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**Dandelion Children: Year 6 pupils' perspectives
of the impact of transferring schools on learning**

Bryony Parkinson

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Abstract

By the time they finish school, most British pupils will have attended at least two schools. The empirical link between moving schools and declining academic performance is well documented, but pupil perspectives on the impact of school transferal on their learning are rarely sought. Drawing on multiperspective Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a philosophy and methodology, this article outlines a proposal for a small-scale research project comparing the views of three Year 6 non-mobile, mobile, and Service children, also known as 'dandelion children'. It concludes that listening to pupil perspectives empowers them as active agents in their own transition experiences, whilst helping teachers reflect on the support they provide to pupils as they join and leave their classrooms.

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Introduction

Most school children in the UK will change schools at least once before the age of eighteen, typically moving from primary school in Year 6 to secondary school in Year 7. However, many will also attend more than one primary school in a phenomenon known as 'pupil mobility', also referred to as "pupil turnover', 'transience'... and 'turbulence'" (Demie, 2002, p.199). Pupils move primary schools for many reasons, but it is agreed that Service children form a subgroup amongst mobile children (Dobson et al., 2000; Jørgensen & Perry, 2021). Such children are sometimes called 'dandelion children', for their capacity to "survive and even thrive in whatever circumstances they encounter, in much the same way that dandelions seem to prosper irrespective of soil, sun, drought, or rain" (Boyce & Ellis, 2005, p.283-284), and the dandelion is the 'official' symbol of Service children (Little Troopers, 2020).

Empirical investigations have focused on the impact of mobility on educational outcomes, but there are few qualitative studies comparing the perspectives of the pupils themselves. The research proposed here seeks to address this by using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) case study approach to explore two research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What do Year 6 pupils think about the relationship between moving primary schools and learning outcomes?

RQ2. How do Year 6 non-mobile, mobile, and Service pupils approach transitioning to secondary school?

This paper will first explore the literature relating to pupil mobility and transitions to secondary school before outlining this study's proposed methodology, research limitations, ethical considerations, and implications for my own future as an educator. As a Service child, I have an emic perspective that aids my understanding that every pupil's experience is unique. The results of this research will not only draw attention to oft overlooked groups of pupils but demonstrate the

importance of listening to all pupils and empowering them to speak about, and into, the issues that concern them.

Literature Review

Pupil transitions from primary to secondary school, pupil mobility, and Service children constitute three distinct areas within the literature. Though there is little overlap, each of these categories have been studied extensively using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the volume of literature for each area reflects the number of pupils affected. A longitudinal study analysing 525 396 pupil records found that only 0.2% of pupils had never moved schools, 87.7% had moved to a secondary school in Year 7, 54.5% had moved more than once, and 1.1% of the total cohort were Service children (Jørgensen & Perry, 2021). This literature review will first analyse the literature related to the primary-secondary school transition—the common factor for participants—before examining the literature relating to general pupil mobility, and finally focusing on the literature dealing specifically with the experiences and impact of mobility on Service children. Despite the emergence of similar themes and issues, there is little dialogue between these three areas. The literature therefore provides the context for the gap that this proposed study will bridge.

The Primary-Secondary Transition

There is a wealth of literature exploring the transition Year 6 pupils make from primary to secondary school; enough, in fact, to warrant the publication of at least two systematic reviews in the last four years (Evans et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). This is unsurprising given the overwhelming evidence that this transition has a negative academic and psychological impact on pupils (Evans et al., 2018). Galton et al. (1999) found that “up to two out of every five pupils fail to make progress during the year immediately following the change of schools” (p.6). Jindal-Snape et al. (2020, p.544) list a further nine studies that report a decline in attainment after transitioning, to which may be added Akos et al. (2015) and Carey et al. (2017).

To mitigate these findings, many studies have sought to discover the reasons for lower educational outcomes after the primary-secondary transition. Noyes (2006) noted that “the differential success of children negotiating the transfer has remained along the lines of socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity” (p.43), supported by qualitative and quantitative research from Benner and Graham (2009),

Evans et al. (2018), Jindal-Snape et al. (2020), and Rice et al. (2011). There is a growing emphasis on the connection between academic performance and emotional wellbeing, demonstrated by the increasing number of studies focused on pupil perspectives. This reflects an awareness of children as “agentic beings in their own lives” capable of shaping “how they themselves experience transitions and those of others” (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020, p.534-535, see also Messiou & Jones, 2015; Noyes, 2006). Interestingly however, Zeedyk et al. (2003) found that “teachers rarely identified children's individual abilities as making a difference to the transition process, focusing instead on institutional initiatives, an emphasis that carries the risk of creating a degree of helplessness for individual pupils” (p.67), highlighting a difference in attitude between researchers and teachers.

