

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE SCHOOL CHOICE, WITH PARTICULAR  
REFERENCE TO SCHOOL REPUTATION?

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## Abstract

Legislative changes in Great Britain in the 1980s introduced a competitive, quasi-market in education (Woods, Bagley and Glatter, 1998) in which parents are able to exercise choice about the school they wish their child to attend. Parents specify (and sometimes rank) their preferred schools and places are allocated on the basis of those preferences, if school capacity permits (Woods et al, 1998). In order to thrive in this educational market, schools must appeal to parents and will use a variety of means to make a positive impression. This study asks three questions about school choice.

1. To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?
2. To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation,' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?
3. What are the implications for schools?

The study is based in an all-through (educates children aged 4-18) Academy Trust of three schools (two primary and one secondary) in a socially and economically diverse town in the East of England. The inquiry paradigm adopted is one of pragmatism with the utilization of two data collection methods within a case study methodology. Quantitative data were collected from parents and school staff using a 'card sort' of eighteen choice criteria that were placed in order of relative importance. The card sort task was taken home by pupils for completion and returned for collation and analysis using a predesigned 'Data Analysis Plan'. Fifty-two cards sorts were completed by staff groups and thirty-nine card sorts were returned by parents / families. Of the eighteen criteria for school choice, twelve indicate an extremely significant or very significant difference between what parents say they rank most highly, and what school staff think parents rate most highly. School staff believe parents place greater emphasis on school reputation than parents say they do

Qualitative data was collected from ten semi-structured interviews (six parents and four staff) and thematically analysed to elicit a deeper understanding of parental choice in this community. The meaning of 'school reputation' is understood in different ways between, and within, groups of parents and school staff.

Three implications for practice in the Trust schools arise from the study:

1. School leaders need to understand the social makeup and therefore the likely motivations of the people in the locality from which the intake is drawn.
2. School leaders must recognize the importance of academic achievement in school choice.
3. School reputation can be managed by improving the quality of teaching and learning.

I expect my 'particularized' study to be of tangible use to the Academy Trust in which it is based, but as this is an issue of contemporary strategic relevance to all school leaders, the findings are likely to be transferable to other settings.

**Key Words:** Parental Preference, Parental Choice, School Choice, School Reputation, Pragmatism, Card Sort, Case Study, Semi-Structured Interviews, All-through.

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## Introduction

Since 1999, with increased political devolution in the United Kingdom, the education systems in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have diverged somewhat. Whilst this research project has been conducted in English schools, all British state schools operate to a greater or lesser extent within a 'quasi-market' or 'public-market' (Woods, Bagley and Glatter, 1998: 135-156) where people with parental responsibility (hereafter referred to as parents) are expected to make an informed judgement about the appropriate school for their child. Whilst the selection of their child's school is usually referred to as parental choice, the term 'choice' is largely absent from English education law (Woods et al. 1998: 4). In fact parents have a right in law to express a 'preference' to the relevant admissions authority and are able to give a reason(s) for that preference. It seems clear to me as an experienced educational professional, that schools for their part, must do enough to attract children and maximize pupil performance to satisfy the demands of parents and society, and fundamental to this is the ability of the school to project a positive image and thereby attract a 'good' reputation.

The central premise of this study is that English schools operating in a quasi-market (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993; Heath, 2009) in educational provision must understand the motivations and aspirations of their potential clientele if they are to successfully attract them. Parents are indeed able to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend, but I will show that they make their choice in different ways. The leadership of a school needs to understand that parental choice is a process in which some parents will not actively participate, whilst others will do what ever is necessary to ensure their aspirations are met. By properly understanding the motivations (or absence of) of different social groups of parents, schools are more likely to prosper in the competitive market place.

My research focus is: What Factors Influence School Choice, with particular reference to school reputation? The research questions that will give my study a conceptual structure (Stake, 2000) are as follows:

1. To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?
2. To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept

of ‘school reputation,’ and what is the relative importance which both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?

### 3. What are the implications for schools?

By identifying clear questions I am setting limits to my study to avoid the type of ‘mission creep’ described by Newby (2010: 54) where one thing leads onto another until the study begins to meander and lack focus. The questions will also allow me to assess how successful my study has been.

The study is presented as a series of sequential chapters. In Chapter 1, I examine the literature on ‘choice’ in its widest sense and describe how it has become so important in many western cultures and then how it has been applied to education policy in England. In a section entitled, ‘School Choice, Social Class and Community’ I show how in the view of some authors, parental choice has led to social segregation and middle class parents ‘playing the game’. This will lead into a section entitled ‘How Parents Choose’ in which I write about parental ‘networks and grapevines,’ reputation, the relative importance of academic achievement in parental choice and the sources of information utilized by parents. The chapter concludes by examining the evidence about how schools respond to the ‘choice landscape’, and whether parents really want choice in education.

Chapter 2 describes the research paradigm, methodology and methods I have employed in this study. The inquiry paradigm I have adopted is one of pragmatism and the research design I have utilized is one of a case study with two data collection methods – qualitative semi-structured interviews and a quantitative card sort. The context of the case is described in detail, as are the ways in which I collected the two sets of data and analysed the outcomes. I also describe the inherent and potential risks and threats in conducting the project in sections entitled ‘The Role of the researcher: Insider / Outsider’, ‘Ethical Issues’ and ‘Threats to the Research Design’.

The results and subsequent analysis of the two data collection methods are presented as two separate chapters. In Chapter 3, I present the quantitative data collected using the card sorts and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. In Chapter 4, I present the qualitative data collected from a thematic analysis of ten interviews with parents and school staff and the conclusions that can be drawn.

In Chapter 5, I synthesise the card sort data and conclusions with the interview data in a discussion chapter and seek to determine conclusions that allow me to address each research question in turn.

In the conclusion I draw threads together, demonstrate that the study is of doctoral standard and identify potential related topics for further attention and study. The thesis ends with an important postscript, a full reference list and appendices.

The motivation for this study arises from my background as a professional teacher and headteacher of three English state schools. As an experienced headteacher, I have been fascinated most of my professional career about how parents make their choice of schools and the rationalities they express when discussing it. My first headship was in a school with a relatively poor reputation according to the parents, staff, governors and local authority representatives to whom I spoke when first appointed. Although the academic and non-academic outcomes improved, the reputation of my school did not change significantly as exemplified by parental comments to me. My school still lost children to another local school, which parental, governor and colleague comments to me, demonstrated had created a positive reputation over many years, and this was enough to maintain its attractiveness to parents, even though its general academic outcomes were declining in comparison to my own school. My final headship was in a school which I knew from discussions with parents, staff and local authority representatives, to have a very high reputation even though the academic results were not as good as the intake merited. The degree of parental belief in the school, and the degree of reputational credit it had banked over many years, meant that a poor Ofsted inspection, whilst a shock to those working in the school, had no deleterious effect on parent confidence, pupil numbers or future intakes. Indeed, the following year the applications to the school were higher than they had ever been. So what is going on? This study is an attempt to shed light on a topic that I have tried to fully understand all through my professional career.

This study makes an original and independent contribution to knowledge in four ways. Firstly, the study makes a contribution to academic knowledge by demonstrating an effective and valid method for data collection, successfully utilizing the card sort technique to rank order and compare the preferences of two sets of respondents. This has rarely been done before and never in quite the way it is done in this study. Secondly, the outcomes of the research has practical value and the potential to contribute to professional practice,

because it exposes a disconnect between what the staff in one small group of schools think parents value most highly when exercising their right to choose and what the parents actually think is most important. So long as this disconnect between parents and school staff remains, the Trust schools may be unable to meet the aspirations of the parents and risk losing their confidence. Thirdly, this research is unique in that it looks in detail at the part played by school reputation in school choice and the extent to which it is perceived by parents and school staff as important. This has never been done before and in so doing this study makes a significant contribution to academic knowledge and the potential to contribute towards professional practice. Fourthly, this study will make a modest but important and defensible, contribution to scholarship by adding to our general understanding of how parental choice operates in the real world. In particular, no other study has sought to seek the opinions of school staff and compare them with those of parents. This has therefore created a new understanding of existing issues, something Trafford and Lesham, (2008) and Trafford et al. (2014) identify as essential within doctoral research.

# Chapter 1

## Literature Review

My research focus is: What Factors Influence School Choice, with particular reference to school reputation?

The conceptual framework that will give my study structure is one that seeks to develop theory in the data collected rather than starting with an existing theory to be tested (Basit, 2010). Mercer (1991) points to the dual function of theories as,

‘To set agendas for research by generating certain kinds of questions that the research will answer, and to provide an environment of discourse within which research findings can be explained and discussed.’ (Mercer, 1991: 42)

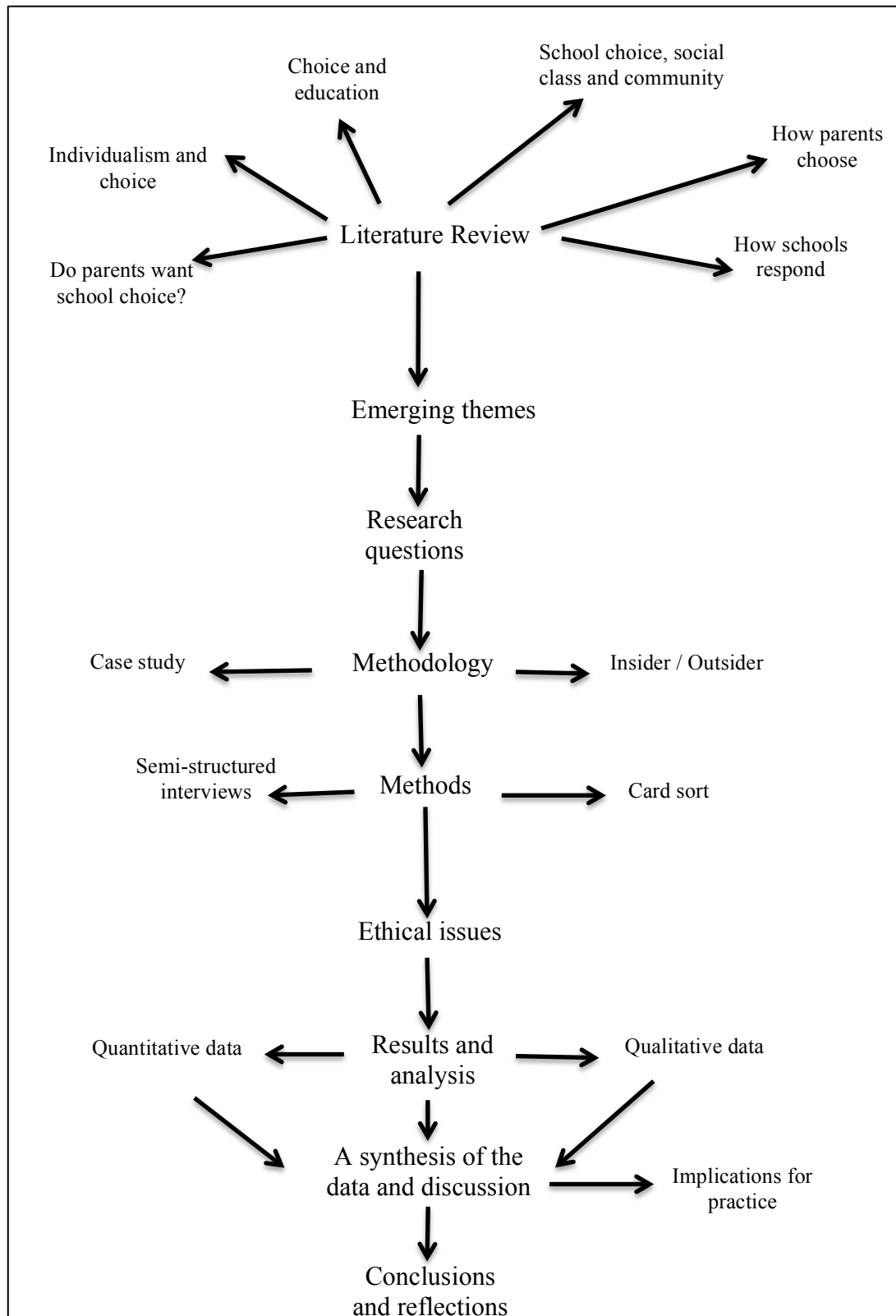
A representation of the structural framework I will adopt is shown in Table 1.1.

Whilst my ultimate intention is to focus on a limited number of research questions, my starting point in this literature review is to take a very broad socio-political-economic and psychological perspective and explore a wide variety of topics and issues around choice generally, school choice in particular and reputation. I have particularly sought those studies that relate to ‘parental choice’ in England but will make frequent reference to international studies (published in English) where they are relevant. Whilst placing an emphasis on more recent studies (post 2010), I have chosen not to disregard earlier studies when they have something important and relevant to say. A search and review of the literature is important because as Basit (2010) writes,

‘No research study can be undertaken without an understanding of the context to which it is related and what previous researchers have found when investigating a topic similar to the one we have chosen to study.’ (Basit, 2010: 41)

I began by searching databases accessed through the Anglia Ruskin University library website (such as ProQuest), Google and Google Scholar using the following key words and phrases: school reputation, school image, parental perceptions, parental views and how parents choose schools with no success. It was only when I searched ‘parental choice’ did I gain access to useful academic sources of information which would help me define my study and research questions. I have also accessed, through Google and Google Scholar,

**Table 1.1: A structural framework**



some non-academic sources where I feel they add to my understanding and where there appears to be a deficit of academic study such as ‘reputation’ and ‘school reputation’.

Inevitably there will be some very influential actors in this field whose views I will want to reflect and I have taken the decision to do so in a very pragmatic, systematic way. This will mean certain sections will rely heavily on the work of individual researchers because of their importance in the field but I believe this serves to present a complicated and divisive subject in a systematic and logical way.

## 1.1 Individualism and Choice - A Short Historical Perspective

Choice pervades all aspects of modern life in those societies that can be referred to as ‘individualist’ such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Schwartz, 2004; Iyengar, 2011). I therefore think it is helpful to begin this review with a short historical critique to understand more precisely how that has come about. I have found the psychologist and Dorwin Cartwright professor of Social Theory and Social Action at Swathmore College in the USA, Barry Schwartz (2004; 2005), the S. T. Lee Professor of Business in the Management Division at Columbia Business School, Sheena Iyengar (2010; 2011; 2011a) and the American legal scholar, currently the Robert Walmsley Professor at Harvard Law School, Cass Sustein (2014), particularly helpful and will make frequent references to their work.

It is well understood by historians that prior to the Enlightenment of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, citizens depended on higher sources of authority such as the clergy or monarch to tell them what was right and wrong (Porter, 2001; Iyengar, 2011). But the Enlightenment taught people that they were capable of making their own discoveries and choices (Iyengar, 2011) and the publication of Adam Smith’s ‘The Wealth of Nations’ in 1776 introduced the notion that if each person pursued his / her own self interest, society as a whole would benefit as if guided by an ‘invisible hand’ (Iyengar, 2011). Central to this individualism is the ability to choose and at its best, active choosing promotes learning and the development of preferences (Sustein, 2014). The English philosopher John Stuart Mill made this the central point in his 1859 treatise ‘On Liberty’ emphasizing that;

‘the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being,’ and, ‘that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of these things,’ and further that, ‘the human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, are exercised only in making a choice...The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used.’ (Quoted by Sustain, 2014: 30-31)

Schwartz (2005) describes what he calls the, ‘official dogma’ of all western industrial nations as being a belief that,

‘if we are interested in maximizing the welfare of our citizens, the way to do it is to maximize individual freedom. The reason for this is both that freedom is in and of itself good, valuable, worthwhile, essential to being human. And because if people have freedom, then each of us can act on our own to do the things that will maximize our welfare, and no one has to decide on our behalf. The way to maximize freedom is to maximize choice...The more choice people have, the more freedom they have, and the more freedom they have, the more welfare they have.’ (Schwartz, 2005: 00:21)

But not all societies have developed this individualism and their citizens remain ‘collective’ in their outlook. Indeed collectivism has been the more pervasive way of life throughout history and has had many manifestations (Iyengar, 2011). Collectivism remains dominant in countries such as Japan or China where citizens are taught the importance of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ (Iyengar, 2011). The exercise of choice (if it exists) by citizens in such countries will, therefore, be a very different process from that in an individualistic country. The notion that choice, as seen through Western eyes best fulfills an innate and universal desire for choice in all humans in all countries of the world, does not, according to Iyengar (2010: 02.42) hold true.

The Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede has created a comprehensive ranking of the degree of individualism in various countries and geographical areas around the globe based on his work with IBM employees (Iyengar, 2011) and offers an interesting insight into the range to be found (Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2: Countries individualism rankings**

Geographical Area	Score (maximum being 100)
USA	100
Australia	90
UK	88
Western European Countries	60 – 80
Russia	39
Asia	Around 20
Central & South America	10 – 40 (Ecuador: 6)

Source: Information taken from Iyengar, 2011: 34-35



But as Iyengar (2011) cautions, there are dangers with too much and too little individualism,

‘true choice requires that a person has the ability to choose an option and not be prevented from choosing it by an external force, meaning that a system tending too far toward either extreme will limit people’s opportunities.’ (Iyengar, 2011: 64)

In countries such as the USA, UK and Australia, citizens are asked, or on occasion required, to make choices from the trivial to the life changing, from a sometimes perplexing range of options. The challenge for those of us living in an individualistic society, surrounded by an array of choice, is to learn to manage it.

Some choices are relatively easy to make but some are ‘hard choices’ (Chang, 2014) where alternatives are ‘on a par’ (Chang, 2014:08:51) and one choice is no better than another,

‘rather the alternatives are in the same neighborhood of value, in the same league of value, while at the same time being very different in kind of value.’ (Chang, 2014: 08.51)

We cannot completely opt out of making choices because choice is omnipresent in our daily life. We can, however, be pragmatic and learn to decide when it is right to invest time and energy in becoming informed about the choices open to us, and when it is not. The challenge is also about accepting that we do not all need or want choice in the same situations and that it is perfectly reasonable to choose not to choose (Sustein, 2014). But this is quite different from failing to make a choice; it is about making a conscious decision not to choose. For some citizens choice can present a huge burden and because they feel uninformed, too busy or perhaps understand their own biases, they will ask others to make the choice on their behalf (for example a financial adviser) (Shiv, 2012; Salecl, 2013; Sustein, 2014). For Sustein, any system that requires an active choice is paternalistic and that,

‘for both ordinary people and private institutions, the ultimate judgement in favour of active choosing, or in favor of choosing not to choose, depends largely on the costs of decisions and the costs of errors.’ (Sustein, 2014: 2)

Salecl (2013: 05.17) describes the exercise of choice as ‘anxiety provoking’ because choices are ‘linked to risk’ and ‘highly unpredictable.’ Get the choices right and self-realization, self-fulfillment and happiness will follow, or so we are led to believe. Get choices wrong, and risk mockery, marginalization or worse. Schwartz (2004) contends that

‘choice overload’ leads to stress and anxiety and damages our emotional wellbeing For Schwartz there is no question that some choice is better than none, but he questions the assumption that more choice means better options and greater satisfaction which is why he calls his book, ‘The Paradox of Choice – Why More Is Less’ (Schwartz, 2004). The paradox is that, whilst a certain amount of choice is a good thing, too much choice can lead to ‘paralysis’ rather than ‘liberation’ (Schwartz, 2005: 07:44). Schwartz contends that even when this paralysis is overcome, the likely outcome is that we will be less satisfied with our choice (because by choosing one thing we are inevitably failing to choose something else even though it has lots of attractive features) leading to inevitable feelings of regret, not least because the huge range of choices leads to an ‘escalation of expectations’ which cannot be easily met (Schwartz, 2005: 12:13). For Iyengar (2011a) an overload of choice leads to procrastination (a delay in choosing), the making of worse choices and less satisfaction with the choice made. Iyengar (2010) states,

‘when someone can’t see how one choice is unlike another, or when there are too many choices to compare and contrast, the process of choosing can be confusing and frustrating. Instead of making better choices, we become overwhelmed by choice, sometimes even afraid of it. Choice no longer offers opportunities, but imposes constraints. It’s not a marker of liberation, but of suffocation by meaningless minutiae.’ (2010: 11:36)

This makes sense to me because as Gilbert (2005) points out that the human brain evolved for a very different world than the one we inhabit today. This was a world in which people lived short lives in small groups, rarely meeting anybody different from themselves and where trying to satisfy the most basic of needs provided few opportunities to exercise choice. Consequently, Schwartz believes that too much choice is positively harmful and contends that the citizen needs to learn how to eliminate some choices from their lives (Schwartz, 2004; 2005). In his view the consumer should learn to love constraints and not let freedom of choice become a tyranny, viewing limits on possibilities as liberating, not constraining. Schwartz (2004) suggests a number of ways in which the citizen can manage choice overload: do not feel that you have to make a choice if none are right or it does not matter to you, otherwise you just make a choice for the sake of it and become a ‘picker’ not a chooser; learn to say ‘good enough’ (or ‘satisfice’ which is a term coined by the economist Herbert Simon (Simon, 1958) from two words; ‘satisfy’ and ‘suffice’) rather than seeking the ideal (‘maximizing’) which usually ends in disappointment anyway, because of the inability of the human mind to assimilate and digest all the information that would be needed to do such a thing. Do not dwell over what you have rejected and make decisions which are nonreversible, because if a choice can be changed we tend to be less

satisfied with it; focus on what is good about the choice you have made (an attitude of gratitude) and regret less; adopt sensible expectations, accept that the thrill of the new experience or artifact will wear off, and be content with what makes you happy irrespective of what others are doing. In her 2011 lecture to business people, Iyengar (2011a) suggests that retailers can help their customers overcome choice overload by cutting the number of options available, helping the customer to understand the differences between the options (concretization), to categorize the options and gradually increase complexity (condition for complexity).

In the rest of this chapter and in my study I will explore, how parents when choosing a school for their child, use some of these strategies perhaps without realizing they are doing so.

## 1.2 Choice and Education

During the 1980s and 1990s market theories and the idea of giving choice to service users came to have a powerful influence on public sector policy in many ‘individualist’ countries around the world including Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Continental Europe (Woods, et al. 1998).

Proponents see the market as a transformational force for good in all aspects of life, including education. For Tooley (1997) choice is by its very nature a good thing because it offers the citizen protection, even if it places some quite considerable demands on those asked to make the choice. The proponents of market theories argue that parental choice in education is a good thing for three principal reasons. Firstly, the libertarian argument that we all appreciate choice in many areas of our life, so why not in education? Secondly, the equity argument, which holds that choice has only been available to the few in the past and it can now be made available to all. And thirdly, that market forces will encourage competition between schools and serve to drive-up standards, increase efficiency and make schools more receptive to the demands of the ‘customer’ who in the case of education, will be the parent (Gorard and Taylor, 2001; Bagley, 2006; Exley, 2014; Lubienski and Myers, 2016). Friedman (1962) argued that a free market in which schools compete on the strength of their reputations would lead to an efficient supply of educational services. However, because the English state education market is still controlled, centrally funded and non-profit making it is usually described as a ‘quasi-market’ (Heath, 2009). Le Grand

and Bartlett first used the term quasi-market in 1993 to differentiate public sector markets such as state education from free markets such as independent education provision. Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) maintain that quasi-markets offer a free service and do not seek to make a financial profit whereas businesses operating in a free market must make a profit to survive. Other conceptual labels have been coined to recognize and describe the partial nature of such public sector markets. Saltman and von Otter (1992) refer to the 'planned market,' while Ransom (1993) writes of the 'administered market'. Woods et al. (1998) extended the notion of the quasi-market by incorporating the 'public interest' and created an analytical tool they call the 'public-market'. In this public market, the market elements consist of choice, diversity, competition, demand-driven funding and self-determination or management. The public elements are intended to address the needs and represent the interests of the community as a whole and include structures for action (the executive arm of government), representation (democratic arrangements) and overseeing public services (public agencies that advise, regulate or inspect).

Until 2015, Stephen Ball was the Karl Mannheim Professor of Sociology of Education at the Institute of Education (IOE) in London. Ball has written extensively and persuasively on many aspects of school choice over a number of years, both as the lead author and in collaboration with other researchers and I will make frequent references to his work throughout this chapter, as much of it resonates with me. Ball's two primary concerns relate to social class, social inequalities, social reproduction of class, and education policy generally. He is known for bringing sociological concepts to bear to make sense of the relationship between these two primary concerns. According to Ball (2013) advocates of the free market tend to approach the issue of values in one of two ways. They will either see the market as value free; as simply the most efficient way of delivering a service, or they see it as possessing a set of positive moral values that will include, 'effort, thrift, self-reliance, independence and risk taking' (Ball 2013: 54). In Britain a belief in the transformational power of the market led to passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act (England and Wales) and the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 and the introduction of a competitive educational market in which parents are able to make a choice and express a preference about the school they wish their child to attend. This is 'open enrollment' in which parents specify, and sometimes rank, their preferred schools and places are allocated on the basis of those preferences (if capacity permits), overlapping catchment areas and per capita funding through local management of schools (LMS) and devolved budgets.

Ball (2013) characterizes parental choice as introduced by the Conservative government in the 1980s, as a neoliberal policy. Neoliberalism is a contested concept, but those who advocate it tend to argue that the state is inherently inefficient when compared to markets and should withdraw from service delivery so that an entrepreneurial system based on competition and markets can thrive (Ball, 2013). In New Zealand at the same time, a Labour government was embarking on a similar programme, but there the background to reform was mainly economic (Ball, 2013). In England and Wales in contrast, the changes had strong political antecedents, relating to criticisms of teachers and of the curriculum, perceived progressive educational methods and the desire to move from a government planned and bureaucratically driven educational system (Woods et al. 1998). However, in Ball's opinion, the New Zealand reforms did not have the 'neoconservative' elements that underpinned important parts of the Education Reform Act 1988 (Ball, 2013). Research by Adler carried out between 1983 and 1986 concluded, that parental choice provisions in Scotland and England and Wales,

'could best be understood as political rather than educational initiatives and were enacted in spite of the opposition of the main interest groups.' (Adler, 1990 referred to in Adler 1997: 298)

On the basis of a comparative study of school choice in six countries (including England) Hirsch (1977) identified the four main objectives of school choice: to give all parents irrespective of their social or economic standing a choice of school for their child; to enhance the role of parents and diminish the role of educators; to give schools an incentive to improve and to encourage a wider range of provision (educational pluralism). Much of this literature review examines how, and to what extent these aims are being realized.

When New Labour came to power in 1997 the new government continued many of the neoliberal policies of the previous Conservative governments. In education policy Ball (2013) identifies some breaks and continuities. He identifies the continuation of the 'back to basics' approach promulgated by the previous government, but standards, targets and performance monitoring were all given a sharper edge. There was a declared intention to reform the teaching profession, involve the private and charitable sector in education and focus on school improvement. New Labour also pursued a policy of creating an educational system that would re-engage the middle class who were deserting state education (Ball, 2013). Ball quotes the Secretary of State for Education (Charles Clarke) in 2004 as he launched the Government's Five Year Plan as saying,

‘there is a significant chunk of them (the middle class) who go private because they feel despairing about the quality of education. They are the people we are after.’ (Ball, 2013: 102)

Significantly for this study, New Labour also moved to increase and regulate parental choice (Ball, 2013). For example, the 2006 Education Act required all Local Authorities to provide ‘choice advisers’ to assist parents and introduced a Code of Practice for School Admissions, primarily to inhibit schools’ ability to select or ‘cream off’ the most academically able students (Ball, 2013). Under the 1997 New Labour government, ‘voucher’ style reforms in England were taken further than the Conservatives had done as part of a planned ‘modernization’ of public services (Powell, 2008; Exley 2014) with new types of school introduced to facilitate diversity and enhance choice (West and Currie, 2008).

Just as New Labour revoked very few of the Conservative education policies in 1997, the 2010 Coalition government revoked very few New Labour policies (Ball, 2013). Instead there was a marked change in emphasis and what Ball calls a ‘radicalization’ of existing New Labour policy (Ball, 2013). The Coalition government oversaw the rapid expansion of the academies programme with the creation of a new type of academy known as a Free School. The government claimed that these new entrants would contribute to increased diversity and choice leading to higher academic standards through competition, autonomy and innovation (Morris, 2015).

‘International evidence (shows) the galvanizing effect on the whole school system of allowing new entrants in areas where parents are dissatisfied with what is available.’ (DfE, 2010: 10)

The government claimed that the Free Schools would help to tackle inequality and disadvantage by providing more places in good schools for children from poorer backgrounds; a claim still to be fully tested (Morris, 2015). However, Ball (2013) describes parental choice as,

‘one of the most contested and most difficult concepts...where choice and voice are slippery notions that are often used loosely and elusively by advocates, policy makers and critics.’ (Ball, 2013: 147-148)

And although, according to Clarke, Smith and Vidler (2006) choice is an ‘indeterminate concept’,

‘in a submission to the recent Public Administration Select Committee on Choice and Voice in Public Services (2004), Ministers of State argued that choice must be central because; it’s what

users want; it provides incentives for driving up quality, responsiveness and efficiency; it promotes equality and it facilitates personalization.’ (Smith and Vidler, 2006: 1)

However, as Clarke et al. (2006: 1) go on to point out, ‘each of these claims is, as the Select Committee indicated in its 2005 report, contestable.’

School choice is intrinsically controversial because of its ideological origins and significance and Adler (1997) sums up the four main objections commonly cited by critics. Firstly, the middle class will make the system work to their advantage. Secondly, it will undermine a sense of community thus increasing social segregation and reducing the pressure for school improvement. Thirdly, the actions of a few may undermine the wishes of the majority, in that if a group of parents choose not to support a school it may undermine its viability to the detriment of everybody. Fourthly, putting power in the hands of parents will make them more conservative and risk throttling innovation.

In the rest of this chapter I will examine evidence to evaluate the extent to which the objectives and objections identified above are being realized; how parents make their choice and the extent to which parental behaviour is undermining those policy objectives. For clarity I will present my analysis of the literature on school choice under two inter-related thematic headings; School Choice, Social Class and Community and How Parents Choose.

### 1.3 School Choice, Social Class and Community

Throughout this thesis I make extensive reference to the middle class and the working class in English society. Teixeira and Abramowitz (2008: 3) write about the difficulty in defining class and that, in their view, there is, ‘no ‘correct’ way to do this.’ Class can be defined by educational level, occupation or income, each definition having its own virtues and drawbacks (Teixeira and Abramowitz, 2008). However, in my reading I have been struck by how often the labels ‘middle class’ and ‘working class’ are used by authors who offer no clarification of how they are defining the terms. For this study I will use the general definitions provided by the Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary and Thesaurus (<http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org>) because they encompass notions of educational level, occupation and income. The middle class is, ‘a social group that consists

of well educated people, such as doctors, lawyers and teachers who have good jobs and are neither rich nor poor’, and the working class is, ‘a social group that consists of people who earn little money, often being paid only for the hours they work, and who usually do physical work.’

### 1.3.1 Educational and Social Segregation

As I will demonstrate, much has been written about how the middle classes negotiate the ‘rules of the game’ in school catchment areas and in selection criteria to ensure the reproduction of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 1997) in order that a school contains enough ‘people like us’ (Byrne, 2012) or as Ball (1994) puts it,

‘the market works as a class strategy by creating a mechanism which can be exploited by the middle classes as a strategy of reproduction in their search for relative advantage, social advancement and mobility.’ (Ball, 1994: 17)

Butler and van Zanten (2007) make a very broad, but I believe in my experience a generally valid assertion, that middle class parents will devote considerable time and energy deciding where to live and where to educate their children with concern for the longer term outcomes. In his study set in Athens, Maloutas (2007) found that although, as in most of Europe, the middle class have become sensitive to the need to maximize opportunities for their children and are prepared to deploy a range of strategies to achieve this, it is not solely a middle class prerogative. He found that the great majority of Greek families ‘play the game’ to some extent but what makes the difference is that middle class families can invest greater resources, have a clearer understanding of the rules of the game and can select more efficient options. Or to phrase it in terms of economic theory, income constraint, different preferences for school quality and informational advantages all favour the middle classes (Allen and Burgess, 2014). The literature relating to middle class strategies deployed by English parents include moving house to be closer to a school of choice, getting involved in local churches to ensure entry to high-performing faith schools, pursuing appeals when the preferred choice is not given and opting out into the private sector (Ball et al. 1995; Benson et al. 2014). The net effect of course, is likely social segregation as the middle class concentrate around preferred schools. Maloutas (1997) describes how the strategies of middle class families to gain advantage will, when aggregated, have an important social impact by reproducing occupational hierarchies and indirectly reinforcing social segregation. The natural consequence is that good schools become better and the poor schools become poorer, thus producing what Butler and van



Zanten (2007: 4) describe as, 'a continuing spiral in perceptions of desirability and performance.'

Intuitively social segregation in schools is perceived as a negative because it does nothing to redress educational inequality between rich and poor, affects the progress of those in 'poor' schools and damages social cohesion. Consequently it is fundamentally unfair (Coldron, Cripps and Shipton, 2010). Whilst acknowledging that, to a greater or lesser extent, social segregation of schooling occurs across the industrialized world, Coldron et al. (2010) seek to examine what they describe as, 'the persistent social phenomenon of segregated schooling in England' (Coldron et al. 2010: 19). They conclude that persistent segregation is not just due to flaws in the way the market is working in England and that social segregation has not significantly increased nationally (though there is considerable local variation) since the introduction of the quasi-market but that, 'ultimately the drivers of segregated school are in the fundamental wish of individuals and families to optimize their social position given the resources at their disposal' (Coldron et al. 2010: 32). Further, they conclude that there is a desire on the part of the majority of middle class and working class parents to opt for such socially segregated schools and that raises a potentially great dilemma for those who would seek to balance intakes through progressive admissions policies and ask this provocative question:

'If the motivation to distinction is so deep rooted in the world view of the already advantaged in the service of maintaining that advantage, will the interests of poorer children be served by more integration or will the visceral response of middle class parents put them in the way of more humiliation and denigration?' (Coldron et al. 2010: 32)

Tooley (2007) rejects the notion that school choice impacts in a pernicious way on social class, and maintains that it does not add to the educational disadvantage of working class families. The findings of Gorard and Taylor (2001) imply that markets are not resulting in between-school socio-economic segregation and Gorard and Fitz (2006) also contend that English schools were not becoming more socially segregated as a result of parental choice. They believe that English schools were already socially segregated and they found no evidence in their study to link education markets with increasing concentrations of disadvantaged children in some schools. They are quite dismissive of the criticisms heaped on their research and state,

'one should not naively attribute any and all changes in segregation to the introduction of choice and competition in the state-funded education system, as other researchers have done.' (Gorard and Taylor 2001: 801)

This may be true, but it is surely also true that the quasi-market in education is not serving society as a whole by encouraging social and academic segregation. Two recent international studies emphasize the point. In her study of school choice in Taiwan, Chin-Jin Mao (2015) found that,

‘school choice practices of parents, compounded with the neo-liberal rhetoric of education reform in Taiwan, is rapidly exacerbating the great disparity between public junior high schools.’ (Chin-Jin Mao, 2015: abstract)

A Swedish study conducted by Bunar and Ambrose (2016) found that, despite nationally defining principles mandating fairness, transparency and integration, school choice policy is being implemented in such a way as to aggravate current patterns of segregation in education and even housing.

In 2001 Bagley, Woods and Glatter researched the reasons why parents *reject* schools. From 6000 questionnaires and sample personal interviews they were able to conclude that one major factor was the social composition of the pupils at the school, which included in one sample school, their ethnicity and heritage. In her Greater Manchester study of parental choice, Byrne (2012, 2014) was able to identify the ‘naturalness’ of gravitating towards ‘one’s own’ at the expense of any embrace of difference whether that be perceived ethnic, religious or composition to ensure that the school has enough ‘people like us,’ to ensure the reproduction of social and cultural capital. In examining the literature, it becomes clear that the social mix or the nature of the peer group – in terms of social class and ethnicity – is a key factor on which parents choose a school for their child and that this has been known for some time (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995; Bagley, 1996; Ball 2003; van Zanten 2011). Benson et al. (2014) concluded that by far the most common basis for choice of school in London and Paris is social mix – the school peer group - and that getting the ‘right’ social mix (social class and ethnicity) heavily influences schooling strategies with some parents seeing the social and ethnic mix as a proxy for school quality, sometimes despite evidence to the contrary provided by,

‘little used official statistics. In this way, social mix becomes a self-justifying prophecy: parents choose a school on that basis as well as employing it as a proxy for the quality of school to justify their choice.’ (Benson et al. 2014: 17)

So although parents do not admit to choosing a school on the basis of its social composition, Burgess, Greaves and Vignoles (2009) found evidence that it is happening in

practice. Macleod and Urquiola (2009) concluded that if schools are entirely non-selective (based on ability) then the free market will lead to improvement but that if schools are allowed to select then it will lead to stratification by parental income and reduced student effort. Their model predicts, 'that parents care not only about schools' value added, but also about schools' student composition' (Macleod and Urquiola, 2009: 40). Or as Ball succinctly puts it, 'markets in education provide the possibility for the pursuit of class advantage and generate a differentiated and stratified system of schooling' (1994: 3). The 2010 British Social Attitudes Survey demonstrates that the British public realize (English responses are amalgamated with those from Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland so it is impossible to say whether they would be significantly different) that choice may exacerbate segregation and believe that 'local schools' are the best hope of promoting equity and cohesion within education. Indeed Burgess et al. (2009) found that location is very important and that parents tend to choose the local school and,

'this of course would also tend to undermine the process of school choice which relies on parents choosing better schools rather than closer ones.' (Burgess et al. 2009:18)

In their 2001 study of why parents reject schools, Bagley et al. (2001) also found the main reason for choosing schools was a pragmatic choice based on proximity and that,

'it was clear from parents that in reflecting on the difficulties associated with getting their children to and from school they weighed up the potential inconvenience against the benefits other schools might have.' (Bagley et al. 2001: 314)

However, some academics challenge the idea of the 'neighbourhood school' and whether it can ever really facilitate good social mixes of pupils, because extensive residential segregation of those experiencing deprivation or affluence will always lead to neighbourhood schools being segregated, and may actually make the situation worse (Hoxby, 2007; Burgess, Propper and Wilson, 2007). Burgess, Briggs, McConnell and Slater (2006) contend that although attendance at the neighbourhood or local school may seem the most straightforward system it would actually be the most exclusionary because it would produce communities strongly segregated by income. A good school would attract families with the income to buy houses in the area thereby pushing up prices beyond the reach of poor families.

Bosetti (2004) describes what she calls the 'active choosing parent' and the 'non-active choosing' parent. The active chooser is one who will engage with the market, research and

come to a decision. The non-active chooser is one who does not engage and whose child ends up in the 'default' (and by inference, worse) school. The inference is that these parents have not 'chosen not to choose' (Sustein, 2014) or adopted one of Schwartz's coping strategies, but have failed to engage with the process at all, for whatever reason. Bosetti (2004) points to research undertaken across a range of western industrialized countries which indicates that parents who are active choosers are better educated, have higher levels of income and are less likely to be unemployed than non-choosers and are more likely to be satisfied with the school. For Bosetti this raises important questions of,

'agency, equity and access...what distinguishes between the classes is the level of aspiration they conceive as possible for their children, and the, 'social distance' required to reach that destination.' (Bosetti, 2004: 393)

According to Hatcher (1998) middle class parents are more likely to be engaged in the educational market because they perceive the stakes as being high. Whereas a working class child may be able to maintain his or her social position merely by completing compulsory secondary education, a middle class child risks 'social demotion' if he / she fails to achieve academically. Coldron et al. (2010: 26) describe the 'moral panic' and 'moral anxiety' felt by middle class parents as their children approach secondary school and the possibility that their children will experience a loss of advantage by having to attend schools with unsuitable peers. Therefore, educational success becomes particularly important. Ball (2003) characterizes middle class choice as being about academic outcomes where, 'the school is not represented as an independent variable with qualities of its own separate from its intake' or to put it another way, good test scores equals a good school with little regard to the quality of teaching (Allen and Burgess, 2014).

Reay and Ball (1997) explore what they call the 'ambivalence' displayed by many working class parents to school choice because of their own school experiences and contrast this with the middle class experience. For the working class, exercising choice 'appear to be as much about the avoidance of anxiety, failure and rejection as they are about, choosing a good school for my child' (Reay and Ball 1997: 93). For Coldron et al. (2010) working class parents tend to trust their local school as a public utility that will be as good as any other school and if their child does not succeed there, then that is due to the child's capacity to learn. Middle class parents are more likely to understand that schools will differ and therefore scrutinize each one available to see which one will be best able to meet their social and academic aspirations for their child. Vincent, Braun and Ball (2010) argue that

the working class respondents in their study had a different set of priorities in choosing a school centred on, 'the communal and the local' (Vincent et al. 2010: 283).

The analysis so far may imply that it is the parents who are making (or not making) the choice of school. Reay and Ball (1998) looked at the family dynamics of school choice and the involvement of the child and found that middle class families were characterized by a process of 'guiding' where a 'consensus' would be reached. In contrast Reay and Ball (1998) found that in many working class families the parents defer to the child who is seen as the 'educational expert' within the family and that generally, working class parents tend to go along with their children's preferences, which are 'immediate, local and affective' (Ball et al. 1995; Ball, 2002). Reay and Ball (1998) found no cases of middle class families leaving choice to the child. In contrast, Woods et al. (1998) concluded secondary school choice is overwhelmingly a family activity involving parents and child and that there are no class differences in this. They also found that the choice made or accepted for the first child was a significant determinate of the choice for subsequent siblings. But for Reay and Ball (1997: 89), 'choice is a new social device through which social class differences are rendered into educational inequality' and the working class is being asked to play a middle class game that they will inevitably lose (Reay and Ball, 1997). However, this view tends to paint the working class as 'deficient choosers' (Coldron et al. 2010: 22) lacking in educational discrimination and because they are insufficiently engaged in the choice process and make 'poor' choices, they will be less successful. It is therefore the consumer that is at fault, not the system. Heath (2009) explores the effects of choice when a child does not get a place at their preferred school and has to attend another school. In one school in her study this had negative consequences because,

'the fact that the majority of pupils did not choose the school inevitably resulted in negative feelings being projected onto the school and teachers by students.' (Heath, 2009: 550)

From his research in Scotland, Adler (1997) concluded that parental choice was a 'negative sum game' in that the gains achieved by some pupils and parents were more than offset by the community as a whole (Adler, 1997). Therefore, even though an individual parental decision may have been based on perfectly rational factors, the aggregation of many individual decisions had led to, what Adler refers to as 'irrational' outcomes for the community as a whole (Adler, 1997). This situation results from what Hirsch (1977: 36) calls, 'the tyranny of small decisions' and according to Adler (1997: 300-301), 'would not

arise if, when making individual choices, people could see and act on the results of their combined choices.’

Burgess et al. (2006) describe the English education system as a sort of ‘musical chairs’ – there are enough chairs for everyone but some are more desirable than others and when one of the desirable chairs is taken, it is not available to others, ‘unlike in most consumer choice contexts, choice by one person has spill-over effects on others’ (Burgess et al. 2006: 14; Allen and Burgess, 2014). In this context, the following quote from the nineteenth century philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill taken from, ‘On Liberty and Other Writings’ seems relevant:

‘The only freedom deserving the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it...Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.’ (quoted by Iyengar 2011: 32)

However, not everybody is prepared to ‘play the game’ and some parents seem to demonstrate a wider perspective. A study by Oria, Cardini, Ball, Stamou, Vertigan and Flores-Moreno (2007) explored a framework for an ethics of choice in urban education (Hackney in London) and outlined the educational ambitions and ambivalences of a group of middle class parents. What emerged was a reflexive dynamic in which the impersonal concern for the public good and ‘others’ was balanced with the personal requirement to meet the needs of the child, family and ‘imagined futures’. Another study by Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) identified groups of middle class parents in London and Paris who set great store by the need for equality and integration. These parents were less concerned with the instrumental side of schooling than other middle class parents and felt that they possessed sufficient cultural capital to make up for any possible deficiencies with the school. The parents interviewed as part of the study,

‘tended to emphasize the need to strive for equal results or at least equal satisfaction for all and a model of integration based on interconnectedness between social groups.’ (Raveaud and van Zanten, 2007: 112)

Reay, Hollingsworth, Williams, Crozier, Jamieson, James and Beedell (2007) identified a group of middle class parents who did not share the values of what they call, ‘the atomized self-interested chooser’ and were prepared counter-intuitively, to send their children to the local low performing, local inner city school. In an ethnographic study Crozier, Reay, James, Jamieson, Beedell, Hollingsworth and Williams (2008) targeted a group of middle

class parents who were seemingly committed to the principle of comprehensive education and explored their motivations and feelings. They found people,

‘caught in a web of moral ambiguity, dilemmas and ambivalence, trying to perform, “the good/ethical self” while ensuring the “best” for their children.’ (Crozier et al. 2008: 261)

Most of the parents in the sample did make a conscious decision to send their children to the local school but as Crozier et al. (2008) point out, the samples were taken from a more privileged social area making the choice easier. Some of the respondents made it clear that if the local school was poor they may have had to compromise their principles. For these parents the choice and commitment to the local comprehensive is not,

‘merely based on a single principle of politics, morality, ethics or pragmatism, but are contingent upon their child’s happiness and academic success.’ (Crozier et al. 2008: 266)

Having made the decision these parents, whilst expressing egalitarian principles of supporting state education, have no qualms about using their knowledge and cultural capital to ensure the best opportunities and advantages for their children because of course,

‘both the children and parents are highly valued by the schools, which in turn strengthens their privileged positions and agency.’ (Crozier et al. 2008: 270)

### 1.3.2 ‘Playing the Game’

But not all parents are prepared to behave in a principled and ethical manner and will do almost anything to get their children into the ‘best’ local school and even engaging in various forms of ‘skullduggery’ (Coldron et al. 2010). However, Coldron and colleagues maintain this is only a minority at most and to say that most middle class parents are ‘fiddling’ the system is a caricature (Coldron et al. 2010). Nevertheless a 2006 survey of parents (Crace, 2006) found that nearly half the respondents would consider ‘underhand’ tactics to get their child into their first choice school. Roughly a third would be prepared to move house, 19% would consider renting a property in the catchment area for the duration of the application process and 14% would be prepared to fake an address. 12% of parents said they would consider embellishing their religious or ethnic credentials and that hiring a private tutor was entirely legitimate. By 2007 a survey of 1250 parents commissioned by the Children’s Society (Ward, 2007) found that a total of 51% would be willing to move to get their child into their school of choice and 14% said they would go so far as to give false information such as lying about their faith or where they live.

