



Article

# Implications of Educational Policy-Making Which Encourages Schools to Collaborate with the Community, External Agencies, Private Companies, Employers and Voluntary Organisations

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**Abstract:** Despite the move to state education, policy-makers since the early 1900s have encouraged the community, external agencies, private companies, employers and voluntary organisations to become involved in schools. The rationales for these collaborations are to address issues (e.g., delinquency, neglect, underachievement and low family support), which will be tackled through activities (e.g., extra-curricular clubs and one-to-one support) and to focus on the social aspects of schooling of wider audiences (e.g., adults). These activities are deemed as beneficial through implementation which is perceived to be issue free. Research is lacking with regard to how these policy responses are played out in practice and the perceptions of those involved. This paper reveals the individuals involved in four case study schools using an audit pro-forma, documentary analysis and interviews with school staff and external agencies. The findings highlight that several individuals were expected to deliver former statutory provision for free, but quality was a concern. Individuals may perceive that their activities contribute to the national curriculum, but staff had different perceptions. This paper reveals how policies are directing the individuals involved and their activities. There are questions over whose interests are intended to be served and the implications for pupils, parents, schools, communities and politicians.

**Keywords:** school; collaboration; community; employers; external agencies; voluntary organisations; educational reform; policy-making; ideology; progressivism

## 1. Introduction

Despite the shift to state responsibility for education or schooling, this paper highlights that policy-makers have continually invited the community, external agencies, private companies, employers and voluntary organisations to become involved in schools. Policies from the early 1900s such as the Hadow Report ([Board of Education 1926](#)) and a range of other policies discussed in this paper outline policy-makers' concerns about pupils (e.g., behaviour, learning and wellbeing) and the perceived underlying issues (e.g., delinquency, lack of achievement or neglect). The policies propose to address these issues through a solution which includes the involvement of individuals and groups beyond the "state" in schools to deliver activities and services. This paper argues that these policies are underpinned by assumptions about pupils or their families and influenced by policy-makers' ideologies. [McCulloch \(1993\)](#) warns that the state can contain different ideologies and interests which are evident across policies. [Matheson \(2008\)](#) agrees that these ideologies are not mutually exclusive and a policy could advocate both traditional and child-centred methods, despite these often being expressed as a dichotomy. This suggests that there is a complexity in the purpose of policies which encourage

groups and individuals to collaborate in schools and those who respond maybe delivering hidden policy-makers' ideologies.

This paper firstly presents a literature review, which discusses a range of educational policies that have advocated the involvement of individuals and groups beyond the state. The review reveals the underlying concerns, ideologies and solutions detailed in these policies. This paper argues that there is a lack of research with regard to how these collaborations are played out in practice, which is essential if these policies are underpinned by ideologies. Research is also lacking with the groups and individuals who are continually invited to collaborate with schools, which this paper calls "external agencies". To address these gaps, this paper explores the involvement of external agencies in four schools: two middle schools and two secondary schools. The research questions from the doctoral research on which this paper focuses are: (1) Who are the external agents involved in the case study schools and what are they there to do? (2) Is the involvement of external agents related to government policies and initiatives or do other rationales exist? The methods include an audit pro-forma, interviews with school staff and external agencies and documentary analysis. It presents the types of external agencies involved, their activities and how these relate to educational policies to provide a sense of the external agency involvement across the four schools. This paper discusses the issues identified by the schools and external agencies as they respond to these policies and reveals the potential implications for pupils, schools and communities as these continual policies influence provision. Finally, this paper makes recommendations to improve the involvement of external agencies in schools.

## 2. Literature Review

The paper begins with a review of the literature to highlight the different themes which underpin the requests for schools to collaborate with external agencies from the community, providers, businesses, statutory organisations and the voluntary sector. The methods used in the literature are first outlined, before the different themes which arose are discussed.

### 2.1. Literature Review Methods

Three "live" lists of key words to be used in the literature search were maintained throughout the research process which related to: (a) the activities on offer by the external agencies (e.g., extra-curricular activities); (b) the labels used for the individuals working in schools (e.g., external agencies); and (c) how to describe the provision that was on offer (e.g., collaborative working). To locate the initial key words, the following search was used via Google using the phrases "schools working with partners" and "schools working with agencies". This resulted in the production of these three "live" lists of key words and additional key words were added to these "live" lists throughout the review. The Education Research Complete (ERC) database was then searched using the key words from the three live lists. The first search of "schools" and "agencies" returned 28,065 results whilst "schools working with agencies" returned 39 results. Following this, a search was undertaken for "schools working with agencies" and then "schools working with partners", with a date range of 2000–2013, which both returned only six results. Specific searches were then undertaken using the key words; for instance, "schools" and "employers" returned 19 articles and one of these was included. In total, this returned 133 articles and from these there were five of interest. This only generated a small number of articles for inclusion within the original review. The key words of these new articles were then collated and incorporated into further searches (e.g., "non-profit sector", "education", "family services", "child welfare", "school", "social work" and "Great Britain social policy"). The original literature review was updated prior to the submission of the thesis (see [Everitt 2018](#)) and again during the production of this article to maintain currency from 2018 to 2020. In total, 22 items of literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, books and educational reports were included in the review for this paper, in addition to 17 policy documents (as outlined below).

These policy documents were located through the Education in England website (see [Gillard 2018](#)) using the abovementioned keywords in the search facility. Critical summaries were created of any

policies, which included references to external agencies, that were produced from the early 1900s. Seventeen policy documents were included in the original literature review and these policy documents are close to what is discussed in this article. A timeline was created of any new policy documents which invited external agency collaborations during the 2010–2017 period and this has been monitored during the 2017–2020 period (see [Everitt 2018](#)).

## 2.2. Literature Review Themes

The different themes from the literature include: (a) constructive activities delivered by quasi-military style external agencies; (b) external agencies perceived as specialists; (c) supporting the national curriculum or social aspects of schooling; (d) support around the concept of social inclusion; and (e) supporting schools in times of a reduced state. This review argues that previously external agencies were used by policy-makers to try to enforce social control over disadvantaged pupils who were deemed as at “risk” of not realising their human capital potential, despite the suggestion of wanting to meet individual needs. In addition, the review highlights the system barriers to the realisation of these collaborations or associated costs which are not recognised by the policies. This paper argues that it is important to consider the ideologies which underpin the policies that encourage schools to collaborate with external agencies and to consider the implications of these policies to practice.