Embodying these ideas about the agency of the child in the transition process, some studies (Messiou & Jones, 2015; Noyes, 2006; Zeedyk et al., 2003) conducted interviews with pupils about their experiences, while others (Evangelou et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2011) used surveys and questionnaires, and others (Hanewald, 2013; Topping, 2011) reviewed the literature surrounding student experiences to identify themes. The themes that emerge consistently highlight the importance of social capital, networks of beneficial social relationships, when transitioning (Sperne, 2020). Jindal-Snape et al. (2020) found “ten studies reported negative transition experiences due to worries that pupils had about peer relationships” (p.540), while Zeedyk et al.'s (2003) study discovered that pupils were primarily concerned about being bullied, getting lost, and peer relationships. Evans et al. (2018) link this directly with academic performance, noting a correlation between the number of peers from the same primary school and academic achievement, and concluding that social, emotional and academic “components are not independent” (p.2). However, although peer relationships emerge as the greatest concern for pupils (Zeedyk et al., 2003), parental support may have the biggest effect on how well pupils transition into secondary school. Benner and Graham (2009), Evans et al. (2018), Jindal-Snape et al. (2020) and Smith et al. (2008) argue the presence of supportive parents has the greatest impact on continued academic progress and emotional wellbeing.

In summary, the literature surrounding pupil transitions from primary to secondary school consistently reports a dip in academic progress in the year following the transition, and offers a variety of causal, contributing or mitigating factors, such as the pupil's socio-economic status, gender or ethnicity, as well as their social capital in their peer and parent relationships. Pupil perspectives primarily focus on the peer aspects of transitioning. In their systematic literature review, Jindal-Snape et al. (2020) observe that researchers tend to focus on the negative aspects of transition: out of 96

studies, 60 focused exclusively on the negative impact of transitioning (p.537). This is apparent in questionnaires like the Student Concerns Questionnaire used by Rice et al. (2011), which only asks what pupils are worried about and not what they are looking forward to. This has implications for the research proposed here, which will be discussed in the methodology section.

As will become apparent, much of the literature about the primary-secondary school transition is also relevant to pupils transitioning between primary schools. However, there are two important caveats. The first is that the time when pupils transfer to secondary school coincides with puberty (Sperne, 2020), which may have an additional impact on the way pupils experience the transition. Secondly, there are greater structural differences between primary and secondary schools than between primary schools, and this may also increase pupil concerns prior to transitioning (Evans et al., 2018). Bearing these factors in mind, we may now examine the literature concerning pupil mobility.

Pupil Mobility

Pupil mobility refers to pupils joining a school at non-standard times, including the beginning or middle of the school year. As aforementioned, approximately 54% of pupils will move schools at least once in addition to transitioning from primary to secondary school (Jørgensen & Perry, 2021). Much of the research into pupil mobility was conducted in the 2000s, and as Jørgensen and Perry (2021) observe, “there is thus a significant need for updating and expanding this work, particularly following almost 10 years of austerity policies, a significant increase in child poverty... and the ever-increasing marketisation of the English education sector” (p.1140). The literature that exists is primarily concerned with measuring the consequences of pupil mobility, especially grade decline, and possible causes for this.

Echoing the trend observed when pupils move to secondary school, several studies demonstrate a correlation between pupil mobility and lower academic performance (for example: Demie, 2002; Pribesh & Downey, 1999). Demie’s (2002) analysis of 2403 pupil records from a London LEA found that mobile pupils scored, on average, 19% lower than their non-mobile peers in English, maths, and science (p.204). Pribesh and Downey (1999) found high mobility pupils were also less likely to aspire to further education, leading them to conclude that “combined school and residential moves are associated with lower educational expectations” (p.531).

However, other studies argue high pupil mobility is a symptom, not a cause, of lower educational outcomes. Strand and Demie (2006) consider when other factors, “such as low family income, lack of fluency in the English language, a higher incidence and severity of SEN, and low attainment at the start of the key stage” (p.563) are accounted for, there is little difference in academic performance between mobile and non-mobile pupils. Some studies have also found a correlation between pupil mobility and eligibility for free school meals (Jørgensen & Perry, 2021; Demie, 2002). Pribesh and Downey (1999) surmise “movers perform less well in school than nonmovers in large part because the *kinds of families* that tend to move are also likely to have other disadvantages” (p.531, emphasis in original).