Concern about fraudulent and misleading applications reached such a point by 2009 that the Secretary of State for Education asked the Office of the Schools Adjudicator to conduct an investigation. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) helps to clarify the legal position on admissions policies in schools in England. The adjudicators work independently of the Department for Education but are appointed by the Secretary of State for Education. The OSA is not involved in making decisions about school admissions for individual pupils but is responsible for ruling on objections and referrals about state school admission arrangements, settling disputes over school organization proposals, making decisions on requests to vary school admission arrangements, determining appeals from maintained schools against the intention of the local authority to direct the admission of a particular pupil, resolving disputes concerning the transfer and disposal of non-playing field land and assets and producing an annual report for the Secretary of State for Education about their work. The first report (OSA, 2009) concluded that the picture was ‘gloomy’ with many Admission Authorities reporting large numbers of fraudulent and misleading applications though the vast majority of parents remained honest and were ‘playing by the rules’. The main problem was that there was no disincentive to dishonesty so the Secretary of State for Education for England asked the Chief Schools Adjudicator to suggest how this could be rectified. There followed a report (OSA, 2010) that made 15 recommendations that could be incorporated in the Admissions Code. However, an untrue application for a school place is still not considered a crime and a report commissioned by the government in 2012 from a leading barrister concluded that there was no justification in law for doing so, as to charge parents with conspiracy to defraud would be, ‘extraordinarily heavy handed’ (Hunter, 2012).

A report from the Sutton Trust shows how some parents ‘cheat the system’ (Francis and Hutchings 2013: 2) but far more significant is the degree to which better-off families are able to buy a property near a good school. A 2015 survey of 1100 parents across the UK (Adams, 2015) found that a quarter of families had moved house or changed address to obtain a school place with one in six saying that they had deliberately bought or rented a second property within a desirable catchment area. This is despite having to pay a typical 18% premium on the house price or a higher rent to be within a sought-after catchment area. This option is not available to poorer families but is one that had had a significant impact on the families who made that choice, with one in four of the buyers saying that they had to work extra hours or change jobs as a result after paying, ‘significantly more for a property’ than they could afford (Adams, 2015). Adams (2015) also found that 10% of



parents with school age children had moved house to be within their catchment area of choice but that parents with younger children were more likely to move than parents of those aged over 11. This is in accord with the conclusion reached by Allen, Burgess and Key (2010) that house moves during school years make only a small contribution to school segregation and that most of it, ‘derives from families being in the right place before the relevant child is aged five’ (Allen et al. 2010: 20). However, the conclusions of this work seem to contradict much of what has already been stated in that they found,

‘some inertia in the system because families do not appear to use house moves to optimize their school choice decision to the extent we might expect.’ (Allen et al. 2010: 20)

Research by Burgess, Briggs, McConnell and Slater (2006) concluded that a choice of school was feasible for most secondary pupils in England in the sense that they had more than one school within their locality. They found that 75% of secondary age pupils in England had at least three schools within 4km of their home and that around half of all secondary age pupils in England were attending their local school. Burgess et al. (2006) also found that affluent families, whose secondary schools were of, what they defined as poor quality, were much more likely to transport their children to better schools than were poorer families. Consequently a pupil eligible for free school meals was 30% more likely to attend a poor local school than an otherwise identical pupil from a better-off family (Burgess et al. 2006).

In 2006, New Labour acknowledged some of the problems with the operation of the quasi-market in education in England when it passed the Education and Inspections Act (Burgess et al. 2006; Exley, 2014). The Act cemented a prominent role for school choice but sought to ensure that the practical issues around access to good schools were addressed: namely, how far children have to travel to reach school and the admissions policies being used by schools. The ‘corrective measures’ that were enacted included the extending of government funding of school transport costs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds allowing them to access schools outside their immediate locality; the appointment of ‘choice advisers’ to provide help, support and information to disadvantage families to enable them to engage with the system and an enhanced mandatory code of school admissions attempting to control and limit possible problems of selecting the most academically able or what Exley, 2014) calls ‘cream skimming’ by schools.

In April 2011 the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition government introduced the ‘Pupil Premium’ to provide additional funding for disadvantaged children (DfE 2010, Sutton Trust 2015). This was a significant new departure in that large amounts of money were to be linked to individual disadvantaged children (defined as having been on free school meals at some point over the past six years, in care or having been in care) as opposed to being distributed through local authorities. In 2014/15 a total of £38.8 million was being spent on the premium and was complemented by the Early Years Premium added an additional £50 million in the 2015/16 financial year (Sutton Trust, 2015). The Pupil Premium and Early Years Premium are significant not only because they recognize the significant needs of disadvantaged children, but because they also incentivize schools to admit such children.

However, critics still argue that such ‘corrective’ measures are not only expensive but also insufficient to overcome the inherent problems within the quasi-market (Exley, 2014). In the conclusion to their study of middle class parents in Paris and London, Benson et al. state:

‘Our results point to strong continuities in middle class practices towards social enclosures in education (in Paris and London). To achieve more egalitarian outcomes in the future, policy interventions need to be more focused on considering possible incentive structures that might operate explicitly against these consistent forms of enclavism by middle class parents. The success of the middle classes in gaining advantage in the system is also the reason however, why such interventions may be difficult to implement or sustain.’ (Benson et al. 2014: 18)

One way in which there has been an attempt to undermine the creation of ‘social enclosures’ or ‘enclavism’ has been through the introduction of random selection (ballots or lotteries) for school admissions. In the eighth annual report of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA, 2006/7) the Chief adjudicator, Philip Hunter called for more secondary schools to consider allocating places by lottery to stop middle class families being over-represented. He recognized that schemes such as ballots, which randomly allocate pupils with places at popular schools, would be unpopular with many parents, but that action needed to be taken.

The extent of the unpopularity of random allocation was amply demonstrated by the objections to its introduction in Brighton and Hove from September 2008. The local council had sought to ensure that each of its eight secondary school would have a better social mix by redrawing the catchment areas and instituting a lottery or ballot for oversubscribed schools. This meant that some parents, who had bought a particular house

to be in the catchment area of a preferred school, were potentially disenfranchised. However, the adjudicator who examined the 51 objections from parents found against them and declared that, 'a greater degree of justice' was likely to result from the new arrangements (BBC news website, 2007). He also noted that the proposed random ballots were only to be used to differentiate between applicants when there was over-subscription, and not to allocate all secondary school places. Consequently the use of random ballots or lotteries was, 'a reasonable means of exercising a tie-break function' (BBC news website 2007). By 2008 the political backlash was such that the Conservative opposition declared that they would scrap what the then Opposition Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove called a, 'completely inequitable and unfair' process and that the admission system should not be reduced to the, 'spin of a roulette wheel' (Curtis and Shepherd, 2008) and in 2009 the Education Secretary, Ed. Balls asked for a review from the Schools Adjudicator.

In his response to the Secretary of State, Ian Craig, the Chief Schools Adjudicator wrote that although the use of random selection by admission authorities was not uncommon, it was having very little impact on the allocation of school places, because the vast majority of authorities were not using it, 'in any real sense' and had no wish to do so. Those authorities that were using lotteries or ballots were only using them as a tiebreak and not, as some feared, to randomly assign pupils across local authorities (OSA, 2009a). In 2011 the new Admissions Code introduced by the new Coalition administration banned all admission authorities from using random selection as the main way of allocating school places (Shepherd, 2011).

So did the strategy work or did it promise more than it delivered? A study of the Brighton and Hove experience (Allen, Burgess and McKenna, 2010a) concluded that the system did not give equal chances to all pupils, because catchment areas were still the main determinant of access and they were drawn in such a way that families in the poorest neighbourhoods still had little chance of getting into the most popular schools. Furthermore, the researchers found that, if anything, socio-economic segregation had increased slightly, and although there had been some 'evening out', the lottery had not equalized the chances of poorer pupils getting into the highest performing schools. But there are still calls for greater use of lotteries or ballots, particularly if they are combined with catchment areas as they provide, 'clear and equal probabilities of the chances of success in the school choice process' (Allen and Burgess, 2014: 28).

Whilst the procedures used in lotteries and ballots may be seen as objectively fair, parents do not always perceive the outcomes as such (Noden, West and Hind, 2014). For that reason there is an increasing use of ‘admission bands’ with the number in use by Admissions Authorities increasing from 95 in 2008 to 121 in 2012 (Noden et al. 2014). Admission bands are a process through which children are grouped into ability bands and a number of places in a school are reserved for children from each band. The idea is to ensure that the school intake properly reflects the broad ability range of applicants but of course it will only do that if there are applications from the whole range of academic ability in the first place. A variation on this would be the use of quotas (Leroux, 2015). The quota system proposed by Leroux would be used to award a significant number of places in outstanding schools to children who are from socially disadvantaged families. Whilst equitable, it would be interesting to see how aspirant middle class parents and government would regard such ‘social engineering’ if it were to be adopted.

But a note of caution: all these ‘corrective measures’ are for nothing if the mechanisms creating segregation in English schools are much more deep-seated than just a dysfunctional quasi-market in education (Coldron et al. 2010). For Coldron et al. the current arrangements, ‘work in the interests of the already advantaged and show the processes of classification and stratification as fateful’ (2010: 26).

## 1.4 How Parents Choose

Those advocating neoliberal policies often draw on rational choice theory (RCT) for support (Bevir, 2015). Rational choice theory is an economic principle grounded in assumptions drawn from behavioural psychology pioneered by sociologist George Homas, which assumes that individuals always make prudent and logical decisions that provide them with the greatest benefit or satisfaction and which are in their highest self interest (Scott, 2000, Bevir, 2015). Central to the theory are two key elements. Firstly the belief that all action is fundamentally ‘rational’ in character even if it appears irrational, and secondly the assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the individual actions that lead to that phenomena, often referred to as ‘methodological individualism’ (Scott, 2000; Bevir, 2015). However, the theory has its critics who argue that it does not explain why people will sometimes behave in a selfless or altruistic manner, will follow social norms of behavior or perceived obligations that may not be in

their best interest, and finally, that it focuses too much on the individualistic when there must be social structures that cannot be reduced to the actions of individuals, and therefore must be explained in a different way (Scott, 2000; Bevir, 2015). A recent Swedish study undertaken by Thelin and Niedomysl (2015) found that although rational choice theory underpins school reforms in many countries, little research has been done on its validity. The researchers used data from a choice experiment and demonstrated that RCT is invalid, revealing what they describe as ‘significant flaws’ in the central assumption motivating school choice policy reforms which is that parents will make well informed, rational choices based on academic performance.

In a 1994 paper Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz examined rational models developed by Hunter (1991) and Coldron and Boulton (1991) for how parents make their choice and found them wanting as they,

‘fail to capture the messy, multi-dimensional, intuitive and seemingly irrational or non-rational elements of choice. Not only do they eradicate luck and chance, but they exclude social relations, history, context, influences and doubt. Matters of compromise, mind changing and vicissitude are replaced by simple certainties.’ (1994: 74)

In the interviews conducted by Oria et al. (2007) parents, ‘represent school choice as a messy, complex and fraught business. In some cases they indicate moral and ethical discomfort’ (Oria et al. 2007: 93). For Ball (2002) parents appear to employ a ‘mixture of rationalities’ involving an element of, ‘the fortuitous and haphazard’ and to the outside observer the choice of some parents will appear entirely irrational (Ball 2002: 23). Bosetti (2004) maintains that parents tend to rely on their personal experiences, values, social status, their beliefs about the goals and purposes of education and the degree to which they wish to be involved in their children’s education and school related activities when making their choice.

This section will examine the literature for evidence of the extent to which parents can be seen as ‘utility maximisers’ (Bosetti, 2007) that is people who make rational decisions based on the costs, benefits and likely success of the various options, who have the social capital to hold schools and teachers to account and who can be relied upon to pursue the best interests of their children (Bosetti, 2007). My starting point is to present information from a recent study by Wespieser, Durbin and Sims (2015). This will give an overview and context to a subsequent review of the literature on how parents choose.

Wespieser et al. (2015) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,005 British parents of children aged five to eighteen to find out whether they felt they had a genuine choice of schools for their child, what factors do they take into consideration and what activities they undertake to help decide which school their child should attend? Of course there were some considerable regional variations in this national study, but overall 72% of parents felt they had a choice (bearing in mind that in large parts of the country there may only be one realistic choice available). Overall the most important factors for parents when choosing a school are as shown in Table 1.3. The study finds that location, well qualified teachers and a reputation for taking parental views into account, are more important to parents with a lower household income, and that discipline, examination results and the effectiveness of the schools' leadership team are more important to parents with a higher household income (Table 1.4). Wespieser et al. (2015) found that a majority of parents undertake a range of activities to help decide which school their child should attend, but that there are differences determined by household income. Lower income families are more likely to let their child decide or select a school already attended by a sibling, whereas parents on higher incomes are typically more likely to discuss potential schools with other parents, attend open evenings, visit or make contact with schools and undertake their own research on possible schools (Table 1.5).

The results obtained by Wespieser et al. (2015) confirm a theme running through this review, namely the importance of local factors. But they are also able to confirm another theme, namely that parents from different socio-economic groups value different choice factors and undertake different activities to help make their choice (Wespieser et al. 2015). It will be illuminating to compare the results I obtain from a case study of parents and school staff in one locality and I will make reference back to this research in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 5) when I will be able compare my findings with those of Wespieser et al. (2015).

**Table 1.3: Factors important to parents when choosing a school**

Factor	Most important factor %	2nd most important factor %	3 <sup>rd</sup> most important factor %	Total %
School that best suits my child	20	16	12	48
Location / proximity	19	15	12	46
Discipline, behavior that promotes effective learning	10	16	17	43
Ofsted inspection rating	16	12	9	37
Well qualified teachers	10	11	13	34
Examination results	11	12	10	33
Inclusive ethos where all pupils are valued	5	6	10	21
Effectiveness of schools' Senior Leadership Team	4	6	7	17
Reputation for taking parents' / carers views into account	2	4	4	10
Links to the local community	1	2	3	6
Freedom to make decisions about taught curriculum	1	2	3	6

Data taken from Wespieser et al. 2015: 3

**Table 1.4: Household income affects school choice**

Factor	Low income Less than £25,000 n = 334 %	Middle income £25,000 – 50,000 n = 294 %	Higher income More than £50,000 n = 377 %
Location / Proximity	52	46	40
Well qualified teachers	39	35	29
Reputation for taking parents / carers views into account	12	10	6
Discipline and behavior which promotes effective learning	41	39	48
Examination results	26	30	41
Effectiveness of schools Senior Leadership Team	11	16	22

Data taken from Wespieser et al. 2015: 4

**Table 1.5: Activities undertaken by parents when choosing a school by income**

Activities	Lower income Less than £25,000 n = 334      %	Middle income £25,000 - £50,000 n = 294      %	Higher income More than £50,000 n = 377      %
Let your child decide	43	41	36
Select the school already attended by siblings	53	52	47
Discuss potential schools with other parents / carers	60	71	79
Undertake your own research on possible schools	79	87	95
Attend open evenings, visit or contact school	88	89	95

Data taken from Wespieser et al. 2015: 5

#### 1.4.1 Networks and Grapevines

Smrekar and Goldring (1999) discovered that parents will use networks to collect information about schools and the choices open to them and that parents without access to such networks are limited in their capacity to make informed choices. Bosetti (2004) found that social networks appear to play a critical role in informing parental decision making but that this raises significant issues about the accuracy and quality of the information being circulated. In her view it is up to educational administrators to find ways of ‘infiltrating’ these networks to ensure the information is accurate and helpful even if it is unlikely to engage those parents who, ‘do not appear to have the disposition or motivation to deviate from enrolling their children in their designated neighbourhood school’ (Bosetti, 2004: 395-396). Hunter (1991) found that more than 50% of parents had talked to other parents and children to help identify ‘good’ and ‘bad’ schools although,

‘such local ‘knowledge’ may only be loosely based on up-to-date information and may reflect priorities different from those of individual parents.’ (Hunter 1991: 40)

In their study of middle class parents in Paris and London, Benson, Bridge and Wilson (2014) concluded that in both cities, parents were making choices based on informal sources of knowledge such as their own experiences, the opinions of teachers (unfortunately it is not clear here whether the authors mean ‘what the child’s current teachers think’ or what parents ‘think about prospective teachers’) and the opinions of other middle class parents and not publically available performance data,



‘rather they focus on the visible aspects of schools, and in particular the social and ethnic characteristics of the school population, making these the basis of their judgments of what the school offers.’ (Benson et al. 2014: 11)

Although school reputation is not specifically discussed by Benson et al. (2014), my professional interpretation of their data is that is exactly what they are describing.

Ball and Vincent (1998) also highlight the variety of roles played by informal social networks in school choice making and discuss what they call ‘the grapevine.’ The grapevine is fickle and based on rumour, gossip and story telling, but is often seen as more reliable than other ‘official’ sources of information, particularly when that information comes from the school itself.

‘The grapevine is a powerful way in which parents can circumvent professional control over information and the resulting selective presentation and gain a sense of the life of the school as experienced directly by students.’ (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 381)

The grapevine was also shown to be effective in delivering information about pupil behavior, the welfare aspects of school and ‘happiness’ (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 381). Ball and Vincent (1998) are clear that there is not just one grapevine operating and that many of them are class related, ‘where you live, who you know and what community you belong to are vital determinants of the particular grapevine that is open to you’ (Ball and Vincent 1998: 391). Such socially differentiated grapevines help to ensure that children are likely to end up with children from a similar social group. Ball and Vincent (1998) also analyze how various groups react to the grapevine(s) and identify three broad groups of parents. The first make fairly minimal use of the grapevine and consists of predominantly middle class parents who search out additional knowledge, predominantly working class parents who reject the grapevine entirely and a group who, for whatever reason, are excluded from the grapevine. The second broad group are those parents who rely heavily on the grapevine but seek to question it. The third broad group are those who rely heavily on the grapevine and tend to accept it as a much more reliable source of information than can be obtained from the school.

In the same paper, Ball and Vincent (1998) also raise the issue of school reputation as a factor particularly with the second broad group of parents. They point out that, ‘reputation is not always based on direct knowledge; it is ‘pseudo information’ (Ball and Vincent 1998: 389). Parents are aware that schools are attending to and managing their image and

reputation, which means that, ‘image, information and sense compete for attention and vie for authenticity’ (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 392). Macleod and Urquiola (2009) conclude that what they call ‘informational initiatives’ may be less effective than hoped for. They maintain that a,

‘school’s reputation is a function of both the quality of its students and the school’s value added. This implies that parents may select a school with lower value added if a significantly high quality student population counterbalances this. Hence, a concern for school reputation does *not* imply that parents will always choose schools with greater value added.’ (Macleod and Urquiola, 2009: 40)

Bagley et al. (2001) found that school reputation was an important factor for why parents will reject a school but one that they found very difficult to talk about at length or in depth. They found, like Ball and Vincent (1998) that their notion of the reputation of a school had not been gained from personal experience but from ‘word of mouth’ in discussions within their network. The part played by school reputation in school choice appears to be a very under-researched topic and worthy of greater study.

#### 1.4.2 Reputation

**Reputation:** ‘The beliefs or opinions that are generally held about someone or something’ (Oxford English Dictionary).

Reputation is the opinion of unsolicited third parties about us. The important distinction being not what we say (promote / market) about ourselves but the product of our cumulative activity (what we do - reality) (The Knowledge Partnership, 2011). Reputation is about what people say about us - those on the outside looking in and, most importantly, in a school context, those who have first hand experience as parents, students or members of staff (Holmes, 2006).

The academic literature on reputation and school reputation is limited, but where it exists it will be referred to. Perforce I will also refer to some non-academic literature where I feel it adds something to my understanding, and the understanding of the reader, about reputation.

Concern over reputation is sometimes considered a human fault; exaggerated in importance due to the fragile nature of the human ego no better exemplified than by William Shakespeare in this insight from Othello, the Moor of Venice, Act. 11. Scene 111.

**‘Cassio:** Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

**Iago:** As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound. There is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all unless you repute yourself such a loser.’  
(Shakespeare, 1974)

We can understand Cassio’s concern for his loss of reputation because traditionally people put great store by it. Individual reputation has always been something to be cherished, guarded and protected unto death. Recently, however, with the onset of social media and mass media, individual reputation seems less important to some people and harder to protect, though of course there is still recourse to the law for those able to afford it (Fine, 2009). Some people live their lives in the full gaze of others and publish information about themselves, with the potential to be very damaging to their reputation. At the same time, with the dominance of the free market, I will show that in most parts of the world, corporate and institutional reputation has become increasingly important, not only in all areas of commerce, but also in those elements of the public sector which are now subject to market influences; education in England being one of them.

In a market economy a positive, deeply grounded, reputation is essential for any school, business or institution. In education, as a people-based, professional service, excellence and success attracts staff, parents, students and advocates (community and business). In society where evaluation and measurement are paramount and where open feedback and comment can be found online at any time - globally, it is essential that educational institutions have some idea about where they sit in their competitive market. Carpenter and Krause (2011) make the point strongly that those working in what they call ‘public administration’ have to deal with audiences that are multiple and diverse so that in order to keep one stakeholder content, they may upset another but, what they call ‘audiences’ will, ‘aggregate functions and behaviours’ to form an overall opinion.

Technology and government policy around the world have made all institutions (including schools) more open to public scrutiny than ever before. Whether the institution is a multinational corporate giant or a small village school, its decisions and behaviours are more visible and transparent to stakeholders. Stakeholders are less dependent on parsed, sanitized and selective disclosures. Corporate character, values and ethics can no longer remain static and hidden. Now, the decisions and actions companies and their people take,

day after day, are on full and immediate display. To earn trust, institutions and their employees must behave in a manner that is authentic, 100% true to their character. Carpenter and Krause (2011: 31) discuss what they describe as, 'a false hypothesis' the notion that as facts become readily more available to the public through modern technology, the influence of reputation will diminish. This is because of information overload similar to that described by Schwartz (2004), Gilbert (2005) and Iyengar (2010; 2011a) with too much choice. Carpenter and Krause (2011) contend that because humans have innate cognitive limitations and information is now more abundant and accessible than ever, the citizen will continue to rely on simplifying complex issues by employing a practical method not guaranteed to be optimal or perfect, but sufficient for the immediate goals. Notions of reputation will therefore remain important because of this human heuristic predisposition.

It is the knowledge and information gleaned from a myriad of sources from which the consumer will construct their perception of an institutions' reputation, including that of a school. As Abraham Lincoln once said, 'Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing,' (authenticreputation.com, 2012). In a very interesting and informative book on the subject, Fobrum and Van Riel (2004) explain how people make decisions and illustrate how people make them, not only on the basis of reality itself, but on the basis of their perceptions of reality, whether accurate or not. So reputation is the sum of impressions held by an institution's stakeholders. In other words, reputation is 'in the eyes of the beholder' and crucially, reputation is not what the leadership insists it is, but rather what others perceive it to be. Importantly, behavioural psychologists remind us that people are heavily influenced by non-rational elements when exercising choice. We act on rumours and hearsay and on perceptions of the products (whether they be washing powders or a school place) rather than making careful calculations about the objective features of the products themselves. These perceptions are heavily influenced by our own highly personal, emotional, non-rational reactions to the way the product is presented to us by companies, journalists or friends (Fobrum and Van Riel, 2004).

A good reputation is important to any business, institution or school because it attracts both the worker and the consumer (teachers, parents and children in the case of schools). It acts like a magnet (Fobrum and Van Riel, 2004). People want to work in organizations with a good reputation and the consumer is attracted by good reputation. If stakeholders like what

they hear and see, they will support the organization and an upward spiral of esteem, viability and growth will occur. If stakeholders withdraw their support, a downward spiral is likely to occur leading to poor esteem, declining viability and ultimately, in the context of schools, closure.

A good reputation can also be important because it can be used to bestow a positive distinctiveness that will differentiate the institution from its rivals. Where product and service differences are slight because of commoditization, reputation can become a powerful and salient source of differentiation. Schools that seek to compete primarily on measurable terms (exam results and facilities for instance) are vulnerable in the long term precisely because they are measurable and so can be matched. That is why marketing professionals increasingly talk about the need for schools to develop a strong brand image or distinctive personality. In their marketing literature, SchoolEnterprise.com (2011) state,

‘the more attractive and compelling the reputation of a school, the more likely parents are to trust its promise. A strong brand is a trustworthy promise’ and as, ‘parents usually short-list schools for consideration using measurable criteria, but base their final decision on intangible qualities - the “feel” of a school, brand management is about ensuring that the “feel” is coherently expressed.’ (Speirs, 2012: 1)

Accruing positive reputational capital through a good reputation that can be brought into play when times are difficult, may prove to be very important. Conversely, an institution with little or no, ‘halos of past actions’ (Fobrum and Van Riel, 2004: 2) has no reputational capital to draw on when times are tough. My experience as a school leader tells me that this is a very important point. I have experience of a school that had reputational capital and was trusted by its customers (parents and children) and its community and was able to survive a difficult event, whereas I know in different circumstances, the event could have been extremely damaging.

Carpenter and Krause (2011) identify four critical facets of reputation as being crucial to public perceptions. Firstly, *Performative Reputation*: simply, can the institution do the job it is there to do well? In the case of schools this will involve providing a good education for all the children. Secondly, *Moral Reputation*: is the institution compassionate, flexible and honest? Does it protect the interests of its clients, constituencies and members? In the case of a school this will involve providing an environment where school staff feel able to do their job in a safe environment, children are cared for and protected and the role of parents is valued. Thirdly, *Procedural Reputation*: does the institution follow accepted

rules and norms, however good or bad its decisions? In the case of a school this will involve ensuring that it is competently run and fulfilling its legal duties. And fourthly, *Technical Reputation*: does the institution have the capacity and skill required for dealing with complex environments, independent of and separate from its actual performance? In the case of a school, of course, this will relate to the skills of the school staff. Not all organizations will want to concentrate on all four facets to the same degree depending on their core mission (Carpenter and Krause, 2011), but in my view it would be difficult to see how a school could develop a 'good' reputation if it did not take into account all four because reputation essentially, reconciles the many images people have of a school: it is the net image.

Reputation is always at risk from events and situations. Eccles, Newquist and Schatz (2007) identify three determinants of reputational risk for any institution (which would include a school). The first is whether its reputation exceeds its true character. That is, if the reputation of an institution is more positive than the underlying reality, this poses a significant risk, as it is only a matter of time before the reality becomes apparent. The second point involves the changing beliefs and expectations of stakeholders. When expectations are shifting but the institution's character remains unchanged this can lead to a widening reputation gap between reputation and reality and thus risks increase. The third risk involves weak internal coordination. If one part of the organization creates expectations that cannot be met by other parts then there is a risk to reputation. In a school context a simple example might be where the parents are led to believe by the headteacher that teachers will mark pupil workbooks in a particular way, but that this fails to happen because the demands on teachers are too onerous. The net effect on school reputation may then turn out to be worse than if nothing had been done about the marking policy in the first place. Whilst the evidence presented in the article is not based on empirical research because Eccles et al. (2007) are writing from a marketing perspective and not an academic one, the conclusions have resonance for me as a school leader so I have included them.

In a scholarly paper that may turn out to have particular relevance to my study, Helm (2011) explored employees' awareness of their impact on corporate reputation using an on-line survey of employees working for firms ranked in Fortune's America's Most Admired Companies Index. For her, the relationship between an institutions reputation and its employees is two sided. On the one hand, employees (particularly in service industries like

schools) are very influential in shaping the perceptions of other stakeholders through the quality of their interactions (formal and informal) and on the other hand, employees are themselves affected by the public perceptions of their employer. As Helm states,

‘Affiliation with a reputable firm improves employees self-esteem thereby constituting both, an appeal to join for potential employees and a vested interest for current employees to safeguard their employers good name.’ (2011: 657)

But what if the quality of the employee’s interactions with stakeholders is poor because they are demotivated and have not ‘bought into’ the ethos and mission of the employer? In a school setting one can see how this will lead to a downward spiral of poor parent engagement and little sense of pride in the organization.

Relatively little has been published in the academic literature relating to school reputation. However, two international studies have been published which are of interest to this study. Cosine (2013) and Cosine and Carrasco (2014) have published research relating to the role of school reputation in Finland and a comparative study between Finland and Chile. In the purely Finnish study, Cosine (2013) found that the choice between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ schools seems superficial and to conceal certain educational reproduction processes, ‘which do not officially exist in the Finnish education system’ and that, ‘choosing between classes within a school also works as a distinction strategy’ (Cosine, 2013:1). In the comparative study, Cosine and Carrasco (2014) identified differences between the two countries in the way reputation influences school choice. In Chile, the expressive-social order in terms of contributing to habitus was seen as the most important factor in constructing school reputations and shaping preferences, whilst in Finland the expressive-personal order in the form of school contentment was highlighted.

#### 1.4.3 The Relative Importance of Academic Achievement in School Choice

The central premise of a market in education is that parents value academic standards above all else and that a strong demand for academic performance as expressed through school choice, will drive up school standards (Hastings, Kane and Stagier, 2008). In a 2009 study on behalf of the British Government, Gibbons and Silva found that indeed this was the case for parents of different background and with children of all abilities. In contrast, however, as early as 1991 in a letter to the Times Educational Supplement (cited by Thomas, Vass and McClelland, 1997) Barstow was suggesting that examination results

were not as important a factor to parents as whether the school was coeducational or single sex, its religious denomination or its proximity to children's homes. Coldron and Bolton write that,

'There is a mutually supporting nexus of motivations of which the four criteria of happiness, child preference, discipline and proximity are vital.' (Coldron and Bolton, 1991: 170)

Coldron and Bolton (1991) then go on to suggest that security or 'process' criteria (as well as the child's preference) are more important than academic success and that concerns for discipline and behavior are very much tied in with the notion of happiness,

'Children cannot be happy, if they are constantly afraid or frustrated. Whilst there is a connection between discipline and schoolwork, parents in this study were reluctant to make it. They were, however, very ready to regard discipline as a necessary basis for happiness.' (Coldron and Bolton, 1991: 174)

Bagley et al. (2001) concluded that parents will, 'avoid schools where *human warmth* is relatively neglected and where a concern with the *rational academic* is seen as too dominant.' (Bagley et al. 1991: 321)

In 2009 Burgess et al. investigated the importance placed on academic standards by parents when choosing a school and found that more middle class parents are more likely to cite academic standards and a 'general good impression' of the school, whilst the working class were more likely to cite proximity (Burgess et al. 2009: 17). In 2014 Allen and Burgess concluded that, 'it seems clear from international evidence that some parents do not choose schools by placing a large weight on school performance' (Allen and Burgess, 2014: 5) and drawing on data from the Millennium Cohort study, Leprous (2015: 3) concluded that academic quality is, 'far from the main driver in parental choice of schools'. She concludes that more than 40% parents choosing a secondary school do not consider good results or academic standards an important factor in school choice and that working class parents give significantly less weight to these factors than the better off. In choosing primary schools, parents are even less likely to consider school performance with only 40% citing it as an important factor, way below school proximity at 66%, a good impression of the school (reputation) or the fact that a sibling already attended. However, Leprous (2015) does identify that, whether it be primary or secondary school choice, the higher the household income and the higher the level of education of the mother, the more likely parents are to mention academic performance as an important factor in school



choice. The study carried out in Sweden by Thelon and Niedomysl (2015) sought to investigate the relative importance of factors in school choice and specifically to test the central theoretical assumption that guided school choice reforms in Sweden (the pursuit of academic excellence) was valid. The study found that the assumption was invalid and that choice had more to do with geographical factors (proximity).

This parental attitude to academic achievement is problematic for proponents of the quasi-market and parental choice, because a key driver of school improvement is that parents must value and be able to identify correctly education success as a key school characteristic (Lubienski and Myers, 2016). Schools must become popular because of the standard of teaching and learning and not because they engage in other activities (Allen and Burgess, 2010d). In a later paper, Allen and Burgess (2014) identify two potential impacts if parents do not choose schools for their academic success. The first is what they refer to as the, ‘individual’ and relates to the possible consequences for the child of the parents making a choice based on the ‘wrong’ criteria and therefore making a ‘poor’ choice. This of course is controversial because it implies that there is only one ‘right’ way to choose. The second impact is less controversial and relates to what they call the ‘systemic’. That is, if parents are not choosing school because of their academic standards then schools have no incentive to improve them and admissions will remain ‘undeservedly high’ (Allen and Burgess, 2014: 9).

Burgess et al. (2009) postulate that competition, as it currently exists in England, has not significantly improved the academic performance of schools and this could be because parents may not value academic standards and so schools do not need to compete on that basis. They argue that perhaps parents place value on, ‘the *wrong* school characteristics (such as the performance of the schools sports team, or social status of the school intake’ (Burgess et al. 2009: 2). The ‘inextricable link’ that Benson et al. (2014:18) found between social mix and the perception of school quality presents a problem for school improvement because, as already stated, for choice to create the incentive for improved performance, parents must choose a school at least partly on that basis. But even then, if parents maintain they are choosing schools on the basis of test scores or a position in a league table, this can be a proxy for choosing peer groups, since test scores depend heavily on earlier attainment (Burgess et al. 2007).

In another study in 2009, Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles and Wilson combined survey, administrative, census and special data to study parental preferences for schools in England (Burgess et al. 2009a) and concluded that the three main characteristics that parents sought were academic attainment, school socio-economic composition and travel distance. Parents were not much concerned about ethnic composition or proportions of children with special educational needs. However, the researchers were also able to identify what they refer to as ‘stark differences’ in the options available to families at different ends of the socio-economic spectrum (Burgess et al. 2009a: 32). A more recent study by Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles and Wilson (2014) found that most families have a strong preference for schools with a good academic performance but that parents also value proximity and the socio-economic composition. Burgess et al. (2014) found that most of the variation in preferences for school quality across socio-economic groups arises from differences in the quality of accessible schools rather than differences in parental preferences, although more advantaged parents do have a stronger preference for academic performance. However, the data also indicate that parents from all socio-economic groups prefer schools that are closer to home which suggests that parents make a trade-off between distance and academic quality which may have the effect of limiting the potential positive role of choice and competition in raising academic standards across schools.

The willingness of some parents to base their choice of school on the behavior of others led to Gibbons and Machin (2003) identifying what they call ‘herd’ behavior in primary school choice where oversubscription becomes significant for school choice irrespective of school and pupil performance. In their 2014 study of middle class parents in Paris and London, Benson et al. found that the most common concern was about both the prospective school population and parent’s perceptions of what other ‘people like us’ do when educating their children and choosing schools and,

‘in this respect, peer groups are at the level of children nested within the peer groups of parents, demonstrating the continued concern over social reproduction.’ (Benson et al. 2014: 9)

And according to Coldron et al. (2010), this applies at both ends of the social spectrum. Whereas middle class parents will seek a school populated by middle class academic achievers, the working class parent will seek a school populated by children like their own and where teachers give positive attention to low achievers. In this way working class parents are seeking the ‘benefits of solidarity’ leading them to ‘opt for segregation’ (Coldron et al. 2010).

A study by Burgess et al. (2009) sought to examine parents' *stated* preferences and *revealed* preferences for schools (their actual choice of school as opposed to what they say they value in a school) and whether different social groups use different criteria. Through interviews they found that the more educated, middle class parents are more likely choose schools with better academic standards, a lower proportion of children receiving free school meals than rivals and of which they have gained a 'general good impression' (Burgess et al. 2009: 17). Working class parents tend to choose schools by their proximity to home. So although parents do not admit to choosing schools because of their social composition, this happens in practice. The study also found from an analysis of English Admissions Data that although nationally 94% of parents get their first choice of school, they conclude that this is because working class parents make less ambitious choices than middle class parents. Flatley, Connolly and Higgins (2001) found that parents were less likely to cite academic factors among the reasons for wanting a place in their favourite school if the mother was in a manual social class, or had never worked, than if the mother was in a non-manual social class. They also concluded that where the mother was of non-white ethnic origin they were almost twice as likely to cite academic factors than white mothers.

Bearing in mind that parent's true preferences may be different from their stated preferences, Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin and Matland (2000) found that over 90% of parents' valued 'educational quality' as important or most important to them. Class size was also important (80%), as was proximity to the school. Friendships were seen as important or most important by the fewest number of parents. Schneider and Buckley (2002) found substantial race and class differences in household preferences for schools, with middle class parents citing diversity and teaching values as most important and working class parents citing discipline and test scores and note a 'remarkable consistency' in the results of parent's surveys. Parents invariably cite academic achievement and teacher quality as the most important, but when revealed preferences are examined they show something different. In 2006 Buckley et al. (cited by Burgess et al. 2009: 5) used survey data from Chile to assess whether there was a correlation between the stated and revealed preferences of parents. While they found that parents in Santiago said they were seeking schools with a strong academic base, parents actually chose schools that were very different academically but very similar socio-economically. Buckley et al. (2006, cited by Burgess et al. 2009: 5) conclude that parents choose, 'class – not the classroom' and Burgess et al. (2009: 4-5) postulate that academic standards may be given by parents as the reason for their choice

because it is a ‘socially desirable’ response when in fact social or ethnic composition is far more important to them. The use of academic standards as a proxy for social choice will be a key theme in my study, as I will want to assess the degree to which it is taking place within the group of parents I will be studying.

#### 1.4.4 Sources of Information

Central to the contention that parents must not only value educational success but also be able to correctly identify it, is access to useful information (Allen and Burgess, 2010d). Flatley et al. (2001) found clear socio-economic differences in knowledge about and use made of information about the admissions process, as well as reasons given for applying for particular schools. Despite efforts by government to make information more accessible to parents (Leprous, 2015) the Sutton Trust (Francis and Hutchings, 2013) found a significant proportion of parents used no, or just one source of information, when choosing a school (a group they call ‘limited choosers’) with substantial difference between social groups (10% of middle class parents and 42% of poorest families). The group they labeled ‘informed choosers’ consisted of over 60% of middle class parents and just under half of working class parents. These are the parents who used at least one independent documentary source of information and one experiential source. Within the informed choosers Francis and Hutchings (2013) were able to identify a sub-group they call ‘hyper choosers’ who used five or more sources of information, a group which was dominated by middle class parents (38% compared to 13% working class parents). Therefore the central assumption underpinning parental choice that all parents are equally informed and knowledgeable and actively desire to exercise their right to choose is demonstrably flawed (Francis and Hutchings, 2013).

Research has shown that families gain information on schools from a wide variety of sources, both formal and informal. The types of information and the strengths and weaknesses of these sources were tabulated and summarised by Hall (2009: 24) and replicated in Table 1.6.

Thomas, Vass and McClelland (1997) interviewed 659 parents and found that although 60-70% looked at league tables, 75% said it had made no difference to how they felt about the school. The clearest finding was that, ‘parents do appreciate information, though this is primarily related to the detail and intelligibility of reports on their own children’ (Thomas et al. 1997: 194). Kirsten, Fischer and De Jong (2001) found that middle class parents in

England and France use published performance data, but that there is no conclusive evidence that the publication of this data has a major influence on their choice of school. A key finding from Francis and Hutchings (2013) was that parent evenings and discussions with other parents were used to inform school choice more often than league tables and Ousted reports. However, Bowe, Ball and Geertz (1994) examined open evenings and found,

‘Parents ... attach varying degrees of importance to their visits, are occasionally cynical about schools ‘marketing’ themselves, and often talk about ‘reading between the lines.’ (Bowe et al. 1994: 43)

**Table 1.6: Sources of information used by parents**

Types of information	Sources	Strengths	Weaknesses
Informal/ relational	Friends  Extended family  Families in schools  Co-workers	High levels of trust in the source  Less “costly” for the chooser in terms of time and energy spent	Not always accurate  Social networks are culturally/socially bound  Favour higher-income, more educated families
Formal/ Media	Television  Radio  Newspaper  Community centre  Politicians  Internet / web-based	Able to reach many people simultaneously  Multiple forms available	Scarce in terms of educational information  Questionable reliability  Need for choosers to have access to electronic media or have high level of literacy skills
School- based	Brochures  Newsletters  Web-pages  Application materials  Staff / administration  PTA	Important factual and procedural information  Creates connection between family and school	Biased in favour of school  Propaganda  Extensive “red tape”  Language usually technical or advanced  Intimidating – especially for younger and less educated parents

Source: Hall (2009: 24)

In their 2001 study of why parents reject schools, Bagley et al. concluded that two important factors were the school environment and the staff, with individual Head teachers often singled out as a particular reason for school rejection. However, parents with

sufficient social capital (social, cultural or economic) will understand that some school investment will be ‘invisible’ but necessary, whilst some will be overtly cosmetic and very visible. They will also understand that how money has been spent sends important messages about what is considered important. A school wishing to enhance its academic credentials may invest in impressive ICT suites whereas a school wanting to demonstrate its care and human warmth may invest in classrooms (Bagley et al. 2001).

In 2002 Bradley and Taylor reported that schools with ‘good performance data’ as shown in the league tables, tend to have fewer pupils entitled to free school meals the following year. They interpret this as showing that middle class parents making use of data increasingly occupy successful schools. However, there is evidence that even parents who pay attention to academic performance often refer to raw test scores rather than the value-added measures which would be a much better indicator of school effectiveness (Francis and Hutchings, 2013; Allen and Burgess, 2014; Leroux, 2015). Leroux (2015) calls for the development and introduction of new and useful information to be made available to parents with encouragement to use it and welcomes the introduction in 2016 of a new measure called Progress 8 which will give parents access to value-added data by using a measure of progress across eight subjects. Whether the introduction of Progress 8 will encourage parents to utilize value-added data when making school choice, or whether it will come to be mainly used by government and the schools inspectorate (Ofsted) as another data-set against which schools can be judged, remains to be seen. Allen and Burgess (2010c) argue that the school performance information a government chooses to publish is critical because it has the capacity to influence school choice but to do so it must be functional, relevant and comprehensible - which it tends not to be. Their view is that providing more ‘intuitive information’ has the potential to,

‘reduce the social gradient in how parents choose schools and so may achieve more balanced intakes at popular schools if a greater proportion of disadvantaged families apply.’ (Allen and Burgess, 2010c: 3)

However, despite its limitations, Allen and Burgess (2010b) conclude that parents should use performance information to choose a school, as it is better than choosing one at random and state,

‘a child who attends the highest ex ante performing school within their choice set will ex post do better than average outcome in their choice set twice as often as they will do worse.’ (2010b: abstract)

But they offer the crucial rider that this will only happen if the admissions system gives access to the school of choice.

## 1.5 How Schools Respond

Schools have responded to the new landscape in different ways. However, from my experience as a headteacher, I agree with Ball (2013) when he writes that a culture of self-interest has developed in educational settings (including schools) where,

‘self interest is manifest in terms of survivalism - an increased, often predominant, orientation towards the internal well-being of the institution and its members and a shift away from concern with more general social and educational issues within the community.’ (Ball, 2013: 53)

A study by Bagley (2006) examined how the apparent contradiction in New Labour policy of wanting schools to increasingly collaborate, whilst at the same time strengthening the education market, worked in practice. Bagley had visited the study location initially between 1993 and 1996 to conduct a large multiple case study using quantitative and qualitative research methods (Woods et al. 1998). The much smaller follow-up study allowed him to make a direct comparison between the two periods. Bagley (2006) was able to reaffirm the local and complex nature of the public market in education and how competition and marketization has shaped the town’s educational system. He found that although the government was expounding collaboration and partnership between schools, the need to compete in the town had become embedded. The study found a culture of rivalry,

‘informed by and informing a new managerialism (and with it the increased emphasis on a customer-orientated ethos) continuing to shape senior management responses and the culture and values of schooling.’ (Bagley, 2006: 360-361)

The response of some schools is best exemplified through examining the work of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA). A series of annual reports refer to the long and ongoing issue of some schools displaying self-interest through their admission arrangements where it can appear that schools are choosing children as opposed to parents choosing schools (Lubienski and Myers, 2016). Most headteachers would not be surprised by the conclusion of Allen and Parameshwaren (2016) that there is a correlation between social selection, league table performance and Ofsted ratings, with the schools that have a socially selective intakes likely to do better in both measures.

The proliferation of new types of school in England – academies, free schools, foundation and trust schools, city technology colleges, university technology colleges and studio schools with three quarters of all secondary schools having their own admission arrangements by 2014 (Millar, 2014), has led to a bewildering range of entry criteria including:

- Distance: the distance from the front door of the family home to the school gate (which as I have already shown in Chapter 1 Section 3.2 ‘Playing the Game’ is open to abuse).
- Selection by academic ability: the 11-plus is still used in 25% of all English local authorities.
- Partial academic selection: a small number of schools select a proportion of their intake based on aptitude or ability.
- Catchment areas: some schools prioritize applicants who live in certain postcodes.
- Lotteries and Banding: the pros and cons of which have already been described in Chapter 1 Section 3.2 ‘Playing the Game’.
- Faith: schools with a religious character were granted exemptions under equalities legislation that allows them to discriminate on the basis of faith.
- Founders’ or teachers’ children: free schools are allowed to prioritize the children of founders or teachers.
- Feeder schools: giving priority to children from feeder primaries at the expense of others and any of the above used together (Miller, 2014).

In 2006/7 the OSA investigated objections against 79 schools where admission criteria and practices had breached legislation or the Admissions Code. Some admission authorities were found to have not given the highest priority to children in care whilst some heads had asked to see parent’s marriage certificates and asked the order in which parents had ranked their school choices, while others had invited parents to an interview despite this being banned under the revised 2007 Code (OSA, 2007).

A Department for Children, Schools and Families check of 570 schools in Manchester (metropolitan authority), Northamptonshire (shire county) and Barnet (London borough) in 2008 found that 96 were in breach of the Admissions Code. Six were found to be asking parents to make a financial commitment to the school and others were found not to be



giving due priority to children in care or with special needs and asking parents about their marital status (BBC news website, 2008). A 2015 study by the British Humanist Association (BHA) found that at least 100 schools in England were still demanding or pressurising parents to contribute financially to the budget in contravention of the Admissions Code (Richardson, 2015).

