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**Exploring friendship experiences in young people  
with social pragmatic communication difficulties in  
an English Local Authority EP service context**

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I, Agnes Elliott, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed: Agnes Elliott

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## **Abstract**

Previous research suggests that young people (YP) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) are at risk of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties (Lindsay and Dockrell, 2012). SLCN covers a range of different language and communication needs including difficulties with social pragmatic communication. Research in this area is limited, but evidence suggests that social pragmatic communication difficulties (SPCD) can have long-term impact on YP's social relationships (Whitehouse, Watt, Line and Bishop, 2009).

DSM-5 introduced Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder (SPCD); a new diagnostic category defined as “persistent difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal communication” in the absence of the rigid, restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours that characterise Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, SPCD is a relatively new label that is not widely used. YP with SPCD are at risk of falling through gaps between the support available to those with a diagnosis of language impairment and those with ASD.

Friendships provide emotional support and opportunities for learning social skills (Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2010). There is limited research into friendship in YP with SPCD, but research with YP with other communication difficulties suggests friendship may support emotional well-being (Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008). Therefore, research is needed to explore the potentially protective role of friendship for YP with SPCD.

This thesis explored the views and experiences of YP with SPCD, focussing on friendship and related aspects of emotional well-being. The study used a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews with 6 secondary school pupils with SPCD. A multiple case study design brought together data for each YP triangulated with the accounts of parents and school staff, to explore friendship and related aspects of emotional well-being.

The findings offer potential insights into the role of friendship and supporting factors for YP with SPCD. These have potential implications for EP practice, including the importance of raising awareness of the needs of this vulnerable group, and using YP's views to inform development of holistic support.

## **Impact Statement**

This research has offered potential insights into the views of YP with SPCD, triangulated with the comments from their Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and parents, on their friendships and related aspects of their emotional wellbeing. The research tentatively suggested several potential protective and risk factors at different levels in the environment, which have been conceptualised in a proposed model of resilience for YP with SPCD, informed by ecological principles. This model may suggest that YP with SPCD benefit from the support of friends, but also their parents, and staff who support their social interactions and emotional wellbeing. The model offers a potential framework for EPs to develop a holistic picture of YP with SPCD, to consider the impact of possible risk factors and potential opportunities to support protective factors. The research presented here has several potential implications for Educational Psychology (EP) practice as well as some general implications for schools.

The current findings imply that YP with SPCD may experience difficulties with friendship and emotional problems. At an individual level EPs may offer support to YP with SPCD through consultation, applying therapeutic approaches, and delivering, monitoring and evaluating social skills interventions. EPs may also support YP with SPCD in consultations with school staff and parents, through applying psychological theory to reframe narratives about the YP's behavioural presentation, consider the need for a secondary attachment figure in school, advocate for the YP, and plan provision

that is informed by the YP's views. At a wider level, EPs can support YP with SPCD by supporting home-school communication, and through multi-agency collaboration with SALTs. EPs can also work at a systemic level to raise awareness of SPCD and SEMH within schools and children's services.

A number of more general implications for how secondary schools might support pupils with SPCD arose from the research. These include developing an inclusive ethos, providing support for their social and emotional needs, providing opportunities to develop a secure relationship with a member of staff, and facilitating opportunities to interact with other YP with shared interests.

This thesis also offers suggestions for future research, including exploration of the role of other non-friend relationships and relationships outside the school context.

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## List of Acronyms

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<b>Acronym:</b>	<b>Explanation:</b>
<b>ASD</b>	Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>CAMHS</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
<b>CCC</b>	Children's Communication Checklist (Bishop, 1998)
<b>CYP</b>	Children and Young People
<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychology / Educational Psychologist
<b>LSA</b>	Learning Support Assistant
<b>PLI</b>	Pragmatic Language Impairment
<b>SALT</b>	Speech and Language Therapist
<b>SDQ</b>	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997)
<b>SEAL</b>	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
<b>SEMH</b>	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
<b>SENCo</b>	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability
<b>SLCN</b>	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
<b>SLI</b>	Specific Language Impairment
<b>SPCD</b>	Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder / Social Pragmatic Communication difficulties

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research problem**

This thesis explored the views of young people (YP) with social pragmatic communication difficulties (SPCD), focussing on their friendships and related aspects of their emotional well-being. There is limited research into the experiences of YP with SPCD, yet having this type of communication need may have long-term impact on YP's social relationships (Whitehouse, Watt, Line, & Bishop, 2009). YP with Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN) are at risk of experiencing social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) problems in addition to, and potentially as a result of, their language and/or communication difficulty (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012).

In my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and in my previous work as a teacher in a specialist resource provision for children with SLCN, I have seen first-hand the impact that communication difficulties can have on a child/young person's (CYPs) social experiences and emotional well-being. I have observed how CYP can often be viewed in terms of their behavioural presentation without understanding of their underlying needs. These experiences have led to my interest in research aiming to develop understanding of the experiences of these CYP. Working with CYP with SLCN has inspired my hope to raise awareness of their holistic needs, and to promote support for their social and emotional well-being.

YP with SLCN are at higher risk of exclusion from education (Ripley & Yuill, 2005), of entering the youth offending system (Snow & Powell, 2008), and of developing mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008). This is of particular concern at the current time, given the reported high levels of mental health problems in YP in the UK (Mental Health Foundation, 2015) and the responsibilities given to schools to support the mental health of their pupils (DfE, 2016). There is a pressing need to develop an understanding of the experiences of YP at risk of developing SEMH problems such as those with social communication difficulties, and of how they may be better supported.

This thesis focussed on YP with SPCD i.e. difficulties with the social aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication (see Section 1.2 for explanation of this terminology). It was essential to focus the project within the SLCN category because it is a broad educational term that covers a wide range of different language and communication profiles (Dockrell, Ricketts, & Lindsay, 2012) including difficulties with speech, expressive language (saying what they want to), receptive language (understanding what is said), or social communication (DfE & DoH, 2015).

Studies exploring which aspects of language impairment are associated with these problems have highlighted the role of pragmatic language ability in this relationship (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Farmer & Oliver, 2005). Therefore, it is hypothesised that YP with SPCD are at risk of experiencing SEMH difficulties. Furthermore, Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder

(DSM-5; APA, 2013) is a relatively new diagnosis that is not yet widely used, is little researched, and suggests a need to raise awareness of the needs of this vulnerable group.

The current research focussed on YP with SPCD and their experiences of friendship. Friendships can provide emotional support and opportunities for learning social skills (Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesised that friendships could act as a protective factor for YP with SPCD. However, SPCD may also present challenges to the development of friendships because of their impact on social interactions. Therefore, this research contributes to the understanding of the role of friendships for YP with SPCD, the challenges they may face in building friendships, and the support needed to promote this potential protective factor.

I used an explorative, qualitative approach to seek deeper insight into the experiences of YP with SPCD from their own perspectives, triangulated with the views of parents and school staff. This study aimed to raise awareness of SPCD in adolescents, and the impact of these communication difficulties on their social and emotional well-being. It is hoped that this will enable a better understanding of their needs in order to plan effective holistic support and intervention. The research aimed to provide potential insights for EPs for supporting YP with SPCD at individual and systemic levels. I will use first person throughout this thesis because of the qualitative nature of the study.

This chapter explains what is meant by SPCD and summarises the history and rationale behind this terminology. The chapter sets out the theoretical perspective and the rationale for exploring friendships and related aspects of emotional well-being of YP with SPCD, and the importance of seeking their views.

## **1.2 What is meant by social pragmatic communication difficulties?**

Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder is a relatively new diagnostic category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and is defined as “persistent difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal communication” in the absence of the rigid, restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours that characterise Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). According to DSM-5, Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder covers various social communication problems including difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, following the rules of communication, understanding nonliteral language and using nonverbal communication.

The possibility that some children may have SPCD distinct from other categories of language impairment or ASD has been discussed since the 1980s. In 1983, Rapin and Allen published a framework for classifying subtypes of developmental language disorders which included a category they called “semantic pragmatic syndrome” (Rapin, 1996). This term referred to a subtype of language disorder characterised by difficulties with vocabulary and

word-finding, and the social use of language. However, Rapin (1996) later used “semantic-pragmatic disorder” as a descriptive term that could be applied to individuals with deficits in semantic and pragmatic aspects of language including those with ASD.

The term “Pragmatic Language Impairment” (PLI) (Bishop, 1998) was introduced in an attempt to describe the needs of those individuals who might previously have been diagnosed with semantic-pragmatic disorder but who did not have ASD (Botting and Conti-Ramsden, 1999). Evidence of individuals with PLI occurring independently of other impairments found in autism (Bishop, 2000) indicated the need for this diagnostic label. Individuals with PLI have problems with using verbal and nonverbal communication for social purposes. This can include difficulties with understanding and expressing intentions, awareness of the needs of the listener and appropriate use of language in context (Ketelaars, Cuperus, Jansonius, & Verhoeven, 2010).

According to Ketelaars et al. (2009), PLI is usually regarded to be a subtype of Specific Language Impairment (SLI), where SLI refers to significant delay in language development that is not attributable to another neurodevelopmental disorder (Bishop, 2000). However, it is not clear whether PLI is a sub-type of SLI or ASD, or possibly a condition overlapping with both (Bishop, 2014).

Individuals with PLI show higher-order communication difficulties overlapping with those described in individuals with autism (Frith, 2003); they may be



capable of producing complex sentences, but lack understanding of social aspects of communication including turn-taking, conversational topics and social cues (Bakopoulou, 2010). However, individuals with PLI can also have grammatical or phonological difficulties resembling those found in SLI (Bishop, 2014).

The situation is complicated further by evidence of social communication difficulties in some children with SLI. Young children with SLI can display poor eye contact, preference for routine, and difficulties with peer interactions due to the impact of their language impairment, but these difficulties usually resolve as language skills develop (Simms, 2017). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest a genetic link between ASD, SLI and PLI from studies showing higher rates of language impairment (Bailey, Palferman, Heavey, & Le Couteur, 1998) and pragmatic language difficulties (Miller, Young, Hutman, Johnson, Schwichtenberg & Ozonoff, 2015) in family members of children with ASD.

Despite these overlaps, there are differences in the profiles of the three groups that lend support to the validity of distinct diagnoses. Gibson, Adams, Lockton, & Green, (2013) compared children with ASD, SLI and PLI on measures of receptive and expressive language, communicative ability, and repetitive and restricted behaviours and interests (RRBIs).

Gibson et al. (2013) found that receptive language was stronger than expressive language ability in both the SLI and PLI groups, whereas there was no significant difference between receptive and expressive language ability for

the ASD group. Children with PLI, in comparison, were found to have greater difficulty with structural language skills (speech, syntax, semantics, coherence), but fewer difficulties with initiation, stereotyped language, nonverbal communication and restriction of interests, when compared to the group of children with ASD. The PLI and ASD groups had a similar level of difficulty with contextual language use/understanding and social difficulties. Using regression analysis, the study showed that RRBIs were a significant predictor for membership of the ASD group, but not for the PLI or SLI groups, demonstrating distinctive patterns of ability and impairments for each group, despite the overlap in types of impairment.

In a more recent study conducted since the introduction of the “Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder” diagnostic category, Mandy, Wang, Lee, & Skuse, (2017) found similar group differences on measures of social communication and repetitive stereotyped behaviours. Mandy et al., (2017) conducted a retrospective analysis of assessment information for 1,081 Children and Young People (CYP) (aged 4-18 years old) who attended a specialist social communication clinic. By applying the new DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for ASD and SPCD, they reported that 88 CYP met the criteria for SPCD diagnosis, 801 met DSM-5 criteria for ASD, and 192 had neither SPCD nor ASD and were used as a clinical comparison group. Comparisons of the three groups’ mean scores on the Children’s Communication Checklist (CCC; Bishop, 1998) indicated that the SPCD group had social difficulties at an intermediate level between the ASD group and the comparison group, but had restricted interests at a lower level than the ASD group and at a similar level

to the comparison group. These findings lend support to the view of SPCD as a specific cluster of social communication difficulties in the absence of significant restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests.

It is interesting to note that of the 88 CYP who were classified as SPCD in Mandy et al.'s (2017) study, many were previously diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) or were given an ASD diagnosis according to DSM-4 but would not meet all of the updated diagnostic criteria for ASD in DSM-5. This highlights a major challenge to conducting research in this area, where many YP who meet the descriptors of SPCD may have already been given an alternative diagnosis according to outdated criteria. Even more concerning is the implication that some YP will have gone without any diagnosis and support, due to not meeting the thresholds for ASD diagnosis, lack of any other appropriate label and limited awareness of social communication needs outside of ASD.

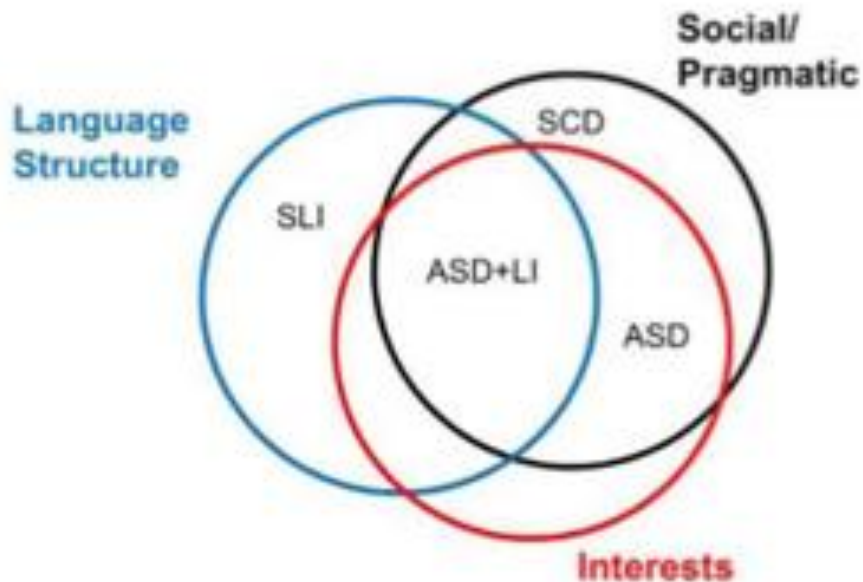
Therefore, the current literature suggests that there are both distinctions and overlap in the profiles of individuals with ASD, SLI and SPCD. This indicates a need for three diagnostic categories which overlap, rather than viewing SPCD (or PLI) as a sub-type within SLI or ASD. The introduction of the label of "Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder" (DSM-5) is an attempt to resolve this issue (Bishop, 2014). DSM-5 distinguished between Language Disorder (receptive and expressive) and Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder but positioned both under the umbrella of Communication Disorders. The new label is intended to represent the previous term of "PLI", and does

seem to achieve this, given the matching profiles of those with PLI in Gibson et al., (2013) and those with SPCD in Mandy et al. (2017), although SPCD has been expanded to include difficulties with nonverbal communication (Swineford, Thurm, Baird, Wetherby, & Swedo, 2014).

SLI, SPCD and ASD may be related conditions that vary in terms of the degree of impairment in structural language ability, social/pragmatic ability and restricted/repetitive behaviours and interests (Taylor & Whitehouse, 2016). Bishop (2014) presented an illustration of the overlapping impairments of SLI, ASD and SPCD that is useful in conceptualising these diagnostic categories (Figure 1). The diagram shows that impairment of social pragmatic difficulties and restricted interests overlap in ASD, and that some individuals with ASD will also have language impairment, while individuals with SPCD have social pragmatic impairments which overlap with ASD, but without restricted interests, and that some individuals with SPCD may also have difficulties with structural language characteristic of SLI.

**Figure 1. the relationship between Social Communication (Pragmatic) Disorder, SLI and ASC from Bishop (2014)**

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This thesis has focussed on YP with impairment of social pragmatic communication without ASD. Participants were identified as having SPCD if they presented with SPCD in the absence of other markers of autism. This was established through consultation with the school’s Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), using Sampling Criteria based on diagnostic criteria from the DSM-5 (APA, 2013).

The term “Social Pragmatic Communication Difficulties” (SPCD) is used in order to reflect the most recent diagnostic terminology (DSM-5; APA, 2013). I acknowledge that not all YP with these needs have a clinical diagnosis, and therefore refer to “difficulties” rather than “disorder”. Discussions with SALT employed at a London hospital highlighted the issue that SALTs tend to use

the terms “pragmatic language difficulties” or “social communication difficulties” as descriptors for SPCD in the absence of other ASD markers, and that although “Social Communication Disorder” is now a diagnostic term, it is not widely used currently. It is important to note that YP who present with SPCD may receive *different* diagnoses or labels, due to the wide range of terminology in use (Bishop, 2014). Furthermore, it may be unclear to professionals how best to identify the correct term to use, due to the similar and overlapping profiles of impairment, so that children may be diagnosed differently by different professionals (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000).

Some researchers have raised a concern that the new classification may result in a group of children for whom no professional group feels responsible (Norbury, 2014). Nevertheless, it is hoped that the SPCD category will lead to further research and greater understanding of this group, enabling them to access support tailored to their needs (Swineford et al., 2014). Mandy et al. (2017) suggested that SPCD is a diagnosis for people on the “borderlands of the autism spectrum”. Although it is widely accepted that Autism is a spectrum, diagnosis of ASD requires a categorical threshold decision. Therefore, although the validity of SPCD as a distinct category remains unclear, it could be argued that the label is vital for those YP who experience significant social communication difficulties in the absence of other ASD markers, or at levels that would not meet thresholds for ASD diagnosis.

### **1.3 Resilience theory as a framework for exploring views on friendship**

This thesis used resilience theory (Masten & Powell, 2010) as a theoretical lens through which to explore the potential role of friendships in YP with SPCD. Resilience has been defined as “positive adaptation in the face of risk or adversity” (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). Therefore, to say an individual has shown resilience, we infer that they have been at risk of a negative outcome, yet they have achieved a more positive outcome. This thesis hypothesised that YP with SPCD are at risk of poor outcomes in terms of their social and emotional well-being, and that YP who show positive outcomes despite their SPCD may show resilience.

Historically, resilience was conceptualised as a personality trait applied to individuals who were capable of functioning successfully despite experiencing adversity (Antony, 1974; Pines, 1975 in Wright et al., 2013). However, this ‘within-person’ perspective failed to take account of environmental and relational factors that affect an individual’s ability to show positive adaptation. Individuals can show resilience in their various interactions with their environment, such as relationships with their family, friends, peers, school and community (Masten, 2015). This thesis used an ecological perspective on resilience (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013), recognising the interactions between an individual and their environment.

Resilience can have different meanings for different individuals, groups, cultures and contexts. Different cultures have different views on what constitutes positive adaptations, for example, individual success and

leadership skills may be viewed as less adaptive in a culture that is more collectivist (Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, 2005). Therefore, it was necessary to take a social constructionist perspective (Burr, 2003), acknowledging that resilience is a concept that means different things to different individuals or groups at different times and in different contexts.

Environmental factors can represent risks or protective factors. Risks are characteristics of an individual, group or situation that relate to a negative outcome, whereas protective factors are characteristics which may associate with positive outcomes (Wright et al., 2013). In this thesis, I hypothesised that SPCD presents a potential risk factor, while friendships may provide a protective factor. The mechanism of this process may be additive (adding more protective factors can offset greater risk) or protective factors may act as moderators (protective factors change the effect of certain risks).

An individual's ability to show resilience can change over time, throughout their development, and in response to their circumstances (Masten, 2015). An individual can show behaviours that are adaptive in certain situations but not in others, thus behaviours can vary over time and across contexts. Therefore, this thesis viewed resilience as a dynamic process rather than a fixed personality trait. The implication of this is that anyone may be able to show resilience, given the right protective factors.

This has relevance for Educational Psychologists (EPs), part of whose role is to work to promote positive outcomes for vulnerable YP (DfE, 2011).



Resilience often comes from systems of typical human adaptation (e.g. attachment and social support), which Masten (2001) called "ordinary magic". It follows that supporting these protective factors can promote resilience. This thesis adopted this assumption of the resilience model, with the implication that supporting friendships or other potential protective factors may promote positive outcomes.

#### **1.4 Why focus on adolescents with SPCD?**

Secondary schools may be less aware of communication needs as teachers are focussed on their subject and may have a less holistic view of pupils, as a result of the secondary school teaching structure (Ripley & Barrett, 2008), which may cause communication needs to go unnoticed. Furthermore, communication difficulties tend to be harder to identify in adolescents (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010)., and can be easily misinterpreted as defiant or inappropriate behaviour (Cohen et al., 1998).

Support for SLCN is predominantly focussed on early-years and primary school settings, and there are fewer professionals and resources available for secondary school pupils (Dockrell, Lindsay, Letchford, & Mackie, 2006). There is currently an important focus on early intervention, but there is also a need to ensure that support is continued into adolescence (Bercow, 2008, 2018). Previous research into the social and emotional needs of CYP with SPCD has focussed on primary school children, and research into adolescents with SPCD is limited.

Research in this area has been mostly quantitative and focussed on the level of difficulty experienced. Therefore, little is known about *how* these difficulties are experienced or their impact on well-being. Previous research has tended not to consider strengths or potential protective factors for this group. This research intended to begin to bridge this gap through qualitative exploration of the views of YP with SPCD, with a focus on friendships as a potential protective factor for promoting well-being.

### **1.5 Why consider young people's views?**

Articles 12 and 13 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) stated that children have the right to express their views and for these views to be taken into account. Current legislation in England highlights the need to include children's views when planning their support (DfE & DoH, 2015). Involving YP in discussions about their needs increases their motivation to engage with support tailored to them (Briesch & Chafouleas, 2009), and might therefore promote greater chance of successful outcomes.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This literature review explored existing research into the social and emotional impact of SPCD, followed by a review of the potential protective role of friendships in adolescence. This required a comprehensive literature search to identify a range of relevant literature (see Appendix 1).

For clarity, the term “social pragmatic communication difficulties” (abbreviated to SPCD) is used throughout the literature review to refer to samples whose described needs resemble those of SPCD, however more historical terms (see section 1.2) may have been used in the original articles.

### **2.1 The relationship between language and communication difficulties and social, emotional and mental health**

A relationship between communication difficulties and SEMH has been well documented in the literature (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012). Four potential theoretical explanations have been proposed to explain this relationship (Hartas, 2012). The first is that communication difficulties cause frustration and withdrawal leading to difficulties with managing emotions, behaviour and social relations. Alternatively, problems with managing behaviour and emotions might create barriers to learning language and social development. The third possibility is that difficulties with language and behaviour may be comorbid and influence each other in a cyclical relationship, or a final possibility is that there may be another factor which influences multiple aspects of development (e.g. socioeconomic status).

Evidence for the relationship between language and communication needs and SEMH has come from both studies of CYP with SEMH problems (Ripley & Yuill, 2005; Snow & Powell, 2008), and from studies of CYP with identified language and communication impairments (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Mok et al., 2014). Lindsay & Dockrell (2012) conducted an analysis of national statistics on CYP with SLCN in the UK, and reported that problems with peers, emotional difficulties and less developed pro-social behaviour are more common in pupils with SLCN compared with typically developing peers of the same age.

The following sections will discuss the role of SPCD in the relationship between language and communication needs and SEMH, and the potential impact of having SPCD on YP's social and emotional well-being, followed by a discussion of the potential reasons behind this relationship.

## **2.2 The role of social pragmatic communication ability**

There is evidence to suggest that social pragmatic communication ability plays a significant role in the relationship between SLCN and SEMH (Gilmour, Hill, Place, & Skuse, 2004). Gilmour et al. (2004) reported high levels of pragmatic language difficulties (measured using the CCC; Bishop, 1998) in children referred to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for behavioural problems or at risk of exclusion for disruptive behaviour, which indicates a link between pragmatic communication ability and SEMH.

However, there was a lack of agreement between parent and teacher reported scores on the CCC questions relating to social pragmatic ability, but this may be due to differences in how children behave differently between home and school contexts. Despite this issue, Gilmour et al.'s (2004) findings were replicated by Mackie & Law (2010), lending external reliability to both studies. Mackie & Law (2010) reported that primary school children who presented with concerning behavioural problems were significantly more likely to have difficulties with social pragmatic language than age- and sex-matched controls, and that pragmatic language ability was a significant predictor of behaviour.

However, it is not possible to establish a causal link from the correlations found by Gilmour et al. (2004) and Mackie & Law (2010). Nevertheless, a longitudinal study by Helland et al. (2014) showed that emotional and peer problems at 7-9 years correlated with pragmatic difficulties at 12-15 years. They concluded that peer problems predict later social pragmatic communication difficulties but acknowledged that the reverse relationship might be true.

Findings from studies of CYP who have been identified for behavioural problems may not generalise to other populations. Nevertheless, the relationship between SPCD and SEMH has been replicated in mainstream samples (Ketelaars et al., 2010; Law, Rush, & McBean, 2014a). Therefore, findings from studies of CYP with SEMH needs indicate that social pragmatic

communication ability plays a significant role in the association between communication difficulties and SEMH.

### **2.3 Social, emotional and mental health in children and young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties**

Further insights into the role of SPCD come from studies of CYP diagnosed with communication difficulties. Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) argued that previous studies into SEMH in CYP with communication difficulties had failed to take account of the variety of different needs that make up this population. Therefore, they analysed their data by different subgroups of impairment to give a more detailed understanding of the different needs of CYP with communication difficulties.

Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) divided their sample of 242 children (from 118 Language Units in England) into groups with expressive difficulties (52), expressive and receptive difficulties (84), and another group referred to as “complex language impairment” (77). This third group included CYP with SPCD (referred to as “semantic-pragmatic” at that time) and higher order language processing difficulties (e.g. difficulties with syntax). Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) found both emotional and behavioural problems in the group with “complex language impairment” and reported higher levels of behavioural problems in this group when compared to the others.

Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) also believed that SEMH problems were secondary to language difficulties for CYP with SLCN. They used a longitudinal design which enabled them to look for changes over time. One issue with the longitudinal design used was that different teachers tended to provide ratings at time 1 and time 2, as some pupils had moved schools or into mainstream classes. The researchers acknowledged that there might have been a difference in ratings between teachers in mainstream and Language Unit settings, but their findings demonstrated that this was not the case i.e. they found no significant differences in ratings between the two types of setting. However, it is possible that the data were affected by differences in behavioural expectations between teachers teaching Year 2 pupils compared to those teaching Year 3 pupils.

The longitudinal design enabled Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) to show that behavioural problems did not increase over time for the children in the group with “complex language impairment” (including SPCD-like problems), whereas the group with expressive and receptive difficulties showed an increase in behavioural problems over time, which may reflect their growing frustrations with their language difficulties. The authors hypothesised that children with a growing awareness of their own difficulties would become more frustrated, resulting in increased behavioural problems over time. The implication is that children with complex semantic-pragmatic communication difficulty might lack awareness of their own difficulties, which might explain the

lack of change over time for this group. This thesis intended to capture YP with SPCD's views on their experiences giving insight into their awareness of their own needs.

The findings of Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) are supported, to an extent, by a study by Farmer and Oliver (2005) which replicated an association between SPCD and behaviour. This study used the CCC (Bishop, 1998) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) completed by teachers. However, Farmer and Oliver (2005) only found a significant correlation with hyperactive behaviour and no significant relationship with other behavioural or emotional problems. This suggested that children with SPCD may be at risk of hyperactivity. However, it is not certain that hyperactivity is a consequence of SPCD, rather than a cause or comorbid difficulty.

There are some limitations to Farmer and Oliver's (2005) quantitative study which might explain the lack of significant results. The sample was small (38 in total) meaning that they had only very small groups for their statistical analysis. In addition, the wide range of ages in the sample could explain the lack of significant differences in behavioural and emotional problems found between the groups. Further research is needed to explore emotional and behavioural needs using a large sample and CYP who meet the criteria for diagnosis of SPCD.



In addition to possible emotional and behavioural problems, CYP with SPCD may experience difficulties with social interaction and peer relationships. Farmer and Oliver (2005) reported that peer relations scores on the SDQ were correlated with all of the CCC subscales measuring aspects of social and pragmatic communication. Mok et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of peer relations of children with communication impairments, from age 7 to age 16. Peer relations were assessed using the Rutter Children's Behaviour scale at ages 7, 8 and 11 and the SDQ at 11, 14 and 16. The researchers created a peer problem subscale for the Rutter scale by using regression analysis to find which items predicted the peer problem subscale of the SDQ at age 11. They reported that the two scores for age 11 were highly correlated lending reliability to their subscale and enabling them to make comparisons across time points. Pragmatic language ability was assessed initially by teacher report and then using the CCC at age 11, alongside measures of receptive and expressive language, word reading and reading comprehension.

Mok et al. (2014) found that the best fit model for the data was one with 4 groups each with a different trajectory of peer relations. The four groups were low-level/no peer problems (22.2%), childhood-limited problems (12.3%), childhood-onset persistent problems (39.2%), and adolescent-onset problems (26.3%). Receptive and expressive language and reading scores were not predictors of trajectory group membership. Pragmatic language at 7 was not a significant predictor, but the children in the “persistent peer problems”

trajectory group were 2.5 times more likely to have pragmatic language difficulties than the group with low or no peer problems. Pragmatic language at age 11 was a significant predictor of trajectory membership.

The use of teacher assessment of pragmatic language difficulties seemed to lack construct validity since 12.6% of children who were not identified later met the threshold for pragmatic language difficulties on the CCC, although it is possible that this was due to needs changing over time. Despite limitations to the teacher assessment measure, the inclusion of the CCC at age 11 enabled the researchers to identify SPCD as a predictor of peer relations.

Several of the studies reviewed have used the CCC (Bishop, 1998) and SDQ (Goodman, 1997). It could be argued that correlations on these two questionnaires would be expected because there is some overlap in the behaviours that indicate emotional and behavioural problems on the SDQ and those that indicate social communication difficulties on the CCC. For example, it is likely that a young person who is rated as one who “often fights with other children or bullies them” on the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) would also be rated as one who “hurts or upsets other children” on the CCC (Bishop, 1998). The overlap in certain items may mean that the apparent relationship between social communication and behaviour problems might simply reflect similarities in the presentations of YP with SEMH and SPCD needs. Nevertheless, the CCC measures several social pragmatic aspects that are specific to

communication and do not overlap with the SDQ (such as inappropriate initiation, stereotyped language, use of context and nonverbal communication), which supports the validity of using the CCC as a measure of social pragmatic communication ability and the SDQ as a measure of behaviour and emotional problems.

There are limitations to using these quantitative questionnaire measures to investigate complex relationships; the SDQ and CCC both require ratings on specific behaviours, without room for detail or explanation. This can be seen to limit the usefulness of these measures in terms of the understanding that is gained. As an example, the item “rather solitary, tends to play alone” (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), could describe a child who prefers to play alone, or a child who seeks social play but is excluded by peers, or a child who seeks to play with peers but does not have the social skills or understanding required to engage appropriately. Therefore, quantitative data gives an indication of the level of difficulty but gives no further understanding. This further supports the need for more detailed and in-depth qualitative exploration of social and emotional well-being in YP with SPCD.

#### **2.4 What are the long-term outcomes for young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties?**

There is limited research into the long-term outcomes for YP with SPCD. Research into the outcomes of YP with language impairments indicates a high

level of poor social and emotional outcomes (Brownlie et al., 2004; Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008). Outcomes for YP with SPCD are less well documented, but a study by Whitehouse et al. (2009) suggested an impact on social outcomes and friendship beyond adolescence and into adulthood. Whitehouse et al. (2009) conducted a follow-up of adults with SLI (19), SPCD (referred to as PLI in their research) (7) and ASD (11), who were previously recruited as children from specialist schools or units in the UK, in order to investigate their social and emotional outcomes in adulthood.

Whitehouse et al. (2009) asked the participants' parents to complete a questionnaire and Autism Diagnostic Interview - Revised (ADI-R) regarding the participants' behaviour as children and adults and used the Autism Diagnostic Observation Scales - Generic (ADOS-G) to observe the participants. The researchers found that a large proportion of adults in all three groups had no close friendships, in contrast to a "Typical" control group who all had at least one close friend. The ASD and SPCD groups had poorer quality of friendships compared to the SLI and control groups. All of the typical control group had experienced a romantic relationship (lasting more than three months), whereas this was the case for only half of the SPCD group. The proportion was similar in the SLI group (53.3%), whereas none of the participants in the ASD group had experienced a romantic relationship. They found that members of the SPCD group tended to work in "skilled" professions, whereas members of the SLI and ASD groups tended to work in manual or

service professions, and a small proportion of both SLI and ASD groups were unemployed.