Other factors connected to the experience of moving may also affect pupil progress. As in the literature discussing the primary-secondary transition, some researchers cite the relevance of social capital, acknowledging the social, psychological, and emotional challenges of starting a new school (Brown et al., 2011). Pribesh and Downey (1999) argue “from a social capital perspective, moving interrupts social relations with persons in the school, the neighborhood, the community, and, perhaps, the family” (p.522), although they admit this accounts for only 5% of the difference in test scores between movers and non-movers. However, although the National College of School Leadership concurs that “a significant theme in the data was that social and emotional wellbeing underpinned all learning” (Brown et al., 2011, p.17-18), there is only one study examining pupil perspectives on the impact of mobility on learning. After interviewing mobile secondary pupils, Messiou and Jones (2015) found “at the top of the students’ list of worries was the issue of friendships and peer acceptance” (p.258). Mobile pupils’ concern about the social dimension of moving schools is therefore consistent with pupil perspectives of the primary-secondary transition.

As well as the limitations imposed by the dated nature of the research on pupil mobility and the paucity of qualitative studies, the literature often fails to take into account the reasons why pupils move schools, instead “treating mobile pupils as a homogenous group” (Strand & Demie, 2006, p.562). This becomes particularly relevant when considering the circumstances of one mobile subgroup: Service children.

Military Transfers

The term ‘Service children’ refers to “any child of school age whose parent has served in the Armed Forces during that child’s school career” (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2006, p.24). They

are a distinct subgroup of mobile pupils, and face unique challenges, such as “recurrent separations, frequent relocations, the threat of injury or death of a parent and disruptions to schooling, social networks and activities” (Rowe et al., 2014, p.490). Like other mobile pupils, they do not represent a static, homogenous group; Bradshaw et al. (2010) cautions that “most of the extant research on mobile military students, however, was published during peacetime, when the risk for deployment into a combat situation was considerably lower than it is today” (p.86). As well as the shifting impact of changes in the geopolitical landscape, children connected to different branches of the military may also have different experiences. Rose and Rose (2021) found in a survey of school leaders that mobility was perceived as a bigger challenge for British Army children, compared to Royal Air Force or Royal Navy children.

The evidence is unclear whether the correlation between mobility and lower academic performance is present among Service children. Some researchers deny Service children are as affected academically by moving as their civilian peers. Dobson et al. (2000) report “some schools where mobility was linked to movement of the armed forces had relatively high overall performance levels” (p.12), and the House of Commons Defence Committee (2006) found the “performance of SCE [Service Children’s Education] schools compares favourably with English schools” (p.18). This may reflect the impact of the schools’ mitigating interventions rather than a lack of an educational penalty. Although the Service pupil premium (SPP) “is there for schools to provide mainly pastoral support for service children” (Ministry of Defence, 2021, para. 7), Rose and Rose (2021) found that 47% of the schools involved in their study “used this resource to provide academic support... [including]...targeted catch-up support for Service children with gaps in learning, and access to additional resources and experiences relevant to the curriculum” (p.7). They also found that schools identified addressing gaps in learning as the second most significant challenge in supporting Service children (ibid., p.3). This aligns with Service pupil and parent perspectives, who report “having to repeat classes and lessons... [and]... missing critical topics, such as fractions, multiplication, and cursive handwriting” (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p.92); see also Ruff & Keium, (2014). Other studies did find that Service children had lower academic outcomes than other pupils, but attribute this to deployment-related stress rather than mobility (Chandra et al., 2010). Service children face a variety of unique challenges as well as mobility that interact with each other and make it impossible to draw simple causal links.

