What are the views and experiences of key stakeholders regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling for pupils with an ASD?

Rachel Kipling
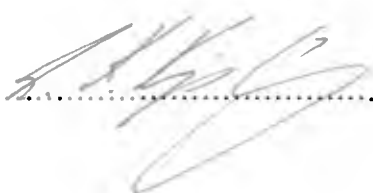Institute of Education, University of London

Abstract

The research question addressed by the study is; "What are the views and experiences of key stakeholders regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling for pupils with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?" The pupils were identified as meeting the focus Local Authority criteria for admission to a specialist provision for ASD, six pupils in total. All pupils were in Year 6 at the start of the study, May 2008, and moved to secondary phase schooling in September 2008. All had a Statement of Special Educational Need (under section 324 of the Education Act 1996). Three pupils transferred to the specialist ASD provision, two transferred to a Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and one transferred to a school with no specialist provision. Qualitative methodology was used to collect views and experiences during transition: semi-structured interviews with parents and pupils, focus groups with school staff. A visual framework using symbols (Talking Mats) supported the difficulties pupils had with social communication during their interviews. Data was collected at two time points, in the summer of 2008 prior to the pupil's transition and again in the winter of 2008 following their first term at secondary school. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was analysed using a form of thematic analysis to elicit common categories and themes. Seven themes emerged at Time 1 and a further six at Time 2. Two key points were identified: 1. five pupils transferring to mainstream schools where additional support was provided appeared to have a more positive transition experience than the pupil transferring to a school with no additional support 2. The findings from the study relating to areas of concern and difficulty during transition for pupils with an ASD were consistent with those reported in the transition literature relating to typical pupils and those with other Special Educational Needs. Words 302

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices and bibliography): 35, 352 words.

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1: Introduction

1.1 Aims of the project

The research question pursued by this study is:

- What are the views and experiences of key stakeholders regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling for pupils with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Specifically:

- What are the views and experiences of pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

- What are the views and experiences of parents of pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

- What are the views and experiences of school staff supporting pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

These questions will be addressed by focusing on pupil's transition to secondary mainstream schools, through semi-structured interviews with parents and pupils as well as additional focus groups run to elicit the school staff perspective.

1.2 Rationale

1.2.i Context

The context for the study is a Local Authority (LA) in the south east of England where provision for pupils with an ASD has recently been under review and a pilot specialist ASD provision opened, attached to an ordinary mainstream secondary school.

The purpose of researching the views and experiences of the key stakeholders (parents, pupils and school staff) about the inclusion of pupils with an ASD is to provide and extend what is currently known about the experiences of these pupils in mainstream secondary settings. There is little current research which, firstly seeks to elicit the views of pupils with an ASD and secondly looks specifically at the transition of this group from primary to secondary phase schooling.

Addressing this lack of research into the inclusion of pupils with an ASD into mainstream secondary schools is necessary due to the acknowledged rise in the identification of ASDs alongside the governments move towards including more pupils within mainstream schools (Every Child matters, 2004; Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2001)

1.2.ii Rise in incidence

One study by Keen and Ward (2004) found the number of recorded diagnoses for ASDs in a single UK health authority had doubled over a four year period. Currently it is thought that 535,000 people are affected by ASDs throughout the UK; 1 in every 100 children (DfES, 2006). In a report by the All Parliamentary Party Group on Autism (Loynes, 2001) there was a recognition that the number of pupils identified as receiving a diagnosis of an ASD had increased over the previous five years. In fact over 10% of pupils with a Statement of Educational Need (Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2001) had an ASD at that time. Most of this change can be accounted for by the increased knowledge and understanding of the disorder together with early

identification. However, it is not possible to rule out the possibility of increased incidence (Rutter, 2005).

The rise in identification is a phenomenon which has occurred internationally. For example, a study in Canada by Ouellette-Kuntz et al (2007) found a significant increase in the prevalence of those identified as having an ASD. One factor they found was the increased numbers of girls being identified with an ASD.

1.2.iii Inclusion

The Salemenca statement makes it clear that all children have the right to be educated within mainstream settings and calls on governments across the world to abide by that principle (UNESCO, 1994). In the UK this has been reflected by the Education Act (Office of Public Sector Information, 1996) and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) which states that: "the special educational needs of children will normally be met in mainstream schools or settings" (DfES, 2001, p.7). This has meant that a number of children and young people who may previously have been educated in specialist schools are now being placed in mainstream schools. One particular group whose placement is shifting towards inclusion in mainstream schools are those pupils with an ASD. This reflects a gradual evolution in education resulting from a developing understanding of special educational needs (SEN) as well as a need to manage funds; to support an infinite number of needs with finite budgets. One aspect of this trend at a local level has been a reduction of out borough placements for pupils, including those pupils with an ASD, who may have traditionally been supported in specialist schools across the country. This change to provision at the organisational

level means that many schools now have to cater for more challenging and complex students (Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000; LeCouter, 2003; OFSTED, 2004).

1.2.iv Provision

There is therefore a clear need to offer support to the education of pupils with an ASD. A survey (Loynes, 2001) across the country revealed a number of issues in the current provision within the UK. Loynes findings included: a varied and inconsistent use of teaching programmes (which were not always clearly evidenced based), a large proportion of Local Authority (LA) tribunal cases involving the provision of pupils with an ASD and a lack of consistent training for staff working with pupils. There is a need to research and find evidence for the best practice to support the transition and inclusion of pupils who have an ASD into their education within mainstream schooling, and to ensure that this good practice can be shared effectively. The first step in this journey is to gather information about the views and experiences of key stakeholders in the education of this group of pupils, i.e. parents, pupils and the school staff.

1.2.v Multiple views

The Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) also talks about the right of children to have their opinions heard and this is again reflected in UK legislation and guidance. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) has a chapter devoted to eliciting pupil views and states that "The views of the child should be given due weight according to the age, maturity and capability of the child" (UNISEF, 1990, articles 12 and 13). Those pupils with an ASD have difficulties and needs in the area of social communication and as such giving these children the opportunity and support

necessary to share their views can be difficult. Never the less they have a right that these views are heard and unless given this opportunity it will be difficult to improve the mainstream provisions and educational experiences for pupils with an ASD.

Alongside eliciting pupil views bringing the views of parents and teachers together as well provides a richer set of qualitative data. Previous research has suggested that triangulating the views of these stakeholders can highlight differences and similarities in the perception of pupil experiences and the education of pupils (Frederickson, Dunsmuir & Monsen, 2004). The present study hopes to build on this research, looking specifically at the views and experiences of pupils with an ASD in order to evaluate and assist the provision for pupils with an ASD in one particular Local Authority (LA) in the south east of England.

1.3 Organisation

The study has been organised as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction

  The introduction outlines the aims, rationale and research questions of the current study.

- Chapter 2: Autistic Spectrum Disorders: definitions, explanations and implications

  Chapter 2 outlines research in the area of ASDs, in order to provide an understanding of the possible difficulties facing this group of pupils. The

chapter includes past and recent definitions and theories of ASDs from
cognitive psychology and neuroscientific research.

- Chapter 3: Literature Review; views and experiences of pupils, parents and staff

Chapter 3 critiques the literature which examines the process of transition to
secondary school for all pupils, those with and without an ASD. This includes
studies which have previously considered the views and perspectives of pupils,
parents and school staff.

Chapter 4: Methodology: qualitative approaches, semi-structured interviews and
analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology for the current study. This includes the
rationale behind decisions made as well as a summary of the techniques used
and analysis undertaken.

- Chapter 5: Results: analysis of transcriptions

Chapter 5 reports the analysis of the current study and the themes identified.

- Chapter 6: Discussion.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodology and findings in the light of previous
literature. Conclusions are drawn about the themes and factors which create
positive and negative experiences for pupils with an ASD.

- Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

Chapter 7 considers the implications of the results for future practice and
research, specifically within the focus LA.

Words 1387

2: Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs):

Definitions, explanations and implications

In this chapter definitions of ASDs will be explored to establish what is meant by the term in the current study. Research into ASDs, which attempts to qualify what ASDs are and offers explanations through theoretical frameworks, is presented in order to establish the possible implications or difficulties for pupils with an ASD transferring to mainstream secondary schooling.

2.1 What is an ASD?

2.1.i Definitions:

Autism was first identified and defined by Leo Kanner in his paper 'Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact' (Kanner, 1943). Shortly after Kanner's original paper Hans Asperger (Asperger, 1944 translated in Frith, 1991) described another group of pupils who also presented with difficulties in social interaction. The syndrome observed by Asperger later became known as Asperger Syndrome. Over time these two papers have become the basis for research into ASDs.

There is still some discussion about whether Asperger's Syndrome or AS and Autism are meaningfully different. However, the difficulties associated with ASDs are now largely considered to lie on a spectrum involving verbal and non-verbal communication, reciprocal social interaction and a markedly restricted repertoire of behaviours or interests (appropriate to developmental level) (Frith, 2003). It is this theory of a continuum or spectrum which will be adopted as a definition for the purposes of the current study.

In 1979 Wing and Gould published a paper, which examined the epidemiology and classification of ASDs. This was one of the initial papers to explore the broader phenotype of autism and present thoughts and ideas about the differences between individuals. Their differentiation of the quality of social interactions is still useful today when thinking about those described as having a social communication difficulty. Wing and Gould talked about three main categories: 'social aloofness', 'passive' and 'active but odd'. The third group, termed 'active but odd' most easily fits with current thoughts about individuals with AS or High Functioning Autism (HFA).

2.2 Explanations

The syndrome of ASD is identified and diagnosed through a collection of symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; World Health Organisation, 2007). There have been several attempts to explain the underlying causes of this syndrome. In recent years this has included a number of studies within the field of health research exploring the neurobiological factors, including research into genes and chromosomes as well as different brain structures (Bauman and Kemper 2005). Within the field of psychology, research has focused on explaining the cognitive processes that are affected in ASDs and the impact they have on behaviour.

In addition whilst historically much research into ASDs has originated from a medical model, i.e. assuming a pathological view of ASDs, there has recently been the suggestion that ASDs reflect a 'difference' in cognitive style rather than a 'difficulty' of 'disability'. This has largely originated from the growing body of

autobiographical accounts written by those with an ASD. (Boucher, 1996; Grandin, 1995; Williams, 1996).

A short summary of these areas follows:

2.2.i Neuroscience research and theories of ASD

There has been much research in recent years in trying to establish whether there is any biological or neurological basis to the spectrum of ASDs. These have included studies of the brain as well as genetic and chromosomal research (Bauman and Kemper 2005).

This field of study has its roots in early twin studies (Folstein and Rutter, 1977; Rutter, 1967; Rutter, 2005) which demonstrated a genetic link in families where an individual was identified as having an ASD. In addition research has been developed to look at the co-morbitiy of other conditions with ASDs, such as fragile-X and language difficulties to discover whether there is an underlying genetic difference for individuals with additional symptoms.

Other studies have looked for differences in the brain between neurotypicals and those with an ASD to try and offer further understanding of the increasingly complex picture. Ashwin, Chapman, Colle & Baron-Cohen (2006) found people with an ASD were less accurate than control participants when asked to identify emotions, mainly with the basic negative emotions of fear, anger, disgust and sadness. There were no differences for identifying happy, surprise and neutral.

This is similar to the performance of people with damage to their amygdala and suggests that this part of the brain could be indicated in ASDs.

Another study presented in Medical News Today (Dalton et al., 2005) found that those with an ASD could be seen to have a reaction in their brain which indicated a threat reaction to faces, even those which were familiar.

A neurological theory which is being studied currently is the idea of Mirror neurons. These are neurons that fire in 'typically developing' individuals, not only when they perform an action, but also when they see someone else perform that action. It is believed that this enables the brain to become more familiar with actions, practicing these processes through observation as well as performance, over time this helps an individual immediately understand another's actions and intentions. Individuals with an ASD have been shown to have exceedingly reduced mirror neuron activity when observing others. This may explain some of their difficulties (Dapretto et al., 2005).

2.2.ii Theory of mind, Executive Functions and Weak Central Coherence as an explanation for ASDs

There are several theories that explore the cognitive nature and observable difficulties associated with ASDs. The idea of a cognitive deficit in those with an ASD was first put forward by Lockyer & Rutter (1969; 1970) when they carried out a fifteen year follow up study, through adolescence, of those with and without an ASD. One of their key findings was related to a characteristic cognitive profile for those with an ASD (Rutter, 2005).

One such cognitive explanation is Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985), which hypothesises that those with an ASD have a deficit in their ability to 'mentalise' about the views of others in a given situation. That is they are more likely to see the world from their own point of view and be unable to describe another viewpoint or perspective. However, there have been discrepancies over some of the assessments and the different levels of ToM that are assessed and tested (Happe, 1994).

Grant, Grayson and Boucher (2001) discuss some of the evidence which questions the reliability and validity of ToM tests. Following a comparison of four test activities the authors did find consistency in the performance of individual children across the tests, suggesting that individuals with an ASD do have a difficulty in this area. However, they also discuss the need for individuals to have a language level of, at least, 9 years in order to pass the tests and also the slightly different elements of 'mentalising' being assessed in each case. Grant et al (2001) conclude that an individual's ability to pass false belief tasks should not be judged on the basis of a single assessment.

Brent, Rios, Happe & Charman's (2004) study divided the tasks presented into identifying mental states and physical states. It was the heavily socially loaded mental state that caused the most difficulty. These participants did have a significantly higher level of language ability than those who found tasks more difficult.

Similarly, Garcia-Perez, Hobson and Lee (2008) looked at the performance of those with an ASD who were of average or above intelligence. They tested participant's ability to retell stories from different perspectives using the role-taking task (Feffer, 1970). They also found that although those with an ASD did struggle to retell stories from another's perspective and were scored as being less proficient than control participants there were also those individuals who demonstrated that they were able to understand and respond to the task, and make adjustments to their stories to take into account the different perspectives of those involved in the story. These participants were also assessed to have a higher level of language skill. Garcia-Perez et al therefore make the point that to suggest that all individuals with an ASD are not able to take different roles is an oversimplification of the issue. Other researchers have continued to develop the ToM framework.

Baron-Cohen has gone on to develop his theories of ASDs in several research papers. The ToM is later developed into the empathising-systemising or ES theory (Baron-Cohen 2004, 2008). Here the difficulties of ASDs are referred to in terms of a weakness in empathy, similar to the idea of mentalising or not being able to appreciate others points of view. However this is developed with an additional component of systemitising, which tries to explain some of the non-social difficulties of those with ASDs, including their repetitive behaviours, collecting habits and obsessions. Baron-Cohen breaks down the systems into two levels to address the spectrum of ASDs from severe autism to AS.

A second cognitive theory, discussed by Rajendran and Mitchell (2007), is the theory of Executive Function in autism (Ozonoff et al., 1991; Russell, 1996). This

was developed through the desire to explain symptoms shown in difficulty switching attention, a need for sameness and a lack of impulse control, these were symptoms not explained by ToM. However the theory of Executive Function (EF) has been shown to have a link to ToM. Both ToM and EF involve the use of higher order rules and processes and some researchers felt that difficulties on tasks such as the false belief tasks in ToM research could be associated with inhibiting responses (Russell, Mauthner & Sharp, 1991), an EF.

A difficulty with the EF theory however is that not all individuals with an ASD show difficulties in EF, those that do, have differing profiles of strength and difficulty. In addition problems within the area of EF are not unique to those with an ASD, therefore it is difficult to state that EF is an underlying cause of ASDs.

Weak Central Coherence (Frith, 2003) is a theory which has built on the work of Hermelin & O'Connor (1970). The theory considers both the social and non-social aspects of ASDs. Initially it was believed that those with an ASD processed information by focusing on the detail of a visual image, and were therefore not able to process globally. For example individuals with an ASD were thought to see the individual features of a face (detail focused processing) rather than focusing on the face as a whole (global processing). Over time this theory has developed to hypothesise that people with an ASD are able to see and process in a global way as well as in detailed focused way, however, they do not have a preference for one form of processing (Lopez, Leekam & Arts, 2008). In contrast 'neurotypicals' have a preference for global processing over local processing and therefore always see a

'face' and have to make more effort to see the local parts of 'nose' etc. This is thought to be true for processing both conceptual and perceptual information.

In Aukland (O'Connor, 2007) researchers found that individuals with AS were not as able as controls when they were asked to identify incongruent facial expressions and faces, again suggesting that individuals with an ASD may not process all of the social information as a whole. This may be one of the reasons they are often unable to identify sarcasm or humour and can lead to difficulties in social interactions. Weak Central Coherence (WCC) as a theory does help those with an ASD and those working with individuals on the spectrum understand some aspects of behaviour but it does not offer a single theory which explains all the behaviours and difficulties which present as part of the syndrome.

Some theorists have tried to overcome the gaps in each of the theories by looking for links and correlations between them. In a paper by Burnette et al. (2005) there was evidence to support the WCC theory but this was not found to be linked with difficulties with ToM as the authors had hypothesised. A similar finding was reported by Pellicano, Murray, Durkin and Maley (2006) who reported that there were significant differences between children with an ASD and matched controls on tasks of Central Coherence, EF and ToM. However, fewer children performed poorly on the Tom and EF tasks than the WCC tasks and in addition there was no correlations found between performance on the three tasks.

Rajendran and Mitchell (2007) published a comprehensive review of the three theories outlined above: ToM, EF, and WCC. They then went on to introduce the

newly developing idea of a multi-deficit account of ASDs where, the variety of symptoms presented, reflect the variety of biological systems implicated and therefore, at a cognitive level, those with an ASD may have a combination of all or some of the above difficulties.

Finally there are other authors who have begun to construct the concept of ASDs differently. For example Hobson (2002) discusses the development of language and thought through infancy and childhood to provide a different approach to the problem. Hobson believes that,

"autism presents a kind of negative image of what social experiences contribute to intellectual life" (Hobson, 2002, p184).

He describes the difficulties presented in terms of a lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the individual's inter-relations with others which leads to a difference in the development of thought processes and behaviours. Hobson cites several of his own research projects to support his ideas and explain some of the cognitive discrepancies within this theory.

All these theories can provide a useful framework for the difficulties that may be presented by those individuals identified as having an ASD, though none can be held alone as the one explanation. Individuals with an ASD may differ widely in the difficulties with which they present.

2.2.iii ASDs: Disorder or Difference?

The diagnosis of ASDs has always been problematic as it is based on the observation of symptomatic behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 1994;

World Health Organisation, 2007). This means that the diagnosis is currently largely subjective Volkmar, State and Klin, 2009). Ongoing discussions about the causes and symptoms of ASDs have led to discussion about the usefulness of the label.

It is recognised by several authors that the spectrum covers a variety of strengths and difficulties, affecting each person in a unique way. Those with an ASD are as varied as individuals as any other group (Boucher, 1996; Jordan 1999). Volkmar et al (2009) raise their concerns about the accuracy of the variety of labels in use for diagnosis and the lack of consistency with which these are applied within clinical and research settings. They suggest that currently designing support to meet the needs of an individual's strengths and difficulties is more appropriate than debating what label to use. They suggest more research is needed to establish exactly what is meant by the different terms in order to ensure greater consistency of usage which, may then lead to increased usefulness in the labels.

However, many of those with a diagnosis talk about the usefulness of the label in terms of signposting the individual to receive appropriate support (Jackson, 2003; Mitchell, 2005; Williams, 1992& 1994).

A recent development relating to this debate has been the introduction of the idea that ASDs rather than demonstrating a 'disordered' way of thinking actually recognise a 'difference' in thinking. This belief is discussed most commonly by those individuals with an ASD who have written autobiographical accounts of their experiences (Grandin, 1995; Jackson, 2003; Williams, 1992 & 1994). Many writers

attempt to share with their reader an insight into their inner emotional experience as someone with an ASD (Gerland, 1997; Williams 1992)

Oliver Sacks' work "An anthropologist on Mars"(Sacks, 1995) takes its name from an interview with Temple Grandin who described herself as feeling like an anthropologist on Mars when faced with complex social situations and the "games people play" (p248).. Grandin has also written herself regarding ASDs. She describes her own difficulties in terms of a 'different' way of thinking. Grandin believes that many individuals with an ASD are visual thinkers. She describes how her own memories run like a collection of videotapes (Grandin 1995) where she will access several specific images she has seen for a single concept e.g. cats. Grandin also explains that whilst she can indeed experience emotion she remembers and experiences this differently to most people. Grandin describes how she may feel extreme emotion at the time of an event but that thinking and remembering this event in future does not bring with it the associated emotions. Grandin is an able and intelligent woman with a successful career. Her insight into her own experiences of living with ASD is one example of this body of work. However, relying on autobiographical accounts of ASDs can have its difficulties as Happe (1991) explains. Happe's views will be explored further in the next chapter.

2.3 What does this mean for individuals identified with an ASD transferring to mainstream secondary schools?

2.3.i Implications

Transition from primary to secondary school is a vulnerable time for all students and research suggests that many pupils show a drop in their academic levels during

the first term at secondary school (Anderson, Jacobs, Schraumm & Splittgerber, 2000; Peterson & Crokett, 1985). Many factors have been discussed in relation to this and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3. For those pupils identified as having an ASD, this transition may be even more of a challenge as their ASDs may set them apart from their peers.

Difficulties with mentalising (Baron-Cohen et al 1985) suggests that any mismatch of expectation between staff and pupils could be even more pronounced and have a greater impact on pupils with an ASD. Having difficulty understanding and interpreting others points of view (ToM) presents a challenge in an environment with more people and a variety of teachers, all of whom will have different approaches and perspectives and may not always appreciate the difficulties for pupils with an ASD. This also means pupils may struggle to understand why they have been asked to follow a particular instruction and not understand why they must follow school rules if they do not fit with their own perception and belief about a situation. In addition, if they are not able to easily identify more complex emotions, they may not recognise the emotions being conveyed by teachers when being told off. They may react inappropriately to such a situation and end up in more trouble. Pupils may not appreciate the role of staff as responsible for students learning and behaviour. Students with these types of difficulties can be accused of 'cheeky' behaviour or answering back. In Boleman's (2008) fifteen year case study of a pupil with an ASD the individual would often contradict the teacher and correct factual information taught in lessons. As he did not have the ability to mentalise and see his teacher's perspective this was often done in a confrontational way, which led to difficulties in his relationships with staff.

Difficulties with executive functions such as inhibiting impulses, switching attention and desiring sameness, could also present problems within a secondary school. Secondary schools are fast and busy environments where different teachers often teach classes in different locations. This requires individual pupils to regularly change their environment, switch their attention and focus to a different teaching style, which they can find difficult. In addition any lack of impulse control, which may be present, can lead to immediate and extreme reactions to difficulties experienced which can be a challenge for staff to manage. For those with an ASD who may find their ability to cope in social situations closely related to being able to predict what is happening and have a clear structure and routine these factors of secondary schools can be stressful.