A strength of Whitehouse et al.'s (2009) study was the use of separate groupings in order to compare outcomes for SPCD, SLI and ASD, and the noticeable group differences found lend theoretical reliability to the research. However, it should be noted that these group differences in employment show that there are contextual differences between groups, which may also affect their social relationships, potentially limiting the comparability of the groups.

There are further limitations to Whitehouse et al.'s (2009) study. SPCD participants were chosen on the basis of parent or teacher reports of them having pragmatic language difficulties that were disproportionate to their structural language difficulties. The researchers stated that this was the only measure available at that time, however it could be argued that judgements made by SALTs might have been more reliable.

In addition, there may have been a limit to authenticity in Whitehouse et al.'s (2009) follow-up study due to self-selection. This may have limited participation to those with less severe impairments who are more able to understand recruitment materials, or conversely towards those with greater needs who sought an opportunity to report on these difficulties.

All of the outcome measures came from parent reports or observations during the ADOS-G assessments, except for the data regarding romantic relationships. In this case, parent and participant reports were both taken. However, in cases where parent and participant reports differed, the researchers selected which they felt to be more accurate based on the participant's level of "functioning", where the authors defined "high functioning" as "with a full array of independent behaviours". In addition, participants aged younger than 21 years old were removed from this part of the analysis, which left very small groups (only 4 in the SPCD group) making it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions from this data. It could be argued that these measures position the views of younger adults and those considered "low functioning" to be less valid when it comes to experiences of romantic relationships. Therefore, there is a need for research to further explore the social and emotional outcomes of YP with SPCD, and value YP's own views on their experiences.

At this stage, this review of the literature lends support to the view that social and emotional problems may arise as a result of the impact of having a communication difficulty (Hartas, 2012).

The potential link between SPCD and SEMH is further supported by the evidence from longitudinal studies which indicate that SEMH problems are

predicted by communication difficulties (Mok et al., 2014). Given the evidence reviewed above, Hartas' (2012) explanation can be extended to acknowledge that difficulties with the social pragmatic aspects of communication can lead to social and emotional problems. Furthermore, it should be noted that not only can SPCD be associated with withdrawal and frustration, but that communication skills are a key component of social behaviour (James Law, Rush, Clegg, Peters, & Roulstone, 2015), and thus have an inevitable impact on social interaction. Law et al. (2015) argued that social communication skills are essential for interaction with peers, caregivers, and learning environments, and therefore CYP with difficulties with these skills are at risk of disengaging from interaction in all of these contexts.

## **2.5 Why are social pragmatic communication skills important for friendships and emotional well-being in adolescents?**

In adolescence, conversation is fundamental to friendships, and supports the development of intimacy through self-disclosure and sharing of feelings, thoughts and experiences (Wadman, Durkin, & Conti-Ramsden, 2011). Socialising in adolescence tends to focus less on playing games and more on social play at a more abstract level (e.g. teasing, joking and daring) (Baines & Blatchford, 2010). Social behaviours are also important; pro-social behaviours e.g. sharing and helping are associated with high quality friendships (Berndt, 1982 in Wadman et al., 2011).

The ability to form friendships involves a number of social skills or tasks such as the ability to initiate interactions, self-disclose, provide enjoyable companionship, offer help and support, initiate get-togethers, and manage conflict (Rose & Asher, 2004). It could be argued that many of these social requirements for friendship (Rose & Asher, 2004) could present potential challenges for YP with SPCD. They may have difficulty using language appropriately to initiate interaction, or have difficulty following the rules of conversation such as not giving turns or persisting with a topic of their own interest which might limit enjoyment for the conversation partner. YP with SPCD may benefit from the help of others, but have difficulty giving help if they have difficulty with interpreting others' emotions, needs or expectations. Managing conflict may be challenging for YP with SPCD, as it requires the ability to understand the views and needs of others (Laursen & Pursell, 2009).

SPCD are associated with reduced pro-social behaviour and difficulties with peer relations in primary school children (Ketelaars et al., 2010; Law, Rush, and McBean, 2014) and in adolescents (Mok et al., 2014). A child's own behaviour strongly affects their social acceptance by peers; children who display cooperative and socially appropriate behaviour and can participate in a group are more accepted by their peers (Newcomb, Nukowski and Pattee, 1993 in McKown, Gumbiner, Russo and Lipton, 2009). Conversely, the needs of children with SPCD may mean that they are less well accepted by peers.



Difficulties with peer relations may affect emotional well-being as well as social development. Durkin and Conti-Ramsden (2010) suggested that YP with SLI experience feelings of frustration due to having a desire to seek social interaction but lacking the skills to participate fully. As YP with SPCD also seek interaction (Simms, 2017), it is likely that they may experience these frustrations. Peers are an important source of social support for adolescents, as they typically spend less time with family and more time with peers (Buhrmester, 1996, in Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2010). The implication of this is that YP with SPCD are at further risk of emotional problems due to having limited social support from peers.

Children with SPCD are reported to have poor narrative (storytelling) skills (Ketelaars, Jansonius, Cuperus, & Verhoeven, 2016). Narrative skills are fundamental to everyday interactions to share experiences, retell events, and explain situations. Narrative difficulties may also put YP at risk of getting into conflicts if they are not able to explain their own actions (Snow & Powell, 2008).

There is some evidence to suggest that YP with SPCD also experience difficulties with “theory of mind” (the ability to make inferences about another person’s mental state) (Freed et al., 2015). Impairment in theory of mind has been reported in ASD (Happé, 1994) and might be an expected area of difficulty in SPCD, given the apparent overlap between SPCD and ASD in the

domain of social communication. YP with SPCD have been found to demonstrate difficulty making inferences about other people's viewpoints and mental states (Freed et al., 2015). This is likely to affect their interactions with others and how others perceive them.

Finally, YP with communication difficulties may present with behavioural problems (Helland et al, 2014; Mackie & Law, 2010), yet it is often the case that their difficulties with using and understanding language can be misinterpreted as non-compliant behaviour (Cohen et al., 1998). Snow & Powell (2008) gave the behaviours of "monosyllabic responses, shoulder shrugging and poor eye contact" (p. 24) as examples of behaviours that could represent uncooperative behaviour but could also relate to underlying social and communication problems. If behaviour is misinterpreted as defiance, it may result in the YP being reprimanded for behaviours that are unintentional or misunderstood. Experiencing these social and disciplinary consequences, without having a clear understanding of the reason, might negatively affect a YP's self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Therefore, it is suggested that YP with SPCD may have difficulties with friendships and related aspects of their emotional well-being due to their social communication difficulties. The following sections explore the role of friendship in adolescence, and the potentially protective role that friendship may play for YP with SPCD.

## **2.6 Friendship in adolescence**

Friendship has been defined as “strong positive affective bonds that exist between two persons” (Bukowski, Motzoi, & Meyer, 2009) and is characterised by reciprocal liking, similarity and responsivity. According to Hartup & Stevens (1997), friendships in early childhood are characterised by shared activities, whereas in adolescence, cognitive and emotional development enables sharing of beliefs and interests and increased intimacy. Adolescents become more reliant on peers for emotional support, this change may arise as they develop independence from their families, as well as developing new interests and concerns about issues that are less easily discussed with family (such as sexuality and relationships) (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000). Friendships provide relationships in which peers are expected to be available to offer help, companionship and emotional support (Bukowski et al., 2009). Therefore, peer friendships may serve an important function in promoting social and emotional well-being in adolescents.

### **2.6.1 Peer attachment**

Attachment theory, which originally referred to the attachment relationship between an infant and their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1973), has more recently been applied to thinking about relationships between children and other significant individuals including peers and close friends (Laible et al., 2000). This theory assumes that dependence on close others, as it occurs during development, is a normative process and is necessary for the

development of self-efficacy and independence. Therefore, although dependence on others may be viewed as a negative attribute, this perspective posits the concept of “optimal dependence” as essential to an individual’s development (Feeney, Van Vleet, & Jakubiak, 2015).

According to attachment theory, infants develop an ‘Internal Working Model’ of their expectations and beliefs about their relationship with their caregivers, based on their experiences (Bowlby, 1973). For example, an infant with a secure attachment to their primary caregiver, who is sensitive and responsive to their emotional and physical needs, will develop expectations of significant others as responsive and reliable, and beliefs about themselves as competent and valued. This influences the individual's future interpretations of their experiences in extra-familiar relationships, such as those with friends (Shomaker & Furman, 2009).

More recently, attachment theory has been reconceptualised to include other significant relationships including those with significant peers (Laible et al., 2000). Piaget (1965) viewed peer-friendships as unique, suggesting that these relationships are more equal than parental relationships which inevitably involve an element of obedience and hierarchy. This more equal type of relationship (e.g. because of a common age or experience) provides a safe context for exploring ideas, and might therefore serve an important role in adolescent social development (Piaget, 1965).

Laible et al., (2000) investigated the contributions of parent- and peer-attachments on a construct they referred to as 'adolescent adjustment' (operationalized using measures of sympathy, academic efficacy, aggression, anxiety, and depression). In this study, 89 male and female adolescents (with a mean age of 16 years old) completed various self-report scales designed to measure constructs of peer and parent attachment, depression, sympathy (perspective-taking and empathic concern), anxiety, aggression as well as efficacy in maths and English.

Laible et al., (2000) divided participants into four different groups based on their peer- and parent-attachment scores, to examine the impact of both types of attachment on their outcome measures of adolescent adjustment. They noted that the high parent- and peer-attachment group scored lowest on depressing and aggression and highest on sympathy, while the low parent- and peer-attachment group had the highest scores on depression and aggression, and lowest on sympathy. Interestingly, the two groups with high scores for only one attachment (either parents or peers) both had intermediate scores on these measures, but the group who showed strong peer- but not parent-attachments had slightly lower scores on depression and aggression and slightly higher on sympathy. Therefore, Laible et al.'s (2000) findings indicate that secure attachments with both parents and peers contribute to positive outcomes in adolescents.

The group differences in Laible et al., (2000), suggested that peer-attachments may have more significant impact than parent-attachments during adolescence. These findings also suggest that peer-attachments may become distinct from parent-attachments (at least in adolescence), since it was possible to have secure attachment with one but not the other, although it seems that both peer- and parent-attachments may serve similar functions. Therefore, parent-attachments may influence later development of peer-attachments (Bowlby, 1973), but secure peer-attachments might also develop in adolescents even in the absence of secure parent-attachment. These peer-attachments might be important for the social and emotional well-being of adolescents.

The groups in Laible et al.'s (2000) study were split according to whether scores on peer- and parent-attachment were above or below the group mean. This means that an individual described as having a secure peer-attachment and insecure parent-attachment might have only scored one point above the mean for peer-attachment and one point below the mean for parent-attachment. It could be argued that this individual might better be described as "average" in both peer- and parent-attachments. Therefore, it is possible that greater differences might have been found between peer- and parent-attachments if comparisons were made between individuals with more extreme scores for each attachment type.

It is important to note that the associations found between self-reported attachment and measures of depression, aggression and sympathy were correlational. Without suitable controls and a longitudinal study, it is not possible to assert that it was attachment that influenced adolescent adjustment and not the reverse relationship. It could be argued that adolescents who are well-adjusted would be more likely to experience more secure attachments, or to report more positively on their relationships.

It could also be argued that this study is limited in its conclusions about 'adolescent adjustment', because significant associations were only found for their measures of depression, aggression and sympathy. For example, a well-adjusted adolescent might also be predicted to report high self-esteem and pro-social behaviour, and low levels of anxiety. Therefore, the findings can only indicate an *association* between peer- and parent-attachments and certain *specific aspects* of adolescent adjustment. Nevertheless, there is support for the role of peer-attachment in other aspects of adolescent adjustment such as reduced likelihood of experiencing low mood (Millings, Buck, Montgomery, Spears, & Stallard, 2012) and reduced involvement in bullying (Murphy, Laible, & Augustine, 2017).

Much of the research discussed in this section was conducted in the USA. Therefore, caution must be taken when generalising the implications to YP in the UK. Laible et al., (2000)'s study was conducted in a Midwestern city in the

USA, using a sample described as 53% of European American origin, 38% Latino and 9% of other ethnic origins. Differences between USA and UK cultures and schooling systems, as well as potential cultural differences between different ethnic groups may influence expectations of friendships and parenting relationships, as well as experiences of adolescence. Therefore, this study can be used to suggest that peer-attachments may be important for social and emotional well-being of YP, but this is currently a tentative hypothesis in respect of YP in London.

A limitation of much of the previous research on friendships is that it relies on self-report data. This may limit the reliability of the findings because they rely on individuals' subjective views of themselves and might also be vulnerable to the impact of social-desirability. Nevertheless, it could be argued that self-report measures are most appropriate for understanding the very personal constructs and processes involved in friendship. This view is supported by Graber et al., (2016) who argued that self-report measures provide opportunities to explore "the 'deep' personal meanings of close friendships rather than the 'surface' observable exchanges of a given moment" (p. 353, Graber et al., 2016). The extent that such relations are protective or negative is addressed next.

### **2.6.2 Friendships as a protective factor for emotional resilience**

An individual's social and emotional outcomes are influenced by multiple factors at different levels of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Certain



factors such as poor health, marital conflict, domestic violence and low socio-economic status (SES) can put individuals at greater risk of poor outcomes, whereas certain protective factors such as positive self-concept and strong social support networks can act as protective factors that promote more positive outcomes (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004). Resilience can be seen as something that can change over time in response to risk, rather than a fixed personality characteristic (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). Therefore, it is hypothesised that resilience might be promoted through supporting development of protective factors such as friendships.

Studies of peer-attachment have suggested that adolescents' peer-relationships may be important for promoting emotional resilience in adolescents (Laible et al., 2000; Murphy et al., 2017). Friendships might serve as a protective factor that mediates the impact of risks to an adolescent's well-being. Sullivan's (1953, in Bukowski et al., 2009) early theory of friendship posited that friendship gives children a sense of well-being and validation, and that positive experiences of friendship in adolescence can protect against the impact of earlier trauma.

Research suggests that friendships are associated with greater well-being; children with friends are reported to be more self-confident, less lonely and less depressed than those without friends (Hartup, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1993). Whereas, children without friendships are at risk of experiencing

loneliness and stress (Bagwell et al., 2005; Ladd et al., 1996; Whitehouse et al., 2009a in Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2010). The positive effects of friendship may promote resilience in the face of risks. Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates (2003) found that unilateral parental decision-making (making everyday decisions for the adolescent) reported by parents in interviews, was associated with teacher-reported externalising behaviour problems in early adolescence, but that pupil self-reported friendship quality and peer-acceptance moderated the impact of this type of parenting. The implication of Lansford et al.'s (2003) findings is that high quality friendship may act as a protective factor against potential risk factors for adolescent well-being.

However, Lansford et al. (2003) did not find the same moderation effect for friendship and peer-acceptance for the correlations between externalising behaviour and the other aspects of parenting assessed (supervision and awareness, and harsh discipline). This weakens the evidence for friendship as a protective factor for reducing risk of externalising behaviour. It could be hypothesised that more moderating effects would be found for associations between risk factors (e.g. harsh discipline) and other aspects of adolescent well-being such as anxiety, low mood, and pro-social behaviours.

As with Laible's et al.'s (2000) study, Lansford et al.'s (2003) research was conducted in the USA, and so caution must be taken in generalising the conclusions to UK adolescents. Nevertheless, the methodology used in

Lansford et al.'s (2003) study has many strengths which lend validity to the findings. The study was longitudinal, with parenting factors assessed in interviews approximately two years before the pupil and teacher measures. This strengthened the conclusion that parenting impacted on later behaviour, rather than vice versa. Teacher-reported data on externalizing behaviour was also collected at the earlier time-point so that regression analysis could control for earlier externalising behaviour and it was possible to triangulate across perspectives.

In addition to exploring the role of friendship quality, Lansford et al.'s (2003) study highlighted the role of peer-group affiliation and found a stronger moderating effect for peer-group affiliation than for friendship quality. Having a wider network of friends may provide more opportunities for exposure to the positive impact of friendship than that provided by just one close friendship. An implication of this for the current research was the importance of exploring both friendship groups and best friends during interviews with YP.

Lansford et al.'s (2003) conclusions about the protective role of friendships have been further supported by more recent research. Friendship may offer protection against bullying, either by increasing social adjustment, decreasing vulnerability or through friends acting as defenders (Kendrick, Jutengren, & Stattin, 2012). A longitudinal UK study conducted in Cambridgeshire by Harmelen et al. (2016) found that friendship quality at age 14 mediated the

association between experiencing relational peer bullying in primary school and later depressive symptoms at age 17.

Harmelan et al. (2016) examined the relationships between measures of self-reported bullying by peers in primary school, friendship quality at 14 and 17 years old, and symptoms of depression at 14 and 17 years old using self-report questionnaires completed by 771 adolescents. Factor analysis of the bullying measure revealed two factors representing two type of bullying: relational verbal bullying and physical bullying. Harmelen et al. (2016) reported a mediation effect for friendship quality and concluded that friendships mediate the relationship between relational bullying and later symptoms of depression.

However, Harmelen et al.'s (2016) analysis showed that there was no significant moderating effect of friendship on the relationship between bullying and symptoms of depression. A moderating effect would mean that friendship quality influences the strength of the relationship i.e. a higher friendship quality could be predicted to weaken the relationship between previous bullying experience and later depression symptoms. Harmelen et al.'s (2016) findings suggest that this is not the case, but that friendship has a mediating effect i.e. friendship quality can be seen to explain the relationship, so that previous experience of bullying negatively affects friendship quality, which in turn has a negative impact on well-being.

Therefore, it could be argued that it is less clear whether supporting friendships for adolescents at risk (due to previous bullying experiences) would have a positive impact on their later well-being, than if a moderating effect had been found. Nevertheless, the mediational role of friendships was significant and explained 35% of the variance in the relationship between relational bullying and depressive symptoms. Therefore, it could be hypothesised that providing support for friendships could alter this relationship to promote emotional well-being.

Whilst Lansford et al.'s (2003) findings are from a USA sample and may be less representative of the experiences of YP in the UK, Harmelen et al.'s (2016) study was conducted in the UK, giving it greater external reliability when considering its findings in relation to YP in the UK. However, it should still be noted that the study was conducted in an area of above average SES that may be less representative of YP in London.

Although these studies have their limitations, when taken together, they suggest that friendship may play an important role in promoting emotional resilience for YP at risk of both internalising and externalising problems.

Graber, Turner, & Madill (2016) developed the Adolescent Friendship and Resilience Model (AFRM) to explain how having a supportive close friendship can promote resilience for adolescents. Graber et al., (2016) developed their model through a study of the associations between the perceived quality of friendship with their closest friend and self-report measures of resilience, in 409 male and female adolescents (aged 11 - 19). Participants were recruited from schools and colleges with high intake of pupils from low SES backgrounds, as they expected these pupils to have encountered challenges requiring resilience.

The model was developed through a series of regression analyses to find the model that best fit the data. The validity of the model was strengthened by Graber et al.'s (2016) method of analysis as they tested the fit of their predicted model as well as possible alternatives, resulting in a model that included only the mediating factors for which regression associations were significant. In this model, perceived friendship quality was a significant predictor for promoting effort, a supportive friendship network and constructive coping, and these mediators were positively associated with resilience, while friendship quality was a negative predictor for disengaged and externalising coping, and these mediating factors were negatively associated with resilience.

Graber et al., (2016) reported that a direct relationship between supportive friendships and resilience was not significant when compared to the indirect

model including mediators, this lends support to the significant role of the mediators in their model. In addition, the researchers tested a model of the reverse relationship in which resilience predicts friendships via the predicted mediating factors and found that this reversed model was less predictive of friendship quality than the hypothesised model was predictive of resilience, lending further support to the AFRM model.

Therefore, Graber et al.'s (2016) findings support a model which suggests that friendship promotes resilience through supporting the development of constructive coping strategies, encouraging effort, developing a supportive friendship group, and reducing development of disengaged and externalising coping strategies. The authors suggested that friendship can provide a resource for coping in the support of the close friend, as well as the wider friendship network, and promote development of coping strategies by providing a behavioural model of effective coping (e.g. through seeking support, distraction or positive reinterpretation, rather than less adaptive responses to stressors like avoidance or externalising behaviours).

Graber et al. (2016) used a large sample of 409 male and female YP which enabled them to report on gender differences in their findings. For example, they found that having a supportive close friendship network only acted as a mechanism through which perceived close friendship quality facilitated resilience in girls.

The authors suggested that this effect may not apply to boys due to their increased vulnerability to “antisocial and maladaptive behaviour” within groups. There are gender differences in the social processes of friendship networks of girls who tend to co-ruminate on problems, and friendship networks of boys which tend to reinforce antisocial behaviour (Graber et al., 2016). However, it could be argued that this may be an over-simplification of adolescent friendship, given that many adolescents will engage in mixed gender friendship networks, and it does not account for measures of the size or quality of interactions of the friendship network.

Graber et al.'s (2016) AFRM model highlighted the potential role of friendships as a protective factor and explained how this relationship might operate through aspects of friendship. The model suggests that friendship promotes constructive coping, effort, and access to a wider friendship group.

An issue with Graber et al.'s (2016) AFRM model is that it was developed using a sample of adolescents from low SES backgrounds. Although this sample was chosen for theoretical reasons (it was expected to enable measurement of resilience), it was not clear whether the model is representative of the relationship between friendship and resilience in other samples of adolescents, or whether there may be something different about the role of friendship in this sample.



It could be hypothesised that there are relevant differences between this group and the wider population of adolescents; the authors themselves suggested that “shared social, community-based, or developmental risks may be particularly responsive to peer support”. If this is the case, this sample might have showed greater impact of friendship quality than might be expected in another sample of adolescents. Alternatively, the continued exposure to risks associated with low SES for both the adolescent and their friend might limit the impact of friendship. Graber et al. (2016) suggested that further research is needed to explore the role of friendship in adolescents who are facing other types of risk factor.

Graber et al.'s (2016) AFRM model highlighted the potential role of friendships as a protective factor and explained how this relationship might operate through aspects of friendship. This has implications for the current research; it was important to explore whether friendships support resilience for a sample of adolescents facing different risk factors (those associated with SPCD).

### **2.6.3 Is friendship always a protective factor?**

Friendships may be protective but might not *always* have a protective role. Membership of a friendship group can have potentially negative impact on well-being through promoting co-rumination about the problem (this tends to be seen in girls) or reinforcement of antisocial behaviour (which tends to be seen in boys) (Graber et al., 2016). Adolescents might view themselves as

having positive friendships, despite these involving disengagement or externalizing behaviours (e.g. shared substance abuse) (Graber et al., 2016).

Lansford et al.'s (2003) study (discussed above) included a measure of adolescents' perception of their friends' and peer groups' antisocial behaviour. Participants were asked to rate how often their best friend and their peer group engaged in the described behaviour, for 5 items describing antisocial behaviours such as fighting with other children. They found that perceptions of peer groups' and best friends' antisocial behaviour was a moderating factor for the relationship between harsh parental discipline and externalising behaviour, suggesting that friendships can increase the risk of externalising behavioural problems if those friends are engaging in anti-social behaviours.

An unexpected finding from Lansford et al. (2003) was that for adolescents who experienced high levels of unilateral parental decision-making and low supervision and awareness from parents, positive peer relationships with peers that they perceived as highly antisocial was found to be a protective factor against externalising behaviour. Lansford et al. (2003) suggested that these YP might benefit from having a group of friends to share problems with, even if they viewed them as "anti-social", and that this might help them to avoid engaging in negative behaviours.

Therefore, it is important to consider that adolescent friendships are complex, and simply having friendships may not be enough to promote resilience and well-being. Thus any attempts to promote friendship-building should consider how to foster friendships that are supportive and promote effective coping. At the same time, it could be argued that the findings suggest the importance of including the YP's views, because the benefits of a friendship for that individual YP may not be clear to an outside observer.

In summary, friendships may be protective but might not *always* have a protective role for adolescents. The following section will discuss the potential role of friendships for YP with SPCD.

## **2.7 Could friendships promote resilience in YP with SPCD?**

Friendships may act as a protective factor for YP with SPCD, as they offer opportunities to develop social understanding, practise social skills and access emotional support (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010). It is hypothesised that YP with SPCD who have received support to develop friendships, within an inclusive school that promotes peer-acceptance, will have greater likelihood of positive SEMH outcomes.

There is a lack of research into friendship in YP with SPCD, but research in YP with other communication difficulties suggests that additional factors, such

as social support, can mediate the relationship between language difficulties and emotional well-being (Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008). Conti-Ramsden & Botting (2008) reported higher risk of anxiety and depression in YP with Language Impairment but found that language ability at 7 years was not a significant predictor for development of anxiety and depression in later life. Conti-Ramsden and Botting (2008) concluded that the relationship between language difficulties and emotional outcomes may not be a directly causal association. Additional factors may mediate the impact of language difficulties on emotional outcomes. Durkin & Conti-Ramsden (2010) suggested that other variables such as a young person's level of self-help skills, ability to compensate for difficulties, past experiences and social support might mediate this relationship. It could be hypothesised that this would also be the case for YP with SPCD; risks and protective factors might mediate the relationship between social communication difficulties and emotional resilience.

Therefore, friendships may have a potentially protective role for YP with SPCD. Research is needed to explore potential protective factors, such as friendships, that might feasibly be supported in order to promote the social and emotional well-being of YP with SPCD.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

There is a growing body of evidence showing that YP with SPCD are at greater risk of SEMH problems than their peers. It is acknowledged that behavioural

problems are likely to stem from underlying SEMH needs, so the association between communication difficulties and behaviour indicates an association with SEMH. Therefore, there is a need to understand the social and emotional experiences of these YP. Furthermore, SPCD is a relatively new category, and further research is required to understand the needs of this group.

Risks and protective factors in each individual YP's environment may influence how their needs affect their social and emotional well-being. Research is needed to understand the potential risk and protective factors for these YP. This thesis explored friendships as one potential protective factor for YP with SPCD that might be supported to promote their social and emotional well-being.

Much of the previous research into SPCD has focussed on primary-school-aged pupils and has predominantly relied on analysis of quantitative data. Therefore, little is known about adolescents with SPCD, and there is a gap in qualitative understanding of these YP's experiences. The current study aimed to take a qualitative approach to exploring the views of YP themselves to gain greater insight into the nature of their SEMH needs and experiences. This may enable EPs to promote more effective holistic intervention and support tailored to these YP's needs.

## **2.9 Research Questions:**

- 1. What are the views of young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties on their friendships and related aspects of emotional wellbeing?*
- 2. In what ways do schools support the friendships of young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties?*
- 3. In what ways do secondary school staff understand social pragmatic communication difficulties and how does the school address these needs?*

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This chapter will explain my epistemological perspective and the rationale for the qualitative case study design. It will outline the research design and method, how I ensured the trustworthiness of findings, and details of ethical considerations.

### **3.1 Research Design**

This research aimed to understand the friendship experiences of YP with SPCD, through exploration of their views on these experiences, complemented by the perspectives of their parents and the professionals who work with them (Learning Support Assistants and the SENCO).

The study used a qualitative multiple case study design using semi-structured interview data.

#### **3.1.1 Rationale for Qualitative Case Study Design**

A qualitative design was used because qualitative methods enable detailed exploration (Yardley, 2000) and can give a rich, contextually sensitive and meaningful description of the experiences of participants (Henwood, 1996 in Richardson, 1996). Although this design does not allow for generalisation beyond the sample, it enabled deeper insight into the often unheard views of a group of YP with SPCD. Qualitative methods allow for data in the form of broad and flexible natural language, rather than the finite descriptive choices provided by measures used to collect quantitative data (Hammersley, 1996 in Richardson, 1996). Therefore, qualitative data was likely to better represent

the complexity of participant's perspectives in a non-restricted way that invited new understanding.

A case study design was chosen because it enabled me to capture a holistic understanding of the complex contextual conditions that are important in explaining "real world" cases (Yin, 2014), such as of the experiences of YP with social communication difficulties.

The aim of this research was to:

- (a) bring together multiple sources of evidence from the YP's views, and the views of their parents and professionals who know them,
- (b) develop an understanding of the experiences of each YP,
- (c) look at this experience from different perspectives.

The use of multiple case studies enabled comparison of similarities and differences across cases, which allowed for development of implications for supporting friendships and well-being, based on both common themes and consideration of individual differences, as well as contextual differences occurring between cases.

A limitation of this design was that it used a small sample and the data will not generalise beyond the specific context of the school involved. Nevertheless, although small scale research may not yield a complete and fully-generalisable explanation, it can be used to present different perspectives and new ways of understanding (Yardley, 2000). This study aimed to provide an



insight into the perspectives of individuals within their social and cultural context, and present transferable findings that offer possible starting points for EPs, which may be adapted to support YP with social communication difficulties beyond the context of this study. Therefore, it hoped to identify issues and elements to inform work in the field.

### **3.1.3 Epistemological Perspective**

This research took a constructivist stance using a qualitative participatory methodology. According to a constructivist perspective, knowledge is socially constructed, and is time and context dependent (Mertens, 2015). Events and concepts mean different things to different individuals or groups at different times (Burr, 2003). For example, the concept of “friendship” is a construct that is understood differently by different individuals, in different cultures and across time periods. Therefore, constructivist research seeks to give a balanced representation of individuals’ views on reality. This study acknowledged that the experiences of the YP involved may differ from what has been said or written about them by others, and sought to understand their experiences from multiple perspectives, to present a balanced representation of the participants’ views.

An issue with this perspective is its vulnerability to challenges to trustworthiness and authenticity. The researcher interacts with participants to create meanings (Mertens, 2015). Although the aim of constructivist research is to develop understanding from the participant’s perspective, it is possible that participants do not fully understand their experiences (Mertens, 2015).

Constructivism acknowledges different perspectives, but for the researcher to form conclusions they must make judgments about which narratives to follow. Therefore, the researcher must be clear about their own values and how these influence their analysis (Mertens, 2015). I endeavoured to be transparent and reflexive about the impact of personal values (see section 3.7 Reflexivity), and took steps to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (see section 3.6 Ensuring Trustworthiness).

A constructivist view fits with my theoretical perspective which draws on resilience theory (Masten & Powell, 2010) as a theoretical lens through which to explore the role of friendships in YP with social pragmatic communication difficulties. Resilience is seen as a social construct that is understood differently by different individuals, groups and cultures. I believe that an individual's experience of a particular risk or protective factor will be influenced by their socially constructed view of the value and role of that factor.

One of the challenges to applying resilience theory is that it necessitates a value-laden judgement on what constitutes resilience, risk and adversity (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). I endeavoured to use the participant's own judgments about their experiences, but it must be acknowledged that this was reliant on my interpretations of the participant's accounts.

I took an ecological view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of resilience whereby risk and protective factors can come from different levels of the systems operating in the context. Therefore, I took the position that YP's experiences of their

social communication needs, their friendships, and their social and emotional well-being are socially constructed through their interactions with systems in their context.

This ecological model does not take account of an individual's strengths and capacity for resilience; it does not explain how an individual may achieve positive outcomes despite risk factors in the systems around them (Christensen, 2016). This thesis focussed on friendship as a potential protective factor in the young person's microsystem, but it also acknowledged their individual strengths in terms of their personality and social skills.

This study sought to understand these experiences by constructing case studies that brought together views from each YP and from the home and school systems around them. This was achieved through a systematic process of triangulation of the views expressed, which enabled the development of a rich and comprehensive account of each case. Social constructivism acknowledges that different individuals and groups will experience constructs differently depending on their interpretations. Therefore, I saw each individual YP's experience as different. This study aimed to both capture individual stories through case studies, while also developing broader understandings constructed from multiple perspectives to encompass the complex interactions involved.

## **3.2 Sample**

The sample came from one mainstream secondary school with a specialist provision for pupils with SLCN, in an inner-city London borough. In this London borough, 40% of the population were White British or Irish, 15% were from other White backgrounds, approximately one third of the population were Black African, Caribbean or from other Black backgrounds, and 8.4% were from Asian backgrounds (Local Authority X, 2016). The school population in the current study is thus more ethnically diverse than the wider population, with 14.6% of pupils in schools coming from White British backgrounds (Local Authority X, 2016). This school prioritises provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the Inclusion department is central to the school, which contributes to an inclusive ethos. Therefore, this school provided a useful context to explore views on effective provision.