In 2010/11 the number of complaints about admissions had gone up to 127 (OSA, 2011) and in the following year (2011/12) it had risen again to 156, with the OSA commenting, ‘we remain concerned that year after year we see some of the same breaches of the code’ (OSA, 2012). Many of the complaints in 2011/12 related to school catchment areas and priority, or lack of priority, given to siblings and the chief schools adjudicator, Dr Elizabeth Passmore said she was calling for all admissions authorities in England – usually schools or councils, ‘to comply fully with the admissions code on consulting, determining and publishing their arrangements to ensure fair access for all children’ (Harrison, 2012). In the 2013/14 annual report, Dr Passmore stated that there had been 274 complaints about admission arrangements and she was once again calling on all admission authorities in England to comply fully with the School Admissions Code (OSA, 2015). The report notes that too many schools that set and run their own admissions criteria do not comply with the Code and admission arrangements in too many schools are overly complex. In an interview following publication of the 2013/14 report, Dr Passmore said that in some cases,

‘the arrangements appear to be more likely to enable the school to choose which children to admit rather than simply having oversubscription criteria...that are reasonable, clear, objective and fair...the complex arrangements compared with the clearest have some or all of: numerous oversubscription criteria and sometimes sub-categories within them; different categories of places; more than one catchment area; feeder schools; tens of points available and needed to gain priority; banding and therefore tests to be taken; aptitude assessment; and several faith-based oversubscription criteria.’ (Richardson, 2015a: 2-3)

Organizations such as The British Humanist Association (BHA) (<http://humanism.org.uk>) and the ‘Fair Admissions Campaign’ (FAC) (<http://fairadmissions.org>) have campaigned for many years to ensure an admissions system that is fair and complies with the law. This has recently, entailed frequent referrals to the OSA of cases where they suspect the Admissions Code is being flouted. However, in January 2016, the Secretary of State for Education announced new rules which would only allow local parents to raise a complaint against faith schools in order to ‘unclog’ the admissions system of, ‘vexatious complaints’ from secularist campaign groups (DfE, 2016). This followed a report from FAC (2013) demonstrating the degree of religious selection and socio-economic selection being

undertaken by faith schools in England and a damning report from the BHA and FAC entitled, 'An Unholy Mess' (BHA, 2015). In this they demonstrated, 'how virtually all religiously selective schools in England are breaking the law', and lodged objections to the admission arrangements of a representative sample of nearly fifty religiously selective secondary schools (Weale, 2016). Research by Allen and Parameshwaren (2016) published by the Sutton Trust, identified more than 1000 primary schools in England that admit significantly fewer children (10% or more) from poor or disadvantaged families than live in the school's local area. Faith schools are especially likely to have lower proportions of children on free school meals than their surrounding neighbourhood (Allen and Parameshwaren (2016). Allen and Parameshwaren (2016) found that the most socially selective primary schools (which tend to include many Catholic and some Church of England schools) generally use complex oversubscription criteria in allocating places that are more difficult for some parents to understand and navigate. These criteria are often faith based and because previous research by Allen and West (2011) has demonstrated that church-going families tend to be of a higher social class, this will contribute to the social segregation of the entry.

The education market works by asking parents to compare the merits of one school over another. As a consequence it is not surprising that schools behave in an entirely pragmatic way and seek to strengthen their position in the local hierarchy by extolling their positive features (Woods et al. 1998, Coldron et al. 2010). Central to this is the publication of examination results in league tables and consequently it is in the schools interest to attract children who because of their social characteristics or prior attainment are likely to do well (Woods et al. 1998; Coldron et al. 2010).

'The focus on school performance measures for pupil attainment, provided to facilitate parental 'choice' (and as an accountability measure), incentivizes schools to exercise care in choosing children as much as the other way around.' (Francis and Hutchings 2013: 9)

But the key aim of parental choice in education of raising standards in schools will only be realized if a school succeeds with the children in its locality. School standards generally will not improve if a school achieves high scores simply because it succeeds in attracting a good intake of pupils and avoids taking those who will dilute the quality of academic attainment by the student body as a whole (Burgess et al. 2007; Lubienski and Myers, 2016). So one of the aims of the introduction of the new value-added measure, Progress 8,

in 2016, is to encourage schools to focus on all their pupils by giving them credit for any child who meets or exceeds expected progress (Francis and Hutchings, 2013; DFE 2014).

Research shows that poor families have a smaller choice of primary schools than their better-off neighbours even when they live near the same number of schools (Burgess et al. 2011). By analyzing how a child's postcode was linked to the number of primary schools which would admit them, the researchers found that of those families that live within two miles of twelve primary schools, the poorest fifth of pupils were likely on average to be accepted by four local primaries, while the richest fifth were likely to be accepted by at least five. In urban areas they found that the poorest children were likely to be accepted by only three local schools whereas those children from better off families could expect to be accepted by at least four. They also discovered that although the poorest families only have an 80% chance of their child getting a place at their first preference school, for better off families there was a 91% chance. The study concluded that the large differences in the range of schools genuinely available to different families, coupled with the use of proximity (catchment areas) does nothing to help reduce the inequality of access in the English school system. This chimed with an earlier study (Burgess and Briggs, 2006a) which sought to estimate the chances of children from different socio-economic groups getting a place at a school rated good or better. They found that children from poorer families were significantly less likely to go to a good school and that the 'lower chance of poor children attending a good school is essentially unaffected by the degree of choice' (Burgess and Briggs, 2006a abstract).

This section is important to my study because in order for me to be able to understand and critically evaluate the dynamics of parental school choice in the community in which my study will be based, I must have an appreciation of how choice is being used by parents but also by some schools.

## 1.6 Do Parents Want School Choice?

There is very little in the academic literature that seeks to answer, what seems to me the fundamental question; do parents want school choice? However, if the opportunity presents itself in this study, I will seek to evaluate the degree to which parent's value school choice in the abstract, in context and intrinsically or instrumentally important. The

study will not seek to gather the views of non-parents. In order to inform my data gathering, I draw on an analysis by Exley (2014) of the 2010 British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research: 2012). The survey tested public attitudes towards a range of issues, but on this occasion this included information about quasi-markets in British education. A nationally representative sample of more than 2000 people were asked, in face to face interviews, about four aspects of school choice:

- In order to evaluate support for choice in its abstract form the participants were asked, ‘How far do people believe choice ought to be a basic right for parents?’
- In order to assess support for school choice in context, the participants were asked questions to determine the degree to which parental choice remains important in the public mind when people are asked about government spending priorities or about, ‘corrective measures’ to help ensure choice for all within a quasi-market system. Beyond this, does support for choice conflict with any competing arguments about how state education ought to be organized?
- To see whether the participants support choice as intrinsically, rather than instrumentally valuable they were asked questions to determine the degree to which they value choice beyond a simple securing of quality education. If people could be guaranteed quality schooling, would they still want choice?
- And finally, to evaluate the support for choice among parents and non-parents, the participants were asked questions to evaluate the degree to which parents are more or less enthusiastic than non-parents about quasi-markets, choice and diversity.

From her analysis of the resultant data, Exley (2014) concluded that British parents and non-parents support school choice in the abstract sense but do not see it as a priority and positively dislike competitive differentiation between schools. Most prefer the idea of,

‘the nearest state school with even mixes of pupils and even standards of quality, only valuing choice (indeed perhaps even seeing it as a burden, albeit a necessary one) where it is not the case’ (Exley, 2014: 39).

School choice is therefore valued more instrumentally than intrinsically, ‘a finding that is potentially problematic given inconclusive evidence on the extrinsic successes of quasi-markets’ (Exley, 2014: 39). However, since the data was only analyzed on a national level,

it is impossible to say from this study, whether there were significant differences between the home nations.

## 1.7 Summary and Research Questions

To conclude this chapter and to sum up some of the arguments about parental choice I return to the four main objectives identified by Hirsch (1977) and briefly test them against Adler's four objections (Adler 1997: 307).

*To give all parents irrespective of their social or economic standing a choice of school for their child; to enhance the role of parents and diminish the role of educators; to give schools an incentive to improve and to encourage a wider range of provision (educational pluralism) (Hirsch 1977).*

*According to Adler (1997) school choice is intrinsically controversial because of its ideological origins and significance and he sums up the four main objections commonly cited by critics. Firstly, the middle class will make the system work to their advantage. Secondly, it will undermine a sense of community, increase social segregation, and reduce the pressure for school improvement. Thirdly, the actions of a few may undermine the wishes of the majority in that if a group of parents choose not to support a school it may undermine its viability to the detriment of everybody. Fourthly, putting power in the hands of parents will make them more conservative and throttle innovation (Adler, 1997).*

The literature indicates that access for all to the best schools is still 'work in progress,' with middle class strategies to manipulate and 'play the system' by fair means or foul, a dominant feature. Government has not yet found a way to stop school segregation (should it wish to) and some parents are not choosing schools in the way proponents of parental choice envisaged. Many parents are therefore behaving in an entirely pragmatic way when it comes to school choice. They are less interested in the theories that underpin school choice than achieving what they perceive to be the best for their child. If, as seems likely from the evidence, large numbers of parents are not selecting schools on their academic standards then parental choice will not necessarily improve standards in some schools. The drive may then have to come from Government agencies such as the schools inspectorate

(Ofsted). The socio-economic and academic profile of the intake in some schools will mean that they are able to achieve good results, with limited effort, and be deemed successful, so long as raw examination results are the key indicator some parents look for. If, however, value added data can become the indicator of choice this might change but that relies on parents being willing to educate their children with those from very different social backgrounds.

Through my review of the literature pertaining to school choice, I have shown it to be wide-ranging and extensive. What follows in Table 1.7 is a summary of the dominant themes explored in this review of the literature on school choice and reputation. This summary will help me to ensure that as many of the relevant themes as possible are reflected in later parts of this study.

Despite a thorough literature search, I can find no studies that attempt to examine and describe the potential mismatch between what parents say they want from schools when making a choice and what school staff think parents want and very little about the role of school reputation in school choice. My contribution to academic and professional knowledge will be to conduct a study within a small group of schools in a defined geographical location in the East of England to fill this gap.

Following my review of the literature pertaining to choice, school choice and reputation, the research focus I will adopt is: **What Factors Influence School Choice, with particular reference to school reputation?**

I will ask the following three research questions:

1. To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?
2. To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation,' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?
3. What are the implications for schools?

The next chapter will detail the theoretical and practical considerations for conducting my study and answering the three research questions I have posed.

**Table 1.7: School choice themes arising from the literature**

Main Themes	Associated Themes
Individualism, choice and the quasi-market	
Philosophical and political justifications for choice in education	
Segregation	Ethnicity Religious Educational Social / class
Parents as choosers	Positive choosers Ambivalent non choosers Conscious non choosers Children as choosers Choosers for the public good
Factors important to parents when exercising their right to choose	Class Academic standards Stated and revealed preferences
Networks	Gossip / the grapevine
School reputation	Types of reputation Definition Importance How notions of reputation are constructed
Do parents want choice in education?	
Sources of information used by parents	
Attempts to mitigate the worse effects of school choice	Pupil premium Choice advisors Quotas Random allocation Ballots / lotteries
Parents playing the game	Relocation Fraudulent and misleading applications
How schools respond	Admissions policies Complaints Equitable access for all?

## Chapter 2

### Methodology and Methods

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will establish and justify the theoretical and practical conditions for this research project. I will start by describing the inquiry paradigm in which I will work and then my reasons for wishing to carry out a case study. I will acknowledge the advantages and limitations of the research design and then provide a rich description of the case context. As a school leader with wide experience in the practical aspects of education in English schools, I want the outcomes of this research to be of practical use to professional colleagues and so a clear understanding of the context in which it was conducted is vital.

I will provide clear descriptions and justifications of the methods I will use to collect the data, how I will present it and how it will be analysed. This is important because the reader must be able to draw their own conclusions and replicate elements of the study if they so wish. The conclusions and assertions will arise from my individual interpretation of the data but other interpretations may be possible. I will be as proactive as possible in anticipating threats to my study by creating a risk analysis and will consider all the ethical issues that may arise.

As in the Literature Chapter, I will identify some very influential actors whose views I will want to reflect. This will mean certain sections will rely heavily on the work of individual researchers (such as Robert Stake and Robert Yin) because of their importance in the field and because I believe it serves to present opinions that are complicated, and sometimes disputed, in a systematic and logical way.

#### 2.2 Methodology

The inquiry paradigm I will adopt for this study is one of pragmatism because of its flexibility and practicality. As a practitioner undertaking a Professional Doctorate, I want this research to have practical benefits both to myself and my profession, so working within a pragmatic paradigm seems entirely appropriate. The pragmatic paradigm, ‘focuses



on the problem to be researched and the consequences of the research' (Feilzer, 2010: 7) and pragmatism,

'sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself toward solving practical problems in the "real world". In that sense, pragmatism allows the researcher to be free of mental and practical constraints imposed by the "forced" choice dichotomy between postpositivism and constructivism' (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007: 27),

Also, researchers do not have to 'be the prisoner of a particular [research] method or technique' (Robson, 1993: 291). Thus, pragmatists are what Rorty (1999: ix) calls 'anti-dualists' in that they question the dichotomy of positivism and constructivism and seek a convergence of quantitative and qualitative methods. 'Pragmatists do not 'care' which methods they use as long as the methods chosen have the potential of answering what it is one wants to know' (Feilzer, 2010: 14). Researchers working within the pragmatic paradigm acknowledge that any knowledge 'produced' through research is relative and not absolute, that even if there are causal relationships they are, 'transitory and hard to identify' (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009: 93).

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that began in the USA around 1870 which enthusiasts suggest offers an approach that is both pluralist and practical (Cornish and Gillespie, 2009). It is a movement consisting of a varying but associated theories originally developed by Pierce, James and Dewey (commonly referred to as the 'classical pragmatists') and distinguished by the pragmatist maxim that the meaning of an idea or a proposition lies in its observable practical consequences (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013). Pragmatist ideas became somewhat marginalized in the mid 20th century but in the last thirty years more philosophers have become ready to describe themselves as pragmatists, though their understanding of what they mean by pragmatism is not always the same (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2013). The new pragmatists embrace a form of naturalism, employing a methodology that is open to exploring the different methods that are employed in different sciences whilst being willing to exploit the work of the classical pragmatists (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2013).

The research design I will employ to conduct this study will be a case study because as Yin (2009, 2014) notes, case studies are particularly appropriate when the researcher is asking a 'How' or 'What' questions in the case of contemporary events and where the researcher cannot control the situation. He also notes that 'How' and 'Why' answers might take the

form of simple causal models, but they can also take the form of understanding the complexity of people's reasons and feelings, something that will be important in this study. In deciding on the most suitable research design, I am influenced by a very practical consideration: how to achieve the most illuminating outcomes within the constraints placed on me of solo, unfunded, practitioner research (Duncan, 1999). Although a case study is not an easy option, it is something I will be able to complete with limited time and resources, it makes the most of the access I have negotiated and it will fulfill a need (Chandler, 2013). I acknowledge that case study research is not a simple linear process. It is a complex iterative process (with feedback loops) trying to capture the complex nature of the reality of the issue I am looking at in context (Chandler, 2013). But as an inexperienced researcher I have chosen to adopt a closed (Yin, 2009, 2014) or fixed (Chandler, 2013) research design where I will state at the outset what sources of evidence I will use, how much I will collect, how I will record and organize the data and how I will present it. Although this may reduce my flexibility, it will provide a valuable structure to my study.

I intend to use two data collection methods within a case study design and these emerge directly from my pragmatic research paradigm and research questions. I will describe the two data collection methods in more detail later in this chapter. It is entirely consistent within pragmatism as a research paradigm to use more than one method of data collection to reveal a true and accurate picture of parental choice operating in one community and answers the research questions. I can therefore describe my research design as utilizing two data collection methods within a case study methodology or conceivably, a case study methodology utilizing mixed methods (Cresswell and Plano Clarke, 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Feilzer, 2010; Stake, 2010)

However, according to Stake (2010) the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods is essentially a matter of emphasis more than a discrete boundary. In any qualitative study the,

‘quantitative ideas of enumeration and recognition of differences in size have a place, and in any quantitative study natural language description and research interpretation are to be expected.’  
(Stake, 2010: 19)

But it is the aims of the two paradigms that fundamentally separates them, ‘it is an epistemological distinction, one based on a perception of knowledge that is personally

‘constructed’ versus one of knowledge as ‘discovery’ of what the world is’ (Stake, 2010: 56) and fundamentally that quantitative researchers seek to find explanation and exert control whilst qualitative researchers look for understanding and complex interrelationships (Stake, 1995). And because most qualitative researchers emphasize experiential and personal determination of knowledge they tend to be relativists and believe that the value of interpretations will vary relative to their ‘credibility and utility’ (Stake, 1995: 102).

Stake (2010) identifies what he describes as the, ‘special characteristics of qualitative study’ as being,

- Interpretive: it keys on the meaning of human affairs as seen from different views,
- Experiential: it is empirical and field orientated,
- Situational
- Personalistic: it is empathetic, working to understand individual perceptions.

Qualitative research seeks uniqueness more than commonality and it honours diversity (Stake, 2010: 15-16).

Yet Stake acknowledges that there is no single way of conducting qualitative research and each researcher will place varying emphasis on the ‘special characteristics’. However, qualitative research is sometimes called ‘interpretative research’ because of the fundamental importance of interpretation by researchers, the objects of the study and the readers of the study (Stake, 1995, 2010). The conclusion of a qualitative research paper will generally feature an assertion(s) related to the research question(s) which will arise from the interpretation(s) the researcher finds most appealing. These assertions may be particular or general and may invite generalization or not but they offer the reader the opportunity to suggest other interpretations (Stake, 2010). In contrast standard quantitative research designs emphasize an orientation towards cause and effect and tend to limit the role of personal interpretation (Stake, 1995). The subjective and personalistic nature of qualitative research is sometimes seen as a weakness (Stake, 2010) but for Stake (1995) it should not be seen as a failing to be eliminated, but rather as an essential element of understanding. This research study is exploratory and there is an acknowledgement on my part that readers may have varying interpretations of the concepts discussed and the data produced.

Stake (2000) succinctly describes the major conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case researcher that I will seek to follow (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1: The major conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case researcher**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;</li> <li>2. Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues – that is, the research questions – to emphasize;</li> <li>3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;</li> <li>4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;</li> <li>5. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue;</li> <li>6. Developing assertions or generalizations about the case.</li> </ol> |
|--|

Source: Stake, 2000: 448

I will begin by examining elements of the case through the prism of the quantitative paradigm by conducting a card sort exercise and then conducting a statistical analysis of the outcomes. The second element will be a qualitative element where I will conduct semi-structured interviews and analyze the results using a thematic analysis. The quantitative element of my study (card sort) and the qualitative element (semi-structured interviews) will be reported in two separate results chapters and then synthesized in a ‘Discussion’ chapter (Chapter 5) allowing for triangulation. Because no two observers constructing knowledge will necessarily come to the same conclusions, it is important that evidence is triangulated (Stake, 2000, 2010). In social sciences, triangulation is a technique used to validate data through cross-verification from two or more sources, thereby enhancing the credibility, validity and persuasiveness of the research (Bryman, 2004). Bryman (2004) acknowledges that some writers aligned with constructivism are dubious about triangulation but that they do not deny its potential and,

‘they depict its utility in terms of adding a sense of richness and complexity to an inquiry. As such, triangulation becomes a device for enhancing the credibility and persuasiveness of a research account.’ (Bryman, 2004: 4)

However, according to Stake (1995), by combining multiple observers, theories, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness and intrinsic biases and the problems that emerge from single method, single observer and single theory studies. Denzin (1970) devised four forms of triangulation. The first he called *data triangulation* and this involves gathering data through several sampling strategies, so that the pieces of data are gathered at different times and social situations as well as on a

variety of people. The second form is *investigator triangulation* that refers to the use of multiple observers to gather and interpret data. The third is theoretical triangulation that refers to the use of more than one theoretical position to interpret the data. And fourthly, the one I intend to use, *methodological triangulation* where more than one method of data collection is utilized and then the data is compared and contrasted to identify confirmations and inconsistencies. Denzin (1970) drew a distinction between *within-method* and *between-method* triangulation. Within-method triangulation involves utilizing two varieties of the same method in the investigation whereas between-method triangulation involves the use of contrasting research methods, as I will be doing.

Another criticism of triangulation is that it assumes that sets of data deriving from different research methods can be,

‘unambiguously compared and regarded as equivalent in terms of their capacity to address a research question. Such a view fails to take account of the different social circumstances associated with the administration of different research methods, especially those associated with a between-methods approach.’ (Bryman, 2004: 4)

While remaining conscious of the potential criticisms of triangulation, it is my intention to follow the advice of Stake (2000) (see Table 2.1) and seek to triangulate my findings from two data collection methods within a case study design.

As a research design the case study has a long but mixed history (Newby 2010; Yin 2009, 2014). It has been a common means by which to examine individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena in a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, political science and business (Yin, 2009: 4). But Newby (2010) describes how in the late 1930s it came under particularly heavy criticism,

‘as being nothing more than description and unable to provide insights that would produce general explanations of individual and organizational behaviour.’ (Newby, 2010: 51)

For Yin (2009) and Flyvbjerg (2011) much of the reason the methodology came to be held in such poor regard was because it was poorly understood and in some cases, poorly used. Yin (2009) acknowledges that many researchers still disdain the case study as lacking in rigour because of studies in the past where the investigator has been ‘sloppy’, not followed systematic procedures or has allowed equivocal or biased views to predominate. Yin (2009) and Chandler (2013) also feel that critics may be confusing case study research with case study teaching. In using the case study as a teaching tool it is quite legitimate to

manipulate facts to make a teaching point but such practice in case study research would be entirely unethical and illegitimate.

Yin (2009) identifies four ways in which the case study has historically been used in evaluation research; to explain, to describe, to illustrate and to enlighten. He goes on to describe three main approaches to case study: exploratory (where a case is explored and used to generate ideas for future research), descriptive (a full description of the case) or explanatory (where the study tries to link the case to its context, often suggesting particular reasons for particular features of the case). I have chosen for my case study to be exploratory as that fits my research focus and the paradigm in which I am situating my research.

Whilst acknowledging that definitions of case study ‘abound’ and that some are more useful than others, Flyvbjerg (2011: 301) recommends a ‘commonsensical’ definition of, ‘an intensive analysis of an individual unit (the ‘case,’ which can be a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment.’ This definition fits perfectly with my desire to focus on the ‘individual unit’ or case that is one group of parents and staff to explore a phenomenon within a defined context. The definition also stresses the importance of ‘intensive analysis’. This implies depth and rigour. For Flyvbjerg (2011) the main strength of the case study is depth in which the researcher can pull out the detail, richness, completeness and within-case variance. ‘If you want to understand a phenomenon in any degree of thoroughness...you need to do case studies’ (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 314). For Sturman (1997) case study is a, ‘generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon’ which can involve both qualitative and quantitative approaches but that its distinguishing feature is, ‘the belief that human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose collection of traits’ and to fully understand why things happen as they do and to be able to generalize or predict, ‘requires an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and of then patterns that emerge’ (Sturman, 1997: 61).

A case study is defined by Yin (2009) as an, ‘empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context’ (I will be researching parent choice in an Academy Trust of three schools), ‘especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (I will be researching how the parents in this locality actually exercise their right to choose a school for their child and

whether the school staff actually fully recognize the dynamics of parental choice in their locality). ‘The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest (therefore complexity) than data points and as a result relies on multiple sources of evidence (documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations and physical artifacts for example’ (I will use interviews and a card sort) with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion’ (Yin, 2009: 18).

Yin sees case study as one on a series of research methods available to the researcher (Yin 2009) but for Chandler (2013) it is not a method at all but a research design that can encompass a number of methods to collect data. Chandler (2013) describes Yin’s definition as too complex and too normative, offering a particular view of what constitutes a ‘good’ case study such as the necessity to adopt a theoretical proposition. He also is not convinced that it is entirely necessary to adopt multiple sources of evidence (though it often will) to gain credibility. Instead Chandler (2013) offers a much simpler and broader definition: case study research involves selecting a limited number of sites as the basis of investigation (often just one or two) and that it is about the ‘field of investigation’ rather than a method. The methods will be the interviews or surveys the researcher chooses to use. It therefore follows from this definition that there is not a right (or wrong) way to conduct a case study (Chandler, 2013).

In his most recent publication, Yin (2014) has developed his definition of case study into two parts. The first part deals with the *scope* of a case study and describes it as an empirical inquiry that,

‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context may not be clearly evident.’ (Yin, 2014: 16-17)

The second part of his definition relates to the *features* of a case study in which the inquiry,

‘copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.’ (Yin, 2014: 16-17)

The ‘case’ within a case study can consist of an individual, a group, an organization or a subset of an organization and there could be more than one case under consideration in order to compare and contrast (Yin 2009). In this study there will be two groups of

participants: the parents and the school staff associated with one Multi-Academy Trust consisting of three schools. Yin (2009: 60) examines the advantages and disadvantages of the multi case design and the single case design and advises the use of the former over the latter when possible, as it offers greater analytic benefits, even if the multi-case just involves two cases, and provides results which enable more secure theoretical replication. However, Yin (2009) acknowledges that multi-case studies can be very time consuming and require significant resources, whilst acknowledging that the single case design can be very successful. For Stake (2000), case study research is defined by an interest in an individual case and not by the methods of inquiry used and even when multiple case studies are being carried out simultaneously the central importance of a concentrated inquiry into the single case remains.

For Yin (2009) there are five key rationales for selecting a single case: The ‘critical’ case that seeks to test theory; The ‘extreme’, ‘unique’ or ‘rare’ case; the ‘representative’ or ‘typical’ case; the ‘revelatory’ case that is important because it may not have been investigated before; and the ‘longitudinal’ case that is studied at different moments in time with a focus on change (Yin, 2009: 47-52). Whilst maintaining that case study reports and authors do not fit neatly into clear categories, Stake (2000) identifies three broad categories of case study. The first he calls *intrinsic* which involves the choice of a case not because it is representative, but because it is interesting in its own right. The second category is the *instrumental* case study where a case is being examined (it may considered typical or not) because it will help to explain a wider issue and in these terms this is where I can situate my study. The third category identified by Stake (2000) is the *collective* case study and this is a grouped set of instrumental case studies.

Thomas (2011) questions whether it is possible for any case study to be ‘representative’ or ‘typical’ as it is limited to, ‘a particular representation given in context and understood in that context’ (Thomas 2011: 21). So whilst I can reasonably present the three schools that constitute the Academy Trust where I will be conducting my research as representative or typical example of English state schools, the fact that the Trust is All Through (educates children aged four to nineteen and I will therefore have access to the parents and staff of primary and secondary age children) is not typical. It is also situated in a very mixed socio-economic small town in the east of England on four sites and if the extensive literature on school choice is to be believed, the responses I will get from these parents and staff may be quite different to those I would receive from parents and staff associated with a school in a



more affluent area. Consequently my study will be ‘revelatory’ in Yin’s terms (Yin 2009). Therefore, it will be for other school leaders to draw their own conclusions from my research outcomes as befits their context.

Helpfully Flyvbjerg (2011: 302) identifies five misunderstandings about the case study as a research design and seeks to address each in turn to reinforce its research credibility. The first one relates to the relative importance of general, theoretical knowledge over concrete case knowledge and concludes that, ‘Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete case knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals’ (Flyvbjerg 2011: 304). However, Yin (2009) advocates using case studies deductively, that is to formulate a theory (or hypothesis) and then test it using the case. This clearly differentiates Yin’s case method from the use of case studies in ethnographic research where the researcher keeps an open mind and they are usually used inductively to develop a theory from analysis of the case data. Both are deemed legitimate (Chandler, 2008). In so far as I have not developed a theory or hypothesis which I wish to test but will keep an open mind and develop theory from the outcomes of my research, my study will be deductive and more in line with Chandlers (2013) approach than Yin’s (2008).

Secondly, Flyvbjerg (2011) identifies what is commonly held to be the most problematical of objections to the case study methodology, namely the inability to be able to generalize on the basis of an individual case and therefore, an inability to contribute to greater knowledge. This is an important objection for my study as I intend to base my research in a single Trust of three schools. A researcher working within the positivist or normative paradigm sees social reality as objective, observable, controllable and measurable, with patterns and causality producing generalizable results. In contrast, a researcher working within the constructivist, interpretive or naturalistic paradigm need not be interested in generalizing their findings as this paradigm interprets social reality the way it is viewed by the research participants - known as ‘double hermeneutic’, indicating the interpretation of an already interpreted world (Basil, 2010). The quantitative researcher ultimately seeks to establish a grand theory and establish generalizations that will apply widely and often sees the ‘unique’ as ‘error’, whereas the qualitative researcher will treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. ‘The purpose of a case study report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case’ (Stake, 2000), so consequently particularization is usually seen by the qualitative researcher as more

important than generalization (Stake, 1995). Lincoln and Guba (2000) are clear that they consider no generalizability possible from a case study and I would suspect agree with Stake (1995) when he writes, 'case study is a poor basis for generalization...seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is' (Stake, 1995:7). For Stake (1995) the value of a case study does not rest on its ability to be reproduced but rather on whether or not the meanings generated (by the researcher or by the reader) are valued. 'Case study research is not sampling research...we do not study a case primarily to understand other cases.... our first obligation is to understand this one case' (Stake, 1995: 4) and 'damage occurs when the commitment to generalize is so strong that the researchers attention is drawn away from the features important for understanding the case itself' (Stake, 2000: 439).

However, despite the views of Basit (2010), Stake (1995, 2000, 2010) and Lincoln and Guba (2000) researchers continue to seek to justify the case study in terms of generalizability. Yin (2009) draws a clear distinction between statistical and analytical generalization and although he believes it is not possible to generalize from one or two cases to a population it is possible to use a case study for analytical generalization to test and build theories of general utility and this is why he advocates the development of a theoretical proposition to be used as a template with which to try and understand other similar cases, phenomena and situations and to guide data gathering and analysis (Yin, 2009; Robson 2002). Basit (2010: 19, citing Adelman et al. 1980) calls case studies, 'a natural basis for generalization,' but agrees that they are not statistical generalizations so the researcher cannot claim to generalize to the whole population. Basit (2010) maintains that,

'a case study presents a rich description of the lived experiences of specific cases or individuals and offers an understanding of how these individuals perceive the various phenomena in the social world and their effect on themselves.' (Basit, 2010: 20)

Flyvbjerg (2011) adopts a more straightforward rebuttal of the objection when he concludes,

'one can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas 'the force of example' and transferability are underestimated.' (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 305)

However, for Newby (2010: 54) case studies that emphasize uniqueness are not very helpful and the researcher should always be trying to identify what learning can be transferred to other settings. This study will show how the parents in one locality exercise

their right to choose a school for their child. As a single case study the results will be illuminating for a particular group of schools and I will endeavour to ensure sufficient transferability (sometimes referred to as external validity or generalizability) for other school leaders to draw their own conclusions from my research as befits their context by providing very detailed information about the context in which the study will be carried out.

Bassey (1999) is an advocate of what he calls 'fuzzy generalization'. This he defines as a general statement with built in uncertainty that accepts, because there has been a particular outcome in one setting, it may mean that a similar outcome will be achieved elsewhere, but there is no certainty. I will endeavor to ensure there will be sufficient in my study and its conclusions to be of help to me as a professional, the Trust schools which are the focus of my study, and also to other senior managers in other schools.

Thirdly, Flyvbjerg (2011) addresses another common misunderstanding, which is that the case study methodology is most useful for generating hypothesis, while other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building. He rejects this contention as being based on the mistaken assumption that one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case. Yin (2009) acknowledges that some social scientists still think that the case study should only be used as a preliminary research method and cannot be used to describe or test propositions, but as a great proponent of the methodology he also dismisses this.

Fourthly, Flyvbjerg (2011) addresses the perception that the case study contains a bias towards verification. In other words, the researcher will have preconceived notions that he or she is seeking to verify. Stake (2010) argues that it is important for the qualitative researcher particularly to recognize and contain their biases as much as possible because bias is a 'predisposition to error' (Stake, 2010: 166). 'All researchers have biases, all people have biases, all reports have biases, and most researchers work hard to recognize and contain helpful biases' (Stake 2010: 164) but, 'almost no one now believes that the social researcher can operate without exercising personal values' (Stake 2010: 200). Flyvbjerg (2011: 311) concludes, however, that a tendency towards bias is no more apparent in case studies than in other forms of inquiry, and that, 'on the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification.' Basit (2010: 7) describes something she

calls 'axiology', which refers to the nature of values and value judgments. She also agrees that no researcher will approach their study value-free and there will be a number of factors that will impinge on how the researcher views social reality and the nature of knowledge, and on how they interpret their results. Basit (2010) therefore advocates reflexivity and the maintenance of high ethical standards on the part of the researcher. For his part, Stake (2010) writes that the best way of minimizing the effects biases will have on research is by improving research design, triangulation and healthy skepticism. Newby (2010) accepts that the case study can be excellent at giving researchers a rich understanding of a situation but he warns that participants, like the researcher, are not neutral beings. They can forget, dissemble and put their own spin on events, which means that the researcher may have real issues in determining the truth.

The last misunderstanding Flyvbjerg (2011) identifies is the contention that it is difficult to summarize general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies. He agrees that it can be difficult to summarize case studies but that, in his view, it is often not desirable to summarize or generalize case studies and good case studies are best read as narratives in their entirety. Yin (2009) identifies a common complaint about case studies is that they can take too long to complete and result in massive, unreadable documents. I shall overcome this by time-limiting my study, attempting to answer three specific questions and retaining a sense of proportionality.

### 2.3 The Role of the Researcher: Insider / Outsider

As already stated, a researcher carrying out a case study would normally make their choice of case based on whether their research question requires a critical, unique, representative or typical, revelatory or longitudinal study (Yin, 2009). My situation is somewhat different. I am unable to carry out my study in the school at which I am the Headteacher because it is due to close, so instead I have been granted unfettered access to conduct my study with the parents and staff of a group of three schools that make up an Academy Trust. Gaining access to schools to carry out research can be difficult (Duncan, 1999) but in this case the Trust Principal acknowledges that they need to better understand how and why, parents make their choice of school if they are to remain competitive within the town. It is therefore an ideal location in which to conduct the study.

The 'binary language' (Thomson and Gunter 2011: 2) of insider – outsider is the dominant way in which the notion of the 'internal' researcher is framed. The former works within the institution to be researched, as opposed to the external person coming in from outside. This is despite the contention that we are all outsiders to each other, that insiders often have outsider perspectives and that the notion of 'liquid identities' where the researcher may move between the two as the research progresses is helpful (Thomson and Gunter 2011). However, in planning this study I have been very conscious of the increasing debate about insider academic research and its advantages and disadvantages. Brannick and Coghlan (2007: 59) define such research as 'research by complete members of organizational systems in and on their own organizations.' For Brannick and Coghlan (2007) the knowledge about the institution that the insider already has will allow the researcher to uncover things that might otherwise escape the attention of the outsider, or indeed, be able to be hidden. Edwards (2002) is in accord with Brannick and Coghlan (2007) in believing that it will be harder for the interviewee to 'pull the wool' over the interviewer's eyes. He also believes that being an insider researcher will improve the quality of data because relationships will already have been formed and this is likely to engender trust. The insider will also have knowledge of group and individual agendas, of past histories and experiences. He/she will understand the culture of the organization and the 'Balkanized' subcultures that may exist. An outsider will be oblivious to such things. However, Morse (1998) maintains that,

'it is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she is already employed and has a work role. The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and may place the researcher in an untenable position.' (Morse 1998: 59)

Insider research is often rejected as lacking rigor because as Brannick and Coghlan (2007: 60) concede, 'insider researchers have a personal stake and substantial emotional investment in the setting.' Edwards (2002) also seeks to illustrate some of the problems that can be faced by the insider. The insider may be so much part of the institution that they can overlook the familiar that an outsider would see as being very important. The insider may also see a shift in their relationships within the organization, because it will be known that they are carrying out research, to the point where they may no longer be made privy to certain information and conversations (Humphrey, 1995 (unpublished PhD) cited by Edwards, 2002). The insider can also find a potential for conflict or embarrassment when the researcher is interviewing somebody they know well. Edwards (2002) does not refer directly to what Mercer (2007: 15) calls 'power hierarchies', but a theme throughout

his hazards section is how the dynamics between people who may know each other well can cause problems for the research, relationships and organization. This may well be an issue if there is a difference in status between the researcher and the participant. The disparity in the 'power-relationship' is likely to lead to an inhibition on the part of the subject so 'playing it safe' when responding.

The insider may also encounter problems when writing up the research. There will be dilemmas about how much 'privileged' information to disclose and the possibility of managerial interference (Edwards, 2002). As an experienced school leader, I believe that all leaders of organizations are gatekeepers of its image and reputation and should be protectors and builders of the brand. Consequently, in order to protect the organization and to maintain good relationships with staff and stakeholders, I have found myself insisting that a piece of insider research conducted in my school be partly rewritten to avoid the 'fall out' that would inevitably follow its publication. Anonymity can be very difficult to maintain and the sense of betrayal when group secrets are exposed can be very damaging to individuals and the organization.

Whilst recognizing the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider or outsider researcher, I am by circumstances destined to be an outsider. I cannot be an insider researcher because I am not employed by the Trust, but I will in effect be conducting organizational research in so far as I will be seeking the views of the parents who send their child to the Trust and eliciting the schools support in gaining those views. However, I have extensive knowledge of the educational system, considerable experience of leading schools and a rapidly developing knowledge of the Trust, so I do not expect to feel like a true outsider. I will not have intimate knowledge, but I will have sufficient knowledge.

## 2.4 Case Study Context

A key conceptual responsibility of the qualitative case researcher already identified in table 2.1 is to ‘bound the case’ and ‘conceptualize the object of study’ (Stake, 2000: 448). As somebody with a personal and professional interest in the outcomes of this study, I recognize the need to ensure sufficient transferability (external validity or generalizability) for other school leaders to draw their own conclusions from my research as befits their context, by providing very detailed information about the context in which the study will be carried out. A researcher has a duty to protect the anonymity of the context so I will use pseudonyms throughout and the level of detail offered has been agreed with the Trust.

### 2.4.1 Newtown (a pseudonym)

Originally a small rural market town, Newtown grew very quickly after the Second World War with a significant influx of families from London resulting in considerable social impact, something that has been described to me by the Trust Principal. Newtown has a growing population of 24,000 with an ongoing influx of new businesses and residents. The town has high numbers of ‘Hard Pressed’ families of ‘Moderate Means’ (Acorn data only available from the Trust) with over 80% of school age children living in wards where, on average, less than 10% of adults attended higher education (Raise Online data only available from the Trust). There are some pockets of significant deprivation in the town.

The ‘Index of Multiple Deprivation’ (IMD) (Table 2.2) was published by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government in 2010. The Index provides a way of comparing relative affluence and deprivation across the country. A range of economic, social and housing indicators is combined into a single deprivation score for each small area (Lower Super Output Area / LSOA). The IMD 2010 was constructed by combining the seven transformed domain scores, using the following weights: Income (22.5%), Employment (22.5%), Health and Disability (13.5%), Education, Skills and Training (13.5%), Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%), Crime (9.3%) and Living Environment (9.3%). The overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 (Table 2.2) gives the following information for the fourteen wards (or Lower Layer Super Output Area - LSOA) that constitute Newtown.

**Table 2.2: Index of multiple deprivation (IMD) for Newtown in 2010**

IMD	National IMD Ranking
18.90	14838
21.85	12641
7.02	27793
22.10	12479
28.24	9001
19.00	14747
7.72	26936
12.93	20486
19.19	14610
32.25	7241
29.93	10177
4.64	30414
11.76	21816
21.18	10059

The average Newtown  
IMD: 18.69

Source: Department of Communities and Local Government 2011  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indicies-of-deprivation-2010>

The overall IMD 2010 has two data columns: The first data column is the Index of Multiple Deprivation Score. The second data column is the Rank of the Index of Multiple Deprivation Score. The score is an absolute measure of deprivation. The score allows the 32,482 LSOAs in England to be ranked relative to one another. The ward / LSOA with a rank of 1 is the most deprived, and 32482 the least deprived, on this overall measure.

#### 2.4.2 The Case Study Sample

(All school names are pseudonyms).

Newtown has two secondary schools both of which are Academies (Newtown High and Oldtown High). The Academy Trust in which the study has been conducted is made up of one secondary school (Newtown High School, age range: 11 to 19) and two primary schools (Newtown Primary and Newtown Junior, age range 4 to 11). Each school has its own Head of School and Governing Body. The Academy Trust is led by a Principal and a Board of Directors (made up of the three chairs of governors, a staff representative, the Principal, two co-opted and three nominees). A three-tier education system operated in Newtown until 2012 and the Trust was formed in 2012 from Newtown High and Newtown Primary when the town adopted a two-tier system. Newtown Junior federated with the Trust in 2013 and become a full member in September 2014. The three Trust schools were



all rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted in their most recent inspections (Newtown High: 2013, Newtown Junior: 2010 and Newtown Primary: 2013).

What follows are a series of tables with explanations, placing the Trust schools in context.

**Table 2.3: School rolls**

January Census	Newtown High	Newtown Primary	Newtown Junior
2013	638	385	436
2014	637	406	442

Table 2.3 shows the pre-16 roll for each school. Data is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 census returns. Newtown High school is a small secondary school under pressure to attract sufficient pupil numbers to ensure viability. Newtown Primary and Newtown Junior have steady but growing numbers, but a significant minority of children do not transfer to Newtown High.

**Table 2.4: Stability of KS2 or KS4 cohort**

Year	Newtown High		Newtown Primary		Newtown Junior	
	Roll	% Stability	Roll	% Stability	Roll	% Stability
2013	155	95	45	93	51	92

Table 2.4 shows the ‘turbulence’ or stability of the school roll in Year 6 and Year 11. The roll is the number of pupils ending the key stage in 2014. The % is that of the number of pupils that were on roll in January two years earlier. School rolls across the Trust are relatively stable.

**Table 2.5: Free school meals**

Newtown High	Newtown Primary	Newtown Junior	Locality	Local Authority
30.3%	32.8%	19.3%	23.2%	22.8%

Table 2.5 gives the percentage of the pre-16 roll in each school entitled to free school meals. Figures for the locality and the local authority are given for comparison. Data is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available

from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 census returns. Newtown Primary traditionally has a relatively high percentage of children entitled to free school meals. Newtown High has a relatively high percentage of children entitled to free school meals because a significant number of children from more affluent families do not transfer there. Every child entitled to a free school meal attracts significant additional funding to the school through the Pupil Premium.

**Table 2.6: Special educational needs (SEN)**

SEN status	Newtown High %	Newtown Primary %	Newtown Junior %	Locality %	Local Authority %
No SEN	78.5	79.3	85.8	86.1	82.8
School Action	16	7.9	6.4	6.4	8.7
School Action Plus	4.6	12.1	7.1	6.4	7.1
Statements of special educational needs	0.9	0.7	0.7	1.2	1.4

Table 2.6 gives the percentage of the pre-16 roll in each school in each Special Educational Needs (SEN) group and compares the figures with other schools in the locality and the Local Authority. Data is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 census returns.

**Table 2.7: English as a first language**

Language	Newtown High %	Newtown Primary %	Newtown Junior %	Locality %	Local Authority %
English	91.5	88.4	92	92.7	92.5
Not English	8.5	11.6	7.3	8.7	6.7
Not obtained			0.7	0.5	0.9

Table 2.7 gives the percentage of the pre-16 roll in each school that do not have English as their first language and compares them with schools in the locality and across the Local Authority. Data is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 census returns.

**Table 2.8: Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Newtown High		Newtown Primary		Newtown Junior		Locality		Local Authority	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Asian Bangladeshi	2	0.3			2	0.5	19	0.2	350	0.7
Asian Indian	1	0.2	1	0.2	1	0.2	84	0.8	427	0.8
Asian Other	1	0.2	1	0.2			39	0.4	151	0.3
Asian Pakistani							28	0.3	92	0.2
Black African	6	0.9	2	0.5	2	0.5	49	0.5	241	0.5
Black Caribbean	1	0.2					6	0.1	98	0.2
Black Other					2	0.5	35	0.3	135	0.3
Chinese							3	0.0	44	0.1
Gypsy/Roma Traveller							29	0.3	152	0.3
Mixed White Asian			6	1.5	1	0.2	115	1.1	422	0.8
Mixed White Black African	1	0.2	4	1.0			61	0.6	338	0.6
Mixed White Black Caribbean	7	1.1	6	1.5	6	1.4	71	0.7	775	1.5
Not Obtained	20	3.1			4	0.9	124	1.2	749	1.4
Other	4	0.6	2	0.5	2	0.5	109	1.1	405	0.8
Other Mixed Background	5	0.8	4	1.0	4	0.9	342	3.4	1394	2.7
White British	546	85.7	338	83.3	374	88.4	7962	79.2	45200	86.6
White Irish	1	0.2	1	0.2			25	0.2	96	0.2
White Irish Traveller								0.1	20	0.0
White Other	42	6.6	41	10.1	25	5.9	941	9.4	2703	5.2

Table 2.8 gives the number and percentage of the pre-16 roll in each school in each ethnic group and compares the figures with other schools in the locality and across the Local Authority. Data is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 census returns. Newtown is not ethnically diverse though there is anecdotal evidence that this is changing

rapidly. It remains to be seen whether the issues relating to race and choice described in Chapter 1, Section 3.1 will be a factor in this study.

**Table 2.9: Income deprivation affecting children index data (IDACI)**

IDACI	Newtown High %	Newtown Primary %	Newtown Junior %	Locality %	Local Authority %
Decile 1	0	0	0	0	2
Decile 2	0	0	0	2	9
Decile 3	18.58	20.44	20.80	6	8
Decile 4	17.01	22.17	22.70	9	10
Decile 5	34.80	36.95	18.68	17	10
Decile 6	2.2	4.9	1.42	12	10
Decile 7	0.47	0	0.24	12	16
Decile 8	9.29	5.91	11.11	21	15
Decile 9	13.86	10.10	23.64	16	14
Decile 10	3.78	0.25	1.42	7	6
IDACI Score	0.17	0.19	0.17	0.12	0.16

The Association of Public Health Observatories publishes data on IDACI child deprivation scores for local areas in England (<http://apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=97317>).

IDACI stands for the Income Domain Affecting Children Index and is defined as the percentage of children aged 0-15 living in income-deprived households. The larger the IDACI score, the greater the deprivation. Families are classed as income deprived if they are in receipt of income support, income based jobseekers allowance or pension credit, or child tax credit with an equivalized income (excluding housing benefits) below 60% of the national median before housing costs. Table 2.9 gives the percentage of the pre aged16 roll in each school in each IDACI decile and compares the figures with other schools in the locality and across the Local Authority. Ranking the 32,844 neighbourhoods in England, from the most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into ten equal groups calculate deciles. These deciles range from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally to the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally. Decile 1 indicates the most deprived and decile 10 the least deprived.

