked about whether a child had been in trouble at school and not the severity of the issue.

Parents of children who went to a school club were not only more engaged with their child's education, they also rated their child as being happier in school and were more likely to believe their child aspired to higher education. A statistically significant link was still found between children attending school clubs and child happiness at school; also between children attending school clubs and children wanting to go on to higher education[51].

This suggests either that aspirational and happy children go to school clubs, or that clubs contribute to happy and aspirational children.

Parent and Child Aspirations: hopes for the future

Parents were asked about what their children wanted to do after school, and also about their own aspirations for their children in the future.

5.3 How bright is the future? Parent's hopes for their children

72% of parents see a bright future for their child.

68% of parents would like to see their child in Higher Education when they are 19, but these figures reduce during secondary school.

Hopes were especially high for children whose behaviour was good and who had welcoming and approachable teachers.

Parental aspirations drop as children move through secondary school.

Parents of all backgrounds and experiences were equally likely to imagine a bright future for their child. Feeling that a child lacked opportunities rather dampened this optimism, and so did the feeling that children were not happy at school.

Hopes were especially high for children whose behaviour was good and who had welcoming and approachable teachers, who parents felt were doing all they can. Parents who imagined a bright future for their children were also likely to aspire to Higher Education for their child.

Table 5.6 How bright the future is for your child

1 = not at all bright	0%
2	2%
3	26%
4	41%
5 = very bright	31%

Around 70% of parents thought their children would want to be doing further education after school, and around the same number hoped this for their children themselves. The majority of those mentioning Higher Education did not specify which form (for many of them, their children were only in primary school), but of those who did, 23 parents mentioned university and 16 mentioned college. University aspirations are clearly not off the radar for Whitley parents.

Having said this, these aspirations for University appear to be less than the UK average. A review of parental aspirations for primary school children in other parts of the UK suggested that over 85% hoped their child would go on to further education, although the way the question was asked could have influenced the response[52].

It was observed in this external study that parents who had not been in Higher Education themselves and also who had never worked were less likely to have mentioned Higher Education for their children. These are issues that may also apply to some Whitley parents. Indeed, in this study it could also be seen that parents with a bad school experience themselves, or who had no one in the household in a job, were less likely to aspire to Higher Education for their child.

Table 5.7 Parental Aspirations for their Children (n=122)

What your child wants to do after finishing school? (Categories to tick – more than one selection possible)		What the parent would like to see the child doing at age 19 (Open question)		What the parent would like to see the child doing at age 25 (Open question)	
Further study	69%	Higher Education (University)	68%	In a Job	90%
Job (some specific jobs and apprenticeships were mentioned)	52%	Working	19%	Other	30%
Raise a family	6%	Other	14%		
Child does not know	19%				

As children moved into secondary school, aspirations dropped. Parents of secondary school children were less likely to hope to see their child in higher education. This is in keeping with trends in other parts of the UK. Perceived lack of ability is also associated with less expectation of going into higher education.

On the other hand, 90% of Whitley parents aspired that their children should be in a job at the age of 25, which is higher than was noted in other parts of the UK where only just over 80% of parents mentioned this aspiration for their child. Only very few mentioned travel opportunities for their child – far less than in other parts of the UK.

A significant number of parents were vague about the specific direction of their child's future – wanting only that their child is 'doing well', happy and fulfilled, which are all important goals and equally as valid as going to University:

"I just want my child to discover what she is good at and what she needs to work on a bit. I would like her to reach her full potential" (Mother, 25-35)

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51 This assertion is based on regressions with either 'child happiness' or 'child aspiration to higher education' as the dependent variable, and 'attendance of a school club', 'parent aspiration for child to go on to higher education,' 'parent helps with homework' and 'parent experience of school' as independent variables. Even controlling for the parent variables (some of which became insignificant) attendance at a school club still had a statistically significant interaction with positive outcomes for the child.

52 Bradshaw, P., Hall, J., Hill, T., Mabelis, J., and Philo, D. (2012). Growing Up in Scotland: Early experiences of Primary School, Edinburgh: Scottish Government. [online] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/05/7940/13

However, lack of specific direction and the feeling that their child did not know what they wanted to do tended to be associated with parents who had had a bad school experience themselves or who had no one in the household working. There were no significant gender differences.

Barriers to aspiration

'Lack of confidence' and 'money' seen as holding children back by half of all parents.

Monetary barriers included costs associated with going to University and after school clubs, expensive local housing and austerity and government cuts impacting on youth provision.

Parents own poor personal experiences of school were linked to less aspirations for their children to go on to Higher Education and being more likely to say that their child 'does not know what to do' after school; they were also less likely to send their children to after school clubs.

Out of the options available, parents selected the following issues as things that hold their child back (here presented in order of priority):

Table 5.8 Factors that hold children back

Confidence	50%
Money	46%
Opportunities	34%
Getting qualifications	22%
Direction / vision	18%
Ability	14%
Health (including special needs)	14%
Support from authorities	12%
Family circumstances	8%
Language and cultural barriers	3%

Lack of confidence (linked also to anxiety and fear of failure) is a major issue with is seen to hold children back:

- There was no significant difference between boys and girls.
- The problem was noted in primary schools as well as in secondary schools.
- Lack of confidence was rather associated with good behaviour than bad behaviour – misbehaviour and confidence went together!

Money: lack of money is another significant issue. Parents mentioned the costs associated with:

- The costs associated with going to University.
- Expensive housing, such that it is hard for young people to launch out independently.
- Government cuts were seen to be damaging the prospects of young people.
- Costs of after-school clubs and transport.

Money barriers may also link to the cost of giving children the opportunity to try new things. Lack of opportunity was another important reason why Whitley parents felt their children were held back:

"Limited experiences at home and with family can limit a child's achievements so I try to do as much as I can" (Mother, 45-55)

Getting qualifications followed by direction/vision were the next most important issues, especially for secondary school pupils:

- However, it was not the case that parents who felt that their child lacked direction, were less likely to hope their child would go on to Higher Education or to believe their child wanted this.
- Some parents were more worried about their child lacking direction '(mucking around in class' instead of focusing on their work) when they had high aspirations for their child.

As one parent commented "I would like to teach my child to work hard and to not be indifferent to education. I want her to have ambition. My thoughts are that schools do not teach ambition" (Mother, aged 35-45).

Ability and health (often talked about in terms of special needs) were the next two barriers perceived to face children, followed by support from local authorities. Parents who felt their child faced barriers in terms of ability were also less likely to say they hoped their child would go on to higher education. It was interesting to note that family circumstances came after all of these – understandably parents did not like to say that their own family circumstances were holding their children back, but our research with young people showed that this can be a significant factor.

Family circumstances and parental school experience, including what the parent's own school experience was like, and the occupation of members of the household, were also linked to perceptions regarding their child's experience, with parents who were unhappy at school being more likely to say that their children were unhappy also.

Moreover, poor personal experiences at school were linked to:

- Less parental aspiration for the child to go on to Higher Education.
- Being more likely to say that their child 'does not know what they want to do' after school.
- Being less likely to pick up information from multiple channels
- Having a poorer perception of teachers and their ability to fix the things that concern them.
- Being less likely to be engaged with school in terms of attending or helping out with school events.
- Being less likely to send their child to a school club, some of which may be due to simply not being aware of what is going on (parents in this category were less likely to say that information from schools is sufficient).
- Being less likely to help their children with homework.

Poor school experience was also linked to the feeling that money is a barrier to their child's progress, to not having anybody in paid work in the household and to picking the school just because it was local.

People who had had a difficult school experience themselves were not more likely to expect their child's future to be bleak, they were not more likely to say the school should be doing more to support their child or to blame staff for their child's misconduct, they were less likely to blame peers for behaviour issues, and they were just as likely as everyone else to hope to see their child in a job in the future.

Parents clearly still hope for good for their child, and they can still be positive about the overall education of their child despite some difficult relations with school staff, and yet struggles with the education system tend to persist from one generation to the next.

Parental concern for the welfare of their children came over very strongly in the surveys in spite of sensitive family circumstances which parents refused to discuss. It is not helpful for teachers to assume that because of tragic and chaotic family circumstances that the parent does not care about the welfare of their children – this just wrong-foots people and puts them on the defensive. Assuming the best could help ease communication.

Mothers were more likely to perceive barriers for their children than fathers, and boys were perceived to suffer more from lack of direction (linked to bad behaviour) or difficult family circumstances than girls.

A few parents resisted the idea of children facing barriers at all. They felt it was wrong to have anything holding a child back. One parent added "Parents and school's role is to give direction and vision, although the future is ultimately all down to the child." Another said, "Anything is possible."

The idea that there is always a way forward from any situation is important to keep in mind, without neglecting to improve the things we can for children. As one parent noted about the taking part in the survey, "it has given me questions to ask myself how best to help my child."

5.4 Conclusions: The links between parent-school engagement, family circumstances and positive aspirations

The data clearly tells us that there are a number of interrelated factors that are working together to influence parent's feelings about school and aspirations for their children: good parent-school engagement/communication, school ethos and parent's own experiences and family circumstances shaping aspiration and hopes for their children's life chances.