In attempting to explain the effect—or lack of—of relocation on Service pupil performance, many authors turn to ideas about the impact of higher levels of adaptability amongst Service ‘dandelion’ children, developing a strong resiliency narrative absent in studies involving other mobile pupils (Alderson, 2005). Jindal-Snape et al. (2020) note that “adaptability... has the strongest relationship with educational achievement” (p.546), while Fabian (2003) argues that moving frequently provides Service children with the opportunity to “become adaptable and flexible; become confident with change; gain a wide network of friends and value relationships; develop a sense of realism and the importance of 'now'; and become adept at closure skills” (p.101); see also Ruff & Keium (2014). Increased resiliency may be linked to a cumulative effect of multiple transitions (Bradshaw et al., 2010; see also Ruff & Keium, 2014), and interviews with school staff, parents and pupils also found that Service children perceived themselves to be more resilient than other pupils (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Compared to the literature on the primary-secondary transition and general pupil mobility, the literature focused on the experiences of Service children is remarkably positive (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Cramm et al. (2018) argue that “the tensions within the military family field often hinge on polarized messages of military families being at increased risk and military families as strong and resilient” (p.622-623). It is possible that Service children have become part of a romanticised narrative emphasising an ideology of sacrifice and heroism borrowed from military culture. Interestingly, this narrative may be a factor that develops resiliency among Service pupils; Cramm et al. noted that “military family members ascribe meaning and purpose to the normative stressors characterizing the military mission” (ibid., p.629). It is perhaps the normalcy of mobility, the “battle rhythm” that turns “chaos into consistency” (Villagran et al., 2013, p.778) that sets military pupils apart from their peers and enables them to develop effective coping strategies, as well as the social capital they gain from moving within a supportive military community with a shared identity (Cramm et al., 2018). However, a perception of high resiliency may be detrimental to the wellbeing of Service children. Bradshaw et al. (2010) caution that some coping strategies are developmentally inappropriate, leading to advanced maturation or “parentification” (p.96). Furthermore, Cramm et al. (2018) warn that overemphasising a resilience narrative, risks transferring “blame and shame to them if they are not able to achieve a state of resiliency” (p.634); see also Rose & Rose, (2021). It is important that ‘dandelion children’ are acknowledged as individuals facing unique personal challenges as well as members of a resilient and adaptable community.

Summary of Literature

Overall, there is a wealth of research exploring school transfers, although the research is compartmentalised into specific categories that rarely overlap. Of these categories, the three that are pertinent for this research proposal are those dealing with the primary-secondary transition, general pupil mobility, and Service children. While some common themes emerge—such as the correlation between moving schools and grade decline, and the importance of social capital—the background circumstances of each group renders comparing quantitative data futile. However, researchers of all three groups emphasise the importance of collecting qualitative data to explore the phenomenon of moving schools, evidenced by the number of studies that involve interviews of pupils, parents, and teachers. There are no studies that compare the lived experiences of pupils from each of these three groups; it is this gap that the proposed research will attempt to address.

Methodology

In light of the existing literature, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of a variety of Year 6 pupils, specifically focusing on their perspectives of the impact of moving schools on learning. It is worth at this point restating the research questions:

RQ1. What do Year 6 pupils think about the relationship between moving primary schools and learning outcomes?

RQ2. How do Year 6 non-mobile, mobile, and Service pupils approach transitioning to secondary school?

To answer these questions, I will utilise a phenomenological approach, IPA. The following section will explore the philosophies informing this methodology, before outlining my research design and discussing limitations.

Research Philosophy

Moustakas (1994) writes, “in phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p.52). It is only recently, however, that researchers have realised the importance of listening to children’s perceptions (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). This study is underpinned by the acknowledgement that children are active agents (Jindal-Snape et al.,

2020), and therefore have a right to shape and guide the research process. As a study of individual perspectives, this research is idiographic, concerned with understanding the lived experiences of specific pupils rather than discovering objective general laws. This does not mean that any findings are irrelevant for the wider population; Bourdieu argues for “particularity within generality, and generality within particularity” (Wacquant, 1989, p.36), and Smith (2004) claims “that delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal” (p.42). IPA is therefore the most suitable methodology for exploring in detail the ways Year 6 pupils make sense of the phenomenon of transferring schools. IPA is “an epistemological position” that also “offers a set of guidelines for conducting research” (ibid., p.40), which will be unpacked as the research design is explained. However, Smith also acknowledges that “one cannot do good qualitative research by following a cookbook” (ibid.), and there are some elements of IPA that require modifying to meet the needs of this study, which will also be explained.

Research Type

IPA is an inductive methodology, meaning that this study is concerned with allowing themes and meanings to emerge rather than proving a hypothesis (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2007). As the literature demonstrated, there are multiple theories surrounding pupil mobility and transitions to secondary school, and this study does not seek to prove or disprove them; rather it seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals. This has already shaped the design of the research questions, which are concerned with ‘how’ and ‘what’ rather than ‘why’ (Smith & Osborn, 2007), and will shape the questions asked during semi-structured interviews, allowing “unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during analysis” (Smith, 2004, p.43). Semi-structured interviews will be used as they offer the richest way of collecting in-depth individual perspectives. However, combining this with a case study approach provides an opportunity to use mixed methods to supplement qualitative data. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) argue that as long as any quantitative data is not “seen as superior to, or more important than, the qualitative work...[but]... as enriching the contextualization and understanding of the case” (p.24); see also Evans, (2009), then collecting quantitative data may be beneficial. This project will therefore use a whole-class questionnaire to enrich the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews in a cross-sectional three case study. Time limits this study to being cross-sectional; further research could extend it longitudinally by interviewing the same pupils after their transition to secondary school (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020).