### 2.2.1. Constructive Activities Delivered by “Quasi-Military” Style External Agents

This section is concerned with policies which have encouraged schools to collaborate with external agencies who possess membership structures which enable them to deliver constructive activities to certain pupils.

The Hadow Report ([Board of Education 1926](#)) encouraged the involvement of external agencies in schools, which included the Young Farmers’ Clubs or girls’ departments of the Women’s Institutes. The report warned of the opportunities for pupil interaction with “social dangers” and delinquency as a result of increased leisure hours. The external agencies were invited to deliver constructive activities in schools, as teaching staff lacked knowledge and skills and the activities were costly. The aim was to reduce delinquency and prepare pupils for employment. Concerns about illiteracy, unfitness and lack of training amongst British conscripts during the Boer War, WWI and WWII ([Great Britain Parliament 1944](#); [Barber 1994](#)) resulted in Circular 1486 to local authorities ([Board of Education 1939](#)). This circular demanded state assistance for voluntary organisations such as the Boys Brigade, Scouts and Girl Guides. The circular also suggested that external agencies should be allowed to use schools on a low or no cost basis to deliver constructive activities to certain pupils. These external agencies responded to this invitation and this underpinned the start of the Youth Service ([Roberts 2004](#)). This thinking from Circular 1486 entered the 1944 Education Act (Clause 53) ([Great Britain Parliament 1944](#)) but three further reports ([Ministry of Education 1947, 1948](#); [Central Advisory Council for Education 1967](#)) also called for external agencies with membership structures to deliver constructive activities, which suggests the same issues and solutions. [Gillard \(2018\)](#) highlights that there was an increase in education spending on schools and extra-curricular activities, but this was influenced by the recognition by the Conservative government of the link between educational investment and economic growth or human capital ([Becker 1964](#)).

There is a continuation of the desire to involve external agencies with membership structures in schools to deliver constructive activities to specific pupils within more recent policies. For instance, the Character Grants (3.5 million) announced in a speech by the [Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP \(2015\)](#) aimed to fund external agencies including the Scouts and rugby clubs. These external agencies were perceived to be able to build character and resilience in “disaffected and disadvantaged” young people. In the speech, Morgan suggests that external agencies would contribute to the delivery of social justice, but the reference to behaviour and attendance indicates an interest in performativity. This paper argues that this implies that these policies are underpinned by a deficit model, a concept

highlighted by [Dyson et al. \(2002\)](#) as a method of social control (see [Jones 1983](#)). [Brooks \(2012, p. 18\)](#) warns that this interest in character development through the involvement of external agencies such as Cadet Forces to formulate a “quasi-military” environment is problematic. The issue is that pupils are characterised as disaffected, due to policy-makers’ assumptions which view pupils as active citizens, as opposed to their creative contribution. [White et al. \(2017\)](#) investigates how schools are responding to the desire for “character education” as proposed by policies since 2010 and funded through the Character Innovation Fund. Their research highlighted how schools are working with external agencies to secure free activities, for the supply of advice or tools and for training days. Schools might commission external agencies but they also exploit goodwill and favours. Whilst the schools involved in the [White et al. \(2017\)](#) study saw character education as a holistic approach which underpinned all of the schools’ current activities, some schools clearly had targeted activities for certain young people. [Heyes \(2019\)](#) agrees that policy-makers are interested in the delivery of character education by external agencies with membership structures (e.g., Scouts and Sea Cadets). Furthermore, the number of uniformed services has expanded in the belief of their role in character development. See [Beckett et al. \(2019\)](#) highlight that, whilst there is an interest in the involvement of uniformed services in character development programmes, the evaluations are not robust. This encouraged their randomised control trial of uniformed service involvement which showed positive results. However, they emphasise the difficulties in setting up and maintaining programmes, as well as in attendance and leadership. This suggests that there is a continued interest in the involvement of external agencies with a membership structure to be involved in schools to deliver constructive activities. However, there are concerns around the underlying rationales for these activities in addition to issues around implementation and evaluation.

### 2.2.2. External Agencies Perceived as Specialists

This section is concerned with policies which focus on the involvement of external agencies who are deemed as specialists and able to respond to cases of neglect or complex cases that require specialist support.

The involvement of social workers and voluntary organisations (e.g., NSPCC) in schools is included in the both the Newsom Report ([Ministry of Education 1963](#)) and the Plowden Report ([Central Advisory Council for Education 1967](#)). The 1960s was characterised by the perception of external agencies as specialists to support pupils who had specific needs ([Barron et al. 2007](#)). The Plowden Report argued that primary schools could not offer everything that children needed and there was a desire to tackle social amelioration. The external agencies were perceived to be able to help with children labelled as backward and maladjusted. The Newsom Report outlined that the involvement of external agencies was deemed as a cost-effective solution to the social problems which impacted 13–16 year olds (e.g., delinquency, poverty and truancy). The report suggests the delivery of extra-curricular activities for pupils of average or below average ability by external agencies. This paper argues that certain pupils were perceived as assets to be developed for their future economic value or the development of human capital ([Becker 1964](#)).

There are more recent publications which continue to portray external agencies including social workers, health professionals and psychologists as specialists ([Barron et al. 2007](#); [Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009a](#); [Hadfield et al. 2005](#)). The value of specialists is in their ability to respond to complex needs through individualised support packages ([Ainslie et al. 2010](#); [Harris et al. 2010](#)). The involvement of external agencies could relieve teachers of pressures and boost morale ([Hadfield et al. 2005, p. 5](#)) or heavy workloads ([Ainslie et al. 2010](#)). These specialist workers could complement schools by taking referrals into their services ([Department for Education and Skills 2004](#)) but there is a recognition that one-to-one support activities and services are expensive ([Higgins et al. 2013](#)). [Ainslie et al. \(2010\)](#) highlight the potential tensions between professionals which cannot be eradicated by simply placing them together. [Harris et al. \(2010\)](#) report that schools which had high engagement with external agencies were influenced by the belief that the

school and community were interconnected influences on children's learning. Schools that did not collaborate cite the lack of time, agency connections and relevance to the standards agenda, a suspicion of agencies or perceived extra cost. This suggests that, despite the interest from policy-makers for schools to collaborate with external agencies for their specialist skills, there are a range of potential barriers and enablers to these collaborations.