The WCC theory also has implications for life in secondary schools. If an individual has a lack of preference for global processing this can make it difficult to attend to general themes and concepts in lessons. These pupils may often ask questions related to, what may appear to others, to be irrelevant details. ASDs have also been associated with difficulties generalising, so that even if a pupil can follow the themes of a lesson and learn a new concept or skill they may not be able to use this themselves in a new project or a different lesson, as their teachers may expect (Rutter, 2005).

In addition, processing sensory information from the environment can become overwhelming as all details may be responded to with no filtering. Therefore, busy classroom displays or resource cupboards can provide constant distractions for the

pupil in terms of the difficulties they may have in filtering out the unnecessary sensory inputs of flickering lights or noisy heating systems.

Pupils who are included in mainstream secondary schools will most probably have been identified with AS or HFA, due to their level of cognitive and language abilities. However, they can be vulnerable to teasing and feeling isolated and excluded, unable to cope with the social expectations of the school environment. There is evidence that those adolescents with an ASD, especially HFA are at increased risk of presenting with mood and anxiety disorders (Ghaziuddin, 2005).

Bolman (2008) published findings from a 25-year case study of a pupil and young person with a diagnosis of HFA. Despite an initial early intervention that supported "Shane" through his primary schooling, there were continued and identifiable difficulties throughout the rest of his life as situations, contexts and expectations changed. Shane struggled to shift his own behaviour and understanding without support. His underlying difficulties remained largely unchanged throughout the course of the study, although these presented in different ways due to his age and development. At middle school Shane faced suspension due to difficulties interacting with his teachers and peers. He did not understand the social context of the classroom and would often correct his teachers if he felt their information was incorrect. Transition from secondary to college was equally difficult when he moved to work with those who did not know him. It was a situation that offered less support than his school.

With support Shane was able to succeed, but this was due to the ongoing support and joint working of his family, his schools and Bolman. The study emphasises the difficulties that pupils with an ASD can face in school and the need for understanding and support if they are to have successful and positive experiences through school.

Following this exploration of the definitions, explanations and implications of ASDs Chapter 3 will explore in greater detail the current research examining the views experiences of this group of pupils, including a summary of relevant transition literature.

Words 3750

3: Literature Review.

Views and experiences of transition and inclusion: The findings so far.

Following the exploration of ASDs in the previous chapter the literature which considers the secondary transition and inclusion of those with an ASD into secondary phase schooling will now be reviewed.

Exploration of the current literature highlights a lack of research specifically examining the transition of pupils with an ASD into mainstream secondary schools and the views of key stakeholders regarding this process of inclusion. This lack of research stresses the relevance of the current study.

Due to the limited transition literature available a wider literature base is examined. Firstly, for all pupils and then for those with an SEN, including the small existing literature which discusses pupils with an ASD specifically. This provides some indication about the difficulties which pupils with an ASD may face when transferring into mainstream secondary schools. In the second part of the chapter focus is given to those studies which have aimed to collect the views of pupils, parents and school staff regarding inclusion and transition into secondary phase schooling.

Many of the themes and issues represented in the literature reflect the findings of the current study; this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

3.1 The implications from the wider transition literature

There is a growing body of literature looking at transition processes for all pupils. This body of work raises some interesting points about why transition to secondary school can be a challenge for pupils, including: increased building size, numbers of pupils, changes in the organisation and structure of the school day, pedagogic approaches and social relationships. For example Ashton (2008) elicited the views of a large number of pupils and found there were key issues pupils were concerned with when thinking about their transition to secondary school. These included: getting lost, racist bullying, being the only child from their primary school, teachers, growing up and choosing a school.

In the Cambridge primary review one section considered the difficulties associated with transition from primary to secondary schooling as part of a larger study about transitions throughout education (Blatchford, Hallam, Ireson, Kutnick & Creech, 2008). In this review the focus was on the learning tasks of schools, referring to the fact that 40% of pupils who transfer to secondary school stop making academic progress. The authors highlight a number of issues, for example: the increase in the challenge of work set for pupils, difficulties adjusting to the changes in the learning and social environment, secondary staff not making full use of the information provided to them by the primary schools and secondary staff not trusting the assessment of primary schools. Galton, Hargreaves and Pell (2003) discuss the rigorous application of government teaching strategies commenting that much of classroom practice in Year 7 repeats that experienced by pupils in Year 6, pupils are pushed to succeed academically

but appear to be "turned off learning" (Galton et al., 2003, p. 9) at the start of their secondary career.

Noyes (2006) broadens out this discussion to look at the wider issues of social and family systems and school culture as part of the difficulties in the learning trajectories of pupils moving into secondary phase schooling. Through the exploration of two case studies Noyes presents the importance of: the peer group, the social structures and the systems within the school and family of the pupil, in pupil's ability to transfer successfully. Where such systems compete, transition is more difficult. Due to the increased number of teachers within the secondary school Noyes also recognised that behaviour and attitudes of pupils in lessons, and thus the smoothness of their transfer, differs from lesson to lesson reflecting the different teaching approaches and strategies of staff. Noyes' key finding can perhaps be summed up by recognising that any difficulties pupils have are all intensified in the larger and more complex secondary system. However as Noyes' study looks only at two pupils the ability to generalise these findings is limited.

Jindall-Snape and Foggie (2008) carried out a longitudinal study in Scotland through interviews with nine children in Years 6, 7 and 8. They also found several factors affected the transition of pupils in their study at a systemic level. The pupils for Jindall-Snape and Foggie's study were selected specifically because they were identified as being particularly vulnerable during the transition process. This sampling makes it unsurprising that anxieties were found and that some pupils were still struggling with the transition process during their follow up interviews.

Other research emphasises the psycho-social processes rather than the organisational structures as the greatest cause of anxiety regarding transition (Jindall-Snape & Miller, 2008; Pratt & George, 2005). Certain individual resilience factors, including the pupil's level of self-esteem, can affect the level of that anxiety. In addition what pupils consider to be important may differ from that of the adults around them. Pupils in the Pratt and George (2005) study were much more concerned with friendships than the organisational features highlighted by their parents. In fact some studies have shown that pupil's anxiety is actually accompanied by a level of excitement about the change (Lucey & Reay, 2000).

3.2 Evidence regarding the transition of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), including an ASD.

There is also some literature which looks at the group of pupils described as having SEN. For example, Maras and Aveling (2006) constructed case studies of pupils with a statement of SEN during transition, through semi-structured interviews with pupils both before and after transition. However, only two pupils were interviewed at both time points. Their key findings reflected that pupils benefited most from a level of continuity throughout the transition process and the provision of a small unit or base where the pupils could go. In addition the authors suggest that the best way to promote a successful transition is through the clear communication between support services, parents and the pupils themselves. However, as previously stated, their research does not focus specifically on pupils with an ASD but a wider SEN category.

Deslea (2005) did focus specifically on pupils with Asperger's Syndrome but looked more generally at their success in mainstream secondary schools rather than at the process of transition itself. In order to examine success in schools she considered students from Year 7 through to Year 11. Deslea reviewed strategies to support inclusion in Australian secondary schools, including the views of pupils. The first strategy discussed was the need for a planned transition over an extended period of time to allow for familiarisation with staff and physical surroundings.

3.3 The Challenge of transitions from primary to secondary phase schooling and implications for the pupil with an ASD: the guidance.

Despite the academic literature tending to look at a broader group of pupils than those with an ASD, there are many references to the transition of pupils with ASDs within the policies and guidance of LAs. Most make the assumption that ASDs reflect a pathological difficulty and pupils with an ASD will therefore require something different to other pupils.

One rural south eastern LA produced a booklet about planning a successful transition for pupils, beginning in Year 5, with good planning and preparation, continuing into Year 6 (Ennis & Manns, 2004). Similarly in another LA, in the same region, a booklet was drawn up by three parents following their experience of their own children moving through the entire education system (Haris, Harris & Homewood, 2004); they particularly highlighted the need for good lines of communication between parents, schools and other professionals. A pilot project was carried out in a large city LA in the west of England. This was alongside the DfES and SEN small funds programme

(DfES, 2004), to develop a toolkit for professionals to support the transition of pupils from primary to secondary education. The project resulted in a pupil workbook for transition, as well as an adult guidebook designed to give pupils key information specific to their own secondary school. It also answered frequently asked questions. The areas identified by the project for inclusion in the pupil's workbook were: finding your way around, maps, timetable, homework, equipment, rules, rumours, meeting new people and making friends. In addition the project staff produced pen portraits of the pupils for staff to share key information about strategies.

The National Autistic Society also produced advice regarding transition and the inclusion of pupils into secondary phase schooling on their website, for example, 'Education: moving from primary to secondary school' (Thorpe, 2008), which discusses some of the difficulties they believe students with an ASD may face at secondary school including: being the youngest, more teachers, new building, timetables, new routines and structures.

These publications, programmes and interventions all suggest that the transition to secondary phase schooling is a challenge for pupils with an ASD. However few of them refer directly to the literature which underlies their claim, or refer to the views of individuals with an ASD. There is in fact little research looking specifically at the transition from primary to secondary phase schooling specifically for pupils with an ASD. The guidance referred to above highlights those issues which are in fact a concern for most pupils transferring to mainstream secondary schools, as referenced earlier.

3.4 Implications of transition challenges and ASDs

It does however seem likely that pupils with difficulties within the triad of impairments will struggle with the challenges posed by transition. As Noyes suggests whatever difficulties the pupil has may be intensified in the larger and more complex secondary system (Noyes, 2006).

3.5 Collecting the views of pupils, parents and staff regarding the inclusion of pupils with an ASD.

There is therefore a lack of research around the transition of pupils, with an ASD, to mainstream secondary schools, including the examination of the views of key stakeholders. This lack of research is mirrored in the small number of research studies which collect the views of key stakeholders about inclusion into mainstream secondary school for this group of pupils. However this body of work, although not directly examining the transition process does provide some findings regarding pupils within mainstream secondary schools which offer some indication about the importance of a good transition.

3.5.i The parents perspective

In terms of the parental perspective Stoner et al's (2007) qualitative study identified key themes regarding the successful transition of pupils with an ASD from the parent's viewpoint. For example, transitions needed to include: child centred approaches, involve good home and school communication, start from an understanding of the individual child. However the parents in Stoner et al's study (2007) had young

children this was not therefore a study examining the transition to secondary phase schooling.

Despite a lack of research around the specific phase of secondary school transition several studies seek to present the voice of parents, who have a child with additional needs or a disability, regarding their experiences of inclusive education more generally. Elkins, Ban Kraayenoord & Jobling (2003) interviewed 354 Australian parents, (all had a child with a recognised disability), about their views of their children's education. They found that parents supported inclusion into mainstream when this was properly resourced and supported. However half of the parents, when asked about their own child, said they would prefer a specialist provision. The main concerns described were: the size of class groups and the ability of the teacher to meet the needs of all pupils. For some, a curriculum which allowed pupils to master functional living skills alongside more academic aims was also seen as desirable.

However Elkins et al. study focuses on parents of children with SEN, and although some of the cohort included those with an ASD this was not exclusively the case. Fewer studies focus on the parents of children with an ASD specifically. One example is Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger and Alkin (1999) who looked at the parental perspectives, asking questions about the inclusion of pupils with Downs Syndrome and Autism into mainstream settings. They interviewed 149 parents about the current and ideal educational placements for their children. There were some similarities but also clear differences between the two groups of parents. Parents of pupils with an ASD were happy with some mainstream education but wanted this balanced by specialist

support. Their greatest concerns were around the ability of the children to function in a mainstream setting, considering their social needs and difficulties. When asked about their ideal placement 46% of these parents wanted a change in provision. Therefore nearly half of the parents felt their children could be better supported elsewhere, a similar figure to that of the Elkins et al. (2003) study. The need for individualised support and therefore a greater caution around mainstream provision occurred as the children became older. This suggests that specialist ASD provision may be considered by parents to be needed at secondary school, even when pupils have been maintained in mainstream primary schools with no specialist provision.

The need for some specialist training and teaching approaches was especially important to parents of children with an ASD. In the early years and for the initial stages of primary both sets of parents were happier with full inclusion but for secondary provision there were again greater concerns about this prospect. However, the study reflects the views of parents who were selected through their local parents association for Downs Syndrome and Autism. It is possible that parents who have elected to join advocacy support groups, such as these, may be less satisfied with current provision than their counterparts who have not requested such support (Kasari et al., 1999).

Whitaker (2007) sought to address this issue of representation amongst samples of parents in his study. He approached all the parents and carers who had a child with an ASD within one county in England, a total of 599 potential participants. He received responses from half of the parents and carers who had a child attending mainstream school with an ASD. From this data Whitaker drew key themes about the mainstream

provision for children with an ASD in that county, in terms of what parents wanted to see. In contrast with previous studies, Whitaker found that 61% of parents in his sample were happy with the mainstream provision their child was receiving. However, some of the areas of concern did reflect those of parents in more selective studies. For example, parents placed a high degree of importance on the training of staff and their ability to be understanding and flexible when working with pupils with an ASD. In addition communication and liaison between the home and school was seen as essential and the degree to which parents felt this was available reflected their level of satisfaction with mainstream provision; themes which reflect those discussed by parents in Stoner et al's (2007) study about transition. Whitaker's questionnaires were anonymous and therefore perhaps provide a more representative view of parents in the county. His mixed method approach allowed him to gain statistics relating to satisfaction levels amongst parents, as well as more qualitative information regarding the reasons behind this dissatisfaction/ satisfaction.

Sharp (2005) who sent anonymous questionnaires to all 90 parents within one local authority whose child had a diagnosis of ASD also found that the majority of those who responded were satisfied with the current provision their child was receiving. However, they raised concerns about the provision available for secondary education and their child's social experiences within the secondary school.

The inclusion literature therefore suggests that the issue of pupils with an ASD transferring into mainstream secondary schools and the availability of specialist ASD provisions is important to parents.

3.5.ii Teacher views

Despite a similar lack of studies eliciting teacher views around the transition of pupils
with an ASD the views of teachers have been sought around the concept of integration
and inclusion. Some, again, regard the wider group of pupils with a SEN, such as
Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000). They surveyed 81 teachers in one LA about the
inclusion of pupils with SEN. A number of the schools were selected for inclusion in
the project as they were thought to provide good models of inclusive practice. The
majority of these teachers were positive about the overall concept of inclusion, which is
not surprising given the sample. However, they also highlighted the need for the:
appropriate training, support, skills and resources needed to do so effectively.
Avramidis et al. found that those teachers with a more positive attitude towards
inclusion had tended to have more experience of working in an inclusive way, which
may suggest that confidence and uncertainty are a large part of negative views of
inclusion and can have an impact even in an environment and context which is largely
perceived as inclusive.

This was also found to be true by McGregor and Campbell (2001) who surveyed 23
specialist and 49 mainstream teachers, 22 of whom had experience of working with
pupils with an ASD and 27 who did not. Increased experience of working with pupils
had a positive impact on staff views about inclusion; many worried about the
experience of individual pupils. Similarly Helps, Newson-Davis and Callidas (1999)
found that the majority of the 72 school staff they interviewed had little or no training
in the area of ASDs. The authors stressed what they felt was a negative impact on the

experiences of pupils and recommended a greater amount of training and understanding.

All of the above studies surveyed teacher views through questionnaires. Although this resulted in high numbers of teachers giving their views, it could be argued that the data gathered was not as rich as that which could be gathered through a more focused interview or case study approach. One case study which provides a more in depth account of the views of teachers is Hesmonlagh & Breakley (2001) and Hesmondlagh (2006). They describe in detail the experience of setting up a specialist provision for pupils with an ASD at a secondary school in the north of England. This was not an academic study but a worldly account. However, they again emphasise the need for experience and understanding amongst staff.

3.5.iii Pupil views

Giving children and young people a voice is central to the government's current agenda and work within 'Every Child Matters: Next Steps' (DfES, 2004). However, the views of pupils with an ASD have not been consistently sought, although advocates for the group are very present within the political arena, for example the National Autistic Society (NAS). A study by Alderson and Goodey (1999) evaluating the provision for pupils with an ASD in their authority included interviews with parents, a range of professionals and "forty-five pupils aged 7-17" (Alderson & Goodey, 1999, p. 249). However during the paper no reference is made to the pupil views but conclusions are drawn from observations and the views of professionals.

This lack of a voice from the young people themselves is despite the fact that many of those with an ASD have written books about their school experiences in later years for example Lawson (2000), Mitchell (2005) and Sainsbury, (2000). The autobiographical accounts of individuals with an ASD can provide a valuable insight into individual experiences.

Clare Sainsbury refers to reflecting on her schooldays and feeling "regret and anger for the needless pain I went through and for the energy my teachers wasted pointlessly. If the right people had been given the right information, more than a decade of my life might have gone very differently" (Sainsbury, 2000, p. 9). This is a view which is shared in many respects by other contributors to her book, for example Jack who comments that "... the boring subject matter and the teacher's styles, the whole set-up of the school, prohibited me from being able to learn much of anything". These views paint a very negative picture of the school experiences of pupils like Claire and Jack.

Other authors have similarly reflected on their own negative experiences of childhood (Lawson, 2000; Mitchell, 2005; Williams 1992). However these accounts are written retrospectively they do not refer to the current school systems and curriculum which face young people with an ASD today. In addition some accounts are written by those who did not receive a diagnosis whilst at school, which they feel impacted negatively upon their experiences.

Luke Jackson is one teenager who has written about his own current experiences (Jackson, 2003). He talks about his view of the world and some of the difficulties he

has faced as a teenager with Aspergers Syndrome, including issues regarding diagnosis and sharing this information with others. Luke draws on his knowledge of ASDs as well as the personal experience of his family (two of his brothers are also on the autistic spectrum) to offer advice and guidance to others in his situation. This is perhaps one of the most enlightening personal accounts about the current systems. Luke devotes an entire chapter to 'the problem with school'.

However, whilst interesting in their own right and offering insight into the personal worlds of individuals such individual and worldly accounts do not replace the need for rigorous academic research. They allow us only to glimpse the individual's experience and without thorough objective analysis, we may misinterpret what is recorded or miss key themes which would enhance understanding of living with an ASD. Happe (1991) discusses some of the issues associated with relying on autobiographical accounts. One of the main issues is the fact that many of these books are written with the support of second authors and editors who may have significantly changed the structure and organisation of the text as well as adjusting some of the language used. Happe refers to one of Temple Grandin's books "Emergence labelled autistic" as an example of when this has happened. In addition many individuals with an ASD will parrot what they have heard, in terms of ideas and phrases. Both of these issues make taking a work at face value difficult. In addition Happe talks about the group of individuals who choose to write an autobiographical account. As mentioned in the previous chapter individuals with ASDs are as individual and unique as any other group (Boucher, 1996) therefore taking the individual accounts of a few does not make generalisation of ideas possible. These individuals have also demonstrated a greater language skill and intelligence than

is present in many individuals with ASDs, It is not possible therefore to feel that these accounts reflect on other groups within the spectrum. However, Happe does value the interest of such accounts and recognises the contribution they can make when such factors are taken into account.

Where academic accounts of the experience of living with an ASD have been published they have often been drawn from adults considering the longer term outcomes for those with an ASD or Asperger Syndrome in adulthood, and several focus on the situation in the USA and Canada (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Jennes-Coussens, Magill-Evans & Koning, 2006; Muller, Schuler & Yates 2008).

The need to elicit the views of young people themselves, in an objective manner, when at school, is now well recognised (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Lewis 2004) and the situation is improving. There is now a small amount of academic research which seeks to elicit the views of young people with an ASD (Connor, 2000; Howard, Cohn & Orsmond, 2006; Humphrey & Lewis 2008; Williams & Hanke, 2007), looking at their experience and understanding of the physical and social context of daily life at school. This progress has had to face the challenge of eliciting the views of young people with communication and learning difficulties (Lewis, 2001, 2004).

Howard et al's work with a 12 year old boy diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome gained qualitative information about his understanding and experience of friendships through the use of semi-structured interviews and photographs the boy had taken. Similarly Humphrey and Lewis used pupil diaries alongside interviews to collect the views of 20

pupils in mainstream secondary schools in England. Connor (2000) interviewed 16 pupils from across the secondary age range. Results suggested an interest and difficulties in social relationships; a desire for friends but difficulty understanding how to achieve this goal. Pupils were concerned about their peer interactions and in addition how to spend unstructured times, such as break and lunch times.

Williamson and Hanke (2007) were able to gain a fuller picture of school life for a group of pupils with an ASD through the use of personal construct psychology (Kelly 1955), adapting the drawing of the ideal self technique, pupils instead drew pictures of their ideal school. In this way Williams and Hanke (2007) were able to elicit the emotions of pupils in different situations. Pupils talked about the physical space of the school and the qualities and characteristics of the staff around them. The use of visual tools to support the interviews provides a valuable insight into the experience of the group.

However, none of the above studies focus specifically on the experience of transition to secondary school.

3.5.iv Multiple perspectives

Alongside studies seeking the views of individuals there are also those which bring together multiple perspectives of a situation or experience. Frederickson, Dunsmuir and Monsen (2004) are one example of a study which looked at 107 pupil, teacher and parent perspectives on the inclusion into mainstream schools of pupils who had previously been educated in special schools and found overlap between teacher and

parent views with some differences in the pupil's perspectives. Frederickson et al. (2004) found that all parties recorded positive benefits and areas of concern around inclusion in terms of social and academic factors. However for the pupils the social factors were more highly stressed. Jones, Jordan, Gulberg, McLeod and Plimley (2006) also found many overlaps between the different perspectives, all participants talked about the importance of understanding AS and having knowledge and training in the area. However, the pupils again highlighted a social issue, bullying, which was not directly discussed by the other participants. The survey also collated some statistical data which indicated that whilst the 59 parents and 205 teachers were satisfied with current provision in the majority, 71% and 81% respectively only 55% of the 35 pupils indicated the same level of satisfaction, making clear the value of collecting the young people's views in this instance. Multiple perspectives are essential if we are to gain a true picture of a particular context.

A large scale study which looked specifically at inclusion of those with an ASD into mainstream education through the views of parents and pupils was the national Autistic Society survey (Thorpe, 2008). Questionnaires were sent out to 2409 parents/ carers and individuals with an ASD and the first 1000 returned were analysed. Many of the findings of this study painted a negative picture of the experience of those diagnosed with an ASD, For example, only 12% of parents indicated that they were satisfied with their child's mainstream education. However, although large, this is a biased sample. All the parents were members of the advocacy group and only half of those approached returned the questionnaire, which may indicate they felt they wanted to make themselves heard.

In contrast The Autism Education Trust (Jones et al, 2008) produced a report which aimed to be representative of the population in England and to influence policy and practice. It also included the views of parents, carers and professionals regarding current provision for those with an ASD. Results emphasised the importance for staff to have knowledge of both ASDs more generally and of each individual child, alongside good links with families.