### ***3.2.1 Young people participants***

#### ***3.2.1.1 Sampling Criteria***

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to identify information-rich cases through consultation with the school's SENCO and SALT. A disadvantage of this was that selection was not random and may have been skewed towards pupils who stand out more due to their social difficulties. Nevertheless, it enabled accurate identification by professionals who both knew the pupils well and understood the selection criteria. This arguably enhanced the reliability and ecological validity of their judgements.

The following selection criteria were developed based on the research questions:

- Secondary school pupils
- Referred to the SALT
- On a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support Plan (the stage before an Education, Health and Care Plan in the graduated approach to SEN provision).
- With a clinical diagnosis of “Social Communication Disorder”, or associated descriptive label from a relevant professional e.g. “pragmatic language difficulties” or “social communication difficulties”, or whose described language and communication need meets the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for “Social Communication Disorder” (i.e. persistent difficulties with social verbal and non-verbal communication in the *absence* of rigid, restricted and repetitive interests, behaviours and activities). Selection criteria were written following discussion with a community SALT, to take issues with diagnostic terminology into consideration (see section 1.2).

### **3.2.1.2 Exclusion Criteria**

Pupils who had received a diagnosis other than SPCD that would explain their social communication needs (for example ASD, Global Developmental Delay or a medical condition) were not included in the sample. This meant that YP’s presenting social communication needs were not attributable to another known diagnosis.

However, pupils with other additional SEN (e.g. Dyslexia) were not excluded from the study. This is because I acknowledged that YP with SPCD are at risk of other SEN such as literacy difficulties (Freed, Adams, & Lockton, 2011). All YP with communication needs are at risk of difficulties related to SEMH and education (Bercow, 2018). Therefore, it is acknowledged that YP with SPCD may have additional identified needs, and it would be inappropriate to exclude their views.

Two participants had English as an Additional Language (EAL) status which might contribute to their difficulties with aspects of communication. However, exclusion of these YP was deemed unnecessary because both pupils were reported to be fluent in English (Level E is the highest level of EAL proficiency on the scale from A to E where A is “new to English”; Department for Education). Additionally, there is a high prevalence of EAL in the inner-city London school context, therefore it was deemed appropriate to represent EAL pupils in the sample.

### ***3.2.1.3 Participant details***

The participants were 6 young people aged between 12 and 14 years old in Years 8, 9 and 10 of a secondary school in an inner-city London borough (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Participant details**

Name	Age	Gender	School Year	Ethnic Background	First Language	EAL Proficiency Level	Additional Needs (other than social communication)
Ellen	13	Female	8	Mixed	Turkish	E (fluent)	Dyslexia
Sacha	13	Female	8	White and Asian	Arabic	E (fluent)	None reported
Sarah	13	Female	9	Black African	English and Somali	N/A	Social and emotional needs, literacy and numeracy support
Spencer	14	Female	9	White and Black Caribbean	English	N/A	Literacy and numeracy support
Jason	14	Male	10	Black African	English	N/A	None reported
Tom	12	Male	8	White British	English	N/A	Literacy support

Note: Names have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.

As shown by Table 1, participants were from a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and had various needs in addition to their SPCD.

### ***3.2.2 Parent/carer participants***

Four of the YP participants' parent/carers gave written consent to take part in parent interviews. However, one parent/carer was unable to interview due to unforeseen health reasons. The mothers of three YP took part in interviews.

### ***3.2.3 School staff participants***

For each YP participant, the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) who spends most time with the pupil took part in an interview. In addition, the SENCo was interviewed to gain additional data on the school context.

### **3.3 Procedure**

#### **3.3.1 Participant Recruitment**

The Head Teacher of the chosen secondary school was contacted to invite participation in the study. Once consent was gained, I contacted the SENCo, who identified pupils who met the criteria for inclusion in the study, in consultation with the SALT. The SENCo made contact with the parents of identified pupils and sent out parent and YP information sheets and consent forms requesting participation (See Appendix 2).

#### **3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews were used because they can yield rich and insightful qualitative data; linguistic communication can offer unique perspectives on people's viewpoints and actions (Robson, 2011). A semi-structured approach was taken to enable flexibility of questioning, which allowed me to adapt questions to individual participants and follow up on interesting responses.

Interview schedules were developed for each participant type (see Appendix 4) with the aim of eliciting their views on the YP's friendships and related experiences, and of support for their needs. Staff interviews also contained questions designed to elicit contextual information and understanding of SPCD. I used open questions (e.g. Can you tell me about her friendships?), because this type of question allows for in-depth answers and broader representation of the respondent's viewpoint, and may lead to unexpected insights (Robson, 2011). I also used closed questions to support respondents



through prompts, or to summarise or seek clarification. Interview questions were refined following piloting (see 3.4.4. Piloting).

### **3.3.3 Activity-oriented interviews**

An inclusive methodology was developed through an activity-oriented interview designed to support the YP to engage with the interview and communicate their views. Activity-oriented interviewing refers to the use of activities and exercises to supplement questioning (Colucci, 2007). An activity-oriented method was used because this approach has been found to promote engagement and facilitate communication for YP with communication needs, leading to more insightful findings (Winstone, Huntington, Goldsack, Kyrou, & Millward, 2014).

There are limitations to using an activity-oriented approach; it can be more difficult to compare and interpret pupil's responses without a fixed interview structure, activity-oriented interviews take more time to conduct than standard interviews, and some participants may be more reluctant to take part if they find activities difficult or uncomfortable (Colucci, 2007). I sought to overcome this by giving participants choices about which activities they completed and how they completed them (e.g. writing, drawing, choosing cards or orally), to support participation. This approach elicited rich data, and was consistent with the use of the case study design which allowed for individual differences to be presented.

It is the dialogue elicited through participation in the activities, rather than the content of the completed activities, which is the main focus of activity-oriented interviews (Colucci, 2007). Therefore, the data came from transcription of the interview dialogue, encouraged by the activities used which nonetheless were noted as they constituted contextual data around the interviews.

I developed a schedule of interview questions and related activities in consultation with my supervisors, and through trialling /piloting of a wider range of tools designed to elicit the views of YP in EP practice. The interviews were semi-structured; a structure was provided by the schedule of activities and questions, but was adapted to suit individuals. Additional questions were used to follow up individual participant's responses. This was important in to engage the YP and allow them some control over the direction of the conversation.

Use of a semi-structured approach enabled me to adapt activities to the participant's preferences, while aiming to ensure sufficient coverage of questions related to the research questions. For example, one participant (Jason) spoke at length and gave detailed and relevant responses to questions asked in the first two activities. It was pertinent to ask follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the views he shared, rather than rushing to get through the interview schedule.

The interview aimed to elicit the YP's views and experiences of friendship and peer interactions, related aspects of their social and emotional wellbeing, and

what supports them. This was achieved through questioning during completion of the following participatory activities summarised below:

### Strength Cards 1:

The participant is asked to sort picture cards (Strength Cards - ELSA Support, 2013) showing different “Strengths” used to describe people (e.g. brave, playful, helpful) into “Like Me” and “Not Like Me” (see Figure 2). They are asked questions linked to their responses, for example: “Tell me about when you were... (e.g. brave)”, “How did you get to be brave?”, “Are there any that you would like to be?” and “What could help you be...?” This activity builds rapport, and elicits views of self and others, and can lead to discussion of what /who helps them and how.

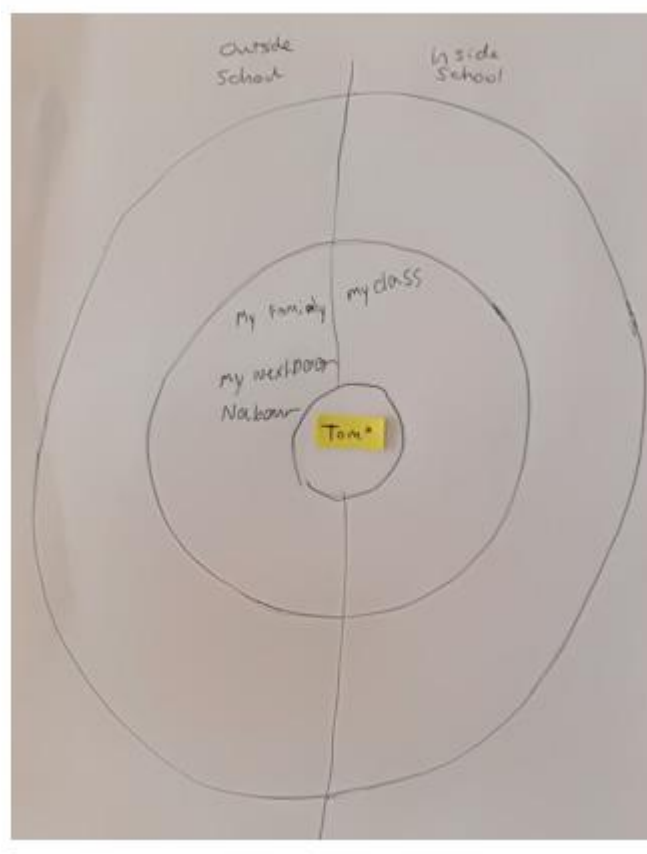
**Figure 2: Strength Cards 1 example**



### Relationship Circles:

The interviewer draws three concentric circles and explains that the inner circle represents the participant, the middle circle is for their closest/most important friends, and the outer circle is for friends who are still important but less close to them. The circles are divided into “Inside school” and “Outside School” (see Figure 3). During this activity, they are asked questions about these friends to elicit their views, both positive and negative, on their friendships and other peer relationships. Positive and negative views were recorded on different coloured sticky notes (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Relationship Circles example**



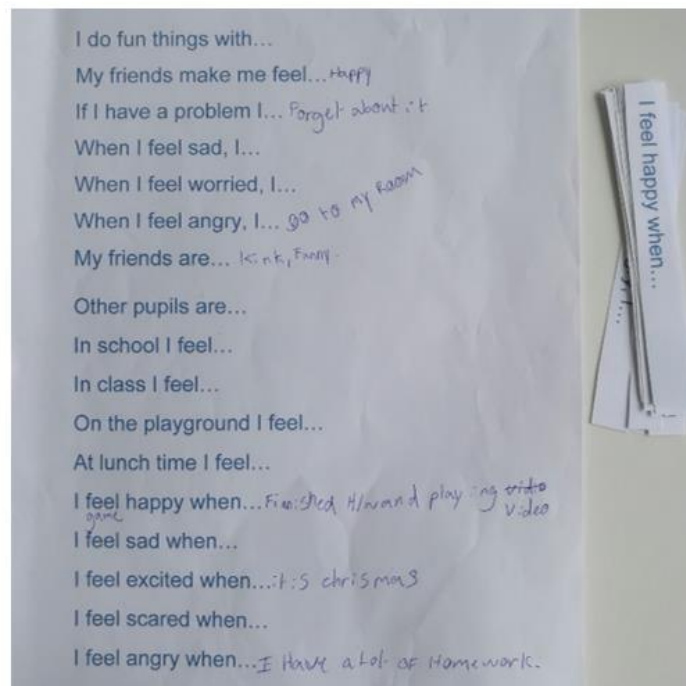
**Figure 4: Example of YP views about friends recorded on sticky notes**



Sentence Completion:

The participant chooses whether to complete the “fill in the gap” worksheet (see Figure 5), or to complete sentences verbally. Sentence starters have been written based on questions in the research literature on friendships, and designed to elicit views on friendship, social and emotional wellbeing, and support.

**Figure 5: Sentence Completion example**



Blob People:

Participants look at pictures taken from Blob School (Wilson & Long, 2015) and are asked if any of the Blobs are like them or their friends, if there are any they would like to be, or any that look like a good friend. They are also asked if any make them feel happy, sad or worried, which can lead to discussion of when they feel sad or worried, and what or who can help them.

**Figure 6: Blob People example page**



Ideal Friend (based on the Ideal Self; Moran, 2001):

This activity used a script adapted from Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2001). Participants draw and write (or instruct the interviewer on what to draw/write) their responses to questions about what makes a good friend, and what makes a bad friend. The interviewer then draws a scale between the good and bad friend drawings/descriptions (see Figure 7) and asks the participant scaling questions, for example:

Where would you rate your friends now?

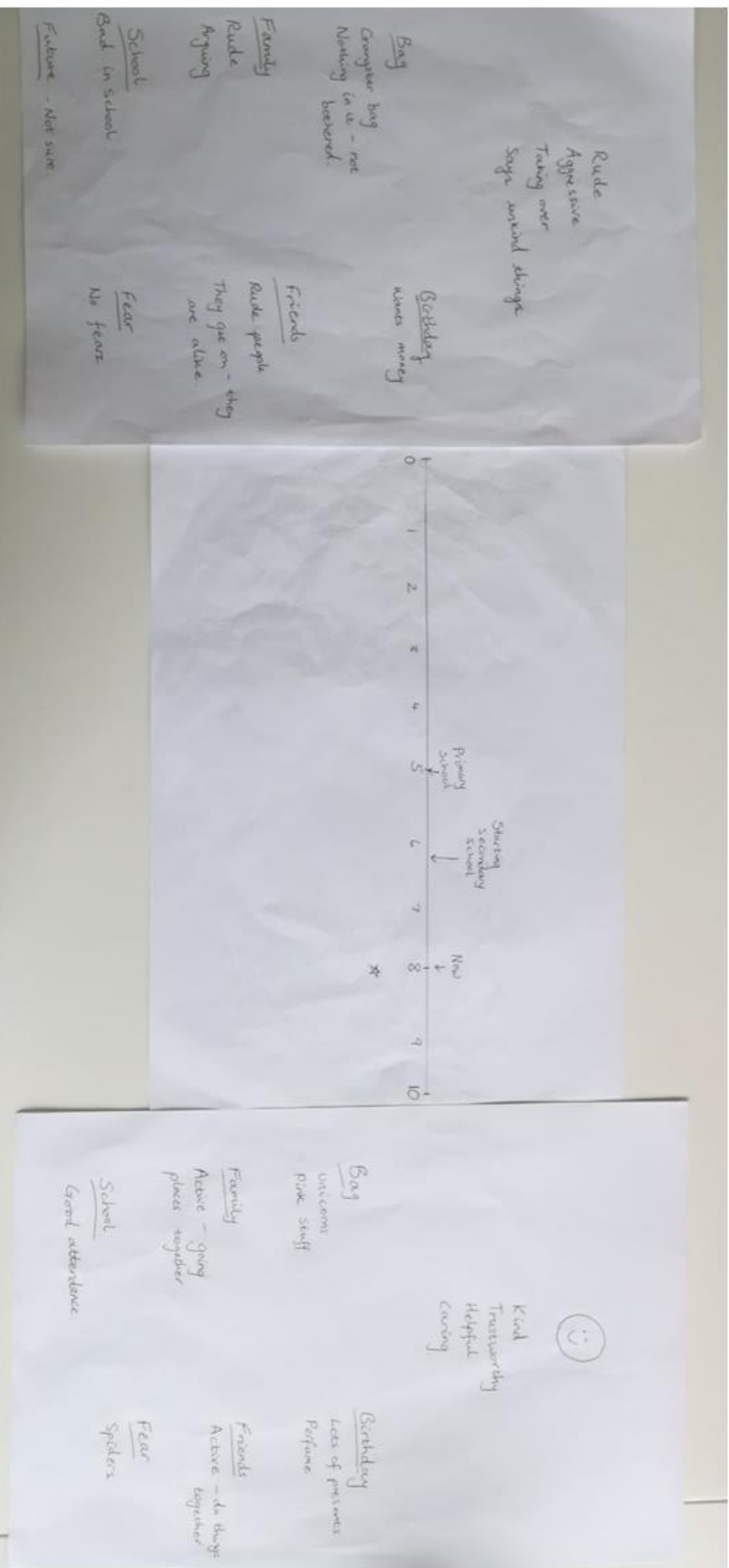
What makes your friends an 8?

What would need to change to move from an 8 to a 10?

Who or what could help?

This activity is used to elicit views on the role of friendship, on current friendship quality and can lead to discussion of what/who can help with friendships.

Figure 7: Ideal Friend example





### Strength Cards 2 - Good Friend:

The participant is asked to pick 5 Strength Cards to show the most important strengths for a good friend. They are asked follow-up questions about their choices e.g. “What is good about having a friend who is...?” to elicit their views on the role of friendship.

**Figure 8: Strength Cards 2 example**



### **3.3.4 Piloting**

I piloted the parent interview with the parent of a YP with SPCD who was not included in the main study, and piloted the staff interview with a teacher who had a YP with these needs in their class. Piloting of the parent interview helped me to develop lists of prompts to support parents if they had difficulty answering more open questions. For example, the parent said she was not sure what she found helpful for supporting her son’s friendships and wellbeing, but was able to describe various factors once I asked if anything at school or in the community supported him (e.g. work experience in his community helped him develop confidence).

Prompts were used in the pilot teacher interview and were found to encourage greater detail to her answers. For example, I asked whether the pupil had any additional needs apart from their communication needs, and the use of prompts ensured that the teacher included detail on her pupil's SEMH needs as well as learning difficulties.

The interview schedule including participatory activities was piloted with two YP with SPCD who attend a different secondary school in the same inner-London borough as the main study. Draft information sheets and consent forms were also used and discussed with the YP to ensure understanding. Piloting of the YP activity-oriented interview led to some adaptations to further support communication, such as the inclusion of visual vocabulary on one page so it could be easily referred to (Appendix 5).

### **3.3.4 Data Collection: Conducting Interviews**

All participants received an Information Sheet prior to the interview, and YP were given a "pupil-friendly" version (Appendix 2). I explained the purpose of the interview, consent, and right to withdraw or leave out any section of the interview at the beginning of the interview. Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone, with the participant's permission. All interviews were conducted in a private room, which was familiar to the YP. They were given the option to ask for a familiar adult to come with them, although none requested this option. Initial rapport building questions were used to make participants comfortable before the interview.

Parent interviews were conducted at a time of their preference, following an initial telephone conversation to confirm understanding of the research and consent. Parents were offered a telephone interview to minimise barriers to participation, and all three parents chose this option due to work/family commitments. Telephone interviews were conducted on speakerphone in a private room, and recorded on a Dictaphone.

I used principles of active listening, presenting questions in a simple and non-threatening way, and showing interest and enjoyment to promote participant engagement and sharing (Robson, 2011).

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Education, University College London (Appendix 3).

#### **3.4.1 Informed consent.**

All participants were informed of the aims and procedure of the interviews and their right to withdraw from the process at any time. Written consent was given by all participants before taking part. Additional steps were taken to ensure the YP's informed consent (see Section 3.4.2).

Whilst conducting this research, I was also a Trainee EP for the Local Authority, which may have influenced participant's willingness to consent. I attempted to reduce the impact of this by conducting the study in a school which I was not linked to in my EP role.

### **3.4.2 Vulnerability of young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties.**

YP participants were vulnerable both because they are children and because of their SPCD. Children are less able than adults to protect their own interests (Farrell, 2005 in Merrick, 2011). The communication needs of the YP involved meant it was more challenging to ensure understanding of the procedure and their right to withdraw. Consent was sought from parents initially, and then from the YP themselves. I explained the interview activities, and reassured them that they could choose not to participate without consequence. I involved parents/carers when gaining consent to facilitate understanding. Even when it is not possible to gain fully informed consent from YP, it is ethical to establish their “assent” to participate (Morris, 2003). Therefore, I continued to monitor the YP’s willingness to participate throughout the process.

The research was not intended to cause harm and aimed to develop understanding and support for the needs of this population. It was intended to promote the ethical practice of respect for YP’s own views. Nevertheless, as YP in the sample may experience SEMH problems, it was important to ensure that they felt comfortable and did not experience emotional harm as a result of their participation.

To put participants at ease, I suggested that they may wish to have a familiar adult with them during interviews, although none of the YP who participated

chose to have this. I sent an information sheet before the interview to be shared with the YP to reduce any anxiety that might arise beforehand. I monitored the YP's responses for signs of distress or anxiety, offered breaks, and reminded them of their right to withdraw from the study. However, this was not found to be necessary as none showed signs of distress.

Two participants indicated that they would like to leave once the current lesson was over, so I checked that they were happy to continue until then, and checked lesson timings in order to finish at their preferred time. The LSA who collected and introduced the YP to me reported that they all seemed to have enjoyed participating.

My previous role as a teacher in a Specialist Provision for children with SLCN means that I have an awareness and understanding of the needs of this population which I applied to support their participation.

It was essential to the research and to ensuring ethical practice, that participants' views have been understood and reported accurately. I took a reflexive approach to listening by acknowledging that "truly listening to children means being prepared to be surprised by them" (Merrick, 2011). The study used a participatory approach (Clark, 2001) i.e. YP were invited to check,

review and discuss their interview transcripts and guide my interpretations during feedback interviews.

### **3.4.3 Sensitivity of topic.**

It is possible that the YP and their parents may have experienced discomfort when discussing peer-relationships. In some cases, YP recalled experiences that had caused previous emotional distress (e.g. bullying incidents). I was sensitive to this and used consultation skills developed as a Trainee EP to show empathy, elicit their problem-solving strategies and signpost them to further support if appropriate.

Use of an unstructured interview method allowed for deviations from the interview schedule when appropriate to protect the wellbeing of participants. Participants were assured that the data collected would be kept anonymously and confidentially (unless a safeguarding concern had arisen, in which case school safeguarding procedures would have been followed).

Participants may have felt discomfort about being recorded, therefore their permission to be recorded was obtained, and they could choose not to be recorded if they did not wish to be. Participants were assured that recordings would be kept confidentially and used only for this research. Following the feedback interview, participants were offered an opportunity for a de-briefing

in which to discuss the research and ask questions and were given contact details for any follow-up concerns.

#### **3.4.4 Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection.**

Data was encrypted and stored anonymously to maintain confidentiality, and remains anonymous in this report. Pseudonyms (chosen by the YP) have been used to protect their identities. Names of parents and staff members have not been reported. Consent forms were stored separately from the data, and names were removed from interview transcripts.

#### **3.5 Data analysis**

The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to search for themes within the data. The activities supplemented the interviews, so they were not analysed separately but rather as part of the interview data. Thematic analysis was used because it is a flexible approach that can be inductive i.e. the themes are strongly linked to the data, or deductive i.e. the themes are driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility was appropriate for the current study because the research questions guided the coding process deductively, but it was also important to allow for the identification of unexpected themes from the data.

However, thematic analysis has limitations. It requires the researcher to make their own judgements about the data, and can allow for a lack of consistency

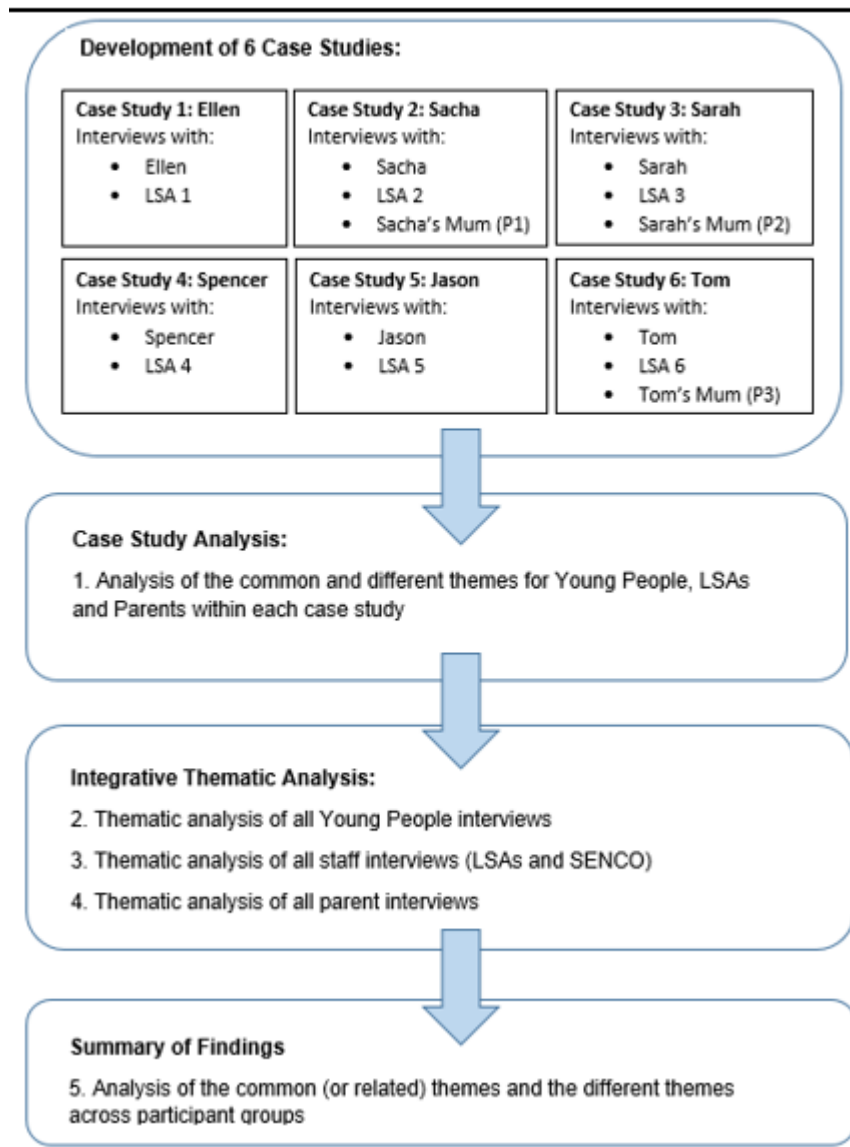
and rigour in the development of the themes (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In the current study, it is acknowledged that I have influenced the analysis of findings. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to ensure the credibility through peer checking, and consistency by using a consistent theoretical perspective (of ecological resilience).

The use of thematic analysis fits with the constructivist perspective of the research, as thematic analysis can be used to explore how different narratives influence events, meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It also allows for triangulation of different perspectives through analysis of the common and different themes found across participant types.

A multiple case study analysis was used, where the unit of analysis was the young person (Yin, 2014). Figure 9 illustrates the sequence of analysis. Step 1 (see Figure 9) involved analysis of each individual case (interview data from each young person, parent and TA), followed by drawing the cases together through analysis of similarities and differences of themes relevant to each case, taking account of their differing contexts. This case study analysis was followed by analysis by participant type i.e. thematic analysis of each set of transcripts for each group (YP, parents and staff - a triangulation approach), as shown in steps 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 9.



**Figure 9. Overview of multiple case study design and integrative analysis**



The order of coding i.e. all YP interviews first, then all staff interviews, and finally all parent interviews (steps 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 9) ensured that YP's views were prioritised with reduced influence from other perspectives, and permitted the analysis within and across case studies and across participant types. The following is a description of the thematic analysis process applied to each transcript.

Thematic analysis of the transcribed interview data was conducted following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following transcription, the transcripts were read thoroughly until I had developed familiarity with the data. The Transcripts were then coded using NVivo software (*NVivo qualitative data analysis Software, 2012*). A complete coding approach was used to ensure coverage of all data, and transcripts were coded thoroughly and systematically, rather than anecdotally, to ensure authenticity. Coding was guided by the research questions so that transcripts were coded for any content broadly related to the research questions.

Once all of the interview transcripts had been coded, the individual case studies were developed (see the first box in Figure 9 which illustrates the development of the 6 case studies). For each case, the codes were collated into categories of codes representing similar or related ideas (see Appendix 7: Example of coding table). At this stage these categories represented linked codes within the individual participant's transcript (although many of these categories formed the basis for themes in the later integrative thematic analysis i.e. if the category was common across different participants). The case studies were constructed using the categories (and their related codes) for each participant relevant to the case (e.g. YP, LSA and parent). This has been presented in a narrative style in the Findings chapter, in order to tell the story from each perspective. Within each case study, the categories and codes for each of the different participants were analysed to search for similarities

and differences across perspectives (see Step 1 in Figure 9), and a summary of these findings has been presented at the end of each case study.

Following the case study analysis, an integrative thematic analysis was used to search for themes across individual participants within each participant type (YP, parents and staff). At this stage, I returned to the original coded transcripts for each participant type, which ensured inclusion of relevant data which was not included in the case study analysis (e.g. staff comments on their broader understanding of SPCD not specifically related to the YP discussed in the case study). I also included the SENCo interview data in the thematic analysis of staff themes.

Codes were collated into initial themes using handwritten mind maps to organise the codes into potential themes and sub-themes, which were then reviewed again in relation to each transcript and its data set (steps 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 9). Following this review process, tables of themes were developed to represent the themes and sub-themes (see Appendix 8: example table of themes). Themes were then refined, named and described according to their contents. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that identification of themes should not depend on quantity of occurrence but on whether the theme represents an important idea in relation to the research questions. Therefore, themes were assembled according to patterns identified in relation to the guiding research questions. Finally, the resulting themes were analysed to see if there were similarities and/or differences in the different themes for each participant type (step 5 in Figure 9).

### **3.6 Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Small-scale case study research is open to criticism in terms of the reliability and validity of the findings. It is not possible to replicate the identical circumstances and context of the study (Robson, 2011). Nevertheless, constructivist researchers seek to ensure “confirmability rather than objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, in Mertens, 2015) so that the findings represent the participants and their contexts. Furthermore, “theoretical generalisation” means that findings from this study may be used to inform understanding in other comparable contexts (Robson, 2011).

I took several steps to enhance trustworthiness of the findings. This included ensuring dependability by maintaining accurate records of the research process in a research diary, recording interviews on a Dictaphone and checking the accuracy of transcriptions.

The credibility of findings was enhanced through feedback interviews and member-checking of the interview transcripts with the YP to ensure correspondence between their views and my understanding of them. A member-check interview was conducted with each YP. This is an interactive approach in which the participant can review their transcript, and confirm or modify their views (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I supported member-checking by reading the transcripts with the YP, and showing the visuals used and activities completed in their original interviews. Member-

checking fits with the constructivist epistemology when used to enable participants to reconstruct their narrative (Birt et al., 2016).

Data and coding were checked by two peers (Trainee EP colleagues) and my research supervisor, to establish confirmability of the findings. A transcript for each participant type (YP, parent and LSA) was shared with peer-reviewers who coded the transcript independently. The codes were then discussed. There was an agreement between reviewers and myself (codes used similar wording or it was agreed that they conveyed the same meaning). Potential themes and sub-themes were also shared with Trainee EP colleagues and supervisors which ensured that others agreed with my interpretation and analysis of the data.

### **3.7 Reflexivity**

In line with a constructivist perspective, I acknowledge that my interpretations influence the research findings, and that the research process involved interactions between myself and the participants (Mertens, 2015). As a Trainee EP working within the same London Borough as the school, I had preconceptions about the school and its local context. I took steps to enhance authenticity, such as conducting the study in a school that I am not linked to in the EP role, but acknowledge that my position as a professional working for the Local Authority may have influenced participants' perceptions of me. Nevertheless, an understanding of the local context and wider community was useful in building rapport with participants and interpreting findings in context.

This study used semi-structured interviews, in which the questions used have inevitably been influenced by my previous professional experience. Nevertheless, the interview questions were developed following a review of the literature, and adapted in response to piloting, and were continually adapted to the individual conversations that took place throughout the interview process. Yardley (2000) has argued that it is impossible for a researcher to remain “neutral” when conducting an interview, and that attempting to do so would result in unnatural interactions. I endeavoured to help participants feel relaxed and comfortable throughout my interviews, and engaged with their stories and emotional reactions to them, as is an inevitable consequence of the communicative process. Although the participant-researcher relationship might limit “objectivity”, I found it conducive to openness from participants. My relationships with the YP were enhanced by repeated engagement through feedback interviews. This was an essential aspect of the research process, in order to ensure that I represented their views, and was also a rewarding experience because of the appreciation showed by the YP when given the opportunity to ensure their views were accurately heard.

Similarly, I acknowledge the active role of the researcher in thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) have argued that themes do not “emerge” passively from the data, as the researcher plays an active role. My analysis required active identification of themes relevant to the research questions.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

This chapter will present the findings for each individual case study, including data from the young person (YP), their LSA, and their parent (for those cases where it was possible to collect parent data). LSA and parent perspectives will be used to triangulate the views of the YP. This section will give the background to each case, followed by a description of the data found through analysis of each interview, and then present a summary of commonalities and differences in views from the young person, their parent and their LSA within each case. The chapter will then present an overall summary of the six cases, followed by an integrative thematic analysis of common themes found for each participant type (YP, parent, LSA). The chapter will conclude by triangulating these themes, by presenting a summary of the commonalities and differences in themes across all three participant types.