### 2.2.3. Supporting the National Curriculum or Social Aspects of Schooling

This section is concerned with policies which tasked teachers with delivering a national curriculum, whilst external agencies were invited to support the wider curriculum or to deliver the social aspects of schooling.

The focus on the national curriculum in England has led to the reduction in the social aspects of schooling (Wyness and Lang 2016). Ball (1997) warns that this is the continued move from education as a vehicle for developing moral values towards its economic value. The social aspects of schooling were to be delivered by businesses and private companies that were invited to undertake profit-making activities within the public sector (Ball 2012). External agencies have been involved in the delivery of the wider curriculum such as citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE). External agencies (e.g., road safety and theatre companies) were perceived as able to deliver sensitive topics or a credible message, but some external agencies were expensive whilst others did not charge, but quality was a concern (QCA 1998; Watkins 1992; Macdonald 2009; Formby et al. 2011). The government made PSHE compulsory in 2019 with support for schools offered through the PSHE Association, which suggests it is best delivered by teachers and the previous model of "drop-down days" to be used only as enrichment (PHSE Association 2020). Furthermore, Department for Education (2019) in their guidance to schools around pupil online safety suggest that schools could use external agencies, but only to enhance provision as opposed to a standalone activity. Research by Beckett et al. (2019) highlighted how some primary and secondary school pupils advocated the involvement of external agencies for the delivery of sessions around online sexual harm for their credibility and specialist knowledge. This suggests that, whilst external agencies have been encouraged to be involved in the social aspects of schooling for many years and the usefulness of their perceived credibility highlighted, both cost and quality are a concern.

### 2.2.4. External Agencies Involved Around the Concept of Social Inclusion

The section focuses on policies which encourage external agencies into schools to deliver activities and services to pupils but also parents and communities influenced by the concept of social inclusion.

In the late 1990s, there was a focus on the development of social and emotional capabilities of disadvantaged or socially excluded pupils, driven by underclass theory linked to poverty, low achievement, delinquency and crime (Hill 1999; Brannan et al. 2006; Wyness and Lang 2016). The response included policies such as the Extended School agenda where all schools in England received funding via the local authorities and the duty to provide access to a *core offer* of activities and services. These were aimed at children, families and communities and delivered in partnership with the private, statutory and voluntary sectors (Department for Education and Skills 2005). The Extended School agenda was the delivery mechanism for Every Child Matters which aimed to improve partnership working, support parents and improve children's outcomes (Department for Education and Skills 2003, 2005). The change from New Labour to the Coalition government (between Conservative and Liberals) and subsequent spending review in 2010, resulted in the removal of ringfencing for Extended School activities and services. There was an indication that nearly all schools had provided access to the *core offer* (Maddern 2010). Higham and Yeomans (2010) argue that there was a shift from disadvantaged pupils to those at risk of being unable to contribute to the global society. Edwards et al. (2010) add that this shift was influenced by the realisation of the small numbers of younger workers to support an ageing population. Diss and Jarvie (2016) undertook research to determine what Extended School provision remained and reported that the



popular activities such as after-school sports clubs were mainly delivered by school staff (76%) with some external agencies (21%) and local government (3%). There was some community use of the schools and parenting support, but activities aimed at individual pupils (i.e., one-to-one support) were not discussed in the findings. This suggests there is a reduction in the involvement of external agencies in relation to extended activities due to the aforementioned funding changes or that activities were ad-hoc or not prevalent in the first place. [Fahmy et al. \(2018\)](#) reveal that since the Coalition government in 2010 the concept of social exclusion has been de-prioritised. The reasons include the lack of consensus around measurement and researchers were critical of “inclusion” being measured through economic outcomes (e.g., paid work). This suggests that policies might have intended to meet individual needs, but the focus on economic competitiveness remained and resulted in a shift in focus.

### 2.2.5. Supporting Schools in the Time of a Reduced State

The section focuses on policies which have encouraged schools to collaborate with external agencies as funding from central to local government is reduced and replaced with direct funding to schools or external agencies.

Historically, local government provided activities and services in schools (e.g., behaviour support), which were funded by money that was top-sliced from schools’ budgets ([Thraves et al. 2012](#)). The expansion of academies and introduction of free schools in 2010 meant that funding went direct to schools for them to commission external agencies and local government provision was reduced (e.g., educational welfare officers) ([Henderson et al. 2016](#)). In 2011, the government introduced the pupil premium funding for schools, which is aimed at specific pupils (e.g., low-income families eligible for free school meals and looked after or military children). The aim was to narrow the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged and more affluent backgrounds ([Ofsted 2013](#)). [Carpenter et al. \(2013, p. 73\)](#) reveal that schools used the pupil premium to commission services from external agencies that they could not offer (e.g., educational psychologists) but the replacement of local authority provision was small scale. This suggests that, whilst neoliberal policies aim to replace local authorities with external agencies such as the voluntary and community sector, there could be gaps in provision.

In addition to the provision of direct funding that went to schools or external agencies is the transfer of responsibility for activities and services which was made without recompense. An example is the transfer of responsibility for careers guidance to schools which was outlined in the Education Act (2011) ([Great Britain Parliament 2011](#)), but this was not accompanied by any funding ([Hooley and Watts 2011](#)). To fulfil this responsibility, some schools used high numbers of employers, but questions were raised over the independency and impartiality of the career guidance ([Slack et al. 2013](#)). The Department for Education policies in 2017 ([Department for Education 2017a](#)) continued to place responsibility for careers with schools and employers (e.g., science, engineering, technology and math) that are encouraged to co-design and co-deliver the national curriculum. The government have for some time been keen to point out the benefits for employers (e.g., marketing and recruitment) and disadvantaged pupils (e.g., access to role models) ([Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009b](#)). However, the costs to the employers have not been taken into account ([Huddleston and Laczik 2012](#)) and the targeting of certain pupils indicates the desire to develop pupils for their value towards economic competitiveness.