Lewis, Davison, Ellins, Niblett, Parsons, Robertson and Sharpe (2007) and Lewis, Newton and Vials (2008) also focused on gaining multiple perspectives through a variety of survey techniques. In their 2007 study the authors drew out key themes for discussion based on the views of 1776 participants, gathered through the use of questionnaires, and then offered recommendations for practice for each theme. The themes included: independence and autonomy, the accessibility of education services, discussion around labels and identity, the attitudes and behaviour of others and longer term ambitions and aspirations. Although the study was drawing on multiple perspectives on a large scale, and therefore may offer findings which can be generalised, it did not clearly define what was meant by the term 'disabled pupils' and the data indicates that this covered a wide range of needs and difficulties which in themselves explains some of the differences in views and attitudes. Therefore, it could be argued, that the data is not as useful as it may first appear.

A study which focused specifically on Asperger Syndrome and took a different approach was Carrington and Graham's (2001) case study of two teenage boys in

Australia. The authors took an inductive approach to data analysis and gathered rich qualitative data to explore their experiences. In addition the mother's perspectives were also gathered through semi-structured interviews. Three of the identified themes were drawn from the mother's perspective: a recognition that there were developmental differences due to the Aspergers Syndrome, relating to, interactions with parents and play, the need the boys had for routines, and a belief that in social contexts, such as school, the boys 'masked' their emotions and difficulties through coping behaviours and strategies until they came home. The boys themselves talked around issues of stress in social situations and the final two themes emerged from both viewpoints. Firstly, social difficulties relating to understanding and reading other people and secondly the fact that both boys could have restricted and obsessive interests. Many of these themes reflect what is already known in the literature, but the author suggests that the 'masquerading theme' drawn from the mother's perspectives may prove to offer new insights into the daily experience of living with Asperger Syndrome; a theme that emerged because of the methodology used. However, it would also have been helpful to have the teacher's perspectives so that the idea that some difficulties are hidden in the school context could have been compared with those working in that context.

3.6 The social vulnerability of pupils

The social vulnerability of pupils with an ASD in secondary schools as referred to in some of the above literature (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Jones et al, 2006) is an area of concern when considering the transition and inclusion of pupils with an ASD. In a survey conducted by Mencap (2007) it was reported that 82% of pupils with a disability suffered bullying and that this had a negative impact on their lives. Although this was

again a study looking at a wider group than those with an ASD it is supported by research which focuses more closely on this specific group. For example Humphrey and Lewis (2008) found that the experience of pupils with an ASD in secondary schools is often "marked by bullying, social isolation and anxiety" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p. 132.) and Williamson, Craig & Slinger (2008) reported that the pupils they interviewed felt that they had less peer approval. This last point was discussed in terms of the impact it had on the psychological adjustment of adolescents with an ASD.

The research which has been done in the areas of transition and inclusion in mainstream secondary schools does raise some interesting questions. However, both evidence bases consider the experiences of a wider group of 'normally developing' pupils and pupils with a range of SEN. Those specifically focusing on pupils with an ASD are based to a greater extent on worldly accounts, LA practice and policy documents and a far fewer accounts of rigorous academic research.

There is therefore a clear need to extend this evidence base in order to address the questions of transition and inclusion for pupils with an ASD more fully.

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4: Methodology:

Qualitative approaches, semi-structured interviews and analysis.

In this chapter the intended methodology for the current study will be presented. However due to the real world nature of the research some adaptations to this methodology were required. These will be discussed prior to the presentation of results in chapter five, along with any impacts or implications the adaptations had upon the results.

This chapter includes an introduction to the context for the study, outlining and explaining the research design, intended processes and procedures, underlying paradigms and epistemological standpoints, ethical considerations and issues of validity and reliability. In addition a clear explanation of the methods used to analyse the data is given.

4.1 Methodology

The aim of the present study is to address the following research question:

- What are the views and experiences of key stakeholders regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling for pupils with an ASD?

Specifically:

- What are the views and experiences of pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

- What are the views and experiences of parents of pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

- What are the views and experiences of staff supporting pupils with an ASD regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling?

In order to address the concept of inclusion the period of transition into mainstream secondary schooling was chosen as a focus.

4.2 Context

The study was located within one Local Authority (LA) in the south east of England where a specialist ASD provision has been set up to support the inclusion of pupils with ASDs. The specialist ASD provision is attached to an existing secondary school in the LA, to allow pupils to access mainstream classes alongside their peers as often as they are able to cope with.

The specialist ASD provision opened following a move within the LA towards inclusive schooling with the aim of catering for the vast majority of pupils in mainstream settings alongside their peers (Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2001). However, to achieve this inclusive goal the LA found that new ways of supporting pupils with SEN within established mainstream schools had to be developed if inclusion was to be meaningful for the teaching and learning of pupils, rather than a simple geographical change. The specialist ASD provision is one project which provides the support needed for a particularly vulnerable group of pupils. In designing

the provision the LA drew many of its ideas from the work of Hesmondhalgh and Breakey (2001) in Sheffield.

As this was a pilot scheme there were a limited number of places at the specialist ASD provision during 2008/2009. The expectation within the LA was that if the structure and organisation proved successful it would be used as a model to introduce similar provisions at further secondary schools within the borough. This meant that during 2008/2009 some of the pupils in the LA who may have had an ASD or similar social communication difficulty were not be able to access the specialist ASD provision and difficult decisions had to be made to select those who were felt to be the most vulnerable.

A multi-professional panel following set criteria for discussion made these decisions. These criteria included the fact that pupils had to have a Statement of Special Educational Need (under section 324 of the Education Act, 1996) where the priority need was identified as a diagnosis of an ASD or a recognised difficulty in the area of social communication. Other factors taken into account included the advice and input of other outside agencies such as the Social Communication Difficulties Team (SCDT) or the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and evidence of persistent difficulties accessing mainstream classrooms (see appendix 1). In addition to these discussions some parents elected for their children to attend their local schools, despite being offered a place at the provision. In these mainstream settings such specialist support is not set up in the same way, but is variable between the schools.

This situation within the LA provided an opportunity to survey the expectations and experience of secondary education for this vulnerable group of pupils, including comparisons between experiences for those pupils attending the specialist ASD provision and those transferring to other mainstream settings.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The present study has been conducted within the ethical guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2002 & 2006).

As with any research which uses interview data there can be a danger of misrepresenting the views given, due to the fine line between objectivity and subjectivity. This was a particularly pertinent issue in the present study due to the vulnerability of pupils. Therefore the following factors were carefully considered:

4.3.i Informed consent

According to the guidelines (section 1.3 BPS code of ethics and conduct, section 2.1 BPS professional practice guidelines division of educational and child psychology) informed consent should be obtained from parents or legal guardians and from young people themselves before any individual work begins. In accordance with this an information letter was sent to parents, including a signed consent form giving them all the information to make their decision (see appendix 2). In addition parents were offered the opportunity to ask any questions over the telephone and the research was again outlined during telephone conversations to set up interviews.

Pupils were supported to give their own consent using the information packs in appendix 2. These aimed to provide the key information in a clear format, using visual symbols to further support understanding. Most pupils in the study made use of visual symbols within their schools for timetables and instructions and were therefore familiar with the concept. This consent was obtained a week prior to the interviews and pupils were asked again at the start of the interview if they were happy to talk to the researcher. All participating pupils gave their consent.

Discussions with staff during this initial process provided the forum for explaining the research and allowing them the opportunity to ask any questions. Staff members then received letters to invite them to attend the focus groups (expanded upon below) with the aims of these groups clearly outlined.

4.3.ii The right to withdraw

In line with the specific point of section 3.3.7 BPS code of ethics and conduct and section 2.1.9 BPS professional practice guidelines division of educational and child psychology, it was made clear to all participants at each stage of obtaining consent and throughout the research process that they had the right to withdraw consent at any time. For the pupils this involved a clear message during the interviews that they did not have to answer anything they did not want to and could leave at any time.

4.3.iii Deception

Section 3.3 and 4.1 of the BPS code of ethics and conduct refers specifically to research considerations to protect the participants and maintain a level of honesty about

the research. There was no deception involved in the study and all participants were kept informed at all stages as well as having contact details for the researcher should any further questions arise.

4.3.iv Debriefing Participants (section 3.4 BPS code of ethics and conduct)

All participants were thanked for their participation and received written feedback at the end of the research project to outline the key results. In addition a number of feedback sessions were arranged in the LA and invitations sent to participants where the results were presented and discussed; these sessions also allowed participants to feedback about their experience of being involved in the project.

4.3.v Confidentiality and Anonymity (section 1.2 BPS code of ethics and conduct)

All participants were given an explanation of confidentiality and ensured anonymity for their views and opinions within the final written report. Names were changed within the report and following completion of the research all tapes and copies of transcriptions were either returned to participants or destroyed.

4.4 Procedures

4.4.i Research Design

In the hopes of addressing the research questions and providing meaningful data about the experiences of pupils within the LA a qualitative methodology was used following that laid out by Frederickson et al (2004). The design of the study attempts to meet the need for rigorous research within the field of Educational Psychology.

The overall design employed fell within the qualitative methodology of surveys, as the research questions are primarily focused on the subjective experiences of the participants. As Robson explains "surveys are more like a research strategy (ie an overall approach to doing social research) than a tactic or specific method" (Robson, 2002, p.228). It is widely recognized that investigating the subjective experiences of individuals using scientific approaches can be difficult and furthermore the group whose experiences were being explored in this study, those pupils with an ASD, were identified as having social and communication difficulties which further impacted on the ease of eliciting their subjective experiences. Reductionist approaches of positivist and experimental psychology do not have the capacity to meaningfully analyse experience, yet exploring the views and experiences of those most closely affected by a phenomenon is an important part of the process of understanding that phenomenon. "Pure logical thinking cannot yield us any knowledge of the empirical world; all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends in it." (Einstein et al, in Spinelli, 1989 p.1). There are three recognised perspectives, which contribute to these attempts to understand human experience: phenomenological, humanistic and existential. There is some commonality between these three approaches, all of which have at the centre the belief that a person's experience is a result of the interaction between that person and their environment. Surveys offer a well recognized and organized approach to gathering such qualitative data around human experience.

In this study semi-structured interviews and focus groups (expanded upon below) were the specific techniques used to survey the experience of participants. Consent was

received from the parents of all six pupils and in addition all six parents also consented to be interviewed themselves (see above ethics section).

4.4.ii Semi-structured interviews

Following the decision to use a survey based approach consideration was given to the two methods of surveys available, i.e. questionnaires versus interviews as tools for data gathering.

Although questionnaires can provide the fastest and easiest way of gathering information from a large group of people at a low cost there are difficulties with response rates, which can be low and it is also difficult to know how seriously respondents take the questions when completing questionnaires. As the sample in this study was fixed according to the age of pupils and the criteria for the provision it included a small number of participants. This was one reason for choosing against questionnaires, any loss of responses would have been detrimental to the results. In addition the research questions were focusing on the experience of participants and it was hoped to obtain a level of richness in the data which would not have been possible using questionnaires.

For this reason interviews were chosen as the appropriate tool for data gathering for all participants. Working face to face with participants allowed the researcher to clarify any questions and encourage participation and involvement. The use of interviews was also made by Frederickson et al (2004) when looking at the experiences of pupils with

moderate learning difficulties. Following an already established methodology was felt to add rigour to the study.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a balance between providing some structure and keeping interviews relevant to the research questions whilst having enough flexibility to allow for ideas and themes to emerge which had not previously been anticipated by the researcher. One of the key figures in the field of research into ASDs reflected on similar lessons he had learnt: "It is essential to use research strategies and measures that are able to detect the unexpected. The real rewards in research come from discovering something you did not know." (Rutter, 2005, p248). Rutter also describes the need for flexible and open questions if researchers are to be able to "appreciate the meaning of the unexpected" (Rutter, 2005 p248) He warns against using closed questions which require either a simple confirmation or negative response. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to follow the respondent's interests and concerns in a freer-flowing conversation in which the ordering of questions is less important (Smith, 1996). In this way the method is very responsive to the individual experiences of participants.

For pupils and parents individual interviews were used. For staff it was decided that focus groups would be more appropriate. The details behind these decisions and the specific processes undertaken for each group are detailed below.

4.4.iii Parent Schedules

Parents were given the opportunity to complete their interviews over the phone or face to face, in line with Frederickson's methodology. It was felt that offering parents an option of how to complete interviews would encourage them to choose the method which would be most convenient for them and make them feel most comfortable. Allowing parents this convenience and comfort was also intended to enable them to stay involved for the duration of the project and to give the richest answers possible.

The interview schedules for the parent interviews were drawn up following the approach of Smith (Smith, 1996). This approach involved the use of open questions to lead participants as little as possible and allow for new and unexpected themes to emerge. Prompts were recorded on the interviewer's schedule, unseen by the parents. These prompts could be drawn on by the interviewer if necessary to help participants develop the richness of their answers. The prompts related to more specific areas such as 'relationships with staff', 'support', 'friendships' which encouraged parents to think about the different aspects of their child's education.

The questions during the first data collection point, during the summer term of 2008, looked at three areas: the past educational experiences of pupils, current educational situation and expectations participants may have around the upcoming move to secondary phase schooling including any associated thoughts and feelings. The aim of the questions was to elicit the experience parents had had of the education system to date for their child and for themselves, as well as exploring their expectations of this

continued system into secondary schooling. The interviewer had no formal hypotheses at the start of the process.

The nine questions and their prompts used during the parent interviews are given in appendix 3.

The second data point took place at the end of the autumn term 2008, when pupils had attended their new secondary schools for one term. The schedules for these second interviews followed the same format and asked about how the experience of secondary school compared with previous experience and how the experience of transition compared with the expectations revealed in the summer term. The questions are also included in appendix 3.

4.4.iv The use of 'Talking Mats' with pupils during individual interviews;

It is clear that those pupils with SEN have an equal right to have their views heard. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001) states that "children and young people with special educational needs have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances and their own views about what sort of help they would like to help make the most of their education.' (pg 27; paragraph 3:2). However the very nature of ASDs, the fact that difficulties are found in the social and pragmatic use of language, poses a challenge to being able to communicate these views effectively. Careful consideration was therefore given to offering pupils with an ASD the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences and perceptions in a way that supported their social

communication difficulties. However as Morris (2003) warns "It can be easy to underestimate or misinterpret someone's ability to understand or co-operate".

Thus, in order to support pupils to give their views, whilst taking account of their needs, Talking Mats were used throughout the interview process (Murphy 1998).

Talking Mats were developed at the University of Stirling to provide a tool to support individuals with communication difficulties to express their opinions about issues. Recent research has supported the hypothesis that using Talking Mats during interviews improves the quality and quantity of information elicited (Murphy & Cameron, 2008).

The time limits imposed on the project made a full pilot of the Talking Mats difficult, although it is acknowledged that completion of pilot interviews using the Talking Mats may have led to greater refinement of their use. However, during an informal meeting with a pupil, not later included in the study, the questions and use of the mats were trialed. From this work and from the knowledge the researcher had of the difficulties associated with ASDs, two Talking Mats were chosen to be used in the final interviews.

The first Talking Mat asked pupils about their likes and dislikes. This Talking Mat allowed pupils to discuss their thoughts and feelings about school and the approaching transition. Happy and sad faces were used to show how the pupils might feel in

different situations. Pupils were then asked about what made them happy or sad in their current school, about their current classroom, then what made them feel happy or sad about going to secondary school. The choices were limited to two feelings due to the difficulties which have been noted in some individuals with ASDs sequencing information (Mesibov and Howley, 2003). However it was acknowledged that this reduction of choices, leaving no middle choice, presented the issues initially as closed questions to the pupils encouraging them to make a definitive decision. The limitations of this were reduced by providing the options of 'happy & sad' and 'same & different' so that the questions then allowed the researcher to explore the reason for these choices in more depth, rather than simply being 'yes' or 'no' answers, thus providing the richness necessary for the study. Furthermore the topics which pupils chose to place in these categories were not limited by the prompt cards and thus pupils were able to bring new ideas to the Talking Mat activities.

This limitation of choices could also have resulted in later themes appearing definitively positive or negative. However, it was felt that the pupils would gain from having a visual structure to help them through the social situation of an interview and this justified these decisions. In addition some pupils did opt to place some issues in the middle of the two extremes (see Chapter 4) thus demonstrating the ability to develop their ideas.

Talking Mat 1a: Feelings about two schools

School now	School next year

Talking Mat 1b: feelings about school

Helpers	Pupils	Lessons
Break time		Assemblies

The second Talking Mat asked pupils what would be the same and different about their secondary school compared with their current school. This mat enabled pupils to explore the expectations they had of secondary school and to introduce any worries or

concerns they may have, if they had any, without this being prompted by the researcher.

Talking Mat 2: Expectations

some	different
Pupils	Break time
	toilets

As language comprehension difficulties can be associated with ASDs Talking Mats were preceded by questions to ensure that pupils understood what was meant by key concepts. For example the terms 'happy' and 'sad' in the first mat were checked by first asking the pupil to identify what they were seeing, 'a happy/ sad face'. They were then asked to describe a time when they had felt that way. All pupils were able to give good examples of times when they had felt happy or sad. For one pupil in particular this was referenced to the use of symbols in the classroom. The terms 'same' and 'different' in the second Talking Mat were also checked with the pupils. The interviewer used two books and asked the pupils to name three things which were the same about the items. For example, pupils answered 'they are both books, they are both about maths, they are the same size'. Pupils were then asked to name three things which were different about the books. All pupils completed this exercise with no problems. The pupils were then given a short story about a girl called Mel, who moved

house and the things she noticed which were the same and different about her houses. For instance, both houses had a garden but something was different, one house had a swing in the garden, one had a pond. This was used to introduce the activity of thinking what would be the same and different about their current and new school.

When the Talking Mats were introduced pupils were initially invited to simply tell the interviewer what they thought would make them 'happy or 'sad' or what would be the 'same or different'. In this way pupils were able to introduce their own ideas about their views and experiences of the transition and talk about aspects of the move, which may not have been previously considered by the researcher.

Once pupils had had this opportunity cards were used as a visual prompt to support the development of ideas if necessary. These cards reflected key aspects of school life which had been shown by the existing transition literature to be important to pupils. For instance there was a card which said 'lunchtimes', as previous research has suggested that dinner halls and being required to pay for your own dinner can be a concern for some young people (Tobell, 2003). The word 'lunchtimes' was thought to be a suitable prompt to this type of discussion without leading pupils to the specific aspects of the hall and paying for your dinner.

The same Talking Mats were used during the second set of interviews when participants were interviewed about their experiences of secondary school. This allowed comparison between the two sets of data.

The first Talking Mat (See Talking Mat 1a above), was used for pupils to discuss how they felt about their new school and their old primary school, pupils were then asked what made them happy and sad about their current school (see Talking Mat 1b above). Finally using Talking Mat 2 (see above) pupils were enabled to discuss their experience of secondary school and this could then be compared to their answers during the summer term which indicated their expectations of secondary school.

4.4.v Focus groups for members of school staff

In order to gather the views of school staff it was decided to adopt the focus group technique described by Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996). The focus group is appropriate for use in a study which has at its heart phenomenological assumptions, as the focus group assumes that there are multiple perspectives about any given reality or situation. In terms of qualitative research the focus group is very much based on the relationship and interactions between group members with the facilitator, this reflects the 'inquirer/ respondent' relationship of qualitative methods.

Vaughn describes four assumptions underlying the technique. Firstly is the belief that people are *'valuable sources of information, particularly about themselves'*. The second assumption linked to the first is that people are able to describe and articulate

into words their thoughts and experiences. Thirdly there is a belief that structured conversation led by a moderator is the best way to elicit any views held. The fourth and final assumption links specifically to the focus group, asserting that the effects of group dynamics create an advantage over individual interviews, in that they provide an environment where people feel confident to speak openly as they are not the only focus for the conversation, thus reducing any pressure. In addition ideas given by others may help develop individual's own thoughts and views, therefore resulting in richer data being gathered. This concept was first described by Hess (1968) who broke down the advantages of focus groups into five categories:

1: Synergism, the group interaction results in more information.

2: Snowballing, comments made by one participant may initiate a chain reaction of comments from others.

3: Stimulation, having a group discussion allows an excitement and joint interest to be generated around the topic.

4: Security, the support of being in a group provides a level of security, which encourages openness in responses.

5: Spontaneity, participants do not have to respond to every question so when they do answer this can be considered spontaneous and therefore more genuine.

In fact focus groups produce rich information in a relatively short space of time. However, one difficulty is that any information to be analysed for the focus group must be gained in that setting. It is not possible within the approach to contact individual participants at a later date to clarify contributions. For this reason it was essential that

the focus group was thoroughly planned, with a clear statement of purpose and a guide for facilitating discussion (Vaughn et al 1996).

Vaughn suggests that the ideal size for a focus group is eight to ten participants. As there were seven pupils included in the study each of their class teachers and any key support workers were invited to attend in order to achieve the ideal group size. In the secondary setting there were four schools involved, so each school was invited to bring two or three key members of staff who felt they could contribute to the discussion. As results were analysed in terms of the experiences of these particular pupils, it was felt that asking schools to select those members of staff most closely linked to the students was an acceptable way of selecting participants in this case.

In addition focus groups can be used alongside other forms of information and data gathering in order to create a portfolio of measures and triangulate data (Morgan and Spanish 1984).

The focus group question schedule was drawn up following the same procedure as that for the parent interviews and covered the same areas during the summer of 2008 i.e. the past educational experiences of pupils, current educational situation and expectations participants may have around the pupil's move to secondary phase schooling, including any associated thoughts and feelings.

The questions again took the form of open questions in order to avoid leading participants and allow for new and unexpected themes to emerge. Prompts were

recorded on the interviewer's schedule, unseen by the participants. These prompts could be drawn on by the interviewer if necessary to help participants develop the richness of their answers. The prompts related to more specific areas of school life, such as relationships between staff and pupils and their academic progress which encouraged staff to think about different aspects of school for these pupils.

As with the other two groups the researcher had developed no formal hypotheses prior to the focus group interviews. Instead the aim of the questions was to elicit the experiences and views of the participants through open questions, which allowed them to introduce their own themes and ideas.

The nine questions used in the focus group sessions and their prompts are included in full in appendix 3.

The second data collection point took place at the end of the autumn term 2008 when pupils had attended their new secondary schools for one term. The schedules for these focus groups were addressed to the secondary staff working with the pupil's. The eight questions used in these focus groups are also included in appendix 3.

4.5 Timescale for the project

The research questions relate to the inclusion of pupils, with a focus on the transition into secondary school, for this reason it was decided to collect data at two time points to allow the discussion of any themes to be discussed in the light of previous

experience and expectations whilst still at primary school and experiences following a term at secondary school. Table 1 summarises the exact timescale for all the procedures.