Throughout this chapter, quotations will be used to illustrate the issues discussed. Quotes from YP are referenced by their chosen pseudonyms. Parents and staff are referenced by participant type (LSA, SENCO or P for parent) and participant number (i.e. P1 is parent 1). Table 2 shows which parent and LSA corresponds with each case.

Although potential gender differences were considered, I did not identify any clear themes that linked the two boys and differentiated them from the four girls, or vice versa. Therefore I have not presented any analysis regarding gender.

## 4.1 Case Studies

For each case study, the YP interview focussed on their views on friendship and related aspects of their emotional well-being. LSA interviews focussed on their perspective on the social and emotional presentation of the YP and the support needed in school. Where possible, parent views were also sought to provide the parental perspective on these issues in the home context.

**Table 2: Contextual information on participants.**

Name	Age	Gender	School Year	Additional Needs or Factors (other than social communication)	Class Type	Adults interviewed
Ellen	13	Female	8	Dyslexia	Supported Curriculum	LSA1
Sacha	13	Female	8	Young Carer	Reduced class size	LSA2 and mother (P1)
Sarah	13	Female	9	Social and emotional needs, literacy and numeracy support	Supported Curriculum	LSA3 and mother (P2)
Spencer	14	Female	9	Literacy and numeracy support Young Carer	Supported Curriculum	LSA4
Jason	14	Male	10	None reported	Mainstream	LSA5
Tom	12	Male	8	Literacy support Adopted aged 7	Supported Curriculum	LSA6 and mother (P3)

Note: Participants are identified using pseudonyms rather than actual names.

Key contextual information about the case studies is presented in Table 2. Note that four of the pupils are in Supported Curriculum Classes. These are classes for pupils with SEND. They provide an adapted curriculum and a reduced class size of approximately 15 pupils (mainstream classes have



approximately 30 pupils). These classes have an LSA who provides support in all lessons, and have additional LSAs to support in core subjects.

Two of the pupils are reported to be Young Carers. Young Carers are pupils identified as providing support to a relative with a disability or health condition.

### **Case Study 1: Ellen**

As can be seen in Table 2, Ellen has a diagnosis of Dyslexia in addition to her SPCD. She is in a Supported Curriculum class which means that her classmates have a range of SEND.

#### **Ellen's View:**

Ellen described her friendships in terms of having two "*best friends*", and a wider group of friends within her Supported Curriculum Class. She said she is friends with most people in her class, and that they love playing running games together at break times. Ellen said she could "*trust these more*" when comparing her best friends to the wider group, and that they often separate from the wider group to play as a three:

*"us three friends we normally go to somewhere else... play our own little game"* (Ellen).

Ellen's closeness with her two best friends has developed over time since Year 7; "*they so close to me because I've... known them for... a bit long*" (Ellen), and that this means she can trust them.

Ellen said that a good friend is honest and trustworthy, because she wants friends who tell the truth and keep her secrets. She talked about an old friend who betrayed her trust:

*“Used to have this friend... she was only my friend cus she could... find my secrets and tell other people...”* (Ellen)

Ellen said that a good friend is “*respectful*” and “*not always rude to other people*”, because if her friend “*be rude to other people then it makes me look bad*” and also because she would not like a friend who is “*aggressive or always just like taking over things*”.

Having shared interests with friends is important to Ellen; “*I’m very creative so I like my friends to be creative as well*”. Ellen does dance and music with one of her friends.

Ellen described her friends in a supporting role; “*if I’m having a bad day or something, they’re always there to cheer me up*”, and views friends as people to “*share feelings with*”. She said that a good friend is helpful, caring and kind.

Ellen also said she has fun with her friends, and enjoys playing and talking with them. She said that a good friend is funny, because it is important “*to have someone to make you laugh*”.

Ellen said she has better friends in secondary school than she had before, as her and her peers’ social skills have developed:

*“Primary school was a lot different... didn’t have the right minds we were just still kids... we’ve grown up and we know what we’re s’posed to say...”* (Ellen)

However, she also spoke about negative interactions with opposite-sex peers at secondary school: *“boys they’re just like rude most of the time to the girls”* (Ellen).

Ellen spoke about feeling sad and worried, and said she can worry about what she has said to people; *“like if I said something I’d be thinking what if I said this would it change anything?”* Ellen has some strategies to help herself to feel better. She said *“it’s best if I’m alone so I can just calm down”*, and that when she feels *“down”* she listens to music, and that she also talks to her Mum if she is worried.

Ellen talked about her relationship with her Mum. She said that her Mum *“really likes dancing as well, she inspired me to dance”*. She said she would talk to her Mum if she is worried, and that *“I’d tell my Mum, and I’d tell her to be with me the whole day”*.

In the feedback interview, Ellen spoke again about her closeness with her best friends, and their role in supporting her. However, on this occasion, she spoke in more detail about feeling worried:

*“I have really bad anxiety so I kind of panic a lot and get really worried”* (Ellen)

She reported having difficulty communicating about these feelings:

*“I don’t know why words just can’t come out when I’m sad”* (Ellen)

Ellen also spoke more about her own personality, describing herself as “a *really happy person*”, who likes to talk to people, and takes courage to do so: “*I don’t have courage to do like most stuff but I have courage to talk to people*” (Ellen).

She said this might be because she is “*in a happy environment*” at school. Ellen said that school should help pupils make friends, but that they cannot “*force you to like*” people. She spoke about how clubs help pupils make friends as they allow you to meet people who have things in common.

### **LSA’s View:**

The LSA described his role in supporting Ellen as:

- Supporting understanding of tasks
- Monitoring and supporting social interactions
- Being a consistent adult in all classes

In her LSA’s view, Ellen has communication strengths as well as difficulties. She is able to communicate with her LSA and “*she does understand things like sarcasm*”. Her difficulties include tendency to interpret language literally and difficulty expressing herself; “*it sounds as if she’s really trying hard to get the words out... she’s focussing on it... an almost un-normal amount*” and her conversations are “*not quite fluid*” (LSA1).

According to her LSA, Ellen has some good friendships in her class, is “*well-liked*” and “*one of the more popular girls in the [Supported Curriculum] class*”. He suggested that Ellen’s physical appearance may influence her popularity:

*“Maybe the boys fancy her, maybe the girl’s kind of want to be with her” “she looks a bit older, I’d imagine a lot of the kids are kind of attracted” (LSA1).*

He also spoke about her personality as a factor in her popularity, and described her as *“one of the more sassier people in class”*.

Ellen was also reported to have social difficulties. She tends to react to other pupil’s behaviours, and is vulnerable to negative influences from peers. Her LSA needs to monitor her interactions with peers, and thinks she needs to have more support to *“build the right kind of friendships not to be kind of drawn by negative influences”*. He also reported that she tends to get into *“tiffs”* with boys in her class.

The LSA described the context of Ellen’s Supported Curriculum Class as *“a small supported curriculum to help the children flourish and progress”*. Children in the class have various SEND. He described this group as a *“very well behaved class, they’re not kind of talking to each other all the time”*.

### **Summary of themes for Ellen:**

The following **common** themes were found in Ellen and her LSAs interviews:

- Both indicated that Ellen has close friends as well as a wider group of friends or classmates she is popular with in her Supported Curriculum Class.
- Both made references to her personality; she described herself as a “*happy person*” and her LSA spoke about her “*sassy*” personality.
- Both mentioned that Ellen has had some negative interactions with opposite-sex peers.
- Both spoke about Ellen’s difficulty expressing herself, and Ellen spoke specifically about difficulty communicating about her emotions.
- Both made references to the school context; the LSA spoke about her Supported Curriculum Class, and Ellen described school as a “*happy environment*”.
  
- However, certain **differences** between Ellen and her LSA’s perspectives were also noted:
  - Ellen gave insight into her own emotional difficulties such as feeling worried and anxious, and highlighted the supportive role her of her friends.
  - Ellen’s LSA spoke about Ellen’s social and communication difficulties, as seen from the perspective of another.

## **Case Study 2: Sacha**

As shown in Table 2, Sacha is in a reduced-size class of 25 pupils and LSA support. She is classed as a Young Carer because her mother has ongoing health problems.

### **Sacha's View:**

Sacha described herself as *"always happy"* and *"always smiling"*. She said she likes school and likes making friends. Like Ellen, Sacha made reference to finding it easier to make friends in secondary school:

*"Secondary school... you're getting new friends, you're adapting more... there's a lot people so you can easily make friends"* (Sacha).

Sacha talked about one specific friend, who she described in a supporting role; *"sometimes I'm brave by myself but in school my friend, she's always been there for me, like she tells me just do it don't be scared..."* and *"says you know take a few deep breaths"*. This friend also provides company and someone to walk around with, sit next to, and talk to a break times.

Sacha said a good friend is caring, helpful and trustworthy. It is important to her that friends are trustworthy so *"they won't lie to you and you can trust them"*, and she would not like a friend *"that's just mean and talks about you behind your back"* (Sacha). She would not like a friend who ignores her or leaves her.

Sacha talked about several incidents of negative interactions with peers, which included being teased, laughed at, and talked about behind her back. She described one incident in which she went out with a group of classmates:

*“All of them ran off and they left me on the bus... they’d been planning something... they were hiding in this alley way... they said “oh we’re just joking around” I [said] “it wasn’t a joke you just left me”...”* (Sacha).

Sacha talked about feeling “*nervous*” about being out on her own, and about being teased by peers. Sacha said she deals with these incidents by leaving the classroom or telling an LSA, teacher or her Learning Mentor. She talks to her Mum and her friend about her feelings. If she feels angry, she listens to music “*cus it cools me down*”, or goes for a walk to relax:

*“I could walk all around the school and I’d be fine when I get back to class... to relax so everything that has been happening can get out of my mind”* (Sacha).

Sacha mentioned seeking support from her Learning Mentor for managing social difficulties. She said her Learning Mentor does Restorative Justice Sessions with her and peers, and explained that “*if you’re having trouble with someone you could sit down and talk about it*”.

She spoke about her relationship with her Mum, and said they have fun together. Her Mum gives her advice on friendships: “*my Mum’s always told me it’s better to have more than one friend...*”. She also alluded to her Mum being protective and having control over Sacha’s social life, for example:



*“My Mum doesn’t like me going out anywhere” (Sacha).*

Sacha spoke several times about wanting to help others including her friends, victims of bullying, younger pupils, and strangers in the community. She explained that she wants to help others because *“if I needed help for example, I would want someone to help me so, that, I would help someone”*.

In the feedback interview, Sacha spoke again about negative social interactions with peers, Restorative Justice Sessions for managing conflict, and about her Mum’s influence over social activity: *“Mum told me to stay away”* (Sacha).

She also spoke about avoiding social interactions by staying inside:

*“I don’t really like staying outside... sometimes there would be problems and I don’t wana be involved... just stay in this room, sit quietly and listen [to music] and... do homework”* (Sacha).

She spoke more about the importance of music for her emotional well-being:

*“When you’re listening to the song, you’re just listening to it, you’re not listening to anything else”* (Sacha).

She also suggested that schools could help pupils with making friends:

*“have a session where we sit together we say our names, what we like”* (Sacha).

### **LSA' View:**

The LSA's described their role in supporting Sacha as:

- Classroom support including help with understanding instructions and breaking down tasks
- One-to-one mentoring including debriefing after incidents, explaining what went wrong and helping her to see the other person's perspective, and understand her own and others' emotions.

According to her LSA, Sacha's "*general conversation is fine*", but she has difficulties communicating appropriately. She communicates inappropriately with adults, and sometimes communicates with peers as if they were adults. She also has difficulty following instructions. The LSA reported that "*sometimes she will shout out something random*". She has difficulty understanding others' perspectives, and can make inappropriate or insensitive comments:

*"certain news, she kind of says it very loudly and expressively and it makes other people feel uncomfortable"* (LSA2).

The LSA spoke about Sacha's friend:

*"she mainly hangs around with one girl... there's a big group of them, but she's predominantly with this one girl"* (LSA2).

However, he also talked about her having frequent friendship issues, which can take different forms:

*"a lot of friendship issues within her social group and it's usually her at the main forefront"* (LSA2).

*“it ended up with a physical altercation between her and the other girl” (LSA2).*

*“Sacha just kind of snapped and was like I don’t care about you... said some really horrible things” (LSA2).*

She can be defensive, and has difficulty managing conflict:

*“she points the blame at somebody else” (LSA2).*

Sacha’s LSA reported some behavioural problems and said *“she does try to challenge me”*, and that she will argue even when *“it’s just a simple instruction”*. The LSA suggested that she has problems managing her behaviour because *“it’s just hard for her to sit down and kind of really think about things before she does them”* and she has a tendency of *“taking situations further than it needs to go” (LSA2).*

He talked about teasing and reported that *“certain jokes have been made”* about Sacha.

He also spoke about Sacha’s emotional needs, he described occasions when Sacha had cried in school, and suggested that she has difficulty *“balancing her emotions”*. Her social understanding can impact her emotions:

*“minor things that she ends up taking out of context, she takes very seriously” (LSA2).*

Sacha’s LSA suggested that she needs more mentoring, and would benefit from sessions on *“relationships and friendships... how to deal with conflict, and when she learns from mentoring, how to adapt it in her actual relationships” (LSA2).*

### **Mum's View:**

Sacha's Mum spoke about her having one good friend; *"she's got a very good friend, one friend"*, and said that *"when she does find someone, she just gets stuck with that friend"*. She said that the two girls have several things in common: they have similar interests and go to a Saturday Club together, both are Young Carers, and they are both very kind. She feels that the girls communicate well with each other, and are a positive influence on one another:

*"they take the bad from each other but they give the good to each other"* (P1).

Sacha's Mum also spoke about Sacha's friendship difficulties, and her fear of trusting friends:

*"she's quite scared yeah starting new friendships... she doesn't always know who to trust"* (P1)..

She spoke about Sacha's SPCD, including difficulties expressing her emotions, and her communication difficulties can affect her behaviour:

*"struggling communicating with each other, we always end up arguing more"* (P1).

She reported that Sacha *"gets quite frustrated"*, but she believes that Sacha hides a lot of her feelings.

Sacha's Mum said that Sacha's Learning Mentor has *"helped her come out of her shell"*. She reported that Sacha also receives counselling outside of school.

She suggested that schools could help pupils further by providing counselling within the school context:

*"I think if they had like counselling in school... that would be so much better, because I've had to get her counselling from outside... the school is not aware of the support she is receiving and obviously the counsellor is not aware of the problems she faces in school"* (P1).

She suggested that schools should have higher expectations for pupils with SEND, and give them more responsibilities:

*"they should encourage kids who have issues... more responsibility... maybe put them at the library or the reception to do some work... more focus and goals to achieve"* (P1).

She also spoke about the importance of professionals sharing information on children's needs when they transition.

### **Summary of themes for Sacha:**

The following **common** themes were found in the interviews with Sacha, her Mum and her LSA:

- Sacha, her Mum and her LSA all spoke about Sacha having one close friend.
- All three made references to problems with friendships and peers; Sacha and her Mum spoke about difficulty trusting friends while her LSA spoke about her social interaction and difficulties managing conflict.
- All three indicated that Sacha experiences some emotional difficulties.
- Sacha and her Mum both talked about the support she had received from her Learning Mentor, while her LSA suggested she would benefit from furthering mentoring to support her with her social difficulties.
  
- However, certain differences between Sacha, her Mum and her LSA's perspectives were also noted:
  - Sacha's Mum and LSA spoke about her social communication difficulties, and her LSA mentioned the impact on her behavioural presentation.
  - Sacha's mum noted a positive increase in confidence, while her LSA indicated some concern over challenging authority.
  - Sacha talked about wanting to be sociable and wanting to help others, but the perspectives shared by her Mum and LSA suggest that her social communication difficulties make this difficult for her to achieve.

### **Case Study 3: Sarah**

Sarah is in a Year 9 Supported Curriculum Class with LSA support (see Table 2). Sarah has an SEN Support plan for learning difficulties (literacy and numeracy) and emotional needs, in addition to her SPCD.

#### **Sarah's View:**

Sarah described herself as a loving person:

*"I'm loving to my Mum... my friends and family"* (Sarah).

When talking about emotions, Sarah's responses suggested a limited awareness of emotions, or a reluctance to discuss them:

*"I'm never sad"* (Sarah).

Sarah's responses suggested that she is self-directed, for example she said [I'm happy] *"when I get what I want"*, and she may lack awareness of social boundaries:

*"I tell people what I feel... I say it in front of their face"* (Sarah).

Sarah said she would like a friend who is nice, happy, funny, loving, thoughtful, sensitive, sensible, caring, generous and helpful. She said she would not like a friend who is bossy, angry, or who would *"mess around in school"*.

Sarah spoke about joint activity with friends, such as eating and sitting together.

She said that her friends help her:

*“If I’ve got a problem they can help me sort it out... help me get out of the problem”* (Sarah).

She also seeks help from teachers: *“If I have a problem I tell a teacher”* (Sarah).

However, some of her responses suggested that she may have limited social support, for example:

*“When I feel worried I... sort it out”* and *“I would go to... don’t know”* (Sarah).

Sarah would like access to play equipment at break times:

[When talking about a Blob People scene character who is playing with a skipping rope] *“I would like to be the jumping lady... I wana skip, that’s not the school how it looks like”* (Sarah).

Sarah’s language-use tended to be like that of a younger child, which may affect her interactions with her Year 9 peers, for example:

*“happy and happy, jumping and jumping, skipping rope”* (Sarah).

She said there was no play equipment in secondary school, that the clubs available are *“boring clubs”* and suggested that the school should provide skipping ropes and hula hoops.

In the feedback interview, Sarah said *“no one”* makes her feel happy, suggesting again that she may lack, or not be motivated by, social support.

#### **LSA’S View:**

Sarah’s LSA described their role in supporting Sarah as:



- Simplifying instructions, adapting language and using “*very simple...very literal*” sentences
- Giving her thinking time and prompting her to respond
- One-to-one literacy support
- Emotional support
- Help to reconcile friendships

The LSA talked about using humour to “*lighten the mood if she’s getting frustrated*”, and the importance of being friendly:

*“Always be friendly, always with a smile on your face... non-imposing”* (LSA3)

The LSA reported that Sarah is able to respond in conversation, make eye contact, and communicate with familiar people. She “*does have a good grasp of humour and she even makes jokes*”, but “*for a teenager, they might not be the most mature jokes*” (LSA3). Her SPCD needs include difficulty understanding non-literal language, expressing her emotions, and adapting language to the person:

*“You have to remind her that that’s not the way you speak to like an adult”* (LSA3).

The LSA said that Sarah “*isn’t the most talkative person so you don’t really get to have many meaningful conversations with her*”, she struggles with initiating interaction, and takes time to express herself.

According to her LSA, Sarah has a *“very close knit group”* of friends in her class, and that *“all four of them go around and do everything together”*. Her friends help her when she is upset, and will seek adult support for her:

*“It’s usually one of the other girls who will tell me she is upset”* (LSA3).

They spoke about several factors that seem to support Sarah’s friendships, such as being in the Supported Curriculum class with pupils with similar needs:

*“because of their specific needs and being in that class... they’ve just formed a bond in that group I think”* (LSA3).

They suggested that her familiarity with her classmates helps her:

*“they’re all very familiar with each other, she probably doesn’t feel as sort of self-conscious”* (LSA3).

They also talked about ways in which school staff support friendships in the Supported Curriculum Class, through providing interventions in pairs, opportunities to work with peers, creating a social atmosphere and building a sense of community in the class, encouraging pupils to join clubs, and offering a breakfast club and lunchtime clubs in the Inclusion department. The LSA spoke about using Restorative Justice Sessions to support pupils to manage conflict, with an emphasis on supporting rather than punishing:

*“rather than just dishing out punishments, so we’ll try and reform the group”* (LSA3)

However, in the LSA’s view, Sarah has *“quite volatile”* friendships due to her difficulties with social interaction:

*“Because of the way the girls are and the way they interact with each other, very frequently they’ll have fall outs... pretty much every week there’s something...”* (LSA3).

Sarah was reported to have emotional needs; she finds upsets overwhelming, has difficulty communicating what is wrong, and can become withdrawn:

*“she’s quite... passive so even if she’s annoyed, she won’t really act out that much, her behaviour well it will be more like withdrawn”* (LSA3).

### **Mum’s View:**

Sarah’s Mum said that Sarah has the words to communicate, but that *“sometimes when she’s talking she’ll have a... special need”*.

She talked about difficulty communicating with Sarah, and said that she does not know what Sarah likes or what her current interests are. She suggested that their lack of communication is due to Sarah’s age:

*“she’s complicated sometimes, but it’s okay, she’s teenager now, I understand this”* (P2).

This seemed to indicate that she lacked clarity on whether her daughter’s needs reflected her SEN or her age, or a combination of the two.

Sarah’s Mum spoke about her daughter’s friendship problems and difficulty communicating with her friends:

*“Sometimes they don’t communicate, they have difficult friendships”* (P2).

Sarah's Mum often described Sarah as being angry and having difficulty controlling her anger: "*she's angry, she's really angry*" and "*she's not controlling her anger, she's too much anger*", but that Sarah will apologise later after directing her anger towards her mother.

Sarah's Mum described her daughter's behaviour as "*very difficult*" and spoke about Sarah's anger at being asked to do things and rudeness towards her, sometimes throwing things and behaving "*like a 5 years [old] child*".

She spoke about Sarah's need for support with learning and behaviour, from school: "*she needs this small supportive*" [class], and from herself: "*I need to support her, she's very difficult*" (P2).

Sarah's Mum suggested that school should investigate Sarah's social communication difficulties further so that they can offer more support. She also spoke about her reluctance to communicate this to school because of the language barrier; "*because my English is not good*".

### **Summary of themes for Sarah:**

A **common** theme in the interviews with Sarah, her Mum and her LSA was that Sarah has friends, and her friends help her, but that she also has friendship difficulties and may have limited social support.

However, some **differences** between Sarah, her Mum and her LSA's perspectives were noted:

- Sarah seemed to show a lack of emotional awareness or a reluctance to talk about her emotions, whereas both her Mum and LSA talked about Sarah's emotional needs. Their reports suggest that her needs may present differently in the home and school contexts; her LSA described her as withdrawn in school, while her Mum described her as angry at home.
- Sarah's Mum and her LSA both made references to her having strengths and difficulties with communication, such as her having the vocabulary to communicate but struggling to initiate interaction.
- The LSA talked about factors which support Sarah's friendships, such as the context of the Supported Curriculum Class, opportunities to work with peers, and adult support to resolve friendship problems.

**Overview of first three case studies:**

The three case studies presented so far show the data from young people and their LSA, as well as from their Mums in Sacha and Sarah's cases, for each individual case. Taken together, they begin to develop a picture of the experiences of these young people with social (pragmatic) communication difficulties, which suggests that they have friendships but also experience difficulties with friendships and peer interactions. This chapter will go on to present a further three case studies, followed by a summary of the six cases.

**Case Study 4: Spencer**

As shown in Table 2, Spencer is in a Supported Curriculum Class. Like Sacha, Spencer is classed as a Young Carer as her mother has ongoing health problems. She has an SEN Support plan for learning difficulties (literacy and numeracy) in addition to her social communication difficulties.

**Spencer's View:**

Spencer said she has three "*best friends*" who she feels close to, and spends most time with:

*"These friends are more close and I hang out with them more, I know more things about them, and they know more things about me"* (Spencer).

Spencer talked about the support her best friends provide:

*“They’re always there for you if you have a problem” and “if I’m upset they’ll comfort me and be there for me” (Spencer).*

She said that friends should be caring, thoughtful and helpful, and *“a friend should ask a friend are you ok”*.

As well as supporting her, Spencer’s friends provide company, and are *“nice people to hang out with”*. They also provide enjoyment; they do fun things with her, tell her jokes, and make her feel happy.

Spencer also spoke about having friendship problems, and finding it difficult to communicate to effectively resolve arguments with friends:

*“We have to like speak to tell them to like calm down... and try and sort it, it’s kinda hard” (Spencer).*

Spencer talked about negative social interactions with her peers outside her friendship group, including name-calling, teasing and social exclusion:

*“when people say harmful things it hurts your feelings... I try ignore them but sometimes they like to carry on and on and they don’t stop” (Spencer).*

Spencer expressed confusion about why peers behave in this way, for example, when talking about a girl who called her friendship group “annoying”:

*“I don’t understand why we’re annoying cus we don’t like we don’t even speak”*.

She shared negative views about her opposite-sex peers: *“boys in our year are really weird”* and *“they’re just so immature, really immature”*.

Spencer mentioned her emotional needs; feelings of frustration, anger and upset in response to negative interactions with peers, and said *“I’d like to be more strong, cus I’m kind of a bit sensitive”*. Spencer has developed ways to manage her emotional needs using different strategies:

*“Sometimes I would walk away and just like take a moment to breathe”* (Spencer).

*“I try to think about things that do make me happy”* (Spencer).

*“I just tried to pretend like it didn’t happen”* (Spencer).

Spencer mentioned her family, and their role in supporting her; she said that her family make her feel happy, and *“when I feel worried I tell my Mum, when I feel angry I tell my Mum”*. She also spoke about her Mum’s health problems, and said *“sometimes when she’s really ill... I try and help her as much as possible”*.

Spencer talked about the support she received from school staff, including emotional support and guidance from the SENCO:

*“She (SENCO) said if you’re upset with someone or something happened the easiest way to do is just walk away”* and *“When I’m upset I think (SENCO) kind of helps me like she makes me feel better”* (Spencer).

She said that her LSA and teachers also support her. The Inclusion Department helps by providing break-time support:

*“We’ll come up to Inclusion, Miss will open a room for us, we’ll play games like in a group”* (Spencer).

The Head Teacher helps by encouraging pupils to support each other:



*“My head teacher... sometimes she reminds the whole year to help someone”*  
(Spencer).

In the feedback interview, she spoke again about the role of friendship as providing company: *“I think it’s the company, so you’re not lonely”*, and for support: *“to have someone that’s on my side”*. She also spoke again about support from family and school staff.

She spoke more about her use of social media, and said she used it more at the beginning of the year, but is using it less now as she has less time due to increased workload.

**LSA’s View:**

The LSA said that her role in supporting Spencer mainly involves supporting her emotionally. She described herself as Spencer’s *“Key Adult”*:

*“The Key Adult in the room if they need to speak to someone, if they get a bit overwhelmed”* (LSA4).

It should be noted that *“Key Adult”* is not a specific role in the school, but is a self-designated term used by the LSA in reference to the idea that she has developed a strong relationship with her. LSA 4 indicated that she has built up a relationship with Spencer because she is with her class for all lessons.

According to her LSA, Spencer is *“fairly good at adapting her language depending who she speaks to”*, but has difficulty with other aspects of social

communication. She has difficulty making eye contact, and her communication style is *“seen as a bit odd from people around her”*. She also has quite limited vocabulary.

She reported that Spencer has social difficulties, is *“pretty shy”* and can be socially withdrawn; *“she will just close herself, she doesn’t want you to speak to her anymore, she just decides that it’s done...”*(LSA4). She seems to avoid difficult social interactions: *“she will get really quiet or she can get snappy or maybe rude, just to try and get out of the situation”* (LSA4).

The LSA reported that Spencer does not seem aware of boundaries with friends, and with boys she can be *“harassing, but because she doesn’t really realise that’s what she’s doing”* (LSA4).

Spencer has difficulty interpreting other’s intentions; *“even if it’s not aimed at her, and it can be positive or negative, she kind of interprets it her own way, and it’s gonna be about her”* (LSA4). She is also concerned about Spencer’s social media use: *“she’s quite a vulnerable student in terms of online safety and her relationships”* (LSA4).

The LSA spoke very positively about Spencer’s attitude to learning. She reported that Spencer tries hard and works independently, but knows when to ask for help.

She talked about Spencer’s *“little group of friends”*, which she described as *“a really strong friendship”*, but *“really intense”* as they are together all of the time.

She mentioned that the group had formed in Year 7, and that they all have SEN and are in the same class. She spoke about the role of support in their friendship:

*“I think it’s probably helping them to cope”* (LSA4).

The LSA has been able to use this support within the friendship group to enable her to support Spencer:

*“I actually use the friendship group that she has, so instead of... putting her on the spot... I just take all the girls with me... share ideas and eventually she will start speaking”* (LSA4).

However, she also reported that Spencer has friendship problems, and the group frequently moves between friendship and conflict:

*“She has had friendship issues... sometimes it’s just a bit too much... that’s what happens when you’re all the time with someone... that just goes with waves really”* (LSA4).

Spencer’s LSA also reported that she has emotional difficulties, including anxiety and low self-esteem.

She reported some ways in which the school supports pupils with SPCD such as breakfast club, social skills groups run by the EP, and providing a Key Adult that pupils can easily access. She emphasised the importance of developing a relationship with pupils, and making herself relatable to them:

*“I will always try to tell them stories to which they can relate so that they see it’s not just them and it’s not all messed up... and it will be better”* (LSA4).

She also suggested that school staff should adapt their approach to support pupils with SPCD by providing more flexibility to meet individual needs, and allowing pupils to make choices about their own learning:

*“A bit more flexibility in the lesson I think... I think that giving them a bit of choice in the way they want to learn” (LSA4).*

She highlighted the importance of recognising YP’s own views:

*“we always say that they don’t really know themselves, but actually I think they are the ones that know themselves the best” (LSA4).*

### **Summary of themes for Spencer:**

The following **common** themes were found in Spencer and her LSAs interviews:

- Both Spencer and her LSA talked about her friendship group and their role in supporting her.
- Both made references to conflict within her friendship group.
- Both indicated that Spencer experiences some emotional difficulties, such as feelings of anger and frustration.
- Both mentioned Spencer's social media use, and her LSA also indicated concerns about Spencer's potential vulnerability in online interactions.
- Both talked about the role of school staff in supporting Spencer's social and emotional needs.
  
- Some **differences** in the perspectives of Spencer and her LSA were also found:
  - Spencer spoke about the role of her family in supporting her.
  - Spencer also talked about being teased and excluded by peers.
  - Spencer's LSA spoke about her social communication difficulties including difficulty interpreting other's intentions or adapting to the social context.
  - The LSA also highlighted Spencer's strengths in her positive approach to learning.

## Case Study 5: Jason

As shown in Table 2, Jason has no additional needs (aside from his communication difficulties). He is in a mainstream class of 30 pupils with some LSA support in core lessons such as English.

### Jason's View:

Jason talked about his family, and said they make him happy. He said his Mum has helped him to be strong and described her as his inspiration.

Jason said that his friends are very important to him; *"it's so important these people mean so much to me"*. His friends have a supportive role; *"they can comfort me"*. Friendships also seem to help him feel accepted and give him a sense of belonging, in several ways:

*"the thing that makes me happy about my friends is that they are similar to you but they are not afraid to accept differences you have"* (Jason).

*"you don't always have to speak, you can just be chilling and if they like that then that's your true friend cus they're content with you not having to speak"* (Jason).

*"nothing is ever forced" [with friends]* (Jason).

For Jason, friendship also seems to provide enrichment. It is important to him that his friends are intelligent and able to have a *"deep conversation"*. He said that he *"can't have a stupid friend"*. This is important to him because *"it motivates me, it makes me feel secure... it makes me feel like I'm not wasting my time"* He described his friends as *"very determined and they have their own goals"*.

He sees part of their role as giving him guidance and constructive criticism:

*“when they see me messing up they tell me... and same when they’re messing up I tell them it’s like constructive criticism”* (Jason).

His friends also provide enjoyment. He described his friends as *“fun they don’t have negative energy”*, and said that friends *“have to make me laugh”*. It is also important to him that his friends share his interest in music; *“[friends] have to listen to some music whether its rap whether it’s jazz anything”* (Jason).

Jason spoke in depth about music. He said he enjoys listening, dancing and singing or rapping to music with friends, and views music as important:

*“Music can introduce a lot of things like language, music and creativity”* (Jason).

However, he also mentioned some difficulties with friendship. He said that friends can be annoying, like when they are *“just shouting grabbing you”*. He talked about social misunderstandings:

*“There’s nothing too difficult with being friends but it’s also like... misunderstanding”* (Jason). These social difficulties can have a negative impact, both on his friendships and on his emotional wellbeing:

*“I can be too playful sometimes and I hurt people”* (Jason).