The data presented is taken from the school improvement summary issued by the local authority (only available from the schools) and is taken from the 2014 school census returns. It should be noted that the Trust has no children in decile 1 or 2 but that in Newtown High and Newtown Primary there was a significant grouping around deciles 3, 4

and 5. The data demonstrates that the three Trust schools have a marginally more deprived intake than the Local Authority average but a substantially more deprived intake than other schools in the locality.

## 2.5 Methods

In determining the methods I will use to collect data I am conscious of Yin's (2009) three principles of data collection:

- Create a case study database of evidence and own thoughts and reactions – I will keep a research diary (Silverman, 2000; Yin, 2009; Dhillon, 2009)
- Maintain a chain of evidence – all data and paperwork will be kept physically or on a secure database throughout the life of this study.
- Use multiple sources of evidence – In this study I will use two methods to collect data: the CARD SORT (quantitative) and the SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (qualitative).

In order to ensure dependability, reliability and that it is clear to other researchers how the study will be undertaken so it may be replicated, there follows a detailed account of how I intend to conduct the study.

### 2.5.1 The Card Sort

I have chosen to use a card sort for two principle reasons. Firstly, I recognize that the information could be collected using a questionnaire home to parents or an online questionnaire. However, the Principal of the Trust has warned me that the response rate for questionnaires is generally poor. Secondly, I have used card sorts extensively with both school staff and children in my professional life and have found the technique engaging and productive.

The traditional card sort (also known as sorting tasks) is a qualitative technique in which users are asked to sort cards (actual or virtual) into piles according to their own perceptions so that by imposing their own organization on a set of concepts they are demonstrating their mental models (Faiks and Harland, 2000). By identifying groups of objects, products or brands that go together, the technique is particularly helpful in the process of designing

computer interfaces, product assortments or store layouts in a way that is intuitive to consumers (Faiks and Hyland, 2000; Spencer, 2009a).

The card sort technique has been around for some time (Rugg and Petre, 2007) and has a long tradition of use in marketing and computer science but particularly in psychological investigations (Duncan, 1999). A 1970 paper from Cataldo, Johnson, Kellstedt and Milbraith reported the card sort as a ‘novel’ method of gathering data in large-scale research. They concluded that,

‘card sorting is a fast and interesting method of obtaining valid and reliable interview data, and one that appears to be capable as well of counteracting at least some of the biasing effects of response set.’ (Cataldo et al. 1970: 202)

The Dimensional Change Card Sort (DCCS) and the Wisconsin Card Sort (WST) are widely used in neuroscience, neuropsychiatry and psychology to measure executive function and the Paediatric Activity Card Sort (PACS) is an occupation based assessment tool which helps to determine children’s levels of occupational performance and engagement (York Haarland, Vranes, Goodwin and Garry 1986; Laws 1999; Bialystock and Martin 2004; Zelano 2006). Through the sorting of occupational title cards, the Tyler Vocational Card Sort elicits client attitudes and information regarding occupations, as well as views that the client holds and their training needs (Dolliver, 1967; Harper, Jentsch, Rhodenizer, Van Duyne, Smith-Jentsch and Sanchez, 2002). Fincher and Tenenberg (2005) state that,

‘among the knowledge elicitation techniques card sorting is notable for its simplicity of use, its focus on subjects’ terminology (rather than that of external experts) and its ability to elicit semi-tacit knowledge.’ (Fincher and Tenenberg, 2005: 89)

It is also easy to replicate (Faiks and Hyland 2000) and Santos (2006) demonstrated in his corporate communications study that the use of the qualitative card sort method could be used successfully to replace the quantitative exploratory factor analysis for the task of construct development, saving time, funds and a large number of participants. Rugg and Petre (2007: 120) refer to the technique as a ‘pleasant method’ that is flexible and can be used ‘quite creatively.’

As already described, traditional card sorting involves sorting a set of pictures, objects or labelled cards into distinct categories using a single criterion (Faiks and Hyland 2000; Fincher and Tenenberg 2005; Rugg and Petre, 2007). Spencer (2009b) identifies that the

researchers can predetermine the categories and the respondents have to fit the objects into them (a closed card sort) or the respondents can be left to devise their own categories (an open card sort). For her, this latter way allows for greater creativity and richer outcomes. Whichever way is chosen, the cards are usually scored and the data entered into a statistical analysis program and a statistical cluster analysis can then be used to create a composite of all the various grouping of users. However, in my study, I am more interested in the RANK ORDER the respondents place predetermined cards so I will be using a variation on the traditional technique. I want to be able to identify if there is any significant difference between the way parents rank the cards and the way school staff THINK parents will rank the cards. This method of eliciting data will be able to present a true picture of the phenomena under investigation thereby ensuring the credibility (internal validity) of my research. My rank ordering of the cards as opposed to grouping them is not common but not unique. A study by Scribney and Reddon (2010) with young male sex offenders successfully used the 60 items, 12 factor Yelom Card Sort to compare the rank order they placed the cards to those of adult sex offenders and a psychiatric adult outpatient group. In 1999 Duncan asked school pupils to identify the behaviours they disliked in the other gender. These were then synthesised by the researcher onto Q-cards so that the pupils could rank, re-order and exclude them. Q-cards emerge from Q-methodology and consist of a number of stimuli (verbal statements, single words, pictures or figures) which a subject is asked to sort into piles along some dimension (Wolf, 1997; Rugg and Petre, 2007). Duncan (1999) found the cards useful in generating ideas and stimulating debate as well as obtaining data on actual frequency and perceived relative gravity of behaviours.

### 2.5.2 Administering the Card Sort

‘Actually, administering a card-sorting study is a relatively easy task, for both those administering the study and those participating in it’ (Faiks and Hyland 2000: 351). I recognize that data collection and analysis might be easier if I were to ask for respondents to complete a computer based card sort using the TPL-KATS program (Harper, Jentsch, Berry, Lau, Bowers and Salas, 2003) or a more modern online version such as Optimal Sort, Simple Card Sort, MOIST (Modifiable Online Interface for Sorting Tasks) or something similar, but I have chosen to conduct a physical card sort, rather than a computer based one, because large number of the parents I want to reach do not have easy access to a suitable computer and anyway Harper et.al. (2002: 2049) found that computerized and manual card sorts were equally effective at eliciting knowledge.

For my study I will use a deck of twenty-three cards. Eighteen of the cards will have a commonly given reason why parents say they choose a school, two blank cards are for the respondents to write any additional factors and three are administration cards (see Table 2.10).

**Table 2.10: The cards**

1.	After school activities and clubs
2.	Friendship groups – children and / or parents
3.	Family connections
4.	Child care arrangements
5.	Whether or not it is a church school
6.	Reputation
7.	Good discipline / children well behaved with little bullying
8.	Proximity / nearness the home / easy to travel to
9.	Good academic standards / pupils do well
10.	Well managed school / head has a good reputation
11.	Caring / understanding / friendly teachers
12.	Good facilities
13.	Appropriate curriculum
14.	Parents are always welcome
15.	A good, happy and caring atmosphere / children are happy to be there
16.	Good pupil / teacher relations
17.	Good teachers
18.	School uniform
19.	Spare
20.	Spare
21.	Instruction card – Each card describes a reason why parents might choose a particular school for their child. Please read them all and place the cards in order, with the factor you think is MOST IMPORTANT FIRST and the LEAST IMPORTANT LAST. There are 2 spare cards for you to add anything you think I have not included. I would also like to interview a few willing parents. If you are willing to be interviewed, please fill in the last card and I'll be in touch. Many thanks for your help. Andrew Nicholson.
22.	Thanks card – Please return your completed card sort to school as soon as possible. Thanks once again.
23.	Interview card – I would be happy to be interviewed.
	Name.....
	Contact telephone no.....
	Email.....
	Age of children.....



The cards have been constructed with reference to the work of Hunter (1991) and Woods et al. (1998) and through discussion with school staff. In a series of informal meetings, school staff were asked to comment on Hunter's list of school choice criteria (Appendix 1) and make any suggestions for inclusion that they felt may be particularly relevant to the locality. The consensus was that the list needed updating but that I should avoid too many cards. Woods et al. (1998: 228) identify thirty-five criteria for their questionnaire to parents choosing a secondary school (Appendix 2) to allow for very detailed analysis but utilizing that number of cards in my study is clearly out of the question. A card sort involving so many cards would not be practical. Indeed, Rugg and Petre (2007) recommend between ten and twenty cards as being most appropriate.

Initially I devised a set of fourteen cards, but trials with friends, family and colleagues indicated that some cards conflated ideas that they preferred to separate. For example, good pupil / teacher relations and good teachers; and parents are always welcome and a good, happy and caring atmosphere / the children are happy to be there. The compromise I have adopted is to group some very similar criteria together e.g. Good discipline / children well-behaved with little bullying, and to leave two cards blank so that respondents can add additional reasons pertinent to them. I also considered and trialled the possibility of including a card relating to gossip but decided against it. Gossip is not a criteria for school choice, it is a way in which opinions and information about schools are transmitted between people and as such will undoubtedly arise as an issue in the interviews but I found when trialling the cards that its inclusion confused people.

The cards have not been numbered as my practical experience as a teacher is that using numbered cards influences the sorting. I have also been careful in my use of language to achieve a compromise between being clear about the concept without demanding too high a level of reading ability. This has been achieved by asking a colleague with considerable experience of teaching children with special needs to review the cards and offer suggestions and through trialling with a range of family, friends and colleagues. Respondents will also be advised to think of the concepts behind the words more than the words themselves (Faiks and Hyland, 2000).

In order to maximize parental responses I will use volunteer pupils as research assistants. My belief is that most parents, but particularly those that are hard to reach, are more likely to participate in the study if they can do so in their own home and feel as though they are

supporting their own child as well as the research. However, my use of pupils is not the main focus of the study. Rather, it is the means by which I will gather the data to answer my research question. For that reason I will need to recruit and brief a large number of pupils if I am going to get sufficient feedback from parents to make the conclusions of the study valid. For that reason I do not intend to create a Young Researcher group as discussed by Sharpe (2009a, 2009b and 2010). The creation, training and maintenance of such a group, which I carefully considered, whilst interesting, would be a distraction from my core aim. Sharpe (2009b) suggests such a group must be of between three and ten members if it is to function well, but such a small group would not give me the data collection coverage I require. However, the use of pupils, even in the limited way envisaged, fits with the ethos of a Trust that treats their pupils as active participants in their own learning. For Sharpe (2009a and 2009b) even limited involvement of pupils in research promotes understanding, educates and can bring positive outcomes. There are also important legal as well as moral reasons why children and young people should be involved in research. Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that they have a right to receive and give information through speaking, writing, printing, art or any other form. Article 17 gives children and young people the right to information that helps build social, spiritual and moral wellbeing and physical and mental health.

By agreement with the Principal, the oldest child from each family attending the Trust schools will meet me in an assembly for an explanation of the study and the part he / she can play (Appendix 3). With the return of the parent consent form (Appendix 4), the oldest child in each family will take a set of cards home and conduct the card sort on my behalf. Although the procedure will have been explained to the pupils and a detailed Parent Information Sheet (Appendix 5) will be sent home, it is possible that some parents may not understand what is expected of them so I have included my email address. The sorted cards will be returned for analysis. As questionnaire returns tend to be very low in the Trust schools, my hope is that by using a 'game' conducted by one of their children to elicit a response, the return rate will hit my target of 30%+ of families. This is an ambitious target that may be impossible to achieve and I will build in the eventuality that I do not receive sufficient responses back to make the data valid into my risk analysis (Table 2.14). As my case study school is an All Through School taking children from four to nineteen years, some of the children will be too young to act on my behalf. I have agreed with the Principal that where the oldest child in any family is in Year 3 or is younger, I will offer to meet the parents in school to conduct the card sort.

The family will be asked to place the cards in rank order. I have decided to ask for family responses, rather than individual responses, because the literature indicates that choosing a school is often a shared activity within the family and that by creating a ‘team’ activity I will get what Gaffney (2009: 4) describes as a, ‘rich combination of pure card sorting with user exploration, or almost focus group type activities on top of it.’ In reality I will have no way of knowing whether the activity has been carried out by the full family group, a part family group or an individual, though I will ask those I interview who was involved. The only way to overcome this problem is to ask for the activity to be undertaken under my supervision and this is impractical given that I cannot expect the large numbers of families I want to involve to meet with me.

An elastic band will be placed around the cards to keep them secure and returned to me for analysis. All returns will be anonymous save for those parents who indicate that they would be willing to meet me for a semi-structured interview in the second part of my research. Small self-selected groups of school staff will be asked complete the card sort in exactly the same way so that their choices can be entered onto a spreadsheet for comparison with parents. Although I expect the entering of the data onto the spreadsheet to be a relatively simple procedure, it is likely to be very time consuming.

### 2.5.3 Card Sort Analysis

The statistical analysis of card sort data can be a challenge (Fincher and Tenenberg 2005) so in order to bring clarity to my data gathering and data analysis I will follow a predetermined Data Analysis Plan (Table 2.11) and present the findings in a Chapter 3 named ‘Results and Analysis – Quantitative Data’. Please note that the process by which the Graphpad Prism program performs the Mann-Whitney U test is described in detail in Table 3.6 in section 3.3.

**Table 2.11: Data analysis plan**

1.	The raw data taken from the card sorts is entered into two Microsoft Excel spreadsheets: one for school staff and one for families. Each spreadsheet will show how each respondent ranked the selection criteria. These spreadsheets appear in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7.
2.	Transfer the data into data analysis software with a separate sheet for each selection criteria, with staff data in column A and family data in column B. I have chosen to use software called Graphpad Prism as I have it readily available and have found it more efficient and user friendly than Microsoft Excel (Connolly, 2012).
3.	The initial intention was to look at the differences between the two means of the two independent groups, and to use to use an independent (unpaired) students t-test. This is a parametric test which can be used when two sets of independent and identically distributed samples are obtained, one from each of the two populations being compared (Connolly, 2012).
4.	However, following expert advice and an unsuccessful search in the literature for precedents, I have concluded that it is inappropriate to treat ranks as scores undermining my use of a parametric test. I have therefore resolved to use a Mann Whitney U Test (also called the rank sum test). This is the non-parametric version of the t-test and uses the median rather than the mean to compare the distributions of two unmatched groups. 'Non-parametric procedures test hypothesis about equality of distributions rather than equality of means' (Keselman and Lix, 2012).
5.	<p>When the Mann-Whitney Test is conducted, the information for each selection criteria will be presented thus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which data is compared (i.e. Staff (column A) v Families (column B))</li> <li>• P value – represents the probability that any differences between the medians of the groups are due to chance, if <math>&lt;0.05</math> then the difference is statistically significant. To conduct this test, the software ranks all values from low the high, giving the smallest number a rank of 1 and the largest a rank of N (N = total number of values in each group). The ranks are then summed in each group. If the sums of the ranks are very different, the P value will be small. The P value shows the probability that the difference between the sum of the ranks is due to chance. As the data sets are small enough, an exact P value will be calculated.</li> <li>• P value summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <math>&lt;0.0001</math> = extremely significant, ****</li> <li>ii. <math>0.0001-0.001</math> = extremely significant, ***</li> <li>iii. <math>0.001-0.01</math> = very significant, **</li> <li>iv. <math>0.01-0.05</math> = significant, *</li> <li>v. <math>&gt;0.05</math> = not significant, ns</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Significantly different? Yes or no</li> <li>• One or two tailed P value? All results will be two tailed as there are two conditions required to choose a one-tailed Mann-Whitney U Test and these are not met within this data set. The conditions are: predict which group will have the larger median (or proportion) before the data is collected and if the other group had ended up with the larger median, this would have been attributed to chance (i.e. difference would be called 'not statistically significant').</li> <li>• Sum of ranks in column A (staff) and column B (families)</li> </ul>
6.	<p>Plot data as a box and whisker graph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Box represents the upper and lower quartiles with the median value as the central line</li> <li>• Whiskers represent the full range, showing the biggest and smallest values</li> <li>• Median = middle value when put in order</li> <li>• Quartiles = median value of the upper and lower halves of the data, when the median is taken out</li> </ul>
7.	Create a table showing the selection criteria by p value with the most significantly different at the top and the least different at the bottom. The box and tail graphs will be included in the main body of the thesis.
8.	Finally, I will conduct a 'Spearman Nonparametric Correlation Test' which quantifies the

direction and magnitude of correlation or co-variance between the two groups, using the rank of the data, not the actual values (meaning the data doesn't need to be from a Gaussian distribution, i.e. it is a nonparametric test). The two-tailed test will be done here (with the same reasons as the other test).

$r$  = correlation coefficient, can range from -1 (perfect inverse correlation) to +1 (perfect positive correlation). If the value is from 0 to 1, it shows the two data sets tend to increase together. If  $r=0$ , the two data sets don't vary together. If  $r$  is between -1 and 0, it means that as one data set increase the other decreases.

P value = quantifies the likelihood that any apparent co-variance (correlation) is due to chance, lower means it's less likely to be due to chance and the correlation seen is a real co-variance.

The P value shown here is labelled as 'approximate' not exact, as there are more than 16 factors, but it is taken as very accurate so can be assumed to be very close to exact.

9. Interpretation: My first and second research questions are:

To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?

To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation,' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?

In order to answer the first question and the second part of the second question I will:

- Observe which factors are significantly different from what families' think and what school staff believe families think – attempt to explain.
- Observe factors where no statistical significance is observed – attempt to explain.
- Look at the range and suggest reasons for larger/smaller ranges in the different groups.

To help me interpret the data and to provide a degree of validation, I will share the card sort data with the Senior Leadership Team of the Trust and include their views in the analysis.

#### 2.5.4 The Semi-Structured Interviews

Stake (2010: 64) contends that, 'the interview is the main road to multiple realities' and that the qualitative researcher will use interviewing to obtain unique information or interpretation held by the person interviewed, collect a numerical aggregation of information from many persons and to find out about 'a thing' that the researchers were unable to observe themselves. I will conduct a series of semi-structured interviews to discover more about participants understanding of school choice and particularly about 'school reputation' and the relative importance they place on it. I recognize that the research interview is very resource intensive as it requires the researcher to elicit information on a one to one basis but at the same time it can allow flexibility and the opportunity to 'drill down' into the data.

Although guided by a set of predetermined questions (parent pro-forma: Appendix 8; school staff pro-forma: Appendix 9), the interviews will resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries (Yin, 2014) and although it will not necessarily follow the exact same verbalization with every participant interviewed (Yin, 2014) it will allow

sufficient flexibility to allow the interviewee an opportunity to shape the flow of information (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). This is in accord with Stake's contention that, because each interviewee has had unique experiences and special stories to tell reducing the interview to a 'survey' where everybody is asked exactly the same questions is inappropriate (Stake, 1995).

In developing the interviews I will follow the advice of Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003: 44) and adopt the following stages: draft the interview; pilot the questions; select the interviewees; conduct the interviews and finally, analyse the interview data. The drafting and piloting will be conducted during the autumn of 2014. A number of pilot interviews will be undertaken with friends and family (I will do as many as necessary until I am happy with the results) and I will record some in order to practice using the audio recording equipment.

I recognise that there are benefits to video-recording interviews. The ability to pick up and record visual cues and body language may be useful, but it is unnecessary for this study because I am purely interested in what the interviewee has to say and I want to keep the process as simple as possible. If I feel that there has been a particular physical reaction of relevance, I have the option of recording it in my field notes after the interview. I have also considered interviewing by telephone, or email interviews, as these would be less demanding of resources, but rejected the idea because it would be less personal. I accept the advice of Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003: 59) that, 'where a more exploratory approach is required, the face-to-face interview is preferred.' I have also considered taking the advice of Stake (1995) and taking cursory notes as the interview proceeds, which can then be used to 'reconstruct' the account immediately afterwards (Stake, 1995: 66). However, I have rejected this approach because I want to be seen to be giving the interviewee my full attention, and as a beginner researcher I question my ability to be able to capture the full richness of the responses immediately. I prefer to record and transcribe each interview in full so it can be digested and analysed at leisure. Full transcripts also allow me to demonstrate the truthfulness of the research.

Time and opportunity permitting, my intention is to interview four parents and four members of the school staff on a single occasion (Mears, 2012). If time allows, there are sufficient volunteers and the interviews are still generating new data, I may well seek to conduct additional interviews. A sample of four parents and four members of the school

staff can never be truly representative of the entire school and parent population but it is what is manageable within the limitations of this study. In any event, all parents and school staff will have the opportunity to participate in the study by completing the card sort.

The participants will be selected from those card sort respondents who waive their anonymity and volunteer. From the parent volunteers I will aim to select one parent with children in one of the two primary schools who believes reputation is important and one who does not, and the same in Newtown High School. Selecting by these criteria I hope to achieve an acceptable cross section of participants representing age, gender, numbers of children and ages of children. I also want to try and select parents who have children throughout the Trust, to see if their attitudes change, as their children get older. Parents who can meet a number of these criteria will be particularly valuable to the study.

From the school staff group I will aim to select a member of the Senior Leadership team, somebody with children in the school, somebody who thinks that parents rate reputation as a defining factor, and somebody who does not. Selecting by these criteria I hope to achieve an acceptable cross section of participants representing age, gender, seniority and parents / non parents.

I have considered interviewing fewer people more than once (Mears, 2012) so that I can follow up missed opportunities in the first interview or seek clarification but have taken the view that busy colleagues and parents who are willing to give up valuable time for no material benefit once, might not be willing to do so again. I also want to achieve as great a range of perspectives as possible within the constraints of this study.

The staff interviews will be conducted in a place and at a time to suit the individual. Parent interviews will be conducted at a time to suit the individual, but in a family meeting room adjacent to the school office in Newtown High School. This room is a pleasant and comfortable with good acoustics for recording. The school secretary will be notified when I commence and end an interview in order to protect my personal safety. The respective Participant Information sheets (Appendix 10: school staff and Appendix 5: parent) for staff and parents make it clear how participants can withdraw from the study and how to make a complaint about my conduct. Participants will be free to leave at any time.

All the interviews will be transcribed verbatim as this will be essential to the thematic analysis I intend to conduct (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Prior to interview all participants will be informed that they will receive a draft transcript of the by email for checking prior to analysis. Although this has the potential to lead to disagreement and ongoing conflict with the participant, I feel that respondent validation (Silverman, 2001; Dhillon, 2009) is important to ensure confirmability (reliability) and credibility (internal validity). It also seems to me to be just good manners and naturally the right thing to do, but also sensible in that the participant might feel they have expressed themselves clumsily or with insufficient clarity and so should have the opportunity to put that right. It will do nothing for the credibility of my research if I allow untrue, incomplete or dubious comments to stand. I will, however, make it clear to all the participants it is in neither of our interests participate in a prolonged debate and ultimately it is their right to withdraw from the research project.

In order to apply meaning to the content of responses to my open-ended interview questions and to identify patterns in the text, I will conduct a thematic (or conceptual) content analysis. This process will allow me to develop a revised conceptual framework. Having started with the themes identified in Table 1.1 and explored how they relate to each other, identified the research questions, collected data that I have analysed thematically to identify concepts, and compared these with the literature, I will arrive at a new conceptual framework and a new understanding of how ideas relate to each other.

Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) state that,

‘in essence content analysis is based on the assumption that an analysis of language in use can reveal meanings, priorities and understandings, and ways of organising and seeing the world.’  
(Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003: 68)

I am also drawn to thematic content analysis because of its flexibility, its theoretical freedom (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and its compatibility with the pragmatic paradigm. As with any analytical technique there are advantages and pitfalls with thematic analysis that the researcher should be aware of before utilizing it and these are summarized in table 2.12. The advantages are very powerful for an inexperienced researcher, as I am, and the pitfalls serve as a useful warning.



**Table 2.12: Some advantages of thematic analysis and some pitfalls**

Advantages	Pitfalls
1. Flexibility	1. Failure to analyse the data
2. Relatively easy and quick methods to learn, and do	2. Using the data collection questions as themes
3. Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research	3. Weak or unconvincing analysis
4. Results are generally accessible to educated general public	4. A mismatch between the data and the analytic claims made about it
5. Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators	
6. Can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and /or offer a 'thick' description of the data set	
7. Can highlight similarities <i>and</i> differences across the data set	
8. Can generate unanticipated insights	
9. Allows for social (as well as psychological) interpretations of data (my brackets)	
10. Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development	

Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006: 94-97

Because this is a piece of qualitative research I will not concern myself with the number of times a word, theme or concept appears in the analysis as I am more concerned with the meaning and significance and in any event,

‘the “keyness” of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82)

I intend to identify the themes and patterns within the data manually (at least initially) and in an inductive way which means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves and involves a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This flexibility is entirely in accord with the pragmatic inquiry paradigm I have adopted for this study.

I also intend to identify the themes at a semantic or explicit level (as opposed to the latent or interpretative) which means they are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and I am not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said. However, that should not be taken to mean that I will only provide a description account of what has been said and the patterns I have identified. There must be interpretation of the significance of the patterns, their broader meanings and implications, so that an argument is made in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Wilkinson and

Birmingham, 2003). My intention is to provide a rich description of the entire data set in order to better understand what factors parents deem most important when selecting a school for their child and comparing and contrasting their comments with those of school staff (Stake, 2010). But I will also seek to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of the data on the importance of school reputation. My intention is to conduct the thematic analysis manually, but to assist me with the analysis of what I expect to be a considerable amount of interview data, I may use a Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis (CAQAS) program called NVivo (Gibbs, 2012). Again, building in this flexibility is entirely in accord with the pragmatic inquiry paradigm I have adopted for this study. I have chosen to use NVivo because it is freely available to through the university and training in its use is also available through the university.

This analysis will form the second results chapter and be called ‘Results and Analysis – Quantitative Data’. Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases for conducting a thematic analysis and these are reproduced in table 2.13. My intention is to follow these steps in as closely as possible but also to take advantage of the flexibility of the approach if necessary.

**Table 2.13: Phases of thematic analysis**

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading data, noting down initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. Codes should be Valid, Mutually exclusive and Exhaustive (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Gibbs 2012)
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question(s) and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Source: Braun and Clarke 2006: 87 (modified)

My intention is to produce an analysis of the highest quality and to help me I will be guided by four principles (Yin, 2014: 168). Firstly, I will ensure that I attend to all the

evidence even if it is inconvenient. Secondly, I will address all plausible rival explanations. Thirdly, I will ensure that my analysis covers the most significant aspects of my study and I do not allow myself to be sidetracked. Fourthly, I will use my professional expertise and prior knowledge to enhance the analysis.

The results will answer part of the second research question which is: ‘To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of ‘school reputation,’ and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?’

## 2.6 Ethical Issues

Edwards (2002) writes about the ‘ethics of intrusion’ in the context of the insider-researcher in an educational setting and states,

‘researching the lives of others carries with it onerous ethical implications. Quite apart from matters of disclosure and anonymity there is also the need to justify such intrusions, willingly though they may have been granted by participants.’ (Edwards, 2002: 71-82)

According to Measor and Sikes (1992) it is essential to maintain a respect for the person, allow self-determination and ensure confidentiality. They further add, ‘researchers have an obligation to protect people from being managed and manipulated in the interests of research,’ and that, ‘we should not initiate situations that we are not prepared to see through to their potential conclusion’ (Measor and Sikes, 1992: 221 and 226). Pring (2004) points to the dilemma faced by some researchers in reconciling the two, sometimes competing, ethical principles of respect for the dignity and confidentiality of the what he refers to as the ‘objects’ of the research and the necessity to get to the truth. With advice and appropriate support I expect to be able to strike the right balance.

In order to complete my research I will need the active participation of a number of people and groups. The Academy Trust is overseen and run by a Board of Directors (appointed from a range of backgrounds including education, local business, parents and the local community). Whilst the Board has overall responsibility for the Trust, it has delegated some powers to local governing bodies in each of the three academies and it is they who oversee the interests of the individual schools. The chairs of the three local governing bodies are also directors. Since my study will be based across the Trust I will need to liaise

with the Board and individual Governing Bodies. It is these bodies who have the power to ensure a continuity of access for the life of my study and to whom I have a degree of responsibility. The goodwill and support of the Principal and other senior staff in the Trust (including the three Heads of School) is crucial. The Principal is my link to the directors, governors, staff, pupils and parents and as the gatekeeper of the Trust; I will keep her fully informed of my intentions and seek her advice and approval as necessary.

The Data Protection Act, 2004 ([www.dca.gov.uk](http://www.dca.gov.uk)) specifies that personal data must be: processed fairly and lawfully; obtained for specified and lawful purposes; adequate, relevant and not excessive; accurate and up to date; not kept any longer than necessary; processed in accordance with the 'data subjects' (the individuals) rights; securely kept and not transferred to any other country without adequate protection in situ. To ensure the eight principles are adhered to my intention will be to collect, store and process all data personally using a personal password protected computer in my home. In any case, all responses from parents and school staff will be anonymous unless the respondent chooses otherwise. In addition to completing the simple card sort task, parents and school staff will be offered the opportunity to follow it up with volunteering to attend a short semi-structured interview with me in school. In that case the parent or staff member will choose to waive their anonymity so that I am in a position to make contact and arrange the interview. However, the responses of all interviewees will be reported in my research anonymously. School staff will be referred to as S1, S2, S4 and S4 and parents as P1, P2, P3 and P4.

Data collected by the card sorts will be entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for analysis. Each set of returns will be numbered and only I will be able to identify the set of cards created by a participant.

I will conduct myself in a professional and ethical way at all times. Throughout my research I will pay due regard to the principles explicit in the British Educational Research Associations (BERA) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2011) and The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 'Framework for Research Ethics' (2015), namely, a respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom. Enshrined in my conduct will be the voluntary informed consent of participants, openness and disclosure on my part, a right to withdraw from the study, a respect and awareness of vulnerable adults and young people, the absolute minimization of detriment to participants and a respect for privacy and disclosure. No

person, child or adult, will be coerced into participation.

The 1947 Nuremberg Code and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration enshrined the central importance of properly informed consent that is given freely without coercion, threats or persuasion and this still forms the basis for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework For Research Ethics which has two core principles concerned with freely given and fully informed consent (Research Ethics Guidebook, 2015). These are,

‘Research subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any are involved’ and ‘Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from coercion.’ (2015: 4)

In order to demonstrate respect for participants, the avoidance of harm and to abide by ethical expectations I will devise a series of handouts and forms for parents and school staff to include; Parent Information Sheet (Appendix 5), Parent Consent Form (Appendix 4), School Staff Information Sheet (Appendix 10), School Staff Consent Form (Appendix 11), a letter to the parents of children too young to take the card sorts home (Appendix 12) and a Pupil Information Sheet (Appendix 3). This information will allow potential participants the opportunity to decide if it is worth taking part in the study despite any risks and costs and engages them in a process of informed or valid consent. Whilst every effort has been made to identify potential ethical issues at the outset of this study, I will follow the latest Economic and Social Research Council (2015) advice to be aware of potential issues arising throughout the life of the study and be ready to address them.

Throughout my case study I will employ four strategies to ensure its trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). To ensure *credibility* (internal validity) I will present an authentic picture of the phenomena under scrutiny. To ensure *transferability* (external validity or generalizability) I will provide sufficient detail so that the reader will be able to decide whether the findings can reasonably applied to another setting. To ensure *dependability* I will ensure that the study could be repeated and to ensure *confirmability* I will take steps to ensure the elimination of bias and that the findings emerge from the data and not my own predispositions (which is always a potential problem for case study researchers as it is essential that they understand the issues beforehand (Yin, 2014).

I am an experienced, qualified teacher and headteacher and have obtained an Enhanced Certificate from the UK Disclosure and Barring Agency (DBS) issued in 2013, clearing me to work with children within the Trust. Full ethical approval has been sought and gained

sought from Anglia Ruskin University before starting the data gathering. The Principal and Directors of the Trust have given permission to conduct research there. By careful planning and consultation with Academy Trust and University supervisors I will seek to avoid making an ethical mistake and if I do, rectify it as soon as possible.

My approach when writing up my research will be to assume that the reader is sceptical about how valid and reliable my data collection methods have been and how selective I have been in reporting the evidence. In so doing, I will accept that this will be an exercise in persuasive communication which in the view of Chandler (2013) is even more important for case studies than other pieces of research. I will seek to acknowledge and address the limitations of my research and its outcomes and indicate where I think further research could be usefully undertaken.

## 2.7 Threats To The Research Design

Much depends for the success of this study on the willingness of school staff, pupils and parents to complete the card sort. Only that will give me the data to compare school staff and parents views and find volunteers to interview. However, the following contingencies have been made in case of difficulties (Table 2.14).

**Table 2.14: A risk analysis**

Potential Risk	Action
Too few parental card sorts returned	A questionnaire will be devised and sent home.
Too few school staff card sorts returned	A questionnaire will be devised and be completed in school.
Too few parent volunteers to be interviewed	Those that do volunteer will be interviewed more than once and in greater depth or additional parents volunteers will be identified by the 3 schools and approached on my behalf.
To few school staff volunteers to be interviewed	Those that do volunteer will be interviewed more than once and in greater depth or a request will be sent to all staff members for additional volunteers.
Withdrawal from the study of a parent / family having returned their card sort	Those respondents that have waived their anonymity in order to volunteer to be interviewed will be able to be identified and have their card sorts withdrawn. Every effort will be made to identify the card sort of a family that returned it anonymously.
Withdrawal from the study of school staff member having returned their card sort	Those respondents that have waived their anonymity in order to volunteer to be interviewed will be able to be identified and have their card sorts withdrawn. Every effort will be made to identify the card sort of a staff member / group that returned it anonymously. As staff will complete their card sorts in small groups, if one person in that group wishes to withdraw from the study the

	card sort for the whole group will be withdrawn.
Withdrawal of parent after interview	The interview will not be used and be deleted from the database.
Withdrawal of school staff member after interview	The interview will not be used and deleted from the database.
An ethical issue arises	Immediate advice will be sought from my academic supervisor to rectify the issue.
A significant safeguarding or radicalization issue arises	Immediate referral to the designated person in the Trust. My responsibility to the protection of children over-rides any responsibility to the Trust or my research.
A criminal act is discovered	Immediate advice sought from my academic supervisors.
The Directors of the Trust and / or the Principal wish to withdraw from the study	Before embarking on the study I have obtained written approval and commitment to the study. All references to the Trust will be anonymous.
An unforeseen problem	I will use my professional judgement and experience to find a solution. I have access to advice from academic supervisors and the Principal of the Trust.

## 2.8. Summary

In this chapter I have sought to establish and justify the theoretical and practical conditions for this research project. I started by describing my reasons for wishing to carry out a case study and acknowledging the advantages and limitations of the research design and then provided a rich description of the case context.

I have also provided clear descriptions and justifications of the methods I will use to collect the data, how I will present it and how it will be analysed. This is important because the reader must be able to draw their own conclusions and replicate elements of the study if they so wish. The conclusions and assertions will arise from my individual interpretation of the data but other interpretations may be possible. I have tried to be as proactive as possible in anticipating threats to my study by creating a risk analysis and have considered all the ethical issues that may arise.

## Chapter 3

### Results and Analysis – Quantitative Data

#### 3.1 Introduction

The data from the quantitative and the qualitative elements of the study will now be presented in two separate chapters for analysis. There will then follow a chapter entitled ‘Discussion’ where the outcomes of the two data threads are brought together to answer the research questions.

#### 3.2 Data Gathering and Visual Analysis

The staff card sorts were distributed at a whole Trust staff meeting attended by teaching and non-teaching staff in the autumn term 2014. Following a presentation, all school staff participants were handed an information sheet (Appendix 10) and were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 11) before beginning the task. I observed some cards completed by a single person, but the majority were completed by groups of three or four school staff.

I negotiated twenty minutes to complete the task in a full staff meeting with the Principal, because my professional experience told me that I was more likely to have the task completed if it was undertaken in a controlled setting. My professional experience as a headteacher and staff trainer is that if I allowed staff to complete the card sort in their own time, they would not necessarily spend greater time on the task than we would be allowed in the meeting, and I would be unlikely to get the majority back. For some groups the twenty minutes was more than enough whereas for others, they would have valued more time.

In total 105 school staff were involved with only two present at the meeting who chose not to participate. School staff unable to attend the staff meeting or were not contracted to do so, were offered the opportunity to complete a card sort later. Two completed card sorts were returned in this way. A total of 53 school staff card sorts were returned for analysis.



The distribution and collection of the parent card sorts in the autumn term 2014 proved to be more challenging. In order to minimize the number of cards I would need to produce, my intention was to give a set to the oldest member of each family across the three schools in the Trust. It was also my intention to ensure that the oldest child in each family was fully briefed and engaged with the project by meeting them in a series of assemblies. However, due to communication difficulties and the difficulty in identifying who was the oldest child in each family represented in the Trust schools because of an underdeveloped whole Trust administrative ICT system, I often spoke, and distributed the invitation letter, to more than one child from each family. After consideration, I decided that this did not matter because the more children who were enthused by the project and understood the procedures, the more likely I would be to get a positive response. However, I have no way of knowing how many invitation letters actually got home to parents.

On receipt of the consent form, the office staff in each of the three schools distributed the cards sorts. The same staff collected in the completed returns on my behalf. This process went without incident.

As planned, I wrote to the parents of children in years Three and below to invite them to attend an informal session in one of the primary schools to complete a card sort (Appendix 12). This was important because I wanted to ensure that all eligible parents had been given the opportunity to participate in the study. In the event nobody attended, but I was informed on more than one occasion that because the child had older siblings they had already responded or the school had already given them a set of cards when they were requested.

I received 39 card sorts back which was fewer than I anticipated and hoped for, but was advised by the Principal that this was a better return than I might have expected using a questionnaire. Unfortunately, because I do not know the total number of families represented in the Trust schools, I am unable to express the number of returns as a percentage of the total possible. Also, I cannot be sure that a family did return more than one set of cards, because the majority were returned anonymously, though I find this unlikely. After taking supervisory advice, I decided that the parent response rate would give me a valid data set for analysis and it was unnecessary to devise an alternative questionnaire.

I have also no way of knowing the socio-economic status of the parent respondents and whether they represent a true cross section of the parent body. My impression from conducting six interviews with those who waived their anonymity is that it does not, as they have all received an education to at least 'A' level standard and usually beyond, and the majority spoke about their middle class jobs (See Chapter 4, Table 4.1 for greater detail). It is possible, therefore, that the views of the working class majority in the community are not represented in my data and consequent analysis, but it is also possible that the working class respondents chose anonymity and not to be interviewed.

The data for parents and school staff was collated in two Excel spread sheets (which appear in full in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7) for analysis as per my stated Data Analysis Plan (see Table 2.11).

For illustration, there follows two screen shots of the respective spreadsheets (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Each return was given a number (family number or staff number) to maintain confidentiality. The number assigned to each school choice criteria is the rank score the family or staff group assigned it. **The lower the rank score, the more important the respondent deemed the criteria.**

**Table 3.1: A screen shot of parent / family card sort data entered onto a spreadsheet**

Family Number	Activities and clubs	Friendship groups- children or parents	Family connections	Child Care arrangements	Church School	Reputation	Good Discipline & behaviour	Well managed school	Appropriate curriculum	Good pupil-teacher relations	Proximity and transport	Caring / friendly teachers	Welcoming to parents	Good teachers	Academic standards	Good facilities	Happy/Caring atmosphere	School Uniform	Other 1	Other 2
1	16	12	17	15	18	5	10	6	3	7	14	8	9	4	1	13	2	11		
2	14	10	15	17	18	2	6	3	11	7	1	8	13	4	5	12	9	16		
3	15	5	18	17	14	11	2	3	7	8	13	9	12	6	1	10	4	16		
4	15	16	11	18	19	9	4	10	13	5	8	6	14	3	7	12	2	17	1	

**Table 3.2: A screen shot of school staff card sort data entered onto a spreadsheet**

Staff Number	Activities and clubs	Friendship groups- children or parents	Family connections	Child Care arrangements	Church School	Reputation	Good Discipline & behaviour	Well managed school	Appropriate curriculum	Good pupil-teacher relations	Proximity and transport	Caring / friendly teachers	Welcoming to parents	Good teachers	Academic standards	Good facilities	Happy/Caring atmosphere	School Uniform	Other 1	Other 2
1	4	12	15	3	19	14	5	11	18	9	1	8	17	10	13	6	2	16	7	
2	17	9	12	16	18	8	11	3	2	14	7	5	10	6	1	13	4	15		
3	15	13	12	7	16	2	4	3	17	10	6	11	14	9	1	5	8			
4	10	4	2	17	18	6	8	14	13	3	1	9	12	11	7	15	5	16		

Six parents and seven school staff used the spare cards to add criteria that they felt had been absent in the card sort (see Appendix 13). Following advice from a statistician these

additions were not considered when analysing the data since they only served to distort the results, as the median scores in both ‘other’ columns would be based on very few scores. However, they are reported in the spreadsheets.

At this stage, I want to reiterate my three research questions, as it is these I will be using the data to answer:

1. To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?
2. To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of ‘school reputation,’ and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?
3. What are the implications for schools?

In my Data Analysis Plan (Table 2.11) I described how I would seek to interpret the card-sort data to answer my first research question and the second part of the second question:

- Observe which factors are significantly different from what families’ think and what school staff believe families think – attempt to explain.
- Observe factors where no statistical significance is observed – attempt to explain.
- Look at the range and suggest reasons for larger/smaller ranges in the different groups

Parents were asked to rank the eighteen criteria for choosing a school in order of importance from one to eighteen, with eighteen being of the least importance.

School staff were asked to rank the eighteen criteria in the way *they thought parents would rank them*. I present in Tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 the ranges of responses from parents and school staff and the median responses from both.

Parent / family responses (Table 3.3) vary widely with ten of the eighteen (twenty including the blanks) cards being of the highest priority (1). Equally, nine of the criteria have the highest value indicating that some parents at least do not rate their importance at

all highly. Few people rate ‘child care arrangement’ as of the utmost importance and ‘church school’ status and ‘activities and clubs’ do not rate highly.

School staff responses (Table 3.4) vary widely across the whole value range, but not as widely as parent responses. Seven of the criteria have the lowest value of 1 (and therefore highest importance), whilst seven criteria are assigned the highest value (and therefore the least importance). School staff do not think that parents generally assign much importance to ‘church school’ status, the need to be ‘welcoming to parents’ or school uniform.

When the values are examined as ‘median ranks’ (Table 3.5) the disparity between school staff and parents comes into sharper focus. The one criterion on which there is common understanding is on ‘church school’ status. Parents generally do not believe it is an important factor in school choice and school staff would appear to know that. However,

**Table 3.3: The range of card sort responses from parents /families**

PARENTS / FAMILIES	Lowest value = greatest importance	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Highest value = lowest importance
Activities and clubs	4	12	14	16	17
Friendship groups	2	9	13	15	18
Family connections	1	12	16	17	18
Child care arrangements	5	14	15	17	18
Church school	4	17	18	18	20
Reputation	1	3	7	11	19
Good discipline and behaviour	1	3	5	8	13
Well managed school	1	3	6	9	16
Appropriate curriculum	2	4	8	12	16
Good pupil-teacher relations	1	5	7	8	14
Proximity and transport	1	5	12	15	18
Caring/friendly teachers	2	6	7	9	14
Welcoming to parents	2	9	11	13	16
Good teachers	1	4	5	7	11
Academic standards	1	1	5	8	18
Good facilities	2	8	11	12	15
Happy/caring atmosphere	1	1	3	6	18
School uniform	1	12	15	16	18

Note: where a ranking is greater than 18, this because one or two of the ‘blank’ cards were completed.

**Table 3.4: The range of card sort responses from school staff**

SCHOOL STAFF	Lowest value = highest importance	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Highest value = lowest importance
Activities and clubs	3	11	13	15	18
Friendship groups	1	3	5	11.5	16
Family connections	1	3	6	11	18
Child care arrangements	2	6.5	12	16	18
Church school	6	17	18	18	19
Reputation	1	1	4	7	15
Good discipline and behaviour	2	4	7	8	13
Well managed school	1	3	7	11	17
Appropriate curriculum	2	13	15	16	18
Good pupil-teacher relations	3	8	10	12.5	17
Proximity and transport	1	1	3	9.5	16
Caring/friendly teachers	2	7	9	11	16
Welcoming to parents	5	11	14	16	18
Good teachers	2	6	9	12	16
Academic standards	1	2	4	10	16
Good facilities	3	5	10	13	17
Happy/caring atmosphere	1	5	6	8	16
School uniform	4	15	17	17	18

**Table 3.5: A table showing the median rank for each selection criteria for school staff and parents**

Selection Criteria	Median Rank: School Staff	Median Rank: Parents /Families
Good Teachers	9	5
Happy/Caring Atmosphere	6	3
Family Connections	6	16
Friendship Groups	5	13
Appropriate Curriculum	15	8
Proximity and Transport	3	12
Good Pupil Teacher Relations	10	7
Child Care Arrangements	12	15
School Uniform	17	15
Reputation	4	7
Welcoming to Parents	14	11
Caring/Friendly Teachers	9	7
Good Discipline and Behaviour	7	5
Well Managed School	7	6
Academic Standards	4	5
Activities and Clubs	14	13
Church School	18	18
Good Facilities	10	11

there are church school options in the locality and those parents who do think it is important may not have enrolled their children in the Trust schools, so this result is not surprising. If we allow for a difference of no more than three ranks as still indicating a reasonable convergence of views between parent and staff opinions then there seems

general agreement on 'happy, caring atmosphere', 'family connections', 'good pupil teacher relations', 'child care arrangements', 'school uniform', 'reputation', 'welcoming to parents', 'caring, friendly teachers', 'good discipline and behaviour', 'well managed school', 'academic standards', 'activities and clubs' and 'good facilities'. However, if we allow for a divergence of no more than two values the number of points of convergence nearly halves to 'school uniform', 'caring friendly teachers', 'good behaviour and discipline', 'well managed school', 'academic standards', 'activities and clubs' and 'good facilities'. The largest disparities between parents and school staff were 'family connections' (ten places), 'proximity and transport' (nine mean places), 'friendship groups' (seven mean places) and 'appropriate curriculum' (seven mean places). School staff think that parents will place significantly more importance on 'family connections', 'friendship groups' and 'proximity and transport' whereas parents place more importance on an 'appropriate curriculum' than school staff think they do. These disparities are explored in more detail in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews (Chapter 4).