Parent/School Engagement:

Firstly, our research shows that how well parents engage with the school and positive aspirations regarding children were found to go together. Parent-school engagement is therefore an issue of importance, and both parents and school/teachers have a role to play in this. Moreover, school-parent communication is linked to happiness and higher aspiration.

- **Staff Approachability:** Regarding teachers, a welcoming and approachable attitude was strongly linked to a child's perceived happiness at school, to whether parents think the school does enough to support their child, to how well parents engage with the school, to parental aspirations for the child and to belief in a bright future for the child. Whatever the family circumstances, these associations still held. The soft skills of teachers and their mode of relating to children and parents are therefore very important – and even more important than whether or not parents were picking up on all the school communications they should have been.

- **School-Home Communication:** Having a parent showing active interest in school life (asking the child all the right questions) is linked to the child doing well in school, but parents need to feel informed and up to date for this. Most parents were happy with the information flow from school, although 21% felt there is insufficient information. This was, to a large extent, because of not picking up on the information that is already out there. It would seem almost half of parents interviewed were not even aware of school reports for example, or at least, did not see them as a significant form of communication.

- **Parent engagement with child's learning:** It also takes time for parents with their first child at school to get to grips with how things work at school, and some simply have not understood the system yet. A few parents who want more information do take in all there is however, but just want the opportunity to engage more with their child's learning – perhaps through homework that they can do together with the child. Just because parents had had face-to-face time with teachers in the last month did not make them more likely to feel they had sufficient information from the school, although for a small minority of parents this was the only way they picked up any information at all. Working parents felt they needed more notice of school events so that they could plan attendance into their time.

- **Parental Background and Poor Experience of School:** Regarding parents, indicators of difficult family circumstances (such as parents having had a bad experience of school or no one in the household working), were related to a less good school experience for the child, less good parent engagement and communication with the school and less high aspirations for the child to go on to further education (although we don't see aspirations towards HE as a particular 'goal').

Parents are well aware that their involvement in education matters to child outcomes. However, most parents resisted the idea of child aspiration being limited by family background or at least, they resisted the idea of their own family circumstances holding their child back. Parents in general were more likely to quote barriers related to confidence, lack of money and opportunity, and the need for their child to knuckle down to work at school. They did not tend to blame teachers.

Without negating the fact that parental background affects parent-teacher relationships and child aspiration, it is important not to wrong-foot parents by insinuating that they do not want to do their best for their children. The concern of parents for their children came through very strongly, regardless of family background, and this provides a positive starting point for parent-teacher relations. How welcoming and approachable staff are makes a great deal of difference to the on-going school-parent relationship.

- **Family support:** As we've explored in the previous chapter on young people's experiences, a number of families in South Reading have experienced traumatic events and they need more support. Parents facing difficult family circumstances are the least likely to feel that they have enough information about what is happening to and for their children, and this may be contributing to their lack of engagement with school events and clubs.

- **Parent/school communications:** Special measures may have to be taken to improve the information flow, including the use of written material. Leaflets and letters, although now the least popular mode of communication between school staff and parents, still remain the best form of communication in terms of helping parents to feel in the loop. Telephone or text contact has also been used to good effect, and is the method of communication that parents are most likely to have picked up on. Texts can also be used to good effect to send micro-information to parents of children who are falling behind, helping them to engage in discussion with their child about school work. It helps if school staff pick modes of communication which do not require parents to do something proactive (like download an app) in order to participate[53].

- **School Support:** Almost half of all parents wanted schools and teachers, to do more to help their children prepare for life after school, and this was not only with careers information, but also with life-skills and the general management of their affairs. Parents who had not had a good school experience themselves particularly expressed this[54].

It would seem that these parents hope teachers can fill some of the gaps they know exist in preparing their child for life after school. Attention to this area (and provision of special funding to make it happen) could be an important way of breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage passing from parent to child.

However, schools/teachers alone are unable to provide all this additional support and we need to find new mechanisms for supporting young people outside of formal education. In Chapter 7, we discuss the importance of community organisations and service providers in providing training in lifeskills, confidence building and connecting them to employers.

Parents, therefore, are clearly open to the idea of interventions on behalf of their children even when they are sensitive about discussions of family life directed at them. To criticize family structures is to attack a person's core identity, which understandably does not promote collaboration.

- **Being Local:** Having the school close by was an important factor for Whitley residents. The deep local roots of Whitley are reflected in the number of mentions of children attending the same school as their parents. Although the quality of schools is valued, there was little evidence that parents had a resentful attitude about the school their children attended, even when that school had not been selected by choice.

Parental Aspirations: Opportunities and Challenges

- **No lack of aspiration:** In keeping with research carried out elsewhere[55], it was clear that there is no lack of aspiration amongst 'disadvantaged children', but there is a lack of knowhow in terms of how to sustain and achieve those aspirations. Parents simply do not know the pathways. The information provided by schools is therefore very important, but schools may need to work harder to get it across. Live examples (contact with someone from the same background who has taken the path aspired to) has been found to be more useful in helping young people take the path themselves than long explanations of advantages and disadvantages[56].

- **Importance of school clubs:** Children who attended school clubs tended to be happier at school and more likely to aspire to higher education. Part of this may be parental influence (engaged and aspirational parents were more likely to send their child to a club) but even controlling for multiple elements of parental influence, there was still evidence of a significant link between attendance of a school club and being happier and wanting higher education.

- **Happiness at school:** When asked directly, parents felt that their child's happiness at school depended on 'managing well with lessons', 'having good peer friendships' and 'having encouraging teachers'. Whilst other data backs this up, it was also found that happiness is correlated to behaviour in school and to parental influences. Parents felt that their children were held back by lack of confidence, lack of money (goes with lack of opportunity), and the need for their child to 'knuckle down to work at school'. Very few blamed teachers or negative family circumstances.

53 Sanders, M. & Groot, B. (2018) Why text. The Behavioural Insights Team. [online] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/trial-design/why-text/

54 Also in the Scottish study, the desire for teachers to teach life-skills was found to be almost twice as prevalent amongst people who have no qualifications themselves. Bradshaw, P., Hall, J., Hill, T., Mabelis, J., and Philo, D. (2012). Growing Up in Scotland: Early experiences of Primary School, Edinburgh: Scottish Government. [online] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/05/7940/13

55 Menzies, L (2013) Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [online] https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/england-education-aspirations-summary.pdf

56 Soon, Z., Chande, R. and Hume, S. (2017) Helping everyone reach their potential: new education results Behavioural Insights Team [online] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/education-and-skills/helping-everyone-reach-their-potential-new-education-results/

- **Barriers to aspiration:** As for behaviour, money barriers, barriers in terms of ability and having special needs were all linked to misbehaviour. Perhaps our system favours the wealthy, the able and the socially dextrous, and those less favoured in these areas resist conforming to it. Parents who had had a bad experience of school themselves were not more likely to have children who got into trouble at school, although some other indicators of parental circumstances were linked to child behaviour.

- **Parents and schools together:** Parents felt that communication with schools can be difficult when parents (and their children) do not feel informed/do not understand; feel threatened; feel that bullying/issues with other children are not being dealt with; feel that they are only ever contacted when something is wrong and not when their child is doing well and working hard. Some parents were aware that they only make things worse by refusing to cooperate or by spreading bad reports about the school. Reflection on the issues that can be improved, and especially noting the points of tension between parents, teachers and young people that might be eased can be helpful.

The last point about working together is summed up by one of our Whitley Researchers below:

Liz Ashcroft, July 2018

'We Need to Work Together'

I am a Whitley Researcher and the following is a small contribution to the report's conclusions. I carried out many interviews and questionnaires with parents about their relationships with schools and their hopes and aspiration for their children.

My Main Findings:

Unfortunately many of the parents I spoke to (mostly Mums) felt quite negatively about their relationship with their child's school. This was for a variety of reasons such as, the school not being that friendly, previous experiences and a fear of authority.

However, stepping back from the research now I feel that this was also down to the parents themselves. Some parents brought with them a very negative view of school and education in general largely due to their own experiences and history. They brought this to their child's situation and they had some inherent, embedded fears and concerns that actually could hinder their child's progress.

Much work needs to be done in order for us as practitioners to get past this. We need to make school a positive place for our young people to grow, learn and explore the world!

One of the other issues that stood out to me was how very important transitions are!! All transitions - from Nursery to Reception to KS1 to KS2 and in particular Year 6 to Year 7. Many parents felt that these transitions were very important to them and their children, and that they could be managed better.

In my view these transitions should start earlier. Way before the end of Year 6 the children should be learning about, visiting and becoming part of Year 7. Particularly as very little learning takes place in Year 6 after SATS in May!

Another important idea to me as someone who works in a school, is that the Teachers of Year 6 and Year 7 need to communicate with each other more. Discussions need to happen about transition, expectations of learning and behaviour and for more visits to each other's settings to occur. To observe the children in their previous and future schools may help the process.

FINALLY, on this matter in particular I feel very strongly that we should be in this together. We need to join up on this and not treat transitions as separate entities! To make them more successful we need more unity.