*“I kind of feel sunken it’s not guilt but it’s like ah I feel like a jerk”* (Jason).

Jason is aware of his social difficulties, and described himself as *“a very awkward person”*. He explained that he is *“not really too sociable”*. He also spoke about not having *“too much friends”* and said *“I don’t really go out”*. He

expressed a desire to be more sociable, and to be *“more fluid with my conversations”*, and thought this may help him socially and emotionally:

*“Maybe I can make more friends maybe I can be like less... you know... worries”* (Jason).

Despite these difficulties, he is able to talk about his strengths:

*“being unsociable there’s a pro to that... you don’t have to be everybody’s friend... sometimes you have to stay reserved”* (Jason).

He described himself as *“extremely honest”*, brave, helpful towards others, and said *“I feel like I’m a really good person at least I try to be”*.

Jason spoke about being bullied in the past, but suggested that having friends provides protection from bullying: *“I don’t think it could happen to me now... the people around me cus I didn’t have this many friends before”*

He also talked about emotional needs including feeling *“stressed about the future”*, *“overthinking”* and having *“too many regrets”*.

In the feedback interview, Jason spoke more about the importance of music and art. He explained that he is influenced by musicians and artists:

*“I can watch a hour long interview two hours three hours long interview on artists like Jean Busquiat er Pablo Picasso all that stuff and er Tupac and er just you know Michael Jackson Marvin Gaye Whitney Houston just really reflect”* (Jason).

He is influenced by song lyrics:



*“what they say in their songs there’s just so many quotables”* (Jason).

He also spoke about the role of music and musicians in providing guidance:

*“it’s like a guide you know and it’s music um a artist job some artist job is to guide the youth”* (Jason).

He spoke about having negative experiences in primary school: *“primary school it was really rough... it was terrible”*.

When reading what he had said about overthinking, he said *“I don’t have any regrets anymore... everything happened for a reason”*.

He also spoke about his hopes to go to university in the future. He said that he would like to keep his friends, but also said *“new friends are gona come, they could be better than the ones I have now”*.

In this second interview, Jason suggested that teachers should support pupils by offering more *“one-to-ones”* and more emotional support:

*“I feel like it’s amazing for a kid to see that the teacher’s not there just to point at the board and mark their books they that they can confide in their teacher, their teacher can be their therapist and that’s awesome”* (Jason).

### **LSA’s View:**

LSA5 supports Jason in English lessons, so she was only able to give a perspective of how Jason presents in the classroom context. She supports Jason by:

- breaking down tasks
- Repeating information
- Giving “*positive affirmation*”

She also highlighted the importance of developing a relationship with pupils:

*“you have to form a relationship... for them to know that they can confide in you, once you’ve done that and they do have a problem... they will come and seek you out”* (LSA5).

According to the LSA, Jason is good at English and able to express his views well in writing. She described him as intelligent and keen to learn. She mentioned that he finds it difficult to move on from a task before he has finished:

*“he tends to get carried away, you give him a ten minute time limit and he’s still writing when everybody else has stopped... he tends to get so engrossed in the answers”* (LSA5).

She reported that he is able to communicate his needs and ask for help. He is able to adapt language to the person for example *“the language he uses for me is yes miss and for the others it will be go away... he’ll do that with peers but he’ll speak respectfully to the adults”*. However, she was not able to comment on his social communication outside the classroom context:

*“I don’t see him in a friendship situation, I only ever see him in the classroom”* (LSA5).

She reported that Jason “*doesn’t want to feel different from the rest*”. She supports him with this:

*“I say I’m here to support the whole class I’m not just [supporting] this particular child, and they accept that”* (LSA5).

#### **Summary of themes for Jason:**

Two **common** themes were found in Jason and his LSAs interviews:

- Both interviews indicated that Jason is keen to learn and dedicated to his education.
- Both also suggested that Jason feels a desire to be accepted by his peer group.
- However, several **differences** were also found between the two perspectives:
- Jason talked about emotional needs and showed awareness of his own social difficulties. His LSA did not comment on these aspects, which was in line with her acknowledgement that she only knows Jason in the classroom context.
- Jason gave insight into the importance of his friendships and their role in providing support, company, enjoyment, and enrichment.
- Jason also talked about support for pupils with emotional needs, and suggested that pupils would benefit from more one-to-one time with teachers.

## **Case Study 6: Tom**

As with the previous cases, contextual details are provided in Table 2. Tom was adopted five years ago (aged seven), and lived with a foster carer for two years before he was adopted.

Tom has been assessed by a Paediatrician because his foster carer believed he may have ASD, but he did not receive an ASD diagnosis. Tom has an SEN Support plan for literacy difficulties in addition to his social communication difficulties, and is in a Supported Curriculum Class.

### **Tom's View:**

Tom spoke about playing with most of his class, and said *"I get along with lots of my class"*. When asked if he had any particular friends in his class, he said *"not really it's just all spread out"*, suggesting he has friendly interactions with his classmates but may not have any specific friendships. He spoke about friendships outside of school with neighbours he plays with, and said his friends make him happy and they have *"a great time"* together.

Tom talked about negative interactions with peers. He said his peers *"can annoy me"*, and he sometimes gets into conflict with them:

*"We have arguments about some simple things like... sometimes people get... its complicated sometimes"* (Tom).

He also spoke about being teased by classmates, for example:

*"They kind of like to prank me sometimes"* (Tom).

It was unclear whether this teasing was playful or unkind, but when asked if he liked it, he said *"I wouldn't really but you get used to it after a while"* suggesting that he does not like being teased, but tolerates it.

Tom's descriptions of how he spends his free time suggest that he enjoys a range of activities, but has a preference for solitary activities (both in school and at home):

At break time: *"Just in the library just clearing up some things on my email"* (Tom) and

*"I just like climbing trees that's all"* (Tom).

At home: *"Sitting down and play some games and things like that with my technology"* (Tom) and *"I just do some Lego and making stuff"* (Tom).

When asked **who** he does fun things with, he said *"um I don't really"* which supports the suggestion that he may have a preference for solitary activity.

Tom responded to most questions about emotions with *"um not sure"* suggesting he might have a limited awareness of emotions, or a reluctance to discuss them. However, he spoke about being angry when he has too much homework.

Some of his responses suggested that he may have limited social support, or again they may reflect a reluctance or difficulty with talking about his emotions, for example:

When asked if there was anyone or anything that could help him when he felt angry, he said *"um not really"*.

When finishing the sentence starter “If I have a problem I”, he said “*I forget about it*” suggesting that he does not have strategies for solving problems.

Tom mentioned his adoptive Mum several times throughout the interview, often in response to questions that did not necessarily relate to her, suggesting that their relationship is important to him. For example, when explaining that he is helpful he said “*I sometimes help my Mum around the house*”, and when explaining that he is helpful he said:

*“There’s lots of times when my Mum asks me questions and she asks if I have homework and I say yes”* (Tom).

Tom said that his experiences were better in secondary school, because “*there wasn’t really much to do in primary school... there’s just more activities there’s just a bit more bigger space*” (Tom). When talking about arguments with peers, he said they happen “*sometimes but it doesn’t happen as much as it did in primary school*”.

In the feedback interview, Tom read through his transcript but said he was happy with it, he did not want to change or add to it, or discuss anything further.

### **LSA’s View:**

Tom’s LSA supports him in class by:

- Helping him to understand tasks using simple literal language
- Supporting his literacy development
- Helping him to develop his confidence and independence.

The LSA described Tom as an *“ideal student” because “he gets on with his work, I mean he’s excellent” and “never ever ever gets in trouble”* (LSA6).

He spoke about Tom’s literacy difficulties, describing him as one of the *“weaker ones”* in his literacy class.

The LSA described Tom as having a *“warm relationship”* with his classmates, and positive interactions with them for example:

*“He had these fingerless gloves and he shared one of them with a student in class, they used to kind of wear one each, it was kind of sweet”* (LSA6).

He has some negative interactions with peers, but they seem to be able to resolve these:

*“the good thing about boys when they fight when they’re young they forget about it ten minutes later so they do seem to have quite a warm relationship”* (LSA6).

Tom’s LSA described him as *“definitely one of the quieter and shyer ones”* and said that it can be *“hard to get much out of him”* in conversation. He suggested that Tom has *“social anxiety issues”*. Description of some of his social interactions suggest that he has difficulty interacting using verbal communication, for example:

*“playing a game of hitting each other... got to the point where he got quite upset”* (LSA6).

He suggested that Tom has difficulty making friends, possibly due to his interests:

*“I’m not sure whether there are other students in the class who have the same specific interests”, and that “the kids you know won’t take to him straight away” (LSA6).*

Nevertheless, he said that Tom is not excluded by his classmates:

*“whenever they have to get into pairs... there are people who want to be in a pair with him... he’s not left out” (LSA6).*

However, he also mentioned incidents in which Tom had been teased by his peers due to difficulty making social inference or misinterpreting non-literal language, for example:

*“Student laughed at him for getting a question wrong” (LSA6).*

According to the LSA, Tom lacks confidence and does not often put his hand up to answer in class. He believes Tom’s reading difficulties affect his confidence, and hopes that he will gain confidence as he develops reading skills:

*“If it [literacy intervention] improves his ability to read maybe he will he’ll be more confident and he’ll be able to put his hand up and read things out in class and contribute more” (LSA6).*

The LSA talked about the ways in which school staff have tried to support Tom’s friendships through encouraging team work in his class, and through



timetabled lessons on Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) taught by the SENCO. These sessions include teaching social skills through team-based games:

*“The kids always play... team-based games... like building bonds with each other... Reminding them at the end, it’s just a game, you’re going to shake hands...”* (LSA6).

He also suggested some ways in which he thought Tom might be supported further, such as setting up clubs for pupils with similar interests:

*“Maybe if we set up this club at lunchtime other students who have this particular interest will be drawn to it and then a potential friendship can be based on that”* (LSA6).

He also suggested Tom might benefit from more Speech and Language Therapy and *“mentoring to improve his social communication skills”*.

### **Mum’s View:**

Tom’s Mum reported that he is able to communicate with his parents and with other familiar adults:

*“He’s very good when he meets adults with us, we’ve got some friends that he knows well and he’s always able... to converse with them”* (P3).

Tom’s ability to communicate with familiar adults may be facilitated by the patience of adults who are able to mediate the interaction. She also mentioned some of Tom’s social communication difficulties including difficulty giving

appropriate eye contact, and said *“listening to his sentences, they don’t always make sense”*.

She mentioned Tom’s literacy difficulties, but also his progress in reading since attending secondary school.

Tom’s Mum said that she thinks he is popular in his class. She said he has *“boys at school that he sort of hangs out with”* and has friendships with some of his neighbours. She reported that he is good at initiating social interactions, for example:

*“If we go to a beach or something like that he will be the one to go off and find a chum to play with if he wants to”* (P3).

However, she reported that others have expressed concerns about whether he has friends, including school staff and his older sister:

*“I suppose there’s a little sort of anxiety I guess from secondary school whether he sort of has any friends”* (P3)

*“We’ve got a daughter there and she seemed to say he was on his own a bit”* (P3).

She mentioned that he took time to make friends in primary school, and that these friendships broke up when he and his friends started secondary school.

Some of Tom’s Mum’s comments suggested that he may only be able to initiate interaction and engage in play when the interaction is focused on his

own interests. For example, in the following quotes, both interactions are focussed on Lego:

*“He’ll you know go and get a box of Lego and knock on somebody’s door” (P3)*  
*“as soon as you know got out the car he just asked them questions about Lego and that’s what set a conversation off” (P3).*

Tom’s Mum mentioned that he spends time alone and plays by himself, and said *“he’ll just stay on his own and play with some Lego or something like that, he can sort of regulate himself”*.

Tom’s Mum said that he has some problems with feelings of anger: *“He’ll kind of get very angry about life” (P3)*. In the past, this affected Tom’s behaviour:

*“some violence... things would have been thrown” (P3).*

However, she also indicated that this has improved:

*“that has died down a lot actually since the beginning of the summer holidays” (P3).*

According to Tom’s Mum, he has a loving relationship with his family, and enjoys spending time with them. She described him as *“very loving, you know, he loves hugs”*. He seems to have a close relationship with both of his parents; *“particularly my partner, he absolutely adores her”* and *“I’m reading to him you know before bed time and stuff again which is nice for me” (P3).*

She talked about his adoption and its impact on him, and suggested that Tom has shown resilience in coping with this:

*“A lot of adopted children have emotional difficulties and I think he’s sort of dealing with his better than some people I know about” (P3).*

Tom’s Mum spoke about his aspirations for the future:

*“He really wants to succeed at school and go on to higher education” (P3).*

She also added that she thinks Tom is *“quite driven by money”*.

Tom’s Mum spoke positively about the support he has received in secondary school; *“[school name] has been an excellent school for him...we’re so lucky that he’s there” (P3).*

She said Tom is happy in school. She reported that school staff have been very supportive of him and aware of the support he needs. Staff awareness has supported his inclusion *“because people had known about the difficulties... (Tom) just came in and were able to slot in and get on with life even though they were getting some extra support” (P3).* The Supported Curriculum Class has also supported Tom’s inclusion: *“because the class was there, he doesn’t, he feels that there are other people around him he doesn’t feel like you know he’s anything different” (P3).* She said he receives mentoring support, additional support in English, and small group teaching, which she said has *“helped his learning and I’m sure it’s helped him sort of socially”*.

Her comments suggested that Tom benefits from the school’s person-centred approach; she said *“school is very flexible”* and are *“able to structure things around him and around that group of children”*.

### **Summary of themes for Tom:**

There were some **common** themes across the three interviews with Tom, his Mum and his LSA. An overall picture developed of Tom as a social young person who has warm relationships with his classmates and some friends outside of school, while also having a lack of specific identified friends in school.

However, several **differences** were found between the perspectives of Tom, his Mum and his LSA. Tom did not name specific friends in school. His LSA suggested that he has warm relationships with classmates, but is also very shy and has difficulty making friends, whereas his Mum described him as sociable and good at initiating social interaction. However, there were some inconsistencies across the course of the interview, as she also reported concerns about Tom not having friends, from his sister and teachers. Analysis of Tom's Mum's descriptions of when Tom has shown good social skills suggest that these are when the focus is on topics/activities that are of interest to Tom (i.e. Lego).

**Overview of case studies 4, 5 and 6:**

Spencer, Jason and Tom's case studies show the data from each of the young people and their LSA, as well as from their Mum in Tom's case, for each individual case. Taken together, these case studies imply that these YP have experienced emotional needs and friendship difficulties, as well as bullying from peers. Their cases seem to indicate that they are supported by their relationships with family, friends (in Spencer and Jason's cases) and school staff (in Spencer and Tom's cases).

The six case studies presented, give insight into the views of young people with SPCD on their friendships and related aspects of their well-being, triangulated by data giving the perspectives of school staff and parents. Overall, the case studies seem to indicate that these YP experience emotional needs and friendship difficulties related to their social communication difficulties, but implied that friendships may have a supportive role for these YP. In the following section, a thematic analysis of the themes found for each of the three participant types is presented.

**4.2 Integrative Thematic Analysis**

This section will present the findings from integrated thematic analysis of the data for each of the three participant types, and represents a triangulation of perspectives from the various participant groups, starting with themes found through analysis of all YP data (a), followed by themes from the school staff

data (b), and the themes from the parent data (c). Themes are illustrated by quotations from interviews, except for where they have previously been evidenced in the case studies (participant reference and page number will be given).

### (a) Young People Themes

**Figure 10. Young People Themes**



Note: numbering is for referencing and does not denote priority or importance.

As shown in Figure 10, nine themes were developed through thematic analysis of the data from the YP. The following presents an analysis of each theme:

**1. Friends-help-and-support:**

All YP referred to the supportive role of friends. All of the YP except Tom said their friends help when they have problems and comfort them when they are upset. Some YP said they would like a friend with qualities relevant to this theme such as kind, caring and helpful (e.g. Ellen, p.94).

**2. Friends-provide-pleasure-and-company:**

All YP mentioned having fun and laughing with their friends, having shared interests and doing activities together (e.g. Spencer, p.115).

**3. Emotional-issues:**

Ellen, Sacha, Spencer, Jason and Tom described feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger and frustration. Ellen, Sacha and Spencer also mentioned how they manage these difficulties feelings e.g. taking time out or going for a walk, listening to music, and talking to their friends, their Mums or various individual members of staff (e.g. Sacha, p.100).

**4. Friendship-problems:**

All YP except for Sarah reported falling out or getting in arguments with friends. Jason spoke about unintentionally upsetting his friends due to



misunderstandings (e.g. Jason, p.123). Some YP referred to difficulties with resolving problems with their friends (e.g. Spencer, p.115).

#### **5. Peer-problems:**

Sacha, Spencer, Jason and Tom mentioned being teased, laughed at, talked about or socially excluded by peers. Some described incidents of bullying by their current or previous peers (e.g. Sacha, p.100). Ellen and Spencer also mentioned negative interactions with opposite-sex peers.

#### **6. Family-support:**

All YP mentioned their families e.g. some spoke about loving them, or said their family makes them happy.

##### **6.1. Mum:**

Of their family members, all YP spoke mostly about their Mums. They mentioned their mothers' roles in providing support, advice and guidance for them. Ellen and Jason also described their mothers' roles in inspiring their own interests/attitudes.

#### **7. School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-emotional-issues:**

Ellen, Sacha and Spencer talked about the support they had received from school staff. This included help making friends in clubs and support with playing games in the Inclusion department at lunch times (e.g. Spencer, p.116). They mentioned Restorative Justice for helping resolve friendship problems (e.g. Sacha, p.100). They spoke about

specific adults in school who they felt able to talk to about problems (e.g. LSAs, Learning Mentors, and the SENCO). Spencer also mentioned the Head Teacher's role in encouraging pupils to help each other.

**8. Secondary-school-is-better-than-primary-school:**

Ellen, Sacha, Jason and Tom expressed a preference for secondary school when compared to their primary school experiences. Reasons for this included finding it easier to make friends (e.g. Sacha, p.99) and having less arguments with peers in secondary school (e.g. Tom, p.130).

**9. Help-with-making-friends:**

Ellen and Sacha suggested their own ideas for how to help pupils with making friends such as joining clubs, having sessions on making friends, and playing games that help pupils get to know each other (e.g. Sacha, p.101). Sarah said she wanted play equipment in school.

**(b) Staff Themes:**

**Figure 11. Staff Themes**

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Note: numbering is for referencing and does not denote priority or importance.

As shown in Figure 11, six themes were developed through thematic analysis of the data from the LSAs plus data from an interview with the SENCo. The themes presented in this section relate to Research Questions 2 and 3 pertaining to staff understanding of SPCD and how pupils with these needs are supported:

## **1. Staff-understanding-of-Social-(Pragmatic)-Communication-**

### **difficulties:**

This theme and subthemes summarised staff understanding of SPCD. All staff expressed agreement with the research definition of SPCD. Staff showed understanding of social aspects of communication and recognition that the label can cover various needs, for example: *“I think that’s quite broad isn’t it”* (LSA4).

### **1.1 Difficulty-understanding-social-cues:**

Staff said pupils with SPCD have difficulties understanding social cues or other people’s intentions, and have difficulty adapting their communication to the social context in different ways:

*“either a bit too much or not enough... a bit too social and wanting to be around everyone all the time and getting really loud”* (LSA4)

*“Their kind of social cues and understanding of social norms sometimes is a bit lacking compared to most”* (LSA1).

*“Hard to understand the meaning of language and other people’s intentions”* (SENCO)

### **1.2 Difficulty-expressing-themselves:**

Staff said pupils with SPCD have difficulty expressing themselves in a way that is understandable to others:

*“Might not make sense when you explain something to somebody else but it, but it may make sense in your mind... explaining yourself in a way that makes sense to yourself and to other people” (LSA2).*

Staff also made reference to pupils with SPCD communicating in an unusual or unexpected way:

*“not able to communicate their thoughts in the way that people are expecting them to... sometimes their own way is not understandable to the rest of us” (LSA4).*

### **1.3 Difficulty-understanding-language:**

Staff mentioned that pupils with SPCD may also have difficulties understanding certain vocabulary and language.

### **1.4 Difficulty-with-social-interaction:**

Staff highlighted the difficulties that pupils with SPCD have in their social interactions, including difficulties making friends and interacting with peers, and becoming *“socially withdrawn”* (LSA4), for example:

*“Being able to form friendships and relationships... or rather not being able to form them as easily as other people” (LSA3).*

### **1.5 Emotional-impact:**

Staff acknowledged the emotional impact that SPCD can have on pupils, for example:

*“...can feel really stuck... they start being in some sort of negative loop they feel like they can never get out and they can even less put words on their feelings or thoughts... they can’t even think straight anymore I think” (LSA4).*

## **2. Whole-school-approach-to-SEND:**

Staff referred to the school’s inclusive ethos and whole-school awareness of SEND, with particular emphasis on understanding of communication:

*“I think it is quite accepted in the school that not everybody communicates in the same way” (SENCO).*

All staff are seen as responsible for pupils with SEND, and the Inclusion Department is seen as a central part of the school:

*“Inclusion is actually a place that people want to be... we’re in this new building, it’s bright, kids want to be here at lunchtime... not just Inclusion kids... they know that it’s somewhere that if they need help with something... that obviously raises the profile” (SENCO).*

Staff spoke about being open about their own difficulties, and creating a sense of community and respect for diversity:

*“It’s important to make them understand that it’s not just them” (LSA4).*

## **3. Support-for-social-communication-and-interaction:**

All staff talked about support for pupils with SPCD’s social communication and interactions. This theme was divided into four subthemes:

### **3.1 Supported-curriculum-class:**

Staff mentioned the impact of the Supported Curriculum class system in the school. This system means that pupils with SEND can access smaller group teaching with high levels of adult support, and *“a small supported curriculum to help the children flourish and progress”* (LSA1).

Pupils are included within a peer group of other YP with various needs:

*“There’s about 16 children... some that have a specific learning difficulty such as ASD and there will be others... moderate learning difficulties for example...”*  
(LSA1)

LSAs reported supporting social interactions between classmates, and encouraging team-work and a social atmosphere in Supported Curriculum classes, for example:

*“building the sense of community in class... trying to get them in class to develop like working together”* (LSA3).

### **3.2 Support-during-unstructured-times:**

Staff talked about support available to pupils with SPCD during unstructured times, including access to breakfast and lunchtime clubs, adult support with playing games, and availability of staff to support and mediate social interactions. Staff provide this support in different ways, for example:

*“[Pupils] play a game with two adults in the class just to make sure all the communication’s appropriate”* (SENCO)

*“Finding out their interests, seeing if you can maybe create a club”* (LSA1)

*“They [SALTs] pick up a lot of the social communication that goes on at lunchtimes” (SENCO).*

The SENCO also highlighted the importance of planning this type of support and not just focussing on classroom support: *“looking creatively at staffing and not just thinking about having LSAs in the classroom”.*

### **3.3 Allocated-time-for-learning-social-skills:**

Some staff members mentioned specific interventions or time designated for pupils to develop their social skills. Examples of this included SALT social communication groups and weekly SEAL lessons. The SENCO explained that she adapts this for older pupils by *“instead of talking about er social skills they can actually talk about current affairs and that’s a bit more Key Stage 4... less talking about how to make friends”.* Sacha’s LSA suggested that pupils with SPCD might benefit from further support in this area, such as direct teaching on *“relationships and friendships”* and on *“how to deal with conflict”* (LSA2) as well as support to *“adapt it in her actual relationships”* (LSA2).

### **3.4 Support-with-resolving-conflicts:**

Most staff members talked about supporting pupils with SPCD to resolve conflicts with their friends, peers or other members of staff. Staff referred to using Restorative Justice as an approach for resolving conflicts with other pupils and members of staff:

*“the learning mentor will then try to reengage them, try to bridge that relationship [with their teacher] if something’s gone wrong in a classroom”*  
(SENCO)



*“Restorative justice sessions...if there’s a problem we bring them all into a room and have a conversation about it” (LSA2).*

Staff also offer debriefs to pupils to help them understand other’s viewpoints and feelings, and problem-solve ways to resolve conflict:

*“Kind of reverse the roles and ask her how she would feel...” and “Help her understand the other person’s point of view” (LSA2).*

#### **4. Emotional-support:**

Staff spoke about the school’s role in providing emotional support to pupils with SPCD, including formal support such as mentoring and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)-based groups run by the EP (adapted to pupil’s communication needs). LSAs mentioned the informal emotional support they give pupils on a daily basis. The SENCO talked about her availability to speak to pupils at lunchtimes, and highlighted the importance of making this informal support available:

*“I think the most important thing is...being able to have time to spend with young people... make time for young people, listen to them” (SENCO).*

#### **5. Support-with-learning:**

All LSAs made references to supporting pupils with SPCD with their learning through helping them to understand tasks and adapting language to meet their needs. The SENCO reported that all staff received training on differentiating for pupils with SLCN from the SALT, and that staff have access to EP consultation to develop strategies and interventions.

Spencer's LSA highlighted the need for flexible pupil-centred teaching approaches to meet the needs of these pupils:

*"Some of them will not cope when they're put under spotlight, but some of them will love it. Some of them will need thinking time... some will need to write it down... some of them will need to work in pairs or group, some of them will never be able to work in a group"* (LSA4).

Some LSAs mentioned the importance of supporting emotional needs to support learning e.g. LSA1 described part of his role in the classroom as "just a case of building his confidence". The SENCO justified the need for emotional support to enable learning:

*"If a young person has had an incident at lunchtime there's no way that young person is going to start learning until that's resolved"* (SENCO).

## **6. Involving-parents:**

Some staff members made reference to contact with parents:

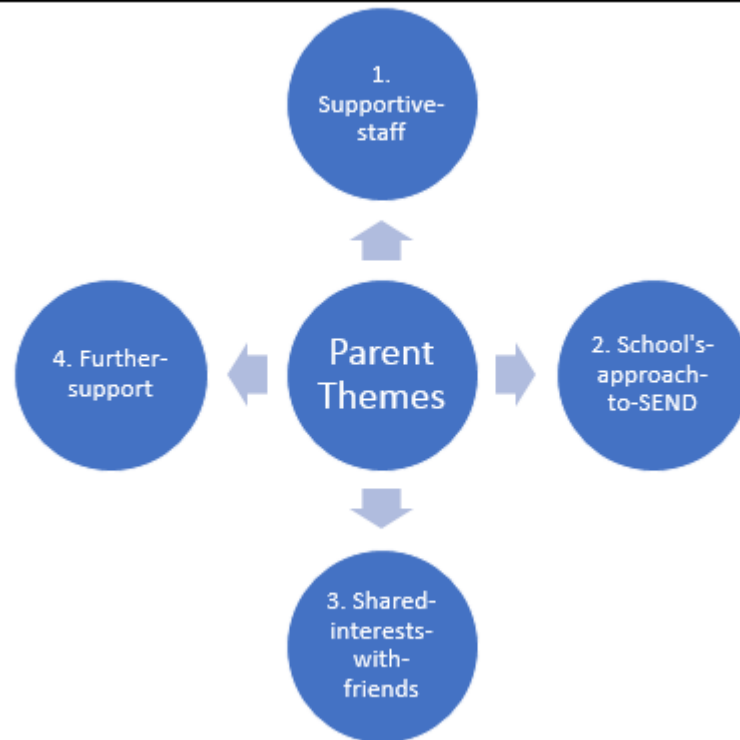
*"phone call to parents quite often to see if everyone is ok at home"* (LSA4)

The SENCO reported that staff have good communication with parents, and try to work as a team with parents and other professionals to plan support for their YP:

*"The thing is having good communication with families"* (SENCO).

(c) Parent Themes:

Figure 12. Parent Themes



Note: numbering is for referencing and does not denote priority or importance.

As shown in Figure 12, four themes were developed through thematic analysis of the data pertaining to Research Question 2 (on how the school supports YP with SPCD), from the three parents who participated in interviews:

**1. Supportive-staff:**

Sacha and Tom's Mums spoke about members of staff who supported their children, and highlighted the importance of staff being aware of the YP's individual needs. They mentioned that their child was helped by mentoring from members of school staff (e.g. P1, p.105).

## **2. School's-approach-to-SEND:**

Parents talked about the school's approach to supporting pupils with SEND, including provision of smaller supported classes, and use of a flexible pupil-centred approach:

*"structure things around him and around that group of children" (P3).*

### **2.1 Supported-Curriculum-class:**

Sarah and Tom's Mums mentioned the small supportive environment provided by the Supported Curriculum class, their child feeling included in this class, and the high level of staff attention received by their child in this class (e.g. P3, p.136).

## **3. Shared-interests-with-friends:**

Sacha and Tom's Mums highlighted the importance of shared interests for friends, either by mentioning their child's shared interests and joint activity with friends (e.g. P1, p.104), or by referring to their child's ability to initiate social interaction if it is focussed on their interests (e.g. P3, p.134).

## **4. Further-support:**

Sarah and Sacha's Mums suggested that their child might need more support. Sarah's Mum wanted further support to understand her needs. Sacha's Mum suggested that counselling within the school environment would benefit her child.

### 4.3 Summary of Findings

There were some **common or related** themes identified across the thematic analyses for each participant group. Tables 3, 4 and 5 (below) show where the contents of the themes overlap across participant types.

Table 3: Common or related themes between YP and other participant types

Participant Group	Themes	Related themes from:		
		YP	Staff	Parents
YP	Friends-help-and-support	-	-	-
	Friends-provide-pleasure-and-company	-	-	Shared-interests-with-friends
	Emotional-issues	-	Staff-understanding-of-SPCD	-
	Friendship-problems	-	Staff-understanding-of-SPCD	-
	Peer-problems	-	Staff-understanding-of-SPCD	-
	Family-support	-	Involving-parents	Further-support
	School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-emotional-issues	-	Support-for-social-communication-and-interaction, Emotional-support	Supportive-staff
	Secondary-school-is-better-than-primary	-	-	-
	Help-with-making-friends	-	Support-for-social-communication-and-interaction	Shared-interests-with-friends

Table 3 shows an overlap in the YP themes of Emotional-issues, Friendship-problems and Peer-problems and the staff theme of Staff-understanding-of-SPCD. The YP made references to School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-

emotional-issues which is also referred to in Staff and Parent themes (Table 3).

**Table 4: Common or related themes between Staff and other participant types**

Participant Group	Themes	Related themes from:		
		YP	Staff	Parents
Staff	Staff-understanding-of-SPCD	Emotional-issues, Friendship-problems, Peer-problems	-	Supportive-staff
	Whole-school-approach-to-SEND	-	-	School's-approach-to-SEND
	Support-for-social-communication-and-interaction	School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-emotional-issues, Help-with-making-friends	-	School's-approach-to-SEND
	Emotional-support	School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-emotional-issues	-	Supportive-staff, School's-approach-to-SEND
	Support-with-learning	-	-	Supportive-staff, School's-approach-to-SEND
	Involving-parents	Family-support	-	Further-support

Table 4 shows an overlap in the Staff theme of Whole-school-approach-to-SEND and the parent theme of School's-approach-to-SEND, and that the staff themes of Support-for-social-communication-and-interaction and Emotional-support overlap with YP and Parent themes.

**Table 5: Common or related themes between Parents and other participant types**

Participant Group	Themes	Related themes from:		
		YP	Staff	Parents
Parents	Supportive-staff	School-staff-support-with-friendship-and-emotional-issues	Staff-understanding-of-SPCD, Emotional-support, Support-with-learning	-
	School's-approach-to-SEND	-	Whole-school-approach-to-SEND	-
	Shared-interests-with-friends	Friends-provide-pleasure-and-company, Help-with-making-friends	-	-
	Further-Support	-	Involving-parents	-

Table 5 shows the relationships between the themes of Parents and those of YP and Staff, including an overlap between the parent theme of Shared-interests-with-friends and the YP themes of Friends-provide-pleasure-and-company and Help-with-making-friends.

The following is a summary of the **common or related** themes across all three participant groups:

- The **role of school staff in supporting the YP** with their **social interactions and emotional needs** was common across the three participant groups.

- The contents of the **Staff-understanding-of-SPCD theme** were reflective of the YP themes of Emotional-issues, Friendship-problems and Peer-problems. It should be noted that Staff-understanding-of-SPCD also included aspects of social interaction difficulties which were not reflected in the YP themes, due to the professional perspective provided by staff. The correspondence between Staff-understanding-of-SPCD and the YP themes also linked to the parent theme of Supportive-staff, because this theme highlighted the importance of staff awareness of YP needs.
- **The school's approach to SEND** was a common theme across the staff and parent themes. Although this was not reflected in the YP themes, it could be hypothesised that the school's flexible and supportive approach may be linked to the positive appraisal of this school indicated by the YP theme of Secondary-school-is-better-than-primary.