Table 1 Timescale for Research Project

Spring Term 2008 (February/ March/ April)	Summer Term 2008 (May/ June)	Autumn Term 2008 (November/ December)	Spring Term 2009 (March)
Meetings with the team responsible for setting up the specialist provision in the local authority	Initial pupil visits & pupil consent/ information for staff	Initial visits to pupils in their secondary provisions/ information for staff	Feedback sessions for schools, parents and pupils
Ethics form completed and ethics approval granted (February 2008)	Pupil interview 1	Pupil interview 2	Information letters sent to all participants with summary of analysis
Information and consent letters to parents	Parent interview 1	Parent interview 2	
Telephone conversations with school to outline project and arrange initial visits	Focus Group with Primary staff at all schools	Focus Group with Secondary staff at all schools	
	Interview with provision teacher 1	Interview with provision teacher 2	

4.6 Participants

There were three separate groups of participants for the project. Firstly the six pupils identified by the LA as meeting the criteria for admission to the specialist secondary provision for ASD, secondly their parents and finally key members of staff at both the

primary and secondary schools of the pupils. The final sample, meeting all the above criteria consisted of six pupils, five boys and a girl, six parents and key members of staff.

4.6.i Pupils

The pupil participants were all in Year 6 at the start of the study in May 2008 and moved to secondary phase schooling in the September of 2008. All pupils had a Statement of Special Educational Need (under section 324 of the Education Act 1996) for an ASD, including AS. The pupil participants were five boys and one girl, all of White British ethnicity, ranging in age from 10 years 8 months to 11 years 7 months at the start of the project. Individual details for each of the pupils are listed below in table 2. Names have been changed to protect the identity of pupils.

Table 2 Pupil Participant Details

Pupil	Age at 01.05.08	Gender	Ethnicity	Secondary Provision
Mike	11 yrs	Male	White British	Local Secondary School
Toby	10:9 yrs	Male	White British	Local Secondary School
Sam	10:8 yrs	Female	White British	Local Secondary School
Tim	11:7 yrs	Male	White British	Specialist ASD Provision
Geoff	11:1 yrs	Male	White British	Specialist ASD Provision
Luke	10:8 yrs	Male	White British	Specialist ASD Provision

4.6.ii Parents

Table 3 shows the individual characteristics for each of the parent participants. One parent was unable to complete participation in the interviews for personal reasons; however both of Geoff's parents were present at their interview. The final group of parents therefore consisted of four mothers, each with a child with an ASD, and a

mother and father who together had a child with an ASD. All parents were of White British ethnicity. Parents are identified by their children's names to ensure confidentiality.

Table 3 Parent Participant Details

Parent of pupil	Gender of parent	Ethnicity	Employment status of parents	Marital Status
Mike	Female	White British	Mother housewife Father employed	Married
Toby	Female	White British	Employed part time	Single Mother, no contact with father
Sally	Female	White British	Both parents employed	Married
Tim	Female	White British	Employed	Single Mother, regular contact
Geoff	Male & Female	White British	Mother employed, Father unemployed due to health reasons	Married
Luke	Did not participate for personal reasons			

4.6.iii Staff

Table 4 shows the individual characteristics for the staff who were invited to participate in the study.

Table 4 Staff Participant Details (NB Missing is recorded if participants were invited to participate but did not attend, see Chapter 5)

Role & Qualification	Years working in schools	Years working with Special Educational Needs	Data collected at:		Gender	Ethnicity	Type of provision
			Summer 2008	Autumn 2008			
Teaching Assistant	3 Years	3 Years	YES	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Primary
Class Teacher			YES	N/A	Male	White British	Mainstream Primary
Class Teacher	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	Missing	Mainstream Junior School
Class Teacher	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Primary
Teaching Assistant	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Primary
Class Teacher	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	Asian British	Mainstream Primary
Teaching Assistant	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Primary
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Junior School
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	White British	Mainstream Primary
Class Teacher	Missing	Missing	NO	N/A	Female	Missing	Mainstream Primary
Provision Lead Teacher	20 Years	10 Years	YES	YES	Female	British Pakistani	Specialist ASD Provision, secondary
Support Assistant	1 term	1 term	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Specialist ASD provision secondary
Support Assistant	4 terms	4 terms	YES	YES	Female	Black British	Specialist ASD provision secondary
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	20 Years	20 Years	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Mainstream secondary
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	14 Years	8 Years	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Mainstream secondary
Inclusion Coordinator	15 Years	15 Years	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Mainstream secondary
Teaching Assistant	5 Years	5 Years	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Mainstream secondary
Secondary Teacher	3 Years	3 Years	N/A	YES	Female	White British	Mainstream secondary

In total 18 staff members were approached, these included 4 Special Educational Needs Coordinators, 1 Inclusion Coordinator, 1 Specialist provision lead teacher, 6 class teachers and 6 support staff. Time spent in working in schools and with children with special educational needs ranged between 1 term and 20 years.

4.7 Analysis

In addition to the qualitative analysis outlined below pupil responses to the Talking Mats were recorded and listed. Comparisons between different pupils and also between pupil's expectations at Time 1 with their experience of secondary school at Time 2 were noted.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analysed according to the procedures laid out used by Frederickson et al (2004). This approach was based on that outlined by Vaughn et al (1996) which itself was underpinned by a phenomenological and inductive approach to avoid a priori assumptions and in an attempt to build a picture and understanding of the lived experience of these participants.

At both data collection points the views of the three groups, i.e. pupils, parents and staff, were analysed as an individual group and then compared to identify any similarities or differences across the views and experiences of the different participants. It was expected that such commonalities would emerge through the data analysis process (Marton 1981)

Analysis of the interviews began by searching the transcripts for 'big' themes. Following this initial surface analysis units of the texts were identified as being relevant to the research; these

units were selected on the basis of their content and therefore ranged from single words and phrases through to whole sentences and paragraphs.

During the next stage of the analysis the units were sorted into piles or categories where units had some common meaning. These categories were a combination of those which reflected the views of a number of participants and those which perhaps reflected the repeated statements of one person. After it was felt that all possible categories had been explored and that they best represented the data a stage of theorizing began. At this point themes were formulated which attempted to best explain the emerging categories and synthesised the data. Previous literature and theory was revisited to see how the themes from the current study reflected the findings of previous researchers, and if any new themes had been identified.

This analysis was interpretative and results are not considered as statements of fact as the process is largely subjective. However the results are grounded in examples from the data and therefore should appear transparent and plausible (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005) and therefore valuable in the field of research into ASD.

4.8 Reliability and Validity;

As with all research projects it is important to discuss the reliability and validity of the work undertaken, the data collected and the results found. In the case of the current qualitative project the reliability reflects the extent to which the answers given by participants would have reflected the same categories and themes if the researcher had been able to repeat the exercise. The validity reflects the extent to which the participant's answers and the researcher's interpretation of these are felt to represent the views and experiences of this group. It is essential that both of

these factors are properly addressed in order for the results to be considered meaningful and useful in this field of research.

Due to the subjective nature of qualitative data it is not possible to replicate the results in the traditional way of positivist approaches as the interviews collect the views and experiences of the participants at that one moment. However, collecting views from a range of participants at two time points provides some sense of how these views changed over the focus time of transition between primary and secondary phase schooling for parents, pupils and staff. In addition following an established methodology based on the previous work of published colleagues (Frederickson et al 2004; Vaughn et al 1996) ensures that the methods have been trialed previously and shown to demonstrate good reliability and validity.

The method of analysis, a form of thematic analysis, ensured that all categories and themes can be systematically traced back to the raw data and therefore offers a level of reliability and validity for the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). In order to further this reliability a sample of 10% of the data was given to a colleague for analysis following the same process to check the reliability of this categorization. Inter-rater reliability was found to be 83% overall and to range from 80% for the pupil interview data, to 81% for the staff data up to 88% for the parent interview data.

Participant validation of the categories was also collected to a limited extent for the first data set during the second interview process and for the whole project during the final feedback sessions.

It was especially important to ensure the validity and reliability of pupil responses, given their difficulties in the pragmatic use of language, previously described. The validity of pupil

responses was supported through the methodological approaches, which aimed to support the pupil's understanding of the questions presented to them. The use of a tested approach, Talking Mats, to work with individuals with communication difficulties was one measure taken to support the validity of responses. The additional time taken by the interviewer to check the individual's understanding of key concepts was a second measure which enabled pupils to demonstrate their understanding of a question before giving their own thoughts and ideas. In terms of the reliability of pupil answers a repetition of ideas was looked for in order to identify categories and themes during the analysis. In addition the collection of parent and staff information allowed the researcher to assess if the pupil's description of their experiences matched what was being described by parents and staff.

The results will now be presented.

Words 6425

5: Results

5.1 Real World Research

Before presenting the results of the study it is necessary to address three adaptations to the methodology, which were made during the course of data collection and any implications these may have on the results and conclusions drawn.

Adaptation 1:

Due to the 'real world' nature of the research (Robson, 2002) the staff focus groups during the summer of 2008 did not run as expected. Despite all ten members of primary staff who were approached offering a commitment to the group only two members of staff attended the focus group for primary staff in the summer of 2008. The remaining eight staff were approached several times during the remainder of the summer term but no agreement could be reached for a date to conduct the focus group.

In September 2008 the primary staff were again approached and despite renewed enthusiasm did not return phone calls or agree a time. In order to gather as many views as possible the researcher agreed with participants that they would receive a written version of the questions which they could complete and return, unfortunately these were not returned despite a follow up phone call.

This reduction in primary staff involved in the focus groups makes it difficult to be confident about conclusions drawn from the primary staff focus group transcripts at Time 1. However, the initial transcript for the primary staff focus group, with two

participants, is included in the analysis as the researcher did not want to lose their views from the project.

At Time 2 all ten members of secondary staff approached took part in focus groups and so the staff data for Time 2 can be considered as robust as that for the parents and pupils.

Adaptation 2:

Although the Talking Mats, outlined in Chapter 4, presented two options to pupils; either happy & sad or same & different, some pupils asked to place items in the middle of the Talking Mats. For example when talking about friendships at his new school Mike said he wanted to place them in the middle as some pupils would move with him but he would also meet new pupils. Other pupils also made similar requests. For example Tim was clear about having some of the same aspects in his new school, for example, chairs and teachers but that these were different. He wanted to be more precise in his answers. This precision added a greater depth to the pupil data than had been expected. The ability of pupils to develop the Talking Mat exercise in order to put across their views demonstrated that were not limited by the Talking Mats and any concern that presenting questions in this way may have limited the data set were unfounded. In addition this also means that when presenting the results where a middle option has been requested, this is reported.

Adaptation 3:

Returning to speak to participants in the autumn term 2008 it became clear that the provision for the three pupils in the three ordinary mainstream schools differed. Two of the schools had provided a specialist SEN provision for 'vulnerable' pupils, including those pupils in the study. This involved pupils being part of a smaller tutor group of pupils with a variety of needs, not just ASD. For instance: language needs, visual impairment, Downs Syndrome, ADHD and others. The specialist SEN provisions gave pupils the opportunity to register in a small safe environment and also to receive some lessons in this group. However pupils did also move around the school for some lessons to access specialist equipment, such as the Science and ICT labs, as well as to join their wider peer group for some lessons, for instance P.E. These specialist SEN provisions were therefore run in a similar way to the specialist ASD provision but catered for a wider variety of need.

For the analysis at Time 2 comparisons can therefore be made between the ordinary mainstream school with no provision, the specialist SEN provision and the specialist ASD provision, rather than simply between the specialist ASD provision and ordinary mainstream with no provision, as described in Chapter 4.

Following the description of these adaptations to the methodology the results will now be presented.

5.2 Pupils Results from Talking Mats

5.2.i Talking Mats Time 1 (Summer term 2008: pre transition)

Using the first Talking Mat, 1a (see Chapter 4 for details), pupils talked about whether they liked their Primary school and how they felt about moving to Secondary school.

- One pupil said that they were happy about moving to a new secondary school (Sam: Ordinary mainstream)

- One pupil said they were sad about moving to secondary school (Luke: ASD provision)

- Two pupils said they were sad at their primary school (Luke, Tim)

- Four pupils said they were happy at their primary school (Mike, Toby, Sam, Geoff)

- Four pupils said they were okay about moving to secondary school, indicating some anxiety or nerves about the unknown (Mike, Tim, Geoff, Toby: All provisions)

The second Talking Mat, 1b, also used the extremes happy & sad to allow pupils to discuss different aspects of their school experience. Many of the pupils gave their own ideas when discussing their school. For example Mike mentioned talking partners and Tim referred to having a quiet area. When using the prompt cards four of the six pupils were happy with their teachers and helpers at primary school. Five of the pupils were able to name at least one lesson they enjoyed, although two pupils specifically named Numeracy as an area they did not like. The results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Talking Mat 1b. What Makes pupils happy & sad about their school?

Pupil Name (Changed to protect identity)	Happy	Okay	Sad
Mike	Teachers and helpers Talking partners Lessons (Literacy, numeracy, Science, History, RE and PE)	Friends	Can be confused by other pupils not wanting my help
Toby	Teachers Lessons	Making friends	Nothing
Sam	Friends/ pupils Teachers and helpers Lessons Break times Having a job		Being told off
Tim	Having a quiet area ICT Teachers and helpers Dinner time		Lessons (Mathematics) Outdoor Break Pupils
Geoff	Lessons (ICT, Science, Art, PE) Break times Dinner time		Lessons (Numeracy, Literacy) Teachers and helpers Pupils
Luke	Running Trips	Finding my way round	Teachers and helpers Making friends

Using Talking Mat 2 all pupils were able to talk about what they thought would be the same or different about their current primary school and their new secondary school. This aimed to establish pupil expectations about their new school. All pupils referred to the physical space of the school, for example: classrooms and lockers or the structures of the day: having break times and having teachers, as remaining the same. However the expectation appeared to be that pupils felt there would be a lot of change when they moved to their secondary school. Five of the pupils mentioned the size of the buildings being bigger, five talked about having new and harder work. Three of the pupils mentioned the fact there would be older and more pupils in their new school.

The pupils also had individual concerns, for example one pupil was particularly interested in the colour of his surroundings, where another wanted to know the location of the toilet. The results are summarised in table 6 below.

Table 6: Talking Mat 2. What is the same & different between primary and secondary school?

Pupil Name (Changed to protect identity)	Same	Middle option	Different
Mike (Mainstream)		Some same children, some different. Curtains but different colours.	Different names for subjects and lessons Learn new things Bigger, two dining rooms Will need less help
Toby (Mainstream)	Subjects Classrooms (Chairs, tables, display boards)		I won't know what happens Bigger More break times More children More lessons Move round Dinnertimes
Sam (Mainstream)	Same lessons		Fun and new lessons Different rooms Bigger, more rooms and stairs Older pupils Timetable Walking to school Buying food
Tim (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Have lockers and bookcases Have classes	Will have teachers but will be different people.	Bigger building Different colours Don't know way around Indoor break Food Older pupils
Geoff (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Both got buildings Break times Trips		Higher building Go by minibus Food Lessons

Luke (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Classrooms ICT games		Register Toilets Harder work

5.2.ii Talking Mats Time 2 (Autumn term 2008: post transition)

Using the first Talking Mat, 1a, pupils talked about whether they liked their Primary or Secondary school.

- Two pupils liked both schools (Mike: SEN Provision, Toby: Mainstream)

- Two pupils preferred their primary school (Luke: ASD provision, Sam: SEN provision)

- Two pupils preferred their secondary school (Geoff & Tim: ASD Provision)

- Four pupils said they were happy at their old primary school (Mike, Toby, Sam, Luke)

- Four pupils said that their new secondary school was a happy or okay place (Mike, Toby, Tim, Geoff)

The two pupils who preferred their secondary school were both in the specialist ASD provision and had been sad at primary school.

Talking Mat 1b also used the extremes happy & sad to allow pupils to discuss different aspects of their secondary school experience. Pupils who had liked their primary teachers continued to like secondary staff, the two who had placed teachers on sad during the summer term also continued to do so. However, at Time 2 only two pupils referred to lessons as being happy, four pupils placed lessons on the sad side of the

Mat, including again Maths and English. Four pupils now referred to other pupils being 'nasty' on the sad side of the Talking Mat where none had referred to this in their primary school. Only one pupil said there was nothing sad about his new school. The results are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Talking Mat 1b. What Makes pupils happy & sad about their secondary school?

Pupil Name (Changed to protect identity)	Happy	Sad
Mike (Mainstream with SEN provision)	Teachers Pupils Lessons	Nothing
Toby (Mainstream, no provision)	School dinners Teachers	Mathematics Some pupils
Sam (Mainstream with SEN provision)	SEN Base Lessons Teachers Support staff Pupils	Break times Pupils swearing Pupils being nasty Missing old friends Uniform
Tim (Mainstream with ASD provision)	SCD provision base (including computers and games) Teachers Support staff	Another pupil in the base All lessons
Geoff (mainstream with ASD provision)	The views Break times and lunchtimes SCD Hub (going on the computers) Trips	Support staff (Wants to be independent) Noisy bells Other pupils hurting and annoying him English Mathematics
Luke (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Going outside and running around	Getting beaten up Another pupil teasing Lessons, work, classrooms History Teachers Helpers

All pupils were able to talk about what was the same or different about their current secondary school and their old primary school. Using Talking Mat 2 pupils referred to some of the physical aspects and structures being the same, for example: having doors and chairs, having lunch time and lessons. This was as expected. However the pupils gave a lot more information about what was different about their new school at Time 2. Some of these were as expected, for example the school was bigger, and there were new and different lessons. However, the pupils had also made several observations about their particular school, for instance one pupil talked about the observatory at his new school, another talked about the fact parents did not come to watch sports day now and a third discussed being able to learn about sex and growing up. The results are summarised below.

Table 8: Talking Mat 2. What is the same & different between primary and secondary?

Pupil Name (Changed to protect identity)	Same	Middle option	Different
Mike (Mainstream with SEN provision)	Still have packed lunch	Basically same lessons, some new, some new names Stay partly in my own class, partly move around.	New people Having a tutor Science equipment Starting to have school dinners Have to pay for dinners Growing up – wanting to know about sex and being allowed to talk about it Lots of different buildings and blocks Need to find way around Old friends here
Toby (Mainstream, no provision)	Having a timetable Having a uniform Having homework		Layout of school, lots of different blocks Bigger school Moving for lessons Teachers stay in one place

	Teaching activities People are kind		Observatory More time at break Can buy food More food Can go on the field at break No afternoon break Learning Spanish Harder work New people No assemblies
Sam (Mainstream with SEN provision)		Have art but it is harder work Have cookery but have to do the planning now, not just cooking. Have sports day but parents don't watch. Have a uniform, but I don't like this one, no summer dresses.	People Having SEN base More teachers Different teachers for different lessons Moving classrooms No mathematics sets New lessons Different food Not having a job
Tim (Mainstream with ASD provision)		Have computers but they are black now. Have chairs but they have holes in them. Have doors, different wood/ colour.	New rules about mouse on computers New equipment e.g. D&T Bigger school Have SCD base Can have milk and biscuits at break Can stay in at break Stay in SCD base at lunch Moving classrooms New topics People are nicer
Geoff (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Still has lots of doors		New people New teachers Subjects changing name e.g. Literacy and Numeracy now Mathematics and English New lessons e.g Learn2learn and revision The layout of the gym
Luke (Mainstream with ASD provision)	Some same lessons	Food is the same but have to buy dinner, used to be free.	New lessons e.g. French Teachers are stricter Lots of teachers Don't like helpers Can't go outside at break

5.2.iii Summary of comparison between expected and experienced transition for pupils.
These results reflect the answers pupils placed on the Talking Mats. The fuller descriptions and answers given are also analysed qualitatively along with the parent and staff data.

Overall the four pupils who felt okay about moving to secondary school (Mike, Tim, Toby and Geoff: All provisions) were now feeling happy or okay in their new school (terms used in Talking Mats), as expected. For Luke who had been sad about the move, he remained sad in his new school, also as expected. Only one pupil's experience had changed her view. Sam had been happy about the move at Time 1 but at Time 2 told me she preferred her primary school and missed it (Specialist SEN provision).

5.3 Results of Thematic Analysis
Categories were identified and checked according to the methods outlined in Chapter 4. In total 193 categories (100 at Time 1 and 93 at Time 2) were identified from the pupil, parent and staff data. A full list of the categories can be found in appendix 4.

The categories were then sorted to form groups and hierarchies within broader themes. Themes were intended to be mutually exclusive.

The number of participants and references contributing to the theme are recorded for all three provisions. Where a difference in views or experience reflected a difference in provision this has been described. Quotes are reproduced verbatim.

5.3.i Thematic Analysis Time 1 (Summer term 2008: pre transition)

In total seven themes emerged from the data at Time 1. Four themes relate to what pupils need to succeed in mainstream;

Theme 1: Important for pupils to know their environment

This theme split into two further subthemes, relating to the physical and social environment of pupils. The first subtheme emphasized the importance for pupils to feel comfortable and familiar with the social environment. Participants talked about the pupil's need to both be familiar with, as well as to be known by, the people around them and the importance of having continuity in their social environment in their ability to feel safe at school.

Total categories in subtheme: 23

Table 9: Number of participants contributing to theme 1i: pupils need to feel comfortable and familiar with the social environment

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	32
Parents (n=6)	5	92
Staff (n=4)	4	19
Total (n=16)	15	143

This theme was particularly important for parents who mentioned their child's social environment and the need for them to know and feel safe in it a total of ninety-two times. However pupils and staff also referred to this theme.

Parents emphasized the importance of knowing the staff and pupils in school for the confidence of their children:

Sam's Parent: "It's not just the sort of bricks and mortar it's the people, the children, you know those sorts of things that are important to him for the familiarity."
Mike's Parent: "He likes having adults around that he can call on, to make him feel secure"

In addition they felt that it was important to have a continuity of staff who knew and understood the individual pupil.

Tim's Parent: "...he went from this child to THIS child because he trusted everybody and he knew what was coming next. They knew how to get the best out of him; they knew if he had an outburst, they knew how to control him. I found in the last year, which is a very important year, he's had three change of teachers... this has really unsettled him."

Pupils talked about the fact that people would change when they moved school. For one pupil this left him feeling some confusion about the transition:

Mike "I'll put it here in the middle because it shows both, the thing is I like moving school, I like going there but it's also a little bit confusing because there will be some children that's there at the new school and some children that's not there."

Knowing and trusting the teachers played a large role in pupils feeling safe in their current primary school

Toby: "It's safe" Interviewer: What's safe about it? Toby "Teachers who support you."
Mike: "Well it's very safe, the thing is if I've done something wrong, hopefully I can tell the teachers about it."