BOX 5.1 PARENTS – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

• Feeling that school staff are welcoming and approachable was very closely correlated to parent engagement with the school and support of the school. 84% of parents rated most school staff as being welcoming and approachable.

• Although Whitley's primary schools were seen to have a better reputation than secondary schools, most parents were positive about their own child's school. Having the school 'local' is important to Whitley residents, who have often been around since generations. Happy parents are associated with happy children.

Three key issues damage parental communication with the school and affect their positivity:

1 A lack of mutual respect (parents for the school and the school for parents); Parents know they influence child outcomes. However, parents resist the idea that their circumstances hold their child back. Parents of all backgrounds want their child to do well. Feeling judged puts parents on the defensive, damaging communication with the school.

2 Feeling the school is not addressing parental concerns, especially bullying concerns.

3 Not understanding/feeling informed. More information was wanted. Also positive news – not only being contacted for negative reasons. Emailed communications were seen as useful. Letters home are still the most effective form of communication. However, the school communicates in multiple ways and picking up on multiple channels was correlated to better engagement with the school. Highly engaged parents felt that appropriate homework is an important tool for increasing engagement still further. Many parents (esp. those with their first child) had not picked up on existing channels of information however and did not understand how things work at school. Also timelier reminders would help working parents plan their time. Having more information about what their child is doing helps parents to support their child's education.

Regarding child happiness at school, managing well with lessons, having good peer friendships and having encouraging teachers were seen by parents to be the key factors. Good behaviour and parental influence was also correlated to happier children.

• Although peers were partly blamed, most parents felt their children to be responsible for their own behaviour. A small role was also attributed to lack of understanding. Correlations within the data suggested that misbehaviour was also linked to money barriers, barriers in terms of ability and having special needs (in other words, those feeling disadvantaged were less inclined to cooperate).

• Lack of confidence, lack of money (which goes with lack of opportunity) and the need for a good attitude to work were seen by parents to be key barriers to child aspiration. Few parents blamed teachers or negative family circumstances, although both of these factors were also associated with aspiration.

• Almost half of parents (particularly those in difficult circumstances) wanted the school to help provide life-skills. There is no lack of aspiration, but there is a lack of knowhow in terms of how to achieve those aspirations. Parents tended to think more children wanted higher education than the young people themselves expressed. The message about the benefits of higher education or other forms of training is not reaching young people.

• Better off children went to extra-curricular clubs (and the clubs may also contribute to them being better off).

In the following chapter, we move on to explore teachers' views on young people's life chances in South Reading and on the role played by school-parent relationships.

6: TEACHER'S VIEWS ON YOUTH ASPIRATIONS AND SCHOOL-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 Introduction

The Whitley Researchers felt it was important to explore teacher views on school-parent relationships, barriers to child development in Whitley and how these could be overcome. Because parents, teachers and teenagers had all been asked similar questions, we could also see which issues were understood in a similar way by all parties, and where the differences of opinions lay.

This chapter also includes data from the snapshot interviews undertaken by the Young Whitley Researchers with 15 JMA teachers about their own past and present aspirations, what influenced them, the helps and hindrances they encountered and their views of student aspirations.

6.2 Teachers: Youth Aspirations and School-Parent Relationships

In total, 38 school staff members completed questionnaires[57]. Just over half of the respondents were teachers in a secondary school (JMA), and the rest, teachers in primary schools. The respondents were all women in primary schools, and about half were women in secondary schools. The majority of the respondents were regular teachers, although teachers with special responsibilities (like Head of Year or Head of Department) were very well represented (just over a quarter of all respondents). Two teaching assistants, an office staff member and an area officer of SEN and inclusion also responded.

57 Our questionnaire was distributed through the WEC in March 2018. We do not suggest that our sample and data are representative of all teachers in South Reading.

Teacher motivation and challenges

Teachers were asked about the most rewarding part of their jobs. Most of them were motivated by their love of seeing children learn, develop and achieve as they experience education. They were rewarded by the 'light bulb' moments and they reported how much they enjoy seeing the children happy. Many mentioned their enjoyment of interacting with children, and the opportunity they have to 'make a difference'. Having enthusiastic children was seen to be highly rewarding, but so was seeing a child progress and change after a struggle.

Likewise teachers were asked about the most challenging or least favourite part of their job. The number one most challenging issues were found to be:

- Behaviour (mentioned by 46% of staff, but primary and secondary school teachers to the same degree).
- Paperwork and to a lesser extent, marking (mentioned by 29%, and especially by primary school teachers).

Some teachers mentioned feeling distressed by the traumatic situations some children face, which they are helpless to address within the classroom, and three teachers mentioned the challenges of dealing with unreasonable or unsupportive parents. As one of our Whitley Researchers commented in Box 6.1:

Box 6.1: Teaching Pressures

Sandra Clare, August 2018

I just wanted to say as a Whitley Researcher my main findings from the questionnaires were that although, every effort by school /teachers is made to inform parent and carers not all of the information is acknowledged or received well. I work in a school and feel both parties must take some responsibility for this. There is a lot of pressure on all teaching staff to improve standards, with some reluctant students at times, and this drains both resources and people power, although the attainment still needs to be met. The staff I work with work extremely hard during the working day and behind the scenes to ensure all pupils enjoy their learning.

Communications between school staff and parents

Parents' evenings are the mode of communication most cited by teachers, with almost all teachers mentioning it. Far more teachers mention this (and other direct and personal forms of interaction) than parents do — only two thirds of parents mentioned parents' evenings as being a main way of communication for example. This highlights the known problem of some parents being out of the loop, and particularly when it comes to face-to-face contact.

Table 6.1 The main ways your school communicates with parents:

Mode of Communication	Parent View	Teacher View
Email	75%	68%
Text	79%	87%
Parents Evenings	65%	89%
Other face-to-face interactions	37%	55%
School Reports	54%	66%
Leaflets and Written Material	33%	32%

The reports of parents and teachers on modes of communication are broadly similar, although teachers tended to be more aware of multiple forms of communication than parents were. If anything, teachers underestimate the importance of email. One teacher said 'read receipts' would be helpful, but it would seem that more parents pick up on emails than teachers think. Getting emails do not make any difference to how well-informed parents feel however – the parents' survey revealed that only letters (the least-used mode of communication) were associated with parents feeling better informed.

According to teacher responses, primary schools do more face-to-face interaction outside of parents' evenings. Secondary schools rely more on websites for communication. Although teachers are equally likely to cite school reports in primary and secondary schools, parents are more likely to pick up on these in secondary schools (parents were significantly more likely to mention school reports as a way of communication when their children were in secondary school as opposed to primary school).

Regarding whether teachers feel this information is sufficient and useful (easy to understand and act upon), their impressions were slightly (but not significantly) more optimistic than those of parents (see Table 6.2). Since parents not happy with communications were mostly (not exclusively) those not accessing the information available, this is a reasonable finding.

Table 6.2 Do parents receive enough information from school?

Is this enough information that is useful?	Parent	Teacher
No / unsure	21%	13%
Yes	79%	87%

Of the few teachers who felt that communications were insufficient, there were mentions of the problem of some parents not accessing the information that is available. Also, the mention to be timelier with reminders, which was a point brought up by parents. Apart from maybe providing materials for the parents who want extra involvement in their child's education, this suggests that teachers have a good understanding of where communication works and where it does not.

We asked teachers what are the most common issues or questions that parents raise with the school or about their children. Teachers, both in primary and secondary schools, said that the most common issue was the behaviour and attendance of the child (just over half of the teachers mentioned this). Parents also want to know about their child's progress in class, child-teacher relations, peer relations and wellbeing generally.

A quarter of teachers mentioned parents bringing up the topic of disputes with other children and/or bullying concerns (this was particularly in primary schools). Around a third of teachers say that they are also asked for information about school events, class or lunch arrangements and so on. Finally, there were homework related questions, more often asked of secondary school teachers.

It is interesting that child behaviour, clearly a sensitive topic, is one of the foremost issues under discussion with parents. Managing poor behaviour is also cited by teachers as one of the most challenging/least favourite parts of their job. The fact that so much conversation revolves around behaviour could be a factor in making parent-teacher relations tenser that the progress of the child actually warrants. Parents also mentioned how unfortunate it is that the most common communication with schools seemed to be of a negative kind.

Teachers went on to tell us what makes it easy and what makes it hard to work with parents on these issues or questions. The most common response (mentioned by over 80% of teachers) was to do with the way in which parents communicated. Teachers found it much harder to work things through where parents took an aggressive stance, resisting the school and its policies or setting their family up against the school instead of trying to support the school approach and work things through positively.

The second most frequently mentioned communication problem was where parents were simply disengaged with the school rather than reinforcing the learning.

Less frequently mentioned issues that made it hard to communicate included parents not understanding what is going on, or parents not following established procedures for sorting things out. Making the time to engage with parents was seen as important in working things through.

It is interesting that both teachers and parents emphasise this need for approachability and a willingness to listen when communicating. This is clearly something that cuts both ways.

Does the school do enough to support students?

Teachers and parents responded in very similar ways to the question, "do you think the school does enough to prepare and inspire children for their next stage in life," – there was no significant difference between responses.