This review shows that the invitations for external agencies to be involved in schools can be traced back through policies. These invitations were in response to social issues (e.g., increased leisure hours and neglect), events (e.g., war), policy changes (e.g., transfers of careers duty) and assumptions around the purpose of education (e.g., economic competitiveness). The solutions are played out through policies which suggest that teachers will focus on the national curriculum whilst external agencies will focus on the wider curriculum or social aspects of schooling. The external agencies will deliver extra-curricular activities, one-to-one support, the wider curriculum or adult and community learning. There are recurring themes including the control of pupils’ leisure hours or development for economic competitiveness, despite the suggestions of holistic focus. Policies highlight the lack of teaching staff

skills and activity costs for which external agencies are a solution. These activities are not always perceived to contribute to the standards agenda and there is a question about the quality. There is a lack of exploration of the perspective of external agencies, which this paper addresses. This paper argues that it is important to consider the interests at work through policies that encourage schools to collaborate with external agencies and the implications of these policies to practice.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This article is drawn from doctoral research with ethical approval where the aim is to investigate the phenomenon of external agents in schools, in terms of their role and responsibilities for the learning and wellbeing of children and young people (Everitt 2018). The research questions from the doctoral research on which this paper focuses are: (1) Who are the external agents involved in the case study schools and what are they there to do? (2) Is the involvement of external agents related to government policies and initiatives or do other rationales exist?

The study aimed to include both primary and secondary schools and a convenience sample of 39 schools known to the researcher were approached through email and telephone, but this did not result in any school participants. Two intermediaries were used to approach a further 22 schools by email, from which four schools agreed to participate. This included two secondary schools (Compton Academy and Thornily Academy) for pupils aged 11–16 and two middle schools (Meadows Middle School and Sunnyside Church of England (C of E) Academy) for pupils aged 9–13. The final sample does not include primary schools, as the area is based on the middle school system, which is accepted as a limitation of this study.

Fifteen agents and seven members of staff participated across these four schools, as detailed in Table 1, during the data collection period (2014). Table 1 presents the participants' names, roles, employers and the associated methods.

**Table 1.** School and agent details.

School Name	Agents (All Interviewed)	Name, Job, Methods (p = Pro-Forma, i = Interview)
Compton Academy	Tom, Young Theatre (Theatre in Education) Jane, Rare Disease (Charity) Elaine, Red Bricks (Employer) Sarah, Work Skills (Training Provider)	Ashley, Teacher with responsibility for Careers (IAG) (p, i)
Meadows Middle School	Kiely, Connected Counselling Glenn, Together Housing (Housing Association)	Laura, Music Teacher and Head of Year (p) Aileen, Teacher (p) Adam, Teacher and Head of Year (i)
Sunnyside C of E Academy	Peter, Road Safety Phil, Sparks (Christian Youth) Jack, Fire Safety	Pam, Teacher and Learning Leader (p) Linda, Principal (i)
Thornily Academy	Serena, ABC Engineering Keith, Building Maintenance (Property Development) Nigel, Uniformed Service Leanne, West College Claire, CareerMed (University Society)	Sian, Co-ordinator for Careers, Enterprise and Work Experience (p, i)

A staff member at each school was asked to complete an audit pro-forma with the external agency names and activities or services against seven types identified from the literature. These types included those that were contained in the Extended School *core offer* such as extra-curricular activities, parental support, community use of the school or adult

and community learning (Department for Education and Skills 2005). The audit pro-forma also included individual pupil support which was activities and services where pupils required extra one-to-one support (Department for Education and Skills 2004). Additionally, there was pupil group support which included workshops or assemblies for pupil groups in relation to the national curriculum or wider curriculum subjects (e.g., Citizenship, PSHE or Careers) (Department for Education 2015; Macdonald 2009). Staff knowledge of external agencies was incomplete (see below) so the audit pro-forma was supplemented with documentary analysis (e.g., newsletters, parent letters and Twitter feed). A staff member from each school was asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Lack of participant time meant that in two schools one staff member completed the audit pro-forma and another was interviewed. Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the schools, staff members, external agencies and agents to maintain anonymity.

Purposive sampling was used to select the agencies from the list which emerged from across the data sources, at the time the interviews took place. In total, 44 agencies were invited by email, of which 15 semi-structured interviews were undertaken (see Table 1). The agencies were invited across the activity or service type (see above), and the sector in which they worked (e.g., statutory, voluntary, community and private), but half of the final participants were from the third sector. There were 158 agencies identified as working across the four case study schools. Thornily had the most with 60 agencies and Meadows the least with 27. Compton had 30 and Sunnyside 31 agencies.

There was a messiness in the process to identify the external agencies as some school staff members' knowledge was restricted by their role; for example, Ashley (Compton) was only able to identify 14 of the 30 agencies who were related to his role in careers education. All four case study schools used collective terms to describe the agencies (e.g., companies) or just used the activity name (e.g., healthy eating). Attempts were made to supplement the data with additional staff interviews; some declined and where extra staff were included (e.g., Meadows) it did not result in the identification of all of the agencies. The audit pro-forma and staff interviews were supplemented with documentary analysis, but this was limited as not all schools had a well-developed online presence. Several agencies were only mentioned once (e.g., newsletter) but this was perhaps due to a brief involvement such as Young Theatre whose involvement was just a 30 min theatre performance.

The interview recordings were fully transcribed and coded, to identify significant themes (Stark and Torrance 2005). Content analysis was used to verify the contents in a rigorous manner through analysis, including frequency of words or categories (Cohen et al. 2017). The researcher moved back and forth among the data, research questions and underpinning literature, as the units of analysis and themes emerged (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Codes were subsumed where necessary to assist with creating open and flexible coding categories (Mason 2002). The documents located for each case study school were manually coded which was useful for the frequency of certain words or phrases (May 2011). Each agency was coded to an activity type from the audit pro-forma, e.g., pupil group support, which were sub-codes in the coding structure. These activity types were then analysed in terms of their frequency per school, which allowed trends of activity types to be identified.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section outlines the findings from the methods that were used (i.e., audit pro-forma, interviews and documentary analysis) and these findings are presented using themes identified in the literature review. Each theme includes a discussion of the related findings which have emerged and the issues, assumptions and solutions from policies which invite external agencies to collaborate with schools. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to practice.