Staff talked about the importance of engaging and involving other pupils in the school to understand the needs, and offer support, to pupils with an ASD within this social environment.

Primary staff 1: "... I spoke to each class... how would you support someone on a wheelchair, how would you support someone who couldn't hear well or see well, what about children who have difficulty at playtime and don't always understand the rules of what to do, can you think of any children like that? And you will find they mention all the children on the autistic spectrum and then all of a sudden the penny drops with them... and they're very good, very supportive."

The success of this support and understanding of other pupils in primary school was reflected in the anxiety of staff that this may not continue when the pupil moved to their secondary school and other pupils were no longer familiar with this group.

Primary staff 2: "Our class are so tolerant of him, they know what he's like... there's going to be other children there who don't know him and if he's standing there in a corridor and there's a problem, he wouldn't mind going up and saying "that's a bit naughty" whereas children that know him will understand ... yes so children that don't know him, that's my main worry"

The second subtheme, with fewer mentions than the first, stressed the importance for pupils to know their physical environment. In this theme statements reflected the pupils need to be familiar with the physical environment in school, to know where things are (e.g. classrooms, toilets), to know how to get around (e.g. reference to maps and need for knowledge) as well as statements from pupils about the importance of the environment itself (e.g. colour, size)

Total Categories: 7

Table 10: Number of participants contributing to theme 1ii.

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	48
Parents (n=6)	3	14
Staff (n=4)	2	9
Total (n=16)	11	71

This theme was more important for pupils, in contrast to the social theme, which had had greater emphasis for parents. Pupils also mentioned the social environment, but spent more time talking about the physical environment, with a total of 32 and 48 references respectively. The theme was of greater importance to those parents of pupils going to an ordinary mainstream school.

For pupils the theme reflected a level of anxiety about not knowing the layout of the school and the location of key places, such as the toilets

   Tim: "Well I don't know a map of the place so if I needed the toilet it could be anywhere"

As well as a general knowledge about the physical features of the school

   Geoff: "Does it have a library? Does it have chairs and tables? Does it have computers? Does it have clocks? Does it have window blinds? Does it have windows? Does it have plants?"

Pupils who had been given strategies to address these anxieties were keen to share these with me

   Mike: "Mrs McC. says if you have any problems here ask me, and she might give me a map to show me where to go. If I find golden curriculum I'll know where to go, if it's left or right or straight along"

Staff also recognized how these strategies had been valued by pupils

   Secondary staff 2: "Once they get used to where they are and find their way around the building... we gave them maps ... one of them found this very helpful... and it's all in different colours so "I'm here, I need to get there""

Parent's realised the importance of this knowledge for their children and stressed the need for the children to be given this information prior to their transition.

Sam's parent: "They've got to make sure...that she knows exactly on the first morning where she goes, what door she walks in and to where she goes...that will play on her mind the whole summer if we don't"

They also indicated that controlling the physical environment and the level to which the child would have to manage this environment contributed as a reason for their choice of school

Mike's parent: "We thought that would be good for him, as there would be less chopping and changing and he could get used to his environment, also with it being smaller and less busy."

Theme 2: To be supported to engage in learning (motivation and pedagogy)

The second theme at Time 1 looked at the need for secondary schools to support pupils to engage with learning. Pupils talked about lessons being either fun or boring, what teachers do to help them to learn and what they hope will happen at secondary. This view was supported by parents and staff, who discussed the need to motivate and support pupils with their learning flexibly.

Total categories: 21

Table 11: Number of participants contributing to theme 2: To be supported to engage in learning

	Number of participants mentioning them	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	59
Parents (n=6)	6	58
Staff (n=4)	4	40
Total (n=16)	16	157

This theme appeared to be important for all participants and for pupils transferring to both ordinary mainstream and the specialist ASD provision.

One pupil in particular was clear that they were looking forward to secondary school as they felt lessons there would be more fun

Sam: "I think it will be more fun, there'll be a proper Science room, proper Geography, proper Art... it's important because then we get to learn more and it makes it more funner"

Other pupils talked about their current primary school and what they liked about their teachers there

Mike: "Well I like talking to talking partners that Mr O chooses, like that, I also like listening to Mr Os subjects because Mr O usually talks about many things, like in History he talks about many things in History, like we were talking about since 1948 and he was telling many things and I thought in my mind, he's very clever."

Parents tended to refer to specific strategies which had been used in the past with their child and which they felt had supported their learning. This included set structures and approaches

Sam's parent: "First of all they were working to Sam's needs so we had visual timetables. We had doing things at Sam's level, explanations properly to Sam about what was going on, time and trouble taken; Sam was taken out, she needed to do some things in smaller groups with her, that kind of thing, but there was a lot of focused work by them ..."

As well as working with the child's interests

Mike's parent: "The guy who ran it would let them use their interests and involve that in it... Mike was talking about aliens and rockets and things."

Staff also talked about the helpfulness of strategies to support pupils with an ASD and the ongoing learning and development of these

Primary staff 1: "I think we've learned a lot over the last few years and we've got a lot of the strategies in place that we should have…"

As well as the need for individual and flexible support for learning based on individual

pupils changing needs

Secondary staff 1: "It's daily, we were talking today about how the pupils needs change… what we had for one of the pupils at the beginning doesn't apply now and we need a different set of interventions for that student"

Theme 3: To be prepared for change: schools and families need to be proactive in

anticipating difficulties and putting structures and organisation in place

This theme was more specific about what needed to be put in place prior to transition

and emphasized the importance of being proactive during this planning process. The

adult participants discussed the pupil's difficulties with change, the need to be thinking

ahead and putting in place systems and structures to support them during the transition.

For pupils the theme was reflected through their reference to structures and routines

they had enjoyed or found useful, including being given jobs and responsibilities in

their primary school.

Total Categories: 10

Table 12: Number of participants contributing to theme 3: To be prepared for change.

	Number of participants mentioning them	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	2	4
Parents (n=6)	4	42
Staff (n=4)	4	30
Total (n=16)	10	76

The theme was mentioned more regularly by the adult participants, and most often by parents. Although the pupils did talk about structures they enjoyed, or had helped, they only referred to the theme a total of four times. The parents of pupils transferring to ordinary mainstream schools referred to the theme more often than parents of those pupils going to the specialist ASD provision. However it was the staff from specialist ASD provision who contributed more than those staff from ordinary mainstream schools, perhaps suggesting that parents were more anxious and aware if these structures were not explicitly available in their secondary school.

Parents were anxious about the change in structure from the primary to the secondary school and how pupils would cope with this.

> Sam's parent: "The whole regime the whole everything... is totally different from primary ... most of the children relish that... for S, taking her so much out of her comfort zone, I hope it's not a bridge too far."

They felt it was important to support the pupils by giving them time to prepare for the change

> Mike's parent: "At one time when I started talking about high school he wasn't happy about it at all, but I thought the sooner I started mentioning it, the longer he has got to think about it, he's quite positive now."

As well as trying to build in some consistency in the initial stages of the transition

> Sam's parent: "In other words we keep some things, while we change other things and then they can move her on"

For the staff preparing to receive students into their secondary school, they also stressed the importance of proactive planning, including sharing information about the pupils amongst all members of staff.

"I'm trying to counteract all the difficulties that have been discussed with me and that I've seen, passing the information on to teachers, so that they know, and making sure teaching assistants know and are ready for it."

Theme 4: A need for home/ school liaison and communication

This was one of the themes with fewer references and reflecting the views of only one group of participants, the parents. However this theme did seem to be important to parents and is therefore included for consideration. Parents talked about the importance of liaising with schools and being given the information to work together.

Total categories: 2

Table 13: Number of participants contributing to theme 4: Home/ school liaison.

	Number of participants mentioning them	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	0	0
Parents (n=6)	5	14
Staff (n=4)	0	0
Total (n=16)	5	14

The need for home/ school liaison was important to most parents, five out of six of the parents talked about the theme. This included parents of pupils transferring to both the specialist ASD provision and ordinary mainstream schools. It was interesting to note that during the school staff interviews at Time 1 not one of the staff participants referred to the need for good home school liaison.

Parents emphasized the desire to know what is happening in school and the increasing difficulty of hearing information from their children as they grew older

Sam's parent: "I've already told them that ... they need to keep their liaisons with parents. It's very difficult to do things when you don't know what's happening because to some extent as they grow older, even worse in high school, you have less to do with it so how do you know what they're up to if nobody tells you."

Tim's parent: "When he's at school, like most children, when he's at home he wants to forget school, but if I said to him what did you do today he's not going to tell me, but if I had an insight of what he'd done then I would be able to have a pretty good conversation with him... As a parent I want as much information as they can give me"

Geoff's parent: "They did say they were going to ring for the first week and let us know. I hope for the first couple of weeks and go from there."

Where the first four themes referred to factors which support the transition process the final three themes at Time 1 present the emotional experience of transition for participants.

Theme 5: Anxiety around transition

The predominant emotion around the experience was anxiety with all participants revealing some anxiety, worry or concerns around the transition to secondary school for pupils.

Total categories: 7

Table 14: Number of participants contributing to theme 5: Anxiety around transition

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	3	13
Parents (n=6)	5	35
Staff (n=4)	4	11
Total (n=16)	12	59

Parents contributed the most to the theme with a total of thirty-five statements.

One pupil in particular was not able to think of anything positive about moving to

secondary school

> *Luke: Interviewer "I would like to talk to you about moving to secondary school and what you think it will be like at secondary school." Pupil: "Bad, bad, bad."*

Parents were anxious about the initial stages of the move and how the pupil would cope

> *Geoff's parent: "I'm worried... because personally I don't think he's going to cope with this... I'm dreading the first couple of weeks"*
> *Toby's parent: Interviewer "So what are you thinking about his move up to secondary school?" Parent: "Terrified."*

Statements also reflected a belief that this would be a difficult time

> *Sam's parent: "I'm scared because it's going to be difficult and traumatic and I'm kinda building myself up for a bumpy few months."*

Parents were worried that old difficulties may re-emerge at a new school

> *Mike's parent: "I'm worried this will start again, because it's a new school"*

The school staff were also worried about the pupils ability to cope in such a new

context

> *Primary staff 2: "This worries me about high school because it will be so different and he's so used to the same faces."*

Theme 6: Generally positive about move

However despite this anxiety, theme six reflects the generally positive attitude of

participants towards the transition to secondary schooling.

Total categories: 8

Table 15: Number of participants contributing to theme 6: Generally positive about
move

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	30
Parents (n=6)	5	20
Staff (n=4)	1	3
Total (n=16)	12	53

Pupils in particular were excited about the move and looking forward to their new
school, with a total of thirty statements. Parents were also quite positive with twenty
statements reflecting an optimistic attitude to the transition. However the theme only
reflected the contribution of one staff member, perhaps indicating that this is not a
personal change for them.

Pupils looked forward to new lessons, rooms and equipment

*Sam: "Oooh yes, I think I will like this school next year because… I think it will be
more fun, there'll be a proper Science room, proper geography, proper art, proper
English, proper maths room and then computer rooms and things."*
*Mike: "Well …like History in Year 7 … they learnt about the first world war and
we've never done that."*

One parent in particular felt very positive about her decision to choose the specialist

ASD provision for her child

*Tim's parent: "There was something which made me think, this is the school I want
him to go to … I thought to myself how lucky he really is to be coming here, to have
these people that are trained … that know what they're doing."*

The one member of staff whose statements reflected a positive attitude discussed the fact that the pupil was ready for a change

Primary staff 2: "I think he's ready for something different"

Theme 7: Emotional impact on adults

The final theme from the first set of interviews reflected the emotional impact that supporting pupils with an ASD can have on the adults around them. Staff in particular openly discussed how emotionally tiring and stressful it could be working with pupils with an ASD. However some of the statements made by parents also reflected the impact on their lives as parents.

Total categories: 4

Table 16: Number of participants contributing to theme 7: Emotional impact on adults

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	0	0
Parents (n=6)	4	22
Staff (n=4)	3	29
Total (n=16)	7	51

The theme was therefore drawn from statements of parents and staff of pupils transferring to both the specialist ASD provision and ordinary mainstream schools, but no pupils.

For parents there was an acceptance that many things have been difficult since having a child with an ASD. They felt there is therefore no way of looking too far into the future, including the transition; having any expectations would be too difficult

Mike's parent: "We didn't know what impact that would have on our lives. Whereas if you know your child is paralyzed, they're never going to walk, you know where the outcome will be, where you stand. But we never knew how Mike was going to turn out. We still don't to a degree. We're quite hopeful now to what we were; you just have to take it day by day. Work on the now."

Sam's parent: "There's bound to be some that come in from the sideline and you think 'I didn't realize that was going to be a problem' but yeah, I've tried because when you get a Sam you have to learn to adapt your life, to adjust it"

For staff the emphasis was on the stress of caring for pupils in school

Primary staff 1: "Emotions run really high, I think, when staff are dealing with pupils like this... I don't think you can underestimate the stresses some of these children put on staff."

And the need to be able to cope with this stress and not take difficulties personally

Primary staff 2: "You have to have a very thick skin"

5.3.ii Thematic Analysis Time 2 (Autumn term 2008: post transition)

In total six themes emerged from the data at Time 2. The comparison between provisions will now be made between ASD specialist provision, SEN specialist provision and ordinary mainstream to reflect the actual experiences of pupils as described above.

Theme 8: Factors which support transition and inclusion in mainstream secondary schools

The first theme was the largest theme at Time 2 and represented a large number of statements from pupils, parents and staff. It discussed the factors which facilitated a

successful transition for pupils, including some categories where these factors had not

occurred and this had negatively impacted the transition experience.

Total categories in theme: 27

Table 17: Number of participants contributing to theme 8: Factors which support

transition and inclusion

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	17
Parents (n=6)	6	95
Staff (n=10)	7	102
Total (n=22)	19	214

This theme was important to all participants, from all provisions. However the adults

interviewed particularly stressed the factors which had helped or hindered pupil's

transitions.

For pupils this was about having helpful and understanding staff

*Luke: "...never (referring to getting lost) because Mrs. M always told me where we
were going next and I knew I had to follow her to get anywhere."*
*Mike: "Mrs. H, she knows me enough because I went to visit (name of secondary
school) ... she's very nice to me, she understands."*

Pupils were very clear when teachers had not helped them to settle in to their new

school

*Toby: Interviewer "When would you be feeling sad?" Toby "When I've got Maths"
Interviewer "What don't you like about Maths?" Toby "I don't like the teacher"
Interviewer "What is it you don't like about the teacher?" Toby "He shouts a lot."*

Parents and staff discussed the structures and routines in school including the use of:

'Buddies',

Sam's parent: "They took them in and they gave them two fairly handpicked prefects... they were Year 11s and they were lovely... good at answering questions from the kids..."
Mike's parent: "... they wanted to know who Mike knew in the year above, the ones who knew the ropes and he's been lucky she's been really good."

Additional visits,

Geoff's parent 2: "I think the fact he went in for those visits before he went, when he didn't have to actually do anything as such; there was no pressure."
Sam's parent: "So when transition day came, Sam had already been in to (Name of secondary school) three or four times."
Mike's parent: "It really is just making them feel comfortable within their new environment... even things like where they get dropped off in a morning and practicing walking from the gate to reception..."

Structure and routine for predictability

Toby's parent: "To have the proper support really, the structure, he needs structure... until they put that in place they've got no hope."
Sam's parent: "She'll accept the rules, even if she doesn't like it, so that's been really helpful."
Secondary staff group 1: "Once they know these are the rules, these are the rewards and that helps them a lot and it gives them structure and they can understand..."

There was also an emphasis from parents on valuing qualified and experienced staff

and good communication with staff. Parents value 'being told', not just 'finding out'

about difficulties their child may be having.

Tim's parent: "They're very on the ball. They'll even pick up on something and they'll be telling me whereas I found at the other school it was the other way round... it makes me feel confident."
Mike's parent: "Very good, and they're very honest as well, they'll come out and tell you things that have happened not wait for you to hear dribs and drabs from Mike."

Where this wasn't happening it was referred to as desirable

Toby's parent: "I do feel they should have rung me, it shouldn't be up to me to find out from him."

Staff also valued being able to communicate easily with parents.

Secondary staff group 1: "His parents are great... they come and pick him up and drop him off in the morning so the communication is really good and he's really settled."

In addition staff were aware of their role in getting to know the individual pupil and ensuring that any strategies were individualised and that key staff were able to build up a good relationship with pupils.

Secondary staff group 1: "Every group that I've had, the first term has always been the challenge because it's getting to know the children, getting to know their individual traits... and then you can put your interventions in because I find if you put interventions in too quickly they don't always work."
Secondary staff group 2: "I think getting to know the individual child is the most helpful because you can have all the training in the world and it won't prepare you for one individual child."

Theme 9: The benefits of having a specialist provision (SEN or ASD specific)

This theme was referred to by all participants. Those who were part of the ASD or SEN specialist provisions within their mainstream school were clear that this was valued. The theme also stressed that where a provision was available pupils had had a positive transition experience. For the single pupil who moved to an ordinary mainstream school with no specialist provision a generally negative picture emerged, further offering support to the role of provisions in a positive transition experience.

Total categories in theme: 20

Table 18: Number of participants contributing to theme 9: Benefits of having a

specialist provision

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	3	41
Parents (n=6)	6	109
Staff (n=10)	7	32
Total (n=22)	16	182

This theme was important to all participants; however parents in particular were clear

about the value they placed on having a specialist provision for their child at secondary

school, they mentioned their child's overall transition experience a total of 109 times.

For five of the parents, whose children had transferred to either the specialist ASD or

SEN provision these statements were positive, however for the pupil who had

transferred to mainstream with no provision these statements were negative. Staff

working in either the specialist ASD or SEN provisions also reflected positively on

their pupil's transition.

For those in the specialist ASD provision its value was referred to by all the parents and

half of the staff members, however only one of the three pupils referred directly to it.

Pupils:
Tim: "This school is so much better, including my very own SCD hub to go to at break time, lunchtime and home time and even at the start of the day."
Parents:
Tim's parent: "The SCD hub (ASD specialist provision) works really well for him, it helps him calm down in a morning, he looks forward to going in in a morning because he has that extra bit of time."

Geoff's parent 2: "I think it's the hub where he goes because he knows he can go there and it's nice and peaceful."
Staff:
Secondary staff group 1: "We can do that in the provision because we're here, trying to monitor that and wonderful teaching assistants who support them..."

For the pupils attending the specialist SEN provisions, all related participants talked

about the value of provisions.

Pupils:
Mike: "I wanted to put it in the smiley because it's new for me. When my father was a lad ... well they didn't have things like golden curriculum.(SEN specialist provision)"
Sam: "It makes me feel happy and safe.. I feel safe because of all the LSAs"
Parents:
Sam's parent: "All these pupils will be together this year ... it's just them in a tutor group, so a smaller group ... what we'll do in the longer term I don't know but that's what we're doing at the moment as much as anything to take a bit of the pressure off."
Mike's parent: "We just felt he'd be more secure in that small environment with less moving around the school, the big school and yeah he's doing really well."
Staff:
Secondary staff group 2: "I've been really impressed with them ... I mean this is a huge school and if there isn't support there you can often get lost in it, and these students haven't, they've got lots of places they can go, lot's of people they can turn to."
Secondary staff group 3: "...they only go out into mainstream for tutor periods so he does have his own tutor group for PE, technology, music and IT, they move around. The rest of the time they're here so he's not actually out in the chaos, in the big classes...I think if Mike was out in a mainstream class all the time we'd be having a very different experience."

For the pupil without a specialist provision the parent discussed the difficulties for her

child of not having a specially allocated space to go, further emphasizing the

importance of specialist provisions.

Toby's parent: "She was in the meeting and I said "you know what if it's going to be like that why don't we take Toby out of class to the library or somewhere else where he can do his work on his own". "That's not a problem" M said, "that's fine". I said to Toby, " you've got the option, if you don't do your work in the lesson you'll be removed during that lesson and taken somewhere else". So then they decided to take him to the exit room, which is where you go when you're naughty. So now he's all confused, why are they taking him to the exit room?"

This theme also stressed the positive experience of pupil's transition when moving to a school with either specialist provision.

Parent's talked about their child's transition being better than they had expected

Tim's parent: "I think because it was all so new, to be honest he's settled in much quicker than I thought he would... I can't really fault it, which is, I mean I was so worried"
Geoff's parent: "...me not thinking he would settle and he's proved me completely wrong."
Sam's parent: "...perhaps it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, it certainly hasn't been as horrendous."
In addition they referred to the fact that pupils were now happy to go to school, a

positive change from their time at primary school

Tim's parent: "He's happy to go in, he's happy to come home of course, but he doesn't go in with any, well before he'd say "I don't want to go to school, I want to escape form school, I hate school" and I don't hear any of that anymore."
Geoff's parent: "Because at (Primary) it's these things like "I feel sick" or "I can't go in" but you don't get that from him now"

The exception was the one parent whose child had moved to mainstream without a specialist provision. For her child the experience had not been positive

Toby's parent: "Toby's experience so far? At school? Terrible really I just don't think Toby knows where he is coming from or going to next at the minute really."

For staff there were also references to a positive transition experience, but only from those staff working in either the ASD or SEN specialist provisions.

Secondary staff group 3: Participant 1 "I think it was quite good" Participant 2 "He's happy,
He's settled quicker than we thought he would" Participant 1 "The other students have built a relationship with him, he feels valued, he feels part of (name of secondary school)."
Secondary staff group 2: "In terms of what we were expecting she's doing amazingly well."
Secondary staff group 1: "I think he's settled a lot quicker than a lot of the other regular kids in his class."

Theme 10: Early days: ongoing targets and challenges

Despite an overall positive experience throughout the transition both staff and parents were clear that there were still future targets to achieve and ongoing challenges to support pupils through secondary school. Pupils themselves discussed some of the new aspects of their secondary school, which they were still learning about, and two pupils talked about missing primary school.

Total categories in theme: 20

Table 19: Number of participants contributing to theme 10: Early days

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	68
Parents (n=6)	6	67
Staff (n=10)	7	12
Total (n=22)	19	147

This theme was particularly important to the pupils and parents, all twelve parent and pupil participants referred to new and ongoing challenges, although it was also mentioned by staff from all provisions.

Pupils talked about still missing primary school

Sam: "I miss it and in the summer time I'm going to be always looking at primary schools thinking I wish I could wear that summer dress again I want it back and I can't."
Toby: "I'd been there more years, and I'm used to it ... like I knew where I was going and stuff."
Luke: "it had more things to do."