There were some **differences** in themes for the different participant types:

- The themes of **Friends-help-and-support** and **Friends-provide-pleasure-and-company** were unique to the YP perspective on the role of their friendships, although the parent theme of **Shared-interests-with-friends** related to the second of the YP themes.



- The YP theme of **Family-support** highlighted the role of their families, and in particular their mothers, in supporting them. The role of family was not reflected in the staff themes, although the **Involving-parents** theme indicated some recognition of the importance of working with families. However, the parent theme of **Further-support** included reference to the idea that one of the mothers would like more support to understand her child's needs.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

This chapter will discuss the findings that emerged from the current study in relation to each of the research questions. The themes identified within case studies and between different participant types will be used to address each research question. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for EP practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study, followed by suggested directions for future research in this area.

YP's views are referenced by their chosen pseudonyms in *italics*, and the views of adults (staff and parents) are referenced by participant codes underlined to indicate when the discussion makes reference to evidence from the current study.

### **5.1 Research Question 1**

*What are the views of young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties on their friendships and related aspects of emotional wellbeing?*

Each of the individual case studies and the integrative analysis of the YP's interviews gave insight into their views on their friendships, and other related aspects of their emotional wellbeing. *YP* viewed friendships as important for providing enjoyment, company, help to solve problems, and emotional support. The role of friendship for these YP is supported by a resilience model of adolescent friendships (e.g. Graber et al., 2016). In this perspective, friendship can be a protective factor that supports emotional well-being in YP

with social communication difficulties. There is a lack of previous research on friendship in YP with SPCD, but research with YP with other types of language and communication difficulties has suggested that social support can mediate the relationship between language difficulties and emotional well-being (e.g. Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2008). The current findings tentatively imply that the same relationship may be identifiable in YP with SPCD.

Graber et al.'s (2016) model proposed that friendship promotes emotional resilience in adolescents through supporting the development of constructive coping strategies, encouraging effort, developing a supportive friendship group, and reducing potential development of disengaged and externalising coping strategies. Some of these factors are evident in the current findings: *Ellen, Sacha, Sarah and Spencer* described sharing problems and seeking comfort from friends, *Sacha* talked about her friend helping her to take deep breaths, and LSA3 talked about *Sarah's* friends helping her to seek adult support. All of these could be viewed as constructive coping strategies. Some of the LSAs highlighted the development of a supportive friendship group, for example one spoke about the benefits of *Sarah* having a group of close friends who are able to recognise when she needs help and tell an adult for her. Therefore, the findings arguably evidence that friendship may be considered a protective factor for emotional wellbeing in YP with SPCD, and that in this view, friendship may work through supporting development of a supportive friendship group and constructive coping strategies.

In addition to supporting coping strategies, having friends may also provide some protection from bullying. *Jason* said he did not think he would be bullied now that he has friends around him, while *Sacha and Spencer* talked about the protective role of friends in terms of defending them or taking their side in conflict with peers. This is supported in the existing literature on bullying, e.g. increased friendship quality is associated with decreased bullying victimization (Kendrick et al., 2012). Kendrick et al. (2012) further suggested that friendship might protect adolescents either by increasing social adjustment and decreasing their vulnerability, which arguably informs *Jason's* comments, or directly through friends acting as defenders, which is in line with the views of *Sacha and Spencer*.

Friendship may also promote wellbeing in another way: by giving YP a greater sense of belonging. This may be important for pupils who are aware of their differences from peers, which appeared to be the case here. The importance of belonging was evidenced by Lansford et al. (2003) who reported that peer group acceptance, as well as friendship quality, constituted a protective factor. This is evidenced in *Jason's* case:

*"The thing that makes me happy about my friends is that they are similar to you but they are not afraid to accept differences you have" (Jason).*

The development of supportive friendships may take time for YP with SPCD as it may take time for them to access and process social interactions. This is supported by the importance of familiarity and closeness as a factor in

enabling YP's friends to support them. For example, *Ellen* spoke about the importance of knowing friends for a long time.

The current findings indicate that YP with SPCD also experience social difficulties within their friendships and with their peers as a result of their social difficulties. *All YP* spoke about some form of conflict with their friends, arguments with peers as well as teasing or social exclusion by peers. This is consistent with the link between "persistent peer problems" and social pragmatic communication difficulties, in a longitudinal study of pupils from age 7 to 16, reported by Mok et al. (2014). The qualitative design of this thesis allowed for deeper exploration of how these peer problems are experienced emotionally.

The current findings provide indications that *all of the YP* experienced emotional problems. *All but Sarah* made references to these issues themselves, and in *Sarah's* case the perspectives provided by her Mum and LSA indicated that she also had emotional needs. The emotional needs of the YP with SPCD in this sample were in line with previous research which suggested a relationship between social pragmatic communication difficulties and SEMH problems (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Farmer & Oliver, 2005; Mok et al., 2014).

The YP in the current sample's accounts implied that their social difficulties may negatively affect their emotional wellbeing. For example, *Ellen* spoke about anxiety about what she has said, while *Jason* reported anxiety about his

actions towards peers. *Ellen, Sacha, Spencer and Jason* described feelings of anger, frustration, sadness or anxiety as a result of peer-conflict, teasing or social exclusion by peers.

The *YP* in this study indicated a desire to have friendships, which is consistent with Simms's work (2017) which reported that *YP* with social pragmatic communication difficulties do seek social interaction. Yet there seemed to be tension between the desire for friendship and the social difficulties that arose for these *YP* as a result. These tensions are illustrated in the individual cases. For example, there is tension between *Sacha's* desire to make friends and her behaviour of staying inside at break times to avoid problematic social interactions. Likewise there is a tension in *Jason's* expressed desire to be more sociable and his acceptance that he is "*unsociable*" but "*there's a pro to that*".

Some of the *YP's* experiences suggest that friendships can become a risk factor for wellbeing due to conflicts between friends. *YP* with SPCD may lack the conflict resolution skills required to successfully move on from conflicts. Conflict resolution requires the ability to see the situation from another's perspective, recognise the impact of the conflict, and make accommodations for the needs of others (Laursen & Pursell, 2009). These social skills, it is asserted, are limited in *YP* with SPCD (Ketelaars et al., 2016). This is supported by the accounts of Sarah, Sacha and Spencer's LSAs who all made reference to their difficulties with resolving conflicts. Conflict among friends is

common, but chronic conflicts affect the perceived quality of friendships (Laursen & Pursell, 2009).

Therefore, it seems arguable that YP with SPCD may benefit from the protective factor of friendship. However, their friendships might also present a risk to their well-being, without support to manage friendships and resolve conflict.

Despite these social and emotional difficulties, the YP's accounts demonstrated resilience, and many had developed constructive coping strategies. This included seeking support from their friends, but also from their mothers. This finding may be informed by Liable et al.'s (2000) research which reported that secure attachments with both parents and peers contribute to positive social and emotional outcomes in typically-developing adolescents. Having a secure attachment is regarded as a protective factor for emotional resilience (Masten, 2001), and the current findings imply that this may be the case for YP with SPCD.

However, it is important to note that one of the YP in the current study (*Tom*) was adopted five years ago and had been in foster care for two years before his adoption. Late-adopted children are at greater risk of developing insecure or disorganised attachment internal-working-models as they may have experienced the loss of at least one attachment relationship (Pace & Zavattini, 2011). It is not possible to assess the quality of Tom's attachment security based on the current data. His comments seemed to communicate positive

regard towards them, and implied that his relationships with them are important to him. This may be understood in light of evidence that late-adopted children can develop attachment security over time within a stable adoption (Pace & Zavattini, 2011).

*Most YP* talked about seeking support from school staff. However, *Jason* said he wanted more opportunities to speak one-to-one with teachers. Interestingly, *Jason* is the only pupil in the sample who is in a mainstream class without consistent LSA support across subjects. The four YP in Supported Curriculum classes have access to a consistent LSA throughout their day, and *Sacha* has LSA support and a Learning Mentor. It is hypothesised that these supportive relationships with members of staff may reflect secondary attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989). The Supported Curriculum class LSAs seem to have the potential to represent attachment figures for the YP they work with because of their consistent presence and availability for support. However, Verschueren & Koomen (2012) have pointed out that typical teacher-child relationships lack some of the key features of parental attachment, such as durability over time and relative exclusivity. Yet Verschueren and Koomen (2012) also suggested that for vulnerable children with limited capacity for self-regulation, the teacher may represent an attachment figure who can provide security and support. This may reflect the relationship with the LSA for some YP with SPCD.

An unexpected insight from some of the YP interviews was the importance of music. *Sacha and Ellen* talked about using music as a tool for calming or



comforting themselves. *Jason* talked about music as a way to connect with peers, and as a vehicle for guidance from artists and their lyrics. Music may play an important role in providing a topic of shared interest for YP to focus conversations around (Miranda, 2013) Music may be a common interest for YP, independent of their perceived differences. *Jason* had a tendency to discuss a topic of interest at length, so it is likely to help facilitate social interaction when the topic is one shared by peers such as music.

Another unexpected finding was the *YP* in the sample's preference for secondary school. Previous literature suggests that secondary school may be a challenging time for YP with any social or communication difficulty, because secondary schools tend to be less aware of language and communication needs and to have a less holistic view of pupils, as a result of the secondary school teaching structure, and as peer relationships and language use becomes more complex in adolescence (Ripley & Barratt, 2008). Yet the *YP* in this sample reported finding it easier to make friends, experiencing less arguments with peers and less bullying, and having more space and activities in their secondary school. It is important to note that this school has a specialist provision for SLCN, a whole-school awareness of communication needs and an inclusive ethos, which may more broadly contextualise their experiences. In addition, the perspectives provided by LSAs indicated that these pupils receive adult support with their social interactions. These factors might contribute to the YP's positive views of their school, and may be viewed as protective factors in the systems around the YP. This is in line with the

evidence supporting the benefits of a whole-school approach and supportive ethos for promoting social and emotional well-being in schools (Weare, 2015).

Overall, the findings imply that these YP with SPCD view friendships as important for providing enjoyment, company, help to solve problems, and emotional support. However, their views also offer insights into their experiences of friendship and peer problems, and the emotional impact of these.

## **5.2 Research Question 2**

*In what ways do schools support the friendships of young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties?*

This section will bring together the relevant findings from YP, staff and parents, firstly to explain the context of the difficulties these YP experience in their friendships, and then to discuss the ways in which the school supports their friendships.

The findings from the YP, LSAs and parents indicate that the YP have social difficulties which affect their friendships. This is in line with previous research which has suggested that SPCD are associated with reduced pro-social behaviour and difficulties with peer relations in primary school children (Ketelaars et al., 2010; Law, Rush, and McBean, 2014; Mok et al., 2014). The perspectives of LSAs and parents in this study suggest that these difficulties included:

- difficulty initiating and maintaining social interaction,
- miscommunication,
- conflict between friends,
- difficulty resolving conflict.

According to Rose and Asher (2004), the ability to form friendships involves various social skills including the ability to initiate interactions, self-disclose about oneself, provide enjoyable companionship, offer help and support, seek help, and manage conflict. The LSA interviews in the current study suggest that YP with SPCD may have difficulties with some aspects of these friendship skills. LSAs reported their YP having difficulties understanding social cues or other people's views and emotions, which may affect their ability to initiate appropriate interactions, know when to offer help and support, and manage conflict. LSAs also reported difficulties for their YP in communicating in a way that was understandable to others, which may affect their ability to initiate interactions or self-disclose about themselves, offer verbal support, and manage conflict through conversation. Therefore, the findings suggest that YP with SPCD are likely to need support with their friendships.

Parents and staff suggested that friendships were supported by the school's inclusive ethos and approach to SEN, through fostering inclusion of pupils with SEN, and promoting staff awareness of the social needs of these pupils. Use of a whole-school approach is supported by evidence indicating the benefits of developing a whole-school ethos of acceptance and inclusion to support social development (Weare, 2015).

The Supported Curriculum class system supports pupils by providing them with a peer group of other YP with a range of needs, and LSA support to facilitate and mediate social interactions. Parents indicated that this system helped their child feel included in a peer group, and helped their social development. This school's Supported Curriculum system could be viewed as a form of Nurture provision as it provides a small supportive environment for vulnerable pupils. Thus the benefits of such a system are supported by indications that nurture groups can promote wellbeing by fostering feelings of security and belonging (Weare, 2015).

School staff suggested that friendships were also supported through specific interventions which were either intended to teach social skills or to help YP resolve conflicts. These include weekly SEAL lessons and SALT Social Communication groups. One LSA suggested that pupils with SPCD would benefit from more social skills teaching, on friendships, relationships and managing conflict, and support to know how to apply taught social skills in real-life friendships. *YP* and LSAs suggested that Restorative Justice is often used as an approach to help YP resolve conflicts that have already occurred. This approach involves providing an opportunity for the pupil who has been harmed to explain the impact of the incident on them to the pupil who was responsible (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015). The adult helps the pupil responsible to understand the other person's perspective and emotions, and plan how the conflict can be resolved. *Sacha* and her LSA spoke about using this to resolve problems within friendships. The use of Restorative Justice is consistent with

research which has indicated that explicit teaching of social and emotional skills can promote social development (Weare, 2015).

YP and staff (e.g. *Ellen, Spencer, LSA3, LSA6 and SENCo*) suggested friendships are also supported through clubs and lunch time activities, and supervised play in the Inclusion Department. These present opportunities for YP to socialise, but with an adult available to support and mediate interactions. The provision of activities and clubs may be supportive of friendship development through enabling YP to meet others with similar interests. Hartup and Stevens (1997) suggested that friendships in early childhood are characterised by shared activities, whereas in adolescence, cognitive and emotional development enables sharing of beliefs and interests and increased intimacy. This may explain the references made by *some of the YP* to shared interests and closeness with their friends.

However, the shared beliefs, interests and intimacy that characterise friendships for typically developing adolescents may present challenges for some YP with SPCD, due to the abstract and complex nature of this type of interaction. Joint activity may promote social relations, as the development of communication is underpinned by turn-taking (e.g Bloom, Russell, & Wassenberg, 1987). *Sarah's* wish to have more play equipment in school seemed to indicate that some YP with SPCD may benefit from continued access to opportunities for shared activity in adolescence. According to Baines & Blatchford (2010) games can provide a way to scaffold social interactions

through learning rules, turn-taking and cooperation. Blatchford (1998, in Baines and Blatchford, 2010) reported that playing games reduces in adolescence and is replaced by socialising and conversation. Adolescent socialising tends to focus on social play but at a more abstract level (e.g. teasing, joking and daring) (Baines and Blatchford, 2010). These more abstract interactions may be challenging for YP with SPCD to access given their pragmatic communication difficulties. YP with SPCD may benefit from adult support to unpick social communication, and by games and play equipment to provide structure and focus for social interactions.

Finally, the importance of obtaining the YP's views is apparent in the findings from the YP in this study. Although there are several common themes, the use of case studies showed that *each YP* had different views on friendship. The findings imply that schools may be able to support friendships through enabling YP with SPCD to pursue their interests and access joint activity with peers who share them.

### **5.3 Research Question 3**

*In what ways do secondary school staff understand social pragmatic communication difficulties and how does the school address these needs?*

Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder is defined as “persistent difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal communication” in the absence of the rigid, restricted and repetitive interests, behaviours and activities that

characterise Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

For the purpose of the staff interviews, the term “Social (pragmatic) communication difficulties” was used, and explained as:

*“Difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes. Sometimes these difficulties are called “pragmatic language difficulties”. Social communication also includes nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.”* (see Appendix 4).

All staff indicated agreement with this definition, although some commented on how different aspects would apply to different pupils in particular cases.

Prior to hearing this research definition, staff explained their understanding of social pragmatic communication difficulties (SPCD). Staff demonstrated an awareness of different aspects of social communication that could be impacted by SPCD. Staff spoke about pupils with SPCD having difficulties understanding social cues and adapting their communication to the social context, difficulty understanding others’ intentions, difficulty communicating in a way that others can understand their meaning, difficulties with initiating social interactions, and appearing socially withdrawn. Therefore, as a group, staff showed knowledge and understanding of the difficulties experienced by pupils with SPCD.

Some staff also talked about YP with SPCD having difficulties understanding certain vocabulary and language. Some referred to difficulties understanding non-literal language, but some also mentioned more general language comprehension issues. Although receptive language difficulties do not come under the SPCD label, previous research has acknowledged that individuals with SPCD may also have some structural language difficulties (Bishop, 2014). School staff reported supporting pupils with SPCD with any receptive language difficulties they may have by adapting language used in the classroom, and helping them to understand instructions by using simple literal language.

Some staff members also acknowledged the emotional impact that SPCD can have on pupils. Emotional needs have not been recognised in the descriptors for SPCD, but the staff accounts suggest that social difficulties can affect these pupils' emotional wellbeing. There is evidence for the emotional needs of children with SPCD (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000), and the findings from this research tentatively imply a potential comorbidity between emotional difficulties and SPCD. The school in this study provides support for the emotional wellbeing of YP with SPCD through mentoring, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)-based groups, SEAL lessons, and the availability of staff to offer informal support when needed. There is an existing evidence-base for interventions to support social and emotional development, including CBT and SEAL, (Weare, 2015). Further research is needed to develop an



evidence-base for interventions to promote emotional wellbeing in YP with SPCD.

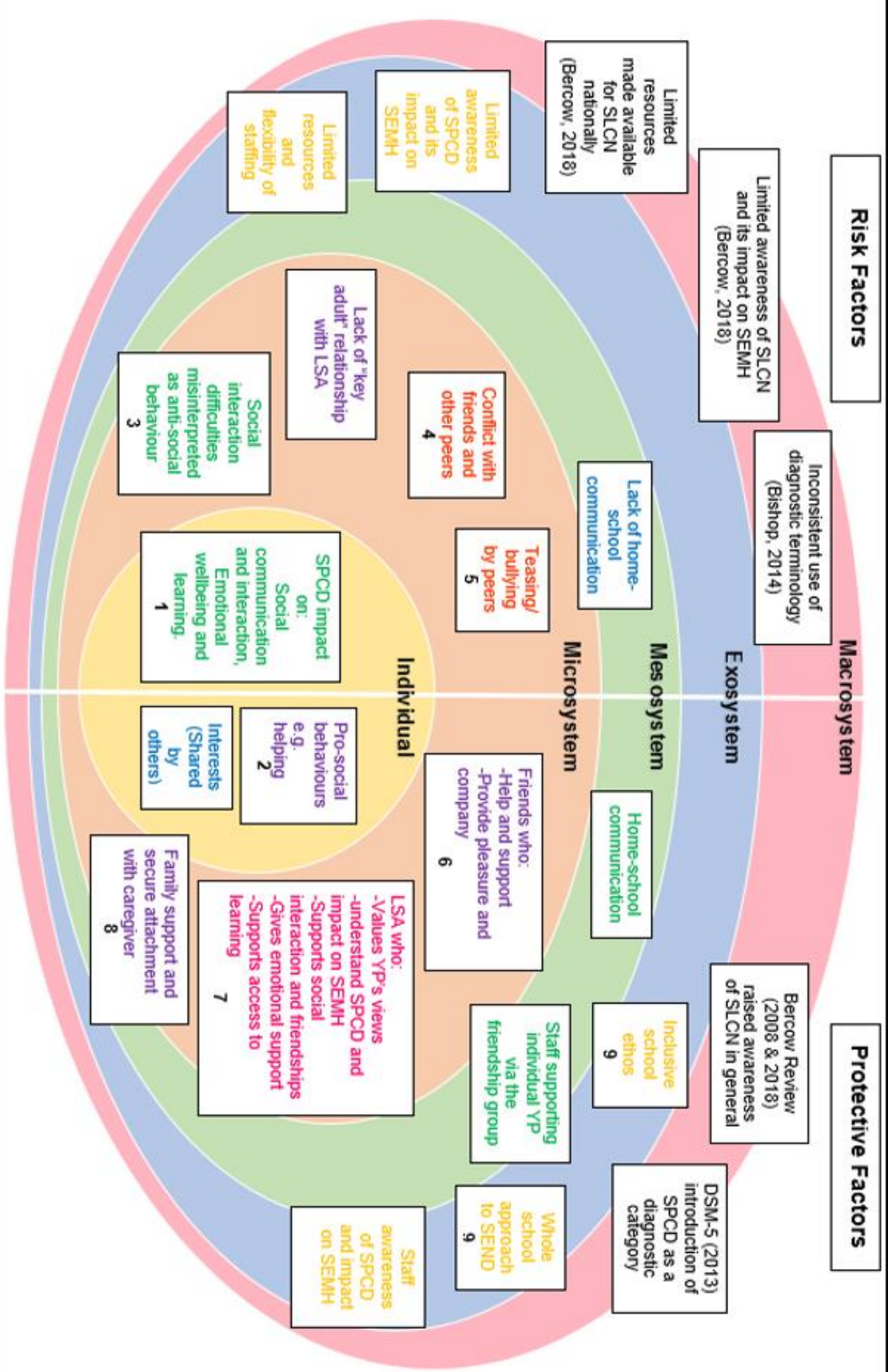
#### **5.4 A hypothetical ecological model of risk and resilience for YP with SPCD**

The findings from this study can be understood in terms of different risk and protective factors with the potential to affect YP with SPCD's emotional wellbeing. An ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979) was used to integrate the factors which impact on YP with SPCD at each level of their environment. Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) conceptualises an individual's development through their interactions with their environment. An ecological model of resilience enables a deeper understanding of the processes that influence resilience at each level of the environment (Ungar et al., 2013). The proposed hypothetical model (Figure 13) is an attempt to conceptualise the related findings from all three Research Questions.

The diagram in Figure 13 shows the proposed conceptual model. Potential risk factors are shown on the left side of the diagram and potential protective factors are shown on the right side. The concentric circles in the diagram represent the different levels of the YP's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the proposed model, the Individual level refers to within-person factors and is represented by the innermost circle in Figure 13. The Microsystem (shown by the inner pink circle in Figure 13) refers to factors related to interactions with their immediate environment (family, school staff, friends and peers). The

Mesosystem (the green circle in Figure 13) refers to connections between aspects of the Microsystem (e.g. home-school communication). In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, the Exosystem is the indirect environment which the individual does not interact with directly, but has an influence on them. In this model, the Exosystem (the blue circle in Figure 13) refers to whole-school factors (e.g. school ethos) because although these factors affect the environment in which the YP interacts with those in their Microsystem, the individual YP has no direct influence on these factors. The Macrosystem refers to relevant factors in the wider cultural context (represented by the outer pink circle in Figure 13). Bronfenbrenner's model includes a Chronosystem which refers to changes over time, but this was not included in the current model because the study did not use a longitudinal design.

**Figure 13. Ecological model of risk and protective factors for YP with SPCD**



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**Note.** This is a hypothetical model based on interpretation of the data informed by the literature. For example, the factor “family support and secure attachment with caregiver” comes from the interpretation of data from the Young People interviews that is informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973).

**The text within each box is colour-coded to show where the data has come from, as follows:**

- Young People data
- Staff data
- Parent data
- YP and staff data
- Staff and parent data
- YP, staff and parent data
- Potential factors relevant to the hypothetical Macrosystem based on the literature review

**The numbers in the boxes indicate where links have been identified between the data from the current study and the previous research literature, as follows:**

1. The impact of SPCD on social and emotional skills is supported by previous research e.g. Freed et al. (2015), Ketelaars et al. (2010), Mok et al. (2014) and Whitehouse et al. (2009).
2. The role of pro-social behaviours (e.g. helping) for friendship development is supported by Rose & Asher (2004).
3. The issue of young people presenting with behaviours which may appear anti-social but actually reflect underlying communication difficulties has been discussed in previous literature e.g. Snow and Powell (2008).
4. The potential impact of social interaction difficulties on the emotional well-being of YP with communication difficulties is supported by Durkin and Conti-Ramsden (2010).
5. The negative impact of teasing and bullying on emotional well-being has been documented in mainstream populations e.g. van Harmelen et al. (2016), while the current study has highlighted this issue in YP with SPCD.
6. The potentially protective role of friendship is supported by previous research in mainstream populations e.g. Graber et al. (2016), while the current study has highlighted the potential for this protective factor to support YP with SPCD.
7. The supportive role of secondary attachments with school staff for vulnerable young people is supported by Verschueren and Koomen (2012).
8. The protective role of secure attachments to caregivers in adolescence is supported by Liable et al. (2000).
9. These factors are in agreement with the existing research which supports the use of a whole school approach and supportive ethos to promote positive social and emotional well-being in schools (Weare, 2015).

### **5.5 Implications for Understanding the Participant's Perspectives**

This study aimed to explore the YP's own views about their experiences at the Individual Level, triangulated with the perspectives of their parents and school staff in their Microsystems (see Figure 13). The findings offer potential insights into the different perspectives of the YP, parents and staff. Although there were commonalities in these views, the findings demonstrated differences in the views of different YP, parents and LSAs both within and between cases. Seeking these different perspectives was in line with my constructivist perspective which acknowledged that events can mean different things to different individuals or groups at different times (Burr, 2003). An important implication for researchers and EPs is the need to take account of all of the different perspectives on a presenting concern.

It is important to consider the credibility of what is reported here, both in research and as an EP. In research involving multiple perspectives, the researcher necessarily influences how the differing perspectives are synthesised. Nevertheless, this study took measures to enhance credibility, which were reviewed in the Methodology chapter. In brief, this involved attempted triangulation of views, prolonged engagement, member-checking, peer-checking and active reflection.

### **5.6 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice**

The current findings offer insight into the experiences of YP with SPCD, triangulated with the perspectives of staff and parents. These views have

potential implications for supporting their friendships and related aspects of emotional wellbeing. EPs work at individual, group and systemic levels. This section will discuss implications for EP practice at different levels of the proposed hypothetical model (Figure 13).

### **Individual:**

- Individual YP with SPCD may experience SEMH problems, in addition to their difficulties with Communication and Interaction (C&I). EPs can use **consultation** to develop a holistic picture of an individual's strengths and needs, which can highlight a need to support SEMH as well as their communication needs. Some authors suggest that EPs are well-placed to support the SEMH needs of individuals and groups of YP in schools, due to their contextualised and interactionist understanding of the YP in relation to their home and school contexts (MacKay, 2011). EPs are trained to deliver various **therapeutic approaches** including Solution Focussed Brief Therapy (SFBT) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to individuals and groups as part of their practice (Atkinson, Corban, & Templeton, 2011). Therefore, EPs may have a role in supporting the SEMH needs of YP with SPCD.
- YP with SPCD can be supported through **interventions designed to develop their social skills** (e.g. Restorative Justice, SEAL). EPs can be involved in **monitoring and evaluating** the impact of these interventions, and exploring adaptations required to meet the needs of individual YP.

In summary, EPs may offer support to YP with SPCD at an individual level through consultation, applying therapeutic approaches, and delivering, monitoring and evaluating social skills interventions.

### **Microsystem**

- EPs can use psychological theory (e.g. Attachment theory; Bowlby, 1973 and Ecological Systems theory; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and research evidence to support staff and parents to understand the needs of YP with SPCD. EPs can reframe the narrative about a **YP's behavioural presentation** in terms of the **impact of their SPCD and/or SEMH needs**. Use of the proposed **ecological model of resilience** may be used to explore potential risk and protective factors for individual YP, and consider how intervention can be used to minimise risks and promote protective factors.
- EPs can also apply understanding of **Attachment Theory** (Bowlby, 1973) to understanding the needs of these YP, and consideration of whether they have/need a **secondary attachment figure in school**. The theory of “optimal dependence” in attachment (Feeney et al., 2015) can be used to examine the need for YP to feel secure *before* they can develop independence, to alleviate concerns about YP becoming overly-dependent on staff.

- The findings showed that although there were common themes from the YP interviewed, each had their own unique perspective on their own needs. This highlights the importance of **seeking the views of YP** on their own provision, as is required by the most recent Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). The research explored the use of tools which EPs can use to offer ways for YP with SPCD to share their views. EPs might also play an **advocacy role** in sharing these views with other professionals, and using them to inform the development of person-centred interventions.
- An unexpected finding was the **importance of music** for some of the YP, as a tool to calm themselves, for guidance, and as a way to connect with peers. Allowing YP who are experiencing anxiety to listen to music might be a powerful tool for supporting their emotional wellbeing, and this finding warrants further research into the potential facilitative and therapeutic role of music for these YP. This has a more general implication for EPs for using consultation to think creatively with school staff about YPs interests and how these can be used to provide support.

Therefore, EPs can support YP with SPCD at a Microsystem level through applying psychological theory to reframe narratives about the YP's behavioural presentation, consider the need for a secondary attachment figure in school, advocate for the YP, and use consultation with staff to plan provision that is informed by the YP's views.



### **Mesosystem:**

- The findings highlighted the importance of **involving parents** in supporting YP with SPCD in school. However, one parent reported feeling a lack of home-school communication. The challenge presented by recruitment of parents for this research indicated potential difficulty in engaging parents. EPs can support **home-school communication** through using consultation to support parental involvement, building their social capital by stating the value of their perspectives, and facilitating development of a shared understanding of the YP's needs.
- EPs can promote **multi-agency collaboration** with SALTs and other professionals, to plan coordinated holistic support. EPs often have little involvement with children with SLCN beyond the assessment stage (Vivash, 2016), yet collaboration **between EPs and SALTs** could facilitate coordinated interventions embedded within the curriculum (McConnellogue, 2011).

In summary, EPs can offer support at the Mesosystem level through supporting home-school communication, and multi-agency collaboration with SALTs.

### **Exosystem:**

- There is a need to **raise awareness of SPCD** and its potential impact on friendships and emotional wellbeing. Schools may benefit from EP

support to recognise when a YP may have SPCD needs, as these can present in subtle ways. For example, YP with SPCD may interact well with familiar adults, but have difficulties interacting with peers, or they may have friendships but still experience difficulties in their social interactions with them. EPs can offer whole-school training to schools to raise awareness of these needs, to promote identification and support for YP with SPCD.

- EPs can **raise awareness of the need to support SEMH** in secondary schools at a whole-school level, by sharing psychological theory (such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Maslow, 1943) and research evidence (e.g. Public Health England, 2014), to support Senior Leadership to understand the importance of promoting emotional wellbeing for raising academic attainment.

Therefore, EPs can work to raise awareness of SPCD and SEMH at the Exosystem level.

## **5.7 General Implications for Schools**

More general implications for how secondary schools might support pupils with SPCD at different levels of their environment (see Figure 13) arose from the research:

### **Microsystem:**

- Provide opportunities for YP with SPCD to develop a **secure nurturing relationship** with a trusted adult in school.
- Provide **opportunities for YP with SPCD to interact with other YP with shared interests**, such as through providing support with choosing, joining and participating in extra-curricular activities and clubs.

### **Exosystem:**

- Schools can develop a **culture of inclusivity** through **raising universal awareness of diverse needs**. Examples of this include using assemblies to promote diversity, and staff being open about their own diverse strengths and difficulties.
- Schools may need to consider how to **meet social and emotional needs** as well as learning outcomes e.g. use of LSAs to facilitate and mediate social interactions during unstructured times, and use of games and play equipment to support engagement in social interaction.

In summary, schools can support YP with SPCD by developing an inclusive ethos, providing support for SEMH needs, opportunities to develop a secure relationship with an adult, and opportunities to interact with other YP with shared interests.

## **5.8 Limitations**

This research used a qualitative case study design, which has limitations in terms of reliability and generalisability. It used a small sample in a specific

setting, and it would not be possible to replicate the exact circumstances and context. This means that the findings cannot be generalised beyond the individuals and school involved. This study was intended to be exploratory and to identify possible themes for further research. Despite their limitations, the findings offer potential insights into the views of YP with SPCD. Although the specific findings are unique, the implications are arguably transferable, and offer possible starting points for EPs supporting YP with similar needs.

Exploration of gender differences was beyond the scope of this thesis, due to its small scale qualitative design. Nevertheless, future research should look to explore potential gender differences in the role of friendships for YP with SPCD, with consideration for differences in the quality and type of interactions as well as their impact on resilience.