Table 6.3 Does the schools do enough to support students?

School does enough?	Parent	Teacher
No	17%	11.5%
Unsure	30%	31.5%
Yes	53%	57%

Teachers in secondary schools were particularly concerned about preparing children for their next stage in life (although parents were equally worried in primary and secondary schools). These teachers felt that the education was not sufficiently holistic. Children were not learning to become independent. Life skills were lacking and they need better preparation. This is exactly the wish/concern expressed by parents who felt the school could do more too, even

from primary school level, and especially amongst parents who themselves are struggling with difficult circumstances that make it hard for them to fulfil this role at home.

Child happiness

Parents tended to rate their own children happier in school than was the teachers' assessment of the school in general (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 How happy an environment is school? Teacher views

Q to parents: How happy is your child at school? Q to teachers: How happy an environment is school?	Parent	Teacher
1 = not at all happy	3%	3%
2	7%	3%
3	14%	32%
4	40%	51%
5 = completely happy	36%	11%

Teachers were more likely to see primary schools as a happy environment, although parents were equally likely to say their children were happy at school in primary and in secondary. Male and female teachers rated the happiness of the (secondary) school in similar ways.

Teachers were asked what key factors influenced how happy children were at school. The top responses in order of priority were:

- Positive relations with peers (mentioned by nearly half of teachers).
- Positive relations with school staff.
- Managing well with the school structures and with lessons.

In these three, teachers' responses closely resembled the responses of parents and the responses of young people themselves – it would seem that the factors affecting happiness are widely understood.

Just over a third of teachers mentioned how important it is for children to have support structures in place for the things that they struggle with. Some teachers also mentioned the link between reduced happiness and poor behaviour – the way the child engages with school structures is important to their wellbeing. Getting involved also with extra activities in the school was seen to go with happy children (a suggestion borne out in the parent survey correlations).

Just under a third of teachers also mentioned home influences on the happiness of children at school (even coming to school hungry). Again, this was borne out in the parent survey correlations, and is a point that is returned to in later questions.

Child behaviour and improving child support

Child behaviour is an important question since dealing with misbehaviour is a challenging and unpleasant part of a teacher's job. Some of this was low-level disturbance going on and on, but some was related to highly confrontational pupils.

When asked what are the contributing factors to child misbehaviour, teachers cite three major factors:

1. The first is peer conflict or acting up for peers (mentioned by nearly half the teachers).

2. The second concerns home issues (stress, lack of support, poor diet) along with personal immaturity in communication and in coping with school demands. Children with special needs were mentioned as finding it especially hard to cope with school demands.

3. The third, mentioned by 36% teachers, has to do with teacher skill and the setting of inappropriate work demands.

These three factors overlap with the three reasons put forward by parents. Peer influence is the same. Child lapse of judgement is similar (although teachers put more emphasis on home influences here than parents do. Certainly correlations in the data confirmed that misbehaviour was linked to families facing money barriers). Poor teacher management is also similar, although significantly less parents mentioned this compared to teachers, who are much harder on themselves than parents are on them.

Teachers were asked what would help most in dealing with these difficulties. Some said that experienced and understanding teachers, along with clear, consistently applied boundaries were important. Teaching assistants are valued.

However, it emerged that big issues are faced that cannot be sorted out within the classroom, however good the teachers. Lack of time, resources, or capacity to deal with such issues (some of them very distressing) is a problem. Time outside of the classroom to work these things through, pulling in the collaboration of parents where possible, and accessing specialist help where needed from child therapy specialists or social workers was very widely requested. Good communication is necessary to make this work, but this also takes time. It involves having space in school for things besides direct teaching but which aid the development of the child.

Some teachers felt that for children disengaged with learning, the curriculum was inappropriate and more focus on life skills would help, including working through peer relationship issues with young people. They mentioned how important it is to set the right kind of work for these students.

This brings us on to the issue of improving support for children. Teachers were asked not only what could be done better in school, but also what parents and authorities could do better to support their children.

Teacher views on how parents could improve their support

The number one advice of teachers to parents wanting to support their children in school was to:

- Try to understand the way the school works so as to cooperate with it.
- Keep communicating.
- Come to meetings.

Most other points flow from this:

- Ensure child attendance and timeliness, encourage responsibility for kit and behaviour,

- Encourage the child in their attitude to learning, ensuring homework is done and praising achievements.
- Back-up the school line rather than working against it. Realise teachers are trying to do the best for the child too, so they do not need to 'defend' their child from the school.

A few teachers mentioned other points about parenting such as limiting 'screen time' or letting the school know about issues at home that may affect the behaviour of the child.

Teacher views of how education authorities could improve their support

Regarding education authorities, some teachers asked for less emphasis on comparing final grades and more on the underlying factors (such as revision and homework!). In other words, they do not like the implication that they are responsible for everything to do with the success of the child when the playing field is not level to start with. They want more listening to where the real issues are locally and the direction of efforts into dealing with those.

A few teachers suggest more training, also for parents. They also suggested more funding for social care and vulnerable families, and more funding for special needs pupils. There needs to be more support and funding to enable the school to attend to pupils with behaviour problems – addressing these needs outside of regular classes. This involves funding for outside agencies that are involved with these things as well as funding for more school staff, such that staff are not only teaching, they also have the time to deal with issues that go beyond teaching.

How bright is the future?

Parents reported slightly brighter futures for their children than teachers. Most teachers think that the future is at least bright for their pupils but they tend to be more uncertain about the future than parents or young people.

Table 6.5 How bright the future is for your child/the children you teach

	Parent	Teacher
1 = not at all bright	0%	3%
2	2%	3%
3	26%	50%
4	41%	35%
5 = very bright	31%	9%

It must be noted that these results are not directly comparable. Parents are being asked about their own child for whom they may give a biased answer, whilst teachers are asked about Whitley children in general. However, this does challenge the view that Whitley parents have low aspirations for their children. When talking about 'aspirations,' there is a need to define the aims more clearly and the means of getting there.

Perhaps the pathways involve a positive attitude to learning, respectful behaviour, and overcoming barriers in terms of money constraints and low self-confidence. (Regarding self-confidence however, it was noted in the parent survey that it was the children who never got into trouble who were more likely to suffer from low confidence, which raises some interesting questions in itself).

Being prepared in these non-academic life skills is what parents felt held their children back as well. Secondary school teachers were especially worried about children getting adequate (non-academic) preparation for their future, and this lack of preparation had a big influence on the prospects they predicted for children. Thus, secondary school teachers were fairly pessimistic about the prospects of children in their school.

Teachers were asked what things favour the future of children who go to their school, and what things hold them back.

64% mentioned negative parental influence as holding children back

Regarding things that hold children back, the most frequently mentioned point (mentioned by 64% of teachers) was negative parental influence. Chaotic homes and generational poverty was seen to disadvantage children. Disengaged parents were seen to result in lack of good advice, direction, aspiration, and home support for the child. Internet influences, poor diet and too much 'screen time' were also mentioned as contributing negatively. Likewise, some teachers mentioned community influence, pressures and stigma. Some said there are a lack of role models with whom the pupils can relate.

It would seem that parents have a warmer attitude towards teachers than teachers have for parents. Parents and young people resisted the idea that their background held them back (even though they readily recognize that they bear responsibility for how things turn out). They defend themselves against being 'judged'. The feeling of not being held back is positive, so long as resistance to criticism does not stop parents from being open to change. As came out clearly in the parent survey, the process of teachers working these things through with parents is a delicate matter requiring good soft skills.

Other teachers remarked that children were held back by confused policies from the top and lack of resources, especially for more staff. Again it was suggested that children who cannot engage with the subjects might do better with an alternative curriculum and with a focus on the acquisition of life skills. Counselling/pastoral services are important.

As things are, negative home influences and limited school focus can lead to a poor attitude to learning, low expectations of self, a poor grasp on 'life-skills' and poor behaviour, all of which hold children back.

Regarding things that help children and young people forward in Whitley, teachers mentioned:

- Activities that widen the vision and enrich lives (some of them extra-curricular).
- A positive attitude to learning and to challenge.
- A positive ethos in schools, including inclusive school policies.
- Good, encouraging teachers.
- Positive parental input.

6.3 Conclusions

In the conclusions, we compare the views of teachers with the responses of parents and young people to see whether there are key differences that might be focus for change:

The future's not so bright. Teachers are more uncertain about the future than parents or young people. It may be that teachers have a better grasp of the difficulties facing the next generation in terms of jobs, rising housing costs and government cut backs.

Adequately Preparing Young People in School: Teachers, parents and children felt that futures were being adequately prepared for in school were all more likely to rate the future of their children more highly. Around half of teachers did not feel young people were being adequately prepared in these ways.

'Adequate preparation' includes a focus on helping students' access pathways to:

- Enhanced attitudes to learning.
- Understanding the opportunities offered by higher education (and how to access it).
- Training in life skills and working around barriers that parents feel hold their children back (lack of money, opportunity and confidence).
- Disengaged children may benefit from a curriculum more relevant to their needs.