##### 4.1. Constructive Activities Delivered by "Quasi-Military" Style External Agencies

This section discusses the findings that emerged, which were related to the policies where the theme is the need for external agencies with a military style to deliver constructive activities to certain pupils in schools.



The Uniformed Service could be described as a quasi-military style external agency that operates a membership structure. A newsletter from Thornily identified that Nigel from the Uniformed Service had visited a lesson in the school to promote his organisation. During his interview, Nigel revealed that his involvement in Thornily was a result of national funding that his service had received and he approached the school at a community meeting. This funding emanated from Youth United, an organisation created by Prince Charles (HRH The Prince of Wales). Nigel believed that Prince Charles wanted all uniformed organisations to unite and have a voice. However, in a Youth United Impact Report (Youth United Foundation 2013, p. 2), Prince Charles outlined the problems caused by some young people:

We often hear about the trouble that young people are causing and the problems they face: gang culture, unemployment, drink, drugs and underachievement are just some of them.

These are the real problems, but in my view, this is only part of the story. Around the country, there are many thousands of young people who are involved in constructive activities which give them the chance to do something in the service of others, to learn valuable new skills and even have some fun.

This suggests the funding was aimed at certain young people and the response was the involvement of external agencies with membership structures to deliver constructive activities. This supports the comment by Heyes (2019) that the government are interested in uniformed services in the delivery of character education. Nigel stated that his organisation received this funding to set up groups in deprived areas and the groups were to be delivered by volunteers. It was Nigel who decided to approach schools:

We got money to employ about 10 development workers around the country using specific targeted area schools. As [local area] being a highly deprived area and our job was to go out and recruit volunteers to set up new groups. I wasn't given any idea or any sort of plan where to go.

Nigel was unable to find volunteers so the group in Thornily did not take place, which concurs with the findings by See Beckett et al. (2019) that setting up and running these programmes are difficult. This questions the government assumption that certain young people require constructive activities delivered by external agencies, as highlighted in older policies (e.g., Hadow Report) (Board of Education 1926). Indeed, Nigel questioned the ideology behind the target audience of the groups and the intended role of the external agencies:

I think the assumption was well there's plenty of voluntary groups out there for young people to go to, so we'll just cut the centre. I think that this is not very good thinking, because children who go to youth centres or engage with youth centres don't necessarily want to engage with a uniform organisation.

This comment by Nigel reveals a complexity in the assumptions which underpin this funding, as Nigel viewed his service was for a different audience than what was planned by the funding. Both this funding, as indicated by Prince Charles in the Youth Impact Report (Youth United Foundation 2013), and youth centres were created for certain pupils who require constructive activities (Roberts 2004), but Nigel believed otherwise. This does not appear to suggest the holistic focus of the character education as indicated by the schools in the research by White et al. (2017) but these funded activities were to be targeted at certain pupils.

This paper compliments the research by Brooks (2012, p. 18) who warns that policy-makers have assumptions which view pupils as disaffected and the government are funding external agencies to work in schools. Furthermore, these policies advocate that pupils required character development through "quasi-military environments" to achieve their societal duty, which is apparent in the more

recent character grants launched in 2015 ([Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP 2015](#)). What this paper adds is not only the prevalence of current examples of the involvement of external agencies, but that the assumptions that certain young people require constructive activities delivered by external agencies with membership structures have persisted from earlier policies such as the Hadow Report ([Board of Education 1926](#)). It is important for external agencies and schools to be aware of ideologies which can underpin funding or policies which encourage these collaborations and to think about whose interests are at work.

#### 4.2. External Agencies Perceived as Specialists

This section discusses the findings which emerged in relation to policies which encourage the external agencies deemed as specialists to collaborate with schools.

Connected Counselling are a charity that had been commissioned by Meadows to provide counselling to pupils. The charity was mentioned by Adam, a teacher, listed on the pro-forma (by Aileen) and included in a pupil premium report (on funding spent). A counsellor from Connected Counselling spent one day per week in Meadows to deliver counselling sessions to pupils. Kiely from Connected Counselling highlighted that the demand for their service was influenced by the complexity in the backgrounds of some pupils which was impacting their learning:

I am hearing a lot that you know there are a lot more complex backgrounds of these young people and that's having a knock-on effect with their learning and they [schools] want to support the child holistically. So it's about the child feeling happy and being settled before they can learn to the best of their ability and that is becoming more and more recognised I think. (Kiely, Connected Counselling)

This suggested Kiely held the belief that the school and community were interconnected influences as suggested by [Harris et al. \(2010\)](#). However, the involvement of external agencies could equally be about reducing the social problems which could hinder the expected economic value from education.

Connected Counselling was the only commissioned external agency, which implied this counselling was a service the school could not provide, as reported in the research on the pupil premium by [Carpenter et al. \(2013\)](#). There is also an element of profit-making through these specialist services, as suggested by [Ball \(2012\)](#), although Adam (Meadows) highlighted that, despite the need, that finance was a barrier:

It's the budget restrictions and it is just adding more onto our load, but I would say the pastoral care side of things is probably more important than delivering the curriculum, you're kind of dealing with emergencies at side and our hands are tied a bit when we are trying to stick to our timetable and things. (Adam, Meadows)

This suggests that there is either a lack of budget or activities such as one-to-one support are expensive, as highlighted by [Higgins et al. \(2013\)](#), which could restrict the agencies used by the school, despite the pupil premium funding. The issues of cost could account for the lack of one-to-one support, which were also highlighted by [Diss and Jarvie \(2016\)](#). The Newsom Report ([Ministry of Education 1963](#)) perceived the involvement of specialists as a cost-effective method to dealing with social problems, but this was before external agencies were encouraged to charge ([Ball 2012](#)). Despite the encouragement to charge and potential commissioning through the pupil premium, available finance to commission agencies was an issue. This was perhaps recognised by Sparks, a Christian youth project that also delivered wellbeing activities (e.g., puppet club) in Sunnyside and Mentoring in Meadows, as they did not charge. Sparks were mentioned in a range of data sources for both Sunnyside and Meadows such as the audit pro-forma and interviews. Phil (Sparks) revealed that they did not charge as they did not want to be another drain on school finances. However, some schools did not always unpack the reason for the activities or the associated cost to the agent:

Sometimes we're asked to go and work with individual children on a one-to-one mentoring basis. We've learned over the years, for us as an organisation, we've done mentoring that's open ended which just seems to go on and on and on. That again was down to the expectation of the school.