A major challenge to conducting this research was participant recruitment. Although “Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder” is now a diagnostic term, this label does not seem to be in common use in schools currently. In addition, YP who present with SPCD may have previously received different diagnoses or labels. For example, some children who would now be described as having SPCD were previously diagnosed with “Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specialised” (PDD-NOS) (Mandy et al., 2017). Lack of consistent labelling makes it difficult to identify individuals with SPCD, although labelling may also create issues for YP (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). Therefore, I was reliant on the professional expertise of a SALT, and her

knowledge of the pupils, for identification of participants. This meant that the study was limited to one secondary school which was known to have SALT provision and staff with expertise in SLCN, so that I was confident in the identification of pupils according to the selection criteria. This recruitment issue has implications for EPs; it suggests that YP with SPCD are not always identified, which supports the importance of raising awareness.

The profiles of some of the YP included in the sample meant that there may have been other factors contributing to their friendships and emotional well-being, beyond the impact of their SPCD (e.g. adoption). It was acknowledged that SPCD are unlikely to exist in isolation, and that these YP may have various other needs. All YP with SLCN are potentially vulnerable to the impact of their communication difficulties on SEMH and education (Bercow, 2018). These case studies should be interpreted in relation to each YP's individual circumstances and environmental influences. Contextual details have been presented in this thesis for transparency. However, it is acknowledged that this study only focussed on one aspect of the YP in this sample's needs.

A further limitation to the sample was the lack of parental participation. These parents gave written consent for their child to take part, but did not consent to parent interviews. This meant that they were not contacted for ethical reasons, so the reasons for their lack of participation are not known. Parents may have been reluctant or unable to participate for several reasons, such as limited free time due to work or childcare commitments, health issues, difficulties with language and/or communication, or discomfort at the prospect of discussing

their child's needs with an unknown professional. This was unfortunate as a higher level of parent participation may have given these cases a richer, more detailed picture from a different perspective.

Finally, from a social constructivist perspective, there are limitations to the use of interview data. Each interview is the socially constructed narrative of one person at one time, which will have been influenced by discourses in that person's context. The ways in which each individual perceived the events that they describe will have been influenced by these narratives (e.g. the LSAs will have observed the YP through the lens of their prior knowledge of them as a pupil with SLCN). I endeavoured to reduce these issues by gathering data from multiple perspectives and by meeting the YP on two different occasions. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that each view is socially constructed, but offers valid insight into their experiences. This point also has implications for EPs; it implies a need to triangulate information from various perspectives and from different contexts when assessing and supporting YP with SPCD.

## **5.9 Future research directions**

This exploratory research could be extended through further exploration of:

- The relationship between specific social interaction difficulties and peer problems (e.g. bullying).
- Exploration of how YP can be supported to apply the skills learnt in interventions (e.g. Restorative Justice) to their everyday interactions.

- The role of other non-friend relationships, including relationships and interactions beyond the school context.
- The potentially facilitative and therapeutic role of music, and how this might be used within school settings.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

This research study has offered potential insights into the views of YP with SPCD, triangulated with the comments of their LSAs and parents, on their friendships and related aspects of their emotional wellbeing. Overall, the findings imply that friendships are important to these YP, and provide enjoyment, company, help and support. However, the findings also indicated the impact of their social difficulties on their friendships and emotional wellbeing.

Each case was unique, but there were common themes around friendship problems, peer problems, and emotional consequences to these experiences. The findings suggested that friendship has the potential to work as a protective factor for these YP, through helping them to develop and use effective coping strategies.

The study suggested several potential protective and risk factors at different levels in the environment, which have been conceptualised in a proposed model of resilience for YP with SPCD, informed by ecological principles. This model may suggest that YP with SPCD benefit from the support of friends, but

also their parents, and staff who support their social interactions and emotional wellbeing. The model offers a potential framework for EPs to develop a holistic picture of YP with SPCD, to consider the impact of possible risk factors and potential opportunities to support protective factors.

The findings also suggested the relevance of listening to their views, and providing opportunities for friendships to develop through shared interests and joint activity, in addition to explicit social skills teaching. Furthermore, this study also highlighted the importance of raising whole-school awareness of diversity and inclusion, and staff awareness of the holistic needs of YP with SPCD.



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## 7. Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Literature Review Search Strategy**

The literature review required a comprehensive literature search in order to identify a range of relevant literature. Main concepts were identified from the research question e.g. “social communication”, “friendship”, “social”, “emotional”, “friendships” and “young people”, and these were used to generate key words and their associated terms (e.g. “social communication” and “pragmatic language”), synonyms (e.g. “disorder” and “impairment”) and truncated forms (e.g. “friend” as well as “friendship”) to be used as search terms.

Search terms were then combined in various ways using Boolean logic to combine relevant search terms using AND or OR, for example: ("social communication disorder" OR "pragmatic language" OR "semantic pragmatic") AND ("social" OR "friend\*" OR "peer relation\*" OR "social interact\*") AND (child\* OR adolescent OR pupil).

Searches were refined in response to the search results, for example an initial search using “social communication” yielded 861 results including articles on a range of topics. This term was deemed too broad and was refined to “social communication disorder”. On the other hand, “pragmatic language” was used without “impairment” so that the search was not restricted, given the range of synonyms for “impairment” found in the literature.

Searches were conducted in a number of electronic databases which provided access to peer-reviewed literature on education and psychology. This included searches within the databases of the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index (EBSCO), Web of Science, Psych Info, as well as University College London and Institute of Education library resources. Some articles were excluded on the basis of topic relevance, age and language, but the search was not restricted to the UK because research in this area is limited, and valuable research has been conducted abroad e.g. the Netherlands. Additional literature came from significant articles that were referenced in those found through these searches.

## Appendix 2: Information Sheets and Consent forms

### Information sheet and Consent Form for Head Teacher

Dear .....

My name is Agnes Elliott and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project on the social experiences of young people with social communication difficulties. This project aims to help us better understand these young people's needs and how to support them.

Social communication difficulties refer to difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes, and/or difficulties using nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

I am a doctoral student at UCL Institute of Education and a Trainee Educational Psychologist who supports schools, staff, parents and children within an Educational Psychology Service. I am carrying out a study designed to understand more about the social experiences of young people with social communication difficulties.

I am writing to enquire whether you would give me permission to recruit participants from among the pupils, their parents and staff at your school.

#### **Why am I doing this research?**

The aim of this study is to explore young people's views on their friendships and life at secondary school. Furthermore, the study aims to hear the views of the young people, their parents and the staff who work with them on how they can be supported. It is hoped that this will enable parents, professionals and schools to better understand the impact of social communication difficulties and develop ways of supporting these young people.

#### **What will happen if pupils, their parents and staff choose to take part?**

- Pupils, their parents and the staff involved will have the opportunity to ask me any questions they might have regarding this research.
- I will meet with you and/or the school SENCo to identify pupils, and will invite the SENCo to complete a brief interview about the school context.
- If pupils and their parents consent to take part, pupils will be invited to meet me for an informal interview with a choice of activities designed to help them share their views. They will be able to bring a familiar adult (this could be a member of staff from your school) with them if they prefer, and can choose which activities to do and to stop at any time if they wish.
- After this we will arrange to meet again so that I can show them what I have learned and check that I have understood their views correctly.
- For a small number of the pupils involved, I will also invite their parents and the staff who work with them (e.g. teacher, Teaching Assistant, Speech and Language Therapist) for an informal interview. This can be in school or on the phone.

#### **Will anyone know I have been involved?**

Participant confidentiality is important to us. To protect their identity, all recordings and interview transcripts will be allocated a unique number.

#### **Withdrawing from this research**

Being in this study is voluntary and pupils, parents or staff are under no obligation to consent to participation. If they do consent to participate, they are entitled to stop at any point if they wish to withdraw their participation with no negative consequences or the need to explain why.

#### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

Findings of this study will be used for reports. Participants will not be identified in any of the reports. Data collected will be stored in accordance with UCL Institute of Education regulations, and kept in an encrypted data storage for a maximum of 2 years (or until my thesis is examined).

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

If you have any comments or questions about this research or consent forms, please contact me at [REDACTED]  
I will be in touch in a week's time to discuss the research and answer any questions.

If you would be willing to give permission for me to conduct this study in your school, I would appreciate it if you could sign the enclosed consent form. Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Regards,

Agnes Elliott  
-----

I, \_\_\_\_\_(NAME) consent for Mrs. Agnes Elliott to proceed with this study with the supervision of Dr. Karl Wall.

Signature of Headteacher: .....

Print name: .....

Date: .....

## Information sheet and Consent Form for Parents

### Who is conducting the research?

My name is Agnes Elliott and I am inviting your child to take in part in my research project on the social experiences of young people with social communication difficulties. This project aims to help us better understand these young people's needs and how to support them.

Social communication difficulties refer to difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes, and/or difficulties using nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

I am a doctoral student at UCL Institute of Education, and a Trainee Educational Psychologist who supports schools, staff, parents and children within an Educational Psychology Service. I am carrying out a study designed to understand more about the social and emotional experiences of young people with social communication difficulties.

### Why am I doing this research?

The aim of this study is to explore young people's views on their friendships and life at secondary school. Furthermore, the study aims to hear the views of the young people, their parents and the staff who work with them on how they can be supported. It is hoped that this will enable parents, professionals and schools to better understand the impact of social communication needs and develop ways of supporting these young people.

### What will happen if you choose to take part?

- You and your son/daughter will have the opportunity to ask me any questions you might have regarding this research.
- If you and your son/daughter consent to take part, your son/daughter will be invited to meet me for an informal interview with a choice of activities designed to help them share their views.
- They will be able to bring a familiar adult with them if they prefer, and can choose which activities to do and to stop at any time if they wish.
- After this we will arrange to meet again so that I can show them what I have learned and check that I have understood their views correctly.
- For a small number of the pupils involved, I will also invite their parents for an informal interview. This can be in school or on the phone at a time arranged to suit you.
- If you are involved in this interview, I will ask you questions about your child. The questions will be about your child's needs and how they are supported in school. With your permission, I will record the interview on a voice recorder.

**Will anyone know you have been involved?**

Participant confidentiality is important to us. To protect your identity, all recordings and interview transcripts will be allocated a unique number.

**Withdrawing from this research**

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do consent to participate, you are entitled to stop at any point if you wish to withdraw your participation with no negative consequences or the need to explain why.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

Findings of this study will be used for reports. Participants will not be identified in any of the reports. Data collected will be stored in accordance with UCL Institute of Education regulations, and kept in an encrypted data storage for a maximum of 2 years (or until my thesis is examined).

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

**If you have any comments or questions about this research or consent forms, please contact me at [REDACTED]**

**If you would like to be involved, I would appreciate it if you could please complete and sign the enclosed consent form and return it in the envelope provided. Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project.**

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.**

If you are happy to participate, please complete this consent form and return by the **19<sup>th</sup> July**

Yes No

I have read and understood the information sheet about the research

I agree to my son/daughter taking part in interviews as outlined on the information sheet

I agree to take part in a parent interview as outlined on the information sheet

I agree to the interviews being recorded

I understand that my child and/or I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used

I understand that I can contact Agnes Elliott at any time if I have any questions or concerns

---

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Researcher's name \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## Information sheet and Consent Form for YP

### Information sheet for Pupils

Hello



**My name is Agnes**

- I work with teachers, parents and young people.
- I'm interested in finding out about your friendships and life at secondary school.

Please can I meet you to talk about this?

#### **What will happen if you take part?**

- I will come to your school to talk to you and do some activities together.
- We can ask an adult you know well to come with you if you would like.
- Anything you say will be kept confidential. This means your parents and teachers will not know what you tell me. When I write my report, I will give you a made-up name so nobody knows which bits you said.

#### **What are the activities?**



Talking



Blob Friends



Card sorting



Feelings Post-Its



Drawing

You won't have to do any writing or drawing if you don't want to.

### Do you have to take part?

- You do not have to take part. You can say no if you do not want to do it.
- You can say Yes and then change your mind and say No later.
- It is OK to start and then say you want to stop.  
Just tell me or your parents if you do not want to take part anymore.

### What will I do with the information I find out?

- I will come back again to show you what I found out and check if it sounds right to you.
- I will write a report about what I find out. Your name will not be in the report.

Thank you for reading.





Circle your answer:



Would you like to take part in the research activities?

YES

NO

Is it OK for me to record what we are saying when we talk?

YES

NO

Would you like someone to come with you?  
If yes, who should I ask to see if they are free?

YES

NO

.....

You can take a break or stop at any time.

You can ask me questions when I meet you.  
Or you can email me: [REDACTED]

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Parent/Guardian's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (Parent/Guardian) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Researcher's name \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## Information sheet and Consent Form for Staff

### Who is conducting the research?

My name is Agnes Elliott and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project on the social experiences of young people with social communication difficulties. This project aims to help us better understand these young people's needs and how to support them.

Social communication difficulties refer to difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes, and/or difficulties using nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

I am a doctoral student at UCL Institute of Education and a Trainee Educational Psychologist who supports schools, staff, parents and children within an Educational Psychology Service. I am carrying out a study designed to understand more about the social experiences of young people with social communication difficulties.

### Why am I doing this research?

The aim of this study is to explore young people's views on their friendships and life at secondary school.

Furthermore, the study aims to hear the views of the young people, their parents and the staff who work with them on how they can be supported. It is hoped that this will enable parents, professionals and schools to better understand the impact of social communication needs and develop ways of supporting these young people.

**What will happen if you choose to take part?**

You will have the opportunity to ask me any questions you might have regarding this research. If you consent to take part, I will invite you for an informal interview. This can be in school or on the phone at a time arranged to suit you. In the interview, I will ask you questions about an identified pupil who you work with. The questions will be about the pupil’s needs and how they are supported in school. With your permission, I will record the interview on a voice recorder.

**Will anyone know you have been involved?**

Participant confidentiality is important to us. To protect your identity, all recordings and interview transcripts will be allocated a unique number.

**Withdrawing from this research**

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do consent to participate, you are entitled to stop at any point if you wish to withdraw your participation with no negative consequences or the need to explain why.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

Findings of this study will be used for reports or academic articles. Participants will not be identified in any of the reports. Data collected will be stored in accordance with UCL Institute of Education regulations, and kept in an encrypted data storage for a maximum of 2 years (or until my thesis is examined).

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

**If you have any comments or questions about this research or consent forms, please contact me at**



**If you would like to be involved, I would appreciate it if you could please complete and sign the enclosed consent form and return it in the envelope provided. Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project.**

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.**

If you are happy to participate, please complete this consent form and return by.....

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information sheet about the research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in an interview as outlined on the information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can contact Agnes Elliott at any time if I have any questions or concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

-----  
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
Researcher’s name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Ethical approval form



### Student Research

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentethics/> or contact your supervisor or [researchethics@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@ioe.ac.uk).

**Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s). Please attach all supporting documents and letters.**

*For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.*

Section 1. Project details			
a.	Project title	Exploring the social and emotional experiences of secondary school for young people with Social (Pragmatic) Communication difficulties	
b.	Student name	Agnes Elliott	
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Dr. Karl Wall/Helen Upton	
d.	Department	Psychology and Human Development	
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>	EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
		<del>MRes</del> <input type="checkbox"/>	DEdPsy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<del>MTeach</del> <input type="checkbox"/>	MA/MSc <input type="checkbox"/>
		ITE <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Diploma (state which) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Other (state which) <input type="checkbox"/>	
f.	Course/module title	DEdPsy Research Methods	
g.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	N/A	
h.	Intended research start date	April 2017	
i.	Intended research end date	July 2018	
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in	England	
	<small>If research to be conducted abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> and submit a completed travel insurance form to Serena Ezra (<a href="mailto:s.ezra@ucl.ac.uk">s.ezra@ucl.ac.uk</a>) in UCL Finance (see guidelines). This form can be</small>		

found here (you will need your UCL login details available): <a href="https://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/secure/fin_acc/insurance.htm">https://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/secure/fin_acc/insurance.htm</a>	
k. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:
No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:
<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.</li> <li>– Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Note:</b> Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the <a href="#">National Research Ethics Service (NRES)</a> or <a href="#">Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)</a>. In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.</p>	

## Section 2. Project summary

### Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews        | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires    | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <i>if only method used go to Section 5.</i>              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action research              | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <i>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observation                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups                                   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature review | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, give details:   |

Please provide an overview of your research. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, your method of data collection (e.g., observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and kind of questions that will be asked, reporting and dissemination (typically 300-500 words).

Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder is a new diagnostic category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5, 2013) and refers to "persistent difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal communication" in the absence of rigid, restricted and repetitive interests, behaviours and activities found in Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASD). Social communication difficulties might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes, and/or difficulties using nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact. This type of communication disorder has previously been referred to as "pragmatic language impairment" or "semantic pragmatic disorder".

Research has shown an association between language and communication difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural problems (e.g. Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012), and recent studies indicate that social pragmatic language ability is associated with social, emotional and behavioural outcomes (e.g. Farmer & Oliver, 2005; Katsiava et al., 2010). Previous research into social pragmatic communication difficulties has used analysis of quantitative data such as data from questionnaires. Therefore, there is a need for future research to take a qualitative approach to exploring the views of young people themselves in order to gain greater insight into the nature of their social and emotional needs, and of how these needs are experienced by the young people themselves. This study will focus on secondary-aged pupils because previous research has focussed on primary-aged pupils, meaning little is known about the experiences of adolescents with Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder (DSM-5).

#### Main Aims and Research Questions:

- To explore the views of young people with Social (Pragmatic) Communication difficulties on their social and emotional needs, and on how to best meet these needs.

RQ: What are the views of young people with social communication needs on their feelings, their friendships and life at

secondary school?

- To better understand the needs of these young people in order to plan effective holistic support and intervention.

*RQ: In what ways do schools support the social and emotional needs of young people with Social (Pragmatic) Communication difficulties?*

- To increase awareness of Social (Pragmatic) Communication difficulties and how schools can support these needs.

*RQ: In what ways do secondary school staff understand Social (Pragmatic) Communication difficulties and how does the school address these needs?*

**Design:** The design will be in 2 parts: 1. qualitative design with a participatory approach. 2. qualitative case study design.

**Participants:**

- 6-10 young people with social pragmatic communication difficulties (see Sampling Criteria) aged between 12 and 18 years old.
- 2-3 young people will be selected as case studies, and their parents and school staff who work with them (e.g. teachers, Teaching Assistants) will be invited to take part in interviews.
- School **SENCO**.

**Sampling:** Purposeful criterion sampling to identify 6-10 information rich cases through consultation with the school **SENCO**.

Criteria for selection will be: secondary school pupils who are known to Speech and Language Therapy Services; have SEN support or EHC plans; and have a diagnosis of "Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder" or labels of "pragmatic language difficulties" or "social communication difficulties" or whose described language and communication need meets the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for "Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder" (i.e. persistent difficulties with social verbal and non-verbal communication in the absence of rigid, restricted and repetitive interests, behaviours and activities).

**Method of data collection:**

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study will be used to pilot the information sheets and consent forms, draft interview schedules and participatory methods for eliciting the young people's views. I will ask 2 young people with social communication difficulties to take part in the pilot. I will trial using an opt-in approach to offer the choice of activities for one participant ~~with~~ give signal sentence rationale and an opt-out approach with the other, in order to establish which approach is most appropriate. I will pilot information sheets and interview schedules with a parent and a **SENCO**.

**SENCO, Semi-structured Interview (draft interview schedule attached):** questions to gather contextual information

**Unstructured interviews with 6-10 young people:**

Pilot and then use participatory methods (offer choices from a range of activities that can be used flexibly depending on preferences and abilities of the young people). These methods will be adapted and refined following piloting.

- Blob people colouring/talk using "Blob School" pictures and prompts (Pip Wilson)
- School "tour" walk led by young person, taking photos
- Drawings of self, friends, school using prompt questions from "Drawing the Ideal Self" (Heather Moran)
- "About Me" profile/passport/poster making – give choice to use Values, Environment and What Helps Me pictures
- "Graffiti wall" coloured post-it notes on likes/dislikes of school
- Feelings Diary (colour/draw)
- Missing word game (sentence completion)
- Ranking activities (e.g. Hill et al., 2016)

Visual supports will be made available to support verbal communication throughout.

The participants will be invited to attend a second brief interview to review the transcripts and check their views have been understood.

**Case Studies:**

2 – 3 detailed case studies from multiple sources of data to explore the circumstances associated with their social and emotional experiences, how they have been supported, and their views on the support they need.

Data to come from the young person's interview (as above) and:

- Semi-structured interviews with parents (draft interview schedule attached)
- Semi-structured interviews with staff who work with the young person (draft interview schedule attached)
- Review of the young person's school file with permission from parents.

<b>Section 3. Participants</b>	
Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.	
a. Will your research involve human participants?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 4
b. Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school <input type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults please specify below <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify below
<p><b>NB:</b> Ensure that you check the <b>guidelines</b> (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES).</p> <p>Secondary school and sixth form pupils, their parents, teachers, teaching assistants, SENCOs and SLTs.</p>	
<p>c. If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?  <b>(Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.)</b></p> <p>I intend to firstly approach schools to seek permission from head teachers to contact parents. I will then seek permission and informed consent from parents (by sending out information sheets and consent forms). I will also seek informed consent from the pupils themselves by giving them consent forms and information sheets, but also talking them through the procedure, confidentiality, right to withdraw, and what will happen to the data.</p>	
<p>d. How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)?</p> <p>I will approach schools identified as having pupils who are known to Speech and Language Therapy Services; have SEN support or EHC plans; and have a diagnosis of "Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder" or labels of "pragmatic language difficulties" or "social communication difficulties" or whose described language and communication need meets the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for "Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder" (i.e. persistent difficulties with social verbal and non-verbal communication in the absence of rigid, restricted and repetitive interests, behaviours and activities). I will make contact with the schools' head teachers for permission to approach individuals, and then ask schools to pass on information sheets and consent forms to relevant parents and staff. Once parents have given consent, I will then meet with pupils to obtain their consent.</p>	
<p>e. Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing.</p> <p>I will send out information sheets informing participants of the purpose, research questions, procedure expected timings, as well as their rights to consent and withdraw at any time. In addition, I will talk through the procedure, confidentiality, right to withdraw, and what will happen to the data with the pupils and give them opportunities to ask questions.</p>	
<p>f. How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?</p> <p><i>See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.</i></p>	

	I will use an opt-in procedure for obtaining consent. Written consent will be obtained from parents and the school staff who participate. All participants will be informed of the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences in the information sheet and consent form. I will also state this orally to participants before beginning the interviews.
g.	<p><b>Studies involving questionnaires:</b> Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If <b>NO</b> please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.          _____</p>
h.	<p><b>Studies involving observation:</b> Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed.</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If <b>NO</b> read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.          _____</p>
i.	<p>Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If <b>yes</b> what steps will you take to explain and minimise this?</p> <p>Participants asked to participate in interviews may feel discomfort or embarrassment about being recorded, therefore I will ask for their permission to record and will explain that the recording will be kept confidentially and used for including their views in the research. They will not be recorded if they do not wish to (if they do give consent to take part I will ask permission to take notes instead). Pupils and their parents may experience discomfort about discussing and sharing information about their difficulties and needs. Therefore, I will explain that this information will be kept anonymously and confidentially. I will explain the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw.</p> <p>If <b>not</b>, explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise? _____</p>
j.	<p>Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If <b>YES</b> please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.          _____</p>
k.	<p>Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If <b>NO</b> please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.          _____</p>
l.	<p>Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.)</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>

Participating schools will receive a brief summary of the findings after the project has been completed and marked. The pupils and their parents will be invited to a feedback session to hear about the findings and how they will be used.
if no, why not? [redacted]

**Section 4. Security-sensitive material**  
Only complete if applicable  
Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

\* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues

**Section 5. Systematic review of research**  
Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

\* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues  
If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered No to both questions, please go to Section 10 Attachments.

**Section 6 Secondary data analysis. Complete for all secondary analysis**

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		if no, do you have the owner's permission/license? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>	
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Do you plan to anonymise the data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
		Do you plan to use individual level data?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Will you be linking data to individuals?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>



g.	<b>If no</b> , was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
h.	<b>If no</b> , was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><i>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p> <p><i>If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to Section 9 Attachments.</i></p>			

### Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). (See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>* If yes</b>, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.</p> <p>Data will not be processed or sent outside the European Economic Area.</p>		
c.	Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? Myself (student researcher) and my Research Supervisors.	
<b>During the research</b>		
d.	Where will the data be stored? In encrypted files on a laptop and USB.	
	Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> * No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>* If yes</b> , state what mobile devices: USB and laptop.	
e.	<b>* If yes</b> , will they be encrypted? Yes	
<b>After the research</b>		
f.	Where will the data be stored? The data will be stored securely encrypted on a laptop.	
g.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The data will be kept for an additional 2 years after the research is completed. The data and records will be anonymised and encrypted.	
h.	Will data be archived for use by other researchers?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<b>* If yes</b> , please provide details. <input type="text"/>	

### Section 8. Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Methods</li><li>- Sampling</li><li>- Recruitment</li><li>- Gatekeepers</li><li>- Informed consent</li><li>- Potentially vulnerable participants</li><li>- Safeguarding/child protection</li><li>- Sensitive topics</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- International research</li><li>- Risks to participants and/or researchers</li><li>- Confidentiality/Anonymity</li><li>- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality</li><li>- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)</li><li>- Reporting</li><li>- Dissemination and use of findings</li></ul> |
|--|--|

The participants in this study are vulnerable since they are not only children but also have SLCN. Children are less able than adults to protect their own interests (Farrell, 2005) and the language needs of the children involved mean that it will be more challenging to ensure understanding of the research procedure and the right to withdraw. Therefore, it is important to consider how informed consent will be obtained. Consent will be sought from parents initially, and then from the young people themselves. I will explain what activities they will be doing if they choose to take part, and reassure them that they can choose not to participate without consequence. I will involve parents/carers/familiar adults when gaining consent in order to facilitate communication and understanding. Even when it is not possible to gain fully informed consent from a young person, it is ethical to establish their "assent" to participate (Morris, 2003). Therefore, I will continue to monitor the young people's willingness to participate throughout the process.

The research is not intended to cause harm and aims to develop understanding and support for the needs of this population. Furthermore, as a project that aims to listen to young people, it is intended to promote the ethical practice of respect for young people's views. Nevertheless, given that the young people in the sample may have emotional and social difficulties, it will be important to ensure that they are comfortable and do not experience emotional harm as a result of their participation. To put participants at ease, I will suggest that they may wish to have a familiar adult with them during interviews. If participants wish to have a member of staff to accompany them, the staff member will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to protect the confidentiality of the young person's views. I will also send an information sheet before the interview so that these can be shared with the young person to reduce any anxiety that might arise before or within the interview. I will monitor the young people's responses for signs of distress or anxiety, will offer them breaks, and remind them of their right to withdraw. I have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and has received safeguarding training in my previous role as a teacher in a Specialist Provision for children with SLCN. This previous experience also means that I have an increased awareness and understanding of the needs of this population.

It is possible that the children and their parents participating in this research may experience discomfort when discussing and sharing information about their difficulties and needs. Therefore, they will need to be assured that this information will be kept anonymously and confidentially (unless a safeguarding concern arises, in which case school safeguarding procedures would be followed). Participants may feel discomfort or embarrassment about being recorded, therefore their permission to be recorded will be obtained, and they will not be recorded if they do not wish to be. They will be assured that all recordings will be kept confidentially and used only for including their views in this research. Data will be encrypted and stored anonymously to maintain confidentiality, and will remain anonymous when presented in the report. Participants will be offered a debrief in which to discuss the anonymised research and ask questions, and will be given contact details for any follow up concerns.

Finally, I will need to ensure that participants' views have been understood and reported accurately. I intend to take a reflexive approach to listening by acknowledging that "truly listening to children means being prepared to be surprised by them" (Merrick, 2011). Therefore, this research will use a participatory approach (e.g. Clark and Moss, 2001), in which the young people involved will be invited to check, review and discuss transcripts and guide my interpretation of their viewpoints.

## Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

My Year 1 Research Project involved interviews with staff who work with secondary school pupils with "pragmatic language needs". Three of the 7 main themes identified using thematic analysis were:  
**Social difficulties** such as difficulties with friendships, social interaction and interpreting others' responses.  
**Behavioural difficulties** including impulsive behaviour, and communication difficulties that are misinterpreted as behaviour.  
**Emotional difficulties** including problems with self-esteem and feelings of confusion.  
 These findings have influenced me in the direction of the current research, and I may make reference to them in my thesis. Ethical approval was granted for the Year 1 project, including for me to retain data for up to 2 years after collecting in order to use in my thesis.

**Section 10 Attachments** Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Consent form	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>If applicable:</i>		
c.	The proposal for the project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Full risk assessment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

**Section 11 Declaration**

	Yes	No
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BPS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BERA <input type="checkbox"/> BSA <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>		
I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:</b>		
The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.		
Name	Agnes Elliott	
Date	28/02/17	

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor.

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you may refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Administrator (via [researchethics@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@ioe.ac.uk)) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics representatives in your department and the research ethics coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee': <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html>

<b>Reviewer 1</b>	
Supervisor name	Dr Karl Wall
Supervisor comments	The arrangements for this study have been extensively discussed and reviewed with the inclusion of piloting to examine key strategic aspects.
Supervisor signature	
<b>Reviewer 2</b>	
Advisory committee/course team member name	Helen Upton
Advisory committee/course team member comments	Approved.
Advisory committee/course team member signature	
<b>Decision</b>	
Date decision was made	3/5/2017
Decision	Approved <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Referred back to applicant and supervisor <input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Recording</b>	Recorded in the student information system <input type="checkbox"/>

Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the relevant programme administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the IOE website at <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/> and [www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk](http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Interview Schedules

### Young Person Activity-Oriented Interview Schedule

-Go through consent form

-Introduce visuals

#### Warm Up Questions e.g.

- What's your favourite subject in school? Favourite lesson?
- What do you like to do outside school?
- What do you like to do at home?
- Do you have any other children or young people in your home?

#### 1. Strength cards

These cards show some words and pictures that can describe people.

- Which ones are like you? Which ones are not like you?
- Tell me about when you were... (e.g. brave) Can you think of a time when you were...?
- How did you get to be...? Has anyone or anything helped you to be ...?
- Are there any you would you like to be? Why? What or who could help you? What makes it difficult?

#### 2. Relationship circles (or drawings) + Post-its

I'm going to draw three circles. This middle circle is for your friends who are closest/most important to you. This outside circle is for friends who are still important, but you are not as close to them. It's split into 'inside school' and 'outside school' (show)

- Who is important to you? (inside/outside school)  
**N.B. first names only + remove from transcripts**
- What do you do with your friends?
- How do you feel about your friends? Prompt – how do they make me feel? Do you like having friends? (*provide emotions vocabulary sheet as a visual prompt*)
- **Post-its:** What do you like about your friendships? (*provide good friend/bad friend pictures sheet as a visual prompt*)
- Is there anything you don't like?
- Are there any people you don't like at school? Why?

#### 3. Fill in the blank (sentence completion)

Choice to play as "card game" or write answers on sheet format (sentence starters below)  
(*Provide emotions vocabulary sheet as a visual prompt*)

#### 4. Blob people

(*Provide emotions vocabulary sheet as a visual prompt*)

- Which Blob do you feel like?
- Which Blob would you like to be?
- Are any Blobs like your friends?
- Which Blob is a good friend?
- Which Blob makes you happy/sad/worried?
- What do you do if you feel sad/worried/scared? What helps you?

#### 5. Ideal Friend (adapted from Ideal Self)

**Give choice to draw and/or write or for me to draw/write**

**Reassure e.g. It's just a really quick sketch**

- Prompt q's (adapted script from Ideal Self) for good/bad friend
- (Set up scaling with script adapted from Ideal Self) Where would you rate your friends now? You don't need to add everyone, maybe just your important friends?
- What makes your friends a - ?
- What would need to change to move from an - to -?
- Who could help? What could they do to help? Prompt – What could your friends/parents/teacher do to help?

## 6. Strength cards sort

- What makes a good friend?

Choice to rank cards into most/least important or choose their top 5

Follow-up questions? What's good about having a friend who is... ?

- Is there anything else important? Do you want to add any?

Thank you for answering my questions, you have been very helpful!

I am going to have a look at what you told me today, then please can I meet you again for a quick chat so you can check that I've understood your views correctly?

## Parent Interview

I am interested in finding out about how young people who present with social (pragmatic) communication difficulties experience friendships.

Social communication difficulties means difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes.