Sample

Qualitative data collection favours a small sample size, and IPA requires that the sample should be purposeful (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). My mixed methods approach necessitates selecting two sample groups: a larger group for the questionnaire, and, derived using the results from this, a smaller sample of interviewees. Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend that IPA novices select three participants to preserve the depth of the interviews, a figure that maps neatly onto the three categories of pupils—non-mobile, mobile, and Service children—whose various experiences are the focus of the research. To represent these specific pupil voices, sampling will be dimensional as well as purposeful (Winterbottom, 2009).

The nature of the research questions requires sample selection to be purposeful at every level, determining the choice of year group, school, and individuals. Year 6 has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, most Year 6 pupils in the UK transition to secondary school in Year 7, and therefore have an opinion on transitions, regardless of whether they have experienced it previously. This addresses the second research question, exploring how Year 6 pupils navigate their upcoming transition to secondary school. Secondly, Year 6 pupils are more likely to have experienced and remember at least one prior transition than any other year group by virtue of being older, widening the sample of mobile pupils eligible to interview. On a school level, it is necessary to select a school that has some Service children, but not a majority. A majority Service child school is likely to have additional structures in place to support them that may be atypical and therefore unhelpful. 49% of schools in receipt of SPP have more than two service children (Rand, 2019); a suitable school for this study would need to have at least two Service children in Year 6. Likewise, it is important that the school does not have an unusually high proportion of mobile pupils, as again it may have atypical support structures. The median number of mobile pupils in primary schools reported by OFSTED in 2002 was 11.1% (p.4), which means a school with mobility of 11.1% \pm 3% is desirable.

This is the level of purposeful sampling required for the questionnaire, which will be given to all Year 6 pupils within the chosen school (at least 25). Part of the purpose of the questionnaire is to identify three individuals to interview who can address the research aims, particularly the second question: one pupil who has never moved schools, one non-military pupil who has moved schools at least once, and one Service pupil who has also moved schools at least once. Completed questionnaires will be

divided into these three groups, numbered, and then a random number from each group will be chosen from each group to select interview participants.

In choosing a deliberately non-homogenous sample this study strays from a purist IPA approach (Smith & Osborn, 2007). However, recent developments in IPA advocate drawing on multiple perspectives to find meaning in the spaces *between* participants (Larkin et al., 2019). Treating each participant as a single case study (Smith, 2004) will preserve the integrity of the IPA analysis process.

Research Strategy

As discussed, this study will involve a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This section will explain their content.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire (presented in Appendix 1) is two-fold. As well as identifying participants for the interview sample, it also addresses the first research question focusing on perspectives of moving from primary to secondary school. Although the sample size is too small to make generalisations, it will still contribute to the wider literature. For example, Section 1 will build on the Student's Concern Questionnaire developed by Thomasson et al. (2006), "a simple checklist of seventeen concerns which pupils are required to rate on a Likert scale" (Rice et al., 2011, p.247). Following the recommendation of Jindal-Snape et al. (2020) that future questionnaires focus on positive as well as negative aspects of transitions, Section 2 will ask pupils what they are looking forward to. Section 3 will address the second research question, finding out what Year 6 pupils think the impact of changing primary schools is. Section 4 will establish the background of each child and will be used to identify appropriate children to interview.

Interviews

The interview schedule is presented in Appendix 2. Having chosen three interviewees, the next step is contacting their parents/carers. This is both an ethical consideration and a practical one. Wong and Gerras (2010) observe that "children may be unreliable sources of information concerning their parents' deployment history" (p.15), and the same may be true if a child has moved multiple times. It is therefore necessary to find out each pupil's actual number of school transfers. This enhances the

meaning of transferral in a child's account, especially if there are discrepancies between the figure given by the parent/carer and the child. A child who identifies as having moved schools five times when they have only moved three times clearly has a different perception of transfer to the child who only remembers moving once. As some of the issues that may be raised during the interviews—such as leaving friends or parental deployment—are sensitive, contacting the parents will also enable me to be more considerate in my questioning.