Any time we're asked to do mentoring, we've agreed to do a couple of sessions to see how it goes ... if they want to continue...what the point of it is...if the kids understand why they are there ... cos it might not work.

This questions the assumptions which underpin the involvement of external agencies, for instance with Sparks the delivery of specialist activities is seen as cost effective. There are clearly differences between the expectations of Sparks and the schools, which indicates potential tensions as suggested by [Ainslie et al. \(2010\)](#). These findings highlight that Sparks were providing a solution to the demand for wellbeing activities, in the competing landscape of reduced local authority provision outlined by [Thraves et al. \(2012\)](#) and budget restrictions highlighted by Adam. This has implications for the external agencies, if they do not charge and pupils if the rationale for the activities are not always fully explored with pupils, which could imply a deficit model.

#### *4.3. Supporting the National Curriculum or the Social Aspects of Schooling*

This section discusses the findings which emerged in relation to the policies which encouraged external agencies to collaborate with schools to support the national curriculum or social aspects of schooling, whilst teachers focus on the national curriculum.

Despite the discussion in the literature for external agencies to support the wider curriculum, or the social aspects of schooling ([Ball 2012](#)) there were five external agent participants who indicated during their interviews that their activities supported the national curriculum. These five external agencies included Road Safety (statutory service), Rare Disease (charity), Building Maintenance (business), ABC Engineering (employer) and Sparks (Christian youth charity).

Road Safety were featured in two Sunnyside newsletters and a parent calendar which stated they visited PSHE and Citizenship lessons, which indicated a wider curriculum link. Their organisation was listed on the audit pro-forma, but was not mentioned in the interview with Linda (Principal). Peter from Road Safety emphasised that it was his teaching background which meant he could make links to the national curriculum. He added that external agencies such as his organisation and the police have credibility which enable them to get the message across in PSHE, as highlighted in research by [Macdonald \(2009\)](#). However, the value of the activities towards the national or wider curriculum was not always perceived by schools, even if pupils enjoyed the activities:

Some of the things we do, the kids afterwards say it's great, it's different, it's practical, it's not maths again [and] it's not English. Although a lot of it does link in, if the teacher lets it link in. (Peter, Road Safety)

This suggests that, despite the assumption that external agencies can support the curriculum, it is perhaps that the social aspects of schooling are not seen as relevant in the drive for an economic return. In this sense, the involvement of external agencies could be restricted by the schools.

The next external agency that suggested their activities support the national curriculum was Building Maintenance, a construction company. Keith from Building Maintenance revealed that his organisation was involved in Thornily through Business in the Community (BITC) and had delivered 50 projects during the previous three years. Building Maintenance was mentioned on the audit pro-forma, during the interview with Sian (Thornily) and on the school's Twitter feed. From the 50 projects that Building Maintenance had undertaken with Thornily, Keith emphasised that a mentoring project between his employees and 20 mixed-ability pupils was "strategic". He believed the employees were role models who could raise disadvantaged pupils' aspirations, which appeared in line with policy-maker assumptions (see [Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009a](#)). Sian revealed

that, despite the suggested benefits of the mentoring it was moved between curriculum time and after-school due to new performativity measures (Progress 8) (Department for Education 2017b, p. 7), which questioned the perceived value to the standards agenda:

It is not just about resources it is about time and the impact away from the end result that schools are interested in, which is the GCSE or not the GCSE . . . I think there's potential for a lot more scrutiny of bringing outside agencies in. (Sian, Thornily)

The external agencies themselves perceive that their activities are valuable to the national curriculum, which is perhaps a false assumption influenced by the continual requests for them to be involved. The schools are perceiving the external agencies as valuable to the social aspects of schooling, whilst the teachers focus on the national curriculum (Wyness and Lang 2016). The mentoring delivered by Building Maintenance was moved to after-school, which suggests a tussling for the time within the school day, but this had an impact on pupils:

The pupils didn't like it when it was in their own time, it came across as a bit of a punishment. (Keith, Building Maintenance)

The last example of an external agent referring to the national curriculum was ABC Engineering, which was involved in Thornily and were mentioned on the audit pro-forma, in Sian's interview and a school newsletter. Serena from ABC Engineering revealed that, whilst her organisation was involved in the delivery of the national curriculum, it was just a one-off:

We do one-off projects usually to support them with a piece of work they are doing. It is usually the design and technology teachers that we have the most involvement with. They're [Thornily] desperate to get across the importance of design, technology and engineering in the school, so for them we held a STEM day. (Serena, ABC Engineering)

Sian (Thornily) emphasised that visits from external agencies to curriculum areas was occasional, so it appeared that the involvement of ABC Engineering was indeed a one-off. This has implications for external agencies that want to be involved in schools as their involvement in the national curriculum might be restricted. The discussion of these agents, which all implied their activities supported the national curriculum, indicates a different perception between agencies and schools. Although the Department for Education (2019) and the PHSE Association (2020) advocate that external agencies should enrich the work of teachers in the now compulsory PSHE, the external agencies clearly believe that they have something to offer both to and beyond the social aspects of schooling. The views of pupils do not appear to have always been considered which is important as highlighted by Road Safety and in the research by Beckett et al. (2019) in terms of the value of involving external agencies.

#### 4.4. External Agencies Involved around Concept of Social Inclusion

The section discusses the findings which emerged in relation to the themes from policies which invited external agencies to be involved in schools to support the concept of social inclusion.