They also referred to learning and understanding new rules and structures

Tim: "*Well in primary school I did used to have lessons like ICT and DT but in DT now I have to use proper... instead of just designing. I also have to use some new machines but since I'm a scardy cat I'm normally too scared at first and I have to get used to it and have to use it...*"

Toby: "*...now I do Spanish instead...it's a bit hard.*"

Tim: "*That's a new rule for (name of secondary school) now that we have to get a mouse for the computer...*"

For parents there was a feeling that it was 'early days'

Geoff's parent: "*It's a bit early to tell exactly...*"

Mike's parent: "*...we'll just have to see, I mean they might be taking it a little bit easy at the moment because it's early days...*"

And that it can take time for pupils to settle

Sam's parent: "*We saw behaviour from May until about now, that we hadn't seen in a long time...*"

"*...there isn't a simple answer for these kids, it's just time...*"

Toby's parent: "*...it's going to take a bit longer because it's all new teachers, new staff, new kids that he doesn't know so it's obviously going to take more than six weeks...*"

There was also some anxiety that the good experience would not last

Tim's parent: "*I just hope that it is not something that is just going to dwindle away...*"

For parents and staff there was a recognition of ongoing challenges and targets

Parents

Geoff's parent: "*Hopefully by the end of he year he'll stay in classes a bit longer.*"

Tim's parent: "*I might ask them, when it gets a bit nicer weather nearer summer, to try and coax him to go out a little bit more, try and get him to socialise a bit more.*"

Mike's parent: "*I'm not sure whether he could be pushed harder, he doesn't get a lot of homework.*"

Staff

Secondary staff group 1: "*... for Luke we've already got a new target for next term, based from we've observed.*"

Secondary staff group 2: "*...we'll have to think about who we put her with in terms of students and in terms of support as well.*"

In addition, for staff, it was clear that the transition and support will need to continue through school.

Secondary staff group 3: "Even where you've successful through the course of a year, come moving up to Year 8, come moving up to Year 9, 10, start of each year you're going to have to put those supports back in there because of new teachers, new curriculum, every year can be more like starting again..."

Secondary staff group 3: "You can't really predict to be honest ... it's really seeing what his needs are and how he develops and then try to meet those needs as best we can."

Theme 11: Pupils with an ASD are individuals first

This theme was especially relevant to pupils and parents who talked about their individual likes and dislikes and the need to be seen as an individual first. However, there were also references to the experiences of pupils with an ASD being the same as those of 'any' pupil and this was also mentioned by school staff.

Total categories in theme: 14

Table 20: Number of participants contributing to theme 11: Pupils with an ASD are individuals first

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	51
Parents (n=6)	4	16
Staff (n=10)	6	18
Total (n=22)	16	85

This theme was particularly important to pupils who contributed fifty-one of the eighty-five statements.

Pupils talked about a variety of aspects of their experience which reflected their individuality rather than anything relating to their ASD, for example their comments about lessons which they enjoyed or not

> Tim: "I only really like ICT and DT"
> Mike: "In English and Literacy it was interesting because I like to write stories."

Whether they were motivated to work

> Mike: "My father was a very nice pupil ... so I wanted to continue this."
> Tim: "I'm also sad when I do something wrong because, you might have worked hard on it."

Pupils also wanted to have choice over aspects of their day at secondary school, such as their lunch and break times. They enjoyed it when they did have some freedom to choose and control these aspects

> Toby: "Some people have tuck, some people have proper dinners."
> Sam: "We get more time and we can buy cookies and drinks and stuff"
> Tim: "Break times here, because they let me have milk just so long as I bring enough from home."
> Toby: "...come in here sometimes, come in the library sometimes, sometimes go to sport and sometimes play sport on the field."

Parents talked about the fact that their child's experience was similar to that of most children

> Mike's parent: "I would perhaps say he was a bit nervous which is probably normal ... I think he was perhaps a little apprehensive, but probably no more than what everyone else was about it, you know?"
> Sam's parent: "I think they all are, I mean it's a big step I still remember my own first day at high school."

Similarly, staff referred to the experience of this group of pupils as being comparable to that of all pupils:

Secondary staff group 3: "...obviously change of school for any student at eleven years old is stressful."

They also discussed some of the individual attributes of pupils and how these had supported pupils through the transition process.

Secondary staff group 2: "I think she'll do well, she's a friendly person, she really enjoys other people..."
Secondary staff group 3: "Compared to other students we've had with a similar type of need before (child's name) is extremely social ... he naturally seems to have that ability to find a place where he can fit."

Theme 12: Support for mainstream subject teachers

The fifth theme at Time 2 was referred to only by staff participants. However, it was a strong theme in the secondary staff data set and was therefore felt to be appropriate to be reported as a separate theme.

Total categories in theme: 10

Table 21: Number of participants contributing to theme 12: Support for mainstream subject teachers

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	0	0
Parents (n=6)	0	0
Staff (n=10)	8	53
Total (n=22)	8	53

This theme was important to staff from all provisions.

Staff stressed that working with pupils with an ASD is a challenge

Secondary staff group 1: "I think for all three it was extremely hard work, there's no doubt about it, it was extremely hard work."

This was partly because staff felt it is more difficult to organise support in secondary school than primary school

Secondary staff group 1: "It's hard to support because you've got so many different people, so you've got to make sure all the information is out there."

The need to share information across the school was emphasised in the three schools without the specialist ASD provision

Secondary staff group 3: "Well, we've got a system, well the assessment sheet, like a provision map with all the student's names, where they register, why they're on it, a brief description of need, what the school are doing, any outside agencies involved and then at the end you've got a thing, all the strategies that have been recommended."

Staff also felt that attitudes of subject staff are important and that all staff need to take responsibility for these pupils to ensure inclusion

Secondary staff group 3: "...every teacher here is a teacher of special needs and it's trying to get that message across."

In order to support pupils effectively and for staff to take responsibility training was a key issue

Secondary staff group 3: "...it's really important that they know certainly a little bit and have some training and some information, because they're going to come across in pretty much every lesson, someone with a need..."
Secondary staff group 4: "When inclusion first came about we were told that mainstream schools would be given training to cope and sadly I think most people have learned on the hoof as they've been going along. I think training is a huge thing that needs support and needs time. It needs due time to be given to it."

For the specialist provision staff, both ASD and SEN, offering training on a whole school basis was considered difficult, staff found it more effective to offer informal

support to individual teachers as it becomes relevant to them regarding individual

pupils

> *Secondary staff group 3: "..if they come to you with an issue they're more likely to take it on board."*
> *Secondary staff group 1: "... a lot of them felt they can pick up the phone and call me."*

For staff working within the specialist ASD provision a "no blame approach" was felt

to be essential

Secondary staff group 1: "Sometimes you put every single intervention in place and that day nothing will work, you just have to write that day off, it's not going to work.
Secondary staff group 1: "I think the key to it working has got to be if you've got the staff, the staff have got to be able to work together, support each other, not blame each other and just laugh and go 'well that happened.'"

Theme 13: The issue of social interaction

Finally, difficulties in social interaction are a recognised part of an ASD. This theme

reflects the continuation of such difficulties as pupils move into secondary phase

schooling. Pupils, parents and staff all talk about difficulties with other pupils

including some instances of bullying. However alongside this is the additional fact that

pupils seem to have an increased interest in social interaction, and for some the move to

secondary school has resulted in their first friendships being formed.

Total categories in theme: 8

Table 22: Number of participants contributing to theme 13: The issue of social interaction

	Number of participants mentioning theme	Total number of statements
Pupils (n=6)	6	26
Parents (n=6)	5	8
Staff (n=10)	1	2
Total (n=22)	12	36

This theme was particularly important to the pupils who contributed twenty-six of the thirty-six statements. They spent time reflecting on new friends as well as seeing old friends, but also the fact that they continued to have difficulties making friends and getting along with other pupils.

Pupils appear to have an increased interest in social interaction

Pupil
Sam: *"The best thing about it here is that I get ... I've made a good new friend called A."*
Tim: *"...I've actually never seen him before but we've become brilliant friends..."*
Toby: *"I've met loads of new people."*
Mike: *"...he's a good chap. He understands what I like..."*
Parents
Sam's parent: *"What's been really lovely is she's made really good friends with a girl who has come from (name of school), so she didn't know her."*
Geoff's parent: *"I think he's interacting more now with other children."*
Tim's parent: *"...they seem to be making friendships whereas in the other school that never seemed to happen... is something I always wanted and low and behold it seems to be happening."*

This included positive surprise at meeting old friends from primary school

Mike: "I was astonished by something amazing because I found that my old friends from my old school are over here and I thought 'how did they get here?' I was wondering."

However they did also continue to have difficulties with other pupils, in fact all pupils

had experienced some teasing or bullying episodes since moving to secondary school

Pupils
Geoff: "(Child's name) keeps hurting me...he always wants to hurt my ingrown toenail."
Sam: "...when I was in Year 3 all those people who were in Year 5, they are being nasty to me now and I don't now what's wrong with their behaviour."
Luke: "They're nasty, some people are nasty ... they beat me up."
Parents
Geoff's parent: "Unfortunately he'd got one little boy that goes there that used to come on the minibus with him and they've separated them because he was a bully."
Sam's parent: "...some of them think it's great fun to basically wind her up over the swearing issue so there's been a few incidences of them swearing, Sam telling them off and them swearing and swearing until Sam just went and walloped them one."
Toby's parent: "Some Year 10 boy was trying to take his money, he told him he'd given it, so he choked Toby with a tie and tied him to the radiator and left him there and he was choking."
Staff
Secondary staff group 2: "...the only issue we've had with it has been with the Year 9s...she finds it very hard to talk to older year groups, they find it easy to tease her."

The implications of the above results for practice in local authorities supporting pupils

through the transition process will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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6: Discussion

It is essential that lessons are learnt from the views and experiences of the participants in the current study in order to inform future research and practice. This should develop the process of secondary transition for pupils with an ASD, ensure a positive start to their inclusion in mainstream secondary schools and therefore improve their overall educational experience.

In order to further explore the views and experiences presented in Chapter 5, the findings will be discussed in the context of current understanding and knowledge in the field, reflecting back on literature introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Following this implications for policy and practice are discussed in Chapter 7.

Firstly, the methodology used to elicit the views will be examined; its success in answering the research questions and any limitations or adaptations which occurred will be discussed.

6.1 Comments on the methodology

Addressing issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research can be difficult as the terms are strongly associated with quantitative and fixed method designs. Recently the terms of reliability and validity in qualitative research have received increasing interest (Cho & Trent, 2006). It is important to demonstrate the reliability and validity of the current findings if they are to prove useful in developing practice within the focus LA. The aim of this project is not simply to 'give voice' to the participants, but

also to draw conclusions from their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Dismissing the traditional terminology of reliability and validity is not helpful in this regard and only provides support to critics of qualitative approaches, who see methodologies such as thematic analysis as unreliable and invalid (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Robson, 2002). In order to address such possible criticisms the reliability and validity of the current study will now be addressed.

6.1.ii Reliability

Reliability is often associated with the use of established and standardised instruments (Robson, 2002). Although the interview schedules used in the study were not standardised, their focus was on the individual views and experiences of participants. Following a methodology designed and tested by an established researcher ensured the reliability and rigor of the qualitative approaches used (Frederickson et al, 2004; Smith, 1996; Vaughn, 1996).

The reliability of results is also supported through the extent to which they reflect previous findings; a full discussion about this is given later in the chapter.

The use of focus groups made it easier for school staff to participate and organise attendance, rather than having to find space and time for a series of individual interviews. Having an individual focus group for each school context reflects the method used by Frederickson et al. (2004), and allowed staff with a shared context to participate together to promote discussion around their specific experiences. One limitation was that focus groups ranged from three to four members rather than the

ideal eight to ten participants advocated by Vaughn (1996). The data gathered from these participants was however rich and valuable. All participants contributed equally.

There is also a question about the lack of participation from primary staff, even following the offer of allowing staff to contribute written opinions to the study. Perhaps the research questions seemed more relevant to secondary staff, as the focus was on transition and inclusion to secondary schools. The change in any practice would have a greater impact on secondary staff and they were therefore more committed to the study.

The reliability of pupil responses was supported through the use of an evidence based tool, Talking Mats (Murphy, 1998; Murphy & Cameron, 2008). Speaking with the pupils at two time points, before and after the transition, allowed comparison of their ideas and concerns over time. Many of the issues discussed by pupils before transition were referred to again at Time 2, adding reliability to the data. For example, Sam had been looking forward to the move in the summer, but after a term at secondary was missing her primary school. When explaining this she did refer to the fact she had been looking forward to coming, which supported that this was a change in opinion and not the case that the initial data was unreliable. For many of the pupils their opinion about the move generally remained the same. For instance, Tim had been looking forward to the move and reflected on how good it had been at Time 2. Another reflection of the reliability of pupil responses was the fact that one pupil, Mike, fed back to his class teacher following the interview that he had enjoyed talking with the researcher and hoped that it would help other pupils like him moving to secondary school. This

comment demonstrated an understanding of the interview and its aims, suggesting his views had been accurately expressed.

Reliability for all groups was ensured through the prolonged time period of the study. Participants seen at Time 2 were given the opportunity to discuss the analysis from Time 1. In this way informal member checks of the researcher's interpretation of the results could be made. Had more time allowed findings would also have been checked with participants at the end of the study, to formally assess the extent to which participants agreed with the analysis.

The constraint of the time limitation also meant that it was not possible to fully pilot the interview schedules. If carrying out similar data collection in the future piloting of schedules and Talking Mats could lead to a refinement of ideas and questions, further ensuring their reliability as a research tool.

However, despite this lack of piloting the reliability of the data collected was supported through the inclusion of three groups of participants: parents, pupils and staff as well as using different methods of eliciting views, judged to be most appropriate for each individual group (see Chapter 4 for full explanation). This allowed for triangulation of participant views. Many of the themes identified did draw from the data of all three groups, suggesting a level of agreement between groups. In addition, this also added to the reliability of the individual pupil's experience as comparisons could be made across groups (parent, pupil and staff).

Following the approach of thematic analysis, a recognized approach to analysing

qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and using a previously tested process

(Frederickson et al., 2004; Vaugn, 1996) ensured reliability for the analysis and the

categories and themes identified. Engaging a colleague to read, unitise and categorise a

selection of the data also allowed for a level of inter-rater reliability to be calculated,

see Chapter 4. This adds further reliability to the results.

6.1.iii Validity

The validity of the current study is judged by the extent to which the results accurately

reflect the views and experiences of participants (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Following the survey approach and using face to face interviews and focus groups did

lead to a richness of data appropriate to thematic analysis. This in turn has provided a

valuable data set of information from the key stakeholders (pupils, parents and staff)

about the research question. Conversations were free-flowing which allowed for

unanticipated themes to arise and be brought to the study by participants (Smith, 1996

and Rutter, 2005), as hoped. Secondary staff also engaged well, and the use of the

focus group (Hess, 1968; Vaughn, 1996) proved a successful way to elicit their views.

Focus groups provided a dynamic situation, where the members could be seen to draw

on ideas provided by other members and expand opinions given. This resulted in

valuable data which complemented well that of parents and pupils.

The methodology used in the study ensured that all contributions made by participants

were accurately transcribed verbatim. The researcher placed no interpretation on the

data at the time of transcription, unitising, or coding of data. As such the data remains transparent and all analysis of the data to form categories, and later themes can be traced back to the original verbatim transcripts. The thematic analysis process, described in Chapter 4, was closely followed. This process was fully recorded, both manually and using the computer programme NViVo, ensuring full traceability of analysis. Quotes from participants to support the description of themes were also reproduced verbatim, allowing the reader to make their own interpretations about the validity of descriptions made adding further credibility to the results.

The fact that semi-structured interviews were used allowed participants to bring their own views and experiences to interviews and ensured that the researcher remained open throughout the data collection period and did not seek to find evidence to support a pre-designed hypothesis or theory. All thematic analysis was done inductively.

Utilising the visual framework of Talking Mats (Murphy, 1998, 2008) offered support to participants known to have social communication difficulties, ensuring their understanding of the interview process. When given visual support many pupils proved able to express their views clearly and overcome some of the possible difficulties highlighted by Lewis (2001; 2004) and Mesibov and Howley (2003). The data gathered was of sufficient depth to be analysed thematically alongside that of the staff and parents. Pupils showed thought in their answers. For example, asking to place an idea in the middle of one of the Talking Mats and explaining it was because they felt a little happy and a little sad. Similarly, explaining situations were both the same and different e.g. we still have art but the work is harder. Despite initial concerns

that pupils may have difficulty sequencing information and therefore the reduction of the Talking Mats to two choices: happy & sad, same & different (Mesibov & Howley, 2003) and the concern that this may limit pupil answers, this has not proved to be the case. It could be argued that the use of the Talking Mat made the task clearer to pupils and provided them with the structure necessary to expand on their experience, which they otherwise may not have done (Murphy, 2008); thus adding validity to the data.

It addition to the expressed use of the Talking Mats to provide structure and a visual prompt to a social interaction, it was also felt, following the interviews, that the presence of a joint activity prevented the social load of pupils within the interview situation from becoming overwhelming. It enabled pupils to relax and spend time with an unfamiliar adult.

The fact that pupils were transferring to one of three provisions: ordinary mainstream with no specialist provision, mainstream with a specialist ASD provision, mainstream with a specialist SEN provision also allowed a comparison of experience. This comparison supports the validity of any claims regarding the success and helpfulness of specialist provisions, as the control of a school with no specialist provision has also been included in the study. However, as only one pupil attended the school with no specialist provision there is a limit on the extent findings can be generalized. This should be borne in mind when considering the findings discussed below.

The current study therefore adds successfully to the work of other authors (Connor, 2000; Howard, Cohn & Orsmond, 2006; Humphrey & Lewis 2008; Williamson &

Hanke, 2007) in presenting the views of pupils with an ASD and demonstrates how this can be achieved successfully, in order to add the pupil voice to decisions about policy and practice in LAs.

With these methodological issues described the results will now be discussed.

6.2 Factors which support the transition to and inclusion in mainstream secondary schools

6.2.i A place to go

Williamson and Hanke (2007) found the physical space was an important factor for pupils with an ASD in affecting their attitude to school. The pupils in the current study also discussed the physical environment with which they were presented. A central part of the current study was the comparison between the provision in schools. The participants in this study were clear that they believed a large part of the benefit of the specialist provisions was the availability of a specifically assigned physical space for pupils. This need for a quiet space to go was valued most when the mainstream classroom became too loud, noisy or busy for the pupils to focus, or they became overwhelmed by that social context. Those parents, whose children had access to a specialist provision, were very positive about the transition and inclusion of their child.

This finding supports that of Elkins et al. (2003), who found 50% of parents supported inclusion when properly resourced. However, it also goes beyond that, in this small project all five parents who felt their child's placement was properly resourced and supported were positive about it. In this way the finding more closely relates to that of

Kasari et al. (1999), who spoke to parents of children with an ASD. The parents in Kasari's study were happy to support inclusion but wanted to see this balanced with specific support. In the current study both the specialist ASD and SEN provisions were seen by parents as adequate specific support.

The specialist provisions also supported the transition process by providing some familiarity and continuity throughout a large number of other changes, possibly reducing the anxiety felt by participants. This finding also supports the previous literature (Deslea, 2005, Maras & Aveling, 2006). Maras and Aveling (2006) showed that pupils with an SEN respond well to continuity throughout a transition process. In their example this also included having a small, safe base to go to. The importance of safety was highlighted in the current study by the one pupil who did not have this space to access. He was struggling without it, and found himself more often in the rooms provided for the removal of pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Interestingly it seemed that it was not important whether the specialist provision was specifically designed for pupils with an ASD or whether it provided more broadly for pupils with SEN. This is an interesting point and it questions the need for specifically designed specialist ASD provisions. However, it may be explained by looking more closely at the individual pattern of each pupil's difficulties on the triad of impairments: verbal and non-verbal communication, reciprocal social interaction and a restricted repertoire of behaviours or interests (Frith, 2003). For those pupils, in this study, who appeared to be more social, perhaps better fitting Wing and Gould's (1979) term 'active but odd' (see Chapter 2 for full description), and having a HFA or diagnosis of AS, it

seemed that a specialist SEN provision supported them adequately. These pupils seemed more socially aware; they had good language skills, which have been associated with better Theory of Mind skills (Garcia-Perez et al., 2008). Perhaps this enabled them to better understand the complex social systems of a secondary school. However, it was apparent from the knowledge the researcher had of individual pupils, that those who were accessing the specialist ASD provision had more difficulties with social interactions, and were more rigid in their ways of thinking, thus fitting the 'aloof' or 'passive' descriptions more adequately (Wing & Gould, 1979). These pupils presented with more executive function difficulties, such as struggling to control impulsive responses, a need for sameness and a difficulty switching attention (Ozonoff et al., 1991; Russell, 1996). Thus, the fact the support was individually tailored to individuals with an ASD was a positive benefit and they may not have had such a positive experience in a specialist SEN provision.

Alternatively, it could be argued that the specialist ASD provisions by expecting certain types of behaviours from pupils and catering for these actually led to some of the more extreme behaviours. The specialist SEN provisions provided adequate support but did not anticipate this level of rigidity in pupils and therefore better supported their developing social skills. This would be an interesting focus for future research.

The issue of gender was also raised when considering the appropriateness of specialist provisions. Only one of the pupil participants was female, reflecting the balance of boys and girls identified with an ASD in the general population. For this female pupil

her parent felt that the fact the specialist ASD provision currently supported all boys had been a consideration for deciding against it. She had not wanted to isolate her daughter from a female peer group. In fact, this pupil did make her first close friendship in the specialist SEN provision, with a girl who had language difficulties. Had she been in the specialist ASD provision this opportunity may not have arisen.

6.2.ii. Structures and organisation

When discussing factors which had helped or hindered the transition of pupils with an ASD into mainstream secondary schooling, there were several which related to the structure and organisation of the school. This is unsurprising when we consider that some of the key difficulties associated with ASDs include a restricted repertoire of behaviours or interests (Frith, 2003). However, despite these specific difficulties it is interesting that many of the factors raised corresponded to those discussed in the wider transition literature for all pupils. This suggests that the transition experience for those with an ASD is not qualitatively different from that of pupils without an ASD. For instance, some of the general worries and concerns identified by Ashton (2008) overlap with those discussed here; getting lost was mentioned by four of the current participants. Perhaps it is the case that pupils with an ASD may need more preparation due to difficulties associated with ASDs. They may experience a greater intensity of worry and difficulty, but the actual focus of the worries and concerns is no different to those of all pupils experiencing this transition.

Much of the discussion around the need for structure and organisation in this study originated from the difficulties the pupils had when faced with change. In terms of

transition, it was felt best that these questions were addressed prior to the pupils moving and in anticipation of any difficulties they may face. In addition, the issue of time and early support for the transition supports the intervention recommended by Ennis and Manns (2004), which provides guidance, in their south eastern region LA, to start the transition process in Year 5. Several parents in the study talked about their need for more time to make decisions, collect relevant information and support their child to face the change, prior to the spring term of Year 6.