Child Happiness. We note that parents rate their children as being happier in school than teachers do, and they are also less likely than teachers to blame the school for the misbehaviour of their children. The vast majority of parents' rate teachers highly on a scale of how welcoming and approachable they are. Teachers may therefore be encouraged – parents have a better opinion of their work than they might think!

It is unfortunate that most contact takes place where things go wrong (a low-point noted by both parents and teachers), which means that teacher-parent communications can seem more negative than they actually are. Both parents and teachers would like to see a higher number of positive communications being sent out so as to shift this balance.

Relationships and soft skills are important. Parents feel better when teachers are welcoming and approachable, and teachers also feel better when parents are cooperative rather than aggressive or unwilling to listen. Just as teachers need to avoid a judgemental attitude, recognising that parents genuinely care for the welfare of their children, so parents need to recognize that teachers thrive on seeing the children in their care happy and developing well; this is a strong motivating force for most teachers. Since both parents and teachers want the best for the child, there is a good basis for working together. Parents do not need to 'fight' on behalf of their child. Parents taking a resistant or unsupportive attitude to the school was the top issue mentioned by teachers in making it harder to get things sorted out. Teachers also found it hard to work things through with parents who were disengaged altogether.

Child behaviour (or misbehaviour) is one of the most frequent issues parents bring up, as well as being one of the most challenging issues for teaching staff to deal with. Both parents and teachers clearly recognise the importance of good behaviour for child progress in school. No unexpected motivators for poor behaviour were unearthed – teachers are aware of the underlying factors and place higher expectations on themselves to help ease the way than parents tended to place on teachers. Teachers are also perceptive as to the other influences on child wellbeing at school (positive relations with peers and with school staff, positive engagement with the work, and getting enough support from home).

Support for Teachers. Teachers emphasise that time is needed outside of regular classes but still in school time to deal with behaviour issues, relationships issues and with other child development programmes. They want to pull in assistance from the local community and outside agencies – charities and specialist workers, working with parents where possible as well as with the children. Time and resources will need to be specially directed into these things. Teaching is one role of the school but in increasing measure (and especially in locations where families are unable to provide support at home) school staff believe that children (and even their parents) have need of support beyond their academic studies. Staff and resources need to be found to meet these needs as well. Disengaged children in particular should be given a curriculum more relevant to their needs, such as focusing on life skills.

Only just over half of parents and teachers feel that school preparation for future life is fine as it is. Both parents and teachers want more focus on teaching life skills to children who lack them. They both see the need to have additional training for children in positive modes of behaviour where necessary.

Nearly all teachers say face-to-face meetings with parents (for example on parents' evenings) is a major channel of communication, but only two thirds of parents mention this as a main mode of communication. This suggests that at least one third of parents are not getting what is on offer. Teachers are aware that not all parents pick up on the forms of communication available to them. Conversely, teachers reach more parents than they think they do with email. Not that this necessarily helps parents to feel connected. Letters (the least used mode of communication) are important for this, as is parents accessing multiple forms of communication. In secondary school, parents rely less on informal face-to-face meetings to communicate, and more on school reports and the school website.

When asked to think about easing communication, here are the key messages that parents and teachers would like to tell each other:

Table 6.6 How can we ease communication between parents and schools?

What parent's want from schools	What teacher's want from parents
Not to be judged.	That they try to understand the way the school works and to cooperate with it (backing up the school rather than working against it).
They do not like it when things go on that they do not understand, or when they feel that their concerns (particularly over bullying) are not being addressed.	Parents should keep communicating, keep coming to meetings and following the communications, and try to see things from the teacher's point of view.
Besides the need to reach the disengaged parents, even engaged parents want to have more input and information about the education of their child - this can be done through appropriate homework.	Parents should encourage their children to take the same open attitude, encouraging the child to take responsibility for timeliness, kit, homework and behaviour. Parents are role models and affect the behaviour of their children.
Parents and teachers alike mentioned having timelier reminders of events/ deadlines.	Encourage their child in a good attitude to learning and praise their achievements.
Parents and also teachers feel more need to share good news as well as bad.	Parents can enrich their child's vision by enrolling them in extra-curricular activities.

We conclude with a snapshot on what the Young Researchers found when they interviewed 15 teachers at JMA in November 2017.

Box 6.2: Snapshot Interviews by the Young Researchers at JMA

15 teachers answered a series of questions asked by Whitely Young Researchers about their own past and present aspirations, about what influenced them, about helps and hindrances to their aspirations and about their view of JMA student aspirations. The interview questions were put together and carried out entirely by the Young Whitley Researchers.

It was interesting to discover that very few teachers set out to be teachers as a child, demonstrating how aspirations change over time. The influence of other people was the most significant factor in shaping aspirations – families in first place, but also teachers and role models. Life's experiences and personal skills or inclinations played a part as well, with a few chance events thrown in. A desire to help others was mentioned several times as shaping the choice regarding becoming a teacher.

The current aspirations of teachers tended to be more quality-of-life focused than career choice oriented. Several teachers mentioned new hobbies they wanted to try or experiences they wanted to have, or the way they wanted to improve in their job, or their aspirations for their own children.

Obstacles to their own aspirations mentioned by teachers included lack of confidence, life's set-backs, personal failings and lack of support. Things that aided teachers in their achievements included family and friends and also internal motivation – you have to help yourself!

Finally, teachers were asked whether they thought students at JMA had any aspirations. The answer was a qualified yes. Most teachers added the need for the right support, especially to express aspirations and to explore new possibilities. Students could think bigger, but then they need to act for themselves on what they aim for. The need to take responsibility for one's own future came out clearly, both in the teacher's reflections on their own life, and also in their advice to JMA students.

BOX 6.3 SCHOOL AND TEACHER'S – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

• Teachers are more uncertain about the future than parents or young people. However, teachers, parents and students who felt that futures were being adequately prepared for in school were all more likely to rate the future of young people more highly. 'Adequate preparation' includes a focus on pathways: attitudes to learning, understanding the opportunities offered by higher education or training (and how to access it), training in life skills and working around barriers that parents feel hold their children back (lack of money, opportunity and confidence). Disengaged children may benefit from a curriculum more relevant to their needs. Around half of all those interviewed did not feel young people were being adequately prepared in these ways.

• Seeing children thriving and developing was a key motivating force for teachers. All the more then, teachers found it hard when parents refused to cooperate, disengaged, aggressively 'defended' their child against the school, resisted school policy or made no effort to follow school communications.

• Managing child behaviour was one of the most challenging issues. Teachers were well aware of all contributing factors to misbehaviour, and they expected a lot of themselves too.

• Teachers wanted time and resources outside of regular classes to deal with behaviour issues, relationship issues and for other child development programmes, assisted also by outside agencies.

• Aspirations change over time. Although shaped by families, role models, life experiences, personal inclination, timely information and support, teachers also emphasise the need for young people to take responsibility and take action in order to secure their own future.

7: COMMUNITY

7.1 Community

This chapter reports on three research events each reflecting a different approach to engaging the wider Whitley community with a focus on aspiration and as a context for understanding the relationships between family and school. The 'community' is perceived here as a geographical entity, largely residential and served by a range of agencies and institutions – some statutory such as schools and health services and others of a voluntary or community group character.

Older notions of community reflect a settled and distinct neighbourhood where people knew each other for much of their lives. However:

"People's sense of identity used to be embedded in the community to which they belonged, in people's real knowledge of each other but now it is cast adrift in the anonymity of mass society"
(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

There are seven primary and two secondary schools in Whitley – described as a partnership in the Whitley Excellent Cluster (WEC). Approximately 1,100 students (June 2018) in total attend the two secondary schools. Reference has already been made to levels of attainment and academic 'success' in Chapter 1, including the well-researched link between pupil attainment and inequality. Feeling threatened, stressed or helpless directly impacts the capacity to learn. As Wilkinson and Pickett[58] go on to say:

"Another way in which inequality directly affects educational achievement is through its impact on the aspirations, norms and values of people who find themselves lower down the social hierarchy" (p 115)

The Whitley Big Local Community Plan (2012 – 2022) written by Whitley residents, who are vexed about the way in which their community is portrayed e.g. it's 'crime addled' 'falling further behind' 'benefit dependant' with a 'very high concentration of single parents' (pages 9 and 10). They go on to say it is not surprising that people in Whitley suffer from '.. low expectations within ourselves' (p10).

Residents have been 'talked down to' and disabled by those authorities who 'know best' for long enough with the result that residents:

".. (think) they aren't capable … so they expect others to do things for them when in practice they could and should be making changes for themselves and their community and friends" (p10).

What these quotes and comments illustrate is a set of tense relationships first of all between Whitley residents – those who are discouraged and disengaged and those who are activist and working at community betterment. Secondly, the links between residents and serving agencies or institutions who may be seen by residents as patronising and/or dismissive of local capabilities. Thirdly, is the view from inside the schools of the community they serve and the families whose children they educate.

"To a degree, working class people resist the imposition of education and middle class values, because becoming educated would require them to give up ways of being that they value"[59].

Compounding the challenges associated with attempts to bridge differences of expectation and experience between community, families and schools is the impact of deprivation and inequality which tends to fracture bonds and undermine potential ties. Here structural forces such as social class, gender and ethnicity shape aspiration and influence the relationships between home, school and community.