There appear to be differences between what parents say they value and what school staff think parents value only in the categories of 'good teachers', 'family connections', 'friendship groups', 'appropriate curriculum' and 'proximity and transport'. However, if we look at where the staff have overestimated the value parents place on certain criteria, we find that they overvalue the importance of 'child care arrangements', 'reputation', 'academic standards' and considerably overvalue the importance of 'family connections', 'friendship groups' and 'proximity and transport'.

What is important is the number of criteria for school choice that parents say they rate more highly than school staff think they do. Parents rate 'good teachers' and an 'appropriate curriculum' considerably more highly and 'a happy caring atmosphere', 'good pupil teacher relations', 'school uniform', 'welcoming to parents', 'caring friendly teachers', 'good discipline and behaviour', 'well managed school' and 'activities and clubs' higher.

So, for the eighteen criteria, school staff are overestimating the value parents place on seven of them and underestimating the value they place on ten of them. On only one criterion is there total agreement. But in order to establish the true significance of the divergence of views I carried out a statistical data analysis.

### 3.3 A Statistical Analysis of the Data

As discussed in chapter 2, I had already devised an appropriate Data Analysis Plan (Table 2.11) using the Mann-Whitney U test to assess whether the differences between parent and school staff responses were statistically significant using a program called GraphPad Prism that goes through process described in Table 3.6. GraphPad Prism was originally designed for experimental biologists in medical schools and drug companies, especially those in pharmacology and physiology. Prism is now used much more broadly by all kinds of biologists, as well as social and physical scientists. I chose to use this program because it is the preferred choice of the person who helped me develop the statistical skills necessary for this study and it proved to be entirely suitable.

**Table 3.6: The process by which GraphPad Prism performs the Mann-Whitney U test**

1. Rank all scores, ignoring whether they are from the families or staff, with the lowest score getting 1. If two or more scores are identical, they get the average of the ranks they would have obtained (i.e. if the lowest two values are the same, they would get 1.5)
2. Add up the ranks for the families, to get T1. Add up the ranks for the staff to get T2
3. Select the larger of these two rank totals and call it TX
4. Calculate N1, N2 and NX:
  - a. N1 = the number of people in the group that you gave the T1 rank (families)
  - b. N2 = the number of people in the group that you gave the T2 rank (staff)
  - c. NX = the number of people in the group that gave you the larger rank total, TX
5. Find U by working through the formula below:
$$U = (N1 \times N2) + \frac{(NX + 1)}{2} - TX$$
6. Use a table of critical U values for the Mann-Whitney test. This standardised table (available online and a section reproduced as Table 3.7) shows critical values for U for different group sizes, for a two-tailed test at the significance of  $P < 0.05$ . To be statistically significant, the U value has to be equal to or less than the critical value in the table. If this is the case, it is legitimate conclude that the differences between the different sets of ranks is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

The GraphPad Prism computer program performs this whole process and then works out how much the U value obtained differs from the critical value, therefore applying a level of significance more accurately and giving an exact P value. Note that the ‘Mann-Whitney U’ value in the diagrams is the outcome of the statistical test, and determines the significance

of the difference between the rankings of the two groups, by comparing this value to a standard table of critical U values (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7: Mann-Whitney U Values**

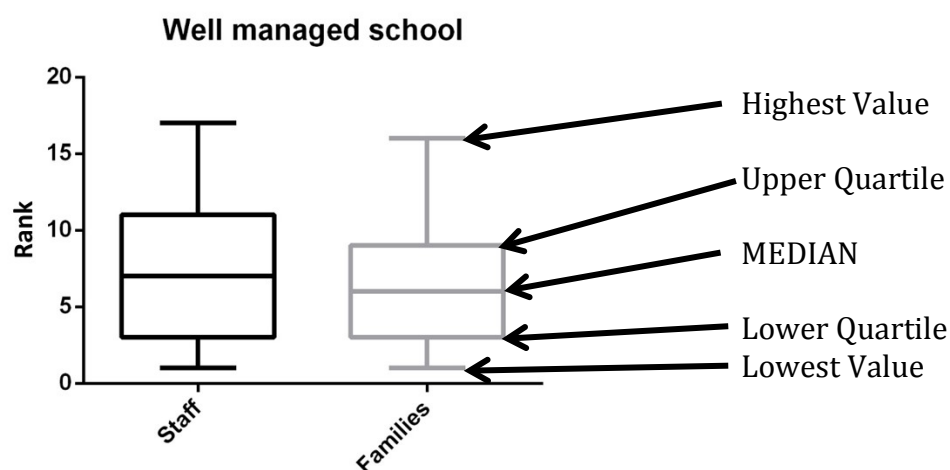
$N_1$	$N_2$	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
5		2	3	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	17	18	19	20
6		3	5	6	8	10	11	13	14	16	17	19	21	22	24	25	27
7		5	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34
8		6	8	10	13	15	17	19	22	24	26	29	31	34	36	38	41
9		7	10	12	15	17	20	23	26	28	31	34	37	39	42	45	48
10		8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	33	36	39	42	45	48	52	55
11		9	13	16	19	23	26	30	33	37	40	44	47	51	55	58	62
12		11	14	18	22	26	29	33	37	41	45	49	53	57	61	65	69
13		12	16	20	24	28	33	37	41	45	50	54	59	63	67	72	76
14		13	17	22	26	31	36	40	45	50	55	59	64	67	74	78	83
15		14	19	24	29	34	39	44	49	54	59	64	70	75	80	85	90
16		15	21	26	31	37	42	47	53	59	64	70	75	81	86	92	98
17		17	22	28	34	39	45	51	57	63	67	75	81	87	93	99	105
18		18	24	30	36	42	48	55	61	67	74	80	86	93	99	106	112
19		19	25	32	38	45	52	58	65	72	78	85	92	99	106	113	119
20		20	27	34	41	48	55	62	69	76	83	90	98	105	112	119	127

Source: Sussex University

<http://users.sussex.ac.uk/~grahamh/RM1web/MannWhitneyHandout%202011.pdf>  
(Accessed 22.8.15)

Using GraphPad Prism, Mann-Whitney test box and whisker graphs were produced for each of the eighteen criteria (Tables 3.8 to 3.25). I have included all the graphs in the main body of the text because they give a useful visual representation of the data for the reader. In Table 3.8 I have included additional labelling to assist the readers interpretation of the data.

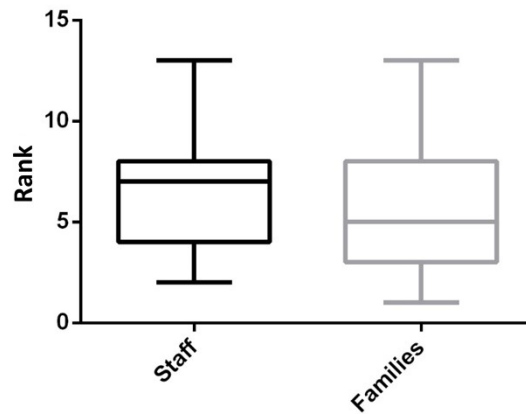
**Table 3.8:**



Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.1992
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2627 , 1651
Mann-Whitney U	871.0

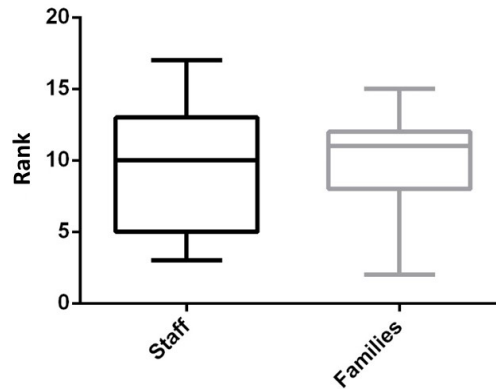


Table 3.9:

**Good discipline and behaviour**

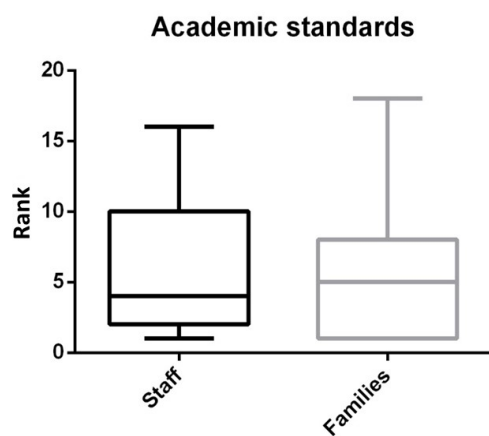
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0800
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2685 , 1593
Mann-Whitney U	813.0

Table 3.10:

**Good facilities**

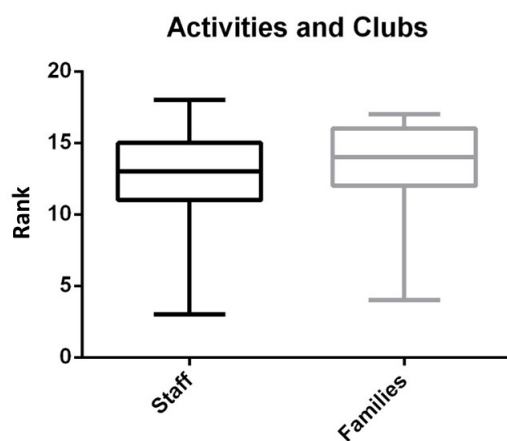
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.8389
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2439 , 1840
Mann-Whitney U	1008

Table 3.11:



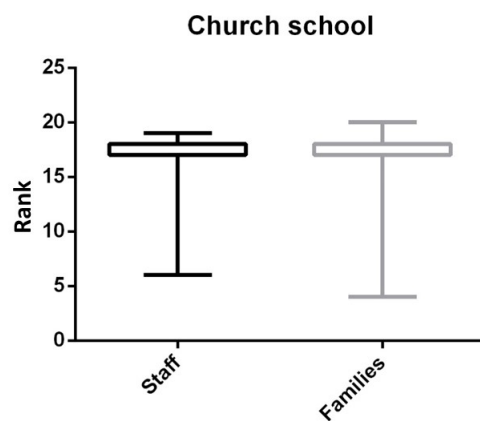
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.2863
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? ( $P < 0.05$ )	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2599 , 1679
Mann-Whitney U	899.0

Table 3.12:



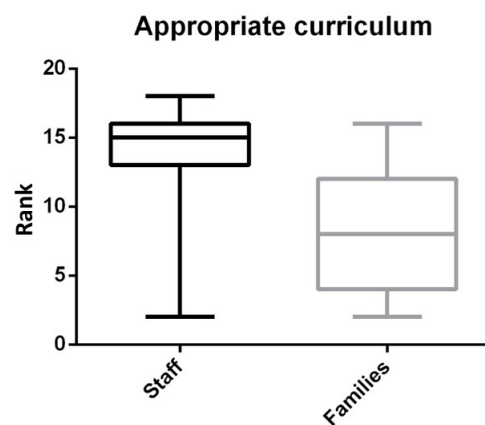
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.4482
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? ( $P < 0.05$ )	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2369 , 1910
Mann-Whitney U	937.5

Table 3.13:



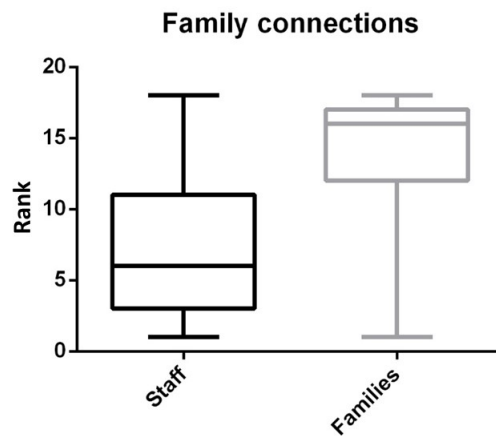
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.5602
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	ns
Significantly different? ( $P < 0.05$ )	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2533 , 1745
Mann-Whitney U	965.0

Table 3.14:



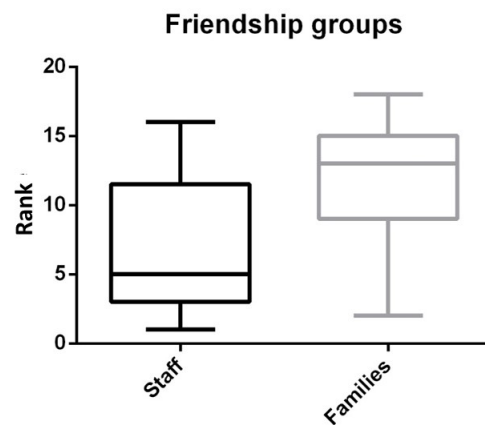
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? ( $P < 0.05$ )	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	3140 , 1138
Mann-Whitney U	358.0

Table 3.15:



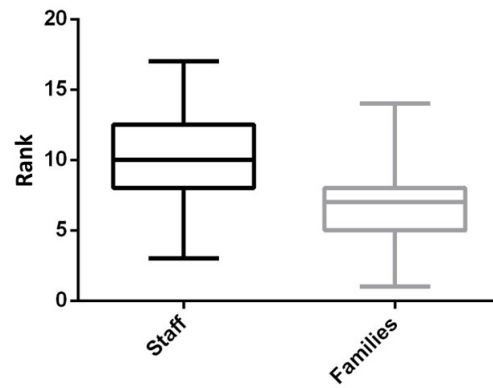
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	1737 , 2541
Mann-Whitney U	306.0

Table 3.16:



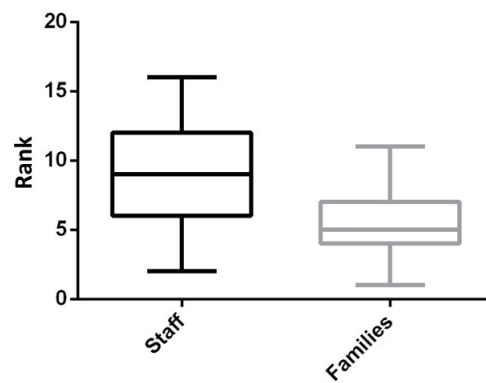
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	1824 , 2454
Mann-Whitney U	393.0

Table 3.17:

**Good pupil-teacher relations**

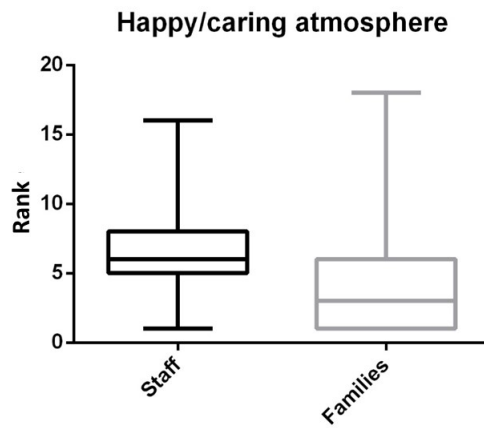
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	3053 , 1226
Mann-Whitney U	445.5

Table 3.18:

**Good teachers**

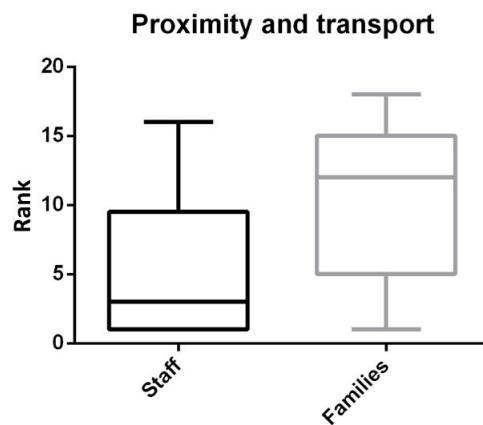
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	3005 , 1273
Mann-Whitney U	493.0

Table 3.19:



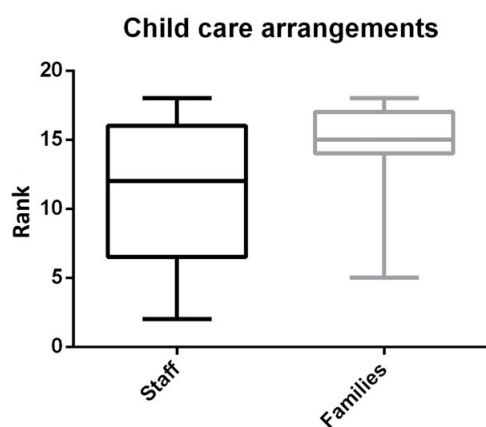
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2981 , 1297
Mann-Whitney U	517.0

Table 3.20:



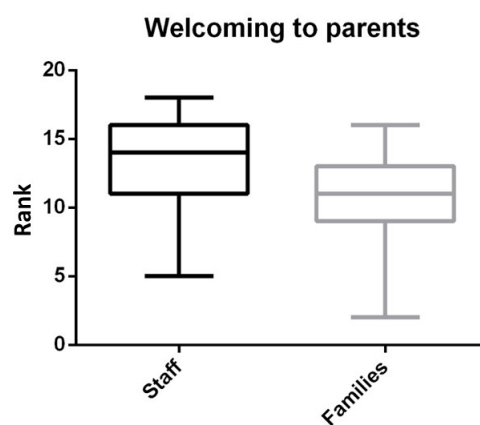
Mann Whitney test	
P value	< 0.0001
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	****
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	1931 , 2347
Mann-Whitney U	500.0

Table 3.21:



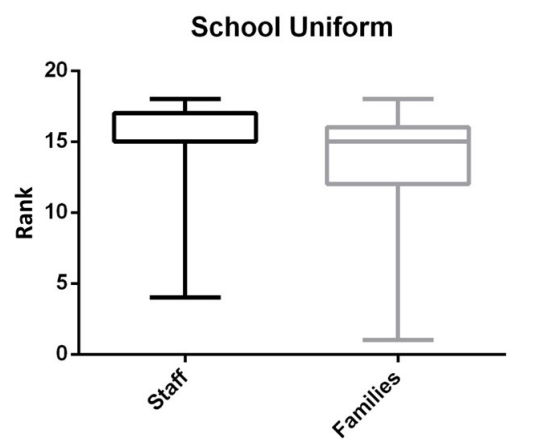
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0006
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	***
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2036 , 2242
Mann-Whitney U	605.0

Table 3.22:



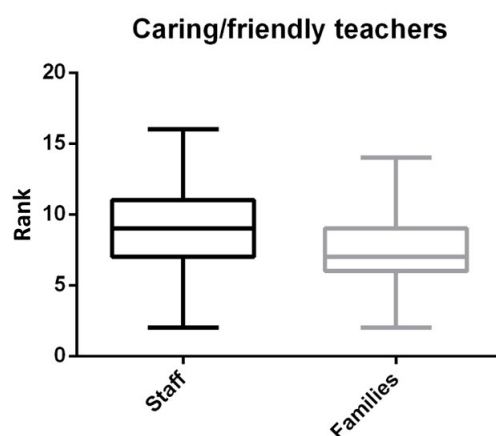
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0024
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	**
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2844 , 1435
Mann-Whitney U	654.5

Table 3.23:



Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0012
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	**
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2787 , 1400
Mann-Whitney U	619.5

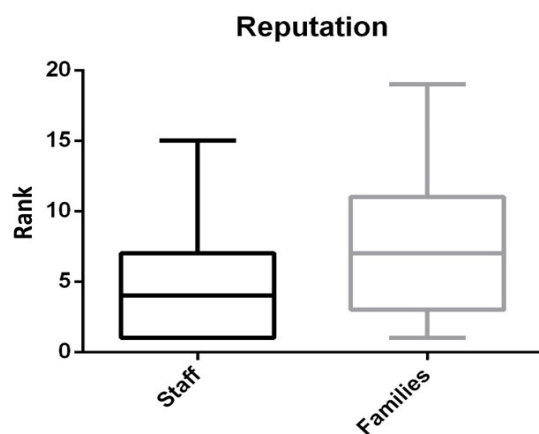
Table 3.24:



Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0081
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	**
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2796 , 1483
Mann-Whitney U	702.5



Table 3.25:



Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0018
Exact or approximate P value?	Exact
P value summary	**
Significantly different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks in column A,B	2078 , 2201
Mann-Whitney U	646.5

The data from each Mann-Whitney test was then tabulated for ease of analysis (Table 3.26).

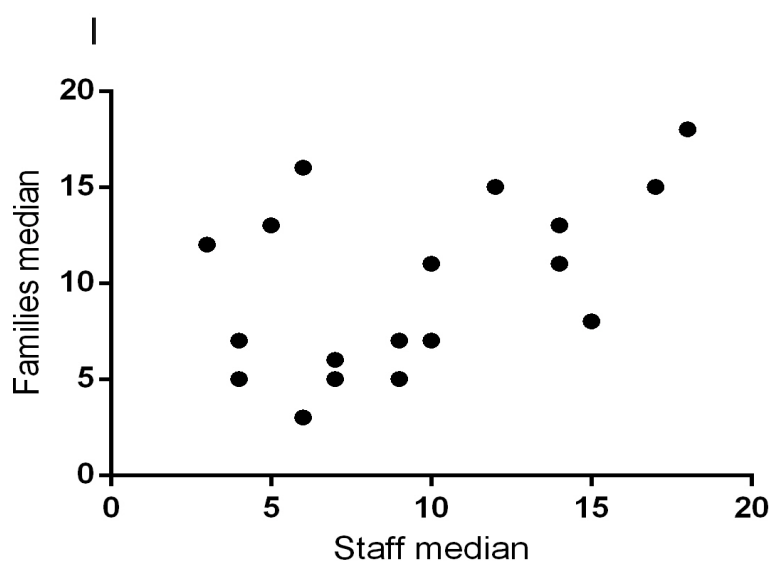
**Table 3.26: A table showing the selection criteria by p-value as identified using the Mann-Whitney U Test with the most significantly different at the top and the least different at the bottom.**

Selection Criteria	p-value	p-value Significance
Good Teachers	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Happy/Caring Atmosphere	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Family Connections	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Friendship Groups	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Appropriate Curriculum	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Proximity and Transport	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Good Pupil Teacher Relations	<0.0001	Extremely Significant ****
Child Care Arrangements	0.0006	Extremely Significant ***
School Uniform	0.0012	Very Significant **
Reputation	0.0018	Very Significant **
Welcoming to Parents	0.0024	Very Significant **
Caring/Friendly Teachers	0.0081	Very Significant **
Good Discipline and Behaviour	0.0800	No
Well Managed School	0.1992	No
Academic Standards	0.2863	No
Activities and Clubs	0.4482	No
Church School	0.5602	No
Good Facilities	0.8389	No

- i. <0.0001 = extremely significant, \*\*\*\*
- ii. 0.0001-0.001 = extremely significant, \*\*\*
- iii. 0.001-0.01 = very significant, \*\*
- iv. 0.01-0.05 = significant, \*
- v. >0.05 = not significant

The final part of my Data Analysis Plan (Table 2.11) was to use GraphPad Prism to run a Spearman r test on the data to see if there is any correlation between the medians of families or parents and school staff (Table 3.27). The outcome of the test demonstrates that there is no significant correlation and therefore it can be reliably said that there is a significant statistical disparity between what parents say they value when making a school choice and what the school staff in this study believe parents most value.

**Table 3.27:** A graph generated by the Spearman r test to establish whether there is a correlation between the medians of the parents and school staff data



Spearman r	
r	0.4222
95% confidence interval	-0.07069 to 0.7494
P value	
P (two-tailed)	0.0809
P value summary	ns
Exact or approximate P value?	Approximate
Significant? (alpha = 0.05)	No
Number of XY Pairs	18

r = how strong the correlation is and the direction. Generally if it is greater than 0.8 it is a strong positive correlation. If it is less than -0.8 then it is a strong negative correlation. The p value shows how close the values are to a line of best fit. This test demonstrates there is not a significant correlation because the r-value is too small and the p-value is too big.

### 3.4 Summary

Of the eighteen criteria, parents and school staff held eight ‘extremely significant’ statistically different views and for a further four held ‘very significant’ statistically different views (Table 3.26) as defined by the Mann-Whitney U Test.

The results from the statistical analysis confirm the conclusions I was able to derive from a visual analysis of the card sorts. The Mann-Whitney Test confirms that school staff significantly over estimate the importance parents place on ‘family connections’, ‘friendship groups’ and ‘proximity and transport’ but also demonstrates that the disconnection with ‘child care arrangements’ and ‘reputation’ is statistically significant. The overestimation by school staff of ‘academic standards’ and ‘good facilities’ is not statistically significant and therefore of little concern. In both the visual analysis of the data and the statistical analysis, I have found that school staff significantly overestimates the importance of ‘family connections’, friendship groups’ and ‘proximity and transport’. This may be a secure finding, but it could also be because the school staff have local knowledge of the parents and children as being from generally working class homes, which may not be reflected in the views of the respondents to this study. The literature (Chapter 1) indicates that many working class parents tend to choose schools on the basis of proximity and family connections and friendship groups can be very important. The lived experiences of the school staff seem to reflect that belief. I will explore this further in Chapter 4.

The statistical analysis also confirms that parents rate ‘good teachers’ and an ‘appropriate curriculum’ statistically significantly higher than school staff think they do but also confirms that the mismatch on ‘happy caring atmosphere’, ‘good pupil teacher relations’, school uniform’, ‘caring friendly teachers’ and ‘welcoming parents’ are all statistically very significant. The mismatch between school staff and parents on ‘good discipline’, ‘well managed school’ ‘church school’ status and ‘activities and clubs’ is not statistically significant. School staff would appear to be underestimating their own importance in the eyes of the parents as a factor in school choice. Parents want teachers who are kind, welcoming and are demonstrably good at their job (all things that they can do something about) whereas school staff seem to feel that parents make choices based on factors which are generally out of their control. These issues will be followed up in Chapter 4 when I

present the data from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with parents and school staff.

The card sort data demonstrates that school reputation is important to parents (a median of seven) but not as important to them as school staff think it is (a median of four). This disparity is statistically very significant and demonstrates that parents do not place as much importance on school reputation when choosing a school, as school staff think they do. I will explore the relative importance of school reputation as a factor in school choice further in Chapter 4 when I analyse the semi-structured interviews.

In order to ensure the credibility (internal validity) of the study and therefore its trustworthiness, I presented my data and conclusions to a meeting of the Trust senior leadership team in the summer term 2014. There was some discussion about whether the 39 family or parent returns are sufficiently representative of the whole parent body and whether parents would have given different answers if they had been asked about primary school choice and secondary school choice separately, but nevertheless, there was a general agreement that the outcomes and conclusions resonated and were valid. The Principal was very clear that she felt that staff were misjudging the parents and guilty of ‘cultural bias’. By that she meant that school staff were showing their middle class outlook and being ‘too sophisticated’ in their perceptions of what parents want. At one point it was asked whether school staff are being ‘too snobby about some of our parents’. However, the dominant theme throughout the discussion was around the parents’ overwhelming desire for good teachers and teaching and that ‘staff do not associate what they do everyday in the classroom as being very important for reputation’ (Principal). The Principal was clear that school staff are, ‘too hung up on reputation’ and that if it is accepted that there is a clear link between what goes on in the classroom and reputation, then that is something that can be influenced by focusing on quality teaching and celebrating it.

To ensure that the analysis presented in this chapter is fair, accurate and credible a draft was shared with the members of the leadership team present at the previous meeting (one of whom is also a parent who had participated in the card sort activity) to ensure an accurate representation of their views had been presented. I also asked them whether they agree with my interpretation of the data. They were happy to accept both, thereby confirming the trustworthiness of this part of the study.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Analysis – Qualitative Data

#### 4.1 Introduction

Four interviews were conducted with school staff and six with parents using the prepared interview schedules (Appendix 8 and 9). The staff interviews were conducted in the autumn term 2014 and the parent interviews in the spring term 2015. All interviewees were volunteers who had chosen to waive their anonymity when returning their card sort. I initially envisaged conducting four parent interviews, but as I was presented with the opportunity and time to conduct more and new and interesting data was still emerging, I did so. All ten transcripts have been retained and one parent transcript and one school staff transcript is presented in Appendix 14 and Appendix 15. Following the advice of Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003), the school staff and parents interview schedules were trialled on friends and family and found to be fit for purpose in that the questions were understood and I was able to elicit the information I needed so long as I used them flexibly. The recording device was trialled extensively until I was confident in its use, as it was important not to lose any of the interview data before it could be transcribed. In the event, all interviews were conducted and transcribed without incident. The starting point for all interviews was to layout the cards, in the order that the respondent had returned them to remind them, of their response and to give a point of reference.

#### 4.2 Parent Interviews

Of the 39 parent / family returns 19 respondents chose to waive their anonymity and volunteer to be interviewed. From the parent volunteers my aim was to select four parents in total as this was deemed a manageable number to interview. I aimed for one parent with children in one of the primary schools, who believes reputation is important, and one who does not, and the same in the secondary school. Selecting by these criteria I hoped to achieve an acceptable cross-section of participants representing age, gender, numbers of children and ages of children. I also wanted to try and select parents who had children throughout the Trust to see if their attitudes changed as their children got older. Parents who could meet a number of these criteria would be particularly valuable to the study.

Considerable time was spent making contact with volunteers and agreeing mutually convenient times to meet and conduct the interviews. However, my ability to select by the criteria I had envisaged proved difficult and I was forced to accept volunteers on their availability, rather than on their initial responses to the card sort, which was a useful lesson in the realities of conducting research with busy people.

In the event, I was able to interview six parents because I found the time and opportunity and interesting rich data was still forthcoming after the fourth interview. That helped me to ensure I covered all my choice criteria. A profile of the parents I was able to interview is shown in Table 4.1. The profile amply demonstrates the variation in parental views about school choice, a range of child ages, a lack of male representation. I also became aware that of the 19 cards sorts returned with an offer to be interviewed, 17 were from females and only two were from female and male combinations, one of whom I was able to interview. The consequence is that, of the six parent interviews, five are with mothers alone, their age range is only nine years, with no representation from young parents and they are representative of a higher level of education attainment than would be expected in this community (as I described in section 2.4.1, less than 10% of adults living in the relevant wards have attended higher education whereas in my sample of six parents, Table 4.1 shows that all had completed A levels and four had attended higher education).

The preponderance of female participants in the study was disappointing, but not surprising. My professional experience is that mothers are much more involved in their children's education than fathers and this is reflected in the literature. In her feminist critique of the literature on parental involvement, David (1998) discusses the critical importance of mothers in their children's education at home and at school and how mothers normally invest more time and energy than fathers in child rearing and school related matters. Dudley-Manning (2010) describes how the involvement of both mothers and fathers in the education of their child is undoubtedly a policy goal but in practice parent involvement refers more often to the work of women in support of children's schooling. A study by Garner and Clough (2008) explores why the involvement of fathers in their children's education tends to be limited and marginal and through interviews illustrates the alienation, expectations, guilt, confusion and soul-searching often displayed by fathers. Reay (2006) and David, Davies, Edwards, Reay and Standing (2010) offer other perspectives on female involvement in their children's schooling. Reay (2006) highlights the power and ability of middle class mothers to influence their child's education

**Table 4.1: The profiles of parents interviewed and their choices**

Identifier	P1	P2 / P2i	P3	P4	P5	P6
Family number	17	12	16	33	26	29
Age	40	33 / 38	42	38	34	38
Sex	F	F / M	F	F	F	F
Educational Level	Nursing Diploma	Higher National Diploma / Degree	Degree, Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	A level	A level	Degree
Age of children	11	9, 6	11, 15	7, 5	4, 8, 12	10, 12, 15
Activities and clubs	11	13	14	14	16	17
Friendship groups	17	18	13	9	3	14
Family connections	18	17	17	16	18	13
Child care arrangements	12	14	18	15	17	18
Church school	16	20	4	18	19	19
Reputation	1	19	15	10	5	11
Good discipline and behaviour	4	7	3	8	11	9
Well managed school	3	2	6	5	8	10
Appropriate curriculum	8	8	5	4	12	3
Good pupil teacher relations	5	6	8	6	13	5
Proximity and transport	15	16	7	17	2	16
Caring / friendly teachers	7	4	12	7	14	6
Welcoming to parents	14	5	9	11	7	12
Good teachers	6	3	1	3	6	2
Academic standards	9	11	2	1	4	7
Good facilities	10	12	11	12	10	8
Happy caring atmosphere	2	1	10	2	9	1
School uniform	13	15	16	13	15	15
Other		9			1	4
Other		10				

in order to ensure social reproduction, through a focus on the social and cultural processes which she believes are embedded in parental involvement. However, David et.al (2010) consider that whilst much of the responsibility for school choice may fall on mothers, women are not as free to choose as one may think because,

‘mothers’ various perspectives from their varied vantage points are indeed limited by structural and moral possibilities in a patriarchal and racist society’. (David et. al, 2010: Abstract)

The possible lack of male involvement in the card sort, but the certain limited male involvement in the interviews, creates a gender imbalance in the data that is not unexpected but must be acknowledged as a limitation of this study.

Whilst I have no way of knowing about the respondents who returned card sort anonymously, I have already acknowledged elsewhere (Chapter 3), it is possible that the views of hard to reach, working class parents are not represented adequately in this study and certainly not in the interview analysis. However, I was able to interview six willing, articulate and motivated parents who had considered their position and had something to add to the debate about school choice. In addition I was fortunate that three of the six parents had written additional cards that suggested important criteria not offered to them (Appendix 13). P2 / P2i added, ‘play based child-centred approach in early years and Yr. 1’ and ‘outside spaces and use of outdoor learning’. P5 offered ‘primary partnership with Newtown High’ as being the most important of all the choices and P6 highlighted ‘support for SEN’ as her 4<sup>th</sup> highest criteria. Although a decision had already been made not to include these ‘extras’ in the statistical analysis because their addition would skew the outcomes, I anticipated that they would add to the richness of the data I would derive from a thematic analysis of the interviews.

I have already indicated in Chapter 3 that I did not receive back as many card sorts from parents /families as I had hoped to receive. However, in interview I was able to establish how and by whom the activity had been completed. In each case, the mother of the family was the main participant and fathers were only marginally involved. Their respective daughters assisted P1, P2 and P3. Her son helped P5, with the father showing an interest. One son helped P6, with another son and the father showing some interest. P4 completed the card sort on her own. Even where the father attended the interview (P2i) he had not been involved in completing the card sort. This evident female engagement with the task



and the interviews suggests the dominance of female interest in school choice in this community at least. P6 offered the response that she had found the card sort an interesting exercise and enjoyed doing it with her children.

### 4.3 School Staff Interviews

Although the card sort task was completed in small groups to encourage discussion and arrive at a consensus, I requested offers to be interviewed from individual people. Of the volunteers selected for interview, S1 was part of a group of four female secondary art teachers, two of who have children being educated in the Trust. This group found it hard to reach a consensus in the time allowed. S2 was part of a group of three secondary school men (one of whom was very new to the school) and they did not find it difficult to reach a consensus. S3 was a lone female who felt under a great time constraint and S4 was part of a group of three females from one of the primary schools and they easily reached a consensus.

From the school staff card sort returns, my aim was to select a member of the Senior Leadership team, somebody with children in the school, somebody who thought that parents rate reputation as a defining factor, and somebody who did not, for interview. Selecting by these criteria I hoped to achieve an acceptable cross section of participants representing age, gender, seniority and parents / non parents. Of the 53 school staff returns representing the views of 105 people, seven staff volunteered to be interviewed. I was fortunate that those that did volunteer included the Principal of the Trust (S3), the Newtown Junior Head of School who also felt that parents did not place much importance on school reputation (S4), a teacher with children being educated in the Trust (S1) and a younger male teacher who thinks that parents do rate reputation as a defining factor (S2). The profiles and choices of the four school staff interviewed are shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: The profiles of school staff interviewed and their choices**

Identifier	S1	S2	S3	S4
Staff number	6	22	51	1
Age	40	29	53	49
Sex	F	M	F	F
Educational Level	Degree Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	Degree	Degree PGCE	Degree PGCE
Role	Community engagement, Art and Design Technology teacher	Higher Level Teaching Assistant, Cover Supervisor	Executive Principal	Head of School
Age of children taught	11 - 16	13 -19	3 - 19	3 - 11
Activities and clubs	7	15	17	4
Friendship groups	3	3	2	12
Family connections	8	6	3	15
Child care arrangements	9	16	16	3
Church school	17	18	18	19
Reputation	2	1	4	14
Good discipline and behaviour	5	7	8	5
Well managed school	10	5	5	11
Appropriate curriculum	16	13	13	18
Good pupil teacher relations	11	12	11	9
Proximity and transport	1	8	1	1
Caring / friendly teachers	13	11	7	8
Welcoming to parents	15	14	15	17
Good teachers	12	9	9	10
Academic standards	4	2	10	13
Good facilities	6	4	11	6
Happy caring atmosphere	14	10	6	2
School uniform	18	17	14	16
Other				7

A sample of four people can never be entirely representative of the whole teaching and associate staff of nearly 200 people, but they were all volunteers who had something to say and in any event, all the school staff had been given the opportunity to participate in the study through the card sort. Unfortunately time and opportunity did not present itself to conduct more than the minimum four school staff interviews, but since I had already been able to cover the selection criteria, I was satisfied.

Seven of the school staff groups' added 'extras' to their criteria (Appendix 13) and one of those is reflected in my sample for interview. S4's group felt that 'class sizes' was an important additional criterion that parents take into consideration when choosing a school for their child and I was able to follow this up in interview.

#### 4.4 Thematic Analysis of the Parent and School Staff Interviews

Following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006) and outlined in Table 2.13, the ten transcripts were read through numerous times to immerse myself in the data. As I identified data I wrote it as a code on a card. Nothing at this stage was rejected as being irrelevant. Cards with similar codes were collected together and through a process of trial and error it became clear that the codes could be grouped into sub-themes that in turn coalesced around two dominant master themes, for both school staff and parents. The codes and emerging sub-themes and master themes are identified in Table 4.3 for parents and Table 4.4 for school staff.

Having completed an initial manual thematic analysis I revisited the transcripts and read them again to ensure that I had not misquoted, misrepresented anybody or missed an important comment. I also analysed the interview transcripts using NVivo to check I had not missed any important data. I had not. Where appropriate I will utilize direct quotes to illustrate and emphasize the views expressed by the interviewees.

**Table 4.3: Parent codes and themes**

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Sub Themes</u>	<u>Master Themes</u>
Friendships – pupil - parents Family links	Connections	CHOICE
Different children – different needs SEN Different criteria for primary and Secondary Pupil happiness	Differentiated needs	
Partnership links Facilities Uniform Behaviour and discipline Teachers – quality Lessons – quality Teacher / pupil engagement Church school Quality of intake Class and segregation Partnership links Academic standards Happy school Atmosphere Child care	School qualities	
Data – Ofsted - SATs - Examination results - Limitations Incomplete knowledge Hypocrisy Gossip	Knowledge	
Prejudices Personal Out of date Fixed ideas To be ignored Historical burden Gossip Academic standards Behaviour Listening school Well-organized school Uniform	Perceptions	
To be managed Fragility Re-branding	Control	REPUTATION

**Table 4.4: School staff codes and themes**

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Sub-Themes</u>	<u>Master Themes</u>
Families Friendships Proximity	Connections	CHOICE
Happy child Different children, different needs	Differentiated needs	
Open evening Appropriate curriculum Church school Happy school Academic standards Good results Discipline and behaviour Class sizes Facilities Good teachers Community links Welcoming Reach out Child-care arrangements Segregation	School qualities	
Non-choosers Influence of children Lack of credit Choice creates choice Gossip	Knowledge	
Community Definition Distinctiveness Most important Fragility Minds made up Lack of engagement Gossip Historical legacy Dated perceptions Different criteria for primary and secondary choice Lack of knowledge Staff as ambassadors Good results Behaviour and discipline Uniform	Perceptions	
To be managed Fragility Competition Bribes	Control	REPUTATION

#### 4.4.1 Theme: Choice

##### 4.4.1.1 Sub-Theme: Connections

This section picks up some of the themes from the literature (see Table 1.7) relating to class and the importance of the local (proximity, transport and friendships) to some parents when exercising their right to choose a school for their child.

S1 felt that family connections were very important to the community and it was quite normal for parents to send their child to a given school purely because that is where they had gone as children. S2, however, had more to say. As a local person brought up and educated in this, 'really tight-knit community' he felt the part played by family connections and family friendship groups very keenly and believed it to be a very pervasive and persuasive influence. As somebody who had moved into the town, P5 very much agreed with this perception. In her view, parents who have been educated in the community tend to send their child to the local primary school but select the high school based on where they were educated because,

'they are an Oldtown High family and that's what they will always be. And it doesn't matter if Oldtown High suddenly went into special measures and became the worst school in the country. I think there is a loyalty. If you have been to one or the other that's where you will go' and, 'that decision wasn't made following open evening, that decision was probably made when they started school.' (P5)

For P5 family connections, nostalgia and location are central to the school choice of many parents in Newtown. However, P4 said that although she was a local person she would not be swayed by any family connections and would send her children to whichever school best suited them. For P5 and P6 the practical considerations of having the children in one school and following an older sibling were significant.

Having identified the importance in the of friendship groups in school choice in the card-sort, the school staff had little to say other than brief comments from S1 and S2, that it is important for adults and children. Parents, however, had more to say. All the parents see child friendships, which have often been made in pre-school (P5) as very important and can in some circumstances over-ride all other considerations (P4). P2 stated that she placed child happiness as of the utmost importance and this may only be achieved by letting the child's friendships dictate her decision. For P1 the destination of her child's classmates would be an important consideration but for P5, whilst that was important, she would not allow it to be 'at any price'. P2, P4 and P5 spoke about the importance of friendships for

different siblings. For P5 friendship groups would be a very important factor for one of her children but not for another. Similarly, P2 spoke about how friendships have recently become very important in her child's life and from not considering it as an important criterion for secondary school choice, she and P2i had to take it into account to ensure the happiness of their child. P1 spoke about the influence of adult friendships. Because she had experience of friends who had chosen to send their children to Newtown High and they had done well, that was reason enough for her to make that choice.

In their card sort responses, staff felt that proximity and transport was a fundamental choice criteria for parents as Bagley et al. 2001 and Burgess et al. 2009 had found in their studies and in my interviews, S3 and S4 reiterated it. However, S3 and S2 were concerned that choice purely based on proximity was not a good thing,

‘white working class culture means you choose the school that’s nearby because the kids can go to the same school and there are family connections and there’s a big pride in doing that sort of thing.’ (S3)

‘I think there’s a lot of families who potentially don’t have much of a vested interest in how their children do at school, so we get a lot of children who they say “right, catchment area, you go to Newtown High” and they don’t make a choice based on anything other than that’s where they should go to school – through where they live – which is unfortunate.’ (S2)

However, beyond P5’s comment about the importance of family connections, nostalgia and location, very little reference was made to it as a factor by parents. This is likely to be because Newtown is not large and has a number of easily accessible local primary schools, the children do not need to rely on school transport and secondary age pupils can reach either high school by walking or bicycle. Consequently, because of accessibility, school proximity does not have to be a deciding factor as far as parents are concerned.

#### 4.4.1.2 Sub-theme: Differentiated Needs

An important theme in parental interviews related to the need to occasionally make a choice of different schools for siblings based on their individual needs. However, school staff had nothing to say on this subject and it is barely referred to in the literature.

P4 and P5 and P6 were clear that if necessary they would make different choices for different siblings. P6 said that with her other children she would never have placed a great deal of emphasis on Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a criteria for school choice but because she now has a son with significant problems, it has suddenly become the most important criteria. P5 placed the links between the Trust primaries and the secondary

school as the most important factor for her because of the needs of one of her children. She described a child who found the transfer much easier to cope with because of the familiarity of certain teachers and facilities whereas for her next child this will not be an issue and a different choice is possible. P5 felt that pupils generally do well in both Newtown High schools but that Oldtown High does better with the more able child whilst Newtown High does better with the less academic child and consequently it is likely that her children will attend different schools, unconsciously exacerbating the academic divide in Newtown.

#### 4.4.1.3 Sub-theme: School Qualities

This section picks up some of the themes from the literature covered extensively in Chapter 1 Section 4 ‘How Parents Choose’ relating to the relative importance of factors parents take into consideration when exercising their right to choose a school for their child and discusses issues of segregation arising from those choices discussed in Chapter 1, Section 3 Part 1 ‘Educational and Social Segregation.’

School staff had something to say about the need for schools to be welcoming and happy places. S4 talked about the importance of happiness as a criteria for school choice but S3 felt it was more of an issue with primary school choice where,

‘our families seem to have this thing – when they go to secondary school they shouldn’t be welcome. Anyway, they’re not expecting to be welcome. I wish they were, I wish they did feel that, I wish they’d feel they wanted to be welcome. But at primary they think that is important, that they’re made to feel welcome, they don’t seem to feel it so much at secondary.’ (S3)

S2 maintained that happiness could not be considered important because, how would a parent know in advance that their child was going to be happy until they had tried it? Parents, however, had much more to say. For P1 and P3, children must be happy to succeed and P2, P5 and P6 spoke with passion about the importance of school atmosphere. P5 talked about the central importance of visiting a school and gauging its atmosphere which she sees as encompassing a range of things including teacher / pupil relationships, behaviour and the welcome they receive. For her, atmosphere is almost a tangible thing that can be felt as soon as she enters a school. P6 also spoke about a ‘gut feeling’ and the, ‘vital importance of a good caring and happy atmosphere. If this is not there other things will not make much difference’. The views of the parents were well summed up by P2, who maintained that,



‘unless the children are happy and the atmosphere is good, the children aren’t going to learn. That’s to me a basis - if they’re unhappy and the atmosphere is terrible they are just not going to learn.’ (P2)

In the card sort, school staff statistically significantly underestimated the importance parents place on good teaching. In the interviews no members of staff acknowledged good teaching as a factor and only two parents made comments about it. For P3 the quality of teachers and teaching is of great importance and P1 said, ‘obviously you need good teachers,’ as if it is such an obvious factor that it does not need debate. However, S2 spoke eloquently about how he thinks parents misjudge teachers and teaching by putting too high an emphasis on results where for him a good teacher,

‘is not defined by what they get at GCSE in terms of A to C. It might be that you have a particular teacher that has a group of SEN difficulties, a lot of EAL (*English as an additional language*) children and they might be an absolutely fantastic teacher, but their results will not in turn reflect that. But to a lot of parents that’s what they’ll first judge a good teacher on –results.’ (S2)

And,

‘there’s a lot of great teachers here, who work incredibly hard and do a really good job. But the children we are achieving three or four levels of progress with; those three levels is a D. And then the children who get Ds are the negative percentages on those results and then ultimately people look and go “ah”. But they don’t think, “where was that child?” We had a child, I think it was the year before last that made six levels of progress and like the value added the school gives to children is incredible but obviously it doesn’t show on league tables or tallies unfortunately.’ (S2)

The only participants to speak at any length about the curriculum were S2 and S3. The Trust schools have introduced an all-through curriculum and both believe this will benefit the children and raise standards and thereby improve reputation. However, the challenge, as S2 sees it, is to ensure that parents understand the new curriculum and what it is trying to achieve. The fact that no parent made any mention of the all through curriculum and its influence on school choice perhaps indicates the challenge ahead.