Specific items mentioned when discussing the need to prepare pupils for changes in structure and organisation included: the need to make changes gradually and in a small stepped, structured way (e.g. allowing the pupil increased independence in walking to school by first walking them into school, then meeting them outside the building, outside the school gate, at the end of the road etc...) the helpfulness of additional supports for pupils such as peer buddies and additional visits and some built in predictability (e.g. staff consistency) as well as having the timetable agreed and ready for the first day. Alongside these issues was the expressed importance for pupils to know their physical environment. For example, knowing where the toilets are and what to do at dinner time. These issues again relate to the broader transition literature of the worries of all pupils (Tobell, 2003), as well as previous literature discussing the inclusion of pupils with an ASD (Deslea, 2005). The Toolkit (DfES, 2004), deigned by one LA and referred to in Chapter 2 would provide pupils with the answers and information they need to answer most of these issues and therefore its use is supported by the findings of the current study.

In addition to becoming familiar with the physical features, structures and organisation of the school there were discussions around some of the 'softer' social systems. For example: sharing information across staff groups about the pupils and for pupils to know key members of staff and have had the opportunity to build relationships with them. Noyes (2006) suggests that the transition experience of pupils is impacted upon by the high numbers of different teaching staff with varying approaches and that any difficulties may be exacerbated in this complex secondary system. The Theory of Mind hypothesis would explain why pupils have such difficulty adapting to different social contexts, as pupils with an ASD are not able to intuitively pick up social meanings and new rules and instead require explicit teaching (Baron-Cohen et al. 1985; Garcia-Perez et al., 2008; Happe, 1994). Enabling pupils to have key information, the opportunity to ask questions and to have met with members of staff would provide an opportunity to explicitly teach some of the new social rules of their secondary school. In addition, giving pupils the opportunity to build a relationship with a key member of staff is supported by research in the neuroscience of ASDs, as those with an ASD may have a stress reaction to even familiar faces (Dalton et al., 2005).

All groups of participants also raised issues around the teaching and learning approaches adopted. Pupils needed to be supported to engage in learning and talked, like all pupils, about lessons and teachers they liked or did not like. They preferred kind teachers who were knowledgeable and made lessons fun and interesting. Studies (Blatchford et al. (2008); Galton et al., 2003), which highlight the need to differentiate appropriately and make use of information given when planning for new pupils, are supported by the current findings.

Throughout the study parents maintained that a key structure was the need for home and school liaison and communication. Although this was not mentioned in such detail by staff in the study, other research also suggests that for parents this is an important aspect of successful secondary education experiences (Jones et al., 2008; Whitaker 2007) and therefore requires greater consideration from schools.

In summary, it would appear that the experiences of pupils with ASDs transferring to secondary education do reflect the experiences in the literature of pupils with other types of SEN or without an SEN. It could perhaps be argued therefore that comparing this group with a group of neurotypical pupils would be a useful extension of the study. This would allow further exploration to assess how quantitatively different the transition experience is for pupils with an ASD.

6.2.iii Staff Characteristics

The staff characteristics were also seen as highly important by parents and pupils. Pupils felt the need for kind and understanding staff, an aspect also discussed by pupils in Williamson and Hankes (2007) study. This was formalised by staff and parents. They talked about the need for training and knowledge in the area of ASDs and a more in depth knowledge and understanding of individual pupil difficulties, likes and dislikes. Many adults in the study talked about each pupil with an ASD remaining an individual first. The preferences of the pupils were also varied, suggesting a range of individuality. This idea of pupils being individuals first and an individual with an ASD second is consistent with Rajendran and Mitchell's (2007) theory of a multi-deficit

account of ASDs. Rajendran and Mitchell (2007) argue that the presentation of difficulties may be very different for each individual with an ASD and therefore alongside any basic knowledge of ASDs must come a knowledge and understanding of the individual. This individual knowledge of pupils should then be shared amongst all staff. To ensure efficient sharing of information it may be beneficial to do so in recognized written formats, such as pen portraits, as well as verbally.

One interesting idea was the concept of 'closure' for pupils. This was a term used by one parent who felt her child required time to go back to the primary school and meet with teachers in the autumn term, in order to fully understand and accept she had moved on. This is a new idea, mentioned by only one participant, which does not appear to have been discussed in previous studies. However, it never the less fits with the need for sameness and predictability associated with ASDs (Frith, 2003) and will therefore be discussed further later in the chapter in relation to future research.

Training for staff has become a feature of more recent discussions regarding pupils with an ASD, (Jones et al., 2008). As more pupils move into mainstream schooling and mainstream teachers are faced with a wider variety of need. Whitaker (2007) and Kasari et al. (1999) found that parents of pupils with an ASD felt there was a need for staff to be properly trained in strategies and approaches for use with pupils with an ASD. Teachers have generally been found to be positive about inclusion, but this positivity increases with the level of knowledge and experience (Avramidis et al., 2000; McGregor and Campbell, 2001). The need for training and understanding of staff is supported by the views of the current staff participants. The advisory teachers,

associated with the two types of specialist provision, were working to provide knowledge and understanding to the wider base of mainstream subject teachers. In the school with no specialist provision, staff were clear about the negative effect that the lack of knowledge, understanding and training of mainstream teachers had on pupils.

How this training is organised and how it fits with other agendas in schools was also raised by current staff participants. National teaching and learning agendas in secondary schools can take priority; individual teachers may not feel that training around particular areas of need, such as ASDs, is relevant to them until faced with a pupil with those difficulties. Managing training can therefore become more ad hoc and the need for advisory staff increases. This is another element provided by the two types of specialist provision, which the ordinary mainstream lacks, despite perhaps having a greater need for all staff to be trained; the pupil there spends all time taught by mainstream subject teachers.

6.3 The social vulnerability of pupils, the social environment is just as important
A difficulty with social interactions and friendships is another recognised aspect of ASDs, (Carrington & Graham, 2001). In addition, previous studies, examining the concerns of both pupils with and without an ASD transferring to secondary school, refer to the psycho-social processes. In some studies, pupils have been more concerned with friendships than their parents, emphasising the need for successful friendships and the fear of bullying (Jindall-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Pratt & George, 2005).

In the current study pupils became increasingly concerned with friendships following transition. Five pupils referred to new people they had met and the beginnings of friendships. However, the difference noted from previous studies was that parents were also concerned and interested in this area, perhaps because of the heightened difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships for this group. The transition to secondary school appeared to have brought a change in the social interactions of pupils. Several authors (Connor, 2000; Howard, Cohn & Orsmond, 2006; Humphrey & Lewis 2008; Williamson & Hanke, 2007) have also found that pupils with an ASD had an interest in forming friendships at secondary school, despite their difficulties in actually making and maintaining friends. Although there was still some talk of difficulties, as mentioned above, five pupils seemed to have an increased interest in interacting with others, and parents also talked about the first friendships being formed. This was for those in the specialist provisions. The pupil with no specialist provision did not mention new friends.

It was interesting to consider the types of relationships which were described under the title of 'friendship'. For some these were reciprocal friendships. For pupils within the specialist ASD provision socialising and completing simple activities with pupils with similar difficulties was referred to as friendship. These were reciprocal relationships. For one pupil in a specialist SEN provision a reciprocal friendship was made with a pupil who had identified language difficulties. The two enjoyed each other's company and often spent time at weekends and evenings together. This friendship was supported by the pupil's parents and was felt to be a positive benefit of attending a specialist SEN provision were there were children with different needs.

However, for the second pupil in a specialist SEN provision the term friendships was used to describe relationships with older pupils, chosen for their supportive personalities. Staff encouraged these older pupils to spend time with the pupil with an ASD and help him cope with the practicalities of break and lunch times. It is questionable whether this describes a mutual and reciprocal friendship, but instead an unequal relationship which is required to support the pupil's difficulties within a mainstream setting. For the pupil with no specialist provision, no new friends were mentioned. Although the pupil himself was happy he had friends, this involved spending time with his older brother and his friends. This was again an unequal relationship and one which was only necessary to support the pupil's difficulties.

The differences between social experiences begins to offer further support to the role of specialist provisions and a recognition that social skills can perhaps be best supported in small groups of pupils with similar needs. Where pupils have the same kinds and level of difficulty they can be supported to develop mutual and reciprocal friendships. However, where pupils are part of a wider group there is perhaps no one for them to form friendships with and relationships become unequal, with other pupils taking on a guiding and supportive role.

This raises the question of why these social interactions began to happen, when they had not happened in the primary setting, which is generally considered to be more nurturing of pupil's social and emotional wellbeing. Perhaps adolescence and growing up provide one explanation, as Baron-Cohen suggests, Theory of Mind may be delayed

rather than non-existent (Baron-Cohen 2003, 2008). However, this does not explain why friendships developed more successfully for the pupils in the specialist ASD provision and one specialist SEN provision. Another explanation may be that in the primary setting where pupils were included in a class of thirty pupils, with one additional adult, the social context was actually larger than in their specialist provisions. Although included within a much larger system overall the specialist provisions were actually half the size of an average primary classroom. Between eight and fifteen pupils were catered for by a lead teacher and additional support staff. Perhaps it was this small structured setting which enabled these pupils to begin to form friendships and was actually more socially inclusive. Friendships are often developed due to perceived similarities between people; allowing pupils to spend time with other pupils with a similar level of understanding and need provided a group of similar peers.

Whitaker (2007) found parents to be supportive of environments which supported the development of social skills for their child and Sharp (2005) stressed the importance of positive social experiences as essential to the experience of secondary education for children with an ASD. In addition, giving pupils the opportunity to develop friendships in these small, structured settings could be argued to give them essential practice for developing relationships in their future life.

During the initial stages of the project it became clear that all groups of participants were equally concerned with the social environment around the child, the staff and other pupils, as with the physical structures mentioned above. Pupils with an ASD are socially vulnerable in schools and looking at the transition of pupils it was alarming to

see that five of the pupils, none of whom had mentioned bullying or teasing when talking about their primary schools, had experienced some incident of physical harm or teasing at the hands of other pupils at secondary school. Bullying has been recognized as a difficulty for pupils with an ASD in other studies considering the inclusion of pupils in mainstream secondary schools (Deslea, 2005; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Jones et al., 2006).

6.4 A highly emotional time

Finally, there were several themes which referred to the emotions felt during the transition process for all groups of participants. There was clearly a lot of anxiety prior to the transition. This reflects the experiences of a wider group of pupils, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, this study also emphasized, as others have, that pupils can have different views to the adults around them. Despite a lot of overlap in the themes uncovered by the study, some pupils showed excitement about the move, whilst their parents were clearly anxious, others whose parents were generally positive showed no interest in moving on. However, on completing the transition there was an overwhelming positivity from all participants involved in transition to one of the specialist provisions. The pupil with no specialist provision provided a stark contrast in the anger and frustration felt by his mother, again highlighting the importance of adequate support and resourcing for successful transition and inclusion (Elkins et al. 2003; Kasari et al., 1999).

6.5 Future Research

6.5.i Closure

The additional feature of 'closure', which arose from the interview from one parent provides a possible area for future research. Sam's mother felt that it had been as important to the transition process to allow Sam adequate time to say goodbye to her primary school and revisit occasionally during her first term at secondary school, as the preparation and familiarization with secondary had been in the summer term. This is an interesting idea. Perhaps for those children who find change difficult, i.e. those with an ASD, the sudden uprooting from primary school and not having the chance to return and say goodbye, could be the cause of some of the anxiety as much as the unfamiliarity of their new surroundings.

6.5.ii Which specialist provision?

The specialist ASD provision was set up by the LA in response to a need felt by schools for additional support for this group of pupils, who were now being included to a greater extent in mainstream schools (Special Educational Need Code of Practice, 2001). However, as discussed in Chapter 5, at Time 2 it became clear that two of the three schools, where pupils were transferring to ordinary mainstream, had also provided specialist SEN provision for pupils. This therefore changed the intended comparisons of the study from a simple comparison between the specialist ASD provision and ordinary mainstream secondary schools, to one which included the third dimension of specialist SEN provision. However, this change actually added an unexpected depth to the results, demonstrating that those pupils in either specialist provision were settling well and it was where there was no specialist provision that the

pupil struggled through the transition process. This unexpected change in the methodology has raised further questions about whether specifically designed specialist ASD provisions are necessary. Although there is some evidence to suggest the varying needs of pupils makes both provisions valuable, considering this question in more depth would also be an area for future research. In addition, as the current study includes only a small number of pupil experiences, it would be beneficial to explore whether the difficulties experienced by the pupil moving into mainstream with no specialist provision are typical of a larger group of pupils. It may have be that the support offered by the two provisions in the current study could have been offered within an ordinary mainstream environment in terms of the practicalities the provisions offered e.g. safe space to go, adults with knowledge about ASDs and about individual pupils (see themes in Chapter 5). It would therefore be interesting to explore the experiences of different individuals in different mainstream schools.

6.5.iii The quantitative difference in the experience of transition
It would appear that the factors which support and hinder pupils with ASDs transferring to secondary education do not differ from those identified in the wider transition literature, referring to all pupils. It could, therefore, be argued that an interesting extension of the current study would be to compare a group of 'neurotypical' pupils with pupils identified as having an ASD through the transition process. This would allow further examination of the experiences of both groups of pupils, in order to assess how far the extent and intensity of the experience differs for the two groups.

6.6 Summary

Alongside the support which the study provides to the current evidence base, in the field of transition and inclusion, there are two key points which can be identified. Firstly: The five pupils transferring to mainstream schools where additional support was provided appeared to have a more positive transition experience than the pupil transferring to a school with no additional support Secondly: The findings from the study relating to areas of concern and difficulty during transition for pupils with an ASD were consistent with those reported in the transition literature relating to typical pupils and those with other Special Educational Needs. The question therefore does not appear to be one of qualitative difference but instead regards the extent and intensity of these concerns and experiences.

The implications of the findings in terms of their impact on current policy and practice will now be summarised and recommendations outlined in Chapter 7. It is perhaps the case that LAs do not need to do anything different for this group, but something more.

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7: Conclusions

The following chapter outlines possible conclusions and implications for practice. However when considering the practical implications of the study it is essential to stress the qualitative nature of the work and the very small sample of pupils. This means any implications will initially need to be restricted to the LA where the study was carried out in conjunction with continuing research within the LA.

With further study and exploration in the local context how far the findings reflect the experience of other pupils (with ASDs) individual experience of transition can be assessed. The findings may then be able to contribute to improving the experience of pupils with an ASD during the transition to mainstream secondary schooling. The themes elicited will also be useful during discussions about the need and benefit of having specialist ASD and SEN provisions within the local context and alternative ways of offering appropriate support in mainstream secondary schools.

However, it is also suggested that these findings have value for the direction of future research within other LAs across the country. They offer one method for exploring the experiences of pupils within a variety of school and LA contexts. Through the development of further research with larger numbers of participants the findings may inform a wider picture and enable guidelines to be developed to support the transition to secondary schooling of a particularly vulnerable group of pupils, those with an ASD.

7.1 Key findings and implications for practice within the focus LA

As briefly referred to in the Chapter 6 two key points emerge from the findings:

1. The five pupils transferring to mainstream schools where additional support was provided appeared to have a more positive transition experience than the pupil transferring to a school with no additional support

2. The findings from the study relating to areas of concern and difficulty during transition for pupils with an ASD were consistent with those reported in the transition literature relating to typical pupils and those with other Special Educational Needs. There does not therefore appear to be a *qualitative* difference in the transition experience of pupils with an ASD when compared to those without. However, there is perhaps a greater intensity in the experience for pupils with an ASD, both in the extremes of reactions to the new setting and in a greater need for preparation, structure and organisation. This reflects a possible *quantitative* difference in the transition experience.

Within these key findings were several categories and themes which suggested practical strategies for supporting pupils with an ASD experience a smoother transition to secondary school. These were as follows:

7.1i KEY FINDING 1: The five pupils transferring to mainstream schools where additional support was provided appeared to have a more positive transition experience than the pupil transferring to a school with no additional support

In the current study this additional support took the form of two specialist provisions (ASD and SEN). However, the themes and categories which emerged from the

interviews outlined the specific elements of the specialist provisions which were valued by participants. For example, having an allocated safe space to go provides a base for pupils; a smaller nurturing environment where social relationships with peers can be supported and developed. It also offers an alternative when the classroom becomes overwhelming. These findings suggest that where such spaces are absent its introduction should be considered by schools.

The importance of understanding different profiles of pupil need supports the current system in the focus LA where a panel of professionals discusses individual cases to decide placement. The inclusion of an Educational Psychologist as part of this panel, someone who has an understanding and knowledge of ASDs, is an important role. It is a role which should ensure that the placement of individual pupils is based on the evidence available, regarding both ASDs generally and more specifically the individual pupil.

In addition the success of the current project in consulting more closely with parents and eliciting the views of pupils regarding their views and experiences suggests this approach could be adopted in eliciting the views of pupils and parents regarding placement.

7.1.ii KEY FINDING 2: The findings from the study relating to areas of concern and difficulty during transition for pupils with an ASD were consistent with those reported in the transition literature relating to typical pupils and those with other Special Educational Needs. However more preparation is required to reflect the greater intensity of these concerns and difficulties

It is important to provide time for the transition process to allow for preparation and avoid unnecessary anxiety: Parents value time to consider their options and to make decisions and pupils require time to accept the idea of transition and begin to prepare for changes in structure, organisation and their physical and social environments. It is helpful for pupils to be able to ask questions and gather information about their new school. Perhaps using a structured approach such as the toolkit (DfES, 2004) would provide a useful framework. Additional visits and the use of peer support, such as peer buddies and prefects are also helpful (these were specifically referred to under Theme 8 of the current results).

The issue of additional time, referred to by the parents and staff of the current study suggest that the LA could consider starting the process at the end of Year 5 in the summer term, or in the autumn term of Year 6, as recommended by Ennis and Manns (2004). Providing time for schools to share information about the individual pupils and for the secondary school to start preparing as necessary, e.g. preparing pen portraits is as important as preparing pupils. This may require the LA to prioritise decisions about school placements for those pupils with an ASD. It is also important to recognise that the transition process is ongoing and pupils are likely to require support throughout Year 7 and into Year 8.

The findings also suggest that it is important to have allocated staff who can build relationships with pupils, both prior to and following their transition. Such interventions should be followed through and a continuity of staff provided throughout the transition and into the first term at secondary school. Where this was not the case for a pupil in the current study, the experience of transition became a negative one.

The importance of training for all school staff (specialist provision, mainstream; teachers and support staff) about ASDs was emphasised by school staff and parents. This indicates that it may need to be an area for development with the LA in future.

Schools also need to consider the specialist provisions capacity and availability for ongoing training and support for subject teachers within the school. Consideration of supervision and support for those staff working with particularly challenging pupils should be given.

Good communications between home and school, supporting pupils to engage in this process is also important to ensure the smooth transition and positive education experience of pupils.

The findings demonstrate the importance of research within the field of Educational Psychology. Such research can have a very real impact on pupil experience, through refining and extending evidence based practice.

7.2 Implications for future research in the area

Although the current research remains tied to the local context in which it was carried out, the findings do reflect the work of other authors in the field (see Chapter 6). The findings raise further questions for future research. Other possible research areas raised by the current study for future exploration include:

- The social benefits of being in a smaller, supportive specialist provision

- Further comparison of pupils supported through specialist SEN and ASD provisions: which types of pupils and the benefits of each setting.

- Further examination of specialist provisions over time, using longitudinal studies.

- Comparison of groups of ASD pupils with other groups, including those with no SEN, during transition to secondary school, in order to further explore the overlap of experience and the extent of the *quantitative* difference during the transition experience.

- Similar studies in other LAs to compare the experiences of different groups of pupils and increase the extent to which findings can be generalised.

- Further exploration of the social vulnerability of pupils with ASDs and how to support these needs during transition and inclusion into mainstream secondary schools.

- Exploration of the training experiences of staff, including consideration of the factors helping and hindering the training of staff within mainstream secondary schools.

The information from this study was initially disseminated, to all participants, through a written summary of the findings. The researcher also attended meetings of the specialist ASD provision working group to present and discuss findings in order to inform future practice within the LA. This was formalised through the development of guidelines for the LA, currently in draft (See Appendix 5). All participants were then invited to attend a research presentation, to see the findings presented in more detail and have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

As part of the regional Educational Psychology Continuing Professional Development Day, the research will be presented as part of a workshop to Educational Psychologists from LAs from across the South East region. It is also the intention to submit an article for publication in order to share, more broadly, the findings of the current LA and to inform evidence based practice and future research in other LAs and so improve the transition experience for pupils in mainstream secondary schools across the UK.

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Appendix 1:
Local Authority Criteria for the specialist ASD provision.

Provision checklist for candidates

Name:	Yes	No	Pending/ Maybe/ Comments
A) General Requirements			
1. Has a Statement of Educational Need			
2. Has a primary need of SCD difficulty			
Recent advice from:			
Educational Psychologist			
Social Communication Difficulties Team			
Health			
3. GARs/ GADs checklist			
4. Evidence of persistent difficulty accessing a mainstream classroom			
5. Evidence that pupil would benefit from specialist provision			
B) Curriculum Access			
1. Need to modify language			
2. Need to modify National Curriculum			
3. Needs visual schedule			
4. Needs new skills taught individually			
5. Completes tasks independently in			

mainstream classrm.			
6. Evidence that student makes progress			
7. Needs access to low arousal environment			
C) Social Interaction			
Communication			
Flexibility & Imagination			
D) Placement			
Request received			
Student consulted			
Student meets requirements			
SPAG placement panel evidence received			
SPAG place pupil in specialist provision			

Appendix 2:
Consent letters and pupil packs.

Parental Consent

18th January 2008

Dear ....

I am currently working with the Educational Psychology Service in ...... whilst completing my doctoral training in Educational, Child & Adolescent Psychology with the Institute of Education in London.

As part of my training I am hoping to complete some research exploring the experiences of pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder moving from primary to secondary school. I hope to meet with the teachers, parents and where possible the pupils themselves to ask about the views and experiences of education in .... from the differing perspectives of all involved.

As ....(child's name) ... will be moving up to ..(Secondary school) .. in September I would like to offer you the opportunity to take part in this project and discuss your own views and experiences, both of .... education at his/ her primary school as well as your hopes or concerns for his/ her time at ....

In addition I would like to meet with ..... and ask him/ her about his/ her views and experiences. This may involve a short conversation or using an alternative communication method which will support your child share their views/ experiences.

The aim of the project is to gather rich information about the factors which both support and create barriers for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder in school.

If you would like to become involved in the project it will involve an interview of no more than an hour arranged at a time to suit you in April this year and then again in December following .... first term at ....

Please could you complete the attached form to indicate whether you would be happy to speak with me and return to:

Rachel Kipling,
Educational Psychology Service,
....