The policies which encouraged external agencies to work in schools to support social inclusion include Every Child Matters and its delivery mechanism of the Extended School agenda. The number and types of agencies that could be involved in the delivery of these policies is vast, due to the different activities and services outlined within the *core offer* of an Extended School (Department for Education and Skills 2005). However, the findings of this paper suggest there was a lack of involvement of external agencies in the case study schools in relation to the *core offer* areas (e.g., extra-curricular activities, community use of school, individual pupil support, parental support and adult and community learning). This was determined by the activity or service of each of the 158 external agents, which were cross-referenced to the activity types on the audit pro-forma. There were only 16 instances of external agency involvement in extra-curricular activities across the four schools. This was supported by both the interview data and the documentary analysis for two schools. In Compton, Ashley, a teacher,

revealed that the extra-curricular activities were delivered by school staff. Similarly, for Meadows, an extra-curricular activity plan detailed 22 weekly activities but these were mainly delivered by school staff. This appears to reflect the impact of the Coalition (between Conservative and Liberals) government's de-prioritisation of social exclusion as highlighted by [Fahmy et al. \(2018\)](#).

There were no instances of external agency involvement in the community use of the school in Meadows and only 13 instances of agencies involved, across the other three schools. There were only nine instances of individual pupil support. There were very few instances of parental support or adult and community learning and none in Compton and Meadows. [Diss and Jarvie \(2016\)](#) highlight that there can be differences between primary and secondary schools, with the latter being more likely to offer adult learning; however, Compton Academy is a secondary school. It could be that the schools never offered these in the first place. There were 111 instances of pupil group support, which suggests a shift towards activities delivered to groups of pupils as opposed to the Extended School *core offer* which included a focus on wider audiences (e.g., families, adults). This is perhaps to be expected since the de-prioritisation of the concept of social exclusion by the Coalition government (Conservative and Liberals) since 2010 ([Fahmy et al. 2018](#)). Adam (Meadows) suggested the reduction in external agencies was influenced by the national curriculum focus and financial constraints:

There was a lot more services in my first year and over the course of the three-four years I have been here, it has dwindled away and I am 95% that it is down to budget. We absolutely want to provide the best for the kids but yes I mean it is down to budget requirements. You have to have a certain amount number of staff that deliver the curriculum and that is a priority. (Adam, Meadows)

The reduction in external agency involvement in Extended School activities adds to the research by [Diss and Jarvie \(2016\)](#) who also report a shift in activity focus back to pupils. This is not surprising given the changes in the funding for the Extended School agenda ([Maddern 2010](#)). However, Diss and Jarvie did not explore if external agencies were still involved in schools and if so what they were doing, which is the focus of the rest of this paper.

#### 4.5. Supporting Schools in Times of a Reduced State

The section discusses the findings in relation to themes from policies which focused on the need for external agencies to support schools in times of a reduced state. This is characterised by direct to school funding, direct to external agency funding or the transfer of responsibility without funding.

There were two external agencies where some of their activities appeared to be driven by the reduction in local authority provision. The first of these was Together Housing, a housing association involved in Meadows. Their involvement was outlined in a news story on the Meadows website, but they were not mentioned by school staff. Glenn (Together Housing) emphasised that their organisation was expected to deliver previous statutory provision for free:

Often, we are finding that we are stepping into gaps left where other services have withdrawn or don't exist anymore, so previously a lot of the stuff that we do, would have been done by statutory bodies that either don't exist now or have had the funding reduced to the extent that they are ineffective. (Glenn, Together Housing)

The Fire Service had been involved in Sunnyside for many years and they were mentioned in a range of sources such as the audit pro-forma and Linda's interview. Jack from the Fire Service revealed how recently he had been involved in Sunnyside to speak to pupils who were late for school:

They [Sunnyside] have had a group of people who have been late for school [or] not coming to school as often as they should be. So they are working with them daily, weekly, monthly to try to turn them around, put a request in for me, rang me up, with the link I have got at the school, saying 'Jack would you mind coming, when you are available, just to give a 10–15 min chat to these people?' (Jack, Fire Service)



The delivery of pastoral support around attendance would have been a statutory provision prior to the reduction of local government such as education welfare officers, as reported by [Henderson et al. \(2016\)](#). The above findings in this paper argue that the external agencies are being expected to fill provision gaps that are being created by the rolling back of the state. There are issues here with regard to whether the external agencies are the most appropriate to deliver the activities, beyond the fact that they do not charge. There could be concerns about the quality of what is being provided, as suggested in the research by [Formby et al. \(2011\)](#). This indicates the problems within policies which assume that local authority provision can be reduced and other organisations will step forward to fill the gaps that are created.

The findings also suggest that the shift in responsibility for the provision of career guidance from the local authority to schools, without accompanied funding, has increased the involvement of external agencies with a focus on careers. Twenty-one of the 158 external agencies identified across the four schools were employers, who were engaged in the schools for careers talks, careers marketplaces and workshops. There were also colleges, universities and training providers, which gave a total of 35 agencies (23%) that focused on careers which included four agent participants (Work Skills, Red Bricks, West College and Career Med). Sian (Thornily) revealed the school's decision not to purchase the local authority careers service, was due to lack of finance, but she believed her careers background meant she could be impartial. She revealed that some schools "will attempt to deliver impartiality by bringing a whole range of people in". However, Sian acknowledged that she herself did bring a lot of external agencies, which questions the impartiality, a practice warned against in the research by [Slack et al. \(2013\)](#).

Red Bricks were involved in Compton and, whilst they were clearly involved in the school for careers events, they were not mentioned on the pro-forma or interview; they were only mentioned in one Tweet, suggesting a low profile. Whilst the involvement of external agencies such as Red Bricks in schools contribute to careers events, their access to some schools was limited. Thus, whilst policies might assume that external agencies will automatically be able to access schools, in response to requests, this is not necessarily the case. Elaine (Red Bricks) warned that "as an employer approaching the school . . . you can come up against closed doors". It could be that schools perceive they are already working with employers or careers advisors and are unaware of what the external agencies can offer. However, the findings indicate that there are other policies such as the raising of the participation age (RPA) ([Department for Education 2015](#)) and increase in number of academies, which meant that some external agencies were denied access to schools:

The change of government wanting all schools to turn into academies . . . [a lot] go on to have sixth forms . . . their attitude to letting you have access to their pupils, changes dramatically. [They] now see you as the enemy...the students aren't getting to choose for themselves ... they might go into something that is not quite right ... then dropping out...if you've had all the options then you know which is the right route. (Leanne, West College)

This could therefore impact on young people if they are not receiving impartial information and advice, despite the increased numbers of external agencies (e.g., employers) involved in careers. This paper reveals how continued policies (e.g., [Department for Education 2017a](#)) appeared to have tipped the balance in terms of the types of agencies involved in schools. However, competing policies can restrict access also hidden costs which are not necessarily considered. The cost of involving external agencies (e.g., employers) has implications for the agencies, as outlined by [Huddleston and Laczik \(2012\)](#). Whilst there were a range of agencies from the 158 identified that supported schools with a plethora of activities, the desire to support schools with career guidance and filling gaps in provision offered by the local authority is influencing who is involved and what they are doing. The paper also highlights the impact that austerity measures have had on pupils.