School uniform featured in discussions about reputation that I will discuss later, but little was said about it in relation to school choice. S2 believes uniform is not important to parents in school choice and P1 agreed. But for P5 uniform is important in creating a sense of, ‘conformity in a positive sense’. P6 also said she thought uniform is important in school choice but that is not reflected in her card sort return because her son who was completing the task with her felt differently!

S1, S2 and S4 placed great store on school facilities and a sense that the Trust is losing pupils to Oldtown High because it has better facilities and if this can be remedied at Newtown High then parents will return. S1 obviously believes that parents are seduced by facilities when she said,

‘I think for Oldtown High if they (*parents*) go there, on first appearances it looks awesome – they’ve got a great big sports centre, they’ve got this new shiny building, and for the other half who just pick something for its looks, they’re sold, they’re in. Look at this amazing sports centre – brilliant.’ (S1)

S1 also described how she regularly overheard parents making comments about the facilities, both good and bad, at parent’s evenings and S2 said,

‘I think its just like people say in books – things cling to the walls – like old stories and things from the past. I think if you could start afresh in a new building people will come in and say, “Wow doesn’t this look great!” and they won’t think about anything they may have heard.’ (S2)

S4 acknowledged the facilities deficit at secondary level when she spoke about the possibility of a new building programme,

‘but there is that issue – while you’re waiting for all that to go through you’ve probably got five years of children being in a building...and while Oldtown High continues to do a bit of building work here and a bit of building work there and they’ve got this fancy new thing here and it’s maintaining it, whereas we’re going to be waiting a bit longer for a fantastic new building – and that will encourage people – I don’t know..’ (S4)

What S4 did not say but almost acknowledged, is that the Trust does not have time on its side. Whilst the Trust waits for a building programme that may or may not happen and may or may not materially influence parental choice, it is losing out to the competition in terms of the quality and numbers of its intake. But S4 is perhaps more in tune with parental thought when she says,

‘teaching needs to be good as well – you need to have the good teaching that gets the results. You need to have both. You need to have a good environment and the results to be seen to be improving.’ (S4)

P4 acknowledged that new buildings and smart facilities do attract some people, but not her as she, ‘can see through it’. P4 maintained that, ‘a lot of people are superficial with their choices of school’ and,

‘when you go and look round Oldtown High School it’s all nice and shiny and they’ve got all these new computer rooms and you go to Newtown High and it looks the same as it did when I went there. A lot of people will be swayed by that because it’s superficial. I think that just because a school is nice and new and shiny they think their children will do well, whether they’re bright or not.’ (P4)

The interviews demonstrated a sense that the issue of academic standards and results is intimately tied in with class, academic and social segregation in the Newtown community at a secondary level. There was a very real sense within the school staff that those parents who place emphasis on academic standards are not choosing Newtown High School with, ‘all the brighter children going elsewhere’ (S2) and this includes staff and governors of Trust schools (S4). What follows is part of my dialogue with S4 (*I acknowledge here that I could be justifiably accused of leading the participant and I apologize to her and the reader for that, but it did not seem like that at the time and I have included the dialogue because it says something very important*).

S4: it’s (*segregation*) increasing...because some of the parents who are sending their children are staff here, and a governor and you know in general pass it off in general in the conversations...and they do give different reasons. They are not blatant because they’re trying to be – because they are more educated parents, they know their position as a governor or member of staff is compromised by sending their child somewhere else so they are trying to be – you know – one of the things they like about Oldtown High is the children in year 7 and 8 are together. But the other issue is the results and reputation of the other children there. I’m just thinking of a particular conversation I’ve had with one of our parents – who again was trying to be diplomatic – but she was saying really, the bottom line of it was that...their children were going to be...

Interviewer: Mixing with people like us?

S4: Yes

This was clearly a difficult and uncomfortable thing for this person to articulate. However, S3 was less reticent and could clearly see the segregation between the two Newtown high schools taking place as middle class parents chose to gravitate to the school that was increasingly being populated by middle class parents and their children for whom academic achievement was important and where it is possible to maintain, what Bourdieu (1986) describes as their cultural capital. According to the school staff this has left a largely working class clientele for whom academic standards and results do not seem to be of the highest importance. This presented a particular problem for S2 who bemoaned the fact that, ‘people judge good teachers on results’ and if pupil attainment is relatively poor because of the intake then the teachers are assumed to be poor which is very far from the case. In his (S2) view, the teachers in a school like Newtown High will not get the credit

they deserve until parents value measures of progress over attainment. However, if Macleod and Urquiola (2009) are correct when they write,

‘a school’s reputation is a function of both the quality of its students and the school’s value added. This implies that parents may select a school with lower value added if a significantly high quality student population counterbalances this. Hence, a concern for school reputation does *not* imply that parents will always choose schools with greater value added.’ (Macleod and Urquiola, 2009: 40)

Newtown High School will still have to overcome the social disadvantage it carries.

S1 is an art and design technology teacher, coordinator of community engagement links for the Trust and a mother. Her interview displayed the very real dilemma faced by many teachers who have a professional loyalty and a personal family loyalty. As I will describe in Section 4.4.2, S1 acknowledged the importance of all staff helping to develop the brand image and reputation of the school, and yet she sends her child to Oldtown High. Those that work in schools may choose to send their children to schools other than where they work for numerous reasons and S1 cites catchment areas, independence and the opportunity to make new friends for her choice. However, S1 was also very clear that her main reasons were based on the academic. Although she lamented her child is not getting some of the wider opportunities he would receive at Newtown High, she had nevertheless taken the very decision that many other middle class parents are taking in Newtown, to place the ‘individualist’ needs of her family and child above any of the ‘collective’ responsibilities described by Iyengar (2010; 2011) and she readily appreciates she has put her perceived family needs above her professional needs. She has yet to decide which school she will send her next child to and,

‘she’s a different creature to her brother, so its not necessarily the whole family goes to one school. I would be quite happy to see one at each... the two secondary schools offer different things. I think children are different, perhaps what fits for one child might not fit for the other.’ (S1)

Having had to make a very difficult decision for her eldest child, S1 is clearly not looking forward to being faced with the very same dilemma again and is seeking to persuade herself (and others?) that she will not arrive at the same rational outcome by saying, despite personally being happy to have both children in different schools, ‘I think my husband would like them both to go to the same school’. However, having clearly accepted that she has made her choice based on the academic offer, S1 has little more to say on the importance of academic standards as a criterion for school choice generally. As a parent making a choice of primary school S1 speaks about valuing child care arrangements

because of her own work, the warm atmosphere of a school, whether the school feels happy, friendships, how the teachers interacted with her child on visits and the ties between the primaries and the secondary school within the Trust. My strong sense from my discussion with S1 is that she knows what she values in education and that is possible to achieve with primary school choice. However, when it comes to secondary school choice other factors come into play. The academic reputation of Oldtown High is the dominant factor overriding all others. Whether this is also being used by S1 as a proxy indicator of a middle class intake and therefore socially the 'right' school for her child was, unfortunately not addressed in this interview.

P1 was very clear that a school must be judged in relation to the quality of its intake and for P4 there is, 'only a little bit' of evidence of social or academic segregation in Newtown. However P3 talked about the issue of choice by class implying that the middle classes tend to gravitate to one high school using academic standards as a proxy for ensuring their children are educated with 'people like us' (Benson, Bridge and Wilson, 2014). Burgess et al. (2009: 4-5) postulate that a parental desire for high academic standards may be given as the reason for their choice of school because it is a 'socially desirable' response when in fact social or ethnic composition is in fact far more important to them. According to P5, wittingly or unwittingly, Oldtown High is not discouraging this gravitation when she says,

'I think Oldtown High gets the better and more able and Newtown High seems to get everybody else. Oldtown High seems to have the opportunity to select the better. When I went to Oldtown High, I said to J that the head's going to have to do a really good job for me to send you here, and I sat in his speech and was quite offended because he was very clear that if you fitted his criteria you were welcome and would do well but if you didn't fit that mould then don't bother.' (P5)

S2 also spoke about the ability of Oldtown High to covertly select children at the expense of Newtown High,

'potentially they know – because they get so many applications – I think be able to a degree – say, it's almost like they can look at key stage 2 results and say these are the brightest kids we can.' (S2)

S1 described attendance at an open evening at Oldtown High where a large banner had been created with a league table showing Oldtown High at the top and Newtown High at the bottom. S1 was offended because it was a crude marketing exercise that sought to establish the dominance of one school over another by presenting partial information that

the majority were ready to accept, since it confirmed their prejudices and confirmed the rightness of decisions that had already been made.

Through her position as a primary headteacher not employed by the Trust, P3 was able to offer a fascinating insight into the social and academic segregation in Newtown,

‘do you know, some parents won’t even contemplate Newtown High...due to the catchment, due to – and these aren’t my words – that there is a lower class of children. And I get very angry about those parents out there who want their children to be socially isolated and that’s why they come to my school (*a primary school*) and most of them live in Newtown, but they drive out so their kids are not in Newtown schools.’ (P3)

As a Newtown resident, P3 said she refuses to adopt what Reay et al. (2007) describe as the ‘atomized self-interested chooser’ and educates her children at Newtown High School. But she describes having had to defend her seemingly irrational choice to colleagues and other parents and still has doubts about her decision. However, she would change her mind very reluctantly as,

‘if I took T out – A is about to leave next year – I think it would be an affirmation really to other people that had chosen Oldtown High that yeah they haven’t...So I’m a little bit stubborn.’ (P3)

Whilst valuing academic standards, P3 appears to adopt the wider perspective described by Oria et al. (2007) and places great emphasis on the values espoused and ‘lived’ by a school,

‘I want my children to appreciate what they have, to respect and support other people and not be judgemental on other people and value everybody in our community. That’s what I want my children to be like.’ (P3)

S4 acknowledged the importance of school discipline and behaviour in parental choice and for P3 it was a key determinate of school choice,

‘I felt Newtown High has really good discipline and children are given every opportunity, they’re not disrupted, their learning is not disrupted. If that wasn’t the case, then there’s no way I would send my child to a school where I felt learning was disrupted through behaviour.’ (P3)

S2 confirmed the school staff perception that church school status has no relevance in school choice amongst the Trust parents. P6 explained that despite being a Catholic and having that school option for her children open to her, she chose not to exercise it because it was not an important consideration even though, ‘I know they might academically

achieve higher.’ The response from P3, which saw her place church school as 4<sup>th</sup> in importance in the card sort, was explained by the revelation that she and her husband think it is very important that a school they choose for their child is NOT a church school. It should be noted here, however, that denominational (Roman Catholic) primary schooling is available in Newtown and it is likely that those parents who do value it will have already made that choice and not be available to contribute to this study.

Some comments about school choice relating to school qualities were only made by school staff or parents and therefore cannot be compared and contrasted. However, they offer some interesting insights.

For S2, open evenings and parent visits provide an ideal opportunity to create a good impression of caring, understanding teachers and atmosphere,

‘so it comes down to when they (parents) come into the school, how did the teachers present themselves? Do they look like people who are passionate for their job? Do they sound like people who are compassionate and empathetic to children’s needs?’ (S2)

However, for S1 parents’ evenings are unimportant in school choice, as parents who attend will already have made up their minds. Child-care arrangements are unimportant in school choice for secondary age pupils (S2) but important for primary school choice (S4). In an additional card, S4 suggests that primary class sizes are relevant in school choice but this was not raised by anybody else. S3 raised the issue of children’s influence in school choice and suggested that in some families they were, ‘very keen to be influenced by their children,’ which is in line with the conclusions of Reay and Ball (1998), though there was nothing to suggest this in the parent interviews. P6 offered an insight into the role played by fathers in school choice. In her case she was the chooser, with little input from her husband, but she was swayed by the wishes of her children. P1 and her husband both made the choice for their daughter. P5 described how she had become unhappy with a primary school and moved her child without consulting her husband and he said, ‘Okay, fine then if you are happy with that.’ Woods et al. (1998) describe school choice as, overwhelmingly a family activity but from the evidence of this study I cannot agree; male influence would appear minimal.

I expected when I undertook the research to be told that school choice for primary education and secondary education is very different. However, this has not proved to be

the case. P4 said she would base her choice on very much the same criteria but would look for a slightly different emphasis putting more importance on academic standards at secondary level than at primary level. P2 said,

‘I think probably when I chose a primary school I was looking very much at the environment – the happy caring, they’re allowed to be children sort of environment and the one I have written (*additional cards*) – play based, child centred and good early years, probably because that’s my background. Whereas when I come to secondary, I still probably will be looking for similar things. I would want a happy caring environment and still an appropriate curriculum but that’s a different kind of curriculum I’m looking for.’ (P2)

This quote not only illustrates that parents use many of the same school choice criteria whether they are choosing a primary or secondary school but how those criteria can be very personal to themselves. This is in accord with Bosetti (2004) who maintains that parents tend to rely on their personal experiences, values, social status, their beliefs about the goals and purposes of education and the degree to which they wish to be involved in their children’s education and school related activities when making their choice.

#### 4.4.1.4 Sub-theme: Knowledge

This section picks up some of the themes from the literature relating to how parents gather knowledge about schools through informal networks discussed in Chapter 1, Section 4, Part 1 ‘Networks and Grapevines’ and formal (official) sources of information discussed in Chapter 1, Section 4, Part 4 ‘Sources of Information.’ I also discuss how some parents do not appear to seek any information and the theme of active choosing and non-active choosing parents described by Bosetti (2004) and limited choosers and informed choosers described by Francis and Hutchings (2013)

Gossip (Bagley et al. 2001; Bosetti, 2004) or the grapevine (Ball and Vincent, 1998) did not feature on any of the card sort criteria for reasons explained in Chapter 2. However, as envisaged, it featured in the interviews. Some information offered was unsolicited but I became increasingly aware of its possible importance and began to ask direct questions about it. P2i saw gossip as the only way some parents have to find out about a school but it is usually just hearsay that is often facilitated by social media and local newspapers (P2). However, although P4 maintained that she is unlikely to ever take any notice of it, P5 gave an example of just how powerful it can be:



‘I think it’s quite influential, I think there is a sector of the community who decide what a lot of people are going to believe. There are families in the playground - well you don’t mess with them – whether you choose to listen to what they have got to say, they can be very influential.’ (P5)

S1 was the only member of staff to speak about parental gossip as being important in school choice. Her group discussed how Newtown parents talk a lot amongst themselves to make a decision, but her concerns were with the way social media can be used to spread gossip and the promulgation of out of date or false perceptions. She spoke about the Trust making greater use of the web and social media to communicate directly with parents generally, but particularly the middle class ones whom she felt are susceptible to false impressions. I will say more about the role of gossip in the section on reputation (4.4.2).

A number of parents described the role played by official data (government and school) in school choice. Whilst P4 underlined the limitations of statistics, P2 and P5 described the central role Ofsted reports, SAT results and league tables play in their choosing. For P2 official data makes up for an, ‘information deficit’ because she is not local to the community and it offers a good starting point for choice. For P5 reports, league tables and SAT results are objective measures of a school that can be used to give pointers for observations and questions. But P5 acknowledged that however information is obtained about a school, it can date very quickly and consequently the right school for one sibling may not be the right one for another not only because children are different but also because schools change.

Staff generally were outspoken about those parents they feel do not make any meaningful attempt to equip themselves with sufficient or appropriate knowledge on which they can make a choice. In terms described by Francis and Hutchings (2013), these parents are limited choosers. S4 spoke about parents who do not engage with the school either in making a choice in the first place and not subsequently supporting it and their children. A minority of parents display the ambivalence towards schools and education described by Reay and Ball (1997) and do not return their admission form to attend Newtown High School. Consequently their children are on roll because it is the ‘default’ school (Bosetti, 2004) and because Newtown High has places they must accept them (S3). Others attend purely because their parents have not given much time or thought to it (S2) and lack aspiration (S3). For some it is a ‘hard choice’ (Chang, 2014) to be ignored or avoided. These are not parents who have ‘chosen not to choose’ (Sustein, 2014) or necessarily

suffering from choice overload (Schwartz, 2004; 2005) and adopting a managing strategy, but people who are just not exercising their right to choose (P3) and,

‘don’t fill the form in on time, just assume – don’t know – aren’t engaged just because they have other things going on in their life, aren’t engaged in the fact that you do have to register and all that sort of thing, and know that in the end that’ll - you know – they’ll just go to the local school. They don’t really know enough about it.’ (S4)

For S4 the issue is related to parental education and experiences:

‘I don’t know maybe I made this quote up but it’s about, “education gives people a choice about how people live their lives” and I think parents we are now dealing with in our context. So those parents who haven’t been given a choice about the way they’ve lived their lives either, and that’s the majority of who our parents are at the moment, they haven’t had the benefit of a fantastic education themselves, therefore they haven’t been given those choices, therefore they’re not making those choices for their children.’ (S3)

Those parents who have aspiration engage with the system and make a deliberate choice, too often choose to go elsewhere because they feel that another school will open up more opportunities and choices for their children (S3). These parents are what Bosetti (2004) refers to as ‘active choosers’. However, S3 spoke about what she calls the ‘Abigail’s Party Syndrome’ where people will make a choice with very little thought but feel it must be the right way to behave because the herd instinct (Gibbons and Machin, 2003) takes over, and that is what everybody else is doing.

For one parent (P5) the links that have been created within the Trust between the two primary schools and Newtown High is the single most important factor in school choice. For this aspirational mother, the familiarity this has engendered for her son prior to transfer was very important. S2 is hopeful that the creation of a partnership of two primaries and a high school with an all-through curriculum will allow parents to see the benefits of a linear route through the Trust schools and,

‘it’s almost like you (*parents*) don’t want to make a choice, if you can think right I start here and end up here. There is a change in-between but it’s not one that we have to give much thought to because we know that that is the best path for our child to take.’ (S2)

#### 4.4.2 Theme: Reputation

##### 4.4.2.1 Sub-theme: Perceptions

This section picks up some of the themes from the literature discussed in Chapter 1, Section 4, Part 2 ‘ Reputation’ relating to how important school staff and parents construct their personal notions of reputation, how impressions of reputation are transmitted and how important school reputation is in school choice.

For S1 reputation is,

‘like a bank of knowledge that makes you summarize in some way what a product is like and whether it’s to do with branding, the adverts in the paper, hear people chatting – whatever it is all amounts to a description of a product and from that people make their mind up whether it’s a good or bad product and I think that is what reputation is.’ (S1)

School staff interpret reputation as something that is constructed from a combination of criteria but it became clear from analysing the interview data that they have different views about what the criteria are. For S3 and S4 parents base their notions of reputation on good results and attainment. However, S4 drew a distinction between parental attitudes at primary and secondary level. She maintained that in primary schools results, and therefore reputation, are not the most important criteria for school choice, but that at secondary level they are. Consequently that is why, she believes the aspirant middle class parents opt out of the Trust and send their children elsewhere at secondary transfer. For S3 the communities’ perception of behaviour and discipline in the school is fundamental to reputation. On being appointed Headteacher of Newtown High School, S3 realized the need to present to the community an image of a well-run school if she was to improve its reputation and fundamental to the improved parental perception was a need to improve pupil discipline. S2 agreed with S3 but added the importance of good teachers and good teaching. For S2, if behaviour and teaching is seen to be good, then reputation will improve. As Principal and Head of School respectively, S3 and S4 understandably stressed the importance of school leadership. S3 believed that excellent school leadership combined with good behaviour and discipline, a caring atmosphere and acceptable academic standards are fundamental to building a good reputation. From her mainly secondary perspective, S3 believes there is a direct connection between the profile of school leaders in the community, the perception that the school is well managed, and reputation. In other words, she sees reputation as intimately connected with public relations. From the perspective of the primary based S4,

the way the headteacher in a primary school is perceived by parents is intimately linked with reputation but this is not the case for secondary headteachers who are more distant from the parents. P4 was very clear about the importance of the headteacher because, 'if people don't like the head they will slate it – they do'. P5 likewise was attracted to a primary school because, 'Mr G at the time lived up to the hype that I believed.' Like the school staff, P3 and P4 describe reputation as a collective term that is made up of many different aspects. P6 thinks that the way a parent will gauge the reputation of a school is, 'personal' and that if the school does the things she thinks are important then it will have a good reputation in her eyes, but if other parents value different criteria then its reputation may be poor as far as they are concerned.

For P6 the ability of the school to cater for special educational needs (SEN) is of the utmost importance and it is on this criterion that she will primarily construct her view on reputation. For P1, however, good pupil-teacher relationships are imperative as without that the school will not be able to establish good discipline, a well managed school and happy relations, which are central to her construct of reputation. P3 maintained that a good reputation arises from doing the right things well. For her good teaching, good academic standards and good behaviour will, 'eventually' ensure a good reputation. P2 and P4 maintained that academic standards are very important to reputation but for P4 there will be other criteria involved and for P2 they will arise naturally if the school atmosphere is happy and caring and behaviour is good. P5 constructs her view of reputation almost entirely from measurable data such as results and Ofsted inspections but will supplement this knowledge with her sense of the school atmosphere. P1 said she puts great emphasis on the willingness of the school to listen to parents and her perception of how well it is organized and run. So for parents, like school staff, reputation is constructed from a combination of factors and these factors will change from person to person.

S3 particularly talked about the importance of school uniform in developing the reputation of the Trust schools, as it is, 'a symbolic embodiment of the reputation.' She sees it as an important part of the branding because it is connected in the minds of parents with good discipline. S1 agreed and said,

'I think for the community the reputation has been linked to uniform. Do they look smart? Do they look professional? I think that's kind of put the profile of the school up.' (S1)

However, whilst acknowledging that uniform does help build a positive image, S1 felt that the behaviour of the students making their way to and from school and in the community generally is more important.

Gossip is intimately linked in some parent's minds with the formation of a sense of reputation. Ball and Vincent (1998: 398) refer to reputation as 'pseudo information' because it is not always based on direct knowledge. This is borne out by P1 who said, 'its what you hear' or 'see in the local newspaper,' 'what's happening in the school,' 'what people have asked friends' and 'you hear about reputation from other parents and that their children are happy here.' Again parents understand that some people's perception of reputation is just based on hearsay (P2, P3 and P4). P4 refers to parent gossip as, 'Chinese whispers' and, 'knows how these things work.' Consequently P2 placed reputation second from bottom in her card sort because,

'for me, reputation implies what people say about the school, and I think quite often it's difficult to judge on what other's say as everybody has experience of school, so it could be that they had a good experience or a bad experience and I think its really difficult to know just from what people say whether that is the truth. So I take what others say with a pinch of salt.' (P2)

S2 described how in a town the size of Newtown,

'word of mouth, its almost how the reputation of anything in Newtown is formed. People talk, its that kind of knock on – one person tells two people, then two people tell four and it just spreads like that and in Newtown and the size of the town, something like that can happen in a couple of days.' (S2)

S1 and S2 also spoke about the influence of the local newspaper and the coverage schools receive, whether it is good or bad and how an article can generate gossip, misrepresentation and confirmation of long held prejudices. P2 and P2i understand that some parents will base their opinions on 'out of date views' and their own experiences of being educated in the school. P2i expressed a concern that there can be a substantial, 'time lag' between taking action to improve a school's reputation and an improved public perception because people can be very fixed in their views and they can be very difficult to change. Some 'prejudices' can be very entrenched, but as somebody who had been educated in Newtown High School, P4 was very aware that she must now allow her experiences to colour her perceptions. S1, however, believed that P4 is unusual and that many parents are so entrenched in their views that they do not make the effort to test them by finding out up to date information. P2 felt that as somebody who had moved into

Newtown, she was free of the prejudices that many local residents have and that left her free to make a rational decision based on evidence rather than emotion. She did concede, however, that if she still lived in the town in which she was educated, she would probably have similar prejudices about certain schools.

School staff rated school reputation as a defining feature in school choice in the Newtown community in the card sort. S1 is somebody who works within the Trust to develop links with the community and in her view that is definitely the case. S2 was educated in Newtown, still lives there and maintained,

‘I think most people before they’ve even considered anything else just think “Oh Oldtown High’s the best school”. They don’t actually take any of this (*academic segregation*) into account. They just know that they’ve heard that Oldtown High is a brilliant school, it’s the best school and they instantly feel that’s that, and they look no further. But the first kind of hook is the reputation of Oldtown High which then gets them to look at what the academic standards are, what are the facilities like? Who else is going there? So that’s the initial factor that makes them look at the school.’ (S2)

However, S4 believes that reputation is irrelevant to some parents because they will send their child to the local, default school whatever its reputation. In her view, because some parents are declining to exercise their right to choose (referred to as ambivalent non choosers in the themes arising from the literature review: Table 1.7) none of the choice criteria are seen as important.

The parent interviews also indicated the relative lack of importance parents said they place on school reputation. Of the six parents, three (P3, P4 and P6) said it played little or no part in their school choice, though P4 said she would take more notice of the reputation of the high school than she had for primary. Both P4 and P6 said they had attended schools with poor reputations and done well so they did not place much store on it. P6 went further and expressed the view described by Coldron et al. (2010) that schools are a public utility and that if a child did not do well in school it was generally their fault, not the schools. In her view (P6), parents who send badly behaved children to a school that then develops a poor reputation because of pupil behaviour, only had themselves to blame and should not blame schools. In a similar vein, S2 expressed a view that if children attend school with a willingness to learn and achieve, they will. It is for the child to take advantage of their opportunities and by inference, if they choose not to, the reputation of the school and the teachers in it should not necessarily suffer.

S2 and P3 both spoke about the ‘fragility’ of reputation written about in Section 1.4.2. For P3 there was an acknowledgement that, ‘reputation can take a long time and hard work to build, but only a couple of things to knock it down.’ Particularly if there is insufficient reputational capital on which to draw when times are tough.

A past poor school reputation featured in a number of interviews. From her position as Principal, S3 described the current reputation of Newtown High School as ‘a burden’ and that something ‘dramatic’ will need to be done to change it. S1 spoke of the ‘legacy of the past’ and P3 of the ‘historical burden’ that past but pervasive prejudices and sentiments still present. P6 described how as a newcomer to the town people told her,

‘how terrible Newtown High was and a lot of the people who told me were talking of twenty years ago and they kind of stuck with twenty years ago.’ (P6)

There was a real sense from S2 that Oldtown High had begun the process of reputation rebuilding and management before Newtown High and consequently had ‘stolen a march’ on them and this was having lasting consequences.

#### 4.4.2.2 Control

A number of interviewees spoke about reputation as something to be managed. P3 and P2i maintained that if reputation is a ‘portmanteau’ term made up of constituent parts then it should be possible to manage each of those parts. P6 said,

‘so a reputation of a school, yes ok maybe it is important to some people, but personally I think if a child puts in the time and if you’ve got good teachers in the school, if the reputation is bad they will turn it around and if things aren’t that great the school should be working hard to change that reputation.’ (P6)

School staff were not so bullish about managing reputation. S1 felt it was something to ‘try and manage,’

‘but there will still be people saying things about the school that we can’t control and word of mouth and that will always merge into all the publicity you’ve been given, so you’ve never got complete control of what people think of your reputation.’ (S1)

As Headteacher of Newtown High and then as Principal of the Trust, S3 spoke at length about her strategy to improve and then manage and maintain the reputation of her school(s). In order to overcome the issues (as she sees them) posed by a working class culture that values proximity, friendship groups and family connections above all others in

school choice, she has managed a process of between school federations, converting the schools into academies, the creation of a multi-academy Trust and the introduction of an all-through curriculum. All these initiatives are designed to raise aspirations and academic standards, but only time will tell if these initiatives will serve to improve the standing of the Trust schools in the community. As a relatively new member of the Trust, S4 spoke about not having any real idea of parents views about the reputation of her school and that it is not something that parents discuss with her. S3 was animated about the difficulty of trying to manage reputation in a competitive environment particularly when at disadvantage. However, the Trust has created a post to manage communications with the community so as to raise its profile whenever possible, a post of Director of Families and Community and the Principal spends considerable time interacting with the Newtown community because of her belief that community involvement improves reputation. S1 is in agreement with Helm (2011) in stressing how all school staff need to be involved in building a good reputation in the eyes of the community by every interaction they may have whether, 'official' interactions or social interactions (shopping in the local supermarket).

For S2 and P3 (both local people educated in the town), the only solution is a complete rebranding with a new start in a new building, on a new site, as the present school carries too much historical baggage. S1 does not think that such drastic action is needed. For her the reputation of the Trust can be built and reinforced by building on the successes of the current brand, making a distinctive offer to parents and ensuring that parents are aware of it. S1 does not believe that offering an iPad or, 'free gifts' to new entrants contributes to brand development and enhanced reputation as parents see it for what it is a 'bribe' which can have entirely counter-productive effects. In her view, parents are looking at, 'whether the staff is happy, whether the kids are engaged, whether the school is tidy and clean, not 'shiny prizes'.

## 4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the evidence collected from an analysis of four school staff and six parent interviews to further develop my understanding of, 'What Factors Influence School Choice, with particular reference to school reputation?' and to seek answers to the first two research questions.



*Research question 1: To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?*

The interviews illustrate school choice as being what Oria et al. describe, ‘as a messy, complex and fraught business’ which, ‘indicate moral and ethical discomfort’ (Oria et al. 2007: 93). The data confirms the degree to which parents from different social groups exercise their ‘right to choose’ and the extent to which they engage with the system. The data also illustrates the disparity between what parents say they most value and what school staff think parents most value when choosing a school. In some cases there is a marked difference between the views of school staff and parents, but in most cases it is more a question of differing emphasis.

The evidence suggests that school staff and parents understand the importance of family connections with the Trust schools and parents appreciate it when they can have all their children attending the same school. However, parents will not allow sentiment and convenience to over-ride their perceived obligation to do what is right for each child. Parents consider pupil friendships as important, but in most cases not as important as school staff think they do.

Choice based on proximity is assumed by school staff to be of over-riding importance to parents and this would seem to be a fair assumption based on their knowledge of the local community. It would bear out the findings of the study by Wespieser et al. (2015), which found that low-income families deemed location and proximity particularly important (refer back to Tables 1.2 and 1.3). However, for the parents interviewed, proximity was not a limiting factor in making a choice. This could be because the town is relatively compact, and both high schools are readily accessible to secondary age children but for the majority of pupils that attend Newtown High proximity appears to be a factor to the staff because for the local children it is the default school they attend when no considered choice has been made.

Staff and parents understand the importance of gossip and all appear wary of it because it can be biased, blatantly untrue or partial. I made a conscious decision, as I describe in Chapter 2 Section 5.2: ‘Administering the Card Sort’, not to include ‘gossip’ in the card sort because although the literature describes its importance in school choice and is therefore an important factor, it is not a criteria. This was the right decision. The

qualitative semi-structured interview offered sufficient opportunity to explore the influence of gossip amongst parents and school staff.

Parents think that a welcoming school with a happy and caring atmosphere is important at all stages of education whereas staff, if they think it is important at all, only think it is an important factor in primary school choice. This parental view is in accord with the work of Bagley et al. (2001) who concluded that parents will, ‘avoid schools where *human warmth* is relatively neglected and where a concern with the *rational academic* is seen as too dominant’ (Bagley et al. 1991: 321). The interview data gives lie to the school staff’s belief that it is not important at all or is only really important in the primary sector.

School staff spend a great deal of time developing the curriculum so it is engaging and fit for purpose, so it is no wonder that they want to talk about its importance. However, parents made no mention of the school curriculum generally and of the all-through curriculum in particular that is designed to lead to improved outcomes for children, possibly indicating that parent’s concern is with outcomes not inputs, which, one can reasonably assume they feel, is a matter for the professionals.

School staff place great emphasis on the transformative effect of good facilities and one would expect them to be concerned about the quality of their working environment and its fitness for purpose. School staff speak animatedly about the possibility of a new school where the all-through philosophy can be properly realized, with all the Trust pupils on one site, where a new start could be made and which will attract pupils and parents. My professional experience is that parents do value good facilities for their children, but they value other things more. P4 said that parents, ‘can see through it’ and it will only attract the superficial who cannot see through the marketing hype it entails.

The importance of academic criteria in school choice and its connection with class and middle class aspiration at secondary level in Newtown, is very real, and seems well understood by parents and school staff.

School staff have nothing to say about parental use of data, reports and league tables in school choice but clearly for some parents they form important starting points when choosing schools. Generally, parents are realistic about the limitations of such information

and treat it cautiously but schools would do well to help explain this publically available data to parents to place it in its proper context and avoid misunderstandings.

*Research question 2: To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?*

In the Literature chapter I used the Oxford University Dictionary definition of 'reputation' as, 'the beliefs and opinions that are generally heard about someone or something' and nothing in the interview data leads me to question this. However, it is the varying 'beliefs and opinions' which need to form the basis of the analysis. The meaning of reputation as exemplified by the beliefs and opinions from which it is constructed, are given different emphasis by school staff and parents AND within school staff and parents. In other words, one's notion of any reputation is personal and will differ from person to person. Reputation was described by school staff and parents as a 'collective term', 'a combination of criteria', 'a bank of knowledge' and a 'portmanteau term' to illustrate the fact that it is seen as an embodiment of 'things' which individuals value, but beyond that there is little shared understanding.

School staff realize that a good reputation is important to a school because it attracts both the worker and the consumer. It acts like what Fobrum and Van Riel (2004) describe as a magnet. People want to work in organizations with a good reputation and the consumer is attracted by good reputation. If stakeholders (parents, children, staff and the wider community) like what they hear and see, they will support the organization and an upward spiral of esteem, viability and growth will occur. If stakeholders withdraw their support, a downward spiral is likely to occur leading to poor esteem, declining viability and possibly ultimate closure. However, the parents interviewed seem to treat notions of school reputation with caution, even disdain, and often choose to ignore it. But of course, the parents I interviewed include those that have children in Newtown High (four of the six) and have chosen to send them to a school with an inferior reputation and so are likely to be those for whom reputation generally and academic reputation in particular are not as important as other factors. The scope of this study did not include interviewing those parents for whom reputation is a defining criteria and so had chosen to send their children elsewhere. So whilst school staff would seem to have placed undue emphasis on reputation

as a criterion for school choice, they may very well be correct, because they see the effect of the reputation of a competing school on their school.

Nearly all the interviewees spoke about the role of gossip in formulating peoples' perception of reputation. School staff understand that word of mouth is important in a relatively small community and despair about the misinformation and prejudices, which can be vary hard to change. These parents, however, seem well aware that gossip is just hearsay to be ignored or tempered with objective school statistics provided by the government.

All school staff, and some parents understand reputation as something to be managed and S3 spoke at length about the strategies she has employed to limit the reputation legacy of the past and build a more positive perception in a competitive environment. But the 'historical burden' of a past poor reputation clearly lingers in a relatively stable community with long memories and viable alternatives. P3 realizes that a good reputation can also be important in accruing positive reputational capital that can be brought to bear in difficult times. Conversely, an institution with what Fobrum and Van Riel (2004: 2) describe as little or no, 'halos of past actions' has no reputational capital to draw on when times are tough.

In Chapter 2, Table 2.12: Some Advantages of Thematic Analysis and Some Pitfalls, I cited the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) who describe four potential pitfalls that should be avoided by the researcher conducting a qualitative thematic analysis. I have avoided problems by ensuring that the thematic data has been collected and analyzed robustly and ensuring that there is no mismatch between the data and the analytic claims made about it. I did not directly use the data collection questions as themes for analysis, but since I was seeking to research school choice and school reputation it is inevitable that the answers to my open ended questions could be grouped into sub-themes which in turn coalesced around the two main themes.

The qualitative semi-structured interview data I was able to collect mirrored many of the themes and issues referred to in Chapter 1 (Literature Review) but not all. The data has nothing to say on the philosophical and political justifications for choice in education or the reasons for the introduction of a quasi-market. It also offers no information on whether parents want choice in education, how attempts to mitigate the worst effects of choice have

had an impact in Newtown and the degree to which Newtown parents are 'playing the game'.

What follows in Chapter 5 is a consolidation and synthesis of the quantitative card sort data and the qualitative semi-structured interview data from which I can draw conclusions to answer my research questions.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### 5.1 A Synthesis of the Data

In this chapter I will consolidate the quantitative data analysed in Chapter 3, and the qualitative data analysed in Chapter 4 from my case study on parental choice and reputation, to answer the research questions I posed at the start of this study. By comparing and contrasting the two sets of data I am seeking to triangulate and thereby confirming the veracity of my conclusions and subsequent answers to my research questions (refer to Chapter 2, Section 2 for a description of between-method triangulation). I will also highlight data that indicates new findings not evident in the literature, where I can support or refute other findings and where I have identified opportunities for further research.

##### 5.1.1 School Choice

First research question: *To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?*

The statistical analysis of the card sorts described in Chapter 3 is repeated here in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Results of the quantitative statistical data analysis**

Parents place statistically significantly greater importance than school staff think they do on:	School staff thought parents would place statistically significantly higher importance on:	Parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the importance of:
Good teachers	Family connections	Good behaviour and discipline
Happy caring atmosphere	Friendship groups	Well managed school
Appropriate curriculum	Proximity and transport	Academic standards
Good pupil teacher relations	Child care arrangements	Activities and clubs
Caring friendly teachers	Reputation	Church school
School uniform		Good facilities
Welcoming to parents		

The data from the quantitative card sort demonstrate a statistically significant disconnect between what parents say they place most emphasis on when selecting a school for their child and what school staff think parents most value. Of the eighteen criteria for school

choice parents and school staff disagreed in a statistically significant way on twelve of them.

In Chapter 4, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four school staff members and six parents. The data were analysed thematically and are presented in their entirety in Tables 4.3 and 4.4. However, a summary of the sub-themes and master themes is presented here for convenience as Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Results of the qualitative thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews of parents and school staff**

Sub themes	Master themes
Connections Differentiated needs School qualities Knowledge	Choice
Perceptions Control	Reputation

The qualitative interview data confirm the conclusions of the statistical analysis that indicate a general statistically significant disparity between what parents say they most value in school choice and what school staff think parents most value. Parents place great emphasis on the importance of teacher qualities such as expertise, being friendly and caring and able to foster good relationships in both data sets. For many parents the perception they (and their children) have of the teaching staff is crucial to their school choice. School staff do not seem to sufficiently appreciate this. School staff put the emphasis on criteria that are beyond their control such as proximity and transport, friendship groups and family connections leading to a sense of frustration that they are factors beyond their control. This is an important outcome of this study because it implies that schools and teachers are not powerless to influence reputation and parental choice. Both sets of data also demonstrate parental desire for a ‘happy school’ built around good personal relationships. Atmosphere and ethos in primary and secondary schools across the full age range is seen as more important than staff give credit for. Parents want their children to be safe and happy at school so that they can succeed academically. Once again, this is an important insight gained from conducting the study in an ‘all through’ Academy trust where the parents of primary and secondary age children were available to contribute.

The study conducted by Wespieser et al (2015) referred to in Chapter 1, found that the most important factors important to parents in school choice were in order of importance (refer to Table 1.2) a school that best suits my child, location or proximity, discipline and behaviour that promotes effective learning, Ofsted inspection rating, well qualified teachers, examination results, inclusive ethos where all children are valued, effectiveness of the schools leadership team, reputation for taking parents' views into account, links to the local community and freedom to make decisions about the taught curriculum. All these factors featured in parental responses in this study and there are similarities, but there also differences, some of which can be attributed to the different choice criteria used in the studies. However, the critical importance of a happy, caring atmosphere amongst the parents in this study is not reflected in that of Wespieser et al. (2015) at all.

In their study, Wespieser et al. (2015) found that location, well qualified teachers, discipline and a reputation for taking parental views into account are more important to parents with a lower household income. Examination results and the effectiveness of the schools' leadership team are more important to parents with a higher household income (refer to Table 1.3). In this study no attempt is made to differentiate the parents by income so any comparison between my results and those of Wespieser et al. (2015) on that basis, is not possible. However, because I did not differentiate by income and all the parent responses are combined, it is unsurprising that my data reflects elements of both the income groups discussed by Wespieser et al. (2015).

In Chapter 1 (Literature Review) I quoted Adler (1997) who sums up the four main objections to school choice commonly cited by critics. Firstly, the middle class will make the system work to their advantage. Secondly, parental choice will undermine a sense of community, increase social segregation and reduce the pressure for school improvement. Thirdly, the actions of a few may undermine the wishes of the majority, in that if a group of parents choose not to support a school it may undermine its viability to the detriment of everybody. Fourthly, putting power in the hands of parents will make schools more conservative and throttle innovation. So, to what extent are Adler's (1997) predictions being realized in Newtown?

Reay and Ball (1997) maintain that, 'choice is a new social device through which social class differences are rendered into educational inequality' and the working class is being asked to play a middle class game that they will inevitably lose (Reay and Ball, 1997: 89)



and this seems to be the case in Newtown. The case study context data (Chapter 2, Section 4) shows a marked difference between the social makeup of the two primary schools and Newtown High indicating that the middle class are content to send their children to the local primary school but at secondary level other factors come into play. This perception is confirmed by the interview data. The middle class parents whose children do not make the transition from Newtown Junior and Newtown Primary to Newtown High appear to be using their social agency and knowledge to gravitate towards one high school that is on an upward spiral of esteem. The interview data indicates that academic success is a key driver for this attraction but it may also be tied to social class. Only by being able to interview parents who have chosen to send their children to Oldtown High School rather than Newtown High School would I be able to assess the degree to which the academic criteria for school choice are being used as a proxy for choice based on social grounds. Another study might seek to interview the parents who have chosen not to send their children to Newtown High to find their motivations to try and establish the degree to which academic performance is being used as a proxy for social selection or segregation. Burgess et al. (2009: 4-5) postulate that parents may cite academic standards as the reason for their choice of school because it is a ‘socially desirable’ response, when in fact social or ethnic composition is in fact far more important to them. The interview data in this study suggests that some school staff and parents believe that a concern for academic standards is indeed being used as a proxy for a choice based on the social considerations.

S3 also spoke about the segregation between the two town high schools taking place as middle class parents chose to gravitate to the Oldtown High that was increasingly being populated by their children. She believes that academic achievement is important to these parents but at the same time it is possible to maintain, what Bourdieu (1979) describes as their cultural capital. As a parent and headteacher of a local primary school, P3 was particularly scathing,

‘do you know, some parents won’t even contemplate Newtown High...due to the catchment, due to – and these aren’t my words – that there is a lower class of children. And I get very angry about those parents out there who want their children to be socially isolated and that’s why they come to my school (*a primary school*) and most of them live in Newtown, but they drive out so their kids are not in Newtown schools.’ (P3)

Maloutas (1997) describes how the strategies of middle class families to gain advantage will, when aggregated, have an important social impact by reproducing occupational hierarchies and indirectly reinforcing social segregation. The natural consequence is that

‘good’ schools become better and the ‘poor’ schools become poorer thus producing what Butler and van Zanten (2007: 4) describe as, ‘a continuing spiral in perceptions of desirability and performance.’ This, in my experience as a school leader, is very difficult indeed to change once established, unless the ‘good’ school makes some catastrophic errors.

Adler (1997) writes about school choice as ‘a negative sum game’ in which the gains achieved by some families for their children are more than off set by the, ‘irrational outcomes, that affect the community as a whole’ (Adler, 1997: 300). One of these outcomes is the social segregation of communities (Coldron et al. 2010) because, ‘ultimately the drivers of segregated school are in the fundamental wish of individuals and families to optimize their social position given the resources at their disposal’ (Coldron et al. 2010: 32). Intuitively social segregation in schools is perceived as a negative thing because it does nothing to redress educational inequality between rich and poor, affects the progress of those in ‘poor’ schools and damages social cohesion. A simple survey of information provided by estate agents in Newtown to prospective house purchasers indicated a perception that the town is blessed with good primary schools and two good secondary schools between which a family moving into the community would find difficult to choose. My research indicates that in reality Newtown residents are making stark choices leading to an educationally segregated town at secondary level in a similar way to those I describe in Chapter 1 Section 3 confirming the work of Adler, 1997; Reay and Ball, 1997; Woods et al. 1998; Bagley, 2006 and Coldron et al. 2010.

In the Literature Review (Chapter 1) I describe the lengths some parents will go to in order to achieve the school of their choice for their child. Although not directly related to answering the first research question, it should be recorded that the data contains no concrete evidence of parental malpractice in order to get their child a place at Oldtown High. The size of the town means that both high schools are accessible to all Newtown families, so engaging in the type of middle class strategies to gain advantage described by Ball et al. (1995) and Benson et al. (2014) such as moving house are not as necessary as in other situations, though anecdotal evidence is that it goes on to some degree. However, there is evidence from the interviews that Oldtown High is prepared to work hard to attract the ‘type’ of pupils it deems suitable. P5 spoke about her experience of attending an open evening for prospective pupils and listening to the Principal;

‘I sat in his speech and was quite offended because he was very clear that if you fitted his criteria you were welcome and would do well but if you didn’t fit that mould then don’t bother.’ (P5)

S1 also described her experience as a parent attending an open evening at Oldtown High that she felt was a ‘crude marketing exercise’ with the presentation of partial information that the majority of the audience were ready to accept because it confirmed their prejudices and confirmed the rightness of decisions that had already been made.