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch,

Yours Sincerely,

Rachel Kipling.
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Parental Consent form

Name of your child: _____

I give permission for Rachel Kipling to meet with my child and seek their views: ☐

I would like to take part in the project: ☐

I would like to be contacted by Rachel Kipling to have an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the project: ☐

I would not like to take part in the project: ☐

If you have decided not to take part, please could you indicate a reason for your decision?

_____

_____

_____

Your name:

Signed:

Date:

Preferred Contact Details:

Primary staff

Dear

I would like to thank you for your co-operation in our project so far looking at the transition of pupils with a social communication/ autistic spectrum disorder to secondary school. Meeting with   gave me some interesting insights into the kinds of thoughts that surround this move for the pupils themselves.

Another aspect of the project is to find out more about how school staff experience including children with these types of difficulties into the mainstream classrooms and any thoughts and feelings you may have about   's transition.

I would therefore like to invite you to a focus group which will allow you the opportunity to share your experiences. The group will be confidential so that any issues raised and discussed will be included in the project anonymously. This is hopefully a good opportunity to put your viewpoint across and make a real difference for children with these difficulties in ……... I would very much value your opinion and hope that you will be able to attend.

Please contact me on my mobile number () to let me know whether you are able to attend.

Many thanks,

Rachel Kipling.
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Secondary staff

Dear

I am currently working with the Educational Psychology Service in ……….. whilst completing my doctoral training in Educational, Child & Adolescent Psychology with the Institute of Education in London.

As part of my training I am hoping to complete some research exploring the experiences of pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder moving from primary to secondary school. I am currently meeting with the primary staff, parents and the pupils themselves to ask about the views and experiences of education in …… from the differing perspectives of all involved.

In addition I would like to speak to key staff members at the receiving secondary schools about their experiences of including pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder into mainstream secondary schools. This would involve a focus group discussion to be held in the autumn term in order to share your experiences. The group will be confidential so that any issues raised and discussed will be included in the project anonymously.

The aim of the project is to gather rich information about the factors which both support and create barriers for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder in school, in order to improve provision for these pupils in …………. I would very much value all opinions and hope that you will take this opportunity to make your views heard.

Please can you let me know whether you would be willing to attend a focus group on (). If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch,

Yours Sincerely,

Pupil consent pack

Moving to secondary school.

Student consent pack
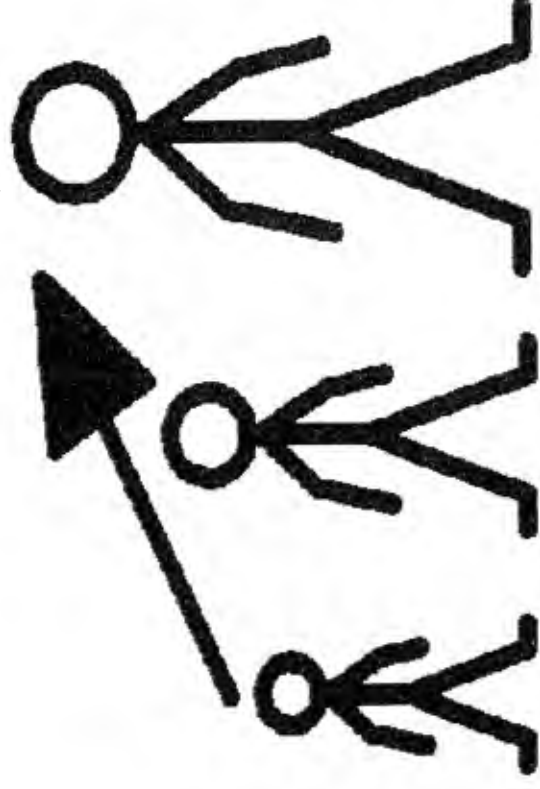
Rachel Kipling, Research student

The Institute of Education, London.
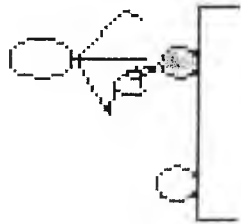
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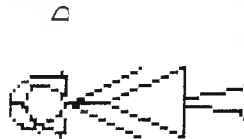
Rachel works at the Institute of Education

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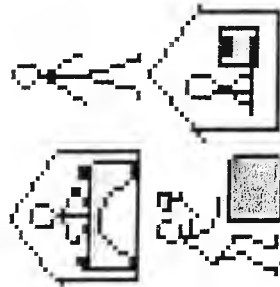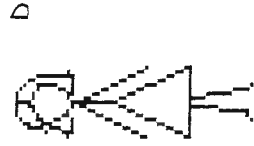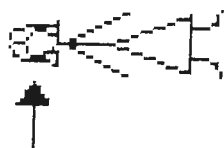
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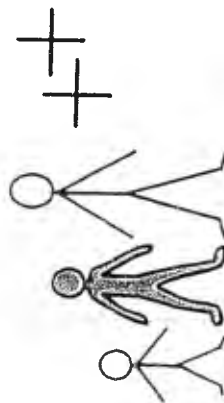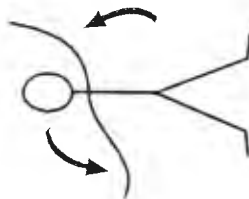
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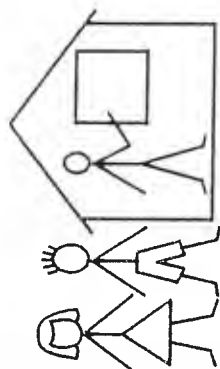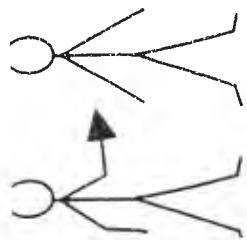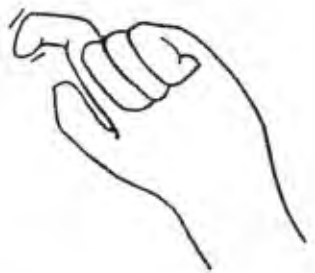
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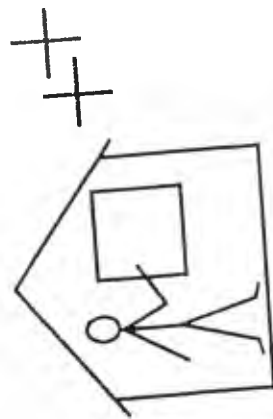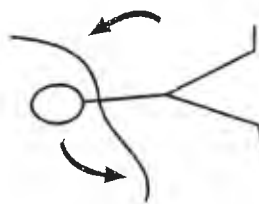
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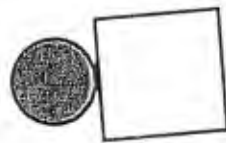
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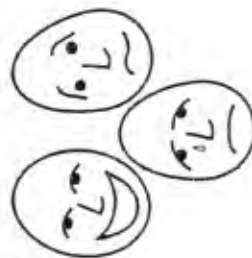
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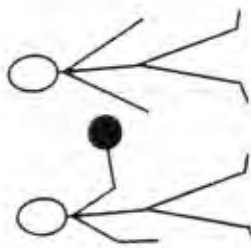
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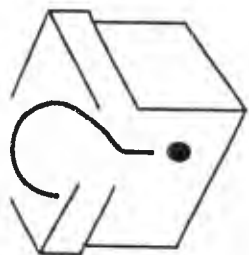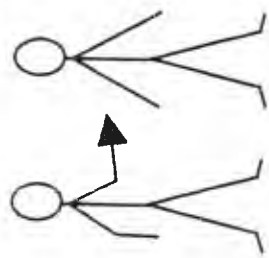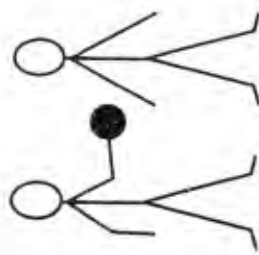
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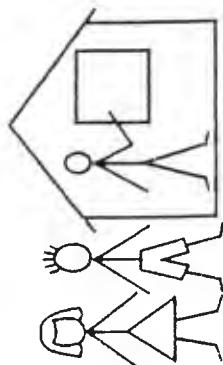
secondary school   will be   like.
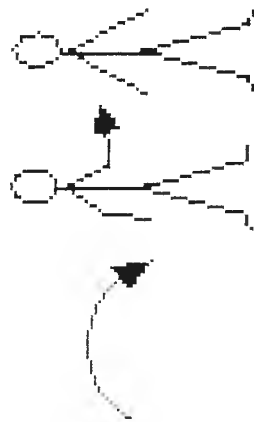
Do you agree to talk to Rachel

and to have Rachel working with you?

No

Yes
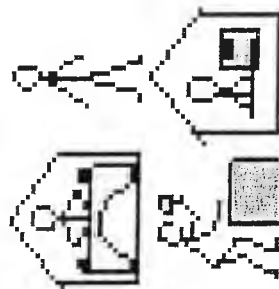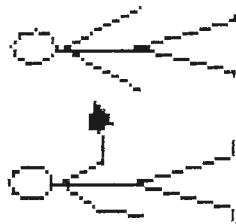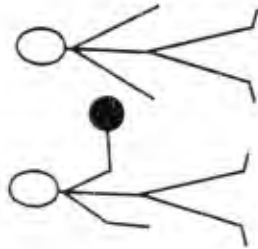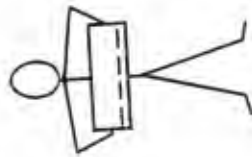
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Appendix 3:
Interview Schedules.

Interview Schedule for parents: Time 1

(A) Past Education

1. Can you describe your child's experiences of education so far?
Prompts: types of provision, support, relationships with staff and pupils.

2. What has been a most useful for your child's development?
Prompts: key relationships, support staff, friends, communication aids

3. Is there anything you would want to change about your experiences?

(B) Current Situation

4. How do you feel about your child's current school situation?
Prompt: friendships, academic progress, relationships with staff

5. How do you think your child feels about school?

(C) Future Education

6. What are your thoughts about your child's move to secondary school? Describe in your own words.
Prompt: Some people worry about change, others look forward to it.

7. What are you expecting life will be like at secondary school for your child on a day to day basis?
Prompt: Any similarities or differences you can think of from their current provision, or from alternative provision you could have chosen?

8. What are your hopes for your child's future?

9. Is there anything else you would like to talk about which you feel I haven't asked?

Interview Schedule for parents: Time 2
(some questions the same, some slightly altered, aim is to find out what the experience of your child's transition has been)

ASK FOR DETAILS OF PARENT AND CHILD (Ethnicity, employment status, marital status)

A.Transition

1.Can you describe your child's experiences of SECONDARY SCHOOL so far?
Prompts: types of provision, support, relationships with staff and pupils.

2. What has been a most useful for your child's transition?
Prompts: key relationships, support staff, friends, communication aids

3. Is there anything you would want to change about your experiences?

4. How do your experiences compare to what you expected SECONDARY SCHOOL would be like?

B.Current Situation
---

5. How do you feel about your child's current school situation?
Prompt: friendships, academic progress, and relationships with staff

6. How do you think your child feels about school?

C.Future Education
---

7. What are your thoughts about your child's continued education? Describe in your own words.
Prompt: Some people worry about change, others look forward to it.

8. What do you believe the day to day experience is like for your child at SECONDARY SCHOOL?
Prompt: Any similarities or differences you can think of from their current provision, or from alternative provision you could have chosen?

9. What are your hopes for your child's future?

10. Is there anything else you would like to talk about which you feel I haven't asked?

Interview Schedule for primary teachers: Time 1

To be used to guide discussion within a focus group.

A.Past Education

1.Can you describe your experiences of supporting pupils with ASD in school?
Prompts: types of school, support, training, relationships with other staff, parents and pupils.

2. What has been most helpful to you?
Prompts: key relationships, support staff, friends, communication aids, training, EP!!

3. Is there anything you would want to change about your experiences?

B.Current Situation

---

4. How do you feel about your class at the moment, the pupils you are currently supporting who have ASD?
Prompt: friendships, academic progress, relationships with teacher/ support staff

5. What is a day at school like for a pupil with ASD?
Prompt: what helps them, what do they find easy / difficult

C.Future Education

---

6. What are your thoughts about their move to secondary school? Describe in your own words.
Prompt: Some people worry about change, others look forward to it.

7. What are you expecting it will be like at secondary school on a day to day basis for these pupils?
Prompt: Any similarities or differences you can think of from your school?

8. What would you like to happen in the future for this group of pupils?

9. Is there anything else you would like to talk about which you feel I haven't asked?

Interview Schedule for secondary teachers: Time 2
COLLECT DETAILS OF TEACHERS (ethnicity, role, qualification, years of experience, years with SEN)
To be used to guide discussion within a focus group.

A. Past Education

1.Can you describe your experiences of supporting pupils with ASD in mainstream schools?
Prompts: support, training, relationships with other staff, parents and pupils.

2. What has been most helpful to you?
Prompts: key relationships, support staff, friends, communication aids, training, EP!!

3. Is there anything you would want to change about your experiences?

B. Current Situation

---

4. How do you feel about the pupils you are currently supporting who have ASD?
Prompt: friendships, academic progress, and relationships with teacher/ support staff

5. What do you think a day at school is like for a pupil with ASD?
Prompt: what helps them, what do they find easy / difficult

6. How do you feel an ASD impact an individual at school?

C. Future Education

---

6. What would you like to happen in the future for this group of pupils?

8. Is there anything else you would like to talk about which you feel I haven't asked?

NB: Talking mats for pupils outlined in Chapter 4: Methodology.

Appendix 4:
List of categories for analysis at Time 1 and Time 2.
Example of NVivo analysis printout

Categories Time 1:

1. younger peers and older peers
2. Vulnerable with peers
3. too much helper support
4. Time
5. Structure Organisation Routine
6. strict teachers
7. Staff understanding
8. Staff training knowledge
9. Staff consistency
10. Staff communication reduces anxiety
11. staff anxiety around transition
12. SS Using peer support
13. SS teachers subject focused same rules for everyone
14. SS TAs have strategies
15. SS pupils belong in mainstream start from there
16. SS preparation for the real world
17. SS Preparation for change
18. SS Preparation anticipation and being proactive
19. SS Need for training and understanding
20. SS Need for quiet calm base
21. SS impact on staff
22. SS Flexible support
23. SS Building relationships with staff and balancing teacher and pupil needs
24. SS Adult decision about using base
25. school more than academic
26. same and different expectations
27. Rules are rules
28. pupils would change
29. pupils positive about staff
30. pupils misc
31. pupils knowing staff
32. pupils jobs and responsibilities
33. pupils future dreams
34. pupils diverted onto special interests
35. pupil adult ratio
36. PS structure at lunchtime
37. PS pupils rely on adults
38. PS other pupils understanding
39. PS Need to know individual child
40. PS Need for staff training and understanding
41. PS need for separate base
42. PS need for preparation rules and routines
43. PS emotional impact and need for support
44. PS dealing with pupils challenging behaviour managing demands of others

45. PS Concerns for future
46. PS communication between staff including dinner and supply staff
47. Proactive parents
48. Preparation for change
49. positive peer models
50. Positive about move to secondary
51. physical features
52. Parents reflect on pupil future goals
53. Parental stress and anxiety about transition
54. Parent opinion valued
55. Own company
56. older pupils
57. not wanting friends
58. not liking teachers
59. Not choosing unit
60. Not brain of britain but no ceiling
61. negative about literacy and numeracy
62. negative about lessons
63. Moving between the home school context
64. moving around for lessons
65. missing primary peers in secondary
66. Maintaining some consistency through change
67. Lunchtime
68. Literacy and Numeracy difficulties
69. Learning is fun
70. Knowing social environment
71. Knowing school environment
72. Knowing physical environment
73. Jobs and responsibilities
74. Involving pupils
75. Involving personal interests
76. interacting more
77. Information
78. Individualised strategies for teaching and learning
79. Home school liaison
80. helpers are helpful
81. getting to school
82. generally positive about move
83. feeling safe and secure in their environment
84. feeling safe
85. Feeling positive about staff
86. every school is the same
87. enjoying friendships
88. enjoying and or wanting transition visits
89. difficulties making friends
90. different foods
91. Different Behaviour at home and school

92. Dealing with behaviour in school
93. Breaktimes getting better
94. boys and girls
95. bigger and louder
96. Behaviour and pupils frustration and understanding
97. Bases for pupils
98. Anxious
99. Adolescence
100.   Academic positives

Categories Time 2:

1. Anxious. Not liking/ coping with change
2. Missing primary school: comparing a positive primary experience with a negative secondary one
3. Missing people from primary school
4. Commenting on physical differences, including bigger buildings
5. Moving for lessons is new, we go to them
6. Everyone enjoys some lessons: a variety, no pattern
7. Lessons we don't like
8. Motivated to learn
9. ...or not!
10. New names for old lessons
11. Some work is new/ some harder
12. New machines and equipment can be scary
13. New staff, rules and structures
14. Helpful and kind staff; pupils appreciate support
15. Pupils don't like staff 'telling' or 'shouting'
16. Having a space to go to seen positively
17. Making new friends
18. Surprised to see old friends
19. Other pupils can be nasty
20. Difficulty making friends
21. Other pupils can be annoying
22. Changes in the availability of food: more choice and control
23. Pupils want and enjoy more choice over free time
24. Looking forward to jobs in Year 10
25. Some signs of adolescence
26. Variety of days at secondary
27. Secondary school is good/ preferred
28. Like both schools: recognise growing up and changing
29. Prefer primary
30. Not understanding social relationship with staff
31. Transition was better than expected
32. Parents pleased/ happy with experience
33. One bad experience left parent feeling fed-up
34. Still early days

35. Understanding of school
36. Pleased early difficulties resolved
37. Pupils struggle with change, need time to settle
38. Pupils need to ask questions
39. Behaviour can be difficult at home
40. Changes in behaviour
41. Gradual changes and increasing independence
42. pupils happy to go to school in a morning
43. Pupils happy at the end of the day
44. Pupils looked forward to secondary
45. Journey makes it easier, predictable
46. Parents see progress
47. Next targets
48. Buddies/ older pupils help
49. Parents value provisions
50. Additional visits help
51. Pupils interacting more
52. Some signs of adolescence
53. Parents value good communication, feeling valued by school staff
54. Parents value 'being told'
55. Parents value pupils meeting staff and building relationships
56. School not being effective
57. Secondary staff should value information from primary staff and parents
58. Parent anxiety
59. Pupil anxiety, like all pupils
60. Difficulties with other pupils
61. A need for structure routine and predictability
62. Pupils organising themselves
63. Different lessons
64. Pupils respond well to praise
65. Need for closure
66. Difficulty with social culture
67. Pleased with transition process
68. Still work to be done
69. See progress
70. Transition continues through school, early days
71. Benefits of a specialist provision
72. Relationships and communication with parents important
73. Additional visits, photo books and familiarising pupils
74. Working with pupils with an ASD is a challenge
75. Visibility of pupils challenges teacher perceptions
76. Need for consistent relationships with pupils
77. Aim to support inclusion, not a special school
78. Helping pupils cope with unpredictability and change
79. Individual pupil attributes can help
80. Some signs of adolescence
81. Need for structures and routines

82. Individual support
83. Role of support staff
84. Clear and precise language
85. Peer buddies can help
86. Difficulties with other pupils
87. Difficult to organise support in secondary system
88. Sharing information
89. Attitudes of staff
90. Need for training
91. Difficulties with training, other agendas in schools
92. Support for staff/ No blame for staff
93. Difficulties arise through lack of understanding

Example category screen on NVivo. Home School Liaison.

Example of developing themes (Tree Nodes in NVivo) for Time 1: saved November 2008

Example of later themes (Tree Nodes in NVivo) for Time 1: saved January 2009

Appendix 5:
Draft guidelines for Local Authority.

Guidelines for the transfer of students with an Autistic spectrum disorder to Secondary Mainstream Schools in Luton.

In order to have a successful and smooth transition the following points should be considered:

1. *Pupils do better when they transfer to a school with additional support.* Having an allocated safe space to go, such as an SEN or ASD provision, provides a base for pupils, a smaller nurturing environment where social relationships with peers can be supported and developed and as an alternative when the classroom becomes overwhelming. Where such provision is absent its introduction should be considered by schools.

    ✓ What additional support is required for pupils will depend on the individual needs of pupils and the extent to which they present with difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, reciprocal social interaction and a markedly restricted repertoire of behaviours or interests (Frith, 2003).

    ✓ As such the panel discussing individual cases within the LA is essential to placement decisions and the inclusion of an Educational Psychologist on this panel to inform discussion on what provision is required to meet individual need would be beneficial.

    ✓ Consulting closely with parents and eliciting the views of pupils regarding their placement and preferences is also an important part of the decision making process.

NB Further research is required to explore the value of SEN and ASD specific specialist provisions for pupils with needs across the ASD continuum.

6.1.ii Time

It is important to provide time for the transition process, to allow for preparation and avoid unnecessary anxiety:

- ✓ Parents value time to consider their options and to make decisions.

- ✓ Pupils require time to accept the idea of transition and begin to prepare for changes in structure, organisation and their physical and social environments.

- ✓ It is helpful for pupils able to ask questions and gather information, perhaps using a structured approach such as the toolkit (OSME, 2004), about their new school.

- ✓ Additional visits and the use of peer support, such as peer buddies and prefects are also helpful.

- ✓ The LA should consider starting the process at the end of Year 5 in the summer term or in the autumn term of Year 6.

- ✓ Providing time for schools to share information about the individual pupils and for the secondary school to start preparing as necessary, e.g. individual timetables, preparing pen portraits, writing social stories.

- ✓ The transition process is ongoing and pupils will require support throughout Year 7 and into Year 8.

6.1.iii The social vulnerability of pupils

During the transition process and later inclusion into mainstream settings it is necessary to consider and support the social vulnerability of this group of pupils, through:

- ✓ The provision of a safe space to go to where pupils can talk to and be supported by adults
- ✓ Educating other pupils about ASDs.
- ✓ Eliciting the support of peer buddies and prefects from older years groups and from previously known peers in Year 8
- ✓ School bullying policies and procedures.

6.1.iv Staff

- ✓ It is important to have allocated staff who can build relationships with pupils both prior to and following their transition.
- ✓ Such interventions should be followed through and staff remain consistent throughout.
- ✓ It is important for all staff (specialist, mainstream; teachers and support) to have training in and know about the basic strengths, difficulties and the teaching and learning strategies associated with ASDs
- ✓ It is important for staff to know the individual needs, strengths and difficulties of pupils through both verbal information sharing and written information such as pen portraits.
- ✓ Schools also need to consider the provisions capacity and availability for ongoing training and support for subject teachers within the school

✓ Consideration of supervision and support for those staff working with particularly challenging pupils should be given.

6.1.v Home/ school communication

✓ Good communications between home and school, supporting pupils to engage in this process is also important to ensure the smooth transition and positive education experience of pupils.