Our first report on transport and mobility[60] suggests that many residents in Whitley have little experience of making connections outside of their own area. This lack of experience and connections can also contribute to a lack of confidence since the unknown is hard to deal with. This may also contribute to the evident friction (referred to in Chapters 5 and 6) between some parents and school staff.

All of the above provided a thought-provoking context for our three community exercises.

58 Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K (2009) The spirit level: why equal societies must always do better London and New York: Allen Lane

59 Evans, G. (2008) Educational failure and working class white children in Britain. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, p115.

60 Lloyd-Evans et al (2015) Working better with Whitley: exploring the everyday transport needs and experiences of local communities in South Reading. University of Reading and Whitley Big Local. Available from http://localtrust.org.uk/assets/images/uploads/Whitley_Report_25.09.2015_FINAL_VERSION.pdf

61 Brown, B. and Ryall, H. (2017) 'Investigating barriers and opportunities in Whitley from the perspective of key community stakeholders as part of the Whitley for Real project 2017', University of Reading

7.2 Researching with Communities

Stakeholder Interviews: Our first formal community research project was conducted in June and July 2017 when two University of Reading interns (Bethany Brown and Hayley Ryall) interviewed nine representatives of Whitley stakeholder agencies and policy makers[61].

The interviews aimed to gain insight into stakeholder perceptions of issues in Whitley and find out what information they wanted to get from the Decent Neighbourhood Fund research to inform future delivery and further engagement with the community. A great deal of preparation went into the planning for the interviews with care and consideration given to the questions to be asked and the methodology for conducting interviews and also the most appropriate agencies to be approached.

This was a highly productive project that generated a rich data haul in issues identified and key recommendations. In tackling deprivation it was suggested, for example, that communications between organisations be improved, schools helped to create incentives for parents to be more actively involved, working for increased community engagement and tackling stigma in and around Whitley.

Some of the key recommendations addressed increasing engagement between secondary schools and parents, improving careers advice for both students and parents, promoting a stronger sense of community, ensuring that Whitley is not by-passed by job opportunities and understanding that higher education is not necessarily a sign of 'high aspiration' there are alternatives such as apprenticeships.

Young Researchers' Community Panel: Our second research exercise was a community panel held on the 25th April 2018. This was hosted by JMA and involved a panel of ten residents and agency representatives[62] who were invited to respond to questions devised entirely by the JMA Young Researchers. They wanted to explore what panel members felt about how the Whitley community supports the hopes and aspirations of its young people. An audience of other community members was also encouraged to participate.

 The Young Researchers – by now recognisably a team in their self-designed T-shirts, badge and logo – spent some time debating and deciding what questions should be posed to the panel. Considerable attention was also paid to the format of the panel – location in the school, seating arrangements, recording, the agenda and chairing arrangements. There was a realisation that the tone of the session should emphasise a constructive approach with some expectation that the panel members and young people together identify some feasible steps that help bring school and community closer together.

One conclusion was that there is always a way forward from any starting point – further findings included:

- Good for us,' is a more valuable aspiration to the community than 'good for me.'

- Supportive relationships are key to developing such aspirations. Parents, teachers and others in the community who genuinely put something into the lives of young people inspire them to give something back.

- Respect, engagement and responsibility cuts both ways in the relationship between young people and adults.

- Addressing stigma involves changing the way that each of us talks about Whitley – there was still evidence of stigma in the room.

- Getting community groups and young people together generated a real sense of goodwill and common purpose. Developing positive lines of communication in this way helps to reduce the negative commentary.

- Celebrating and learning from local role models highlights positive pathways forwards.

- Extra-curricular activities that provide hands-on learning experience also reveals pathways forwards.

- Accessibility to extra-curricular activities in Whitley is increased if they are local, free, and promoted via the school. Collaboration with schools would help with targeting the young people who might benefit the most.

In effect here, there is a plea to create together a community aspiration – one that reflects a shared hope for individuals and groups for the future of Whitley. It's a big umbrella under which the community widely can agree on common values. It may be worth, therefore, compiling together a 'charter' of characteristics for a strong aspirational community.

One further element deserves notice and that is the achievement of the Young Researchers in taking on a formidable challenge for any young person – taking on, in most cases, professional providers and querying in public their commitment to better serving young people. The voice of young people is not often heard in such forums. The panel event could model a new and exciting outlet for the youth voice while building their confidence, their empowerment and a sense of agency.

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62 Representatives of the panel included local police and fire services, RBC, Affinity Housing and the event was Chaired by Charlie Clare from Aspire 2

Partner Meeting and Celebration Event: Our third research event was a partner meeting held on the 16th May 2018. The Whitley for Real partnership led this collaborative session to consider the latest research findings with a focus on generating firm conclusions as a basis for action planning. The event brought diverse players into one room for a common purpose, helping to form the relational network through which change can take place. Members of Whitley's less well heard social groups were able to voice their points of view.

One preamble for the event stressed the importance of words and building a vocabulary – a vocabulary as a means to carry the research forward as a launch pad for action.

"With this understanding we are using words not as bullets or missiles but seeds – seeds are beginnings and everything begins with a word".

For the Young Researchers their words underscored the importance of turning dreams to goals and being steadfast about future ambitions and speaking out 'We must be heard'. The Young Researchers came across as dynamic and positive about the process of going forward that they had begun.

For the Whitley Researchers their words stressed personal growth and development gained through research that also helped in building relationships, being sociable and being listened to.

Other mixed workshop sessions promoted the importance of a local culture of respect and support – key words here were trust, listening, communication, confidence and relationships across the community whether residents or workers. Being aware of opportunities and harnessing them for achieving or advancing aspiration was essential.

To conclude the session a panel of six local representatives – including Reading Borough Council, New Directions and Reading UKCIC and two residents, responded to the workshop's conclusions as a basis for action planning.

7.3 Conclusions

What the three community research events offer is a broader movement for change across the community without internal segregations – where various organisations, groups and individuals can align their efforts to help achieve an aspiring community. We will return to this in our concluding chapter.

BOX 7.1 WIDER COMMUNITY – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

• Whitley is a welcoming place with a strong sense of community, and is surrounded by wealth and job opportunities. Intergenerational poverty and stigma are barriers to change. There is always a way forward from any starting point however.

• Pathways to a brighter future (such as higher education, training, life skills, the right attitude and the right job fit) are imperfectly understood. This could be addressed by:

  • Establishing better links between parents and secondary school staff.

  • Celebrating and learning from local role models.

  • Developing supportive relationships with young people. Parents, teachers and others in the community who genuinely put something into the lives of young people inspire them to give something back. 'Good for us,' is a more valuable aspiration to the community than 'good for me.'

  • Providing extra-curricular activities with hands-on learning experience. Accessibility to extra-curricular activities in Whitley is increased if they are local, free, and promoted via the school. Collaboration with schools would help with targeting the young people who might benefit the most.

• Respect, engagement and responsibility cuts both ways in the relationship between young people and adults.

• Getting community groups and young people together generated a real sense of goodwill and common purpose. Developing positive lines of communication in this way helps to form the relational networks through which change can take place. Positive and direct communication is important in counteracting stigma and negative commentary.

8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Conclusions

The aims of this research were to (i) explore young people's aspirations and how they feel they might achieve them, (ii) examine school-family relationships and how engagement with schools and the wider community can be improved and (iii) suggest ways of strengthening links within the community to aid service provision that enhances the life chances of young people.

Our research concludes that there are three interlinked elements shaping young people's aspirations and school-family relationships in South Reading:

1 Family, school and community attitudes to 'youth aspiration' are influenced by a set of place-based conditions in South Reading. On the positive side, these include strong community bonds, a sense of togetherness and a desire for good local schooling but on the negative side there is evidence of difficult socio-economic and emotional circumstances for some families and poor parental experience of education – socio-economic inequalities, challenging family situations and austerity can fracture trust, respect and damage social cohesion. Young people and their families resisted any sense of stigma and disadvantage, and yet there remained some evidence of struggle in engaging with schools and service providers.

   In addition to the everyday stresses facing adolescents, such as getting good grades and peer pressure, some young people also have to cope with a testing social and emotional environment at home. Young people need help to develop coping strategies and resilience to deal with anxiety and stress, and schools/parents also tell us they need further support in this area.

2 Positive reciprocal relationships between schools, families and communities have an important impact on young people's well being, happiness, and belief in a bright future. We have also shown significant links between good parent-school communication and engagement in school, better student behaviour and more ambitious aspirations and visions for the future. Good communication isn't easy given increasingly busy family lives and pressures facing schools and teachers.

   Students need good relationships with people who believe in them and who have their best interests at heart. Not everyone gets this from family so are there more opportunities in the wider community?

Strong and trusting relationships can be undermined by discrepancies and misunderstandings between schools and parents about young people's capabilities, life chances and their respective roles in supporting children. All parents want their children to have a bright future, and there is no lack of parental aspiration in Whitley. Most secondary school teachers felt that the future is at least bright.