The data echoes similar conclusions to the 2006 study by Bagley of the interactions between secondary schools in one town that demonstrated the local and complex nature of the public market in education and how competition and marketization has shaped the educational system in his study location. He found that although the government was expounding collaboration and partnership between schools, the need to compete in the town had become embedded. Bagley (2006) found a culture of rivalry that had in turn affected the culture and values of the schools. The interview data demonstrates a perception amongst some that much the same is happening in Newtown at secondary level and S2 even spoke about the ability of Oldtown High to covertly select children at the expense of Newtown High,

‘potentially they know – because they get so many applications – I think be able to a degree – say, it’s almost like they can look at key stage 2 results and say these are the brightest kids we can...’  
(S2)

Gorard and Taylor (2001; 2006) and Tooley (2007) contend that school choice has not increased between-school socio-economic and academic segregation and does not work to the disadvantage of working class families, but the data in this study casts doubt on that contention. The case study context school data clearly shows a marked change in the social makeup of Newtown High compared with its two feeder primary schools as middle class families make alternative choices at age eleven. This has the effect of leaving a preponderance of mainly working class children with limited expectations and family support. The net result is a school that struggles to meet expected academic outcomes, recruit and retain staff and be held in esteem by its community at large. This may come about because the parents are what Bosetti (2004) refers to as non-choosers or what Reay and Ball (1997) describe as ‘ambivalent’ and mainly concerned with choosing a school on the basis of ‘communal and the local’ (Vincent et al. 2010: 283). However, it is difficult to come to a firm conclusion about this from the available data. All the parents interviewed

spoke about the choices they had made and would have to make in the future so were clearly ‘choosers,’ and although both parents and school staff spoke about parents who did not really make a choice, I did not interview any. This opens up the opportunity for further research. Another study would seek to interview some parents who are generally referred to as ‘hard to reach’ who did not respond to my request for feedback via the card sort and consequently to be interviewed. Data gathered in such a way would allow researchers to assess the full degree of ambivalence and reasons for a failure to express a preference within the community.

The card sort data indicate that choice based on proximity is assumed by school staff to be of over-riding importance to parents and this would seem to be a fair assumption based on their knowledge of the local community. However, for the parents interviewed, proximity was not a limiting factor in making a choice, particularly after the age of eleven. This could be because the town is relatively compact and both high schools are readily accessible to secondary age children, but for the majority of pupils that attend Newtown High proximity appears to be a factor to the staff, because for the local children it is the default school they attend when no considered choice has been made. Although some parents are choosing to place their children in out of catchment primary schools (as evidenced by P3) from the outset, the primary school context data demonstrates that they are more representative of their communities than Newtown High, indicating a greater concern for the ‘communal and local’ at primary level than at secondary level where other factors come into play.

However, it is as well to remember the arguments made by proponents of the quasi-market in education (Chapter 1, Literature Review). They argue that parental choice in education is a good thing for three principle reasons. Firstly, is the libertarian argument that we all appreciate choice in many areas of our life so why not in education? Secondly, there is the equity argument, which holds that choice has only been available to the few in the past and it can now be made available to all. Thirdly, that market forces will be a transformational force by encouraging competition between schools and serve to drive-up standards, increase efficiency and make schools more receptive to the demands of the ‘customer’ (Gorard and Taylor, 2001; Bagley, 2006; Exley, 2014).

The interview data offers little to support the libertarian or equity justifications but has much to offer on the customer orientation justification. The quasi-market in Newtown is

encouraging competition and is driving up standards in one of the high schools but not the other (as evidenced by published examination results). However, Adler (1997) identifies the risk of community fragmentation and a danger to social cohesion in such a scenario. Whilst this study did not seek to examine the degree to which this may be happening in the Newtown community there is evidence from the interviews, particularly with the school staff, that this is a worry. S2 and S4 express particular concern about the social and educational separation within the community that is taking place after eleven years of age.

Adler (1997) also highlights the potential for the quasi-market to undermine the viability of a school if it ceases to be supported by sufficient parents and that is what is happening at Newtown High. However, this is how the quasi-market is supposed to work. The strong grow and prosper whilst the weak wither on the vine until they cease to be viable as described by Butler and van Zanton (2007). It also, for me, illustrates the conflicts that can arise in macro school policy. School choice is framed in terms of parental rights and school standards whilst at the same time having the potential to create social and educational segregation and system turbulence as schools thrive or fail. This research evidences the effects of government educational policy in one small town in the East of England.

Adler's (1997) fourth prediction was that putting power in the hands of parents makes schools more conservative and will throttle innovation. It is beyond the scope of this study to be able to make any definitive statement about this but it is possible to observe that at Newtown High the Principal has seen innovation (all-through schooling and all-through curriculum for example) as a means of raising standards whereas Oldtown High offers a more traditional curriculum with less innovation but achieves higher academic outcomes, enjoys a high reputation and attracts aspirant parents.

Writing in 1997, Adler could only imagine the educational landscape in 2016 and how the quasi-market in education in England would develop. But when he writes about the way the middle classes will ensure the system works to their benefit, how a sense of community may be damaged and social and educational segregation may be encouraged, how the viability of some schools will be affected and how conservative parental forces will hinder innovation, his concerns appear prescient. But this system is unlikely to change so it is incumbent on school leaders to understand how the quasi-market operates and how it can be managed. A first step must surely be having an understanding of the wishes and aspirations of the potential clients (parents and children) and an ability to answer my first

research question is fundamental to this. If school leaders do not understand what parents want and need, and are not prepared to take a pragmatic approach to meeting those wants and needs, their schools may fall foul of the quasi-market. But school leaders must also take account of government demands and as I will describe later in the postscript to this research, they may be becoming a more dominant factor than parental demands.

### 5.1.2 Reputation

Second research question: *To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation,' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?*

The interview data demonstrate that reputation essentially reconciles the many images people have of a school: it is the net image. But one's perception of reputation is personal and is constructed from the things we think are important. All school staff and some parents (P3 and P4 particularly) describe reputation as a 'collective term,' 'a combination of criteria,' 'a bank of knowledge' and a 'portmanteau term' to illustrate the fact that it is seen as an embodiment of 'things' which individuals value but beyond that, there is little shared understanding. Consequently, individual parents and school staff may talk amongst themselves about the reputation of a school, but may be talking about quite different things. So not only do the data demonstrate that there is not a shared understanding of the concept of school reputation between school staff and parents, the data also demonstrate that there is not a shared understanding within school staff and parents. This is a new finding arising from this research and does not appear in any other literature. However, perhaps this outcome is not surprising when one notes the definition of organizational reputation offered by Carpenter and Krause (2011) as being,

'a multi-faceted concept that comprises a set of beliefs about an organization's capacities, intentions, history, and mission that is embedded in a network of multiple audiences.' (Carpenter and Krause, 2011: 27)

The quantitative card sort data also appear to demonstrate that school staff over-rates the importance of school reputation when parents select a school. But as I have stated elsewhere (Chapter 4), those parents that do take most notice of reputation and particularly academic reputation, are most likely to have not chosen to send their child to Newtown High School and therefore may not have been able to participate in this study unless they currently have a child in Newtown Junior or Newtown Primary. School staff are aware of

this and that explains why they consider school reputation so important in the eyes of parents. Conducting the interviews, my professional experience and the time I have spent in Newtown led me to believe that the school staff are correct when they evaluate school reputation as being of fundamental importance to parents because it is the reputation (generally based on academic criteria) of another school compared with theirs which is so damaging to Newtown High. The parents who have chosen to send their children to Newtown High have chosen to ignore its reputation relative to Oldtown High because its proximity or some other personal factor. Of the six parents I interviewed, four had children in Newtown High School indicating that the reputation was not a defining factor in school choice as far as they were concerned and of the other two, P4 who still has children in the primary school, maintained that reputation would be unlikely to be a factor influencing her choice of high school and P2/P2i felt that their connections with Newtown High were such that it would be unlikely to influence their choice. Another study would seek to find out from parents who have chosen not to send their children to Newtown High but to Oldtown High, the degree to which the relative reputations was a defining factor in their choice.

I described in Chapter 1 how Friedman (1962) argued that a free market in which schools compete based upon their reputations would lead to an efficient supply of educational services. Success in the quasi-market therefore demands that school leaders take the creation, maintenance and improvement of their reputation seriously. I described in the literature review (Chapter 1) how Carpenter and Krause (2011) had identified four critical aspects of reputation as being crucial to public perceptions, describing them as the performative, moral, procedural and technical. Schools will want to seek to address all four aspects and there is no reason to believe that the Trust schools are unable to fulfill the procedural and technical requirements. On moral reputation, the parent interview data suggest that parents think that a happy and caring atmosphere and philosophy is relevant in all stages of education whereas school staff think it is only really important in the primary schools. However, it is on the performative reputation that the Trust is not succeeding as evidenced by published examination results. Although for some parents academic standards and academic achievement does not appear to be of the utmost importance, for the government and many parents, performative reputation is based on academic outcomes because they believe that, fundamentally, that is a school's *raison d'être*. It is clear from the literature and from this small case study that parental choice creates winners and losers, but has it served to improve the standard of education in Newtown as a whole? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study. Another study might seek to monitor the

academic achievement of pupils over time within a town such as Newtown to see if standards rise overall as individual schools do well and less well within it.

In their study of middle class parents in Paris and London, Benson et al. (2014) concluded that in both cities, parents were making choices based on informal sources of knowledge such as their own experiences, the opinions of teachers and the opinions of other middle class parents and not publically available performance data, ‘rather they focus on the visible aspects of schools, and in particular the social and ethnic characteristics of the school population, making these the basis of their judgments of what the school offers’ (Benson et al. 2014: 11). This study confirms the importance of informal sources of information (gossip), personal knowledge and opinions but, in this largely mono-cultural setting (though anecdotal evidence is that is beginning to change), I found no evidence that ethnicity had any impact whatsoever.

In the interviews, parents and school staff refer to what they variously describe as gossip, Chinese whispers and hearsay (or what Ball and Vincent 1998 call ‘the grapevine’). Whilst these informal communication networks are not criteria for school choice, they appear to be very active amongst parents when making their choice of school or forming an opinion about reputation. Only one member of the school staff (S1) referred directly to the impact of gossip and particularly the part played by social media. Parents generally seemed very aware of the role gossip plays in the community (only P6 made no mention of it). For the parents I interviewed gossip was generally something that other parents engaged in and they tended to treat it with a degree of scepticism and even disdain. P2 placed reputation second from bottom in her card sort because,

‘for me, reputation implies what people say about the school, and I think quite often it’s difficult to judge on what other’s say as everybody has experience of school, so it could be that they had a good experience or a bad experience and I think its really difficult to know just from what people say whether that is the truth. So I take what others say with a pinch of salt.’ (P2)

S2 also described how in a town the size of Newtown,

‘word of mouth, its almost how the reputation of anything in Newtown is formed. People talk, its that kind of knock on – one person tells two people, then two people tell four and it just spreads like that and in Newtown and the size of the town, something like that can happen in a couple of days.’ (S2)



The parents are very aware of the prejudices, some of which are very long standing and out of date, that form the basis of much gossip whether it be verbal or on social media. In her community liaison role, S1 was clear about the role of gossip within the community and the need for the Trust to engage in the social media debates and ‘infiltrate’ them as advocated by Bosetti (2004: 396). Such attempts at infiltration are being undertaken by the Trust but it is a constant challenge because of the number and variety of grapevines Ball and Vincent (1998) predict will exist in any community. My hope is that this research will encourage the Trust schools to engage more directly with parents to establish a common understanding about the wishes and motivations that drive school choice so that the disparity between what the school staff think parents want and what they say they actually want is reduced or eliminated altogether.

## 5.2 Implications for Schools

An important element of this study is to identify how the outcomes may be translated into everyday practice and so the third research question asks: *What are the implications for schools?*

To answer this question I will utilize the conclusions I have been able to draw from answering the first two research questions and my experience as a senior manager in a number of schools managing school reputation and parental choice in a quasi-market. My experience leads me to believe that school leaders cannot afford to be ‘queasy’ about managing all aspects of parental choice including school reputation. In a quasi-market, I believe it is not only morally acceptable but also a professional necessity. But that does not give carte blanche to behave unethically and unprofessionally and the three implications for schools I identify require neither of school leaders.

This issue is of contemporary strategic relevance to all school leaders and I expect my ‘particularized’ study to be of tangible use to the Trust in which it is situated. What follows are three ‘implications for practice’ for the Trust schools based on the outcomes of this case study. However, as a pragmatist I hope that some transferability will be possible and that any school leader will appreciate the possible transferability of each of these ‘implications’ in their own context.

First implication for practice: **understand the social makeup and therefore the likely motivations of the people in the locality from which you draw your intake.**

In my professional judgement and noting the outcomes of this research, I believe that parental choice and school reputation can be managed. In order to prosper in a competitive educational environment, English schools must appeal to parents who have the right to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend and the literature indicates there are clear differences in the way parents from different social groups exercise their ‘right to choose’ and the extent to which they ‘engage’ with the system. The literature and the outcomes of this study also indicate a belief that some parents use academic concerns as a proxy for choice based on social concerns. School leaders who fail to understand this and the social make-up of their locality, risk failing to appeal to the parents (and children) they need to attract (Lubienski and Myers, 2016). Finding out about the social makeup of a locality is not difficult given the amount of data available, but what is more difficult is understanding how this translates into the hopes, aspirations and motivations of individuals within the community. This study offers an insight into the disparity that exists in one small group of schools between what the school staff think parents want when they are selecting a school for their child, and what parents say they actually want, and in so doing makes a modest contribution to the literature on school choice. The Trust is in an advantageous position in that it has access to all the parents who choose to send their children to Newtown Primary and Newtown Junior and the all-through system is designed to encourage a seamless continuation through to Newtown High. The work to encourage parents to remain in the Trust beyond the primary schools starts in the primary schools and involves a full understanding of parental hopes and aspirations for their children.

Second implication for practice: **recognize the importance of academic achievement in school choice.** The role of academic criteria in school choice is fundamental in two ways. Firstly, it is of critical importance to those parents who choose to choose as evidenced by the parent interviews and whose loss to a school can be catastrophic to its wellbeing and success, not just in terms of the loss of able motivated children can have on school outcomes, but also because the school raises its income from a pupil count. Fewer children will lead to a loss of income that endangers the financial viability of the school.

Secondly, whatever criteria parents think are most important in school choice, in my professional judgement, a school will only prosper if its academic credentials are secure.

This view is also generally borne out by the literature and the outcomes of this research. The government through Ofsted inspects schools and will place one in 'category' if the children are not succeeding academically even though the school may be inculcating all the values and offering all the criteria the local parents think are important. In this respect I believe that the limits of parental choice and parental pressure to improve academic standards are being realized as government, through Ofsted and Regional School Commissioners, seeks to impose its own will over that of parents. Whilst I find it inconceivable that the government would abolish or even limit school choice, the current government is seeking to diminish the role of parent governors in schools (DfE, 2016) and will intervene where the quasi-market does not bring about the 'right' outcomes. This study indicates that if this new government strategy brings about the general improvements in all schools that parental choice has failed to deliver, then there may not be the need for parents to make alternative school choices and that may result in a very different educational landscape in England. However, I believe that relative reputations will always be important and there will always be an inclination on behalf of some parents to select schools that fulfil the academic criteria, but also a social one.

Third implication for practice: **School Reputation can be managed by improving the quality of teaching and learning.** In the school context, reputation can be seen as a measure or metaphor for intrinsic quality in the institution, that is, real substance and authenticity. This study shows that people construct their understandings of school reputation in different ways, but central to many parents are perceptions of academic achievement. It follows therefore that school reputation can be managed to a large degree by improving the quality of teaching and learning. In my professional judgement, as the quality of teaching and learning improves and standards rise, it follows that the reputation of the school should improve, parents will not feel the need to send their children elsewhere, income will rise to be invested in better facilities and more school staff, and so the spiral of decline becomes an upward spiral of improvement and esteem. But this study also indicates a parental desire for a 'happy school' built around good personal relationships in which there is a positive ethos and atmosphere. A school full of happy staff and children with excellent teaching and learning is a worthwhile aspiration for any school leadership team. I can state from experience that turning round a school in a spiral of decline with a poor reputation, low pupil numbers, precarious finances, difficulties in recruiting and retaining good teachers and relatively poor academic standards in the short time allowed by present government policies is hard, but possible.

Reputation is not something to be left to take care of itself. According to Eccles et al. (2007) reputation and reputational risk can be managed by following five steps: assessing the current reputation amongst stakeholders, evaluating the real character of the institution, closing any reputation - reality gaps, monitoring changing beliefs and expectations, and ensuring that there is a senior individual in charge of reputation management who has the time and space to be proactive. They argue that it is not enough to be reactive, by the time the incident has occurred only damage limitation is possible. Reputation management is about managing the reputation of the institution so that it contributes towards the customer's confidence in the organization. A good starting point would be to acknowledge the work of Helm (2011), which concludes that employer pride is strongly related to the reputation of the institution even though employers and employees are often unaware of this. The dominant topic of discussion when the Trust Executive Leadership Team were asked to review and discuss the quantitative statistical data was around the parents overwhelming desire for good teachers and teaching and that 'staff do not associate what they do everyday in the classroom as being very important for reputation' (Trust Principal). This is clearly an important outcome of this study as it implies a simple remedy. It is surely incumbent on school leaders to help all school staff (teachers and associate staff) realize that everything they say and do and the outcomes they achieve contribute to the reputation of the school.

### 5.3 Summary

In this chapter I have sought to synthesize the qualitative and quantitative data collected in a card sort and the semi-structured interviews about parental choice and school reputation collected in a case study of an Academy Trust comprising of three schools in the East of England. The discussion is structured around the three research questions I established at the start of this research project. I highlight the statistically significant disconnect between what criteria parents say they most value exercising their legal right to express a preference for a school for their child, and what school staff think parents most value. I then explore the ways in which school choice is impacting in one community by structuring the discussion around the predictions Adler made in 1997 about the impact school choice would have on education and society and find that they are generally borne out.

Data from the qualitative card sort also demonstrates a statistically significant disconnect between the importance school staff think parents place on school reputation as a defining factor in school choice and the importance parents say they place on it, and this is confirmed in the semi-structured interviews. However, I explain why this disconnect may not be as real as it appears as the reputation of another high school in the town appears to be a defining reason why some parents choose to leave the Trust for secondary education. The study also seeks to establish the degree to which parents and school staff have a shared understanding of how a notion of school reputation is constructed and finds the meaning of school reputation is understood in different ways between and within groups of parents and school staff.

The chapter ends by identifying three implications for practice that arise from this study in the schools where this research was based with the hope that other professional school leaders will find sufficient relevance and transferability to make the outcomes of this study relevant to their contexts.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 General Conclusions

In this final chapter I will describe and justify the research design and methods I utilize in this study, present the research outcomes, suggest recommendations for action, justify that the study is of doctoral level and how it contributes to the advancement of knowledge, and potential opportunities for future research (Trafford, Lesham and Bitzer, 2014). The chapter concludes with an important postscript and a short reflexive piece about my doctoral journey.

The research focus of this study has been: What Factors Influence School Choice, with particular reference to school reputation? The research questions that give the study a conceptual structure (Stake, 2000) are:

1. To what extent do parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child?
2. To what extent do parents and school staff have a shared understanding of the concept of 'school reputation,' and what is the relative importance both place on it as a factor when choosing a school?
3. What are the implications for schools?

I have demonstrated that parental choice is a messy and complex process that exposes issues of academic and social segregation as aspirant parents seek to ensure the social status they enjoy is transferred to their children and schools seek to gain advantage. Saiger (2014) maintains that parental choice and its place in education are contested because the debate is fundamentally normative, not empirical and the desirability of choice depends upon how an individual weighs competing claims of equality and liberty in education. Parental choice is a process in which there are winners and losers, where reputation and status are hard won and easily lost and this study demonstrates the effect of parental choice

on one Academy Trust of three schools, where the secondary element is perceived by parents to be less attractive than a rival, and the resultant effects.

Various research methodologies were considered but I adopted a case study design because it offers the opportunity to undertake an in-depth study in a real life context (Yin, 2009) or what Flyvbjerg (2011) calls an intensive analysis that implies both depth and rigour leading to detail, richness and completeness. I am also convinced by Sturman's (1997) contention that, to fully understand why things happen as they do and to be able to generalize or predict, 'requires an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and of the patterns that emerge.' (Sturman, 1997: 61) The case study design was also chosen because as a part-time, novice researcher, it was something I felt able to complete with limited time and resources. It would also make the most of the access I was able to negotiate and it would fulfill an identified need both for the Trust and myself (Chandler, 2013). All these aspirations have been achieved.

For Sturman (1997: 61) case study is a, 'generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon' that can involve both qualitative and quantitative approaches and I have utilized both quantitative and qualitative data within a case study design to answer the first research question. This approach has been described and justified in Chapter 2. The adoption of pragmatism as the research / inquiry paradigm legitimized the use of two quite different data collection methods and gave me the flexibility I desired. The use of two data collection methods also allows for triangulation. In social sciences, triangulation is a technique used to validate data through cross verification from two or more sources thereby enhancing the credibility, validity and persuasiveness of the research. In order to ensure the validity of the data and conclusions, this study uses between-method triangulation (Denzin, 1970).

A card sort was conducted firstly with school staff to establish what they think parents most value when choosing a school for their child and then secondly with parents to find out what they actually think is most important. The outcomes described in Chapter 3 were analysed using the Mann-Whitney U statistical analysis technique to highlight differences. Of the eighteen criteria for school choice there was a statistically 'extremely significant' difference in eight of them, statistically 'very significant' in four of them and statistically 'no significant difference' in six of them. The data indicates a great disparity between what parents say they most value in school choice and what school staff think parents most

value. As an experienced headteacher I am not wholly surprised. I have thought for some time that school leaders do not generally seek to understand the motivations and aspirations of their prospective clientele, particularly when they have different hopes and needs to the average middle class teacher or headteacher. The fact that school leaders often talk about the 'hard to reach parent' (as I do in this study) when perhaps we should be discussing the 'hard to engage school', is indicative of a mind-set that may exclude some citizens from actively exercising their right to choose.

In Chapter 4 I explore the findings from the quantitative card sort through qualitative semi-structured interviews with four school staff members and six parents. The data was coded and analysed thematically, with seven sub themes emerging from both parents and school staff codes: connections, differentiated needs, school qualities, knowledge, perceptions and control. Two master themes emerged from the subthemes: choice and reputation (see Table 5.2). The interview data confirms the general disparity between what parents say they most value in school choice and what school staff think parents most value.

In Chapter 5 I bring the quantitative card sort data and the qualitative semi-structured interview data together to triangulate and draw conclusions from which I can answer the research questions. I conclude that parents place great emphasis on the importance on teacher qualities such as expertise, being friendly and caring and able to foster good relationships in both data sets. For many parents the perception they (and their children) have of the teaching staff is crucial to their school choice. But, school staff did not seem to sufficiently appreciate this. School staff put the emphasis on criteria that are beyond their control. Both sets of data also demonstrate parental desire for a 'happy school' built around good personal relationships. Atmosphere and ethos in primary and secondary schools across the full age range is seen more important than staff give credit for. Parents want their children to be safe and happy at school so that they can succeed academically.

As well as exploring the general issue of parental choice, the study also explores the particular role of reputation. The quantitative Mann-Whitney U test data indicated a statistically 'very significant' difference between the importance parents say they place on school reputation and the value school staff think parents place on it. School staff thought reputation was one of the most important factors with a median of four whereas the parent data showed a median of seven. The qualitative data demonstrates that for school staff or parents, notions of school reputation are very personal. Consequently, this study finds that



the meaning of school reputation is understood in different ways between and within groups of parents and school staff. Parents may have very different views about the same school based on what they hold to be its most important functions. For some parents a failure to provide excellent teaching and achieve what they consider appropriate academic outcomes will affect their choice of the school whilst for others other factors are more important. However, it is clear from this study that parents who hold aspirations for their children are the ones most likely to ‘choose to choose’, to seek schools that can boast an academic reputation and for schools not able to do so the future is increasingly uncertain. It is also clear from the outcomes of this study that reputation is not an amorphous concept that cannot be pinned down, controlled and managed. In my professional opinion, if the fundamentals of good teaching and learning and consequent academic success are in place, a good reputation should follow.

My third research question asks, what are the implications for schools? In Chapter 4, Section 2, I identify three ‘implications for practice’ pertinent to the schools in which I conducted my study;

- **Understand the social makeup and therefore the likely motivations of the people in the locality from which the intake is drawn.**

In order to prosper in a competitive educational environment, English schools must appeal to parents who have the right to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend and the literature indicates there are clear differences in the way parents from different social groups exercise their ‘right to choose’ and the extent to which they ‘engage’ with the system. The literature and the outcomes of this study also indicate a belief that some parents use academic concerns as a proxy for choice based on social concerns. School leaders who fail to understand this and the social make-up of their locality, risk failing to appeal to the parents (and children) they need to attract (Lubienski and Myers, 2016).

- **Recognize the importance of academic achievement in school choice** (even if it may be being used as a proxy for social choice). Whilst not all parents value educational achievement as crucial to their choice of school, middle class parents generally do and without their children any school will struggle to survive within a government culture that emphasises the centrality of academic standards when judging schools.

- **School reputation can be managed by improving the quality of teaching and learning.** This study demonstrates that people construct their understanding of school reputation in different ways. For some parent's school reputation is a more important factor in school choice than for others. But when school reputation is considered important, perceptions of academic achievement are central. This study demonstrates that parents value good teachers and good teaching so a school will want to emphasise continued improvements in both. It follows that as these fundamentals improve over time, it is likely that results will improve and as a consequence, it is likely that reputation will be enhanced. But this study also indicates a parental desire for a 'happy school' built around good personal relationships in which there is a positive ethos and atmosphere. A school full of happy staff and children with excellent teaching and learning is a worthwhile aspiration for any school leadership team.

Throughout this case study I have employed four strategies to ensure its trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). To ensure credibility (internal validity) I have presented an authentic picture of the phenomena under scrutiny. School choice and reputation management are issues of contemporary strategic relevance to all school leaders and consequently to ensure a degree of transferability (external validity or generalizability), I have endeavoured to provide sufficient information about the Trust schools and locality so that the reader can fully understand the context and begin to think about the issues raised and how some of them might be transferable to other educational establishments. To ensure dependability I have provided a great deal of detail about the methodology and methods I employed so that the study could be replicated elsewhere. To ensure confirmability I have taken steps to ensure the elimination of bias and that the findings emerge from the data and not my own predispositions (which, as Yin, 2014) cautions, is always a potential problem for case study researchers as it is essential that they understand the issues beforehand). This has been achieved by sharing the emerging data and outcomes with school staff, a parent and supervisors.

In order to demonstrate what Winter, Griffiths and Green (2002: 1) describe as the, 'doctoral worthiness of my thesis,' I have sought to present a conceptual clarity in the design, conduct and analysis of the research; demonstrate an intellectual appreciation of how underlying theories relate to issues in the research; present a thorough and wide ranging engagement with the literature, demonstrate a good grasp of the methodology; and

present a coherent argument within a clear written presentation which complies with academic protocols.

This study makes an original and independent contribution to knowledge in four ways. Firstly, by demonstrating an effective and valid method for data collection, successfully utilizing the card sort technique to rank order and compare the preferences of two sets of respondents, the study makes a contribution to academic knowledge. I can only find two occasions where something similar has been done before (Duncan, 1999; Scribney and Reddon, 2010).

Secondly, the outcomes of the research exposes a disconnect between what the staff in one small group of schools think parents value most highly when exercising their right to choose and what the parents actually think is most important (refer to Table 5.1). The quantitative element of this study (card sort) demonstrates that parents place considerably greater importance than school staff think they do on, the importance of good teachers and teaching, the creation of a happy and caring atmosphere, an appropriate curriculum, good pupil-teacher relations, caring and friendly teachers, school uniform and the school being welcoming to parents. For their own part, school staff thought parents would place considerably higher importance on the importance of family connections, pupil and parent friendship groups, proximity to school and the ease of transport, child care arrangements and school reputation. So long as this disconnect between parents and school staff remains, the Trust schools may be unable to meet the aspirations of the parents and risks losing their confidence. This study therefore has practical value to the Trust schools, but also makes a contribution to professional practice generally by highlighting to senior leaders in all schools the potential for a disconnect between what school staff think parents most value when exercising their right to choose a school for their child, and what parents actually most value.

Thirdly, this research is also unique in that it looks in detail at the part played by school reputation in school choice and the extent to which it is perceived by parents and school staff as important. This has never been done before and therefore this study makes a contribution to academic knowledge and has the potential to contribute to professional practice. The study finds that school staff think parents place considerably greater importance on school reputation than they say they do, but I offer the plausible explanation that those parents who do place most value on school reputation have to a large extent,

chosen not to send their child to Newtown High School and were therefore unable to participate in the study. The study through the semi-structured interviews also seeks to understand the meaning of school reputation: specifically, how the notion of reputation is constructed in the minds of parents and school staff and finds that the meaning of school reputation is understood in different ways between and within groups of parents and school staff.

Fourthly, this study will make a modest but important and defensible contribution to scholarship, by adding to our general understanding of how parental choice operates in the real world, but in particular, no other study has sought to seek the opinions of school staff and compare them with those of parents. This has therefore created a new understanding of existing issues, something Trafford and Lesham, (2008) and Trafford et al. (2014) identify as essential within doctoral research.

Throughout this research project I have sought to exercise the discipline of not straying from the research questions. However, as one immerses oneself in the subject of parental choice, new opportunities for study become apparent and whilst noted, must be left for another day. I have described some of the potential complementary studies in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter 5), but a study such as this inevitably raises as many questions as it answers, so what follows is a list of potential future studies which arise from this work:

1. To interview the parents who have chosen not to send their children to Newtown High specifically to establish the degree to which academic choice is being used as a proxy for social selection.
2. To interview the parents who have chosen not to send their children to Newtown High but to Oldtown High specifically to establish the degree to which the relative reputations of the two schools was a defining factor in their choice.
3. To find a way to question what is commonly referred to as the 'hard to reach' parents about their criteria for school choice and specifically to assess why some parents are ambivalent and choosing not to choose.

4. To repeat the study in a different location to see the degree to which the outcomes of this study are replicated.
5. To research specifically the criteria for choice used by parents for primary schools and secondary schools and the degree to which it differs. I did not find a significant difference, but I would like to explore this more closely.
6. To monitor the academic achievement of pupils over time within a town such as Newtown to see if standards rise overall as individual schools do well and less well within it.
7. To research why some parents do not engage in choosing a state school for their child – they go private. I would like to research why some parents make that choice and the criteria they use to select a private school.

## 6.2 Postscript

In the Autumn term 2015 the Schools Commissioner for the East of England and North London on behalf of the Department for Education, formally expressed concern about the academic outcomes at Newtown High School and the ability of the Trust Directors to improve them. No concerns were expressed about the levels of achievement in the two primary schools nor was any reference made to parental dissatisfaction with the Trust schools. Ofsted currently rates Newtown High School as a ‘Good’ school.

Following continued pressure from the Schools Commissioner, the Directors of the Newtown Academy Trust (Newtown High School, Newtown Primary School and Newtown Junior School) agreed to merge with the Oldtown Academy Trust as soon as possible. The hope in the Trust is that the negative effects of the quasi-market within the town will be alleviated, as it is no longer in the interests of the Oldtown Academy Trust to allow the current situation to continue. However, for parents the choice of two very distinct, easily accessible high schools within the town may disappear as they merge into one homogenised entity.

A central tenet and justification for parental choice has been that the quasi-market will serve to drive up academic standards as parents make rational and considered decisions based on a school's academic record. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this study, many parents do not base their choice of school on academic criteria. In this respect, parental choice is failing to act as a driver for improvement in all schools, as envisaged by its proponents. It is very unlikely (unwise) that any government would seek to take away the right of parents to express a preference but perhaps there is a realization at government level that parental pressure is not a sufficient lever to bring about the wholesale improvement in the system they want, and that government must intervene directly. What this experience demonstrates is that even when a school retains the confidence of its community, still attracts parents and children, is rated a 'Good' school by Ofsted and is financially viable, government will now intervene directly if the school is not deemed to be achieving academically. In other words, those parents who choose to send their children to Newtown High School and others like it, because they value something other than the academic, are not having their choices respected because, by inference, they are not exercising their right to choose correctly. The present Conservative administration is able to take this bold action because academies are accountable directly to government through the funding agreement drawn up with each one individually and this can be removed at any time. The power of central government to intervene at school level has been reinforced by the 2016 Education and Adoption Act (DfE, 2016) that make new provision about schools in England that are causing concern, including provision about their conversion into Academies and about the intervention powers of the Secretary of State for Education and the Regional Schools Commissioners. The British Chancellor of the Exchequer also announced in his March 2016 budget, plans to compel all English schools to become academies by 2022. This is proving controversial, but if this comes to pass central government will be increasing its power to influence all schools directly, potentially at the expense of parental influence.

Finally, although it would have been desirable and useful, there were ethical and practical reasons why it was not possible to interview the parents who had chosen to send their child to Oldtown High instead of Newtown High. As the Newtown and Oldtown Trusts merge this situation changes. The two schools will retain, at least in the short term, many of their distinct characteristics and reputations but it will be important for the leadership of the new Trust to redress the balance within the town and a way will have to be found to encourage

the middle class parents to make different choices in the future. Opportunities and the need for more research may well emerge.

### 6.3 Limitations of the Study and Personal Reflections

The journey resulting in a thesis which is what Trafford and Lesham (2002: 6) refer to as, ‘evidently doctoral in design, shape, argument, text and conclusions’ has been stimulating, exciting, challenging, frustrating, time consuming and very different from any of my previous experiences. I decided to undertake a Doctorate in Education (EdD) because I was (and remain) interested in the topic of my research, but also because having been a professional teacher and headteacher for many years, I wanted to test myself intellectually in a new but related field. I know a great deal about education policy and pedagogy but it was many years since I had undertaken any academic study and a change in life circumstances gave me the opportunity.

I remain convinced that my choice of a pragmatic paradigm and a research design with a case study methodology incorporating both quantitative (card sort) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews), was appropriate to addressing my research questions and has generated some useful data, which I hope will provide some ‘food for thought’ in the reader. However, although I achieved a sufficient response from parents to the card sort, I expected more and was disappointed with the number returned. I hoped that the use of pupil intermediaries would work to my advantage but in hindsight I might have been advised to also meet with parents directly at parents evenings and ask them to spend a few minutes completing the card sort. Although it was not entirely unexpected, I was also disappointed that there was so little evident involvement by male parents in the study and consequently, this is ultimately a limitation. In retrospect I also think I could have conducted the semi-structured interviews more professionally. I was always aware of time constraints and the need to glean as much information from the participants as quickly and efficiently as possible. As I read back through the interview transcripts I could see how on occasions I was guilty of putting words in participants’ mouths in an attempt to help them make the point I thought they were trying to make.

The statistical analysis of the quantitative data proved challenging because I had had little experience of the type of statistics required for this study. This element of work also took

far longer to complete than I hoped because of my inexperience and also because I was initially advised to use an incorrect technique. Time, effort and support eventually achieved the desired outcome. I also think that I could have extended my understanding and interpretation of the data by reference to the work of the French socio-philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. According to Benson, Bridge and Wilson (2014), Byrne (2014) and Exley (2014), the theoretical framework for much that has been written on middle class engagement with school choice originates from Bourdieu's work on class and distinction (Bourdieu 1984; 1986; 1997). As my study progressed I began to realize the extent to which I might have utilized the theoretical framework provided by Bourdieu to help analyze and better understand how parents choose a school for their child.

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is one of the most prominent attempts to explain the intergenerational persistence of social and educational inequality primarily because the educational system serves to perpetuate the socio-economic inequality through legitimizing existing social hierarchies (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). In formulating his account of social reproduction, Bourdieu developed a series of analytical concepts: cultural capital, habitus, practice and field (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1997).

Bourdieu (1997) describes three fundamental but inter-related forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital relates to relative wealth, social capital to 'social obligations' or 'connections' and cultural capital relates to 'cultural competencies'. Edgerton and Roberts (2014: 195) call Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital, 'abstract and much debated', but it is generally interpreted as referring to non financial social assets such as education, intellect, style of speech, dress or physical appearance which he believed form the foundation of social life and dictate one's position within the social order. Sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others creates a sense of collective identity and group position ('people like us'). It follows that the more cultural capital one has the more powerful a position one occupies in life but also that the transmission, acquisition and deployment of cultural capital is a key mechanism in explaining class differences in strategies over school choice and differences in educational attainment more widely (Benson et al. 2014). Crucially, however, Bourdieu points out that because certain forms of cultural capital are more valued than others they can hinder as well as help social mobility just as much as income or wealth (Bourdieu, 1986; *Social Theory Rewired*, 2011).



Habitus refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital and refers to the ingrained habits, skills and dispositions we possess due to our life experiences. Habitus shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014; Social Theory Rewired, 2016). It also refers to our 'taste' for cultural objects such as art, food and clothing which are not innate but culturally developed (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu understood the social world as being divided into a variety of distinct arenas or fields each with its own set of positions and practices (though some degree of overlap is possible). Each field (law, medicine, education etc.) has its own set of rules, practices and forms of capital in which individuals will bring their personal capital to bear to gain status or advantage (Bourdieu, 1984; Gremion, 2005; Edgerton and Roberts, 2014; Social Theory Rewired, 2016). People's practices or actions, are seen by Bourdieu as a consequence of their habitus and cultural capital interactions within the context of a given field (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014).

In spite of coming to the realization through the iterative process central to the undertaking of a study such as this, that it might be profitable to examine the data I was able to gather through the prism of Bourdieu, I chose not to change the approach because I felt confident that the one I had adopted was well suited to answering the research questions I had set myself. I was also concerned, perhaps unjustifiably, that the study would become more theoretical and less practical in its outcomes.

I have not found the interaction with the school staff, parents and directors of the Trust difficult because although I had no formal connections with them whilst undertaking the study, schools are my natural habitat. In other words, I am confident that I was successfully able to be an outsider researcher so that I could be objective and detached but with sufficient knowledge and skills to know when and how to achieve my goals as an insider researcher might. I found the data collection and particularly the interviews very enjoyable and whenever I have been able to talk about my study to others it has been well received.

Where I have felt challenged has been with the necessary reading, the statistical analysis of the data, the writing and operating within university protocols and systems. Perselli (2015: 20) writes about the difficulty faced by practitioners of finding time to think about theory, 'where more pressing issues of professional and personal survival are often at stake' and in

my case this has certainly been true. Also, an, ‘overbearing emphasis on what works’ (Perselli, 2015: 20) means that even if time does present itself, my experience has been that teachers and headteachers (and here I include myself) do not think sufficiently about wider issues within education policy and practice. Allied to this, and in my experience a very significant factor, is that too much academic research and theory that could inform classroom practice is contained in journals that are unfamiliar to many teachers and certainly do not feature in staffrooms and are written in academic language that is largely inaccessible to the average teacher. So to enter a world where it is necessary to read extensively some ‘difficult literature’ and to engage with theory, whether articulated through the literatures or expressed empirically, and which requires considerable time and effort alongside the demands of the day job has been very challenging. With the benefit of hindsight I should have read much more extensively from the very start of this experience and gained a clearer understanding about academic styles and conventions much earlier.

In my professional life I have had to write for a wide range of audiences but I had never been asked to write in the academic language and style required for a doctorate. However, the first two years of the EdD helped me craft my writing style so that as I started to write the thesis I felt increasingly confident of my ability. I have been very conscious of the advice offered by Trafford and Lesham (2002) to ensure that I maintain my sense of audience (the examiners) who will want to be assured that the text is sufficiently transparent with a perfectly intended meaning; the reader will immediately recognize the doctoral worthiness of the thesis; that themes, issues and ideas are clearly presented and the more complex aspects of the thesis cannot be overlooked or misunderstood, and finally that the readers will recognize the scholarly base upon which the text has been written (Trafford and Lesham, 2002). In retrospect I wish I had spent a great deal more time on early writing assignments, honing my skills for the thesis writing. It has been a lengthy and at times frustrating process, but I hope I have achieved it.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Hunter (1991: 36) identified 10 criteria for school selection

1. Discipline good / children well behaved
2. Proximity to home / nearness
3. Emphasis on good examination results
4. Easy travel / accessible
5. Single sex (boys only or girls only) or mixed
6. Well-managed school / head has a good reputation
7. Church school (denominational)
8. Caring / understanding / friendly teachers
9. Good choice of subjects
10. Special emphasis on practical area of curriculum (e.g. Sports, Art , Music, Science).

## Appendix 2

Woods et al. (1998: 228) identified 35 criteria for school selection

1. The secondary school's headteacher
2. The secondary school's staff
3. Pupil's behaviour in the school
4. Pupil's behaviour outside school
5. What school teaches / subject choices
6. Way lessons are taught
7. School atmosphere
8. Way the school is managed
9. School uniform
10. External state of buildings / grounds
11. Facilities (rooms, equipment, books, etc.)
12. Size of classes
13. Size of school (i.e. total number of pupils)
14. School's caring approach to pupils
15. Standard of academic education
16. Standard of education in other areas (personal, sport, art, etc.)
17. Ethnic / racial make-up of the school
18. School is 'single sex' school
19. Exam results
20. Is a church school
21. Policy on discipline
22. School's reputation
23. The other pupils at the school
24. School's attitude to parents
25. Nearness to home / convenience for travel
26. Other preferred schools were full
27. Child has special educational needs
28. Child will be happy there
29. Child preferred the school
30. Older brother / sister is / was there
31. Child's friends will be there
32. Other school(s) not acceptable
33. No other school(s) to choose from
34. Has sixth form
35. Anything else? (Specify below)

PUPIL INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Mr Nicholson and I'm studying at Anglia Ruskin University where I am doing some research into the things parents think are most important when choosing a school for their children to attend.

You have been chosen to help because you are the oldest person in your family that attends one of the X Partnership Academy Trust schools.

All I want you to do is take a set of cards home and sit down with as many of your family as you can get together and by talking to each other, place the cards in rank order. Rank order means piling the cards one on top of the other so that the most important card is on the top and the least important card is on the bottom. You will then place the elastic band around them and bring them back to school.

Some of your parents might volunteer to speak to me about the cards. If that's the case, there is a spare card for them to sign and for you to return to school.

But before you can do this, we have to get permission from your parents. In order to do this I would like you to take a letter and form home. Ask your parents to read both bits of paper and if they are happy to take part, fill in the blue sheet and give it to you to bring back to school. I can then give you the cards to take home.

When all the cards have been returned I will be able to put all the results together and come to some conclusions

So why should you help me with this research? Well, as well as doing something different and having some fun you will be helping to make your school even more successful. I promise to keep you informed about what you have helped me discover.

I will be visiting your school regularly over the next couple of terms so if you have any questions, just ask. My email address is [andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk)

Mr Nicholson

## Appendix 4

### **PARENT CONSENT FORM**



Title of the project: What Factors Influence School Choice?

Main investigator and contact details: Mr Andrew Nicholson  
(email: [andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk))

1. I agree for my family take part in the above research. I understand that one of my children will have a particular role to play and give my consent to this. I have read the Parent Information Sheet for the project. I understand what the role of my family will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the project.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Parent Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University<sup>1</sup> processing personal data that I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me\*

Name (print).....Signed.....Date.....

**THIS COPY IS FOR YOU TO KEEP**

-----

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: What Factors Influence School Choice?

### **I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY**

Name (print).....Signed.....Date.....

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<sup>1</sup> "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

## **PARENT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Section A: The Research Project**

1. Title of project: What Factors Influence School Choice?
2. Purpose and value of study: The study will aim to find out the extent to which parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child AND the extent to which parents and school staff have a shared understanding of 'school reputation' and how much it matters when choosing a school.

By helping X Partnership Academy Trust better understand what it is that parents value most when selecting a school they will be better able to meet the needs of the X community.

3. All registered parents of children attending one of the ..... Partnership Academy Trust schools are invited to participate.
4. Who is organising the research: My name is Andrew Nicholson and I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Doctoral student at Anglia Ruskin University. Prior to that I was a teacher and headteacher in Suffolk for over 30 years. Although I have been invited to undertake my research in the X Partnership Academy Trust I have no formal links with it.
5. What will happen to the results of the study: Regular updates on the research will appear in Partnership newsletters and the final report will be made available via the Trust website.
6. This research is self-funded.
7. Contact for further information:

Mr Andrew Nicholson ([andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk))

### **Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project**

1. All the research will be carried out in X in the X Partnership Academy Trust Schools and to make the results as valid as I can, I need as many parents and school staff to take part as possible.
2. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary. If you and your family would like to take part send back the blue Participant Consent Form with your signature on the bottom. Keep the other one and the Information Sheet at home.
3. You can withdraw at any time from the project by sending the slip on the bottom of the consent form you kept at home back to me via your child's school or emailing me direct.

4. What will happen if you agree to take part? The oldest child in your family attending one of the Trust schools will bring home a 'card sort' activity for you as a family to complete. Depending on the amount of discussion it encourages, it will not take long to do. Once finished, the cards will be returned to school. I would like to interview a few parents so if you would be happy to meet me you should fill in the 'reply card'. Otherwise no names are needed.

Please note: if the oldest child in your family is Year 3 or younger you will be invited to do the card sort in school.