Turning to the interviews themselves, Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend that IPA interviews should be structured around broad issues that meet the research questions. The broad areas in this study are: perceptions of the impact of past moves; perceptions of the unique aspects of being a mobile/ Service child; and perceptions of the upcoming transition to secondary school. All pupils can speak into these areas, as they will have a perspective even if they have not experienced it themselves. The interview schedules will be built around these areas and tailored towards each pupil. After establishing a rapport with the pupil (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017), the interview will begin with broad, open questions, before narrowing down to more specific ones in line with IPA methodology (Smith & Osborn, 2007). However, depending on the maturity of the participants, it may be necessary to use some narrower questions from the beginning (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). As a semi-structured interview, the schedule exists for guidance only and I will use online analysis to allow the child to direct the interview.

As well as questioning, the interviews will also incorporate participatory techniques to facilitate conversation and promote engagement (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). I will provide a variety of buttons and ask pupils to choose buttons to represent the school(s) they've attended, prompting a discussion about why they might have chosen each button. It is important to note that although Henderson (2000) argues such methods could provide an insight into the subconscious, I do not have the psychoanalytical background needed to interpret beyond what the participant chooses to explain (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). After this discussion, I will provide pupils with a blank graph. The x-axis will be labelled 'school', and the y-axis will be labelled 'learning'. I will ask pupils to place their button(s) on the graph, which will prompt further discussion relating to the first research question about the relationship between moving schools and learning. After all the interviews are complete, analysis may begin.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews will be analysed separately. Initially, all the questionnaires will be analysed together, deriving mean values for each of the Likert scale responses. This will make it possible to rank the results and see what pupils are concerned about and looking forward to about moving to secondary school. It will then be possible to calculate the means for each subgroup and compare them, to see whether, for example, Service children are concerned about the same things as their mobile or non-mobile peers. By comparing answers to Section 3 of the questionnaire, I may also see whether pupils who have never moved before perceive the impact of moving schools in the same way as pupils who have. Of course, the sample size means this data is not representative, but it will still contribute to the wider literature and provide an insight into the class' context ahead of the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews will be transcribed, recognising that this is itself a hermeneutic process (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). After transcribing the interviews, I will analyse each interview separately, using IPA. This involves going through each transcript several times, looking for emergent themes considering the research questions. Once I am satisfied that I cannot identify any more emergent themes, I will cluster them into superordinate themes, creating a table that includes direct quotations as evidence. Only then will I move on to the next two interviews, repeating this process and treating each interview as a separate case (Smith, 2004). Larkin et al. (2019) offer further instructions for multiperspective analysis in IPA. They advise identifying consensus/ conceptual overlap, conflicting perspectives, reciprocity of concepts, paths of meaning, and lines of argument. Divergence between pupil perspectives may illuminate the phenomenon of moving schools. Finally, I will create a matrix "with cases on one axis and themes on the other... [which will help] ...identify similarities and differences between and within" the sample (Larkin et al., 2019, p.192), and will visually represent the analysis.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are practical and theoretical. Practically, the sample size for this study is restricted to enable high-quality idiographic analysis, but this means any findings are not representative of the population (Jørgensen & Perry, 2021). Also, while the aims of this research study are focused on exploring pupil perspectives, Sperne (2020) notes that "even if the students'

voices are important, it is a limitation that the students are almost entirely the only participants” (p.12). Further research would explore the phenomenon of school transferral from another angle, by using a multiperspective IPA approach to triangulate my findings with other perspectives, such as parents and teachers.

However, even if these limitations were removed, the nature of the research—exploring pupil perspectives at a particular point in time and space—would still restrict generalisability. Mobile and Service children represent a huge demographic, and the ever-changing geopolitical landscape will impact their perceptions of changing schools (Wong & Gerras, 2010). Although this limits lasting future applicability, it also increases the importance of gathering current pupil perspectives to update past studies.

There are also theoretical limitations. The biggest challenge in conducting qualitative research with children is the power inequality between the adult researcher and the pupil participants (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). This may result in pupils adjusting their responses, also known as the Hawthorne effect (Evans, 2009). This can be reduced by giving children control of the recording equipment, clearly offering them opportunities to withdraw, and using participatory methods (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). The process of analysis is also complicated by the fact that the researcher is “an interpreter whose interpretations cannot be separated from the data that will emerge from the research” (Hamilton et al., 2013, p.53), and my own experience as a Service child will affect my interpretations. This is not necessarily an evil, and may even be an advantage, provided it is made explicit. In spite, therefore, of several limitations, this study remains worthwhile, not least by treading pathways for future research.

Ethics

This research will follow the British Educational Research Association’s guidelines for ethical research (BERA, 2018). There are several dimensions to consider, including the nature of the research, practicalities associated with the methods used, and the content of the questionnaire and interviews.