3 Many young people and their families needed greater support to navigate the different pathways into work, training and Higher Education but they want to have a central role in shaping how this is delivered – having a voice is important. Teachers also believe that schools and local communities could work better together. There is a high level of consensus among families, teachers and service providers that enhancing life skills are a priority, along with better information, careers advice and opportunities for work experience.

Young people also have higher ambitions when they attend clubs, engage in extra-curricular activities and experience new environments as these enhance their soft skills, such as confidence, help them develop networks and meet role models who they can relate to. The Young Researchers have shown how exploring your future through creative methods can help develop confidence and well being but affordable opportunities for young people are currently limited in South Reading.

The breadth of the DNF research project and its richness has produced an abundance of findings and conclusions that prompt a wealth of recommendations. Underpinning the research method was an ethos of participatory engagement and community involvement and our proposal here is that the recommendations and their translation into action is equally participatory.

Moving forward, the W4R Steering Group will transform into a W4R 'Action Group', augmented with new service providers, young people and their families, to help translate the findings and recommendations into co-produced task oriented plans. A dissemination conference is already arranged and given the above, this event may focus on how best to take charge of the recommendations and share their implementation. The recommendations presented here are offered as starting point for a new set of conversations around the action phase of the W4R programme.

8.2 Key Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations below are presented for all the research groups: young people, families, teachers/schools and community but with an implicit emphasis on developing stronger relationships between these groups. They also emphasise the need for prompt action follow-up with proposals for initiating projects via four sub groups, communities of practice and schemes to underpin the need to generate effective relationships locally – of mutual respect and trust.

8.2.1. Young people

Key Findings

Students were particularly unhappy and less confident about the future when:

- Direct personal relationships were affected. Almost two thirds of young people said they were set back by problems with peers, and one-third mentioned concerns with bullying.

- They felt that teachers could sometimes be more approachable. Almost half of young people mentioned this.

- Feeling less happy at school and less confident about the future was also associated with not being able to name someone to talk to in the event of a problem. Over one third of students could not identify someone. Being in clubs is associated with more positive outcomes, although almost half of the young people interviewed were not linked to extra-curricular activities.

- Happiness was linked to managing well with, and the presentation of, schoolwork. Feeling that the school provided relevant skills also linked to happiness. 55% of students felt the school could do more to prepare them for the future.

Anxiety and stress: In addition to the everyday stresses facing adolescents, such as getting good grades and peer pressure, some young people also have to cope with a testing social and emotional environment at home. They need help to develop coping strategies and resilience to deal with anxiety and stress. Having supportive, personal connections with peers and adults is clearly important.

Positive two-way relationships: Young people also need good relationships with people who believe in them and who have their best interests at heart. Positive two-way relationships between young people and their families, teachers and peers have an important impact on young people's well-being, happiness, and belief in a bright future.

Parent-school communication: we have also shown significant links between good parent-school communication and engagement in school. How parents talk about the school has strong links with how young people think of school.

Pathways: Many young people needed greater support to navigate the different pathways into work, training and Higher Education but they want to have a central role in shaping how this is delivered - having a voice is essential.

Young People: Recommendations

Developing a Youth-engaged W4R action group: young people themselves must be at the heart of designing and shaping the outcomes of future actions through the continuation and expansion of the Young Researchers programme; YRs should play a key in the W4R Action Group.

Sustaining and supporting aspiration – regular reviews and evaluations of future hopes or intentions with young people and advice, experience and training offered by employers, schools, FE and HE providers, community groups and other organisations such as Reading UKCIC (Sue Brackley), New Directions (Barry Wren) and the University of Reading. Recognition of the impacts of factors such as housing, job market, unemployment, family issues, should be central.

Positive Relationships – between young people (informed support, advice, access to help), between students and teachers (school council, student voice, student attitudes and teacher attitudes).

Student voice – democratic practice in school, ways in which classroom interaction engages students e.g. more interactive sessions and listening to each other.

Mentorship – Young people need mentorship from 'people like themselves' to help them navigate the pathways to achieving their goals. Appropriate role models, visiting speakers, careers guidance and experience and learning focused mentoring, are all important.

Dealing with anxiety and trauma – support groups, access to outside help, reducing exam pressure (extra-curricular and free space for non-exam learning/activities/projects). Reading's proposals to set up a 'Trauma Informed Community' could be explored here.

Curriculum enrichment and local youth provision – we propose a Second Community Panel run by the Young Researchers to explore what shape 'good quality' outreach and youth work might take. Further focus should be on developing new clubs, experiential learning outside school, youth engagement in community issues for research and learning and innovative activities. This could be linked to Reading Voluntary Action's work on youth leadership and new Ofsted requirements for Enrichment sessions to be embedded in the school day.

8.2.2 Families and Parents

Key Findings

Parental Aspirations - No lack of aspiration: There is no lack of aspiration amongst families in Whitley, but there is a lack of knowhow in terms of how to sustain and achieve those aspirations. Parents are well aware that their involvement in education matters to child outcomes but many do not know the pathways:

- **Role models** (contact with someone from the same background who has taken the path aspired to) has been found to be more useful in helping young people take the path themselves than long explanations of advantages and disadvantages.
- **Importance of school clubs:** Children who attended school clubs tended to be happier at school and more likely to aspire to higher education.

Parent/school engagement and good communication: that good communication and how well parents engage with the school go together. Good communication is central. Feeling teachers are welcoming and approachable is linked to happiness and higher aspiration.

Three key issues damage parental communication with the school and affect their positivity: a lack of mutual respect, feeling the school is not addressing their concerns (especially bullying) and not feeling understood or informed.

- Regarding teachers, a welcoming and approachable attitude was strongly linked to a child's perceived happiness at school, to whether parents think the school does enough to support their child, to how well parents engage with the school, to parental aspirations for the child and to belief in a bright future for the child.
- Regarding parents, indicators of difficult family circumstances (such as parents having had a bad experience of school or no one in the household working), were related to a less good school experience for the child, less good parent engagement and communication with the school and less high aspirations for the child to go on to further education.

Family support: A number of families in South Reading have experienced traumatic events and they need more support. Parents facing difficult family circumstances are the least likely to feel that they have enough information about what is happening to and for their children, and this may be contributing to their lack of engagement with school events and clubs.

Barriers to aspiration: lack of confidence, lack of money, difficult family circumstances (such as parents having had a bad experience of school or no one in the household working), were related to a less good school experience for the child, less good parent engagement and communication with the school and less high aspirations for the child to go on to further education. The importance of life skills was mentioned frequently.

Recommendations: Families and Parents

Parent/school communication - finding new ways of linking and communicating with schools and adopting a collaborative community attitude towards supporting positive relationships.

Learning and life skills - setting up a community wide parent adult learning group with New Directions (Barry Wren) for sharing and learning from past experiences – run by parents within schools and other community settings.

Engaging parents in schools - roles for parents in school on school premises and at school events and shared learning, particularly for parents with poor experience of their own schooling. Newly formed parents groups for fundraising (e.g. Whitley Park) could be a useful model here.

Aspirations for parents – supporting families' knowledge of pathways and opportunities available to young people through better engagement with employers, HE institutions, careers services, schools.

Family support and the home learning environment – some families with difficult circumstances require additional support from service providers and schools; develop new ways of supporting a more enriched home environment; talk about the school positively as parental attitude affects child perspective; find out about and praise child achievements.

8.2.3 Teachers/Schools

Key Findings

The future's not so bright: Teachers are less certain about the future than parents or the young people themselves. We note that parents rate their children as being happier in school than teachers do, and they are also less likely than teachers to blame the school for the misbehaviour of their children. The vast majority of parents' rate teachers highly on a scale of how welcoming and approachable they are.

Adequately Preparing Young People in School: Teachers, parents and young people who felt that futures were being adequately prepared for in school were all more likely to rate the future of children more highly. Around half of teachers did not feel young people were being adequately prepared in these ways. 'Adequate preparation' includes a focus on helping students' access pathways to:

- Enhanced attitudes to learning.
- Understanding the opportunities offered by higher education or other forms of training and work experience (and how to access these).
- Training in life skills and working around barriers that parents feel hold their children back (lack of money, opportunity and confidence).
- Disengaged children may benefit from a curriculum more relevant to their needs.

Support for teachers: teachers emphasise that time is needed outside of regular classes but still in school time to deal with behaviour issues, relationships issues and with other child development programmes. They want to pull in assistance from the local community and outside agencies.

Recommendations: Teachers/Schools

Classroom practice – more interactive and supporting, not just inspiring aspiration; tackling exam pressure; embedding new learning opportunities in the curriculum (Ofsted enrichment sessions).

Community collaborations - Knowledge of the community to engage community assistance and links for joint and collaborative projects i.e. links with local Universities.

Positive communications with parents – also inform parents about current topics/upcoming tests in order to aid parent-child communication - do not assume parents understand procedures – letters home are effective – ensure timely reminders – some parents appreciate the use of homework as a tool for their engagement.

Develop and value soft skills – half of teens find it hard to approach teachers with a problem.

Extra-curriculum support for non-academic issues - provide time and resources out of class for dealing with non-academic issues – more emphasis on discovering pathways to reaching one's goals.