5. There are no risks involved in taking part in this project.
6. Agreement to participate in this research will not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong.
7. There are no special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the project.
8. All information collected from you will be treated in the strictest confidence. No real names will be used in the report.
9. The most immediate benefit of taking part in this project will be to your oldest child who will be asked to conduct the 'card sort' at home. They should enjoy it and it will be good for their confidence. Longer-term benefits will emerge, as the Trust better understands what X parents want from its schools.
10. Your participation in the project will be kept confidential unless you decide otherwise
11. If you have a complaint about me, or the conduct of my research project, I hope you will raise it with me first. If you would prefer not to or you are not satisfied by my response you can refer your concern to Mr W. at school or my University supervisor Professor Waller at [tim.waller@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:tim.waller@anglia.ac.uk)

## Appendix 6

### Parent / Family Card Sort Data

Family Number	Activities and clubs	Friendship groups-children or parents	Family Connections	Child Care arrangements	Church School	Reputation	Good Discipline & behaviour	Well managed school	Appropriate curriculum	Good pupil-teacher relations	Proximity and transport	Caring / friendly teachers	Welcoming to parents	Good teachers	Academic standards	Good facilities	Happy/Caring atmosphere	School Uniform	Other 1	Other 2
1	16	12	17	15	18	5	10	6	3	7	14	8	9	4	1	13	2	11		
2	14	10	15	17	18	2	6	3	11	7	1	8	13	4	5	12	9	16		
3	15	5	18	17	14	11	2	3	7	8	13	9	12	6	1	10	4	16		
4	15	16	11	18	19	9	4	10	13	5	8	6	14	3	7	12	2	17	1	
5	17	13	16	14	18	10	2	8	6	3	12	4	9	5	7	11	1	15		
6	14	13	16	15	17	1	10	2	3	6	18	7	8	4	9	11	5	12		
7	13	16	14	15	18	10	3	9	7	6	11	8	12	5	2	4	1	17		
8	17	7	13	14	18	4	11	5	16	9	15	8	3	10	12	2	6	1		
9	14	15	17	18	19	9	8	2	4	11	16	10	13	6	1	5	7	12	3	
10	10	13	17	16	18	7	2	8	4	6	14	11	12	5	1	9	3	15		
11	16	17	18	5	19	1	11	2	13	8	15	7	14	6	3	12	4	10	9	
12	13	18	17	14	20	19	7	2	8	6	16	4	5	3	11	12	1	15	9	10
13	12	13	14	17	18	5	3	1	6	8	15	7	11	9	2	10	4	16		
14	17	7	15	16	18	6	13	12	8	14	1	10	9	11	5	4	3	2		
15	11	13	5	12	17	3	10	8	4	9	16	6	14	7	2	15	1	18		
16	14	13	17	18	4	15	3	6	5	8	7	12	9	1	2	11	10	16		
17	11	17	18	12	16	1	4	3	8	5	15	7	14	6	9	10	2	13		
18	12	17	16	15	18	7	5	10	8	3	9	2	13	4	6	11	1	14		
19	16	14	15	13	18	5	3	10	8	6	17	7	11	4	1	9	2	12		
20	16	8	11	6	17	4	3	5	12	7	13	10	2	9	18	15	1	14		
21	16	15	12	18	17	14	4	13	8	2	11	7	5	3	6	9	1	10		
22	13	9	18	14	17	12	5	16	6	8	10	3	7	4	1	11	2	15		
23	13	8	7	16	17	12	1	11	15	4	3	5	9	6	10	14	2	18		
24	15	2	1	18	17	3	5	4	11	7	14	9	13	8	10	12	6	16		
25	13	15	16	17	18	2	6	9	7	8	4	11	12	10	1	5	3	14		
26	16	3	18	17	19	5	11	8	12	13	2	14	7	6	4	10	9	15	1	
27	13	15	18	16	17	1	6	2	11	4	10	5	9	8	3	12	7	14		
28	15	12	17	11	18	10	3	6	4	7	13	8	16	5	2	9	1	14		
29	17	14	13	18	19	11	9	10	3	5	16	6	12	2	7	8	1	15	4	
30	8	15	16	17	18	11	4	10	3	5	2	6	14	7	9	12	1	13		
31	12	11	18	13	14	5	8	4	2	10	15	9	16	7	1	6	3	17		
32	14	16	17	7	18	10	6	9	13	8	4	3	11	2	5	12	1	15		
33	14	9	16	15	18	10	8	5	4	6	17	7	11	3	1	12	2	13		
34	9	14	11	17	16	1	4	3	15	7	8	10	13	6	2	5	18	12		

35	4	8	11	16	17	14	6	7	5	1	18	2	15	10	9	13	3	12		
36	15	14	12	13	17	2	5	7	11	4	10	9	16	3	1	8	6	18		
37	14	13	1	16	17	11	3	6	15	9	2	7	10	5	8	12	4	18		
38	11	16	17	15	18	14	1	6	12	2	5	3	10	8	7	9	4	13		
39	13	12	18	14	17	5	6	2	16	8	1	9	11	4	7	3	10	15		



Appendix 7  
School Staff Card  
Sort Data

Staff Number	Activities and clubs	Friendship groups-children or parents	Family Connections	Child Care arrangements	Church School	Reputation	Good Discipline & behaviour	Well managed school	Appropriate curriculum	Good pupil-teacher relations	Proximity and transport	Caring / friendly teachers	Welcoming to parents	Good teachers	Academic standards	Good facilities	Happy/Caring atmosphere	School Uniform	Other 1	Other 2
1	4	12	15	3	19	14	5	11	18	9	1	8	17	10	13	6	2	16	7	
2	17	9	12	16	18	8	11	3	2	14	7	5	10	6	1	13	4	15		
3	15	13	12	7	16	2	4	3	17	10	6	11	14	9	1	5	8			
4	10	4	2	17	18	6	8	14	13	3	1	9	12	11	7	15	5	16		
5	8	15	3	7	18	5	4	6	13	10	2	11	14	9	12	16	1	17		
6	7	3	8	9	17	2	5	10	16	11	1	13	15	12	4	6	14	18		
7	9	2	3	5	18	7	6	15	16	8	1	13	17	12	14	11	10	4		
8	14	4	3	10	18	1	6	15	16	7	11	8	12	9	2	13	5	17		
9	12	15	18	17	19	1	4	3	10	5	13	7	16	6	2	11	8	14	9	
10	13	14	11	17	18	1	5	9	7	12	10	8	15	4	2	3	6	16		
11	14	7	12	13	17	3	8	4	5	9	6	10	16	11	1	15	2	18		
12	16	4	11	13	18	7	2	10	14	8	15	5	9	6	1	12	3	17		
13	14	1	2	11	18	10	7	9	16	3	12	4	13	5	8	15	6	17		
14	14	5	6	18	19	1	8	10	17	11	3	12	15	13	4	9	7	16	2	
15	7	12	14	15	18	4	3	17	16	5	13	10	11	2	1	6	9	8		
16	3	5	4	2	18	8	9	7	14	10	1	11	15	12	6	13	16	17		
17	5	3	4	6	18	15	8	16	13	10	2	7	9	11	12	14	1	17		
18	15	7	6	18	19	1	11	17	12	13	4	9	14	10	2	3	8	16	5	
19	13	12	2	6	18	4	5	3	15	14	1	10	11	9	7	17	8	16		
20	15	4	5	13	19	1	6	2	16	8	3	9	18	7	11	12	10	17	14	
21	14	12	13	18	16	1	3	8	15	5	10	6	9	4	2	11	7	17		
22	15	3	6	16	18	1	7	5	13	12	8	11	14	9	2	4	10	17		
23	10	11	12	14	17	1	4	2	16	8	13	9	15	6	3	7	5	18		
24	16	6	5	2	17	4	7	3	13	10	1	11	15	5	8	9	12	14		
25	13	3	5	11	14	1	9	2	15	17	7	12	10	16	8	4	6	18		
26	12	5	4	6	18	1	8	7	13	15	2	14	16	10	3	9	11	17		
27	14	9	17	11	12	1	4	2	15	6	13	8	18	5	3	10	7	16		
28	18	10	3	12	16	6	7	2	15	11	1	5	14	9	8	13	4	17		
29	11	13	10	17	18	12	6	14	15	4	7	16	8	2	1	3	5	9		
30	15	11	7	13	18	8	4	5	16	6	2	3	12	10	9	14	1	17		
31	10	7	6	14	18	1	13	9	17	15	3	8	5	16	11	4	2	12		
32	13	10	11	17	18	2	9	1	8	6	12	5	16	3	4	14	7	15	19	20
33	13	2	3	15	18	9	11	7	16	12	1	4	14	6	10	8	5	17		
34	15	12	10	17	18	2	3	11	4	7	16	8	13	5	1	9	6	14		

35	12	2	8	14	18	4	3	11	15	9	1	6	17	10	13	5	7	16		
36	17	5	7	12	14	1	8	2	11	16	6	15	13	9	3	4	10	18		
37	13	3	2	12	18	5	4	11	16	14	1	8	6	9	10	15	7	17		
38	17	2	5	4	18	3	6	11	14	12	1	10	16	9	8	13	7	15		
39	11	3	4	12	10	1	7	8	16	13	5	15	18	14	9	6	2	17		
40	18	3	8	17	6	7	11	1	16	13	5	14	15	12	2	4	10	9		
41	8	3	1	4	18	2	7	14	16	11	5	10	9	12	15	13	6	17		
42	15	8	7	10	18	1	3	2	16	12	6	11	9	13	4	17	5	14		
43	15	5	1	4	18	10	8	11	14	9	2	7	16	12	13	3	6	17		
44	13	4	6	12	18	5	8	11	7	15	2	14	16	10	1	9	3	17		
45	5	2	1	4	18	9	7	6	17	11	3	8	12	10	16	15	14	13		
46	17	2	3	5	19	4	9	15	16	11	1	7	13	12	14	10	8	18	6	
47	14	4	7	16	18	1	6	8	15	10	9	11	13	12	2	3	5	17		
48	13	14	18	12	17	2	5	4	7	9	16	10	11	6	1	3	8	15		
49	11	2	3	17	18	12	6	14	15	10	1	7	16	9	8	4	5	13		
50	12	16	8	4	17	9	10	7	13	15	1	2	6	3	5	11	14	18		
51	17	2	3	16	18	4	8	5	13	11	1	7	15	9	12	10	6	14		
52	18	5	4	9	16	3	12	7	15	14	1	10	8	13	2	11	6	17		
53	17	14	15	13	18	4	2	6	9	7	12	8	11	3	1	10	5	16		

## Appendix 8

### Interview schedule - Parents

#### Biographical Details

Name.....

Date of birth.....

Level of Education.....

Age of Children.....

Date of interview.....

Location.....

#### Pre Interview

Welcome and thanks

Intention to record

Confirmation of anonymity

Interview will be transcribed and sent to interviewee for checking

#### Interview

1. Briefly tell me about your children and their schooling to date.
2. How did your family go about completing the card sort?
3. Tell me why you placed the cards in the order you did.
4. Let's focus on the reputation card in particular now. You placed it ..... You obviously think school reputation is very important / reasonably important / not at all important. Can you explain why?
5. May I ask you to explain in your own words what you understand by the word reputation?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Thanks & End

## Appendix 9

### Interview schedule - Staff

#### Biographical Details

Name.....

Date of birth.....

Level of Education.....

Age range of pupils taught.....

Date of interview.....

Location.....

#### Pre Interview

Welcome and thanks

Intention to record

Confirmation of anonymity

Interview will be transcribed and sent to interviewee for checking

#### Interview

1. Please tell me about your role in school?
2. Was anybody else involved in this card sort? (If yes....was it difficult to reach a consensus?)
3. Please tell me why you placed the cards in the order you did.
4. Let's focus on the reputation card in particular now. You placed it ..... You obviously think school reputation is very important / reasonably important / not at all important. Can you explain why?
5. May I ask you to explain in your own words what you understand by the word reputation as it applies to a school?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Thanks & End

## **SCHOOL STAFF INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Section A: The Research Project**

1. Title of project: What Factors Influence School Choice?
2. Purpose and value of study: The study will aim to find out the extent to which parents and school staff agree which are the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their child AND the extent to which parents and school staff have a shared understanding of 'school reputation' and how much it matters when choosing a school.

By helping X Partnership Academy Trust better understand what it is that parents value most when selecting a school, they will be better able to meet the needs of the X community.

3. All employees of one of the X Partnership Academy Trust schools are invited to participate.
4. Who is organising the research: My name is Andrew Nicholson and I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Doctoral student at Anglia Ruskin University. Prior to that I was a teacher and headteacher in Suffolk for over 30 years. Although I have been invited to undertake my research in the X Partnership Academy Trust I have no formal links with it.
5. What will happen to the results of the study: Regular updates on the research will appear in Partnership newsletters to parents, staff briefings and the final report will be made available via the Trust website.
6. This research is self-funded.
7. Contact for further information:

Mr Andrew Nicholson ([andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk))

### **Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project**

1. All the research will be carried out in X in the X Partnership Academy Trust Schools and to make the results as valid as I can, I need as many parents and school staff to take part as possible.
2. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary. As well as this information sheet (a separate one has been prepared for parents) you will be given 2 copies of the Participant Consent sheet (Staff). You must sign one and return it to me before undertaking any activities. The second one is for you to keep.

3. You can withdraw at any time from the project by sending the slip on the bottom of the consent form you kept back to me or emailing me direct.
4. What will happen if you agree to take part? You will be asked to undertake a simple card sort activity with 1 or 2 other colleagues. This will be done in school time. I would then like to identify 4 willing volunteers to be interviewed. The interviews will take place in school at a convenient time.
5. There are no risks involved in taking part in this project.
6. Agreement to participate in this research will not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong.
7. There are no special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the project.
8. All information collected from you will be treated in the strictest confidence. No real names will be used in the report.
9. The most immediate benefit of taking part in this project will be to the child who will be asked to conduct the 'card sort' at home. They should enjoy it and it will be good for their confidence. Longer-term benefits will emerge, as the Trust better understands what X parents want from its schools.
10. Your participation in the project will be kept confidential unless you decide otherwise
11. If you have a complaint about me, or the conduct of my research project, I hope you will raise it with me first. If you would prefer not to or you are not satisfied by my response you can refer your concern to Mr ..... at school or my University supervisor Professor Waller at [tim.waller@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:tim.waller@anglia.ac.uk)

THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP

**SCHOOL STAFF CONSENT FORM**

Title of the project: What Factors Influence School Choice?

Main investigator and contact details: Andrew Nicholson  
(email: [andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.nicholson@student.anglia.ac.uk))

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the School Staff Information Sheet for the project. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the project.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the School Staff Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University<sup>2</sup> processing personal data that I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant

(print).....Signed.....Date.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

-----

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: What Factors Influence School Choice?

**I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY**

Name (print).....Signed.....Date.....

---

<sup>2</sup> "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

## Appendix 12

Letter to parents of children in the two primary schools too young to take the card sorts home

26.1.15

### What Factors Influence School Choice?



Dear Parents

Many of you with children in Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 were kind enough to return a consent form indicating that you were prepared to take part in this study. However, because of the age of your child it was not felt appropriate to ask him / her to take the 'card sort' home.

I would therefore like to offer you the opportunity to participate by dropping into ..... Primary Academy between 2.30pm and 3.15pm on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> February to complete the card sort with me. It should take you no more than 10 minutes.

If you did not return the consent form but would like to participate please feel free to come along.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours Faithfully

Andrew Nicholson



## Appendix 13

### School Staff Additional Criteria

Staff group 1	class sizes
Staff group 9	parents experience at a particular school
Staff group 14	which school the parent attended themselves
Staff group 18	link with primary / secondary (all through)
Staff group 20	historic reputation
Staff group 32	communication between school and parents AND community Activities (links to community)
Staff group 46	iPads

### Parents Additional Criteria

Parent 4	Childs preference / choice
Parent 9	Good Ofsted results
Parent 11	Regular teacher feedback
Parent 12	Play based child centred approach in early years and Yr. 1
	Outside spaces and use of outdoor learning
Parent 26	Primary partnership with Newtown High
Parent 29	Support for SEN

The numbers relate to the number given to each staff group or parent / family on the spreadsheet.

Following advice from a statistician, I did not include these additional criteria in the statistical analysis (Chapter 3: Results – Quantitative Data) as inclusion would skew the outcomes.

## Appendix 14

### Transcript of a Parent Interview: Parent 5

Interviewer (Int.)

Thank you C for meeting with me this afternoon. Can we start with an introductory question and can you briefly tell me about your children and their schooling to date?

P5

Yes, J, my eldest is 12 he started at Newtown Primary in the third term in Foundation and then went right the way through. O is 8 - then he left and came to Newtown High and is in his second year. O is 8 and he started Newtown Primary part time for two terms because he's a summer birthday and he's currently in year 4 and T is 4 and is at the nursery on the Newtown High site and is due to start at Newtown Primary in September - I've just sent his paperwork back.

Int

Right, as a resident of Newtown, were you brought up here, did you attend this school?

P5

No, no, we didn't move here until 1995.

Int

OK, thank you. Now when you completed this card sort, was it you that did it or did you do it with one of your children?

P5

I did it, then my husband and my eldest looked at the order I'd put them in

Int

And did you change any of them after your discussion?

P5

No.

Int

They tended to agree?

P5

Yes.

Int

So we can take it that essentially it was done by you? OK let's talk about the cards and why you placed them in that order. And interestingly you put one of the spare cards as your first one. And that says in the case of Newtown High, the partnership links with the primary school my child attended was the main reason for choosing this school. So that was number one, then it's the proximity card, then it's the friendship card and then good academic standards and then reputation you put as fifth. At the bottom you put that it's a church school as irrelevant, family connections are irrelevant and child care is irrelevant as -well. Can you just tell me a little bit about why you put the cards in the order that you did.

P5

J my eldest is a little bit difficult with change, so from about year 5 he started to be concerned about what was going to be happening when he changed schools. Round about that time Newtown Primary went through a difficult period with Ofsted which did affect J quite badly, then it started to be forged to make it the partnership and in year 5 and quite a lot in year six there were a lot of links and teachers - language teachers, PE teachers - were going to Newtown Primary and teaching the older children, and they were coming up here and having the opportunity to use the science labs and be taught by the science teachers. So when it came to the beginning of year 6 and we started looking round, we looked round here, we looked round Oldtown High, we didn't look further afield. J was more comfortable when we looked round here because it felt more familiar to him. When we went to Oldtown High and I said what do you think of this school? He said he liked the canteen, so I didn't think that was a good basis for seven years education.

Int

So was that familiarity based on the fact that he had been a number of times already?

P5

Yes, he knew the school layout, some of the teachers and I think the uniform helped because Newtown Primary went from the burgundy to the blue in a similar style and it did start to forge the links and the Principal was temporary head so he'd got to know - not personally - but she was a familiar face, and then she was the principal here. So when he came to look round here he was much happier. Subsequently to our visit to Oldtown High - where we had pretty much ruled it out - I then made another appointment to see the Principal because I felt I didn't know enough about the exam results from the open day that I'd attended, and to be honest they were on a par, so it seemed silly to disrupt him when he was happy. I should think the majority of his class came as well - not that that was always a good thing as there were difficulties. But he wasn't being thrown into something totally new, and then they did the weeks induction - which we would have got at Oldtown high - in the July. And the summer holidays were a lot better than I expected. I thought we would have 6 weeks of hell, with him getting more and more worked up. But I think he started on the first day and he was - because they'd been for their week and met some of the teachers and they'd looked round and they knew where their tutor room was, so when they came in on that first day it wasn't new. So that was the main reason for putting the cards in that order.

Int

So were you - are you particularly supportive of the idea of the partnership? Has that made things better as far as you're concerned? Because some of the things you've described in terms of transfer could go on anyway.

P5

Yes, the sharing out of teachers throughout key stage 2 of primary, those people will start to be familiar because he'll see them around the school. So for J with his - he's a bit obsessive - that really did help him, but he would have got the week same as he got the week here. But he was just happier because he felt this was more familiar, he'd been here.

Int

So for J that was particularly important. What about the other two, will it be as important?

P5

I don't think it will, and Oldtown High might suit O better. So although he'll have a guaranteed place here - J prefers structure and boundaries and homework that needs to be in the next day and O's a little bit more relaxed and will manage his time better and Oldtown High has a slightly more relaxed approach, whereas Newtown High is more traditional in their boundaries and their teaching and it may suit O better but he will probably come here, they are already talking about it and a lot of his friends are coming here.

Int

So is it right to say that if I asked you to do this card sort for J and then asked you to do it again...you might come to a different conclusion slightly?

P5

I would probably keep that there, because already in year 4 he's got a French teacher that comes down and teaches him, a music teacher that comes down, the PE staff come down, so he's already forging links. They are doing a media project at the moment that I'm sure is going to culminate with them coming up to use the media suite

Int

Is that sort of thing you obviously value that and think it's important. Do you think from talking to other parents that sort of thing is welcomed?

P5

I think yes it probably is – I did see the benefit for the children I'm not entirely convinced that All-through Learning is best on the whole. I can see the benefits for individual children that they are familiar with the places before they have to move into them but I have mixed feelings, sometimes I think it's a great idea, others I think it takes the focus off the individual schools a little bit and they get left by the wayside a bit.

Int

OK thank you. You put proximity and friendship groups and good academic standards and then reputation as being important as well, let's leave the reputation one out for a moment but proximity – I guess the ability to walk to school, friendship groups

P5

Newtown Junior traditionally would be our catchment school if catchments still existed and that was where Jack was supposed to go, which was why he started at Newtown Primary late, we applied and got the place at Newtown Junior and I asked the Headteacher to look round and they asked me to come back in three months and I asked cannot I look round now if I make an appointment. They said yes in 3 months we want to make changes. Yes by all means tell me the changes you want to make and I will come back and admire them in 3 months. So we moved to Newtown Primary and we can still walk, but with them in 3 different locations at the moment it's a bit of a nightmare. I'm looking forward to September because I've got – well really Newtown Primary because I can drop J off at the top of the road.

Int

What about friendship groups?

P5

J is more of a loner with familiar faces, whereas O has lots of friends – it's pretty much the whole year that he's on friendly terms with and probably at least half he would class as friends. So he would find it harder to go elsewhere if everybody was coming here as he has got so many friends but he is a sociable person

Int

Good academic standards and pupils do well – you've put that as 4<sup>th</sup>, clearly that's important to you.

P5

It is, I think Oldtown High and Newtown High are almost on a par. I know their Ofsted rating is now different but at the time we looked round they were both outstanding. I'm not sure that either school has that greater progress for all of their pupils, I think each school picks a different group of pupils to focus on and here it's the less well able and at Oldtown High it's the more able and I don't think that necessarily benefits J because I think he could do with being pushed a bit more but Ofsted rated both the schools outstanding and had they not we might have looked at an internal Cambridge or somewhere. I want my children to do well, I don't want to be that parent that is pushing them but I want to feel that I've picked a school where they can work harder and achieve good results.

Int

But you could see a scenario where you could see your three children at different schools as they'd be right for different children?

P5

Yes

Int

Does that imply that the schools in this area are segregating or are becoming known as you have inferred - good for a particular type of child. This school will be good for this type of child and that school will be good for that type of child?

P5

Yes I think they are and I'm not sure that the partnerships that have been set up are benefiting the town. Where there were seven independent primary schools or six and a church school I think now we have got one left that is not affiliated with one school or another and I'm not a 100% convinced that that's the best

Int

Almost forcing this route through?

P5

Yes, you're going to XYZ primary school and that's where you end up and the others go here. And yes you can make the decision but all the way through you're kind of being fed that that's where you're going, and the children are being encouraged that's where they're going.

Int

Do you see any sense of – not just academic segregation paths, let's call it, probably a bit strong term but you know what I mean. Do you see any social segregation within that as well within the town?

P5

Yes, and I think Oldtown High gets the better and more able, and Newtown High seems to get everybody else. Oldtown High seems to have the opportunity to select the better, whereas Newtown High...

Int

Is it the schools selecting or the parents choosing?

P5

I think it's a bit of both. When I went to Oldtown High, I said to J that the Head's going to have to do a really good job for me to send you here, and I sat in his speech and was quite offended because he was very clear that if you fitted his criteria you were welcome and would do well but if you didn't fit that mold then don't bother coming.

Int

Go somewhere else?

P5

Yes, and obviously that's good for the people that fit his mold or are prepared to mould themselves to fit it. But their results aren't hugely better than Newtown High so it's not doing that great a job but he does seem to have more ability to...

Int

Could you imagine Newtown High ever saying that to parents?

P5

I think they should but don't know that they're in a position to because the amount of spaces they have, they can't turn round and tell people to... I think they should stand up there and be a bit more...

Int

They've got to go somewhere haven't they?

P5

Because there are a lot of people in Newtown where education isn't their first priority and that is fed through the family. I think the schools have a harder job to encourage the children to believe education is good and will benefit them.

Int

Let's talk about the ones you didn't give much importance to. From the bottom you've got church school, family connections, child care arrangements, activities after-school clubs, school uniform, you don't think any of those are particularly important in your notion of school choice?

P5

I did ask if Newtown High were planning to change the Grange Hill uniform before I applied because Oldtown High's is so much nicer but at the end of the day it's just shirt and trousers

Int

It's not something that bothers you?

P5

No, my husband went to a school that had a purple blazer, I think I might have struggled with J to get him to wear a purple blazer and then it might have been higher up, but no navy blue/black - the cut of the blue suits is nicer but...

Int

But nevertheless do you think a uniform of some sort is important?

P5

I think yes it is because it should create that sense of unity, I think if you don't have uniform it creates division amongst different social groups, people with different opinions not necessarily rich families/poor families but people who consider maybe sport to be more important and therefore their clothing is more that way.

Int

It creates a sort of conformity but in a positive sense

P5

Yes I think when they're in school they're all the same

Int

The family connections, do I assume that's not important because you weren't brought up in Newtown – you've moved into this area.

P5

We're not local so...

Int

So you're not influenced by the local gossip and the grapevine? When you made your choice and when you make your choice for your youngest child it will be your choice? You don't listen much to the gossip?

P5

No you hear it in the playground but you've got to take it all with a pinch of salt. I'm making a decision that I think is best for my child.

Int

How influential do you think the grapevine is in Newtown?

P5

I think it's quite influential, I think there is a sector of the community who decide what a lot of people are going to believe. There are families and groups in the playground who are...well you don't mess with them – whether you choose to listen to what they've got to say, I think they can be very influential, I think maybe that's a route school should go down to get them on board and spreading the right message. But when I chose schools it was more Ofsted results, and where applicable formal qualifications that swayed me. Obviously T starting at Newtown Primary will be much easier than starting elsewhere, because I'll only have one school to drop off at. But had I felt that - and I did meet with Mrs X before I applied because T had decided to teach himself all the letters so I wanted to make sure that that wasn't going to be a problem before he started and if it had of been, I would have had to look elsewhere, but she reassured me that they would be able to cope

with him.

Int

With all the three children has the choice of schools been yours, the mother, or has it been a family decision?

P5

It's probably been mine, when it all went wrong with Newtown Junior it was quite late. It was November. I went to Newtown Primaries open morning for the following academic year, because Newtown Junior – he should have started in the September wouldn't take him in the school until the Easter because they have a nursery and I was working and J was already in a nursery. So after I had applied and I'd been to a open evening and thought yes OK and then I was to look round in more detail and I got told no I couldn't. And I went home and thought no I'm not very happy about that. O was a baby – I was flicking through the local paper and Newtown Primary had advertised their open morning for those starting the following September so I went and looked round and I really liked the atmosphere, I spoke with the headteacher, he said all the right things, it was really open, you could wander into classrooms and it wasn't like anywhere was off limits and I asked whilst I was there do you have any space for this academic year. He went off and checked and I practically signed J up there and then. Then when I went home I said to my husband I moved him from Newtown Junior, he's going to Newtown Primary now he said Oh OK fine then, if you're happy with that.

Int

It's not an uncommon scenario. Let's talk about this reputation card. You put it fifth so out of 18 you put it quite high. So you obviously feel that in terms of choosing a school it's important in some way.

P5

It influences you yes.

Int

Tell me a bit more how it influences you.

P5

If I start with Newtown Primary way back when I went and looked for J it was the only primary school in the town that had an outstanding Ofsted report at that time. And I had done a little research before I went to the open morning so I sort of knew what I wanted to find out. Mr G at the time lived up to the hype that I believed – not at their Ofsted at the time as it was pretty rubbish then there wasn't really much on it at all, but reading the Ofsted report and what the inspectors had found and then compared to the experience I had at Newtown Junior and I didn't even look at Newtown Junior for O. For O I applied to Newtown Primary because J was already there and he started on the part time basis, which was quite annoying but he's a summer birthday. But they've changed that now. Unfortunately O's got a hearing problem and it took a very long time for him to get hearing aids. I'd started to get a little bit frustrated with Newtown Primary, every parents evening they said he's struggling with his phonics and I said that's because he can't hear, I kept telling them. Finally he got his hearing aids, still I keep getting told he's still struggling with his phonics and on the phonics test he got single figures out of the 30 something and they say this might be a problem. I keep saying it's because he can't hear and it's taken them till year 4 for them to start helping him with his phonics and his relearning them. So I have had a period where I felt like I was banging my head against a brick wall. I've



spoken to the head and I did look elsewhere. I went to W. Primary on the Oldtown High side of town and looked round and spoke to the head because it had a good reputation, people spoke highly of it and it was a new building and generally people said since it had moved to the new building it had improved, Ofsted seemed quite impressed. But when I dug down to the nitty-gritty of their SATs results they were so similar. Even when you take into account Newtown Primary because I was looking at J results at Newtown Primary and equivalent and the SATs results from J's year were really poor because their teacher was one of the people that left when they went on special measures. They were effectively 18 months without a teacher which did cloud my judgement a little bit, they had supply in and various people and it almost got to the point where I think they thought we'll start afresh with the new children and then they thought oh they've got to do SATs. So then they had a year and a half of cramming for SATs and I think he came out with a level 5 and a level 6 he did really well but there were a lot of children that did less well which was really bad. But W Primary with no excuse, their results were the same and at that point I'd got to move O before September or I can't use the sibling card for T and I could end up with one one side of town one somewhere else O has a good set of friends. Newtown Primary are now pulling their socks up. They have now agreed and been helping O for a year and I think reputation does play a part

Int

So do you construct your own notion of reputation around things like Ofsted results about SATs? They're important to you.

P5

Yes, because Ofsted I hope are judging schools fairly equally across the board and then SATs results it's the same paper taken at the same time by the same aged children. I hope that would give a fairly good view rather than my personal opinion of Newtown Junior is quite low and I could influence somebody with that but it's 10 years ago now, it's so far off the mark I'm sure.

Int

Some people base their notion of reputation on the grapevine. If you're not listening to that you've got some other hook.

P5

I would prefer to go down the formal route where I hope people are more independent and SATs results are a result of what's happened in the school other than someone's personal opinion.

Int

But you also take into account things in addition to the SATs and Ofsted, because schools are about a lot more than that aren't they?

P5

I'm a big person with atmosphere, when I look round a house, if I don't like the atmosphere then I'm not going to buy it. So when I walked into Newtown Primary that first time it had a nice atmosphere and it had a good Ofsted report and I don't know if SATs existed then but generally the feeling around it was good and when we came here what I really noticed on the open evening was that the students were really engaged and they wanted to tell you about this school and they wanted to tell you about the courses that they were doing. Less so with Oldtown High, the students were just - they didn't really engage at all with the parents.

Int

OK, so would it be fair to say then, from what you've said – tell me if my interpretation isn't correct. That when you think about reputation, because you're not relying on the gossip/grapevine, you're looking at much more concrete, measurable things like Ofsted judgements, SATs scores and so on, but actually take into account lots of other things as well. Could it be that the other things that you're taking into account in terms of constructing your notion of reputation is these things that you think are important within the card sort

P5

Yes. It probably is yes. Obviously there's that little voice of someone that says, I don't like Newtown Primary or Newtown High, but you have to judge it on the basis of what facts you can find to back it up and I think yes, Newtown High and Newtown Primary are local, they are not the closest. They had good results at the time of applying and Newtown Primary has done fantastically to pull itself back to where it is. Neither of my older children had friends before they joined school because I worked in Cambridge and I put them in nursery in Cambridge because if they were ill or had an accident I liked to think I could be there quickly rather than a 20 mile journey back to Newtown or wondering what I was going to find. So from that aspect choosing their initial school wherever they were going was going to be new. Whereas T, I think 70% of the children at the Newtown High nursery are going to be going to Newtown Primary and that would probably influenced me if he had of been my first because once they've made these friendship groups you don't want to tear them away. The boys always knew at nursery they were never going to go to school with the children they were friends with. But when you go to a pre-school or nursery in the town that would probably have influenced me but it wouldn't have been my final decision if it was the worst school in the town and everybody was going then T would have to make new friends.

Int

Does the fact that you have a child here, do you find that people at the primary school ask you, and then you've also got a role at the primary school as Chairman of the Friends Association. Do you find that people ask you how you find Newtown High?

P5

I don't get so much about Newtown High because you are either going to Newtown High or you're going to Oldtown High there's not really a decision to be made.

Int

So at what point do they make the decision then?

P5

They make the decision really early.

Int

Do they? Based on what then?

P5

I think its based on their perception of reputation or whether they've been to one or the other because there is an us and them.

Int

Do you think the family connections element is very strong then?

P5

Yes with people who are local.

Int

Which are a lot of people.

P5

They go down the route if they went to Newtown High they go there and vice versa. Though not so much with the primary schools Newtown Primary with go to here because they are now kind of being funneled. I know there are a number this year, more than Newtown Primary and Newtown High would like, who are going to Oldtown High. That decision wasn't made following open evening, that decision was probably made when they started school.

Int

So there's almost tribalism going on?

P5

Yes, you go to a primary school that is convenient, but when you go to proper school you follow the route that your parents took, the family took.

Int

So using Newtown High as an example. No matter what Newtown High does in terms of standards in terms of atmosphere in terms of building reputation to some parents it won't make any difference because they've already decided.

P5

Because they're an Oldtown High family and that's what they'll always be. And it doesn't matter if Oldtown High suddenly went into special measures and became the worst school in the country. I think there's this loyalty if you've been to one or the other that you will go. But I don't have personal experience of that. I went to an all girls grammar school and I am quite fond of selective grammar schools. I passed my 11 plus and I think it was a mistake to do that, I think everybody benefited because there's less pressure. If you were less able and didn't pass your 11 plus you're not being compared to someone who's... I mean I didn't get straight As, not by a long way, my sister did but I was Mrs Average, but if you're less able I think it's hard for a school to deal with the straight A students and the less able that might be lucky to pass

Int

Is there anything more you can say about reputation then because I don't want to put words into your mouth. Is it that reputation is almost like a construct of a whole variety of different things and that's how you develop your notion of reputation – it's a combination?

P5

Yes. In Newtown listening to what people say and why they make their decisions, I do think it is quite a lot of family connections, nostalgia and location. One's on one side of town and one's the other and one is in the middle of one of the council estates and one is in the middle of the other so where people were moved in way back when. A lady I used to work with she lived in a house opposite Newtown High and her children went there before

she came to Cambridge and it was though there wasn't even another school if you spoke to her. They went to Newtown Primary, then Newtown High. It was almost like it was two separate towns.

Int

Is there anything else you want to say about how you have set the cards out about the place of reputation, how you selected a school, anything else at this point?

P5

No, I obviously put teachers and management a bit lower down. I do think they're important but from the experience with the choices I had I don't think there is a vast difference between the schools. I don't think any has got hugely better teachers they might have people that shine in particular subjects or areas and I think the schools are pretty much – I think less so now they are becoming academies – but when they were all LEA there wasn't much to pick between them. Now they are more businesses I think in time it will show more.

Int

OK thank you.

FINISH

## Appendix 15

### Transcript of a School Staff Interview: Staff 3

Interviewer (Int.)

Good morning. Can you tell me about your role in school please?

S3

Yes, my role is the executive principal of the three schools in the Newtown Academy Trust, which means I oversee the provision for those youngsters and also the outputs, the achievements.

Int.

OK thank you. I'm putting the cards in front of you in the order that you placed them, and I want to ask you a little bit about the cards.

S3

That's the first one.

Int.

That's the first one. OK? The 51 just means that you are respondent 51.

S3

OK. Firstly when I did this I was doing it quite quickly and there may be some areas where...

Int.

No that's OK, that's fine. If you want to change your mind slightly that's OK.

S3

OK.

Int.

You did it on your own?

S3

I did.

Int.

You did. Can you tell me why you placed the cards in that order?

S3

Yes, I put this one about proximity or nearness to home because having been, certainly in Newtown for 11 years, I've noticed that the families that send children to our school, that's the secondary school and actually now the primary schools, they really are the parents who are just keen to send them to the local school, and things like how do they get to the school - how do they physically move to the school, really worry them and I don't believe a number of the parents who actually come to the school now choose it for that reason - about the proximity. They're also very keen to be influenced by their children. So their children will quite often say to them, 'I'm only going because X is going.' I'm very aware that I may be coloured through the particular issues that I know we have at our three

schools. So we are more and more, and increasingly over the last 11 years, getting the families who perhaps traditionally are not those who understand education and are therefore those who think about it as - this is where we send our child because it's closest, their friends go there, it's easy for me to get them there. They haven't – our parents – and this profile has changed gradually over the years – had the sort of education themselves which means they understand what education can give them, in terms of achievement and standards and raising aspirations. So I don't believe over the years we have broken that cycle. In fact I believe that political factors have mitigated against us to mean that the competition locally within schools has meant that we have more and more parents who think that – proximity, friendship group, family connections have become more important. And I know I'm talking in a particular context of being there a long time. OK but I have put reputation as number four, so if you like as the CEO of this organization I know that's why our parents choose schools at the moment – those first three. They also want reputation as well, which is a bit of a dichotomy because actually by the very nature of what I've just said to you it means it's very hard to get the reputation to where you want to get it, particularly in this era of competition between four schools in close proximity, I believe, a government who set up the whole free schools program intending to ensure one of those schools to close because of competition. Of course our parents don't understand any of that. So the last ones I've done are about church school and school clubs and activities and I think they're there probably because I ran out of time actually if I'm being truthful, so actually I think these are the most important ones for me. But of course up there at the top is the thing about leadership, which I would put hand in hand with reputation. But I might be different to everybody else putting those three first. Because I understand the political context we are now working in more acutely because that's what I see every single day.

Int.

So from what you've said, are you almost implying that the parents who are choosing to send their children to your school are sending them because they are not making a choice as such?

S3

Yes.

Int.

They're doing it because it's the obvious thing to do, it's the local school and in effect those who are making a choice are choosing not to send often?

S3

Yes – there's a very powerful quote – I don't know where it comes from but it's related to the film *Educating Rita*. I don't know maybe I made this quote up but it's about, “education gives people a choice about how people live their lives” and I think parents we are now dealing with in our context. So those parents who haven't been given a choice about the way they've lived their lives either, and that's the majority of who our parents are at the moment, they haven't had the benefit of a fantastic education themselves, therefore they haven't been given those choices, therefore they're not making those choices for their children, within our context and I'm talking about specifically our three schools in our context here. So if you look back at the history of Newtown, and we look at the C Estate and the development of it and our schools, particularly the secondary school was the original Newtown secondary school and education in the area – in the immediate area – hasn't always been as good as it should be. But there's been another school in the town that have now got that reputation, so the parents who do know that education gives them a

choice of about how they live their lives have chosen to send their children to – in their eyes – the school that gives that choice. I hope that answers ...

Int.

Yes absolutely.

S3

Understandable.

Int.

Is there anything else you want to say more about the cards, how you've placed them, if not I'm going to look at the reputation card in a bit more detail.

S3

No that's fine.

Int.

So this is the reputation card and you've put it fourth. So you've given it a lot of importance. Can you explain why in a little more detail you've placed it so high in the rank order?

S3

Well reputations an interesting word isn't? Because what does it actually mean? You know whose view of reputation is it anyway? And there seems to be this nebulous thing in a community that a school has a reputation – which it does – now where does that reputation come from is interesting. I think it possibly comes from how high profile the leadership makes the school and therefore has it got a high profile leader who is seen to be modeling leadership in the way that the community want it? So I think these two are connected – reputation and a well managed school and the head has a good reputation. My experience is that that actually is key and it comes down to the head. So for example when I was first head at Newtown High 11 years ago the school wasn't in a good place but just by doing a few quite symbolic things it meant that people thought Newtown High was on the move and almost overnight it got a good reputation, because of something I did about uniform. You know we're seeing in the news at the moment this idea about somebody up in Birmingham – a head - who kicked all the kids out and wouldn't let them come to school that's what I did when I first came to Newtown High in a different sort of way, and overnight because I was on the billboards of Newtown Echo in the first week I was there it drew attention to the school, that could have gone either way. And I didn't do it deliberately, but what I learned in a good way, was that the community thought that heads doing something there, the schools on the move and that built the reputation because it was linked to – I should have put it up higher - the discipline one, because what the school needed at the time was good discipline and a well managed school but they all go together don't they? So I think parents want that for their children. They want to know that someone's leading the school that has no nonsense and it's going to care for their children but also have a tough love approach. But I think the reputation thing is slightly deeper than that because somewhere it's connected with the results that you achieve as well. I think there's some connection there with the class system, I think we'd have to dig round that a bit more, I think there's something there in our British culture which is about the culture of the different classes within this country. There's this white working class culture, and I would hasten to say, I think white working class choose schools for these reasons I've talked about at the top. I think your aspirant working class people might look at the reputation. I think I've spoken to you before about what I call the Abigail's Party

Syndrome, you know this idea in the film or play, there was something about the way you should behave and act and they were all doing these cocktails and things like that and if we could just get underneath what that actually means when parents are choosing schools. You see I think that this 'Abigail's Party Syndrome' goes on in this town with the other school in this town called Oldtown High, parents send their children to that school – I think they're the aspirant working classes or middle classes who do it – they don't know why they're doing it, they think it's about they think they're making a choice – but it's got the badge. It's almost like Emperor's New Clothes in a way but they also manage to get the results now so perhaps I'm talking myself out of that.

Int.

So is it tied into a socio-economic class element which is Newtown High is a more the working class school and that Oldtown High is the more aspirant middle class school and that's how it's basically become divided up?

S3

Yes, some people won't say that because somehow people don't like to use the class word but that's absolutely what it is. And white working class culture means you choose the school that's near by because kids can go to the same school and there are family connections and there's a big pride in doing that sort of thing, and that's the white working class culture. I can't really explain more about it than that but I know that through and through because intuitively that's what I've seen for 10 or 11 years.

Int.

So are those parents then likely to be attracted by academic standards so much or is more what we call the 'soft skills' – the caring school, the good discipline, where the kids will be happy, not necessarily going to have high academic standards, but they're going to be happy there and people know it in the community. Is that important?

S3

I'd like to be able to answer that question but I can't. I don't know the answer to that because I don't think that it is that white working class parents don't want high academic standards for their children, I think they do so I don't think it's easy to answer that question, I mean I would love to be able to say yes. And if I could actually get the answer to that question I think I might crack what we do next with our schools because I think they want all of those things. So I'm talking at odds with myself. If you could answer that for me in the course of your research, that would help us with the way forward.

Int.

How much is the reputation of the school at the moment tied up with the reputation as it has been historically? How much of an advantage or burden is that to you at the moment?

S3

I'm not sure of the answer to that question – at all. Because I'm not sure what the reputation of the school is right now, I know it changed a lot and people told me it took a long time to change. I don't think it changed significantly from where it was when I was first appointed as head but I think it did change when it became outstanding in Ofsted terms. But the reputation is still a burden and I suppose as the principal there, I'm aware that we probably have to do something dramatic to change that reputation, because if we don't this school won't be viable in the future and it's connected with all sorts of other things, economic factors, the fact that another secondary school is now in the town. I think there are ways forward but I think we're on the verge of remodeling, and the research you're doing is



going to help us with remodeling in terms of what does the jigsaw of education look like?

Int.

So is the creation of the Trust part of this remodeling?

S3

Yes, absolutely and that has been the way forward from the start. I was very aware that when I became a head it wouldn't just be for one secondary school in the middle of an estate forever, it was something more than that. In the process of the 11 years there have been various political changes or local political changes that have enabled us to do that. So the middle school situation, the fact that we now don't get children at 14, the fact that prior to this government being elected we were already federating with middle schools and primary schools. So the all-through approach that we have and the Trust. The Trust and becoming an academy all it's done is to formalize the approach we were already taking, so it's a long term strategic approach that we've got, to try to tackle some of the issues I started to talk to you about, which is, white working class culture, which is a very proud culture, about valuing the school that's nearest, about friendship groups about family connections and somehow harnessing that together with this question I couldn't answer about high standards – high exam standards to try to put all those things together in some sort of educational provision that does mean that we 're valuing education locally, that doesn't quite make sense I almost thought I was grasping something I was nearly answering your question .

Int.

OK we've talked a bit about the nature of reputation from a philosophical point of view, let's see if we can go a bit deeper than we've done and talk about things like image and branding and reputation. Do you think the three are synonymous?

S3

Yes, absolutely. Concrete examples of that for example are going into a secondary school that was on its knees in 2003 and totally changing the uniform and making sure those children did wear blazers and ties and that they chose the uniform and they were part of that. That people will tell me now that uniform still has set a certain reputation or a certain brand. I'm not sure a reputation but a certain brand for the school, which is a sharp suited, well disciplined environment, so they are linked. It would be interesting to walk into the high street right now and just say what reputation has Newtown High got? That would be really interesting to see what they think it's at now, because the feedback we were getting was that the ambassadors for the school in the last 10 years have been the children in their uniforms. But I deliberately use certain strategies when I 'm walking round the Newtown High, you know I'll walk into a classroom and the children will stand up, but that's not because I'm a crazy, power control freak, it's because that shows that the children can behave when I'm walking round with an external visitor. That was a deliberate strategy right from day one, 11 years ago, that children know how to behave properly in this school, and they do it in such a way that they're actually being respectful about how they do it as well. Those things, I know from the feedback I've had, just amaze people. The say, 'I can't believe those children just stood up for you in the classroom. They used to do that when I was at school!' - Yep, things have changed.

Int.

In terms of branding and building an image, which you then quote reinforces reputation – you talk about the importance of school uniform, but in your list you've put school uniform quite low down.

S3

Yes, I have, probably that was a mistake, perhaps it should go up a little higher - just because it builds a reputation, but I'm not certain how that's connected with the high standards issue that you talked about earlier on in terms of academic standards.

Int.

But maybe it's connected in the minds of staff and in the minds of parents with the good discipline?

S3

Yes, yes it is, that's where it's connected, that's important so that should probably move up, but is that why a parent chooses a school, because of the school uniform? I think that was in my head, I'm not sure they chose it because of the school uniform. But it does certainly have a reputation because it's a symbolic embodiment of the reputation isn't it? Just as the students – how well behaved they are in the community, but that's a major thing isn't it?

Int.

And it gives the students a sense of belonging, doesn't it in some way?

S3

Yes.

Int.

Can we say anything more, do you think about school choice, about any of these cards? Anything more you want to say?

S3

Right, so the question is 'Why do parents choose a school?' Is that the question we're looking at?

Int.

I'm asking you why you think the parents in this community choose the school, and I'll be asking the parents exactly the same questions seeing if they're in accord.

S3

I think they'd probably think that was important (points to a card).

Int.

That parents are always welcome?

S3

Yes, particularly in our primary schools. Our families seem to have this thing – when they go to secondary school they shouldn't be welcome anyway, they're not expected to be welcome. I wish they were, I wish they did feel that, I wish they'd feel they wanted to be welcome, but at primary they think that's important, that they're made to feel welcome, they don't seem to feel it so much at secondary.

Int.

And is that in primaries generally or your primaries do you think?

S3

I think it's a general primary school thing and because we're all - through, parents need to feel that they can come into any school. I've really noticed in primary – being on the gate thing - the parents delivering the children, we've nurtured a lot at Newtown Primary, we've worked very hard at Newtown Primary particularly on parents feeling engaged and being on the gate in the morning and waving and smiling and that sort of stuff. We're hoping overtime that will roll out into the secondary phase because their children will obviously know those parents there. The appointment and the structure we've just set up with the Trust the fact that we've got a Director of Families and Community is designed to further that into the secondary provision so that he will be aware of all the families and the approach is the same.

Int.  
OK?

S3  
Yes, I don't think I've got anything else to say.

Int.  
No that's great, thanks M, thanks very much indeed.

FINISH