Sometimes these difficulties are called "pragmatic language difficulties".

Social communication also includes nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

I am hoping to hear your views on (*name of young person*)'s friendships and general social and emotional well-being, and on how (*school name*) supports (*name of young person*).

1. Can you tell me about (*name of young person*)?  
Prompt: describe him/her to me?  
What does she/he like doing?  
What is she/he good at?
2. Can you tell me about her/his communication needs?  
Prompt: What's it like to have a conversation with him/her?  
How does he/she communicate with adults?  
What about with other young people?  
What sorts of words/language does he/she find difficult to understand/use?
3. Now, apart from his/her communication needs, does he/she have any additional needs?  
Prompts:  
Emotional? Self-esteem?  
Social? Working with others, staff and peers?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?
4. Depending on answers to 3...  
You've shared that (*name of young person*) has some difficulties with ... (summarise answer to 3), do you have any thoughts on what makes... difficult for him/her?  
Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... found... difficult?  
What/where/when/who/how?

OR

From what you've said about how (*name of young person*) ... (summarise answer to 3), it sounds like he/she has developed some resilience or coping strategies?  
Do you have any thoughts on what might have helped him/her?  
Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... showed resilience/coped well?  
What/where/when/who/how?

5. Can you tell me about (*name of young person*)'s friendships?  
Prompts: Does he/she have a best friend or significant friends?  
Does he/she have a group of friends?  
Spend time with friends outside of school?

6. Depending on answers to 5...

You've shared that (*name of young person*) has some difficulties with *friendships*, do you have any thoughts on what makes... difficult for him/her?  
Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... found... difficult?  
What/where/when/who/how?

AND/OR

From what you've said, it sounds like (*name of young person*) has (*summarise answer to 5 e.g. some good friends*).  
Do you have any thoughts on what might have helped him/her to develop these friendships?  
Prompts: Has he/she always been able to make friends?  
Is there anything or anyone that made making friends easier for him/her?

7. What do you find helpful for supporting your child's friendships and well-being?

Prompt: Strategies? Interventions?  
School? SENCo? SALT?  
Family support?  
Community support?  
Assistive technology?

8. Is there anything you find challenging with supporting your child?

Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional? Self-esteem?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?

9. In what ways does the school support your child's friendships and well-being?

Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?

10. What are your hopes for (*name of young person*)? How might school support him/her to achieve these?

Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?

Independence?  
Any other?

11. From our conversation, it sounds like... (*Summarise their views on provision/support already in place*)... Is there anything more you feel secondary schools or other professionals could or should add to support young people with social communication difficulties?

Prompts: Communication?

Social?

Emotional?

Behavioural?

Learning?

Independence?

Any other?

## SENCo Interview

I am interested in finding out about the needs of children who present with social (pragmatic) communication difficulties.

I'd like to find out a bit more about this school, the pupils' needs and the types of support available.

1. First please could you explain a bit about your role in school?

Prompt: How long have you been working in this setting?

2. Please explain what you think "social communication difficulties" means?

Prompt: For this project, "Social communication difficulties" refers to difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes. Sometimes these difficulties are called "pragmatic language difficulties".

Social communication also includes nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

What is your view on this definition; which definition will you use when answering the questions?

3. Which professionals are involved with pupils with these needs?

Prompt: SENCo, Learning Mentor, SALT, EP, other?

4. What types of support are available to pupils with these needs?

Prompts: Communication? Social? Emotional? Behavioural? Learning? Independence? Any other?

5. What is the role of the Speech and Language Therapist for supporting these pupils?

Prompts: individual? Groups? Whole school? Parents? Staff?

6. What is the role of the Educational Psychologist for supporting these pupils?

Prompts: individual? Groups? Whole school? Parents? Staff?

7. What do you find helpful for supporting pupils with social communication difficulties?

Prompts: With ... communication? Social? Friendships? Emotional? Behavioural? Learning? Independence? Any other?

8. What are the challenges of planning and coordinating support for pupils with social communication difficulties?

Prompts: With... communication? Social? Friendships? Emotional? Behavioural? Learning? Independence? Any other?



## Staff Interview

I am interested in finding out about the needs of young people who present with social (pragmatic) communication difficulties.

I am hoping to hear your views on (*name of young person*)'s friendships and general social and emotional well-being, and on how (*school name*) supports (*name of young person*)'s needs.

1. First please could you explain a bit about your role in school?

Prompt: How long have you been working in this setting?

2. Please explain what you think "social communication difficulties" means?

Prompt: For this project, "Social communication difficulties" refers to difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively with others in different social contexts. This might include difficulties with adapting communication to the social context, difficulties with following the rules of communication e.g. turn-taking, understanding nonliteral language e.g. jokes. Sometimes these difficulties are called "pragmatic language difficulties".

Social communication also includes nonverbal communication e.g. eye contact.

What is your view on this definition; which definition will you use when answering the questions?

3. Can you tell me about (*name of young person*), describe him/her to me and her/his communication needs?

Prompt: Can you describe what it's like to have a conversation with him/her?

How does he/she communicate with adults? What about with peers?

What sorts of words/language does he/she find difficult to understand/use?

4. Now, apart from his/her communication needs, does he/she have any additional needs?

Prompts: Social, peer relationships, working with others?

Emotional? Self-esteem?

Behavioural?

Learning?

Independence?

Any other?

5. Depending on answers to 4...

You've shared that (*name of young person*) has some difficulties with ... (summarise answer to 4), do you have any thoughts on why ... is difficult for him/her?

Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... found... difficult?

What/where/when/who/how?

OR

From what you've said about how (*name of young person*) ... (summarise answer to 4), it sounds like he/she has developed some resilience or coping strategies?

Do you have any thoughts on what might have helped him/her?

Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... coped well/showed resilience?

What/where/when/who/how?

6. Can you tell me about (*name of young person*)'s friendships?

Prompts: Does he/she have a best friend or significant friends?

Does he/she have a group of friends?

Spend time with friends outside of school?

7. Depending on answers to 6...

You've shared that (*name of young person*) has some difficulties with *friendships*, do you have any thoughts on what makes... difficult for him/her?

Prompt: Can you think of an example of when... found... difficult?

What/where/when/who/how?

AND/OR

From what you've said, it sounds like (*name of young person*) has (*summarise answer to 6 e.g. some good friends*).

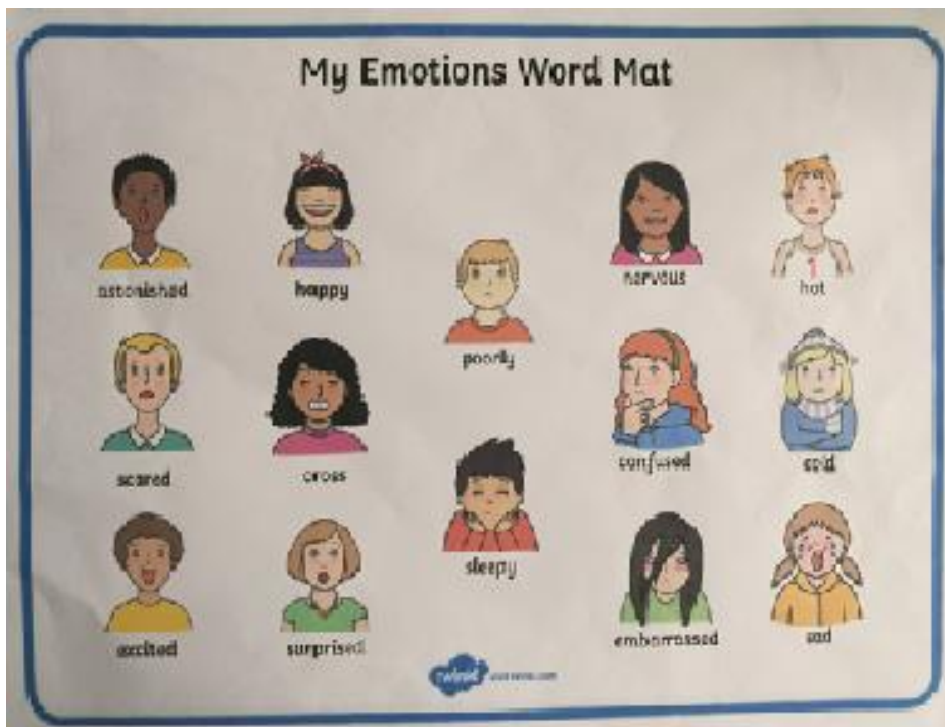
Do you have any thoughts on what might have helped him/her to develop these friendships?

Prompts: Do you know if he/she always been able to make friends?

Is there anything or anyone that made making friends easier for him/her?

8. What do you find helpful for supporting (*name of young person*) or other young people who present with social communication needs?  
Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?
  
9. What are the challenges when planning to support (*name of young person*) or other young people in your setting who present with social communication needs?  
Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?
  
10. From our conversation, it sounds like... (*Summarise their views on provision/support already in place*)... Is there anything more you feel secondary schools or other professionals could or should add to support young people with pragmatic language difficulties?  
Prompts: Communication?  
Social?  
Emotional?  
Behavioural?  
Learning?  
Independence?  
Any other?

Appendix 5: Example visual vocabulary page



*This page was originally taken from [www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk)*

## Appendix 6: Excerpt from a coded transcript

Transcript:	Codes:
<p><b>So what's your favorite subject in school?</b> Um I like drama</p> <p><b>Drama ah ok what do you like about Drama?</b> Um... just like acting... and I wouldn't say I like music a lot but I think bits of it</p> <p><b>Ok and what do you like to do outside of school?</b> Um I don't really do much but if I could meet up with my friends then sometimes I go do that sometimes I don't it depends really whether my Mum lets me go out</p> <p><b>Ok and what do you like to do at home?</b> Erm normally I just well now I'm reading a book which I really like I normally do that sometimes I like singing in my room cus I like singing um yeah</p> <p><b>Ok and are there any other children or young people in your home?</b> No just me and my Mum</p>	<p>Parental control over social activity</p>
<p><b>Ok so I've got these cards and they show some words that could be used to describe people so could you have a go at sorting them into ones that describe you and ones that don't so you can have like me and not like me and if you have any that are maybe you can put them in the middle</b> Ok so this is like me and this not like me (<i>sorting cards</i>)</p> <p><b>Yeah</b> (<i>sorting cards...</i>) Not that brave... I'm not that intelligent... not that playful</p> <p><b>Ok so you said you were helpful, what sort of things do you do that's helpful?</b> Like if I saw someone on the street that's homeless maybe a kid I would give them some money erm sometimes me and my Mum would see a homeless person and buy them so food cus they would have a sign saying I need some food and stuff so yeah</p> <p><b>That's very kind and erm would do you do anything helpful with people you know?</b> Yeah sometimes my friend she would like say she doesn't have much money on her card I would buy her lunch sometimes and when she has money she'll pay me back but I don't mind cus I was just being nice</p> <p><b>Ah that's kind... and er caring?</b> Yeah I care a lot of people like anyone like if someone's getting bullied or something I would be by their side so they don't feel like lonely</p> <p><b>How would you be by their side?</b> Just like not stay with them all the time just give them company so they don't feel like y'know I'm being left out by a lot of people and if someone was bullying I'd stand up for them</p> <p><b>Mmm... ok and sociable?</b> Um yeah I like to talk to a lot of people I like making friends as well.</p> <p><b>Mmm ok so what do you think how did you get to be so helpful and caring do you think?</b></p>	<p>Helping people</p> <p>Helping friend</p> <p>Support victim of bullying</p> <p>Company Support victim of bullying</p> <p>Likes to talk Likes making friends</p>

<p>Umm not sure.. I just started doing it cus like if I needed help for example I would want someone to help me so that I would help someone else if someone was getting bullied say if I was getting bullied I would want someone by my side so I'd do the same for other people</p>	<p>Help others because I would want help if I needed it</p>
<p><b>Yeah mmm and has anyone helped you to be that way do you think?</b></p>	
<p>... my Mum she's always told me to be like be kind be like caring for people and yeah to be helpful</p>	<p>Mum told me to be kind</p>
<p><b>And what about erm sociable how did you get to be sociable do you think?</b></p>	
<p>Well it's like when I was 5 I just liked making new friends cus when I used to go different countries I used to see people like little kids that were my age and I would go up to them and if they didn't speak my language I would just try and speak theirs so they would understand</p>	<p>Likes making friends Talks to a lot of people</p>
<p><b>Ah ok erm and what about loving?</b></p>	
<p>Yeah I love everyone cus I'm a nice person like that</p>	
<p><b>And happy?</b></p>	
<p>I'm always happy I laugh a lot in class you can ask anyone in my class and they'll say she's always happy she's always smiling</p>	<p>Love everyone I'm a nice person</p>
<p><b>And what do you think helps you to be so happy?</b></p>	
<p>I just don't like being sad cus it doesn't make me feel good I just like to be happy</p>	<p>Always happy</p>
<p><b>Ok and do you so you sort of choose to be happy do you think?</b></p>	
<p>No I'm just like that like smiling a lot</p>	
<p><b>And do you think anyone or anything helps you be happy?</b></p>	
<p>No just myself</p>	
<p><b>Yourself ok great um and are there any of these ones that you put not like you or not so much like you that you'd want to be more like?</b></p>	
<p>I wana be more like this these and these as well it's not really more like me cus I don't know if I'm intelligent or not I don't know if I'm brave cus sometimes I don't like going on like say high rides and going to Thorpe Park for example I wouldn't wana go on like really high rides</p>	<p>Don't know if I'm intelligent or brave</p>
<p><b>Ah ok is there anyone or anything that you think would make you feel more brave?</b></p>	
<p>... um... sometimes I'm brave by myself but in school my friend X she's always been there for me like she tells me just do it don't be scared don't be nervous just do like one like when I came up now she's always sitting next to me and I was like I was nervous cus I don't know what was going on then she was like "good luck" she said "just focus on what you're doing"</p>	<p>Friend helps me feel brave</p>
<p><b>Ah ok that's really nice</b></p>	
<p>She's a good friend</p>	<p>Good friend</p>
<p><b>Mmm... and are there any other ones you would like to be would you like to be playful?</b></p>	
<p>Yeah I mean I like hanging around people just talking I don't like running around playing like that</p>	<p>Hanging around talking</p>
<p><b>Ah ok you prefer talking?</b></p>	
<p>Like with my brother cus he's very young I would play with him</p>	<p>Don't like running games</p>

## Appendix 7: Example coding table

### Case Study 2: Sacha YP interview:

Categories	Codes	Example quotes
Role of friendship: companionship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always there</li> <li>• Company</li> <li>• Friend is like a twin</li> <li>• Go out with friends</li> <li>• Do homework together</li> <li>• Like talking to friends</li> <li>• Walk and talk with friend</li> </ul>	<p>“she’s always there anyway if you see me at break time you’ll see me walking with her”</p> <p>“she’s like a twin basically me and her get along a lot”</p> <p>“like if we don’t do the homework we just quickly do it together”</p> <p>“we kind of do a lot of things like at break time now for instance we would like walk around the school we would go to the canteen and just sit down and talk”</p>
Role of friendship: support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company when sad</li> <li>• Friend helps calm down</li> <li>• Friend helps me feel brave</li> <li>• Friend is nice to me</li> <li>• Friend knows how to help</li> <li>• Friend makes me feel confident and happy</li> <li>• Good friend is caring</li> <li>• Good friend is helpful</li> <li>• Stand up for you</li> <li>• Talk to friend about issues</li> </ul>	<p>“a friend that like stays with you gives you company when you’re sad”</p> <p>“she is like says you know take a few deep breaths”</p> <p>“sometimes I’m brave by myself but in school my friend she’s always been there for me like she tells me just do it don’t be scared don’t be nervous just do like one...”</p> <p>“she’s really nice to me”</p> <p>“she would know something is wrong so she would just leave me and talk to another person I can like cool down a bit and then after like 5 minutes she would ask are you ok?”</p> <p>“she makes me feel like confident and happy”</p> <p>“they care for you a lot”</p> <p>“if you’re having troubles they would help you”</p> <p>“if you’re upset they’ll think for you so they’ll stand up for you they’ll help you”</p> <p>“friend that you could talk to if you feel upset or maybe have an issue”</p>
Importance of trustworthiness/reliability in friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good friend is trustworthy</li> <li>• Good friends don’t use you</li> </ul>	<p>“they won’t lie to you and you can trust them as well”</p> <p>“a friend that doesn’t use you at all”</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wouldn't like a friend who ignores you</li> <li>• Wouldn't like a friend who leaves you</li> <li>• Wouldn't like a mean friend</li> </ul>	<p>"whenever you wana talk to them they'll just ignore you"</p> <p>"a friend who like you've known for so long and they'll just leave you and go off with someone else"</p> <p>"I wouldn't like a friend that's just mean and talks about you behind your back"</p>
Happy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always happy</li> </ul>	<p>"I'm always happy I laugh a lot in class you can ask anyone in my class and they'll say she's always happy she's always smiling"</p>
Peer problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embarrassed when peers talk about me</li> <li>• Teasing about friendship with boy</li> <li>• Peers left her on the bus</li> <li>• Not a joke to me</li> <li>• Peers being rude</li> <li>• Peers planned trick</li> <li>• Peers spread rumours</li> <li>• Peers tease about incident</li> <li>• Rude friend makes me angry</li> <li>• Talk behind your back</li> </ul>	<p>"they say something like oh look at your trousers"</p> <p>"if I was by myself and they said that in front of people then I'd be like really shy and nervous kind of embarrassed"</p> <p>"I'm like can't a girl be friends with a boy?"</p> <p>"I couldn't see them anymore and all of them ran off and they left me on the bus"</p> <p>[peers said] "oh we're just joking around" I "it wasn't a joke you just left me"</p> <p>"they're quite rude sometimes like yesterday I was wearing trousers and they were like looking at me saying oh you don't look nice in trousers"</p> <p>"they'd been planning something"... "they were hiding in this alleyway"</p> <p>"a lot of people were spreading rumours"</p> <p>"if I say something that no one likes they would bring up the bit where they're like oh remember the time when Sacha got lost"</p> <p>"if a friend was really rude to me it gets me so angry but I wouldn't say anything"</p> <p>"when they stab you in the back when they talk about you behind your back"</p>
Strategies for dealing with social and emotional problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave the classroom</li> </ul>	<p>"so I was like nervous at the time I wanted like to leave the classroom the</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can talk to teachers about feelings</li> <li>• Listen to music</li> <li>• Mentor support</li> <li>• Restorative Justice</li> <li>• Talk to friend</li> <li>• Talk to Mum</li> <li>• Tell teacher</li> <li>• Walk around to relax</li> </ul>	<p>teacher told her to be quiet ... I would just ask one of the assistants there if I could leave the class for a bit"</p> <p>"when I'm angry and stuff or someone's just been rude or something I just like to listen to music cus it cools me down"</p> <p>"I'd tell my mentor"</p> <p>"we might have an RJ which is when you sign a contract to stop everything"</p> <p>"if you're having trouble with someone you could sit down and talk about it"</p> <p>"I'd tell my mentor again or the teacher that's nearby"</p> <p>"sometimes I just like to walk around like I could walk all around the school and I'd be fine when I get back to class... when I have meetings with teachers I would often go the long way round back to class cus I would just like to relax so everything that has been happening can get out of my mind"</p>
<p>Wants to help others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would help if someone's being bullied</li> <li>• Wants to help younger pupils</li> <li>• Helps friend</li> <li>• Help people</li> <li>• Help others as would want others to help her if needed</li> <li>• Sad when friend is sad</li> </ul>	<p>"give them company so they don't feel like y'know I'm being left out by a lot of people and if someone bullying I'd stand up for them"</p> <p>"start talking to them to make them feel good so if something happen someone in their year was rude to them I could ask them not to be mean so someone they could look up to"</p> <p>"sometimes my friend she would like say she doesn't have much money on her card I would buy her lunch"</p> <p>"like if I saw someone on the street that's homeless maybe a kid I would give them some money"</p> <p>"I just started doing it cus like if I needed help for example I would want someone to help me so</p>



		that I would help someone”
Nervous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nervous about being out alone</li> <li>• Nervous about peers teasing</li> </ul>	<p>“nervous at the time cus I was in year 7 and I’ve never been”</p> <p>“so I was like nervous at the time I wanted like to leave the classroom”</p>
Mum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun with Mum</li> <li>• Mum gives friendship advice</li> <li>• First time out</li> <li>• Mum is protective</li> <li>• Mum wants me to stay home</li> <li>• Parent control over social activity</li> <li>• Mum told me to be kind</li> </ul>	<p>“do fun things with Mum cus she does a lot of fun things with me”</p> <p>“my Mum’s always told me it’s better to have more than one friend...”</p> <p>“it’s the first time my Mum’s ever let me out”</p> <p>“Mum picked me up so she doesn’t really trust anyone now”</p> <p>“my Mum doesn’t like me going out anywhere cus she says he wants me to stay home”</p> <p>“it depends whether my Mum lets me go out”</p> <p>“I can’t go cus my Mum won’t let me”</p> <p>“Mum she’s always told me to be kind be like caring for people and yeah to be helpful”</p>
Making friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easily make friends at secondary</li> <li>• Group of friends</li> <li>• Like making friends</li> <li>• Like to be less shy</li> <li>• New friends at secondary</li> <li>• Talk to a lot of people</li> </ul>	<p>“secondary school cus you’re getting new friends you’re adapting more and more um there’s a lot of people so you can easily make friends with anyone”</p> <p>I’m getting older making new friends”</p> <p>“I like making a group of friends I have a few like a lot of people”</p> <p>“I like making friends”</p> <p>“I like school cus you make new friends and stuff”</p> <p>“I’m getting older making new friends”</p> <p>“I like to talk to a lot of people”</p>
<b>Feedback Interview:</b>		
Peer problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arguments with one boy</li> <li>• Peers stare</li> </ul>	<p>“this is a boy that I had an argument with”</p> <p>“they would just stare at me really badly like I did something wrong”</p>

Prefers to stay inside at playtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't like outside</li> <li>• Don't want to be involved in problems</li> <li>• Prefer to stay inside</li> </ul>	<p>"I don't really like staying outside that much"</p> <p>"sometimes there would be a lot of problems and I don't wana be involved"</p> <p>"I like to just stay in this room sit quietly and listen [to music] and just like do homework"</p>
Friendship Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game in breakfast club that helps you make friends</li> <li>• Schools could offer session on getting to know your class</li> <li>• Teacher could have talked to both of us</li> </ul>	<p>"this game that I play in breakfast club so you have to remember their name and what they like..."</p> <p>"if in a new class we can have a session where we sit together we say our names what we like"</p> <p>"she could have just like brought the both of us and just like talk to us"</p>
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love music</li> <li>• Music cools me down</li> </ul>	<p>"I've listened to music I love music"</p> <p>"when you're listening to the song you're just listening to it you're not listening to anything else"</p>
Mum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mum told me to stay away</li> </ul>	<p>"my Mum told me just stay away from him"</p>
Strategies for peer problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restorative justice</li> <li>• Ignore him</li> </ul>	<p>"the boys are gona agree that they should stay away from me and you should stay away from them"</p> <p>"I just ignore him"</p>

## Appendix 8: example table of themes

### All YP themes:

Theme	Codes / description	Example quotes
Friends help and support	Help solve problems, support and comfort when upset etc, protect from bullying. Importance of trust. Help you feel accepted and sense of belonging.	<p>“if I’m having a bad day or something, they’re always there to cheer me up” (Ellen)</p> <p>“my friends know that I’m sad cus they’ve known me for a long time they know how I feel in my actions so they normally come and cheer me up and I laugh sometimes” (Ellen)</p> <p>“they’re always just gona be there for me” (Ellen)</p> <p>“they would just try to help me out” (Ellen)</p> <p>“if I have anxiety at home I would call my friend and they would make me laugh” (Ellen)</p> <p>“she makes me feel like confident and happy” (Sacha)</p> <p>“they care for you a lot” (Sacha)</p> <p>“if you’re having troubles they would help you” (Sacha)</p> <p>“if I’ve got a problem they can help me sort it out” (Sarah)</p> <p>“if I’m upset they’ll comfort me and be there for me” (Spencer)</p> <p>“they’re kind they’re caring” (Spencer)</p> <p>“a friend should ask a friend are you ok” (Spencer)</p> <p>“I like that they can comfort me” (Jason)</p> <p>“they can help you with homework or something” (Tom)</p> <p>“they’re be kind to you” (Tom)</p>
Friends provide pleasure and company	Fun, enjoyment, laughter, Company and people to do fun things with/share interests with.	<p>“to have someone to make you laugh” (Ellen)</p> <p>“I play with them every day” (Ellen)</p> <p>“we kind of do a lot of things like at break time now for instance we would like walk around the school we would go to the canteen and just sit down and talk” (Sacha)</p> <p>“we go do things together like we do fun things like we might go cinemas funfair” (Spencer)</p> <p>“nice people to hang out with” (Spencer)</p> <p>“they’re fun they don’t have negative energy” (Jason)</p> <p>[friends] “have to make me laugh” (Jason)</p> <p>“I can be happy they have a sense of humour that’s cool” (Jason)</p> <p>“I sometimes go over [to neighbour’s house] and play with my friends” (Tom)</p> <p>“we all have a great time” (Tom)</p>
Emotional issues	Feelings of worry/anxiety/stress/nervousness/p	<p>“I have really bad anxiety so I kind of panic a lot and get really worried” (Ellen)</p>

	<p>anic, sadness, anger and frustration.</p> <p>Ways to manage feelings e.g. time out, thinking happy thoughts, music, telling friends, Mum or school staff</p>	<p>“when I feel sad... I just go quiet and I close myself off from other people” (Ellen)</p> <p>“I just don’t say anything I don’t know why words just can’t come out of me when I’m sad” (Ellen)</p> <p>“so I was like nervous at the time I wanted like to leave the classroom” (Sacha)</p> <p>“now that frustrating is turning to angry” (Spencer)</p> <p>“it used to get me upset but right now it’s starting to get me really angry” (Spencer)</p> <p>“stressed about the future” (Jason)</p> <p>“overthinking”... “life... life... decisions I make I have too many regrets” (Jason)</p> <p>“sometimes I’m just down I listen to music” (Ellen)</p> <p>“talk to my mum if I’m worried” (Ellen)</p> <p>“I’d tell my mentor again or the teacher that’s nearby” (Sacha)</p> <p>“sometimes I just like to walk around like I could walk all around the school and I’d be fine when I get back to class... when I have meetings with teachers I would often go the long way round back to class cus I would just like to relax so everything that has been happening can get out of my mind” (Sacha)</p> <p>“sometimes I would walk away and just like take a moment to like breathe” (Spencer)</p> <p>“take a moment for myself to calm down and then come back”(Spencer)</p>
<p>Friendship problems</p>	<p>Arguments and misunderstandings</p> <p>Difficulty resolving conflict</p>	<p>“...she was only my friend cus she could tell find my secrets and tell other people...” (Ellen)</p> <p>“if a friend was really rude to me it gets me so angry...” (Sacha)</p> <p>“if there’s 2 people arguing that means there’s always like the other 2 being caught between in the middle” (Spencer)</p> <p>“we have to like speak to tell them to like calm down and say that they’re both in the wrong and like try and get them to speak it out and try and sort it it’s kinda hard” (Spencer)</p> <p>“they can be annoying like ah!” (Jason)</p> <p>“I kind of feel sunken it’s not guilt but it’s like ah I feel like a jerk” (Jason)</p> <p>“I can be too playful sometimes and I hurt people” (Jason)</p> <p>“there’s nothing too difficult with being friends but it’s also like... um... misunderstanding” (Jason)</p>

		<p>“I need to go to that person and say sorry and explain what I meant if they don’t want me to say what I said again I be like... yeah I won’t say it again” (Jason)</p> <p>“we have arguments about some simple things like sometimes people get its complicated sometimes” (Tom)</p> <p>“they can annoy me” (Tom)</p> <p>“we get on each other’s nerves sometimes” (Tom)</p> <p>[asked if he has any particular friends in class] “not really it’s just all spread out” (Tom)</p>
Peer problems	<p>Bullying, teasing and social exclusion</p> <p>Avoidance of peer problems</p> <p>Issues with opposite sex peers</p>	<p>“they say something like oh look at your trousers” (Sacha)</p> <p>“I couldn’t see them anymore and all of them ran off and they left me on the bus... [peers said] oh we’re just joking around... I... it wasn’t a joke you just left me” (Sacha)</p> <p>“they’re quite rude sometimes like yesterday I was wearing trousers and they were like looking at me saying oh you don’t look nice in trousers” (Sacha)</p> <p>“they’d been planning something... they were hiding in this alleyway” (Sacha)</p> <p>“a lot of people were spreading rumours” (Sacha)</p> <p>“if I say something that no one likes they would bring up the bit where they’re like oh remember the time when Sacha got lost” (Sacha)</p> <p>“I don’t really like staying outside that much... sometimes there would be a lot of problems and I don’t wana be involved” (Sacha)</p> <p>“sometimes when people say hurtful things it hurts your feelings and ... I try ignore them but sometimes they like to carry on and on and they don’t stop” (Spencer)</p> <p>“I don’t understand why we’re annoying cus we don’t like we don’t even speak” (Spencer)</p> <p>“she calls us annoying she call us names like she calls us snitches” (Spencer)</p> <p>“speaking about us in class on purpose to make us hear” (Spencer)</p> <p>“they used to leave us out...” (Spencer)</p> <p>“have I felt picked on? In the past yeah” (Jason)</p> <p>“they give me a bully vibe” (Jason)</p> <p>“they kind of like to prank me sometimes” (Tom)</p>



		<p>“sometimes we’ll come up to inclusion, Ms... will open a room for us we’ll play games like in a group” (Spencer)</p> <p>“this school has a lot of clubs and that’s how most people have their friends from going to clubs... some people have a lot in common and they become friends” (Ellen)</p> <p>“I’d tell my mentor”</p> <p>“we might have an RJ which is when you sign a contract to stop everything”</p> <p>“if you’re having trouble with someone you could sit down and talk about it”</p> <p>“I’d tell my mentor again or the teacher that’s nearby” (Sacha)</p>
Secondary school is better than primary school	<p>X4 (Ellen, Sacha, Jason, Tom)</p> <p>Easier to make friends, more social skills,</p> <p>Less arguments with peers,</p> <p>School is “happy environment”, more space etc</p>	<p>“primary school was a lot different... didn’t have the right minds we were just still kids... we’ve grown up and we know what we’re s’posed to say and we know what we’re s’posed to do” (Ellen)</p> <p>“secondary school cus you’re getting new friends you’re adapting more and more um there’s a lot of people so you can easily make friends with anyone”</p> <p>I’m getting older making new friends” (Sacha)</p> <p>“in primary school it was really rough” (Jason)</p> <p>“yeah primary school was terrible” (Jason)</p> <p>“not seeing the kids who really need help” (Jason)</p> <p>[arguments] “sometimes but it doesn’t happen as much as it did in primary school” (Tom)</p> <p>“there wasn’t really much to do in primary school” (Tom)</p> <p>“there’s just more activities there’s just a bit more bigger space” (Tom)</p>
Ideas for making friends	<p>Shared activity and play equipment</p> <p>Shared interests and clubs</p> <p>Supported curriculum class, importance of familiarity – closeness and trust</p> <p>Sessions/games to help make friends</p> <p>BUT can’t force friendships</p>	<p>“this school has a lot of clubs and that’s how most people have their friends from going to clubs... some people have a lot in common and they become friends” (Ellen)</p> <p>“if they’re having difficulties then they should help like is I was having difficulties trying to find friends then I would want the school to help” (Ellen)</p> <p>“this game that I play in breakfast club so you have to remember their name and what they like...” (Sacha)</p> <p>“if in a new class we can have a session where we sit together we say our names what we like” (Sacha)</p> <p>“Skipping ropes? We don’t have that here”... “hula hoops”... “I wana skip that’s not the school how it looks like” (Sarah)</p> <p>“more one-to-ones” (Jason)</p>

		<p>“I feel like it’s amazing for a kid to see that the teacher’s not there just to point at the board and mark their books they that they can confide in their teacher, their teacher can be their therapist and that’s that’s awesome” (Jason)</p> <p>“they so close to me because I’ve kind of known them for kind of a bit long”</p> <p>“means I can like trust them” (Ellen)</p> <p>“schools can’t really force you to like if a school sees a person that like doesn’t have a lot of friends they can’t just drag them in and say here’s a friend” (Ellen)</p>
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