## 5. Conclusions

The findings of this paper reveal that the assumptions and proposed solutions involving external agencies advocated in policies (e.g., character education, careers education and extended schools) are related to the ideologies around the purposes of education. This paper argues that it is important to consider the interests at work in policies that encourage external agencies into schools. These policies are impacting on current practice in terms of the types of agencies involved and the activities they undertake. The government assumes that their policies will automatically benefit the pupils, their families, schools, external agencies and wider society. These benefits are not automatic and this paper highlights how these assumptions are problematic—using themes from selected policies which invited external agencies to become involved in schools and then primary research undertaken in four case study schools.

This paper highlights how the invitations for quasi-military external agencies within policies has continued since the early 1900s ([Board of Education 1926](#)) to more recent policies (e.g., character grants) ([Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP 2015](#)). These policies appear to be based on assumptions that certain pupils require constructive activities. This paper highlights that there are different perceptions around the purpose and target audience of these activities and some difficulties in recruiting volunteers, as highlighted by [See et al. \(2017\)](#).

Policies which called for the involvement of specialists (e.g., Newsom Report) ([Ministry of Education 1963](#)) perceived the involvement of external agencies as a cost-effective solution. Despite the allocation of additional funding (e.g., pupil premium) to enable schools to commission agencies ([Ofsted 2013](#)) the cost remains an issue. The government encouraged external agencies to charge ([Ball 1997](#)), which overlapped with the reduction to local authority provision (see [Thraves et al. 2012](#)). However, the budget restrictions cited by the participants in this study, meant that charging schools might not be possible. The result was that external agencies were being asked to support pupils with complex backgrounds with support beyond the national curriculum—based on the fact that the agent did not charge. The selection of external agencies based on the offer of free activities alone, has implications for the external agencies and pupils.

The introduction of the national and wider curriculum has encouraged external agency involvement in schools. This includes supporting the social aspects of schools such as PSHE (see [Watkins 1992](#)). External agency involvement in PSHE was valuable due to agents' credibility or their ability to offer free activities, but quality was a concern ([Formby et al. 2011](#)). This paper argues that, although there is a recent shift to the delivery of PSHE by teachers, this does not remove the desire for credibility, as highlighted by [Beckett et al. \(2019\)](#). This paper reveals how several external agents believed that their activities are valuable to the national curriculum and this needs to be explored. However, external agencies need to be aware that schools may control access to schools, as they navigate competing demands.

The changes to policies such as the reduction in funding for Extended School activities ([Maddern 2010](#)) and de-prioritisation of social exclusion ([Fahmy et al. 2018](#)) does not automatically mean that these issues no longer exist. This paper reveals a shift in focus of activities back to pupils, which adds to the research by [Diss and Jarvie \(2016\)](#). This shift is apparent in the higher numbers of some external agencies (e.g., employers) that are responding to specific policies (e.g., careers guidance) ([Department for Education 2017a](#)). This paper argues that there are concerns around impartiality for pupils if large numbers of external agencies are used instead of qualified career guidance professionals, which adds to previous research by [Slack et al. \(2013\)](#). In addition, access might be restricted due to competing policies (e.g., RPA), which suggests that agencies may be hindered in accessing schools.

This study argues that it is important that schools are aware of which external agencies are involved in their schools. Road Safety was not mentioned within the Meadows or Compton data, and their involvement in those schools only became apparent during their interview for Sunnyside. It is possible that the staff member who had knowledge of the external agencies was not a participant. This messiness or complexity meant that what was identified was only a "snapshot" of external agency

involvement. This appears influenced by the history of policies which have encouraged schools to collaborate with external agencies. It could indicate a disconnection between the agent perception of their role and their profile within the school in relation to the demand to meet these continual policy requests. The implications of this are that the four case study schools did not appear to have a strategic or co-ordinated approach to involving external agencies and this is important if external agencies are to work in schools. Specific staff roles influenced knowledge of agencies and a co-ordinated approach is important to reduce the messiness. It appeared that some agents were involved to respond to a policy and it does not matter who the agent is, just that the activity is delivered. There are issues over equality within the education system for the activities of external agencies, but there are also concerns around the quality of what is delivered.

The implications for external agencies include the need to recognise there are still invitations to be involved in schools but policies and funding constrain the type of agent and activities, with schools mediating access. Competing ideologies and complexities could impact on their involvement in schools. There is a need to navigate these complexities to enter. It is important that agencies consider the other interests at work if they receive external funding. There is a suggestion that schools believe that what external agencies can offer will complement what is already there—and not replace it. For schools and teachers, the implications are that they need to recognise that agents want to be involved, but have issues in access and navigating these complexities. They are also encouraged into schools through policies underpinned by political ideologies. The implications for pupils is that the external agencies might not be the right person to deliver and that funding could mean it becomes a tick-box exercise—with concerns around quality. The activity can be created within a deficit model, which takes place without a discussion with the pupil. Pupils may not be getting all the information that is available to them (e.g., for careers) as it is being restricted by competing policies. This suggests a lack of social justice. There is still a wellbeing need, but funding constraints means there is a potential for low quality activities in this area. There are hidden costs are related to the missed hours towards qualifications which relate to the standards agenda. For parents or communities, the implications are that the range of activities and services once offered through schools via the Extended School or Every Child Matters agenda might be reduced. For government, if external agents are to respond to these continual policy requests, they require support to enable them to gain access to schools.

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