Before the research begins, it will be important to gain written consent from the school, participants, and their parent/carer. They will be informed of the nature and purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, how and where the data will be stored in line with General Data Protection

Regulation laws, when it will be destroyed, and what it will be used for. To empower the pupils, written consent will be required from them as well as their parents (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). All data will be password protected and pseudonymised.

The questionnaires will not be anonymous initially, as part of their purpose is to identify pupils to interview. After this, however, names will be deleted. As a questionnaire it should be unemotive, although some of the issues raised may be sensitive for pupils. This will be explained in advance, and pupils will be directed towards appropriate support through the school as necessary. It will be explained that they can skip questions or stop at any time.

Written consent will also be sought from interviewees, emphasising the fact that even though they may have given permission, they may withdraw it at any time. It will be important to consult the pupils' teacher and parents to find out whether there is any sensitive information to be aware of. For example, a Service child may have a parent who is deployed or injured, or a mobile child may have moved due to a traumatic event. It may be in the best interests of the child to select another participant. The content of the interviews will need to be considered carefully, and I will need to be attune to the child's emotional state, providing continual opportunities for the child to withdraw. The interviews will be conducted in school, for safeguarding transparency and so that trusted adults are available should a child become upset. Real names will not be recorded, and careful school sampling will avoid deductive disclosure by ensuring that there is more than one Service/ mobile child in the class. All recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and password protected, and research findings will be shared with participants and stakeholders in an age-appropriate way. As a qualitative study, which will evolve as the project develops, these ethical outlines will "also be treated as an iterative part of the process" (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p.133).

Conclusion and Implications

In conjunction with the findings from the literature, the process and results of this proposed study will have implications for education in general and specifically for my future practice as an educator. Existing studies highlight the challenges faced by pupils moving schools, evidenced by lower academic outcomes, and the importance of empowering pupils by listening to their perspectives. However, the literature also contributes to perpetuating hidden narratives portraying children as passive victims or resilient heroes that need exposing and countering. The National College for

School Leadership urges schools to “recognise each (mobile) pupil as an individual, make the time and space to understand the needs of each pupil, [and] fit resources and ways of working according to the pupil’s needs, not the other way round” (Brown et al., 2011, p.18). By comparing pupil perspectives this study will enable me to do just that, improving my understanding of the experiences of pupils from all backgrounds in my class and helping me to support mobile pupils, Service children, and pupils preparing to transition to secondary school. In this vein, Messiou and Jones (2015) argue that dialogue between teachers and pupils “is the first step in addressing issues that might arise due to students’ mobility, rather than a final step” (p.264).

However, the goal is not simply to listen to pupils so that *I* can solve their issues, but to recognise their agency in shaping all their experiences, including transitions (Zeedyk et al., 2003). Giving them space to speak is the first step in giving them space to act. The process of conducting this study will therefore play an active role in supporting me as an educator by challenging my underlying epistemological assumptions and stereotypes, which will in turn impact my attitude towards all pupils, not just mobile ones. This means that although this study is limited in its scope and the generalisability of its findings, the process of doing it will have an impact on me and the children I will eventually teach. Further research could extend its reach by increasing the sample size, the time frame, and the range of perspectives included to triangulate the data.

The phenomenon of pupil mobility is itself a mobile category. Even since the initial proposal of this research, world events have changed the geopolitical landscape. It is difficult to predict what the coming months and years will bring, but it is certain that it will be more important than ever to listen to pupil perspectives to make sure that my classroom is a safe, inclusive, and welcoming space for all ‘dandelion children’, wherever they may have come from.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire for all pupils (adapted from Thomasson et al., 2006)

First name:

I am a... (circle your response)

Boy

Girl

Prefer not to say

Section 1: Your New School

Here is an example of a rating scale:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all worried	▼										I get extremely worried about it

We would like to ask you some questions about any concerns or worries you may have about your new secondary school. Please rate each of the following using the scale above. For example, if you were really worried you would put a 10 in the box beside it.

Making new friends		Getting to school		Being able to do the work		Getting lost	
Being bullied		Changing classes for different lessons		Losing old friends		Remembering equipment for school	
PE		Discipline and detentions		Following a timetable		What to do if you are feeling ill	
Size of school		Lots of different teachers		Dinner times		Lots of people	
Older children		Homework		Toilets		Break time	

If you have any other concerns, you can write in the boxes below and then rate your concerns with the same scale as above...

.....	
.....	