8.2.4 Community

Key Findings

Communications between organisations could be improved:
Working for increased community engagement and tackling stigma in and around Whitley. Addressing stigma involves changing the way that each of us talks about Whitley.

Supportive relationships are key to developing aspirations:
Parents, teachers and others in the community who genuinely put something into the lives of young people inspire them to give something back.

Respect, engagement and responsibility cuts both ways:
In the relationship between young people and adults. Celebrating and learning from local role models highlights positive pathways forwards.

Extra-curricular activities that provide hands-on learning experience also reveal pathways forwards. Accessibility to extra-curricular activities in Whitley is increased if they are local, free, and promoted via the school. Collaboration with schools would help with targeting the young people who might benefit the most.

Improving careers advice for both students and parents, ensuring that Whitley is not by-passed by job opportunities and understanding that higher education is not necessarily a sign of 'high aspiration' there are alternatives such as apprenticeships.

Recommendations: Community

Community Panel - led by the Young Researchers on youth provision in South Reading; task centred and action based to align current work on local youth provision.

Community wide 'charter' for aspiration – what is an aspiring community?

Community practice projects – where schools and parents jointly explore local issues with university support (Aspire2); curriculum links with schools for community development with WCDA and WEC (e.g. community museum).

Community orientation training for teachers and parents.

Community support for issues affecting families e.g. troubled families.

Community Assets - researching and promoting more awareness of assets in the community e.g. skills of parents.

Our research journey and participatory ethos has already led to new partnerships and collaborations that we hope will provide the foundations for the task ahead. Some possibilities include:

- Setting up parent, teacher, community and youth groups (e.g. 4 in each group to turn recommendations in this report into a handbook or manual for guidance that each sector should adopt).

- Community of practice – joint or collaborative projects to tackle local priorities together in mixed groups with university support.

- Art of conversation – at least one major session before December to bring a mixed group together to explore issues of respect, communication and listening – relationships count.

- Whitley for Real Action Group will curate and shape the outcomes of this research going forward.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewed by: Date: Form number:

Gender of the person you interview: M / F   Form number(s) of linked questionnaire(s):

This survey is being conducted by the Whitley Researchers in order to understand parent-school relationships. This is so that schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council can improve and develop the support they give to families in South Reading. Could we ask you some questions about your relationship with your children's school and how this impacts on their future goals? You can answer any questions you like and skip any you do not want to answer (continue only if consent given).

1. How many children do you have in your household?

_____

2. How old is your oldest (or only) child still in primary/secondary* school? (*Delete as appropriate)

Age: _____

Please answer the following questions with this one child in mind.

3. Gender of child: M / F

4. Where do your children currently go to school?

_____

5. How did you choose this child's school? (tick all that apply)

☐ Only school available – no choice   ☐ Good reputation

☐ Local – easy to get to   ☐ Offers the kind of support my child needs

☐ Other family / friends there   ☐ Other (please explain) _____

6. On a scale of 1-5, how happy is your child at school?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

Any special reason/reasons for your rating?

7a. What are the main ways your school communicates with you as a parent? (tick all that apply)

☐ Email   ☐ School reports

☐ Text message   ☐ Leaflet and written material

☐ Parents evenings   ☐ Phone call

☐ Other face to face interaction   ☐ Other _____

7b. Do you feel you are getting enough information in this way that is useful to you?

☐ Yes

☐ No/ not sure. What would make things better? _____

8. Are you satisfied with the way the school has handled any issues and concerns you raised?

☐ Not applicable - no concerns

☐ I have concerns but have not involved school staff. Explain if you wish_____

☐ School staff have not been helpful when I raised concerns

☐ School staff have been of some help when I raised concerns

☐ School staff have been very helpful when I raised concerns

9. On a scale of 1-5, how welcoming and approachable are the school staff?

1 (not at all welcoming)   2   3   4   5 (completely welcoming)

10. If and when your child gets into trouble at school, what are the biggest contributing factors?

_____

11. In an average month, how likely is it that you do the following:

	not at all likely	possible	likely	Comments, e.g. Would like to but not possible
Speak with a member of the school staff about your child				
Help out with a school event				
Pick up your child from school personally				
Send your child to a school club				
H elp your child with homework				
Attend a school event with your child				

12. Looking to the future:

What does your child want to do after finishing school? (tick all that apply)

☐ Further Study   ☐ Raise a family

☐ Job   ☐ Child does not know

☐ Other _____

What would YOU like your child to be doing at the age of 19?

_____

What would YOU like your child to be doing at the age of 25?

_____

Is there anything that might hold your child back (circle words or add words)

Health   Confidence   Opportunities   Ability   Direction/vision   Support from authorities

Money   Family circumstances   Culture   Getting qualifications   English language

On a scale of 1-5, how bright do you think the future is for your child?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

13. Do you think the school does enough to prepare your child for their next stage in life?

Yes / No / Not sure

14. Could the school do more to support you and your child?

☐ No, it is good as it is

☐ Yes, the school could do more.

IF YES: Please name one or two things the school could do better:

_____

15. Is anyone in your household: (tick all that apply)

☐ In a paid job   ☐ Full time carer

☐ Volunteering   ☐ Studying

☐ Other _____

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, what was your own school experience like at your child's age?

1 (negative)   2   3   4   5 (positive)

17. Is there anything else you would like to add about your child's education or future, or about this survey?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 2

Secondary school student questionnaire

This survey is being conducted by the Young Whitley Researchers in order to give students a voice. We want you to tell us what life is like for you as a student. Schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council will use this information in their attempts to provide a better school environment.

You do not have to take part in this survey, and even if you do, you can skip any questions you do not want to answer.

School:

Personal identification (you can use a number in place of your name to protect your identity):

Gender: Male / Female

Year group:

1a. On a scale of 1-5, how happy are you at school?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

b. What makes a big difference to how happy you are at school?

_____

c. On a scale of 1-5, how positive is/are your parent(s)/guardian(s) about your school?

1 (not at all positive)   2   3   4   5 (completely positive)

2. Are you involved in any groups, clubs or organised activities outside of usual school lessons?

☐ No

☐ Yes. What are they? _____

3. Compared to others in your class, do you miss much school?

☐ I almost never miss school

☐ I miss less school than average

☐ I miss about as much school as others

☐ I miss more school than average

4. If you had a problem at school, is there someone you can talk to for help?

☐ No/not sure

☐ Yes. Who?_____

5. Are any of the following a problem to you:

	No problem	Possibly	Big problem
School work			
Approaching teachers about any problem I have			
The way teachers manage the class			
Fake friends/broken friendships			
Bullying			
Appearance on social media			
Issues at home			
Negative influences in my community			
Getting my voice heard / feeling my views are understood and respected			

Any other problems? _____ _

6. Yes/no/not sure questions

	Yes	Npt sure	No
Do you feel safe when going somewhere other than your usual route to and from school			
Do you feel the school is providing you with the skills you need for your future?			
Do you feel confident you will get a good job after school?			

7. Looking to the future:

What would you like to be doing at the age of 19 (straight after leaving school)?

_____

What would you like to be doing at the age of 25?

_____

On a scale of 1-5, how bright (positive) do you think your future is?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

Main thing that helps you forward:

_____

Main thing that holds you back:

_____

8. Any other comments?

_____

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire for school staff

This survey is being conducted by the Whitley Researchers in order to understand parent-school relationships. This to help schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council to improve and develop the support they give to families in South Reading. Could we ask you some questions about your views on parental involvement with the school, and how this impacts on the pupil's future goals? You can answer any questions you like and skip any you do not want to answer.

1. Your Gender: M / F

2. Name of school:

3. Your role:

4a. In your experience, what are the main ways your school communicates with parents? (Tick all that apply)

☐ Email   ☐ School reports

☐ Text message   ☐ Leaflet and written material

☐ Parents evenings   ☐ Other face to face interaction

☐ Phone call   ☐ Website

☐ Other _____

b. Do you feel that parents are getting enough information in this way that is useful to them (easy to understand and act upon)?

☐ Yes

☐ No/ not sure. What would make things better? _____

c. What are the most common issues or questions that parents raise with you about the school or about their children?

_____

d. What makes it easy and what makes it hard to work with parents on these issues or questions?

Easy if...

_____

Hard if...

_____

5a. On a scale of 1-5, how happy an environment is school for the children you deal with?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

b. What key factors influence how happy children are at your school?

_____

6a. If and when children get into difficulties or misbehave at school, what are the biggest contributing factors?

_____

b. What would help most in dealing with these difficulties?

_____

7a. What is the most rewarding part of your job?

_____

b. What is the most challenging or least favourite part of your job?

_____

c. What might enable parents to better support you and their children?

_____

d. What could the education authorities do?

_____

8. Do you think the school does enough to prepare and inspire children for their next stage in life?

☐ Yes

☐ Not sure

☐ No. What would make things better? _____

9a. On a scale of 1-5, how bright do you think the future is for the children you teach?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

b. Regarding children who go to your school:

Things that favour their future:

_____

Things that hold them back:

_____

10. Any other comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____

ASPIRATION IN WHITLEY

ⓘ For more information, please contact:

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