Section 2: Your New School

We would also like to ask you about what you are looking forward to about your new secondary school. Please use this scale:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not
looking
forward
to this. ▼

I am really
looking forward
to this

For example, if you were really looking forward to something, you would put a 10 in the box.

Getting away from some pupils		New teachers		School sports facilities		More challenging work	
Opportunities for school leadership		School teaching facilities (e.g. science laboratories, art studio)		A different school uniform		Being the youngest in the school	
Being taught by a variety of different teachers		More independence in getting to school		A fresh start		New location	
Getting new devices (e.g. a laptop or mobile phone)		Opportunities to make new friends		Extracurricular activities		School plays and performances	

If you have any other things you are looking forward to, you can write in the boxes below and then rate them with the same scale as above...

.....	
.....	

Section 3: Moving from one primary school to another

The following questions are designed to find out what you think the impact of children moving from one primary school to another primary school is.

Please tick the box indicating how far you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I think children who have been to more than one primary school...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...are more likely to be bullied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...find it easier to make friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...find school work easier	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...have a closer relationship with their parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...are good at keeping in touch with friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...struggle to catch up on missed work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4: All about you

How many primary schools have you been to? *Circle your response*

(Only this one): 1 2 3 4 5 More than 5

When did you join this school? *Circle your response*

Reception Y1 Y2 Y3 Y4 Y5 Y6

Have either of your parents served in the military since you started school? *Circle your response*

Yes

No

If yes, which part of the military were/are they in? *Circle your response*

British Army

Royal Air Force

Royal Navy (including Royal
Marines)

Would you be happy to take part in a face-to-face interview to discuss your school experiences further? *Circle your response*

Yes

No

Appendix 2

Interview Schedules

Interview schedule for non-mobile pupil:	Interview schedule for mobile pupil:	Interview schedule for Service pupil:
<p>Area 1: Perceptions of the impact of past moves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your school <i>Prompt: What do you like/ dislike about it?</i> 2. How do your teachers help you learn? (<i>note: ask them to choose a button to represent their school and place it on graph, moving it to show how much they think they learnt each year</i>). 3. What do you think it would be like to move primary schools? <i>Prompt: What would be good? What would be hard? What do you think would happen to your learning?(note: use the button/graph).</i> <p>Area 2: Perceptions of the unique aspects of being a Service child</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Do you know anyone with a Mum or a Dad in the military? 5. What do you think is hard for them? 6. Are there any good things you can think of? <p>Area 3: Perceptions of the upcoming transition to secondary school</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Tell me about your new secondary school 8. How are you feeling about going into Year 7? <i>Prompt: Are you worried about/ looking forward to anything?</i> 9. What do you think will happen to your learning in your new school (<i>note: use the button/graph</i>). 10. How do you think people who have moved before might be feeling about moving to secondary school? 	<p>Area 1: Perceptions of the impact of past moves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about this school. <i>Prompt: What do you like/ dislike about it?</i> 2. What do you remember about your other school(s)? (<i>note: ask them to choose buttons to represent their schools and place them on a graph, moving them to show how much they think they learnt each year</i>). <p>Area 2: Perceptions of the unique aspects of being a Service child</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Do you know anyone with a Mum or a Dad in the military? <i>Prompt: mention specific pupils.</i> 4. What do you think is hard for them? 5. Are there any good things you can think of? 6. What do you think is different about moving schools if one of your parents is in the military? <p>Area 3: Perceptions of the upcoming transition to secondary school</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Tell me about your new secondary school. 8. How are you feeling about going into Year 7? <i>Prompt: Are you worried about/ looking forward to anything?</i> 9. What do you think will happen to your learning in your new school (<i>note: use the buttons/graph</i>). 	<p>Area 1: Perceptions of the impact of past moves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about this school. <i>Prompt: What do you like/ dislike about it?</i> 2. What do you remember about your other school(s)? (<i>note: ask them to choose buttons to represent their schools and place them on a graph, moving them to show how much they think they learnt each year</i>). <p>Area 2: Perceptions of the unique aspects of being a Service child</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Tell me about what it's like to have a parent in the military. <i>Prompt: What do you think is hard about having a parent in the military?</i> <i>Prompt: What is the best bit about being a Service child?</i> 4. What do you think is different about moving schools if one of your parents is in the military? <p>Area 3: Perceptions of the upcoming transition to secondary school</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Tell me about your new secondary school. 6. How are you feeling about going into Year 7? <i>Prompt: Are you worried about/ looking forward to anything?</i> 7. What do you think will happen to your learning in your new school? (<i>note: use the buttons/graph</i>).

